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Introduction by Edward Miller

**Christopher Goscha. *Vietnam. Un État né de la Guerre 1945-1954*.** Paris: Armand Colin, 2011. 560 pp. ISBN/EAN: 978-2-200-26329-4 (Brochée/paperback, €25.40).

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Introduction by Edward Miller, Dartmouth College

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In the past two decades, scholarship on the Indochina Wars has expanded by leaps and bounds. Several scholars have produced new studies on the origins of the Vietnamese Communist Party and the life and career of its founder, Ho Chi Minh.<sup>1</sup> Others have revisited various aspects of the thirty-one-year history of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV), the communist-dominated Vietnamese state which the party led to victory in both the First and Second Indochina Wars. Much of the best of this recent work on the DRV and its communist leaders has been produced in the emerging field of Vietnamese Studies, by scholars who use Vietnamese-language materials and who connect their inquiries to broader trends in twentieth-century Vietnamese politics, society, and culture. In addition to revising our understanding of Vietnamese communist diplomacy and military strategy, these scholars have produced new studies of DRV nationalism, cultural politics, religion, and intellectual life; they have also probed various aspects of DRV state building, such as land and resettlement policies, as well as the construction of infrastructure and institutions.<sup>2</sup>

Christopher Goscha's *Vietnam: Un état né de la guerre, 1945-1954* is a major contribution to this exploding body of scholarship. Goscha is an international historian with a truly international educational pedigree: he is an American who trained and has taught at universities in Australia, France and Canada, and whose work is based on extensive research in French, U.S., U.K., Vietnamese, and Thai archives. Even before this new volume appeared, Goscha was already a pre-eminent scholar of the Indochina Wars and modern Southeast Asian history, having published a bevy of important articles, monographs and

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<sup>1</sup> William Duiker, *Ho Chi Minh* (New York: Hyperion, 2000); Sophie Quinn-Judge, *Ho Chi Minh: The Missing Years, 1919-1941* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002); Pierre Brocheux, *Ho Chi Minh* (Paris: Presses des Sciences Po, 2000); Céline Marangé, *Le communisme vietnamien, 1919-1941: construction d'un Etat-nation entre Moscou et Pékin* (Paris : Presses de la Fondation nationale des sciences politiques, 2012).

<sup>2</sup> This scholarship is too vast to be comprehensively cited here. Key works in English on DRV diplomacy and military strategy include Pierre Asselin, *A Bitter Peace: Washington, Hanoi and the Making of the Paris Agreement* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Merle Pribbenow, "General Vo Nguyen Giap and the Mysterious Evolution of the Plan for the 1968 Tet Offensive", *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 3:2 (2008), 1-33; and Lien-Hang T. Nguyen, *Hanoi's War: An International History of the War for Peace* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012). Among the many contributions on nationalism, culture, religion and intellectual life are Tran Thi Lien, "The Catholic Question in North Vietnam: From Polish Sources, 1954-6." *Cold War History* 5, no. 4 (November 2005): 427-49; Peter Zinoman. "Nhan Van Giai Pham and Vietnamese Reform Communism." *Journal of Cold War Studies* 13:1 (Winter 2011): 60-100; Haydon Cherry, "Digging Up the Past: Prehistory and the Weight of the Present in Vietnam," *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 4:1 (2009), 84-144; and Kim N. B. Ninh, *A World Transformed: The Politics of Culture in Revolutionary Vietnam, 1945-1965* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002). On DRV state-building, see Ken Maclean, "Manifest Socialism: The Labor of Representation in the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (1956-1959)," *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 2:1 (2007), 27-79; Christian Lentz, "Mobilization and State Formation on a Frontier of Vietnam," *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 38:3 (2011), 559-86; and Andrew Hardy, *Red Hills: Migrants and the State in the Highlands of Vietnam* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2003).

edited volumes in both French and English over the past two decades.<sup>3</sup> But *Vietnam: Un état nè de la guerre* is not merely a synthesis of Goscha's earlier work. It is a synoptic, sweeping, and highly original interpretation of the DRV's early years of existence, from the August Revolution of 1945 to the Geneva Conference of 1954. Goscha is particularly interested in two interrelated aspects of this history: (1) the relations between the DRV state and the communist party; and (2) the relations between the DRV state and Vietnamese society at large. The five reviewers in this roundtable agree that *Vietnam: Un état nè de la guerre* offers pathbreaking insights on both of these crucial topics, as well as a host of other relevant questions and issues.

In designating the DRV as "a state born of war," Goscha is not merely noting the fact that the DRV's early evolution coincided with the prosecution of its war against France. Rather, he is borrowing insights and concepts from scholars who examine the complex interplay among wars, states, and human societies in other historical contexts. As Goscha acknowledges, he draws on the work of Charles Tilly and other historians who have studied the many ways in which war-making and state-making are interdependent processes. Goscha is also interested in whether and how the Indochina War can be thought of as a "total war," and what implications this might have for understanding the DRV and the ordinary Vietnamese who were subjected to its authority.

All of the reviewers find much to praise in *Vietnam: Un état nè de la guerre*. They note in particular Goscha's attention to geography, such as his apt description of the DRV as an "archipelago state" that sought to wield authority across several non-contiguous territorial zones. The reviewers also appreciate the book's careful elucidation of the strikingly different ways in which the Indochina war was fought and experienced in different regions. Here, Goscha's interest in geography intersects with his commendable emphasis on chronology; the reviewers all concur with his representation of the period 1949-1950 as a turning point when the interventions of China, the Soviet Union and the United States transformed the war in northern and central Indochina into a more conventional conflict, with vastly greater levels of firepower and violence. Goscha also wins plaudits for his analysis of how Vietnamese communist leaders imported Chinese and Soviet mass mobilization techniques so they could enlist and coerce the population of the northern and central provinces on a massive scale. This analysis, Stein Tønnesson observes, explodes the enduring myth of Vietnamese soldiers as "fearless ants willingly sacrificing themselves for the larger cause of national liberation." Several reviewers highlight Goscha's final chapter, which describes the awful toll that the war inflicted on the bodies of northern Vietnamese combatants and civilians, as one of the most effective parts of the book. They are especially impressed with his discussion of the hellish conditions and heavy casualties at the Battle of Dien Bien Phu, and how these experiences led DRV leaders to acquiesce to the compromise peace terms offered to them at the Geneva Conference.

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<sup>3</sup> "Page de Christopher Goscha," UQAM - Université du Québec à Montréal (website), [http://www.er.uqam.ca/nobel/r26645/recherche\\_publications.php](http://www.er.uqam.ca/nobel/r26645/recherche_publications.php), accessed 9 September 2012.

The reviewers also raise several criticisms of the book. Eric Jennings suggests that Goscha's decision to organize the book thematically—with chapters on different aspects of state-building, including the army, police, medicine, communications and diplomacy—makes for too many confusing cross-references and undermines some of Goscha's key points about change over time. Phillipe Papin praises the final chapter on mass mobilization but wonders why it does not appear earlier in the text, since one of Goscha's main objectives is to illuminate state-society relations and the impact of DRV social control efforts on ordinary Vietnamese. Tønnesson suggests that the book would have benefitted from a chapter on DRV finances, as well as more attention to the DRV's anti-communist rival, the French-backed State of Vietnam. Pierre Grosser argues that Goscha could have supplemented his analysis of the DRV's interactions with its Chinese and Soviet allies with some attention to the state's complex dealings with France and French colonial institutions; Grosser also would have liked more discussion of non-communist Vietnamese groups, including Catholics in the north, and other sectarian groups in the south. In his response, Goscha sympathizes with many of the complaints about omitted or underplayed topics. But he defends the thematic organization of the book, pointing out that each chapter is organized chronologically, with particular attention to the 1949-1950 watershed in every case.

Several of the reviewers question the applicability of the notion of “total war” to the Indochina conflict. This term, of course, has been used in different ways by different scholars. For some, it describes the sweeping forms of social, military and economic mobilization pursued by the Great Powers during the World Wars; for others, it refers to annihilationist military strategies and tactics. As several reviewers point out, such definitions seem problematic in the case of the Indochina war. (As Tønnesson observes, the French war effort did not involve a World War II-style mobilization of resources or population.) In his response, Goscha readily acknowledges the slippery and problematic qualities of the concept of “total war,” but notes that he carefully limited his use of it to refer specifically to the erasure of distinctions between civilians and combatants. More generally, Goscha distinguishes his arguments from those of the Péronne school of scholarship on World War I; he feels more affinity with scholars such as Hew Strachan, Mark Mazower, Matthew Connelly and others who have focused on the ways in which war fosters connections between mass mobilization and state building.

The most elaborate critique of Goscha's main argument is offered by Papin, who challenges certain aspects of its portrayal of the relationship between the DRV state and the communist party. According to Papin, Goscha errs in suggesting that the party did not fully consolidate its control over the DRV until after 1950. Papin also suggests that Goscha is too credulous in accepting party-sanctioned official histories and statistics about the rapid expansion of DRV state power and influence. From the outset, Papin insists, the DRV was a communist-dominated “skeleton state”—that is, it was a bare-bones institutional framework which the party gradually transformed into a formidable instrument of coercion. In his reply to Papin, Goscha readily agrees that the DRV became much more effective and powerful over time; however, he insists that the party's dominance over the state prior to 1950 was more circumscribed than Papin admits. Goscha points in particular to the party's institutional weaknesses in 1945 (especially in the number and quality of its

cadres) and to evidence suggesting that the party only gradually expanded its control over the state (through, for example, its building of powerful police and intelligence agencies). For Goscha, the organizational capabilities of the communist party and the DRV state evolved in tandem, even as the former was taking the latter more firmly in hand.

The criticisms expressed by the reviewers do not undermine their consensus assessment that *Vietnam: Un état né de la guerre* is a work of great importance. The book makes many valuable contributions to scholarship on Vietnamese communism, modern Vietnamese history and the history of the Indochina Wars. It is also a first-rate work of international history, which combines a multi-archival research agenda with Goscha's unparalleled understanding of the transnational aspects of the Vietnamese Revolution. Finally, it dramatically revises scholarly views of state-society relations in Vietnam and directly challenges some of the most enduring myths about the DRV during the 1945-1954 period. Both the current edition of the book and a forthcoming English-language version are sure to have lasting impacts on the field.

### Participants:

**Christopher Goscha** is Associate Professor at the Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM). He has recently published *Going Indochinese? Contesting Concepts of Space and Place in French Indochina*, (Honolulu, University of Hawaii Press/Copenhagen, Nordic Institute of Asian Studies, 2012). He is currently working on a socio-cultural history of colonial Saigon and Hanoi at war (1940-56).

**Edward Miller** is Associate Professor of History at Dartmouth College. His research interests include Cold War history, the history of development in Southeast Asia, and the Vietnam War. His first book, entitled *Misalliance: Ngo Dinh Diem, the United States, and the Fate of South Vietnam* will be published by Harvard University Press in Spring 2013. He is currently at work on a project that examines the history of counterinsurgency during the Indochina Wars from local, international, and environmental historical perspectives.

**Pierre Grosser** is a Professor of History at Sciences Po, Paris. He teaches international history and world politics and conducts research at its Centre d'Histoire. He received his Ph.D. in 2002 and his dissertation was entitled *France and Indochina in a Global Context (1953-56)*. Among his publications are *Les temps de la guerre froide* (Brussels, 1995); *Pourquoi la Seconde Guerre mondiale?* (Brussels, 1999); and *1989, l'année où le monde a basculé* (Paris, 2009), which won the Ambassadors Prize. From 2001 to 2009 he was Head of the Diplomatic Institute of the French Foreign Ministry (2001-2009). He currently has two books in preparation: *La guerre d'Indochine* and *Dealing with the Devil: The Uses and Limits of Diplomacy*.

**Martin Grossheim** is Adjunct Professor, Department of Southeast Asian Studies, Passau University/Germany. Selected Publications include: *Ho Chi Minh. Der geheimnisvolle Revolutionär. Leben und Legende (Ho Chi Minh. The Mysterious Revolutionary. Life and Legend)*, Munich: Beck, 2011; "The Year 1956 in Vietnamese Historiography and Popular



Discourse: The Resilience of Myths”, in: Volker Grabowsky (ed.). *Southeast Asian Historiography. Unravelling the Myths. Essays in Honour of Barend Jan Terwiel*, Bangkok: River Books, 2011: 306-316; *Die Partei und der Krieg: Debatten und Dissens in Nordvietnam (The Party and the War: Debates and Dissent in North Vietnam)*, Berlin: Regiospectra Verlag, 2009; “Revisionism in the Democratic Republic of Vietnam: New Evidence from the East German Archives”, in: *Cold War History* 5:4 (November 2005): 451-477; Research interests: modern Vietnamese and Southeast Asian history and politics, cold war, history and memory.

**Eric T. Jennings** is a Professor of History at the University of Toronto. He is the author of *Dalat, the Making and Undoing of France in Indochina* (University of California Press, 2011), as well as *Curing the Colonizers* (Duke University Press, 2006, translated into French as *A la cure, les coloniaux!*, Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2011), and *Vichy in the Tropics* (Stanford University Press, 2001, translated into French with Grasset in 2004 under the title *Vichy sous les tropiques*). His other publications include an edited volume with Jacques Cantier, *L'Empire colonial sous Vichy* (Odile Jacob, 2004), as well as many articles straddling the histories of France, Southeast Asia, the Indian Ocean, Africa, and the Caribbean.

**Philippe Papin**, historian, spent fifteen years in Vietnam working for the Ecole française d'Extrême-Orient, before taking up his current position as professor at the École pratique des hautes études in Paris. Author of many books and articles on pre-colonial Vietnamese history, he is currently conducting research on seventeenth and eighteenth century inscriptions. In 2011, he expressed his interest in contemporary issues through the publication, with Laurent Passicouset, of a book on social and political change in today's Vietnam: *Vivre avec les Vietnamiens*, Paris, L'Archipel.

**Stein Tønnesson** is Research Professor at the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) and adjunct professor at the Department of Peace and Conflict Research, Uppsala University, where he leads a research programme 2011-2016 on the East Asian Peace since 1979. His publications include *The Vietnamese Revolution of 1945* (SAGE, 1991); ‘National divisions in Indochina’s decolonization’ (Duara, ed., *Decolonization*, Routledge, 2004); ‘Franklin Roosevelt, Trusteeship, and Indochina: A Reassessment’ (Mark Lawrence & Fred Logevall, eds, *The First Vietnam War*, Harvard UP 2007); ‘The Class route to nationhood: China, Vietnam, Norway, Cyprus—and France,’ (*Nations and Nationalism* 15(3), 2009); ‘What Is It that Best Explains the East Asian Peace Since 1979? A Call for a Research Agenda’ (*Asian Perspective* 33(1), 2009); *Vietnam 1946: How the War Began* (University of California Press, 2010); and ‘Active citation through hyperlinks: The retarded replication revolution’ (*International Area Studies Review* 15(1), 2012). Publications may be accessed through CV on [www.clioste.com](http://www.clioste.com).

L'ouvrage de Christopher Goscha est un travail de tout premier ordre, non seulement grâce à la richesse de ses sources, à la fermeté de ses analyses et de ses conclusions, mais aussi grâce aux avancées qu'il constitue dans notre connaissance de la guerre d'Indochine. Au-delà même de ces apports, il deviendra une référence indispensable dans l'historiographie de la guerre en général et du totalitarisme. On retrouve nombre de thématiques traitées par Goscha dans ses livres et articles publiés depuis quinze ans. Mais il ne s'agit pas du tout d'une compilation d'articles : il y a une cohérence d'ensemble remarquable dans la construction de l'ouvrage, de vrais fils conducteurs, et une vraie vision d'ensemble.

L'historiographie actuelle de la guerre reste partagée entre la guerre vue d'en haut et la guerre vue d'en bas, à savoir l'expérience de guerre des combattants et des « civils ». Pour la guerre d'Indochine, les multiples témoignages de combattants français ont longtemps pris toute la place, de même que les débats sur les responsabilités des politiques et militaires dans la défaite. Goscha a d'excellentes pages sur la guerre des hommes de l'autre côté, notamment pour la bataille de Dien Bien Phu, qui fut une véritable boucherie du côté vietnamien, et a failli mal tourner à cause d'une crise du moral des combattants<sup>1</sup>. Il faudrait d'ailleurs reprendre l'ensemble du dossier sur cette bataille, érigée au rang de mythe, pour en étudier l'impact stratégique. Le général Navarre n'a pas été le seul à considérer que cet impact avait été exagéré afin de trouver au plus vite une porte de sortie pour une France qui voulait se dégager d'une guerre devenue plus impopulaire et politiquement ingérable que financièrement coûteuse<sup>2</sup>. La question de l'état d'épuisement du Viet Minh et de ses capacités à pousser son avantage décisif est importante pour pouvoir porter un jugement éclairé sur la conférence de Genève<sup>3</sup>. Mais ce qui est vraiment nouveau, c'est l'insistance sur le « niveau du milieu » de la guerre, qui commence à être privilégié<sup>4</sup> : dans le cas de la guerre d'Indochine, ce sont les spécialistes du renseignement, des communications, de la logistique, et ceux qui ont essayé de créer une médecine de guerre. En même temps, cette réflexion sur les « infrastructures » de la guerre Viet Minh constitue une réponse aux logiques de domination qui avaient permis l'hégémonie occidentale<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> On pourra aussi se reporter au numéro spécial de l'*European Journal of East Asian Studies* (2010, 9(2)) sur les expériences de guerre que Goscha a co-édité

<sup>2</sup> Pierre Grosser, *La France et l'Indochine (1953-56): une "carte de visite" en "peau de chagrin"*, PhD, IEP Paris, 2002

<sup>3</sup> Pierre Asselin, "The Democratic Republic of Vietnam and the 1954 Geneva Conference: A Revisionist Critique", *Cold War History*, Mai 2011, et le débat avec Sophie Quinn-Judge dans H-Diplo.

<sup>4</sup> Paul Kennedy, « History from the Middle. The Case of the Second World War », *The Journal of Military History*, Janvier 2010

<sup>5</sup> Daniel Headrick, *Power over Peoples. Technology, Environment and Western Imperialism*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2010.

Goscha apporte une contribution décisive à la réflexion si nourrie sur la guerre totale, qui semble s'enliser aujourd'hui. Il s'agit du dilemme de la poule et de l'œuf. Il faut déjà beaucoup d'Etat-nation pour avoir de la guerre totale, mais la construction étatique-nationale est une conséquence de la guerre totale ; celle-ci a même souvent été pensée comme un moyen de réaliser l'unité nationale, et de donner à l'Etat sa toute-puissance. Dans le cas Viet Minh, comme pour nombre de pays communistes, l'Etat totalitaire est indissociable de la guerre de masse, contre des ennemis extérieurs et intérieurs, et permet mobilisation et réformes radicales. Mais en même temps, on a le sentiment d'un Etat très particulier, qui n'a même pas une base territoriale bien définie, et dont les structures se sont créées trop rapidement. Bref, c'est une sorte d'Etat reposant principalement sur la volonté, qui est parvenu à mener une des guerres les plus totales de l'histoire, et surtout à mobiliser, d'une manière ou d'une autre, des millions d'hommes. Ce n'est pas, comme ailleurs, la coercition d'Etat ou l'adhésion à un Etat constitué qui explique tous ces sacrifices. En cela, le livre ne répond pas tout à fait à la question du POURQUOI cette mobilisation a été possible et ces sacrifices ont été consentis, car il se concentre surtout sur le COMMENT. La question reste pendante également pour l'Union soviétique durant la Seconde Guerre mondiale, malgré de nettes avancées, ou pour les derniers mois de la guerre nazie, lorsque tout semblait perdu pour l'Allemagne<sup>6</sup>. Or, pour l'Indochine, il n'y a pas une invasion massive et brutale d'une force étrangère ; le pouvoir colonial français n'avait rien à voir avec les Nazis (et même avec ce qui se passait en Algérie), et le Viet Minh combattait très souvent d'autres Vietnamiens ! Les ressorts de la combativité des soldats Viet Minh, mais aussi des risques pris par les centaines de milliers de coolies restent un mystère, au-delà des réponses soulignant le nationalisme, l'anticolonialisme, le fanatisme communiste, etc.

La mode est aujourd'hui à l'histoire « transnationale, « connectée ». Mais la production est souvent très inégale. Le travail de Goscha est un modèle, qui ajoute beaucoup aux efforts déjà entrepris pour écrire une histoire internationale des guerres d'Indochine et du Vietnam. Il est capable d'y insérer l'histoire diplomatique traditionnelle, en développant les relations avec Moscou et Pékin. Il montre comment le Viet Minh a cherché des armes dans toutes l'Asie du Sud-est au sortir de la guerre, et comment il a du sa survie à des réseaux marchands traditionnels, certes d'envergure modeste. On aurait juste souhaité des développements plus longs sur une des inconnues majeures de l'économie de la guerre d'Indochine, l'opium, et sur les questions de la monnaie, avec les jeux complexes sur la piastre<sup>7</sup>. Goscha, s'appuyant sur des travaux antérieurs, rappelle que la guerre d'Indochine eut des conséquences sur la vie politique de la Thaïlande. Il faudrait un jour travailler en détail sur les frontières de la Thaïlande, notamment lors des offensives Viet Minh au Laos à

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<sup>6</sup> Par exemple, Roger Reese, *Why Stalin's Soldiers Fought. The Red Army's Military Effectiveness in World War II*, Lawrence, University Press of Arkansas, 2011, Ian Kershaw, *The End. The Defiance and Destruction of Hitler's Germany, 1944-45*, New York, Penguin, 2011.

<sup>7</sup> Daniel Leplat, *Le trafic de la piastre indochinoise, 1945-1954*, thèse soutenue à l'Université de Paris I, 2010.



partir de 1953, et sur le jeu chinois. Les interactions sino-vietnamiennes « sur le terrain » doivent être plus étudiées encore, qu'il s'agisse du rôle de la communauté chinoise au Vietnam ou des autorités provinciales en Sud de la Chine<sup>8</sup>.

Surtout, Goscha apporte une contribution décisive à la réflexion sur la diffusion des techniques et pratiques de la guerre moderne, et sur les dimensions transnationales de la construction des Etats. Ce chantier est immense et commence seulement à être abordé par l'historiographie. L'exemple de la RDV pourrait devenir un des *case studies* les plus éclairants. On y voit, au nom de l'efficacité et en situation de guerre, un extraordinaire bricolage puisant dans les pratiques coloniales françaises, les pratiques impériales japonaises, celles de l'OSS américain et surtout dans les pratiques de communisme combattant d'Union soviétique<sup>9</sup> et de Chine. Ce qui est le plus riche dans le livre de Goscha, c'est l'étude minutieuse des « importateurs »/adaptateurs, des « passeurs » vietnamiens, au travers de trajectoires biographiques ou de décisions prises par la direction Viet Minh. Bien sûr, après 1950, les Vietnamiens semblent un peu perdre le contrôle du processus, et on peut avoir l'impression qu'ils se voient imposer les techniques maoïstes – ainsi de la politisation de la médecine (p. 215). Mais en réalité, celles-ci avaient fait preuve de leur efficacité, de même que celles de l'Union Soviétique, dont on ne soulignera jamais combien ses victoires contre la Wehrmacht ont suscité admiration et prestige. Cette greffe était certes le prix à payer pour obtenir le soutien sino-soviétique. Mais elle n'a pas seulement été subie. Elle a été efficace et a permis de mener une mobilisation unique et une guerre moderne. Goscha confirme à quel point le communisme fut aussi (surtout ?) un ensemble de technologies jugées efficaces destinées à construire un Etat capable de transformer, contrôler et mobiliser une société, de se battre de manière moderne, et développer une économie de manière accélérée sans dépendre du système capitaliste international. En cela, le travail de Goscha apporte beaucoup à une histoire sociale des totalitarismes, devenue si riche pour l'Union soviétique ou la RDA.

A travers le livre de Goscha, il est possible de relire toutes les principales étapes de la guerre. L'importance de l'occupation chinoise, qui a permis au Viet Minh de planter les graines d'un Etat. La difficile guerre au Sud, qui a tourné en déroute. Le tournant de 1949-50, qui a réellement transformé la nature de la guerre, avec l'aide sino-soviétique. Les campagnes de 1952-53, qui ont préparé Dien Bien Phu. Goscha apporte beaucoup sur une des périodes les moins connues du conflit, les années 1947-49. Le chapitre consacré aux relations de la RDV avec Staline et Mao confirme à quel point le contexte international, et notamment la guerre froide (la solidarité « asiatique » anti-coloniale fut faible, tardive, et de peu de conséquences), ont constitué des ressources et pas seulement des contraintes. Le

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<sup>8</sup> Sur ce point, Charles Kraus, Charles Kraus, "A border region 'exuded with militant friendship': Provincial narratives of China's participation in the first Indochina War," à paraître.

<sup>9</sup> On peut lire aussi Tuong Vu, «Dreams of Paradise. The Making of a Soviet Outpost in Vietnam,» *Ab Imperio*, 2008/2.

soutien sino-soviétique ne fut pas un acquis, mais a été obtenu au prix d'efforts répétés et de beaucoup de frustrations<sup>10</sup>.

Ceux qui s'intéressent aux questions stratégiques contemporaines, et ont parfois tendance à considérer que certains phénomènes sont entièrement nouveaux, trouveront des pages intéressantes sur l'utilisation des enfants<sup>11</sup>, souvent des pauvres orphelins de la grande famine de 1944-45, embrigadés par le Viet Minh, et sur le rôle important des femmes non seulement dans le renseignement et le combat, mais également dans les actions terroristes. La mode est aujourd'hui à travailler l'histoire des insurrections et contrinsurrections coloniales pour essayer d'en tirer des leçons. Mais le Vietnam semble un cas unique, non seulement à cause du contexte international, mais aussi par le choix de combler l'asymétrie avec la puissance occupante par la mise en place de forces conventionnelles. Alors que les guerres de contrinsurrection sont en bloc placées dans les guerres asymétriques, ce qui se justifie pour la guerre d'Indochine au vu notamment du monopole français en aviation et en chars (p. 421), c'est beaucoup plus discutable dans d'autres domaines, en particulier les communications (p. 360, 367). Il faut aussi rappeler que les bombardements français n'avaient rien à voir avec ceux que les Américains firent subir aux Coréens, aux Vietnamiens et aux Cambodgiens. La France a toujours été réticente à engager des renforts, parce que l'Europe et l'Afrique du Nord étaient prioritaires. Nombre d'officiers, habitués aux guerres dans les colonies, menaient la guerre sur un faux rythme. Ils voulaient certes éviter une défaite localisée cuisante, mais aussi (c'était l'accusation américaine) une victoire qui pourrait entraîner une aide accrue de la Chine communiste, voire une intervention de ses « volontaires » (surtout après la fin de la guerre en Corée). Il faudrait confronter systématiquement le regard des « Occidentaux » sur la manière de faire la guerre de l'adversaire et sur sa nature, et interroger ainsi, comme aujourd'hui en Afghanistan, l'« orientalisme militaire »<sup>12</sup> et une ethnographie/anthropologie trop prompte à faire la liste des invariants culturels, en particulier ruraux. En effet, comme Goscha le montre bien (chapitre IV), la ville, avec sa diversité et ses bouleversements, est au moins aussi essentielle pour comprendre les logiques sociales de la lutte insurrectionnelle. Aujourd'hui comme hier, l'enfermement est source de radicalisation, et de lien social si important dans les guerres d'insurrection. En sens invers, Goscha évoque (p. 135) une question sous-étudiée, celle des désertions ; il faudrait pouvoir étudier en détail la masse des prisonniers détenus par les Français durant la guerre, ceux qui optèrent plus encore pour la lutte, ceux qui se rallièrent ou acceptèrent de travailler pour les Français et le Vietnam national (en combattant, en travaillant de manière plus ou moins forcée, en fournissant des renseignements), et ceux qui sont morts en captivité, rendant les échanges de prisonniers en 1954-55 particulièrement compliqués.

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<sup>10</sup> Sur ce point, on lira aussi Cécile Marangé, *Le communisme vietnamien* Paris, Presses de Sciences Po, 2012.

<sup>11</sup> Manon Pignot (dir.) *L'enfant soldat, XIXe-XXe siècles*, Paris, Armand Colin, 2012.

<sup>12</sup> Patrick Porter, *Military Orientalism. Eastern War through Western Eyes*, Londres, Hurst, 2009.

Toutefois, l'interaction avec les Français durant la guerre n'apparaît guère. Il aurait été intéressant de traiter des cas des métis. Comme dans nombre de guerres récentes, les forces opposées évitaient les combats directs et s'efforçaient avant tout de réserver et de consolider leurs positions, à savoir des territoires et des hommes<sup>13</sup> ; mais le camp Viet Minh a beaucoup plus voulu une victoire finale et définitive que le camp franco-vietnamien. Il existait nombre de trafics entre les deux « parties » au conflit, en particulier de produits pharmaceutiques. L'auteur en aurait certainement parlé s'il avait pu inclure un chapitre spécifique sur l'économie de guerre Vietminh dans un ouvrage déjà volumineux. Goscha cite le professeur Huard (p. 184) : celui-ci connaissait nombre de membres du Vietminh, dont ses anciens élèves, et fut promu à plusieurs reprises pour discuter avec le Vietminh, notamment pour les blessés de Dien Bien Phu et au Nord-Vietnam après juillet 1954. Surtout, le Vietnam national n'apparaît guère. Il faudrait certes une étude aussi remarquable que celle de Christopher Goscha sur les Etats associés, et sur leur manière de conduire la guerre, même si la direction restait française. Face à l'historiographie qui insiste sur les dimensions modernisatrices de la colonisation, il semble bien que l'administration coloniale française a surtout été fascinée par la tradition, et que les efforts de modernisation étaient bien différents de ceux des Etats-Unis à partir du milieu des années 1950.... Et que les succès accomplis ont surtout profité au Viet Minh ! Mais les interactions entre les deux Vietnam, notamment au niveau local, devraient être d'avantage étudiées, d'autant que les outils théoriques se sont beaucoup développés ces dernières années<sup>14</sup>. Ainsi, les quelques mois suivant les accords de Genève mériteraient d'être étudiés au niveau individuel, en particulier autour de la question des ralliements. En revanche, Goscha montre bien, comme une partie de l'historiographie récente, que le Viet Minh s'est imposé dans le sang contre des partis nationalistes, soutenus par la Chine et souvent bien plus antifrançais, et qu'il a eu des relations très difficiles avec les Sectes à la fin des années 1940 – mais les Evêchés « militarisés » du Centre-Vietnam sont également des cas intéressants.

Bref, il s'agit d'un excellent ouvrage, qui à la fois fait le bilan des travaux de l'auteur et ouvre de nombreuses pistes de réflexion. Beaucoup est encore à découvrir sur le quotidien de la guerre, notamment dans les dossiers personnels de la Sécurité, aux Archives Diplomatiques de Nantes, dans le fond rapatrié de Saïgon. Mais il faut conseiller à tous les spécialistes de la guerre, mais aussi de l'histoire du XXe siècle, d'effectuer une plongée dans ce cas unique dans les guerres de décolonisation ; elle est particulièrement riche d'enseignements.

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<sup>13</sup> David Keen, *Useful Enemies. When Waging Wars is More Important than Wining Them*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2012

<sup>14</sup> Je ne citerai qu'un exemple, Stathys Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006 ; mais une grande partie de la Seconde Guerre mondiale, à l'Est, dans les Balkans, et en Asie, a été entièrement relue depuis quelques années en brouillant les notions de collaboration et de résistance, et l'histoire militaire traditionnelle.

Review by Pierre Grosser, Sciences Po

(English translation by Diane Labrosse, H-Diplo Managing Editor)

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Christopher Goscha's new book is first-rate, thanks not only to the richness of its sources and to the soundness of its analysis and conclusions, but also thanks to the advances he has made in terms of our understanding of the Indochinese war. The book will become an indispensable reference for the historiography of the war and of totalitarianism. While we encounter many of the themes explored by Goscha in his books and articles that have been published over the past fifteen years, this is not at all simply a collection of previously published articles. There is a remarkable coherence to the whole work, not only in its construction but also in its guiding themes, a truly global vision of his subject.

The current historiography of the war is divided between those who study the war from the top and those who study it from below, which is to say the experience of the war of its combatants versus that of its civilians. The multiple memoirs of the French combatants have tended to dominate the topic of the Indochinese war, as have debates on the responsibilities of politicians and military officials for the defeat. Goscha includes an excellent section dedicated to the men on the other side, most notably concerning the battle of Dien Bien Phu, which was a veritable slaughter on the Vietnam side, and very nearly ended badly due to a crisis in the morale of the combatants.<sup>1</sup> It is further necessary to examine the entire dossier on this battle, which has taken on a mythical status, in order to understand its strategic impact. The French General Henri Navarre was not the only one to have considered that its impact had been exaggerated in order to more quickly provide an exit strategy for a France that wanted to disengage itself from a war that had become more unpopular and politically unmanageable than it was financially costly.<sup>2</sup>

The question of the state of exhaustion of the Viet Minh and its capacities to take advantage of its victory is important in order for historians to be able to offer a clearer judgement of the Geneva conference.<sup>3</sup> But what is really new is the insistence on the "middle level" of the war, a topic which is increasingly privileged in studies of war<sup>4</sup>: in the case of the war for Indochina, this involves an investigation of the intelligence, communications, and logistic specialists, as well as those who tried to create a wartime medical branch. At the same

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<sup>1</sup> Goscha has also recently coedited a special issue of *European Journal of East Asian Studies* (2010, 9(2)) on of the "The Experience of War: Four Sino-Indochinese Perspectives.

<sup>2</sup> See Pierre Grosser, *La France et l'Indochine (1953-56): une "carte de visite" en "peau de chagrin" », PhD, IEP Paris, 2002.*

<sup>3</sup> See Pierre Asselin, "The Democratic Republic of Vietnam and the 1954 Geneva Conference: A Revisionist Critique", *Cold War History*, Mai 2011, and the debate with Sophie Quinn-Judge on H-Diplo.

<sup>4</sup> Paul Kennedy, « History from the Middle. The Case of the Second World War", *The Journal of Military History*, January 2010.

time, this reflection on the “infrastructures” of the Viet Minh war comprises a response to the logic of domination that had figured in the establishment of western hegemony.<sup>5</sup> Goscha has made a decisive contribution to the lively and sustained discussion of the concept of total war, which currently seems to be rather stagnant. Here we have the classic question of the chicken or the egg. There must be many nation-states in existence in order to have a state of total war, but nation-state building is a consequence of total war, which has often been thought of as being a means for realizing national unity, and one of providing states with their power. In the Viet Minh case, as with many other communist states, the totalitarian state is an integral part of the mass war against internal and external enemies, and it enables mobilization and radical reforms. But at the same time, this was a very particular type of state, which did not even possess a well-defined territorial base, and whose structures were created too quickly. In short, it was the type of state which was principally based upon will, and which was able to conduct one of the most total wars of history, and above all, to mobilizing, in one way or another, millions of men. It was not, as elsewhere, state coercion or the adhesion to a well constituted state which explains these sacrifices. On this matter the book does not entirely answer the question of **why** this mobilization was possible and its sacrifices were accepted, because it concentrates above all on the question of **how** this occurred. This question remains equally unresolved in terms of the Soviet Union during the Second World War, despite recent visible progress on the topic, or for the last months of the Nazi war, when all appeared to be lost for Germany.<sup>6</sup> Thus, for Indo-China, there was not a massive and brutal invasion of a foreign force; the French colonial effort had nothing in common with the Nazis (or even with that which occurred in Algeria), and the Viet Minh often fought other Vietnamese. The motives for the Viet Minh soldiers’ readiness to fight, and also for the risks taken by the hundreds of thousands of coolies, remain a mystery, beyond answers which highlight nationalism, anti-colonialism, communist fanaticism, etc.

The current historiographical fashion involves history that is ‘transnational,’ or ‘connected.’ But in practice it is often uneven. Goscha’s work is a model of the approach, which greatly adds to the efforts already made to write an international history of the wars of Indochina and of Vietnam. It also includes traditional diplomatic history by developing the history of relations with Moscow and Beijing. It reveals how the Viet Minh searched for weapons across South-east Asia at the beginning of the war, and how it owed its survival to a network of traditional arms merchants, which was modest in scope. One can legitimately wish that Goscha had developed in greater depth one of the major unknowns of the economy of the war in Indo-China, opium, on questions of funding, with the complex matter of the Indochinese piaster.<sup>7</sup> Relying on previous scholarship, Goscha reminds us that the

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<sup>5</sup> Daniel Headrick, *Power over Peoples. Technology, Environment and Western Imperialism*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2010.

<sup>6</sup> For example, Roger Reese, *Why Stalin’s Soldiers Fought. The Red Army’s Military Effectiveness in World War II*, Lawrence, University Press of Arkansas, 2011, and Ian Kershaw, *The End. The Defiance and Destruction of Hitler’s Germany, 1944-45*, New York, Penguin, 2011.

<sup>7</sup> Daniel Leplat, *Le trafic de la piastre indochinoise, 1945-1954*, thèse soutenue à l’Université de Paris I, 2010.

Indochinese war had consequences for the politics of Thailand. Scholars should focus in detail on the frontiers of Thailand, notably during the Viet Minh offensives in Laos starting in 1953, and on the Chinese game. The Sino-Vietnamese interactions “on the ground” must be further studied, since they involve the role of the Chinese community in Vietnam or the provincial authorities in southern China.<sup>8</sup>

Above all, Goscha makes a decisive contribution to the question of the diffusion of the techniques and practices of modern war, and on the transnational dimensions of the construction of states. This task is immense and is only beginning to be tackled in the historiography. The example of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) could become one of the most illuminating case studies. That state, in the name of efficiency and in a situation of war, created an extraordinary hybrid entity, drawn from French colonial practices, imperial Japanese practices, those of the American Office of Strategic Services (OSS) and above all from those of communist warfare of the Soviet Union<sup>9</sup> and of China. One of the richest aspects of Goscha’s book concerns its meticulous study of the Vietnamese “importers”/adapters, the smugglers, through their biographical trajectories or the decisions taken by the Viet Minh leadership. Certainly, after 1950, the Vietnamese seemed to be a slightly losing control of the process, and we can have the impression that they found themselves forced to impose Maoist techniques, as well as the politicization of medicine (215). But in reality the leadership proved its effectiveness, in the same manner as that of Soviet leaders (one can never emphasize sufficiently how the victories over the Wehrmacht generated admiration and prestige). This grafting of techniques was certainly the price to pay in order to obtain Sino-Soviet support, but it was not simply an imposition; it also was effective and permitted the Viet Minh leaders to lead a unique mobilization and a modern war. Goscha confirms that communism was also above all an ensemble of technologies which were considered to be effective and which were intended to construct a state capable of transforming, controlling, and mobilizing a society so that it could fight in a modern manner and quickly develop an economy without having to depend on the international capitalist system. In this manner, Goscha’s work brings much to the social history of totalitarian states, which has become so rich for the Soviet Union or the RDA.

Goscha’s book includes a full discussion of the principal stages of the war: the importance of the Chinese occupation, which permitted the Viet Minh to sow the seeds of the future state; the difficult war in the South, which turned into a rout; the turning point of 1949-50, which, with the Sino-Soviet aid, truly transformed the nature of the war; and the campaigns of 1952-53, which set the stage for Dien Bien Phu. Goscha provides much new information on one of the least known periods of the conflict, the years 1947-49. The chapter which is devoted to the relations of the DRV with Stalin and Mao confirms at which point the international context, and notably the Cold War (the anti-colonial “Asian” solidarity was

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<sup>8</sup> On this point see, Charles Kraus, “A border region ‘exuded with militant friendship’: Provincial narratives of China’s participation in the first Indochina War,” *Cold War History*, forthcoming

<sup>9</sup> See also aussi Tuong Vu, « Dreams of Paradise. The Making of a Soviet Outpost in Vietnam », *Ab Imperio*, 2008/2.



weak, slow to develop, and of little consequence), involved resources and not simply constraints. Sino-Soviet support was never a given, and was secured only after repeated effort and much frustration.<sup>10</sup>

Those who are interested in contemporary strategic questions, and who are at times inclined to consider that certain phenomena are entirely new, will find the sections on the use of children, often poor orphans of the great famine of 1944-5, who were recruited by the Viet Minh, and on the role of women, not only in intelligence and combat, but also in terrorist actions, to be of great interest. The current fashion is to examine the history of colonial insurrections and counter insurrections and to attempt to draw lessons from them. But Vietnam appears to be a unique case, not only because of its international context, but also in the decision to address the asymmetry of forces with those of the occupying power by the deployment of conventional forces. Whereas counter-insurrectionary wars are as a whole classified as asymmetric wars, what justifies this classification for the Indochinese war, especially when one considers the French monopoly on aviation and tanks (421), is much more debatable in other areas, in particular that of communications (360, 367). One must also recall that the French bombing was in no way related to what the Americans subjected the Koreans, the Vietnamese, and the Cambodians. France was always hesitant to engage its reinforcements, because Europe and North Africa were its priorities. A number of officers, who were accustomed to wars in the colonies, conducted the war without conviction. They certainly wanted to avoid a stinging, localised defeat, but also (this was the American accusation) a victory which could lead to increased aid from communist China, which is to say an intervention of its “volunteers” (especially after the Korean War). Here it is necessary to systematically confront the “Western” gaze in terms of an adversary’s manner of conducting war and on his nature, and thus, as with today in Afghanistan, to interrogate “military orientalism”<sup>11</sup> and an ethnography/anthropology which is too quick to describe the cultural invariants, particularly those that are rural. In effect, as Goscha ably demonstrates (Chapter IV), the city, with its diversity and its upheavals, is at least equally essential for understanding the social logic of the insurrectionary struggle. Today, as before, confinement is a source of radicalization, and forms terribly important social bonds during wars of insurrection. Conversely, Goscha evokes (135) an understudied question, that of desertion; it is necessary to be able to study in detail the mass of prisoners detained by France during the war, those who opted more for the struggle, those who rallied to or agreed to work for the French and for ‘national’ Vietnam (in fighting, in working in a more or less forced manner, in providing intelligence), and those who died in captivity, making the exchange of prisoners in 1954-55 particularly complicated.

However, this interaction with the French during the war hardly appears. It would have been interesting to examine the case of the Métis (those of mixed blood). As with many

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<sup>10</sup> On this point see also Cécile Marangé, *Le communisme vietnamien* Paris, Presses de Sciences Po, 2012.

<sup>11</sup> Patrick Porter, *Military Orientalism. Eastern War through Western Eyes*, Londres, Hurst, 2009.

other recent wars, the opposing forces avoided direct combat and strove above all to reserve and consolidate their positions, namely their territory and their men;<sup>12</sup> but the Viet Minh camp wanted a final and decisive victory much more than did the Franco-Vietnam camp. There was a certain amount of trading between the two “parties” in the conflict, that involving pharmaceuticals in particular. The author would have made a statement had he been able to include a chapter devoted to the topic of the economy of the Vietnam war in this admittedly already large study. Goscha cites Professor Huard (184), who knew many Viet Minh members, including some of his former students, and several times was sent to discuss matters with the Viet Minh, notably regarding the wounded of Dien Bien Phu and in North Vietnam after July 1954. National Vietnam scarcely appears in the book. We certainly require a different book, one that would be as remarkable as Goscha’s, on the topic of the associated states, and on their manner of conducting war, even if the perspective is a French one. Despite a historiography that insists on the modernizing dimensions of colonization, it rather seems that the French colonial administration was above all fascinated by tradition, and that their efforts at modernization were completely different from those of the United States from the mid-1950s.... and that the successes mostly profited the Viet Minh! Still, the interactions between the two Vietnams, notably at the local level, must be further studied, all the more so since our theoretical tools are much more developed than they were in earlier years.<sup>13</sup> Thus, the months following the Geneva Accords should be studied on an individual level, in particular with respect to the question of those who rallied to certain sides. On the other hand, Goscha joins others in showing how the Viet Minh used violence against nationalist parties, which were supported by China and often even more anti-French, and that the Viet Minh had very difficult relations with the religious sects at the end of the 1940s. The “militarized” bishops of Central Vietnam are an equally interesting case.

In sum, this is an excellent work, which at once adds to the author’s previous works and opens many paths for further reflection. There is much more to discover on the daily aspects of the war, notably in the military security personnel file in the Archives Diplomatiques de Nantes which were repatriated from Saigon. One must advise all those who specialize in the Vietnam wars, and also in the history of the twentieth century, to immerse themselves in this unique case in the wars of decolonization, which reveals particularly rich lessons.

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<sup>12</sup> David Keen, *Useful Enemies. When Waging Wars is More Important than Wining Them*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2012

<sup>13</sup> I will cite but one example: Stathys Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006 ; but over the past few years a large part of the Second World War, in the East, in the Balkans, and in Asia, has been entirely re-interpreted for and has upended notions of collaboration and resistance, as well as of traditional military history

Christopher Goscha's *Vietnam: Un État Né de la Guerre 1945-1954* is a milestone in research on Vietnamese communism and the relationship between decolonization and the Cold War in Indochina. By making use of an impressive amount of French and Vietnamese sources Christopher Goscha has written a new history of the First Indochina War (1945-1954). He convincingly shows how the internationalization of the war and the making of the Communist Party-State in Vietnam were closely interrelated; i.e. how the war had changed the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) and Vietnamese society and how the DRV leadership used the war for its own political purposes.

This history is not chronological, but discusses different aspects of one of the most violent conflicts in the early stages of the Cold War. Some of these conflicts have been given only scant attention so far and are analyzed for the first time in a systematic way.

The first two chapters present the First Indochina War as a connected history, an anti-colonial struggle that gradually became a hot conflict within the Cold War. The author emphasizes that the war was not just a struggle between the DRV and the French, but also a civil war between contending forms of Vietnamese nationalism. Thus, the establishment of the Associated State of Vietnam in 1949 led to the "Vietnamization" of the war and at the end more Vietnamese soldiers of the French-invested state died than French soldiers (33-34).

Both the DRV and the French welcomed the Cold War that reached Indochina at the end of the 1940s. It allowed the DRV to overcome the diplomatic isolation that it had been suffering from in the first years of war and it allowed the French to present themselves as fighting on the front line against communism. In other words, at least initially neither the DRV nor the French were victims of the Cold War. On the contrary, it was only after the turning-point of the war in 1950 with the material and ideological support of the People's Republic of China and the Soviet Union that the DRV managed to consolidate its power base, and to intensify its control of Vietnamese society and thereby to enforce its ideological homogenization.

The following chapters discuss the different aspects of this process: the construction of a professional and modern army (chapter 3), a modern health system (chapter 5) and of a public security and intelligence service (chapter 6). The last-mentioned chapter is especially important since it highlights the significance of the newly created DRV intelligence service in establishing a Communist Party-State in Vietnam, eliminating its opponents, fighting the French, and preparing and launching rectification campaigns and land reform in 1951 and 1953, respectively. While using many Vietnamese-language sources that have only become recently available, Goscha also provides intriguing details on the biography and activities of persons such as Trần Quốc Hoàn, Minister of Public Security from 1953 to 1981, who played an important role in the DRV, but is usually rarely discussed in non-Vietnamese literature on Vietnamese communism. This also applies to Lê Đức Thọ who already in the 1940s was adamant in enforcing a monopolistic interpretation

of “communist” as being equivalent to “patriotic” and “anti-communist” as equivalent to “reactionary” (88). Thus, this book makes an important contribution to the better understanding of the inner workings of the DRV and the Vietnamese Workers’ Party.

The following chapters analyze specific aspects of the war: chapter 7 on the “transnational colonial war” makes clear that although the DRV was diplomatically isolated until 1950 it nonetheless had close trade relations with partners in Southern China, Hong Kong, Macao, and Thailand and was able to buy weapons, military equipments, medicine and other items. Trade with Thailand in particular, however, became much more difficult after the arrival of the Cold War in Indochina. The internationalization of the conflict also had a clear impact on another sideshow of the war: the establishment of propaganda and communication networks by the Vietnamese People’s Army. After the outbreak of the war in 1946, the DRV had almost completely lost access to modern tools of communications. Gradually, however, it managed to set up a radio communication network connecting the different regions of the country and later with Soviet and Chinese military aid pouring into Vietnam after 1950 made quick progress in modernizing those networks. Thus, during the battle of Điện Biên Phủ the French still could decipher most of the Vietnamese radio traffic, but could not prevent the Vietnamese People’s Army from communicating (376).

In chapter 9, “The diplomatic struggle” Goscha elaborates on a point that he has made before. The DRV did not slip into the Cold War, but enthusiastically voted for the Communist camp to enhance its own legitimacy and to enjoy the military and economic aid of the Soviet Union and the People’s Republic of China. The author argues that entering the Communist bloc turned out to be difficult because the Soviet Union mistrusted the DRV leadership and in particular its president Hồ Chí Minh because of the temporary cooperation with the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) before the August Revolution in 1945, the dissolution of the Communist Party of Indochina in November 1945, and because in the first years of the war the DRV leadership had refrained from openly condemning U.S. policy (390-391). The author emphasizes that Chinese support was absolutely instrumental in allaying this mistrust (393-395).

The decision to side with the Communist bloc, however, proved to be a double-edged sword: it helped the DRV to win a war that almost had been lost in 1949, but also aroused the fear of anti-communist U.S. policy-makers and thus allowed the French to gain U.S. support and (418).

In this intersection between decolonization and the Cold War the Indochina War turned into a modern war with a hitherto unseen level of violence. In the last chapter and the conclusion the author focuses on the Vietnamese experience of war and the almost total mobilization of Vietnamese society and provides a ‘revisionist’ military history of the Indochina War which undermines accounts of a glorious and heroic struggle that are dominant in the orthodox Party historiography in Vietnam.

Although after 1950 the DRV received military aid from the Soviet Union and the People’s Republic of China, the war remained asymmetrical as the Vietnamese People’s Army lacked airpower, tanks, trucks and health care services. When, after 1950, the intensity of

battlefield violence increased, the Vietnamese body was thus exposed to the modern war technology that the French army had at its disposal. Also, in order to compensate for these deficiencies the DRV had to mobilize its population. This transition to total war also produced the Communist Party-State: by using Maoist mass mobilization techniques and launching a social revolution, the DRV gained control of Vietnamese society and ensured the loyalty of cadres, soldiers etc. towards the Vietnamese Workers' Party. In this context, the author could also have addressed the role of intellectuals who were also instrumental in mobilizing the population.

In his conclusion Goscha describes how the level of violence and the destructive force of modern war culminated in the battle of Dien Bien Phu. His analysis of this decisive campaign based on new Vietnamese sources shows that the victory of the DRV forces was not that glorious nor inevitable. The death toll on the Vietnamese side was so high that after the second attack on the French positions in April 1954 fighting morale decreased and there were even incidents of defeatism. After rigorous counter-measures initiated by General Võ Nguyên Giáp the Vietnamese managed to defeat the French, but at the cost of complete physical exhaustion. This, Goscha argues (489), was one of the main reasons why the DRV had to accept the compromise solution reached at the Geneva negotiations.

The conclusion of the book is actually not a conclusion, but a new separate chapter. This fascinating book deserves a real conclusion that systematically sums up the main arguments and that shows in which way the Party-state that had come into existence during the Indochina War continued to exist after 1954.

For anyone who wants to fully understand how Vietnam was shaped by the first Indochina War and how the Vietnamese experienced this war, Christopher Goscha's book is compulsory reading.

Christopher Goscha's *Vietnam, Un État né de la guerre* provides a remarkable, wide-ranging, and very original overview of the first decade of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV), and of the first Indochina war. Making wide use of Vietnamese language sources, adopting a multi-angled, almost cubist approach that encompasses topics as varied as disease, administrative practices, the role of women in the war, intelligence gathering, and logistics, this excellent book will be of considerable use to students, general readers, and experts alike.

I was struck immediately by the range of comparisons that Goscha draws. Both Algeria (including the Battle of Algiers and the role of the FLN), and Indonesia are frequently and fruitfully invoked, as is Europe during the Second World War, to highlight the links between city and countryside, for instance. Other allusions to wars and flashpoints of decolonization, like the Mau Mau rebellion, also dot the text. In keeping with much of Goscha's previous work, the Vietnamese case is firmly grounded in a regional context: Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, and especially China loom large in this fine study. Indeed, to take one example, Goscha points to the transfer of an entire school-- the Tran Quoc Tuan military academy that ultimately propelled the DRV's "military revolution"-- from Vietnam to Southern China in 1950. This is, in other words, as much Vietnamese as it is international history.

The book is also profoundly revisionist, and perhaps to the francophone audience it targets in its current form, outright iconoclastic. Take the simple but evocative point that more forces of Bao Dai's State of Vietnam perished on the battlefields of Indochina than French ones (34). Goscha's highlighting of Vietnamese agency is equally significant, for he demonstrates like other so-called revisionist historians that Vietnamese parties and actors were engaged in a civil war that embroiled outsiders, more than vice-versa. Goscha's analysis of the battle of Dien Bien Phu likewise shatters several myths. General Henri Navarre was aware that the DRV had acquired new heavy artillery, Goscha shows. Moreover, the imbalance in communication networks and devices was not as important as many have assumed. In other words, the DRV forces at Dien Bien Phu were not as heavily outmatched as is commonly believed. Nor was their victory in any sense a foregone conclusion: Goscha dwells upon General Vo Nguyen Giap's equivocation and fears about the outcome of the battle. Equally if not more interestingly, Goscha shows how the DRV was in fact losing many aspects of the war more generally: thus, as the DRV grew increasingly "communitic" and repressive (135), ordinary Vietnamese people joined the rival Vietnamese state in droves. Nearly 5,000 DRV officials deserted in the first ten months of 1952 alone (135). Meanwhile, Vietnamese farmers frequently refused to fight, and this in spite of indoctrination classes, "emulation campaigns" (435) and other potent means of persuasion.

*Vietnam : Un État né de la guerre* displays sound chronological sensitivity. According to Goscha, 1949-1950 marked a major watershed in several respects: it brought the war's internationalization, a major escalation in its violence and in the lethal nature of its



weaponry, as well as a fundamental shift in strategy-- the implementation of mandatory military service and the accompanying move from guerilla warfare to a campaign of pitched battles. 1953 witnessed another turning point, with a major shift in the international context following Joseph Stalin's death. Internally, the discourse of national unity was swept aside in favor of agrarian reform and class struggle.

The construction of the DRV lies at the heart of Goscha's study. The young state faced innumerable hurdles. The most obvious was geographical: Goscha aptly terms it an "archipelago state," (63) so fractured and isolated were its different constituent parts by French and Vietnamese State forces and administrations wedged between them. It was largely comprised of "corridors," "pockets" and "islands" (65). The new state obviously did not have to invent everything: much was inherited. Among the many rather counterintuitive colonial continuities he identifies, Goscha notes how the *Journal officiel de l'Indochine* morphed seamlessly into the *Cong Bao Dan Quoc Viet Nam*. The new state also copied French policing techniques and tapped into Sûreté files. Its officials pored over French colonial libraries. They were of course themselves products of French training, like the engineer Tran Dai Nghia, who attended the prestigious French *École centrale des arts et manufactures*, only to take his knowledge to the service of the DRV to produce bazookas, mortars, and rocket launchers. Likewise, Vietnamese doctors took up, and sometimes over, French colonial techniques, institutes and networks.

The book poses a number of important questions, some implicitly, others explicitly. Was the new state weak or strong? Externally, Goscha shows how the DRV garnered scant international support, even among the likes of Nehru, who might seem at first blush a logical ally. Internally, Goscha consistently points to the surprising weakness of the Communists within the Viet Minh, and concomitantly, to the DRV's strategically inferior position throughout most of the war. The Indochinese Communist Party's (ICP) "schizophrenia" (69) also contributed to its inherent weakness, not to mention regional variations. Thus, Goscha depicts the situation in the south as outright calamitous for the ICP for much of the period under consideration. At the very least, the strength of the Hoa Hao and Binh Xuyen militias in the south rendered the situation unstable and unpredictable. Yet for all of these fractures, dissensions, rifts and regional differences, the ICP was capable of immense ruthlessness across all of Vietnam, as Goscha makes plain. He shows several purges at work: one in 1945-6, involved the physical elimination or the systematic defamation and pillorying of non-communist nationalists, in what Goscha depicts as nothing short of a civil war. Subsequent liquidations ensued, most notably during Nguyen Binh's terrifying campaign to impose his authority on the south. Finally, in 1950, Goscha contends, the ICP "revealed its true ideological colors" (277) and began purging non-communists from the state. In one sense, however, these levels of violence, the civil war and its enduring consequences, might all point further in the direction of weakness.

How then did the DRV win? On one level, Goscha provocatively suggests, it did not. The DRV was left amputated of its southern half in 1954, while in August 1945 it had controlled all of Vietnam. Yet if the question shifts to how the French were beaten, other answers emerge. Goscha's outstanding chapter on the city at war shows critical compromises,

appropriations and adaptations at work. Ironically, capitalism, and especially black market activities and contraband, paved the path to victory, including, for instance, the large-scale smuggling of everything from sandals to medication from the city to the countryside. So too did knowledge accumulated by colonial trainees loom large. Local propaganda agents also played a crucial role, bringing the party line to remote regions. So did porters, conveyors of goods across lines and pockets, play an absolutely vital role in winning the war. Here Goscha's figures are dizzying: 333,200 civilians served as porters in the battle of Hoa Binh, another 200,000 at Na San in 1952 (446 & 452). Many of these women and men perished. Yet here too, such factors could easily be placed in the opposite column of a balance sheet. The need for cannon fodder (447) and for farmers to agree to serve as porters is precisely, Goscha argues, what led the ICP leadership to move forward with agrarian reform. How then did it not backfire? Goscha seems to suggest that this precarious dynamic risked doing so just as the victory of Dien Bien Phu and the Geneva accords came about.

A review in this venue would run the risk of seeming partial if it did not formulate a few criticisms. The book's organization presents some minor flaws in my opinion. Thus some thematic sections, be they on the battle of Dien Bien Phu, the discussion of the role of porters and messengers, or the building of a state (from emitting postage stamps to training officials and building an army), recur across chapters, making for a slightly disharmonious read. In a related problem, there is a tendency to send the reader time and again to sections in other chapters.

Chapter ten is entitled "a state in total war?" although Goscha quickly points out that total war constitutes an elusive and problematic concept. Indeed, the deep trenches in France between the Péronne school and its detractors, within the minefield that is the historiography of the Great War, serve to remind us that "total war" is in many ways a more problematic and unwieldy concept than it is a useful one. Finally, there are a handful of occurrences when other debates or studies could have been usefully introduced: Hue Tam Ho Tai's edited volume *The Country of Memory* in the conclusion, Clifford Rosenberg's *Policing Paris*, to connect surveillance and colonization (220), and divergent Ho Chi Minh biographies around pages 222-223<sup>1</sup>.

None of this detracts from the fact that this ambitious and original book is as welcome to the fields of Vietnamese history as it is to international relations, the study of decolonization, and conflict studies. There is really nothing like it, to my knowledge, bridging the gap on all sides of the conflict from 1945 to the Geneva accords, while displaying deep knowledge of both local and international contexts. Indeed, the marriage between the big picture and the myriad examples Goscha delivers is particularly successful.

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<sup>1</sup> Hue Tam Ho Tai, ed. *The Country of Memory : Remaking the Past in Late Socialist Vietnam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Clifford Rosenberg, *Policing Paris: the Origins of Modern Immigration Control Between the Wars* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006); William Duiker, *Ho Chi Minh* (New York: Hyperion, 2001); Sophie Quinn-Judge, *Ho Chi Minh, the Missing years, 1919-1941* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); Pierre Brocheux, *Ho Chi Minh: A Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

At its core, *Vietnam: Un État né de la guerre* explains how an external conflict became grafted onto a civil one. It considers how the DRV went from its inception-- which others like David Marr have discussed at length-- to its victory over French forces, while suffering setbacks and overcoming major internal turmoil. All the while, it avoids teleological and partisan pitfalls. For all of these reasons, and the more prosaic point that I would very much like to use it in my own teaching, I will conclude by stating that I look forward to this excellent book coming out in English as well.

A conventional book review retraces the author's footsteps, reports his ideas – criticising and relativising this, requesting more information on that – synthesises the book's strengths, regrets its weaknesses and skilfully doses the ingredients to produce a particular taste. Let me instead take a shortcut and immediately state that this book's main virtue, apart from the valuable data it contains on the Indochina War, is to have confronted us with two true 'problems of history'. Contrary to what one may think, this is a rare virtue, even among historians and especially among historians interested in Asia. But the methodology we witness here undoubtedly belongs to the great tradition of historical writing: the author chooses a period, a place, a set of personalities and a series of events that happen and follow one another, and then goes beyond that particular choice to produce – without blushing at the claim – an overtly systematic analysis. He thus exceeds our expectations. Aware of Christopher Goscha's talents, we were sure he would portray the lives and viewpoints of Vietnamese in this war, bring unknown sources and testimony to light, and reconstruct the resistance side of this decade of conflict conventionally portrayed from colonial, military, international or ideological perspectives. This is indeed present in the book and delights us without eliciting any particular surprise. The surprise lies elsewhere, in the two problems of history mentioned above, problems that may apply to other contexts. The first deals with State-Party relations, relations between the new regime's organisation and its political objectives, and is scattered throughout the book, most patently illustrated in the apparently adventitious question of medicine. The second addresses the issue of how to mobilise a population to make sacrifices for a cause that is, in its eyes, no more than a notion, and is treated *en bloc* in the final chapter.

Nothing reveals the centrality of these true problems more than the author's stated intention to avoid recycling old platitudes and empty debates. On numerous issues, Goscha moves forward quickly, wasting neither his time nor ours. And when he does happen to mention the ubiquitous false problems, he does so in the form of asides, treating them as matters that are long settled and require little of our attention.

See for example the infuriating debate on Ho Chi Minh's 'real' political persuasion: his trajectory and actions demonstrate without any ambiguity – or with ambiguities that are entirely tactical – that he was an orthodox communist, an internationalist, a man caught up in the Comintern's game, just like many others of his time around the world. That said, the author sees Ho Chi Minh as symbolic of the DRV's split personality, struggling for national independence here and internal social transformation there, and thus obliged to adopt a strategy on two fronts. On the one hand he sought to achieve the liberation of a community of equals, while on the other he strove within that community to emphasise or create cleavages for the purposes of class struggle. The first front – which united – was extremely apparent and is the only one proclaimed today; the second – which divided – was and remains concealed. But the issue today is no longer the reality of these two fronts, nor indeed the 'real ideology' of a Ho Chi Minh (as though what he thought could take precedence over what he did or said): it is those places and moments where, between the two fronts, contradictions arose that could be resolved only by recourse to the stock of ready recipes cooked up by

Bolshevism. At the time of these events, the tension between fatherland and class, between the national and the social was already an old and recurring problem for communist thinkers. Vietnam's leaders knew that, as they also knew the theoretical and practical responses developed during a quarter century of Stalinism. What is striking when one examines this period, and should lead us to remove the case of Vietnam from its analytical enclave and set it in broader context, is the systematic adoption of instruments of seduction and domination imported from the USSR, including those that arrived along Maoist channels. Research was needed in this area, and this is what Goscha has done, through field observation of specific instances of tension and contradiction.

This is undoubtedly the reason for the choice – I weigh my words – of Ho Chi Minh as the regime's icon. While a Tran Phu was just a communist and a Nguyen Binh only a patriot, Ho Chi Minh united the regime's two faces. This union's artificial nature, dominated as it was by communism, was irrelevant to the symbol's construction: it was even an advantage as, according to circumstances and the needs of the day, the symbol could be skewed, as in 1945 towards peaceful patriotism or in 1950 towards social revolution. Ambivalence is the primary quality of a hero, the key to his durability. To convince oneself of this, one needs only compare what was said of the Ho Chi Minh doctrine in the Stalinist Vietnam of the 1980s and what is said in the capitalist Vietnam of today. It is hard to believe that this is the same man.

To summarise: the issue is not the Vietnamese political strategy's split personality during the Indochina War, but rather the concrete manifestations of that split, and in the same way the issue is not the (claimed) dual nature of the Vietnamese leader who symbolised the split but the appearance of duality which was ascribed to him, in which he was perhaps complicit. Here – and this is but one example of the author's choices – Goscha has rightly spared us the debates of the past twenty years and leaped straight to the next stage. The leap is long overdue and while it does not of itself guarantee that he is right, it does mean we can move on to new questions.

Among them is the matter of popular mobilisation. It comes late in the book, too late in my opinion, but has the merit of saying what we had despaired of hearing: that the recruitment of peasants for the army, like the recruitment of porters and messengers, like the political rallying of ordinary villagers was achieved primarily through coercion. That's obvious, you might say. Perhaps, but it also happens that no one has ever expressed it so clearly. Furthermore, when you stop to reflect, it is extraordinary to think that we know so much about the forced levying of troops in Europe, the pressing of soldiers *en masse*, the terrible bleeding of rural societies, and yet the Vietnam People's Army remains presented like a helmeted Minerva descending peacefully from Olympus. We know so much about the rebellions European recruitments caused, the cannon fodder's resistance, the extreme violence into which peasant apathy sometimes transformed itself, and yet, as far as Vietnam is concerned, everything seems to have happened as the natural effect of a great momentum of national enthusiasm. This is the equivalent of a history of the First World War as viewed by maréchal Joseph Joffre and Prime Minister Georges Clémenceau, or by the muzzled press, in other words without the mutinies, without the fraternisation, without the *ras-le-bol*, the rage and the rebellions reported by Louis Barthas, Pierre Chainé, Léon Werth and Gabriel Chevallier, to name but a few. Of course, for Vietnam as for other mass wars – starting with

the French Revolution, which initiated conscription – attempts were later made to explain popular mobilisation as a function of political propaganda, with constructed enthusiasm substituted for natural enthusiasm. Greater credibility was thus apparently achieved. But going round in circles was achieved here, no more than that. What mysterious process was at play to ensure that national sentiment – admitting that it had been introduced into people’s heads – suddenly, in a matter of years, in a matter of months, became true and truly felt? All this is perfectly incoherent and, moreover, contrary to the evidence.

Goscha does not pick up this false question, or its orientalist avatars like ‘the mandate of Heaven’: he seeks out the nature of the coercion masked by this so-called patriotism. This leap deserves to be measured, as he has moved forward not by one step, but by two. In the first he has abandoned all those wide-eyed questions about natural Vietnamese nationalism to arrive at the idea that coercion was applied. In the second he moves from the idea of coercion to its historical modes. His history’s object is the manifold ways adopted by Vietnam’s wartime leaders – in this place or that, at this moment or that, using this means or that, with varying success – to convince men to go and die at the front – not counting the 1.7 million porters mobilised between 1950 and 1954, a figure I find astonishing (453). Since Tran Hung Dao, the fourteenth century general who expelled the Chinese, it has always been possible to find exceptional cases: natural patriots, peasants who were patriots through and through. But it is no less true that in Vietnam as elsewhere – and this universal characteristic should at last be recognised for Vietnam – the soldier of fortune, promoted to the rank of citizen so as better to serve as a soldier, was inevitably “caught between two forces: ahead, the enemy army; behind, the police cordon” (Chevallier)<sup>1</sup>. It is the police – in the physical or institutional sense – that Goscha has advisedly chosen to show us here: by consequence, he has also highlighted popular resistance to the police, the sullen, the rebellious, the refractory, the deserters. This is an excellent thing, and not only for a true history of Vietnam, because one of the great remaining enigmas of the past two hundred years is the way, at moments of war, that people are moved. They are forced to move, certainly, but how? What are the mechanisms of coercion, its basis, its method? Where do we situate the dividing line between subjection pure and simple and semi-voluntary servitude? Where is the constraint external? Where is it integrated, digested and ultimately desired? For answers to these questions, work is needed, monographs must be written, the magnifying glass must be brought to bear on such and such a village in such and such a period.

However, as the author notes, we may well wager that the recipes of international communism – those that before their export were developed by a Soviet Union beset by foreign and civil wars – may be found at the heart of the matter. Goscha tells us that from the point of view of the Vietnamese in their struggle, whatever their original ideological motivation, communism – as a method of mass mobilisation for total war – was the only sufficiently rapid and efficient solution. On this point, I entirely agree. The Vietnamese equipped themselves with techniques for internal constraint and external conquest, and this body of tried, tested and rapidly available techniques was determinant in the communist method’s triumph. The strictly ideological option should not be understated, as an older

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<sup>1</sup> Gabriel Chevallier, *La Peur* [1930], Paris, Le Dilettante, 2008, p. 283.



history of communism certainly existed in Vietnam, but to tackle the question in terms of the need to mobilise the population in order to recruit troops is, in my view, an excellent historian's intuition (see 435). As a result, the Comintern programme made its way through the Vietnamese countryside with constancy and fidelity to the model, as described in Chapter X: obligatory military service, mass levies, invention of heroes and false martyrs (when there were so many true ones), campaigns of mobilisation, patriotic emulation and rectification, purges, etc.

One point escapes me: why mention land reform here? Why connect it to the "massive manpower needs imposed by the war" (445)? I fail to understand the train of thought here (445 ff), which starts with the observation that land was distributed and concludes with the idea that the manpower available to the army thus increased. It was surely the opposite: the more land you give peasants, the less they wish to leave it... Or perhaps the idea suggested by the vague expression "overcome peasant overcautiousness" (448) should have been made explicit: land reform allowed rural communities to be brought to heel, notables to be overthrown and the Communist Party itself to be purged of peasant elites recently but superficially converted to socialism. This observation (found, for example, in Olivier Tessier's Ph.D. dissertation<sup>2</sup>) returns us to the problem of contradictory strategic fronts: what was good for social and socialist revolution (creating cleavages within the villages, empowering the very poor) was bad for national struggle (recruiting landless peasants, stabilising the population in the rear).

To stay with the criticisms, or at least my regrets, I also wonder why the otherwise magnificent discussion of porters of arms and provisions overlooks a possible hypothesis: their role in propaganda. Porters were central to scenes filmed of the war, several were heroised and became the subjects of widely distributed books and brochures: they are the quintessential ordinary people participating in the struggle, the heart of the idea that the individual serves the national community and that the least effort of the smallest biceps is useful. This makes us immediately suspicious. Because, despite their real logistical contribution, can we not imagine that their role was staged? This would not be the first time in history that a spontaneous patriotic feeling has been totally manufactured. The famous 'taxis of the Marne' of 1914, which never travelled 50 kilometres and which never went to the front, served first and foremost as film images of the fine solidarity of Parisians and the rear: their influence on military events was nil. This was certainly not the case of porters in the Indochina War, but there is no shame in wondering if a little exaggeration was applied. Moreover, that exaggeration would resolve the hiatus that existed between the affirmation of a modern Vietnamese army (from before 1950, the author tells us) and the fact that those porters would never have sufficed to deliver the food and equipment if they had not also possessed Soviet trucks. Their labour, perhaps indispensable in the early stages of guerrilla war, was certainly less so later on: and yet the porters continued portering and continued to be filmed. They were a mobilisation tool, and one that emphasised the national dimension of the conflict. The image of the coolie pushing artillery up the slope to Dien Bien Phu –

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<sup>2</sup> Olivier Tessier, *Ancrage social et mobilité spatiale : essai de définition d'un espace social local au nord du Vietnam*, Université de Provence, département d'anthropologie, 2003, 658 p.

enthusiastically, voluntarily? – belongs to the register of decolonisation wars; the Chinese soldiers at the top of the slope belong to the register of international communism and the Cold War. We understand that the former are foregrounded, not the latter, but this is no less an illustration of the contradictions between the two strategic fronts. The question of the porters' use in propaganda deserves, I think, to be asked. The author touches on it when he notes that the mobilisation of porters “had the effect of expanding, in a way, the spatial configuration of the conflict, by sending thousands and thousands of Vietnamese throughout the country, even into the ethnically non-Vietnamese territories” (452) – a question discussed in the fifth chapter of Andrew Hardy's *Red Hills*.<sup>3</sup>

These two minor misgivings aside – land reform and the porters – the final chapter frames the Vietnamese Indochina War so expertly that it might have benefitted from a more prominent place in the book, perhaps at the very start. In fact, the rest of the book leads out from this discussion, including the population's real suffering and the choice of a communism of the Leninist and military type. Did the author hesitate? Was he afraid he would overstep the mark or fail to muster sufficient evidence, testimonies, documents, sources? Undoubtedly, and it is also quite possible that he wanted to keep this question for later; this in any case is implied in note 32 on page 540 (allow me a parenthesis here: how did the publishing house manage to create such a poor notation system?), which announces future research. We await this research with impatience.

Let me say from the outset, the second historical question posed by the book is huge. It is huge and fascinating because it contains all the rest. The problem is the articulation of the Party and the State. We have long been wondering who will tackle this question. It requires considerable daring and obviously called for a Goscha, unparalleled *connaissanceur* of the people, language and archives that he is. It is complex, because nothing is certain and the element of interpretation is great, but also because the author's standpoint does not appear very fixed. One senses hesitation and caution within his argument, that he is waiting to see what the trial balloon will bring back, for the results of the experiment he has launched in these pages, little by little, with an air of innocence, to test the wind rather than build a system. But this system is, I believe, present in the book, although it is not explicitly formulated.

We should start at the beginning. In order of their appearance on the stage, there are three actors: the Communist Party (born in 1930), the State (the DRV, born in 1945) and the Indochina War (1947-1954). We have a fair knowledge of the Party; the war and its political and social effects are also known; by contrast, our understanding of the third point in this triangular structure, the State, is more confused. Institutionally, it denotes the regime established in August 1945, which went underground in 1947, continued fighting for eight years and was victorious at Dien Bien Phu. But this institutional description is deceptive. It deceives at the general level, as the same vague word is used to denote a content which must have changed between 1945 and 1954; and it deceives in its details, because at the time its

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<sup>3</sup> Andrew Hardy, *Red Hills: Migrants and the State in the Highlands of Vietnam*, Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2003.

task was to shelter communism, the tool of anti-French resistance, in the watertight shell of a legitimate and universal institution. In itself, the word State means absolutely nothing (in this it resembles the word “culture”). It must describe a reality and if that reality truly existed, we need to say in what form, in what offices, with what staff, what objective, what engagement with other realities, etc. This is precisely Goscha’s aim. His entire book (especially chapters II, III, V and VI) is packed with references to this State, understood as an authority capable of organising the community’s administrative and military life and imposing choices upon it. We must thank him for going to look behind the façade, at the machine’s very entrails, to see how it functioned.

This research is not easy, as documents are scarce, and it has consequently achieved mitigated results. We cannot be sure of really knowing what existed behind the façade. We see ministries, offices, departments of public health, public servants and cadres, a whole network of administration, police and military, a pyramid of skillfully boxed authorities; but the further we strain our neck to see, the more we get the impression that there is not much behind the façade and even less behind the curtain. We end up in doubt. The reader’s malaise is illustrated in the case of the civilian and military services (chapter V). We know of certain great doctors, their skill and engagement with the resistance; we can see that there must have been effective clinics, equipped medical units, unyielding courage, iron will and extraordinary ingenuity; we can even admit the existence of a Ministry of Health with the capacity to organise all that and find medicine, equipment and doctors. Yet, even so, how can we reasonably think that in 1952 the DRV possessed 136 hospitals and infirmaries, 468 district maternity hospitals and almost 4,000 village maternity hospitals (192 and 198)? That there were doctors, nurses and midwives everywhere? That the university and medical schools were anything other than what Goscha finally describes: “a heterogeneous collection of thatched houses” (202)? If medicine was so up-to-date, we do not understand why between a third and a half of the soldiers were sick, why cholera vaccinations were a disaster, why it was necessary to pedal to produce the electricity necessary for surgical operations, or why the top leadership were treated in a separate structure (Infirmery 303) which, moreover, was prudently relocated to Nanning (214). We do not understand the general disorganisation – which was inevitable: Vietnam was at war, and a tough war at that – which, for example, meant that the Ministry of Health’s personnel took three years to go from Vinh Yen to Tuyen Quang (p. 190). Frankly, how could it have been otherwise? So, how can we not be sceptical when we see data and statistics based on official publications, and of much later date too, as most come from a book published in 1995 (cf. note 3 in chapter V: see too the data on “millions of mm<sup>3</sup> of vaccines”, 197)?

Of course, Goscha knows that this is a great illusion. He uses and criticises these “eloquent statistics” (198). He bases the idea of a highly developed administration on a dry nomenclature, and immediately afterwards proves his source’s limits with information that is more reliable and more specific. He even sometimes goes round to the far side of the mirror, for example in his evocation of the Filatov anti-cholera procedure, and clearly shows us the propaganda (207). So I wonder if he should not have taken the plunge and frankly stated that the State in question was no more than a skeleton. The bone structure existed, but it was without flesh because it had no staff, no site and no funds. There was a ministry of this and a ministry of that, a department X, a committee Y, a laboratory Z and universities U, U’

and U” – in short, all that one could dream of : but each of these organs functioned with a handful of people (63 students at the university of medicine) and in conditions of terrible penury. More than this: it is not certain that all this really existed; some may have been no more than lines traced on paper. Despite its name, the “medicine production factory” never produced a single medicine (205). And we know the communist tendency for multiplying titles and reforming its organs (see 216-217). Wartime Vietnam’s state apparatus was ghostly or, at the very least, it demands proofs of its existence that are more convincing, human, and grounded in reality.

However, this is precisely the point. This evanescent nomenclature, these figures from today or yesterday, are not there to describe a reality: they are not even there for plausibility. Their goal is simply to attest to the existence of an organisation which was neither military nor political, but civilian, administrative, and ordinary, corresponding to the project announced in the independence declaration of August 1945. And that is why, on paper, nothing is missing. Seen from afar, seen by populations which had yet to be seduced, a complete State was established and operational, capable from one day to the next – when it came out of exile – of administering the whole country and administering it in a normal and civil way, without the shadow of a communist hand. From a political perspective, this was a stroke of genius (it was the second, the first being not to have received power from Japanese hands in 1945). The creation of a complete skeleton had at least three advantages: 1) to present the resistance not as bearded guerrillas but as respectable officials being hunted down (and who were fighting not to seize power but to restore it); 2) to play down or even deny the Party’s underground action (no surprise to learn that important theoretical positions were given to non-communists: that was the fiction’s very purpose); 3) finally, in better times, as when China sent aid, the existence of the skeleton allowed pieces of flesh to be properly distributed around the body. Goscha shows this when he writes that the people’s army was not mediocre before 1950 (90): no, it was not, precisely because it rested on a bone structure capable of absorbing even the smallest outside contribution and, in 1950, was able to make a great leap. In sum, the skeleton strategy was sublime in that it enabled the structure to be simultaneously irreproachable, discreet, focused on the future and very effective in action.

I think that the fact of having believed a little in the *maquis* State’s reality made our author hesitate over the articulation of war and the State apparatus. Here, we must say that he is not helped by the French language, into which the expression *State of War*, or *War State* – which is the idea he wants to convey – cannot be translated, obliging him to adopt the ugly and meaningless term “*État de guerre*” (136, 345, for example). There is the “*état de guerre*” (state of war : the situation) or the “*État en guerre*” (State in war : the actor, as on 133, 387): not both. I fully understand that he means that the Vietnamese State was shaped by the Indochina War, which contaminated it, gave it its characteristics, led it off course and, to be specific, placed it in the Party’s clutches. This position is logically consistent with the idea that the State actually existed, that it pre-existed the war and thus its control by the Party. But why then the title “A State *born* from war”? Did it follow the war or precede it? Here, no pirouette can extricate us; we cannot say ‘a little of each, the one and the other, like the chicken and the egg’; we must choose. Let us say that the title is unfortunate and our author maintains his opinion: first the State and then and only then the war that modified it through communism: “from top to bottom, the Party has taken hold of the State and society” (422); it

exercises “a stranglehold on the State” (423), and “decided to communise the State between 1950 and 1954” (135). Viewed in this light, the argument is again based on the authenticity of the civilian structures captured from the outside by the war and the Party, captured and then perverted. The same goes for the army: “Initially the Party was quite simply in no position to control the army (no more than the State for that matter)” (94).

But is this so sure? Can we imagine that the Party – which existed well before the war and well before the State – waited until 1950 before playing its role? That it initially exercised only “weak control over the State” (10)? Can we really think that the Party – the actor that proclaimed independence, made the first DRV, eliminated the nationalists, existed through propaganda, etc. – nonetheless only joined the train of history after it had left the station? And in these conditions, who was driving the train before the Party boarded? Without the Party’s structures and Party’s men, what was this State, what was this army? And how do we explain that it behaved like the Party and in the Party’s interests (banning sedition, making arbitrary arrests, limiting demonstrations, establishing extraordinary tribunals, 249-251)? Chance would have been busy indeed. In fact, the hypothesis of the anteriority and autonomy of the State and army is hard to maintain. But if Goscha does not entirely renounce it – although he does hesitate, as we have seen – it is because once we have admitted the reality of the civilian (and military) administration and its chronological precedence, we are obliged to minimise the initial action – and maximise the later action – of the Communist Party. The Party emerges as the seasoned player, perhaps enjoying a run of good luck, who has no sooner arrived at the card table than he rakes in the chips.

I myself do not place much faith in this hypothesis, especially as the theory of the skeleton State lets us out of the impasse. In short, the Party created the skeleton from A to Z. The Party did not capture anything that pre-existed, nor did it pervert or transform anything: rather, from the start it manufactured the instrument it needed to conceal itself and which was never intended to be strong enough to become a rival. It proceeded like the Bolsheviks, who likewise started from scratch, with a tarnished *ancien régime* destined to disappear and with clear plans about what to set in its place. The State was shaped, as our author sees it, but undoubtedly shaped less by the war than by the Party itself, which did not join a moving train but instead placed the train on its rails. In 1945 it offered itself the luxury of an elegant window case, designed to rally large numbers of people, but theoretical and ghostly, a construct, a pure puppet the powerlessness of which was precisely its purpose. If the Party really did only intervene after the fact, it is hard to understand why, in 1945, an ‘academic’ system of control was established over the civil service and State organs: the double hierarchy, coat of “white paint” (see p. 236), creation of cells, dispatch of cadres, doubling of functions (the administrative head is only a political deputy head), etc. In 1954, everything was ready and the *in vivo* experiments had already been conducted for the establishment of a typical communist regime: on the stage there was a theoretically autonomous State apparatus and in the wings a Party was pulling the strings. The war produced not a State but a regime. This is what in any case resolves the contradiction: a State (but a Party-State) born of war but which pre-existed war (as a bone structure). In the final analysis it is the term ‘State’ that has, from the outset, led us astray through its artificiality, its lack of definition or its strictly administrative definition. In 1945 and 1954, in reality we are not speaking of the same thing at all. The continuity is not historical: it lies only in the language.



Let us be clear: there is nothing pejorative in the metaphor I have adopted here, of the skeleton. There is even a trace of admiration in so far as the strategy seems subtle. Communism in war created, planned and established the prop on which it was able to attach its future content. It prepared a ministry so that a ministry would exist, a company so that a company would exist, a laboratory that could, tomorrow, receive the machines that would produce the medicines. It was a skeleton for sure, but a skeleton that trembled with life and of which the Party controlled each of the organs that were soon to start functioning. This union of a dead body and a body about to wake up – along with the lack of reliable sources – undoubtedly explains the author's hesitation to take the plunge. It seems to me that Goscha senses it, scents it and suggests it but shies from completely overturning the genealogy of the actors. For him the State came before the party, the war then put the Party into the State and in so doing changed it. I prefer a different configuration: the Party came before the State, the Party made the State and hid behind it during the war. As I read the author's description of the place reserved for Party members in the police (236) – valid for the whole administration – I let out a roaring "hurrah!" The same goes for the Party cadres who were enjoined to "avoid speaking of class struggle and radical revolution" (437-438). It is all there.

Incidentally, I also imagine that Goscha did not want to overload this long and beautiful book. It already contains data and analyses destined to cause much ink to flow. The horns of many received ideas have been extracted and some of those ideas have been wholly demolished. Let me say a little more about these data and analyses. The passages on the police and its multiple origins (225), the informers, the Dao Thi Bai affair (241), or on foreign relations and diplomacy (401), Stalin's more than prudent attitude (391) or the Vietnamisation of medical terms (208) are remarkable; the documents on the internal opposition to Ho Chi Minh (p. 385), the espionage and indoctrination operation H122(267), and military intelligence at Dien Bien Phu (274) are truly fascinating. I should have mentioned them. But in doing so, I would have risked not leaving space for the book's huge historical, theoretical and 'systematic' contribution. This book shows the way out of many cul-de-sacs. In black and white, it presents the obvious which no one previously dared to say. The question of the population's national sentiment and united patriotic feeling is now cut-and-dried, that of coercion exercised over civilian populations clearly posed. The history of the Vietnam War sheds its (purely political) status as an exception to emerge as what it is: an object of history like any other and which must be understood in the light of others.

The process of normalisation is not complete, certainly, but we may be grateful to Christopher Goscha for having brought some order to the house. He has blocked access to paths that lead nowhere, and pushed hard against doors that open onto truth and real issues. I have not expressed all the admiration I feel for this book, page by page. But it was necessary, I think, to emphasise these two great laboratories of historical research – not debates, not exchanges of opinion, not chatter, no, laboratories, calling for monographs and case studies – the one on the conditions of military recruitment and political mobilisation, the other on the definition and mutations of the State apparatus between 1945 and 1954. The importance of these two laboratories, these two problems of history, lies in the fact that the nature of the victorious regime depended upon them.



This is a rich, innovative book on how the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) and its dominant force, the Indochinese Communist Party (ICP), combined state building and warfare in an eight-year struggle against France. The author does away with several widespread myths. Vietnamese soldiers were not fearless ants sacrificing themselves willingly for the larger cause of national liberation. Goscha shows convincingly, with crescendo in his concluding chapter, that death and suffering took a heavy toll on morale. The Vietnamese communists had to use multiple techniques derived from Soviet and Chinese models to mobilize the population, recruit soldiers and invigorate them through a combination of coercion and inspiration. During the 1954 battle for Dien Bien Phu the morale of the advancing soldiers was close to the breaking point after the second inconclusive assault. The sacrifices made by porters equipped with 20,991 bicycles and by civilians compelled to provide food and shelter for the troops were so huge that the DRV was obliged to seek a reprieve after its 7 May victory (459, 468). Hence it is untrue that the Geneva accords of 21 July were imposed on the DRV by its Chinese and Soviet allies. While they did compel their Vietnamese comrades to accept an agreement on worse terms than the military balance of power warranted, the DRV badly needed an armistice to get its people out of their state of exhaustion (489). The Vietnamese leaders had seen what the United States could accomplish in Korea, and were concerned that its overwhelming force might be turned against them after the Korean armistice of 27 July 1953. Hence the DRV leaders shared the Chinese and Soviet aim to combine the Dien Bien Phu campaign with diplomacy so that a wedge could be drawn between the United States and its European allies. In Geneva the United States was on the sidelines while the United Kingdom and France engaged with a coordinated team of Chinese, Soviet and Vietnamese negotiators.

Goscha seeks also to refute as a myth that the First Indochina War was essentially asymmetric. While he concedes that this is not a myth as far as the period 1945–49 is concerned, and also that asymmetric guerrilla tactics remained dominant in southern Vietnam, he argues that the massive support and training provided by China to the DRV from 1950 transformed the war in the north to symmetric, regular warfare. General Vo Nguyen Giap's People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN) was able to set up no less than seven divisions and fight eight major battles, two of which were victorious (Cao Bang October 1950, Dien Bien Phu May 1954). France maintained complete command of the sea and the air though, and the PAVN suffered from a lack of motorized transportation, but it did get heavy artillery. Through massive Chinese logistical assistance and the mobilization of an army of porters PAVN was able to win these key battles. Cao Bang and Dien Bien Phu were of course far away from the French-controlled sea- and airports, so a key strategic task for the Vietnamese commander Giap was to lure the French into battle in places where they were at a disadvantage.

Goscha's argument goes much further. His book is not about military tactics, not even strategy – at least not in a narrow sense. It is about the methodical build-up of institutional and technological capacity that a state must undertake in order to sustain itself and its

army in a time of war. Such capacity-building went on relentlessly from the proclamation of the DRV on 2 September 1945 through the period of Chinese occupation of northern Indochina (October 1945–June 1946), the negotiations with France (January–December 1946), the war against France (December 1946 to July 1954), and the continued struggle for national unification (until 1975) (125). Goscha’s main point is that state-building and war-making were intimately connected. A certain kind of state was needed in order to mobilize the population for “total war,” and its “totalizing war” in turn determined its nature as a “total war state” (420–423). Goscha’s claim (434) that “L’État faisait la guerre mais la guerre faisait aussi l’État” is deeply reminiscent of the theory put forward by Charles Tilly in his *Coercion, Capital, and European States, AD 990–1992*,<sup>1</sup> where the third chapter is entitled “How War Made States and Vice-Versa.”

Goscha spells out his Tillyite thesis in a number of chapters with multiple data and facts, many of them new to a Western audience. He has read a great number of Vietnamese-language memoirs, institutional histories and official accounts, and has also got to see some Vietnamese primary sources. He makes good use of his material. While we read his account, we may also look forward to David G. Marr’s new forthcoming study of Vietnamese state building 1945–46.<sup>2</sup> Just like Goscha, Marr looks at state building and internal political divisions in Vietnam, but with emphasis on the pre-war period, and with even more extensive use of Vietnamese sources.

One of Goscha’s chapters describes the systematic but arduous and long-lasting construction of the Vietnamese army. A following chapter analyses the war in the cities, not by repeating the old inter-communist debate about the respective revolutionary roles of city-based proletarians and country-based peasants, but instead making the point that the Indochina War was not just fought in the countryside but also in the colonial cities. The Indochina War began with a drawn-out battle for Hanoi from December 1946 to January 1947. The DRV government was well aware that this battle was unwinnable. It just aimed to hold out inside the city for a month in order to prove its resolve. This was achieved, notably because the French did not want to destroy Hanoi with heavy artillery the way they had done with the port city of Haiphong one month earlier. In the following years there was no active warfare in north Vietnamese cities, but guerrilla warfare continued in Saigon until 1950, after which the strategy in the south also shifted to mainly rural mobilization. Goscha’s city chapter points out the importance of the ‘war of information,’ with agents of either side depending on each other for intelligence and playing complex games with and against each other. The communists always depended on city-based networks for information. Thus there was a curious kind of symbiosis between the belligerents. Goscha also conveys the impression that the communists were more apt at utilizing human intelligence than the French and their local allies. By contrast, the French for a long time held a monopoly on signal intelligence and code-breaking.

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and European States, AD 990–1992* (Blackwell, 1992).

<sup>2</sup> David G. Marr, *Vietnam: State, War and Revolution 1945–1946* (University of California Press, forthcoming).

The next chapter treats a subject that is often neglected in military history: medicine. Disease is often a more serious threat to armies than the enemy troops with their weapons. Goscha describes in great detail the recruitment of doctors and pharmacists, and the acquisition of drugs.

Then he returns to a more focused discussion of intelligence, showing how the Vietnamese communists learned from and took over the methods of their French oppressors, while building on networks of friendship formed in the colonial prisons. However, there was not just friendship but also hatred among rival groups of inmates and the animosities continued after their release in 1945. Goscha relates the story of how communist-led police forces continued their formerly prison-based 'civil war' against rival nationalist factions. He also reveals how the Vietnamese learned to decipher French radio communications and how this helped them in the battles for Cao Bang and Dien Bien Phu.

Next Goscha turns to trans-national networks of revolution, an area of research where he has played a pioneering role. His books *Thailand and the Southeast Asian Networks of the Vietnamese Revolution (1885–1954)* and *Going Indochinese: Contesting Concepts of Space and Place in French Indochina*<sup>3</sup> are essential contributions to the field. The chapter in the book under review demonstrates his grasp of the spatial aspects of revolutionary warfare. However, it also makes the reader aware of the book's main missing chapter: that on finances. Goscha quotes Pierre Mendès-France's famous statement that although not everything is financial, everything in the end is reduced to finance. The book contains many interesting facts on financial matters. Yet Goscha has not made a focused account of how the DRV financed its war. Thus we still lack the Vietnamese counterpart to Hugues Tertrais' study of how France funded its war: *Le piastre et le fusil: Le cout de la guerre d'Indochine 1945–1954*.<sup>4</sup>

In Goscha's following chapter on the means of communication, we are back again to intelligence. Goscha has much to tell about how Vietnam built up its communication systems so that they became increasingly effective, but he could perhaps have made more out of its communication failures. He notes the extent to which the French were able to decipher the DRV's radio communications and map out its emplacements and movements. The Vietnamese must have faced a terrible dilemma. If they used radio to convey orders, the French would monitor what they were doing. If they refrained from using radio they would be unable to coordinate large scale operations or launch simultaneous attacks. Although the Viet Minh leaders who gathered for a national congress at remote Tan Trao in August 1945 had radio equipment (325) so they could pick up the unexpected news that

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<sup>3</sup> Christopher Goscha, *Thailand and the Southeast Asian Networks of the Vietnamese Revolution (1885–1954)* (Routledge/Curzon, 1999) and *Going Indochinese: Contesting Concepts of Space and Place in French Indochina* (NIAS Press, 2012; first ed. 1995).

<sup>4</sup> Hugues Tertrais, *Le piastre et le fusil: Le cout de la guerre d'Indochine 1945–1954* (Paris, Comité pour l'histoire économique et financière de la France, 2002).

Japan had been subjected to attacks by a new kind of bomb, that the USSR had entered the war, and that Japan had then capitulated, they had no means by which to convey instructions to the cadres around the country. Hence there was no way they could launch or lead an insurrection. The 'August Revolution' did not thus have any central direction, but was carried out by local cadres acting on their own volition, with only a partial basis in general instructions issued by the ICP leadership several months earlier. Local commanders acting on their own initiative under general instructions remained a key aspect of how the Vietnamese communists operated for many years to come, although not – as Goscha shows – in the big battles. Loosely coordinated local initiatives were in some ways a weakness but in others a strength.

While it is true that the DRV leaders were able when war broke out in December 1946 to dismantle Radio Bach Mai and bring the equipment to secure areas, there is reason to believe that a broadcast of Ho Chi Minh's famous appeal to arms had been planned to signal a simultaneous attack against all French garrisons in northern Indochina during the evening of 19 December. Yet it took until the next day before the broadcast occurred. Thus the element of surprise was lost. The delayed broadcast may provide part of the explanation for the fact that the attacks on the various French garrisons were far from simultaneous (344), hence providing the French with ample opportunity to launch their counter-attack. Goscha's scant attention to communication failures, however, offers no objection to the main message of his book. His point is that the DRV gradually built up its technological capacity to fight a modern war, often through trial and error.

The following chapter on diplomacy is fascinating, although for some reason Goscha omits the whole story of the DRV's 1945–47 diplomatic effort vis-à-vis France. He emphasizes the DRV's attempts to mobilize support from other Asian countries and from the main communist powers. Goscha builds on a wealth of material from the archives of various communist countries – albeit not Vietnam. It appears that Josef Stalin was deeply suspicious of Ho Chi Minh. The impression one gets from what Goscha writes (although he does not fully say so) is that Ho risked being denounced as an 'Asian Tito.' He was held responsible for the decision to 'dissolve' the ICP in November 1945 and for having failed to carry out land reform during 1945–46, when the DRV held government power in Hanoi. Two ICP members launched a campaign in 1949 to convince Stalin that Ho Chi Minh was a right wing nationalist deviationist who should be purged from the communist movement. Ho did not apparently dare to exclude the two campaigners from the party until well into 1950. He was saved by Mao Zedong, who brought him to Moscow in 1950, by Zhou Enlai and Liu Shaoqi, who pleaded on his behalf, and by the leader of the French Communist Party, Maurice Thorez, who had already on a previous occasion tried to convince Stalin that Ho was a good communist. Without Mao's rescue operation, the Vietnamese communists might well have lost their struggle for national independence, Goscha claims (393).

Yet he disagrees with the idea that the United States could have helped Ho Chi Minh become an 'Asian Tito' by working with him instead of against him. Goscha sees Ho as a true and dedicated communist internationalist (376), and argues that the DRV failed miserably in its diplomatic struggle for liberation precisely because it was dominated by communists. Goscha compares Ho Chi Minh's Vietnam with Indonesia, where Sukarno

succeeded in his diplomatic struggle without having to win any military battles, and also with the National Liberation Front in Algeria which failed militarily but won diplomatically (418). A precondition for victory in both cases was that the national liberation movements were non-communist. Because of its diplomatic failures, the DRV was isolated in the 1947–49 period and was forced to go through the worst of all the world’s wars over the next 25 years. The Vietnamese people paid a heavy price for the communist convictions of their national leaders. Goscha could also have compared Ho with Sihanouk, who won a quick victory in his campaign for Cambodian national independence in 1953. Goscha rejects the idea that there is an absolute contradiction between nationalist and communist ideology. They may well be combined (19). He speaks of Ho Chi Minh’s “two faces,” one nationalist and one communist, and makes a comparison with Ngo Dinh Diem’s combination of nationalism and Catholicism (531 note 16).

Any great book contains mistakes. In the book under review I’ve found only one worth mentioning. The outbreak of the Korean war on 25 June 1950 did not lead president Truman to decide to engage the United States on the side of France in Indochina (373). State Secretary Dean Acheson had announced that decision already on 8 May 1950 on a visit to Paris, when he said that the U.S. government, “convinced that neither national independence nor democratic evolution exist in any area dominated by Soviet imperialism, considers the situation to be such as to warrant its according economic aid and military equipment to the associated states of Indochina and to France...”<sup>5</sup>. Since I am writing this review in Stockholm, not far from the editorial office of *Expressen*, I have to add one mistake that is not worth mentioning: *Expressen* is Swedish, not Swiss (409). Its Paris correspondent Svante Löfgren made the biggest scoop of his whole career when he got an interview with Ho Chi Minh on 23 November 1953. Löfgren did not even have to go to Hanoi. With help from the Swedish foreign service, he sent a telegram with questions to the DRV embassy in Beijing. Ho’s replies came back through the same channel. They made big news throughout the world: Ho was ready to negotiate.

French publishers do not generally live up to the same index standards as English-language university presses. Armand Colin has allowed just a short index of personal names. There is also no list of references (just a short bibliography), so the reader has to search through the notes for bibliographic information. Since much of the material used in the book is Vietnamese, it would make sense to create a website with scanned copies of the source material, linked to page or footnote numbers. This would make it possible for readers to replicate Goscha’s inferences from his sources. Such websites are becoming standard in quantitative research and ought to be used also in qualitative empirical studies.

One problem in researching Vietnamese contemporary history is that scholars have no access to classified material in Hanoi or Ho Chi Minh City. Vietnam is far behind China, Russia and European countries in terms of making its files available for academic research. While this has not prevented Goscha from amassing information about the contributions made by various services to the Vietnamese war effort, it has made it impossible to dig into

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<sup>5</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1950, East Asia and the Pacific*, Vol. VI, 812



crisis decision-making and internal party debates. Goscha reveals that the original version of a speech made by party General Secretary Truong Chinh in 1948 contained a passage that was omitted from the version published in a 2001 volume of historical documents. The undesirable fact was that Truong Chinh had aimed to create an Indochinese Federation of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia (401–402, 535 note 72). How many similar omissions are there in published Vietnamese material?

*Vietnam: Un État né de la guerre* offers perspectives with a potential to inspire further reflection among students of war and states. Goscha adopts the terms ‘total’ and ‘totalizing war’ in order to demonstrate similarities between the DRV’s war against France and Europe’s modern wars. He refers to a number of writings about ‘total war’ in Europe from the French Revolutionary to the First and Second World Wars. This allows him to underscore his point that the Indochina War was not primarily an asymmetrical guerrilla struggle but a modern war with full use of advanced technology and mobilizing a herculean national effort through modern organizational means.

A first reflection is that some further research may be needed in order to establish to what extent Goscha is right. As he concedes, the Indochina War was ‘total’ only during its second half (113–120, 421, 426, 469), only in one half of the country (110–113, 469), and – he might have added – only for one of the belligerents. Goscha exaggerates when claiming that it was “une guerre totale entre deux armées bien décidées à se battre *jusqu’au bout...*” (466, my emphasis). While the war was costly for France (and the U.S.), France never had to mobilize its population or suffer casualties at home. It did not even resort to conscription as it did later in the war for Algeria. In this sense the war was clearly asymmetrical and different from the European ‘total wars.’ Yet Goscha is right to underscore the importance of the “total war” in the north. The French army was not just worn out by guerrillas, but beaten in regular battles.

Another reflection is that it may be interesting to examine in what ways the strategic thinking of Mao Zedong, Truong Chinh, Tran Huy Lieu, Vo Nguyen Giap, Che Guevara and other proponents of revolutionary People’s War differed from the way the Indochina War was actually fought. None of these theorists imagined that a victory could be won with guerrilla tactics alone. Only at the first stage of the struggle would it be dominated by guerrillas. A main task at the first stage was to build the required political, organizational and military strength to advance to the next stage, which Mao and Truong Chinh called the ‘general offensive.’ This is, as Goscha says (67, 90) what happened in 1950. The struggle moved on to regular warfare in the border area to China, while guerrilla tactics continued to dominate in the areas where the asymmetry of power prevailed. Goscha points out that General Nguyen Binh, the southern commander, failed when trying to launch a “general offensive” in 1950 without sufficient military strength (113, 138, 469).

A third reflection concerns the relationship between civil war and war of national liberation. Goscha correctly notes that there were several competing Vietnamese nationalisms (31–34), and suggests convincingly that a “civil war” broke out in northern Vietnam in July 1946. This was the first of a number of civil conflicts that unfolded during – or as part of – the Indochina Wars (255). Goscha claims that the Communist Party was at



the outset much weaker than is normally assumed. As late as 1950 it was by no means in full control of the population in the areas that were out of reach for the French (46). Mobilization for war was a means to gain such control. Hence the war against France was from the outset intermixed with civil war against various non-communist groups, many of which eventually sided with the French-supported Associated State of Vietnam. Hence the Indochina War was at one and the same time a war for national liberation, a civil war between rival state-builders, and – from 1950 – a Cold War confrontation.

In this context we should remind ourselves that the People's War doctrine was not a purely communist phenomenon. It also formed the key doctrine of the Indonesian and Burmese national armies which fought against communist insurgents. Chief ideologue Abdul H. Nasution wrote in his manual *Fundamentals of Guerrilla Warfare* in 1953 that "war in this century has become a total people's war."<sup>6</sup> The Burmese Army applied People's War strategy and tactics in its long and ultimately successful struggle against the Chinese-supported Communist Party of Burma, which relied on the same strategic principles: there was a People's War against a People's War.<sup>7</sup> In a Vietnamese context it might be interesting to compare more systematically the DRV with the (French-sponsored) Associated State of Vietnam (ASV) and its army, in terms of popular mobilization and organizational capacity. Could it be that the two Vietnamese armies were more similar than we are accustomed to imagining? Were they trying to do the same thing? Goscha does mention the ASV and its army (425) – which formed the basis for the later South Vietnamese army – but it does not form a part of his study.

This leads to a further reflection concerning state capacity or regime strength. We need a systematic and detached comparison of the two rival Vietnamese states. Such an endeavor could seek inspiration from Dan Slater's stimulating book *Ordering Power*.<sup>8</sup> While Slater's comparison of regime strength and state capacity in Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, the Philippines, Burma and Indonesia is persuasive, his brief chapter on South Vietnam is less convincing, and the DRV (North Vietnam) is not included in his study except as a threat. Slater's main assumption is that authoritarian regimes gain in strength and resilience by convincing social elites that they need protection against external or internal threats. It seems to me that although the DRV did not seek to protect social elites or propertied classes, but instead mobilized the lower classes against them, it also depended on at least partial support from national elite groups. Its extremely costly wars against the rival Saigon-based regimes and their French and American patrons provided the DRV with an institutional cohesion and strength (not just at the grassroots but also on the level of elites) that has helped the unified Socialist Republic of Vietnam (SRV) to survive for almost four decades since its founding in 1976. First it survived disastrous experiments with collectivization and centralized economic planning, then capitalist market reforms and

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<sup>6</sup> Abdul H. Nasution, *Fundamentals of Guerrilla Warfare* (Praeger 1965).

<sup>7</sup> Maung Aung Myoe, *Building the Tatmadaw: Myanmar Armed Forces Since 1948* (ISEAS 2009).

<sup>8</sup> Dan Slater, *Ordering Power* (Cambridge University Press, 2010).

integration with the global market, and then spiralling corruption. Clear signs of erosion have only appeared in the last few years.

A state born in war may be highly resilient, but will sooner or later face the challenge of managing a transition to a more service-oriented, transparent and accountable institution. Slater makes an interesting remark towards the end of his book: drawing from the Mexican experience, he sees states born in leftist revolutions as prone to internal fragmentation and factionalism – after one or two generations. Duration is not the same as durability, he warns.<sup>9</sup>

Christopher Goscha reads and communicates in Vietnamese and Thai and publishes interchangeably in French and English. Yet the book under review is written in an even better French than his own. Agathe Larcher, also a specialist on Indochina, has penned a wonderful translation.

Goscha is a leading force in applying theoretically informed perspectives to solidly knowledge-based studies of the Indochina War. He does so in a regional, comparative framework. Few people have read his magisterial doctoral thesis *Le contexte asiatique de la guerre franco-vietnamienne*,<sup>10</sup> but he has since then contributed a series of wellknown monographs, edited volumes, articles and book chapters, even a massive *Historical Dictionary of the Indochina War*.<sup>11</sup> *Vietnam: Un État né de la guerre* is yet another impressive achievement of a great scholar.

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<sup>9</sup> Slater, p. 289.

<sup>10</sup> Goscha, *Le contexte asiatique de la guerre franco-vietnamienne. Réseaux, relations et économie, d'août 1945 à mai 1954* (Paris: École Pratique des Hautes Études, 2000).

<sup>11</sup> Goscha, *Historical Dictionary of the Indochina War* (NIAS Press/University of Hawaii Press, 2012).

Author's Response by Christopher Goscha, Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM)

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I would like to thank each of the five eminent scholars for taking the time from their busy schedules to read and review my book so carefully and thoughtfully. They have critiqued it fairly, offered alternative interpretations, and opened up a healthy and thought-provoking debate. I could not ask for more. I will do my best to respond to each author's critique of my book, *Vietnam: A State of War* (1945-54).

I will start with the question of sources. In undertaking this project, I knew that in 1960 Armand Colin had published Bernard Fall's ground-breaking historical synthesis of the "Viet Minh" (a common shorthand for the DRV).<sup>1</sup> Almost a half century later, I felt there was room for a new history and angle for approaching this topic again. The opening of the French military archives on the Indochina conflict and the possibility of using the state and military archives in Hanoi convinced me that there would be new things to say. However, my two attempts to work in National Archives Center No. 3 of the State Archives Department of Vietnam (SADV) and those of the Ministry of Defense in Hanoi in particular largely failed. As a result, I turned to the large body of books, memoirs, and primary document collections pouring off the presses in Vietnam and combined them with my work in the French archives. The recent publication of the *Complete Party Documents* (*Van Kien Dang, Toan Tap*) volumes and several "internal" (*noi bo*) studies helped me compensate for the lack of archival material from DRV Vietnam.<sup>2</sup> As Stein Tønnesson points out, it remains difficult to obtain access to archival source materials related to major crises as well as policing, intelligence, communications, or military matters.<sup>3</sup> David Marr's forthcoming book on the Viet Minh relies mainly on French-captured DRV state archives from 1945-46 that are held in Aix-en-Provence.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, the editors of the *Complete Party Documents* have tampered with certain politically problematic documents.<sup>5</sup>

In any case, I found myself with more information than I could handle. The challenge became how to condense all of this material into a readable yet manageable historical synthesis, something which was part of the deal with Armand Colin. To keep the book's size down, I omitted several chapters, most regrettably the one on the war economy. Pierre

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<sup>1</sup> Bernard Fall, *Le Viet-Minh, la République démocratique du Viet-Nam, 1945-1960*, (Paris: Armand Colin, 1960), with a preface by Paul Mus.

<sup>2</sup> *Van Kien Dang, Toan Tap*, (Hanoi: Nha Xuat Ban Chinh Tri Quoc Gia, early 2000s for the volumes covering the Indochina War).

<sup>3</sup> Others have had more success, including Andrew Hardy, Benoît de Tréglodé, Pierre Asselin and Alex Holcombe.

<sup>4</sup> These documents are held in the file grouping *Gouvernement de fait* in the Centre des Archives d'Outre-mer. They deal mainly with administrative matters. David G. Marr, *Vietnam: State, War and Revolution 1945-1946* (Berkeley: University of California Press, forthcoming).

<sup>5</sup> See Goscha, *Vietnam*, p. 535, note 72, on the Indochinese Federation.

Grosser and Stein Tønnesson are right to critique the absence of such a chapter and if I do publish the book in English, this chapter will be included. To reduce the size, I also cut notes and combined some, thereby opening me up to the criticisms rightly leveled against me by Philippe Papin and Stein Tønnesson. For similar reasons, I also sent readers Tønnesson's way for the 1945-47 period in my diplomacy chapter. He criticizes me for leaving this period out, but he overlooks that fact that I summed up his pathbreaking work in my first chapter. Tønnesson's larger point may be that the outbreak of war on 19 December 1946, despite Ho Chi Minh extraordinary diplomatic efforts to avoid a break with France, only reinforces my contention that DRV diplomacy was largely a failure from the start.

More than using "new documents," I wanted to provide a different angle on the DRV, the war it was making, and to consider how the Indochina conflagration made the DRV at the same time. Several of my reviewers label book and its arguments as 'revisionist' and, for a French audience, Eric Jennings says, potentially "iconoclastic". None of my reviewers uses the term 'revisionist' in the French sense. Nor by using this term do they associate my book with the endless arguments between the 'orthodox' and 'revisionist' scholars over the legitimacy of the DRV and of Franco-American attempts to destroy it.<sup>6</sup> I thank them all, for I intentionally penned a historiographical introduction calling such paradigms into question before presenting my own argument. It is true that readers looking for 'mandates from heaven' and 'fires in lakes, 'heroic resistance,' and 'unwinnable wars' will find parts of my book heretical. But 'revisionist' scholars will hardly appreciate what I have to say in chapters 2, 9, and 10 about the weakness of Vietnamese communism, the almost total lack of Soviet interest in Ho Chi Minh and Vietnamese communism, and the myth of a 'totalitarian communist state.'

Some reviewers ask where the State of Vietnam (later the Republic of Vietnam) fits into my account. This is a legitimate question. I certainly take it seriously, arguing in several chapters that one cannot understand what the DRV was doing without relating it to the non-communist nationalist project and diplomacy of the State of Vietnam. As Pierre Grosser and Stein Tønnesson note, what I have done with the DRV thematically could just as easily be applied to the State or Republic of Vietnam. Tønnesson's point about looking at the state capacity of each of these Vietnamese polities and how both were competing with each other for control over territories and populations is spot on (and I will read the relevant literature he suggests). I did try in chapters 2 (State), 6 (Police), 10 (Mobilization), and 11 (Experience of War) to factor into my analysis of the DRV the State of Vietnam. In chapter 2, I zoomed in to the ground level to show how the civil war opposing these two Vietnams manifested itself in a fierce competition for sovereignty at the local level, as bureaucrats and policemen from each regime attempted to roll back the administrative control of their adversaries at the village level. Although my focus is admittedly on the DRV, the State of Vietnam, the 'sects' in the south, and the Catholics in the center are also featured. They ran their own territorial administrations. I provide the example of the

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<sup>6</sup> For an excellent manifestation of the debate, see H-Diplo's roundtable review of Mark Bradley's recent book on the Vietnam War at <http://www.h-net.org/~diplo/ISSF/PDF/ISSF-Roundtable-2-7.pdf>

Catholic state operating independently of the French ‘colonialists’ and the Vietnamese ‘communists’ in the Phat Diem area until the early 1950s. Without considering these other Vietnams contesting the DRV’s sovereignty, I would have been unable to build my wider argument on how, when, why, and where the DRV leadership had to build, shape, and expand its state, especially the army and the police services. I sincerely hope that more work on the State of Vietnam, especially social history, will attract future scholars, because until then we only have an incomplete picture of the Indochina War and the states emerging from it.

This leads to another matter rightly raised by Jennings about my thematic approach. Well aware of recent shifts in French historiography on war, Jennings wonders to what extent the Péronne school on WWI explains my thematic approach and topic selection. The Péronne school’s focus on the cultural dimensions of WWI was and remains of considerable interest to me. Its combination of history and anthropology is particularly appealing, as is the work of anthropologists like Heonik Kwon and Shaun Malarney on memory and suffering in postwar Vietnam.<sup>7</sup> The only problem I have with the Péronne school in terms of what I wanted to do in this book is its rather unidimensional focus on the *culture de guerre* and memory. While I share the Péronne’s school’s interest in the work of George Mosse<sup>8</sup>, more helpful to me here has been the rapidly-expanding body of scholarship exploring the socio-political aspects of war and how it provides insights into state formation, social mobilization and control, morale, choice, and ideology. Certainly, as Tønnesson states, the pathbreaking Charles Tilly was a source of inspiration, but equally important remains the scholarship of authors like Jan Gros, Matthew Connelly, Meredith Merridale, Christopher Browning, Mark Mazower, Martin Thomas, Christopher Bayly, Richard Overy, Andrew Barros, Hew Strachan, Stathis Kalyvas, Timothy Snyder, and others. I don’t know how one could group these scholars as a ‘school’ and it’s perhaps best not to do so. But again, what really caught my interest in this new scholarship was the attention paid to the connection between war and society, the importance of mass mobilization and how it relates to state building, and the human experience of war. While I used my introduction to try to put to rest a certain type of historiography noted above, I relied often on this scholarship in conceiving and framing the analysis of the themes taken up in each chapter.

This wider body of scholarship on the socio-cultural aspects of war across the globe also helped me to make comparative points, as Jennings, Tønnesson, and Grosser note. Rather than celebrating DRV exceptionalism or villifying it, comparisons helped me to relativize the DRV project, all the while showing why and where it was sometimes unique. I was also interested in comparing DRV Vietnam to other postcolonial war states where the Cold War

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<sup>7</sup> Heonik Kwon, *After the Massacre. Commemoration and Consolation in Ha My and My Lai* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006) and Shaun Malarney, *Culture, Ritual and Revolution in Vietnam* (London: Curzon Press, 2003).

<sup>8</sup> George Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memories of the World Wars*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

and decolonization struck violently. This is why I developed comparisons to the Algerian and Indonesian conflicts and to the communist Chinese and Korean ones. My diplomacy chapter owes a great deal to Matthew Connelly's book on Algeria<sup>9</sup>, but instead of arguing in favor of a 'diplomatic revolution' for the DRV, I went in the opposite direction, suggesting that DRV diplomacy was a failure.

As Pierre Grosser notes, I also try to show how the DRV leadership relied on transnational connections from start to finish. This included at the outset reliance on French colonial technology and state structures to build its own nation-state. The Allies and Japanese also helped out at the end of WWII. The first part of each of my chapters makes the colonial connection. The Soviets and especially the Chinese made important contributions during the height of the Cold War. Indeed, from 1950 on, the communist core of the DRV imported a panoply of Sino-Soviet mobilization techniques and used them to help remold their embattled nation-state in a more communist fashion. Going in the other direction, as Jennings correctly notes, the DRV exported its entire military academy and part of its national education system to southern China to accelerate the training of officers and civil service elites. But it also simultaneously exported these techniques across the Indo-Chinese divide where Vietnamese communists presided over the creation of two new revolutionary nation-states and parties, one for Cambodia, the other for Laos. As rudimentary as these transplanted Sino-Soviet-Viet structures were in Laos and Cambodia, they were not always *coquilles vides* or empty shells, as Philippe Papin would have it (see below). Coupled with military power provided by the Vietnamese (themselves backed by the Chinese) from 1950 and welcomed by Cambodians and Lao looking to use collaboration for internal purposes, these techniques gave rise to new states, parties, and administrative structures in occupied territories.<sup>10</sup> The Cambodian one melted down in the 1970s; the other rules Laos to this day.<sup>11</sup> Viewed from this wider context, I argue that revolutionary states of war emerged not only in eastern Indochina but also in its western half.

Some of the reviewers criticize my thematic approach and the ordering of my chapters. This is a legitimate critique. Eric Jennings wonders whether I sacrificed chronology a bit too much on the thematic altar, at the risk of repeating myself in chapters. Philippe Papin wonders why I would reserve the question of civilian mobilization and the combatants' experience of war for the end of the book, when it should come at the beginning, if, according to him, my book is really all about mobilization. Martin Grossheim regrets the lack of conclusion. Let me respond by stressing my core argument and why a thematic

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<sup>9</sup> Matthew Connelly, *A Diplomatic Revolution: Algeria's Fight for Independence and the Origins of the Post-Cold War Era*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). Reviewed by H-Diplo at <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=6609>

<sup>10</sup> On the social dynamics of collaboration, see: Jan T. Gross, 'Themes for a Social History of War Experience and Collaboration', in Istvan Deak, et al, *The Politics of Retribution in Europe: World War II and its Aftermath*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), p. 26.

<sup>11</sup> Vatthana Pholsena is currently exploring this process in Laos during the Vietnam War.



approach seemed essential. I digress here too in order to prepare my response to Philippe Papin's "skeleton state" argument.

At the heart of my reflection is indeed the "Tillyean" idea that war forged the postcolonial state in Vietnam as much as the communist party used war to take control and reshape the colonially- inherited state. At the outset, the communist core was remarkably weak in terms of quality and quantity (Papin says nothing about chapter 2, where I fully discuss this). If anything, the DRV grafted itself on to the pre-existing colonial state and relied on French-trained civil servants to operate it (see above). This continuity extended from 1947, when the outbreak of full-scale war forced the government into the countryside, where the state continued to operate – with great difficulty – in free zones in central and northern Vietnam. Again, non-communist nationalist intellectuals and colonial trained civil servants continued to play the key role in operating the state. The south was a mess and I will not go into it here since my reviewers seem to agree with me on this point.

But I try to go a bit further in my analysis of this 'war state.' I argue more specifically that, unlike in Algeria or Indonesia, but also as in communist Korea and China, the DRV communist core sought to transition from a purely guerilla, low-intensity war between 1945-1950 to a modern, conventional, set piece battle between 1950-1954. Dien Bien Phu was not a low-intensity guerilla conflict. Nor were the majority of the seven other battles that occurred between 1950 and 1954 in central and northern Indochina (although guerilla warfare accompanied each of them). By 1954, the DRV operated six divisions. Dien Bien Phu was trench warfare in many ways, not least of all because both sides were using modern artillery, driving men, as Michael Howard put it for the Russo-Japanese war a half-century earlier, into the ground.<sup>12</sup> The *Front de Libération Nationale* (FLN) never realized such a military revolution, much to the (humiliated) French army's frustration.

This transition to modern, conventional warfare is at the core of my argument, for it forced the communist party and the state it was now desperately trying to take in hand to mobilize civilians and soldiers on a massive level and more efficiently and rationally than ever. Military victory depended on it. The need for tremendous civilian mobilization was also linked to the fact that this shift to modern war remained *uneven*, in that the DRV had no mechanized capacity until the battle of Dien Bien Phu (no trucks, planes, helicopters, or boats). Stein Tønnesson somewhat incorrectly states that I argue that the war became symmetrical from 1950. No, it did not; my point is that the DRV transitioned to conventional warfare but it remained asymmetrical in logistical and medical terms, leading to the overmobilization, indeed the exhaustion, of the DRV civilian porters (chapter 10) and peasant soldiers (chapter 11). This massive mobilization of the civilian population for military service and the human logistics required a state to emerge and the communist core used this transition to import and apply Sino-Soviet mobilization techniques to reshape the state and increase their control over it. This, in turn, meant creating more civil servants to staff and run an ever larger and more complex army and state. It is little

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<sup>12</sup> Michael Howard, 'Men Against Fire: Expectations of War in 1914', *International Security*, vol. 9, no. 1, (Summer 1984), pp. 41-57.

wonder that the DRV welcomed the opportunity to send its military academy and civil servant school to southern China.

I understand Jennings' frustration that the thematic chapters lead to some repetitions. But this was a risk I was willing to take in order to try to tease out a "global vision" of my argument, as Grosser puts it, a connected analysis of my "state of war". However, I would point out that each of my thematic chapters runs in a chronological order, beginning in 1945 and ending in 1954, with the 1949-50 conjuncture serving as the turning point for tracking how this (uneven) transition to modern warfare impacted upon and drove state making in each of these areas. By structuring the book thematically, with each chapter moving along chronologically, my hope was also to allow readers to follow 'horizontally,' from chapter to chapter, how the shift from guerilla to modern war affected and connected medicine, policing, communications, and so on. Lastly, organizing the book in this way helps me to show how the Party needed and used war to implement a 'vertical' consolidation of its control over each branch of the state from 1950. The goal was to mobilize civilians and soldiers more effectively and rationally, but by using revolutionary techniques and social revolution to do so, the party began to transform the nature of the embattled nation-state into something very different from that which existed in 1950, at least in northern and central Vietnam.

For all of these reasons, the two chapters on civilian mobilization and the combatants' experience of war had to come at the end – after the transition to conventional warfare, after set piece battles running from Cao Bang to Dien Bien Phu, after the creation of six divisions in wartime, and after the mobilization of hundreds of thousands of civilians. While I understand Martin Grossheim's desire to see a concluding chapter sum it all up, my inner goal was to let the argument reach its denouement at the Battle of Dien Bien Phu and to leave it up to readers to make up their own minds about what I argue. My conclusion is that the communist core created a functional war state, capable of mobilizing hundreds of thousands of civilians and combatants, but that it did so at the cost of exhausting the population and potentially undermining its own legitimacy. If true, then one can understand a bit better why post-Geneva Hanoi was in no rush to apply social revolution in the north and resume war in the south *at the same time*. The leadership had already tried it ... during the Indochina conflict.

Philippe Papin's review does not discuss the argument driving my book from chapter to chapter and from within each chapter. Rather than engaging what I argue in the book, Papin counters with his own argument, that of a communist-run "skeleton state", or a theatre state behind which there was not much of substance. The DRV may well have been a "skeleton state", indeed a weak one at the outset, between 1947-1949 and especially in the south during the entire conflagration. But a state cannot mobilize such a massive number of civilians, create operational divisions of 20,000 men each, run them across all of northern Indochina (including Laos) in a coordinated fashion using radios and telephones, and then win at Dien Bien Phu on just a "skeleton" or high levels of propaganda. It can, however, and this is what I argue again, exhaust its people, trigger mutiny in its army, and even lose a war.

Moreover, it is erroneous to think that the DRV controlled all of modern Vietnam, except for one month in 1945. During the Indochina War, the DRV was an archipelago state<sup>13</sup>, hardly a unified state, a shadow of what it is today. It was a collection of sovereign (and semi sovereign) islands. Contrary to what so many have written, the DRV did not control anything like the country's total population at the time. However, and this is particularly true from 1950, increased military power (see above) allowed the DRV to control and expand its territorial control with greater efficiency, and thereby allow its police services and bureaucrats to move in. Simultaneous guerilla action forced the French army to further disperse. Conventional war began to put substance on the skeleton in DRV-controlled territory.

Papin overplays his hand in my view and in so doing undermines his argument. Again, for the period up to 1950 and in the south until 1954, he is right: the DRV state was weak and skeletal. I never hesitate to say so. To make his point, Papin focuses on my medicine chapter. For Papin, there was not much to the medical system in DRV hands. It remained a ghost structure and I have fallen into the trap of believing glorious communist histories vaunting its successes. They were a mirage, Papin is saying. I agree with Papin that the medical service was woefully underdeveloped and I accept that I should have been even more critical than I was in this chapter (though he leaves out some of the transformative effects of war on medicine that I discuss in this section). However, Papin spends an inordinate amount of time dwelling on the weak medical system without saying anything substantial about my larger argument above and my other thematic chapters.

This may be true for the medical branch (and God help the wounded soldier or sick civilian porter landing in a DRV hospital between 1950 and 1954), but 1947 is not 1953, and southern Vietnam is not northern Vietnam or interzones IV and V. Papin lets out a brief "hurrah" for my chapter on policing, intelligence, and surveillance, but apparently does not see in following this chapter through chronologically how the police and intelligence services modernized and strengthened as the party increased its military and administrative control from 1950. As with anywhere else, the police were a powerful tool of social control and state consolidation. Nor does Papin spend much time on the "military revolution" I discuss from 1950. I make the point that until 1950 military intelligence was indeed skeletal, a joke in many ways. But look what happened from 1950. Thanks to Sino-Soviet help, the DRV revamped the skeleton into something very new, not necessarily all that modern, but nonetheless capable of running and coordinating the military operations of six divisions. I show the same thing for communications, which were essential to the military revolution but also vital to connecting the archipelago state's islands.

Or to put it another way, Papin is admittedly "astonished" by the massive mobilization the DRV achieved by 1954. This condition arises from the fact that he cannot account for how such a skeletal state could pull this off. That's my point. It wasn't so skeletal by 1954 in the territories under its control in northern and central Vietnam where its military power

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<sup>13</sup> I must note that I owe the term "archipelago state" to an anonymous reader of my text. I would like to thank him or her for the idea.

developed simultaneously. It is worth noting what happened in South Vietnam in 1950 when Nguyen Binh attempted the general counter offensive. Considering wider comparisons to the Soviet Union or Maoist China would have been useful. The comparison Papin makes to the Soviet Union in the early 1920s is well taken, but it would be more relevant to my argument to compare the embattled communist run DRV to what the Soviets were doing to keep their state alive and functioning during WWII, as Grosser suggests. The Chinese Maoist comparison is even better.

Papin suggests that I want to have it both ways. Not really. Nor am I trying to make the DRV into a 'weak' or 'strong' state. Other reviewers question me on this, too. In some places the state was and remained weak. In some places, things changed. Is it really a coincidence that the strengthening occurred in 1) areas along the Sino-Vietnamese border; 2) in central Vietnam, zones IV and V, where the French army high command had decided to leave the DRV largely alone since 1947; and 3) in the highlands hugging the Red River delta? These were the areas the army increasingly controlled from 1950.<sup>14</sup> Thanks to military power, the DRV could police, enforce the military draft and the civilian mobilization law, activate mass organizations and kinship ties, and use the courts and coercion (I'm responding to Grosser's 'how' question) in order to mobilize and apply the Sino-Soviet mobilization techniques discussed above. Peasant nationalism was undoubtedly there, but so was peasant resistance. Force was used. Here Papin and I agree.

But we disagree on another major point. Papin sees a lot more party and communist control than I do. I see little party and more state control at the outset, especially the colonially-trained apparatus that existed until 1950 if not 1954. How could it be otherwise? Think about the French colonial reliance on the pre-existing Nguyen dynasty administration until WWI. State-makers are never as revolutionary as they think. Official party historians as well as inveterate anticommunists would like us to believe that the communists were in control and building a new revolutionary state from the start. In some areas (education for example), it was true. But like David Marr in his book on the August Revolution of 1945<sup>15</sup>, I find the party to be remarkably weak during the first part of the war, doing its best to guide policy along nationalist lines and control non-communist civil servants dominating the state down below, but always worried that 'things' (like the State of Vietnam) could get out of hand. I go so far, thanks to the Party document collection noted above and the French-captured minutes of Le Duc Tho's speech to southerners in 1949, to argue that the party was having trouble maintaining control over its *own* national front, the *Lien Viet* (formerly the Viet Minh). Papin contends that party members remained in control in the background. I think they would have liked this and want us to believe this today, but the reality at the time was quite different. One of the reasons I focused on Tran Quoc Hoan and especially Le Duc Tho, as Martin Grossheim notes, was because they were frontline

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<sup>14</sup> As I argue in my book, the Ho Chi Minh Trail was pushed 'inside' Vietnam from 1950 in order to link zones IV and V to southern China in order to support the operation of at least one division. Goscha, *Vietnam*, pp. 316-319.

<sup>15</sup> David Marr, *Vietnam 1945: The Quest for Power*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

soldiers in charge of asserting party control over the administration, not least of all through the police and the strengthening of the party bureaucracy. During the Indochina War, both men were deeply involved in the training of a new class of communist bureaucrats and security officials, specifically designed to expand party control over the pre-existing state, one which was colonially trained, nationalist, but not communist. This bothered the communist leadership terribly.

Lastly, I tried to argue in my book that the particularly skeletal parts of the state (again I often agree with Papin) appeared in those areas where two, indeed three competing Vietnamese states came into competition with one another for control over territory and people. The Indochina War was all about sovereignty, not just up above at Geneva or on the battlefield of Dien Bien Phu, but also down below – all the way down – at the village level where each side tried to push its mass organizations, propaganda, police and intelligence services, cadres, and administrative structures into the villages. Much of this was makeshift, amateurish and very superficial. How could it be otherwise ... until the armies and police services arrived in greater numbers from 1950? I am not convinced by Papin's argument that the notion of a "state of war" (which I had to rework in French as *un état né de la guerre*) is inoperable. War, conventional war, and the simultaneous shift to social revolution and communist mobilization techniques drove state institutionalization and party control and in so doing it reshaped postcolonial Vietnam.

Eric Jennings and Stein Tønnesson rightly ask whether the concept of 'total war' is appropriate. I am aware of the methodological and theoretical dangers of this term. Many scholars use it without defining it, applying it to one war before moving on to the next. The Péronne scholars are convinced that the First World War was *the* 'total war.'<sup>16</sup> David Bell insists that the "first" total war was the French revolutionary one of the late eighteenth century.<sup>17</sup> Still others have said it was the American Civil War. I'm sure that scholars will soon be referring to the wars for Vietnam in such terms. David Hunt put the two words on the title of his recent book on the Vietnam War, but does not really tell us what he means by it theoretically.<sup>18</sup> Scholars often use it (and get into trouble using it in my view) to refer to the 'mobilization of everything and everyone' and/or to discuss the 'annihilation of everything and everyone.' As I explain in the introduction to my chapter 10, such 'total war' does *not* exist. At its core definition, "total war" refers to the collapsing of the distinction between civilians and combatants in wartime. I thus kept my definition limited in order to understand how the line dividing civilians and combatants broke down in this violent war

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<sup>16</sup> The leading scholar of the Péronne school, Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau, puts it this way. See [http://www.lexpress.fr/culture/livre/14-18-est-l-invention-de-la-guerre-totale\\_820059.html](http://www.lexpress.fr/culture/livre/14-18-est-l-invention-de-la-guerre-totale_820059.html)

<sup>17</sup> David A. Bell, *The First Total War: Napoleon's Europe and the Birth of Warfare as We Know It*, (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2007) and the H-Diplo review of Bell's "total war" argument at <http://www.h-net.org/~diplo/essays/PDF/BellForum.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> David Hunt, *Vietnam's Southern Revolution: From Peasant Insurrection to Total War*, (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2008) reviewed by H-Diplo at <http://www.h-net.org/~diplo/roundtables/PDF/Roundtable-XII-11.pdf>



of decolonization. Here, I relied on Talbot Imlay and Hew Strachan's incisive work<sup>19</sup> to help me show how this war became increasingly 'totalizing' in social terms, largely because the logistically and technologically weak 'colonized' had to mobilize civilian populations and the environment on a much greater level than the industrially armed colonizer. Contrary to what Tønnesson claims, I most certainly agree that the French were hardly fighting a total war in Indochina. The State of Vietnam, colonial African, and Foreign Legion troops were doing most of the fighting. Paris never mandated obligatory military service from its French boys, but the DRV most certainly did from November 1949 as well as approving a special law authorizing the general mobilization of civilians a few months later. From 1950, the DRV-controlled civilian populations (about 10 million in all) thus became involved in a remarkably totalizing mobilization, one which rapidly deteriorated the line between civilians and combatants in ways never experienced by the French population during World War I (Viewed in comparative terms, it's hard to see how the Péronne school can call the First World War a 'total war'). Thus rather than using the term 'total war' I preferred speaking of a 'totalizing one.' I use this term as a heuristic device and I think I use it carefully, not least of all because I see it as a way of comparing different types of wars rather than claiming 'my war' to be yet another 'first total war' in the colonial world.<sup>20</sup>

Martin Grossheim is right that I need to say more about intellectuals and their role inside the DRV during this entire period as well as their decision to leave it. Philippe Papin is right, too, that I need to say more about propaganda and the use of labor as a propaganda tool. He is right, but I caution against thinking that all is a hall of mirrors designed to mask a pathetic skeleton. A chapter on education will, for example, have to focus on the efforts to train more civil servants. And those "transnational" Sino-Soviet connections emerging at the end of the conflict may prove as important as the French colonial ones in helping to get the nascent nation-state off the ground.

In something of *tu phe binh*, a personal critique, I must admit that I regret leaving out my chapter on the economy and above all the question of *food*.<sup>21</sup> As I write these lines, I realize that by shifting to conventional war the state increased the demand on the people to produce or at least provide the state with unprecedented amounts of food to feed the tens of thousands of civilian porters and the divisions it was putting together between 1950 and 1954. Little wonder that the DRV asked the Chinese to send rice for the battle of Dien Bien

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<sup>19</sup> Hew Strachan, "Essay and Reflection: On Total War and Modern War," *The International History Review*, vol. 22, no. 2, (June 2000), 341-370 and Talbot Imlay, "Total War," *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 30.3 (2007), 547-70.

<sup>20</sup> Roger Chickering et al. *A World at Total War: Global Conflict and the Politics of Destruction, 1937-1945*, (Washington: Global Historical Institute, 2005); Strachan, "Essay and Reflection," particularly pp. 353-355; and Imlay, "Total War," 547-70.

<sup>21</sup> Recent work by scholars working on Europe during WWII only convinces me more of my error. See Timothy Snyder's *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin*, (New York: Basic Books, 2010) and Mark Mazower's *Inside Hitler's Greece: The Experience of Occupation, 1941-44*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001).



Phu that lasted six months and required the fielding, in all, of over 100,000 troops and porters. Did famine break out because of such massive food requirements? Here is where social exhaustion would have made itself felt and the legitimacy of the DRV would have run into serious problems by the end of this epic battle.

I also feel terrible about not giving credit to the Swedish for the wonderful *Expressen* paper and its correspondent's famous interview of Ho Chi Minh in 1953. My apologies. I also stand corrected on the timing of President Harry S. Truman's support of the French and the Korean War as noted by Tønnesson. I agree, too, that my communications chapter, which admittedly relies largely on published official sources, talks little about failure, giving the impression, perhaps one that is a little too rosy like the medicine chapter, that the DRV was more technologically capable than it truly was. But, as Tønnesson and Jennings recognize, my main argument in that chapter is to show how communications, above all radios, helped the DRV administer its incredibly fragmented archipelago state and run, from 1950, an army of six divisions operating in real time across all of northern Indochina.

Why would the state engage in land reform, Papin asks, in a time of mobilization? For one, Stalin and Mao required this policy for entry into the communist club and the Vietnamese wanted in and needed in (chapter 9). Second, the major leaders of the communist party agreed with Mao that it was a potentially important source and instrument of social mobilization and peasant politicization, one that was essential to attracting more peasant support for the war (chapter 10). Third, the decision to begin land reform in late 1953 was clearly related to the decision to bring down the French at Dien Bien Phu at all costs before opening negotiations at Geneva (chapters 9 and 11). Fourth, we might know that land reform was full of all sorts of risks, capable of undermining the war effort and the DRV's legitimacy, but the people at the helm at the time were not necessarily aware of all this. The Chinese Communists had won in the civil war in 1949, providing what seemed to be an unbeatable peasant strategy and Chinese advisors in the DRV were pushing their model forcefully (chapters 2, 3, and 10). I would venture to guess that the areas selected for land reform in 1953-54 coincided with those most heavily involved in civilian mobilization for Dien Bien Phu (and this includes upland "ethnic minority" territories as Christian Lentz has shown<sup>22</sup>). I will most certainly read Olivier Tessier's study, but, based on what Papin writes, I don't see how this contradicts what I'm advancing here. In fact, it would only make my point: The Vietnamese communists applied Sino-Soviet mobilization techniques to a Vietnamese social milieu and they often did so blindly. The fact that the results were contradictory, and indeed catastrophic, is hardly surprising. As I show in chapters 10 and 11, Sino-Soviet rectification got out of hand for the Vietnamese communists too! They may well have learned lessons from all this in devising their post 1954 policy seeking to avoid simultaneous social revolution and war. In any case, we need to put ourselves in the shoes of the leadership as it emerged out of WWII and moved forward, rather than projecting into the past what we know happened after the Indochina War or after 1975.

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<sup>22</sup> Christian Lentz, 'Making the Northwest Vietnamese', *Journal of Vietnamese Studies*, vol. 6, no. 2 (Summer 2011), pp. 68-105 and his 'Mobilization and State Formation on a Frontier of Vietnam', *Journal of Peasant Studies*, vol. 38, no. 3, (2011), pp. 559-86.

Tønnesson's point on the spread and use of People's War in non-communist hands is well taken and I will read up on this. The point I was trying to make in my discussion of it and Vo Nguyen Giap's use of it was that if one looks closely at what Giap was saying in 1949-50, as the communists began importing Maoism and Sino-Soviet mobilization techniques, one sees that what he means by 'people's war' is not exclusively the nation-in-arms or timeless peasant nationalism, but rather an argument for how to take control of, politicize, mobilize, and simultaneously transform the peasant 'masses' into revolutionary, communist minded force. I don't think this is what his non-communist followers were thinking or doing with the idea of "people's war" as it made its way through the Global South. It's a bit like the French army's obsession with and export of 'modern war' or 'counter insurgency' techniques from Indochina to Algeria and beyond. What they thought they saw in Mao's People's War, what they actually had before them in Indochina (actually in southern Vietnam), and what they exported to Algeria, the U.S., and South America were very different things. My second chapter is designed in part to cast doubt on Charles Lacheroy and Bernard Fall's notions of "totalitarian" communist social control through "parallel hierarchies".<sup>23</sup>

But I digress and I've gone on for far too long, an indication of the immense pleasure and the great honor it has been for me to respond to my critics. I thank each and every one of my reviewers as well as to the editors of H-Diplo. I do not claim to have the last word. As my good friend and colleague Philippe Papin rightly states, I may well be wrong. And I may be. Indeed, I fully expect to be taken to task and totally revised by Papin and/or a new generation of young scholars. I'm confident they will take us further in our understanding of the Indochina War and the states and societies that emerged from it.

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<sup>23</sup> Fall, *Le Viet-Minh*, p. 84. On Lacheroy and his parallel hierarchies, see Paul and Marie-Catherine Villatoux, *La République et son armée face au « péril subversif »*. *Guerre et action psychologiques en France (1945-1960)*, (Paris: Les Indes Savantes, 2005).