



Intelligence in a time of decolonization: The case of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam at war (1945–50)

Christopher E. Goscha

To cite this article: Christopher E. Goscha (2007) Intelligence in a time of decolonization: The case of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam at war (1945–50), *Intelligence and National Security*, 22:1, 100-138, DOI: [10.1080/02684520701200848](https://doi.org/10.1080/02684520701200848)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02684520701200848>



Published online: 15 Mar 2007.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 328



View related articles [↗](#)

Intelligence in a Time of Decolonization: The Case of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam at War (1945–50)

CHRISTOPHER E. GOSCHA

The renaissance in intelligences studies over the last two decades has offered new and exciting insights into war, societies, ideologies, institutions, and even cultures and mindsets. Yet, its geographical reach has remained largely limited to the West or Western cases. We still know relatively little about intelligence services and their roles in the making of postcolonial nation-states in Africa or Asia, much less their perceptions of the world outside. This article uses the case of communist Vietnam during the First Indochina War to provide a general overview of the birth, development, and major functions of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam's Public Security and Intelligence services in a time of decolonization. It then examines three Vietnamese case studies as a way of considering wider themes relating to the question of intelligence and decolonization. In wider terms, this article seeks to contribute to the expansion of intelligence studies on the non-Western, 'postcolonial' world.

INTELLIGENCE STUDIES AND THE POSTCOLONIAL WORLD

The renaissance in 'intelligences studies' over the last two decades has offered new and exciting insights into war, societies, ideologies, institutions, and even cultures and mindsets. However, since its take-off some two decades ago, its geographical reach has remained largely limited to the West. We still know relatively little about intelligence services and their roles in the making of postcolonial nation-states in Africa or Asia, much less their perceptions of the world outside. This is not surprising. For one thing, the renewal of 'intelligence studies' blossomed thanks to the work of mainly Anglo-Saxon scholars working on the West. Second, oral and archival sources on intelligence activities are far more readily available in North

America, Australia, Western Europe and, since the end of the Cold War, former communist Eastern European archives than in Asia or Africa. Third, there are simply fewer scholars working in intelligence studies who can read Arabic, Indonesian or Chinese than German, French or English. While the academic terrain is admittedly shifting, the time and money invested in learning such 'difficult' languages is not always rewarded on the job market. Even more problematic, the 'South' lags far behind in intelligence studies, despite the vital importance of this part of the world to the making of twentieth century international history. Closed archives, tongue-tied intelligence officers, and the lack of local scholarly interest in such questions have blocked its development.

That is not to say that intelligence studies have not ventured beyond the West. Important studies have long been available on Japanese intelligence during World War II, for example. New studies have recently appeared on Chinese intelligence leaders and services. Frederic Wakeman's impressive study of Chinese nationalist (and European) 'policing' of Shanghai certainly comes to mind.¹ And this journal and its editors have been particularly instrumental in pushing intelligence studies (and with it international history) beyond its Western contours.² Some of the most exciting new research moving in this direction has been on 'imperial intelligence'. Christopher Andrew, one of the driving forces in the intelligence studies revolution and a renowned specialist on Soviet intelligence,³ first worked on the French colonial empire.⁴ And despite his recent emphasis on the Cold War, he has remained interested in imperial and World War II intelligence operations in Asia. Another British historian, Christopher Bayly, also pushed intelligence and imperial studies in new directions when he published his highly original study of the role of British intelligence gathering in the making of the Indian empire in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.⁵ Richard Aldrich, Martin Thomas, Karl Hack, Maochun Yu, Gary and Ming-Yen Rawnsley, Alexander Zervoudakis, Jean-Marc Le Page and others have provided rich studies of Western intelligence in Asia during the Cold War and, increasingly, in a time of decolonization.⁶ Their findings have been exciting and inspiring for me.

Few would disagree that intelligence studies could provide us with a unique window into how newly independent nation-states born out of decolonization went about processing information on their enemies, the region, the world as well as their own societies, states, and religions. The Vietnamese communist case suggests that the study of intelligence in the postcolonial non-European world is perhaps not impossible. Contrary to what I affirmed above, in the case of Vietnam there is no shortage of sources on a wide range of security, intelligence, and espionage services for the period from 1945, when Ho Chi Minh announced the birth of the modern Vietnamese

nation-state, to 1975, when the communists placed southern Vietnam under the party's leadership.

The intelligence sources I have located on modern Vietnam can be divided into two main categories. First, a growing collection of official Vietnamese language sources (memoirs, intelligence histories, and articles) on the role of 'public security' (*cong an*) and 'intelligence services' (*tin hieu*) during the Indochina War of 1945–54. Second, a large body of French-captured and decrypted Vietnamese security and intelligence documents from the period (often with the Vietnamese originals attached).⁷ Some will object that the first category of documents is unreliable, since these memoirs were published well after the events and official histories are almost always subject to approval by the party or relevant ministries. Indeed, these documents must be used with caution: they are often directed towards legitimating the 'just' and 'national' cause of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) and its 'inevitable victory' (*nhât dinh thang loi*) over the French 'colonialists', American 'imperialists' (and later the Chinese 'expansionists'), not to mention all sorts of Vietnamese 'puppets' (*bu nhin*). Moreover, the Communist Party is often cast in an omniscient role, when in many cases it was *reacting* to events – not necessarily directing or controlling them. And of course as far as memoirs are concerned (*hoi ky* in Vietnamese), what is missing very often is more important than what is published.

Nevertheless, many of the official intelligence histories published in Vietnam over the last two decades are 'internal' (*noi boi*) studies, destined for use within the relevant ministry or party, and not for public diffusion, much less foreign consumption. These internal publications often provide important information unavailable elsewhere. Moreover, the memoirs of ranking Vietnamese security and intelligence officers are also of great value if used carefully. To cite but two examples, we now have access to the personal recollections of Le Gian and Mai Chi Tho, two central figures in the development of modern Vietnam's security services in northern and southern Vietnam, respectively.⁸ Nor has the importance of these new Vietnamese publications for the history of intelligence gone unnoticed: the United States National Security Agency recently translated a detailed Vietnamese history of its cryptography branch. It is a fascinating read.⁹

In the first part of this essay, the case of Vietnam is used to provide a general overview of the birth, development, and major functions of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam's Public Security and Intelligence services in a time of decolonization. Building on this, the second part examines three Vietnamese case studies as a way of considering wider themes relating to the question of intelligence and decolonization in the non-Western, 'postcolonial' world. While I will underline the impact of the Cold War on the transformation of the DRV's intelligence services in 1950, because of the

sheer size of the topic at hand, this essay will focus on the period between 1945 and 1950. Much work remains to be done and it is to be hoped that others will take up what is, I think, a very promising field of study and a unique way of looking at decolonization, war, and the states and the people driving them. It might also provide an original way of pushing intelligence studies further into the non-Western world.

INTELLIGENCE IN A TIME OF DECOLONIZATION: THE CASE OF VIETNAM

The Birth of the Vietnamese Nation-State and Postcolonial Intelligence

On 2 September 1945 Ho Chi Minh announced the formation of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. The French colonial state had been overthrown by the Japanese in March of that year, followed shortly thereafter by the defeat of the Japanese themselves. The Viet Minh, the nationalist front created in 1941 by the Indochinese Communist Party (ICP), seized this favourable moment in August 1945 to ride a patriotic groundswell to power. It was an electrifying time for Vietnamese nationalists of all walks of life and political colours.

However, the French colonial state was not necessarily dead. On the contrary. Having been recently freed from German occupation by the Allies, French nationalists, led by Charles de Gaulle, turned to rebuilding colonial Indochina. Their task was complicated not only by the emergence of the new Vietnamese nation-state, but also by the fact that the Allies had signed accords in mid-1945 allowing Chinese nationalists, led by Chiang Kaishek, to occupy and disarm the Japanese north of the 16th parallel in Indochina. British troops would do the same below that line. If the Chinese blocked a rapid French return to northern Indochina, the British did not. On 23 September, the latter backed a local French *coup de force* against the Vietnamese in Saigon and facilitated the return of the French Expeditionary Corps to all of southern Indochina. The war for Vietnam had begun. In December the following year, with Chinese troops finally withdrawn, negotiations gave way to full-scale war as the French and the Vietnamese took up arms to determine whether the nation or colonial state would prevail. It was a war of national liberation for the Vietnamese; it was a colonial war for the French.

It was also an international conflict. For better or worse, the Cold War profoundly affected the Franco-Vietnamese conflict. In 1950, the Chinese communists began supporting the DRV and the US threw its weight behind the French and their anticommunist Vietnamese allies. If the French 'colonialists' were able to transform their colonial war into a vital part of the wider anticommunist struggle, most Vietnamese 'communists' were

thrilled to join the internationalist communist world linking them to Moscow by way of Beijing. International communist support allowed the Vietnamese to accelerate radical social policies, such as land reform and the communization of the state. The internationalization of the war also intensified the level of fighting on the battlefield as the Vietnamese began to take the war to the French Expeditionary Corps. In both cases, Vietnamese security and intelligence services were heavily involved in building, protecting, and expanding the Vietnamese state, armed forces, and communist power.

Crossing the Colonial Divide: Continuity and Change

Vietnamese national intelligence services did not emerge in 1945 *ex nihilo*. For one thing, throughout the 1920s and 1930s, the international nature and networks of communism had moved a growing number of Vietnamese throughout a clandestine world stretching from Saigon to Moscow by way of Canton and Paris. A handful of Vietnamese communists had made it to the Soviet Union where they pursued advanced studies in communism and learned some basic techniques in Soviet espionage, communications, and clandestine operations. Ho Chi Minh had first travelled to Moscow in 1923 and would lead an underground life moving him across much of the world until he returned to northern Vietnam in the early 1940s. Following in his footsteps were dozens of younger Vietnamese nationalists. Duong Bach Mai, the head of southern Vietnam's security services in late 1945, was one of them. Young Vietnamese radicals also learned Leninist organizational methods and techniques in communist bases located outside colonial Indochina, in north-eastern Thailand and southern China. Perhaps an even greater number of young Vietnamese radicals discovered these revolutionary ideas and techniques in colonial prisons, such as Poulo Condor and Son La. There, captured returnees from Moscow or Guangzhou (Canton) transferred their knowledge via carefully organized study sessions for radicals serving time together.¹⁰ These closely knit communist communities of the colonial prison formed some of the tightest bonds in the postcolonial Vietnamese intelligence world.

Soviet and European intelligence techniques and models also made their way into Vietnamese hands via southern China, where the Soviets helped create in 1923 the first modern Chinese Military Academy at Whampoa. What is less well known is that hundreds of Vietnamese also passed through those doors, where they studied modern military science (including military strategy, tactics, and intelligence techniques).¹¹ During World War II, the southern Chinese link continued to contribute to the development of Vietnamese intelligence. At war with the Japanese, British and American intelligence services relied upon the Vietnamese to help them gather information on enemy strength and movements in French Indochina. From

bases in southern China, Ho Chi Minh collaborated with the American Office of Strategic Services (OSS) and underwent American training in the basics of military intelligence and radio communications. American intelligence officers trained Vo Nguyen Giap's guerrillas in the 'Politico-Military Academy for the Anti-Japanese Resistance' (*Truong Quan-Chinh khang Nhật*).¹² Moreover, some of the most useful Japanese crossovers to the DRV after the Allied victory of August 1945 were those who could bring military, scientific, medical, and intelligence and communications skills to the budding Vietnamese nation-state.¹³

However, continuities did exist between the colonial and national intelligence services. When the Vietnamese came to power in mid-1945, they gained access to the voluminous police files stored in the *Sûreté*'s Indochinese archives, largely abandoned by the French on 9 March 1945. For the first time, they were able to access the policing machine which had put many of the very men poring over those archives behind bars a few years earlier. That was certainly the case of Nguyen Van Ngoc, as well as the first director of the national Public Security forces, Le Gian (see below). Of course, access to the secret files and lists of colonial agents and spies allowed them to arrest and/or eliminate a number of those who had long been tracking the communist movement. But the modern intelligence apparatus they discovered in Hanoi, Hue and Saigon also dazzled them. This is clear from Nguyen Van Ngoc's memoirs. The opening of the colonial intelligence archives provided this new intelligence chief an up-close, hands-on glimpse into what had made the French colonial intelligence service so terribly effective. In his memoirs, Nguyen Van Ngoc did not hide his secret admiration for one of the colonial period's *superflics*, Léon Sogny, his colonial predecessor in Hue. While Ngoc had no love for the man, he had every intention of learning from Sogny's methods, organization, and techniques in order to build Vietnam's national security services. And while the new Vietnamese intelligence leadership weeded out the colonial spies, it was just as careful to keep on board a wide range of mid- and lower-level Vietnamese civil servants who had been working in the colonial security apparatus for years. They were, after all, well-trained, knowledgeable, and experienced in intelligence and security questions. Without them, there was no intelligence or security service. As Nguyen Van Ngoc explains: 'I once again realized that they [the French trained security personnel] were an invaluable resource which the revolution had to know how to use' (*Toi lai thay day cung la mot cai von qui nua ma cach mang can biet su dung*).¹⁴

Given that war broke out almost immediately in the south, the DRV was desperate for all sorts of specialists to strengthen the fragile state and develop its military potential. Whatever the French army's problems against the Germans in 1940, the Expeditionary Corps on its way to Indochina was no

pushover. Thanks to French colonialism, however, Vietnamese nationalists could tap into a large pool of well-trained mathematicians, radio operators, telegraph specialists and military officers.¹⁵ The example of the colonial scout, Hoang Dao Thuy, is particularly revealing. During World War II, he was the General Commissioner of Vietnam's vibrant scouting movement unleashed by Vichy. He was trained in Morse code, radio operations and ran on high levels of patriotism. In 1945, his advanced knowledge of radio communications and ciphering served him well when he became the first director of the Ministry of Defence's Bureau of Communications and Information (*Cuc Thong Tin lien lac*) and, briefly, its Cryptographic Section (*Ban mat ma*). He played a pivotal role in 1945–47 in creating the government's and military's first radio codes, encryption service and telegraph dispatching network. He also organized the training of the first corps of Vietnamese communications, radio, and ciphering specialists. In 1954 the former scout commanded all communications during the complex Battle of Dien Bien Phu.¹⁶ Nor was he the only scout or civil servant in the colonial Post Office and Telecommunications (PTT) to use his talents for the service of the nationalist cause.¹⁷

Perhaps one of the most remarkable examples of how the colonial, international and national periods intersected in 1945 is to be found in the selection of the first directors of the DRV's Public Security and Intelligence services – Le Gian (To Gi) and Tran Hieu (Hoang My). The latter was born in northern Vietnam in 1908 and educated at the *Ecole pratique industrielle* in Hanoi. He joined the Indochinese Communist Party in the early 1930s before his political activities landed him in jail in Son La in the late 1930s, where he met Le Gian. The latter was born in northern Vietnam and had joined the party after becoming involved in radical nationalist politics in the late 1920s. He too ended up in colonial prison in Son La, and it was behind bars that a lifelong friendship between the two men was forged. In 1941, the French deported Tran Hieu, Le Gian and a number of other important communists (including Nguyen Van Ngoc) to a colonial prison in Madagascar. It was here that the world of the colonial prison intersected with that of Allied intelligence operations. In 1943, following the Allied occupation of Madagascar, the British were looking to recruit agents to run clandestine intelligence operations in Japanese-occupied Asia. With Indochina being a priority, it did not take them long to obtain a list of Vietnamese prisoners held in Madagascar. Le Gian and Tran Hieu's knowledge of English and Vietnamese and their antifascist credentials trumped their communist résumés. In an extraordinary twist, the British Intelligence Service (IS or MI6) liberated Le Gian and Tran Hieu (and others), provided them with intensive training in commando and basic intelligence techniques in India, and then shipped them off to southern China.¹⁸ From there, the Americans

parachuted both men into northern Vietnam. If these two Vietnamese immediately went to work providing intelligence on the Japanese, they also rejoined the party as it positioned itself to take power. With the birth of the DRV, both put their clandestine communist experience, prison contacts, and recently acquired intelligence knowledge to work for the nationalist cause. Tran Hieu became the head of the Ministry of Defence's Intelligence Service, while Le Gian took over as general director of the Public Security Service (see below).¹⁹ Ironically, Tran Hieu, who would later run the DRV's Strategic Intelligence Service (*Cuc Nghien cuu*) against the Americans during the Vietnam War, had received six months of intensive intelligence training from the OSS, the forerunner of the Central Intelligence Agency.²⁰

The Cong An and Tinh Bao

For all these reasons, Vietnamese communists understood the importance of intelligence and security services in the protection, institutionalization, and expansion of the young Vietnamese state and the party determined to run it. However, the creation of intelligence services in the DRV was a formidable undertaking. Only a small handful of Vietnamese had intelligence training at the outset, and even then it was very rudimentary – Morse code and ciphering practice for scouts was not the same as professional cryptology training. Second, the DRV did not control large parts of Vietnam during the Indochina War. The French held the main cities and routes for much of the conflict. Third, from September 1945 below the 16th parallel and from December 1946 above that line, the French pushed the Vietnamese out of Saigon, Hue, and Hanoi and into the marshes in southern Vietnam and the remote hills of the north. In the south, the party, government and military structures were more or less born in war and were always in a much more precarious state than their northern counterparts. This remained the case until 1975. In central Vietnam, however, the DRV controlled large expanses of territory in interzones IV and V (see below). Nevertheless, communications between and within zones were difficult due to French ground, naval, air and electronic operations and surveillance. Each area often acted on its own, receiving instructions only periodically via delegations sent from the north or those sent to meet with the central government. Lastly, it should not be forgotten that there were only 5,000 Communist Party members in September 1945. The DRV's intelligence services emerged in this fractured and heterogeneous context that lasted until 1950, when the party began to take the state and the army more firmly in hand. Until then, it would not be inaccurate to say that there was not one intelligence or police service, but several, often operating independently of each other, without clear directions from above, and not always in control of the territories under their jurisdiction.

The Cong An or the Public Security Service. On coming to power, the DRV needed order and security as quickly as possible. Here the new nation-state relied most heavily on its colonial predecessor's archives, organization, model, and staff. In the north, the DRV created the 'Bureau of Security Forces for Northern Vietnam' (*So Liem Phong Bac Bo*), modelled largely on the French *Sûreté*.²¹ Le Gian directed this bureau with Tran Hieu as deputy director. The Bureau of Security Forces for Northern Vietnam consisted of a 'Scouting Intelligence Unit' (*Ban Trinh Sat*), a 'Political Bureau' (*Phong Chinh Tri*), a 'Bureau of Legal Administration' (*Phong Hanh Chinh Tu Phap*), and a 'Bureau of Identification' (*Phong Can Cuoc*).²² In central Vietnam, the DRV started more modestly with a simple 'Scouting Intelligence Service' (*So Trinh Sat*). In Nam Bo, the 'National Defence Guard' (*Quoc Gia Tu Ve cuoc*) came to life under the leadership of Duong Bach Mai, Nguyen Van Tran, and later Cao Dang Chiem.²³ When war broke out below the 16th parallel in mid-September 1945, part of the Guard was pushed out of Saigon-Cholon (where it had only really been present to that point) and the rest went underground.

From the outset, the ICP sought to control and to direct these new police and intelligence services. In charge of this was a discreet man who oversaw the party's own internal security affairs – Tran Dang Ninh. In 1947 he assumed the leadership of the 'Control and Inspection Board' (*Ban kiem tra*) of the Executive Committee of the Central Committee of the ICP. He served as the deputy director of the party's 'General Inspectorate for the Government' (*Tong Thanh Tra Chinh Phu*). He also headed up the Central Committee's own 'Surveillance Board' (*Ban Trinh sat*) to oversee and coordinate the emerging security services.²⁴ He was thus a very powerful man. With the Vietnamese at war in the south and Chinese-backed non-communist parties contesting the party's control over the fragile state in the north, Tran Dang Ninh moved to reinforce the party's control over what was a very heteroclitic, but potentially crucial instrument of power. In February 1946, on the orders of the party's Central Committee, Tran Dang Ninh met with Le Gian to spearhead plans to create a new, unified national security service. On 21 February 1946, the government promulgated decree 23 which unified all security and police forces under the Ministry of Interior. This was the 'Vietnamese Public Security Department' (*Viet Nam Cong an vu*).²⁵ Officially Le Gian headed the new department for the government. But he was secretly answerable to the ICP Central Committee via Tran Dang Ninh.²⁶ The central governing body of the Public Security force was referred to as the *Nha Cong An Viet Nam*. It stood between the Ministry of Interior and the two lower levels of this new security administration. The first was the Public Security services in northern, central, and southern Vietnam (*So Cong An Bac Bo, Trung Bo* and *Nam Bo*) and the second was the provincial Public Security

services (*Ty Cong An*).²⁷ The new chief of the central Vietnamese office was none other than Nguyen Van Ngoc, a close collaborator of Tran Hieu and Le Gian who had served time with them in Son La before accompanying them to Madagascar. He, too, had been trained in intelligence and parachuted into Vietnam by MI6. Recalling an inspection tour he made to Hue in mid-1946, Le Gian wrote fondly of an evening spent with Nguyen Van Ngoc, reminiscing on how the personal ties forged in prison had created the trust that was now binding the Public Security Department at the top.²⁸ Prison and intelligence duties were linked across the colonial divide.

The Public Security Department was in charge of collecting information and documentation both inside and outside the country which was vital for ensuring national security. Internal security was the priority at the outset. Police forces were mainly concerned with keeping the state alive and protecting it against its internal and external enemies. This meant maintaining law and order, and neutralizing anticommunist opponents, such as the 'Greater Vietnam Party' (*Dai Viet*), the 'Vietnamese Nationalist Party' (*Viet Nam Quoc Dan Dang, VNQDD*) and the 'Alliance League' (*Dong Minh Hoi*). But given that the cities were the main sources of information on the French and the outside world, the Public Security Department played the leading role in intelligence gathering (*tin h bau*) in the early years of the DRV's life. To this end, three main offices were created for early espionage activities – a 'secretariat' (*van phong*), a 'documentary and research gathering committee' (*ty tap tai lieu*), and an 'Inspection service' (*Ty thanh tra*). The Documentary and Research centre was authorized to conduct intelligence gathering both inside and outside the country, although the cities were its central focus. Nguyen Tao ran this service and, given the nature of his work, he suggested that the *Ty tap tai lieu* be renamed the 'Espionage Service' (*Ty Diep Bao*). Nguyen Tao ran its operations until the early 1950s.²⁹

While the ICP had created this unified Public Security Department to consolidate its hold over policing and espionage activities, it went to great lengths to camouflage its role so as not to provoke anticommunist nationalists or lose the support of wary non-communist international observers, above all the United States. The party adopted what it called a policy of 'paint it white'. This involved appointing non-communists ('whites') to what seemed to be top level positions of power in the government, while the communists ('reds') assumed apparently less important jobs. However, in reality, decision-making powers remained in communist hands, 'red on the inside' as recent communist publications put it. Early 1946 was a particularly tense period, with non-communists, backed by the Chinese, accusing the DRV of being a communist-controlled state. Fearful of a possible coup, the communists had Le Gian cede his post as director of the police to a non-communist. Tran Hieu also transferred his post at the head of the Public Security Service for Bac Bo to a

non-communist. However, both men continued to run operations from behind the scenes for the ICP. As one recent internal intelligence history described the 'paint it white' policy, this meant 'that it was only neutral above and on the outside' (*co nghĩa la chi trung lap ben tren va ben ngoai*). In any case, the two 'new' directors, frustrated by their powerlessness, resigned within a short time. Tran Hieu and Le Gian 'resumed' their leadership positions in the Public Security Department; the DRV had survived a very tense period in domestic politics.³⁰ Overall, therefore the communists had every intention of running the Public Security forces as a powerful instrument of control.

But that was easier said than done. In southern Vietnam the situation was more precarious. For one, the southern communist leadership and its regional networks had been greatly damaged by French colonial repression following a failed communist uprising in 1940. In 1945 the communists were but one group among others competing for the nationalist high ground. They had competition from the likes of the Hoa Hao, Cao Dai, Trotskyites and even gangsters turned patriots grouped around the Binh Xuyen. Second, the outbreak of war in September 1945 pushed the communists into the countryside, and underground in the cities. Communications with the party centre were extremely difficult. For example, leaders of the National Guard first heard of the formation of the unified Public Security Department in early 1946 by listening to a radio broadcast from the north.³¹

However, the communist power vacuum in the south changed notably with the arrival from Poulo Condor of another tightly knit prison group which immediately began to reorganize the party and Public Security forces, much like their counterparts were doing to the north. They set foot on the mainland the day war broke out in the south. Their names read almost like a *Who's Who* of the Vietnamese communist leadership from the late 1950s: Le Duan, Pham Hung, Mai Chi Tho, Nguyen Van Linh and Ton Duc Thang among others. Spearheaded by Le Duan, these men quickly revamped and took charge of the party's 'Territorial Committee for Nam Bo' (*Xu Uy Nam Bo*).³² This committee instructed Pham Hung to begin reorganizing the security services in the south in order to place them firmly under the party's control. Pham Hung effectively ran the Nam Bo Public Security Service from behind the scenes, as deputy director to another party member, Cao Dang Chiem and then Diep Ba. While the Public Security forces were involved in gathering intelligence on the enemy, organized sabotage commandos, eliminated 'traitors' (*Viet gian*) and set up clandestine networks in the conglomerate of Saigon-Cholon, it was not until 1950 that the party was able to consolidate its hold over security and intelligence matters in the south. In that year, Diep Ba, Pham Hung, Nguyen Van Linh, Cao Dang Chiem, and Mai Chi Tho increased the Public Security Department and the party's control over the southern administration (see below).³³ Though few details are available, there

was another secret intelligence unit in the south, called the 'Office of Special Affairs' (*Phong Dac Vu*). It was part of the Resistance and Administrative Committee for Nam Bo and was directed by the legendary Catholic spy, Pham Ngoc Thao.³⁴

In upper Vietnam, the outbreak of war in December 1946 forced the central and northern Vietnamese Public Security services into the countryside and underground in the cities. In northern Vietnam, the Public Security Department's headquarters (*Nha Cong An*) was moved to remote regions, while the police in central Vietnam pulled back into unoccupied zones (interzones IV and V). Faced with full-scale war, the security forces not only had the task of consolidating the state's power in these new and often uninviting areas, but they also had to build clandestine networks in the occupied cities in order to keep providing vital intelligence on both the French and on the world outside. In May 1947, an All Country Plenum of the Public Security Department issued orders to this effect. Special investigation, scouting intelligence units, and traitor eliminating squads were organized and dispatched to the cities. During the entire Indochina War, the Public Security Department ran agents in Hanoi and Saigon.³⁵ Indeed, one of the party's most powerful security leaders, Tran Quoc Hoan, first made his mark running party intelligence operations underground in Hanoi from December 1946 to 1953 (when he took over as head of the newly created Ministry of Public Security). His teams provided a steady stream of intelligence by monitoring the press, reporting on French troop movements, mobilizing youth groups and workers unions, and running agents between the city and the liberated zones. French historian Philippe Papin has skilfully translated an engaging account of one of Tran Quoc Hoan's agents, Nguyen Bac, working underground in Hanoi, whose memoirs are aptly entitled *In the Heart of the Occupied City*.³⁶ Party security specialists understood perfectly well that the city was the crucial source of intelligence on the French, their Vietnamese allies, and the world. Getting newspapers to analysts in the mountains became an art, as Nguyen Bac relates in his memoirs. Faced with full-scale war, espionage became critical to political and military decision-makers in the DRV. Not only were the French trying to knock the DRV out militarily, but they were also moving to create a counterrevolutionary state under Bao Dai and, to this end, sought to legitimate it at the international level. Espionage was thus essential to keeping the DRV's policymakers abreast of changes directly affecting their state and its survival at the national and international levels. Although the Public Security forces may have sent a few agents abroad, the vital intelligence during this early period came from the occupied cities. Hence the Public Security forces played an important, additional role in intelligence activities during this early period. Military intelligence services remained weak and underdeveloped during this time, as we shall see below. Having

operated freely in upper Vietnamese cities until December 1946, the security services were in a better position to reorganize networks for channelling information and intelligence from the cities to the government zones now operating in the countryside.³⁷ I have found no evidence that the DRV/ICP had created a separate intelligence service or a foreign intelligence agency (see below).

The DRV/ICP's efforts to organize their networks, increase their surveillance, and analyse their intelligence were impressive for a nation fighting a full-scale war of decolonization. At the same time, intelligence operations were rudimentary and wracked with problems well into the 1950s. One example will suffice here. One official Public Security history claims today that its intelligence operatives in Hanoi had first learned of the date of the famous French paratrooper attack on Bac Kan in 1947 two days before it was to occur. Bac Kan was where much of the governmental and party leadership had been located since evacuating Hanoi in late 1946. However, because of communication problems between Hanoi and Bac Kan, this vital intelligence only reached the area as French paratroopers were making their raid.³⁸ This was the classic problem of 'time and space', as Peter Jackson has put it.³⁹ However, this painful Vietnamese experience left no doubt in the leadership's mind that its intelligence services were far from effective. Again, national intelligence services did not just appear *ex nihilo*; it was a long and frequently painful learning process. In the Vietnamese case, however, they did indeed learn from their mistakes. Giap's critique of faulty 'military intelligence' in the document below is a fascinating example.⁴⁰

More than anything else, Bac Kan taught the Vietnamese that intelligence gathering, analysis, and transmissions had to be improved – and fast. On 13 November 1947, in the wake of the Bac Kan fiasco, a Joint Conference of the Ministry of Interior's Public Security and the Ministry of Defence's Bureau of Military Intelligence (*Hoi Nghi Lien Tich Cong An va Tinh Bao Quan*) was held in northern Vietnam on orders from the party. The goal was to improve cooperation between the state's two main intelligence services in order to follow the enemies' moves better.⁴¹ Le Gian headed the Public Security Department's team, while Tran Hieu represented the Bureau of Military Intelligence (*Cuc Tinh bao*, see below). The fact that both men knew each other from prison and had served respectively in both services demonstrates the degree to which the Public Security and Military Intelligence services were overlapping during this early period. Given that the Public Security services were already in a position to obtain intelligence of military value in the cities, a way had to be found so that intelligence could be provided to the army's High Command quickly. The result was the creation within the police of a special 'Public Security Committee on Intelligence' (*Ban Cong an Tinh bao*). This new intelligence unit, run by the Public Security forces from the

cities, was designed to share vital strategic intelligence with the military. Such cooperation was ensured by the fact that its directors were, again, Le Gian at the Public Security headquarters and Tran Hieu at the Ministry of Defence's Bureau of Intelligence (*Cuc Tinh bao*). This 13 November 1947 meeting marked a 'landmark' (*moc*) in the cooperation between the Public Security Department and the military in conducting joint intelligence and espionage operations. It also examined the question of improving the collection of intelligence, its analysis (*phan tich*) and processing (*xu ly*). All strategic intelligence had to be sent immediately to the Ministry of Defence's General Staff (see below). Given the guerrilla and urban nature of the war up to 1950, the distinction between Public Security and Military Intelligence was understandably blurred.

A brief word needs to be said here about the relatively weaker position of the Public Security forces and party control in southern Vietnam. This is linked to the fact that war broke out almost immediately in Saigon-Cholon. Given the weakness of the ICP in the south since 1940, the military leadership under the direction of Nguyen Binh took the lead in conducting intelligence operations, mobilizing the youth and workers, and in running urban warfare. It was not until Nguyen Binh disappeared in September 1951 that the southern party leadership, now headed by Le Duan, Nguyen Van Linh, Pham Hung and Mai Chi Tho, was able to consolidate the party's control over intelligence operations and clandestine networks in Saigon-Cholon.⁴² This is also why it is important not to accept uncritically recent Vietnamese communist publications affirming the party's omnipresent direction of southern affairs. This was not the case in the south, not even after 1954.

The Cuc Tinh Bao or the Ministry of Defence's Bureau of Intelligence. The guerrilla nature of the war between 1945 and 1950 also meant that *military* intelligence in the modern sense of the word was relatively weak. This would explain the absence of concrete information on military intelligence services as compared to the more prolific security histories. Moreover, as we have seen, the largely guerrilla nature of the Franco-Vietnamese war did not require a clear distinction between the two intelligence services, as the creation of the special 'intelligence service' in the Public Security Department would seem to suggest. In the absence of a 'modern' army and large-scale movements and sophisticated battles, the need for 'classical' military intelligence remained relatively low until 1950.

But that does not mean that the DRV did not try. It is known, for example, that upon creating the General Staff (*Bo Tong Tham Muu*) on 7 September 1945, the Vietnamese included an intelligence section in it (in addition to offices for administrative affairs and communications). Vo Nguyen Giap and his deputy Hoang Van Thai were in charge. Based on the French model,⁴³ the

DRV's General Staff was in charge of organizational matters, training of the army, and military intelligence. Hoang Dao Thuy came on board to direct communications, while Hoang Minh Dao headed up military intelligence in *Phong 2*,⁴⁴ a rough equivalent of the French Deuxième Bureau. This rudimentary military intelligence service followed as best it could enemy military movements in Vietnam above the 16th parallel (especially in DRV inter-zones 4 and 5). Below that line, the Vietnamese were on their own. While Hoang Minh Dao and others did their best to train cadres and put a military intelligence service together, it was no easy task. When the Chinese opened fire on the French in Haiphong in early March 1946, almost setting off a three-way war, Vietnamese intelligence agents there could not apprise the General Staff of rapidly developing events, simply because they did not have access to functional phones!⁴⁵

Military intelligence received a boost on 25 March 1946, however, when Ho Chi Minh signed into law Decree 34, which consolidated within the Ministry of Defence a separate 'Bureau of Intelligence' (*Tinh bao cuc*).⁴⁶ In May 1947, Ho Chi Minh signed a second piece of legislation creating a new High Command, consisting of a revamped 'Bureau of Intelligence' (*Cuc Tinh bao*).⁴⁷ Until June 1948, Tran Hieu headed the Bureau of Intelligence for the High Command in the Ministry of Defence. In central and especially northern Vietnam, this military intelligence service established offices at the provincial and district levels. However, until 1949, it was mainly concerned with sabotage, commando operations, assassination missions, and local espionage. It is doubtful that the Ministry of Defence's Bureau of Intelligence was present in southern Vietnam, where General Nguyen Binh ran his own show.⁴⁸

The Ministry of Defence was apparently responsible for gathering two types of information: intelligence (*tinh bao*) and military intelligence (*quan bao*). The latter focused on gathering information so that the high command could 'know' the enemy and respond accordingly. Its activities were limited to Vietnam and concerned with the execution of mainly military affairs. Intelligence, on the other hand, was defined in wider terms, meaning information on the enemy's social, economic, political, cultural and military situations, both inside and outside Vietnam. Intelligence would allow Vietnamese analysts to understand in a wider purview French politics, policy, strategy and tactics.⁴⁹

Judging from Vo Nguyen Giap's severe critique of military intelligence just before the Bac Kan fiasco (see above), the General Staff's military intelligence operations were running into serious problems, however. Giap did not mince his words. After stating that 'an intelligence service is absolutely indispensable for an army', he made it clear that the DRV's military intelligence was failing. Agents were badly trained and were often French spies. Worse, since taking to the hills, army intelligence had little

contact with the Vietnamese masses. The shift from the city to the countryside meant a new geographical and social orientation in intelligence gathering. Giap stressed that the Vietnamese populations had to be used to report on French military movements. Scouting intelligence units (*doi trinh sat*) were of the utmost importance. The Bac Kan fiasco, occurring a month after this critique, only confirmed Vo Nguyen Giap's fears. Building a modern intelligence services in the midst of a war of decolonization was a chaotic and difficult business.

*A New State of War and the Professionalization of Intelligence:
'nghiep vu hoa'*

As noted at the outset, 1950 marked a turning point in the war. In January of that year, Mao Zedong and Josef Stalin recognized the DRV diplomatically. The Chinese communist victory of October 1949 linked Vietnam directly to the wider international communist world based out of Moscow. Thanks to Chinese communist aid, the Vietnamese were able to create, train, and outfit at least five modern divisions in order to take the battle to the French in 'classical' ways (at least in northern and central Vietnam). The shift from guerrilla warfare to the general counteroffensive was underway. In order to meet the demands of the modernization of the Vietnamese army and the shift towards 'modern' warfare, Vietnamese intelligence services had to keep up. Indeed, they had to be revamped. This is not new. As Peter Jackson writes of the impact of the Napoleonic wars on the take-off of intelligence in Europe: 'The sheer quantity of information needed to make strategy and wage war under these conditions increased dramatically. As a result, command and intelligence were similarly transformed.'⁵⁰ What is significant in the Vietnamese case is that this shift in intelligence development was now intensifying in the non-Western world as a new set of nation-states came into being and new generation of revolutionary wars emerged.

The arrival of the Cold War also triggered political changes within the DRV. For one thing, Vietnamese communists embraced the Chinese communist victory and welcomed Sino-Soviet diplomatic and military support. From 1950, the ICP announced its ideological colours and professed its membership in the international communist movement. It was, as Truong Chinh explained, the cutting edge of communist revolution in Southeast Asia. As a result, the party began to communize the state, discarding or purging non-communists and unreliable party members. In 1953, land reform began in earnest based on the Chinese model. The Public Security services would have to contribute to this new type of state – even as it evolved during a war of decolonization. In short, the internationalization of the Franco-Vietnamese war from 1950 put added pressure on military and security intelligences services to improve their work in order to take the war to the French and to

consolidate the party's power and control over the nation-state. Not only did the General Staff under Vo Nguyen Giap and Hoang Van Thai need accurate intelligence on the adversary's numbers, movements, tactics and strategy, but the party leadership also needed more information as to which cadres and nationalists to purge, which religious groups to follow, which lands to confiscate and divide up, and which populations to bring under increased control.

The Vietnamese had anticipated these changes as the Chinese Red Army began moving southwards against the nationalists. From 1949, in both north and south, an effort was made to improve intelligence gathering and espionage as the party began preparations for the general counteroffensive. In mid-January 1949, the 6th Cadres Plenum of the ICP's Central Committee passed a resolution calling for the 'revamping of Public Security and Intelligence'.⁵¹ During the rest of the year, a number of high level intelligence and party meetings were held to discuss ways of improving intelligence gathering, espionage, and its processing. In November 1949, the general director of the Public Security Department, Le Gian, issued order 160 on the 'collection and exploitation of information' (*việc sưu tầm và khai thác những tài liệu*). For the first time, intelligence was to be rated systematically, sources had to be compared and double-checked, and processing and analysis of intelligence had to be improved (*xu lý tin báo*). New techniques for interrogating prisoners were introduced in order to improve knowledge of enemy forces (their size, movements, armament). Accuracy became increasingly important, as did improving the secrecy and rapidity of communications. In short, an effort was being made to professionalize and modernize intelligence and security services as the war and state-building entered a new phase.⁵²

Of particular importance was the improvement of the espionage services (*ban diep bao*). As Vietnamese documents and recent publications reveal, the widespread idea that Vietnamese espionage officials had placed their spies within the highest echelons of the French intelligence services is largely false. While the French were indeed obligated to rely upon Vietnamese agents, interpreters, and civil servants to administer the lower levels of their own intelligence services, it does not follow that French services were compromised at the highest or most sensitive levels. However, the pressure of the internationalization and intensification of the war led the Vietnamese to redouble their efforts to create a more effective espionage service capable of penetrating and providing vital information on the enemy's size, movements, tactics, and strategy. And they achieved some notable successes. In 1949, for example, newly trained agent Nguyen Kim Son successfully penetrated the French *Service de Renseignements opérationnels* (SRO) which was under the direct command of the French commander-in-chief in Indochina.⁵³ Because of his privileged position, Kim was able to provide important

intelligence on parts of the SRO, its structures, agents, operations, as well as on the nature and size of American military assistance going to the State of Vietnam and the French.⁵⁴ (see next section for a discussion of Nguyen Kim Son's role in operation 'A13').

The crucial year in the modernization and professionalization of Vietnamese intelligence was 1950/51. Between 8 and 15 January 1950, for example, the fifth countrywide meeting of Public Security took place in Tuyen Quang. Moreover, for the first time ever a ranking representative of the south was there; it was none other than Pham Hung (see above). This important meeting approved the revamping of the service in light of the new international situation and the building general counteroffensive. Directives were issued to train more cadres, step up espionage and counter-espionage activities (even against American and British targets and espionage networks), and develop better intelligence on the counterrevolutionary government coming into being under the direction of Bao Dai. This meeting concluded that the Public Security forces were to maintain order and security, protect the Vietnamese state, and contribute to the independence struggle. This coincided with the Third Plenum of the ICP in early 1950, which called for the consolidation of the state and authorized an intelligence offensive against enemy spies and networks. Of fresh concern was the newly formed Associated State of Vietnam. Backed by the Americans and recognized by the West, this state was now building up its own security and military intelligence services to consolidate, protect, and expand yet another Vietnamese nation-state.⁵⁵ For better or worse, there were two 'Vietnams' from this point and two Vietnamese intelligence services at work for them.

The party had every intention of using the Public Security forces to increase its hold over the state, especially in the south. On 5 May 1950, the Executive Committee of the Central Committee issued directive 10/CT/TW instructing the party to pay better attention to police affairs at all levels. This important document stated that: 'In the people's democratic state machine led by our party, Public Security is an instrument of struggle against the reactionary forces inside and outside the country and [vital to the] protection of the people's interests' (*trong bo may chinh quyen dan chu nhan dan do Dang ta lanh dao, cong an la cong cu dau tranh chong cac luc luong phan dong trong nuoc, ngoai nuoc va bao ve quyen loi cua nhan dan*). Thus Public Security was deemed an essential tool in establishing communist control over the state. Until 1950, this document pointed out, the party had not correctly realized the importance of the Public Security forces in state-building. And this is why Public Security 'still had many shortcomings' (*con nhieu khuyet diem*). These included a lack of police coordination with party branches, weak cooperation with the people, and a loss of its prestige due to 'many regrettable incidents' (*nhieu vu dang tiec*). Things had clearly not been

running so smoothly. The party now had to use Public Security to strengthen or even establish its control over different parts of the state in this new period. The security forces would help the party spread its influence and establish vertical control throughout the state, train cadres better under the party's direction, improve their ideological education and loyalty to the party, and increase horizontal links between the police and the party at the district and provincial levels. This also meant shaking up the leadership of the Public Security forces at different levels.⁵⁶

One of the unknown questions concerning the reorganization of Vietnamese Public Security in 1950 is the role played by Chinese advisors and the extent to which Sino-Soviet intelligence and security models were imported. That the Chinese sent intelligence advisors, there is no doubt; the Vietnamese have acknowledged it.⁵⁷ We do know that in late 1950 the High Command sent a group of 43 cryptologists, including the head of the General Staff Cryptographic Bureau. They returned in May 1951.⁵⁸ However, Vietnamese publications say nothing about who was sent, in what capacity and with what effect. Chinese experts did, however, work carefully to reorganize Vietnamese military intelligence. On 6 August 1950, for example, the General Staff in the Ministry of Defence was completely revamped with Chinese assistance. A new Bureau of Military Intelligence (*Cuc Quan bao*)⁵⁹ was created within the General Staff under the direction of Le Trong Nghia. This change was designed to meet the increasing needs of the army as it moved to engage the French in more modern warfare. For the first time, military intelligence began to collect information on the Americans as well as on the battlefields in Laos and Cambodia. Chinese advisor 'Mai An Sinh' (Mei Jiasheng?) was attached to the DRV's General Staff. He was in turn in charge of an undetermined number of Chinese advisors working in the different sections of the Vietnamese General Staff. In the 'Tactics' and 'Intelligence' sections, Chinese advisors were present down to the regimental level.⁶⁰

Still missing was a modern external espionage service. It appears that at the outset the Public Security forces continued to play the lead role in the expansion and the operation of the party/DRV's intelligence activities in this period. On 28 February 1950, for example, the Standing Committee of the ICP's Central Committee approved resolution no. 8, entitled 'On the Integration of a Section of the Ministry of Defence's Intelligence Bureau (*Cuc Tinh bao*) into the Public Security Department of the Minister of the Interior' (*Sat nhap mot bo phan cua Cuc Tinh Bao Bo Quoc Phong vao Nha Cong An thuoc Bo Noi vu*). The National Assembly approved this with the promulgation of decree no. 66. As a result, the Ministry of Defence transferred part of its Intelligence Bureau to the Public Security Department to create what was in effect a new or at least an enlarged 'Intelligence

Service' (*Ty Tinh bao*). Tran Hieu headed it up, revealing once again the continued overlap between the military and the Public Security forces. In reality, the Ministry of Defence was shutting down the Bureau of Intelligence (*Cuc Tinh bao*) in favour of a new 'Military Intelligence Branch' (*nganh quan bao*) located in the General Staff. The purely intelligence side of the former Bureau of Intelligence (*Cuc Tinh bao*) was transferred to the Public Security Department. The military intelligence specialists went into the new Military Intelligence Branch. This transfer was completed by late May 1950.⁶¹

However, this arrangement did not last long. It is tempting to conclude that the Chinese advisors had something to do with this *volte-face*. For less than a year later, in 1951, the party decided it was best to shut down the intelligence tasks of the Public Security Department and thus separate the Public Security activities from those of the Military Intelligence Service. On 12 May 1951, the Secretariat of the Central Committee issued directive no. 5 on the 'Tasks and Organization of Public Security'. Following the crucial second party congress announcing the radicalization of the party's policies, the Public Security Department was assigned a new and clear role in the strengthening of the party, the state, and people's democracy (meaning communization). The General Secretary of the party, Truong Chinh, explained that 'the Public Security forces are no longer responsible for espionage or strategic intelligence, nor military and tactical intelligence, or for work in prostelyzing the enemy (*dich van*), demolition, or in the assassination of puppets'. According to directive no. 5, the Public Security Department was to protect the party, protect the 'people's democratic power', guard the national economy, and defend the army and the people.⁶² This marked a significant break with the past. (For more on this institutional transformation, see the discussion of 'affair H122' below.)

But the question still remained as to whether the party would create a separate, independent intelligence service. On 31 May 1951, the Central Committee secretariat issued a directive on 'The Improvement of Intelligence Work'. As the Central Committee explained: 'Intelligence work is an important instrument which cannot escape the party's control during the struggle with the enemy' (*Cong tac tinh bao la mot cong cu quan trong khong the thieu duoc cua Dang trong cuoc dau tranh voi dich*). As a result, the Central Committee decided to create 'a strategic intelligence board' within the Prime Minister's Office (*Thu Tuong Phu*), which would collect, analyse, and diffuse intelligence on the inside and outside. It would oversee strategic, political, military, and economic intelligence, as well as direct operations against the enemies and their 'puppets'. Significantly, this new board was in charge of running 'strategic intelligence' (*tinh bao chien luoc*) on all fronts.⁶³ Another Vietnamese source claims that the party's central committee issued instruction no. 07 which created a Strategic Intelligence Branch within

the Ministry of Defence and a special Intelligence Board (*Ban Tinh bao truc thuoc Trung Uong*) within the Central Committee to oversee strategic and tactical intelligence work, as well as that of the Public Security Department.⁶⁴ In either case, from May 1951 the party was in charge of intelligence matters via this powerful board and this marked probably the first attempt, to my knowledge, to create a separate intelligence service. From this point, the DRV's intelligence organization included three main intelligence services: Public Security, Military Intelligence, and a separate Intelligence agency run apparently inside the party and in charge of strategic intelligence. It is highly likely that all three services continued to overlap well into the 1950s.

But what remains less clear is whether the party created an *external* intelligence agency. After all, decolonization was not just a military question; it was also a diplomatic battle. From 1950, more than ever before, high-ranking Vietnamese decision-makers needed accurate and reliable information and good analysis on changes occurring at the international level. What were the objectives of the Americans regarding their relations with the French, the Associated State of Vietnam led by Bao Dai, and the rest of the West in the Cold War? What were the positions of the Soviet Union, China and the United Nations? And what about public opinion in France or elsewhere on Vietnam in particular and decolonization in general? What were the views of the non-communist Asian countries and other newly decolonizing countries? I have argued elsewhere that Vietnamese communist diplomacy almost broke down in early 1950. Vietnamese diplomats stationed in Bangkok, Paris, and Prague were remarkably out of touch with the party inside Vietnam and often acting alone and even recklessly.⁶⁵ According to an internal study commissioned by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1976 on the DRV's diplomacy between 1945 and 1954, the DRV delegation arriving in Geneva in mid-1954 was poorly informed of the complexity of the international situation and relations. According to this report, the DRV did not yet have a 'research bureau' (comparable to an external intelligence service) for the study of the international situation (*co quan nghien cuu ve tinh hinh quoc te*). This lack of understanding of the international level led the Vietnamese to rely on 'the Friends' (*ban*) – the Chinese and/or the Soviets – for information, intelligence, and analysis. Writing in 1976, as relations with Beijing deteriorated, the authors of this report concluded that this blinded the Vietnamese to the real intentions of the 'Friends', something which 'caused damage to us during and after the Geneva accords'.⁶⁶ Whether one agrees with this conclusion or not is less important here than understanding that the Vietnamese were quite possibly operating without an external intelligence service during the entire Indochinese War. If security and military intelligence played a vital role in keeping the state alive, and in helping the military to hand a defeat to the 'colonizer' in a set-piece and remarkably modern battle at Dien Bien Phu, the

effective absence of a real external intelligence service seems to have weakened the Vietnamese hand during the last act of decolonization – at the negotiating table in Geneva.⁶⁷ On 21 July 1954, despite the victory at Dien Bien Phu, the DRV only got half of the nation-state declared by Ho Chi Minh on 2 September 1945.

INTELLIGENCE IN A TIME OF DECOLONIZATION: THREE VIETNAMESE CASES

Political Assassination and Espionage

Recent Vietnamese publications on the history of the Intelligence and Public Security services abound with examples of successes and heroic acts carried out against the French and their Vietnamese ‘puppets’ (*bu nhin*). Indeed, one recent internal history is organized as an ‘historical chronicle’ of Public Security’s actions against ‘reactionary forces’ (*phan dong*) between 1945 and 1954. This is a blow-by-blow, month-by-month, heroic and ultimately teleological account of the victory of the communist side.⁶⁸ Other publications focus on model agents and intelligence martyrs during the wars for Vietnam. In 1997, for example, Public Security published a collected volume on ‘model women spies’.⁶⁹ Furthermore, Vietnamese television and cinema have recently latched on to the spy genre.⁷⁰ While these new publications make for exciting reading and often serve as training manuals, if used carefully they can also provide important insights into the evolution of the Vietnamese intelligence services in a time of decolonization. Two examples come to mind.

The first is the important role Public Security and Intelligence services played in conducting political assassinations, sabotage and intimidation as an important strategic part of the war against what was, at least until 1950, a militarily superior adversary. During this time, Vietnamese intelligence and espionage services concentrated on scoring political points by assassinating French intelligence, *Sûreté* and political figures as well as their corresponding Vietnamese allies trying to rebuild the colonial state or decolonize it in different national ways.⁷¹ Between 1946 and 1950, General Nguyen Binh waged an angry urban war in the conglomeration of Saigon-Cholon. He used terror, assassination, sabotage and the ‘socially underclass’ as arms against the French a decade before the *Front de libération nationale* (FLN) launched a similar battle for Algiers.⁷² If the party’s Public Security forces had a surprisingly hard time controlling Binh’s death squads in Saigon-Cholon and independent intelligence operations, the communists were just as intent on using assassination and sabotage to attain strategic goals by other means. The Public Service Department’s espionage services (*ty diep bao*, see above) were deeply involved in the killing business during the Indochina War.

The assassination of Marcel Marshal Bazin by the southern Public Security Service on 28 April 1950 is an instructive example. Bazin was a career colonial police officer who had tracked Vietnamese communists since the 1930s. And, like Léon Sogny, he had been particularly good at it. Back in Indochina after World War II, he continued to pose problems for his Vietnamese adversaries. First, he helped turn the religious sects against the DRV in collaboration with the Deuxième Bureau in 1946 and 1947. Second, in 1949, he became head of the *Sûreté fédérale* for Cochinchina and launched an all-out urban counteroffensive against Nguyen Binh and the party's Public Security networks and agents. Bazin never hesitated to use harsh methods to get results. Scores of Vietnamese agents were arrested, tortured, locked up or worse. By early 1950, the party's public service underground network had been decimated.⁷³ There was also a wider strategic dimension: Bazin's successful 'pacification' of the city was designed to create a favourable political climate for the emergence of the Associated State of Vietnam under Bao Dai.

For all these reasons, the DRV decided that Bazin had to be removed. The army could not do this; the security and intelligence services were put in charge of the urban war. The party's secret committee for Saigon-Cholon gave this task to the local security unit in Saigon-Cholon (*ty cong an Saigon-Cholon*). Four 'assault force agents' were put on the case and began following Bazin's every move, carefully noting his habits and itineraries. The agents, with the approval of the local Public Security and party cells, then designated the spot where the assassination would occur, which team would execute the plan, and how back-up and extrication would be implemented and coordinated. It was all very carefully planned: Bazin would be assassinated at 7.00 on 28 of April 1950 in front of the house he always strolled past at 203 rue Catinat (*Dong Khoi* today). At the agreed time, four men shot him dead before safely returning to their underground bases. As the official police history concluded in 1994: 'The internal bases in the city could [then] be reconsolidated and developed again, our cadres could move about the city more freely [than before].'⁷⁴ While this conclusion is highly debatable, it reveals one of the important uses of the Public Security and Intelligence services in a war of decolonization and in urban warfare.

Between 1945 and 1950, and indeed well into the 1960s, the Vietnamese urban security forces and military intelligence conducted numerous strategic assassinations for politico-military ends. Bazin was simply one of the better known examples of these kinds of operations. The DRV assassinated a very efficient intelligence office of the Deuxième Bureau, trained in India by the British (like Le Gian), named Hans Imfeld. The DRV's security services eliminated the non-communist nationalist, Nguyen Van Sam who threatened to join his forces with the new counterrevolutionary state Bao Dai and the

French were trying to build.⁷⁵ Others killed included non-communist politicians and journalists hostile to the DRV, such as Tran Tan Phat, Duong Hien Su, and Nguyen Van Thach.⁷⁶ What is worth emphasising is the importance of political assassination as a weapon for the Vietnamese intelligence services in the early years of the war when their army was still weak and enemy security forces were still very effective. The party's secret services carefully controlled the use of assassination, sabotage, demolition, and terror with an eye on the political and strategic advantages that could be gained from it. All of this reveals an important component of the evolving Vietnamese intelligence services and may constitute a common denominator in the early development of postcolonial intelligence services at war.⁷⁷

A second example – the sabotage of the French warship *Amyot d'Inville* on 27 September 1950 – concerns the debut of the DRV's use of its intelligence services as a part of wider politico-military operations. This operation was in response to the French decision to begin supplying covert arms, support and men to a dissident Vietnamese anticommunist force located secretly in the heart of DRV zones in Thanh Hoa province (interzone IV).⁷⁸ Again, these French moves coincided with the emergence of the Associated State of Vietnam under Bao Dai and the internationalization of the war evoked above. In February 1950, for example, the Americans and the rest of the West recognized the French counterrevolutionary government. The French now wanted to win over non-communist, anticolonialist support for this new nation-state in the making.

All of this was obvious to Vietnamese communist strategists determined to put their state on the map (it had just been recognized by Beijing and Moscow in January 1950). Orders went out to various espionage services to study how to block possible French espionage and politico-military operations against the DRV's vulnerable free zones in central Vietnam. In fact, the northern Vietnamese espionage service knew very well what the French were up to in Thanh Hoa. As previously mentioned, since 1949, Nguyen Tao, the head of the Public Security's Espionage Service, then director of the Hanoi Public Security branch, had placed two of his best agents within the French *Service de Renseignements opérationnels*, Hoang Minh Dao and Nguyen Kim Son (see above). They were known to the Espionage Service as A13 and A14, respectively. These two agents had so successfully passed themselves off as anticommunist nationalists that they had already met leading non-communist enemy nationalists such as Nguyen Huu Tri, Phan Van Giao, Buu Loc and apparently, Bao Dai himself. The agents, considered by the French to be on their 'side', were brought into Franco-Vietnamese preparations to expand nationalist forces into Thanh Hoa. In June, they met with none other than French General Marcel Alessandri and Nguyen De, Bao Dai's personal political advisor. The French and the Vietnamese gave full authorization to

A13 and A14 to meet with the anticommunist forces in central Vietnam with a view to liberating Thanh Hoa from years of DRV administration.⁷⁹

Now the Public Security Department's two spies had to find a way to stop the French operation against the DRV stronghold in support of 'nationalist forces' of which they were considered to be pivotal leaders – for the strategic threat to the DRV had suddenly become very important. This was especially the case in mid-1950, as the Chinese and Vietnamese began preparations to take the Sino-Vietnamese frontier at Cao Bang in order to begin supplying military aid to the Vietnamese army in the north. It was crucial to stop the French operation 'in order to protect this great rear area, a source of supplies and manpower for our forces and a key node in our north-south communications and transportation artery'.⁸⁰ The case officer, Nguyen Tao, in close collaboration with the top security official responsible for Hanoi, Tran Quoc Hoan and the party's man there, Nguyen Tai, ordered A13 to stop the French operation at all costs.

As a result, a suicide espionage cell was created, led by Hoang Minh Dao (Dao Phuc Loc), Nguyen Kim Son, and a young Vietnamese woman agent, Nguyen Thi Loi. The idea was to lure the French ship and the non-communist nationalists in Thanh Hoa out into the open in order to arrest the latter at the given time and bomb the French warship, *Amyot d'Inville*, on its way back to the north. Agents A13 and A14 duly accompanied the French warship to Thanh Hoa, disembarked and watched as special units and arms were unloaded. However, Hoang Dao (A13) convinced the French to take his 'wife' back to the north (meanwhile he would arrest the non-communist nationalist leaders for the DRV secret services). His 'wife', Nguyen Thi Loi, carried a suitcase packed with 30kg of explosives. Hoang Dao gave her a sleeping tablet and bid her farewell. The explosives went off, the ship was put out of commission for two years and the operation to aid 'nationalist forces' in central Vietnam was called off, but Nguyen Thi Loi, one of Vietnam's first 'suicide bombers', was dead.

This operation has become the subject of a spy novel 'Espionage Cell A-13' by Van Phan, who provides an admiring account of this female hero. A statue of the brave young woman now stands in the hall of the Ministry of Public Service today.⁸¹ While no one should doubt this woman's extraordinary courage, there are several other aspects of this operation that make it important for understanding intelligence operations in a war of decolonization. First, this was a step up from simple political assassination as we saw above. Not only did this operation have clear geo-strategic and political goals, it was also one of the first times that the services were effective because their agents had penetrated the French operational services. However limited and rudimentary all this most certainly was, it nevertheless marked an important evolution in the modernization and professionalization of the

Vietnamese secret services. And this is significant for the study and comparison of intelligence services in postcolonial non-Western societies.

Second, women clearly had a role to play in these espionage and counter-espionage operations. Nguyen Thi Loi was one of many female operatives during this period.⁸² It would be interesting to know more about the role of women in the Public Security and Intelligence services in violent wars of decolonization. Were they from lower class backgrounds like Nguyen Thi Loi? How were they recruited? Indoctrinated? Commemorated? If we can believe the new intelligence studies coming out of Vietnam, women were clearly being used in running dangerous operations on the ground, enticing enemy soldiers and officers, delivering bombs and for assassinations. While men also sacrificed themselves for the nationalist cause, fewer women occupied high level, decision-making positions within the secret services.

Lastly, despite the modernization of the DRV's espionage operations symbolized by the case of A13, there remains one very important piece of information provided by some Vietnamese accounts of this operation – the DRV's spies infiltrated into the French side had been instructed to *create* the deception that there were 'nationalist forces' in Thanh Hoa and that they were a part of them. In reality, there were no hostile 'nationalist forces' in Thanh Hoa. It was a cover. The irony of all this could not have been lost on the General Secretary of the ICP, Truong Chinh, when he ordered his intelligence men to stop the very French action that his espionage service had helped to create. As the internal history explains:

Truong Chinh complained that this espionage operation was creating an impression among enemy forces that Region IV contained nationalist, anti-communist resistance forces. He said that this could lead to the enemy conducting a rash act of military adventurism by attacking the Thanh Nghe Tinh free zone [Thanh Hoa, Nghe An and Ha Tinh provinces in central Vietnam]. Comrade Truong Chinh requested that this mistake be corrected.⁸³

Nguyen Thi Loi lost her life in order to 'correct' that intelligence mistake – one which could have harmed Vietnamese geo-political interests at the very moment the DRV's army was preparing for the battle of Cao Bang to open the frontier to vital military and economic aid from communist China.

Enemy Deception: The Case of 'H122' and Intelligence Failure

French intelligence services were neither as impassive nor as inept as the heroic thread in recent Vietnamese intelligence implicitly suggests. Indeed, the French launched their own espionage operations against the DRV, its intelligence services as well as the party and military leaders running them.

The French 'infiltration' of a dangerous Vietnamese spy, codenamed H122, into the upper echelons of the military establishment in 1948 made this painfully clear. Indeed, the French-planted H122 almost tore the Vietnamese High Command apart as it desperately sought to ferret out this agent.

Ironically however, 'Agent H122' probably never existed. While the details from the French side remain somewhat unclear, recent and remarkably candid Vietnamese publications provide useful information.⁸⁴ In March 1948, the underground DRV Public Security Service in Hanoi obtained and forwarded to the central Public Security Service an enemy document entitled: 'Report by the Agent code-name H122' (*Bao cao cua mot diep vien mang bi so H122*). The document was forwarded on to the Bureau of Intelligence in the Ministry of Defence. Not only did the report focus on the DRV's own military plans for the upcoming autumn/winter offensive, but it was clear that this spy had to be in the upper levels of the Viet Bac interzone's military High Command in order to have been able to obtain such information. Orders were given to Public Security and the Bureau of Intelligence to find the spy. Arrests and interrogations multiplied as intelligence officers went to work to flush the agent out. Within one month, 'several hundred military cadres and officers at the regimental level were arrested and interrogated'. To make matters worse, the Bureau of Intelligence used torture liberally to locate the spy and his/her network. Some 200 cadres, military personnel and 103 civilians were interrogated. Under physical pressure, many admitted to being in the pay of the Deuxième Bureau and/or members of anticommunist nationalist parties, such as the Vietnam Quoc Dan Dang (VNQDD) and the Dai Viet. This is when things started to go awry. Accusations and recriminations spread from one office to another, sweeping through combat units, and even spilled into the party leadership. Paranoia began to turn into hysteria. To prevent a meltdown, the ICP Central Committee and Ho Chi Minh brought in their top intelligence official, Tran Dang Ninh. The very fact that the party assigned him to investigate and solve the 'H122 affair' shows how effective this French *deception* was.

Tran Dang Ninh scrupulously and systematically investigated the affair, interviewing hundreds of 'prisoners' and comparing and analysing their confessions. He also put a brake on the use of torture. After thorough reflection and consultation with his investigating team and the party leadership, he concluded that this was a French-mounted deception plan designed to sow precisely the sort of paranoia and internal divisions afflicting the party and army over H122. Tran Dang Ninh based this on various criteria. First, he doubted that hundreds of loyal cadres, many of them communists with impeccable backgrounds, could all be spies without the party knowing. Second, torture had clearly done a disservice to the DRV and party's counter-

espionage services. Third, Ninh observed correctly that the military and political contexts would explain why the French would want to mount such an attack. Lastly, he noted that the report and other mentions of H122 had all come from sources never clearly identified by the intelligence services. Tran Dang Ninh concluded that it was most likely a French deception operation. There was, he judged in his final report to the party Central Committee, no spy codenamed H122.

Besides being a 'good story', several points are worth noting here. First, for better or worse, H122 demonstrates clearly the vulnerability of young postcolonial states to more experienced Western intelligence services using deception techniques against them. Second, this deception did indeed generate paranoia within the Vietnamese leadership. Worse, it led the DRV to apply torture indiscriminately in order ferret out this perceived national security threat. Third, the Vietnamese Communist Party brought in (or rather had access to) clear thinking, highly educated analytical minds, who had the authority and the trust to carry out an in-depth investigation to determine whether the threat was real or not. This analytical capability was key to putting an end not just to the widespread and debilitating climate of paranoia and torture, but it also helped maintain party and military unity at a crucial point in the war. Fourth, it would appear that French military intelligence services had begun to develop their own psychological techniques to provoke internal dissension and paranoia through deception and to take advantage of the less developed nature of their adversaries' counter-espionage structures. While it cannot yet be proven, it is possible that H122 was the predecessor of another famous French 'psychological operation', which would tear parts of the FLN apart in Algeria: *Opération Bleuite*.⁸⁵ In any case, French intelligence knowledge and operations were also evolving in these wars of decolonization. Studying the non-European context can thus help us to shed new light on the development of imperial intelligence services in the West and elsewhere.⁸⁶

Lastly, the Vietnamese once again drew important lessons from H122 in the development and modernization of their intelligence services. In fact, the H122 affair was one of the main reasons for the revamping of military intelligence in early 1950 discussed above. On 27 February 1950, the Standing Committee of the ICP passed resolution 08-QD/TW aimed at 'reorganizing the intelligence branch'.⁸⁷ Real or imagined, H122 seems to have hurt the DRV intelligence apparatus sufficiently for the military side to accept the decision to focus strictly on military intelligence (*quan bao*) while wider intelligence operations were transferred and integrated into the relatively unscathed Ministry of Interior's Public Security services. From May 1950, the Public Security Department was in charge of intelligence for the government and the party, working in collaboration with the military

services.⁸⁸ H122 also seems to have contributed to the party's decision to control the use of torture in its intelligence services, my last case study.

The Use of Torture in Postcolonial Intelligence Services

Recent Vietnamese publications have recognized that the DRV employed torture (*tra tan*) within its intelligence and security services. While this subject has dominated French studies of the Algerian war, spawning even a second generation of studies obsessed with the subject,⁸⁹ little has been written on how the Vietnamese, like the French or the Algerians, had to come to terms with the relationship between torture and intelligence. While this question cannot be examined in detail here, it needs to be evoked as part of our wider examination of the development of 'postcolonial' intelligence services outside the West.

Like the creation of Vietnamese intelligence services discussed in the first section, the nationalist use of torture did not simply appear in 1945 without any link to the colonial past. Not only had many of those Vietnamese running postcolonial intelligence services served time in the 'colonial bastille', to borrow Peter Zinoman's phrase, but many of them had direct personal experience of torture.⁹⁰ Given that many of the ICP's security chiefs had been imprisoned in Poulo Condor and Son La, it is not particularly surprising to learn that many of them applied colonial torture techniques for their own national ends after 2 September 1945. A revealing, if disturbing, account of this link between colonial and postcolonial torture is to be found in Nguyen Tai's memoirs, *Back to my Roots*.⁹¹ Nguyen Tai was an early collaborator of Le Gian in the building and operation of security services in northern Vietnam. He had been involved in running operation A13 in 1950 and he went on to become one of the DRV's most redoubtable spies during the war against the Americans, coming 'Face to Face with the CIA' as he puts it in his recently published memoirs.⁹² However, he also reveals how colonial methods of torture were associated with the nascent Vietnamese Public Security services. It is worth quoting Nguyen Tai's memoirs at length in this connection:

In late September 1945, when I returned from Tan Trao to Hanoi with Le Gian and was assigned to work in the Security Bureau for North Vietnam [*So Liem Phong Bac Bo*, see above], 'Old Man Minh' was already working there. After the August Revolution, seeing that old Minh had a lot of experience gained from being arrested and imprisoned by the French secret police, the Party assigned him to Public Security duties. He was appointed as Chief of the Political Office (now called Political Security) and used the name 'Bui Duc Minh'. He was about my father's age. He had been an elementary

school teacher and knew my father. He had joined the Vietnam Quoc Dan Dang (VNQDD) at the same time as Nguyen Thai Hoc. He abandoned his teaching job and devoted himself full-time to working for the revolution. He was arrested and thrown in prison by the French secret police during the 1930s. While in prison, he had learned about communism, so he abandoned the VNQDD and joined the Communist Party in the early years. Afterward, although the enemy arrested him, tortured him brutally, and threw him in prison on numerous occasions, he steadfastly continued to work for the revolution, abandoning his family in the process, until victory was achieved.

Turning to the question of ‘technical transfers’ in a time of decolonization, Nguyen Tai explains how ‘old man Minh’ taught young security interrogators to torture more effectively for the nationalist cause:

However, old man Minh used to tell the interrogators, ‘When you beat prisoners with clubs or use electric shocks to question them, your methods cause injuries and give us a bad reputation. These methods are not as “good” as the methods that bastard Lutz used to torture me.’ Lutz was a French secret policeman who was infamous among revolutionary cadre who had been arrested for conducting clandestine operations. According to Minh, when Lutz tortured you it was difficult to resist even though he did not leave any visible marks. One of us young officers ‘volunteered’ to let old Minh try out the method on him so that we could learn what method Lutz used.⁹³

The link between colonial and postcolonial torture techniques is clear. In the same account Nguyen Tai reveals that the DRV security forces were using a colonial *magneto* – ‘a hand-cranked electrical generator for torturing people’ – to get their victims to talk. But like his colonial predecessors, Nguyen Tai never once describes the physical pain the police inflicted upon prisoners.⁹⁴ Significantly, torture during this early period was mainly used against other Vietnamese. This was especially the case in 1945–46, when the DRV was engaged in a civil war against anticommunist Vietnamese nationalist parties (Dai Viet, VNQDD and Dong Minh Hoi).

Like their counterparts elsewhere in the world, postcolonial security and intelligence services did not escape the political, ethical and humanitarian questions posed by the use of torture. In southern Vietnam torture became a common practice in 1949 when it was learned or feared that French-backed ‘reactionary’ nationalist party spies had penetrated the Public Security forces. Paranoia swept through the security services. As during the ‘H122 affair’, officials turned to torture and heavy-handed interrogation to

ferret out these moles.⁹⁵ The head of the southern Public Security Service, Diep Ba, severely criticized the service's organizational and professional shortcomings in dealing with this threat, in particular the unwarranted arrests and heavy-handed interrogations of scores of cadres and civilians.⁹⁶ As the official history concedes in remarkably candid terms that deserve to be quoted at length:

In Cho Lon, Nguyen Huu Doc, the Deputy District Public Security Chief who was personally in command of Area B in Can Duoc district conducted waves of arrests, using brutal torture, rape, and murder in a so-called 'espionage case' that caused unjust suffering for 86 families of innocent civilians.

Similar waves of arrests were made in Tay Ninh. Hundreds of cadres, Party members, civilian supporters, company and battalion-level military commanders were arrested. The arrests even extended into the ranks of Public Security itself, where reconnaissance personnel and investigating officers up to the rank of the deputy chief of a district public security officer were arrested. A reconnaissance team member who one day went out to arrest someone would suddenly be arrested the very next day. An investigating officer who one day was sitting in his chair conducting interrogations would the next day be forced to stand in that same office to be interrogated himself.⁹⁷

As in northern Vietnam, the southern service understood that it must not only to detect enemy deception, but also limit the use of torture so that it did not spiral out of control, harming the legitimacy of the DRV and its national base. As the official history notes on this matter:

It turned out that during this period waves of arrests had been carried out in many provinces that caused us extremely regrettable losses and damage. This was the result of the use of physical violence and torture, forcing people to make statements, putting words in their mouths, and then arresting everyone implicated by the suspects during torture.⁹⁸

The author was able to obtain the French-captured minutes of the early July 1949 Public Security meeting. In this document, Diep Ba, Mai Chi Tho and others took up the difficult question of torture. Mai Chi Tho pointed out the political dangers of this method, for 'it brings about profound hate in the heart of the man being tortured unjustly, creating a bad reputation [for the party] in his family and in the surrounding region where he lives. Involuntarily, we can by this [the use of torture] push a certain number of

people down the bad reactionary road'. That said, the use of torture in certain cases seems to have been maintained; however, it had to be kept to a minimum and used only in exceptional cases. Orders were given to 'harm the health of prisoners as little as possible'.⁹⁹

From the evidence currently available, it appears unlikely that the Vietnamese intelligence services used physical torture systematically. There is no denying that it existed and was accepted. The problem, at least at the beginning, is that it often spun out of control when paranoia and then hysteria got the best of them. Indeed, this excessive use of torture seems to have done serious damage, resulting in the deaths of dozens if not hundreds of innocent people. According to the Nguyen Tai, the situation got so bad that in 1951 the Public Security Service issued a regulation banning the use of physical violence in interrogations.¹⁰⁰ While this remains to be verified, it is quite possible that the party and its leaders in security and intelligence operations had indeed decided that torture and its systematic use as a security and intelligence method were too dangerous both in terms of its possible manipulation by the enemy and, more importantly in my view, in alienating local Vietnamese support and undermining the legitimacy of the party's 'cause'. The party kept close tabs on the practice of torture.

But the question obviously did not go away just because a regulation had been passed. In 1952, in the revolutionary underworld of Saigon-Cholon, the use of torture spun out of control again in the Public Security offices. Here again high level leaders had to step in to establish order. In this case, the party's Central Bureau for the South (COSVN as it was later known to the Americans) closed the case concluding that 'there were no spies'. The fear of French agents, it concluded 'is simply the result of subjective, paranoid thinking'. While this is possible the recurrent bouts of security paranoia reveal the absence of effective counter-espionage and a professional intelligence culture able to prevent hysteria and internal divisions from doing serious damage to the nationalist cause and its own people. It also suggests that the party's control was perhaps not quite as 'total' as the party today, and some of its anticommunist detractors at the time, would have us to believe.¹⁰¹

CONCLUSION

If the Vietnamese services seem to have truly backed away from the use of physical torture in the early 1950s, the military intelligence services in particular would become institutionally and deeply involved in attempting to penetrate, win over and change the entire way of thinking of their adversaries. In Vietnamese, this was known as 'prostelyzing the enemy' (*dich van*). Military intelligence services assigned particular attention to propaganda

and psychological warfare in order to win over enemy soldiers to the DRV's 'just' cause. This little studied service became an institutional part of the Vietnamese army, a very political one by 1954. It also became very controversial when the army's *dich van* services went to work on thousands of prisoners from France and its empire in a bid not to hurt them necessarily physically, but to change them psychologically. Paradoxically, *dich van* not only transformed Vietnamese intelligence, but it also influenced the development of French and American counterrevolutionary tactics and methods to this day. I would argue that this emphasis on *dich van* in particular distinguished communist Vietnamese, North Korean and Chinese intelligence services and security cultures from their non-communist, postcolonial counterparts in other parts of the non-Western world. But this is another, complex story.

NOTES

Thanks to David Marr, Cam N. Nguyen, Merle Pribbenow, Jean-Marc Le Page, Jay Veith, and Martin Thomas for the thoughtful critiques of this essay. Special thanks go to Peter Jackson for his patience, support, and suggestions for improving this article.

- 1 Frederic Wakeman, Jr., *Policing Shanghai, 1927–1937* (Berkeley, University of California Press 1995). Also see John Byron and Robert Pack, *The Claws of the Dragon: Kang Sheng* (Riverside, NY: Simon & Schuster 1992); Robert Pack, *Behind Mao and His Legacy of Terror in People's China* (Riverside, NY: Simon & Schuster 1992); and Frederic Wakeman, Jr., *Spymaster: Dai Li and the Chinese Secret Service* (Berkeley: University of California Press 2003). However, professors Qiang Zhai and Arne Westad have pointed out to me that little work has been done on communist Chinese intelligence services using Chinese-language sources.
- 2 One need only take a rapid glance at the on-line table of contents for *Intelligence and National Security* to get an idea of this journal's expanding geo-historical reach. Available at <<http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals/titles/02684527.asp>>. In the August 2006 issue of *Intelligence and National Security*, Michael Warner, of the American Office of the Director of National Intelligence, published an analysis of Sun Tzu's thinking on intelligence. See Michael Warner, 'The Divine Skein: Sun Tzu on Intelligence', *Intelligence and National Security* 21/4 (August 2006) pp.483–92. Also see Peter Jackson, 'Historical Reflections on the Uses and Limits of Intelligence' in Peter Jackson and Jennifer Siegel (eds.) *Intelligence and Statecraft: The Use and Limits of Intelligence in International Society* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press 2005) pp.11–51.
- 3 Christopher Andrew and Vasili Mitrokhin, *The World Was Going Our Way* (New York: Basic Books 2005).
- 4 See Christopher Andrew and A.S. Kanya-Forstner, *France Overseas: Great War and the Climax of French Imperial Expansion* (London: Thames & Hudson Ltd. 1981).
- 5 Christopher A. Bayly, *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780–1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1996).
- 6 Richard Aldrich, Gary Rawnsley and Ming-Yen Rawnsley (eds.) *The Clandestine Cold War in Asia, 1945–65: Western Intelligence, Propaganda, and Special Operations* (London: Frank Cass 2000); Richard Aldrich, *Intelligence and the War Against Japan: Britain, America and the Politics of Secret Service* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press 2000); Martin Thomas, 'Processing Decolonization: British Strategic Analysis of Intelligence on Vietnam and Indonesia, 1945–50' in Christopher Goscha and

- Christian Ostermann (eds.) *Connecting Histories: Decolonization and the Cold War in Asia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, under external review); Stein Tonnesson, 'La difficulté d'utilisation des archives des services secrets: le cas de l'Indochine lors de la Seconde guerre mondiale' in *Renseignements & Opérations spéciales*, no. 5 (July–August 2000) pp.61–70; Maochun Yu, *OSS in China: Prelude to Cold War* (New Haven: Yale University Press 1997); Alexander Zervoudakis, "'Nihil mirare, nihil contemptare, omnia intelligere'": Franco-Vietnamese Intelligence in Indochina, 1950–1954' in Martin Alexander (ed.) *Knowing Your Friends. Intelligence Inside Alliances and Coalitions from 1914 to the Cold War* (London: Frank Cass 1998) pp.210–24; Jean-Marc Le Page, 'Les services de renseignements français pendant la guerre d'Indochine (1945–1954)', Institut d'Etudes Politique de Paris (PhD currently in progress under the direction of Professor Maurice Vaisse). *Intelligence and National Security* has published numerous articles on British policing and intelligence in the empire. See for example: Karl Hack, 'British Intelligence and Counter-Insurgency in the Era of Decolonisation: The Example of Malaya', *Intelligence and National Security* 14/2 (1999) pp.124–55, and Simon C. Smith, 'General Templer and Counter-Insurgency in Malaya: Hearts and Minds, Intelligence, and Propaganda', *Intelligence and National Security* 16/3 (2001) pp.60–78 among others.
- 7 The same can be said for the Vietnam War. The Vietnamese have published on their intelligence and police services for this latter period and the Americans captured and intercepted scores of Vietnamese security and intelligence materials from the DRV (and others).
 - 8 Le Gian, *Nhung Ngay Song Gio, Hoi Ky*, 3rd ed., revised and augmented (Hanoi: Nha Xuat Ban Thanh Nien 2003), and Mai Chi Tho, *Hoi Uc Mai Chi Tho, theo buoc chan lich su*, 2 vols. (n.p.: Nha Xuat Ban Tre 2001). Historians also have access to biographical information on the party's security chief at this time, *Tran Dang Ninh, con nguoi va lich su* (Hanoi: Nha Xuat Ban Chinh Tri Quoc Gia 1996).
 - 9 *Essential Matters: A History of the Cryptographic Branch of the People's Army of Viet-Nam, 1945–1975, with a supplement on cryptography in the border guard (formerly the Armed Public Security Forces), 1959–1989*, trans. and ed. David W. Gaddy (Fort George G. Meade, MD: Center for Cryptologic History, National Security Agency 1994). This is the translation of the original Vietnamese publication: *Lich su nganh co yeu Quan doi nan dan Viet Nam, 1946–1975* (Hanoi: Nha Xuat Ban Quan Doi Nhan Dan 1990).
 - 10 For an incisive analysis of the colonial prison world in Indochina, see Peter Zinoman, *The Colonial Bastille: A History of Imprisonment in Vietnam (1862–1940)* (Berkeley: University of California Press 2001), esp. chapters 2, 7, 8, and 9.
 - 11 Vladimir Nicolaevitch Ouzov, 'Le renseignement soviétique en Chine, 1925–1927', *Communisme* 65–66 (first and second trimesters 2001) pp.73–100, and Christopher E. Goscha, 'Building Force: Asian Origins of 20th Century Military Science in Vietnam (1905–1954)', *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 34/3 (2003) pp.535–60.
 - 12 For some fascinating pictures of the American intelligence officers training Vo Nguyen Giap's men in this rudimentary military academy, see the special issue of *Chien Khu*, 25 November 1945. I found this newspaper in the *Bibliothèque nationale de France*.
 - 13 See my 'Belated Allies: The Technical Contributions of Japanese Deserters to the Viet Minh (1945–1950)' in Marilyn Young and Robert Buzzanco (eds.) *A Companion to the Vietnam War* (London: Blackwell Publishers 2002) pp.37–64. The Vietnamese People's Army openly recognizes the contributions of Japanese crossovers to the development of their military intelligence and communications in the wake of World War II. See 'Nho Dai Doi Truong Trinh Sat Trung Doan Cao Bac Lang Koshiro' and 'Nho Anh Si Quan Thong Tin Nguoi Nhat Nguyen Chi Hung', *Su Kien va Nhan Chung* 83 (November 2000) and 77 (April 2000), reprinted in *Bao Quan Doi Nhan Dan, 2000–2001* (Hanoi: Nha Xuat Ban Chinh Tri Quoc Gia 2002) pp.761–3 and 766–7, respectively.
 - 14 Nguyen Van Ngoc, *Nguoi luu day tro ve: Dieu vien nhay du thanh giam doc cong an Trung bo* (Hanoi: Nha Xuat Ban Cong An Nhan Dan 1997) pp.224–36. One of the party's most powerful security chiefs has recently recognized the continuities between colonial and national intelligence and security staffs. Mai Chi Tho, *Hoi Uc, nhung mau chuyen doi toi*, vol. 1 (n.p.: Nha Xuat Ban tre 2001) p.154.

- 15 *Lich su Bo doi Thong tin Lien lac, 1945–1995* (Hanoi : Nha Xuat Ban Quan doi Nhan Dan 1996) pp.13–14.
- 16 See the entry for Hoang Dao Thuy in my *Historical Dictionary of the Indochina War* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow, forthcoming).
- 17 See e.g. *Essential Matters* (note 9) p.3. However, one should be careful not to assume that all colonial trained civil servants crossed over to the DRV in 1945. They did not. And many would leave the nationalist government, not least of all because of low pay and harsh living conditions.
- 18 The parallel between the Allied training of these Vietnamese and Free French officers in India at the same time should not be overlooked. Jean Deuve, for example, was trained in commando operation by the British and parachuted into Japanese-occupied Laos. He stayed on to work in the Deuxième Bureau and was one of architects of the police services of the Royal Lao Government. See Jean Deuve, *Histoire de la police nationale du Laos* (Paris: Editions L'Harmattan 1998).
- 19 See also Le Gian, *Nhung ngay* (note 8) p.74 and Nguyen Van Ngoc, *Nguoi luu day tro ve* (note 14) pp.178–212 (on their recruitment and training by the British Intelligence Service (IS) see pp.190–1).
- 20 This is according to the Department of the Army, Trampoline 2, *The DRVN Strategic Intelligence Service Cuc Nghien Cuu*, dated June 1968, pp.10–11, in Carlisle Barracks, US Army Military History Institute Library. My thanks to Jay Veith for sharing a copy of this document with me. It seems more likely, however, that he was trained by the British MI6. Not unlike their American counterparts, because of the tension generated by the Vietnam War, Vietnamese officials were until recently reluctant to talk about this early collaboration with American intelligence services. In this sense, the publication of Le Gian's memoirs parallels those of the controversial American OSS agent who worked with the Viet Minh during World War II, Archimedes L.A. Patti, *Why Viet Nam? Prelude to America's Albatross* (Berkeley: University of California Press 1982). His memoirs have been translated into Vietnamese. For a Vietnamese defence of his collaboration with Allied intelligence services during the war, see: Nguyen Van Ngoc, *Nguoi luu day tro ve* (note 14) p.191.
- 21 The Vietnamese term, *so liem phong*, was borrowed from the colonial period term for *la Sûreté*. For information on the French colonial police, see Patrice Morlat, *La répression coloniale au Vietnam (1908–1940)* (Paris: Editions L'Harmattan 1990). The history of the French colonial police in Indochina, before and after 1945, remains to be written.
- 22 *Lich Su Tinh Bao Cong An Nhan Dan Viet Nam (1945–1954)*, Luu Hanh Noi Bo [Internal Distribution only] (Hanoi: Nha Xuat Ban Cong An Nhan Dan, no date, circa 1996) p.32, and Le Gian, *Nhung ngay* (note 8) p.238.
- 23 *Cong An Nam Bo trong Khang Chien Chong Thuc Dan Phap Xam Luoc* (Hanoi?: Nha Xuat Ban Cong An Nhan Dan 1993) p.47; *Lich Su Tinh Bao Cong An* (note 22) p.32.
- 24 *Lich Su Cong An Nhan Dan Viet Nam (1945–1954) So Thao*, Luu Hanh Noi Bo [Internal Distribution only] (Hanoi: Nha Xuat Ban Cong An Nhan Dan 1996) p.84; Ha Minh Quoc, 'Anh Tran Dang Ninh voi "Vu An Gian Diep H122"' in *Tran Dang Ninh* (note 8) pp.232–3; and Dinh Xuan Lam and Do Quang Hung, *Danh Nhan Lich Su Viet Nam*, vol.3 (Ho Chi Minh City: Nha Xuat Ban Giao Duc 1992) pp.45–6.
- 25 For reasons of commodity, French intelligence specialists (incorrectly) translated *Cong an* as *la Sûreté*.
- 26 'Sac Lenh so 23 ngay 21 Thang 2 nam 1946 thiet lap – "Viet Nam Cong An Vu"', Hanoi, 21 February 1946, signed by Ho Chi Minh and the Minister of Interior, Vo Nguyen Giap, in *Viet Nam Dan Quoc Cong Bao*, 2 March 1946, p. 118. That Le Gian had been selected by the party to run the Public Security department, see: *Lich Su Cong An Nhan Dan Viet Nam (1945–1954) So Thao* (note 24) p.82, and Le Gian, *Nhung ngay* (note 8) p.239.
- 27 *Lich Su Tinh Bao Cong An* (note 22) pp.33–5.
- 28 Le Gian, *Nhung ngay* (note 8) p.244.
- 29 *Lich Su Tinh Bao Cong An* (note 22) pp.35–7.
- 30 *Lich Su Cong An Nhan Dan Viet Nam (1945–1954) So Thao* (note 24) pp.83–4 and *Lich Su Tinh Bao Cong An* (note 22) pp.36–7.

- 31 *Cong An Nam Bo* (note 23) p.98.
- 32 Together with Le Duc Tho they would run the *Cuc Trung Uong Mien Nam*, Centre [Party] Bureau for the South (COSVN as it was known later to the Americans) before going on to form one of the most powerful blocs within the Vietnamese Workers' then Communist Party.
- 33 *Cong An Nam Bo* (note 23) pp.167–9, and *Lich Su Cong An Nhan Dan Viet Nam (1945–1954) So Thao* (note 24) p.84.
- 34 Commandement des Forces Terrestres en Extrême-Orient, Etat-Major, Deuxième Bureau, no. 3093/2, 'Note d'information: Etude des organismes de renseignement viet-minh', Saigon, 27 October 1948, p.9, dossier VI, box C881, Service Historique de l'Armée de l'Air and Tran Bach Dang *et al.*, *Chung Mot Bong Co* (Ho Chi Minh City: Nha Xuat Ban Chinh Tri Quoc Gia 1993) p.930. My thanks to Merle Pribbenow for bringing the second document to my attention. While I have no other information on this secret service, one wonders whether it was operating independently of the party in the south.
- 35 *Lich Su Tinh Bao Cong An* (note 22) p.55.
- 36 Nguyen Bac, *Au Coeur de la Ville Captive, souvenir d'un agent viet minh infiltré à Hanoi* (Paris: Arléa 2004). First published in Vietnamese as *Giua Thanh Pho Bi Chiem* (Hanoi: Nha Xuat Ban Hanoi 1994).
- 37 *Lich Su Tinh Bao Cong An* (note 22) pp.56–8, 62–4.
- 38 *Ibid.* p. 59.
- 39 Jackson, 'Historical Reflections' (note 2) pp.13–14 and 43–5.
- 40 Captured document: Democratic Republic of Vietnam, High Command of the Ministry of National Defence, 'Directives for the Organisation of Intelligence Services', no.1147/XY, Bac Bo, 6 August 1947, signed: the Supreme Commander of the Vietnamese National Army, Vo Nguyen Giap, in Commandement des Troupes françaises d'Indochine du Nord, Deuxième Bureau, no.4817/2, Hanoi, 17 October 1947, 'Document Viet Minh saisi à Bac Kan', captured document dated 6 August 1947, in dossier 342–3, box 10H2963, Service Historique de l'Armée de Terre.
- 41 *Lich Su Tinh Bao Cong An* (note 22) p.59.
- 42 This is one of the arguments I made in my 'A "Popular" Side of the Vietnamese Army: General Nguyen Binh and War in the South' in Christopher E. Goscha and Benoît de Tréglodé (eds.) *Naissance d'un Etat Parti: le Viet Nam depuis 1945* (Paris: Les Indes Savantes 2004) pp.325–53.
- 43 In the early days, Vietnamese military leaders relied upon French-language publications on General Staff work as well as on colonial-trained Vietnamese soldiers and officers to build their military structures. This would change in 1950, when the Vietnamese switched to Chinese and especially Soviet models.
- 44 In Vietnamese, this office was referred to as *phong nhi*.
- 45 *Lich su Bo Tong Tham Muu trong Khang Chien chong Phap (1945–1954)* (Hanoi: Bo Tong Tham Muu, Ban Tong Ket, Bien Soan Lich Su 1991) pp.6–8, 46–7. See also: 'Nghì Quyết của Hội Nghị Quân Sự Toàn Quốc lần thứ ba (12–15 June 1947)' in *Van Kien Quan Su của Dang*, volume II, Luu Hanh Noi Bo [Internal distribution only] (Hanoi: Nha Xuat Ban Quan Doi Nhan Dan 1976) pp.175–7.
- 46 *Lich su Tong Cuc Chinh Tri Quan Doi Nhan Dan Viet Nam, tap 1 (1944–1975)*, vol. I (Hanoi: Nha Xuat Ban Quan Doi Nhan Dan 2004) pp.41–2.
- 47 *Ibid.* p.57.
- 48 'Etude des organismes de renseignements Viet Minh' (note 34) p.4. On Nguyen Binh's military intelligence operations, see my 'A "Popular" Side of the Vietnamese Army' (note 41) pp.325–53.
- 49 Captured document: Ministry of Defence, Democratic Republic of Vietnam, High Command, no.86/TT, 'Directives au sujet de l'organisation du quan bao', dossier VI, box C881, Service Historique de l'Armée de l'Air, and Michel Bodin, 'Les services de renseignements Viet-Minh (1945–1954)', *Guerres mondiales et conflits contemporains* 191 (October 1998) pp.20–6.
- 50 Jackson, 'Historical Reflections' (note 2) p.22.
- 51 *Lich Su Tinh Bao Cong An* (note 22) p.69.

- 52 Ibid. pp.70–2.
- 53 Which became the Section d'Etudes historiques in 1949. My thanks to Jean-Marc Le Page for this information.
- 54 *Lich Su Tinh Bao Cong An* (note 22) p.77.
- 55 *Lich Su Cong An Nhan Dan Viet Nam (1945–1954) So Thao* (note 24) pp.194–5. I am unaware of any history, in any language, of the intelligence services of the Associated State of Vietnam or even its successor, the Republic of Vietnam.
- 56 *Lich Su Cong An Nhan Dan Viet Nam (1945–1954) So Thao* (note 24) p.198, citing *chi thi so* 10CT/TW, pp.206, 207. Significantly, Le Gian says nothing of these problems in his memoirs. Indeed, he does not even talk about the post-1946 period. And yet he ran the Public Security forces until at least 1950. The same is true of Nguyen Van Ngoc's memoirs. Why this silence?
- 57 *Lich Su Tinh Bao Cong An* (note 22) p.94.
- 58 *Essential Matters* (note 9) p.50.
- 59 codenamed C52.
- 60 *Lich su Bo Tong Tham Muu* (note 45) pp.402–7.
- 61 *Lich Su Tinh Bao Cong An* (note 22) pp.74–5, and *Lich Su Cong An Nhan Dan Viet Nam (1945–1954) So Thao* (note 24) p.198, citing 'Sac Lenh so 66-SL ngay 14.5.1950 do chu tich Ho Chi Minh ky'.
- 62 *Lich Su Tinh Bao Cong An* (note 22) citing the document, p.96 and *Lich Su Cong An Nhan Dan Viet Nam (1945–1954) So Thao* (note 24) pp.234–5.
- 63 *Lich Su Cong An Nhan Dan Viet Nam (1945–1954) So Thao* (note 24) p.236.
- 64 *Lich Su Tinh Bao Cong An* (note 22) citing the document, p.96, citing excerpts from the instructions. These two directives were consolidated and archived by the sixth nationwide Cong An plenum in 1951 and the seventh in 1952.
- 65 Christopher E. Goscha, 'Courting Diplomatic Disaster? The Difficult Integration of Vietnam into the International Communist Movement (1945–1950)', *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 1/1 (2006) pp.40–70.
- 66 Bo Ngoai Giao, *Dau Tranh Ngoai Giao trong Cach Mang Dan Toc Dan Chu Nhan Dan (1945–1954)*, tap hai: *Dau Tranh Ngoai Giao trong Khang Chien Chong Thuc Dan Phan Dong Phap Xam Luoc va Hoi Nghi Quoc Te Gio-Ne-Vo nam 1954 ve Dong-Duong (1947–1954)*, Internal study commissioned by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, p.229, prefaced signed by the Bo Phan Tong Ket and dated 1976. This study reveals elsewhere that the party 'did not understand clearly the situations in France and in the world' as negotiations opened on Indochina at Geneva (*Chung toi khong hieu ro tinh hình ben Phap va the gioi*). *Dau Tranh*, p.104, citing extracts from the party's cable sent to the DRV delegation in Geneva, in Luu Tru Van Phong Trung Uong Dang (Archives of the Secretariat of Party's Central Committee).
- 67 It would be interesting to know when exactly and where the Vietnamese appointed their first military attachés abroad.
- 68 *Luc Luong chong Phan Dong: Lich Su Bien Nien (1945–1954)* (Hanoi: Nha Xuat Ban Cong An Nhan Dan 1996).
- 69 *Nhung Guong mat Nu Diep Bao* (Hanoi: Nha Xuat Ban Cong An Nhan Dan 1997).
- 70 See <<http://home.netnam.vn/live/FrontPage06/Van-hoa/News-page?contentId=5379>> (accessed 2 February 2007).
- 71 For lack of space, I will not discuss here the role of the security forces in what was a civil war against the non-communist and anti-French nationalist parties in upper Vietnam between August 1945 and late 1946. This is a complex and important topic which needs to be treated separately. For a rare and penetrating study of the non-communist side, see: François Guillemot, 'Au cœur de la fracture vietnamienne: l'élimination de l'opposition nationaliste et anticolonialiste dans le Nord Viet Nam (1945–1946)' in Goscha and Tréglodé, *Naissance d'un Etat-Parti* (note 42) pp.175–216.
- 72 Goscha, 'A "Popular" Side of the Vietnamese Army' (note 42).
- 73 *Cong An Nhan Dan Viet Nam, Lich Su Bien Nien (1945–1954)*, Luu Hanh Noi Bo [Internal distribution only] (Hanoi: Nha Xuat Ban Cong An Nhan Dan 1994) p.222 and *Cong An Nam Bo* (note 23) pp.106–7.
- 74 *Cong An Nhan Dan Viet Nam, Lich Su Bien Nien (1945–1954)* (note 73) p.223.

- 75 *Cong An Nam Bo* (note 23) p.129.
- 76 *Lich Su Cong An Nhan Dan Viet Nam (1945–1954) So Thao* (note 24) p.94.
- 77 Martin Thomas is right to point out the parallel with intelligence and security activities in new nation-states emerging from an earlier postcolonial wave in Europe, that of the meltdown of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. See his document commentary in this issue. A more recent example would be the states emerging out of the implosion of the Soviet Union.
- 78 *Lich Su Tinh Bao Cong An* (note 22) p.77, and *Cong An Thu Do: Nhung Chang Duong Lich Su (1945–1954)* (Hanoi: Nha Xuat Ban Cong An Nhan Dan 1990) pp.173, 186.
- 79 *Cong An Thu Do* (note 78) p.187, and *Lich Su Tinh Bao Cong An* (note 22) p.78.
- 80 *Lich Su Tinh Bao Cong An* (note 22) p.78.
- 81 See: Van Phan, ‘Nu Anh Hung cua To Diep Bao A13 trong Truyen cua Nha Van Phan’, *Van Nghe Cong An*, 10 October 2005, <<http://vnca.cand.com.vn/vi-VN/tulieuvanhoa/2005/4/49846.cand>> (accessed 2 February 2007).
- 82 *Nhung Guong Mat Nu Diep Bao* (Hanoi: Nha Xuat Ban Cong An Nhan Dan 1997).
- 83 *Lich Su Tinh Bao Cong An* (note 22) p.77.
- 84 I rely on : *Lich Su Cong An Nhan Dan Viet Nam (1945–1954) So Thao* (note 24) pp.174–5; *Cong An Thu Do* (note 78) p.150; *Cong An Nhan Dan Viet Nam, Lich Su Bien Nien (1945–1954)* (note 73) pp.180–2, 217–18; and Ha Minh Quoc, ‘Anh Tran Dang Ninh voi ‘Vu An Gian Diep H122’’ (note 24) pp.232–40.
- 85 ‘Comment la bleuite a empoisonné le FLN’, *Nouvel Observateur* no.1947, 28 February 2002. One of the French architects of the *bleuite* operation in Algeria, Paul-Alain Léger, was an officer in France’s SDECE (*Service de documentation extérieure et de contre-espionage*) in Indochina during the Franco-Vietnamese war.
- 86 See Paul et Marie-Catherine Villatoux, *La république et son armée face au ‘péril subversif : Guerre et action psychologiques, 1945–1960* (Paris: Les Indes Savantes 2005). Some French intelligence officers became obsessed with the *guerre révolutionnaire* they saw in the Vietnamese communist model (as spawned from the Chinese one in their eyes). This had important effects on how French intelligence officers would go on to view the war in Algeria, and would colour how they perceived the Third World, decolonization and of course communism there.
- 87 Cited in *Cong An Nhan Dan Viet Nam, Lich Su Bien Nien (1945–1954)* (note 73) p.217.
- 88 *Ibid.* pp.217–18.
- 89 To cite only the latest French fixation on torture in Algeria, see Raphaëlle Branche, *La torture et l’armée pendant la guerre d’Algérie, 1954–1962* (Paris: Gallimard 2001), and Sylvie Thénault, *Une drôle de justice: les magistrats dans la guerre d’Algérie* (Paris: La Découverte 2001).
- 90 Zinoman, *The Colonial Bastille* (note 10). Zinoman does not treat the subject of colonial torture in his study. Patrice Morlat provides a few details in *La répression coloniale au Vietnam* (note 21) pp.201–4. The best analytical treatment of the question is in Daniel Hémery, *Révolutionnaires vietnamiens et pouvoir colonial en Indochine* (Paris: Maspéro 1975) pp.162–9. We are badly in need of a sophisticated, nuanced and cool-headed study of this question during the colonial and postcolonial period. The first General Secretary of the ICP, Tran Phu, was savagely tortured to death by the French colonial *Sûreté*.
- 91 Nguyen Tai, *Ve Voi Coi Nguon: Hoi Ky* (Hanoi: Nha Xuat Ban Cong An Nhan Dan 1997) pp.42–7. My thanks to Merle Pribbenow for bringing this book to my attention and providing me with his translations of large parts of it.
- 92 Nguyen Tai, *Doi Mat voi CIA My* (Hanoi: Nha Xuat Ban Hoi Nha Van 1999). Merle Pribbenow, himself a former CIA officer absolutely fluent in Vietnamese, has translated the entire book.
- 93 Nguyen Tai, *Ve Voi Coi Nguon* (note 91) pp.42–7, translated by Merle Pribbenow.
- 94 *Ibid.* pp.42–7.
- 95 The timing leads one to wonder whether the French had launched a simultaneous deception operation in the south.
- 96 *Cong An Nam Bo* (note 23) pp.153–6, translated by Merle Pribbenow.
- 97 *Ibid.* pp.154–5.

- 98 Ibid. p.154.
- 99 Captured document : 'Procès verbal de la réunion des organes de la Sûreté du Nam bo le 2 juillet 1949', pp.21-2, sub dossier Otages prisonniers de guerre, échanges, libérations, dossier 801, box 285, file grouping Haut Commissariat de France en Indochine, Centre des Archives d'Outre-mer, France.
- 100 Nguyen Tai, *Ve Voi Coi Nguon* (note 91) p.45.
- 101 For such a view in the upper levels of the French military intelligence community (2B) in Indochina in 1948, see: 'Note d'information sur les services spéciaux V.M.', pp.1-3 (introduction). Also see my 'A "Popular" Side of the Vietnamese Army' (note 42) pp.325-3.