6. Vietnam Declaration of Independence (September 2, 1945)∗

Throughout the period of Japanese occupation, the Viet Minh had been organizing for eventual armed uprising and independence. Formation of youth groups, women's and peasants' associations, a literacy campaign, and self-defense training had all been part of the Viet Minh effort during the war years. These activities continued after the Japanese seized power in March 1945 until the moment was considered ripe for a general insurrection. In August 1945, the Japanese surrendered unconditionally; in the same month, the Vietnamese August Revolution began. It was, David Marr writes, “in the first instance a giant, spontaneous outpouring of emotion, and secondarily a well-organized Leninist seizure of power.” By September, a functioning government, calling itself the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, was a reality, well established before the arrangements made for Vietnam by the powers at Potsdam could begin.²

Archimedes Patti, an American OSS agent who was in Vietnam at the time, expressed surprise when he was read a draft text of the declaration of independence Ho Chi Minh had prepared. Hearing the words of the American declaration quoted, he “turned to Ho in amazement and asked if he really intended to use it in his declaration. I don’t know why it nettled me—perhaps a feeling of proprietary right, or something equally insane. . . . Ho sat back in his chair, his palms together with fingertips touching his lips ever so lightly, as though meditating. Then with a gentle smile he asked softly, ‘Should I not use it?’” On the first Sunday in September, before a vast crowd in Hanoi’s Ba Dinh square, Ho Chi Minh began to read the declaration. After the opening lines, he paused, looked out at the crowd, and asked: “Do you hear me distinctly, fellow countrymen?” The crowd roared back: “YES!”³

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

This immortal statement was made in the Declaration of Independence of the

United States of America i

The

on the earth are equal fro

and free.

The Declaration of the

and the Citizen also state

must always remain free at

Those are undeniable t

Nevertheless, for more

standard of Liberty, Equal

oppressed our fellow-citize

and justice.

In the field of politics, liberty.

They have enforced in

regimes in the North, the (n
tional unity and prevent

They have built more j
patriots; they have drowne

They have fettered pub

our people.

To weaken our race the

In the field of economic

our people, and devastated

They have robbed us of

materials. They have mon

trade.

They have invented nun

pecially our peasantry, to a

They have harpered th

mercilessly exploited our w

In the autumn of 1940, τ
story to establish new bases i
went down on their bende

Thus, from that date, oi
French and the Japanese. T
that from the end of last ye
ince to the North of Vietna
from starvation. On March
The French colonialists eit
they incapable of “protecti
twice sold our country to th

On several occasions bef
to ally themselves with it a
posal, the French coloniali
United States of America in 1776. In a broader sense, this means: All the peoples on the earth are equal from birth, all the peoples have a right to live, to be happy and free.

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

Those are undeniable truths.

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

In the field of politics, they have deprived our people of every democratic liberty.

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

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

They have fettered public opinion; they have practised obscurantism against our people.

To weaken our race they have forced us to use opium and alcohol.

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

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

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

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

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

Thus, from that date, our people were subjected to the double yoke of the French and the Japanese. Their sufferings and miseries increased. The result was that from the end of last year to the beginning of this year, from Quang Tri province to the North of Vietnam, more than two million of our fellow-citizens died from starvation. On March 9, the French troops were disarmed by the Japanese. The French colonialists either fled or surrendered showing that not only were they incapable of “protecting” us, but that, in the span of five years, they had twice sold our country to the Japanese.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

---

4. At the Tehran Conference, from November 28 to December 1, 1943, the Big Three (US President Franklin Roosevelt, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, and Soviet Premier Joseph Stalin) agreed on broad principles of operation for what became the United Nations. At the San Francisco Conference, from April 25 to June 26, 1945, representatives from fifty nations adopted the UN Charter.