CHAPTER TWO

1945-1957: THE SETTING

2.1. Geopolitical Background

Both Vietnam and Malaysia are part of the greater region of Southeast Asia. Situated at a Longitude of 102 10' to 109 30' East and Latitude of 8 30' to 23 22', Vietnam today is the rugged part of the Indochina peninsula. Leaning back against the Asian continent, it looks out on the South China Sea on one side, and is framed by China in the North, Laos and Cambodia in the West and South. Historically, Vietnam is a part of mainland Southeast Asia. In the southwest of Vietnam, separated by the Gulf of Siam, stands Peninsular Malaya which extends 460 miles from the Malay state of Perlis in the North to the Straits of Johor in the South. And together with the two Northern Borneo states of Sabah and Sarawak make up what is Malaysia today.

Vietnam and Malaysia are also separated from each other in terms of culture and differences in historical

1. The term Malaysia was first coined by Rupert Emerson in his, Malaysia: A Study in Direct and Indirect Rule, University of Malaya Press, Kuala Lumpur, 1979. The terms "Malaysia" and "Malaya" will be used alternatively, with "Malaya" referring to pre-independence Peninsular Malaysia, while "Malaysia" will be used for the post-1963 period with the incorporation of Sabah, Sarawak and Singapore (1963-1965).
development. For centuries, Vietnam has been the home of the Viet people who claimed their origin to Hung Vuong, king of the legendary Hong Bang Dynasty, and eventually established their claim on the whole of present Vietnam after the conquest of territories formerly under Champa and the Khmers of Cambodia. The Cham areas were annexed in a series of southward movements or Nam Tien by the Viet, which occurred in 1306, 1360-90, 1471, 1602, 1611, 1653 and 1697; whereas areas around Gia Dinh (Saigon) was wrested from the Khmers between 1674 and 1832. Today the Vietnamese people consist mainly of the Viet (88%) and


3. The Kingdom of Champa was an Indianized kingdom founded between 190-193 A.D by the Cham people, extending south to what is now Binh-Tuy province, west into the Mekong Valley of present day Cambodia, and Southern Laos, and as far north as Quang Binh province. Champa was at its height during the 10th to the 14th century, but declined since then, in the face of the threats from the Vietnamese' Nam Tien, and in 1822, the last Cham king or chieftain, Po Chon relinquished the throne.

4. Nam Tien literary means the march to the South, a process by which the ethnic Vietnamese expanded their territory southward from the Red River Delta to include all what is now referred to as Vietnam. Most historians consider the establishment of independence from China (939 A.D) as marking the beginning of the Nam Tien. see Danny J. Whitfield, op.cit., p.187.
with no less than 53 other minority ethnic groups, with the Tay, Thai, Hoa (Chinese), and the Moung as the larger groups. Historically, the Vietnamese came under Chinese rule, which was then followed by Dynastic rule, and later, French colonialism in the late 19th century. After ousting the French in 1954, the nation was subsequently divided at the 17th parallel into two, with the North under the rule of a communist-led government and the South under a democratic, or more correctly, anti-communist government. The country was once again reunited with the formation of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam in 1976 after South Vietnam fell to the army of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) a year earlier. Since that date, Vietnam has been under communist rule.

Like Vietnam, Malaysia is a multi-ethnic nation, with the Malays as the numerically largest single ethnic group. The Malays are believed to have come to peninsular Malaysia from southern China between 2500 and 1500 B.C., while on the Borneo territories, the Kadazans (Dusun) and the Ibans are the main indigenous groups, and together with the Kayans, Muruts, Bajaus and Kelabit and others

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make up the indigenous community. The Chinese are the second largest ethnic group in Malaysia followed by the Indians. Historically, the Chinese and the Indians came as traders to Malaysia in earlier times, and carried out trading activities from one kingdom to another. Both China and India influenced greatly the cultures and traditions of the indigenous people. Nevertheless, the Chinese and Indians only began to arrive and settle down in Malaysia in large numbers in the early 19th century with the encouragement of the British colonial government.

Historically, Malaysia was divided and ruled by many different kingdoms with the Malacca empire as a unifying force in the 15th and early 16th centuries. The whole of Malaysia came under British colonialism in the 19th century and achieved independence in 1957 (for the states of Malaya) and 1963 (for the North Borneo states of Sabah and Sarawak).

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7. For studies on the natives of Sabah and Sarawak, see Owen Rutter, The Pagans of North Borneo, Hutchison, London, 1929; and Henry Ling Roth, The Natives of North Borneo and Sarawak, University of Malaya Press, Kuala Lumpur, 1981.

2.2. Early Relations

Although both Vietnam and Malaysia were governed under different colonial masters, the relationship between the two lands could be traced to very early times. This relationship existed in many forms including migration, trade, religion and politics.

The Malays of Malaysia and the Cham people of Vietnam are of the same ethnic group. The Kingdom of Champa itself was considered as a Malay Kingdom, and had connections with some of the Malay states in peninsular Malaysia. It was reported that after the capital of Champa was conquered by the Vietnamese in 1471, a great number of Cham dignitaries sought refuge in the Malay Sultanate of Malacca. In 1594, the King of Champa sent an army to assist the Sultan of Johor against the Dutch.

Two religions played a role in strengthening the relationship between the two lands: Islam and Christianity. The Crown Prince of Champa Po Rome visited Kelantan in the early 17th century for a year to learn about Islamic teachings. There were also many others who

came to the peninsula, especially to the state of Kelantan for the same purpose.

The Catholic mission also contributed to the relationship between Vietnam and Malaysia. The College General that was established on Penang Island by the French Society of Foreign Missions in Paris had since 1807 served as a training centre for many Vietnamese Catholic priests.

In terms of trade, the earlier period was characterised by many Malay trading vessels frequenting the ports of Faifo and Dongnai in Vietnam during the 15th and 16th centuries. The Champa ports of Qui Nhon and Cam Ranh were frequented by Malay traders in the 15th to the 18th centuries. The later period saw the Vietnamese travel in their much improved and larger ships to trade in the Malay Peninsula, particularly Singapore. The trade was reported to be growing even after the French conquest of


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Cochinchina.

Although the magnitude of the early relationship was small, it definitely illustrated the connection that existed over a span of several hundred years.

2.3. The Colonial Experience

2.3.a. Vietnam

Prior to the French seizure of Da Nang in 1858, Vietnam was under the administration (reign) of the Nguyen Dynasty established by Nguyen Anh (Gia Long) in 1802. Before the Nguyen, Vietnam was under the Chinese tributary system for more than a thousand years from 111 B.C. to 939 A.D. when the Vietnamese people under the leadership of Ngo Quyen defeated the Chinese forces. The newly independent Vietnam was later ruled by a series of dynasties, with the Ly Dynasty (1009-1225), the Tran Dynasty (1225-


14. The Nguyen Dynasty continued to survive as a French protectorate until the disposal of Emperor Bao Dai by the nationalists in 1954. During the period of colonial rule, the emperor resided at Hue.

15. Ngo Quyen, who ruled from 939-944 was the founder and first ruler of the Ngo Dynasty (939-965 AD) in Vietnam. He led an army against the Chinese occupying forces of the Tang Dynasty in 938, and won final victory at Bach Dang River which ended one thousand years of Chinese administration.
1400), and the Le Dynasty (1428-1788) and with intermittent Chinese attempts at invasion and reimposition of China's sovereignty over Vietnam.

The French conquest was completed in 1883 with the acquisition of Tonkin and Annam by establishing a French protectorate over the two territories, the French had earlier annexed Cochinchina in the South from the Nguyen Dynasty in 1862. The French administration in Vietnam and Indochina (including Cambodia and Laos) was placed under the jurisdiction of the Ministre de Outer-mer (Ministry of Overseas Colonies) represented by the Governor-General at Saigon. The French colonial administration like other colonial powers was essentially an exploitative government. While there were considerable improvements of

infrastructure and social welfare in Vietnam, they were carried out for the sake of the French Colons and their exploitative activities.

As the revenue of French Vietnam increased, so did the burden of the people, especially the rural population who are the majority in Vietnam. Various heavy taxes caused many to lose their possessions and forced the majority of Vietnamese into indebtedness. The organization of public education in Vietnam in 1920 seemed to be a benevolent effort by the French but in actual fact, the French conquest brought about a general decline of literacy in Vietnam. The traditional mandarin scholars who refused to collaborate with the French left the Imperial

17. There were 1700 miles of railway tracks and an admirable road system. In terms of cultivated land, a total of 41/2 million acres were opened between 1880 to 1937. In addition, schools were built and hospitals were opened. See Charles Robequin, The Economic Development of French Indochina,(trans.) Isabel A. Ward, Oxford University Press, London, 1974, p.99.

18. Under the French colonization, Vietnam was divided into 3 parts namely, Cochinchina in the South, Annam in the centre and Tonkin in the North. All three were part of the 5 states of the French Union of Indochina created in 1887, the other two being Cambodia and Laos.

19. An example of this debt-ridden situation can be illustrated through the rise of total rural indebtedness in Cochinchina from 31 million piastres in 1900 to 134 million piastres in 1930. Paul Bernard, Probleme Economique en Indochine, Paris, Nouvelles Editions, 1934; See also Jean Chesneaux, The Vietnamese Nation: Contribution to a History, (trans) Malcolm Salmer, Current Book Distributors, Sydney, 1966, p.121.
Academy and many who taught in the village schools simply lost the zeal to carry on their activities. The extinction and seclusion of the Vietnamese scholars who protested against the French conquest resulted in the loss of educational opportunity, and illiteracy among the Vietnamese. The reorganization of public education by the French Colonial Administration did little to alleviate the problem. It was reported that in 1924, only some 6,200 boys and 1,000 girls out of 600,000 children of school age were receiving an education.

Discontent among indigenous people was usually considered as the main reason for resistance against colonial rule. While it is true that social abuses resulted from French conquest and colonial administration brought about discontentment and poverty for the majority of the population, the feeling of losing their independence and freedom aroused their sense of nationalism. This feeling was manifested by a series of armed resistance against the French colonial administration. The thousand years of Chinese hegemony up to the 10th century, and constant on and off invasions in the succeeding centuries taught the Vietnamese the value of freedom. Thus, the French conquest was looked upon as a new act of hegemony by a foreign power which deprived the Vietnamese of their freedom, and

therefore should be resisted.

From 1883 up to 1940, the French colonial administration faced a series of no less than 10 major rebellions by the Vietnamese people with the earlier protests led by the mandarin scholars themselves. Truong Buu Lam aptly comments that:

...whether foreign rule ultimately injures the masses or not, it is clear that its first victims are usually the highly placed persons who must now yield, or at least share their power and privilege, with newcomers. In this respect, the first losers of the foreign occupation of Vietnam were the mandarins.

Notable Vietnamese nationalists included the following:

Pham Boi Chau and Phan Chu Trinh, both scholars; Nguyen Thai Hoc, who later led the Viet Nam Quoc Dan Dang; and Nguyen Ai Quoc (Ho Chi Minh) who later founded the Indochinese Communist Party. Others were Phat Sanh who led the rebellion in Nam Bo in 1913; Tran Van Cao in Truong

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21. The few notable rebellions included: Emperor Ham Nghi’s resistance 1885-1888; Hoang Hoa Tham (De Tham)’s armed resistance 1890-1903; Dong Kinh Nghia Thuc in 1907; Hanoi Uprising and Poison Plot in 1908; Phan Phat Sanh’s rebellion in Nam Bo 1913; Tran Van Cao’s rebellion in 1916; the Thai Nguyen Insurrection in 1917; Pham Hong Thai’s attempted assassination on the life of the French Governor General in 1924, the Yen Bay Mutiny, 1930 and the Nghe Thin Soviets in 1930-1931.

Bo, Trinh Van Can and Luong Ngoc Quyen and many others who one after another were suppressed or pacified by the French.

All of the pre-war rebellions failed to remove France from Vietnam and Indochina. The main reason could be due to the fact that Vietnamese nationalists were uncoordinated in their activities, were parochial in outlook and lacking an appealing ideology that could arouse the masses to react in line with their aspirations and goals. Also there were many who would rather work towards an autonomous administration under a wider context of French Indochina, and were thus unwilling to confront the French: they were further weakened by the fact that the French held the military might. The brutal repressions by the French administration against rebellious elements and the continuation of French exploitation and


social abuses only further inflamed the Vietnamese to a greater height of nationalist feeling, waiting to burst-out for independence. Thus, the frequent threats of foreign hegemony fermented in the Vietnamese a strong desire to protect and preserve their freedom and independence.

2.3.b. **Malaysia**

Malaysia first experienced contact with western imperialism when the Sultanate of Malacca fell to the Portuguese in 1511. While Malacca remained under western powers, the rest of the Malay states in Peninsular Malaysia remained independent until the late 19th century. The British, having first acquired the island of Penang in 1786, Singapore in 1819, and Malacca from the Dutch through the Anglo-Dutch treaty of 1824, formed the Straits Settlements Administration in 1826.

The Treaty of Pangkor in 1874 signaled the expansion of British interests to the Peninsular mainland. In the East, North Borneo (Sabah) came under the North Borneo Charted Company in 1881 after it was ceded by the Sultan of Sulu. Sarawak came under the Brooke family in 1842. By 1915, British sovereignty was firmly established in all the territories of present day Malaysia, though under different administrations.
British rule in Malaysia was no different from that of other colonial masters -- being an imperialist power, their rule was also exploitative in nature. The British however, were skillful in executing their policy of divide and rule. The policy ensured division and disunity among the nine Malay states which essentially were peopled by the Malays. The same policy also enabled Britain to maintain a division in racial occupation thus limiting contact and interaction among the various races. Politically, the Malays claimed to be the rightful owners of Malaya, but they failed to rise as a cohesive group with the same aspiration of nationalism due to parochialism and loyalty to their respective states. On the other hand, the majority of the Chinese and Indians tended to look towards their respective motherlands of China and India. Thus, prior to 1940, unlike Vietnam, there were no major rebellions in the whole of Malaysia against the British, giving the impression that Malaysians generally were contented to


27. For a study on Malay nationalism, see William R. Roff, *The Origins of Malay Nationalism*, University of Malaya Press, 1980.

28. The situation in Sabah and Sarawak was similar to that of Malaya. The greater number of ethnic groups among the indigenous people only further kept them divided, while the Chinese and the negligible number of Indians were still politically inclined toward China and India respectively.
live under British rule.

The 1930s saw the rise of two political parties that carried their activities and struggle across state boundaries. The Communist Party of Malaya (CPM) -- a predominantly Chinese party, was formed in 1930, with a small number of Malays and Indians as well. On the other hand, The Kesatuan Melayu Muda (KMM) which was founded in 1938, encouraged the notion of a single Malay race regardless of states -- a reflection of its members who were teacher trainees drawn from all states in Malaya. Both CPM and KMM failed in their objective of overthrowing the British from Malaya. The KMM was quickly banned and its leaders arrested whereas the CPM was banned from its infancy, and had to go underground. However both were given a breathing space during the Japanese occupation, which will be discussed later.

Thus, the Vietnamese were talking about rebellions against the French and were looking for an ideology to carry them through. On the other hand the people of Malaysia seemed to be contented under the British, and political consciousness was at a minimum compared to Vietnam and many other Asian countries.

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29. For a discussion on the KMM, see William R. Roff, op.cit., Chapter 7, pp.211-247.
2.4. The Japanese Occupation

The war spread to the rest of Southeast Asia in December 1941 with the bombing of Pearl Harbour and the invasion of Malaya and the Philippines by the Imperial Japanese Army. However, in June 1940, French Indochina was the first to fall prey to the Japanese. Nevertheless, the Japanese occupation in Vietnam and Indochina was different from the rest of Southeast Asia in the sense that France was actually still in power long after the other colonial powers collapsed. The fall of France to the Germans saw the rise of the Vichy Government which signed an agreement with Japan in August 1940 to allow Japanese troops to use Indochina as a base in exchange for granting the French a freehand in maintaining their sovereignty in Indochina. The French were actually in command until 9th March 1945, when the Japanese staged a coup de force against them.

Malaya fell to the Japanese army with the surrender of Singapore on 15th February 1942, while the Borneo states of North Borneo (Sabah) and Sarawak were subdued in January 1941. Ironically, the Franco-Japanese treaty contributed to the decisive fall of Malaya. The Japanese

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armies launched their attacks by using Indochina as their base, especially the airfields in southern Vietnam.

Many would agree that the Japanese victory and occupation in Southeast Asia played a very important role in diminishing the image of the Europeans colonial master, while at the same time contributing to the growth of nationalist movements that eventually fought for, or demanded freedom from their colonial masters. Von Der Mehden identified three important legacies left behind by the Japanese occupation: the loss of face by the colonial master, Japanese aid and stimulation to the nationalist movements, and the end of European monopoly on modern weapons.

The Japanese occupation in Vietnam though symbolic in nature, was equally repressive as the French. Vietnamese historians described that period as a period of "double Franco-Japanese yoke." Not only did Japan fail to live up to its image as Asian liberator, it also played an equal role in suppressing the nationalist elements in Vietnam. The Japanese turned a blind-eye by allowing the French


administration to suppress at least three nationalist uprisings against the French. The Franco-Japanese treaty of August 1940 which recognized the "pre- eminent position of Japan in the Far East" had a profound effect upon the image of French omnipotence. As Hammer noted:

Defeated in Europe in 1940, France was defeated in Asia in 1941. One day the Vietnamese would cite their failure as proof that France had forfeited its right to protect Indochina.

The Decoux administration that governed Indochina during the Second World War realized that France's position needed to be reinforced as a counter to the Japanese power and presence, and thus sought increasingly to come to terms with the indigenous interest while still preserving the special French position. Infrastructures such as schools and hospitals were increased and at the same time closer relationships with the Vietnamese people especially the elites were promoted -- a step by the French to win

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34. During the revolts of 1940 (the Bac Son, Nam Bo and Vinh mutiny 1941) for instance, the Japanese stood aside and allowed the French a free hand to put them down. See Ellen J. Hammer, The Struggle For Indochina, 1940-1955, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1966, pp. 23-24.


36. The Decoux Administration was under the Governorship of Admiral Jean Decoux from 1940 to 1945, formerly Commander in-Chief of the French Far Eastern Fleet up to 1939.

the hearts and minds of the Vietnamese population.

The nationalist movements were given room to manoeuvre, especially those that were willing to work under the framework of an Indochina Federation. On the other hand the Japanese also sponsored their own set of leaders under the leadership of Emperor Bao Dai. However, the nature of both the French and Japanese presence in Vietnam and Indochina created two categories of nationalists: (1) those who were willing to work with the conquering powers, and (2) those that favoured a total elimination of colonial rule.

Amidst these developments, emerged the Viet-Minh, or in full Viet-Nam Doc Lap Dong Minh Hoi (League for the Independence of Viet-Nam). The Viet-Minh was the national front set up by the Indochina Communist Party (ICP), in May 1941 in Tsinghai, China, under the sponsorship of Marshal Chang Fa-Kuei, a Chinese Governor and Warlord, after the convening of the Eighth Plenum of the ICP at Pac Bo, Cao Bang province in northern Vietnam. It included under its wing several other nationalist parties as

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well. The role of the Viet-Minh under the leadership of Ho Chi Minh will be discussed later in the chapter.

The turn of the tide in the conduct of the war against the Japanese was visible by 1945. The liberation of Paris and France in 1944 led to the rise of pro-de Gaulle elements among the French population in Vietnam and Indochina, especially amongst the military circles. The Decoux administration began to show signs of shifting allegiance to the Gaullist camp. Gaullist elements began to urge the Council of Indochina to plan for a coup to end the Japanese military presence in Indochina once and for all and to reestablish French sovereignty. However the plan leaked and the Japanese struck first. A coup de force was delivered on 9th March 1945 when the French forces were disarmed and interned. This was the final blow to French prestige in Indochina.

As a result of the coup, the French machinery in Indochina was paralysed, and after the surrender of the Japanese forces in Asia including Vietnam and Indochina,

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40. Hammer, *op.cit.*, p.34.

41. John Davidson, *op.cit.*, p.34.
the slow arrival of the allied forces and the internment of the French forces created a political vacuum in Vietnam -- an opportunity which was seized by the Viet-Minh. The Viet-Minh-sponsored People's Congress at Tran Trao adopted the Ten Big Policies of Viet-Minh. The Policies included the Order of General Insurrection which signaled the beginning of the August Revolution. The ultimate aim was to oust the colonial powers of France and Japan, and to "establish the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam on the basis of complete independence."

On the night of 13th August 1945, the party Central

42. The delayed return of the Allied forces to Indochina and the whole of Southeast Asia was due to the instruction issued by General MacArthur, who specifically stated that the documents of surrender in theatres other than his own might only be signed after his own had been signed, and that no landing or reoccupation by military forces might be made until after the formal surrender in Tokyo. See Davidson, op.cit., p.37.

43. The People's Congress which was also the First National Congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam held one day after the convening of the All-Nation Party Conference, adopted the Ten Big Policies of the Viet-Minh. It also adopted the Order of General Insurrection, the national anthem of Tien Quan Ca, the national Goldstar flag, and ratified the National Liberation Central Committee which was the provisional government with Ho Chi Minh as President. See Democratic Republic of Vietnam, Breaking Our Chains: Documents on the Vietnamese Revolution of August 1945, Foreign Language Publishing House, Hanoi, 1960, pp.63-81.

Committee issued a decree (Military Order No.1) to launch the insurrection throughout the country. The insurrection was a success as the Japanese army offered no strong resistance, and in fact in many instances were more than willing to hand over their arms to the Vietnamese. By September the Viet-Minh was strong enough to consolidate power in the Northern region of Tonkin and Ho Chi Minh promptly declared the Independence of Vietnam on 2nd September 1945.

The fall of Singapore placed Malaya and the Borneo states under the terror of Japanese military rule. Malaya together with Sumatra was placed under a single administration in Singapore (Syonan). The early phase of the occupation saw the Japanese treating everybody harshly to maintain law and order. However right from the beginning, the Japanese treated the Chinese with contempt for their part in supporting the Chinese resistance war against the Japanese in China. The situation improved slightly later with the Japanese hoping to win the confidence of the people, especially the Malays and the Indians in support of their war effort.

During the entire three and a half years of occupation, the Japanese had to face the local guerrilla resistance wars that aimed at paralyzing the military organs of the Japanese. In Malaya the guerrillas were made
up of the Communist-led Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army (MPAJA) which was recognized by the British on the eve of the war to assist in the anti-Japanese war effort. Force 136 which comprised of British and Malayans began to land in Malaya in 1943 to disrupt Japanese strategies. Both MPAJA and Force 136 worked together right up to the end of the war. The recognition and the cooperation extended by the Communist-led MPAJA was later to have a major repercussion in the form of a major guerrilla war after the Second World War. The CPM under the pretext of MPAJA was able to move freely and to equip itself for a general uprising against the British later.

Among the Malays, the Japanese released the jailed KMM leaders to organize a Malay Defense Corps in the form of KRIS (Kesatuan Rakyat Indonesia-Semenanjung) under the leadership of Ibrahim Yaakob. The Malay rulers were also well treated in order to gain Malay support for Japan's illusive propaganda of an East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere. Many scholars regard the Japanese occupation as an era which encouraged the rise of Malay nationalism in Malaya


47. Lt. Col. Frederick Spencer Chapman gave a record of this cooperation in his famed The Jungle is Neutral, Chatto and Windus, London, 1949.
and also one which gave opportunities for Malays to occupy higher administrative positions which they could have never attained under British colonialism. The extent to which the Japanese legacy encouraged the rise of nationalism in Malaya is a debatable question. However, it is clear that the Japanese victory over the British shattered the myth of British omnipotence and created a negative feeling towards British rule in Malaya, in the same way that the Vietnamese outlook toward the French was altered by the Japanese occupation.

The Japanese regarded the Indians as a potential source of access to achieve their military aim of advancing into British India. Indians were encouraged to join the India Independence Army which hoped to participate in the battle for India. While Japanese atrocities were rife in Malaysia and became the synonym of Japanese occupation, its greatest impact was in the amount of freedom it gave the CPM's armed wing, the MPAJA, whose subsequent anti-British activities led to the twelve-year emergency in Malaya soon after the war.
2.5. **Communism**

2.5.a. **Communism In Vietnam**

Vietnam had its first contact with communism in 1925 when a group of Vietnamese students in Canton, China was organized into a youth group by Ho Chi Minh, a Moscow trained communist cadre. The group was named, Thanh Nien Cach Mang Dong Chi Hoi (Young Revolutionary Youth League) or commonly known as Thanh Nien. Ho later organized another group within the Thanh Nien, known as the Cong San Doan (Communist Youth League) which eventually became the proto-Communist Party of Vietnam.

However, as most of Thanh Nien's activities were carried out in China, it was only in March 1929 that a party cell was established in Hanoi. During this period there existed various groups that were formed out of Thanh Nien, namely the Annam Communist Party, the Indochinese Communist Party and the Indochinese Communist League. However all were separate communist organizations with no centralized or coordinated guidelines, even though all were under the directive of the Comintern.

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48. For a detailed study of the early development of communism in Vietnam, see Huynh Kim Khanh, *op. cit.*

It was not until January 1930, following a Comintern directive dated 27 October 1929 that a single Indochinese Communist Party (ICP) was formed, a result of the merger of the three existing groups in a meeting in Hong Kong. Douglas Pike remarked that the initial years of the ICP were marked by both challenge and frustration. The party experimented with various measures aimed at freeing Vietnam from French rule. The early strikes, demonstrations and eventually insurrections all proved futile. The Red Soviets of Nghe An and Ha Tinh provinces organized in 1930 to 1931 were also suppressed in what was termed as White Terror, a period of mass detention, massacre and executions of the ICP members and supporters. The party suffered so badly that it needed almost ten years to recover.

During the whole of the 1930s, the party was virtually inactive and weak, a direct result of the failure of


52. The Soviets are commonly known as the Nghe-Tinh Soviets. For discussions on the Nghe-Tinh Soviets, see Pike, Ibid., pp.15-23; and Huynh Kim Khanh, op.cit., pp.151-171.

the Nghe-Tinh Soviets. Ho Chi Minh's whereabouts during this period also remained unclear. The triumph of the Popular Front in French politics in the mid-thirties gave some breathing space for the ICP. In 1935 the Comintern issued a directive for the organization of a Democratic Front as an anti-fascist effort. In the same year, the ICP supervision was transferred from Moscow to Paris under the French Communist Party. All these however did not eventually give the ICP very much advantage, save for the fact that it was able to move more freely through the Democratic Front. The French Communist Party, which should have been more supportive and sympathetic to the ICP struggle was however constrained by its own patriotic duty towards France. Furthermore the rising storm of war consumed much of the French Communists' energies.

In 1940 when the Japanese army was knocking at the door of Vietnam and Indochina, the Bac Son uprising erupted, led by Hoang Van Thu, the local ICP leader. Thu tried to capitalize on the Japanese entry to take the French by surprise. It was quickly suppressed by the French who later together with the Japanese "agreed to cooperate in

54. For a discussion on Ho Chi Minh's whereabouts during this period, see Ton That Thien, Ho Chi Minh and the Comintern, Was Ho Chi Minh a Nationalist?, Information & Resource Center, Singapore, 1990.

quelling Vietnamese resistance." In November the same year, Tran Van Giau and the ICP in Cochinchina started an uprising in the My Tho region, and proclaimed the Indochinese Democratic Republic. The uprising lasted two weeks before being brutally crushed. Both the uprisings broke out without the consent of the ICP, indicating therefore its highly localised character. The My Tho uprising was later to have severe repercussions for the ICP, as the ICP in Cochinchina was virtually wiped-out as an effective force in the August 1945 revolution.

In may 1941, Viet Nam Doc Lap Dong Minh Hoi (Viet Nam Independence League) or commonly known as the Viet-Minh was formed under the sponsorship of the Chinese Nationalist government. It aimed to intensify pressure on the Japanese in Vietnam and Indochina. Thus, the Viet-Minh was formed as an umbrella organization and comprised of no less than ten organizations. The ICP convened its Eighth Plenum in Pac Bo prior to the formation of the Viet-Minh and "decided to set up a broad united front,...to lead the

58. The parties involved were the Indochinese Communist Party, The Cuu Quoc (National Salvation) organizations for the Workers, the Peasants, the Youths, the Women, the Elderly People, the Military Personnel, the Buddhist Monks, the Buddhist Nuns, and the Cultural Cuu Quoc. Also elements of the De Cuong Hoa Viet Nam (Vietnam Cultural Platform), elements of the Viet Nam Quoc Dan Dang and various other Vietnamese emigrants' organisations were involved.
people to carry out partial uprisings, and eventually a
general insurrection to win back power throughout the 59
country."

During the whole of the Japanese occupation, the Viet
Minh was planning for a general uprising to oust the
French and Japanese "yoke of burden." Raids and skirmishes
were launched against the Japanese troops using weapons
supplied by the American Office of Strategic Services
(OSS), the precursor of the Central Intelligence Agency.
The Viet-Minh also supplied intelligence information to
the Allies besides helping Allied airmen to get out of
Indochina. But the Viet-Minh contribution was minimum in
strategic importance as all its energies were channeled
for the preparation of the uprising.

The uprising broke out in August 1945 when a vacuum
of power was created after the Japanese coup de force
against the French and the Japanese surrender. This opportu-
nity was seized by the Viet-Minh who portrayed them-

59. Pike, op. cit., p.46.
60. The OSS supplied and helped to train 200 Viet-Minh
troops in one of its major contacts with the Viet-
Minh in July-August 1945. See Richard Harris Smith,
OSS: The Secret History of America's First Central
Intelligence Agency, University of California Press,
61. Pike, op. cit., p.49. In the battle of Chen Pass in
May 1945, sixty Japanese were killed.
selves as the victor in the war against the Japanese and the French, and at the same time offered themselves as the ideological alternative in the nationalist struggle.

2.5.b. **Communism In Malaysia**

Prior to the formation of the Nanyang (South sea) Communist Party in Singapore in 1930, Comintern-PKI (Partai Komunis Indonesia) agents such as Tan Malaka, Alimin and Maeso were already working among the Malays. The PKI link was however weakened after the failed-PKI uprising in 1926 in Indonesia. The CPM was under the control of the Comintern and received directions through the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in Hong Kong and Canton as it was regarded as the South Sea Branch of the Chinese Communist Party. One interesting observation was that Ho Chi Minh, who was to become the President of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV), and who was a Comintern agent at that time was reported to have played an important part in establishing the CPM:

As representative of the Eastern Department (of the Comintern), Ho founded the Communist Party of Indochina in 1930. He also played a key role in the foundation of the Communist party of Siam and the Communist Party of Malaya, all in the same year.

In view of the nature of its international links with the CCP, the CPM was mainly a Chinese dominated organization. In the early days, the CPM functioned under the disguise of the General Labour Union. Before the war, the CPM was banned by the British Administration which was generally sensitive towards activities of such nature. However, at that stage, the CPM did not constitute a real threat to the colonial administration. Nonetheless the British pursued the CPM when the party tried to stir up civil unrest through the General Labour Union.

It is difficult to establish whether the CPM did receive any material support from the CCP or Comintern. But moral support in the form of training and leadership personnel was a frequent feature. In 1937 for instance, the CPM received the arrival of Lai Teck and a group of trained cadres from the Comintern through Hong Kong to

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63. Ton That Thien, op.cit., p.30.
help to settle its internal problem. Ironically, Lai Teck, a Vietnamese in origin, who soon became the CPM Secretary General was a multiple agent who was at that time under the pay of the British administration. The CPM was outlawed until the outbreak of the Pacific War when the Japanese invasion of Malaya was imminent. Prior to that the CPM Youth organization organized an "Malayan Overseas Chinese Anti-Japanese Mobilization Society." The CPM shifted from its anti-British 'Imperial' stand to support the British in the war against Japan. The British government, alarmed by the rapid advance of the Japanese army, agreed to the inclusion of the CPM for the defense of Malaya and Singapore. After the fall of Singapore, the remnants of the CPM forces under the British organized themselves into the MPAJA, and carried out resistance activities against the Japanese Army and its collaborators. The British were to cooperate with the MPAJA through Force 136 under the Southeast Asia Command (SEAC). Through an agreement with the SEAC, the MPAJA received training and armed supplies in return for its cooperation with the Allies against the Japanese establishment.

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Thus the war not only legalized the CPM but actually strengthened it morally and materially — a consequence that eventually proved almost disastrous for the British after the war. However, cooperation with the British to counter a common enemy, at least put off temporarily the idea of forming a Malayan Democratic Republic.

The victory against Japan was quickly manipulated by the CPM's MPAJA which marched into towns portraying themselves as the sole victor and liberator against the Japanese armies. The sudden surrender of Japanese forces left a power vacuum — an interregnum which saw the MPAJA virtually take over half the country. It was during this brief interregnum that the MPAJA carried out a clean-up campaign against those who collaborated with the Japanese. Many Malays were victimized during this period. Kangaroo courts were held, in which the accused rarely escaped from brutal reprimands.

The brief interregnum also later proved to be significant in the development of racial relations in Malaysia.

66. The idea of a Malayan Democratic Republic was first mooted by the CPM in the 1947 party constitution, and later reasserted in the 1972 and 1980 constitutions: Zakaria Hj. Ahmad and Zakaria Hamid, "Violence at the Periphery: A Brief Survey of Armed Communism in Malaysia", in Lim Joo Jock & S. Vani (eds), Armed Communist Movements in Southeast Asia, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, 1984, p.53.

67. For a detailed study on the Interregnum see, Cheah Boon Kheng, Red Star Over Malaya, op.cit.
The returning British lavished decorations and medals to the MPAJA members with a contingent scheduled to take part in the Victory parade in London. The British were quick to request the disbandment of the MPAJA. The CPM leadership complied but not without reservations. While many arms were surrendered, many were not accounted for.

Between 1945 to 1948, the CPM were allowed to carry out its activities openly. This situation was quickly exploited by the CPM which again began to organise labour strikes throughout Malaya. The British clamp-down on CPM activities forced the CPM to resort to subversion. The Communist Youth Conference held in Calcutta in early 1948, generally considered as the turning point of CPM strategy shifting from a moderate line to a militant posture, was also responsible for the beginning of a general emergency in Malaya against CPM insurgents. From 1948 to 1960, the whole of Malaya was engaged in the battle against communism. The damage inflicted upon Malaya was significant: not only was development hampered, many lives, both civilian and military were lost. The twelve-year emergency also heightened racial tension in Malaya as


the CPM was largely Chinese (more than 90%). Thus to be Chinese was viewed as synonymous with being communist.

One interesting development in the CPM during this period was the support it gave to the Viet-Minh in the latter's struggle against the French. In early 1947, the Viet-Minh issued an appeal for volunteers from neighbouring communist parties to help in the communist effort in Indochina, and the MPAJA Ex-Comrades Association and its branches started a campaign to collect funds to help the Viet-Minh, partly to finance its "volunteers". A number of ex-MPAJA personnel, sensing that the party might start a war in Malaya in which they could see no prospects for success, volunteered and were sent to Indochina. This development demonstrated the existence of personnel movements between communists in both countries.

2.6. 1945 to 1957

The surrender of the Japanese Army saw the Viet-Minh take over most of the Northern provinces of Vietnam. In the South the Viet-Minh under Nguyen Binh was weaker and could not effect a major takeover like their Northern colleagues. Prior to the end of the war, the Allied leaders met in Potsdam and agreed that Chinese forces will disarm Japanese forces in regions north of the 16th paral-

70. C.C. Too, *op.cit.*, pp.67-68.
lel and to occupy the area until the return of the French forces. The Southeast Asia Command was responsible for a similar task south of the 16th parallel.

Thus by September 1945, 200,000 troops of the Chinese army under the command of General Lu Han marched into Northern Vietnam and disarmed the Japanese, and in the South, General Gracey led an Anglo-Indian force into Saigon. The Viet-Minh under Ho Chi Minh were weary at the sight of the Chinese army, which they perceived as a new Chinese hegemony, and thus feared that the Vietnamese people were under the risk of falling from one colonial master into another. Ho Chi Minh understood the danger of having to deal with the Chinese instead of the French whom he felt were easier to handle. While Ho liaised with the French agents that were dropped into Vietnam, he declared the dissolution of the ICP on 11 November 1945 under the pretext of being purely nationalist, but maintained the entire network of the ICP. The move was aimed at wooing the French into cooperation with the Viet-Minh, to facilitate the French return to Vietnam, and to get rid of the Chinese.

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72. "Communique Issued by the Central Committee of the ICP, November 11, 1945", Doc.34 in Allen Cameron, op.cit, p.66.
General Leclerc, the French commander in Saigon recognized that the Viet-Minh’s apprehension of the Chinese presence North of the 16th parallel could be used to establish French footholds in Tonkin. He also recognized the fact that French return could only be achieved through negotiations. The Chinese demand was clear: in return for Chinese withdrawal from Indochina, France would have to (a) surrender its concessions in Shanghai, Tientsin, Hankow and Canton; and (b) return the Yennan railway and the free port and transit facilities through Haiphong into China.

On the other hand, the Viet-Minh had no choice but to negotiate with the French to avoid the permanent Chinese presence. The changes in French politics by 30 January 1946 also contributed to the Viet-Minh’s stand. De Gaulle’s withdrawal from power in France and the assumption of power by Felix Gouin and the appointment of Marius Moutet as the new Minister of Colonies suggested a turning point in favour of the Viet-Minh. Through the

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73. John Davidson, op. cit., p.44.
office of Jean Sainteny, Ho Chi Minh was invited to France to negotiate. A Franco-Vietnamese Convention was signed on 6 March 1946 by which France recognized the Democratic Republic of Vietnam as part of the Indochina Federation and also as part of the French Union. In return, the Viet-Minh and Vietnam welcomed the return of the French army to relieve the Chinese army. However, the Viet-Minh would not settle for anything less than total independence. Having got rid of the Chinese, the Viet-Minh tried to negotiate for total independence. Two conferences were held, one at Dalat, and the other at Fontainebleau. During the Fontainebleau phase of negotiations, the French High Commissioner in Saigon, General d'Argenlieu appointed Nguyen Van Thinh as President of the Autonomous Republic of Cochinchina, in total disregard of the spirit of

74. Jean Sainteny (1907-1978), the French representative in Indochina at the close of World War II, arrived in Hanoi in August 1945 as French Commissioner for the Protectorates of Annam and Tonkin and negotiated with Ho Chi Minh. The negotiations resulted in the agreement of March 1946 which recognized the DRV as a "free state" in the French Union.

negotiations. Pham Van Dong of the Vietnamese delegation to Fontainbleau protested against the appointment. The various negotiations led to the signing of a Franco-Vietnamese modus vivendi on 14 September 1946 which basically upheld the treaty of 6 March 1946 with greater emphasis on economic and cultural control by the French, and upheld the DRV's position as part of the Indochina Federation and French Union. The treaty also effected a cease-fire between the two parties.

Between 14 September to December 1946, hostilities continued despite the cease-fire accord. On 8 November 1946, the DRV adopted its own constitution. The persistence of hostilities, with both sides unwilling to adhere to the terms of the treaty, forced General Vo Nguyen Giap of the Viet-Minh to issue an order for nationwide resistance on 19 December 1946. Two days later Ho Chi Minh appealed for Nationwide Resistance.

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76. For documents and works on d'Argenlieu's Franco-Cochinchina Convention and the establishment of the abortive "Autonomous Republic of CochinChina on June 3, 1946, see Doc.38 in Cameron, op.cit., Doc.38, pp.80-82.


hus began the First Indochina war which would last for 8
ears.

In Malaya the return of the British was warmly re-
eived after three and-a-half years of terror under the
Japanese. The British Colonial Office had worked on a plan
to transform Malaya into a permanent British Colony
through the introduction of the Malayan Union. The plan
which was formulated during the war was to place Malaya
under a single administration under the charge of a Gover-
nor General. The plan excluded Singapore, and under the
Malayan Union, citizenship would be given on an equal
basis. As the whole of Malaya was still in the midst of
recovering from the aftermath of the war, little attention
was given to the plan. It however, caught the attention of
the Malay nationalists who perceived the Union as one
which would not only ensure that Malaya permanently re-
mained a British colony, but which would also greatly
threaten the rights of the Malays as the indigenous people
of Malaya. Mass protests by the Malays were held to oppose
the Malayan Union. Nevertheless, the British carried on
with the Malayan Union idea for another two years until it
was replaced by the Treaty of Federation of 1948 which
promised gradual progress towards self-rule.

For a detailed study on the Malayan Union, see Moh-
hammed Noordin Sopiee, From Malayan Union to Singapore
Separation, University of Malaya Press, Kuala Lumpur,
1975. See also Albert Lau, The Malayan Union Contro-
Although Malaya came under communist threat not long after the war, the willingness of the British administration to grant political concessions meant that the nationalist struggle could be pursued through negotiations. Not only was there no bloodshed in the struggle by the masses against the colonial master, the peaceful transition from colony to independent nation was later to have a profound influence on the conduct of the foreign policy of the country.

While decolonization was greatly encouraged through the United Nations Charter, the fear of these former colonies falling under communist rule was viewed as a direct threat to the Western world which was already locked in a Cold war against the Soviet-led Communist Bloc. On 8 March 1949, France entered into a series of treaties with the State of Viet Nam and also Laos and Cambodia. The treaty commonly known as the Elysee Treaty, granted to the State of Viet Nam under Bao Dai, independence within the French Union as a gesture of France's decision to decolonize. Through the treaty France

also hoped to create the State of Viet Nam as a nationalist alternative to the Viet-Minh-led DRV. As a result of the treaty, the State of Viet Nam received diplomatic recognition from most western countries and was entitled to receive US development and economic assistance through the French government.

The Cold War did not come to Asia until 1950 when, with the outbreak of the Korean War, it was manifested in a hot and bloody struggle between the communist forces and the freeworld forces. At the time of the Korean war, Vietnam was also engaged in a hot war between the Communist-led Viet-Minh and the French who were determined to maintain their sovereignty in Vietnam and Indochina. Further south, Malaya was engaged in counter-insurgency warfare against the CPM. Unlike Malaya where the insurgents were predominantly Chinese and lacked mass support, the French were basically fighting a war against the whole Vietnamese population which did not see the Viet-Minh as terrorists but rather as nationalists who wanted to free them from the burden of colonialism.

82. The Cold War is generally accepted as having begun with the expansion of the Soviet Union since 1945 into the heart of Europe. The resulting tension was further heightened by a fundamental ideological hostility between the communist camp and the free world. For a further definition on the Cold War, see Joseph Dunner (ed) Dictionary of Political Science, Vision Press, London, 1965, pp.101-102.
As the war progressed year after year, by 1951 the French began to feel exhausted and the Viet-Minh were gaining strength and winning many victories. The communist victory in China in 1949 not only gave the Viet-Minh and DRV a moral boost but most importantly, material supplies and training, which proved more than useful against the French. By the end of 1953, while the military commanders in Indochina were still planning major offensives against the Viet-Minh, many national leaders began to feel the pinch of war, and questioned the wisdom of carrying on the war. General Navarre, commander in Chief of French forces in Indochina planned for a show-down with the Viet-Minh in the border village of Dien Bien Phu. The plan was to lure the Viet-Minh to fight in that area and by virtue of greater arms the Viet-Minh shall be defeated. The battle began in March 1954 and lasted until 8 May 1954.

As the situation in Dien Bien Phu deteriorated against the French, many French leaders were hoping for American and British intervention to bombard the Viet-Minh positions. Towards the last phase of the battle, the French were still soliciting for American and British support, but without success, other than assurance of

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backing at the forthcoming Geneva Conference. President Truman of the United States was apprehensive about assisting France to maintain its sovereignty in Indochina as it would be contrary to the American constitution to support colonialism. The US consideration also arose from its desire to avoid triggering a major war in the form of another Korean war which had just ended. The British government shared this point of view, and was also limited by its overseas troop commitments especially in Malaya. Churchill’s government was also more interested in a round table negotiation for the settlement of the conflict.

Thus, the French garrison at Dien Bien Phu was overrun by the Viet-Minh on 8 May 1954 and together with it ended French colonialism in Vietnam and Indochina. The Geneva conference opened on 26 April to resolve the Indochina conflict. The conference brought Vietnam into the international limelight.

At the Geneva conference, the DRV was supported by the Soviet Union and PRC, and France by the US and Britain. Both sides accepted the fact that French influence in Indochina had ended after Dien Bien Phu, and a cease-fire was agreed upon. However the DRV was unable to press for a unified Vietnam as there existed in the South a government

led by Bao Dai, the former emperor who acted as the Chief of State. The DRV was pressured to accept half a Vietnam for the time being pending a general election to be held in July 1956. The US and the State of Vietnam under Bao Dai however refused to sign and rectify the accord, and thus refused to hold the intended nationwide election.

The withdrawal of the French forces was marked by the emergence of two states in Vietnam -- one South of the 17th parallel and another, the DRV in the North. The refusal of the South in ratifying the Geneva Agreement to hold elections resulted in strong protests from the North leading to a resumption of hostilities. Thus the demarcation line of the 17th parallel became more or less a permanent territorial boundary reinforcing the entry of the cold war into Southeast Asia.

The creation of the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) on 8 September 1954 further dragged Vietnam into the politics of the cold war. SEATO was formed through the initiative of both the United States (US) and Great Britain with the aim of containing communist aggres-


86. For a detailed study on SEATO, see Leszek Buszynski, SEATO: The Failure of an Alliance Strategy, Singapore University Press, Singapore, 1983.
sion in Southeast Asia, and Vietnam was naturally looked upon as the frontline of that struggle. Under Articles III and IV of SEATO, the State of Vietnam together with Cambodia and Laos were included as protocol states, which enabled them to receive assistance from member states especially the United States. As protocol states under the treaty, Vietnam and its Indochina neighbours of Cambodia and Laos enjoyed protection under SEATO, as provided under Article IV of the treaty.

The creation of SEATO and its protective arm over the State of Vietnam caused strong protests from the DRV which considered the alliance as an act violating the Geneva Agreement and also a means to facilitate US intervention in Vietnam and Southeast Asia. In May 1957, a joint statement was issued in Washington by President Eisenhower and Ngo Dinh Diem, guaranteeing closer cooperation for the freedom and independence of the Republic of Vietnam by the US, thus reinforcing the promise under Article IV of the SEATO treaty. By 1957, Vietnam was


89. Ngo Dinh Diem, the former premier of the State of Viet Nam won a referendum in October 1955 against Bao Dai. The Republic of Vietnam was proclaimed on 20th October 1955 and Diem proclaimed himself president.
firmly divided into two political entities, namely the DRV and the RVN, with both under the influence of opposing camps in the cold war.

2.7. Foreign Policies of the Two Vietnams up to 1957

The foreign policy of a country determines its relationship with other countries. Although the process of formulation of foreign policy lies in the hands of the policy makers, its evolution and development however, depends on both internal and external factors that emerged throughout their long history. Without exception, the foreign policies of both the DRV and the RVN were also formed under such conditions. The same time process however, did not result in a common and similar foreign policy; instead, two policies of two extremes emerged resulting in different approaches to their external affairs. Thus, in examining Vietnam-Malaysia relations, an understanding of the evolution and development of the foreign policies of the two Vietnams is important to reconstruct a realistic picture of the nature of the relationship.

2.7.a. Foreign Policy of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam

The declaration of Independence on 2 September 1945 by the DRV did not lead to the emergence of a truly independent Vietnam. It was only in 1954 with the
The communist background of the DRV had its origins in the formation of the Indochinese Communist Party in 1931. The ICP aimed first of all to free the oppressed people from the clutches of the imperialist powers and to further the cause of socialism throughout Indochina and the region of Southeast Asia as clearly manifested through
its initial name of 'Indochina'. This point was confirmed by Ho Chi Minh himself, in a speech to the cadres of the party in January 1949, when he said: "we are an Indochinese party, but we have also the task of contributing to the liberation of Southeast Asia...." And at the Third National Congress of the party in September 1960, Ho was said to view Vietnam as "the outpost of socialism in Southeast Asia."

Besides the two main factors, there are other internal and external elements which also played a very important role in influencing the foreign policy of the DRV under Ho Chi Minh. The personality of Ho Chi Minh was a force in itself in the DRV's foreign policy. Not only was Ho famous in winning international sympathies for his struggle, he was also the strong unifying force that bridged the gap created by factional rivalries inside the politburo so that all energies were centred on the goal of national independence. Another factor was the homogeneous character of the Vietnamese society in both North and South Vietnam which also contributed to the unity of the nation in the face of foreign aggressions and interventions. The strong People's Liberation Army, created in


91. Ibid.
1940, was a diplomatic tool that strongly influenced the
direction of the DRV's foreign policy. The rapid growth of
a semi-guerrilla force into a national army suited the aim
of unifying the whole of Vietnam.

There are two external factors namely, the Cold War
and the Sino-Soviet conflict that considerably influenced
the formulation of DRV foreign policy. The Cold War which
dominated international politics since the end of the
Second World War witnessed a number of open armed
conflicts and Vietnam was one of the first victims in
Southeast Asia, with its communist-backed DRV against the
Western-supported Republic of Vietnam (RVN). Thus the Cold
War ideological conflict strengthened the DRV's aspiration
for a unified Vietnam. The DRV, having the "responsibility
and great honour to stand at the forefront of the world
people's struggle" received both military and economic
assistance from the communist bloc countries particularly
the Soviet Union and China.

Soviet and Chinese aid to the DRV was significantly
affected by the outbreak of the Sino-Soviet conflict in

92. For detailed studies on the development of the People's Army of Vietnam, see Greg Lockhart, Nation in
Arms, op.cit., and Douglas Pike, PAVN: People's Army

93. Quoted in Harvey H. Smith, et al., North Vietnam: A
Country Study, Foreign Area Studies, The American
the late 1950s. The conflict started as a result of China's refusal to accept the Soviet Union as the leader of the communist bloc after Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev criticized Stalin who was revered by the Chinese. Besides the differences on Stalin's status, the Sino-Soviet conflict also involved several other aspects including boundary problems, the question of Moscow's refusal to share knowledge on the production of the atomic bomb, differences over the handling of the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1963, and most of all, the challenges posed by China against the Soviet Union's position as the leader of world communism. The conflict was very significant as it changed the bipolar nature of world politics into a tripolar situation, especially with respect to the client states of the Communist powers. The widening rift between the Soviet Union and Communist China caused the DRV to adopt an expedient policy of neutrality between the two communist giants by pleading that it was fighting at the forefront of a decisive battle between East and West in order to ensure continued military and economic assistance from both.

Thus overall, the DRV enjoyed good relations with


95. Ibid., p.195.

96. Ibid.
both the Soviet Union and China. It also took an active part in the Non-aligned Movement, making its international debut at the Non-aligned Movement meeting in Bandung in 1955, where it was able to win sympathy and support from many neutral countries especially India and Indonesia which viewed the DRV's struggle as similar to theirs against the imperialists. However, because of its communist nature, the DRV did not have any diplomatic relations with the west nor any of the western-oriented countries, and was most critical of the US and its scheme in Southeast Asia, especially SEATO.

Thus by 1957, the DRV's foreign policy was firmly established -- a policy that was pro-communist and anti-west, with reunification of Vietnam as the main political goal.

2.7.b. Foreign Policy of the Republic of Vietnam (RVN)

The RVN's foreign policy like the DRV's was built on the principle of preserving its independence and sovereignty, with the aspiration of an unified Vietnam. The State of Vietnam and after 1955, the RVN, though founded

in 1949, only became truly independent after the Geneva conference. However it was not bound by the agreement as its leaders, first Bao Dai and later Ngo Dinh Diem rejected the agreement as one that was "shameful". 98

As a new nation, the RVN’s foreign policy was mainly formulated and implemented by the Chief of State and after October 1955, the President. The formulation of the RVN’s foreign policy was influenced mainly by two factors, namely the constant threat from the communist-led DRV, and the Cold War. The refusal of the RVN to ratify the Geneva Agreement and to hold elections in 1956 caused the resumption of hostilities between North and South Vietnam. The DRV’s aspiration to unify Vietnam by overthrowing the RVN government presented a direct political threat to the RVN. Although the RVN also aimed to reunify Vietnam under its administration, the extent to which this goal was pursued by the Saigon government is questionable. There was no clear indication on Diem’s part as to how he would deal diplomatically with the question of the reunification of Vietnam.

The RVN Government maintained since its inception in 1954, an amicable relationship with the United States

98. "Premier Ngo Dinh Diem’s Statement regarding the Geneva Agreement, 22 July 1954", Doc.137 in Cameron, op.cit., p.325. Flags were flown at half-mast and the anniversary of the signing was later declared a "day of shame."
which extended lavish aid to the RVN's national development and defence budget. In the two-year period prior to 1957 alone, US aid to the RVN amounted to more than half a billion dollars. The persistence of the communist threat from the North, and Saigon's need for foreign support for its political survival contributed significantly to the moulding of the RVN's foreign policy. By 1957, the foreign policy of the RVN was firmly established in terms of maintaining a pro-west, and anti-communist direction internally, as well as in the RVN's external relations.

2.8. Conclusion

Although both Vietnam and Malaysia have undergone different historical processes, two common developments featured prominently, namely, colonialism and communism. The former left a legacy for these countries in terms of treasuring their independence. Safeguarding the newly-won independence became a national goal that featured prominently in their respective foreign policies.

The Cold War factor figured prominently on both sides of the 17th parallel. While the DRV was known as the frontline-state for the communist bloc, the RVN was the

frontline-state for the communist bloc, the RVN was the frontline-state for the freeworld. Both the DRV threat and the Cold War caused the RVN leadership to seek aid from western nations, especially US military and economic assistance. As a staunchly anti-communist nation, it became a feature of RVN foreign policy to seek greater friendship and much needed help from the freeworld countries.

Thus by 1957 the stage was set for the next 18 years: the struggle by two ideologically opposed governments in Vietnam whose differences encouraged external intervention in the context of the global phenomenon of the Cold War. This ideological phenomenon singularly influenced the external policy orientations of Vietnam in Southeast Asia including Malaysia -- a newly independent country that also emerged with a pro-west and anti-communist outlook. The bilateral relationship that developed between the two Vietnams and Malaysia was therefore bound to be strongly influenced by ideological considerations.