

HANOI'S WAR

An International History of the War for Peace Vietnam

Hanoi's War: An International History of the War for Peace in Vietnam

By Lien-Hang T. Nguyen. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012. ISBN 978-0-8078-3551-7. Appendix. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Pp. ix, 444. \$40.00.

BOOK
REVIEWS

H*anoi's War* is arguably one of the most illuminating books available on the subject of the North Vietnamese Communist Party during the Vietnam War. Author Lien-Hang T. Nguyen, a professor at the University of Kentucky, has utilized both her native language and formidable research skills to pry open obscure resources with both successful and informative results.

The archival grounding of important primary resources in Nguyen's work is the first strength of the book. Although much Vietnamese material remains classified and inaccessible, Nguyen was able to access texts of the North Vietnamese Communist Party's military and foreign ministries that are available through the Vietnamese National Archives.

The two primary and comprehensive documents are *Van Kien Dang Toan Tap* (*The Complete Collection of Party Documents*), which is noted as being similar to the archived *Foreign Relations of the United States*. The second, compared in importance to the United State's Pentagon Papers by Nguyen, is *The Diplomatic Struggle and International Activities of the Anti-American Resistance and National Salvation*. These documents are important to mention because they reveal, through Nguyen's work, political, diplomatic, and military vicissitudes experienced and created by the North Vietnamese Communist leadership (the Politburo). Most pivotal to these ups and downs and, to the book specifically, is the Politburo's First Secretary, Le Duan.

Although Le Duc Tho also plays a critical role in the book, primarily as Le Duan's deputy but also as Henry Kissinger's counterpart in the Paris negotiations, Le Duan is the pivotal figure in *Hanoi's War*. General readers, in particular, will be impressed by how Le Duan arguably marginalized more famous leaders such as Ho Chi Minh and Vo Nguyen Giap.

In the case of Ho Chi Minh, Le Duan manipulated Ho Chi Minh's compromises in the 1954 Geneva Accords to sideline the leader as a force within the Vietnamese Worker's Party and the Politburo's leadership. This marginalization is consistently supported by Nguyen's detailed citations from the aforementioned Communist primary resources. In the case of Giap, widely considered the architect of the General Offensive and General Uprisings of 1964, Tet in 1968, and the 1972 Easter Offensive, Nguyen makes a cogent case that it was Le Duan who masterminded these offensives. She, in fact, notes that Giap was not even in Vietnam when the final decision for the Tet 1968 was made. Notably, the military failures of these offensives later played to Giap's favor as the Vietnam War wound down, but the dominance of Le Duan over both military and political matters regarding the course of North Vietnamese decision-making is potent.

The detailed machinations of Le Duan are an important part of the book's first half because it sets the groundwork for the political history of negotiations between the United States and North

Vietnam in the second half. Nguyen artfully explains how the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) was able to manipulate the Sino-Soviet split for both arms, particularly during Operations Linebacker and Linebacker II, and for political backing during negotiations with the United States.

The political intrigue of the secret negotiations between Le Duc Tho and Kissinger are magnified with Nguyen's discussion of the larger context of the Cold War. An example of this is a superb analysis of super-diplomacy which consisted of President Richard M. Nixon's goal of achieving *détente* with the Soviet Union and rapprochement with the Peoples' Republic of China. Nguyen does not make conjectures on her own regarding what could have been but provides space for the reader to more effectively analyze events independently.

Hanoi's War is one of the most substantive accounts of the Vietnam War from an international perspective. Most striking is Nguyen's in-depth analysis of Le Duan and the North Vietnamese Politburo's decision-making apparatus and methods. *Hanoi's War* also demonstrates the limits of superpower influence when confronted with dedicated and ruthless political leadership, as demonstrated by Le Duan and Le Duc Tho.

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