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David G. Marr, *Vietnam: State, War, and Revolution (1945-1946)*. Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2013. Pp. xix, 721. ISBN 978-0-520-27415-0.

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In his new book, David Marr, a leading and veteran scholar of Vietnamese history,¹ picks up from his previous work, *Vietnam 1945*,² with a focus on the formation of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) during the sixteen-month period from September 1945 to December 1946. Marshaling copious evidence,³ he shows that the Indochinese Communist Party (ICP) was not the sole inspiration or guiding force behind the Vietnamese independence movement. He argues instead that the efforts to achieve independence were initiated and channeled by a collective groundswell of many political groups.

Marr does not deny that the ICP as an organization and its Standing Bureau Chief, Tru'ung Chinh, were seeking to consolidate power through the formation of an independent Vietnamese state. But he stresses that the ICP was locked in a competition with several other political factions, notably the Vietnamese Nationalist Party; as events unfolded through 1946 and after, the ICP did not initially dominate the DRV. The evidence Marr musters will also correct the perception that the ICP was a monolithic hegemon. Indeed, its adoption of less than purely communist tactics and policies led Ho Chi Minh to dissolve the party in November 1945.

Ho's controversial decision was intended to prevent Nationalist Chinese Forces from remaining in North Vietnam (Bac Bo and Tonkin) on the pretext of preventing a communist takeover there. Ho also wanted to counter claims that the DRV was only a communist front. The competition between the ICP (later camouflaged under the name Lien Viet) and the Nationalist Vietnamese is at the center of Marr's penetrating investigation of the DRV's development after the proclamation of independence (2 September 1945).

Marr organizes his work thematically in nine chapters. In the first, "Forming the DRV Government," he investigates how the organizational structure of the DRV quickly evolved into a set of regional committees in the South (Nam Bo), Central (Trung Bo), and North (Bac Bo) regions of Vietnam. He analyses the political formation of the provincial committees, revealing how local motivations and conditions either ensured or obstructed good relations among the echelons of government.

In a similar manner, chapter 2, "The Government at Work," covers the election of the DRV's first and second National Assemblies and their debates over a constitution and governmental structure—"This was not mere political theater, but Vietnam's first attempt at representative government" (63). Marr also describes the vital roles of the DRV's education system, judiciary, and postal service when the South became increasingly isolated as the French tried to reestablish control of Indochina.

In chapter 3, "Defense," Marr's sources reflect a wide range of political perspectives, but almost all decry French encroachment back into Vietnam after the evacuation of the Chinese from the North and the British, French, and Japanese from the South. Most striking here are the courage and tenacity of the Vietnamese people in fighting foreign regular forces with spears and machetes in the absence of modern weaponry. Marr also recounts the battle of Nha Trang and the Nam Tien (southern advance) movement, which sup-

1. Marr (PhD Berkeley) studied the Vietnamese language in the United States and deployed to Vietnam as a US Marine Corps Intelligence Officer in 1962. He is currently a Senior Fellow in the Research School of Pacific Studies at the Australian National University.

2. Subtitle: *The Quest for Power* (Berkeley: U Calif Pr, 1995). Marr's work on earlier eras in Vietnamese history includes *Vietnamese Anticolonialism, 1885-1925* (id., 1971) and *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial, 1920-1945* (id., 1981).

3. Marr's sources include documents in the Fonds du gouvernement de fait located at the Archives nationales d'outre-mer in Aix-en-Provence. This extensive collection comprises government dossiers, directives, and correspondence seized by French forces from the DRV's Northern Region Office after war broke out in December 1946. Marr has also consulted forty Vietnamese serials produced in 1946 and now held in the Vietnam National Library in Hanoi. The evidentiary light shed by newspapers and periodicals on the perceptions and attitudes of the Vietnamese is a considerable strength of the book.

port his contention that independence resulted from a truly mass movement of a committed Vietnamese populace and not solely from the direction of communist factions like the ICP.

In chapter 4, “Peace or War?” Marr returns to the August Revolution of 1945 and the DRV’s response to French attempts to regain control in Vietnam after World War II. Principals in this struggle included Adm. Georges Thierry d’Argenlieu (France’s commissioner for Indochina), Gen. Lu Han (commander of Chinese Forces in the north after the Japanese capitulation), Ho Chi Minh, and Jean Sainteny (head of the French intelligence mission in southern China). Marr emphasizes the critical role of contingency in this period of Vietnam’s history: later events might well have unfolded differently and with better outcomes. His deep, lifelong interest in Vietnam is evident in the poignancy of his discussion of Ho Chi Minh’s efforts to gain diplomatic recognition from the western Allies. The following passage describes Ho’s reaction to British Gen. Douglas Gracey’s enactment of martial law in Saigon after a complex series of events had precipitated a general strike in September 1945.

When OSS Major Patti gave Ho a French copy of the Southern Administrative Committee’s 16 September declaration of public protest over Great Britain’s refusal to recognize its legitimacy, Ho commented that his worst fears were being realized. “If only there was a way to stop the inevitable onslaught,” Ho added with an air of resignation. He harkened back to the Atlantic Charter, issued by President Roosevelt and Prime Minister Churchill in 1941, which promised that the Allies would “respect the right of all peoples to choose the form of government under which they will live.” Ho now doubted the British meant what they said. (187)

Chapter 5, “Seeking Foreign Friends,” shows how the Allies’ failure to make good on the assurances of the Atlantic Charter contributed to Vietnam’s struggles during the Cold War. To this end, Marr remains focused on the DRV and its difficult relations with China, its former ally. Additionally, his review of the OSS mission in Vietnam includes a particularly interesting account of the death of Lt. Col. Peter Dewey (September 1945), the first American to lose his life in Vietnam. This and many other stories typify Marr’s ability to clarify the birth pangs of the DRV and their powerful impacts beyond its borders. Indeed, a whole series of political and military challenges arose in the coming years, as the DRV waged a civil war against the French-sponsored Associated State of Vietnam in the South of Vietnam. This conflict metastasized in the Cold War environment and in 1950 China and the Soviet Union recognized the DRV, while Great Britain and the United States recognized the Associated State of Vietnam.

After the 6 March Franco-Vietnamese Preliminary Accord reduced the chances of early French attack above the sixteenth parallel, Nam Bo (South Vietnam) became the symbol of nationwide resistance to French attempts to recolonize Vietnam. When southern DRV adherents gradually worked out tactics capable of sustaining rural and jungle resistance despite French assaults, this gave the government in Hanoi confidence that forced evacuation from the capital could be weathered, and the fight carried on from the hills and countryside if required. The reality of war in the south and threat of war in the north changed the nature of the Vietnamese revolution and the DRV state. (8)

Chapter 6, “Material Dreams and Realities,” concerns the DRV’s failure to attract international attention in 1945 and 1946; regrettably, vigorous outside assistance did not come until later and then with problematic long-term consequences. This chapter also explores the economic situation in North Vietnam, with discussions of taxation, trade, the Vietnamese market system, and fund-raising efforts like “gold week,” a pecuniary drive in which “tables were set up in public venues to receive donations of jewelry, gold leaf, and other precious items from patriotic citizens” (348). Marr also details the DRV’s decisions on the operation of monopolies on salt, opium, and alcohol, along with its developmental plans for the country.

Chapter 7, “Dealing with Domestic Opposition,”⁴ on the development of the DRV’s security apparatus, is the most intriguing in the book. Marr presents here a comprehensive overview of the DRV’s fusion of its various police and security forces into the Viet Nam Cong An Vu (Vietnam Public Security Department),

4. This chapter draws upon an excellent paper by Christopher E. Goscha (with commentary by Marr and Merle Pribbenow)—“The Creation of a Vietnamese Intelligence Service, 1945–1950,” in *Exploring Intelligence Archives: Enquires into the Secret State*, ed. R. Gerald Hughes et al. (NY: Routledge, 2008) 103–22.

known as the Cong An. He also describes the Vietnamese Sûreté (Liem Phong) and secret investigation units like the Trinh-Sat. Especially valuable is his explanation of how the increasingly dominant Viet Minh used the sophisticated security apparatus and appeals to “threats to the state” to finish off such rivals as the Dai Viet party and the Vietnamese Nationalists.

Chapters 8 and 9 treat “The Indochinese Communist Party and the Viet Minh” and “Mass Mobilization,” respectively. Other scholars have shown that Ho Chi Minh’s willingness to negotiate with the French in order to gain Vietnamese autonomy had regrettable consequences for both Ho and other leaders, like Vo Nguyen Giap. One of these was the ascendancy of future Communist Party First Secretary Le Duan and his colleague Le Duc Tho over the communist party and, in turn, Vietnam.⁵ The party attempted to obscure the grassroots efforts of the Vietnamese people in their quest to achieve independence, casting the ICP as the prime mover in the struggle for freedom not only from France, but, later, the United States. Marr has done a most valuable service in dismantling the myth of the ICP as sole champion of Vietnamese independence.

In the epilogue to *Vietnam: State, War, and Revolution*, the author identifies several areas in need of further research. Students and scholars who may answer that call (and any other interested readers) will greatly benefit from careful reflection on David Marr’s discerning, meticulously researched study of a key period in the history of Vietnam.

5. See Lien-Hang T. Nguyen, *Hanoi’s War: An International History of the War for Peace in Vietnam* (Chapel Hill: U North Carolina Pr, 2012).