

listing and correcting his exaggerations and errors (pp.162–163). Morrison also points out the insularity of Irish revisionist debates, citing Ian McBride’s recent criticism of some historians of Irish history for failing to place their work within wider theoretical or comparative frameworks (p.169). However, a weakness of Morrison’s book is that it too suffers from insularity. The extensive reflections in the last two chapters on the entrenched, sometimes personalised, disputes between historians of Ireland risk losing the interest of the military historian or general reader (especially those coming to the topic for the first time). A promising discussion of Alistair Thomson’s work on the ANZAC myth is not developed, neither is a brief reference to the killing of prisoners during the First World War (pp.170, 127). The reader does not learn how the killing at Kilmichael resembles or deviates from other guerrilla campaigns or close combat experiences. The scholarship of Erella Grassiani and Anthony King on combat motivation, cohesion and close combat would have been a good starting point. Retrospective accounts of false surrenders have also characterised controversial killings during the NATO-led campaign in Afghanistan (and many other conflicts). Nonetheless, Morrison has provided an outstanding excavation of one of the most contested days in Ireland’s war for independence.

Christopher Goscha, *The Road to Dien Bien Phu: A History of the First War for Vietnam*, Princeton University Press: Princeton, NJ and Oxford, 2022; vii + 503 pp.: 978-0-691-18016-8, \$35.00 boards

Reviewed by: Nathaniel L. Moir, *John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University*

In *People’s Army, People’s War*, General Vo Nguyen Giap, North Vietnam’s top military leader, called conflict in Vietnam “the model of the people’s total war.” In an analysis of the National Liberation Front published in 1966, Austrian journalist Kuno Knoebl noted, “Vietnam has become the testing ground for the clash between Peking’s revolutionary Communism and the West’s liberal-democratic philosophy.” Knoebl added, “The people, not soldiers and armies, are the decisive factor in this war...The side that wins the people over – convinces and controls them – will be victorious.” In *The Road to Dien Bien Phu*, Christopher Goscha, professor of international relations at Université du Québec à Montréal, investigated the phenomenon Giap and Knoebl identified. Goscha demonstrated how war made the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) and how the DRV waged war against neocolonialism after the Second World War.

From Giap’s and Knoebl’s perspectives, political legitimacy pivoted on a social revolution required to counter the superior war armaments French forces deployed in their effort to re-occupy Indochina after the Second World War. *The Road to Dien Bien Phu*, a compelling and well-written history, centers on describing the Viet Minh’s approach to statecraft and how this was inseparable from its approaches to waging war. Goscha investigates this phenomenon and whether wars of liberation in Southeast Asia provided a model to emulate elsewhere after the Second World War by channeling Frantz Fanon’s analysis of colonial violence found in Fanon’s 1961 book, *The Wretched of the Earth*.

Fanon's analysis of the dehumanization that colonialism inflicted in Asia and elsewhere is a compelling thread woven through *The Road to Dien Bien Phu*. The Viet Minh, Goscha demonstrated, took every opportunity—and manufactured many others—to exploit vulnerabilities imperialism created. Utilizing Vietnamese, French, and Cambodian archival sources, Goscha also revealed how the Viet Minh inflicted Stalin-like brutality on their people to ensure compliance with its disastrous communist policy through land reform in 1953 and, eventually, collectivization in 1956.

Goscha's critiques of Vietnamese authoritarianism build on his earlier analysis in *Vietnam: A New History* (2016) and a landmark article published in 2012 titled, "A 'Total War' of Decolonization? Social Mobilization and State-Building in Communist Vietnam (1949–1954)." One of the compelling reasons scholars may benefit from this book and Goscha's other work is through examining how he musters evidence to describe pervasive human failings capable of manipulating any ideology—whether capitalist, communist, or other—for both self and state aggrandizement. Colonialism was not a European phenomenon, despite Fanon's claims. The Vietnamese were also colonists, as those in the destroyed Cham empire could attest centuries ago had they survived destruction at the hands of ethnic Kinh (Vietnamese). Colonialism, as a type of authoritarianism, is a human drive for power that is neither exclusively European nor Asian; it is an endemic human characteristic transcending race, time, and geography.

Throughout 12 chapters, the book is much more than a straightforward military history. Instead, it is an examination of the breadth of Vietnamese society, including rice production (and the fight for control of this all-critical commodity), economics, and other factors often under-examined in too many military history books that consider the wars for Southeast Asia. Another notable factor in Goscha's book is his description of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam as "The Archipelago State." This vivid term indicates the struggle and political challenges Vietnamese communists endured in facing legions of nationalist, Cao Dai, and Hoa Hao competitors. Goscha recounts how, through the primary Maoist stage of guerrilla-focused revolutionary war, the Viet Minh pulled together an "operational yet territorially incomplete state." (p. 7) Through the earliest stages of war between the Viet Minh and French Union Forces, Vietnamese communists struggled to consolidate a communist-dominated nation. This struggle did not lessen but instead intensified and metastasized into a conflict entwined with the broader Cold War after the Chinese Communist victory over the Kuomintang in 1949 and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's invasion of the Republic of Korea in 1950.

In a second key concept, Goscha uses the term "War Communism" to articulate how Chinese support after 1949 enabled the Viet Minh to "take the war to the French and remake their state in communist ways at the same time" (p. 10). Goscha harnesses these concepts, and Fanon's internationalist critique of colonization, to assess how state-building and war-making were inseparable. When directed by die-hard communists, this phenomenon of revolutionary warfare—or War Communism, as Goscha suggests—was wielded to defeat more powerful opponents. The lessons Americans might have gained well before 1965, of course, are stark. In turn, the book analyzes a significant antecedent for subsequent and even contemporary wars in which willpower and human factors—more than technological ones—largely determine outcomes.

Ultimately, Goscha recounts how Vietnamese communist willpower—expressed through mass mobilization, doctrine, and warfighting skill—made the difference over a far superior, technologically-assisted opponent. Whether it was in Indochina or, as has been shown again in 2022 in Ukraine, vast quantities of modern weapons are important. However, they are marginal without qualitative factors, such as motivation and commitment, that are rightly associated with existential defense. *The Road to Dien Bien Phu* points to human factors endemic to warfighting that bear far more relevance for wars today than readers may expect.