



# Research Report

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## Introduction

After World War 2, Japan's forces were severely weakened and they were forced to give up a lot of their colonial power, leaving countries like Korea and French Indochina with a power vacuum. One of the main concerns of countries like the United States and Great Britain was the possible spread of communism that could be caused by this. This led to the United States and other Western countries supporting local anti-communist regimes and helping them become nationally recognized leaders of their countries. Communist countries such as the Soviet Union and China, who were already engaged in a cold war with the United States, saw this as a threat. They therefore decided to back the opposing, pro-communist regimes. This led to the (first) Indochina War and the Korean war. As of now (April 26<sup>th</sup>, 1954), the Korean Armistice Agreement has been signed by the United Nations, the Korean People's Army, and China, concluding the Korean war, even though no peace treaty has been signed. The Indochina War, on the other hand, is still going on. In an effort to settle the outstanding issues resulting from these wars, the Geneva Conference has been organized.

## Definition of Key Terms

### **Armistice**

a formal agreement between two countries or groups at war to stop fighting for a particular time, especially to talk about possible peace.

### **Korean People's Army**

The Korean People's Army (KPA) are the military forces of North Korea.

### **Communism**

the belief in a society without different social classes in which the methods of production are owned and controlled by all its members and everyone works as much as they can and receives what they need.

### **Pusan Perimeter**

A 140-mile defensive line around an area on the south-eastern tip of South Korea that included the port of Busan.



Image 1: A map showing the successive North Korean advance. The Pusan Perimeter is the border of the green portion of the peninsula.<sup>8</sup>

## General Overview

Since the 19<sup>th</sup> century Vietnam was part of French Indochina, a French colony in Southeast Asia that consisted of Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia and the Chinese territory of Guangzhouwan. Indochina was controlled by France who wanted to reinforce Catholicism in the area<sup>1</sup>. France kept control of the region up until World War 2 (WWII), when they were invaded by Nazi Germany and Japan invaded Indochina. Japan, who at the time were in an ongoing war with China, hoped that by doing so they would be able to close off China's southern border, thereby cutting off their supply chain of weapons and materials<sup>2</sup>. They did leave the local French government in charge, although its authority was greatly diminished<sup>2</sup>. This allowed them to use Vietnam for their own ends without having to deploy large amounts of soldiers there.

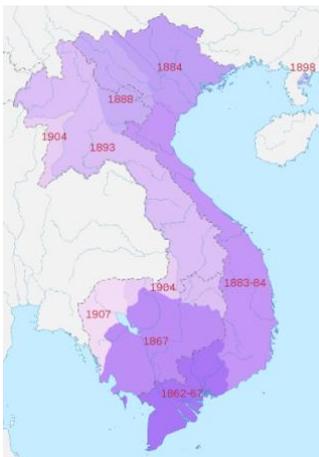


Image 2: Expansion of French Indochina<sup>9</sup>.

With WWII nearing its end, however, Japan was not doing very well. In March of 1945 they had already surrendered the Philippines and were retreating across Southeast Asia. Since Vietnam was a strategic fallback for the Japanese troops, they removed the French from power, and instated emperor Bao Dai to declare Vietnamese independence, though he was not much more than a puppet for the Japanese government.



Removing the French authorities greatly benefited the Viet Minh. The Viet Minh was one of several groups that fought against foreign rule in Vietnam<sup>3</sup>. Without constant pressure from French troops, they flourished. Ho Chi Minh, the leader of the Viet Minh who had previously helped the United States by supplying them with information about Japanese troop numbers and movements, condemned the Japanese occupation and declared the his “number one enemy”. Even though he knew Japan was weak and retreating, he decided to hold off on attacking them because he knew an Allied attack was imminent.

Halfway through 1945, the Viet Minh had taken control of a region in the Northwest of Vietnam. Because the location was very remote and had no strategic importance, the Japanese did not take action against the Viet Minh. This allowed them to focus on organization, propaganda and recruiting. Doing so helped the movement spread to central Vietnam, gaining over 100,000 new recruits in the process.

In August, after the United States had dropped 2 atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japanese forces were retreating and the Viet Minh were seizing control of many Japanese-held places throughout Vietnam.

Emperor Bao Dai, who was still officially in power, abdicated power to the Viet Minh, who set up their government in Hanoi and made Bao Dai their “supreme advisor”. On September 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1945 they asserted Vietnamese independence as the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) and issued a Proclamation of Independence of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam.

In 1948, France wanted to regain its colonial control over Vietnam. They managed to take control of southern and central Vietnam. The war that ensued, between the French-controlled South and the Viet Minh controlled North is known as the First Indochina War. The war ended in a defeat for the French, which frightened the United States. They had been supporting the French out of concern that a victory for Ho Chi Minh's forces would be the first step in communist expansion throughout Southeast Asia. But when France requested the US to intervene more directly in the war, they declined. Thus, France announced they were including the question of Vietnam in the agenda for the Geneva Conference<sup>4</sup>.

Another issue that was on the agenda for the Geneva Conference is the Korean war. When the Japanese were defeated in WWII, the Allied Powers had to take over the administration of Japan's occupied territories, including Korea, until elections could be organized and local governments could be set up<sup>5</sup>. Since the US government were to take over administration of the Philippines and Japan, they were reluctant to also take administration over Korea. The Soviet Union, on the other hand, wanted to take control of the Korean peninsula, a piece of land the Soviet government has had its eye on since before the Russo-Japanese war in 1904-1905.



Even though the United States and the Soviet Union were nominally allies, they did not trust each other, so the United States divided Korea into two parts along the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel of latitude. The Southern half, including Seoul – the largest city in the peninsula – would be controlled by the United States while the Northern half would be controlled by the Soviet Union until local elections could be organized in 1948.

This never happened because both sides didn't trust the other to organize fair elections and reunify Korea. The US wanted the entire peninsula to be capitalist while the Soviets wanted it all to be communist. This meant that there were two elections held in 1948, one for the North and one for the South, officially establishing a North Korea and South Korea.

Since both sides were not content with the border formed by the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel, aggression around the border started increasing. On June 25<sup>th</sup> of 1950, the war began when North Korean troops invaded South Korea. After more than 3 million war fatalities, the fighting ended on July 27<sup>th</sup> of 1953 when the Korean Armistice Agreement was signed. This agreement created the Korean Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) to separate the two countries. As of yet, no peace treaty has been signed so the two countries are still technically at war.

## Major Parties Involved

### **The United States**

The United States is one of the main parties in both conflicts as they are heavily trying to stop the spread of communism through proxy wars in Korea and French Indochina. The US provided around 90% of United Nations military and supported the French by providing them with military aid and equipment.

### **Soviet Union**

The Soviet Union is the United States' main opponent after World War II. Their main goal is to support and create new communist regimes by providing them with weapons, intelligence and other military aid.

### **Viet Minh**

The Viet Minh -- which means "League for Vietnamese Independence" -- was a political coalition formed in 1941. The coalition's project was to achieve independence for Vietnam from France, which then included Vietnam as part of its empire. During World War II, Japan came to occupy Vietnam, and the Viet Minh then opposed Japanese occupation of Vietnamese territory during the war. When the war ended and France reoccupied the country, the Viet Minh returned its attention to gaining formal independence from France<sup>6</sup>.



## France

France was a major colonial power in Southeast Asia, most importantly ruling French Indochina. After losing power there to the Japanese and later the Viet Minh, they fought together with the United States to try and regain power throughout the whole of French Indochina.

## Great Britain

Great Britain is one of the United States' strongest allies and fought alongside the French and Americans in the Indochina War. They also supported the United States in the Korean war, sending almost 100,000 troops to fight North Korean forces<sup>7</sup>.

## China

China is one of the biggest communist powers, alongside the Soviet Union. They supplied weapons to the Viet Minh in the hopes of helping the spread of communism. While in 1949 Chinese communist troops were still fighting the Chinese civil war, in 1950 they were there to support North Korean troops. They did this not only to help spread communism, however, because Stalin had requested Mao to do so, and China was heavily dependent on military and economic support. Together with North Korean troops were able to push back South Korean and United Nations troops all the way to the Pusan perimeter.

## Japan

Japan ruled a great deal of Southeast Asia before WWII. However, after losing that war their forces were severely weakened and therefore were forced to leave the lands they conquered. The power vacuum this created indirectly caused both the Korean and the Indochina War.

## Timeline of Key Events

- October 17 1887** French Indochina is formed
- 1910** Japan occupies the Korean peninsula.
- September 1 1939** World War II starts
- September 1940** Japan invades French Indochina
- May 19 1941** Ho Chi Minh forms the Viet Minh
- March 1945** Bao Dai, whom Japan ruled through, becomes emperor of Vietnam
- July 1945** At the Potsdam conference it is decided that Indochina be split at the 16<sup>th</sup> parallel
- August 1945** Bao Dai abdicates as Japan surrenders
- August 15 1945** Korea is divided along the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel and placed under US and Soviet administration
- September 2 1945** The Viet Minh assert Vietnamese independence



- September 23 1945** French forces overthrow the Viet Minh government
- December 19 1946** The First Indochina War starts
- 1948** The French set up an alternative government to Ho Chi Minh's, with Bao Dai as emperor again
- 1948** Elections in North and South Korea form two new states
- January 1950** Ho Chi Minh's government is officially recognized by China and the Soviet Union, while Bao Dai is recognized by the US and the UK
- June 25 1950** The Korean war starts as North Korean forces cross the border
- October 19 1950** Chinese forces enter the Korean war
- July 27 1953** The Korean war ends when the Korean Armistice Agreement is signed
- April 26 1954 (now)** Conference of Geneva

## Possible Solutions

1. Reunite North and South Korea without disadvantaging either the Soviet Union or the United States. This could be done by setting up an independent body made up of people from both sides.
2. Find a way to get French troops out of Vietnam, avoiding any possible future conflict. This could be done by making a deal between France and the Viet Minh.

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