

## INTERNATIONALISM IN VIETNAM, THEN AND NOW

### Building on the traditions established by Ho Chi Minh

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*Vietnamese celebrate after the fall of Saigon, 30 April 1975.*

Feudal Vietnam was a relatively closed society for thousands of years. Up until the early twentieth century, its external relations were mainly with neighboring countries. A strong tradition of national unity and patriotism was an important factor in enabling the nation's survival as it faced numerous acts of foreign aggression, including three invasions by the Mongol Empire under the Yuan dynasty in the thirteenth century.

True internationalism was first introduced and developed in Vietnam in the twentieth century through the revolutionary activities of Ho Chi Minh. Motivated both by traditional patriotism and a determination to liberate the country from French colonization—following the repeated failures and ultimate deadlock of all existing patriotic movements and uprisings—Ho Chi Minh spent 30 years travelling around the world searching for a path to national salvation. He visited many countries, including France, the United Kingdom, the United States, Soviet Russia, China, India, Thailand, and Burma, and discovered that there were many similarities in the situations of oppressed and exploited people around the world, and that they had common enemies and objectives. This was an important factor in his decision to choose for Vietnam a path of national independence associated with socialism, and to connect the Vietnamese revolution with the rest of the world's struggles for peace, national independence, democracy, and social progress. Ho Chi Minh concluded that only the power of national unity combined with international solidarity would constitute the kind of integrated strength necessary for the success of the Vietnamese revolution, provided the correct guidelines were followed.

## **Ho Chi Minh's Patriotism and Internationalism**

Ho Chi Minh's patriotism and internationalism were not mutually exclusive, but organically and harmoniously integrated. Patriotism was the origin and consistent foundation for his revolutionary activities, while internationalism represented the expansion of his dedication and love for his people to the whole humankind.

True patriotism, according to Ho Chi Minh, was quite different from narrow, selfish nationalism; he believed it should always respect the rights and interests of other nations without harming common interests, while at the same facilitating one's own just and legitimate national interests.

Internationalism, according to Ho Chi Minh, should be based on independence, self-reliance, and the self-determination of each nation on the one hand, and joint efforts for common objectives and interests on the other. It should also be based on mutual understanding and a readiness to appreciate one another's views, avoiding chauvinism, opportunism, and interference in the internal affairs of other countries.

Concerning the relationship between national struggle and international solidarity, Ho Chi Minh always emphasized the vital role of national endeavours as an irreplaceable prerequisite for any struggle, while at the same time cherishing the importance of international support. He stressed the "need to help ourselves before seeking support from others", because "a nation that is not self-reliant and only waits for support from others does not deserve to be independent".

Ho Chi Minh's internationalism was two-directional: it sought to mobilize international support for the struggle of Vietnamese people for national independence and socialism, and to contribute to struggles for peace, independence, democracy, and social progress all over the world. Accordingly, he identified three main channels of international solidarity for Vietnamese revolution in the twentieth century: the international communist and workers' movement (with socialist countries at the core), national liberation movements, and world movements for peace, democracy, social progress, and justice.

Ho Chi Minh's concept of internationalism was developed and implemented by the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) and became a consistent and inseparable component of the Vietnamese state's official foreign policy, even up to the present day. It has contributed significantly to the many victories and achievements of Vietnam's revolution throughout past decades.

## Internationalism in the Struggle for Vietnamese National Liberation in the Twentieth Century

In the difficult and long-lasting struggle for national liberation, unification, and defence of the country in the twentieth century, Vietnamese people have had to face the most powerful foreign aggressors. This can be seen especially clearly in their 30-year resistance against French and US imperialist aggressions.

The foundation of the CPV in 1930 by Ho Chi Minh formally linked the Vietnamese revolution with the world communist movement, especially with the Third International and Chinese, Laotian, and Cambodian communists. During the Second World War, the Việt Minh Front led by Ho Chi Minh and the CPV joined the anti-fascist alliance and fought against Japanese occupation in Vietnam. But the August Revolution, which led to the foundation of the independent Democratic Republic of Vietnam on 2 September 1945, was solely the initiative of Ho Chi Minh and the CPV. It was victorious thanks to the overwhelming support of the Vietnamese people without any input or assistance from outside. Vietnam was by necessity fully self-reliant during the first five years of the nation-wide Resistance against French aggression and US intervention. The Vietnamese People's Army (VPA) also assisted Laotian patriotic forces to fight against the French in Laos, and helped the Chinese People's Liberation Army to liberate a large part of territory in Southern China in 1949.

Vietnam only began to receive assistance from socialist countries after the victory of the Chinese Revolution in October 1949 and the establishment of diplomatic relations with the USSR and its allies in 1950. By this time, the Vietnamese Resistance had defeated all French "rapid war" strategies and was about to advance to the stage of general counter-offensive.

The total amount of aid from China and the USSR to Vietnam from June 1950 to June 1954 was 34 million US dollars (USD). This was equivalent to just 0.86 percent of US aid to the French army in Viet Nam during the same period—which amounted to 1 billion USD per year—but was very important for the Vietnamese



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Resistance given the huge shortage of weapons and military equipment, and helped Vietnamese forces to win victory at Điện Biên Phủ in May 1954.

The solidarity, mutual support, and coordination of the resistance between the liberation forces of Indochinese countries also contributed significantly to the defeat of French aggressive strategies in Indochina and Vietnam.

Meanwhile, the just cause and heroic struggle of the Vietnamese people began to gain world-wide political support and solidarity, not only in the socialist countries but also in many countries in Asia, Africa, and Europe, particularly in France itself. French communists, notably Henri Martin and Raymonde Dien, among others, were at the forefront of anti-war demonstrations and activities despite brutal repression by the French authorities. The continued failures and mounting losses of the French army, as well as the increasing costs of war in Indochina also strengthened and broadened anti-war movements in France, which contributed to forcing 20 changes in government in this period. In August 1953 the number of people within the French population who supported an end to the war in Vietnam reached 82 percent. Many mass demonstrations against French aggression in Vietnam also occurred in other countries. This growing political pressure, on top of the strategic failures on the battlefield, forced French authorities to announce an end to military aggression in Indochina at the Geneva Conference in 1954.

It is also important to note that the then French Foreign Legion in Vietnam recruited soldiers not only from France but also from other countries in Europe and Africa, particularly from Algeria and Morocco. Many of these recruits became sympathizers of Ho Chi Minh and the Việt Minh and, back home later on, they played an active role in the liberation struggles of their respective countries.

The international front that provided support and acted in solidarity with the liberation struggle of the Vietnamese people against US imperialist aggression was unique and unprecedented in world history in terms of its dimension, diversity, comprehensiveness, and effectiveness. The key components of this international front were the solidarity of three neighbouring countries in Indochina, support from the socialist countries,



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the international communist and workers' movement, support from other national liberation movements, and the global people's movements for peace and justice.

Mutual support, assistance, and a sense of joint struggle between patriotic and liberation forces and the people of Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia played a crucial role in contributing to the defeat of US aggressions on the ground.

Socialist countries, especially the USSR and China, were the main providers of military and material support for Vietnam, apart from political, diplomatic, educational and other forms of support. Total aid from socialist countries to Vietnam in this period was about 7 billion USD; this was far below the 168 billion USD of total war expenditure by the United States in Vietnam (which is equivalent to 1,38 trillion in 2019), but was essential to the Vietnamese people's resistance to US aggression. The USSR, China, Cuba, and other socialist countries also sent their experts and volunteers to assist Vietnam in various fields. People in all socialist countries, including young people and children, launched many campaigns and activities to support the Vietnamese people. Fidel Castro was the first foreign leader to visit the liberated province of Quang Tri in the South of Vietnam in 1973. The liberation struggle of the Vietnamese people also received strong support from many other countries across the world from Asia, Africa, and Latin America to Europe and the US.

The just cause, righteous policy, heroic resilience, and the success of the Vietnamese Resistance attracted growing sympathy and support from a very wide political and social spectrum of people around the world, from communists to civil and religious groups, from youth and women to elderly people, from workers and peasants to artists, writers, lawyers, journalists and scientists. Millions of people took part in anti-war campaigns and demonstrations across the world. Solidarity was extended to Vietnam by people in both East and West Germany. The then Swedish Prime Minister Olof Palme himself led mass demonstrations in Stockholm against US aggression in Vietnam. In 1967, the People's International Tribunal led by Bertrand Russell concluded that the US had committed a crime against humanity in Vietnam. In 1964, Caracas guerrillas captured a US officer to demand an exchange for the release of Nguyen Van Troi in Sai Gon. The slogan "My



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name, your name—Vietnam, Vietnam” became very popular during anti-imperialist mass demonstrations across India. Countless organizations and networks of solidarity with Vietnam were established and expanded throughout the world to condemn US war crimes, demand a stop to US bombing and aggression against Vietnam, and mobilize material and political support to the Vietnamese people. Solidarity campaigns with Vietnam even became a practical educational framework for raising political awareness among young people in many countries about struggles for peace, justice, and democracy more broadly. International solidarity played a very important role in inspiring and supporting the Vietnamese people on the one hand and increasing the international political pressure on the US administration on the other hand.

In particular, anti-war movements within the US itself grew to an unprecedented scale, drawing millions of people from a wide and diverse social spectrum into political activity. Many organizations, networks, campaigns, and demonstrations were launched across the US with the participation of trade unionists, young people and students, women, peace and social activists, war veterans, and civil and religious groups. Norman Morrison was the first among eight Americans who self-immolated in protest against the US criminal war in Vietnam. Dr Martin Luther King Jr. linked the anti-war campaign with the struggle for civil rights and social justice in the US. Despite obstructions by US authorities, several prominent Americans such as Tom Hayden, Jane Fonda, Angela Davis, and Noam Chomsky visited North Vietnam during the war. Nation-wide anti-war campaigns in the spring and autumn of 1967 attracted millions of Americans in more than 100 cities across the US, during which 200,000 protesters surrounded the Pentagon for 32 hours. More than 16 million out of 27 million eligible young people refused to be drafted, while two million Americans were accused of “causing illegal damage” through their protest actions. The “Vietnam war” became a central issue in US politics and an important factor contributing to the replacement of five US presidents during this period. The US anti-war movements played a crucial role in preventing further US escalation and prolongation of war, and in forcing the US government to ultimately take steps to end its war in Vietnam.

International solidarity made a significant contribution to the ultimate victory of the Vietnamese people in an uneven fight against the aggression of the most powerful imperialist country.





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Yet Vietnam not only benefited from international solidarity, but was itself also an important actor in the world struggle for peace, national independence, democracy, and social progress in the twentieth century.

During the Second World War, the Việt Minh joined the anti-fascist alliance and assisted US forces to fight the Japanese army in Indochina. Vietnamese communists also took part in defending Moscow against the Nazi assault.

The most direct and significant contribution was Vietnam's consistent support and robust assistance to the people of Laos and Cambodia in their struggle against French colonization and US aggression. In late 1970s, against a backdrop of almost total ignorance on the part of the international community, Vietnam played a decisive role in liberating Cambodian people from genocide at the hands of the Khmer Rouge regime (unfortunately, Vietnam faced international isolation for this endeavour due to the lack of information and complexity of the existing world situation). It is important to note that while supporting Laotian and Cambodian people to liberate themselves, Vietnam always respected their right to self-determination, national independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity, while caring for and protecting their people, and helping them to develop their economy, education, health care, and culture.

The struggle of the Vietnamese people contributed meaningfully to twentieth-century national liberation movements in other countries in both direct and indirect ways. Aside from extending political support and solidarity to the struggles for self-determination and national independence across the world, Vietnam also assisted many liberation forces in Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America by sharing experiences and training their cadres. Furthermore, the victories of Vietnam against French and US imperialist forces contributed indirectly to the collapse of colonialism and neo-colonialism across the world in the twentieth century.

More broadly, by winning significant victories against the imperialist forces in Vietnam, the Vietnamese Resistance diminished the overall capacity of these forces to expand their military operations in other parts of the world, and in this way, too, contributed indirectly to the world struggle for peace and justice. The



development of the world peace movement and the impact of “Vietnam syndrome” had a constraining effect on the waging of new wars by imperialist countries until the end of the Cold War. The just cause and heroic resistance of the Vietnamese people helped to raise the political awareness of large populations in many countries in support for the struggle for peace, democracy and social justice.

## **Vietnam’s Internationalism since the End of the Cold War**

In the wake of the dramatic changes in the world situation after the collapse of the USSR, Vietnamese foreign policy was adjusted accordingly while maintaining a consistent goal of national independence and socialism.

The prime objective of Vietnam’s foreign policy in the new period has been to sustain peace and stability and expand international cooperation, with a view to creating favourable conditions for defending the country’s independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity, national security, political and social stability, and promoting socio-economic development in order to improve people’s living conditions and build socialism. Accordingly, Vietnam has been widening and diversifying its bilateral and multilateral relations in the spirit of “being a friend to all countries” and “being a responsible member of the international community”, while simultaneously emphasizing and adhering to the principles of peace, independence, mutual benefits and non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries, as well as respecting international laws. The realization of Vietnamese internationalism in the new period has been re-adjusted in conformity with these objectives.

Peace, national independence and sovereignty, democracy and social justice remain the core, consistent values of Vietnamese internationalism at present. Vietnam continues to oppose all wars and military aggression, and stands against imperialist hegemony and interference in the internal affairs of other nations; Vietnam supports the just causes of the people of Cuba and Palestine, and expresses solidarity with the people of Nicaragua, Venezuela, and other countries striving to achieve independence, sovereignty, and social progress. Apart from official state diplomacy, people’s diplomacy also plays an important role in expressing Vietnamese internationalism today, with more than 100 mass organizations working on peace, solidarity, and

friendship with people of other countries. While diversifying external relations, the CPV and many other mass organisations continue to strengthen their cooperation and exchange with communist, left, and progressive organizations across the world.

In the spirit of “being a responsible member of the international community”, Vietnam has been intensifying its participation in, and contribution to the solution of regional and global challenges in various areas such as peace and security, climate change, epidemics, etc. After finally leaving behind its earlier status as a low-income country, Vietnam began participating in humanitarian operations by UN peacekeeping missions in selected countries.

Development has become a key area within contemporary Vietnamese internationalism. Despite still being a relatively poor developing country itself, Vietnam has been continuously rendering significant support for socio-economic improvement in Laos and Cambodia by providing aid, implementing projects for the development of infrastructure, industry, and agriculture, as well as education, training, and health care services. Vietnam has also been continuously providing valuable support to Cuba through aid, debt cancellation, supplying food, and assisting Cuba in the development of rice production, among other things. In recent years, Vietnam had sent more than 400 experts to Mozambique, Sierra Leone, Nigeria, Sudan, Liberia, Benin, and Guinea, to assist in the establishment and expansion of rice crops and other essential agricultural products, both for exports and domestic food security. While observing the principle of mutual benefit, investment projects under the auspices of Vietnamese state enterprises are always aimed at supporting sustainable socio-economic development within other countries. For example, the joint venture project by Viettel in Mozambique has been praised in the African media as “a miracle” and declared by Africom to be “the best solution for improvement of African rural telecommunication networks”; the project is helping Mozambique to extend its telecommunication infrastructure from major cities to all rural districts and increase network coverage 29 percent to 84 percent of the population within 2 years, reducing usage costs by half. A further effect will be to support many social programs there, including the provision of unlimited free telecommunications access for all teachers and students across 4200 schools.



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Despite its own continuing status as a developing country, Vietnam has been increasing its humanitarian contribution to disaster relief funds in other countries in recent years, to alleviate damages caused by tsunamis, earthquakes, flooding, famine, and epidemic. During the recent Covid-19 pandemic, the government and people of Vietnam have donated masks and medical equipment to China, Laos, Cambodia, Italy, Spain, Germany, France, the UK and many other affected countries.

At the same time, international solidarity and support continue to be extremely important in this new period for Vietnam's cause of defending the country and building socialism.

The main external challenges for Vietnam today are the growing threats to the country's territorial and maritime sovereignty in the South China Sea, as well as the challenges to peace and stability in the region, the continuing attempts by hostile forces to destabilize the situation and force regime change in Vietnam, the negative impacts of unjust international trade and economic relations, and the impacts of climate change on socio-economic development in Vietnam.

In facing these challenges, the Vietnamese people once again need solidarity and support from, and cooperation with all the people of the world.

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