

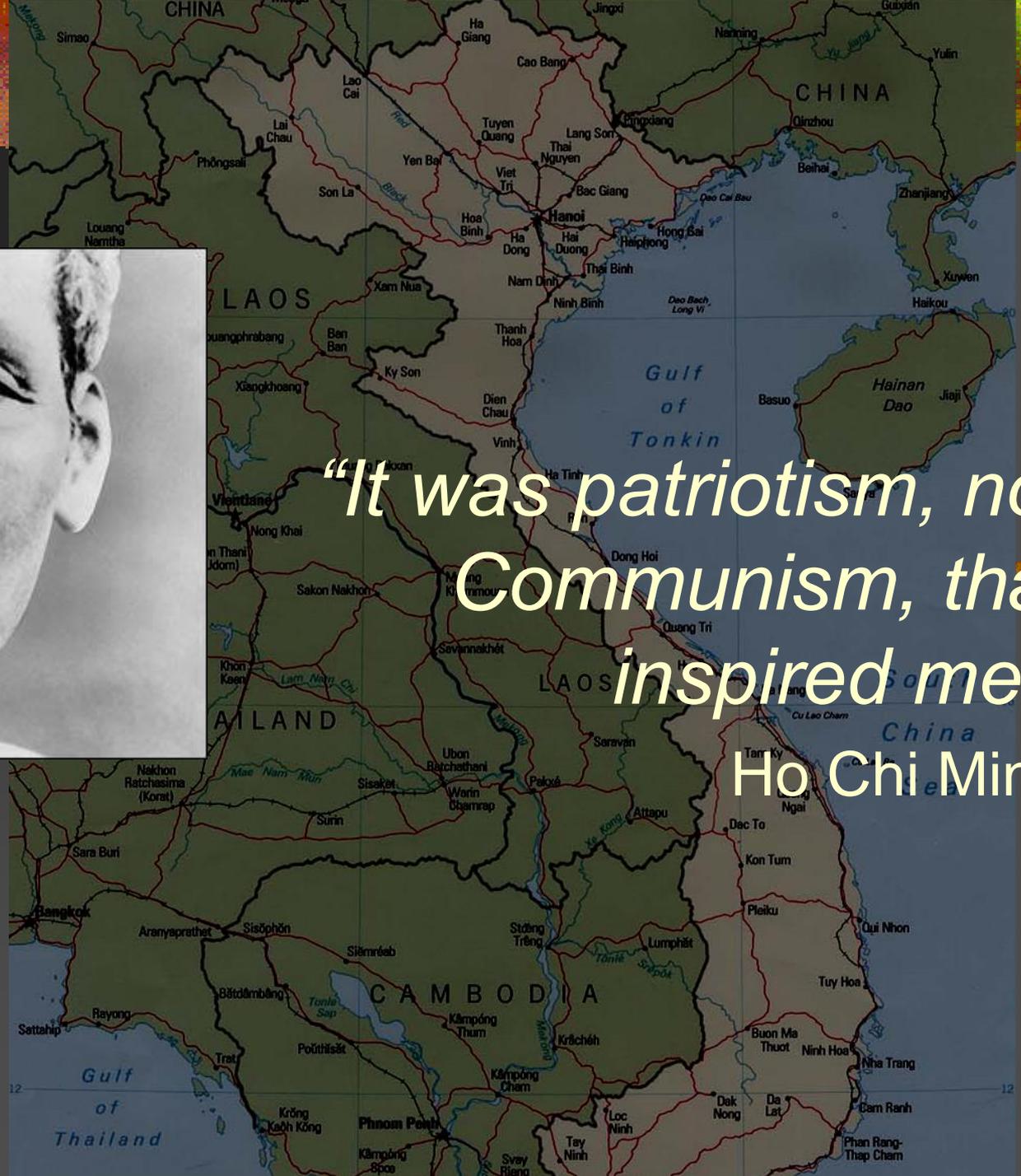


# Vietnam: Road to "The American War"





*"It was patriotism, not  
Communism, that  
inspired me."*  
Ho Chi Minh



# Indochina:

In its broadest sense, Indochina includes most of Southeast Asia; In its strictest sense, it is a **political distinction created by France** to include its colonial possessions of **Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia** (also known as **French Indochina**).



# Timeline to War:

- 1945 (Sept. 2): Ho Chi Minh, in the absence of both Japanese and French imperialists, declares Vietnam an independent nation, with a declaration modeled on our own.
- 1946: The French under President Charles De Gaulle return to Indochina with full military force, and with support of the U.S.

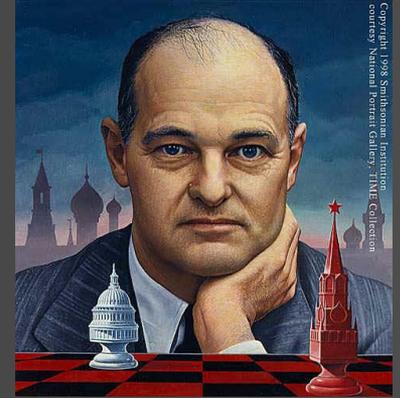


# Question: Why would the U.S. support the re-colonialization of Vietnam in 1946?

- Hint: What was going on in Europe at this time (1946)?
- The Cold War! The U.S. needed French support for the Marshall Plan and NATO.
- The First Indochina War ('46-'54) was fought by Cold War antagonists:
  - U.S.S.R. and China supported Vietminh.
  - The U.S. supported France.



# Related Vocabulary:



George F. Kennan

- Vietminh:
- League for the Independence of Vietnam...nationwide political movement against the French led by Ho Chi Minh.
- Containment:
- U.S. foreign policy of committing political and economic resources to stop the spread of Communism. (first articulated by George F. Kennan)
- Domino Theory:
- Belief that Communism had to be stopped or it would spread (like dominoes falling).

# Timeline to War:

- First Indochina War (1945-1954) ended with the **Geneva Accords**, which split Vietnam in two at the **17<sup>th</sup> parallel** and recognized independence of Laos and Cambodia.
- Critical battle of the First Indochina War was the siege of **Dien Bien Phu**:
  - Vietminh utilized Chinese artillery to defeat the French and essentially end their claims to Indochina.



# Timeline to War:

- Geneva Accords:
  - A Communist government under Ho Chi Minh would control north.
  - A national government under Emperor Bao Dai and Prime Minister Ngo Dinh Diem would control south.
  - Capitals established in Hanoi and Saigon.
  - Elections would be held in 1956 with the aim of unification.



# Timeline to War:

- 1956: Elections not held or supported by U.S., which worked to solidify border and support the Diem regime in the south.
- Eisenhower cited the “Domino Theory” as a rationale for not having elections (he feared that Ho Chi Minh would win)
  - Comm’s notorious for rigging “free” elections
  - Uncle Ho was a popular leader, even among those that did not support Communism.



# Relevant Vocabulary:

- National Liberation Front:
- The “Vietcong.” Communist movement in S. Vietnam; guerrilla fighters loyal to Ho Chi Minh.
- NVA:
- North Vietnamese Army (loyal to Ho Chi Minh).
- ARVN:
- Army of the Republic of Vietnam (S. Vietnam) allied w/ the U.S. and French.

# Timeline to War:

- 1956-63: Both Eisenhower and John F. Kennedy increased “advisors” to S. Vietnam.
- Kennedy increased levels to about 16,000.
- Kennedy ambiguous about U.S. intentions in Vietnam.
- Cronkite interviewed Kennedy at Hyannis Port: Find the mixed message
- (Cronkite-Kennedy Interview)



# Timeline to War:

- 1964 – Critical Year!
- President Johnson dramatically increases U.S. presence in SE Asia after “incidences” in the Gulf of Tonkin.
- Johnson was embroiled in an election campaign and wanted to appear tough on Communism.
- Tonkin Gulf video
  - Tonkin Gulf Resolution amounts to a declaration of war.
  - Johnson unleashes “Operation Rolling Thunder” – large-scale bombing of N. Vietnam – in Feb. 1965.
- 1965 also marks the beginning of national prominence for the anti-war movement in the U.S.



# Relevant Vocabulary:

## ■ Escalation:

■ An increase in the use of armaments; increase in the scope of a conflict.

## ■ Credibility Gap:

■ The gap between reality and what politicians and governments say about reality. Or, the gap between what L.B.J. was saying about Vietnam and what was actually happening there.