

# People's Diplomacy of Vietnam



# People's Diplomacy of Vietnam:

*Soft Power in the  
Resistance War, 1965-1972*

By

Harish C. Mehta

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I dedicate this book  
to the memory of my parents,  
Kanta and Daulat Ram Mehta,  
who lived in, and loved,  
colonial and postcolonial India



Map of Vietnam by the courtesy of the Perry-Castaneda Library.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

ACFTU	All-China Federation of Trade Unions
ARVN	Army of the Republic of Vietnam
BRA	Bertrand Russell Archive
BRPF	Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
COINTELPRO	Counter Intelligence Program
COSVN	Central Office of South Vietnam ( <i>Trung Uong Cuc Mien Nam</i> )
CPSU	Communist Party of the Soviet Union
CWIHP	Cold War International History Project
DRV	Democratic Republic of Vietnam
FBIS	Foreign Broadcast Information Service
FCP	French Communist Party
FRUS	Foreign Relations of the United States
GDR	German Democratic Republic
IADL	International Association of Democratic Lawyers
ICP	Indochinese Communist Party
IUS	International Union of Students,
IWCT	International War Crimes Tribunal
LBJ	Lyndon Baines Johnson
NARA	National Archives and Records Administration
NSC	National Security Council
<i>NCLS</i>	<i>Nghien Cuu Lich Su</i> (Historical Research)
<i>NCQT</i>	<i>Nghien Cuu Quoc Te</i> (International Studies)
<i>ND</i>	<i>Nhan Dan</i> ( <i>People's Daily</i> )
NLF	National Liberation Front ( <i>Mat Tran Giai Phong Mien Nam</i> )
NVN	North Vietnam
PAVN	People's Army of Vietnam ( <i>Quan Doi Nhan Dan Viet Nam</i> )
<i>PQH</i>	<i>Phong Quoc Hoi</i> (National Assembly)
PRC	People's Republic of China
PRG	Provisional Revolutionary Government ( <i>Chinh Phu Cach Mang Lam Thai</i> )

<i>PPTT</i>	<i>Phong Phu Thu Tuong</i> (Office of the Prime Minister)
<i>QDND</i>	<i>Quan Doi Nhan Dan</i> ( <i>People's Army Daily</i> )
RVN	Republic of Vietnam
SDS	Students for a Democratic Society
SKfV	Swedish-Vietnam Committee
SNCC	Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee
SRV	Socialist Republic of Vietnam ( <i>Cong Hoa Xa Hoi Chu Nghia Viet Nam</i> )
<i>TTLTQG</i>	<i>Trung Tam Luu Tru Quoc Gia</i> (National Archives Center)
UN	United Nations
US	United States
USIA	United States Information Agency
VCP	Vietnamese Communist Party ( <i>Dang Cong San Viet Nam</i> )
Vietminh	<i>Viet Nam Doc Lap Dong Minh Hoi</i> or League for the Independence of Vietnam
<i>VKD</i>	<i>Van Kien Dang</i> (Party Documents)
VOW	Voice of Women
VSC	Vietnam Solidarity Campaign
VWP	Vietnam Workers' Party ( <i>Dang Lao Dong Viet Nam</i> , abbreviated to <i>Lao Dong</i> )
VWU	Vietnam Women's Union
WFDY	World Federation of Democratic Youth
WFTU	World Federation of Trade Unions
WIDF	Women's International Democratic Federation
WILPF	Women's International League for Peace and Freedom
WPC	World Peace Council
WSP	Women Strike for Peace

## INTRODUCTION

# THE MISSING “PEOPLE” IN THE DIPLOMACY OF THE VIETNAM WAR

The Vietnamese revolutionary leader, Ho Chi Minh, formulated the concept of “people’s diplomacy” during the First Indochina War against France (1946-1954). Starting in 1948, he began sending small groups of North Vietnamese mass organizations to France and China. As the president of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV, or North Vietnam), Ho Chi Minh, believed that the Vietnamese people would be more effective in establishing relations with people abroad because his fledgling state lacked a properly organized diplomatic service. In these circumstances North Vietnamese people’s groups began conducting people’s diplomacy overseas. They promoted the Vietnamese cause for independence and established enduring links with non-government entities and individuals abroad. People’s diplomacy played a relatively minor role then because the main goal of the Vietnamese revolutionaries was to achieve independence through military means.

Ho Chi Minh was the principal architect of the Vietnamese Revolution, a program of national liberation animated both by ideology and nationalism whose components were, first, the strengthening of the north through economic construction and education and, secondly, after these goals were partially achieved to spread the revolution southward by helping to create and sustain the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam (NLF), and in launching the forces of the north and the NLF in guerrilla war against the combined forces of the United States and the Republic of Vietnam, or South Vietnam. Ho Chi Minh called it “the long war of resistance,” exhorting the people to prepare themselves for it.

A frail figure dressed in the simple clothes of a common worker—some writers described him as “Chaplinesque”—Ho Chi Minh came to be viewed as one-part Lenin and one-part Gandhi, an ascetic person who simultaneously spoke the language of war, peace and diplomacy, and around whom the *Dang Lao Dong Viet Nam* (Vietnam Workers’ Party, or

the Lao Dong) built an enduring personality cult.<sup>1</sup> In twenty-first century Vietnam, he is revered as *Bac Ho*, or Uncle Ho, whose portrait hangs in homes and public spaces. In a show of respect, the party has left the position of chairman vacant since his death in September 1969.

During the Second Indochina War (from the late 1950s to 1975), also known as the Vietnam War, the leaders of the DRV created a “diplomatic front” (*mat tran ngoai giao*) to implement “people’s diplomacy” (*ngoai giao nhan dan*), a strategy designed to win worldwide support and sympathy (*ung ho va cam tinh*) for Vietnamese independence. The concepts of people’s diplomacy and the diplomatic front evolved from a potpourri of policies that Ho Chi Minh employed with flexibility. The two concepts were subsumed within an ideology that would eventually be known as Ho Chi Minh Thought that combined the relentless pursuit of national liberation, economic reconstruction, exercise of military power when required, and a foreign policy that succeeded in forging friendships in both communist and non-communist countries.<sup>2</sup> As president, he held the portfolio of foreign affairs in 1945-1946 in the early days of the new state when he confronted both internal and external enemies.

Ho Chi Minh persuasively elaborated the people’s diplomacy concept at a conference of North Vietnamese diplomats in January 1964, explaining that foreign affairs was “not only an area of concern for embassies and consulates-general ... but also for such organized activities as foreign trade, culture, youth, women, and trade union agencies, all of which are equally responsible for diplomacy.”<sup>3</sup> Under this definition, Ho Chi Minh excluded career diplomats from people’s diplomacy, but he did not exclude officials from other government departments, the communist party—or even himself—from interacting with foreign peace activists in an effort to win their support and sympathy. He stressed that the diplomacy practiced by the mass organizations and individuals was equally important as the diplomacy of the state. A close associate of Ho Chi Minh, Phan Anh, who participated in negotiations with France in 1946 and the Geneva Conference in 1954, has explained: “Diplomacy is not just the talks at the negotiation table to reach certain agreements. It is the occasion for us to propagate our just cause to the people of the other side

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<sup>1</sup> Frances Fitzgerald, Book Review, *New York Times*, October 15, 2000.

<sup>2</sup> Nguyen Dy Nien, *Ho Chi Minh Thought on Diplomacy* (Hanoi: The Gioi, 2004); and *Ho Chi Minh Thought on the Military*, Institute of Military History, Ministry of National Defense (Hanoi: The Gioi, 2005).

<sup>3</sup> Speech by President Ho Chi Minh, January 14, 1964 at a conference of diplomats at the DRV Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Quoted in Nien, *Ho Chi Minh Thought on Diplomacy*, 133.

and the peoples of the world.”<sup>4</sup> The diplomatic front exhibited both social and gender diversity by the inclusion of writers, cartoonists, workers, women, students, artistic performers, filmmakers, architects, medical doctors and nurses, academics, lawyers, and sportspersons. The extended diplomatic front encompassed overseas antiwar activists because they too opposed the American intervention.

In its actual performance and enactment, people’s diplomacy is a component of the familiar concept of informal diplomacy involving interactions between ordinary people that are not employees of any government. Informal diplomacy has a rich history ever since the early contacts between white settlers and the aboriginals in North America and Australia often resulted in signing of treaties and informal pacts.<sup>5</sup> Ho Chi Minh created the people’s diplomacy policy several years before scholars developed the ideas of Track Two diplomacy and soft power. William D. Davidson, an American psychiatrist, and Joseph V. Montville, a U.S. State Department Foreign Service officer, coined Track One and Track Two diplomacy in an article in 1981.<sup>6</sup> Track One involves formal negotiations conducted by diplomats, and Track Two refers to conflict resolution efforts conducted by professional non-governmental conflict resolution practitioners and theorists. Davidson and Montville argue that national political leaders have tended to drift to war because of misperceptions and lost opportunities for peace. At such fleeting moments, “a second diplomatic track can therefore make its contribution as a supplement to the understandable shortcomings of official relations, especially in times of tension.” Track Two diplomacy is “unofficial, non-structured interaction;” it is “always open minded, often altruistic;” and “strategically optimistic.”

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<sup>4</sup> Nien, *Ho Chi Minh Thought on Diplomacy*, 136-137.

<sup>5</sup> Maureen R. Berman and Joseph E. Johnson, “The Growing Role of Unofficial Diplomacy,” in *Unofficial Diplomats*, ed. Maureen R. Berman and Joseph E. Johnson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), 32-33; Molly M. Wood, “‘Commanding Beauty’ and ‘Gentle Charm’: American Women and Gender in the Early Twentieth Century Foreign Service,” *Diplomatic History* 31, no. 3 (2007): 505–531; Emily Abrams Ansari, “Shaping the Policies of Cold War Musical Diplomacy: An Epistemic Community of American Composers,” *Diplomatic History* 36, no. 1 (2012): 41-52. Also see Robert L. Beisner, *From the Old Diplomacy to the New, 1865–1900* (Arlington Heights, IL: Harlan Davidson, 1986).

<sup>6</sup> William D. Davidson and Joseph V. Montville, “Foreign Policy According to Freud,” *Foreign Policy* 45 (Winter, 1981–1982): 145-157.

Some years later the Harvard scholar, Joseph Nye, devised the idea of soft power.<sup>7</sup> Countries exercise soft power by deploying their people and cultures as agents of informal diplomacy to attain diplomatic aims. Soft power aims to co-opt rather than coerce in pursuit of desired diplomatic and political outcomes. For instance, during the early years of the Vietnam War, Henry Kissinger, then a professor of government at Harvard and consultant to the U.S. State Department, embarked on his first venture into Vietnam peace-making at the Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs in September 1966.<sup>8</sup> Kissinger used these occasions to develop contacts with French interlocutors who would carry messages from the U.S. State Department to Ho Chi Minh.

The enactment or performance of unofficial, informal and people's diplomacy predates the official diplomacy conducted by a state because ancient societies were commonly practicing informal diplomacy, or the diplomacy between communities, long before the arrival of the state as a formal political entity under the Westphalian system in 1648.

It can be argued, however, that unofficial or informal diplomacy actually mimics the official diplomacy of a government. The practice of people's diplomacy in Vietnam can be theorized by assimilating the concept of "mimicry" developed by the postcolonial thinker, Homi Bhabha. I further argue that people's diplomacy went beyond mimicry: in comparison to state diplomacy it was humane, but it always aimed to refine and subvert it.

The North Vietnamese people's diplomats were, in effect, mimicking the diplomacy of the American state by counteracting U.S. propaganda, and by undermining and subverting the efforts of U.S. diplomacy through denunciations, for example, of the U.S. civilizing mission in South Vietnam as undisguised imperialism, and the Saigon regime as traitorous. The denunciations took the form of such cultural products as cartoons, films, posters, and newsletters produced in Hanoi. People's diplomacy went much further: it made crucial connections with political leaders, Nobel Prize winners and antiwar movements abroad and shared with them their desire to end the presence of foreign military forces in Vietnam.

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<sup>7</sup> Joseph Nye, *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power* (New York: Basic Books, 1990); and Joseph Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004).

<sup>8</sup> James G. Hershberg, "'A Half-Hearted Overture': Czechoslovakia, Kissinger, and Vietnam, Autumn, 1966," in *The Search for Peace in Vietnam, 1964–1968*, ed. Lloyd C. Gardner and Ted Gittinger (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2004), 292-297.



Bhabha explains that “the effect of mimicry on the authority of colonial discourse is profound and disturbing.” Mimicry is, therefore, a signpost of “a complex strategy of reform, regulation and discipline, which ‘appropriates’ the Other as it visualizes power.”<sup>9</sup>

By enacting mimicry, the North Vietnamese mocked the civilizing mission. By appropriating the tactics of the imperial power (such as the abortive effort of the president, Lyndon Johnson, to win financial and moral support from his European allies), the North Vietnamese waged a global public relations campaign to win sympathy abroad. Scholars have demonstrated that there are a “variety of mimics available to non-state actors,” from loose mimicry that adopts some of diplomacy’s trappings, to claims of diplomatic equivalence.<sup>10</sup>

Each chapter of this book presents a different case study exploring the variegated dimensions of informal diplomacy in practice. The first case study interrogates the process by which the DRV created the concept of people’s diplomacy that was then devolved to the mass organizations that mimicked the official form. The second case study examines the ways the people’s diplomatic offensive circumvented the U.S. government and its allies that denied diplomatic recognition to Hanoi, directly engaging with Western publics and antiwar movements, all the while mimicking and adopting the methods of formal diplomacy. In the third case study of mimicry of U.S. tactics, people’s diplomacy counterbalanced U.S. propaganda as Hanoi film studios cooperated with Dutch and French filmmakers to produce documentary films publicizing the effects of American bombardment on civilians, and outraged antiwar movements and communist parties in Western Europe sent economic aid. In the fourth case study of communist bloc solidarity, mass organizations in China, the Soviet Union and the DRV mimicked the formal diplomacies of their own states, incorporating those strategies in their informal negotiations which resulted in signing economic and cultural agreements. In the fifth case study, the International War Crimes Tribunal, jointly organized by the Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation and the DRV, mimicked a real criminal court that held the United States and its allies guilty of war crimes. The five case studies are really five separate thematic vignettes that formed a part of an organic whole and were occurring at the same historical time.

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<sup>9</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, “Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse,” in *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 85-92.

<sup>10</sup> Fiona McConnell, Terri Moreau, and Jason Dittmer, “Mimicking State Diplomacy: The Legitimizing Strategies of Unofficial Diplomacies,” *Geoforum* 43, no. 4 (June 2012): 804-814.

By subsuming people's diplomacy into the broader diplomatic discourse of non-state groups, this study demonstrates how it subverted and exploited a flawed international system built by a triumphant West after the Second World War. Although people's diplomacy operated within the Western system, it did upset the equilibrium by generating a powerful antiwar consensus.

The mimic-diplomacy of these 'state-like' non-state actors could appropriate the tactics of the colonizing state, the United States, but could never match it, and never gain full recognition as equal from the state. But the revolutionaries did not seek state recognition: They thrived on non-recognition and on defining themselves as separate from it. Mimicry, thus, became a facsimile and menace.

In order to be effective, and to seem to be effective, people's diplomacy not only emulated the apparatuses of statecraft, but strove to imitate formal diplomatic practices as well as institutions: Germane to mimicry was the establishment of a series of mock entities, such as mass organizations acting as embassies and performing consular functions by inviting foreign antiwar activists to the DRV, a full-fledged propaganda machine, and a war crimes tribunal to put American politicians on trial. These structures exhibited and exercised power.

It is an anomaly of the field of diplomatic history and international relations in general, and of U.S. foreign relations in particular, that women were kept out of the literature when they had actually played a role of great consequence as informal diplomats for several centuries past. Although women were deployed as informal diplomats in seventeenth century Europe, they were excluded from formal diplomatic offices because of their gender. Women began participating in diplomacy during the Renaissance, in Italy, the home of the modern diplomatic craft, where young brides from aristocratic families were expected to perform diplomatic tasks. They were trained to deliver speeches to foreign powers, and to compose letters in the proper chancery style.<sup>11</sup>

As America began emerging as a global power in the first few decades of the twentieth century, American women performed a variety of tasks of informal diplomacy within the formal structure of the U.S. Foreign

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<sup>11</sup> Glenda Sluga and Carolyn James, "Introduction," in *Women, Diplomacy and International Politics since 1500*, ed. Glenda Sluga and Carolyn James (Abingdon, Oxford: Routledge, 2015).

Service.<sup>12</sup> They accompanied their diplomat husbands abroad on foreign postings, performing their informal role by taking care of the critical social and domestic aspects of diplomatic life abroad. Women were eventually permitted to join the American diplomatic corps in 1922.<sup>13</sup> Yet, according to 2015 data only 22 percent of senior officials at the State Department and 29 percent of the chiefs of mission at U.S. embassies were women.<sup>14</sup>

In an encouraging sign, a recent crop of authors has broadened the characterization of diplomacy beyond the activities of “men in striped pants” to include women who were ignored in the literature.<sup>15</sup> While most of these books and articles focus on women in diplomatic positions in the West, one book explores the informal diplomacy conducted by the Chinese-American activist, Anna Chennault, who represented the U.S. presidential candidate, Richard Nixon, in an honorary capacity in her meetings with South Vietnamese leaders.<sup>16</sup> North Vietnamese informal diplomacy, however, is beyond the scope of the Chennault book.

A gap in the literature also exists on the Vietnamese side. Vietnamese historians have dealt cursorily with the theme of people’s diplomacy, and have not properly explored the functioning of the North Vietnamese diplomatic front. This lapse has occurred because Vietnamese scholars have been preoccupied with writing about the official diplomacy of North Vietnam.

The North Vietnamese historical literature has also tended to ignore women, for the above reason, but the minister of foreign affairs of the Provisional Revolutionary Government of South Vietnam, Nguyen Thi

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<sup>12</sup> Molly M. Wood, “Wives, Clerks, and ‘Lady Diplomats’: The Gendered Politics of Diplomacy and Representation in the U.S. Foreign Service, 1900–1940,” *European Journal of American Studies* 10, no. 1 (2015).

<sup>13</sup> Isabelle Vagnoux, “Introduction: North American Women in Politics and International Relations,” *European Journal of American Studies* 10, no.1 (2015).

<sup>14</sup> Micah Zenko, “City of Men,” *Foreign Policy*, July 14, 2011; and, “Where are the Women in Foreign Policy?” Council on Foreign Relations, March 8, 2012.

<sup>15</sup> Catherine Forslund, *Anna Chennault: Informal Diplomacy and Asian Relations* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 2002), 163; Katherine L. Hughes, “Wives of Public Men” (PhD diss., Columbia University, 1995); Jewell Fenzi and Carl L. Nelson, *Married to the Foreign Service: An Oral History of the American Diplomatic Spouse* (New York: Twayne, 1994); Wood, “Commanding Beauty”; Molly M. Wood, “A Diplomat’s Wife in Mexico: Creating Professional, Political, and National Identities in the Early Twentieth Century,” *Frontiers: A Journal of Women’s Studies* 25, no.3 (2005): 106; and Cynthia Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches, and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000).

<sup>16</sup> Forslund, *Anna Chennault*.

Binh, is an exception that has received wide coverage in the literature. The glossing over is an anomaly because Vietnamese women think of themselves as the descendants of the Trung Sisters who represented the heroic and activist role of female leaders in ancient Vietnamese society. The Trung Sisters led a revolt against the Han governor, Su Ting, and established a period of independence in Vietnam (40-43 CE).<sup>17</sup> Indeed, strong female heroic figures dominated early Vietnamese history, but with time, the patriarchy suppressed the feminist voice, especially after the arrival of Confucianism. Yet, the feminist voice could not be suppressed.<sup>18</sup> Women were unfettered in the 1930s with the rise of the socialist women's movement that was symbolized by the daughter of a railway worker, Nguyen Thi Minh Khai, as the "female soul." She came under the influence of communist ideals early in life through her teacher Tran Phu, and the communist party celebrated her as a quintessential Vietnamese communist woman.

Besides the belated inclusion of women, the field has been enriched by influential works on the intersection of informal diplomacy with trade and business, demonstrating the agility of the U.S. State Department to partner with the business community to achieve foreign policy goals.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Le ngo cat va pham dinh toai, *Dai Nam Quoc su dien ca* [National History of Dai Nam Told in Poetry] (Hoang Xuan Han trans., Truong Thi Publishing 1949). Quoted in Wendy N. Duong, "Gender Equality and Women's Issues in Vietnam: The Vietnamese Woman—Warrior and Poet," *Pacific Rim Law & Policy Journal* 10, no.2 (March 2001): 191-326.

<sup>18</sup> Duong, "Gender Equality and Women's Issues in Vietnam."

<sup>19</sup> See George L. Ridgeway, *Merchants of Peace: The History of the International Chamber of Commerce* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown, 1959); Michael H. Cardozo, *Diplomats in International Cooperation: Stepchildren of the Foreign Service* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1962); and Ronald Rogowski, *Commerce and Coalitions: How Trade Affects Domestic Political Alignments* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990). Also see Oran R. Young, *The Intermediaries: Third Parties in International Crises* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1967); Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye, ed., *Transnational Relations and World Politics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971); Elmer Plischke, ed., *Modern Diplomacy: The Art and the Artisans* (Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 1979); James N. Rosenau, *National Leadership and Foreign Policy: A Case Study in the Mobilization of Public Support* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1963); David D. Newsom, ed., *Private Diplomacy with the Soviet Union* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1987); Henry E. Mattox, *The Twilight of Amateur Diplomacy: The American Foreign Service and its Senior Officers in the 1980s* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1989); and Raymond Cohen, *Negotiating Across Cultures:*

On the other side, Ho Chi Minh exhibited remarkable prescience by harnessing the considerable soft power of the DRV—its social and cultural values—in a non-coercive manner to gain the support of foreign audiences. His conduct of soft power diplomacy, in that sense, predates Nye’s coining of soft power in 1990.<sup>20</sup> The DRV employed its soft power, and its producers, to its advantage as it took a local Vietnamese liberation struggle beyond its own shores, essentially globalizing the resistance war. A motley mix of producers of its soft power—filmmakers, musicians, poets, dancers, writers, journalists, cartoonists, trade unionists, lawyers, doctors, engineers, architects, sportspersons, propagandists, women, and children—struck a chord directly with people abroad, going over the heads of the U.S. government and its international allies. Under heavy U.S. bombardment, these non-combatants at once gained the sympathy of foreign peoples. Ho Chi Minh’s people’s diplomacy, therefore, belongs to the same genus as informal diplomacy—the diplomacy conducted by ordinary people—as it involved unofficial contacts between the Vietnamese people and their counterparts abroad.

Ho Chi Minh and senior DRV leaders exemplified the paradigm of people’s diplomacy by personally meeting and corresponding with foreign peace activists. In a communist state such as the DRV, separating state actors from non-state actors is problematic because most organizations of workers, women, and artists functioned directly or indirectly under the ruling communist party or an affiliate of the party. Sometimes the North Vietnamese initiated people’s diplomacy by traveling overseas in order to participate in antiwar events. At other times the North Vietnamese acted as recipients and facilitators of antiwar support that developed abroad by the efforts of outsiders. In their role as facilitators of people’s diplomacy, the North Vietnamese invited Western antiwar activists to visit the DRV to see the human face of the Vietnamese people who were being demonized by U.S. officials. They also provided antiwar movements abroad with evidence of the effects of the American bombardment on Vietnamese civilians.

The accomplishments of informal diplomacy can be gauged in the fruitful outcomes of meetings between Westerners and ordinary North Vietnamese: Western peace activists traveling to North Vietnam returned home to write newspaper articles, books, and memoirs—a few made

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*Communication Obstacles in International Diplomacy* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1995).

<sup>20</sup> Joseph Nye, *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power* (New York: Basic Books, 1990); and Joseph Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004).

documentary films—expressing compassion for their plight and criticizing the United States for employing military force against civilians. Some Americans advised U.S. State Department officials to start peace talks with North Vietnam, and others delivered messages of peace from Ho Chi Minh to the U.S. president, Lyndon B. Johnson. These texts are stellar contributions to the canon of informal diplomacy for two reasons. First, they improve an understanding of the informal diplomacy that the North Vietnamese conducted in order to publicize abroad the U.S. bombardment of innocent civilians. In doing so, these accounts sympathize with the North Vietnamese. Secondly, these texts have a memoir-like tone because American travelers were more concerned with recording their personal North Vietnam experiences, thereby imparting a valuable perspective that is missing in academic studies of diplomacy. Informal diplomacy conducted by Westerners had identical aims as the foreign affairs of their DRV counterparts: both intended to pressure the U.S. government to halt the bombing of North Vietnam and enter unconditional peace talks with Hanoi.

The twin strategies of people's diplomacy and the diplomatic front remained under government and party control. People's diplomacy and the diplomatic front were creations of the leaders of the DRV, and were orchestrated by the government and the communist party. North Vietnamese leaders used people's diplomacy to supplement traditional state-to-state diplomacy with both communist and non-communist countries. Hanoi relied on people's diplomacy in non-communist countries because it was more effective than traditional state diplomacy in gaining the moral support and sympathy of people who were otherwise averse to communism. People's diplomacy enabled overseas peace activists to understand the nature of Vietnamese communism, which combined nationalism, anti-colonialism, and internationalism.<sup>21</sup> People's diplomacy was also effective in creating goodwill among people in the communist bloc by generating a vast propaganda campaign that highlighted support for the Vietnamese Revolution. The close relationship the North Vietnamese people established with Chinese and Russians enabled the DRV to receive economic aid from the people of those countries, in addition to the official aid provided by China and the Soviet Union.

This study explores the formation and evolution of the diplomatic front and the implementation of people's diplomacy in the 1960s and early-1970s, and evaluates their contribution to the defeat of the United States in

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<sup>21</sup> Christopher Goscha, *Thailand and the Southeast Asian Networks of the Vietnamese Revolution, 1885-1954* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 1999), 281.

Vietnam. The citizens of North and South Vietnam, mass organizations in communist countries, and the foreign antiwar movements—formed an important element in the Vietnamese effort to publicize its demand for independence.

Ho Chi Minh began mobilizing the overseas Vietnamese community against the repressive rule imposed by France since its conquest of Indochina in 1859. The Vietnamese resistance suffered a setback when Japan invaded French Indochina during the Second World War, and Ho Chi Minh had to struggle to drive both the French and the Japanese from Vietnam. After Japan’s defeat by the Western Allies, Ho Chi Minh announced the creation of the independent Democratic Republic of Vietnam in September 1945. The United States refused to recognize his government, and assisted France’s effort to resume control over Vietnam. Undeterred, the Vietnamese revolutionaries (the Vietminh) fought and expelled France from the north in 1954. Washington refused to sign, or honor, the Geneva Agreements which ended the First Indochina War, and temporarily partitioned the country into north and south until elections could be held in the two halves. Instead of arranging the election, the United States installed the dictator Ngo Dinh Diem in South Vietnam.

After having conducted people’s diplomacy with a measure of success in the early 1960s—principally through the DRV’s efforts to organize face-to-face meetings between Western antiwar activists and the Vietnamese revolutionaries—the Hanoi leadership formally adopted the diplomatic front strategy in 1967 because they realized that they could not defeat the United States militarily, and that diplomacy offered a chance of ending the war. The North Vietnamese conducted people’s diplomacy in the early 1970s because the United States had continued bombing the DRV even after the two sides began peace talks in Paris in 1968.

People’s diplomacy deserves recognition as a powerful force that played a significant part in forcing the United States to withdraw its forces and end the war in Vietnam. The failure of most accounts of the Vietnam War to include a discussion of the diplomatic front or people’s diplomacy reflects an ethnocentric tendency among Western scholars to rely almost exclusively on American sources. There can be little excuse for continuing to ignore these concepts given that both have appeared regularly in the documents of the Lao Dong Party, historical accounts written by Vietnamese historians and diplomats, and North Vietnamese journals *Nghien Cuu Lich Su* (Historical Research) and *Nghien Cuu Quoc Te*

(International Studies), among others.<sup>22</sup> The former Vietnamese diplomat, Luu Doan Huynh has, however, acknowledged the influential role of the American antiwar movement in supporting the Vietnamese. In a brief reflection on people's diplomacy, Huynh applauds American Quakers for sending medical supplies to Vietnam, and argues that American priests and businessmen participated in a "spontaneous movement" that expressed "feelings coming from the heart."<sup>23</sup> Communist Party histories authored by Vietnamese officials and scholars provide some insight into the inner workings of the DRV, but they have remained hampered by the obvious need to adhere to the government line.<sup>24</sup>

A small but growing group of historians has been urging students of the Vietnam War to correct this imbalance by acquiring Vietnamese language skills. Before the Vietnamese archives were opened to outsiders in 1989, an earlier generation of writers such as Carlyle Thayer, Ralph Smith, William Duiker, and William Turley began working with Vietnamese language sources such as official party histories, party journals and documents, Ho Chi Minh's memoirs, *Nhan Dan* or *The People* (published by the Communist Party), *Quan Doi Nhan Dan* or *People's Army* (published by the Military Central Commission and the Ministry of National Defense), and Voice of Vietnam broadcasts.<sup>25</sup> Historians that pioneered the use of Vietnamese language sources also include David Marr, Hue-Tam Ho Tai, Peter Zinoman, Shawn McHale, Jeffrey Race, and David Elliott.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> See Nien, *Ho Chi Minh Thought on Diplomacy*; Luu Van Loi, *Fifty Years of Vietnamese Diplomacy 1945-1995* (Hanoi: The Gioi, 2006); Luong Viet Sang, *Nhien Cuu Lich Su (NCLS)* 6, 325, XI-XII (2002): 49-57; Luong Viet Sang, *NCLS* 4, 329, VII-VIII (2003): 49-57; and Khac Huynh, *NCLS* 4, 347, (2005): 11-25.

<sup>23</sup> Luu Doan Huynh, "The American War in Vietnamese Memory," in *The Vietnam War: Vietnamese and American Perspectives*, ed. Jayne S. Werner and Luu Doan Huynh (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharp, 1993), 245.

<sup>24</sup> See Nien, *Ho Chi Minh Thought on Diplomacy*; and Loi, *Fifty Years of Vietnamese Diplomacy, 1945-1995*.

<sup>25</sup> See Carlyle A. Thayer, *War by Other Means: National Liberation and Revolution in Viet-Nam, 1954-1960* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1990); Ralph Smith, *An International History of the Vietnam War* (London: Macmillan, 1983); William J. Duiker, *The Communist Road to Power in Vietnam* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1981); Duiker, *Ho Chi Minh* (New York: Hyperion, 2000); and William S. Turley, *The Second Indochina War: A Short Political and Military History* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1986).

<sup>26</sup> David Anderson, Christian Appy, Mark Philip Bradley, Robert K. Brigham, Ted Engelmann, Patrick Hagopian, Luu Doan Huynh, and Marilyn B. Young,



Vietnamese archives became accessible to scholars in the late 1980s following the launching of the *doi moi* (renovation) reforms that ushered in a new openness to the outside world.<sup>27</sup> Historians Mark Bradley, Robert Brigham, Pierre Asselin, Matthew Masur, and Edward Miller have published articles explaining how the archive system in Vietnam operates, how it can be accessed, and the kind of materials it contains.<sup>28</sup>

Most of the first studies based on these materials focused on formal, state-to-state diplomacy between the United States and Vietnam, and indirect diplomacy through official intermediaries. These works offer a glimpse into how the Vietnamese communists viewed the war, and how the war affected Vietnamese society. In 1999, the historian, Robert Brigham, published a path-breaking study that demonstrated how the southern revolutionaries conducted international diplomacy to help the NLF gain international respectability.<sup>29</sup> In another important study that employed Vietnamese primary sources, Mark Bradley showed that “an imagined America” occupied a central place in Vietnamese political discourse because the Vietnamese leadership saw in America the noble qualities that could be used to rebuild Vietnamese society.<sup>30</sup> On the theme of DRV diplomacy, Pierre Asselin has argued that North Vietnamese diplomats proved to be such astute negotiators that the outcome of the war was decided at the negotiating table, not on the battlefield.<sup>31</sup> Likewise, Ang Cheng Guan has challenged the assumption that Hanoi was controlled

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“Interchange: Legacies of the Vietnam War,” *Journal of American History* 93 (September 2006): 452-90.

<sup>27</sup> Robert Brigham, “The Archives of Vietnam and the Vietnam Wars,” Working Paper No. 7, September 1993, Cold War International History Project.

<sup>28</sup> See Mark Bradley and Robert Brigham, “Vietnamese Archives and Scholarship in the Cold War Period: Two Reports,” Cold War International History Project. Also see, Pierre Asselin, “New Evidence from Vietnam,” *Passport*, December 2004; Pierre Asselin, “Update on Vietnam’s ‘New Evidence,’” *Passport*, April 2006; and Matthew Masur and Edward Miller, “Saigon Revisited: Researching South Vietnam’s Republican Era (1954-1975) at Archives and Libraries in Ho Chi Minh City,” Cold War International History Project.

<sup>29</sup> Robert K. Brigham, *Guerrilla Diplomacy: The NLF’s Foreign Relations and the Viet Nam War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), x.

<sup>30</sup> Mark Philip Bradley, *Imagining Vietnam and America: The Making of Postcolonial Vietnam, 1919-1950* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press), ix.

<sup>31</sup> Pierre Asselin, *A Bitter Peace: Washington, Hanoi, and the Making of the Paris Peace Agreement* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), xiii.

by Moscow and Beijing.<sup>32</sup> Most recently, Lien-Hang T. Nguyen has shown that a powerful “south-first” faction within the Lao Dong, Vietnam’s communist party, imposed its view on the party that the liberation of the south must be the first national priority.<sup>33</sup> Historians Christopher Goscha, Patricia Pelley, Kim N. B. Ninh, and Ed Miller have also deepened our understanding of the Vietnamese Revolution in both the north and the south. In addition, Matthew Masur and Jessica Chapman have both employed South Vietnamese documents.<sup>34</sup>

A new generation of writers has produced excellent studies of the various stages of North Vietnam’s formal diplomacy with the United States, particularly landmark events such as the Geneva Agreements of 1954 and the Paris peace agreements of 1973. Their work has enhanced understanding of the diplomatic contacts between the DRV and the outside world. While these books have focused on elites, my investigation explores the kind of diplomacy that was conducted by non-government organizations and individuals who tried to forge a worldwide propaganda campaign aimed at bringing the United States to the negotiating table. The campaign hoped that its global publicity of the American bombardment of innocent Vietnamese civilians would embarrass Washington in the world community, and may eventually force it to withdraw its forces from Vietnam.

This study also carefully documents the American response to people’s diplomacy. The perspectives of non-state actors such as antiwar activists in several countries are also presented. To locate the significance of the Vietnamese resistance in a global context, it should be acknowledged that Vietnam became a symbolic centre of struggles around the world that had—until the outbreak of the Vietnam War—been only loosely connected with one another.<sup>35</sup> Peasants, industrial workers, and a new

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<sup>32</sup> Ang Cheng Guan, *The Vietnam War from the Other Side: The Vietnamese Communists’ Perspective* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2002), 1.

<sup>33</sup> Lien-Hang T. Nguyen, “*Between the Storms*”: *North Vietnam’s Strategy During the Second Indochina War, 1955-1973*” (PhD. diss., Yale University, 2008); and Lien-Hang T. Nguyen, *Hanoi’s War: An International History of the War for Peace in Vietnam* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2012).

<sup>34</sup> Matthew B. Masur, *Hearts and Minds: Cultural Nation-building in South Vietnam, 1954-1963*, (PhD. diss., Ohio State University, 2004); and Jessica M. Chapman, “Staging Democracy: South Vietnam’s 1955 Referendum to Depose Bao Dai,” *Diplomatic History* 30, no. 4 (2006): 671-703.

<sup>35</sup> Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 260-261.

intellectual proletariat in several countries formed a common site of resistance against colonial exploitation.<sup>36</sup>

This book shows that North Vietnam’s diplomatic front participated in the creation of an “international civil society” that came together to oppose the American intervention. The international relations scholar, Richard Falk, has argued that civil society not only exercised considerable agency during the American Revolution when Americans established overseas links with Europeans to fight the British Empire, but also organized international popular demonstrations against the American intervention in Vietnam.<sup>37</sup> In the 1960s, influential peace movements in Europe were particularly active in rousing popular opinion against the American involvement in Vietnam. The diplomatic front attempted to unite the peoples of the world into a single world society that shared a common opposition to the American war in Vietnam.<sup>38</sup>

U.S. officials tried to thwart or subvert people’s diplomacy, which in their view jeopardized Washington’s ability to influence the DRV.<sup>39</sup> People’s diplomacy also threatened to undermine Washington’s effort to demonize the enemy. As the North Vietnamese made important linkages with peace activists abroad, they succeeded in publicizing the American use of chemical weapons in Vietnam, and questioning the legitimacy of the American effort to create a non-communist state in the south.

This book relies on documents from archives and libraries in Vietnam, the United States, and Canada. Especially important Vietnamese materials came from National Archives Centre No. 3 in Hanoi (*Trung Tam Luu Tru Quoc Gia 3*), and the National Library in Hanoi (*Thu Vien Quoc Gia*). The presidential papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson in Austin, Texas, proved revealing about the U.S. response to people’s diplomacy. Also of importance were documents from the U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, the Bertrand Russell Archive at McMaster University, the

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<sup>36</sup> See, Jan Arte Scholte, *International Relations and Social Change* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1993); Scholte, “Globalization and Collective Identities,” *Identities in International Relations*, eds. Krause and N. Renwick (London: Macmillan, 1996); and Arjun Appadurai, ed., *Globalization* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001).

<sup>37</sup> Richard Falk, “The Changing Role of Global Civil Society,” in *Global Civil Society: Contested Futures*, ed. Gideon Baker and David Chandler (London: Routledge, 2005), 69-71. Also see, Mary Kaldor, “The Idea of Global Civil Society,” *Global Civil Society: Contested Futures*, 103-113.

<sup>38</sup> Jan Aart Scholte, “The Globalization of World Politics,” *The Globalization of World Politics*, eds. John Baylis and Steve Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 15.

<sup>39</sup> Berman and Johnson, “The Growing Role of Unofficial Diplomacy,” 32-33.

National Security Archive at George Washington University, and the Cold War International History Project.

Chapter One describes how the diplomatic front evolved gradually in response to foreign intervention in Vietnam. It discusses Ho Chi Minh's early efforts to enlist Vietnamese living overseas to influence world opinion against French colonial rule in Vietnam. The chapter also discusses North Vietnamese correctional campaigns to reeducate the party cadre and workers who would participate in the diplomatic effort.

Chapter Two examines the DRV's efforts to mobilize opinion in the United States and among America's allies such as Canada, Britain, West Germany, Australia, and New Zealand. It examines the Johnson administration's response to people's diplomacy as the DRV's diplomatic front and foreign antiwar activists collaborated to criticize the American intervention.

Chapter Three describes how the governments—and people—of France, Sweden, and Cuba supported the DRV's efforts to force the United States to withdraw from Vietnam. These countries were “not-aligned” with the United States because they officially opposed the American invasion. The chapter also explores the connections American women made with women in the DRV and the NLF.

Chapter Four explores the communist side of people's diplomacy by describing how North Vietnamese mass organizations tried to build solidarity with Chinese and Russians. People's diplomacy created a bond of friendship between DRV workers, women, writers, theater and film personalities, poets, ballet dancers, and cartoonists and their counterparts in China and the Soviet Union. The Vietnamese regularly visited China and the Soviet Union, and vice-versa. These encounters symbolized communist bloc support for North Vietnam. Chinese actors, ballet dancers, and opera singers produced works inspired by the struggles of the Vietnamese revolutionaries. Chinese poets produced moving images of Vietnamese heroism, and Soviet cartoonists exposed the imperialist self-interest that underlay the apparent U.S. mission to civilize and modernize South Vietnam.

Chapter Five explains how Ho Chi Minh, and several Vietnamese mass organizations, used people's diplomacy to develop important connections with the British philosopher, Bertrand Russell, a leading antiwar activist who attempted to persuade the Lyndon Johnson administration to withdraw from Vietnam. The focus is on the International War Crimes Tribunal, organized by Russell and presided over by the French philosopher, Jean-Paul Sartre, to publicize U.S. war crimes in Vietnam.

The Johnson administration’s attempts to undermine the tribunal are also evaluated.

This study makes a substantial contribution to the history of the Vietnam War by examining people’s diplomacy, a topic that has been neglected in Western accounts of the war. Through people’s diplomacy the embattled people of North Vietnam, in conjunction with the peace movement abroad, brought popular pressure on the White House to end the American intervention. These worldwide linkages, sustained by informal diplomacy, made it difficult for the United States to prolong the war.

North Vietnamese people’s diplomacy began capitalizing on a fledgling anti-Vietnam War movement that was developing in many countries. The antiwar movement, however, is usually analyzed as a violent period in U.S. history, but it was a truly global phenomenon. People’s diplomacy drew maximum advantage in Europe where it forged close links with the anti-Vietnam War movement and succeeded in embarrassing the U.S. government. It should be remembered that the movement actually began in Europe before it started in the United States. One year before the movement really took off in the United States, Bertrand Russell and Ho Chi Minh jointly created the International War Crimes Tribunal in Europe and Japan in 1967 to put U.S. leaders on trial for “war crimes” in Vietnam.<sup>40</sup>

The DRV calculatedly placed Europe at the epicenter of its people’s diplomacy for two reasons. First, the North Vietnamese people’s diplomats faced powerful constraints in the United States as they were barred from traveling to the country to attend antiwar events. They were, however, regular visitors to antiwar events across Europe as well as Latin America, Asia, and Africa. Their presence enabled direct DRV participation in their own diplomacy. Secondly, many ordinary European citizens vigorously opposed the U.S. war in Vietnam, and they willingly provided economic aid.

Most of the historical literature has presented the conflict in Vietnam as an American tragedy, the consequence of imperial hubris and poor decision-making that led to a quagmire. They have not given sufficient credit to the Vietnamese revolutionaries for their success in building bridges to an international peace movement that hemmed in Washington and exposed the ugly side of the American intervention. This book

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<sup>40</sup> Melvin Small, *Antiwarriors: The Vietnam War and the Battle for America’s Hearts and Minds* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 2002), 67; and Leo Kuper, *The Prevention of Genocide* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985), 193.

explains the contribution of North Vietnam's people's diplomacy and its soft power, to the defeat of the United States, not in Vietnamese jungles and battlefields, but across the world in downtown streets, university campuses, lecture halls, cinemas, art galleries, and coffee houses.

I offer a portrayal of people's diplomacy in practice, as a policy that not just mimicked state diplomacy, but it was humane, and always aimed to subvert and derail the American project to create a nation in South Vietnam through violence and repression.