

AMERICA'S INDOCHINA HOLOCAUST

***The History and Global Matrix
of The Vietnam War***

Stefan Schindler

For David Michael Schindler

and

Howard Zinn, Lewis Randa, Daniel Ellsberg,

Robert Kellman, Jerome Wiener,

Don Brady, Jay Brady,

Joe Volpe and Victor Wallis

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Published by The Educational Publisher

www.EduPublisher.com

ISBN: 978-1-934849-93-4

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Stefan Schindler's other book is *The Tao of Socrates: Eastern Wisdom and the Birth of Western Philosophy*. Now living in Salem, Massachusetts, and teaching philosophy at Salem State University, he is working on his next two books: *Discoursing With The Gods: The Art and Practice of Tarot Divination*, and *Global Mind Change: Whole Brain Harmony and the Re-Enchantment of the World*.

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I was thinking of Pharaoh's great host being sent after the Israelites, when they fled Egypt to cross the Red Sea. Pharaoh said, "Bring them back. Get them." So he sends this great, beautifully equipped, magnificent host of men after them. And I have this image of them stuck in the middle of the Red sea – the Israelites have already made it to the other side – and the waves are about to crash over their heads, the seas are about to close over them. And there they are, their beautiful chariots are overturned and their horses are rearing up in terror and the beautifully clad infantrymen are raising their shields against the ocean.

They have been sent on a fool's errand. Pharaoh didn't pay attention to the signs. He didn't do his homework. And though they were a powerful force, they were up against a much more powerful thing that they didn't comprehend, because they didn't take the time to comprehend it. And that seemed to me a kind of emblem of our failure in Vietnam.

I hardly even say failure because I don't think we had much chance of succeeding over there, to tell you the truth. I mean, what we would have had to do to 'succeed,' to win that war, would have been basically to completely destroy the country. And what kind of success is that? We damn near did it anyway and still lost.

Tobias Wolff

Discussing the title of his Vietnam memoir, *In Pharaoh's Army*

In our supposed ideological rectitude, we sacrificed our compassion to the great god of indifference. We protected the strong against the weak, and we perfected the art of the public lie. We made enemies of decent reformers and friends of the most disgusting potentates. And we scarcely paused to ask ourselves how much longer we could defend our society by these means and remain a society worth defending.

John Le Carré

The Secret Pilgrim

The battles of the Sixties may someday come to seem merely an early skirmish in a conflict whose dimensions we have yet to grasp.

Mike Marqusee

Chimes of Freedom

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PREFACE

The Vietnam War did not occur in a vacuum. It arose out of forces that are tangible yet well hidden. Those forces still exist, and perhaps this book's major virtue is bringing them to light. Whether it be the parallel between Nixon's justification for the invasion of Cambodia and George W. Bush's "WMD" propaganda campaign leading to war against Iraq, or the difficulty American soldiers still face in trying to win "the hearts and minds" of people they are shooting, the reader cannot fail to make the connection with today's realities.

Amazingly, those who ruled America in 2003 – all of whom were present and of an age to observe the disaster of America's war on Southeast Asia – blustered into a similar quagmire in the Middle East. That George W. Bush and Dick Cheney were paying at least some attention to Vietnam is clearly evidenced by their contortions and machinations to avoid serving there. Unfortunately, the lesson they appear to have taken from that war was the importance of convincing the public, by any means necessary, that a war which America's president wants them to fight is somehow crucial to our survival. The Bush-Cheney Administration's most vital insight into America's war against Southeast Asia was: "Thou shalt not get busted for lying". They learned from Vietnam to avoid another truth-telling figure like Daniel Ellsberg.

Now, some 40 years later, following in Ellsberg's footsteps, Dr. Schindler tells the story behind the holocaust America perpetrated against the peoples of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia.

The history and politics of The Vietnam War teach a lesson: Our leaders must be closely watched and vigilantly fact-checked by us – the citizens who pay the tab and give them our children, husbands, wives and, now, partners, to kill and die in wars against peoples of foreign lands who, in fact, pose no threat to the largest military empire in world history.

There is more to democracy than just voting. It is equally important to be informed. As Jefferson said, "We cannot long remain a society both ignorant and free."

America's leaders in the first decade of this new century failed us in much the same way that Johnson, McNamara, Kissinger and Nixon failed us in the 1960s and '70s. They again tragically underestimate an ill-chosen enemy. They again confuse the winning of battles with the winning of wars. They again sacrifice the lives of others for their own political and corporate gain, spending money our nation does not possess to fight wars our nation neither wants nor needs. If there is a God, He will not easily forgive their hubris, lies, and crimes against humanity.

Robert Kellman, Esq. - San Ramon, California; 2012



I. WILSON, ROOSEVELT AND HO CHI MINH

“How do wars start?
Politicians lie to journalists,
then believe what they read.”

Karl Kraus

Death and Deception

In the early morning of September 26, 1945, in southern Vietnam, while driving a jeep from Tan Son Nhut airport to his quarters in Saigon, Lt. Colonel Peter Dewey was murdered. Dewey was an officer in the OSS, the Office of Strategic Services. The OSS was the precursor to the CIA. Dewey and his companion approached Saigon at dawn. Turning a corner on the outskirts of the city, Dewey saw logs across the road blocking his path. Swerving, he swore in French at the shadows. Machine gun fire erupted from the bushes. The jeep crashed, tipped over, Dewey dead. Miraculously, Dewey's companion lived to tell the story. No felons were caught, no trials held.

Was Col. Dewey the first American casualty of The Vietnam War? The phrase “The Vietnam War” is, of course, misleading. Vietnam fought the Chinese for a thousand years, the French for a hundred, the Japanese for five, and in 1945 they were about to fight the French again, and after that the Americans.

When Americans say “The Vietnam War,” they naturally refer to their own war against Vietnam. But the phrase is still misleading. America's “Indochina Holocaust” would be more accurate, during which Laos was for eight years the most bombed country in the world and Cambodia was reduced to genocidal killing fields.

In the fall of 1945, World War Two having just ended, Col. Dewey was meeting with the Vietminh, the Vietnamese guerrilla army led by Ho Chi Minh. The Vietminh had fought alongside American OSS agents to defeat the Japanese in Vietnam. Dewey was sympathetic to Vietnamese independence. He understood why the Vietnamese felt betrayed. The British army, fresh from Burma and given a friendly welcome into Vietnam after the war, gave Saigon back to the French while rearming Japanese troops to control the population. There would be no democracy in Vietnam. The French especially, but also the British, were disturbed by Dewey's meetings with the Vietminh.

Dewey understood what Major Archimedes Patti – also of the OSS, and who had met Ho Chi Minh – said in an interview years later: the Vietnamese were America's natural allies in Southeast Asia.

Vietnam and China were long-standing historical enemies. If America's strategic goal was to prevent Chinese communist expansion into Indochina, no

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better friend could be had than the fiercely independent Vietnamese. Patti elaborates:

Ho Chi Minh was on a silver platter in 1945. We had him. He was leaning not toward the Soviet Union – which at the time, he told me, the USSR could not assist him and they were in no position to help anyone. So really, we had Ho Chi Minh, we had the Vietminh, we had the whole Indochina question in our hand. (“Vietnam: A Television History,” WGBH, Boston, Vol. 1.)

Indochina was created in the 1850s when France colonized Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. The North Vietnamese fought the fiercest and longest resistance, and it wasn't until the 1880s that Michelin rubber plantations were able to function with feudal efficiency. Vietnamese men, women and children were worked to death – and, some said, used as fertilizer for the rubber trees. In France, citizens were taxed enormous sums to maintain a colonial army in Indochina while the Michelin Corporation banked millions in profits.

Despite the heavy boot of oppression, the spirit of the Vietnamese resistance was not broken, and they fought the French for a century. Accordingly, when Vietnam declared its independence at the end of World War Two, it wasn't just the end of Japanese occupation they were celebrating; they were celebrating their freedom from a hundred years of French imperialism.

Michael Parenti observes: “Third world nations are not underdeveloped. They're overexploited.”

The Vietnamese people have a civilization stretching back three thousand years. Yet General William Westmoreland – commander of American forces in Vietnam from 1964 to 1968, and Army Chief of Staff from 1968 to 1972 – said: “Vietnam reminded me of a child, a developing child. Nature has to take its course. A child has to crawl before it can walk; it has to walk before it can run.” (“Hearts and Minds,” documentary film, Peter Davis.)

Westmoreland might believe his words, but behind the rhetoric lies a profound lack of understanding; an imperial arrogance that would, after three decades of bluster, bombing and burning, prove self-defeating.

In the mid-1950s, President Eisenhower, in a moment of television candor with the American people, explained that “if Indochina goes, several things happen right away. The last little bit of crop peninsula hanging on down there could scarcely defend itself. The tin and the tungsten we so greatly value would cease coming.” (“Hearts and Minds”)

Hard to believe that America went to war for tungsten, but there it is.

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Eisenhower forgot to mention that the only forces the people of Indochina were defending themselves against were Western invaders.

What did Eisenhower mean when he said, "If Indochina goes...."? Simply this: If the "loss of China" in 1949 is followed by the loss of Indochina – Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia – in the 1950s, America's "national security" will be severely threatened. Eisenhower's Vice President, Richard Nixon, was more emphatic, saying the "loss" of Vietnam would lead to World War Three; and to prevent that, the United States would be justified in using atomic weapons against the Vietnamese.

The implication here is that China and Indochina were, somehow, America's to lose. Further, if America allowed Vietnam a chance at democracy, Vietnam would – supposedly – become a puppet of the so-called "Moscow-Peking communist axis," and thus a threat to the "free world." Eisenhower knew that this was false. Ho Chi Minh, the George Washington of Vietnam's revolution against French and Japanese imperialism, made appeals to Presidents Wilson, Roosevelt and Truman for American friendship. Accordingly, Eisenhower knew that if the United States worked *with* the Vietnamese, instead of against them, "the tin and tungsten we so greatly value" would in fact be available to American markets.

America's Indochina Holocaust has deep roots in sophistry.

"Loss of China" was part of the anticommunist language of American political discourse in the 1950s. "Loss of China" was perceived politically as, in Reinhold Niebuhr's cautionary words, "a necessary illusion" and "emotionally potent oversimplification." Think "appeasement," "Munich" and "dominoes." Eisenhower was appealing to the Munich metaphor: If we don't stop communism in Indochina, other Pacific nations – Thailand, Burma, Taiwan, South Korea, the Philippines, Japan, Indonesia – will fall like dominoes to communist influence, repeating the Munich mistake of 1938 when British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain declared "peace in our time," after which the countries of Europe toppled under the Nazi blitzkrieg.

Eisenhower failed to mention other riches in Indochina besides tin and tungsten; namely, rubber, timber, and potentially oil. Eisenhower's Secretary of State was John Foster Dulles, whose brother Allen was Director of the Central Intelligence Agency. The Dulles brothers were lawyers formerly employed by oil companies. It was a corporate coup. Big oil infiltrates government to influence foreign policy, overt and covert.

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Stalking the Cat Back

When France surrendered to the conquering Germans in June 1940, Ho Chi Minh launched a new phase of revolutionary struggle in Vietnam.

Vietnam had welcomed their Japanese invaders as brother Asians come to liberate the country from European colonizers. It was not to be. The Japanese imposed martial law and let the French conduct civil affairs. For twelve months, hustling between caves and camps along China's southern border, Ho Chi Minh organized a Vietnamese national independence movement to fight the Japanese. In May 1941, Ho announced the creation of the Vietminh, a guerrilla army with a political objective. Ho knew that the Second World War would eventually end, and he and his comrades were planting the seeds of Vietnamese self-governance. During the course of the war the Vietminh worked with America's OSS, providing tactical information about Japanese troops, coordinating guerrilla operations, and helping to locate and rescue downed American pilots.

Meanwhile, the Japanese had taken economic control of the country. The Japanese wanted Indochina as a breadbasket for the Japanese army spread across the Pacific. Their policies in Vietnam created famine, especially in the more mountainous north. The occupying army lived well, and so did the French. Throughout the Second World War, one of the safest places on the planet for a French soldier was Vietnam. French officers dined in luxury; were carried to their restaurants in carts pulled by Asian peasants; and strolled the parks of Saigon as proud representatives of the Vichy government in France, now allied through Nazi Germany with the Japanese.

In the north, a million Vietnamese died of starvation. Also in the north, the Vietminh expanded from roving bands into a successful army supported by the people. By 1944, the Vietminh had liberated several northern provinces from Japanese control. They redistributed land, eliminated taxation, organized self-governing councils, and began to reverse the famine.

On August 6, 1945, an American nuclear explosion incinerated the Japanese city of Hiroshima. Three days later, another atomic bomb destroyed Nagasaki. Stalin declared war on Japan, then launched an invasion of Manchuria. In less than a week the fighting was over. There was a sudden peace in Asia. General Douglas MacArthur, aboard the USS Missouri in Tokyo Bay, accepted Japan's unconditional surrender on September 2nd, 1945.

In Vietnam, Ho Chi Minh and his Vietminh comrades wrote a declaration of independence, drafted a constitution, scheduled elections, and announced to the world that the Vietnamese people would greet the future as a free nation.

Vietnam exemplified a widespread blooming of democratic hope throughout Asia. Most of those hopes were destroyed before they blossomed. For example, Japan's postwar experience illustrates, less dramatically, the transformation of dream into nightmare.

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What happened in Japan in 1947 mirrored American policy in other parts of postwar Asia. It was a milder version of the coming torment in Vietnam, Korea, the Philippines and Indonesia. Japan's "reversal" – from a fusion of social hope and democratic praxis to a fractured, neo-fascist, market-driven Matrix – is a window into the minds of the Americans who planted the seeds of The Vietnam War.

Immediately after World War Two, General Douglas MacArthur ruled Japan like a philosopher-king, creating space for an exuberant frenzy of democratic pluralism. It didn't last long. Executing a Washington-imposed about-face, MacArthur made sure democracy in Japan was "reversed" in 1947, coinciding with President Truman's creating a new branch of American government to serve the White House.

While the OSS was folded into the Central Intelligence Agency, the National Security Council offered advice on policy. Together, the NSC and CIA enormously enhanced the president's power. Truman issued National Security Directives authorizing covert operations around the world to "contain" and "roll back" "the communist threat." America's 1948 presidential election was coming up, and Truman was preparing to shield himself against the "soft on communism" blows that would come from his Republican rivals. In 1947, anticommunism was the keyhole through which Washington looked at the world, and Truman took care to establish the fixity of his gaze.

At the end of World War Two, Washington and Wall Street agreed that America's new enemy was communism – also called socialism, Marxism, Leninism, or social democracy. This is the version according to standard history. But communism wasn't new, and neither was America's anticommunist reaction. In August 1918, seven thousand American troops invaded Russia, five hundred of which died as part of a Western effort to reverse the Russian Revolution of 1917.

In 1936 and '37, the leaders of Western democracies decided that socialism was a greater threat than fascism. The Spanish Civil War was the only place in Europe where a democratic government and a free people were actively fighting the fascists. France, England and America took a firm position. They claimed neutrality and blocked international assistance while Hitler bombed Guernica. Democracy in Spain was crushed by a cabal of Spanish bankers, bishops and generals in league with their Nazi friend. Hitler, with fascist allies in place in Italy and Spain, planned his conquest of Europe and Russia.

In 1938 Neville Chamberlain reached an agreement with Hitler in Munich. Chamberlain would forever afterwards have his name associated with the cowardice of "appeasement," since the Munich agreement, instead of bringing peace, was a prelude to world war. A decade later, in 1949, Chamberlain's dark cell of history would be joined by Harry Truman, who was branded with "loss of China." To avoid yet another "free world" "loss" in Asia, Truman helped the

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French in their eight-year effort to reconquer Vietnam. In time, the United States would pay eighty percent of the cost of France's failed war. Then, to justify American intervention in Southeast Asia – to succeed where the French had not – Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson and Nixon each invoked “Munich” and the “loss of China” to warn Americans of the danger of appeasing communists.

Forgotten was the actual 1938 Munich agreement, which was not about communist appeasement. It was Britain's alliance with fascism. The purpose was to induce Hitler's army to invade eastwards and destroy Russian socialism. Christopher Hitchens takes us behind the scenes:

Hitler must have giggled with incredulity in the fall of 1938 when the prime minister of Great Britain landed at the Munich airport and asked him if there was anything else, after Austria and the Rhineland, that he especially wanted.... Hitler replied that Czechoslovakia would be nice....

British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain was no duped “appeaser,” with a silly mustache of his own. He had made a cold calculation that Hitler should be re-armed, and be allowed – if not, indeed, encouraged – to expand his Reich. This was ... partly to encourage his “tough-minded” solution to the Bolshevik problem in the East. ...

Respectable circles in Germany, and in Britain and France (and, as we have recently learned from the files of Ford and General Motors, in these United States), decided that [Hitler] was, on balance, a case of “the lesser evil.” (“Imagining Hitler,” “Vanity Fair,” February 1999.)

Fascism was perceived as a lesser threat than socialism. Western leaders rejected Stalin's multiple offers of a Soviet-Western alliance to contain the Nazi threat before the outbreak of war. “Free world” bankers, politicians and industrialists helped build Hitler's war machine. They applauded his crushing of social democratic aspirations – a fair deal for workers and their families – in Germany, just as they had aided the triumph of fascism in Italy and Spain. They

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hoped Hitler would do them the favor of marching east. It was a gamble, and the West lost when Hitler's army marched west to the British Channel in 1940.

Stalin, to protect the Russian people and to buy time to prepare for war, joined Hitler in the so-called "Hitler-Stalin pact," a non-aggression agreement for which Stalin was promptly denounced by the Euro-American power elite.

Meanwhile, Ford Motor Company and General Motors were happy to contribute to Hitler's war machine. This was finally brought to public attention by The New York Times in 1998. German citizens under bombing would retreat to factories owned by Ford and GM because the allied air force had instructions not to bomb there. After Normandy, American soldiers in Europe were appalled to discover Nazi officers riding around in Ford jeeps. At the end of the war, the American government paid Ford and General Motors millions of dollars in reparations for accidental wartime damage to their factories in Nazi Germany.

Author and historian Michael Parenti invites us to wonder why the executives of Ford and GM weren't tried for treason.

American covert intervention after the war, a global operation to "contain" communism, reversed the Japanese democratic experiment in 1947, and shows the road to America's Indochina Holocaust. Patrick Smith explains:

The Japanese refer to the events that followed [1947] as "The Reverse Course." ... [In 1948] a National Security council directive written by George Kennan ... brought the Cold War to Japan. The following year Mao took Beijing, and the year after that the Korean War began. ... [In Japan] purges of right-wing nationalists stopped and purges of those with [social democratic platforms] began. ... Before 1948 was out the prewar industrialists were back in their offices and the old political elite was again running Japan. ... A little more than a decade after the war, Japan had an accused war criminal as prime minister. ... Today the early period [1946-1947] is recalled as a kind of Tokyo spring – a sentimental memory enhanced by the brevity of the season. Democracy came and went so quickly that the Japanese were soon debating whether they had ever had it. (Patrick Smith, *Japan: A Reinterpretation*; Pantheon Books; New York; 1997; p. 13-14)