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East Asia

# East Asia: War and revolution

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**Once France had been defeated after the Vietnamese victory at Dien Bien Phu (1954), the great powers imposed the Geneva Accords, which were highly unfavourable to the Vietminh, temporarily dividing the country into two military regrouping zones.**

At the end of the Second World War, the Vietminh took advantage of a window of opportunity to declare independence. The Japanese occupiers had destroyed the French administration, before being themselves defeated in the Pacific theatre of operations. They had the political initiative, but in a fragile situation. Their military capabilities were weak and their authority contested, especially by religious sects and anti-communist nationalist movements.

## Social revolution and land reform

With the agreement of Chiang Kai-shek's China, the French expeditionary corps bombed the port of Haiphong in northern Vietnam in 1946. The first Vietnam War had begun. Hồ Chí Minh's offers of negotiations were rejected. Given the military balance of power, the war took the form of a protracted revolutionary war, mobilizing the peasantry. Patriotism was not enough. A call for agrarian reform was essential. From now on, national liberation and social revolution were intertwined. This would be the foundation on which to build a long-term resistance.

We also have to take into account the specificities of Vietnam, in relation to China (Beijing sent aid and advisors), which was able to take advantage of the vastness of the country and its population. At every stage, it was necessary to take into account the reactions of enemy forces and adapt strategy accordingly. There is a Vietnamese way of thinking about war.

## The perspective of social and democratic emancipation

Deciding to resume the armed struggle in the second half of the 1950s could not have been an easy decision. The alternative was to confront the United States, or at least accept the division of the country *ad vitam æternam*, as in Korea. And leave the militant networks and social bases of the liberation movement in the South unsupported, in the face of an unscrupulous dictatorship.

People's war (potentially) opens up a dynamic of social emancipation, which however runs the risk of running out of steam if it lasts too long. In Asia, the question is not only historical. Armed conflict, for example, has never ceased in Mindanao (in the south of the Philippine archipelago). Concrete answers must constantly be found to a double question: how to prevent armed groups from degenerating (which does happen), and how to concretely defend, in concrete conditions, the democratic freedom of decision-making and the rights of popular or mountain communities. In Burma, when the military junta seized power four years ago, it could be said that the whole country (almost) went into non-violent civic disobedience. The junta could have been overthrown, if only the "international community" had lent its support. Once again, this was not to be. And the repression ended up forcing the resistance to join the armed struggle, led in particular by ethnic minorities.

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*Translated by International Viewpoint from [L'Anticapitaliste](#).*

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