Introduction

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The Vietnam War (1954–75) was an international and internationalized affair: civil war, Cold War proxy conflict, war of national liberation, anticommunist crusade, and neocolonial war all at the same time. It captured the global imagination as a wide variety of political actors, state and nonstate alike, took a keen interest in it for reasons as widely varied. For some, the stakes were such that they compelled direct involvement. As much as we have conditioned ourselves to think of it as a predominantly Vietnamese–American conflagration, in the same way that we think of the French Indochina War as primarily Franco-Vietnamese in nature, the reality was far more complex. Differences among and between Vietnamese underpinned the conflict. Soviets, communist and nationalist Chinese, North and South Koreans, East and West Germans, Poles, Czechoslovaks, Hungarians, Albanians, French, Australians, New Zealanders, Thais, Filipinos, Mexicans, and Canadians were consequential participants in it. For them and others around the world, the Vietnam War was about more than just Vietnam itself: it was about justice, about what was right, about the future of our world. That is, it was a cause, one fired by revolutionary zeal to create a new world order. Only average Vietnamese on either side of the 17th parallel experienced it as a local and localized affair.

The war's global ramifications became especially evident in its latter stages, the period covered by this volume. The post-Tet 1968 phase of the conflict witnessed its apex as a Cold War crucible. Heightened Sino-Soviet tensions, Sino-American rapprochement, Soviet–American détente, and global counterculturalism served in different ways to elevate the already high profile and importance of the Vietnam War, as did the expansion of hostilities into Cambodia and Laos. The war in Vietnam became closely entwined with each of these circumstances, if not outrightly responsible for precipitating them. After hostilities finally ended in 1975, Hanoi's persecution of former enemies, discrimination against ethnic Chinese, and economic mismanagement

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triggered a massive migratory crisis that redefined international refugee policies. In time, the migration changed the demographic landscape of cities across North America and Europe. Indeed, the Vietnam War continued to affect the rest of the world long after it ended. Its consequences and legacies were as manifold as they have been enduring.

This third and final installment of *The Cambridge History of the Vietnam War* is divided into three parts organized chronologically. The first, "The Late Vietnam War," examines the prosecution of the war by its main belligerents in the period 1969–75. It also considers reactions to it in the United States, among communist-bloc countries, and elsewhere around the world. Since the Vietnam War profoundly affected the neighboring states of Laos and Cambodia, a chapter is dedicated to each. The second part, "The Postwar Era," addresses key domestic, regional, and international developments following the seizure of Saigon by communist-led forces and Vietnam's formal reunification. It pays particular attention to the Third Indochina War that so profoundly affected not just Vietnam and its neighbors, but the entire Cold War international system. The last section, "Legacies," gravitates around the legal, environmental, and memorial implications of the war. It examines diasporic Vietnamese communities, with a focus on the United States, and, in a postscript of sorts, considers Vietnam's search for its place in the world today.

The Late Vietnam War

By 1969, the war had produced neither discernible winners nor losers, yet the Vietnamese themselves continued to endure great suffering and deprivation. The Tet Offensive of 1968, including two "mini-Tet" campaigns launched in May and September, proved an abject military disaster for Hanoi and its armies. Luckily for them, the international community perceived things differently. A combination of powerful images, communist propaganda, and, most importantly, missteps by Washington policymakers and US military authorities relentlessly – and falsely – claiming progress in the war helped create the illusion that Hanoi had masterfully met its core strategic objective through the offensive and dealt its enemies a psychological blow from which they could never recover. That was a purely fortuitous circumstance for Vietnamese communist leaders. In light of the terrible casualties they had sustained, their armies had to retreat to safe havens across the Laotian and Cambodian borders. As Washington suspended its bombing of the North and initiated the de-Americanization of the conflict, Hanoi endorsed

an "economy-of-forces" policy intended to allow its troops to regroup. No wonder, then, that the period 1969–71 witnessed a relative de-escalation of hostilities in Vietnam. Saigon, for its part, emerged stronger from all of this, compounding Hanoi's challenges moving forward. Angered by the violence unleashed against their towns and cities by communist-led armies in 1968, Southerners rallied behind President Nguyễn Văn Thiệu and the Republic of Vietnam (RVN) in record numbers, which in turn facilitated the consolidation of the regime's authority and the expansion of its armed forces. This marked a golden age of sorts for Saigon, generating as it did an unprecedented – albeit fleeting – wave of anticommunist solidarity among South Vietnam's quarrelling factions. Thiệu took advantage of this opportunity to implement a series of political and economic reforms designed in part to increase his own power and control while marginalizing his political rivals.

These developments were largely responsible for a drastic decline in conventional military operations and the onset of a new war predicated on low-intensity, guerrilla-style warfare across much of South Vietnam. This era of "Vietnamization," in American parlance, presaged the end of US interference in what was, dating all the way back to 1945, a Vietnamese civil war. Vietnamese-on-Vietnamese violence remained the conflict's defining feature. In a bid to further weaken communist-led forces below the 17th parallel by disrupting their supply lines, Saigon and Washington mounted incursions into Cambodia in 1970 and Laos the following year. While critics at the time denounced this territorial expansion of the Vietnam War, the conflict's Indochinization had in fact started much earlier. The United States had been waging a "secret war" in Laos dating back to 1962, though in reality hostilities had raged, on and off, in different parts of the country since 1945. At the end of World War II, internecine strife and civil war consumed the whole of Indochina, not just Vietnam.

For all their efforts in the military, political, and social spheres of conflict, President Richard Nixon's administration and senior US military leaders remained uncertain as to how to end the Vietnam War with Saigon intact and Hanoi turning away from its quest of domination. As the phased withdrawal of American troops began, a key question remained unanswered: how stable would South Vietnam be without the presence of US forces, once it was completely on its own? As each side thus recalibrated its military strategy, it endeavored to advance its respective cause through diplomatic means. Diplomacy effectively became the alternative to the stalemated military situation. With semipublic peace talks opened in Paris in spring 1968 yielding no results, used as they were for denouncing instead of negotiating, Washington

and Hanoi opened in August 1969 a bilateral secret backchannel to more seriously explore the prospects of a negotiated solution. Neither was desperate enough for a compromise settlement, but the covert talks gave each a better sense of where the other stood. The two sides also engaged the international community more robustly, largely to ratchet up pressure on the other to relent. Hanoi created the Provisional Revolutionary Government of the Republic of Southern Vietnam (PRG), also in 1969, to legitimize the National Front for the Liberation of Southern Vietnam (NLF), which it secretly controlled, and chip away at the legitimacy of Thiệu's regime internationally. Saigon initiated its own charm offensive around that same time. After Nixon assumed the presidency, Washington redefined its relationship with both of Hanoi's main allies. President Nixon resolutely and simultaneously pursued détente with the Soviet Union, on the one hand, and rapprochement with the People's Republic of China (PRC), on the other, because he hoped that the lure of improved relations with the United States would convince both to cut their aid to the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRVN) and force Hanoi to accept a peaceful resolution to the conflict, or at least restrain its ambitions. "Peace with honor" required no less, Nixon thought. Spawn in part of the Cold War, the Vietnam War eventually paved the way for the normalization of relations between ideological rivals. However, Hanoi did not allow US diplomatic maneuvers to undermine its long-term goal of seeking national unity on the battlefield.

As the war in Vietnam contributed to the attenuation of Soviet–American and Sino-American tensions, it exacerbated the crisis in Sino-Soviet relations. Taking into account North Korean agency in precipitating the Korean War, the American intervention in Vietnam constituted the first full-scale attack seemingly instigated by a Western power against a socialist state. Yet it also shattered the unity of the socialist world just as the war reached its apex. In 1969, China and the Soviet Union came to blows in a brief but fierce border war. The latter conflict resulted from various factors, but the war in Vietnam was key. As Moscow and Beijing battled for Hanoi's allegiance and the title of center of the world socialist movement, mutual acrimony mounted, culminating in war. Far more attuned to the Sino-Soviet dispute than his predecessor had been, President Nixon sought to capitalize on it to advance his aims in Vietnam. As Hanoi sought to maneuver carefully between its feuding allies and tended to other, pressing domestic matters, President Thiệu in Saigon enjoyed unprecedented popularity as his armed forces grew larger and stronger thanks to increased aid deliveries from the United States.

The Vietnam War also made waves elsewhere across the world, as variously disgruntled, disillusioned, anxious, and radicalized youths from China to France took to the streets to challenge established sources of authority. The countercultural movement of the late 1960s was to no insignificant degree fueled by anger and frustration at America's military involvement in Southeast Asia. The movement embraced the position of Hanoi and the NLF/PRG that Washington's war in Vietnam was "imperialist" as well as "criminal" and abetted by Saigon "puppets" and "lackeys" who lacked nationalist credentials. Such attitudes stemmed both from interactions between social movements and activists within the United States and elsewhere, as well as from Hanoi's "people's diplomacy." The North Vietnamese government drew upon and bolstered antiwar sentiment regardless of the specific messaging of individuals and organizations, thereby supporting the creation of a wide range of antiwar arguments and activism abroad. The aforementioned invasions of Cambodia and Laos reverberated particularly loudly internationally, interpreted as they were by the war's critics as a US-sanctioned expansion of hostilities into the rest of "neutral" Indochina. The killing of American students at Kent State University and Jackson State College in the immediate aftermath of the Cambodian invasion gave new life to the antiwar movement in the United States, which had recently lost momentum owing to its radicalization and internal divisions. The incursions proved politically costly for Nixon and Thiệu, by extension. Each man faced mounting criticism for his handling of the war and pressure to end it from legislators and constituents at home thereafter. As Nixon appealed to the "silent majority" of Americans to buy time and achieve "peace with honor," Thiệu manifested increasingly dictatorial tendencies that augmented his domestic unpopularity. Hanoi had lost the military initiative in the South only to gain momentum diplomatically as world opinion became increasingly favorable to its cause and hostile toward Washington and Saigon.

Buoyed by the favorable international situation, aware of its allies' growing unease with the war, and intent on exploiting the American political calendar in a presidential election year, Hanoi launched another go-for-broke campaign in the spring of 1972. By then, its military capabilities had markedly improved owing to generous infusions of new Soviet and Chinese arms. After some initial and severe battlefield defeats, Saigon's armed forces steadied themselves and fought back valiantly as American air power pounded communist troop concentrations and supply lines. Undeterred by the prospects of hurting his chances in the looming presidential election at home, on the one hand, and derailing budding détente with the Soviets and rapprochement

with Beijing, on the other, Nixon resumed sustained bombings of North Vietnam, suspended by Johnson in 1968, and took the unprecedented step of ordering the mining of its ports. As Nixon vowed to Kissinger as news of the North Vietnamese attacks arrived, "we're playing a much bigger game – we're playing a Russia game, a China game, and an election game and we're not gonna have the [South Vietnamese Army] collapse." The bombing was brutal, its efficacy enhanced by the introduction of "smart" munitions that exacted a devastating toll on the North's transport infrastructure. To Hanoi's consternation and Washington's delight, Moscow and Beijing only protested the measures mildly, attesting to their desire to sustain their constructive engagement with the United States and turn the page on the war in Vietnam.

Just as they had done in the Tet Offensive of 1968, allied forces inflicted a devastating military defeat of communist-led armies in the latter's 1972 campaign. Indeed, the defeat was enough to convince Hanoi to drop its demand for the removal of Thiệu as president as a precondition for a ceasefire in the Paris Peace Talks, leading to the finalization of a draft diplomatic settlement between the United States and the DRVN in October 1972. Since his demands had been largely ignored throughout the peace proceeding, Thiệu objected to the agreement and demanded revisions that warranted further negotiations between the Americans and the North Vietnamese. When those negotiations broke down, Nixon subjected North Vietnam to another round of savage bombing, in December 1972. In the end, the escalatory cycle begun by the North Vietnamese offensive, then countered by Nixon with massive reinforcements, the mining of North Vietnamese ports, and the Linebacker air campaigns, led to a peace agreement. Since neither side proved able to establish military dominance sufficient to dictate the terms of peace, the four-party (US, DRVN, RVN, PRG) signing of the Paris Agreement on Vietnam achieved little beyond ending direct American involvement in the Vietnamese civil war and an exchange of prisoners of war (POWs). With neither Hanoi nor Saigon ready to throw in the towel, to no one's surprise hostilities resumed within weeks of the signing, absent the Americans. It was all over within two years, as North Vietnamese tanks rolled into Saigon and leaders there abdicated on April 30, 1975, marking the end of a civil war that had started three decades before. In the final analysis, sharp reductions in American aid and Hanoi's brilliantly conceived and executed military campaigns of 1974–5 doomed Saigon, alongside severe South Vietnamese economic woes resulting from the 1972 invasion and growing internal discontent with President Thiệu. His military government failed to build a viable rural support base even as its mounting corruption and authoritarianism alienated core urban

constituents, contributing in a significant, if underappreciated, way to the state's collapse in 1975.

The Postwar Era

The "fall" of Saigon – and of Phnom Penh and Vientiane around the same time – reverberated across the world. Washington's powerlessness to change the outcome made its defeat in the Vietnam War complete as well as official, while images of US personnel scrambling to get on the last flights out of the South Vietnamese capital added a dose of humiliation. Paradoxically, in the wider regional context, the American failure in Vietnam was something of an anomaly. Washington's containment strategy boasted much broader dimensions, and in supporting its Southeast Asian allies' rightward tendencies, it forged a geostrategic arc of anticommunist states that effectively encircled Vietnam and China, and frustrated Soviet ambitions in Southeast Asia. At the time of South Vietnam's demise, however, that offered little comfort to Americans. Indeed, the United States maintained a low international profile thereafter, haunted by the specter that even minor entanglements anywhere in the Third World might produce "another Vietnam." As the Americans retrenched, their antagonists rejoiced. Variously inspired, emboldened, and invigorated by the triumph of the communist-led national liberation cause in Vietnam and the rest of Indochina, leftist revolutionaries sought to assert their power in the Middle East, sub-Saharan Africa, and Latin America. Cuba, a longtime supporter of Hanoi and the NLF, supported some of their efforts materially and with manpower. Sometimes against its own better judgment, Moscow did the same. Soviet "adventurism" culminated in large-scale military intervention in Afghanistan in 1979–80. The futile and costly commitment there, in conjunction with the misdeeds of ideological allies, mortally wounded global communism, but not in Vietnam.

Following official reunification and adoption of a new constitution in 1976, Vietnam became the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (SRVN). The end of hostilities took the spotlight away from the region, but only for a period. Soon, the country and its people faced a number of serious problems and crises that compelled the international community to once again turn its attention to Indochina. The first of these issues was a refugee crisis that grew more serious over time owing to a combination of political repression and botched economic policies by the authorities in Hanoi. Tens of thousands of civil servants, troops, and others who in various capacities had served the RVN were committed for periods of two weeks to eighteen years to "reeducation" camps

because Hanoi refused to forgive them. Their families were left to fend for themselves, their challenges compounded by the severe economic hardships and deprivations affecting the rest of the nation. Out of despair, millions of Vietnamese left their home country by boat and other means in what became the first global refugee crisis of the post-1945 era. Although Vietnamese had lived in other countries long before 1975, this crisis produced a new kind of diaspora whose identity remained largely exilic, for a time at least. The SRVN's concomitant invasion and occupation of Cambodia, conducted in response to repeated invasions of Vietnamese territory and mass slaughter of Vietnamese civilians by the Khmer Rouge between 1975 and 1978, and an attendant and brief, but extremely violent, war against China in 1979, resulted in Hanoi's international isolation. Communist Vietnam became a pariah state, kept afloat largely by Soviet largesse. As many Vietnamese said at the time, not without a sense of frustration or irony, they had spilled blood for decades resisting the Japanese fascists, the French colonialists, and then the American imperialists only to become a Soviet dependency. Independence solved few problems, it seemed: it merely created new ones.

The Third Indochina War marked the start of the slow end of the Cold War in Southeast Asia. Of all who were involved in the war in one way or another, only Hun Sen in Cambodia and leaders in Beijing emerged as winners. The SRVN's isolation and related domestic as well as international challenges delighted its former enemies, who found solace and redemption in all this. As some claimed their country had lost the war but won the peace, others contended it could have won but did not, owing to timid civilian leaders and failed military leadership early in the conflict. Such assumptions and delusions, in conjunction with other circumstances, helped the United States eventually, albeit slowly, get over its trauma and humiliation. President Ronald Reagan's declaration that the Vietnam War had been a "noble cause" constituted an important step in overcoming this "Vietnam syndrome." But that was not enough. Hanoi had to pay for what it had done to the United States: it had to be humiliated worse than Washington itself had been. Pressed by powerful special-interest groups, including advocacy groups for families of US POWs and personnel reported missing in action (MIA), Washington politicized and manipulated the refugee crisis while indirectly offering succor to Vietnam's enemies in Cambodia, the Khmer Rouge, despite their known genocidal tendencies. While hardly typical of the American experience in the Vietnam War, POWs loomed large in the American imagination because their plight inverted responsibility for the war and its violence, while reaffirming the men, ideas, and institutions that inspired the war in the first

place. It emphasized, even dramatized, the pain and loss the war inflicted on American POWs – and all who identified with them – but suggested that POW sacrifice would redeem American losses and restore the nation's enduring values. Even Hollywood got on board, releasing a series of Vietnam-related, this-time-we-win "revenge" movies featuring famous action stars.

Legacies

As all this indicates, the war *over* Vietnam in the United States did not end in 1975. Every president from Gerald Ford to Joe Biden has had to deal with the multiple consequences of American involvement in that conflict. Perhaps George W. Bush's strained effort to blame Graham Greene's 1954 novel, *The Quiet American*, for undermining popular support for the Iraq War sums it all up. And then there was the debate over the conflict's legitimacy. Arguments about its legality – from America's support of South Vietnam to its use of napalm – proved far more prominent, important, and enduring than in any previous war in which the United States was involved. With the benefit of hindsight, however, there is little evidence that international law itself significantly affected how the Vietnam War unfolded.

The passage of time has healed some old wounds. The collapse of the Soviet Union in late 1991 incited Hanoi to redouble long-standing efforts to mend relations first with Beijing and then Washington. The normalization of US–SRVN relations in 1995 paved the way for Vietnam's reintegration into the global community and eventual accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2007. Throughout this process, Vietnamese refugees formed a key pillar of Washington's approach to Vietnam, as US officials insisted on migration programs as prerequisites to more formal economic and diplomatic ties. Since then, Americans have taken advantage of Vietnam's opening to visit, study, and invest there. Universities in the United States have started welcoming increasing numbers of students from Vietnam. Joint public- and private-sector initiatives, some underway for some time, seek to address the ecological consequences of the war, astoundingly costly and debilitating by post-1945 standards. Common political and economic interests, including placating China in the South China Sea – the East Sea to the Vietnamese – have made Hanoi and Washington strategic regional partners. Indeed, the two countries enjoy remarkably cordial relations for the time being.

That, in turn, has affected the way Americans and Vietnamese look back upon and remember the Vietnam War. The former now think more fondly,

even nostalgically, of their old enemies even as the war remains a matrix for assessing US military performance overseas. The transmission of knowledge and belief about the Vietnam War tracks its lines of diffusion and convergence across a broad social field, including political rhetoric, psychiatric discourses, veterans' narratives, war memorials, and public opinion polls. The tracery across these varied modes of expression constitutes a map of the Vietnam War in American culture. In Vietnam, the war remains a painful memory for the generation that fought it. What was once known as the "Exhibition House for US and Puppet Regime Crimes" (1975–90) and then the "Exhibition House for Crimes of War and Aggression" (1990–5) in Hồ Chí Minh City – still Saigon to many – is now the "War Remnants Museum." As the name changes indicate, mutual enmity has receded over time and given way to mutual respect, to a degree at least. For while many Americans and their government now look favorably upon Vietnam, communist leaders there are as obsessive as ever about using the past to legitimize their monopolization of political power. Although Vietnam opened itself up to the United States and the rest of the world, internally it remains a closed, authoritarian, albeit also fragmented, one-party system. Despite impressive economic achievements, Vietnam's political system is undergoing severe decay after more than three decades of market reform. This perverse outcome of a communist revolution that produced an oppressive and corrupt regime in Vietnam today has lately brought about a moment of reckoning for many Vietnamese about the true meaning of the Vietnam War.

These realities were never lost on post-1975 Vietnamese exiles, whose identity became increasingly transnational in the 1990s. For older members of the diaspora, especially the more than 2 million of them living in the United States, the trauma of loss and persecution resulting from the actions of the communist authorities during and after the war endures. While Vietnamese refugees and migrants in the United States have assimilated rather well, contributing to the "model minority" stereotype that entered the American mainstream during the 1960s, they have also found comfort and redemption in their own traditional culture. The proliferation after 1975 of "Little Saigons," of expatriate Vietnamese enclaves across the United States and elsewhere, has facilitated the perpetuation of various practices and traditions in the West. Indeed, while Hanoi combated traditional Vietnamese culture for decades because of its alleged feudal and bourgeois undertones, diasporic Vietnamese became its custodians. Today, traditional music and other forms of artistic expression thrive in California and elsewhere, so much so that Vietnamese in Vietnam now crave the performers and their art. Other post-1975 refugees

from Indochina, including members of the Lao, Khmer, and Hmong ethnic groups, also went on to establish thriving enclaves in the United States.

As all this demonstrates, Vietnam's search for its place in the world after the Vietnam War was not a linear process of international integration. Conditioned primarily by the country's location bordering China and the South China Sea, it traveled a twisty journey that went through several major turning points – in 1977, 1986, 1989, 2003, and 2014, with the Russia–Ukraine War and a Taiwan Strait crisis in 2022 as harbingers of the next turning point – and reflected the struggle between contradicting Vietnamese worldviews, as well as their often conflicting responses to changes in the environment of the country's quest for security, resources, and identity.

Ultimately, the Vietnam War was a defining development of the Cold War and a defining moment in the history of the post-1945 world. Its impact locally, regionally, and internationally has been anything but negligible.

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The historiography of the Vietnam War, including the period covered by this volume, is as vast as it is broad. Scholars and correspondents who for the most part happened to be critics of American intervention in Southeast Asia produced some of the earliest comprehensive accounts about it.[1] Their writings served to inform, to be sure, but also to validate personal stances and opinions. Almost invariably, the focus was on the United States. Characterizations of Hanoi and the NLF/PRG were simplistic and often favorable; Hồ Chí Minh had all along borne the Vietnamese nationalist mantle, and he embodied their cause. Conversely, those South Vietnamese who fought alongside the Americans lacked legitimacy and were as inept as they were corrupt. A handful of scholars and analysts pushed back against that consensus. On the basis of captured documents and other sources, Douglas Pike detailed communist strategy and tactics in a way that sometimes demonized Hanoi and the NLF, and seemed to justify US intervention.[2] All things being equal, the first "wave" of scholarship on the war disparaged the motives behind and the nature of American intervention in Vietnam. In

1 Joseph Buttinger, *Vietnam: A Political History* (New York, 1968); Committee of Concerned Asian Scholars, *The Indochina Story* (New York, 1970); Frances FitzGerald, *Fire in the Lake: The Vietnamese and the Americans in Vietnam* (New York, 1972); George Kahin and John Lewis, *The United States in Vietnam* (New York, 1967); Robert Shaplen, *The Lost Revolution: The Story of Twenty Years of Neglected Opportunities in Vietnam and of America's Failure to Foster Democracy There* (New York, 1965).

2 Douglas Pike, *Viet Cong: The Organization of the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam* (Cambridge, MA, 1966) and *History of Vietnamese Communism, 1925–1976* (Stanford, 1978).

the context of the Vietnam War, revisionist scholarship constitutes historiographical orthodoxy.[3]

A big shift began to take place in the late 1980s and early 1990s as communism collapsed in Eastern Europe and archives there became accessible. Suddenly, a far more nuanced and complex picture of the war emerged. On the one hand, this new scholarship shed revealing and often surprising light on the role of socialist-bloc countries, including the Soviet Union, in the conflict.[4] On the other, it gave us a better sense of the strategic thinking of Vietnamese communist policymakers, who exchanged regularly with counterparts there. The opening of Chinese archives shortly thereafter attuned us to Beijing's policies vis-à-vis Vietnam and demonstrated just how instrumental the Chinese had been in facilitating the victories over the Americans and the French before that of their Vietnamese comrades.[5] Revelations from the archives of former communist-bloc countries and China inspired a reassessment of the American presence in Vietnam that was far less critical than before and which, to some degree, corroborated Reagan's "noble cause" thesis without, however, absolving the United States from its own crimes and other transgressions in the war. This broadening of the lens through which scholars viewed the Vietnam War inspired some to pay closer attention to the social, cultural, and legal dimensions of the conflict, largely as they concerned the United States, but also Vietnam as well.

The international turn eventually led scholars to engage with Vietnam and the Vietnamese themselves, a process facilitated by the country's opening in the 1990s. Access to the archives of Hanoi and the NLF/PRG is limited but possible. A good part of the documentary record of the former regime in Saigon, for its part, is available for consultation in Hồ Chí Minh City. Those materials, as well as a growing body of published memoirs by participants from both sides, has markedly enhanced our understanding of Vietnamese decision-making and agency in the conflict. Above all, they have helped us see just how central the Vietnamese themselves were in shaping their own history and collective destiny. Beyond that, the ability to conduct fieldwork in Vietnam has proven instrumental in enabling scholars to forge a better

3 The most balanced early accounts of the war were arguably produced by historian and war correspondent Bernard Fall. See in particular his *The Two Viet-Nams* (New York, 1963); *Viet-Nam Witness, 1953–66* (New York, 1966); and *Last Reflections on a War* (New York, 1967).

4 Ilya Gaiduk, *Confronting Vietnam: Soviet Policy toward the Indochina Conflict, 1954–1963* (Washington, DC, 2003) and *The Soviet Union and the Vietnam War* (Chicago, 1996).

5 Qiang Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars, 1950–1975* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2000); Chen Jian, *Mao's China and the Cold War* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2001).

understanding of the war's lasting traces, including its economic, ecological, and architectural consequences. The diasporic community has become an increasingly popular subject of study. How Vietnamese got to, and have adjusted to, their host countries certainly makes for compelling history.

Collectively, the chapters in this volume constitute a powerful summation of the present state of Vietnam War studies. Each contributor is at the top of their scholarly game, to put it idiomatically. They offer perspectives that are as current as they are sound – not merely trendy – and insights that are invaluable for making proper sense of a war that remains poorly understood despite our access to a myriad of new sources of information and the voluminous amount of writing on it. The Vietnam War was far more complex and multifaceted than standard, including best-selling, accounts of it suggest. This volume captures that complexity. As with all such compilations, this one is not without flaws. Owing to various constraints, and despite my best efforts as editor, it rather selectively addresses topics pertinent to the period it covers. Nonetheless, I firmly believe that it achieves its central purpose, namely to synthesize the post-Tet 1968 phase of the conflict and explicate its enduring relevance and consequences.