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Introduction by Balázs Szalontai, Mongolia International University

In the history of the European Cold War, and particularly that of the East European Communist regimes, 1948 has been traditionally regarded as one of the key turning points. In Southeast Asian studies, the importance of that year was emphasized mostly by those scholars who analyzed the Communist uprisings which had erupted in Burma, Malaya and Indonesia between March and September 1948, whereas the historians of the First Indochina War paid comparatively less attention to it. Moreover, “revisionist” studies about the Malayan Emergency or the “Madiun incident” were usually more focused on the domestic roots of these conflicts than on their international aspects.

In this issue of the *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, five noted specialists of modern Southeast Asian history seek to investigate how the Cold War started in that region, and which earlier interpretations of these tumultuous events need re-examination. They conclude that 1948 constituted a watershed in the Far Eastern Cold War as well, for the recently announced Zhdanov doctrine produced a decisive radicalizing effect on the actions of the local Communist parties, not only in Burma, Malaya and Indonesia but also in Vietnam. Still, the emphasis the authors lay on the international context of this process of radicalization does not induce them to underestimate the role of domestic factors. On the contrary, they are all of the opinion that the outbreak of violence in Southeast Asia did not result simply from the transmission of Soviet instructions to the local Communist parties. While the latter parties did gain inspiration from the “Cominform line,” and the Kremlin did express its dissatisfaction with their earlier moderate stance in no uncertain terms, it seems doubtful that the Soviet leadership gave any direct orders to them to embark on a course of armed struggle.

The articles reviewed here are based on papers which their authors presented at the “Roundtable on the Sixtieth Anniversary of 1948: Reassessing the Origins of the Cold War in Southeast Asia”, held on 10 – 11 July 2008, and organized by the Asia Research Institute (National University of Singapore). The scope of that conference was considerably greater than that of these articles, for the other participants also covered countries and topics not discussed here, such as American policies toward Indonesia, the activities of non-Communist Malay politicians, and the Hukbalahap insurgency in the Philippines.¹ Of the conference papers, the following ones were later published in the *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*:

¹ The titles of the other conference papers are as follows: C. C. Chin, “Re-Examining the 1948 Revolt of the MCP in Malaya”; Leon Comber, “Origins of the Cold War in Southeast Asia: The Case of the Communist Party of Malaya. A Special Branch Perspective”; Ang Cheng Guan, “1948: The Beginning of the Cold War in Southeast Asia? – The Vietnam Dimension”; Richard Mason, “The Southeast Asian Revolts in 1948 and the United States’ Policy toward Southeast Asia”; Katharine McGregor, “The 1948 Madiun Affair: Reverberations for the Indonesian Communist Party”; Abdul Rahman Haji Ismail, “1948 and the Origins of the Cold War in Southeast Asia: Traces of Malay Involvement”; and Roli Talampas, “The Philippines in 1948: Revolution after ‘Liberation’.”

- Karl Hack and Geoff Wade, "Introduction: The origins of the Southeast Asian Cold War" 441-48
- Larisa Efimova, "Did the Soviet Union instruct Southeast Asian communists to revolt? New Russian evidence on the Calcutta Youth Conference of February 1948," 449-70
- Karl Hack, "The origins of the Asian Cold War: Malaya 1948," 471-96
- Harry A. Poeze, "The Cold War in Indonesia, 1948," 497-518
- Tuong Vu, "'It's time for the Indochinese Revolution to show its true colours': The radical turn of Vietnamese politics in 1948," 519-42
- Geoff Wade, "The beginnings of a 'Cold War' in Southeast Asia: British and Australian perceptions," 543-66

Having investigated previously inaccessible Russian archival documents, **Larisa Efimova**, a specialist of Soviet-Indonesian relations, concludes that the armed uprisings of the Burmese, Malayan and Indonesian Communist parties in 1948 were not directly instigated by the Soviet leadership. As she notes, such views were formulated as early as the 1950s and 1960s by Ruth McVey and some other Western scholars, but the inaccessibility of Soviet archival sources prevented a proper verification. Since the Calcutta Youth Conference of 1948, at which the Soviet delegates allegedly passed instructions for revolt to their Southeast Asian comrades, was handled by the Komsomol and supervised by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU CC), Efimova embarked on following this bureaucratic trail. "Although the Southeast Asian communists were eager to get more assistance from the USSR, including material help such as arms shipment, the USSR refrained from this and did not even maintain regular ties with Southeast Asian communist parties" (468-469), Efimova observes, describing this Soviet attitude as a "moderate position" (463). Having extensively investigated the background of the Calcutta Conference and the activities of the Soviet delegation there, she concludes that the documents of the Komsomol and the CPSU CC "show no signs that the Soviet leadership planned to call upon Asian communists to rise up against their national bourgeois governments" (449).

Of the reviewers, Anne L. Foster, Robert J. McMahon, and Kenton Clymer are all of the opinion that the documents unearthed by Efimova demonstrate conclusively that the Soviet leadership did not issue any instructions for revolt to the Southeast Asian Communist parties at the Calcutta Conference. Of them, McMahon is most strongly inclined to consider the case closed ("The tired old shibboleth about the Kremlin somehow issuing firm instructions to local Southeast Asian communist parties, via the Calcutta Youth Conference of February 1948, is thoroughly demolished here."), whereas Clymer, adopting a more cautious stance, notes that "further research in Soviet archives might conceivably lead to a different conclusion." In fact, one may keep in mind that neither the Komsomol nor the

CPSU CC were involved in the highest-level decision-making process of the Soviet regime, and thus their cadres were not necessarily privy to the more confidential diplomatic and military plans of the top Soviet leadership. Moreover, Ilya Gaiduk, having also extensively used Russian archival documents in his research on Soviet policies toward Southeast Asia, reached conclusions which are sometimes considerably different from Efimova's.²

Foster also seeks to explain why the Soviet leaders were reluctant to provide material assistance to Indonesia or other Southeast Asian countries. In her opinion, one reason was the Kremlin's preoccupation with other international issues, while another was its distrust of the ideological position of the Indonesian parties which asked for Soviet assistance. Unlike Efimova, she is inclined to believe that the Soviet Union, despite its unwillingness to get directly involved in Southeast Asian affairs, might have actually welcomed the 1948 uprisings. Her argument is similar to that of **Karl Hack**, who states that "From the Soviet perspective, and even Chinese perspective," the series of revolts in Burma, Malaya and Indonesia "was significant in that it had the potential to weaken imperialist powers" (496).

In fact, the documents quoted by Efimova reveal that the Calcutta Conference "on every issue adopted resolutions which are in accordance with the 'Instructions' given to the Soviet delegation" (466). While the Kremlin seems to have refrained from giving any direct and specific instructions for armed struggle to the Southeast and South Asian Communist parties at that conference, its public position left no doubts that an attitude of open rejection was to be adopted toward the "bourgeois" parties and governments in India, Burma, Malaya, and Indonesia.

Citing a monograph of Ragna Boden and other sources, **Harry Poeze**, a specialist of 20th-century Indonesian history in general and of the Indonesian Left in particular, concludes that since the Soviets harshly condemned the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI)'s cooperation with the "reactionary" rightist parties and its "rejection of the armed struggle with the Netherlands" (502-503), the message which the veteran Indonesian Communist leader Muso brought from Moscow to the PKI "was for the greater part not his own, but an adaptation of the new line for Indonesia" (506). Had Muso not imposed his Soviet-inspired *Djalan baru* (new road) on the PKI, Poeze declares, the tragedy in Madiun might have been avoided. This view is markedly different from that of Efimova, who stresses that Muso's actions were considerably independent from Soviet policies.³

Nonetheless, Poeze does not attribute these Soviet actions solely to the influence of the Zhdanov doctrine; in his opinion, they were also shaped by the specific realities of the changing situation in Indonesia. As he points out, the Kremlin adopted a relatively flexible

² See, among others, Ilya V. Gaiduk, "Soviet Cold War Strategy and Prospects of Revolution in South and Southeast Asia," in Christopher Goscha and Christian Ostermann (eds.), *Connecting Histories. Decolonization and the Cold War in Southeast Asia* (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press; Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), 123-136.

³ Larisa M. Efimova, "Who gave instructions to the Indonesian communist leader Musso in 1948?", in *Indonesia and the Malay World* 31, 90 (2003), 184-188.

attitude toward the Indonesian coalition government until the conclusion of the Renville Agreement and the subsequent resignation of Premier Amir Sjarifuddin. Moreover, Zhdanov's "two camps" thesis did not necessarily provide the individual Communist parties with sufficient answers to their specific questions. For instance, the national interests of the PKI and the Communist Party of the Netherlands (CPN) were different enough to generate an acrimonious debate between Muso and CPN leader Paul de Groot.

Clymer and Foster agree with Poeze's interpretation of Muso's role in the events which led to Madiun, concluding that external factors did influence PKI policies to a substantial extent. "In sum," Clymer states, "while no instructions arrived via Calcutta, Muso arrived from Moscow." In other words, the now-indisputable fact that the Calcutta Conference was not used as a forum to transmit orders to the Southeast Asian Communist parties does not necessarily exclude the possibility that the Soviet leadership could, and did, suggest certain courses of action to these parties through other channels. Foster, for her part, also praises Poeze's skill in drawing a nuanced and comprehensive picture about the complex and dazzling labyrinth of Indonesian leftist policies and about the country's attempts to maneuver between the two global blocs.

In contrast with Efimova's views but partly similarly to Poeze, **Karl Hack**, a specialist of Malaysian and Singaporean history with a particular interest in the Malayan Communist Party (MCP), is of the opinion that Soviet and Cominform influence did play a major role in the armed Communist uprisings which occurred in Southeast and South Asia in 1948. Taking into consideration the considerable social, economic, political and cultural differences between the countries that were rocked by Communist insurgencies in 1948, the near-simultaneity of the Burmese, Indian, Malayan and Indonesian revolts indeed seems to indicate that local factors alone do not provide a sufficient explanation.

Having supplied ample evidence about the MCP's awareness of the global Cold War and about its willingness to place its own struggle into that context, Hack further argues that domestic conditions in Malaya were not favorable enough for armed rebellion. He briefly mentions the MCP's frustration over the establishment of the Federation of Malaya in February 1948, but attributes much less importance to this issue than MCP General Secretary Chin Peng. He concludes that the influence of the "Cominform line" must have played a crucial role in the MCP's shifting strategy.

Still, Hack is careful to emphasize that the link between post-1947 Soviet policies and the Southeast Asian uprisings should not be viewed as the simple issuance of Soviet directives to the supposedly slavishly obedient local Communist parties. In his opinion, direct instructions were neither issued nor needed, for the mere ideological impact of the Zhdanov doctrine was sufficient to convince the Asian Communist leaders of the necessity of adopting a new, aggressive approach. Many local cadres enthusiastically "took up and used that line in their own debates, and to serve their own needs" (484).

Unlike Hack, Clymer considers the question of whether the Kremlin issued any specific instructions to the Southeast Asian Communist parties an important one, but otherwise he is fully in agreement with Hack's observations and arguments. He praises the author's

comprehensive and non-polemical overview of the scholarly literature on the domestic and external factors influencing MCP policies, and finds his conclusions sufficiently convincing, even when these are in contradiction with the recollections of Chin Peng. Clymer, Foster, and McMahon all point out that Hack, though he lays the principal emphasis on the external influences, pays considerable attention to the local context of the MCP insurrection. They note with approval that in Hack's opinion, a specific combination of domestic and international factors was needed to trigger an armed revolt in Malaya.

In his analysis of Vietnamese Communist policies, **Tuong Vu** attributes even greater importance to the role of international factors than Hack and Poeze. Emphatically rejecting the view that the Vietnamese Communist leaders were motivated by the ideas of nationalism, he claims that the announcement of the Zhdanov doctrine and the military successes of the CCP produced a stronger effect on Vietnamese Communist strategies than local conditions. Similarly to Hack's analysis of MCP documents, he stresses that the Vietnamese Communist leaders, far from trying to avoid taking sides in the Cold War, were fairly willing to portray their struggle as an integral part of the global struggle between the "two camps." Vu supports this argument with an elaborate analysis of the coalition policies pursued by the Vietnamese Communist leadership. In his opinion, the Viet Minh, having been a remarkably broad and inclusive coalition in the first three years of its existence, started to disintegrate in the spring of 1948, because the Communist cadres, inspired by the "Cominform line," adopted an increasingly intolerant stance toward their non-Communist partners. Symptomatically, the post-1948 campaign against non-Communist intellectuals was heavily based on the concepts of class identity and class struggle, as the "bourgeois" proponents of judicial independence were accused of harboring counter-revolutionary inclinations. The Vietnamese Communist leaders, Vu concludes, crossed the Rubicon of radicalism as early as 1948, rather than 1949 or 1950 (as it is generally assumed), and the nature, ideological justification and timing of this leftward shift indicate that the proclamation of the Zhdanov doctrine must have decisively influenced their actions.

Of the reviewers, Foster and Clymer, whose own research fields have been focused on American and European policies toward Southeast and South Asia, do not dispute Vu's main observations and conclusions, albeit Foster, unlike the reviewed author, considers the post-1948 leftist measures of the Viet Minh regime at least partly of a nationalist/anti-colonial character. In contrast, Martin Grossheim, a specialist of Vietnamese Communist policies, adopts a more critical attitude. While he notes approvingly that the article contains ample information of considerable novelty about the Viet Minh's "forgotten compromises" and about the growing hostility of the Communist cadres toward their non-Communist allies, he doubts if Vietnamese Communist policies really underwent a decisive turn as early as 1948. As he points out, certain important milestones in this process of radicalization, such as class-based land redistribution and the *chinh huan* campaign, were reached only in the early 1950s, rather than the period highlighted by Tuong Vu.

Focusing his attention on the Vietnamese domestic scene, Grossheim does not directly address the issue of whether the "Cominform line" produced a decisive effect on the actions of the Vietnamese Communist leaders or not, though his reservations about the extent of

the 1948 policy shift imply that the importance of this external factor may not have been as great as Vu claims. After all, Efimova reveals that Pham Ngoc Thach, the head of the Vietnamese delegation to the Calcutta Conference, openly praised the “progressive” policies of the non-Communist Burmese government, supposedly because he was more impressed by Rangoon’s support to the Viet Minh’s anti-colonial struggle than by the conference’s condemnation of Burma’s alleged compromise with imperialism. Thach’s partial divergence from the “Cominform line” may indicate that in early 1948, the Vietnamese Communist leaders, though certainly influenced by the recent shifts in international Communist strategies, were still trying to pursue a policy best suited for their own specific interests.

Nevertheless, Grossheim seems to be in agreement with Vu in that the emergence of the Bao Dai regime posed a serious political challenge to Ho Chi Minh. Actually, the political competition between the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) and the State of Vietnam probably played an important role in the radicalization of Vietnamese Communist policies. As Vu points out, in January 1948 – that is, not long after the first Ha Long Bay Agreement (7 December 1947) – “for the first time the Party ordered the confiscation of the land and property of *Việt gian* (traitors),” but it “did not yet attack landlords” as such (535). In other words, the land distribution policy was still based on one’s political stance in the struggle for national liberation, rather than on property and class criteria (as it would be the case in the post-1953 period).

In fact, the other articles reviewed here also make direct or indirect references to the aggressive stance which the Soviet Union and the local Communist parties adopted toward the negotiated and limited decolonization process which occurred in South and Southeast Asia in 1947-1948. **Poeze** and **Efimova** describe how the Soviet cadres as well as Muso and Pham Ngoc Thach condemned the Renville Agreement (17 January 1948). **Hack** cites Chin Peng’s critical comments on the establishment of the Federation of Malaya (1 February 1948), and notes that in Burma, the Communist uprising occurred soon after the proclamation of independence (4 January 1948). Finally, **Geoffrey Wade** quotes a statement made by the U.S. State Department, which emphasizes that “To win support and allies in their drive for power, Communist leaders have consistently pretended to champion the cause of local nationalists and have attempted to identify communism with nationalism in the minds of the people of the area” (552). Remarkably, the dramatic radicalization of Communist policies in South and Southeast Asia strongly coincided with the aforesaid decolonization process, which seems to show that many local Communist leaders, just as **Hack** suggests, had reasons of their own to embrace the Kremlin’s new ideological line.⁴ Of the reviewers, McMahon is the most interested in placing the Southeast

⁴ Interestingly, the wave of radicalization did not affect every Asian Communist party in the same way. For instance, the Japanese Communist Party underwent such a process only in 1950, at which time B.T. Ranadive, an Indian Communist leader who had replaced the moderate P.C. Joshi as General Secretary in February 1948, was demoted, and denounced as a “leftist adventurer”.

Asian Cold War into the context of decolonization, expressing surprise that the reviewed articles, in his opinion, do not pay sufficient attention to this issue.

Citing an impressive array of declassified British documents, **Wade**, a scholar familiar with a wide range of topics related to modern and pre-modern Southeast Asian history, points out that in 1946, neither the British nor the Australian government considered the USSR a threat to their interests in Southeast Asia. According to the logic of rational geopolitics, this optimistic assessment made perfect sense, since, as the British minister in Moscow reported, “the areas of the Far East which most directly interest Russia are those furthest removed from British vital interests” (546). However, as early as May 1947 – that is, well before the announcement of the Zhdanov doctrine, let alone the actual outbreak of violence in Burma, Malaya and Indonesia – British intelligence officials started to harbor suspicions about Soviet intentions toward Southeast Asia. From their perspective, a particularly unnerving phenomenon was the growth of bilateral and multilateral contacts between the various Asian Communist parties, which seemed to indicate a coordinated Soviet strategy. “Ultimately,” however, “it was the establishment of the PRC in 1949 (as a major regional communist power), [...] which was seen as marking the arrival of fully-fledged Cold War in Southeast Asia” (543). In 1949, as the CCP was gaining the upper hand over the Guomindang in the Chinese Civil War, British security analysts started to think, in a retrospective way, that the Chinese Communists may have been at least indirectly involved in the uprisings which had occurred in Southeast Asia in the previous year. This view is shared by Tuong Vu, who stresses that the CCP’s military successes and its land reform program played a crucial role in the post-1948 radicalization of Vietnamese Communist policies.

Clymer finds Wade’s analysis and conclusions “persuasive and reasonable, if not surprising.” He highlights those parts of the article in which Wade suggests that the Calcutta Conference did play at least a certain role in the post-1948 radicalization of Southeast Asian Communist policies, and notes that from the perspective of the British, the mere fact that the various Southeast Asian Communist parties maintained links with the USSR and established contacts with each other was seen as a potential threat, supposedly because it indicated that the anti-colonial actions of these parties were not motivated solely by domestic interests. Foster further underlines the importance of such Western perceptions by arguing that the Southeast Asian Cold War, a process of “intertwined actions and reactions,” started only when the British (and other Western powers) began to concretely act on these perceptions.

Participants:

Kenton Clymer received a Ph.D. from the University of Michigan, 1970, and is Presidential Research Professor in the Department of History at Northern Illinois University. His major publications include *John Hay: The Gentleman as Diplomat* (1975); *Protestant Missionaries in the Philippines, 1898-1916: An Inquiry into the American Colonial Mentality* (1986); *Quest for Freedom: The United States and the Independence of India* (1995); *The United States and Cambodia, 1870-1969: From Curiosity to Confrontation* (2004) [which, together with the following book, won the Robert H. Ferrell Book Prize for 2005 from the Society for

Historians of American Foreign Relations.]; *The United States and Cambodia, 1969-2000: A Troubled Relationship* (2004); and *Troubled Relations: The United States and Cambodia Since 1870* (2007). He is currently writing a history of United States Relations with Burma.

Anne L. Foster is assistant professor of history at Indiana State University. She earned her PhD in history from Cornell University, specializing in US foreign relations and Southeast Asian history. Recently she contributed to *Colonial Crucible: Empire in the Making of the Modern American State* (edited by Alfred W. McCoy and Francisco A. Scarano) and to *Connecting Histories: Decolonization and the Cold War in Southeast Asia* (edited by Christopher Goscha and Christian Ostermann). Her book, *Projections of Power: The United States and Europe in Colonial Southeast Asia, 1919-1941* is forthcoming from Duke University Press in fall 2010. Currently she is exploring the relationship between state power, opium regulation, and colonial policy in Southeast Asia in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Martin Grossheim is Professor of the History and Society of Southeast Asia at Passau University and has published several articles and books on Vietnamese history. He co-edited *Vietnam, Regional Integration and the Asian Financial Crisis* (Passau: Passau Contributions to Southeast Asian Studies, 2001) and *Nationalism and Cultural Revival in Southeast Asia: Perspectives from the Centre and the Region* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1997). He is currently preparing a new book entitled *Behind the Bamboo Hedge: Village-State Relations in Vietnam* and an English version of his German habilitation treatise on *The Party and the War: Debates and Dissent in North Vietnam* (Berlin: Regiospectra, 2009), which makes use of East German and Vietnamese documents.

Karl Hack is at the Open University in the United Kingdom. His books include *Defence and Decolonisation in Southeast Asia* (Richmond: Curzon, 2001). His present projects are: a history of war and memory in Malaysia and Singapore (with Kevin Blackburn); *Singapore from Srivijaya to Present: Reinventing the Global City* (edited with Jean-Louis Margolin and Karine Delaye, forthcoming with NUS Publishing); and a book on the analysis of empires. He has interviewed communists up to the rank of Secretary-General (C.C. Chin and Karl Hack, ed., *Dialogues with Chin Peng* Singapore University Press, 2004), and his most recent article on counterinsurgency is: 'Extracting Counterinsurgency lessons: Malaya and Afghanistan', at: <http://www.rusi.org/analysis/commentary/ref:C4B14E068758F1/> .

Robert J. McMahon is the Ralph Mershon Professor of History at Ohio State University. He is the author of several books, including, most recently, *Dean Acheson and the Creation of an American World Order* (Reston, VA: Potomac Books, 2009). He is currently preparing a volume of collected essays, *The Cold War in the Third World* (New York: Oxford University Press, forthcoming). In 2001, he served as president of the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations.

Balázs Szalontai is Assistant Professor at Mongolia International University in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia. Having received a Ph.D. in Soviet and Korean history, he has done archival research on the modern history of North Korea, the USSR, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Burma, and Mongolia. His publications include *Kim Il Sung in the Khrushchev Era*:

Soviet-DPRK Relations and the Roots of North Korean Despotism, 1953-1964 (Stanford University Press and Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2005), and peer-reviewed articles on Vietnamese domestic and foreign policies. His current research projects are focused on the Korean War, Indochinese-ASEAN relations, North Korea's involvement in the Vietnam War, and DPRK-Middle Eastern relations.

This issue of the *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* examines the origins of the Cold War in Southeast Asia, primarily from the viewpoint of the Southeast Asian communists in Malaya, Indonesia, and Vietnam, and secondarily from the viewpoints of major outside countries, especially the Soviet Union, China, Great Britain, and Australia. The articles draw on important archival and documentary evidence from Russia, Indonesia, and Vietnam, as well as from the Netherlands, Australia, and Great Britain. Some attention is paid to the United States, but no American archival sources are cited (though the *Foreign Relations of the United States* series merits a few references). All of the papers provide real contributions to the field, but it is a bit disappointing that there were no papers included on Burma, Thailand, or the Philippines. Each of these countries had significant communist movements, and they are all relevant to examining the origins of the Cold War in the region. The published papers themselves have several references to them, especially to Burma, indicating their importance; but more sustained attention to some of them would have added to the value of the collection.

One of the main topics considered in all of the papers is the sudden upsurge across the region in communist activity, including violence, in 1948. Was this new activity coordinated? Was it the result of local conditions, or were orders passed from Moscow? In particular, did it stem from Soviet communist instructions passed to the Southeast Asian communists attending a communist-dominated youth conference in Calcutta early in 1948? On this last point, the original orthodox view was that instructions were disseminated, while later revisionist accounts questioned that and contended that communist activities in Southeast Asia arose from local conditions and developed with little if any outside influences.

Larisa Efimova takes on the question of instructions directly in the first article. She argues that the new evidence from Soviet archives indicates that in 1948 the Soviet Union did not issue instructions at Calcutta for the communists in Southeast Asia to revolt. There were Soviet agents and others who were caught up emotionally in revolutionary, anticolonial fervor who did favor revolution and hoped that the Soviet Union would assist revolutionary independence movements in Indonesia and elsewhere. But according to Efimova actual Soviet policy was considerably more cautious than the rhetoric of some might have suggested, and certainly no orders for insurrection were issued.

To demonstrate her case Efimova examines newly declassified documents from the All-Union Communist Party that relate to the Calcutta Youth Conference of February 1948. Two youth “communist-oriented organisations” (451), the World Federation of Democratic Youth (WFDY), and the International Union of Students, were the primary organizations through which leftist Indonesians maintained contact with Soviet communists. When the USSR declared its support for the Indonesian liberation struggle in 1946, these organizations began an anticolonial campaign, which culminated in the Calcutta Youth Conference. Soviet delegates endorsed the conference and called for complete independence of colonial areas.

Efimova devotes considerable attention to the secret report of Olga Chechetkina, a journalist representing *World Youth*, a publication of the WFDY. But Chechetkina was more than a journalist. Her main goal was not to publish articles but to gather confidential information for the Soviet leadership and the Soviet Communist Party. Chechetkina was one of those who strongly supported national liberation struggles and urged her country to send arms to the Indonesia resistance, which it very much needed. However, she did not think that the Indonesian communists were ready to lead a socialist revolution and recommended that the USSR work closely with the Indonesian communists to advise them. Thus, despite her enthusiastic support for national liberation, Chechetkina did not think that the Indonesian communists were ready to lead a revolution or that the people were prepared, yet, to support such a movement. Thus, her report is strong evidence, Elfimova believes, against the proposition that the Soviet Union instructed the communists in Southeast Asia to revolt. Even more significant is that higher Soviet officials in the Foreign Policy Department of the Communist Party thought Chechetkina had gone too far and reacted negatively to many of her recommendations, which were “too radical and far-reaching” (463). She was then dismissed as the USSR’s representative on *World Youth*. The USSR was not yet ready to become deeply involved in Southeast Asian affairs, even communist affairs.

Of particular interest to Southeast Asianists are Chechetkina’s assessments of Indonesian leaders. Communists generally praised Sutan Sjahrir, for example, sometimes claiming him as one of their own. Chechetkina’s initial evaluation was similar, but she changed her mind and came to consider him too much of a compromiser with the Dutch. Sukarno she initially disliked as “petit-bourgeois” and weak, but after meeting him she concluded that he was “smart and witty” (458) and doing his utmost to gain popular support. She was even more sympathetic to Amir Sjarifuddin, then Minister of Defense of the Republic of Indonesia, since he seemed much more determined than Sjahrir to fight the Dutch “without compromise” (458).

As for the Calcutta Conference itself, Efimova quotes at length from the conference’s record to demonstrate that there was much bemoaning such developments as the *Renville* Agreement in Indonesia (brokered by the United States and appearing for the moment to have brought about a peaceful settlement), which had demonstrated that the Indonesian communist party was incompetent and had lost out to the bourgeois parties. Ways of strengthening the movement were recommended. But when the conference was finished, the Soviet party’s Foreign Policy Department decided that no action was necessary. In sum, the Soviet Communist Party “strongly rejected all practical efforts of the Soviet youth leaders” to assist the communist parties in Indonesia and other places in Southeast Asia and “harshly criticised the youth activists who took seriously the propaganda rhetoric and tied to realise it” (468). Although the Soviet Union wanted to weaken western influence in such places as Indonesia, it was not about to lend practical support to revolutionary movements at this time.

Efimova makes a good case that no orders emanated from Calcutta. Her work serves as a corrective to the ideas of those who believed that the change in the Soviet communist line

in 1948 had resulted in instructions issued to the Southeast Asian parties at the Calcutta meeting. This in turn was thought to have led to the disastrous communist revolt at Madiun in 1948. While further research in Soviet archives might conceivably lead to a different conclusion, for now Efimova's argument is persuasive: while there was enthusiastic support for revolution in Southeast Asia among some Soviet agents, the party and government in Moscow took a much more cautious approach.

Karl Hack in his discussion of Malaya in 1948 agrees with Efimova that there was probably no directive from the Soviet Union to the communists in Southeast Asia ordering them to begin a violent revolution. But he argues that the question about instructions from Moscow is an "irrelevance" that has led scholars to ask "the wrong question about 1948, notably: were there instructions from Moscow about a revolt?" (479) Although Hack makes a good case for taking another look at Moscow's influence, research into the "instructions" question is not, as I see it, irrelevant or unimportant. What if Efimova, while examining previously unavailable documents, had uncovered instructions in her research? Would it then be argued that the matter was unimportant? That she did not find such instructions (and indeed found evidence strongly suggesting that such instructions would not have been sent) reinforces previous arguments and is a useful, if limited, line of inquiry.

Hack does, however, provide an excellent and sympathetic review of the literature on the subject of external influence on Southeast Asian communism. He sees value in the analyses of authors on both sides of the debates (his tone is not at all polemical), while presenting a reasoned argument to give more weight to international factors than has been done in recent years. He argues eloquently for a "neo-orthodox" interpretation of Moscow's importance. In the case of Malaya, Hack is careful not to disparage the importance of local factors in explaining the Malayan Communist Party's (MCP) switch to militant tactics. But he argues that the changing line from Moscow was also important in explaining the timing of the shift which, in the case of Malaya (as well as in Indonesia), took place before the situation was really ready and thus made success problematic. Southeast Asian communists were influenced by Andrei Zhdanov's speech in 1947 that ended the united front tactics and proposed instead a "two camps" (473) world in which conflict between the communist and capitalist spheres was inevitable. There may not have been instructions, but local communists were influenced and inspired by the new propaganda line from Moscow. It was surely more than a coincidence that communist parties in several South and Southeast Asian countries turned militant at about the same time. "In short, the international aspect mattered" (495).

Hack does have to confront the recollections of the MCP Secretary-General Chin Peng, whose account was published in 2003 and which supports the revisionist line that local considerations were far more important than any international ones. Hack responds by arguing that Chin's recollections are contradicted by contemporary documents in the British archives and suggests that his memory was flawed, either unconsciously or deliberately.

Harry Poeze's account of communism in Indonesia provides a very useful, concise account of the history of communism and communist parties and related movements in Indonesia,

stretching back to 1920. But the chapter's focus is on the role of Muso, an Indonesian communist who had spent years in Moscow before returning to Indonesia in 1948. He sought to make the communist movement there intensely loyal to Moscow. The party (and related organizations), he felt, had ignored the Zhdanov dictum, which was one of a series of mistakes made over the previous years. Muso, presumably with Soviet approval, intended to discipline and remake the PKI in Stalin's image as his *djalan baru* (new road) document made crystal clear. Poeze does not dwell much on the matter of specific instructions, although, like Efimova, he finds no evidence of specific orders for Indonesian communists emerging from the Calcutta conference. But his focus on Muso as Moscow's agent certainly suggests that there was considerable foreign influence over the direction of Indonesia's communists, at least by 1948. Muso humiliated the previous Indonesian communist leaders and skewed the movement toward a vehement, implacable, uncompromising path with no place for leaders like Sukarno or Hatta. He was, writes Poeze, "a catalyst" who "ended caution, diplomacy and the secrecy of illegal actions" and "set the course towards confrontation. It was his fault that due to his tactless behaviour armed conflict started at an inopportune moment" (516-17). Under Muso's leadership the party moved quickly toward an armed revolt, most notably at Madiun. The Indonesian Republican forces soon crushed it, killing Muso in the process. In sum, while no instructions arrived via Calcutta, Muso arrived from Moscow. More than local factors accounted for the direction of Indonesian communism.

Tuong Vu agrees that the year 1948 marked an important turning point in Indochinese developments, a turning point that historians have overlooked. As in other places, the communists became more radical that year (or, in Tuong Vu's words, simply began acting like communists again now that they could behave in a less restrained way. "Wolves could now be wolves again," he writes (540). As in the other areas of Southeast Asia explored in the other articles, Tuong Vu notes the importance of external factors, such as Zhdanov's speech and Mao's progress in China. But more so than in Indonesia or Malaya local factors determined the direction of the Vietnamese communists.

One of the most important of these factors was the decision by the Indochinese Communist Party (ICP) to make accommodations with a variety of non-communists when it came to power in August 1945. One of the author's contributions here is to give due respect to the predecessor Tran Trong Kim (TTK) government that ruled during the four months after the Japanese overthrew the French in Indochina. Noting that the TTK government has long been ignored because the winners write history, he argues that this has distorted what actually happened. For one thing, the TTK government "greatly expanded the opportunities for mass political action" (552) and thus made it possible for the Vietminh to build support. For another, to come to power in August 1945 the Vietminh had to make significant compromises with the TTK and its supporters. Otherwise the TTK could have effectively resisted the Viet Minh, he argues. The result was that for at least four years thereafter, there was significant non-communist representation (including many former TTK officials) in the government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV). While communists controlled such key ministries as Defense, Foreign Affairs, Interior, and Information, non-communists were in charge of Economy, Agriculture, Education, and Justice. As a result, radical land reform was inhibited, and the judiciary remained

independent. The Vietminh did purge some of its most important rivals in opposition parties, such as the Vietnamese Nationalist Party (VNP) and the Vietnamese Revolutionary League; but it is striking how much non-communist influence remained in the first few years of the DRV.

Similarly, the DRV had inherited a colonial bureaucracy that tended to be conservative. The Vietminh cadres distrusted the bureaucracy, while the latter argued that the cadres should now be replaced with educated professionals. In any event, the DRV had little choice but to retain the bureaucracy for the time being.

Tuong Vu argues that this began to change in 1947 and especially 1948. This was due in part to external factors. As the Cold War began to take shape, Stalin, it appeared, might be about to reverse his long standing aversion to recognizing the DRV and providing assistance to Ho Chi Minh's government, something signaled by Zhdanov's famous speech. Furthermore, the military victories of the Chinese communists in Manchuria proved heartening. Perhaps the ICP could now reverse its policy of accommodation. The result was a "radical turn" in ICP policy (534). The government now promoted "a more aggressive land policy" and attempted to make the party more proletarian (535). But while these foreshadowed a more radical approach involving "unbridgeable" (539) differences with more moderate elements, events in Vietnam were considerably less dramatic and violent (and ultimately more successful) than in Malaya or Indonesia. Instead, it took two years or relatively civil debate for the ICP to consolidate its power and gain full control of the government. In the meantime, judicial independence continued to exist, and there was a great debate over the meaning of the law and its relationship (or lack of relationship) to class struggle.

Thus, as with the other Southeast Asian communist movements, the year 1948 takes on more significance in Vietnam than it has hitherto been accorded. As with the other countries, external communist factors (notably the change in Soviet outlook that was seen in Zhdanov's speech) played a significant part. Yet local factors in Indochina, more so than in Malaya or Indonesia, also contributed significantly to the decisions and the pace of change.

One surprising omission in Tuong Vu's otherwise persuasive account is any discussion of Ho Chi Minh. The founder of the ICP and the Vietminh and the president of the DRV is mentioned only in passing. Just how he responded to the various factors, including Zhdanov's speech and other developments in the Soviet and Chinese worlds is not analyzed.

Goeff Wade addresses the question of when the Cold War arrived in Southeast Asia, particularly as seen in British and Australian circles. The answer depends on definitions. The year 1946 is the earliest possible candidate, Wade argues, for in that year the British saw Russia as a potential threatening actor but not an imminent threat. The Soviet Union was then viewed as genuinely sympathetic to anticolonial movements but so far had not appeared to have taken any actions on behalf of such movements. Regional communist parties communicated with each other, but there was no evidence yet of any

communication with Moscow, though the British did not rule out the possibility that there were as yet undetected contacts. By 1947, however, the British were more certain that there were links between local communists and the Soviet Union and believed that the USSR was about to become more actively involved in the region. "The Russians were probably coming!" writes Wade (548). At this point the British were more worried about this than the Americans.

Reflecting the changes noted by other authors, the year 1948 was the crucial year in terms of British and Australian (and American) perceptions of a dangerous communist threat to Southeast Asia, with the Russians behind it all. "Communist Russia is endeavouring to conquer the world," stated the British Commissioner-General for Southeast Asia, Malcolm MacDonald (552). The opening of a Soviet embassy in Bangkok in November 1948 added to the sense of increased Soviet involvement in the region.

As the communist threat in Southeast Asia appeared to increase, some of the non-communist countries of the region, along with Great Britain, Australia, and the United States began in 1949 to coordinate their policies and take actions to counter the threat. To Wade these developments marked "the beginning of a true Cold War in Southeast Asia" (558). The Chinese Communist victory in 1949 was the final straw. By 1950 there was unquestionably a cold war in Southeast Asia, a struggle in which the United States fully participated.

Wade's analysis, based on extensive research in British and Australian archival records, is persuasive and reasonable, if not surprising. Beginning with vague suspicions of possible connections between the Soviet Union and Southeast Asian communists in 1946, the British and Australians saw more and more evidence of connections as the years passed and concluded that this was very much a part of Soviet (and then Chinese) efforts to control Asia, if not the world. By 1950 there was a full fledged Cold War in Southeast Asia. The Cold War thus evolved over a period of years.

Like the other contributors Wade also addresses the Calcutta conference, though only briefly. He thinks the Calcutta conference was important. Leaving aside the question of whether there were actual instructions issued, he notes that "there was a marked increase in communist activities in South East Asia" (560) soon after it concluded and cites a report by Burmese communist leader Than Tun that "foreign representatives" (561) at Calcutta had given advice to communist delegations from Southeast Asia. Thus like the other contributors, Wade concludes that by at least 1948 there was a growing relationship between Southeast Asian communists and the Soviet Union. China's communists would soon emerge as another force of considerable influence and importance in Southeast Asia.

These papers taken together make a strong argument that the prevailing revisionist case about the nature of Southeast Asian communism needs correction. None of them dismisses the importance of local factors, which were apparent in all situations. But all of them insist that revisionist accounts dismiss too quickly outside influences on local communists. At least by 1948 (clearly a crucial year all across the region), Soviet communist ideas were significant, they insist. These articles will probably not have the last

word on this contentious and at times murky topic (and other Southeast Asian countries remain to be considered). But their arguments cannot be ignored and will inform future research.

The rich collection of essays appearing in the special issue of *The Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* offers scholars of Southeast Asia, the Cold War, and foreign relations history a plethora of interesting insights, tantalizing new information, and fresh approaches to old questions. Many of the big questions in these fields are reexamined in careful, thoughtful and ultimately convincing ways. The long disputed question of whether the Soviet Union orchestrated Communist Party activities in various places around the world receives non-polemical assessment. The concern of Southeast Asianists to demonstrate the ways in which colonized peoples had agency motivates, but does not structure, the arguments. The mutually reinforcing developments which resulted in a global Cold War are carefully explored, with the authors noting when one event seems to have caused another, and conversely when mere chronology does not establish causation. Though often extremely detailed in exposition and addressing events unfamiliar to the non-specialist, these essays individually and collectively tackle historically important questions about the nature of the early Cold War and its Southeast Asian manifestations.

Karl Hack and **Geoff Wade**'s introduction summarizes both the contributions of the essays as a whole, and of each essay. They help draw connections as well to developments in countries not covered in the individual essays, especially Burma and to a lesser extent Thailand. It would have been fruitful to develop those connections more explicitly, since the Southeast Asian countries which receive extended treatment in the individual essays are the usual suspects: Indonesia, Malaysia, and Vietnam. The drama of 1948 in the first two is well known, and Vietnam's history with communist-inspired national struggle (or nationalist-inspired communist struggle, depending on your view) is similarly iconic.

Hack and Wade posit four contributions these articles make: (1) the articles suggest that newly available evidence demonstrates that the Soviet Union did not issue orders to Asian communist parties to revolt in 1948; (2) they also suggest that internal debates, resulting in violent resistant in 1948, were shaped by the dissemination of the new "communist international line" and its emphasis on the "two camp" line, (p. 447) which stressed the incompatibility of communism with other political systems; (3) the articles further suggest that the Cold War developed in Southeast Asia as the result of interactions between "great powers" (p. 448) and local parties, each pursuing its own perceived interest and (4) the articles demonstrate that the date scholars choose as a beginning of the Cold War in Southeast Asia depends largely on the definition of the Cold War employed.

Read as a group, these articles offer particularly compelling support for these four claims. Questions and concerns which one article raises often are answered by subsequent articles; points in later articles are more plausible because of what had been read before. Hack and Wade are to be commended for bringing together such a compatible and accomplished group of scholars.

The first article, by **Larisa Efimova**, provides extensive documentation that the official line within the Soviet government was to keep track, to some extent, of the anticolonial struggle

in Indonesia (she concentrates on Indonesia with some attention to the broader context) and to provide rhetorical support, especially from sanctioned youth groups. Efimova refutes a long-standing scholarly argument that, at the least, Soviet change in policy explicitly encouraged the more radical turn in Southeast Asian politics in 1948. The documentation she provides demonstrates conclusively that the Soviet Union did wish to encourage communist movements in Southeast Asia, but had little willingness to engage in much concrete action in support of that policy. Vietnam, with limitations, forms a partial exception.

Efimova presents this new material from previously inaccessible archives, providing analysis of how reports from Southeast Asia were received and interpreted in Moscow, and demonstrating that the enthusiasm of Soviet visitors to Southeast Asia for the struggle ongoing in that region was not matched by high level officials back in the Soviet Union. It is striking, and perhaps understandable, that Indonesian political activists seem to have believed the “united front” policies of the 1930s and early 1940s still guided Soviet policy. They asked for assistance, particularly in acquiring weapons, from the Soviet Union but clearly intended to maintain freedom of action to institute the kind of government most suited to their situation, rather than toe a Soviet-mandated line. Efimova does not seek to explain why Soviet policy was reticent in the face of Indonesian requests for assistance, but three explanations seem likely. First, the Soviet Union had sufficient other commitments in the mid to late 1940s and could not take on more even if it so desired. Second, and relatedly, on-going anti-colonial struggles posed challenges to the United States and West European countries which weakened them and made them look bad in the eyes of what soon came to be called the Third World. The Soviets might benefit from prolonged struggle without doing much. But finally, and I think importantly, the requests came from groups which had only partial affinity with Soviet ideology and goals. The new evidence Efimova presents will permit both her and other scholars to pursue these and other explanations of Soviet foreign policy choices in the early Cold War.

Karl Hack’s article, “The Origins of the Asian Cold War: Malaya 1948” explores a question which at first glance has significance primarily for scholars of Malaysian history, but in his conclusion he points to the broader importance of his arguments for our understanding of the early Cold War generally. His question: Was the Malayan Communist Party (MCP) decision to launch the violent insurrection which prompted the British declaration of the Emergency in 1948 the result primarily of external factors (changes in Soviet policy) or internal factors (Malay decisions and conditions)? We shortly learn that the question is one that Hack considers simplistic. But he notes the long historiography which is structured by those who think the answer must be one thing or the other, with the bulk of scholarship since 1960 focusing on internal factors.

Although not a focus of his analysis, this recounting of the historiography is revealing of the ways in which official analysis and academic scholarship of the 1940s and 1950s (with notable exceptions including the work of George Kahin) tended to see outside influences, including but not limited to communism, as providing important structure to Southeast Asian anti-colonial movements. Officials and scholars, viewing the region through then-common racial ideas, perhaps could not quite imagine that colonized peoples were

intelligent, focused, motivated, and organized enough to plan and carry out their own successful political movements. Additionally, however, these scholars and officials of the 1940s and 1950s may have believed that if insurrection was prompted by outside influences, then perhaps it would be easy to end the anti-colonial activism by removing the outside influences.

By the 1960s and 1970s, scholars were committed to documenting the agency of ordinary people the world over. Social historians discovered the critical role that working people and women and, in some countries, ethnic minorities had played in shaping society and culture. Political historians and political scientists emphasized, in the case of Southeast Asia, the ways in which indigenous nationalists had proactively struggled for and shaped anti-colonial movements and formation of new nation-states. This basic commitment to the idea that people in a geographical region shape their own destiny prompted scholars to look within the region for answers to questions about how political movements began, grew, changed, and succeeded or failed. It remains an important thread in literature on anti-colonial movements of the 1940s through 1960s, but now scholars are emphasizing the intertwined nature of external and internal influences. Hack's article fits squarely within this new trend. He demonstrates conclusively that members of the MCP faced serious challenges inside Malaya, ranging from increased British repression to internal party conflict to unfavorable new trade union restrictions, all of which made insurrection appealing. And he demonstrates equally conclusively that MCP leaders knew about and absorbed the change in Soviet rhetoric about the "two camps" and international communist line. What prompted decisions to revolt in 1948? A combination of these factors, not in the sense of merely putting them together in a list until you have reached some magic sufficient number of causes, but all these things working in combination.

The argument requires careful attention to rhetoric and to the intricate relationships among events which prompted changes in policy by British officials, MCP leaders, and, although acting primarily off stage, Soviet officials. Hack explores these intricacies from the Malayan side; it would be helpful to have learned more about the role of British actions. He raises that important point only in his conclusion, where he argues that the British by early 1948 had become "increasingly convinced...that the Cold War was coming to Southeast Asia" (p. 494) and that they needed to create policy to prevent that influence. It appears that Britain had decided that the global Cold War was arriving in Malaya and structured their policy there about the same time the MCP was reaching the same conclusion. Hack's call to explore the "web-like interconnections" among varieties of actors and events, if heeded, will reveal a more dynamic and complex early Cold War. As discussed below, Wade's article in this same issue contributes to this process.

The 1948 MCP decision to move to armed insurrection began the well known and protracted Malayan Emergency. The 1948 insurrection in Indonesia had the opposite initial result, since it was easily crushed by the almost-independent and non-communist Indonesian Republic. Malaysian independence was delayed until after the end of the Emergency. Indonesia's full independence followed quickly after the Republic crushed the Madiun Revolt. It has long been a staple story in what might be called the U.S. version of the two camp line: the United States supported the Indonesian anti-colonial struggle only

after Indonesians conclusively demonstrated their anti-communist credentials by forcefully suppressing a revolt of Indonesian communists. In a manner similar to Karl Hack, **Harry Poeze** explores the relationship between external factors, stemming primarily from Soviet policy but also from policies of the Communist Party of the Netherlands, and internal factors, particularly factionalism and disputes among various stripes of leftists in Indonesia, in the course of events leading to the Madiun revolt in the fall of 1948.

Poeze explores the intricacies of Indonesian anti-colonial politics, in a manner engaging and accessible even to those with little knowledge of these complicated developments. Indonesia had the oldest communist party of all Southeast Asian countries. The PKI was founded in 1920, but also was singularly prone to premature rebellions followed by the exile, often for decades, of its most important leaders. The key development in 1948 was the return of Muso, in exile in the Soviet Union, China and Europe almost continually since 1926. He appeared to bring instructions directly from Moscow. Muso embodied both external influences in the form of his connections to Soviet policymakers, and internal factors, in his status as an Indonesian and participant in local politics. The article is fascinating, and revealing of Indonesia's complicated attempts to maneuver in the changing early Cold War world. The **Hack** and **Poeze** articles, especially when read side by side, strongly reinforce the vibrancy of international communist politics within leftist circles in Malaya and Indonesia while also demonstrating that policies were sometimes, even often, adapted to local needs.

Tuong Vu spends almost no time exploring the international influences on Vietnamese decision-making in 1948, since for this particular case, the assumption has long been that Vietnamese communists were influenced by the international communist line. His article argues that the change from united front tactics in the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) dates not from 1950, as has been commonly believed, but from 1948. In a way, the external developments in 1950, when both the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China extended recognition and support, were culminations of internal developments from 1948. Vu's article reveals internal struggles and debates within the DRV known previously to very few scholars, not least because Vietnamese officials have not wanted the complicated picture of the DRV's early history to be fully remembered.

Vu draws on both Vietnamese documents of various types and recent works by many fine scholars of Vietnamese history and politics to demonstrate that the DRV government in 1945-46 had shared power with many non-communists in influential positions. Domestically critical ministries, such as Agriculture, Education and Justice, were headed and largely staffed by non-communists. A key reason was that there simply were insufficient numbers of communists with the proper education and training, but Vu also shows that the political situation was more contested than we tend to think. Control of these ministries by people who did not share the government's relatively moderate agenda for land reform proved a serious problem, since they simply refused to implement laws calling for lower rents and modest land redistribution. In 1948, these internal matters came to a head, with disputes about the purpose of civil law playing out within the government, and demonstrating the "ideological cleavage between communists and non-communists" (p. 537). In the aftermath of this debate, non-communists in the government

began to lose their authority; the more prescient among them fled areas controlled by the DRV. Vu argues that this moment was the crucial split for the DRV; after 1948 it pursued a radical path in concert with international communism at the expense of any pretense of a united front inside Vietnam.

Vietnamese communists ironically can be seen to have become more nationalist, or perhaps simply more anti-colonial, by virtue of moving to implement policies endorsed by international communism. Whether the inspiration for land redistribution was internal or came from China and Mao or the Soviet Union, that policy appears to have been the key one. Those non-communists in the DRV government up to 1948 had too many ties to landlords and the French colonial bureaucracy to be able to serve well inside a government determined to change political participation by, and the economic status of, the Vietnamese people. As Vu suggests, the international situation, with the developing Cold War and the Soviet two camp line, provided a boost or perhaps a justification for policies that communists in the DRV would have been likely to pursue in any case.

The issue concludes with **Geoff Wade's** "The Beginnings of a 'Cold War' in Southeast Asia: British and Australian Perceptions." Alone among the articles, Wade explores the perceptions of countries outside the region, although barely outside, geographically, in the case of Australia and in some ways not yet outside, in the case of Britain, regional colonial power. Still, although both British and Australian officials viewed Southeast Asia as intimately tied to Britain and Australia, they also could decide to leave, or to devote only minimal resources. This choice was obviously not one open to the Southeast Asian countries themselves. Wade is interested to explore how the Cold War's arrival in Southeast Asia was perceived by officials from Britain and Australia. He notes that Britain and Australia had chosen their side in the Cold War at its inception, but that they were not the super powers whose behaviors and choices defined the global Cold War. How did these important but not leading actors shape the Cold War in Southeast Asia, a region where they were involved and responsible to a greater extent than either the United States or Soviet Union. The insights Wade offers, especially for British perceptions, clarify some of the arguments and perplexing issues in the other articles.

Wade reports a high level of British official, but usually secret, concern about Soviet direction of local communists and communist parties already by early 1946, but until 1948, this level of concern was balanced by British assessments that the Soviet Union was relatively disinterested in Southeast Asia, or that, even if Soviet interest was growing, the British and, they hoped, other colonial and former colonial powers, could offer sufficient economic and political benefit to Southeast Asians that the Soviet Communist message would not appeal. The British assessments vacillate to some degree, with some officials expressing degrees of alarm about Soviet direction of all communist movements and cooptation of nationalist ones, while other officials noted the lack of evidence about even direct communication from many local communist groups to Moscow. These assessments, in both their alarmism and their sanguine assessment of low levels of effective organization and communication, echo similar reports from the 1920s and 1930s (not discussed by Wade), when communism first entered the region.

Wade sees a major change in early 1949, which he links to the apparent inevitability of communist victory in the Chinese Civil War. He emphasizes that the “Chinese Communist Party assumption of power in China” provided a model and a guide for local Southeast Asian communists, and a “focus” for British fears, a “rival” for British influence (all from p. 565). Only the Chinese Communist victory prompted serious efforts by Britain and its Cold War allies, including the United States, to begin taking measures to create an organized anti-communist bloc or alliance. Even that would not come to fruition, as SEATO, for years. This argument serves as a reminder that the Cold War itself resulted from intertwined actions and reactions: British perceptions of the communist presence in Southeast Asia may have indicated that the Cold War was raging elsewhere, but until Britain concretely acted on that perception, arguably the Cold War had not arrived in Southeast Asia.

As noted above, this group of essays sheds new and penetrating light on questions Cold War historians have asked for decades. A full ten years after the Cold War ended, however, I wonder if we shouldn't also be asking new questions about what we perceive to be the early Cold War, or at least writing more explicitly about why these old questions have such staying power. Questions of when the Cold War began for a certain region, and whether internal or external factors were more critical in prompting revolutionary movements which were named as communist, were, during the Cold War itself often asked with political motivations at their core. Until recently, much of the scholarship on the early Cold War focused, explicitly or implicitly, on the question of responsibility for starting the Cold War. Are these articles in that mode? Not explicitly, and I think if so, only incidentally. But by continuing to ask questions stemming from that historiography without new consideration for what makes them of lasting importance, they can give that impression.

These articles, and other new scholarship, demonstrate that chronologies inherited from the Cold War may need to be rethought. Colonial governments in Southeast Asia created informal structures and formal agreements to resist communist influence in the region as early as the mid-1920s, yet that is clearly too early a date for the beginning of the Cold War. Soviet direct intervention in the region, in terms of military and financial support, seems not to have been an important factor until the 1950s, yet that seems too late a date for the beginning of the Cold War. Perhaps it would be more useful to set aside the question of beginnings for the time being and explore seriously, as the articles in this special issue prompt us,, the variety of political factors shaping anti-colonial struggle and the nature of early independent governments in Southeast Asia. If we stop looking through the Cold War lens, perhaps we will see some issues more clearly.

I shall start my review with two caveats. First, I am not a specialist in international relations and diplomatic history, but was trained in the history of Southeast Asia. Second, in my commentary I shall focus on **Tuong Vu**'s article "It's time for the Indochinese Revolution to show its true colours': The radical turn of Vietnamese politics in 1948".

In their introduction to *New Terrains in Southeast Asian History* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2003), the editors Abu Talib Ahmad and Tan Liok Ee suggest a new approach to the history of the Cold War in Southeast Asia: "It is time for Southeast Asian scholars to look at the many layers of this entire episode from the *inside*, not in a parochial nationalistic sense, but from a perspective that can take in the local and regional dimensions, relating them to the international strategic factors in the conflicts. Most important perhaps is the utilisation of local sources and local knowledge to understand how the international conflicts that were part of the Cold War impinged on the politics and lives of the people living in the region" (xviii).

By making use of recently released Party documents and Vietnamese memoirs that have been untapped so far, Tuong Vu makes an important contribution to the Vietnamese dimension of the French war, which according to Mark Bradley "....remains the least studied of any aspects of the conflict".¹

Apparently, Tuong Vu also profited from the more open access of Vietnamese archives, although it is unclear whether he was able to draw on sources from the Party archives, which usually remain closed to foreign scholars.

In his paper, Tuong Vu analyses shifts in the politics of the Indochinese Communist Party (ICP) in 1948 and argues that the year represented a decisive turning point in the Vietnamese revolution, whereas Cold War historians have usually declared 1950 the pivotal year in the French war and the development of the communist movement in Vietnam (pp. 519-520). In the first section of his paper, Tuong Vu examines the united-front policy of the ICP and emphasises that the non-communist participation in the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) government in the first few years of its existence has often been neglected in research. He highlights the compromises that the new government and the ICP had to make with the colonial elites and the colonial bureaucracy and thus shows that there was much more continuity between the colonial and post-colonial era than is widely believed. Tuong Vu is not the first person to tell the story² of the

¹ Mark Philip Bradley, "Making Sense of the French War: The Postcolonial Moment and the First Vietnam War, 1945-1954" in *The First Vietnam War: Colonial Conflict and Cold War Crisis*, ed. by Mark Atwood Lawrence and Fredrik Logevall (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007), 27.

² See David Marr, *Vietnam 1945: The Quest for Power* (Berkeley: California Press, 1995) and other books and articles cited by Tuong Vu.

“forgotten compromises” (p. 521), but by using new sources such as interviews with Vũ Đình Hòe, a non-communist minister in the Việt Minh government, and his memoirs, he adds a lot of fascinating details to the whole picture. Tuong Vu, however, overextends the “continuity thesis” when he states: “In sum, Vietnamese communists rose to power with little bloodshed and established a new state in a short time” (p. 527). At the same time, he points to the elimination of Trotskyites and many other “archrivals of the ICP” (p. 527). Other historians such as Shawn McHale have argued that “...the bloodshed was astonishing in its scope”.³ François Guillemot, who has done extensive research on this issue, estimates that between 5,000 and 50,000 persons were killed between 1945 and 1947.⁴ This is just a minor point of criticism, however, since this issue is not central to Tuong Vu’s argument.

In the second section of his paper, the author puts the domestic developments in Vietnam in a wider geopolitical context. He argues that on the one hand the ICP leadership encountered several setbacks in 1947 and 1948: the failure of their diplomatic manoeuvres, the expulsion of the French communists from the government and the successful negotiations between Bảo Đại and French representatives, which resulted in the establishment of the State of Vietnam (pp. 528-529). On the other hand, the announcement of the Zhdanov or two-camp line of the newly formed Comintern in 1947 and the advance of communist guerrilla troops in southern China and Manchuria, which was accompanied by a more pronounced land policy, “...combined to create conditions more conducive to the adoption of radical domestic policy in Vietnam” (p. 530). Tuong Vu suggests that the changing domestic and international context offered the ICP new opportunities to solve problems that the united-front policy of the Việt Minh had created in the areas of “...land policy, leadership conflicts, and the consolidation of state and party organisations” (p. 531).

It was precisely in these three areas, Tuong Vu says, that a radical turn took place in 1948 (pp. 534-540). This is his central argument; he concludes: “While these events in Vietnam were by no means as drastic and violent as the civil wars in Malaysia, Burma and Indonesia, 1948 in Vietnam was still the key turning point on a path that would become irreversible” (p. 535). In order to support his thesis, Tuong Vu analyses the shifts in the DRV policy in detail. He argues that the land policy became more radical in 1948: the ICP pleaded for a more radical implementation of land-rent reduction, announced the confiscation of land belonging to *Việt Gian* (traitors) for the first time and stepped up the mobilisation of peasants (p. 535). Further measures testifying to the more radical approach aimed at the consolidation of the ICP as an organisation (pp. 536-537).

³ Shawn McHale, “Freedom, Violence, and the Struggle over the Public Arena in the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, 1945-1958”, in *Naissance d'un État-Parti. Le Việt Nam depuis 1945. The Birth of a Party-State. Vietnam since 1945*, ed. Christopher E. Goscha and Benoît de Tréglodé (Paris: Les Indes Savantes, 2004), 85.

⁴ François Guillemot, “Au cœur de la fracture vietnamienne: L'élimination de l'opposition nationaliste et anticolonialiste dans le Nord du Vietnam (1945-1946)”, in *Naissance d'un État-Parti. Le Việt Nam depuis 1945. The Birth of a Party-State. Vietnam since 1945*, ed. by Christopher E. Goscha and Benoît de Tréglodé (Paris: Les Indes Savantes, 2004), 209.

However, Tuong Vu claims that the “...debate between communists and non-communists over judicial independence and local law enforcement” (p. 537) was of even more symbolic significance. His detailed analysis of the debate between Quang Đạm, an editor of *Sự thật*, and non-communist ministers such as Vũ Trọng Khánh and Vũ Đình Hòe on questions of class struggle and judicial independence is an original contribution to our understanding of the shift from the united-front policy to the establishment of a Party state that claimed supremacy over all structures.

In his conclusion, Tuong Vu tries to explain why the impact that international developments had on Vietnam in 1947 and 1948 was more “subtle” (p. 443) than on the events in other Southeast Asian countries also covered by this special issue of the *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*. He maintains that the ICP did not “...break immediately with non-communists in 1948 and go all the way down the radical path...” (p. 541) because militarily the Việt Minh were still on the defensive and, in contrast to other communist parties in Southeast Asia, the ICP was “in no hurry” because it was already quite obvious that the communist forces in China would soon win the war (p. 541).

Does Tuong Vu’s central argument that 1948 was “a key turning point in the revolution in Indochina” (p. 540) really hold water, though? I will now reassess the development of the ICP’s policy towards the intellectuals, the land-reform policy and its efforts at Party consolidation and will try to show that Tuong Vu has overextended his argument.

Tuong Vu does not dwell on the Party’s cultural policy, but quotes Kim Ninh’s *A World Transformed: The politics of culture in revolutionary Vietnam, 1945-1965* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002) and claims that this study “...agrees with the argument here that 1948 represented a watershed in the Vietnamese revolution” (p. 520). In her book, Kim Ninh does, indeed, argue that “Between 1948 and 1953, a transformation had taken place” (Kim Ninh, p. 117) and that the Party had introduced several measures to ensure its control of the intellectuals in preparation for the land reform. A “radical turn”, i.e. a radical tightening of the Party’s grip over intellectuals, however, was closely linked to the adoption of Maoist rectification techniques (*chỉnh huấn*) such as criticism and self-criticism, she says (Kim Ninh, pp. 103-104, 111-113). Actually, it was only after the victory of the Chinese communist forces in 1949 and the successful Việt Minh border offensive in 1950 that the ICP fully embraced Maoist concepts: “...many intellectuals recall that Chinese views on art and literature were circulating in North Vietnam with tremendous influence from 1950 onward after the success of the Chinese revolution had opened the Sino-Vietnamese border” (pp. 111-112). Kim Ninh also emphasises the contrast between the more relaxed atmosphere at the Conference of Debate in 1949 and during the rectification sessions in 1951, which reflected “...all austere organization with a menacing sense of enveloping authority” (p. 113).

The land policy of the Party took a radical turn at a later stage as well. While it is true that the Party launched new initiatives to implement its rent-reduction programme and it also ordered the confiscation of land and property owned by Việt Gian (*traitors*) in 1948, these measures were still moderate ones. The Party now put more emphasis on land-reform issues and also tried to step up the mobilisation of peasants, but at the same time the

united-front policy was still upheld. It is striking, for example, that in October 1948 Party head Trường Chinh urged the Resistance Committees to push for the rent reduction more vigorously, but at the same time appealed to the solidarity and patriotism of the landlords and asked them to make their contribution to the war for national independence. He still made use of the quite moderate “united-front terminology” and addressed the landlords as “*ngài*” (“Your Excellency”).⁵ It would take a number of years before class struggle would sweep through the villages of North Vietnam and villagers classified as “landlords” would be addressed by other villagers in denunciation sessions (*đấu tố*) as “*mày*” (*you*), which is very impolite and derogatory in Vietnamese usage and shows utter disrespect. During this radical land reform between 1953 and 1956, the Party used several Maoist techniques imported from China after 1950. In other words, the “path to violent class struggle” was still quite a long one in the field of land policy in 1948.

This was also true for the consolidation of Party organisation. It was only in mid-1952 that a rectification campaign was launched, which aimed at a purification of existing revolutionary organisations (*chính Đảng*).

In his paper, Tuong Vu dwells at length on tension between communist and non-communist leaders within the DRV government and thus contributes to a better understanding of the inner workings of the DRV in the first few years of its existence. I wonder whether Tuong Vu is also aware of debates within the ICP. At one point, he mentions that: “Trường Chinh’s criticism reflected a certain division of opinion within the ICP, although we do not know who in the party leadership was criticised” (p. 532). On the whole, however, the ICP is presented as a monolithic organisation in the article, with the “wolves” – to use Tuong Vu’s metaphor – all howling at the same time. We still only have a few glimpses of debates in the Party during the French war, but the available information shows that the Party was actually far from monolithic. Hồ Chí Minh, in particular, was criticised several times by fellow Party members because of his “nationalist and opportunist line”.⁶ It would be interesting to know whether Tuong Vu found any more evidence about these inner-Party disputes in the Vietnamese archives.

⁵ Trường Chinh, “Giảm tô” [Land Rent Reduction], in *Su That*, 101, 1 October 1948, reprinted in: *Cuộc kháng chiến thần thánh của nhân dân Việt Nam (Những bài viết trong thời kỳ kháng chiến trên các báo Đảng)* [The Sacred Resistance War of the Vietnamese People. Articles Published During the War of Resistance in Party Newspapers] (Hanoi: NXB Su that, 1960-61), Vol. 2, 90-93. See also Phạm Quang Minh, *Zwischen Theorie und Praxis. Agrarpolitik in Vietnam seit 1945* [Between theory and practice. Agrarian policy in Vietnam since 1945] (Berlin: Berlin Studies on Southeast Asia, Logos, 2003), 94-98.

⁶ Quoted in: Sophie Quinn-Judge, “Through a Glass Darkly. Reading the History of the Vietnamese Communist Party, 1945-1975”, in *Making Sense of the Vietnam Wars. Local, National and Transnational Perspectives*, ed. Mark Philip Bradley and Marilyn B. Young (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 124.

This provocative forum, rooted in important new empirical evidence about internal Southeast Asian developments of the late 1940s, addresses a set of crucial interpretive questions for both regional and international scholars. Chief among them are: How, and when, did the Cold War come to Southeast Asia? And, more pointedly, what causal connections can be drawn between the Soviet-American global rivalry for power, influence, and ideological supremacy, on the one hand, and the revolutionary political and social movements that swept across Southeast Asia in the aftermath of the Pacific War, on the other? Those questions have long bedeviled diplomatic and international historians of the Cold War, much as they have regional specialists. These five well researched articles and the introductory essay that usefully frames their overall significance combine to advance the ongoing scholarly debate in noteworthy ways. Yet they also reveal a far less robust engagement with the relevant historiography in international history than one might expect, especially in light of the expansive claims offered by **Karl Hack** and **Geoff Wade**.

The balkanization of contemporary scholarship poses a daunting challenge for historians of the modern era. That is especially so for those researching and writing about the Cold War in the Third World, a subject that has produced burgeoning and diverse literatures in what are oftentimes--if unfortunately-- seen as distinct, disconnected subfields. It takes nothing away from the fine-grained research showcased in the articles featured here to suggest that the symposium, in the end, tells us less about the origins and course of the Cold War in Southeast Asia than the contributors assert.

The strengths of the individual, and the collective, contributions to the "Asian Cold War Symposium" prove considerable. The tired old shibboleth about the Kremlin somehow issuing firm instructions to local Southeast Asian communist parties, via the Calcutta Youth Conference of February 1948, is thoroughly demolished here. May it rest in peace, along with the false dichotomies that flowed from it. Ruth McVey's important book,¹ to be sure, dealt a severe blow over a half-century ago to the notion that Soviet orders triggered the domestic violence and upheavals that erupted in 1948 in Burma, Malaya, Indonesia, and the Philippines. A much more nuanced and sophisticated framework of analysis emerges here, however, that requires a further revision of McVey's revisionist thesis. If Moscow never issued "instructions" to the region's communist parties to switch from a united front strategy to a more confrontational and revolutionary stance, as **Larisa Efimova** and other contributors make clear, that is hardly tantamount to concluding that the fatherland of international communism had no influence on local communist leaders. Southeast Asia's communist movements looked to Moscow for inspiration and direction -- it would be rather surprising had they not -- and they were keenly aware of the advent of the "two camps" doctrine so recently enunciated by Andrei Zhdanov. That dramatic shift in the official

¹ Ruth T. McVey, *The Calcutta Conference and the Southeast Asian Uprisings* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Modern Indonesia Project, 1958)

international line of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union inevitably affected the internal lens through which local communist insurgencies appraised their own prospects and strategies for attaining power.

This forum does a splendid job of underscoring and explicating the key importance of the interaction between three contingent factors: changing Soviet doctrine; international developments – in Europe as well as in Asia; and local leaders’ perceptions of the situation on the ground in their respective countries. For all the important variations from place to place, and the essayists take pains to point them out, a region-wide pattern nonetheless obtains. It is one in which local communists became emboldened to abandon the united front tactics of the past due to a combination of internal and external factors that prompted careful reassessments of the potential benefits and costs of more overtly revolutionary tactics. “In short, the combination of the local and the international,” suggest **Hack** and **Wade**, “is the explanation for the pattern of revolt, even if its precise status in each individual revolt is more difficult to divine” (447-448).

This symposium’s intervention into the wider scholarly debate about the origins of the Southeast Asian phase of the Cold War is weakened, however, by its near-exclusive concentration on just one side of a two-sided global confrontation. All the authors proceed from the unstated assumption that the key, precipitating moves were those taken by the Soviet Union and its regional communist party allies. Their focus on the centrality of Moscow’s doctrinal shifts, and on the subsequent insurrections of 1948, betrays a common assumption that communist action spurred Western reaction. “It might be too dogmatic to claim that the actions of Southeast Asian communists forced great power involvement in the region,” write **Hack** and **Wade** in a key passage. “But it is undeniably true that the decisions which Southeast Asians took in 1948–based on the conjoining of the international communist line and local needs–sowed the seeds for increasing great power involvement” (447). Only one essay in the forum concerns Western policy, and that contribution deals not with the United States but with Great Britain and Australia. Thus, curiously, the interests and actions of the other superpower are virtually ignored in a symposium devoted to the Cold War in Southeast Asia. One can only surmise that the contributors considered Washington’s behavior either unimportant, uninteresting, or – and this would seem to be the operative view – purely reactive.

Perhaps if there were few documentary sources available on U.S. policy in postwar Southeast Asia, or if there were a scant historical literature on the subject, such a “one-hand clapping” approach might be forgivable. But, in fact, far more extensive documentary evidence is available for the United States than all the primary sources currently available for the Soviet Union and its regional communist allies combined. An especially rich secondary literature exists on American perceptions and actions in postwar Southeast Asia, moreover, the best of which draws connections between U.S. priorities in that area and its policies toward Western Europe, Japan, and the wider world. That literature emphasizes that Southeast Asia had become an important priority to the Harry S. Truman administration before the 1948 revolts. After all, the United States maintained a key strategic and economic relationship throughout this period with the Philippines, its own colonial possession until 4 July 1946; its mammoth air and naval bases there were the

largest in the Asia-Pacific region. America's direct intervention in the Indonesian independence struggle had commenced in 1947 with its appointment to a pivotal position on the Security Council-sanctioned Good Offices Committee. Tellingly, the Renville Agreement of January 1948 that secured a temporary truce between the Dutch and the Indonesians was brokered by American diplomats on board an American ship.

That growing regional involvement flowed from a deep-seated belief on the part of key American strategists that the resources and markets of a stable Southeast Asia were indispensable to the economic recoveries of both Western Europe and Japan -- the two most fundamental goals of U.S. foreign policy in the early Cold War period. The Marshall Plan, announced in mid-1947 and launched in early 1948, took as one of its core assumptions that the resources of the British, French, and Dutch colonial dependencies in Southeast Asia could contribute significantly to the economic rehabilitation of Western Europe; and, as a corollary, that a serious diminution in economic ties could compromise European recovery. Likewise, the famous "reverse course" in U.S. occupation policy in postwar Japan, initiated in 1947, depended for its success upon Japanese access to markets and resources in Southeast Asia.²

To see the United States as awakening to the importance of Southeast Asia only as a result of the communist-inspired revolts of 1948 oversimplifies in the extreme. The upsurge in violent, direct action tactics by local communists certainly deepened U.S. concern about regional developments. But that concern was already well developed. Its roots lay in the immediate post World War II years when independence movements challenging the reassertion of European colonial control took center stage in Indochina, the East Indies, and Burma. The resulting uncertainty and instability not only jeopardized the return to prewar levels of economic activity across the region, but posed an insuperable politico-diplomatic dilemma for the United States. Should it break with its wartime anticolonial rhetoric? Or, even worse, risk a rupture with indispensable European allies by supporting Southeast Asia's independence movements?

The process of decolonization, in which the peoples of Southeast Asia assumed the lead role, constitutes the most historically salient framework for comprehending developments in the region during the mid- and late-1940s in their widest perspective. It forms the essential framework as well for explicating the behavior and involvement of external

² The following works are especially useful on these points: Robert J. McMahon, *Colonialism and Cold War: The United States and the Struggle for Indonesian Independence, 1945-49* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1981); Michael Schaller, *The American Occupation of Japan: The Origins of the Cold War in Asia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985); Gary R. Hess, *The United States' Emergence as a Southeast Asian Power, 1940-1950* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987); Andrew J. Rotter, *The Path to Vietnam: Origins of the American Commitment to Southeast Asia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987); Melvyn P. Leffler, *A Preponderance of Power: National Security, the Truman Administration, and the Cold War* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992); Nick Cullather, *Illusions of Influence: The Political Economy of United States-Philippines Relations, 1942-1960*; and Robert J. McMahon, *The Limits of Empire: The United States and Southeast Asia since World War II* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999); Mark Atwood Lawrence and Fredrik Logevall, eds. *The First Vietnam War: Colonial Conflict and Cold War Crisis* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

powers. British, French, and Dutch colonialists labored mightily to persuade U.S. leaders that the Cold War, and not the stirring of nationalist sentiment, was the operative framework. The colonial powers' struggles against local nationalist insurgents, invariably depicted by them as radicals or communists that would make common cause with the Soviet Union, were thus being undertaken on behalf of the West's broader Cold War policies. Or so the European powers insisted. Those entreaties plainly had some effect on U.S. thinking, as Mark Atwood Lawrence has recently demonstrated.³ Surprisingly, these dimensions of the Cold War in Southeast Asia – which speak to significant variations in strategy and perception on the other side of the East-West divide -- are overlooked in the present symposium.

Yet it is the complex intersection between decolonization and the Cold War, much more than the specific events surrounding the domestic upheavals of 1948, that remains essential to any holistic understanding of the Cold War's origins in Southeast Asia.⁴ Greater awareness of, and more collaboration among, scholars who work on the domestic and the international dimensions of the Cold War in the Third World are clearly needed if we are to appreciate this tangled subject in as full and sophisticated a manner as possible. This important forum provides an important step in that direction, even if it is a more modest step than it might have been.

³ Mark Atwood Lawrence, *Assuming the Burden: Europe and the American Commitment to War in Vietnam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

⁴ An important, recent book that highlights this intersection is Christopher E. Goscha and Christian F. Ostermann, ed., *Connecting Histories: Decolonization and the Cold War in Southeast Asia, 1945-1962* (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2009).

Response by Karl Hack, Open University in the United Kingdom, on behalf of the editors and contributors; Response by Tuong Vu

The views given are those of Karl Hack, and cannot automatically be assumed to be shared by all other editors and contributors

First of all, we would like to warmly thank Tom Maddux for organizing this roundtable, and the reviewers – Kenton Clymer, Anne L. Foster, Robert J. McMahon and Martin Grossheim – for reading our special edition on the Asian Cold War in such detail. Given the complexity of the arguments, and the detail they include on Southeast Asian communist parties, the reviewers’ mastery of our content shows a generous investment of time and effort. The overall drift of their comments, that our ‘arguments cannot be ignored and will inform future research’ (Foster), and that we bring sources newly available since the end of the Cold War to bear, are of course welcome to us.

Only one reviewer, Robert McMahon, took issue with any major element of our argument. He doubts how far regional communist actions in 1948 impacted on United States’ decisions to become embroiled in Southeast Asia’s Cold War. But his objections focus more on the implications of our argument for 1949-50 than with our chosen year of 1948. He picks up on our claim that “It might be too dogmatic to claim that the actions of Southeast Asian communists forced great power involvement in the region ... But it is undeniably true that the decisions which Southeast Asians took in 1948–based on the conjoining of the international communist line and local needs–sowed the seeds for increasing great power involvement” (447). Given that Britain, for instance, had run down the Malayan police and local military to very low levels by early 1948, I am surprised (but also grateful) that this slightly tentative thought-bomb provoked such a rigorous response.

McMahon’s response, however, does seem to prove our point, that analysts of Western policy are apt to over-privilege concerns found in western papers as causative, when sometimes they may be more in the nature of background noise. Hence he argues the United States was already significantly interested in Southeast Asia in 1948, implying there was little need for additional regional actions to intensify this concern. The problem is that these alternative reasons for United States involvement do not, to us, seem necessarily to imply that it would take a hardening Cold War stance to the area. Hence McMahon correctly cites American involvement in the Philippines, though omitting to note that there too there was a move to communist violence in 1948. Besides which, it is not clear that the U.S. really treated the Philippines as integral to Southeast Asia, rather than as mainly an offshore base which lent as much towards East Asia as Southeast Asia. Anyone who has lived and worked in the rest of Southeast Asia for any time is likely to be acutely aware of just how detached the Philippines can seem from the rest of the region.

More to the point, none of these American interests in themselves dictated a harder Cold War response to events there. Having interests in a region, and even intervening in Indonesia in 1947 to try and produce a settlement, is in no way the same as being willing to

commit resources, or agree that local nationalists should be seen mainly as ‘Cold War’ protagonists. Quite the reverse, the United States was at first uncertain how to draw the line between anti-colonial nationalists and what we might call ‘real’ communists. Nor does a low level of U.S. activity in Southeast Asia imply a willingness to label particular conflicts there, for instance in Indochina, as key Cold War fronts. Thus we would willingly concede that the United States had involvement in the region before 1948, but in so far as the origins of regional Cold War are concerned the question must be: ‘with what implications, if any?’ It is also well known that McMahon has long argued the importance – to the American ‘official mind’ – of colonial dependencies to European economic recovery. He lists some of his most important works in his own notes, so here it is enough to note that they form a formidable body of work. But this indirect economic importance of Southeast Asia clearly did not, before 1948, persuade the U.S. that it ought to intervene in the area with significant resources. Indeed, one might wonder how far those ‘assumptions’ were sound (or indeed a great deal more than weapons in interdepartmental jostling in Washington), given that the Indonesian conflict was a terrible drain on the Dutch, and that the Indochina conflict weakened the French politically, militarily and economically until 1954. The only country that definitely did rely on Southeast Asia economically was Britain, whose Malayan colony provided up to one third of the entire Sterling Area’s dollar earnings by 1950. Yet that was the one country the U.S. was most reluctant to assist. More to the point, McMahon cites constant factors – such as American presence in the Philippines, or the region having some economic value to European economies, which as such can scarcely be used to explain the *changing* U.S. views and policies towards Southeast Asia from 1948 to 1950. In this period U.S. perceptions – crudely put – changed from Southeast Asia being an area to be neutralised by western European concessions to nationalists with strictly marginal, no or low-cost U.S. involvement outside of the Philippines, towards one of ‘dominoes’ likely to fall if the United States did not offer real support. The story of how, in early 1950, this spawned limited United States assistance to Thailand and to the French in Indochina, is extremely complex, well known, and of course one to which McMahon’s own work contributes hugely. In short, the sorts of factors he cites behind U.S. interest are valid, but by themselves they are hardly likely to be sufficient to explain key changes in U.S. policy.

There therefore remains a very real question: why and how did the United States make that gradual shift? We do not, of course, subscribe to the ‘straw man’ view that local communists alone caused this change. McMahon is also right that we can only hint at forward effects from our main period: 1948. But this question is still not entirely irrelevant to 1948. A U.S. State Department paper of 27 September 1948 – shortly after our wave of revolts- addressed the need to eliminate communism in Southeast Asia and support friendly states. The United States was not as yet willing to become involved, but a shift was arguably, tentatively, underway. Indeed, our 2008 workshop (which originated the *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* special edition under review here) also spawned another special edition. That other collection of papers can be found in *Kajian Malaysia* 27, 1 & 2, (2009). In that special edition, Ang Cheng Guan – as a specialist on the international aspects of the Vietnam War – argued that ‘the transformation from a purely colonial war into a Cold War [in Vietnam] indeed started in 1948’ (ibid: 80). In making this argument, he cites the realignment of the Viet Minh towards the Chinese communists as well as towards the new communist international line. For him and Tuong Vu the departure point for increasing U.S.

agonizing over Vietnam is precisely the Vietnamese decisions to become more active parts of an international Cold War, sloughing off their more nationalist skin. It is true that events in China itself – leading to the declaration of the Peoples Republic of China in October 1949 – pre-occupied the United States immediately afterwards. But it could also be argued that communist victory in China was in itself a permissive, rather than a causative, factor for subsequent U.S. support of the French in Vietnam. Another permissive factor was the French formation of a ‘nationalist’, anti-communist government with a greater degree of autonomy under Emperor Bao Dai by early 1950. The critical, underlying causative factor for American involvement in Vietnam – the *changing* factor, is thus unclear, and we would not want to dabble too deeply in those murky waters in such a forum. But it certainly cannot be found only in internal debates in Washington, still less in Washington’s longer-term general interests in the region. What we would suggest, is that one critical shift of several (and a necessary cause) is the Viet Minh move to a more overt communist position, in closer alignment with international communism as a whole. As both Tuong Vu and Ang Cheng Guan argue, that shift happened from 1948 (the new communist international line and Chinese communist victories suggesting outside aid was becoming more likely) to 1950.

We agree with McMahon that this is just one side of the coin, and we neglect, relatively speaking, the United States’ side of that equation and American documents, and the years 1949-50.¹ The very good reason for all this (I myself use American sources in other works) is of course that we wrote a special edition mainly on 1948. And in 1948 the United States was limiting itself to trying to broker peace in Indonesia, and to a semi-detached relationship with the region from its base in the Philippines. It is not in that year a major causative factor for most countries. Indeed, in Malaya the main players were the British and the communists, and for both the Americans were an indirect, rather than a main, factor. The British, for one, viewed the chances of ensnaring American support in the region as slim to non-existent at this time, and the benefits of doing so as ambivalent. Nevertheless, we genuinely thank McMahon for his critique. It does highlight the fact that our argument and approach now needs to be taken forward in time to 1949-50, and our regional approach properly integrated with Western-centric policy analysis of that period. As Anne L. Foster correctly surmises, our particular contribution is to insist that the regional layers are taken seriously, and their agency and deliberate choice to further embed themselves in the Cold War be made a more serious, dynamic element in Cold War analysis. Again, McMahon is right to say that very recent works on regional inter-connections also need to be factored into the equation and, we might add, their emphasis on the combination of Cold War with decolonisation.² From a regional point of view, the Cold War often seemed a subsidiary aspect of decolonisation, rather than the prime driving

¹ Again, this is a matter of focus. Karl Hack, *Defence and Decolonisation in Southeast Asia: Britain, Malaya and Singapore, 1941-1968* (Richmond: Curzon, 2001), does use American documents, and cites McMahon’s earlier works on the issue of Southeast Asia to European and Japanese development.

² McMahon refers to Christopher Goscha and Christian Ostermann’s *Connecting Histories: Decolonization and the Cold War in Southeast Asia, 1945-1952* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), which I would also endorse, and am reviewing for H-Diplo.

force per se.³

We therefore agree that we are ‘guilty’ of one-hand clapping to some extent (mainly the regional hand, plus Geoff Wade’s chapter on British and Australians). But in a sense this was because the other hand (Western policy-making, and especially United States’ policy-making) was already one-hand clapping. This was, in turn, because the documents and perspectives we use are relatively newly available to scholars. We viewed our job partly as to provide the missing hand, in the form of a study of regional communist parties and their decision-making process, for a particular, crucial period, using new sources. One could think of it as taking a slice of history at a particular point in time, in order to be better able to get under the engine, and see how decisions were being made by the key players. Now that we have shown the way with a regional analysis, there is a need for a better blending of western ‘policy-making analysis’ with the regional. In this sense, we provide a building block and important approach, and demand its integration into the sort of wider analysis McMahan suggests is needed. We are, therefore, gratified that he thinks our arguments do demand a wider historiographical debate, even if we might not entirely agree about where that debate might go.

One motivation for our work was of course to settle the old ‘Soviet instructions’ versus ‘local initiative’ argument over the origins of the Southeast Asian revolts of 1948. That our reviewers accept, broadly, our argument on this is gratifying. A second motivation was to bring to bear new documents and sources. After the ending of the Cold War, and reforms in communist countries such as Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos, considerable new streams of sources are becoming available, in the form of archives opening their doors, memoirs, and oral history. We feel that the regional part of the Cold War equation has been relatively neglected prior to now partly because such sources were thin on the ground. We also believe that these sources do provide a different angle on how the region slipped towards a hotter ‘Cold War’,⁴ and indeed on many other aspects of the Cold War,⁵ such as how and

³ Foster notes that a greater centrality for nationalism and decolonisation might be more profitable. In a forthcoming work, I show how the local broad left’ in Singapore – though attacked as a communist and ‘Cold War’ problem – themselves viewed their actions as broadly ‘progressive’ and decolonizing. See Karl Hack, ‘The Malayan Trajectory in Singapore History’, in Karl Hack and Jean-Louis Margolin, *Singapore from Temasek to Twenty First Century: Reinventing the Global City* (Singapore: National University of Singapore Press, forthcoming).

⁴ Hence each of our articles brings new documentation to bear: Efimova from the archives of the CPSU; Poeze from Indonesian communists, Tuong Vu from communist Vietnam and the memoirs of non-communists who served in Viet Minh led governments; and Hack from Malayan Communist Party documents and oral history. I played a small part in the post-Cold War surge of new documentation, as one editor of C.C. Chin and Karl Hack (ed), *Dialogues with Chin Peng: New Light on the Malayan Communist Party* (Singapore: Singapore University Press), and in November 2008 interviews with ex-communist guerrillas from Sarawak.

⁵ In another of my specialist areas, for instance (Singapore), we now have the memoirs both of communists, and of broad left many of whom claim to have been falsely labelled communist, such as: *Fong Chong Pik: the Memoirs of a Malayan Communist Revolutionary* (Petaling Jaya: SIRTD, 2008); and Poh Soo Kai, Tan Qing Jee and Koh Kay Yew, *The Fajar Generation: the University Socialist Club and the Politics of Postwar Malaya and Singapore* (Petaling Jaya: SIRD, 2010). There are many, many more.

why the Malayan Emergency was defeated.⁶

Take, for instance, Southeast Asia in the period immediately after our chosen year of 1948. For the United States to decide Indochina was a 'domino' in 1949-50, it was first necessary for the Indochina Communist Party to shift clearly enough towards international communism and China to justify such American decisions. As Tuong Vu shows in our special edition, that shift was an incremental thing which started in 1948, and continued to firm up until the critical months of early 1950. We do not wish to claim that such regional decisions were the only causative, changing factors. As Foster kindly points out, I for one call for a proper investigation of the weblike interconnections of local, regional and international. But it is vital to ensure that regional factors are not as neglected as has previously been the case. Hence our articles show that from early 1948, when the United Kingdom and the United States were both reluctant to impose Cold War interpretations on the region, regional communists did take critical decisions to more fully integrate themselves into international Cold War events.⁷ They did this in a way that prioritized violence. They self-consciously sought to insert themselves into a wider, and hotter, Cold War. The UK's Labour Government in particular was very reluctant to relapse into simple Cold War analysis for the region until these revolts broke out. The Korean War, of course, was a major game-changer in Anglo-American attitudes towards regional Cold War. Though interestingly, even then the British continued to want to leave the door open to later reconciliation with China.

In short, McMahon has highlighted the need for further, wider historiographical debate on the implications of our special edition, and on our approach. I have addressed McMahon first and fully precisely because his points are important, and his stature as a Cold War historian deservedly high. However, this should not detract from the overall tenor of the reviews, including his. Broadly speaking all the reviewers endorse our general argument that a 'neo-orthodox' view of the origins of the Southeast Asian Cold War is called for. That is, that there were no definite instructions from outside in 1947-8, nor did local communist parties simply accidentally revolt around the same time. Rather, changes in the communist international line (and concomitant events) in late 1947 to early 1948 helped to tip local debates in favour of revolt across the region, despite very widely varying chances of such revolts succeeding, and the lack of any clear external guidance.

Clymer's review in particular follows the way in which this argument builds across all the articles in our *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* special edition. He notes how Larissa Efimova's article confirms that, far from issuing explicit instructions for revolt, the CPSU seemed unsure of conditions in the region, and diffident about advocating any specific

⁶ See my 'Extracting counterinsurgency lessons: The Malayan Emergency and Afghanistan', online at <http://www.rusi.org/analysis/commentary/ref:C4B14E068758F1/>.

⁷ In mid-1948, the British Labour Government was at first very reluctant to sanction action against Malayan communists, and even after a formal Emergency was declared, it was reluctant to have the local communist party banned, and continued to refer to communist guerrillas as 'bandits'. It took some months over 1948 for the idea that local revolts were a part of a generalised Cold War to gain predominance.

further action there. Hence, we argue, the wave of communist-inspired risings in Burma, Malaya, and Indonesia, and the shift of Indochina away from a united front and towards a more openly radical, communist position, had to be explained some other way. The Soviet Communist Party “strongly rejected all practical efforts of the Soviet youth leaders” to assist the communist parties in Indonesia and other places in Southeast Asia and “harshly criticised the youth activists who took seriously the propaganda rhetoric and tried to realise it” (468).

So how do we explain the alignment of revolts across the region? My own chapter on Malaya argues that – notwithstanding British repression and internal party problems – the objective conditions did not favour revolt in Malaya in 1948. Put bluntly, the party knew that Sino-Malay communal tensions were high, and their chances of bridging them at this time remote. So what tipped the Malayan Communist Party into revolt? It was, in part, the changed international communist line. Namely, Andrei Zhadanov’s speech in 1947 ended the united front tactics and proposed instead a “two camps” (473) world, with inevitable conflict between communist and capitalist camps. This new line formed the beating heart of the key Malayan decisions to move towards open conflict. It helped to tip internal party arguments in favour of revolt despite the objective conditions. In short, ‘the international aspect mattered’ (495). Harry Poeze likewise shows in his chapter that it was key Indonesian PKI leaders (notably Muso [sometimes spelt Musso elsewhere], pp. 516-7) who used the new communist international line, and the (for communists) exhilarating developments in Prague, to leverage revolt at Madiun in Indonesia in 1948. Again, revolt that was hopelessly premature, not to say immature, and without a change in international line would have been very difficult to justify. The PKI had jumped the gun, attacking the predominant broad nationalist front in the midst of a nationalist war against the Dutch. Incidentally, Madiun would not only set back the PKI cause by a decade, but would become an emotive point of debate in Indonesian politics for decades afterwards.⁸ Finally, Tuong Vu’s article highlights a far less dramatic, but still highly significant, set of decisions in Indochina. Though already at war, Vietnam’s communists still took a key turn towards a more radical stance that year: “Wolves could now be wolves again,” (540). Clymer notes Tuong Vu’s argument that Viet Minh coexistence with its united front partners, and ex-colonial bureaucrats, began to crumble from late 1947 to 1948. There was “a more aggressive land policy”, and attempts to make the party more proletarian (535), in other words the tentative moving away from a policy of being wolves in sheep’s clothing. Thus, Clymer’s review highlights how we give 1948 a special significance in the origin of the Southeast Asian Cold War, with the emphasis being on local communist parties – excited by the new international communist line and Chinese communist successes – choosing more violence and more overt allegiance with international communism.

⁸ I regret that the conceptualisation of the special edition under review meant another article on Madiun had to be omitted, Katherine McGregor, ‘A Reassessment of the Significance of the 1948 Madiun Uprising to the Cold War in Indonesia’, *Kajian Malaysia*, 27, 1 & 2, (2009): 85-120, did not fit the focus on new documentation on 1948 itself. But her article is important in showing both the historiography, and how the events soured relations between the PKI and other parties, notably the Islamic Masyumi.

Only one of our articles ranged widely either side of 1948: Geoff Wade's article on 'The beginnings of a 'Cold War' in Southeast Asia: British and Australian perceptions'. He shows how one can make a case for the Cold War beginning in virtually any year from 1946 to 1949, depending on one's definition. Here Clymer, in contrast to McMahon, picks up on our argument that it was the British who first turned towards less ambivalent Cold War interpretations of the region. As early as 1947 the British were becoming very worried about links between local communist parties and the Soviet Union, and in 1948 the British regional coordinator, Commissioner-General for Southeast Asia Malcolm MacDonald, warned that "Communist Russia is endeavoring to conquer the world," (552). Wade concludes however, that it was 1949 (notably with final Chinese communist victory) that marked "the beginning of a true Cold War in Southeast Asia" (558).

In summary, we thank our reviewers again. We are delighted that our main point on the origin of the 1948 revolts seems to hit home, and almost as delighted that we have sparked some broader discussion about the historiography. Integrating our regional perspective (and Geoff Wade's summary of British and Australian views) with analysis of American policy-making for 1949-50 is indeed a big, important, and additional job: one we prepare the ground for rather than undertaking ourselves. Anne Foster correctly identified our work as in the tradition of demanding much greater attention for the agency of non-western actors, and of assessing their significance and their interaction with other players. We are delighted to have been able to provide such a building block, which might be of use in constructing more balanced, nuanced, and weblike 'Cold War' accounts, which truly integrate the wave of new sources on regional players becoming increasingly available since 1989. We look forward to seeing how others tackle this bigger task, in order to ensure that two hands are brought together to clap effectively, and to provide more rounded Cold War analyses.

Finally, Martin Grossheim makes a very detailed and helpful review of Tuong's Vu article on Vietnam. Since his review involves specialist matters and evidence that may be of interest to scholars of Vietnam in particular, we include below Tuong Vu's specific reply to Grossheim below.

Tuong Vu's reply to Martin Grossheim

Let me start by thanking the reviewers, in particular Martin Grossheim, for their insightful comments. When I write that "Vietnamese communists rose to power with little bloodshed," I am referring to the months of August and September of 1945 when most killings had not occurred. I would consider the widespread violence carried out by the Viet Minh regime afterwards to belong more properly to the phase of regime consolidation.

A more important criticism raised by Grossheim has to do with my central argument that "1948 was a key turning point in the revolution." While I accept that really radical policies were taken by the Indochinese Communist Party only after 1950, the evidence presented in my article does show that 1948 represented a clear break with its previous united front policy, especially as expressed in General Secretary Truong Chinh's speech in August 1948 that, for the first time, publicly set the future course for Vietnam to join the ranks of the

“People’s Democracies.” This shift is significant by itself, but gains even more significance if placed against the backdrop of concurrent international and regional events (Zhdanov’s doctrine, Chinese communists’ near victory in mainland China, and communist revolts in Southeast Asia). Vietnamese revolutionaries never viewed their struggle as being isolated from regional and global politics, and I believe that historians should strive to do the same if we are to fully understand how the situation developed in Vietnam in the late 1940s.

Given what Truong Chinh said in August 1948, the really radical steps taken afterwards merely represented tactical moves after the fundamental strategy had been decided. Vietnam is thus unique among Southeast Asian cases in this sense, i.e. historians of Vietnam have to tackle two questions instead of one as their counterparts of other Southeast Asian countries do. These two questions include the shift in 1948 (which has thus far been ignored and which is considered the primary question in my article), and the delayed radicalization (which I speculate on in the conclusion).

A final and fair criticism by Grossheim (also by Kenton Clymer) concerns my representation of the ICP as a monolithic party. This is not what I assume, but I do not visit this issue in my article for two reasons: I have dealt with it elsewhere,⁹ and information about party internal debates is generally scarce. Although aspects of these debates can be gleaned from documents included in the new collection of party documents published in the last decade,¹⁰ my research in the National Archive III and the Museum of the Revolution in Hanoi has failed to turn up any information.

As far as the Vietnamese case goes, Robert McMahon’s criticism that the symposium overlooks American policy does not really apply. The standard assumption in the literature has been that mistaken American policy forced hapless Vietnamese communists to turn to the Soviet bloc for help. Scholars and former American policymakers such as Robert McNamara have spent years searching in vain for “missed opportunities” with the assumption that history would have been different had the U.S. taken different policies, including granting diplomatic recognition to the Viet Minh government during 1945-1947.¹¹ My research suggests that possible U.S. intervention was considered when Vietnamese revolutionaries decided to embark on a radical road in 1948. They sought to

⁹ See Tuong Vu, “From Cheering to Volunteering: Vietnamese Communists and the Arrival of the Cold War 1940-1951,” in Christopher Goscha and Christian Ostermann, eds. *Connecting Histories: The Cold War and Decolonization in Asia (1945-1962)*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), especially pp. 195-196; idem, “To Be Patriotic is to Build Socialism: Communist Ideology in Vietnam’s Civil War” in Tuong Vu and Wasana Wongsurawat, eds. *Dynamics of the Cold War in Asia: Ideology, Identity, and Culture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 33-52; and idem, *Paths to Development in Asia: South Korea, Vietnam, China, and Indonesia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 202-206.

¹⁰ See the forthcoming Forum on the value and limits of this collection in *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 5: 2 (Summer 2010).

¹¹ I have addressed this mistaken assumption elsewhere. See Edward Miller and Tuong Vu, “The Vietnam War as a Vietnamese War: Agency and Society in the Study of the Second Indochinese Conflict,” *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 4: 3 (Fall 2009), 1-16.

avoid such an intervention if possible, but that was only a factor in the calculus. They were strongly motivated by revolutionary commitments that included the construction of a socialist regime in Vietnam and, if possible, also in Laos and Cambodia.¹² Other factors that together were more important to them than American action were Soviet, Chinese and French policies, and of course, the domestic situation that my article focuses on.

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¹² See Tuong Vu, "Dreams of Paradise: The Making of a Soviet Outpost in Vietnam." *Ab Imperio: Studies of New Imperial History and Nationalism in the Post-Soviet Space* (August 2008), 255-285.