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Introduction by Thomas Maddux

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Introduction by Thomas Maddux, California State University, Northridge, Emeritus

Dr. Sophie Quinn-Judge brings a long engagement with Vietnam to *The Third Force in the Vietnam War: The Elusive Search for Peace, 1954-1975*. Quinn-Judge arrived in Vietnam in October 1973 as a participant in an American Friends Service Committee with a focus on assisting civilian victims of the war in the contested province of Quang Ngai, located on the coast south of Danang where Quinn-Judge was taken captive for two weeks by National Liberation Front soldiers. In April she witnessed the final North Vietnamese seizure of Saigon. Quinn-Judge remained engaged with Vietnam and Southeast Asia as a contributor to the *Far Eastern Economic Review*, scholar at Temple University, and author of *Ho Chi Minh: The Missing Years 1919-1941*.¹ In *The Third Force in the Vietnam War*, Quinn-Judge explores, with emphasis on the post-1954 years, the efforts of South Vietnamese to find a path for Vietnam after the end of the first Indochina War in 1954 outside of the Cold War conflicts involving the major powers of the United States, the Soviet Union, and China. The Vietnamese also had to address the division of Vietnam into two separate areas with governments in Saigon and Hanoi with each claiming to represent a unified Vietnam. Although Quinn-Judge does devote a chapter to North Vietnam, 1954-1964, Hanoi's maneuvering with the Soviet Union and China, and policies and views on developments in the South, most of the book discusses the development of neutralist ideas, civil society leaders, and groups in South Vietnam. Quinn-Judge notes that the "Third Force" included different names such as "Third Way" and "Third Solution" and defines the perspective as Vietnamese groups and individuals seeking "a peaceful approach to conflict resolution as opposed to an alternative military solution." (1)

The reviewers note a number of positive contributions in Quinn-Judge's study, with agreement on the impressive research and source materials that the author included in the book. As Sean Fear points out, Quinn-Judge "draws on an impressive range of Vietnamese-language materials and interviews, emphasizing the contributions of non-state actors including students, journalists, and religious groups, among many others." Tuong Vu and Claire Thị Liên Trần agree with Fear, noting that the author pursued the subject in archives, interviews with Third Force individuals, memoirs, and published accounts. As a consequence of the author's focus and research, Claire Thị Liên Trần emphasizes that Quinn-Judge's study "is an absolute necessity for understanding a major conflict at the international and national level because it includes Vietnamese civil society perspectives. The multiple points of view proposed by Quinn-Judge offer a more comprehensive understanding of the Vietnam War, one that is much more subtle and complex than the traditional historiography." Fear agrees that Quinn-Judge has enhanced understanding of the Vietnam conflict in a number of ways, most notably by placing the Vietnamese at the center of the conflict rather than being "regarded as bit players in the drama of the Indochina Wars." (3) Quinn-Judge's analysis of southern Catholics, internal politics among the Buddhists, civil society leaders, and political leaders enhances understanding about modern Vietnam. As Fear concludes, the book "affirms the richness and complexity of a society which, for all the Vietnam War tomes put forth over the decades, English-language scholars are only now beginning to understand."

The reviewers do have concerns with respect to some omissions from the study and particularly the issue of whether the Third-Force perspective, which sought neutralism and an avoidance of armed conflict, ever had a chance of being initiated and successfully implemented. Major obstacles included Cold War considerations involving the major powers and Vietnamese resistance to the prospect in both the South and the North. Claire Thị Liên Trần, for example, applauds Quinn-Judge for exploring the divisions in the North and South over different approaches to take in avoiding or ending the conflict, and implies that the "Third Force" gained strength as the war escalated after 1964 with increasing destruction in the south. She would have welcomed more analysis of the 1945-1954 conflict by developing different Catholic perspectives, including Catholic activists in the south who favored dialogue with Hanoi rather than a civil war. Fear and Tuong Vu, however, express more direct reservations about whether the Third Force and neutralism ever had much of a chance in the Vietnam conflict. Fear gives Quinn-Judge credit for pursuing shifting Vietnamese views and rejecting the inevitability of the end result, the North's conquest of the South. He raises a number of reservations about the author's conclusion that "some variation on the formula of a coalition government and neutrality was possible in the south of Vietnam until late 1974." (191) Fear's list of obstacles include "chronic Third Force

¹ Sophie Quinn-Judge, *The Third Force in the Vietnam War: The Elusive Search for Peace, 1954-1975* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2017). Quinn-Judge is also co-editor with Odd Arne Westad of *The Third Indochina War: Conflict between China, Vietnam and Cambodia, 1972-1979* (London: Routledge, 2006).

factionalism, bickering, and disorganization;” the fact that the “Third Force was primarily an urban and elite phenomenon” “the millions of Vietnamese on both sides committed to fighting rather than talking with their enemies” including Communists leaders in the North and civilian anti-Communist groups in the south; and the conflicting interests of the major Cold War powers. Tuong Vu agrees with Fear that “counterfactual arguments creep” into the study and would have appreciated more analysis of the “social, cultural, and political milieu” in which the “Third Force” activists “emerged and operated.” Vu suggests that Quinn-Judge exaggerates the idea of “missed opportunities” which downplay “Hanoi’s agency and responsibility for the wars” with Hanoi leader Le Duan as committed to the takeover of the South.

Participants:

Sophie Quinn-Judge served as a Quaker volunteer in Vietnam from 1973-1975. After working as a freelance journalist in Bangkok and Moscow, she wrote her Ph.D. and a book on Ho Chi Minh, *Ho Chi Minh: The Missing Years* (University of California Press, 2003) based on newly opened archives in Moscow and France. From 2004 - 2015 she was an associate professor of history at Temple University.

Sean Fear is a Lecturer in Modern International History at the University of Leeds. He is preparing a book manuscript which examines the United States and South Vietnam’s overlapping domestic politics and diplomacy during South Vietnam’s Second Republic (1967-1975).

Claire Thị Liên Trần is the director of Irasec, a French Research Institute on Contemporary Southeast Asia based in Bangkok. After completing a PhD at the *Institut d’Etudes Politiques de Paris*, she has been Associate Professor at Paris Diderot University till 2016, teaching History of Southeast Asia. She is working on the Catholic minority and relations State/religions in Contemporary Vietnam and also on the Elites, Press and Gender History. She is the coeditor of the annual publication *Asie du Sud-Est 2017, Bilan, enjeux et perspectives* and is preparing a book on the Left Catholics in Vietnam.

Tuong Vu is director of Asian Studies and professor of Political Science at the University of Oregon, and has held visiting appointments at Princeton University and National University of Singapore. Vu is the author or editor of four books, including *Vietnam’s Communist Revolution: The Power and Limits of Ideology* (Cambridge, 2017), *Paths to Development in Asia: South Korea, Vietnam, China, and Indonesia* (Cambridge, 2010), *Dynamics of the Cold War in Asia: Ideology, Identity, and Culture* (Palgrave, 2009), and *Southeast Asia in Political Science: Theory, Region, and Qualitative Analysis* (Stanford, 2008). He has also authored numerous articles on the politics of nationalism, revolution, and state-building in East and Southeast Asia.

Review by Sean Fear, University of Leeds

“If the withdrawal of US troops had not been coupled with the maintenance of the [Nguyễn Văn] Thiệu Regime and a strong army... the history of Vietnam might certainly have taken a different course. The prospects would have been numerous: the restoration of peace in South Vietnam as early as 1973; a three-component coalition government in power; the possibility that the United States would shift from a military assistance programme to one of economic aid; and, in the end thereafter, gradual reunification of Vietnam by peaceful means... Such a peace would certainly have brought honor to all sides; there would have been no victors or losers. Justice would have been the sole victor” (190).

Posited by an unlikely source—Communist general Trần Văn Trà, who commanded the assault on Saigon during the 1968 Tết Offensive—this interpretation of the Vietnam War is echoed throughout Sophie Quinn-Judge’s *The Third Force in the Vietnam War*. Quinn-Judge, an accomplished scholar of modern Vietnam, experienced first-hand the elusive search for peace in Indochina, volunteering for the American Friends Service Committee during the final years of the war. Her book is informative and concise, examining successive Vietnamese proposals and appeals to end the fighting. It sheds light on a range of topics, including North Vietnamese palace intrigue and South Vietnam’s vibrant but repressed civil society, critical dimensions often misunderstood or absent from the voluminous historiography of the conflict. Quinn-Judge draws on an impressive range of Vietnamese-language materials and interviews, emphasizing the contributions of non-state actors including students, journalists, and religious groups, among many others. This ‘bottom-up’ lens augments familiar accounts of the protracted statecraft that sealed the 1973 Paris peace accords, resulting in a work of considerable value to scholars of Vietnam and the global Cold War. Still, while helping to illuminate wartime Vietnam’s complex political dynamics, *The Third Force in the Vietnam War* at times leans more to the side of lament than sober analysis.

But first, what, if anything, was the Third Force? As Quinn-Judge notes, the term has a nebulous etymology, often replete with negative connotations. It is perhaps most familiar from the Graham Greene novel *The Quiet American*, whose earnest antagonist Alden Pyle sought a Vietnamese ‘third way’—neither pro-France nor pro-Communist—as a vehicle for advancing American interests.¹ Quinn-Judge, however, sees the prospects of an armed force as Pyle envisioned as having “disappeared fairly quickly.” Instead, she opts for an expansive definition of the Third Force to include Vietnamese advocates of “a peaceful approach to conflict resolution as opposed to an alternative military solution” (1). This broad focus encompasses a diverse, evolving, and often fractious cast of characters, across both sides of the seventeenth parallel.

The aims of this approach are twofold. First, in foregrounding overlooked Vietnamese protagonists, Quinn-Judge challenges what she regards as a tendency “to view the Vietnamese, North or South, as undifferentiated blocs of loyal followers, a people whose arcane internal politics can be of no interest to the larger world” (3). From previous Vietnam War studies’ preoccupation with events in Washington, she suggests, “one got the impression that the Vietnamese were regarded as bit players in the drama of the Indochina Wars” (3). To redress the balance, she spans late nineteenth century anti-French resistance to contemporary Vietnam’s post-war unification in just under 200 pages, recounting a struggle far more complex than mere proxy clash between “American puppets versus pawns of the communist bloc” (3). Reaffirming the centrality of Vietnamese actors and sources, Quinn-Judge adds to a body of work which has been characterized as the “Vietnamization of Vietnam War studies.”² Her analysis of South Vietnam’s turbulent political sphere is of particular importance, detailing critical but neglected developments after the fall of President Ngô Đình Diệm in 1963.

But beyond simply filling historiographical gaps, Quinn-Judge showcases the intricacy and fluidity of Vietnamese views on the war to pursue a second objective: demonstrating that peace between the warring Vietnamese powers was both widely sought and plausible well before 1975. Here, she posits, dismantling the reductive notion of rival puppet monoliths is critical to establishing

¹ Graham Greene, *The Quiet American* (London: William Heinemann, 1955).

² Edward Miller and Tuong Vu, “The Vietnam War as a Vietnamese War: Agency and Society in the Study of the Second Indochina War,” *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 4:3 (Fall 2009): 1-16.

that recurring Vietnamese peace initiatives were truly viable. “To honestly examine the chances of success of such proposals,” she states, “one has to accept the premise that the communist side was an evolving entity, whose capabilities and goals changed over the years” (4). To that end, Quinn-Judge illustrates the travails of peace activists on both sides—a welcome appeal for contingency against teleological assumptions “that war was the only road to take,” or that “the victory of the communist forces in 1975 was the inevitable, culturally appropriate solution for a poor peasant state” (3). Still, persuading readers that peace was truly possible rather than simply desired represents a considerable challenge, and in this regard, *The Third Force in the Vietnam War* does not entirely deliver.

Of course, given the devastation wrought by incessant bombardment, Agent Orange, and decades of civil war, anything short of a clamor to end the fighting would have been astonishing. But how? On whose terms? Enforced by whom? And achieved through which concessions? The mere existence of peace advocates on either side was by no means an indication of their efficacy.

Quinn-Judge, however, concludes by sharing her conviction that “some variation on the formula of coalition and neutrality was possible in the south of Vietnam until late 1974” (191). Yet though it would be rash to dismiss the prospects of such a settlement out of hand, a number of factors require much closer attention in order to present a convincing case. While Quinn-Judge provides valuable insight into Saigon’s long overlooked political and religious opposition, her account reveals little of the many shortcomings—infighting, poor organization, and the lack of a rural presence—which hindered their efforts to affect change. Conversely, in focusing on Vietnamese actors eager to compromise, she neglects the South’s powerful and committed anti-Communists, hell-bent on resisting any attempt to come to terms with the other side. That Hanoi’s own hardliners might spurn co-operation or later renege likewise appears to be discounted. And while the United States—whose good graces if not oversight was surely required—is perhaps beyond the scope of her study, Quinn-Judge implicitly overestimates Nixon’s ability to both reign in Saigon and assuage the pro-war Americans on whom he depended at the polls.

First, let us consider South Vietnam’s largely dovish opposition. While clearly the definitive English-language resource on Third Force activity thus far, *The Third Force in the Vietnam War* offers a less than comprehensive account of the many southern groups pressing for peace. Much of the narrative centres on a cohort of liberal Catholic journalists—Ngô Công Đức, Hồ Ngọc Nhuận, Lý Quý Chung, and Võ Long Triều, among others—associated with the newspaper *Tin Sáng*. This results in a number of surprising omissions, most notably the Progressive Nationalist Movement (PNM), a 1969 attempt to build a grassroots ideologically-driven opposition party. The PNM was helmed by professors Nguyễn Văn Bông and Nguyễn Ngọc Huy, both of whom were among the more cogent and committed peace theorists, with the latter serving on the South Vietnamese delegation to the Paris talks.³

Beyond such noteworthy absences, emphasis on the tight-knit *Tin Sáng* group also obscures the scale and the toll of chronic Third Force factionalism, bickering, and disorganization. By the mid-1960s, virtually all southern political groups had fragmented into quarreling, regionally-divided camps, often further polarized by personal vendettas. South Vietnamese Buddhism, for example, was divided by regionalism and over relations with the Nguyễn Văn Thiệu military regime. In 1967, after Thiệu affirmed the smaller, northern-refugee dominated Thích Tâm Châu faction, the breach grew irreconcilable between Tâm Châu and the central Vietnamese-heavy Ân Quang bloc, itself torn between older moderates and younger radicals. Moreover, in addition to internal schisms, South Vietnam’s liberal opposition lacked organizational structure, discipline, and unifying leadership, save the mostly symbolic figure of General Dương Văn Minh. How such disparate and decentralized groups, often struggling to co-operate, much less self-govern, could have secured consensus on specific peace terms remains uncertain.

Finally, and most critically, the Third Force was primarily an urban and elite phenomenon, notwithstanding efforts by groups like the PNM. This is not to suggest that the countryside did not share the desire for peace, or that Third Force strategists were unaware of the need for broader mobilization. But with the war raging and state-dominated air travel often the only safe passage

³ See, for example, François Guillemot, “An intellectual through revolution, war and exile: the political commitment of Nguyễn Ngọc Huy (1924-1990),” in *New Perceptions of the Vietnam War: Essays on the War, the South Vietnamese Experience, the Diaspora and the Continuing Impact*. Nathalie Huynh Chau Nguyen ed. (Jefferson: McFarland, 2014).

from Saigon, the physical disconnect between town and country was formidable. Quinn-Judge affords only passing attention to the most telling demonstration of this obstacle—the astonishing showing by peace candidate Trương Đình Dzu in the South's 1967 presidential election. Dzu was an obscure lawyer with a checkered reputation. But as Quinn-Judge notes, he shocked political observers with a second-place finish, besting the more esteemed challengers preferred by the urban opposition. His formula? A clear call for immediate peace talks, and effective use of state-allotted radio airtime, both of which endeared him to rural voters bearing the brunt of the war. Absent from the book, though, is that Dzu's ballot success was delivered stillborn. Viewed with suspicion in elite circles, he also fell out with more radical Buddhists and students, who charged him with arrogance and with attempting to hijack their movements. Meanwhile, Dzu's airtime abruptly ceased with the end of the campaign, removing his sole means of organizing or communicating with his rural base, which, in any case, had responded much less to the man than to his message. Arrested days later on trumped-up charges by the military, the shock winner of over 800,000 peace votes faded with scarcely a whimper. As the Dzu affair reveals, with no capacity to channel rural disaffection, there was very little real political force which the Third Force could plausibly hope to muster.

Apart from internal difficulties, the Third Force faced another daunting obstacle: the millions of Vietnamese on both sides committed to fighting rather than talking with their enemies. Foremost among these were the Northern and Southern states themselves, which, as Quinn-Judge acknowledges, had long records of schemes and coups against reputed doves within their ranks. How realistic, then, were the prospects of coalition government, along the lines Trần Văn Trà describes above? South Vietnamese President Nguyễn Văn Thiệu, himself a veteran of the violent intrigue that subsumed the South after Ngô Đình Diệm's murder, was doubtless aware that even the hint of powersharing with Hanoi invited attempts against his rule, if not his life. Trà's demand for Thiệu's deposal, meanwhile, would have been tantamount to surrender for the South Vietnamese military, which, as virtually the country's sole nationwide institution (apart from the Communist Party), would not simply disappear, whatever deal was signed.

Across the border, on the other hand, what were Hanoi's hardliners to gain from making concessions, when they could achieve unilateral U.S. withdrawal merely by maintaining the status quo? Though Quinn-Judge does well to detail diversity of opinion within the Party hierarchy, she offers little to suggest how moderates might have prevailed, and does not contend with recent work by Pierre Asselin on the Party's deep commitment to escalating and prosecuting the war.⁴ And in light of the Communists' track record of ruthlessness and adroitness in pressing their advantage, what could stop them from relenting only to later renege, opting to impose rather than adhere to the terms of peace? Given Hanoi's habit of assassinating headstrong Saigon doves, including the PNM's Nguyễn Văn Bông in 1971, the potential—under-examined in this volume—of a lasting Communist-Third Force agreement appears at best enormously uncertain.

In any event, in addition to its military, the South also featured a range of fervent civilian anti-communist groups—likewise given short shrift—which were undoubtedly determined, in the event of a top-down peace deal, to at the very least make themselves heard. In the Western Mekong Delta, for example, the Hòa Hảo Buddhist sect held sway in An Giang province and other nearby districts, resulting in relative Communist weakness in An Giang through the duration of the war. More powerful still were northern Catholic refugee communities, which capitalized on tight discipline and parish-level (and at times paramilitary) organization to sweep the 1967 National Assembly elections. With their memories of brutal communist land reform in the North still vivid, these vitriolic anti-communist Catholic parties were a force to be reckoned with. Willing to contest perceived 'softness' on Communism with street-fighting, they were also often far stronger than the state itself in their home districts. And they formed a critical pillar of Nguyễn Văn Thiệu's domestic core, exerting their influence to topple successive foreign ministers who dared proffer tepid calls for peace to shore up overseas support. With these constituents in mind, Thiệu routinely turned on the Third Force as a sure-fire means of rallying his base, accusing "those who ask for... a peace in neutrality, or a peace in coalition" of being "demagogues or henchmen of the underground Communists."⁵ Perhaps through conceiving of South Vietnam as a "Western

⁴ Pierre Asselin, *Hanoi's Road to the Vietnam War, 1954-1965* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013).

⁵ "President Thieu Speaks at Vung Tau," Airgram A-240 from Saigon to Department of State, August 31, 1970, POL 15-1 VIET S 1970-1973 Central Foreign Policy Files, Record Group 59, National Archives and Records Administration.

creation,” an interpretation thoroughly refuted by an abundance of recent scholarship, Quinn-Judge overlooks the many anti-Communist actors standing in the way of Third Force plans for immediate peace (189).⁶ But given the strength and depth of southern anti-communist sentiment, both military and civilian, an untimely compromise with the North might well have marked the opening salvo in an outright civil war in the South.

Of course, pondering what might have been is inherently speculative, and as Quinn-Judge hastens to stipulate, she is eager to avoid “engaging in a counterfactual exercise” (4). Yet many of her conclusions—for example, that “some variation on the formula of coalition and neutrality was possible in the south of Vietnam until late 1974,” or that “the communist policies implemented after 1975 were in my view not inevitable”—read like assertions of faith, absent more thorough reasoning (190, 191). Certainly, short of imagining plausible alternative futures, the daunting challenges faced by moderates on both sides must at the very least be grappled with, in order to “honestly examine the chances of success of such proposals” (4). Though it may well have been the case that peace was possible far sooner, an upfront assessment of its prospects is required to truly persuade.

Instead, in lieu of dwelling on the many internal fissures exacerbating the odds of Vietnamese reconciliation, with or without the United States, Quinn-Judge laments that Washington did not simply impose “a negotiated peace backed by US guarantees” (191). “The obduracy of the US government, unwilling to desert an unpopular ally who supported our war aims, preordained a violent end to the conflict,” she charges (191). But even setting aside America’s own complicated domestic Vietnam War politics, it is by no means made clear the United States could have filled the role of *deus ex machina*, indefinitely able to enforce both sides’ good graces. After all, despite its unprecedented scale of commitment, the United States was consistently frustrated in Vietnam, unable to bend Hanoi’s will, and struggling to comprehend much less choreograph its presumed Saigon proxies.

Still, however vague in outlining how a Third Force-brokered peace might have come about, *The Third Force in the Vietnam War* offers much of value to readers with an interest in modern Vietnam. Quinn-Judge’s interviews and archival work on Vatican II-inspired southern Catholics, Buddhist internal politics, or the plight of postwar intellectuals are revelatory. Her efforts to complicate the emerging notion of Lê Duẩn as Hanoi’s *primus inter pares* also merit consideration.⁷ And she also recounts, in poignant detail, Saigon’s crude and brutal treatment of political opponents, refuting the resurgent notion that U.S. support for Thiệu “was really about keeping alive the hope and the possibility of a democratic and a free society in the South.”⁸ Above all, *The Third Force in the Vietnam War* affirms the richness and complexity of a society which, for all the Vietnam War tomes put forth over the decades, English-language scholars are only now beginning to understand.

⁶ Examples include Christopher Goscha, *Vietnam: A New History* (New York: Basic Books, 2016); Edward Miller, *Misalliance: Ngo Dinh Diem, the United States, and the Fate of South Vietnam* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013); Philip Catton, *Diem’s Final Failure: Prelude to America’s War in Vietnam* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002); Geoffrey C. Stewart, *Vietnam’s Lost Revolution: Ngo Dinh Diem’s Failure to Build an Independent Nation, 1955-1963* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

⁷ For Lê Duẩn interpretation, see Lien-Hang T. Nguyen, *Hanoi’s War: An International History of the War for Peace in Vietnam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012).

⁸ Keith Taylor, “Closing Remarks.” *Voices from the South: New Testimonies from the Last Leaders of South Vietnam*, 9 June 2012, Cornell University.

Review by Claire Thị Liên Trần, Irasec, Bangkok

A historian of contemporary Vietnam and of the Vietnamese Communist Party,¹ Sophie Quinn Judge has published a book on the Third Force in the Vietnam war. The author has already approached the question in a special issue of the journal *Peace and Change* in 2013.² Whereas the Third force's political project is mentioned during the entire war and the expression of 'Third segment' appears in the Paris Peace Agreement (1973) as an important element in the architecture of peace, it has never been studied in detail. The purpose of Quinn Judge's book is to focus on this political "force" supporting "a peaceful approach to conflict resolution as opposed to an alternative military solution." The author intends to tell "the story of those Vietnamese who believed that war was not inevitable, who believed that once it had begun, it did not need to continue" (1).

Indeed, the historiography of the Vietnam War mainly insists on a perspective of confrontation at the height of the Cold War, emphasizing the role of the Great Powers on the one hand and the Vietnamese rulers in North and South Vietnam on the other. Besides the 'great actors' at the national and international levels, Western public opinion and peace movements are considered as one of the determinant factors on the course of the conflict.³ But the role of Vietnamese civil society and activists supporting the Third solution has not hitherto been considered as relevant. The outcome of the war and the military victory of the North over the South has increased the tendency to bring to light only the role of the great actors (winners and losers) on the battlefield and at the negotiating table, but not the unsuccessful supporters of the Third Force, who are seen at best as naive and unrealistic, at worst as instruments of the Communist Party.

In his book, *Argument Without End – In Search of Answers to the Vietnam Tragedy*, Robert S. McNamara, the Secretary of Defense who played a major role in escalating the United States involvement in the Vietnam War, addresses the topic in a chapter "A Neutral solution: Was it possible?" He recognizes that "Neither Hanoi nor Washington acted responsibly with regards to their common dream of a neutral solution in Saigon. Opportunities were missed by both. The result was disastrous."⁴ Quinn Judge tackles this issue and looks "at the Vietnamese and their politics [...] as something more complex than the story of communists versus nationalists, or American puppets versus pawns of the Communist bloc" (3).

Writing the history of the Third Force from a long-term perspective, with a long opening chapter on the colonial period, Quinn Judge suddenly in the last chapter adopts a very personal tone. Indeed, she begins the seventh chapter, entitled "The End of the Republic of Vietnam and reunification" in the first person: "I first arrived in Saigon in October 1973, to join the team of the American Friends Service Committee along with my husband Paul" (165). In her twenties, she was the Saigon representative of the Quaker-based organization whose main work was the physical rehabilitation of civilian war victims in one of the most fought-

¹Sophie Quinn-Judge, *Ho Chi Minh: The Missing Years 1919–1941* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002) and Odd Arne Westad and Sophie Quinn-Judge, eds., *The Third Indochina War: Conflict between China, Vietnam and Cambodia, 1972-79* (London: Routledge, 2006).

²Sophie Quinn Judge (ed.), Special Issue "Narratives of reconciliation: the Vietnamese case" in *Peace and Change, A Journal of Peace Research* 38:4 (October 2013).

³In the U.S., Kenneth J. Heineman, *Campus Wars: The Peace Movement at American State Universities in the Vietnam Era* (New York: New York University Press, 2010); Marc Gilbert and Marc Jason (eds.), *The Vietnam War on Campus: Other Voices, More Distant Drums* (Westport: Praeger, 2000); Robert R. Tomes, *Apocalypse Then: American Intellectuals and the Vietnam War, 1954-1975* (New York: New York University Press, 1998); Charles DeBenedetti and Charles Chatfield, *An American Ordeal: The Antiwar Movement of the Vietnam Era* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1990) and in France: Rousseau Sabine, *La colombe et le napalm. Des chrétiens français contre les guerres d'Indochine et du Vietnam. 1945-1975* (Paris, CNRS Editions, 2002).

⁴Robert S. McNamara, Robert K. Brigham, Thomas J. Biersteker, Herbert Schandler, *Argument without end—In search of answers to the Vietnam Tragedy* (New York: Public Affairs, 1999)130.

over province near the 17th parallel, Quảng Ngãi. This introducing of herself in the course of the story she is telling, as a witness “immersed on the post-Paris agreement struggle of the southern Vietnamese” (165), makes her book very personal.

The irruption of her personal narrative in the historical one can be seen as a form of what the French historian Pierre Nora calls *ego histoire*.⁵ Quinn Judge does not elude her youth engagement and through the history of the Third Force, highlights her own itinerary as a concerned historian of contemporary Vietnam. After dealing with the ‘great history’ of the Communist Party through the Ho Chi Minh itinerary in the USSR and the history of the Third Vietnam War, she writes about the visions and failures of these South Vietnamese Peace activists she met during the last years of the war. As she notices, to work on “a fairly constant stream of suggestions from different quarters regarding a neutral or compromise solution to end hostilities in South Vietnam” was not easy, whereas each of the major actors was also “an evolving entity whose capabilities and goals changed over the years” (4). Her personal experience from 1973 to 1975 at a crucial moment of the war offers her a privileged access to private archives and interviews of the former peace activists in Saigon. The thirteen pictures taken by herself and her husband, the British journalist Paul Quinn Judge, are precious visual sources of these actors and period.

Quinn Judge analyzes in a subtle and sharp way this movement, thanks to her deep knowledge of a great diversity of sources, which are not easily documented in the Vietnamese Communist Party archives or American archives. Her work is based on an outstanding range of sources: American, French, British, Vietnamese and Russian archives and publications. Her bibliography is very rich, in particular in Vietnamese publications with a large range of histories on the Resistance in the South, memoirs published in the last two decades, and also unpublished texts of the actors and newspapers. These precious secondary sources offer a Vietnamese perspective on the Third Force. A very useful index of topic and names closes the book.

The book is divided in seven chapters following a chronological plan: the first set the global political landscape of colonized Vietnam, describing the great dynamism of political movements in Indochina and the profusion of ideas crossing the new Vietnamese elites in order to better understand the lifelong course of the Vietnamese intellectuals during the Vietnam war. Then comes a second chapter on the ten years between the division of the country in 1954 and the beginning of the American war in 1964 with the Gulf of Tonkin incident.⁶ It describes the development of neutralist ideas and the building of new political movements. The third chapter describes the North Vietnamese policy and the difficult path of Hanoi, navigating between the two big Communist leaders, Chinese Community party leader Mao Zedong and Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev, between 1956 and 1965 and how they dealt the neutralist movement in the South.

In a fourth chapter, the author comes back to the South, analyzing the Third Force activism through the Buddhist crisis and the urban antiwar movement during the intense years 1964-1967. The fifth chapter focuses on the Têt Offensive (1968) as a turning point for the Third Force’s supporters, bringing to the fore their demands at a particularly tragic moment of the war. The sixth chapter deals with the period characterized by the American withdrawal from the battlefield but also the stepped-up bombing of North Vietnam. It also describes the diplomatic negotiations between the U.S. and the China/Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) for a “Peace with Honor” which led to the ‘Vietnamization’ of the war. This period is characterized by a strong mobilization of the Third force as an opposition movement calling for negotiations with the North, as the Americans were doing. In the final chapter, the author assumes to describe as a witness the last years of the Republic of Vietnam until after the Fall of Saigon in April 1975 and the role of the Third Force in the process of reunification.

Quinn Judge’s book blends international relations history, the history of the ideas, and individual paths, considering the war was not only as a matter of politicians and militaries but also of the Vietnamese people. The historiography on the Vietnam War mostly regards the Vietnamese as bit players of the drama. The great interest of her book is first, to focus on this political

⁵ Pierre Nora, *Essais d’ego-histoire* (Paris, Gallimard, 1987)

⁶ On 2 August 1964, the U.S. destroyer *Maddox* exchanged shots with North Vietnamese boats in the Gulf of Tonkin. This incident led to the more direct engagement of the United States into the Vietnam War.

movement, which the binary vision of the Cold War has occluded, in never considering the Third Force as a significant political force. The quotation which opens the book, from the French journalist Jean Lacouture, perfectly sums up the issue: “There was a real Third Force. It had everything—numbers, wisdom and courage—except force” (1). Lacouture, who covered the Indochina War and the beginning of the Vietnam War,⁷ met numbers of Vietnamese actors of the early period of the Third Force.

The author takes up the major challenge of studying this political movement by exploring a great diversity of actors at the local, national, and international levels. She describes very well the evolution of political attitudes and factions in the DRV, navigating between the Chinese and Soviet positions and “how changing constellations of power impinged on the search for peace” (6). Citing Vietnamese documents in support of her argument, she outlines the evolution of how they have considered the Southern neutralist movement in the different phases of the war (chapters 3 and 5). The Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP) was divided between the supporters of the Chinese Maoist view of a “violent military victory” represented by Truong Chinh and Lê Đức Thọ and the partisans of talks and negotiations to end the war such as Lê Duẩn. Her analysis of the different positions within the VCP about the Tết Offensive is particularly interesting. Accused by Chou en Lai of being “pro Kremlin revisionist infiltrated in the DRV leadership” (119), the southerner Lê Duẩn, usually presented as the key proponent of the Tết offensive, supported a ‘decisive victory’ which also integrated the creation of a coalition government. In his speech to the Central Committee in January 1968, shortly before the Tết offensive, he was considering the south urban opposition as a key factor and advocated a coalition government with the National Liberation Front.⁸ One of the questions is whether some followers of the Communists were closer in the ideological outlook to the Third Force segment than to the Stalinist Maoism of the 1960s and 1970s.

Quinn Judge also shows how the massive commitment of the U.S. army from 1964 has constantly denied South Vietnamese attempts to put an end to the war in promoting a neutral South Vietnam. Indeed, the political solution with General Dương Văn Minh during his short 3 months interregnum, just after the assassination of Ngô Đình Diệm in November 1963 failed. Then, in early 1965, the new civilian prime minister Dr. Phan Huy Quát, close to the Buddhists from Central Vietnam declared “We want to end the war with honor” (89), but was unable to change General William Westmoreland’s policy: the deep commitment of the U.S. into a military intervention has been decided without any formal consultation with the civilian South Vietnamese government” (90). The American administration was opposed to any possible alternative as the Third Force government led by “Big Minh” at the 1971 elections, while Secretary of State Henry Kissinger was negotiating directly with the Communist Chinese. Once again, it demonstrates the “total disregards for the opinion of the citizens the RVN” (154) and the complete “United States’ rejection of any authentic South Vietnamese political process” (153).

The description of the two crucial periods for the Third Force in the urban antiwar movement is particularly new (Chapters 4 and 6). Besides the confrontation between Catholics and Buddhists, Quinn Judge evokes in detail the numerous initiatives of the Peace activists, Buddhists and Left Catholics on their own or in alliance: local social initiatives looking for “a non-communist path to social revolution”, the creation of struggle movements, of newspapers, demonstrations, as many means to express their demand for free elections to end military rule, and for a civilian government that could begin talks with ‘the other side.’ This demand was all the more justified after the Tết offensive and the beginnings of talks between Washington and Hanoi. A number of figures of the ongoing building Third force are highlighted, among them, the monk Thích Trí Quảng at the head of the Unified Buddhist Association of Vietnam, the young reformist monk Thích Nhất Hạnh writing to Martin Luther King to convince him to publicly

⁷ Jean Lacouture is the author of the very first biography of Ho Chi Minh: *Ho Chi Minh* (Paris: Seuil, 1967) and in English, *Ho Chi Minh, a political biography* (New York: Random House, 1968).

⁸ “We will bring the all the personalities close to the French into this government; even those who have worked with the Americans for a long time, if they are not dangerous, we can also include them. We are strong, we will confuse the other side, we will divide them.” quoted on 121 (*Đảng Cộng sản Việt Nam, Văn kiện Đảng Toàn tập*, 29-1968 [Documents of Party History]: *Lê Duẩn’s* speech to the 14th Plenum, January 1968 (NXB Chính trị Quốc gia, 2003), 34-35.

oppose the Vietnam War in 1965, or the Catholic student leader Nguyễn Hữu Thái, the journalist deputy Ngô Công Đức or the Professor Lý Chánh Trung.

I have two criticisms. It is surprising that the period of the French Indochina War (1945-1954), is completely omitted, whereas it is vital to understand the active role of a fringe of Vietnamese Catholics into the Third road in early 1954, but also to explain why a number of Catholic activists in the South were coming from the North. Indeed, anxious not to appear as allies of the French colonizers and then the American imperialists, their itineraries contradict the common idea that Catholics refugees from the North in 1954 (*Bắc Kỳ 54*) were much more anticommunist than the Southerners because of their concrete and negative experience under Communist rule. On the contrary, for some of them, the strong feeling of national pride which gathered Vietnamese people in 1945 led them to believe that the dialog among Vietnamese, even with the Communists, should have had priority over the risk of a long and endless civil war.⁹

Moreover, the theoretical bases of the Catholic commitment in the Third Force would have been interesting to underline. Indeed, the Catholic Action within the workers circles (*Jeunesses ouvrières chrétiennes/Young Christian Workers*) in Europe and the influence of the Personalist doctrine of the Catholic philosopher Emmanuel Mounier (1905-1950) were significant for the young Vietnamese Catholics studying in Europe in the fifties and sixties. Indeed, the Personalism was seen as an alternative to both Liberalism and Marxism. The transnational left catholic networks and the circulation of information on the South Vietnamese Peace movement to the West played a key role in the international audience of the Third Force. The left Catholics were particularly active in the Press, according to the Vatican policy of promoting the social role of the Church and the Catholic Press. The Catholic activists got around the Southern Government's censorship with numerous newspapers defending their views in and out Vietnam: the daily *Tin sáng (Morning News)* and the review *Hành trình (Itinerary)*, the weekly *Sống Đạo (Live his faith)*, the reviews *Đôi Diện (Face To Face)*, *Đất nước (Homeland)*, *Chọn (To choose)*, and *Nhịp Cầu (Hyphen)* and the magazine *Công Giáo và Dân tộc (Catholicism and the Nation)* published from 1970 to 1975 in Paris and then in Saigon from July 1975.¹⁰

To conclude, Sophie Quinn Judge's book is an absolutely necessity for understanding a major conflict at the international and national level because it includes Vietnamese civil society perspectives. The multiple point of views proposed by Quinn Judge offer a more comprehensive understanding of the Vietnam War, one that is much more subtle and complex than the traditional historiography. As the author notes: "After all, with so many families divided between the two sides, the possibility that they could find a way to coexist and reconcile their differences did not seem outlandish or unrealistic" (75). In a more general perspective, her book shows how the great dynamism and political activism of South Vietnamese civil society. It contradicts the vision of a South Vietnamese society, victim of the war, taken hostage in the struggle between the Northern Communist power and the weak and corrupted Southern regime and its American imperialist allies.

Despite the failure of a peaceful solution, however, the debates about a possible peaceful reunification and reconciliation in Vietnam have to be taken into account. As the French historian Paul Veyne rightly points out: "History is full of failed opportunities, of events that did not happen. No one will be a historian if he doesn't feel, around the edges of the history which really occurred, an indefinite multitude of 'compossible' histories of things which could have been otherwise."¹¹ Quinn Judge's

⁹ *Trần Thị Liên, Claire*, "Aux origines de la troisième force : Nguyễn Mạnh Hà et la solution neutraliste pour le Sud Vietnam (1954-1962)" in Christopher Goscha, *L'Indochine entre les deux accords de Genève (1954-1962), L'échec de la paix?* (Paris, Les Indes Savantes, 2010), 347-371.

¹⁰ *Trần Thị Liên, Claire*, "The Challenge For Peace Within South Vietnam's Catholic Community: History Of Peace Activism," in *Peace and Change, A Journal of Peace Research* 38:4 (October 2013), Special Issue on "Narratives of Reconciliation: the Vietnamese Case," : 447-474.

¹¹ Paul Veyne, *Comment on écrit l'histoire. Essai d'épistémologie* (Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 1971), 78-79.

book has the merit of highlighting this uneasy but indispensable perspective around the edges and all at once, at the heart of the Vietnamese contemporary history.

Review by Tuong Vu, University of Oregon

During the Vietnam War, the ‘Third Force’ was a broad term assigned to individuals and groups in South Vietnamese politics who were presumably neither Communist nor anti-Communist and who advocated a peaceful solution to the civil war between Communist North and anti-Communist South Vietnam. Individuals associated with this political tendency were ideologically diverse: some rejected the polarization of politics based on humanitarian, nationalist, or religious values; others were simply against war and foreign intervention. Some were sympathetic to, or even closet members of the Communist Party. Many were incumbent or former government officials of the Republic of Vietnam. A significant number were religious figures and university students. Many others were professionals who had thriving careers. Many had political ambitions, and would have been successful politicians in a democracy.

And yet they did not succeed and some paid a steep price for their political activism. Many were physically harassed or even persecuted by the Saigon government, which suspected them of being Communist agents (Huynh Tan Mam, a prominent student and ‘Third Force’ leader, is an example of a Communist agent under cover). Presumably most were not card-carrying Communist Party members. During the war, the Hanoi-directed National Liberation Front worked hard to court their sympathies and provided secret support for their activities. After the war, most were quickly cast aside as cadres sent in from Hanoi to run the government in the South. Some were even imprisoned or placed under house arrest if they expressed any criticisms, like the case of Father Chan Tin. Many fled to the West, like the student leader Doan Van Toai, only to be denounced by the overseas Vietnamese community, who were predominantly composed of refugees and victims of Hanoi and who blamed them for the loss of South Vietnam.

The story of the Third Force is one of dashed hopes, ruined lives and careers, unrealized ideals and ambitions, betrayals (by Hanoi) and ostracism (by many of their Southern compatriots), and other similarly dire consequences. For all their activism, these individuals did not bring peace or development to Vietnam. (Peace and development for Vietnam began only when Hanoi’s leaders abandoned their revolutionary ambitions in the late 1980s just as world Communism collapsed around them). In hindsight, their greatest historical achievement seems to be in the last days of the war, helping to bring about a quick end, with President Duong Van Minh’s order for the South Vietnamese army to surrender rather than keep on fighting. Duong Van Minh was a prominent, if mediocre, politician associated with the Third Force, and his three-day cabinet was staffed with people of similar tendencies, such as Assembly member Ly Qui Chung. To the extent that the activities of Third Force associates are known, they also serve as inspiring, if tragic, evidence and reminder of a vibrant civil society under the Republic of Vietnam that was crushed after 1975 but that is reviving today.

Sophie Quinn-Judge must be commended for her efforts to write about these long-forgotten individuals as a significant force in South Vietnamese politics during the war. This study is perhaps the first scholarly work in English that focuses on them, four decades after they were forced to disband and denied any political role by the victorious Communists in 1975. For all the tragedies that befell them, they deserve sympathy and understanding, which Quinn-Judge clearly displays throughout the book. She aims to “search for *local forces* that supported these moves toward peace.” In her words, “we need to look at the Vietnamese and their politics as something more complex than the story of communists versus nationalists; or American puppets versus pawns of the communist bloc” (3).

The book relies on a variety of sources, including archival documents from France, the United Kingdom, the U.S., and Vietnam (and occasional documents from the Hungarian and Soviet archives); interviews with a few Third Force individuals such as Assembly member Ho Ngoc Nhuan, student leader Nguyen Huu Thai, Professor Ly Chanh Trung, and the social activist Doan Thanh Liem; memoirs by those individuals and other participants; and many works that have been published in Vietnam since the end of the war. To make her arguments, Quinn-Judge frequently invokes counterfactuals even though at the beginning she declares that “rather than engaging in a counterfactual exercise [about the missed opportunities for peace]..., I would like to record as objectively as possible the dilemmas of the leaders in the middle ground [who advocated peace]” (5). However, counterfactual arguments creep in; here are just a few examples:

[O]ne could posit that a war-weary DRV would not have intervened militarily in the South, if the communists there had been allowed access to a democratic political process after 1954. (5)

If we [Americans] could have foreseen the huge price that our Vietnamese allies would pay, not to mention the sacrifices of so many young Americans, the chances are that we would have examined options for peace more carefully. And had we stopped ... (7)

Had [American leaders] looked a little bit more deeply, we might have had more faith in the Vietnamese capacity to settle their affairs (10).

The [draconian] communist policies implemented after 1975 were in my view not inevitable; had a peaceful political solution be implemented earlier, had there been a serious effort to make the Paris Agreement work, the end of the Vietnam War might have been much different. (190)

The book follows a chronological order that begins with the colonial period, followed by politics in the First Republic under President Ngo Dinh Diem when the earliest initiatives for a neutral South Vietnam were proposed; politics in Hanoi that became radicalized during the 1950s; the Buddhist and antiwar movements in the South in the 1960s; various political opposition groups in the Second Republic under President Nguyen Van Thieu; and the events immediately after reunification. As the back cover explains, “[a] unique contribution of this study is the interweaving of developments in South Vietnamese politics with changes in the balance of power in Hanoi; both of the Vietnamese [governments] are shown to evolve towards greater rigidity as the war progresses, while the US grows increasingly committed to President Thieu in Saigon, after the election of Richard Nixon.”

As this quotation suggests, the chronological approach with great emphasis on larger developments beyond South Vietnam has its strengths. The narrative gives a sense of natural flow in which the chance for peace apparently shrank over time, leading to its logical outcome: a military conquest of the South by the North. The approach leads Quinn-Judge to place the blame on the Americans and the Chinese, who appear in the study as the main culprits. In terms of the two Vietnamese rivals, she dismisses the Saigon government as an American creation (2, 156) while showing Hanoi leaders as having acted under Chinese pressure to wage a war (61, 119) when their peace initiatives were rejected by Washington and Saigon.

Given the approach, the title of the book is slightly misleading. The book is really about neutralism as a political solution for the war, not about the Third Force, although many associated with this label advocated neutralism. In fact, in the introduction Quinn-Judge briefly discusses the “Third Force” concept, then quickly moves on to the “Third Way” and the “Third Segment” (2). Yet whether concepts like ‘neutralism’ or the ‘Third Way’ really capture the richly diverse Third Force in South Vietnamese politics is open to debate. Readers do encounter throughout the book many South Vietnamese activists of the Third Force who are given brief biographies and whose activities are discussed. However, one hardly gets a sense of the social, cultural, and political milieu in which these activists emerged and operated: for example, what was the social and political environment in Saigon’s universities and Hue’s pagodas? What attracted monks and students to activism? What were the major groups and their political tendencies, and how were they linked and interacted with each other? The lack of deep analysis of their society makes the peace activists appear disconnected and their stories sporadic in the study.

Quinn-Judge’s shifting of the blame of the war away from Hanoi and on to the Americans and the Chinese places the book in the longstanding tradition of American-centric scholarship since the 1960s.¹ One thus encounters the familiar stories about missed

¹ An influential book of the 1960s is George Kahin and John Lewis, *The United States in Vietnam* (New York: Dial Press, 1967). More recent works are Marilyn Young, *The Vietnam Wars, 1945-1990* (New York: HarperCollins, 1991); James Carter, *Inventing Vietnam: The United States and State Building, 1954-1968* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008); and Christian Appy, *American Reckoning: The Vietnam War and Our National Identity* (New York: Viking 2015).

opportunities in 1919 and 1945, when the U.S. failed to help Nguyen Ai Quoc/President Ho Chi Minh (9-10). In response to recent scholarship that portrays Vietnamese Communist Party leader Le Duan as a militant, Quinn-Judge argues that he was actually more practical than many of his comrades. She claims that “over the years... a diversity of opinions in the Politburo kept different options for reunification alive, including the search for a negotiated solution that would leave the Vietnamese the freedom to settle their own affairs” (73).

Works that embrace the myths of missed opportunities exaggerate the U.S. role in the war—what it did or could have done. These myths are neither based on documented evidence nor a deep understanding of Vietnam’s Communist leaders. The myths deny Hanoi’s agency and responsibility for the wars, which have been well-documented in many recent studies.² There was no missed opportunity in the 1940s for Ho and his comrades to become Titos, regardless of American policies. As for Le Duan, to use just one piece of counter-evidence, his “Revolutionary Line in the South” written in 1956 clearly portrayed the South as being ripe for revolution, and argued that the enemy to him was not just the Americans but Southern landlords and capitalist class, and that the future of the South would be Communism.³

This study of the Third Force does not underscore the vibrant political scene in South Vietnam, they would be disappointed. Quinn-Judge insists on a nuanced treatment of Hanoi:

To honestly examine the chances for success of such proposals, one has to accept the premise that the communist side was an evolving entity whose capabilities and goals changed over the years. Hanoi’s attitude toward a negotiated peace fluctuated over the course of the war, depending on the views of their allies and their own evaluation of their chances for rapid success. (4)

At the same time, she dismisses the Saigon government as a creation of the U.S. on page 2 of the book. On page 156, Quinn-Judge labels the Saigon leaders “the dependent child of US policymakers.” This familiar trope in the American-centric literature can no longer be defended given the recent studies by Edward Miller, Lien-Hang Nguyen, Geoffrey Stewart, among others.⁴

This points to the study’s failure in understanding the fundamental differences between the socio-political system and foreign relations of the Republic of Vietnam (RVN) and those of the communist North. In the former, the socio-political system was relatively open and fluid, whereas in the latter it was closed and repressive. While the RVN was not a democracy, its citizens, even members of its government, were frequently heard criticizing their leaders and the United States. The so-called “Caravelle manifesto” is an example.⁵ Ho Ngoc Nhuan, Ngo Cong Duc, and many other Third Force associates were part of the Saigon

² For example, see Stein Tønnesson, *Vietnam 1946: How the War Began* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009); Lien-Hang T. Nguyen, *Hanoi’s War: An International History of the War for Peace in Vietnam*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012); Pierre Asselin, *Hanoi’s Road to the Vietnam War, 1954-1965* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013); Tuong Vu, *Vietnam’s Communist Revolution: The Power and Limits of Ideology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

³ Le Duan, “Duong loi Cach mang mien Nam,” [Revolutionary Line in the South], August 1956. *Van Kien Dang Toan Tap* [Collected Party Documents], v. 17 (Hanoi: Chinh Tri Quoc Gia, 2002), esp. 787-788, 805-806.

⁴ Nguyen, *Hanoi’s War*; Edward Miller, *Misalliance: Ngo Dinh Diem, the United States, and the Fate of South Vietnam* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013); Geoffrey Stewart, *Vietnam’s Lost Revolution: Ngô Đình Diệm’s Failure to Build an Independent Nation, 1955-1963* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

⁵ This refers to a declaration issued in April 1960 by a group of prominent Saigon politicians calling on Ngo Dinh Diem to institute political reform. Bui Diem (with David Chanoff), *In the Jaws of History* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1987), 94-95.

government in their role as popularly elected Assembly members—the same way Senator Wayne Morse and Congressman Ron Dellums were part of Washington. Internal dissent was more or less open and tolerated, inside or outside of the government.

In the Communist North, freedom of speech did not exist, and even private criticisms of the leadership or the ‘socialist brethren’ could be reported, leading to harsh punishment. Foreign dependence in the North was not just material but mental: if President Richard Nixon was frequently the target of satire and criticism in the Saigon media, Soviet leader Joseph Stalin and Chinese leader Mao Zedong (until the late 1960s) were revered gods in the North. Criticizing Stalin in the North was taboo. A Southern critic of government policy like Duong Van Minh or Ngo Cong Duc, if living in the North, would have languished in some remote labor camp or worse. To understand the emergence and political role of the Third Force in South Vietnamese politics, one needs a nuanced understanding of its society and political system, including the Ngo Dinh Diem and Nguyen Van Thieu governments. For better or worse, these governments tolerated internal dissent and criticism far more than Ho’s government did, and it is ironic that the book dismisses the former as an American creation while insisting on a nuanced treatment of the latter.

A final shortcoming of the book concerns certain speculations of the author, given what we know and the lack of new evidence. On page 36, for example, Quinn-Judge asserts, without providing any source, that Ho Chi Minh “may have been hoping that the French role [in 1954] would decrease the DRV’s dependence on Chinese advisers.” Yet Ho had written to Chinese leaders in 1950 to ask specifically not only for Chinese military advisors at the headquarters, but also for Chinese military commanders of Vietnamese units down to battalion level.⁶ That this request was extravagant is demonstrated by the fact that Mao approved advisers to the division level only, but not lower ones.

On the excessive killings during the land reform *cum* political purge of 1953-1956 that led to Ho Chi Minh assuming the position of General Secretary of the Party for a brief period, Quinn-Judge claims, again without evidence, that “this added power allowed Ho Chi Minh to carry out a reasonably thorough correction of errors...” (65). She later poses a hypothesis that “one faction within the Party [might have been] aiming this purge of the Viet Minh at Ho Chi Minh and General [Vo Nguyen] Giap, the two leaders who along with Prime Minister Pham Van Dong were most closely identified with the Viet Minh coalition, as opposed to the old [Indochinese Communist Party] hierarchy” (66). If the claim about Ho carrying out a thorough correction of land-reform errors lacks evidence, the speculation that he, Giap, and Dong were possibly targets of the purge is unsustainable.

In conclusion, *The Third Force in the Vietnam War* addresses an important and neglected topic even though it mostly addresses neutralism but not the Third Force itself. The study is deeply flawed, given its silence on the available evidence about the radical ambitions of Hanoi leaders,⁷ its caricature of the politics and workings of the Republic of Vietnam, and its overall failure to move beyond the American-centric scholarship on the Vietnam War. One hopes that it will soon be followed by other studies that place Third Force activists at the center and that make the effort to investigate the socio-political milieu of South Vietnam in which they lived and struggled.

⁶ Qiang Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars, 1950-1975* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 18-19.

⁷ For examples, see R. B. Smith, *An International History of the Vietnam War: Revolution versus Containment 1955-61* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1983), esp. 10-12; *idem.*, *An International History of the Vietnam War, Volume II: The Struggle for Southeast Asia, 1961-65* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1985), esp. 36-38; 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)*, 172-204 (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009); *idem.*, “To Be Patriotic Is to Build Socialism: Communist Ideology in Vietnam’s Civil War,” in *Dynamics of the Cold War in Asia: Ideology, Identity, and Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 33-52.

Author's Response by Sophie Quinn-Judge, Temple University

My book on the third force/third segment, political actors and religious leaders who advocated peace in the Vietnam War, was a long time coming—I always hoped that the right moment would appear to discuss these issues within Vietnam, as the country opened up economically and politically. That moment never came, as the political climate in Vietnam has largely moved in the same direction as China's for the past decade. Today, more than ever, to talk about alternatives to Hanoi's military victory as preferable to what occurred in 1975 is sacrilege in the government's eyes. (The view of the late southern general Tran Van Tra, cited by Sean Fear in his review, is not a popular one.) Meanwhile, in the U.S. recent scholarship has tended to defend the Republic of Vietnam (RVN), in what I interpret as an effort to justify America's interventions overseas. Even to argue that the RVN was a Western creation is too extreme, as two of the reviewers in this roundtable claim. (I discuss this below.)

Members of the former third segment who became refugees to the West found themselves to be targets for fellow refugees. So in the end, I published what is perhaps a skeleton of a study, as it seemed to me that I would not get much farther in my search for unbiased sources. My main hope in doing so was that this book would open up a wider debate and more research on the topic of Vietnamese peace activists. Thanks to this roundtable and the engagement of the reviewers with my text, I can say I am succeeding in this aim. There are surely many gaps in my work and I look forward to other writers filling them in. Here I will make a few comments to explain my judgments.

First, I should address the nature of the southern Vietnamese state, the RVN. Both Sean Fear and Tuong Vu criticize my characterization of this entity as a "Western creation." In spite of recent scholarship attempting to prove the opposite, for example Edward Miller's study of Ngo Dinh Diem, I have to stand by my view. The ascendancy of Ngo Dinh Diem, as first Prime Minister and then President of South Vietnam, may have been superficially the result of a political movement in Saigon and certainly was met with approbation by many members of the southern elite and the nearly million-strong refugee population that moved south in 1954. However, the CIA and Diem's brother, Ngo Dinh Nhu, played a strong role in promoting Diem in the early fifties, as Miller argues.¹ Diem's consolidation of power was unquestionably engineered by U.S. advisors and infusions of money. In fiscal year 1955, U.S. economic aid paid almost all government salaries, as well as the Diem government's other operating expenses, a total of \$320 million. The military equipment supplied by the U.S. averaged \$85 million annually, until a major increase in military assistance began in 1962.² From 1954 until 1975, U.S. money and military support is what kept the southern government afloat. Historian Truong Buu Lam believes that it was the 1950 French creation of the Free State of Vietnam, with former monarch Bao Dai at its head, which turned the war for independence into a civil war. He maintains that the French, at the instigation of the U.S., "adopted a secondary political ploy: the setting up of an anticommunist 'national' government in Saigon, whence have derived all the 'Saigon' governments since. Without the support of France and the United States, the Bao Dai government would never have come into being, and the anti-colonial war would have been waged and won, whereas today [1972], the war of independence and a civil war rage on, side by side."³

Recent scholarship showing that Diem and later President Nguyen Van Thieu made their own decisions on how to govern, often ignoring U.S. advice, does not disprove the facts about the creation of the southern state.⁴ The fact that there were many moral,

¹ Edward Miller, *Misalliance: Ngo Dinh Diem, the United States, and the Fate of South Vietnam*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), 80-81. My review of this book appeared on H-Diplo in 2013, <https://issforum.org/roundtables/PDF/Roundtable-XV-16.pdf>.

² George McTurnan Kahin and John W. Lewis, *The United States in Vietnam* (New York: Dial Press, 1967), 77-78.

³ Truong Buu Lam, "A Vietnamese Viewpoint", in *The Pentagon Papers: Critical Essays Edited by Noam Chomsky and Howard Zinn*, vol. 5, Senator Gravel edition (Boston: Beacon Press, 1972), 36.

⁴ Miller's *Misalliance* is the best example of this scholarship.

intelligent, hard-working people in the RVN also fails to disprove these facts. All along, the Government of Vietnam (GVN) and its leaders suffered from a lack of legitimacy.

A second strong criticism from Tuong Vu's review is that I am perpetrating a "myth of missed opportunities" that existed for making peace. "These myths are neither based on documented evidence nor a deep understanding of Vietnam's Communist leaders. These myths deny Hanoi's agency and responsibility for the wars, which have been well-documented in many recent studies." I am well aware of this scholarship, represented by the studies of two scholars who have worked for considerable periods in the Hanoi archives, Lien-Hang Nguyen and Pierre Asselin, both of whom are cited by Tuong Vu.⁵ I find their studies unconvincing for two reasons. First, they both make undocumented assumptions about the primacy of First Secretary Le Duan as the paramount leader, who pushed Hanoi into war with his uncompromising stance on the need to fight the Americans. They ignore the complicated politics of the politburo, in which Le Duc Tho, head of the organization department who led the purge of 'revisionists' in 1963-1964, and Truong Chinh, the first General Secretary until his demotion in 1956, played leading roles. Why does this matter? Because it is important to understand that there was not one 'evil villain' who set Hanoi policy, but that a combination of factors, mainly U.S. actions, Chinese support for a military resistance to the U.S., and the assertiveness of a radical faction in the politburo, led to Hanoi's gradual escalation of its support for the Communist insurgency in the south. The choice for war was not the decision of one autocrat, but a collegial one that took several years to evolve, in reaction to U.S. increases in personnel and aid to the RVN. Second, these studies of "Hanoi's War" foreground the hardline, aggressive nature of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) throughout the American Vietnam War. They go back to the original U.S. interpretation of the war as a case of Communist aggression against an independent RVN. Saigon's flaunting of the Geneva final statement on the holding of nationwide elections in 1956 and the legitimate right of the DRV to fight for unification (that they thought they had won in 1954) are downplayed.⁶ In other words, there is no dramatic new evidence that the war was initiated by Hanoi or was Hanoi's responsibility.

All that being said, I think that Fear's view that my study is a "lament, rather than sober analysis" may well be true. But I have not yet come across an example of a "sober analysis" that convinces me that there were no missed opportunities for peace. Certainly, there is a heavy burden on anyone hoping to prove that war was 'the only road to take,' as Communist writers have often said. A basic question for all historians is when and why leaders opt to negotiate and make peace. From the beginning, the U.S. believed that it could find the breaking point of the DRV and thus ignored various peace initiatives. But this was a challenge that the U.S. Cold Warriors failed to master, in spite of what looked like "sober analysis" supporting their decisions.⁷ In fact, as CIA historian Thomas Ahearn has noted, "the US Army failed to grasp the causes of the insurgency and therefore lacked any prescriptions for a cure."⁸

Le Duan, on the other hand, is on record as saying that if each side were willing to "lose a little" in negotiations that led to peace, then the Communists would endorse that solution (74). But in 1954 and in 1963-1964, they did not consider the south Vietnamese state as one of the legitimate sides, while the Americans insisted on preserving and legitimating their anti-Communist bulwark. This disagreement was the root cause of the war. The Communists knew that they were confronting French-U.S. power in 1954 and the United States in 1963-1964. In both those instances, peace was an option that the U.S. declined. The question I want to raise here is which approach is the more sober—the one that counts on breaking the will of the other side, or the one that searches for compromise and accepts the need for co-existence? After all, 'sober analysis' also requires that we consider the price

⁵ Lien-Hang Nguyen, *An International History of the War for Peace* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012); Pierre Asselin, *Vietnam's American War: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

⁶ For a detailed analysis of DRV's changing policy, see William Duiker, "Waging Revolutionary War," 24-36 in Jayne S. Werner and Luu Doan Huynh, ed., *The Vietnam War: Vietnamese and American Perspectives* (Armonk and London: M.E. Sharpe, 1993).

⁷ As Robert McNamara, Secretary of Defense, remarked after a trip to Vietnam in 1962, "Every quantitative measure we have shows we are winning this war." Cited in Ralph Smith, *Vietnam and the West* (London: Heinemann, 1968), 173

⁸ Thomas Ahearn, *CIA and Rural Pacification South Vietnam* (Washington, D.C.: Center for the Study of Intelligence, 200), 105, 107.

that will have to be paid for war. Finally, there is the question of what constitutes 'sober analysis' in a Peace Studies framework. This is a discipline based on a search for 'outside-the-box' solutions and confidence building. This has to go beyond what military men consider 'sober analysis' to a profound belief in the possibility of transforming an enemy into a friend. History proves that this is not a pacifist fantasy—U.S. relations with China and the USSR in the 1970s and 1980s prove my point.

Fear's list of constraints on peacemaking that I have overlooked is based on considerable research into Saigon politics -- I look forward to reading his extended discussion of these topics in his forthcoming book. As he notes, I did miss the Progressive Nationalist Movement of 1969, led by what he calls "committed peace theorists." (The 1971 assassination of Nguyen Van Bong, one of the leaders of this movement, by members of the Communist youth, is one of the tragic losses of the War, among so many others. They apparently feared that he would improve the reputation of the Thieu government, if he had accepted the position of prime minister, as was expected at the time.) I am not sure what Fear is referring to, however, when he speaks of "Hanoi's habit of assassinating headstrong Saigon doves." (4). After the removal of General Nguyen Binh in the early days of the French war, I do not know of a pattern of assassination of 'doves.' The Communist insurgency kidnapped and assassinated unpopular village chiefs; in 1968 the fate of a number of workers from the Buddhist Youth for Social Service school was unclear -- both the Saigon side and the Communists were accused of murdering them. The Communists were ambivalent about Truong Dinh Dzu, the 1967 peace candidate, but did not make any attempts on his life. Ironically, Hanoi became more dismissive of its *own* doves by 1974-1975, as their criticism of Tran Bach Dang, a key Communist organizer of the third segment, demonstrates (131-132).

Fear also implies that a peace settlement made by President Richard Nixon would have been impossible to enforce (2). In fact, Nixon and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger cynically signed a peace agreement in 1973 that they never had any intention of obliging their Saigon allies to implement. So far as Nixon's U.S. supporters are concerned, we need to recall that Nixon ran on a promise that he would end the war in both of his elections, 1968 and 1972. Peace was what the public wanted, and congressional leaders insisted that he follow through on troop withdrawals during his second term.

As far as my not paying sufficient attention to factionalism within the various opposition movements, as Fear suggests, I think I covered the splits among the Buddhists adequately. There is surely much more to learn about the Buddhists and their changing relationships with the two main combatants, but as Thich Nhat Hanh and Thich Tri Quang, the leading pacifist monks, are in their final days, we cannot expect any more revelations from them. In the case of the various opposition blocs in the National Assembly, they did gradually consolidate their ranks overtime. But their most outspoken and charismatic leaders were neutralized by President Thieu. By the time of the Paris Agreement in January 1973, organizers in Saigon were working overtime to bring them together. I cite the letters of Ho Ngoc Nhuan, the outspoken third segment deputy and journalist, to show how the opposition was working with leaders including the Archbishop of Saigon and Thich Tri Quang to create pressure for the formation of a real neutral force, to implement the Agreement's political provisions.

The *urban* leadership of the Third Segment opposition was not an insurmountable difficulty to the spread of their message. Ngo Cong Duc, an opposition deputy and newspaper editor, represented a partially rural constituency in the Mekong Delta and had a significant following in the villages. Tran Ngoc Chau, once a close adviser to Thieu, had also been a popular province chief with ties to rural voters, strengthened by his willingness to listen to the grievances of his constituents.

I am truly sorry that Tuong Vu believes that I analyze the RVN without nuance, while insisting on the differences of views among the Hanoi leadership. I assumed that by writing a book on the importance of south Vietnamese politics, I would be expressing my belief that the GVN had an active civil society and political life. What I observed of this from 1973-1975 made me appreciate the courage and intellectual skills of the political opposition. Those who were well known were protected by the U.S. desire to showcase democracy in the RVN. Still, the Saigon government could not claim moral superiority to Hanoi in its respect for human rights. It did not maintain totalitarian control of the population's beliefs and speech. But they did hold a large number of political prisoners, whom they subjected to different kinds of torture.

Claire Tran has commented on this text in a very generous way. Her detailed description of my book's contents is a welcome contribution to this roundtable. I owe her a large debt for all that I have learned from her of the early Catholic peace movement.

Where she sees shortcomings, for example in my failure to include the French War in my study, I can only say that I hope to read her work on this period in the not too distant future.

Finally, I want to thank all three participants for taking the time to comment on my book. Their thoughts help to open up new spaces for discussion of this topic and confirm my belief that there is more to be said about Vietnamese thinking on the Vietnam War.