

# Philosophical and Political Values in Ho Chi Minh's Thought on People's National Defense: From Theory to Contemporary Practice

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## Abstract

One of the main tenets of Ho Chi Minh's extensive political and philosophical system is his view of the protection of the people. In addition to reflecting Vietnam's unique cultural and humanistic traditions, it is a creative continuation and expansion of Marxist-Leninist doctrine on revolutionary combat, national independence, and the role of the people in history. From a philosophical standpoint, Ho Chi Minh's conception of people's national defense reveals a dialectical unity between politics and ethics, theory and practice, national independence and peace, revolution and humanity. The essence of people's national defense lies in the view that the people are both the foundation and the decisive force of defense; that defense is not merely a military affair but a political, economic, cultural, and social undertaking involving the entire population. On this basis, Ho Chi Minh established the principle of "all-people defense," a defense built by the people, for the people, and rooted in the people's will, solidarity, and moral consciousness. In the present day, Ho Chi Minh's ideas on people's national defense continue to serve as a theoretical and philosophical foundation for Vietnam's national defense strategy. It upholds the human-centered approach to socialist defense, combining material and spiritual power, independence and cooperation, patriotism and international solidarity. Ho Chi Minh elevated the concept of national defense to a moral and humanistic philosophy that transcends time and continues to have profound theoretical and practical value for Vietnam's cause of protecting and developing the nation in the new era.

**Keywords:** Ho Chi Minh's thought; people's national defense; dialectical humanism; political philosophy; revolutionary ethics; Vietnam.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Ho Chi Minh's thought is a comprehensive and profoundly humanistic philosophical system, encompassing politics, ethics, culture, and national defense. Among its key components, the concept of people's national defense occupies a central position, reflecting the dialectical unity between revolutionary theory and the lived experience of the Vietnamese nation. Ho Chi Minh's conception of defense was never limited to the military sphere; rather, it was a total, all-encompassing system grounded in the people's strength—spiritual, moral, political, and material.

Based on the ideas of Marxist-Leninist theory, Ho Chi Minh skillfully modified the concepts of class conflict and revolutionary warfare to fit the specific historical circumstances of Vietnam. He saw the people as both the subject and the impetus of national defense, in addition to being the object to be safeguarded. (Ho Chi Minh Complete Works, Vol. 5, p. 698). He once said,

"The people are the roots of the nation; if the roots are firm, the tree will flourish." This statement sums up his ontological belief that all historical power originates from human beings, and especially from the people who are united in revolutionary consciousness.

The emergence of Ho Chi Minh's thought on people's national defense was a product of both theoretical reflection and revolutionary practice. It developed from the experiences of the anti-colonial struggle, the August Revolution of 1945, and the subsequent wars of national liberation. Through these historical processes, Ho Chi Minh formed a distinctive theory of defense that integrated the principles of Marxist dialectics, the Vietnamese patriotic tradition, and the humanistic ethics of the East.

From a philosophical perspective, Ho Chi Minh's idea of all-people defense embodies a profound unity between theory and practice (praxis), individual

and community, national independence and international peace. He transformed the traditional concept of defense from a purely military notion into a comprehensive social philosophy—one that affirms the moral and cultural foundations of national strength. His approach to defense is thus inseparable from his broader philosophical vision: a human-centered philosophy of action, in which the people are both the means and the purpose of all revolutionary endeavors.

In today's era, when national security challenges are increasingly multidimensional—ranging from military and political threats to economic, cultural, and environmental issues—Ho Chi Minh's conception of people's national defense remains profoundly relevant. It provides not only a theoretical framework for Vietnam's national defense strategy but also a moral and philosophical compass guiding the nation toward sustainable peace and human development.

## II. CONTERN

### 1. Philosophical Foundations of Ho Chi Minh's Thought on People's National Defense

Ho Chi Minh's thought on people's national defense was established on the philosophical foundation of Marxism–Leninism, but it was also deeply imbued with the cultural, ethical, and humanistic spirit of the Vietnamese nation. From a philosophical standpoint, this thought embodies the dialectical synthesis of three interrelated dimensions: ontology (the nature of human beings and history), epistemology (the relationship between knowledge and revolutionary praxis), and axiology (the moral and humanistic values that guide action). These dimensions together constitute the fundamental philosophical basis of Ho Chi Minh's conception of people's national defense.

*First, ontological foundations – the people as the essence and source of national strength.* In Ho Chi Minh's worldview, the existence and strength of the nation originate from the people. The “being” of defense is not defined by weapons or military institutions but by the collective will, morality, and consciousness of the people. He asserted: “The people are the roots of the nation; if the roots are firm, the tree will flourish.” (Ho Chi Minh Complete Works, Vol. 5, p. 698). This reveals an ontological conception of defense based on human beings as social, historical, and moral subjects capable of self-liberation and self-transformation.

Ho Chi Minh viewed national defense as the manifestation of human vitality in its highest collective form—the unity of millions of citizens bound together by patriotism, revolutionary faith, and shared moral purpose. In this sense, people's national defense is not merely a military doctrine but an ontological affirmation of the people as the creators of history and the guardians of the nation's destiny.

*Second, epistemological foundations – the unity between theory and practice in defense.* Ho Chi Minh inherited and developed the Marxist–Leninist principle that genuine knowledge is inseparable from action. He wrote: “Theory without practice is meaningless; practice without theory is blind.” (Vol. 8, p. 496). For him, defense knowledge must arise from and serve revolutionary practice. Building a national defense system therefore requires not only strategic planning but also the continuous education and mobilization of the people's consciousness.

Ho Chi Minh emphasized the dialectical relationship between thought and action, between learning and doing. This epistemology of praxis transforms the concept of defense into a living, self-renewing system that evolves with the people's awareness and participation. In this view, the strength of people's national defense derives not merely from external organization but from the internal unity of knowledge, conviction, and collective action.

*The third is axiological underpinnings,* which are the humanistic and moral principles of defense. Ho Chi Minh's philosophy places a strong emphasis on the moral dimension. According to him, the moral purpose of national defense—to uphold peace, independence, and human dignity—is what gives it value, not conquest or force. “We will fight to the end if it means achieving our freedom and independence, even though we love peace” (Vol. 7, p. 56). This assertion articulates a dialectical relationship between humanity and necessity, love and struggle—a type of revolutionary humanism that elevates defense to a moral obligation.

The essence of people's national defense, therefore, lies in the ethical consciousness of its participants. Soldiers, cadres, and citizens alike must cultivate moral integrity, discipline, and responsibility. Defense, in Ho Chi Minh's philosophy, is not only a duty but also a moral commitment—a manifestation of the people's compassion, patriotism, and faith in justice. As he affirmed: “To defend the Fatherland means to defend the people's life, happiness, and peace.” (Vol. 10, p. 604).

In summary, the philosophical foundations of Ho Chi Minh's thought on people's national defense constitute a comprehensive and dynamic system. They reflect the dialectical integration of ontology (the people as the basis of defense), epistemology (the unity of theory and practice), and axiology (the moral purpose of protecting peace and human dignity). This system reveals Ho Chi Minh's distinctive philosophical vision—a vision in which defense transcends the military domain to become a humanistic philosophy of action, affirming that the ultimate goal of all defense is not war, but peace for the people and humanity.

## 2. Values and Application of Ho Chi Minh's Thought on People's National Defense in Contemporary Vietnam

### 2.1. Theoretical and Philosophical Values

Ho Chi Minh's thought on people's national defense possesses profound theoretical significance, reflecting the unity between Marxist-Leninist philosophy and the practical reality of the Vietnamese revolution. Philosophically, it represents the application of dialectical materialism to the realm of national defense—where human beings and the national community are regarded as the true subjects of history. Ho Chi Minh did not view national defense as a purely military instrument but as a social value system in which material and spiritual strength are harmoniously integrated. His principle of “taking the people as the root” embodies this dialectical thinking: human beings are not only the goal but also the driving force of all defense activities (Ho Chi Minh, 1995, p. 322).

The philosophical value of this thought is also evident in Ho Chi Minh's dialectical approach to the relationship between peace and war, the universal and the particular. He affirmed that peace is the eternal aspiration of humankind, yet genuine peace can only be secured when a nation possesses the capacity and will to defend its independence. Hence, the idea of people's national defense reflects the dialectical unity between struggle and peace, independence and development, and affirms an objective law of history: only through just struggle can humanity attain authentic peace.

From a humanistic-philosophical perspective, Ho Chi Minh's thought on people's national defense emphasizes the dignity of the human being and the moral value of revolutionary action. He consistently regarded defending the Fatherland as defending human beings—the right to live, to be free, and to pursue happiness. This embodies a dialectical humanism in which the aim of defense is not only territorial security but also human security, a concept of global moral significance.

### 2.2. Practical and Political Values

In the practice of the Vietnamese revolution, Ho Chi Minh's thought on people's national defense has been concretized into the Party's and State's policies and strategies. From the resistance wars against French and American imperialism to the current stage of national construction and defense, the principle of “all-people and all-dimensional defense” has served as a guiding orientation. This is clearly reflected in the Vietnam National Defense Strategy (2019), which emphasizes the building of a strong all-people defense closely linked with the economy, foreign affairs, and national security (Ministry of National Defense, 2019, p. 11).

The practical value of this thought also lies in its adaptability and dynamism. Under new conditions, people's national defense extends beyond territorial and border protection to encompass fields such as

cybersecurity, energy security, and environmental security—domains of so-called non-traditional security. This adaptability demonstrates the vitality of Ho Chi Minh's thought in responding to the transformations of the modern world, particularly amid the Fourth Industrial Revolution and global strategic competition.

The principle of self-reliance and resilience also carries enduring practical meaning. Ho Chi Minh emphasized that a strong defense must be grounded in an independent and self-sufficient economy, relying primarily on one's own resources and creativity. This viewpoint continues to serve as a strategic orientation for national development. Resolution No. 28-NQ/TW (2018) of the Party's Central Committee reaffirms the need to “closely combine socio-economic development with the consolidation of national defense and security,” reflecting a direct continuation of Ho Chi Minh's dialectical vision of development and protection (Central Committee, 2018, p. 3).

### 2.3. Cultural, Ethical, and Humanistic Values

One of Ho Chi Minh's most profound contributions is his integration of defense thought with Vietnam's cultural and ethical foundations. He asserted that a strong defense depends not only on modern weapons but primarily on “the burning patriotism and the pure revolutionary morality of the people” (Ho Chi Minh, 2011, p. 148). Thus, building an all-people defense is simultaneously a process of cultivating the new socialist human being—citizens endowed with knowledge, ideals, and the readiness to sacrifice for the common good.

The cultural and ethical value of this thought is further expressed in its spirit of tolerance and humanity. Ho Chi Minh always emphasized that “to fight the enemy is to protect the country and the people,” and that hatred must never overshadow compassion. This reveals the profound humanism of his defense philosophy—a perspective that combines strategic vision with moral generosity, turning national defense into both an ethical and humanistic mission.

### 2.4. Application in the New Era

In the context of globalization, digital transformation, and multilayered security challenges, the application of Ho Chi Minh's thought on people's national defense acquires renewed significance.

*First*, the idea of “all-people defense” must be reinterpreted in the digital environment—mobilizing the strength of the entire society within cyberspace, technology, media, and defense education.

*Second*, it is necessary to develop a digitized people's defense, in which knowledge, information, and technology become constitutive elements of national strength. Building a “patriotic digital citizen,” a “digital defense,” or “digital border” reflects the creative and

self-reliant spirit that Ho Chi Minh consistently advocated.

*Third*, Ho Chi Minh's principle of "peace associated with struggle" continues to guide Vietnam's contemporary defense and foreign policy. The strategic direction of "safeguarding the Fatherland early, from afar, and by peaceful means," articulated in the Strategy for National Protection (2022), embodies this legacy—upholding independence and self-reliance while maintaining flexibility and harmony in international relations, combining national strength with the progressive strength of the times.

*Finally*, Ho Chi Minh's thought on people's national defense contributes to shaping a modern Vietnamese defense philosophy—one that harmonizes tradition and modernity, national identity and universal human values. It is a philosophy of a peaceful, self-defensive, humanistic, and modern people's defense, resonating with the global pursuit of peace and sustainable development in the 21st century.

### 3. Dialectical and Ethical Dimensions of Ho Chi Minh's Thought on People's National Defense

Ho Chi Minh's thought on people's national defense embodies not only a political-strategic doctrine but also a profound dialectical and ethical philosophy. It expresses a worldview in which defense is inseparable from humanity, struggle from peace, and the particular destiny of the Vietnamese nation from the universal destiny of humankind. This dialectical and moral vision transforms defense from a mere question of military power into a comprehensive philosophy of human existence, ethical responsibility, and social harmony.

#### 3.1. The Dialectical Dimension

The dialectical foundation of Ho Chi Minh's defense philosophy lies in his creative application of Marxist dialectics to the sphere of national defense. For Ho Chi Minh, all social and historical phenomena exist in the interplay of contradictions—between war and peace, dependence and independence, the material and the spiritual. The task of revolutionary theory, therefore, is not to negate these contradictions, but to recognize and resolve them through historical action.

He viewed peace and struggle as two sides of the same dialectical process. Peace is the aspiration of humanity, but peace cannot be genuine if it rests upon injustice or submission. Likewise, war, though destructive, may become the necessary means for achieving a just and lasting peace. Hence, the unity between peace and struggle in Ho Chi Minh's thought is not accidental but essential—it reflects a moral dialectic in which the pursuit of justice gives meaning to sacrifice, and struggle serves the higher purpose of peace.

Ho Chi Minh also perceived the dialectical relation between the particular and the universal. While

defending the independence of Vietnam, he never separated it from the cause of global peace and human liberation. As he wrote: "Our resistance is the resistance of a small nation, yet it carries the meaning of justice for all nations that love peace and independence." (Ho Chi Minh, 2000, p. 604). This synthesis of national and universal values reveals the profoundly humanistic nature of his dialectical reasoning—where the defense of the nation becomes an act of solidarity with humankind.

Furthermore, Ho Chi Minh viewed the relationship between the material and the spiritual as a dynamic unity. He emphasized that weapons and technology are necessary but not decisive; the decisive factor lies in the consciousness, unity, and moral will of the people. "Men come before weapons," he declared (Ho Chi Minh, 1995, p. 322). This assertion elevates defense to a level of moral ontology, affirming that true strength is the synthesis of material resources and spiritual conviction—the power of a just cause grounded in the people's heart.

#### 3.2. The Ethical Dimension

The ethical dimension of Ho Chi Minh's thought on people's national defense derives from his lifelong commitment to revolutionary morality and humanism. He regarded defense not as an act of aggression but as a moral duty—a manifestation of love for the nation, for peace, and for humanity. To defend the Fatherland, in his view, is to defend the right of the people to live in freedom and dignity. This transforms defense from a political necessity into an ethical imperative grounded in compassion, justice, and solidarity.

Ho Chi Minh's defense philosophy emphasizes three key moral principles: justice, humanity, and responsibility.

- Justice means fighting only for legitimate causes—independence, self-determination, and peace.
- Humanity implies respect for life, even in the midst of struggle; he repeatedly reminded soldiers to "love their compatriots and even show kindness to the enemy when they surrender." (Ho Chi Minh, 2011, p. 148).
- Responsibility requires that every citizen see national defense as both a right and a moral obligation—a reflection of collective conscience and civic virtue.

Ethically, Ho Chi Minh's idea of defense embodies the principle of revolutionary humanism—to fight without hatred, to protect without domination, to win without losing humanity. This moral restraint distinguishes his thought from both militarism and pacifist idealism. It is a form of ethical realism that recognizes the necessity of struggle but subordinates it to the ultimate goal of peace and human flourishing.



### 3.3. Dialectical Unity of the Two Dimensions

In Ho Chi Minh's philosophy, the dialectical and ethical dimensions are not separate but mutually reinforcing. The dialectical understanding of history provides the theoretical basis for moral action, while moral values give direction and purpose to dialectical struggle. The unity of these two aspects reveals the holistic nature of his thought—a synthesis of reason and conscience, power and morality, nation and humanity.

Through this integration, Ho Chi Minh elevated the concept of defense to a philosophical system of human action. National defense becomes a reflection of the broader moral law of history: that justice, once deeply rooted in the people's consciousness, becomes an indestructible force. Thus, people's national defense, in its highest sense, is not the art of war but the art of sustaining peace through justice, solidarity, and human compassion.

## III. CONCLUSION

Ho Chi Minh's thought on people's national defense stands as one of the most profound and distinctive achievements of Vietnamese political and philosophical thought in the twentieth century. It represents not only the creative application of Marxism–Leninism to the realities of Vietnam's revolutionary struggle but also a synthesis of national tradition, moral humanism, and dialectical reasoning. Through this synthesis, Ho Chi Minh transformed the concept of defense from a purely military or strategic concern into a comprehensive philosophy of human existence, justice, and peace.

Philosophically, the essence of Ho Chi Minh's thought lies in the dialectical unity between theory and practice, war and peace, material strength and moral will, nation and humanity. This unity affirms his view that the power of a nation is ultimately the power of its people—rooted in their consciousness, morality, and solidarity. National defense, therefore, is not an external act of protection but an internal manifestation of the people's spirit, their ethical integrity, and their collective historical will.

Ethically, Ho Chi Minh elevated defense into a moral duty inseparable from the universal values of peace, freedom, and human dignity. He consistently emphasized that defending the Fatherland means defending life itself—defending the right of every human being to live in independence and happiness. Thus, the philosophy of people's national defense transcends the boundary between politics and ethics to become a humanistic doctrine of peace through justice, unity, and compassion.

In the context of globalization and the emergence of new security challenges, Ho Chi Minh's thought retains enduring relevance. It offers a theoretical and moral compass for building a defense strategy

grounded in self-reliance, solidarity, and international cooperation. The principle of “all-people defense” continues to guide Vietnam's approach to national security—integrating military strength with cultural, economic, and ethical dimensions, while harmonizing the national interest with the global pursuit of peace and sustainable development.

From a contemporary philosophical perspective, Ho Chi Minh's conception of people's national defense contributes to the construction of a modern Vietnamese philosophy of defense—one that is peaceful rather than aggressive, human-centered rather than state-centered, and ethical rather than purely instrumental. It is a philosophy that upholds justice as the condition of peace and humanity as the foundation of security.

In essence, Ho Chi Minh's thought reveals a timeless truth: the strength of a nation does not come from weapons or wealth, but from the unity of its people and the righteousness of its cause. His philosophy of people's national defense, therefore, is not merely a legacy of the past but a living source of guidance for the present and the future—an ethical, humanistic, and dialectical foundation for safeguarding peace, independence, and human dignity in the twenty-first century.

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