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Small Revolutionaries: Participation of Children and Youth in the Vietnam War

Thursday 4 June 2026 09:00 (1h 30m)

This roundtable will discuss the recently published book *Small Revolutionaries: Participation of Children and Youth in the Vietnam War* by Mai Anh Nguyen (Cornell University Press, 2025). After initial comments by the author, Helen Berents, Synne Dyvik, Seb Rumsby, and Claire Smith will offer their reflections on the book. Q&A will follow.

From the book's description: In *Small Revolutionaries*, Mai Anh Nguyen analyzes the life histories of young Vietnamese who participated in the military struggle against the United States and its South Vietnamese allies from 1955 to 1975. Their contributions took many forms: intelligence gathering, camp care and maintenance, even the building and destruction of roads using simple tools. Through these activities and others, young people contributed to the victory of the Vietnamese revolutionary forces. At the same time, they displayed significant political awareness, kindness, and empathy, as well as remarkable resilience while navigating the physical dangers and emotional challenges of war.

Nguyen examines the predominant social order at the time, which emphasized family loyalty, collectivism, and concern for one's community, as well as communist ideology, which children and youth internalized as part of their lives before joining the military effort. Together, these forces influenced the broader Vietnamese concept of childhood and the wartime experiences of young recruits. In *Small Revolutionaries*, young people emerge as active, socially engaged, and intelligent individuals with valuable and insightful stories to tell.

Track Classification: Critical Military Studies Working Group