

The “Détente to Step Forward” Diplomatic Strategy and Efforts to Save Vietnam’s Fragile Peace from March 1946 to December 1946

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Abstract

The historical period 1945–1946 occupies a particularly prominent position in modern Vietnamese history. It was a period full of challenges for the Communist Party, the newly formed government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, and the Vietnamese people. It was also a period with many historical events including the diplomatic struggle of the Government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam to protect and strengthen the revolutionary government in the face of imperialist countries’ plot to monopolize Vietnam. The current study set out to describe the art of the diplomatic struggle of the Government of Vietnam and the Communist Party in the fight against the sabotage of the Preliminary Agreement of March 6, 1946, by Chiang Kai-shek’s army and his henchmen, and the violation of the same agreement by the French colonialists using historical research, logic, analysis, and listing. The diplomatic struggle was “*firm in objectives, flexible in strategies and tactics.*” Study findings on Vietnam’s revolutionary and modern diplomatic art revealed the plot of France and Chiang, and how the Vietnamese peacefully protected their territorial integrity and national sovereignty.

Keywords: Vietnam, France, Diplomacy, communist party, government

1. Introduction

In Vietnam, the Declaration of Independence was read after the success of the August Revolution “At 2:00 p.m. on September 2, 1945, at Ba Dinh Square (Hanoi), in front of tens of thousands of compatriots nationwide, on behalf of the Provisional Revolutionary Government, President Ho Chi Minh read the Declaration of Independence, giving birth to the Democratic Republic of Vietnam” (Nguyen, Q. N., 2005). The declaration affirmed the legality and official name of the new government in Vietnam. The Declaration of Independence states that: “All the peoples of the world are created equal; every nation has the right to life, the right to happiness, and the right to freedom. Vietnam has the right to enjoy freedom and independence and, in fact, has become a free and independent country. The entire Vietnamese people are determined to use all their spirit and strength, their lives and property, to maintain that right to freedom and independence” (Ho, C. M., 2000). For more than a year since its birth (from September 1945 to December 1946), the Government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and the Indochina Communist Party made efforts to persevere in a flexible diplomatic struggle that was “firm in objectives, flexible in strategies and tactics,” and had “more friends, less enemies,” to maintain, consolidate, and protect the country’s young independence and protect the newly born revolutionary government from the siege and sabotage of reactionary and aggressive forces of “internal and external enemies” (Nguyen, D. B., 2002).

It is rare that a small, poor, and backward colonial country like Vietnam had to immediately deal with internal and external enemies and thousands of mounting difficulties soon after gaining power. How did the Vietnamese people still maintain their government in such difficult and complicated conditions?

Describing the diplomatic struggle that contributed to protecting and consolidating the revolutionary government in the years 1945–1946 is of profound scientific and practical significance. The present research study used specific historical methods to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the diplomatic struggles related to protecting and strengthening the revolutionary government during these years. Moreover, the study offers useful perspectives regarding the use of diplomacy for building and protecting governments in the present.

The vibrant historical period 1945–1946 has attracted the attention of many researchers and historians, both in Vietnam and abroad whose works, especially the works that deal directly and indirectly with issues of protecting and

consolidating the revolutionary government, have been published in many different genres including reference books, monographs, magazines, and textbooks in universities and colleges. Typical examples include: Vietnam's first year after the August Revolution (Nguyen, K. G., 1961); History of the resistance war against French colonial invasion (1994); Unforgettable Years (Vo, N. G., 1974); From the Hue Court to the Viet Bac War Zone (Pham, K. H., 1987); The An Nam Dragon (Bao, D., 1980); The work of protecting and building the people's government in Vietnam in the years 1945–1946 (Nguyen, T. U., 1999); Diplomatic struggle in the people's national democratic revolution (1945–1954) (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1976); Vietnam History 1940–1952 (Philippe, 1952); Paris-Saigon-1952 (Philippe, 1988); Vietnam in 1946: How did the war start? (Stein, 2013); The Vietnamese Revolution of 1945: Roosevelt, Ho Chi Minh, and De Gaulle in a World at War (Stein, 1991); Why Vietnam? Prelude to America's Albatross (Archimedes L.A. Patti, 1990); and Ho Chi Minh, the Last Chance: Vietnam-France Conference at Fontainebleau, July 1946 (Henri Azeau, 1968). The above works are full of fascinating historical events of struggle on each front: culture, politics, military, security, and diplomacy. However, there has been no in-depth, systematic, and comprehensive research project on the diplomatic struggle process of the Government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and the Communist Party to protect and maintain the revolutionary government, on the achievements of the August Revolution, and on Vietnam's territorial integrity in the period 1945–1946.

The present research study selectively builds on all the results of its predecessors and provides supplementary information on the “the diplomacy struggle that contributed to maintaining the revolutionary government in Vietnam from September 1945 to the Preliminary Agreement of March 6, 1946” (Hoang, T. T., 2023). In this research study, the author continues describing the period of the diplomatic struggle to implement the “détente to step forward” strategy from March 26, 1946 to December 1946 in Vietnam by addressing the following questions: (1) Why did the governments of Chiang Kai-shek and the French colonialists try to sabotage the Preliminary Agreement in every way? (2) How did the Vietnamese government and the Communist Party enact diplomatic measures to overrun the plots of Chiang Kai-shek's army and the French colonialists? (3) What efforts did the Government of Vietnam and the Communist Party make to protect and consolidate the revolutionary government to prepare for the long-term resistance war with the French colonialists? (4) What are the implications of the diplomatic strategy that the Vietnamese government used to protect and maintain the revolutionary government in the period 1945–1946?

2. Method

The present study employed the historical method, the logical method, and the analytical method; methods researchers consider indispensable means of investigating historical issues. The historical method helps an author “restore” a complete picture of historical events, phenomena, and characters participating in hard negotiation sessions, as well as individuals and organizations who made decisions and policies related to the fate of both peoples – Vietnam and France – in a historical period (1945 to 1954) and their sequelae. The author used desk research methods to analyze secondary data sources collected from published academic works, namely: scientific research works, books, newspapers, memoirs, official documents of the Party, Ho Chi Minh's Complete Works, and mainly episodes 1945 and 1946 of the multi-episode documentary series “Vietnam in the Ho Chi Minh Era: A Television Chronicles” produced by People's Television in 2020. The author then drew out the nature, rules, or trends of movement and development of historical events and phenomena at that time, and its impact on the policy plans of the authorities in Indochina.

3. Results

3.1 *Struggling against the Sabotage of the Preliminary Agreement by Chiang Kai-shek's Army and His Henchmen and Protecting the Achievements of the Revolution*

The signed Preliminary Agreement demonstrates the farsightedness of President Ho Chi Minh and the leaders of the Indochina Communist Party. Part of the public did not immediately agree with the pacts in the Preliminary Agreement due to enthusiasm for revolution and hatred for colonial invaders. The Viet Quoc and Viet Cach members took advantage of the first few days following the signing of the Preliminary Agreement, when many people were still confused and shocked, to incite commoners and break the triangular peace using extremist arguments such as: “don't negotiate with anyone, win or die!”, “The Preliminary Agreement is an agreement to sell the country,” and “freedom in the French Union is no different from a protectionist regime like the 1884 Treaty” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1976). These aggressive and reactionary colonial powers in Indochina sought to downplay the significance of the Preliminary Agreement, delay its implementation, to continue the war in the South and South-Central regions and establish the Cochinchina Government and the Cochinchina Republic.

Despite Chiang Kai-shek's army and the filial colonial powers in Indochina's actions to sabotage the government and discredit President Ho Chi Minh, the Vietnamese government persistently struggled to strictly implement the Preliminary Agreement, promote peace, and persistently encourage the Vietnamese people to support the implementation of the agreement. The revolutionary government staff proposed several propaganda activities to create a

favorable atmosphere for Vietnam-France relations.

On the afternoon of March 7, 1946, comrade Vo Nguyen Giap spoke of an anticipated war against Vietnamese people on behalf of the resistance coalition government at a rally of Hanoi people at the city's Opera House Square. Comrade Vo Nguyen Giap compared the forces of Vietnam to France and affirmed, "The Preliminary Agreement was achieved because of the heroic fighting spirit of the Vietnamese people. France must recognize Vietnam as a free country rather than an autonomous country; although freedom is not independence, with freedom we will have independence and complete independence. France must also commit to holding a referendum with Vietnam to unify the three terms, whose results we can know in advance." Vietnam's goals were independence, however, "to achieve independence, there must be favorable objective conditions. Sometimes the struggle must be very fierce and tough, and sometimes it must be flexible" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1976).

At the same meeting, President Ho Chi Minh said: "We have had independence since August 1945, but until now no major power has recognized us. Signing the Preliminary Agreement on March 6 with France is a step towards international recognition for our country. It was a great political victory. The Agreement will lead us to an increasingly stronger international position, and it is a great political victory. The French army will arrive on orders from the allies. They only had 15 thousand people and only stayed for 5 years ... choosing to negotiate instead of fighting was evidence of political understanding" (Devillers, 1993). He said, "Now we need to be calm, disciplined, alert, and ready. We have many friends; we trust in the friendship of the Chinese people; China and Vietnam are like lips and teeth" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1976, p. 160). Ho Chi Minh concluded: "Both My life has been fighting for the independence of the Fatherland. I would rather die than ever sell my country!" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1976). Thus, with the perseverance, persistence, and a detailed explanation by the Party, the Government, and Ho Chi Minh, the successful meeting resonated well with the people. Vietnamese people then clearly understood the role of the Preliminary Agreement in the advancement of the revolution, especially when President Ho had placed his reputation on the line before the entire population. The Party, Government, and Ho Chi Minh then received great support from the people of Vietnam which subsequently destroyed the plots of Chiang Kai-shek's army and his Viet Quoc and Viet Cach henchmen.

On March 18, 1946, a government delegation led by Advisor Vinh Thuy set out for Chongqing (China). Although the official purpose of the trip was to strengthen friendly relations with the Republic of China, it was made to compel France to force Chiang to withdraw his troops and return home. Despite a China-France Treaty (February 28) and a Preliminary Agreement (March 6) in existence, Chiang Kai-shek's army wanted to prolong their occupation of Vietnam for fear of being sent to the Northeast to fight the Chinese Red Army when they returned to China. If Chiang's troops stayed longer on the Vietnamese side, it would be difficult for Vietnam to prepare to fight against the French colonialists and eliminate Chiang and France's henchmen. Therefore, Vietnam needed France to drive Chiang's army back home by making France believe that Vietnam would collude with Chiang's army to fight France. "As for Vinh Thuy, the Government did not want France to contact, meet, and take advantage of Vinh Thuy when France went to Hanoi" (Vietnam Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1976).

France's reaction was exactly as the Democratic Republic of Vietnam predicted. The Vietnamese government delegation to Chongqing prompted France to believe that the Vietnamese government had cooperated with Chiang to attack the French. France immediately sent a diplomatic note to the Vietnamese government in which France implied a collaboration between Chiang and Vietnam. Though France and Chiang signed the China-France Treaty on February 28, 1946, Chiang sent French troops to land north of the 16th parallel to replace Chiang's troops. Nonetheless, Chiang's troops still tried to stay in the North. Negotiations between Chiang Kai-shek's government and France in both Chongqing and localities in Northern Vietnam dragged on because Chiang did not want to withdraw their troops as per the China – France Agreement. The command of Chiang's army in the North and Viet Quoc became more frantic in promoting provocative, sabotage, and terrorist activities, and caused many conflicts between Chiang's army and France. These actions pushed the French army to push the government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam into a "dilemma" situation thereby breaking the Preliminary Agreement. The hostilities that broke out between France and the Vietnamese government in the South were on a large scale. Hence on the revolutionary government would need Chiang's help and Chiang's army would have an excuse to prolong their presence in Vietnam. Such actions created opportunities for Viet Quoc to gain more rights and benefits in the government and led to the disintegration of Viet Minh forces. Viet Quoc forces in Hanoi waited for such an opportunity and the help of Chiang Kai-shek's army to conduct the coup plot.

The provocative attitude and sabotage of the implementation of the Preliminary Agreement of March 6, 1946, by the army and henchmen of Chiang Kai-shek's government posed several challenges to the Vietnamese revolutionary government. But the increasingly tense situation between the French colonialists and the Chiang Kai-shek government also pushed France to be softer towards the Democratic Republic of Vietnam government. The "delegation diplomacy" by Ho Chi Minh's government forced France to push Chiang's army who then had to quickly withdraw back to their country. The government also cut off France's hopes of courting Vinh Thuy when they arrived in Hanoi.

3.2 Fighting against the French Colonialists Violating the Preliminary Agreement of March 6, 1946, and Protecting Vietnam's Territorial Integrity and National Sovereignty

Having signed the Preliminary Agreement, “formalizing the existence of a worrying government in Hanoi” (Devillers, P., 1993), the French colonialists immediately sought to limit its implementation. The terms within the framework of an Army Landing Agreement, or a local agreement that had nothing to do with the Southern issue, did not hinder their invasion operations. There was a clear division within the French leadership at this time. On one hand, D’Argenlieu, the French High Commissioner in Indochina, radiated a belligerent attitude and did not want to sign or negotiate anything with the Vietnamese Government. On the other hand, the Leclerc and J. Sainteny factions did not want to cause a nationwide war of aggression. Hence it would be more beneficial to use negotiations to force the Vietnamese government to accept French colonization.

The Party and Government’s strategy at this time was to distinguish and consider “the reactionary French colonialists as an immediate enemy and to clearly point out that the reactionary French component included the most selfish, cruel, and stubborn imperialist elements. The same group had tried to limit the progress of the democratic movement and foreign policies that were friendly to the Soviet Union in France. In Indochina, the same group tried their best to oppose the Preliminary Agreement of March 6 which advocated for brutally suppressing Vietnam’s national liberation movement to put the French imperialist yoke on the neck of the Vietnamese people” (The Truth Newspapers, 1946).

On March 12, 1946, the two sides held consultation meetings to implement the military provisions of the March 6 Preliminary Agreement based on the support of the Vietnamese government. On April 3, 1946, the two sides signed a draft treaty specifying the number, stationing areas, distribution, deployment, and use of French troops to replace Chiang's army north of the 16th parallel. One central joint inspection committee and several local joint inspection sub-committees were established to oversee the implementation of this agreement. The two sides agreed on establishing an armistice committee to go to the South- and South-Central regions.

Although the French High Commissioner D’Argenlieu could not prevent the signing of the Preliminary Agreement on March 6, he immediately tried to find ways to sabotage the implementation of the agreement; an act D’Argenlieu considered “Munich-style surrender.” On March 18, 1946, D’Argenlieu rebuked Leclerc: “I find it very strange that France has such a beautiful expeditionary army and yet its commanders prefer to negotiate rather than fight” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1976). Later, D’Argenlieu’s political advisor Pignon revealed in a secret document written on July 24, 1946, that “French negotiators received extremely strict instructions from the French government, especially that the Southern issue must be kept out of discussion.” In the spirit of the French government, it was necessary to sign an Agreement on Landing Troops. Although the Preliminary Agreement on March 6 was drafted too hastily during the artillery attack on March 9 in Hai Phong, one thing that was certain: “the French negotiators have clearly expressed their will not to force the government that has entrusted them with the area south of the 16th parallel” (Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs: French policy towards Vietnam, 1940–1946).

Alongside D’Argenlieu and the French government in Indochina, the right-wing Popular Republican Movement Party headed by Bidault and extreme right-wing elements and other parties in France did not want to recognize nor continue negotiations with Ho Chi Minh’s government, which they believed was the dictatorial Viet Minh Communist Party. They propagandized and claimed that the Viet Minh leaders were just Communist disruptors, opposers of the French, who were not worthy of France's trust, and that Ho Chi Minh was not a leader who could control the situation and it was impossible to maintain order in Vietnam. Therefore, they felt that the French government should not make any concessions or commitments to the Ho Chi Minh government. It would be best to find someone else who was more trustworthy with respect to France.

The signing of the Preliminary Agreement led to disagreements within the French government. Therefore, France’s advocates tried to find every way to limit the implementation of the provisions by reverting to the extremely strict framework of a troop landing agreement. The French people gradually rebuilt their colonial regime in Vietnam. France believed that the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, which France had to recognize as a free country, only included Vietnamese territory north of the 16th parallel. In the Cedille’s statement dated March 12, 1946 (the Commissioner of the French Republic in Saigon) stated: “The March 6 Agreement is only a local agreement and has nothing to do with the South. Legally, Cochinchina is still a French colony. In a short time, Cochinchina will have its own government, parliament, army, and government.” On March 14, 1946, the French Minister of Overseas Affairs, M. Moutet confirmed that “the South will enjoy a free national regime” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1976). Therefore, the French colonialists did not want to continue any discussions related to the South. France said that such discussions were a violation of French sovereignty. France refused to implement an armistice in the South.

On March 8, 1946, the Vietnamese Government resolutely demanded that the French side implement an armistice in the

South and send an armistice committee to the South as agreed. The Vietnamese government also demanded that France exercise democratic freedoms for the people of the French-occupied areas. Leclerc, however, refused to oblige and demanded that the Vietnamese side withdraw regular northern troops from the south and return to the north.

After France had just sent troops to replace Chiang Kai-shek's army who were disarming the Japanese's in the North, the French army immediately began attempting to occupy ethnic minority areas, spreading leaflets and inciting ethnic minorities to fight against the Kinh people, and propagandizing and distorting the Preliminary Agreement as a surrender of Vietnam and stating that the victorious French army landing in the North would come to liberate the Thai people, Meo people, Nung people, etc. from Vietnam's invasion. In Hanoi, they implemented a two-faced policy: the French authorities pretended to be friendly and kind to deceive public opinion, while ordering the enforcers to act haphazardly. The policy of simultaneously rubbing and punching was a policy of gradually encroaching and putting Vietnam in front of a "fait accompli." A typical example is the case of France occupying the Finance Department of the revolutionary government on March 27, 1946, and violating Vietnam's national flag and internal politics. The French colonialists also blatantly demanded that the Vietnamese government suspend all trials and tax collection for people of French nationality, while the Indochina Bank continued to issue and circulate a series of new banknotes in the region of North Vietnam. Valuy, the French Republican Commissioner in Northern Vietnam, instructed France to prepare coup plans in the towns where France stationed troops and right in the capital, Hanoi. Valuy also blatantly sent a letter to Ho Chi Minh on May 27, 1946, in which he asked the French people not to declare or pay any taxes and to immediately report to the French Republic Commissioner's office if they were threatened or their property confiscated.

The Vietnamese government promptly protested fiercely against the French violations. On March 28, 1946, the Indochina Communist Party, in the name of Indochina Marxists, sent a letter calling on all people: "We must show the French reactionary faction that the Vietnamese people pledge to be loyal to the Preliminary Agreement and love peace, but the Vietnamese people are willing to sacrifice everything to destroy all the cunning and despicable schemes of the reactionary French colonialists" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1976).

The Vietnamese government was determined to maintain and promote a peace strategy with France that would destroy the cunning plot of the French reactionary faction in Indochina to sabotage the Preliminary Agreement. The Vietnamese government focused on demanding that the French side and Vietnam quickly open official negotiations in Paris to resolve basic issues in many forums and via many different approaches: Vietnam's diplomatic relations with foreign countries; the future regime of Indochina; and France's economic and cultural interests in Vietnam. In many meetings in Hanoi between representatives of the Vietnamese and French governments, in notes exchanged between the two governments, and in many mass meetings, the Vietnamese government strongly voiced Vietnam's main demands. The government strived to maintain and prolong the possibility of peace with the French colonialists for the development of the Vietnamese revolution and to successfully implement the Party's "détente to step forward" policy stated in the editorial in the newspaper "Truth" published on March 30, 1946: "Vietnam's revolutionary struggle only made France recognize Vietnam as an autonomous country; Vietnam, as well as Laos and Cambodia, have not yet been completely independent, and the cause of national salvation has not been completed. The national liberation revolution in Indochina has not yet achieved its goal of gaining complete independence, but is moving forward... To move forward, we must do our best to fight against the French reactionary and its henchmen, the group of Vietnamese traitors, who are disrupting our policy. Therefore, our direct slogan right now is to properly implement the Preliminary Agreement and open official negotiations in Paris. The basic slogan of the entire current revolutionary period is to establish a united national front against the French reaction, moving towards achieving complete independence."

While the reactionary colonial powers in Indochina led by D'Argenlieu tried to implement the "fait accompli" policy to gradually encroach and sabotage, they could not blatantly refuse to continue negotiations. D'Argenlieu believed that if he had to continue negotiating with Vietnam, it would be best to do so soon and concisely right in Indochina. Extended negotiations would not be beneficial for them with the political situation in France being unstable during the election campaign period. Such instability would create favorable conditions for the Vietnamese side to enlist the support of progressive parties in France and to force the French government to make broad decisions regarding Vietnam. The Leclerc faction, who also wanted to continue political negotiations, believed that the French army deployed in Northern Vietnam would force the Vietnamese side to reduce its demands and accept a solution beneficial to France. The Leclerc faction believed that if France would prolong the war while negotiations were ongoing, the French army would try to encroach more land and gain sovereignty over the Democratic Republic of Vietnam with the "fait accompli" policy.

After the two parties signed Preliminary Agreement, factions in the French government realized that they would have to negotiate with the Vietnamese government in the immediate future. D'Argenlieu wanted to negotiate with the Vietnamese government in Indochina. The French government instructed D'Argenlieu to hold a preliminary conference to prepare for possible formal negotiations in France later, when political conditions in France had stabilized. Therefore, on D'Argenlieu's request on March 24, 1946, President Ho Chi Minh met with French High Commissioner D'Argenlieu

on the French ship in Ha Long Bay (Northern Vietnam), and the two sides came to an agreement. The two parties agreed that an official negotiation would soon take place in Paris, and Vietnam would send a Vietnamese government delegation to France to enhance diplomatic relations. The parties would hold a preparatory conference in Da Lat to select a Vietnamese government delegation that would take part in official negotiations in France.

The agreements reached in the meeting between President Ho Chi Minh and French High Commissioner D'Argenlieu on March 24, 1946, were an important diplomatic victory for the Vietnamese revolutionary government. France invited President Ho Chi Minh, delegations of the National Assembly, and the Government of Vietnam to visit France to meet all the relevant political circles in France; an invitation that emphasized the legal status of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. However, after D'Argenlieu met with Ho Chi Minh at Ha Long Bay, he immediately went to Saigon to continue promoting his ambition to divide the South. On March 26, 1946, the Advisory Council of Cochinchina appointed Nguyen Van Thinh as Prime Minister of the provisional government of the Republic of Cochinchina. The French army in Cochinchina continued to push for pacification everywhere while the reactionary French colonialists forcefully wanted Vietnam to officially negotiate in Indochina. On March 29, 1946, the French Government announced it was sending an official delegation of 13 people led by the French High Commissioner to Indochina for official negotiations in Da Lat. The secret intention of the French colonialists was to stubbornly refuse to recognize Vietnam as an equal country with France as they considered the Vietnamese issue an internal French matter. However, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam asserted that the Conference in Da Lat was only a preparatory conference and that negotiations between the two governments of Vietnam and France would have to take place in Paris.

At the Da Lat Preparatory Conference (from April 17 to May 12, 1946), the Vietnamese government delegation led by comrade Vo Nguyen Giap actively fought to expose the sinister plot of the French colonialists regarding the three basic contents of the conference: "Vietnam's diplomatic relations with foreign countries; the future regime of Indochina; the economic interests of France and Vietnam" (Nguyen, D. B., 2002). The Vietnamese delegation resolutely maintained its stance of peace, national independence, and national unity and was friendly with France and other countries on the principles of equality, respect, and non-infringement of each other's sovereignty. Due to the unfriendly attitude of the French Government Delegation, the Da Lat Preparatory Conference was deadlocked. The Da Lat Preparatory Conference depicted the stubborn, insolent, and blatant minds of the French colonialists. It helped the Vietnamese government clarify the stance and views of both sides on all the issues raised and served as a basis for better and more thorough preparation for the delegation's upcoming important diplomatic battle between the Vietnamese government delegation and President Ho Chi Minh, and the French in France.

On April 24, 1946, the Vietnamese parliamentary delegation led by comrade Pham Van Dong set out to visit France with the sole purpose of making the French people understand the Vietnamese and creating an amicable relationship between the two nations. The visit succeeded in modifying the French public opinion about the situation in Vietnam and Vietnam-France relations.

On May 31, 1946, President Ho Chi Minh set out to visit France as a distinguished guest of France. In Paris, he had the opportunity to closely monitor and direct the first official diplomatic negotiations of the Vietnamese government which was particularly important for implementing the policy of détente with France and for future French-Vietnamese relations.

On June 22, 1946, the newly established Prime Minister of France solemnly welcomed President Ho Chi Minh to Paris, the capital of France. President Ho Chi Minh introduced Vietnam's red flag and the Vietnamese national anthem to the French people and the world for the first time. Representatives of the French government on the surface always made flashy and vague words; however, they always wanted to sabotage the negotiations and the Vietnamese revolution. The French Prime Minister Bidault gave instructions on "How to achieve all guarantees so that in the field of foreign affairs, Vietnam could not become a new piece of the Soviet chessboard, a new satellite of Moscow" (Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Vietnam, 1940–1946).

The official Vietnam-France negotiations took place in Fontainebleau from July 6 to August 1, 1946. Nguyen Tuong Tam, Vietnam's appointed leader, had fled to China with Chiang's army and 2 million VND in public funds from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Vietnam therefore appointed Pham Van Dong the head of the Vietnamese delegation, while Max André led the French delegation. The conference's agenda included five issues: "Vietnam joining the French Union and Vietnam's diplomatic relations with foreign countries; the Indochinese Federation; three-region unification and referendum; France's economic and cultural interests; a France-Vietnam draft treaty. The conference established five subcommittees: politics, economics, finance, culture, military, and agenda" (Nguyen, D. B., 2002).

Due to the reactionary stance and stubborn, aggressive attitude of the French colonialists, the official Vietnam-France negotiations at Fontainebleau were deadlocked (4). Meanwhile, French High Commissioner D'Argenlieu announced the convening of an Indochina federal conference in Da Lat on August 1, 1946, to put the Fontainebleau conference before

a “fait accompli”. The Vietnamese government issued a statement strongly protesting this wrong action by France, and the parties interrupted the Fontainebleau Conference. On the afternoon of September 10, 1946, the conference resumed with the French side presenting a draft agreement including terms that the Vietnamese could not accept. The French colonialists almost conducted their plot to disrupt the official negotiations with the Vietnamese government and abolish every commitment in the preliminary agreement of March 6, 1946. There was a risk of a fierce war arising while Ho Chi Minh, the head of the government and his delegation, were in France.

In response to the volatile situation, the head of government, Ho Chi Minh, quickly chose to concede to the French colonialists so that the party, state, and people could urgently strengthen their forces and prepare for a long-term national resistance war. On September 14, President Ho Chi Minh, representing the Vietnamese delegation in France, signed the Provisional Agreement with the French government and both sides suspended all conflicts. The French side committed to exercising democratic freedoms in the South and releasing imprisoned patriots. The Vietnamese side guaranteed France some economic and cultural benefits in Vietnam. Negotiations between the two sides would continue in January 1947.

Although the Fontainebleau Conference it did not achieve the goal of signing a formal and complete treaty between Vietnam and France, the Fontainebleau Conference and Provisional Agreement on September 14 was an important victory in terms of the diplomatic fighting strategy of the Vietnamese Party and Government. It was the first diplomatic victory of the Party and Government of Vietnam abroad that brought the Vietnamese national flag to France and to the world; made the French people and international friends clearly understand Vietnam’s stance and goodwill; created amicable relations between people of the two countries; and internationally recognized many Vietnamese mass organizations. “Regarding the situation of the Vietnamese revolution, the Provisional Convention of September 14, although just like a thin piece of adhesive bandage placed on a broken ulcer of Vietnam-France relations, has created conditions for Vietnam’s revolutionary conditions to continue taking advantage of the time to build and strengthen resistance forces in all aspects, especially in the South, and prevent encroachments and invasions by the French colonialists against Vietnam.” (Azeau, 1968).

The Provisional Agreement and the Preliminary Agreement dated March 6, 1946, reflected a gradual progression towards complete victory as reflected by the forces of Vietnamese revolution and foreign invaders in each period. The signing of these agreements was the pinnacle of Ho Chi Minh's principled art of concession.

The Provisional Agreement on September 14, the March 6 Preliminary Agreement and the Da Lat Preparatory Conference was as a temporary peace process that allowed Vietnam to build a revolutionary government to take part in a resistance war in the South. The Vietnamese government sent people and weapons from the north to the south of Vietnam. Concurrently, the Vietnamese government amassed several armies of overseas Vietnamese from Southeast Asia and purchased weapons to take to the South of Vietnam. The agreements created an important legal basis that compatriots and soldiers in the South skillfully used to fight openly, to restrain the enemy’s aggressive actions, and to maintain and develop a revolutionary resistance force. President Ho Chi Minh's activities in France, his sentiments and stance, as well as those of the Vietnamese government's negotiating team raised in France on the Southern issue, were publicly introduced by the Saigon press, which raised the patriotic spirit of people in areas temporarily occupied by the enemy, adding vitality to the resistance war of the people of South Vietnam.

During the negotiation process, Vietnam did not compromise on the principles of independence and national unity, while the French government's stance on these two basic contents did not exceed the pacts in the Preliminary Agreement. The French side waited for the results of the French general election at the end of the year for the French National Assembly to prescribe its regulations on the French Union regime .

Vietnam's strategy was to be ready to join the French Union and make extensive concessions on France's economic and cultural interests in Vietnam to maintain peace and gradually complete the newly won independence. Such a positive solution allowed Vietnam to take advantage of democratic trends and practical-minded people in France to fight against the militant French colonialists. Ho Chi Minh cleverly linked the issue of Vietnam joining the French Union with unifying Vietnam. “In his speech at the first national day celebration of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam held in Paris on September 2, 1946, Ho Chi Minh emphasized that Vietnam's contribution ‘to the greatness of France and the strength of the French Union depends on the unity and cohesion of Vietnam’ and believed that it was the “price” that France “must pay for the future of the French Union” (Nguyen, D. B., 2002). The Indochina Communist Party commented: “The Provisional Agreement on September 14 was the final step of concession. Any further concessions violate the country's sovereignty and harm the nation's important interests” (Communist Party of Vietnam, 2000).

The French government had more time to consider and find beneficial solutions to the Vietnam issue, as well as to France's colonial policy after World War II following the Provisional Agreement. As Minister Moutet telegraphed the French High Commissioner in Indochina, “If the Provisional Agreement is strictly implemented on our part, it will first

create a peace from which we need to review the entire policy of France. We need to start that détente now and avoid any measures that could poison France-Vietnam relations. At the same time, the obstacles on the French side during the official negotiation process at Fontainebleau showed a strong conservative trend in France regarding colonial policy: only accepting some non-fundamental changes according to the formula that General De Gaulle proposed in 1944 – 1945: maintaining direct rule in the form of the French Union” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1976).

The visit to France by the President of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam was one of the most important foreign affairs activities of the Vietnamese government in the period 1945 – 1946. The time spent in France was an opportunity for the President – the supreme leader of the Vietnamese Revolution – to directly learn about the internal affairs of France and to understand political trends and the nature and direction of colonial policy. Such information was essential for the Party and Government of Vietnam to make correct and timely decisions on issues related to relations with France. As a result of activities of the Vietnamese Government delegation in France, the President was able to promote Vietnam's position; make the French people and government pay attention to and understand the Vietnamese issue better; befriend the majority of French people; support Vietnam's independence; and advocate for Vietnam and France's equal cooperation.

The diplomatic struggle and activities that President Ho Chi Minh and the Vietnamese delegation conducted in France won the sympathy and support of progressive French public opinion and modern French people. Ho Chi Minh made many more French friends and enlisted their support for friendly policies and renewed French-Vietnamese relations. Mr. Léon Blum, leader of the French Socialist Party declared after many meetings with Ho Chi Minh: "I wish to maintain French civilization and political and cultural influence; I wish to preserve the material interests of the French people. That method is honest cooperation on the basis of independence, that is, mutual trust and friendliness" (Ho, C. M., 2000).

As soon as he returned to Vietnam, Ho Chi Minh agreed with D'Argenlieu on several measures to implement the Provisional Agreement. Then Vietnam sent a representative to the High Commissioner in Saigon to organize a Vietnam-France joint committee to implement the agreements reached; establish an advisory committee to determine specific measures to implement a ceasefire and convene in Da Lat a meeting of a joint committee to resolve currency and tariff issues. The Vietnamese side changed the name of the resistance government to the National Construction Government, and the Southern Resistance Committee changed its name to the Southern Committee to create a favorable atmosphere for the implementation of the Provisional Agreement. During the negotiation process, that was flexible and resolute, President Ho Chi Minh always allowed the enemy to see the united strength of the entire Vietnamese people from the south to the north and was determined to fight for the independence and national unification.

3.3 Efforts to Save the Fragile Peace and Take Time to Prepare for a Long-Term Resistance War

The conservative colonial powers in France and Indochina were not satisfied with the French concessions on economic and cultural interests in Vietnam that the Vietnamese government had conceded to in the Provisional Agreement, despite them being all the Vietnamese government could compromise. President Ho Chi Minh had done everything he could do to preserve peace in Vietnam.

In December 1946, French politics drastically changed after the general election where the French Communist Party won. Behind the scenes, there was fierce competition for the position of prime minister. Previously, the French believed that Marx had been contacting and bargaining with the leaders of the French Socialist Party to push the French Communist Party out of the government.

During the election campaigns, there was a focus on the French policy regarding Indochina. On December 13, 1946, Mr. Léon Blum, a candidate of the Socialist Party stated his stance on Indochina to enlist the votes of French leftists before the vote to elect a new French prime minister: “There is only one way to maintain French civilization in Indochina, which is to honestly compromise on the stance of independence with the people of Indochina. The right to decide on the Vietnam issue lies not with the soldiers and French nationals in Vietnam but with the Paris government” (Nguyen, D. B., 2002). After the election of Mr. Blum, the French right advocated for tougher policies regarding the French Union.

From August 1945 to December 1946, there was a cabinet crisis in France following four government changes. Conservative colonialists in France and Indochina exploited the political instability and the frequent appearance of power vacuums in their home country to revive the war of aggression. The French authorities in Indochina received reinforcements with many paratroopers and legionnaires landing in Da Nang, Hai Phong, and Hanoi.

In November and December 1946, French replenished its military forces and placed them in new strategic positions that Britain and Chiang created in both South and North Vietnam. D'Argenlieu then increased his military provocations. On November 20, 1946, the French army in Hai Phong attacked several Vietnamese-controlled locations in the city. The Vietnamese saw Hai Phong incident as a prelude to increasingly serious military aggressions and the outbreak of

widespread armed conflict planned in North Vietnam by the French civil and military apparatus in Indochina.

In November 1946, Paris sent J. Sainteny back to Vietnam to continue diplomatic contacts with Hanoi. But J. Sainteny was detained in Saigon until French army commander Valluy saw that the French army had attained new advantages. The army commander then sent J. Sainteny to Hanoi to conduct limited diplomatic work and support the military measures of the French Command in the North. J. Sainteny joined meetings with President Ho Chi Minh and Deputy Foreign Minister Hoang Minh Giam in Hanoi. On December 6, the two sides came to an agreement to peacefully resolve the ongoing conflicts in Hai Phong and Lang Son and quickly implement the provisional agreement. The provisional agreement was the last diplomatic negotiation; but the parties could not realize its modest results when the French diplomat had no real power and yet the French military in Indochina only believed in military solutions.

On December 15, President Ho Chi Minh sent a message to the head of the French government, Mr. Bidault, proposing several suggestions to ease the situation in Vietnam. The Vietnamese side stopped resistance measures in the cities and returned evacuees to the cities. The French side withdrew troops to their former positions before November 20, withdrew reinforcements in Da Nang, and ended the sweep and pacification operations in the South- and South-Central regions. The two agreed to a cease-fire in a joint provisional agreement in Hanoi and Saigon.

On December 18, two days after the National Assembly approved the new French government list, President Ho Chi Minh sent Mr. Blum a telegram expressing his belief that the policies of the French Socialist Party would be implemented in Vietnam: a policy of respecting honest and friendly cooperative agreements. President Ho Chi Minh reiterated the content of the telegram dated December 15 to prepare a favorable atmosphere for decisive negotiations as he firmly believed that by sending a delegation to the French National Assembly from Vietnam, the resulting cordial relationships between the French people and the Vietnamese people and a clear grasp of the situation would create that atmosphere of trust and friendship. In the first two weeks of December before the nationwide resistance war, President Ho Chi Minh sent three messages to the French government and one message to French Republican Commissioner J. Sainteny proposing urgent and practical measures to save peace and prevent the risk of war breaking out.

Unfortunately, President Ho Chi Minh's letters and telegrams to the heads of the French government had to be transferred to the agency of the French High Commission in Saigon. Subsequently there was a delay and the letters were only transferred to Paris after the war that had exploded throughout the territory of Vietnam. Paris sent Minister Moutet and General Leclerc, two high-ranking envoys of Prime Minister Blum, to Indochina in December 1946 to learn about the situation. But the colonial government in Indochina prevented these two officials from contacting President Ho Chi Minh. When the war broke out following the spark of the French Military Command in North Indochina, the French Government inevitably became a prisoner of its own aggressive colonial apparatus in Indochina following the implementation of the policy of "fait accompli".

From December 16 to 19, the French Military Command in North Indochina sent the Vietnamese Government an ultimatum demanding that the Vietnamese Government suspend all resistance preparation activities and destroy all obstacles to the French army occupying the Ministry of Finance; disarm Hanoi of self-defense weapons and hand over the maintenance of security order in Hanoi to France no later than the morning of December 20. The French Military Command in North Indochina sent this ultimatum three times. On December 18, French armored forces arrived and occupied the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Transport and Public Works.

Then the Standing Conference of the Party Central Committee meeting in Van Phuc, Ha Dong, Hanoi, on December 17, 1946, determined that the French plot to expand the war had been advanced. The period of peace had passed. On December 19, 1946, the Central Standing Committee stated that in just 24 hours the French enemy would certainly open fire. They then instructed all fronts to be ready to fight. On the night of December 19, nationwide resistance broke out. President Ho Chi Minh stated the following in his call to the people: "We want peace; we must compromise. But the more we compromise, the more the French colonialists encroach, because they are determined to rob our country again! No! We would rather sacrifice everything than lose our country; we refuse to be slaves" (Ho, C. M., 2000).

Those who ran France's colonial policy destroyed the last hope of a peaceful settlement in Indochina and missed a historic opportunity to establish new cooperative relationships between France and Vietnam at a pivotal moment when the era of old-fashioned white domination over a fully awakened people ended. Consequently, President Ho Chi Minh warnings to France in a letter to French Overseas Minister Moutet, dated July 22, 1946, were: "If France does not recognize Vietnam's independence, that will be a loss for France and for Vietnam as well, but for France, the disadvantage will be permanent..." (Institute for Marxism-Leninism Research, 1993).

It is the trio of D'Argenlieu, Valluy (who replaced Leclerc as Commander-in-Chief of the French army in Indochina), and Pignon that were responsible for sabotaging the implementation of Vietnam-France agreements and causing trouble in Indochina in 1946. Conservative French colonial forces in Paris supported this trio. Even when General De Gaulle was no longer the head of the French government, he still supported D'Argenlieu's aggressive colonial policies and

actions in Indochina. After hostilities broke out in Indochina, General De Gaulle strongly advised Leclerc not to accept the position of Commander-in-Chief of the French army or the position of French High Commissioner at least twice (Devillers, 1993). Until the 1960s, General De Gaulle spoke out against the US war of aggression in Vietnam. In a letter to President Ho Chi Minh, dated February 8, 1966, “De Gaulle wrote: If only there had been a better mutual understanding between the Vietnamese and the French right after the world war, conflicts could have been avoided” (Quatrepoint, 2008). Could these statements, in the language of a seasoned politician, be in part an admission (albeit belatedly) of De Gaulle’s responsibility for France’s policy in Indochina in 1945–1946?

4. Discussion

Thus, August 19, 1945, to December 19, 1946, was a special period in Vietnam's revolutionary history when modern diplomacy was born with the establishment of the Provisional Government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. The diplomatic activities of the Party and Government of Vietnam during this period immensely contributed to protecting and maintaining the revolutionary government during the country’s difficult years.

The Communist Party and President Ho Chi Minh successfully applied the art of diplomacy to maintain the achievements of the revolution, preserve the people’s government, serve the resistance, and engage in national construction in the context of a newly established revolutionary government with young people’s armed forces and the delicate nation’s fate. The Party and government of Vietnam showed their opponents the strength of the united Vietnamese people who were determined to fight and sacrifice for their independence and national unification with the “détente to step forward” diplomatic strategy that was both flexible and resolute.

The boldest mark of the diplomatic victory of this period was the skillful policy application and relationships with five major countries, and tactfully dealing with four foreign armies with over 300,000 soldiers present in Vietnam. The relations among these major countries, and between these major countries and Vietnam demonstrated the classic characteristics of big country politics (on-going conflicts and conflicting interests). But these major countries were ready to compromise to trade with each other as needed and to impose solutions on Vietnam and Indochina regardless of the interests of the Vietnamese people. President Ho Chi Minh skillfully took advantage of the conflicts between these countries and developed subject-specific strategies, keeping the US neutral, patiently avoiding any conflicts with Chiang's forces, and resolutely struggling against the French invasion in the South. He simultaneously sought a peaceful solution when Chiang and France compromised to allow French troops to go to the North of Vietnam.

The sharp thinking and diplomatic bravery of President Ho Chi Minh, the Head of Government, and the leader of the Indochina Communist Party is evident in the application of clever and flexible diplomatic strategies based on the principle that *whatever changes, respond to all changes*. They made political moves that had both important domestic and foreign significance: the Indochina Communist Party withdrew into secret operations, established a Coalition Government, and reserved seats in the Government and National Assembly for pro-Chiang factions. They also signed the Preliminary Agreement on March 6, accepted that *Vietnam is a free country*, decided on unification by referendum and agreed to send 15,000 French expeditionary troops into the North to push 200,000 Chiang troops and their henchmen out of Vietnam. Through a diplomatic struggle that was principled, flexible, and clever, signing the Provisional Agreement on September 14 in the French capital allowed Vietnam to prepare in every aspect for the upcoming decisive battle. The diplomatic strategies during this period characterizes a model of combining diplomacy with the military tact and national unity. Combining domestic and foreign affairs exemplifies a principled foreign diplomacy model.

5. Conclusion

In summary, during this short but eventful historical period under the guidance of Ho Chi Minh and the Communist Party of Indochina, the diplomacy of the newly born Democratic Republic of Vietnam achieved miracles using the soft and flexible “bamboo” strategy. The struggle helped the Vietnamese revolution overcome challenges, prolonged the period of peace, and prepared Vietnam to enter a long and fierce resistance war with the French colonialists that the Party and Government knew was inevitable. Vietnamese diplomacy during these years laid the foundation for revolutionary and modern Vietnamese diplomacy.

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