



**PREPARATORY CONFERENCE IN DA LAT (VIETNAM) AND THE STRUGGLE AT THE  
NEGOTIATION TABLE BETWEEN VIETNAM AND FRANCE**

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***Abstract***

*After the August Revolution in Vietnam was successful, on September 2, 1945, at Ba Dinh Square (Hanoi), on behalf of the Provisional Revolutionary Government, President Ho Chi Minh read the Declaration of Independence to give birth to the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. However, imperialist forces and reactionary henchmen in Vietnam have colluded together to attempt to overthrow the newly established revolutionary government and destroy the achievements of the Vietnamese revolution. In the difficult situation of "a thousand pounds hanging by a thread", with the flexible diplomatic efforts of the Government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and the Indochina Communist Party, on March 6, 1946, the Government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and the Government of France signed a Franco-Vietnamese Accord bringing the Vietnamese people's revolution into a new state. Although the Franco-Vietnamese Accord was signed, the French side always sought to delay the implementation of the signed terms and frequently violated the Accord. Faced with the French colonialists' attitude of subverting, violating and sabotaging the Franco-Vietnamese Accord of March 6, 1946, the Government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam is still determined to maintain and promote the strategy of peace with France. The article focuses on clarifying the historical situation and the process of struggle step by step leading to the Da Lat Preparatory Conference, the developments of the struggle between Vietnam and France during the Conference and drawing some comments.*

*Keywords: Vietnam, France, Da Lat, Government, Revolution.*

**I. Introduction**

**Historical Circumstances and the Process of Struggle Step by Step Leading to the Da Lat Preparatory Conference**

The Franco-Vietnamese Accord of March 6, 1946 signed between the Government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and the Government of France is the wise policy of the Party and President Ho Chi Minh, bringing the revolution of the Vietnamese people into a new state, from armed struggle against French colonial invaders to political and diplomatic struggle to avoid having to confront many enemies at once and take advantage of more peace time, continuing to consolidate human government people in domestic and foreign affairs, building forces in all aspects to achieve the goal of peace and unity in the new situation.

However, the French side always tries to delay the implementation of the signed terms and often violates the Accord. France refused to implement the Armistice Agreement in the South, the French army continued to attack the positions where our troops were stationed and focused on sweeping and terrorizing the people of the South. The French Military Command in the South declared that the Franco-Vietnamese Accord of March 6, 1946 was only valid from the 16th parallel and blatantly demanded that Vietnam's armed forces in the South surrender their weapons to France. Not only stopping at the South, the French colonialists also prepared to carry out their ambition to retake North Vietnam with a provocative and aggressive attitude. France implemented a two-faced policy. Accordingly, the French government still pretended to be friendly and kind, but the executors were ordered to act haphazardly. The policy of both rubbing and punching is a policy of gradually encroaching and putting Vietnam before "fait accompli".

Despite the French colonialists' attitude of overturning, violating and sabotaging the

Franco-Vietnamese Accord of March 6, 1946, the Government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam is still determined to maintain and promote the strategy of peace with France. In more forums and with many different methods, the Vietnamese side focused on demanding that France and Vietnam quickly open official negotiations in Paris to resolve basic issues, including Vietnam's diplomatic relations with foreign countries, future regime of Indochina and France's economic and cultural interests in Vietnam.

In many meetings in Hanoi between the Governments of Vietnam and France, in notes exchanged between the two governments and in many mass meetings, Vietnam has strongly voiced its political request to conduct official negotiations in Paris to resolve the above basic issues. Vietnam's purpose is to strive to maintain and prolong the possibility of peace with the French colonialists to benefit the development of the Vietnamese revolution and to successfully implement the Party's "peace to advance" policy.

On the French side, although the leading reactionary colonialists in Indochina, D'Argenlieu, tried to implement the "fait accompli" policy of gradually encroaching and sabotaging, they could not blatantly refuse to continue negotiations. According to D'Argenlieu, it was best to negotiate soon and concisely to resolve it immediately in Indochina. Prolonging the time would not be beneficial to them because the political situation in France is in the election campaign period, unstable, making it easy for Vietnam to enlist the support of progressive parties in France and force the French government to make broad decisions with Vietnam. Leclerc's side also wants to continue political negotiations and calculates that the French army deployed in Northern Vietnam will force the Vietnamese side to reduce its demands and accept a solution that benefits France if France was able to prolong the negotiations while allowing the French army to try to encroach more land and seize more sovereignty of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam with the "fait accompli" policy. Thus, reality shows that in the immediate future all French colonial factions see the need to continue negotiating with the Vietnamese government.

D'Argenlieu plotted to negotiate with the Vietnamese government an agreement in Indochina to complete, the French government's instructions to D'Argenlieu were to hold a preliminary conference to prepare for possible formal negotiations in France later when French political conditions were more stable.

On March 24, 1946, President Ho Chi Minh met D'Argenlieu on the cruiser Emile Bertin in Ha Long Bay. D'Argenlieu staged a military parade to welcome Ho Chi Minh (on board a ship) to intimidate morale and force Vietnam to accept negotiations to resolve problems right in Indochina. Ho Chi Minh emphasized having a Vietnamese government delegation quickly go to Paris to negotiate with the French government and sign a final official treaty.

D'Argenlieu knew that he could not force Vietnam to complete negotiations in Indochina, so he mentioned France's viewpoint that issues needed to be discussed and prepared by both sides before entering into official negotiations and proposing a preparatory conference in Da Lat (neutral land). On the one hand, France chose Da Lat to easily conceal information, to easily block the Vietnamese delegation's contact with the press and with compatriots, and to easily surround and isolate them in order to put maximum pressure on the Vietnamese delegation. On the other hand, D'Argenlieu's intention was that Da Lat would be the future capital of the Indochina Federation that the French colonialists intended to organize like the old totalitarian regime. If the Vietnam-France meeting here is resolved, it will have great political and psychological significance that will benefit France.

Although there were still many disagreements, at this meeting, the two sides came to an agreement on 3 points: 1. In mid-April 1946, a delegation of the Vietnamese National Assembly would go to France to express the friendship of the National Assembly and the people of Vietnam with the National Assembly and people of France. 2. At the same time, a preparatory conference will be held in Da Lat between a delegation of 12 delegates of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam led by the president or representative and a delegation of 12 French delegates headed by the French High Commissioner. 3. In the last week of May 1946,

the delegation of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam will go to France for official negotiations in Paris.

Thus, clearly realizing High Commissioner D'Argenlieu's intention to delay the official negotiations and wanting the negotiations to take place in Indochina to easily control, suppress, and block information, President Ho Chi Minh was determined to request that official negotiations be held soon in Paris to take advantage of the support of French public opinion, especially now that the two French Communist and Socialist parties have relatively strong support among the people. However, to avoid deadlock, President Ho Chi Minh agreed with D'Argenlieu to organize a preparatory conference in Da Lat to learn about France's position on both restraining the French and supporting the Southern people.

After the meeting between Ho Chi Minh and D'Argenlieu in Ha Long Bay, the reactionary French colonialists continued to want to force Vietnam to accept official negotiations in Indochina. On March 29, 1946, the French government sent a delegation to negotiate with the provisional government of Vietnam. The reactionary French colonialists continued to maintain a condescending attitude towards Vietnam, considering the Vietnamese issue to be an internal matter of French internal politics; Vietnam is not an equal country with France; The Vietnamese government delegation could not come to negotiate with the French central government. However, due to the determined fighting attitude of the Vietnamese government, in the end the French side had to confirm that the meeting in Da Lat was only of a preparatory nature. Before the preparatory negotiations began, the reactionary French colonialists showed their ambition to continue to put strong pressure on the Vietnamese government, forcing the Vietnamese Government to accept their outdated colonial stance.

On April 5, 1946, from Da Lat, head of the French delegation Max Andre sent a private letter to Ho Chi Minh emphasizing France's political stance on the Vietnam issue. Max Andre openly declared that: "France wants to stay and be present in Indochina"... "France believes that it alone is capable of promoting and adjusting technology, economics, diplomacy, and defense". Of course "the active and friendly participation of the peoples of Indochina" will be taken into account. The word "participate" clearly reveals the ambition to be the master, the intention to restore French colonial rule. Accordingly, the main and dominant position will be held by France, the ruled peoples in Indochina will only be allowed to play a dependent role.

On April 14, 1946, just a few days before the Da Lat conference opened, the French Ministry of Overseas Affairs further instructed the French delegation to try to establish an Indochina federation with "as many concerned countries as possible". This clearly reveals the extremely stubborn intentions of the reactionary French colonialists in their efforts to promote the traditional "divide to rule" policy. In addition to the South, they will frantically try to cut off Vietnam's territory and many ethnic minority areas in the North and Central regions.

The Vietnam-France preparatory conference in Da Lat opened on April 19, 1946 and closed on May 11, 1946. The conference was divided into four Committees: Political Committee, Economic and Financial Committee; Cultural Committee and Military Committee. These four types of issues are discussed in parallel and interspersed with each other. During the conference, there were four plenary meetings of the two delegations.

On the Vietnamese side, Nguyen Tuong Tam, Minister of Foreign Affairs in the Resistance Coalition Government at that time, was the head of the delegation and Vo Nguyen Giap, chairman of the National Resistance Committee, was the deputy head of the delegation with thirteen official members, including Trinh Van Binh, Cu Huy Can, Vu Van Hien, Tran Dang Khoa, Duong Bach Mai, Pham Ngoc Thach, Nguyen Van Luyen, Hoang Xuan Han, Vu Hong Khanh, Bui Cong Trung and Nguyen Manh Tuong with advisors.

On the French side, Max Andre was officially introduced as an officer in the office of the French Ministry of Armed Forces as the head of the delegation (in fact, this is a bourgeois with a position in the financial group of Indochina Bank). In addition, the French delegation

included veteran colonialists and colonial officials who had long ruled Indochina and lackeys of the French bourgeoisie.

### **Developments of the Struggle between Vietnam and France during the Conference**

While the two sides entered the official negotiation table, outside the conference table, the French colonialists continued to attack important positions and continued their raids and terrorization of our people in the South. Therefore, the issue of cessation of hostilities was immediately mentioned by the Vietnamese delegation.

On the morning of April 19, 1946, the first plenary session opened the conference, chaired by Foreign Minister Nguyen Truong Tam. After the exchange of courtesy speeches between the two heads of the Vietnamese delegation, comrade Duong Bach Hai immediately raised a proposal on the Southern issue to create a favorable atmosphere for the conversation. The proposal included 3 points: 1. Send a joint committee to the South to implement the armistice agreement signed between the two countries; 2. Immediately release Vietnamese people arrested by French troops for participating in the resistance war; 3. Grant political organizations the freedom to operate normally. Comrade Vo Nguyen Giap supported that proposal and declared that this was the recommendation of the entire Vietnamese delegation while emphasizing the importance of the issue.

On April 20, 1946, the Vietnamese delegation telegraphed a report to the Government asking our press to focus on supporting Duong Bach Mai's proposal in Da Lat, to build public opinion on the Southern issue to support the struggle of the Vietnamese delegation in Da Lat.

The first attack shot was fired right in the opening session, the issue was raised again and again, dominating the battlefield in many sessions of the Political Committee and the majority of all four plenary sessions of the Conference. The struggle around the Southern issue (cessation of hostilities, organization of a referendum to unify the three terms) caused tension and the most heated debate atmosphere from beginning to end of the Da Lat conference, although the French delegation tried every way to avoid the issue of cessation of hostilities in the South and put that issue outside the scope of the conference.

Reasoning that the issue of cessation of hostilities is a matter within the jurisdiction of the two governments, the Da Lat conference is not an armistice committee and has no right to discuss the issue of armistice, The French delegation insisted on refusing to put the question on the conference agenda. The French delegation also cheekily said that currently there is no war in the South, only police operations to maintain public order.

The Vietnamese side resolutely rejects the arguments that France uses to continue attacking our militia and guerrillas and terrorizing the people of the South. In the morning session of April 22, 1946 of the Political Committee, comrade Vo Nguyen Giap once again clearly pointed out: "Attack is continuing everywhere in the South, caused by the French army, and the most urgent measures which have been declared to create a favorable political atmosphere for negotiations is "immediately suspend the conflict in the South, in other words, immediately implement the clause on ceasefire in Agreement 6 March". The comrade said sternly: "Today, April 22, one and a half months after March 6, attacks are still continuing against our army in the South... by allowing French replacement troops to pour into the North "without any sign of fighting"- that was D'Argenlieu's saying, the Vietnamese government faithfully implemented the Agreement. We demand that the French side do the same by ending the conflict in the South"... Vo Nguyen Giap concluded: "I request to put on the agenda the issue of cessation of conflicts and the creation of a favorable political atmosphere" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1976: p.174).

The situation of the struggle became tense. The exchange on economic, financial, cultural, and military issues all clearly revealed France's colonial intentions, seeking to suffocate Vietnam's sovereignty, especially through the Indochina Federation organization. At that time, comrade Pham Ngoc Thach was sent by the Government to join our negotiating

delegation. As soon as he arrived in Da Lat, he was arrested by the French colonial authorities and escorted back to Saigon. At the same time, France also caused difficulties, forcing the Vietnamese delegation to ask permission from France to use the radio to contact the Government. In that situation, the delegation reported to the government (April 23, 1946): "The Southern issue and the armistice are still key issues...In recent days, France has changed its attitude, they are very provocative so we need to immediately decide whether to continue or postpone negotiations". (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1976: p.175)

Thus, the conference has only begun for 4 or 5 days, but the opposition to viewpoints is already fierce, almost to the point of deadlock, although the Vietnamese delegation is very interested in applying a strategy of being hard and flexible. As the delegation's report to the government on April 22 clearly stated: "We are determined about the South and its political, economic, and military autonomy. Only culture is very permissive". (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1976: p.175)

At that time, outside the conference, the French side had an additional reason to be hostile to Vietnam, because the French Minister of Overseas Affairs had just issued a statement on April 22, 1946 complaining: "The Viet Minh appears to be praying to some foreign powers that hide it from us. There have been campaigns against Britain, meanwhile, Bao Dai has now become a scholar in Vinh - Thuy and has gone to Chongqing (China). At the same time, Max Andre, head of the French delegation, also complained to the Vietnamese delegation that some advisors and secretaries of the Vietnamese delegation "have political propaganda activities in Da Lat", meanwhile, the French authorities prevented and arrested compatriots who have contact with our group." (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1976: p.175)

According to the decision of the Political Committee, on the morning of April 24, 1946, the second plenary session was convened to consider our proposal to put on the agenda the issue of cessation of conflict and the creation of an election. The political atmosphere is favorable for negotiations; comrade Vo Nguyen Giap reread his speech on April 22 at the Political Committee and once again emphasized the need to end the conflict in the South.

The French side still argues that the conference does not have the authority to consider the ceasefire issue. And in order to eliminate the problem, they proposed that the French and Vietnamese governments would establish a Committee tasked with studying and recommending measures to immediately stop the conflict and create a favorable political climate for negotiations. That committee will be independent of the Da Lat conference, and members of the Committee will also be selected by the two governments from outside the current two delegations in Da Lat. The French delegation declared it their final concession.

Faced with the condescending attitude of the French delegation, the Vietnamese delegation did not respond and proposed to end the second plenary session. After that, the delegation's comments sent to the government wrote (telegram dated April 24, 1946): "The postponement increases tension, making it difficult for us to tense up further...we consider a proposal that France can accept." (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1976: p.176)

From Hanoi, the Government is still closely monitoring the tough and difficult opening struggle of the Vietnamese delegation in Da Lat. The Government informed the delegation of the nationwide situation and encouraged the delegation's fighting spirit.

On the same day, April 24, 1946, the Government telegraphed to the delegation that the relationship between France and Chiang's army was very tense, so France was: "trying to caress us...the mission in there should not be too soft. The Government did not agree with the proposal of the French delegation to only establish a Study Committee without the authority to resolve the ceasefire because then when will it be possible to stop the conflict in the South?". (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1976: p.176)

Then, according to specific instructions from the Government, on April 29, 1946, the Vietnamese delegation proposed the two governments to establish a Joint Committee to immediately suspend the conflict and create a favorable atmosphere for negotiations. The Committee's jurisdiction is nationwide, but at its first session, the Committee will send a

delegation to the South to effect a cessation of conflict. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1976: p.176)

By the end of April to the beginning of May 1946, the general situation of the Da Lat conference was summarized as: the agenda of the Political Committee had not been definitively approved; basic political issues had not been mentioned. Besides, a number of economic, financial, cultural and military issues have only just been surfaced, the views of the two sides are still very far apart, the heavy atmosphere persists, the conference work is at a standstill, basically is stagnation. Through private exploration and judgment, our delegation believes that the French side "will hardly accept the Armistice Committee into Saigon because that would be accepting our sovereignty" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1976: p.177). The question now is: is it because the ceasefire issue in the South cannot be resolved that the whole negotiation should be suspended? (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1976: p.177)

On the morning of May 3, 1946, the French delegation still reiterated their final concession proposed on April 24, 1946, which was to establish a Committee to study the armistice. Our delegation considers that at this time it is necessary to take concessions to open up the work of the conference. On the afternoon of May 3, 1946, the third plenary session was held to review the situation of discussions on issues since the conference began.

At the beginning of the meeting, on the one hand, we emphasized the need to restore peace in the South for the negotiations in Da Lat to progress. On the other hand, we showed our goodwill, declaring our acceptance of the side's proposal. France established a joint committee tasked with researching and recommending ceasefire measures. But the Vietnamese side proposed to add a few points, the most important of which is: "The Committee will devote its first sessions to the issue of cessation of conflict in the South and will recommend all useful measures to the two governments". (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1976: p.177)

Regarding the Southern issue and then on economic, financial and cultural issues, the debate at the plenary session was lively. Commenting on the stubborn and outdated stance of the French side, the Vietnamese delegations had many strong and poignant words. Regarding the ceasefire issue, comrade Vo Nguyen Giap firmly stated: "Even though it ended within this conference, the issue of cessation of conflict is still expanded between the two governments and between the two peoples. One cannot use "sweeping operations" to force the southern patriotic army and people to lay down their weapons..." and when it comes to the issue of the Indochina Federation, comrade Vo Nguyen Giap sternly said: "we declare the end of the era of governors". (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1976: p.177)

Exposing the French side's excessive demands on all political, economic, military and even cultural issues in order to create an organizational structure that truly strangles the sovereignty of free Vietnam in a super-state in Indochina just like the old governor-general's government, delegate Hoang Xuan Han declared "We want to achieve practical results to buy French-Vietnamese cooperation. But we do not have the right to abolish national personality. We do not have the right to create conditions in which the Vietnamese people are at risk of suffocation". (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1976: p.178)

Thanks to the concessions of the Vietnamese side, after May 3, 1946, the Political Committee could begin to discuss political issues and other Committees could go deeper into more specific discussions. However, the French side refused to reduce one inch of their stubborn and outdated colonial stance of re-establishing full French rule in Indochina as before March 9, 1945.

The deeper we go into the nitty-gritty, the more difficult it becomes to discuss specific issues because the two sides' stances and views are as opposed to each other as fire and water.

On the issue of Vietnam's diplomatic relations with foreign countries, in the opinion of the French delegation... there is no longer that problem: "Vietnam has no diplomatic rights at all, no international personality and foreign sovereignty, only the Indochina Federation has the right to have diplomatic representation, and within the framework of

French diplomatic missions in foreign countries (this Indochina diplomat is on the French diplomatic staff). The French delegation argued that: The March 6, 1946 Agreement was not international in nature. No one abroad recognizes Vietnam. France still has sovereignty in Indochina and only cedes a few rights to Vietnam. Vietnam is just a free country, but is part of the Indochina Federation and the French Union. The federation has a political character. France can only make one concession: "Indochina will have concessions in French missions in other countries." Contrary to that view, the Vietnamese delegation advocates partial diplomatic autonomy of Vietnam, with regular and close coordination with French diplomacy through the organization of a Delegation. Appropriate discussions and consultations and in response to the arguments of the French side, the Vietnamese delegation clearly stated: "The March 6, 1946 Agreement is international in nature, countries which have not recognized Vietnam cannot prevent Vietnam from having diplomacy. Vietnam advocates that the Indochina Federation is only economic in nature, other countries in the Indochina Federation also have their own diplomacy, it is enough to make Vietnamese diplomacy go hand in hand with French diplomacy". (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1976: p.179)

Regarding the issue of Vietnam's relationship with the French Union, France's viewpoint also comes from the principle that this is an internal relationship of France with a constitutional nature, so Vietnam no longer has diplomatic representation in countries in the French union, and at the same time the representative of the French Union, next to the Vietnamese Government will be a high-ranking official and envoy of the French High Commission in Indochina. In addition, the French Union will send French advisors on political, administrative, judicial, economic and technical aspects to Vietnam at all levels: Central, Regional and Provincial. At the same time, French technicians and experts are also sent to Vietnam (Vietnam is not allowed to borrow any foreign technicians without prior agreement from the French government). Reality shows that the French Union is just a dummy for France to easily use to carry out plans in the new situation of the return of French colonial rule throughout Indochina.

Vietnam's stance, contrary to France's wishes and impositions, is that the Vietnamese side views this as an international relationship. Accordingly, the French Union being built must be a community of sovereign countries linked together on the basis of equality of obligations and rights. The relationship between Vietnam and the French Union as well as with France must be a diplomatic relationship. Vietnam will give priority to the hiring of French consultants, technicians and experts and object to the requirement to obtain prior approval from the French government before hiring other foreign technicians.

Regarding the future regime of Indochina, the struggle took place very fiercely. France's "Federation of Indochina" project has beautiful words, but in reality it is to restore the disguised French totalitarian regime in Indochina in a strong federal state headed by a French high commissioner with the power to issue laws to control the Federation in political, diplomatic, financial, economic and military aspects. Under the authority of the French High Commission, there is an entire federal government apparatus in which key positions are also held by French people, including a series of federal departments and agencies with the right to strictly manage all major administrative, economic, financial, technical and cultural activities of national life. A "Council of Nations" was established with 60 members (10 people from France, 10 people from Northern, Central, Southern, Ai Lao, and Cambodia), but the main task of this council is to represent federal budget decision. In addition, France also maliciously raised the issue of "ethnic minorities" that the Council must protect to divide the Vietnamese territory into many countries with special status of administrative autonomy or autonomy in the territory under the Federation (such as Tho and Nung in the Northeast, Thai and Muong in the Northwest, North and South Central Highlands; Central Highlands in the Central Highlands). (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1976: p.180)

Vietnam's project, on the contrary, conceives that the main function of the Indochina Federation is economic coordination, especially in the aspects of tariff policy, monetary

policy and common equipment planning. Thus, Vietnam had conditions for free development to cooperate closely, equally and in friendship with Laos and Cambodia as well as with France. The supreme power of the Federation must be the "Council of Nations" consisting of 60 members: 30 Vietnamese, 10 Laotians, 10 Cambodians and 10 French. The French High Commissioner in Indochina is only the diplomatic representative of the French Union and France next to the Federation and the member countries of the Federation. (2, p.180) Regarding the economic and cultural interests of France in Vietnam, Vietnam advocates that it can make concessions to France to a significant extent.

Economically, Vietnam admitted that France had some privileges in Vietnam, but of course there are also limitations. For French enterprises in Vietnam, we made many concessions. Accordingly, there are enterprises where French and Vietnamese share business shares, and there are enterprises that we lease to the French for the shortest period of time (after returned to the Government of Vietnam, with or without compensation). If there is a relationship with national defense, the Vietnamese Government will immediately buy it back. Finally, there will be a type that Vietnam will confiscate because those enterprises were established in an extremely unfair and unreasonable way (plantations created by the French taking over the land of Vietnamese farmers). However, the French side insisted on maintaining the status quo of privileges and privileges as before March 9, 1945 and also used words to condemn Vietnam for depriving France of its assets. France demands that Vietnam return the expropriated factories, demands that Vietnam compensate for damages caused by the recent turmoil, and claims to the status of French possessions in Vietnam can only be modified with the prior agreement of the French government.

Vietnam accepted France to participate widely in Vietnam's economic development (by investing capital and providing technical staff) and allowed France to enjoy a special tariff regime as the most favored nation. But the French side demanded that the Indochina Federation manage most of the main economic and financial activities, demanded the establishment of a Federal tax office, a Federal bank, a Federal currency, a Federal Exchange Service, and demanded the payment of our tax revenue to the Federal budget. France also requested that France freely invest capital and do business in Vietnam, without any restrictions or obstacles. They asked Vietnam to give absolute priority to French technicians and experts. Vietnam agreed to establish a customs alliance and also made concessions to France on some of the points raised but maintained economic and financial autonomy on key issues and principles.

In the field of culture, the French side insisted on maintaining true colonial privileges, such as demanding that Vietnam return many schools and research institutes, and requiring Vietnam to teach French as a compulsory language in secondary education and as a common language in Vietnam's higher education (French is not considered a foreign language but the second official language of Vietnam). Vietnam refused to hand over to France Hanoi University, the ancient Far Eastern School, the Pasteur Institute..., but Vietnam highly appreciates French culture and expressed its desire to develop long-term cultural relations with France. Vietnam granted France the right to freely spread French culture on Vietnam, freely open teaching schools, open scientific research laboratories and teach French as the first language in Vietnamese schools.

Regarding the military field, the French side tried to strictly limit Vietnam, they proposed that the Vietnamese army only has 10,000 people and is mainly responsible for maintaining internal security and can only accept French military instructors and advisors. The main tasks and roles in defense are assumed by the Indochina Federation army. In addition, the French side refused to discuss any military matters related to the south of the 16th parallel. On the contrary, Vietnam's view was that the Vietnamese national army must be organized separately and must be strong in order to cooperate with the military. New France became effective in the defense of Indochina. Vietnam was ready to receive French trainers, ready to listen to all French suggestions on organization, equipment, training and accept that France had a number of military bases in Vietnam (but after a certain period,

they must be returned to Vietnam). Vietnam also agreed to organize a permanent research committee and a council of French and Vietnamese generals that met regularly, set up a joint advisory council and did not rule out a unified command in wartime.

However, the most prominent and fierce opposition to the viewpoint when the two sides mentioned the final political issue on the agenda was the issue of "unifying the three terms and the referendum", which is essentially Southern issue. At the beginning of the conference, this was the first dramatic issue, and at the end of the conference, it was the last dramatic issue. The Southern issue is a key issue of the Da Lat Conference; the debate revolved around three points:

Firstly, what issue is the referendum about? France's position was to hold a referendum on the issue of who belonged to the sovereignty and territory of the South? While waiting for the results of the referendum, the governance of the South (including the South Central region below the 16th parallel) as entirely the responsibility of France. On the contrary, Vietnam's view considered the South to be definitely a unified land part of Vietnam (historically, geographically, racially...), the three periods followed the same Democratic Republic regime. The issue raised in the referendum was only to decide whether the South would enjoy a special administrative regime within a unified Vietnam (due to the actual situation caused by the French occupation). And right now, to temporarily rule the South, a three-member Provisional Consul Council of the South would be established including 30 members of Southern origin (10 appointed by France, 10 appointed by Vietnam and 10 were appointed by both sides).

Secondly, where is the referendum? The Vietnamese faction advocates voting only in the Southern region, while France advocates voting in the Northern and Central regions as well. The French intention is to interfere in our internal politics in the North. On the other hand, France also blatantly raised questions about the territory and political regime of the Central region (South of the 16th parallel).

Thirdly, how is a referendum organized in the South? The French side alone was responsible and can ensure the "freedom" of expression of opinions of the Southern people and rejected the role of the Vietnamese government in participating in the preparations. And the referendum can only be conducted under the condition that public order and peace were completely restored in the South. (Vietnam knew that the French government was continuing its sweeping operations and constant terrorism, causing conflicts to continue everywhere in the South until then). The Vietnamese side believed that to ensure the freedom of expression of opinions of the Southern people, it was necessary to establish a provisional Southern Council consisting of 30 participating members. This Council appointed a committee consisting of representatives of the Vietnamese government and representatives of the French army with the responsibility of thoroughly implementing a ceasefire in a short period of time, releasing all political prisoners, returning freedom of operation to people's political organizations, suspended all terrorism.

Thus, in the Southern issue, the two sides' stances oppose each other more fiercely and fiercely than on other issues. Debate on the Southern issue often leads to a tense atmosphere. This time, comrade Vo Nguyen Giap told the French delegation directly: "If unfortunately the South is cut off from Vietnam, all the energy of the Vietnamese people will be directed into the fight to pull the South back." within the unified Vietnam bloc". (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1976: p. 183)

On May 8, 1946, the delegation reported on politics: "We were too optimistic...the French authorities were determined not to release the South. They used the military, police, administration, propaganda, and bribery to suppress the armed resistance, restore rule, and pressure the people to separate..." (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1976: p.184).

In general, the situation at the Da Lat conference after the important concessions of the Vietnamese delegation on May 3, 1946, the atmosphere did not ease and was still very tense due to the reactionary stance of the French colonialists in all areas and they showed even more rude, impatient, and insolent attitudes.

On May 4, 1946, comrade Vo Nguyen Giap's telegram to President Ho wrote: "The colonialists are trying to sabotage the negotiations and cause trouble here, you order our soldiers to prepare and be careful." (2, p.184). On May 5, 1946, President Ho sent another telegram: "France showed an unyielding attitude, a very reactionary stance...". (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1976: p.184)

On the same day, May 5, 1946, the Government exhorted the spirit of the delegation: "Public opinion strongly supports the Dalat Mission... We must be careful not to let them disrupt the negotiations, but be careful not to be too soft" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1976: p.184). On May 6, 1946, the Delegation summarized the entire situation of the negotiations and reported to the government.

At this time, Max Andre, head of the French delegation, left Da Lat to return to France to participate in the Provincial Council election. The report from the Vietnamese Delegation read: "During the farewell party, Max Andre said many unpleasant sentences, with the main idea: "Vietnam, don't imagine that going to Paris is easier. France's position has already been determined to make no further concessions, negotiations are not a bargain. The entire French Mission had a stagnant attitude, the French stance was very strict, and has not made any concessions. They wanted to cling tightly to the South... We have ceded a few cultural and economic points, but France had not let go of anything politically... Please instruct the Government to agree on a few points to make it easier to go to Paris" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1976: p.184).

While the struggle was fierce at the negotiating table at the Da Lat Conference, throughout the territory of Vietnam, the French colonialists increased their provocations, violations and sabotage of the Franco-Vietnamese Accord of March 6, 1946. France stepped up attacks on Vietnamese troops and terrorized compatriots in the South, while also stepping up causing conflicts in the Central and Northern regions. In particular, they actively prepared public opinion and prepared all aspects to formalize the establishment of the "autonomous country of Cochinchina".

On May 10, 1946, France instructed the Prime Minister of the "provisional government of the Republic of Cochinchina" to go to Da Lat Pignon to discuss the establishment of the Government. On June 1, 1946, the Government of Nguyen Van Thinh held a ceremony to declare the establishment of the "autonomous country of Cochinchina".

The Vietnamese Government vehemently opposed and protested the betrayal of the Franco-Vietnamese Accord of March 6, 1946. The Vietnamese government sent a note of protest and emphasized: "While honest and friendly negotiations are about to open in Paris between the French and Vietnamese governments, the Vietnamese government reminds the French government that the establishment of The "provisional government of freedom and autonomy in Cochinchina" has stirred up the anger of the Vietnamese people and is therefore not in a position to build a friendly and necessary atmosphere for the upcoming negotiations in Paris". (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1976: p.185)

### **A Few Comments**

During the negotiations at the Da Lat Preparatory Conference, the French side clearly demonstrated its outdated colonial stance of not recognizing Vietnam's diplomatic rights and the right to sign international treaties and especially wanted to separate the Central Highlands into an autonomous region, not discussing the Southern issue... Because of basic disagreements between the two sides, the Da Lat Conference ended on May 11, 1946 without achieving the desired results of the parties.

In the closing session, on May 11, 1946, acting head of the French delegation Bourgouin (Indochina economic official) emphasized once again to the Vietnamese delegation that: "The French delegation did not come to Da Lat to bargain, but brought a solution that was molded into a coherent block that had been researched for a long time, a block whose parts were inseparably linked together" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1976: p.185) and the French side requested the Vietnamese side Nam to think in those conditions.

It can be seen that Bourgouin's tone is not different from the tone expressed by Max Andre before returning to France. The French delegation followed the content of Max Andre's private letter to President Ho before the Da Lat Preparatory Conference began (April 5, 1946) to restore the old French colonial rule in all aspects "technical, economic, diplomatic and defense", and in accordance with the content of the French Government "divide to rule" (April 14, 1946). France has stripped away all the progressive content of the Franco-Vietnamese Accord of March 6, 1946, especially the progressive content of a "free country" that the French government recognized it in a document signed in accordance with international relations procedures witnessed by representatives of allied countries in the Second World War.

The French colonialists plotted to erase all the great achievements of the Vietnamese people's August 1945 revolution, drag Vietnam's history back to the colonial period, and place Vietnam-France relations within the framework of "extremely strict" instructions that the French government gave to French negotiators before they signed the Franco-Vietnamese Accord of March 6, 1946 as Mr. Pignon revealed.

For Vietnam, the Da Lat Preparatory Conference showed the Government and people of Vietnam the extremely stubborn, insolent, blatant and greedy colonial intentions and intentions of the French reactionary forces in Indochina. The Da Lat Conference helped to fully and specifically clarify the stances and views of both sides on all issues raised. Vietnam has the basis to prepare better and more thoroughly for the upcoming important diplomatic battle of the Vietnamese government delegation and President Ho Chi Minh in France.

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