

The Process of Establishing Vietnam – Soviet Union Diplomatic Relation in 1950: A View from Vietnam

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Abstract: The Vietnam-Soviet Union (as of 1991 the Russian Federation) relationship is one of the most important diplomatic relation in the modern history of Vietnam. This relationship was established in January 1950 during the secret visit of President Ho Chi Minh to China and the Soviet Union. It was created in the middle of the fierce resistance against the French colonialist invasion, and the Vietnamese army and people were gaining important victories but other countries and international organizations had not recognized the Government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV). Research on the process of establishing diplomatic relations between Vietnam and the Soviet Union is an interesting historical content that will contribute to clarify the relationship of the two countries in the years later. Due to the lack of conditions to exploit material from Russia, this article approaches from the perspective of Vietnam.

Keywords: Communist International, Communist Party of Indochina, Nguyen Ai Quoc - Ho Chi Minh, Stalin.

INTRODUCTION

Regarding the content of the article, there are a number of books, articles in Vietnam and abroad mentioned at different respects:

In the middle of February 1950, took place the meeting between Ho Chi Minh with Stalin - General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Communist Party) and Mao Zedong-President of the People's Republic of China in Moscow. During the meeting, Ho Chi Minh announced the situation of the Vietnamese resistance war. The Soviet leader clearly understood, decided to recognize the Government of the DRV and agreed to give Vietnam military aid (through China). (Nguyen Dinh Bin, 2000).

This event is also mentioned in Volume IV titled the turning point of the resistance war in 1950 of the 7 volume book

named History of the Resistance War against the French 1945-1954 (Vietnam Military History Institute, 2011). The book highly appreciates the significance of establishing diplomatic relations with China and the Soviet Union which breaking the siege and receiving the direct help of these countries to the resistance. However, the reasons why the two countries so late established diplomatic relations are not mentioned in this book.

During his meeting with Stalin (1950), Ho Chi Minh explained clearly the strategic and tactic measures to deal with the enemies and to conduct the resistance. Stalin said: "Previously, due to inaccurate information from many sources, Soviet leaders did not fully understand the situation of Vietnam and Indochina, now the Soviet Union agrees with the Indochina Communist Party's (ICP) line and will actively provide aid to the Vietnam

resistance war and help Vietnam to train its cadres” (Institute of History of the Communist Party of Vietnam, 2018). Ho Chi Minh exchanged frankly with Stalin and Mao Zedong about Vietnam's revolutionary and resistance lines in the spirit of independence, self-control and international solidarity.

Regarding the visit, in the book named *Memoirs* (Vo Nguyen Giap, 2019), General Vo Nguyen Giap did not mention much about the relationship between Vietnam and the Soviet Union from 1945 to 1949 and did not explain why the two countries had not established diplomatic relations. One detail provided by General Vo Nguyen Giap was that prior to the trip, Ho Chi Minh requested a briefing on Vietnam's military to be presented to Stalin. The General had compiled an 8-page report; Ho Chi Minh expressed his satisfaction after reading the report.

Although the official diplomatic relations had not been established, the Soviet Union still supported Vietnam politically through the Soviet public opinion. Explaining, the book indicates the 2 reasons of the Soviet Union's recognition of the Government of Vietnam: (1) due to the need to expand the Soviet Union's influence in different parts of the world, including Asia after the victory of the Chinese Revolution; (2) due to the growing development of the Vietnamese resistance war, if Vietnam were recognized, it would create conditions for the Soviet Union to expand its influence in Southeast Asia. Therefore, in the meeting of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Soviet Union Communist Party (SCP) on December 10th 1949, the issue of recognizing and establishing relations with

Vietnam was discussed and approved. On January 30, 1950, the Soviet Government decided to establish diplomatic relations with the DRV. This event had a particularly important significance, was the basis for the comprehensive cooperation between the two countries in the future, creating conditions for socialist countries to recognize Vietnam (Institute of Vietnam Military History, 2018).

In foreign countries, there are quite a lot of works written by historians and military advisers about Ho Chi Minh and Vietnam's resistance against French colonialism. In which, typically the book *Ho Chi Minh - The Missing Years 1919-1941* by American author Sophie Quinn. With a rich amount of documents exploited from Center archives of Russia, France, America, England... the author has presented in detail the revolutionary activities of Nguyen Ai Quoc in many places, including Russia and the Communist International III which help readers have a basis to understand why for a long time, from 1928 to 1949, the Communist International and the Soviet Union did not appreciate, somewhat distrust Nguyen Ai Quoc. The author wrote: “... Mr. Ho was criticized at that time because they began to see him as a reformer following nationalism. He thinks that the party must use patriotic sentiments to attract a wide audience. Meanwhile, in Saigon, the party cell began to follow the new policy of the Communist International, that was to follow the path of class struggle and the Communist party is just the party of the proletariat” (Sophie Quinn, 2002).

An American author- William J. Duiker wrote the book *Ho Chi Minh*. Referring to the attitude of the Soviet Union,

W.J. Duiker wrote: "Since the World War II, the Soviet Union has paid little attention to the fate of the Indochina revolution ... For Ho Chi Minh, Stalin for many years doubted Ho Chi Minh's loyalty to his orthodox thought and became especially suspicious when Ho Chi Minh sought to establish relations with the US ". Stalin was also dissatisfied when the ICP officially self-dissolved in November 1945. The author asks the question: "Why did Stalin decide to recognize the diplomacy of the DRVN, despite his doubts about the ICP and Ho Chi Minh? The reason was that the Soviet Union wanted to draw China to the Soviet Union side to counter the US, so it encouraged Mao to take the lead in promoting revolution in Asia" (William J. Duiker, 2000).

Another noteworthy work is "The Real Record of the Chinese Military Advisory Group's Aid to Vietnam against the French". The work by Advisor Truong Quang Hoa mentioned Ho Chi Minh's secret trips to China and the Soviet Union: "On February 6th 1950, after Ho Chi Minh's arrival in Moscow, the SCP's Central Committee held a party for Ho Chi Minh, however, Stalin did not attend ... Mao told Stalin: Ho Chi Minh was a Marxist revolutionary of Vietnam, very much supported and loved by the Vietnamese people, was the leader of the Vietnamese people, so Mao suggested that Stalin should meet him soon ... ". The author writes: "One day in the upper week of February, Stalin finally met Ho Chi Minh in his office. Malenkov, Molotov, Bunganin were members of the Politburo of the Communist Party of Soviet Union; Tran Dang Ninh, Vietnam and Vuong Gia Tuong, Chinese Ambassador to the Soviet Union ...

participated in that meeting. Stalin said: "we are close friends and brothers, meeting you a bit late, hoping you would understand. Ho Chi Minh gave a brief presentation to Stalin about the ICP situation, the current situation of the war against the French and requests for aid". Stalin said: "The Communist Party and the people of the Soviet Union should absolutely aid your struggle against the French ... The work of aid in the war against the French in Vietnam should be in charge of China, which is more appropriate, because China is closer to Vietnam and understands the Vietnamese situation better" ... Stalin stressed: "to defeat the French, foreign aid is necessary, the more important thing is to do well in all aspects of the country. Raising, motivating and organizing the masses were the key to defeating the French" (Truong Quang Hoa, 2002).

The book titled Ho Chi Minh with China, also mentioned the event but did not specify the content of the meeting between Ho Chi Minh and Soviet Union's leader, as well as did not analyze why until early 1950, the Soviet Union recognized and set diplomatic relations with Vietnam (Hoang Tranh, 1990).

Through the above-mentioned works and articles, it can be seen that the process and the reasons leading to the establishment of diplomatic relations between Vietnam and the Soviet Union in early 1950 have been mentioned but have not been analyzed systematically and specifically. This is a content that needs to be studied and clarified, contributing to clarify and more fully the traditional friendship relationship between Vietnam and the former Soviet Union, today's Russian Federation.

Research Questions

The article focuses on clarifying research questions, which is also the orientation in which the report conducts research:

1. In fact, how did the relationship between Vietnam and the Soviet Union from September 1945 to December 1949 take place?
2. Why was the Soviet Union slow to recognize and support Vietnam?
3. Why did the Soviet Union recognize and establish diplomatic relations with Vietnam?

Vietnam - Soviet relationship from September 1945 to December 1949

In early 1930, the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) was established in Huong Cang (now Hong Kong), China. *The communist party's first political platform* determined that the CPV would lead the people to carry out two tasks: The civil rights bourgeois revolution (that is, the national liberation revolution) and the land revolution to reach communist society. The *political platform* drafted by Tran Phu which was approved by the First Plenum (October 1930), also affirmed that after completing the two tasks of nationality and democracy, Vietnam would follow the path of socialism (Communist Party of Vietnam, 2002, vol 2, p.1-6). After 15 years of leading the people to fight against French colonialism, Japanese fascist and the Nguyen feudalism, with great sacrifices, great losses (During 11 years (1931-1942), up to 4 General secretaries of the ICP (October 1930, the VCP changed its name

to the ICP) was arrested, imprisoned and murdered by the French colonialists, of which 3 people had studied and operated in the Soviet Union were Tran Phu, Le Hong Phong, and Ha Huy Tap. In addition, many other Vietnamese revolutionary leaders who had studied and grown up in the Soviet Union, such as Nguyen Thi Minh Khai and Phung Chi Kien, were also arrested and killed by the enemy during this period), the ICP took advantage of the favorable objective opportunities when Germany, Italy and later Japan fascist were defeated by the allies in which the Soviet Union was the mainstay, and launched the General Uprising over the country, founding the DRV.

In the ceremony to declare independence, Ho Chi Minh urged countries around the world to recognize the Government of the DRV. However, there were no countries or international organizations that recognize Vietnam. The special thing was that the Soviet Union, which was in the progress of building socialism led by the Communist Party, was a stronghold of the world revolution, the communist movement and the international worker movement, does not recognize the Ho Chi Minh Government.

The Government of the DRV and Ho Chi Minh had repeatedly sent letters and texts to leaders of the Soviet Union, but there was no response. These letters informed about the Vietnamese people under the leadership of the ICP had a total uprising to take power; Government of the DRV was established, proclaimed to build the people's democracy regime and advanced to socialism. However, the situation in Vietnam was very difficult in both economically and socially. Moreover,

enemies inside and outside were attacking Vietnam. Therefore, Vietnam wanted the help of the Soviet Union, either directly or through the United Nations.

From September 1945 to the end of 1949, Vietnam had to both conduct the resistance war, build the nation, perform foreign relations, open diplomatic representative offices in Bangkok (Thailand), Rang gun (Burma), Paris (France), and participate in international conferences on youth, women, peace ... to introduce the image of Vietnam which was in fighting against invasion and protecting the independence and world peace... Vietnam hoped to receive the consent, recognition and support of the democratic, peaceful and progressive forces, including the Soviet Union. President Ho Chi Minh sent Minister Pham Ngoc Thach as a special envoy to meet the Soviet Ambassador in Switzerland to ask about the establishment of diplomatic relations and call the Soviet Union for help but to no avail (Vietnam News Agency, 2008). During these years, the Soviet Union mainly kept observing and understanding Vietnam. Although the Soviet Union also provided some assistance, such as providing books and articles and operating costs for Vietnamese representative missions abroad, supporting Vietnam politically, but at a low level. At the end of 1945, a Soviet military delegation arrived in Hanoi, but after that trip, the Soviet Union made no further action.

About the reasons that the Soviet Union slowly recognized and supported Vietnam

I would like to focus on finding out why Vietnam declared to build a social

regime like the Soviet Union, but the Soviet Union did not recognize Vietnam soon?

First, the Soviet Union focused on overcoming the consequences of the war and prioritized Europe region. After World War II (1939-1945) ended, the Soviet Union suffered the heaviest losses with about 27 million people dead, its country and economy were severely damaged (Editorial, 2021). Therefore, the Soviet Union focused on overcoming the consequences of the war, restoring the economy, and stabilizing the lives of people in the country. In terms of foreign affairs, the Soviet Union prioritized the Europe region, focused on settling relations with the United States, Great Britain, France, Germany, Eastern and Southern European countries newly liberated by the Soviet Union, which were building social and political regimes following the model of the Soviet Union.

At this time, the Soviet Union did not pay much attention to Southeast Asia, including Vietnam. There was hardly any news from Vietnam on the Soviet Union media. *The Pravda* - the official newspaper of the SCP, only briefly reported on Vietnam's August 1945 General uprising. Maybe at this time, the Soviet Union did not have enough information about the Government of the DRV, so it wanted to learn more about Ho Chi Minh and the road Vietnam would go?

Second, the Soviet Union did not completely trust Ho Chi Minh and did not correctly understand Ho Chi Minh's views and actions. This is shown in the following contents:

Related to Ho Chi Minh's role in the establishment of the VCP. In the second half of 1929, there were communist organizations in Vietnam, but these organizations were in conflict. Upon learning of that situation, Nguyen Ai Quoc who was operating in Thailand, went to Huong Cang at the end of December 1929, took the name of the envoy of the Communist International to convene the delegates of the communist organizations into the VCP. Meanwhile, from the end of October 1929, the Communist International, which was dominated by the Soviet Union, also grasped the contradictory situation of communist organizations in Vietnam. The Communist International advocates the consolidation of communist organizations into the only Communist Party in Indochina.

Due to being active in Thailand, Nguyen Ai Quoc did not know that policy of International Communism. Therefore, Nguyen Ai Quoc convened the Conference to unify the communist organizations due to the initiative and responsibility of Nguyen Ai Quoc for the revolutionary movement in the country that he had diligently prepared politically, thoughtfully and organized for the establishment of a communist organization in Vietnam.

However, the event was not expected by the Communist International. In addition, documents such as *The Party's Brief Political Strategy* and *Brief tactic* drafted by Nguyen Ai Quoc and then approved by the Conference, had different contents from the Communist International's views on the national liberation revolution. Those were the difference related to the issue of prioritizing the mission of the national revolution or the democratic revolution, class struggle;

differences in forces participating in the revolution; differences in party naming. Therefore, the Communist International assessed Nguyen Ai Quoc as a nationalist, sent Tran Phu to Vietnam to survey the situation and assigned to write a new *Political Program*.

In October 1930, the first Party Central Conference held in Huong Cang decided to abolish the documents which were passed at the Consolidation Conference, passed the *Political Program* drafted by Tran Phu, renamed the VCP to the ICP and elected Tran Phu to be the General Secretary. After the meeting, the ICP was recognized as a division of International Communism.

The Soviet Union incorrectly understood the event that the Viet Minh Front led by the ICP actively contacted and coordinated with the Allied forces (here the American troops) to fight the Japanese fascists and received direct assistance on weapons, equipment, and training of the US to build armed forces, preparing to revolt to take power. Although the Soviet Union and the US were in the same anti-fascist Allies, they had fundamental differences in ideology and political and social regime. Therefore, the coordination of the Viet Minh Front with the American troops, in which the direct active member was Ho Chi Minh, made the Soviet leader incomprehensible.

The events that took place after the General Uprising in Vietnam made the Soviet leaders incorrectly understand the Party and Government of Vietnam led by Ho Chi Minh. That was when Ho Chi Minh quoted a passage in the 1776 *American Declaration of Independence* to include the

Declaration of Independence of Vietnam, read on September 2, 1945 in front of tens of thousands of people and broadcasted it internationally. That was the ICP had just openly assumed the leadership of the revolution for more than two months, but declared itself disbanded (November 11, 1945). That was, the Provisional Government at the beginning included mainly communist members, but when the Official Coalition Government was formed, it was a multi-party government. That was, the composition of the National Assembly had up to 70 delegates of the two reactionary and pro-Republic of China organizations, which were the *Nationalist Party of Vietnam* and the *League for Revolution of Vietnam*, but these delegates are not elected (National Assembly of Vietnam, 2006). All those concessions of Vietnam were judged by the Soviet Union as rightist, negative, causing the revolution's nature of the Government and the National Assembly to change, the ICP could not control the situation, so it was forced to compromise.

The Soviet leaders had a number of channels of information to grasp the situation of Vietnam but they were not accurate and complete, through the Embassy of the Soviet Union in France and through the report of the representative of the DRV's Liaison Office in France. The information related to the relationship between Nguyen Ai Quoc and Tran Phu; the ICP returned to implement the *Political Program* drafted by Nguyen Ai Quoc; prioritizing national liberation but did not continue implementing *Political Program* drafted by Phu; the issue of dissolving the ICP; and the issue of land reform...

Third, the Soviet Union signed with France "Alliance and Mutual Assistance Agreement" (December 1944). During World War II, the Soviet Union found that the relationship between the US and the French resistance movement led by Charles de Gaulle was not smooth. At that time, the Soviet Union wanted to limit British influence in Europe after the war ended, so after the liberation of France (August 1944) and the Provisional Government of the French Republic was established, the Soviet Union promoted to sign the above Agreement with France with the intention of joining France as a counterbalance against Britain and the US in Europe. Therefore, the Soviet Union was bound by this Agreement and the interests of the Soviet Union at that time did not coincide with those of the DRV.

The reasons for the Soviet Union's recognition of and the establishment of diplomatic relation with Vietnam.

After the August Revolution of 1945, Vietnam wanted very much recognition from the Soviet Union not only because it shared the same ideology, social regime and was led by the Communist Party but also was very aware that the Soviet Union was a big country, with increasing prestige and influence after World War II. So why in January 1950, the Soviet Union leader declared its recognition and diplomacy with the DRV. Through research, I found the following bases:

Firstly, the Vietnam's Resistance thrived. From September 1945 to the end of 1949, Vietnam was in a resistance war without international recognition and assistance. Following the war in Vietnam

and Indochina, the Soviet leader realized that Vietnam had been effectively blocking the French conspiracies and acts of the war, which were helped by the US, while at the same time building a people's democracy regime according to the Soviet model. If recognizing and assisting Vietnam in the resistance war, the Soviet Union would limit American influence in this region, and at the same time expand its influence in Southeast Asia.

Besides, the Soviet Union also gradually understood better the policies and actions of the Ho Chi Minh's government in the period 1945-1946 which were situational to maintain the leadership of the ICP in practice. Although the land reform had not yet been implemented, the Government of the DRV had also actively implemented the reduction of rents, agricultural taxes, and division of land of landlords, of Vietnamese chicks and French colonialists to poor peasants in liberated zones.

Second, the People's Republic of China was established (1-10-1949) and followed the path of building socialism. This event had a great influence on the force comparison around the world, between the two factions: Vietnam and China had traditional and historical relationship. During the revolutionary struggle, the people and armies of the two countries helped and cooperated in combat with each other, achieving some results. Many Chinese leaders had close relations and understanding of the Vietnamese revolution. Therefore, when Ho Chi Minh expressed his intention to establish diplomatic relations, the Chinese leaders quickly agreed. China played an important

role in promoting the understanding of the Soviet Union towards Vietnam, making Vietnam and the Soviet Union closer together. China transmitted positive information about the Vietnam resistance war and about Ho Chi Minh to the Soviet leadership, making the Soviet Union understand Vietnam better.

Third, the Soviet Union realized that the French Government increasingly leaned towards the US, relied on American aid, to directly intervene in the war in Indochina. Therefore, the Soviet's plan was to use France to deal with the US and Britain proved ineffective. Furthermore, the participation of France in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), which was established on April 4 1949 and led by the US to oppose the Soviet Union and the socialist countries, was a factor making the Soviet Union change its attitude and turn to recognize the DRV (BVK (2018)).

On January 14th 1950, the Government of the DRV issued a statement: "ready to put diplomatic relations with all governments that respect the equal rights, territorial sovereignty and national sovereignty of Vietnam to together protect peace and build democracy in the world" (Ho Chi Minh, 2002, p.7-8). On January 18th 1950, the Chinese Government issued a statement recognizing the Vietnamese Government. On January 30, 1950, the Government of the Soviet Union issued a statement recognizing the Government of the DRV. It was followed by a series of countries: People's Democratic Republics of Korea (January 31st); Czechoslovakia (February 2nd); German Democratic Republic; Hungarian, Romanian (February 3rd); Poland (February

4th); Bulgarian (February 8th); Albany (February 11st) recognized the Government of Vietnam one by one.

Before that, from the beginning of January 1950, President Ho Chi Minh secretly went to China. In Beijing, Ho Chi Minh had to discussion with Chinese leaders (without President Mao Zedong who was visiting the Soviet Union). With the consent of the Government of the Soviet Union, Ho Chi Minh moved from China to the Soviet Union. During the meeting with Ho Chi Minh, Mao Zedong attended, after hearing Ho Chi Minh announcing the situation of Vietnam's resistance war, proposing the Soviet Union to recognize and establish diplomatic and give military aids for the Vietnam resistance, Stalin said: "Previously, due to inaccurate information, the leaders of the Soviet Union did not understand the situation of Indochina and Vietnam; now the Soviet Union agrees with the Vietnamese Party's line, and will join the socialist countries in recognizing the DRV and actively supporting Vietnam in the resistance war and training cadres and building peace; The Soviet Union will coordinate with China on aid matters" (Nguyen Dinh Bin et al, 2002, p.122). Ho Chi Minh asked the Soviet Union to help equip 10 infantry divisions, 1 artillery regiment and some medicine. Stalin agreed in principle and suggested that China would directly aid, the Soviet Union would return to China those China brought to Vietnam.

CONCLUSIONS

Thus, by the beginning of 1950, Vietnam and the Soviet Union had established diplomatic relation. The recognition by China, the Soviet Union and the Southeast European countries and the

establishment of diplomatic relation with Vietnam removed Vietnam's besiege, and put the DRV into the ranks of the people democratic countries, proceeding to build socialism. From this process, some of the following comments can be drawn:

Firstly, this was a fairly long process with the impact of many factors. The fact that the Soviet Union slowly recognized Vietnam after the DRV was established for more than 4 years (from 9/1945- to 1/1950) was quite a special thing, showing the consideration and caution of the Soviet Union and showing a "lack of zeal" which did not focusing on understanding the nature of the situation of Vietnam and not attaching importance to the expansion of Soviet influence in this important area.

Second, in the process of establishing diplomatic relations, Vietnam's efforts had been clearly shown. Through various channels, Vietnam actively wrote letters, sent telegrams, sent representatives to meet with Soviet representatives at international conferences to raise issues and report the situation of Vietnam to Soviet's leaders. Ho Chi Minh actively met with Soviet's leaders in early 1950 as a direct move leading to the Soviet Union's recognition and support for the Vietnam resistance war.

Third, establishing diplomatic relations with Vietnam was the result of the strategic calculation of Soviet's leaders on a global scale based on national interests. While still focusing on Europe, the Soviet Union became increasingly aware of the role of other (peripheral) regions. If the Soviet Union's influence in regions outside Europe increased, it would increase its role

and influence globally. The Soviet leaders was well aware of the important and pioneering role of Vietnam in the fight against colonialism and imperialism. If supporting and helping Vietnam to win this war, the Soviet Union will gain double benefits: (1) The Soviet Union had been known as a stronghold of the world revolution, supporting the movement to fight for national liberation; (2) The Soviet Union used Vietnam to weaken its opponents which were France and the US.

Fourth, China played an important role in establishing diplomatic relations between Vietnam and the Soviet Union. The Chinese Revolution was successful at the end of 1949, which was a favorable condition for Vietnam, through China, to approach the Soviet's leaders. On the contrary, the Soviet Union also wanted to show its leading role of the world revolution when "assigning" China to help and aid Vietnam, thereby building trust with Chinese leaders and using China to increase the Soviet influence over Asia in general, Southeast Asia in particular, and at the same time to restrain American influence.

Fifth, in establishing diplomatic relations between Vietnam and the Soviet Union, Ho Chi Minh's role was very prominent. Due to incomplete understanding and disagreement with the activities of Nguyen Ai Quoc - Ho Chi Minh, the Soviet Union incorrectly understood the Vietnamese revolution and the ICP. On the other hand, Ho Chi Minh was a person who actively, proactively and persisted in overcoming all difficulties and obstacles to establish relations between Vietnam and the Soviet Union, bringing

Vietnam into the big family of socialist countries, and to win the resistance war.

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