

The “Sole Legal Government of Vietnam”

The Bao Dai Factor and Soviet Attitudes
toward Vietnam, 1947–1950

❖ Balázs Szalontai

Introduction

Iosif Stalin’s indifference toward the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) is well-established in Cold War historiography. Having proclaimed the DRV on 2 September 1945, the Vietnamese Communist leaders over the next four years were unable to forge any official contacts with the USSR, despite repeated efforts. Requests for Soviet assistance were made by Tran Van Giau in New Delhi (March–April 1947), Pham Ngoc Thach in Switzerland (September 1947), Le Hy in Moscow (August 1948), Nguyen Duc Quy in Bangkok (September 1948), and Tran Ngoc Danh in Prague (October 1949). All came to naught. Soviet officials adopted an evasive attitude during these encounters and refused to provide any sort of financial assistance, let alone military aid. Not until 30 January 1950 did Moscow finally grant diplomatic recognition to the DRV. The Vietnamese leaders, who had been engaged in a war with France since December 1946, had good reason to find Moscow’s long passivity disappointing, even if they sought to uphold the USSR’s prestige in their intraparty propaganda and downplayed (or denied) their Communist credentials in their external propaganda.

Scholars who have examined this subject—Ang Cheng Guan, Chen Jian, Ilya Gaiduk, Sergei N. Goncharov, Christopher E. Goscha, Martin Grossheim, John W. Lewis, Mari Olsen, Qiang Zhai, Sophie Quinn-Judge, Edward Rice-Maximin, Benoit de Tréglodé, Tuong Vu, and Xue Litai—attribute Stalin’s aloofness variously to his Europe-centric strategy; his determination to avoid a clash with France over Indochina; his interest in maximizing the domestic influence of the French Communist Party (PCF); and his suspicions about the ideological reliability of the Vietnamese leaders.

Journal of Cold War Studies

Vol. 20, No. 3, Summer 2018, pp. 3–56, doi:10.1162/jcws_a_00813

© 2018 by the President and Fellows of Harvard College and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology

According to these arguments, the Soviet decision to recognize the DRV was mainly a consequence of the strategic changes brought about in Asia by the creation of the People's Republic of China (PRC). Accounts along these lines suggest that from December 1949 to January 1950, China provided a much-needed "helping hand" to the diplomatically isolated DRV.¹ For example, Goscha stresses that "without the support of high-ranking Chinese communists like Liu Shaoqi, Zhou Enlai, and Mao Zedong and their vote of confidence in Moscow, Ho Chi Minh . . . would have found it very difficult to get his government recognized by the rest of the communist world, above all by the Soviets but also by the Stalinist-minded [PCF]."² Within this general consensus about Stalin's motives, one can distinguish two models of interpretation. In Gaiduk's depiction, Stalin's aloofness toward Vietnam was but one manifestation of an all-encompassing distrust of Asian revolutionary movements. This distrust, according to Gaiduk, affected Moscow's relations not only with Vietnam but also with China, India, and Indonesia. For instance, in early 1951 Stalin dissuaded the Communist Party of India (CPI) and the Communist Party of Indonesia (PKI) from waging armed struggle against their "bourgeois" governments.³ In contrast, Goscha points out that the USSR was not ipso facto unwilling to assist Southeast Asian national liberation movements but that it provided far less public support to Vietnam than to Indonesia. To explain the difference between Stalin's passivity toward

1. Ang Cheng Guan, "Vietnam in 1948: An International History Perspective," *Kajian Malaysia*, Vol. 27, No. 1–2 (2009), pp. 75–79; Chen Jian, *Mao's China and the Cold War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), pp. 120–122; Ilya V. Gaiduk, *Confronting Vietnam: Soviet Policy toward the Indochina Conflict, 1954–1963* (Washington, DC: Stanford University Press, 2003), pp. 1–11; Ilya V. Gaiduk, "Soviet Cold War Strategy and Prospects of Revolution in South and Southeast Asia," in Christopher E. Goscha and Christian Ostermann, eds., *Connecting Histories. Decolonization and the Cold War in Southeast Asia, 1945–1962* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), pp. 123–136; Sergei N. Goncharov, John W. Lewis, and Xue Litai, *Uncertain Partners: Stalin, Mao, and the Korean War* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), pp. 106–108; Christopher E. Goscha, "Courting Diplomatic Disaster? The Difficult Integration of Vietnam into the Internationalist Communist Movement (1945–1950)," *Journal of Vietnamese Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 1–2 (February/August 2006), pp. 59–103; Martin Grossheim, *Ho Chi Minh, der geheimnisvolle Revolutionär: Leben und Legende* (Munich: Verlag C. H. Beck, 2011), pp. 100–104; Mari Olsen, *Soviet-Vietnam Relations and the Role of China, 1949–1964: Changing Alliances* (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 3–12; Qiang Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars, 1950–1975* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), pp. 13–15; Sophie Quinn-Judge, "Rethinking the History of the Vietnamese Communist Party," in Duncan McCargo, ed., *Rethinking Vietnam* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004), pp. 34–35; Benoit de Tréglodé, "Premiers contacts entre le Vietnam et l'Union soviétique (1947–1948)," *Approches-Asie*, Vol. 16 (1999), pp. 125–135; Benoit de Tréglodé, "Les relations entre le Viet-Minh, Moscou et Pékin à travers les documents (1950–1954)," *Revue historique des Armées*, No. 221 (December 2000), pp. 55–62; and Tuong Vu, "Dreams of Paradise: The Making of a Soviet Outpost in Vietnam," *Ab Imperio*, No. 2 (August 2008), pp. 278–279.

2. Goscha, "Courting Diplomatic Disaster?" p. 89.

3. Gaiduk, "Soviet Cold War Strategy," pp. 125–133.

Vietnam and his helpfulness toward Indonesia, Goscha highlights the peculiar aspects of Vietnamese Communist policies—including Ho Chi Minh’s decision to dissolve the Indochinese Communist Party (ICP) in 1945—and contrasts the strategic importance of France (the colonial power in Vietnam) with the relative insignificance of the Netherlands (the colonial power in Indonesia).⁴

Although these explanations provide much insight into Stalin’s motives, they neglect another important factor: the process of parallel state formation in Vietnam. Unable to come to terms with Ho Chi Minh, the French authorities from 1947 to 1949 made increasing efforts to create a purportedly independent Vietnamese state that could be presented as an anti-Communist alternative to the DRV. On 29 January 1950 the French National Assembly finally gave its consent to the establishment of the State of Vietnam, headed by Emperor Bao Dai. Soviet recognition of the DRV occurred the very next day. When *Pravda*, the Soviet party newspaper, announced the establishment of Soviet-Vietnamese diplomatic relations, it referred to the step just taken by the French legislature.⁵ Ho’s request for recognition, in which the Vietnamese Communist leader berated France for setting up a “puppet government,” was published in the same issue of *Pravda*.⁶ On 6 and 9 February, the Soviet newspaper returned to the subject by carrying two analytical articles about the “Bao Dai solution.” The second article, expressly aimed at justifying the USSR’s recognition of the DRV, forcefully argued that Ho Chi Minh’s government, rather than the Bao Dai regime, constituted the sole legal authority in Vietnam.⁷ Ironically, U.S. Secretary of State Dean Acheson, who condemned the Soviet recognition of the DRV, also linked Moscow’s action with the “Bao Dai solution” when he declared that this step had been “timed in an effort to cloud the transfer of sovereignty by France to the legal Governments of Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam.”⁸

In the light of these references, the question whether the Soviet recognition of the DRV may have been at least partly influenced by the emergence of the Bao Dai regime is worth investigating. In recent times, the State of Vietnam has been extensively studied by Goscha, Mark Bradley, Mark Lawrence,

4. Goscha, “Courting Diplomatic Disaster?” pp. 69–70.

5. “Demokraticeskaya respublika V’etnam (kratkaya spravka),” *Pravda*, 31 January 1950, p. 2.

6. “Obrashchenie Prezidenta Demokraticeskoi respublikii V’etnam ko vsem pravitelstvam miram,” *Pravda*, 31 January 1950, p. 2.

7. Iu. Zhukov, “V’etnam i Frantsiya,” *Pravda*, 6 February 1950, p. 4; and Ia. Viktorov, “Zagovor imperialistov protiv v’etnamskogo naroda,” *Pravda*, 9 February 1950, p. 4.

8. “Kremlin Recognizes Communist Movement in Indonesia [*sic*]: Statement by Secretary Acheson, February 1,” *Department of State Bulletin*, Vol. 22, No. 554 (13 February 1950), p. 244.

T. O. Smith, and Kathryn C. Statler.⁹ However, these authors do not analyze Soviet views of the “Bao Dai experiment,” just as the earlier publications on Soviet-DRV interactions paid little attention to the State of Vietnam. Of the scholars familiar with Russian archival sources on Soviet-DRV relations, only Irina Konoreva and Igor Selivanov make brief—albeit insightful—references to the “Bao Dai factor.”¹⁰ To fill this gap in the scholarly literature, the analysis here traces how the USSR reacted to the emergence of the Bao Dai regime and considers whether this process may have motivated the Soviet Union’s decision to recognize the DRV (which *Pravda* consistently portrayed as the “sole legal government of Vietnam”).

***Pravda* on Vietnam: A Comparative Statistical Analysis**

At first glance, an analysis of *Pravda* articles may appear to be an outdated method of investigation, particularly if compared to the extensive research that Gaiduk, Konoreva, de Tréglodé, Qiang Zhai, and others have done in the Russian and Chinese archives. Scholars who have attempted to gauge the extent of Soviet interest in Southeast Asia by counting the number of press comments—such as Joseph Frankel and Charles B. McLane—used this approach because of their lack of access to Communist archival documents.¹¹

To be sure, Soviet media commentary about Vietnam did not reflect the Soviet Union’s standpoint in its entirety. On the one hand, verbal support for the DRV (or criticism of France’s policy in Indochina) was not necessarily

9. Mark Philip Bradley, *Imagining Vietnam and America: The Making of Postcolonial Vietnam, 1919–1950* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Christopher E. Goscha, “Choosing between the Two Vietnams: 1950 and Southeast Asian Shifts in the International System,” in Goscha and Ostermann, eds., *Connecting Histories*, pp. 207–237; Mark Atwood Lawrence, *Assuming the Burden: Europe and the American Commitment to War in Vietnam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); Mark Atwood Lawrence, “Recasting Vietnam: The Bao Dai Solution and the Outbreak of the Cold War in Southeast Asia,” in Goscha and Ostermann, eds., *Connecting Histories*, pp. 15–38; T. O. Smith, *Britain and the Origins of the Vietnam War: UK Policy in Indo-China, 1943–50* (Houndmills, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); and Kathryn C. Statler, *Replacing France: The Origins of American Intervention in Vietnam* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2007).

10. Irina Aleksandrovna Konoreva and Igor Nikolaevich Selivanov, “Sovetskaya ideologicheskaya podderzhka storonnikov Kho Shi Mina v gody pervo indokitaiskoi voiny,” *Rossiia i ATR*, No. 4 (2012), p. 124; and I. A. Konoreva, *Sovetskii Soyuz i Indokitai: 1943–1976* (Kursk: Kurskii Gosudarstvennii Universitet, 2011), pp. 50–53.

11. Joseph Frankel, “Soviet Policy in Southeast Asia,” in Max Beloff, ed., *Soviet Policy in the Far East, 1944–1951* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1953), p. 208; and Charles B. McLane, *Soviet Strategies in Southeast Asia: An Exploration of Eastern Policy under Lenin and Stalin* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1966), pp. 249–254, 266–275.

accompanied by concrete actions. On the other hand, certain diplomatic steps that the USSR took on behalf of the DRV from 1948 to 1949 were not covered by *Pravda*. Therefore, I also examined the reports of the Hungarian legation in Paris in the late 1940s. From 1947, these reports increasingly reflected Soviet diplomatic aims, and thus they may provide some insight into Soviet motives. Through contacts with French officials, PCF cadres, and the Vietnamese community in Paris, Hungarian diplomats managed to collect information not only about French actions in Vietnam but also about DRV policies and the PCF's views on Indochina. The public and confidential statements of French Communist cadres at least partly reflected the views of their Soviet comrades, all the more so because Moscow habitually relied on the PCF and other metropolitan Communist parties to maintain contacts with the Southeast Asian parties.¹² Because *L'Humanité* (the PCF's daily newspaper) covered the Franco-Vietnamese War more extensively than *Pravda* did, I did not consider the party's statements ipso facto representative of the Soviet Union's standpoint unless they were in accordance with *Pravda's* simultaneous attitude toward Vietnam or unless other sources confirmed the influence of Soviet directives on PCF actions.¹³

Despite these caveats, Communist press articles, if examined in tandem with the available archival sources, can serve as indicators of major policy shifts. For instance, Gaiduk, having analyzed the archival records of Stalin's confidential conversation with CPI leaders on 9 February 1951, summarizes the dictator's comments on the Indian situation as follows:

First, in India there was no People's Liberation Army, like in China. On the other hand, India was more developed industrially with a dense railway network, which was good, from the point of view of progress, but bad for guerrilla war, since this made it easy for the enemy to reach a liberated region and to encircle it. . . . The Indians did not have "a friendly neighbor state, upon which you could lean with your back, like the Chinese guerrillas did in having the USSR behind [them]."¹⁴

12. On the PCF's attitudes toward Vietnam, see Bernard B. Fall, "Tribulations of a Party Line: The French Communists and Indo-China," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 33, No. 3 (April 1955), pp. 499–510; Edward Rice-Maximin, *Accommodation and Resistance: The French Left, Indochina and the Cold War, 1944–1954* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1986); Alfred J. Rieber, *Stalin and the French Communist Party, 1941–1947* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962), pp. 322–329, 343–346; Alain Ruscio, *Les communistes français et la guerre d'Indochine 1944–54* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1985); and Tuong-Vi Tran, "The Failure of the French Tripartite Experiment in May 1947," *European History Quarterly*, Vol. 42, No. 2 (April 2012), pp. 261–285.

13. On *L'Humanité's* articles regarding the Franco-Vietnamese War, see Alain Ruscio, *La question coloniale dans "l'Humanité" (1904–2004)* (Paris: La Dispute, 2005), pp. 253–291.

14. Gaiduk, "Soviet Cold War Strategy," p. 133.

The CPI's subsequent policy statement, whose full text was published in the party weekly *Cross Roads* (8 June 1951), repeats Stalin's arguments against armed struggle almost verbatim. The relevant parts of the statement are summarized by John H. Kautsky:

It is pointed out that the Chinese Communists already had an army when they turned to the countryside, and that the absence of a good communications system in China made it difficult for the enemy to attack the guerrilla forces. But India has such a system; . . . the Chinese Communist army was again and again threatened with annihilation until it reached Manchuria, where, with the industrial base in hand and the friendly Soviet Union in the rear, it could rebuild and launch its final offensive. The geographical situation in India is quite different.¹⁵

The relationship between high-level policymaking and media coverage also manifested itself in the fact that the CPI's new program, announced first in April 1951, was reprinted not only in *Pravda* but in the journal of the Communist Information Bureau (Cominform) and in other foreign periodicals, thus demonstrating high-level Soviet approval.¹⁶ In international disputes over the legitimacy and recognition of a state, media coverage played a particularly important role. Both the USSR and its opponents were strongly motivated to express their legal position clearly, rather than to conceal it.

Pravda's references to Vietnam (or the lack thereof) seem to confirm the observations that Goscha and other scholars have made about the DRV's "remarkably difficult integration into the international system in general and the communist camp in particular."¹⁷ In the sphere of symbolic politics, Vietnam's isolation from the Soviet bloc was just as pronounced as its isolation from the sphere of "hard power." As late as 1949, *Pravda* did not mention Vietnam among the countries in which 1 May and 7 November (the shared holidays of the Communist universe) were celebrated, even as it dutifully enumerated such minor "people's democracies" as Albania and Mongolia and even a few capitalist states. Only in 1950–1951 (i.e., after the recognition of the DRV) did *Pravda* add Vietnam to the list of celebrating countries.¹⁸

15. John H. Kautsky, *Moscow and the Communist Party of India: A Study in the Postwar Evolution of International Communist Strategy* (Cambridge, MA: The Technology Press of Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1956), p. 138.

16. *Ibid.*, pp. 147–148; and "Proekt programmy Kommunisticheskoi partii Indii," *Pravda*, 12 May 1951, p. 3.

17. Goscha, "Courting Diplomatic Disaster?" p. 60.

18. "Narod V'etnama—V ryadakh Demokraticeskogo fronta," *Pravda*, 3 May 1950, p. 3; and "Narody mira otmechayut 34-iu godovshchinu Velikoi Oktriabskoi sotsialisticheskoi revoliutsii—Demokraticeskaya Respublika V'etnam," *Pravda*, 7 November 1951, p. 6.

Table 1. References to Vietnam in *Pravda* in 1947–1950

Type	1947	1948	1949	1950
Primary	7	13	24	110
Secondary	14	12	28	59
Multiple	15	27	41	81

This editorial practice most likely reflected the fact that, from 1945 to 1949, DRV leaders refrained from touting their Communist credentials by such means. Nevertheless, symbolic manifestations of Soviet aloofness (or slight) seem to have persisted even after the act of recognition. As late as 1950, *Pravda* failed to give the same symbolic respect to Ho Chi Minh that it readily accorded to other foreign Communist leaders. On 19 May 1950, the paper devoted only a brief news report—limited to a single sentence and buried in the middle of page 3—to Ho’s sixtieth birthday.¹⁹ In contrast, *Pravda* celebrated the fiftieth birthday of PCF leader Maurice Thorez by publishing the congratulations of Stalin and the CPSU Central Committee on its front page, along with a six-column article on page 2.²⁰ The sixtieth birthday of Polish President Bolesław Bierut was celebrated even more ostentatiously.²¹ The fiftieth birthdays of the Bulgarian and Romanian supreme leaders received less attention (Vulko Chervenkov’s was covered in a six-paragraph article on page 3, and Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej’s birthday was given five paragraphs on page 5), but both articles contained congratulations from the highest Soviet leaders—a gesture denied to Ho Chi Minh.

The first step of my analysis was to compile a list of every direct and indirect reference *Pravda* made to Vietnam (or Indochina in general) from 1 January 1947 through 31 December 1950. The references dated 1945–1946 were too sporadic for a statistical analysis, but their content was taken into consideration. Articles expressly focused on Vietnam were categorized as “primary,” articles that discussed France and made brief references to Vietnam were deemed “secondary,” and articles that cursorily mentioned Vietnam as one item in a list of various Asian countries were defined as “multiple” (see Table 1).

19. “60-letie Kho Shi Mina,” *Pravda*, 19 May 1950, p. 3.

20. “Sluzhenie narodu: K piatidesiatiletiiu Morisa Toreza,” *Pravda*, 28 April 1950, p. 2.

21. “Shestidesyatiletie Prezidenta Pol’skoi Respubliki Boleslava Beruta,” *Pravda*, 19 April 1952, p. 3.

Table 2. References to Vietnam, Indonesia, and Malaya in 1947–1950

	1947	1948	1949	1950
Vietnam	7	13	24	110
Indonesia	166	87	59	28
Malaya	0	15	5	27

The second step was to search *Pravda* for primary references to Indonesia and Malaya (see Table 2). These Southeast Asian countries were selected as control groups because of their similarities with Vietnam. In the late 1940s, all three countries experienced violent anticolonial struggles and armed Communist insurrections, and *Pravda*'s multiple-category references to Vietnam usually also mentioned Indonesia, Malaya, or both. The purpose of this comparative analysis was to ascertain (1) whether *Pravda*'s relative interest (or lack of interest) in Vietnam was comparable to the attention it paid to other Southeast Asian revolutionary movements (as the "Gaiduk hypothesis" implies), or (2) whether *Pravda* covered Vietnam less extensively than Indonesia and Malaya (as the "Goscha hypothesis" suggests).

Table 2 seems to be more compatible with the "Goscha hypothesis" than with the "Gaiduk hypothesis." From 1947 to 1949, *Pravda* paid far more attention to Indonesia than to Vietnam. In 1947, the proportion of its references to the two countries was 23:1, and in 1948 Indonesia still enjoyed a 6:1 margin over Vietnam. This contrast between *Pravda*'s strong interest in Indonesia and its relative neglect of Vietnam accords with the fact that, in 1947–1948, the USSR emphatically took Indonesia's side in the United Nations (UN), and even established consular relations with it, but conspicuously failed to make comparable efforts on behalf of Indochina.²²

At the same time, the data presented in Table 2 seem to disprove the likelihood of a long-term Soviet bias against Vietnam and in favor of Indonesia or Malaya. The extremely high number of references to Indonesia in 1947–1948 was a short-term phenomenon. From 1947 to 1950, each year saw a decrease

22. On Soviet policies toward Indonesia in 1945–1953, see, among others, L. M. Efimova, "Towards the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations between the USSR and the Republic of Indonesia, 1947–48," *Indonesia and the Malay World*, Vol. 26, No. 76 (1999), pp. 184–194; L. M. Efimova, "New Evidence on the Establishment of Soviet–Indonesian Diplomatic Relations (1949–53)," *Indonesia and the Malay World*, Vol. 29, No. 85 (2001), pp. 215–233; and Ragna Boden, *Die Grenzen der Weltmacht: sowjetische Indonesienpolitik von Stalin bis Breznev* (Stuttgart: F. Steiner, 2006), pp. 40–95.

Table 3. References to Vietnam, Indonesia, and Malaya in 1947

	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	Jun.	Jul.	Aug.	Sep.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
Vietnam	4	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Indonesia	12	7	4	0	5	5	45	46	12	14	8	8
Malaya	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Table 4. References to Vietnam, Indonesia, and Malaya in 1948

	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	Jun.	Jul.	Aug.	Sep.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
Vietnam	1	1	0	2	0	1	2	3	1	1	1	0
Indonesia	5	8	2	3	4	7	9	10	14	4	2	19
Malaya	0	0	0	0	0	4	1	6	2	1	1	0

Table 5. References to Vietnam, Indonesia, and Malaya in 1949

	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	Jun.	Jul.	Aug.	Sep.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
Vietnam	1	0	1	1	6	1	1	5	3	0	0	5
Indonesia	20	5	2	2	5	1	2	8	2	2	3	8
Malaya	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0

Table 6. References to Vietnam, Indonesia, and Malaya in 1950

	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	Jun.	Jul.	Aug.	Sep.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
Vietnam	26	19	7	11	7	4	3	4	6	13	7	3
Indonesia	2	1	4	3	4	2	1	5	1	0	4	1
Malaya	1	1	1	7	3	2	0	2	3	3	1	3

in references to Indonesia. In contrast, *Pravda's* references to Vietnam underwent a steady increase from 1947 to 1950. Moreover, the attention *Pravda* paid to Vietnam, limited as it was in certain years, proved more intense than the attention it devoted to Malaya. With the exception of 1948 (the starting year of the Malayan Emergency), *Pravda* consistently published more articles about Vietnam than about Malaya.

To help explain these patterns, the results of the annual statistical analyses were broken down into month-by-month analyses (see Tables 3–6).

These data reveal that the number of *Pravda* references fluctuated within each year, irrespective of which country was covered. Analysis of the content of the articles shows that the highest peaks in monthly *Pravda* references were usually linked to specific events of major importance. For instance, from July to August 1947, a period in which Dutch military forces launched a major offensive that led to a sharp debate in the UN, *Pravda* covered Indonesia almost every day. Other peaks in *Pravda*'s references to Indonesia were inspired by the announcement of the PKI's new program and the resulting civil war (August–September 1948), a new Dutch offensive that triggered UN Security Council Resolution 67 (December 1948–January 1949), and the transfer of sovereignty (August–December 1949). Similarly, the highest number of *Pravda* references to Malaya occurred in August 1948, not long after British authorities declared a state of emergency.

The peak number of *Pravda* references to Vietnam precisely coincided with the period in which Soviet policy toward Indochina reached a turning point. In January–February 1950, when the USSR and its Communist allies finally recognized the DRV, *Pravda* published 45 articles focused on Vietnam—a number slightly higher than the combined total of such articles in the entire 1947–1949 period. Therefore, the number and content of *Pravda* articles on Vietnam seems at least partly to have reflected the extent and motives of Soviet political interest.

From Silence to Indirect Criticism: Pravda and the Start of the Bao Dai Experiment

In the early years of the DRV, when the new state made repeated attempts to reach a mutually satisfactory agreement with France but eventually found itself at war with the metropolitan power, Soviet leaders showed no interest in recognizing Ho Chi Minh's government and simply left his letters unanswered.²³ Still, the possibility that an alternative Vietnamese national government might be established in competition with the DRV seems to have concerned Soviet officials from the very beginning of the Franco-Vietnamese War. On 26 December 1946 (i.e., a week after the outbreak of the war), *Pravda* briefly reported that “a personal enemy of Ho Chi Minh, the former Vietnamese [foreign] minister Nguyen Tuong Tam, announced that he

23. Goscha, “Courting Diplomatic Disaster?” p. 64.

formed a ‘government.’” Notably, the word “government” was put into quotation marks, a practice Soviet journalists routinely used in their references to the “illegitimate” Bao Dai regime. Citing the French Christian Democratic daily *L’Aube* as its source, *Pravda* mentioned that Tam intended to solve the Indochinese question by asking for Chinese and U.S. mediation (an idea that *L’Aube* denounced as a “provocation”).²⁴ The swiftness of *Pravda’s* reaction to this event may be gauged from the fact that the U.S. embassy in Paris reported the story on the same day. The embassy cited a French Foreign Ministry official, Philippe Baudet, who described the formation of Tam’s government as “an attempt to supplant Ho Chi Minh through Chinese intervention.”²⁵ On 25-26 December, the PCF’s *L’Humanité* also warned that “if France did not support Ho, his rivals . . . would provoke Sino-American intervention.”²⁶ The prospect of Chinese or U.S. involvement in the Indochina crisis probably reinforced the Soviet authorities’ interest in the emergence of a potential alternative government. Such considerations strongly influenced Moscow’s attitude toward Vietnam from 1949 to 1950, too.

From early January to late February 1947, *Pravda* paid perceptible but limited attention to the rapidly escalating conflict between the Viet Minh and the French troops. In these months, the newspaper carried six articles focused on Vietnam: three brief news reports about military events (4 January, 10 February, 22 February); a summary of the appeal that Ho Chi Minh (whom *Pravda* characterized as “president of the Vietnamese Republic”—*prezident V’etnamskoi respublikì*) issued to the French nation for a peaceful resolution of the conflict (12 January); a summary of a relevant Chinese article (23 January); and, most importantly an article that openly asked, “Who is sabotaging negotiations in Vietnam?” Similar to most of the other Vietnam-related articles published during this period, this article was based on French press sources (*Franc-Tireur* and *L’Humanité*) and made no direct comment on the Vietnamese situation. Still, it cited the French newspapers in a fairly tentative way, implying that those responsible for the breakdown of Franco-Vietnamese talks were the French hardliners in Saigon (above all, Admiral Thierry d’Argenlieu), rather than Ho Chi Minh.²⁷ The Chinese article must

24. “Parizhskie gazety o sobytiakh v V’etname,” *Pravda*, 26 December 1946, p. 4.

25. “The Ambassador in France (Caffery) to the Secretary of State,” Telegram, 26 December 1946, in U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1946, Vol. 7, p. 75 (hereinafter referred to as *FRUS*, with appropriate year and volume number).

26. Rieber, *Stalin and the French Communist Party*, pp. 327–328.

27. “Kto sabotiruet peregovory v V’etname?” *Pravda*, 3 January 1947, p. 4.

have been selected on similar grounds. It openly blamed the French government for the crisis.²⁸

Despite taking a critical tone, these Soviet articles suggested that a negotiated solution was still possible and indeed desirable. On 15 January, *Pravda* briefly mentioned that PCF deputy Marcel Cachin had expressed hope that the conflict in Indochina would be solved peacefully in the near future.²⁹ On 22 January, the newspaper published a summary of the speech in which Paul Ramadier outlined the program of the new French government. According to *Pravda*, Ramadier stressed the need to replace the outdated idea of a colonial empire with a new French Union. This change, he declared, would be an adaptation to the new trends in world politics, not a sign of weakness. The Indochinese side “responded to France’s cooperative efforts with aggression,” Ramadier claimed, but he pledged to resume negotiations “with those representatives of the Vietnamese people to whom one can talk in the language of reason.” France did not oppose either the union of the three Vietnamese regions (Cochinchina, Annam, and Tonkin) or the independence of Vietnam in the framework of the French Union.³⁰ Ramadier’s quoted words implied that he was searching for alternative negotiating partners, and the U.S. embassy in Paris concluded that “France will not negotiate with present Vietnam Government in anticipation that new more moderate leaders will arise.”³¹ *Pravda*’s direct quotation of these specific words indicates an awareness of this implication.

From March to August 1947, *Pravda* adopted a low-key attitude toward Vietnam. During this time, the newspaper did not publish any article specifically about Indochina, but it evidently continued to monitor Vietnamese events, because it made six brief secondary references to statements the PCF, the French Socialist Party, and the French Socialist youth organization issued about Vietnam (7 May, 7 June, 13 June, 28 June, 31 August, and 16 September). However, *Pravda* failed to describe the sharp debate that took place in the French National Assembly in March, pitting the PCF (which showed reluctance to support Premier Ramadier’s Vietnam policy) against the two other parties of the tripartite government coalition.³² In the same period *Pravda* also

28. “Kitaiskaya gazeta o polozheniiv Indo-Kitae,” *Pravda*, 23 January 1947, p. 3.

29. “Otkrytie sessii frantsuzskogo parlamenta,” *Pravda*, 15 January 1947, p. 4.

30. “Pol’ Ramad’e o programme budushchego pravitelstva,” *Pravda*, 22 January 1947, p. 4.

31. “The Ambassador in France (Caffery) to the Secretary of State,” Telegram, 22 January 1947, in *FRUS*, 1947, Vol. VII, p. 66.

32. On the National Assembly debate in March 1947, see Rice-Maximin, *Accommodation and Resistance*, pp. 48–49.

included seven passing references (6 March, 9 March, 28 March, 4 April, 26 July, 5 August, and 7 August) that mention the participation of Vietnamese delegates in the Asian Relations Conference (New Delhi), the 1st World Festival of Youth and Students (Prague), and a meeting of the Communist-oriented Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF), but with little, if any, specific information about Indochina.

At first sight, this conspicuous decline in *Pravda's* coverage of Vietnamese events seems to accord with both the "Gaiduk hypothesis" and the "Goscha hypothesis." Still, certain phenomena suggest that Soviet motivations may have been more complex than one might assume. From April to June 1947—that is, the same period when *Pravda* provided little, if any, information on Vietnam—Marius Magnien, a journalist for *L'Humanité*, visited Moscow, only to encounter sharp criticism from the whole of the *Pravda* team:

The Soviets were particularly outspoken about the equivocal attitude of the PCF on the question of Indochina. Comrade Viktorov reminded Magnien that on the latter issue, the PCF had not yet taken a firm position to counter-balance the acts of the reactionaries. In a reproachful tone he added, "We are concerned about whether the French people are against this war."³³

Actually, the PCF made far more intense efforts to condemn the war than *Pravda* did. As Tuong-Vi Tran points out: "In the first semester of 1947, *L'Humanité* went so far as to put the Indochina War on its front page at least once every three days on average, as proof of its unbending criticism of French colonialism."³⁴ Still, the Soviet Union found it necessary to urge the PCF to adopt an even more critical approach. Therefore, one should not attribute the decline of *Pravda* articles on Vietnam to a *complete* lack of Soviet interest in Indochina, though it may have reflected a *relative* decrease of Soviet interest. That is, Moscow was probably preoccupied with issues of greater strategic importance, such as the Truman Doctrine (12 March), the meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers (10 March–24 April), and the Marshall Plan (5 June), all of which were extensively covered by *Pravda*.

Another possible reason for *Pravda's* low-key attitude was that Soviet officials, determined as they were to prod the French Communists to condemn the war, did not want to lend credence to anti-Communist depictions of the party's antiwar standpoint as a mere reflection of Soviet policy. Commenting on PCF protests against French repression in Vietnam and Madagascar, a

33. Tran, "The Failure of the French Tripartite Experiment," pp. 268–269.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 272.

high-ranking official of the French Ministry of the Interior told U.S. Ambassador Jefferson Caffery in April 1947 that the French Communists were

in the difficult position in which they always find themselves when Moscow's orders force them to adopt an anti-nationalist line. . . .

On the one hand, Moscow, one of whose cardinal policies is the disintegration of existing colonial possessions not only so that Communists can fill the vacuum but also because it enfeebles the colonial power and makes it an easier prey to ultimate Communist domination, has ordered them to support at all cost colonial independence movements etc. which lead to unrest and weaken France's hold on her overseas empire . . .

On the other hand by obeying these orders Communist Party (French) tends to isolate itself from the other parties which are firmly behind the present government's policy and weakens its position with the average Frenchman, who, although generally apathetic, is nonetheless a flag waver insofar as the French Empire is concerned.³⁵

One other possibility is that *Pravda's* inactivity reflected a wait-and-see attitude amid the impasse that France's policy in Vietnam reached in March–August 1947. As R. E. M. Irving points out, “Between 19 December 1946 and 27 November 1947 there was a constant struggle between those in favour of negotiations with Ho Chi Minh and those opposed to this course.”³⁶ In March 1947, Ramadier closed the National Assembly debate over Indochina by emphatically declaring that he was unwilling to enter negotiations with Ho.³⁷ Accordingly, Emile Bollaert, the new French high commissioner in Indochina, made no determined effort to strike a deal with the Viet Minh, though the possibility of some kind of Franco-DRV talks was still not excluded a priori, and both sides sent out feelers, only to suffer failure.³⁸ At the same time, France could not easily find alternative negotiating partners. On 24 March, the U.S. embassy in Paris received the following information from the head of the Far Eastern Division of the French Foreign Ministry:

Re persistent rumors of possible return of ex-Emperor Bao Dai, Baudet again denied any negotiations with Bao were going on. He remarked that ex-Emperor is extremely cautious person and would certainly not consider returning to

35. “The Ambassador in France (Caffery) to the Secretary of State,” Telegram, 18 April 1947, in *FRUS*, 1947, Vol. III, pp. 700–701.

36. R. E. M. Irving, *The First Indochina War: French and American Policy, 1945–54* (London: Croom Helm, 1975), p. 37.

37. Hungarian Legation in France, Report, 22 March 1947, in Hungarian National Archives (MNL), XIX-J-1-j France [Top Secret Documents], 1945–1964, 5. doboz, 5/b, 1483/pol/1947.

38. Irving, *The First Indochina War*, pp. 41–48.

Indo-China until Viet-Minh had surrendered or been eliminated from political picture. While instructions to Bollaert did not entirely exclude possibility of return of Bao Dai, they make clear that any move for his return must originate with Annamite people.³⁹

As late as the summer of 1947, French efforts to circumvent the DRV were still fruitless. On 18 July, Caffery reported that Bollaert's "main objective was to find other elements or groups of elements with which France could safely deal. . . . Judging by info recently received in Paris from Ministry of Overseas France and Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bollaert's efforts have not been crowned with success."⁴⁰ Under such circumstances, a wait-and-see attitude was a reasonable course of action from Moscow's standpoint.

The *Pravda* articles that first mentioned Vietnam after this six-month hiatus deserve particular attention because the subjects they describe were apparently important enough for *Pravda* to break its silence. By examining which events caught *Pravda's* attention, one may gain insight into Soviet views about Indochina. The first post-hiatus article in *Pravda* (dated 26 September 1947) recounts a meeting of the WIDF Executive Committee (21–22 September) and pays special attention to the "Bao Dai solution." The longest paragraph covers a speech made by Vietnamese delegate Dao Van Chau. Having described the havoc caused by the war, she declared that Bollaert proposed to conclude a peace agreement with the DRV but that his conditions were unacceptable to the Vietnamese side. The DRV Foreign Ministry rejected Bollaert's proposal, whereupon two days later Bao Dai, the "former emperor of Vietnam," expressed his readiness to negotiate with the French authorities. Chau insisted that Bao Dai lacked the authority to make an agreement with France and did not represent the Vietnamese nation.⁴¹

Pravda published this article soon after Bollaert had taken the first step toward an agreement with Bao Dai.⁴² The promptness of the Soviet Union's reaction may be gauged from the fact that Charles S. Reed, the well-connected U.S. consul in Saigon, learned about Bao Dai's proposal on 22 September;

39. "The Ambassador in France (Caffery) to the Secretary of State," Telegram, 27 March 1947, in *FRUS*, 1947, Vol. VII, p. 82.

40. "The Ambassador in France (Caffery) to the Secretary of State," Telegram, 18 July 1947, in *FRUS*, 1947, Vol. VII, p. 119.

41. "Sessiya ispolkoma Mezhdunarodnoi demokraticheskoi federatsii zhenshin," *Pravda*, 26 September 1947, p. 3.

42. On Bollaert's initial moves to reach an agreement with Bao Dai, see Oscar Chapuis, *The Last Emperors of Vietnam: From Tu Duc to Bao Dai* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2000), pp. 152–153; and Lawrence, *Assuming the Burden*, pp. 187–189.

that is, more or less at the same time.⁴³ This suggests that Soviet officials continued to monitor Indochina even during the months when *Pravda* failed to cover it.

In subsequent months, *Pravda's* interest in Vietnam remained sporadic and low-key, but its occasional articles did contain valuable information. On 4 October, *Pravda* carried a short article about a letter the “government of Vietnam” (*pravitelstvo V'etnama*) sent to UN Secretary General Trygve Lie. In the letter, the DRV asked for UN mediation to reach a peace agreement with France.⁴⁴ In December 1947, *Pravda* mentioned the PCF's statements on the Indochina War as many as four times (10, 11, 26, and 27 December). The last article cited the comments Jacques Duclos, the second-highest-ranking PCF official, made on the “Bao Dai solution.” Speaking in the National Assembly, Duclos criticized the negotiations with Bao Dai on the grounds that these talks “did not take the sentiments of the Vietnamese people [*v'etnamskogo naroda*] into consideration.”⁴⁵ This time, *Pravda* did not react to the newest stage of Franco-Vietnamese negotiations as quickly as it had in September 1947. The so-called First Ha Long Bay Agreement had been signed by Bollaert and Bao Dai as early as 7 December.⁴⁶ Still, the article reveals that the Soviet Union kept monitoring the progress of Franco-Vietnamese talks. Furthermore, the phrases “government of Vietnam” and “Vietnamese people” imply that the CPSU and the PCF regarded the DRV, rather than Bao Dai, as the legitimate representative of the Vietnamese nation.

The question of whether Ho Chi Minh's government constituted the sole legitimate authority in Vietnam was one of the principal issues that separated the PCF from the other French political parties.⁴⁷ The PCF's views were succinctly summarized in an article published in *L'Humanité*, whose author dismissed any kind of “Bao Dai solution” or “Bao Long solution” on the grounds that the entire Vietnamese population, from Hanoi to Saigon, had confidence in President Ho Chi Minh.⁴⁸ The Hungarian legion in Paris reported that

43. “The Consul at Saigon (Reed) to the Secretary of State,” Telegram, 22 September 1947, in *FRUS*, 1947, Vol. VII, p. 139.

44. “Obrashchenie pravitelstvo V'etnama k generalnomu sekretariu OON,” *Pravda*, 4 October 1947, p. 4. On the DRV's letter, see George Sheldon, “The Unity of Vietnam,” *Far Eastern Survey*, Vol. 17, No. 11 (June 1948), p. 128.

45. “Vo frantsuzskom Natsionalnom sobranii,” *Pravda*, 27 December 1947, p. 4.

46. On the first Ha Long Bay Agreement, see Chapuis, *The Last Emperors of Vietnam*, pp. 153–154; and Irving, *The First Indochina War*, p. 57.

47. Tran, “The Failure of the French Tripartite Experiment,” p. 273.

48. René L'Hermitte, “De Hanoi à Saigon, tout un peuple fait confiance au président Ho Chi Minh,” *L'Humanité*, 29 March 1947, in Ruscio, *La question coloniale*, p. 265. Bao Long was the crown prince

during the National Assembly debate of March 1947 the PCF continued to urge the French government to start negotiations with the DRVt, whereas the other parties “regarded the current Vietnamese leaders as traitors and murderers, and wanted to restore French prestige first.”⁴⁹

The PCF’s commitment to the DRV caught the attention of the U.S. embassy in Paris too. On 31 July 1947, Caffery sent the following report to the Department of State:

Evidence of Communist confidence in political views and aims of Ho Chi Minh and his Government is furnished by attitude of French Communist Party. In conformity with fundamental Leninist doctrine, French Communist Party supports nationalist movements in all French colonies but it is only in Indochina that this support is given exclusively and openly to one man and one party. French Communists have never varied in their slogan that independence of Vietnam must be entrusted to Ho Chi Minh and to the Viet Minh and to no others. In North Africa they support nationalist aims of oppressed Arab people but they do not support Istiqlal or Bourguiba or Messali Haj (who also has Communist background).⁵⁰

Although the PCF’s public commitment to Ho Chi Minh did not necessarily indicate that the Soviet Union was fully satisfied with the policies of the DRV (Gaiduk and other authors have persuasively shown that this was not the case), the French Communists’ attitude did reveal that neither they nor their Soviet counterparts were willing to accept Bao Dai (or any other non-Communist Vietnamese leader) as a legitimate representative of the Vietnamese nation. As long as the French lacked an alternative negotiating partner, there was still a chance they would eventually reach an agreement with the DRV, not least because a military victory over the Viet Minh seemed unlikely. Even if the French failed to make a deal with Ho, their inability to find an alternative partner seriously limited their room for maneuver. Under such conditions, the Soviet Union was not compelled to take a firm stance and could instead adopt a wait-and-see attitude. However, the prospect of an implementable “Bao Dai solution” seems to have posed a political challenge that Moscow did not want to leave unanswered.

In 1948, the connection between the “Bao Dai factor” and *Pravda*’s renewed interest in Vietnam became even clearer. On 14 January, *Pravda*

whom Admiral d’Argenlieu attempted to enthrone in 1946. See Chapuis, *The Last Emperors of Vietnam*, p. 145.

49. Hungarian Legation in France, Report, 22 March 1947.

50. “The Ambassador in France (Caffery) to the Secretary of State,” Telegram, 31 July 1947, in *FRUS*, 1947, Vol. VII, p. 128.

carried a brief article quoting the statements that DRV special envoy Pham Ngoc Thach had made in Burma. Having described the destruction caused by the war, Thach (whom the article erroneously called “Deputy Premier of the Republic of Vietnam”) declared that the French were trying to establish a “puppet regime” (*marionetchnyi rezhim*) headed by “former emperor Bao Dai” but that “Vietnam will never give its consent to such a program.”⁵¹ Based on an Associated Press dispatch, the article refrains from openly expressing *Pravda*’s standpoint. Nevertheless, the use of “Deputy Premier of the Republic of Vietnam” (along with “former emperor” and “puppet regime”) implies that the DRV, rather than Bao Dai, is the legitimate authority in Vietnam.

In January 1948, Bollaert held new talks with Bao Dai in Geneva. On 29 January, he declared that France would negotiate only with Bao Dai, thus officially excluding the possibility of a Franco-DRV agreement.⁵² The next day, the French police raided the office of the informal DRV delegation in Paris and arrested envoy Tran Ngoc Danh. This crackdown sparked strong dissatisfaction in Vietnamese political circles, and even Bao Dai made efforts to persuade President Vincent Auriol, Premier Robert Schuman, and Foreign Minister Georges Bidault to release Danh. The PCF was the only French political party that openly criticized the raid. From the perspective of the “Bao Dai solution,” the arguments that PCF deputy Jean Guillon raised in the National Assembly were of particular significance. The Hungarian legation in Paris reported that Guillon condemned Danh’s arrest not only on human rights grounds but also because the PCF considered Vietnam “a constitutional republic, whose president, Ho Chi Minh, was the legitimate head of state.”⁵³ A few days later a *Pravda* article also mentioned the PCF’s protest against Danh’s arrest, devoting a whole paragraph to the subject.⁵⁴

Having carried a short article about military events in Vietnam on 17 February 1948, *Pravda* published an article on 18 April titled “Ho Chi Minh on the Situation in Indochina,” whose length (seven paragraphs) considerably surpassed any of the Vietnam-related articles published since 3 January 1947. Referring to Ho Chi Minh as “President of Vietnam,” the article extensively quoted his statements about the war. Ho stressed that only a few

51. “Zayavlenie zamestitelya premiera V’etnama,” *Pravda*, 14 January 1948, p. 4.

52. Lawrence, *Assuming the Burden*, p. 189.

53. Hungarian Legation in France, Report, 14 February 1948, in MNL, XIX-J-1-k France [Administrative Documents], 1945–1964, 11. doboz, 11/f, 701/pol/1948. On PCF protests against the arrest of Danh, see also Rice–Maximin, *Accommodation and Resistance*, p. 66. On the activities of the DRV delegation in 1946–1949, see Igor N. Selivanov, *Stalin, Kho Shi Min i “delo” Chan Ngok Dana: Fakty, gipotezy, arkhivnye dokumenty* (Kursk: Kurskii Gosudarstvennii Universitet, 2014), pp. 43–52.

54. “Resheniya politbiuro Frantsuzskoi kommunisticheskoi partii,” *Pravda*, 7 February 1948, p. 4.

big cities were under French control and that the other areas were controlled by the “Vietnamese government” (*v’etnamskim pravitel’stvom*). He dismissed Bollaert’s optimistic claims as mere propaganda and pointed out that “no one had authorized [Bao Dai] to enter any sort of negotiations with the French authorities without preliminary consultations with the Vietnamese government.” Ho stressed that “Prince [Nguyen Phuc] Vinh Thuy” (the original name of Bao Dai) had never formally resigned from his position as “adviser of the republican government of Vietnam” and thus lacked the authority to sign agreements in his own name. Any agreement that ensured French control over the Vietnamese armed forces and Vietnamese foreign policy was, in effect, a restoration of the former colonial system, Ho Chi Minh concluded.⁵⁵

Whereas earlier *Pravda* articles on Vietnam had relied on French, British, and U.S. newspapers and news agencies (such as *L’Humanité*, *Franc-Tireur*, *L’Aube*, Reuters, and the Associated Press), the article of 18 April cited the Vietnam News Agency (VNA), the official news provider of the DRV, as its source. This shift seems to have been deliberate. In subsequent months (28 April, 26 June, and 10 July), *Pravda* repeatedly published articles based on VNA statements. On 12 August, the newspaper cited the Voice of Vietnam—the national radio broadcaster of the DRV—for the first time.⁵⁶ *Pravda*’s increasing readiness willingness to rely on DRV media suggests a process of informal rapprochement, even if Soviet leaders were still reluctant to establish formal contacts with Ho Chi Minh’s government.

On 5 June 1948, Bollaert signed the so-called Second Ha Long Bay Agreement with Bao Dai and General Nguyen Van Xuan (hitherto the president of the French-controlled Republic of Cochinchina). The Republic of Cochinchina was merged with the two other main regions of Vietnam (Tonkin and Annam) to set up the Provisional Central Government of Vietnam.⁵⁷ The DRV quickly condemned the new agreement, and *Pravda* followed suit. On 26 June, the Soviet newspaper carried an article discussing “the question of the puppet government” (*po voprosu o marionetchnom pravitel’stve*) and quoted Ho Chi Minh, who emphasized that the “government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam” (*pravitel’stvo demokraticheskoi respubliki Vietnam*) was entitled to bring such “traitors” (*predatelei*) to trial, in accordance with the laws of the DRV.⁵⁸

55. “Kho Shi-min o polozhenii v Indo-Kitae,” *Pravda*, 18 April 1948, p. 4.

56. “Voennye deistviya v Indo-Kitae,” *Pravda*, 12 August 1948, p. 4.

57. Rice-Maximin, *Accommodation and Resistance*, pp. 65–66.

58. “Zayavlenie Kho Shi-mina,” *Pravda*, 26 June 1948, p. 3.

On 6 July *Pravda* published a long analytical article about the Provisional Central Government. The title, “The People of Vietnam Wage a Struggle against Xuan’s Puppet Government,” is a clear expression of preference. Based on a Reuters dispatch but written in a sharply critical tone, it examines the limited sovereignty of the Xuan regime in detail. Neither this article nor a later one on the DRV’s struggle against the “puppet regime” (19 August) mentions Bao Dai by name. Instead, both articles juxtapose Ho Chi Minh solely with Xuan.⁵⁹ This omission may have been intentional, insofar as Bao Dai, having signed the Second Ha Long Bay Agreement in June, was denouncing it a month later.⁶⁰ On 4 July, the Hungarian legation in Paris concluded that Bao Dai’s immediate return to Europe after the conclusion of the agreement indicated that he did not attribute real significance to the document.⁶¹

Similar to *Pravda*’s first references to VNA and the Voice of Vietnam, an article dated 19 August indicates a shift in Soviet attitudes toward Vietnam. For the first time, *Pravda* celebrated the anniversary of the DRV’s establishment—a symbolic gesture commonly practiced among the members of the Soviet bloc. From 1948 on, *Pravda* regularly celebrated the founding anniversaries of the DRV: on 22 August 1949, on 3 September 1950, on 2 September 1951, and so on. The celebratory articles published before the establishment of Soviet-Vietnamese relations were synchronized with the date of the August revolution (19 August 1945), rather than the formal proclamation of the DRV (2 September 1945). Still, as early as 1948 *Pravda* used the following expression: “the creation of the Republic of Vietnam” (*sozdanie respubliky V’etnam*).⁶²

French and U.S. diplomats also noticed a shift in Soviet attitudes toward Vietnam in the first half of 1948; that is, in the period when France started to implement the “Bao Dai solution.” As Lawrence points out, “The French embassy in Moscow reported heightened Soviet criticism of French colonialism during 1948.”⁶³ In a policy statement dated 27 September 1948, the U.S. Department of State observed that

An increasing Soviet interest in Indochina, as demonstrated by a step-up in radio broadcasts, was evidenced in the first half of 1948. The line taken by these

59. “Narod V’etnama boretsya protiv marionetchnogo pravitel’stva Ksiuana,” *Pravda*, 6 July 1948, p. 4; and “3-ia godovshchina sozdaniya respubliky V’etnam,” *Pravda*, 19 August 1948, p. 4.

60. Lawrence, *Assuming the Burden*, p. 193.

61. Hungarian Legation in France, Report, 4 July 1948, in MNL, XIX-J-1-k France, 1945–1964, 11. doboz, 11/f, 2363/pol/1948.

62. “3-ia godovshchina sozdaniya respubliky V’etnam,” p. 4.

63. Lawrence, *Assuming the Burden*, p. 198.

broadcasts has been constantly to discredit the United States by attempting to identify it with “imperialistic France.”⁶⁴

In the spring of 1948, the first detailed account of the Indochina War published by the multilingual Soviet magazine *New Times* paid considerable attention to the “frenzied efforts” that William C. Bullitt, a special emissary of President Harry S. Truman, was making “to restore Bao Dai as Emperor of Vietnam.”⁶⁵

In the summer of 1948, *Pravda* published three articles on military events in Vietnam (10 July, 12 August, and 26 August). All three articles cited VNA and the Voice of Vietnam as sources, repeating the latter’s figures about French casualties. This may be regarded as a sign of growing Soviet interest in the military dimension of the Vietnamese conflict. Earlier, from September 1947 to June 1948 the newspaper had carried only a single article about military operations. The intensity of the conflict did undergo a marked increase in July–August 1948.⁶⁶ For instance, on 4 August, Viet Minh forces attacked a French convoy in Cochinchina, the traditional bailiwick of the Xuan regime—an area the French hitherto regarded as relatively safe. The French troops were no longer able to hold the initiative but preferred to stay in their fortified positions. This dramatic intensification of military operations seems to have at least partly resulted from the Second Ha Long Bay Agreement. As the Hungarian legation in Paris noted,

The Xuan-Bollaert “agreement” has not cooled [popular] sentiments; on the contrary, it has induced the Vietnamese nationalists to display even stronger resistance. Since the [4 August] attack that I had mentioned in my aforesaid report, several new attacks of a smaller or larger scale were launched against French convoys, almost on a daily basis.⁶⁷

In September 1948, *Pravda* carried three articles in quick succession that contained brief references to the critical comments the PCF had made on the Franco-Vietnamese War (11 September, 14 September, and 18 September). In the following two months, the newspaper published three articles specifically focused on DRV policies. The first mentions a congress the Democratic Party of Vietnam, an organization affiliated with the DRV regime, held from 5 to 11

64. “Department of State Policy Statement on Indochina, September 27, 1948,” in *FRUS*, 1948, Vol. VI, p. 48.

65. McLane, *Soviet Strategies in Southeast Asia*, pp. 433–434.

66. On DRV military policies in 1948, see Ang, “Vietnam in 1948,” pp. 61–84.

67. Hungarian Legation in France, Report, 3 September 1948, in MNL, XIX-J-1-k France, 1945–1964, 11. doboz, 11/f, 3085/pol/1948.

September, and the second cites a telegram Ho Chi Minh sent to the foreign press to dispel rumors about his whereabouts.⁶⁸ The third article covers a new letter that Tran Ngoc Danh (whom *Pravda* describes as the “chairman of the delegation of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam in Paris”) sent to UN Secretary General Trygve Lie requesting admission to the UN. This letter, dated 22 November 1948, was of greater significance than the message sent in the fall of 1947, which had not directly raised the issue. *Pravda*’s brief summary enumerates the DRV’s arguments about its sovereignty, pointing out that the republic was proclaimed on 2 September 1945 and that the DRV signed an agreement with the French government on 6 March 1946.⁶⁹ The DRV’s initiative remained fruitless, however. The sole reaction it elicited was a French statement reiterating that Paris recognized only one Vietnamese government; that is, the government of Nguyen Van Xuan.⁷⁰ Still, Soviet officials evidently attributed importance to the letter. In September 1949, a top-secret Foreign Ministry report addressed to Stalin also mentioned it.⁷¹

Throughout 1948, *Pravda* frequently referred to the participation of Vietnamese delegates in various Communist-sponsored international events: a conference about the Greek Civil War in Paris (13 April), a WIDF executive committee session in Rome (19 May), the International Conference of Working Youth in Warsaw (9 August), the World Congress of Intellectuals in Wrocław (27 August, 30 August, and 6 September), and the 2nd WIDF Congress in Budapest (1–2 December, 7–8 December). *Izvestiya* (the daily newspaper of the Soviet government) also mentioned the attendance of Vietnamese delegates Pham Ngoc Trong and Tai Thi Lien at the WIDF congress.⁷² By participating in these European meetings, the Vietnamese were able to establish contacts with at least the front organizations of the Communist universe and obtain rhetorical, though not material, support. For instance, the WIDF Executive Committee issued a declaration of solidarity with Vietnam.⁷³ On 1 November, the journal of the Cominform (*For a Lasting Peace, for a People’s Democracy*) also weighed in with an article contributed by a Vietnamese

68. “S’ezd natsionalno-demokraticeskoi partii V’etnama,” *Pravda*, 24 September 1948, p. 3; and “Telegramma Kho Shi Mina inostrannoi gazete,” *Pravda*, 28 October 1948, p. 3.

69. “Obrashchenie respubliki V’etnam k OON,” *Pravda*, 26 November 1948, p. 4.

70. Selivanov, *Stalin, Kho Shi Min i “delo” Chan Ngok Dana*, pp. 50–51.

71. Konoreva, *Sovetskii Soiuz i Indokitai*, p. 52.

72. “Otkrytie II Mezhdunarodnogo zhenskogo kongressa,” *Izvestiya*, 2 December 1948, p. 4; and “Na 2-m Mezhdunarodnom zhenskom kongresse,” *Izvestiya*, 7 December 1948, p. 4.

73. “Na sessii ispolkoma Mezhdunarodnoi demokraticeskoi federatsii zhenshchin,” *Pravda*, 19 May 1948, p. 3.

author, a certain Van Bo. Titled “Vietnamese People Defend Their Liberty and Independence,” the article emphasized that “the government of the resistance movement, headed by Ho Chi Minh, is a government of broad national unity.”⁷⁴ Because the Cominform was the official forum of the international Communist movement, the publication of this article must have required approval from relatively high-ranking Soviet officials.

Points of Contention: ECAFE and the Élysée Accords

In August 1948, the Soviet government made a public gesture toward the DRV that was no longer confined to the sphere of propaganda. The Soviet representative to the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) submitted a draft resolution on behalf of the DRV and Indonesia (E/907). The resolution asked the council to recommend that the two states be accorded associate membership in the Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East (ECAFE), a UN development agency. Moscow’s initiative ended in spectacular failure, however. At the meeting held on 16 August, ECOSOC rejected the Soviet draft resolution on Vietnam and Indonesia by a vote of 11 to 3 and 9 to 4 respectively. Only the Communist delegates (the Belorussian SSR and Poland) supported the USSR’s effort on behalf of the DRV.⁷⁵

Predictable as it was, the fiasco did not discourage either the DRV or the USSR. From 29 November to 11 December, ECAFE held its fourth session. Presumably in coordination with the letter they had sent to Trygve Lie a few days before, the DRV leaders submitted a request for associate membership. As early as 26 November, Western newspapers reported that the Soviet delegation would “press for membership for the Vietnamese Republic.”⁷⁶ Soviet delegates did adopt such a position, but to no avail. They found themselves utterly isolated, which may explain why *Pravda*’s article on the ECAFE session did not mention their futile efforts on behalf of Vietnam and Indonesia.⁷⁷ On 30 November, French delegate Henri C. Maux questioned the authenticity of the DRV documents submitted to ECAFE, and the chair of the session ruled that “no application on behalf of Vietnam was before the commission.” Soviet

74. King C. Chen, *Vietnam and China, 1938–1954* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969), pp. 173–174.

75. *Yearbook of the United Nations, 1947–48* (New York: United Nations Department of Public Information, 1949), p. 536.

76. “Soviet Sponsors Vietnam,” *The Advertiser*, 26 November 1948, p. 1.

77. “V Dalnevostochnoi komissii,” *Pravda*, 11 December 1948, p. 4.

representative N. M. Lifanov asked that the matter be deferred on the grounds that Kirill V. Novikov, the chief Soviet delegate, had not yet arrived.⁷⁸ The next day, Novikov objected to the chairman's decision and criticized the ECAFE Secretariat for not circulating the DRV's telegram. The executive secretary explained that it was the chairman's prerogative to decide which documents should be circulated, whereupon Novikov remarked: "I do not agree that such a telegram should be considered a scrap of paper."⁷⁹ He insisted that the cable was an "official document from a responsible ministry."⁸⁰ On 6 December, the chairman announced that the DRV representative in Thailand had sent a new cable seeking admission, but he again refused to consider it on the grounds that it was not a proper application.⁸¹

The telegram in which Nguyen Duc Quy, the DRV delegate in Bangkok, expressed his government's desire to join ECAFE was as laconic as possible: "Viet Nam Government asks for admission to ECAFE stop demand signed Foreign Minister."⁸² In all probability, however, the real obstacle was a political one. A U.S.-proposed amendment adopted by ECAFE stipulated that if a non-autonomous region wanted to apply for associate membership (full membership being reserved for independent countries), its request could be formulated only by the metropolitan power controlling the territory in question. In July 1947 and again in October 1947, the USSR proposed to permit colonial areas to participate in ECAFE without the intervention of their metropolitan countries, but this proposal was voted down on both occasions. At the second ECAFE session (24 November–6 December 1947), the French delegation requested that the question of Vietnamese membership be left temporarily unresolved, as the political status of Vietnam had yet to be determined.⁸³ A *Pravda* article pointed out that Malaya and Ceylon had sent their own delegates to

78. "Ecafe Again Defers Indonesia Issue," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 1 December 1948, p. 4.

79. "Conflict in Ecafe on Indonesia," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 2 December 1948, p. 1. See also Lawrence, *Assuming the Burden*, p. 199.

80. "Russia Overwhelmingly Defeated in Vote at Lapstone," *Daily Advertiser*, 2 December 1948, p. 1.

81. "ECAFE Conference," *The Age*, 7 December 1948, p. 4.

82. *Interim Report on the Fourth Session of the Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East: Covering the period 1 July 1948 to 5 April 1949 (Fourth Session and the Committee of the Whole)* (New York: UN Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East, 1949), pp. 17–18.

83. As early as the second ECAFE session, the Soviet delegate illustrated its standpoint by criticizing French colonial rule in Vietnam. Nguyen Thi Dieu, *The Mekong River and the Struggle for Indochina: Water, War, and Peace* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 1999), p. 50; Victor Purcell, "The Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East," *International Affairs*, Vol. 24, No. 2 (April 1948), pp. 183–187; and Alvin Rubinstein, "Soviet Policy in ECAFE: A Case Study of Soviet Behavior in International Economic Organization," *International Organization*, Vol. 12, No. 4 (Autumn 1958), p. 460.

the third ECAFE session but that Vietnam was still represented by France.⁸⁴ Under such circumstances, Moscow's support of the DRV's request for associate membership questioned the legitimacy of French control over Vietnam (and, by implication, the legitimacy of the "Bao Dai solution"), even if it still recognized a link between the DRV and the metropolitan power. At the fourth ECAFE session, the Soviet delegation provided less support to the DRV's request than to Indonesia's analogous application, but the divergence between its standpoint and Mau's position was unmistakable. The question of ECAFE membership pitted the Soviet government against the Bao Dai regime as early as October 1949, more than three months before the establishment of Soviet-DRV diplomatic relations.

From the perspective of the Soviet bloc, the importance of this question was reinforced by growing U.S. interest in the "Bao Dai solution." In February 1949, the Hungarian legation in Paris reported that U.S. Ambassador Caffery repeatedly urged French Premier Henri Queuille to reach an agreement with Bao Dai and to proclaim the independence of Vietnam within the French Union.⁸⁵ Although the Hungarian diplomats seem to have overestimated the extent of U.S. interference, the very fact that they did so induced them (and presumably their Soviet colleagues) to pay particular attention to this subject. If Bao Dai enjoyed the support of the United States, the competition between him and the DRV was likely to get intertwined with the global rivalry between the two superpowers. On 22 March, the Hungarian legation pointedly quoted a recent radio broadcast of Ho Chi Minh in which the Vietnamese leader declared that "the document signed by the President of the French Republic and the traitor [Bao Dai] means that now we would belong not only to the French sphere of interest but also to the American one."⁸⁶

The "American factor" may have influenced both the USSR's initial passivity toward the Franco-Vietnamese War and its later criticism of the "Bao Dai solution." From 1947 to 1948, the U.S. government was unwilling to provide political or material support to France's military effort, and it formally excluded Indochina from the Marshall Plan. The French authorities were so wary of Washington's intentions that they went to great lengths to monitor and restrict U.S. activities in Vietnam. The Viet Minh, in turn, refrained from

84. "Na zasedanii Ekonomicheskoi komissii OON dlya Azii i Dalnego Vostoka," *Pravda*, 15 June 1948, p. 3.

85. Hungarian Legation to France, Report, 14 February 1949, in MNL, XIX-J-1-k France, 1945–1964, 7. doboz, 5/b, 927/1949.

86. Hungarian Legation to France, Report, 22 March 1949, in MNL, XIX-J-1-k France, 1945–1964, 7. doboz, 5/b, 2372/1949.

conducting anti-American propaganda (a phenomenon that did not escape Moscow's attention) and even actively tried to gain U.S. goodwill.⁸⁷ Under these circumstances, the Soviet government, which regarded the United States as its main enemy, probably felt little need to get involved in Indochina so long as it faced no U.S. competition there. However, the "Bao Dai solution" raised the specter of U.S. involvement to the extent that it "would enable the French government to claim it was moving toward colonial devolution and would . . . generate support for French policy in the United States."⁸⁸ The Soviet decision to establish consular relations with Indonesia (22 May 1948) was at least partly motivated by the fact that the United States, Britain, and France had already granted de facto recognition to the Republic of Indonesia.⁸⁹

Such considerations probably played a role in the new phase of *Pravda's* comments on Vietnam in the spring of 1949. On 8 March 1949, President Auriol concluded the so-called Élysée Accords with Bao Dai, creating a legal basis for the subsequent establishment of the Associated State of Vietnam. Since the new agreements were signed by the French head of state rather than the high commissioner in Indochina, they had a stronger chance of actual implementation than the two Ha Long Bay agreements (which, much to the chagrin of Bollaert, were never ratified by the French National Assembly). As the Hungarian diplomats pointed out, the Élysée Accords "made such concessions to the former emperor that [the French government] was never willing to make to Ho Chi Minh."⁹⁰ Presumably this is why *Pravda's* response to the accords was both quicker and more forceful than its reaction to the Ha Long Bay agreements. As early as 14 March, the newspaper published a long analytical article about the accords, an article that differed from *Pravda's* earlier coverages in two important respects. First, it was of unusual length: eleven paragraphs, arranged into two columns. Second, it bore the signature of a Soviet author, Viktor V. Maevskii (who would remain a prominent Soviet commentator on Asian affairs well into the 1960s). From the perspective of post-1947 Soviet-DRV relations, it is of particular significance that the "Bao Dai factor" was the issue that persuaded *Pravda's* editors to publish their first signed article on Vietnam.

After criticizing U.S. support of France's Vietnam policy, Maevskii contrasted Ho Chi Minh's government—which he described as the "legal

87. Goscha, "Courting Diplomatic Disaster?" pp. 83–84; and Konoreva and Selivanov, "Sovetskaya ideologicheskaya podderzhka," p. 125.

88. Lawrence, *Assuming the Burden*, pp. 183–188.

89. Efimova, "Towards the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations," pp. 188–191.

90. Hungarian Legation to France, Report, 22 March 1949.

democratic government of the republic” (*zakonnogo demokraticeskogo pravitelstva respubliki*)—with the “puppet regime” headed by Bao Dai and Nguyen Van Xuan. To emphasize the illegitimacy of this “puppet regime,” Maevskii used quotation marks whenever he mentioned the “government” of Bao Dai (*marionetochnoe “pravitelstvo V’etnama”*). Maevskii backed up his claims with detailed references to the limited sovereignty of the Bao Dai regime, describing the wide-ranging control France continued to exercise over the foreign and defense policies of the supposedly independent new state. Agreements with Bao Dai would never bring peace to Indochina, Maevskii concluded. The only way to achieve this aim was to conduct negotiations with Ho Chi Minh’s government, the “sole legal government of Vietnam” (*edinstvennym zakonnym pravitelstvom V’etnama*).⁹¹

On 10 May (i.e., soon after Bao Dai’s return to Vietnam), a short *Pravda* article announced that the “military court” (*voennyi sud*) of the DRV had issued an order to arrest Bao Dai as a “puppet of French imperialism.” The article also noted that the tribunal’s earlier order “to arrest the leaders of General Xuan’s Vietnamese puppet government remained valid.”⁹² That is, DRV authorities had declared Bao Dai a public enemy only after he signed the Élysée Accords, but in the case of Nguyen Van Xuan they had taken this step much earlier. This contrast suggests that, from July to August 1948, *Pravda*’s exclusive focus on Xuan, and its omission of Bao Dai’s name, was not accidental. The DRV’s threats against Bao Dai caught the attention of Hungarian diplomats, too. On 24 May, the legation reported that a recent Vietnamese broadcast had warned that if the French government made a full commitment to the “Bao Dai solution,” the Viet Minh would “exterminate” Bao Dai and his followers, making it impossible to reach agreement with France. If, however, Paris entered negotiations with the DRV and recognized it as an independent state, the North Vietnamese would be ready for far-reaching cooperation with the French.⁹³

From 18 May to 5 September, *Pravda* carried ten short articles on military events in Vietnam. As in the period of July–August 1948, this growing interest in the military dimension of the Vietnamese problem seems to have been inspired by the further intensification of the war. As early as 22 March, the Hungarian legation in Paris reported: “In response to the news of Bao Dai’s return, the guerrilla struggle in Indochina flared up with full force.”⁹⁴ A

91. V. Maevskii, “Ocherednoi fars frantsuzskikh kolonizatorov,” *Pravda*, 14 March 1949, p. 6.

92. “Voennyi sud respubliki V’etnam vydal order na arrest Bao Daya,” *Pravda*, 10 May 1949, p. 3.

93. Hungarian Legation to France, Report, 24 May 1949, in MNL, XIX-J-1-k France, 1945–1964, 7. doboz, 5/b, 5404/1949.

94. Hungarian Legation to France, Report, 22 March 1949.

Hungarian report dated 24 May noted that the French government tried to counter this trend by creating Vietnamese troops loyal to Bao Dai and thus transforming the nature of the war from a Franco–Viet Minh conflict into a Vietnamese civil war.⁹⁵ A *Pravda* article also described the strategic role that French chief of staff Georges Revers intended to assign to the would-be armed forces of the Bao Dai regime. “The French army will operate mainly along the Sino-Tonkin border,” *Pravda* said, “meanwhile, in Southern Vietnam the army of Nguyen [Van] Xuan’s puppet government will carry out operations.”⁹⁶ This summary was not wholly accurate insofar as Revers wanted to concentrate on the defense of the Tonkin Delta rather than the frontier posts in northern Tonkin. Still, he did hope that “a reserve Baodaist army would liberate French units for more offensive operations.”⁹⁷

Signs of a changing Soviet attitude toward Vietnam started to appear not only in the field of propaganda but also in the academic sphere. In June 1949, the Pacific Institute and the Institute of Economics (both connected with the Soviet Academy of Sciences) held a joint meeting devoted to the crisis of colonialism and the rise of national liberation movements since 1945. Later in the summer, the Pacific Institute published a book based on the reports presented at the meeting. The chapter on Vietnam was written by V. Ya. Vasileva, who had been in close contact with Ho Chi Minh during the latter’s stay in the USSR in the 1930s. Vasileva went to great lengths in praising Vietnam’s national liberation struggle in general and Ho Chi Minh’s leadership in particular.⁹⁸

On 14 June 1949, after the unification of Cochinchina with the rest of Vietnam, a ceremony was held in Saigon to install Bao Dai as head of state. On 2 July, Bao Dai formally oversaw the creation of the Associated State of Vietnam. Following Xuan’s resignation, Bao Dai temporarily assumed the premiership as well. “Bao Dai behaved as though he had never abdicated, and as if the Republic had never been proclaimed, much less ever recognized by France,” Ellen J. Hammer noted a year later. “He announced his intention of retaining provisionally the title of emperor ‘in order to have a legal international position.’”⁹⁹ The official establishment of the Bao Dai regime probably played a decisive role in Tran Ngoc Danh’s decision to dissolve the

95. Hungarian Legation to France, Report, 24 May 1949.

96. “Poezdka nachalnika genshtaba frantsuzskoi armii v Indo-Kitai,” *Pravda*, 20 May 1949, p. 4.

97. Rice-Maximin, *Accommodation and Resistance*, p. 85.

98. Konoreva and Selivanov, “Sovetskaya ideologicheskaya podderzhka,” p. 126.

99. Ellen J. Hammer, “The Bao Dai Experiment,” *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 23, No. 1 (March 1950), p. 57.

DRV delegation in Paris (7 August) and to seek refuge in Czechoslovakia. *Pravda* must have attributed great importance to the act of dissolution. A mere two days later it published an article that extensively quoted Danh's declaration. Addressing Danh as the "chairman of the Permanent Delegation of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam in France," the article cited him as stating: "Vietnam is true to its friendship with France, but, conscious as it is of its right to national sovereignty, it regards the support provided to the quislings of the French colonialists as an unfriendly act against itself."¹⁰⁰

Apparently unaware that Danh was not acting "on the orders of his government" (as he claimed) but had made a unilateral decision when he dissolved the delegation, the editors of both *Pravda* and *Izvestiya* apparently assumed that the creation of the State of Vietnam finally broke the informal link that hitherto existed between France and the DRV.¹⁰¹ On 17 August, *Izvestiya* published a signed article tracing French efforts to find allies "in the ranks of Indochinese quislings and bourgeois nationalists" back to mid-1947. After a few brief comments on military developments, the author focused on the Élysée Accords, always putting the words "government" and "independent state" in quotation marks when referring to the Bao Dai regime.¹⁰²

On 7 September, *Pravda* published a long analytical article by Viktor Maevskii occupying nearly half a page. This piece, like his earlier *Pravda* article, described the Élysée Accords, but this time he placed them into a broader context, giving greater emphasis to the U.S. role in the "Bao Dai solution" than he had in March. He claimed that, as early as 1947, Bullitt had "promised active assistance to the French government in its struggle against the Vietnamese people." Maevskii also contrasted Bao Dai's "puppet government" with the state structure created by the DRV, such as the constitution adopted by the National Assembly in the fall of 1946. Unlike the *Izvestiya* article, Maevskii did not mention the Vietnamese Communist movement. Instead, he argued that the DRV was governed by the "League of Vietnam" (i.e., the Viet Minh), which he described as a coalition of democratic parties.¹⁰³

By that time, the "Bao Dai solution" was starting to directly impact on formal Soviet-French relations too. On 6 September, Yves Chataigneau, the

100. "Prekrashchenie deiatelnosti postoiannoii delegatsii V'etnama vo Frantsii," *Pravda*, 9 August 1949, p. 4.

101. Goscha, "Courting Diplomatic Disaster?" p. 73.

102. F. Shahmagonov, "What Is Happening in Vietnam?" *Izvestiya*, 17 August 1949, p. 3; accessed through *The Current Digest of the Soviet Press* (East View Press).

103. V. Maevskii, "Narod V'etnama v bor'be za svobodu i nezavisimost," *Pravda*, 7 September 1949, p. 3.

French ambassador in Moscow, officially informed the USSR about the Élysée Accords, handing over a letter addressed to Nikolai Shvernik, the titular head of state in the Soviet Union. As Konoreva points out, this French initiative was effectively aimed at persuading the Kremlin to recognize the Bao Dai regime, but it patently failed to achieve its objective. On 25 September, First Deputy Foreign Minister Andrei A. Gromyko sent a report to Stalin emphasizing that Bao Dai lacked domestic support and was a mere “puppet of the French government” (*iavliaetsia marionetkoi frantsuzskogo pravitelstva*). “Under such conditions, of course, the USSR cannot recognize the existence of this ‘government,’” Gromyko contended. He averred that the Soviet government, having hitherto refrained from officially expressing its standpoint on the Indochinese question, should simply leave the French letter unanswered, but he also warned that France might later seek to achieve the admission of the Bao Dai regime to the UN. Stalin agreed with Gromyko’s assessment, and on 21 October the Soviet Politburo decided to leave Chataigneau’s letter unanswered.¹⁰⁴

Gromyko’s top secret report used the same terminology that *Pravda* had used earlier in 1949 to define the nature of the Bao Dai regime. This similarity implies that *Pravda*’s comments on Vietnam, and particularly Maevskii’s signed articles, were at least partly in accordance with the confidential views of high-ranking Soviet officials. On 21 October, the Soviet Union opted for further procrastination but soon found itself directly at loggerheads with France over the “Bao Dai solution.” Gromyko’s assessment was prescient insofar as the French government did raise the issue of the Bao Dai regime in the UN, although the venue Paris selected for this purpose was not the Security Council or the General Assembly but ECAFE (a UN agency in which the Soviet Union lacked veto power and France could count on the support of nearly every other member-state).

At the fifth session of ECAFE (20–29 October 1949), France—backed by the United States, Britain, and Australia—decided to sponsor the application of the State of Vietnam for associate membership, whereas the USSR threw its weight behind the DRV. The competition between the two Vietnamese regimes forced the Soviet government into a public confrontation with France and the other Western powers over the question of whether Ho Chi Minh or Bao Dai represented the legitimate authority in Vietnam.¹⁰⁵ At the session,

104. Konoreva, *Sovetskii Soiuz i Indokitai*, pp. 51–52.

105. “Economic and Social Council,” *International Organization*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (February 1950), p. 117.

a sharp debate took place between French delegate Maux and Soviet delegate Sergei Nemchina (who, as a Soviet envoy to Thailand, had met various DRV cadres in 1948). Maux asserted that the State of Vietnam was “virtually an independent and sovereign state,” whereas “Ho Chi Minh’s so-called Democratic Republic was nothing more than an armed party. . . . Although the party maintained information and propaganda organizations in certain countries, no diplomatic status had been granted these organizations by any country.”¹⁰⁶

To counter Maux’s arguments, Nemchina launched a two-pronged attack. On the one hand, he emphasized that the DRV constituted the “only legal government of Vietnam.” As evidence of the DRV’s eligibility for statehood, he mentioned that “a General Assembly possessing the highest legal power in the country was elected in 1946 by secret ballot and universal suffrage,” and that Ho Chi Minh’s government controlled 90 percent of Vietnam’s territory.¹⁰⁷ On the other hand, he questioned the legitimacy of the Bao Dai regime on the following grounds:

Our delegation submits that the Commission cannot accept the application made by the puppet state of Bao Dai—which has no territory and no support of the people. It functions on a small part of the whole territory and only that occupied by French troops. . . . [The Élysée Accord] is actually a slave-like agreement, covered by the statute of the French Union, which puts Vietnam back to its former position as a French colony.¹⁰⁸

In the end, Nemchina found himself hopelessly outvoted. Of the thirteen full members of the commission, eight voted in favor of the French resolution, four abstained, and only the Soviet delegation voted against. The DRV’s application was backed solely by the USSR and India. India’s sympathy was of little comfort to Nemchina, however, because the Indian delegation supported both applications on the grounds that both the DRV and the Bao Dai regime controlled “a fairly large sector of the area.” On 21 October 1949, the State of Vietnam was admitted to associate membership.¹⁰⁹

Despite the obvious failure of this Soviet effort on behalf the DRV (which may explain why *Pravda* failed to make any reference to the stormy ECAFE session), Nemchina’s words rang prophetic: “The fact that the Democratic

106. “Bao Dai Victory at ECAFE; Sponsors Clash at Election of New Member,” *The Straits Times*, 22 October 1949, p. 1.

107. Ibid.

108. Ibid.

109. Ibid.

Republic has no international relations is not its own fault, but there will come a time when it will have established diplomatic relations with the world.¹¹⁰ Whether Nemchina had sufficient insight into high-level Soviet policymaking to foresee the Soviet Union's recognition of the DRV is unclear, but the Kremlin did make such a decision a mere three months later.

In December 1949, the Franco-Vietnamese Joint Commission, having started discussions about the implementation of the Élysée Accords in August, prepared the so-called Supplementary Conventions that transferred various functions of internal administration to the State of Vietnam. On 30 December, the conventions were signed by Bao Dai and French High Commissioner Léon Pignon.¹¹¹ This specific act did not catch *Pravda's* attention, but in December 1949, and even more so in January 1950, the newspaper showed a rapidly growing interest in Vietnam (see Tables 5–6).

In this two-month period, six *Pravda* articles referred to Bao Dai (8 December and 13, 26, 27, 29, and 31 January). The growing frequency of these references was paralleled by a simultaneous increase in *Pravda's* references to French protests against the war in Indochina. Up to August 1949, *Pravda* had not published any article expressly focused on such protests, though it did make brief references to the PCF's critical comments about French policy in Vietnam. Signs of a change in Soviet coverage started to appear in September 1949 when Maevskii's article on the "Bao Dai solution" devoted considerable space to PCF-organized demonstrations against the war, and *Pravda* also published a single-paragraph article about antiwar protests.¹¹² A longer article on this subject appeared on 30 December.¹¹³ From 10 January 1950, *Pravda* devoted concentrated attention to the protests, publishing eight articles by the end of the month and three additional ones in February. This trend reflected the actual dynamics of French antiwar protests. September 1949 was precisely when the PCF decided to intensify its campaign against the war. In November, PCF-organized mass demonstrations started to gather momentum.¹¹⁴

Even if the September 1949 shift in the PCF's attitude toward the war was not linked to the "Bao Dai solution," the two issues became directly linked in January 1950. From 27 to 29 January, the French National Assembly held a long and acrimonious debate over the ratification of the Élysée Accords,

110. Ibid.

111. Lawrence, *Assuming the Burden*, p. 251.

112. "Frantsuzskie trudiashchiesia trebuiut mira s V'etnamom," *Pravda*, 27 September 1949, p. 3.

113. "Trudiashchiesia Frantsii trebuiut prekrashchenia voiny vo V'etname," *Pravda*, 30 December 1949, p. 3.

114. Rice-Maximin, *Accommodation and Resistance*, pp. 78–79.

during which the PCF deputies sharply condemned the war in general and the “Bao Dai solution” in particular. For instance, Jeannette Vermeersch, the wife of Maurice Thorez, called Bao Dai a “French collaborator” who had been a “Japanese valet” in 1945—a double charge that Nemchina had also raised against the ex-emperor at the ECAFE session in October 1949.¹¹⁵ During the debate, *Pravda* covered French antiwar protests on a daily basis, publishing long analytical articles rich in quotations from the statements made by PCF leaders.¹¹⁶ On 30 January, the day after the ratification of the Élysée Accords, *Pravda* repeated Ho Chi Minh’s 14 January call for the establishment of diplomatic relations with foreign countries. On 31 January, when *Pravda* announced the Soviet recognition of the DRV, it also published Ho Chi Minh’s request in its entirety (including his complaints about France’s efforts to create a “puppet government” headed by Bao Dai) and an overview of post-1945 Vietnamese events in which the last two paragraphs focus on the Élysée Accords and their ratification.¹¹⁷ On 6 and 9 February, *Pravda* published two long analytical articles about the “Bao Dai solution,” making additional references to the ratification of the accords and the subsequent U.S. decision to recognize the State of Vietnam (7 February 1950).¹¹⁸

A *Pravda* article of 9 February 1950, signed by Ya. Viktorov (a pen name of Yakov Z. Goldberg, the deputy head of *Pravda*’s international department), paid particular attention to the question of whether the establishment of Soviet-DRV diplomatic relations was a “lawful act” (*zakonomernogo akta*). Having mentioned the “hysteria” generated by this step in the “reactionary French, U.S., and English press,” Viktorov/Goldberg sought to justify Moscow’s standpoint by putting forward two main arguments. First, he dismissed the French claim that the “legal people’s government of Ho Chi Minh” (*zakonnoe narodnoe pravitelstvo Kho Shi Mina*) was just a “rebellious” (*miatezhnoe*) movement and, as such, not legally entitled to establish diplomatic relations with foreign states. Goldberg quoted the Franco-DRV agreement of 6 March 1946 in which the French government recognized “the Vietnamese Republic as a free state having its own government, its own parliament, its own army, and its own finances” within the French Union. Second, the article

115. *Ibid.*, pp. 94–96.

116. See, for instance, “Frantsuzskii narod trebuet prekrashcheniya voiny vo V’etname,” *Pravda*, 27 January 1950, p. 3.

117. “Obrashchenie Prezidenta Demokraticeskoi respubliki V’etnam ko vsem pravitelstvam miram,” p. 2; and “Demokraticeskaya respublika V’etnam (kratkaya spravka),” p. 2.

118. Zhukov, “V’etnam i Frantsiya,” p. 4; and Viktorov, “Zagovor imperialistov protiv v’etnamskogo naroda,” p. 4.

pointed out that the aforesaid agreement was unilaterally and repeatedly violated by the French side. Of these violations, Goldberg singled out the Élysée Accords and their ratification, arguing that the act of granting state authority to a former Japanese collaborator (i.e., a person who had committed high treason against the French Republic) violated the French constitution—an argument that reveals why both Nemchina and Vermeersch had found it convenient to highlight this particular episode in Bao Dai’s political career.¹¹⁹

Goldberg’s arguments, self-serving as they were, showed remarkable consistency with the legal standpoint that *Pravda*’s articles, first indirectly and then directly, had adopted on the question of Vietnamese statehood over the previous three years. Since September 1947, *Pravda* had closely monitored the evolution of the “Bao Dai solution,” and its comments were invariably of a negative nature. Every reference to the state structures created under French supervision (Xuan’s Provisional Central Government and Bao Dai’s State of Vietnam) was made in a form that questioned the legitimacy of these institutions; for example, the term “government” was put into quotation marks or accompanied by the word “puppet,” and Bao Dai appeared as “former emperor.” In contrast, *Pravda*’s references to the DRV consistently presented the latter as a legitimate state equipped with such institutions as a presidency, a government, a National Assembly, a constitution, an army, a chief of staff, a military court, and so on. In the wake of the Élysée Accords, *Pravda* expressly called the DRV “the sole legal government in Vietnam.” In October 1949, at the fifth session of ECAFE, these views were forcefully expressed by the Soviet government delegation.

A Combination of Three Factors

Judging from the gradual but perceptible growth of Soviet interest in Vietnam from 1948 through 1949, it seems advisable to reexamine the notion that the establishment of Soviet-Vietnamese diplomatic relations was attributable mainly (or exclusively) to the “Chinese factor.” In the traditional narrative, Soviet recognition of the DRV is presented as an abrupt turn in Soviet foreign policy, a shift whose first signs appeared only in December 1949, after the leaders of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) decided to back their Vietnamese comrades. However, this image of pre-1950 Soviet indifference is hard to reconcile with the conspicuous attention *Pravda* paid to the

119. Viktorov, “Zagovor imperialistov,” p. 4.

“Bao Dai solution”—attention that was not comparable to Moscow’s initial preoccupation with Indonesia (1947–1948) but that considerably surpassed its post-1947 interest in Malaya, Burma, Thailand, and the Philippines. The step-by-step intensification of Soviet propaganda attacks on the “Bao Dai solution” seems to have brought about incremental changes in Moscow’s attitude toward the DRV. The closer the French authorities were to their goal (the creation of a purportedly independent Vietnamese state that the United States would be ready to recognize), the more willing the USSR became to provide propaganda support, and then diplomatic support, to Ho’s government. This long-term psychological shift probably helped to prepare the ground for the breakthrough in January 1950.

Acknowledging the significance of the “Bao Dai factor” is not necessarily in contradiction with the thesis of the “Chinese factor.” On the contrary, the two factors were at least partly related, and they even mutually reinforced each other. From 1948 to 1949, the victorious advance of the CCP undoubtedly played a decisive role insofar as the U.S. and British governments, which had been initially skeptical about the “Bao Dai experiment,” finally decided to swing behind Bao Dai.¹²⁰ Their involvement in turn led to the intensification of Soviet propaganda attacks on the “Bao Dai solution.” Less clear is the extent to which the French decision-making process was influenced by events in China. In the view of Ellen J. Hammer, at least, some effects of the “China factor” *were* felt in Paris: “The Communist victories in China indicated that Ho Chi Minh would soon have powerful friends north of the Vietnamese frontier. France wanted Bao Dai to return to the country at the head of a pro-French government before that development should occur.”¹²¹ From January to February 1949, the Hungarian legation in Paris reported that the gains achieved by Chinese Communist forces gave inspiration both to those in France who were calling for negotiations with Ho Chi Minh and to the advocates of the “Bao Dai solution.”¹²²

Soviet observers were also keenly aware of the impact the CCP’s victory would have on the prospects of the Franco-Vietnamese war. As early as January 1948, S. A. Mkhitarian, an Asia expert in the Soviet Foreign Ministry, carefully examined the role of the “China factor” in the Vietnamese revolutionary movement.¹²³ In May 1949, Soviet analysts reiterated the view that

120. Lawrence, “Recasting Vietnam,” p. 29.

121. Hammer, “The Bao Dai Experiment,” p. 56.

122. Hungarian Legation to France, Report, 11 January 1949, in MNL, XIX-J-1-k France, 1945–1964, 7. doboz, 5/b, 1895/pol/1949; and Hungarian Legation to France, Report, 14 February 1949.

123. Konoreva and Selivanov, “Sovetskaya ideologicheskaya podderzhka,” p. 125.

“the success of the People’s Liberation Army of China undoubtedly has a strong influence on the outcome of the Vietnamese people’s fight for national independence.”¹²⁴ From November to December 1949, *Pravda* made five successive references to the participation of Vietnamese delegates in such Chinese-organized international meetings as the Conference of Trade Unions of Asia and Oceania and the Asian Women’s Conference.

From 12 to 17 December 1949, the attendance of Jeannette Vermeersch and other French Communist delegates at the Asian Women’s Conference in Beijing gave additional impetus to the PCF’s antiwar campaign.¹²⁵ In an article published in *L’Humanité*, Marcel Cachin predicted that Bao Dai would soon meet the same fate Chiang Kai-shek did.¹²⁶ In January 1950, “just before the National Assembly debate on Indochina, 30,000 women rallied at the Vel’ d’Hiv’ [Vélodrome d’Hiver] against the Vietnam War,” whereupon “the Chinese Communists cited this as a prime example of a broad and popular anti-imperialist front.”¹²⁷

By that time, the Chinese and French governments were at loggerheads. Following the proclamation of the PRC, the French Foreign Ministry adopted the position that if Paris established diplomatic relations with the new state, this act should take place only after the ratification of the Élysée Accords, lest Bao Dai and his supporters be discouraged by France’s recognition of the Chinese Communist regime.¹²⁸ Foreign Minister Robert Schuman attributed so much importance to this issue that he even urged his British counterpart, Ernest Bevin, “to delay his recognition of [the] Peking regime until after he can recognize Bao Dai.”¹²⁹ The CCP leaders, for their part, accused the French authorities of hostile behavior. From December 1949 to January 1950, *Pravda* published as many as seven articles about Beijing’s complaints against various French actions (real or alleged) such as the violation of Chinese airspace by French planes, the mistreatment of ethnic Chinese, and cooperation with Chinese Nationalist troops who had fled to Indochina.¹³⁰ These complaints

124. Olsen, *Soviet–Vietnam Relations*, p. 12.

125. Hungarian Legation in France, Report, 17 January 1950, in MNL, XIX-J-1-k France, 1945–1964, 11. doboz, 11/f, 0835/1950.

126. Marcel Cachin, “On s’organise contre la sale guerre,” *L’Humanité*, 15 December 1949, in Ruscio, *La question coloniale*, p. 269.

127. Rice-Maximin, *Accommodation and Resistance*, p. 78.

128. “The British Embassy to the Department of State,” Memorandum, 28 November 1949, in *FRUS*, 1949, Vol. IX, p. 201.

129. “The Ambassador in France (Bruce) to the Secretary of State,” Telegram, 22 December 1949, in *FRUS*, 1949, Vol. IX, p. 237.

130. On China’s complaints, see Chen, *Vietnam and China*, pp. 203–204.

largely coincided with the secret CCP talks with Vietnamese Communist delegates Ly Bich Son and Nguyen Duc Thuy that led to the establishment of Sino-DRV diplomatic relations (18 January 1950).¹³¹ On 7 January, Nikolai V. Roshchin, the Soviet ambassador in Beijing, also held a reception in honor of the Vietnamese Communist delegation.¹³²

The Viet Minh leaders sought to use the issue of “Franco-Nationalist collaboration” to gain CCP support, and the Soviet press readily echoed their claims. In December 1949, *Su that* (Truth), the journal of the Indochinese Communist Party, published an article about the French authorities’ alleged intention to conclude a secret agreement with Chinese Nationalist troops. On 5 January 1950, a Soviet news agency (TASS) correspondent in Shanghai repeated the story, and from 7 to 8 January both *Izvestiya* and *Pravda* followed suit.¹³³ On 13 January, *Pravda*, citing a pro-Communist Hong Kong newspaper, directly linked the issue with the “Bao Dai solution” by alleging that Chinese Nationalist soldiers were being recruited into Bao Dai’s army.¹³⁴ On 3 February, the CCP journal *Shijie zhishi* published an article on U.S. interference in Indochina. The U.S. government, the Chinese author charged, had facilitated the conclusion of the Élysée Accords and was now urging Vietnamese Catholics to rally behind Bao Dai and trying to organize an anti-Viet Minh force composed of Chinese Nationalist troops.¹³⁵

The growing attention the USSR paid to the “Bao Dai solution” does not necessarily contradict the narrative that CCP leaders took the first *concrete* steps toward the recognition of the DRV in December 1949.¹³⁶ Still, it does indicate that by that time the Soviet Union had become more-or-less ready to follow suit. Goncharov, Lewis, and Xue Litai, however, suggest Stalin was still reluctant to recognize the DRV in January 1950:

At Mao’s behest, the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs passed along the Vietnamese request for recognition to Moscow. That request put the Kremlin on the

131. Qiang, *China and the Vietnam Wars*, pp. 13–15.

132. De Tréglodé, “Les relations entre le Viet-Minh, Moscou et Pékin,” p. 58.

133. “Tainoe soglashenie frantsuzskikh kolonizatorov s gomindanovtsami,” *Pravda*, 8 January 1950, p. 3; and “French Colonialists Intend to Use Kuomintangites for the Struggle against the Vietnamese People,” *Izvestiya*, 7 January 1950, p. 4, translated in *The Current Digest of the Soviet Press* (East View Press).

134. “Frantsuzskie vlasti pokrovitelstvuiut gomindanovtsam,” *Pravda*, 13 January 1950, p. 4.

135. Pan Guangzu, “Meidiguozhuyi dui Yuenan de qinlue,” *Shijie zhishi*, Vol. 21, No. 5 (February 1950), pp. 14–15. I am greatly indebted to Qiang Zhai for informing me about this article and summarizing it for me.

136. On China’s motives, see Chen Jian, *Mao’s China*, pp. 120–123; and Qiang, *China and the Vietnam Wars*, pp. 13–25.

spot. . . . The Chinese leader was taking a big chance. At this time, France held the key to U.S. plans for building NATO and aligning West Germany solidly with the Western alliance. Even more central to Stalin, France opposed German rearmament. . . . Attacking French interests in Indochina at such a pivotal moment would have struck Stalin as half-witted.¹³⁷

This interpretation is problematic not only in light of the “Bao Dai factor” and the USSR’s prompt participation in the Sino-Vietnamese campaign against “Franco-Nationalist cooperation,” but also because the relationship between France and the Soviet bloc underwent a marked deterioration from November 1949 to January 1950. This period partly coincided with the months when Chinese and Soviet leaders made their preparations to recognize the DRV, but the USSR confronted France in Europe earlier than it did in Indochina.

From 9 to 11 November 1949, U.S. Secretary of State Dean Acheson worked out an agreement with Schuman and Bevin on reducing French and British demands for West German reparations and on softening terms for restoring the sovereignty of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG). On the basis of these principles, the high commissioners of the three Western powers soon signed the so-called Petersberg Agreement (22 November 1949) with Chancellor Konrad Adenauer. The Hungarian legation in Paris reported that French industrial circles, despite their longstanding fear of German competition, had already become more favorably disposed toward a resurgence of West German heavy industry than their British counterparts were. The Hungarian diplomats concluded that the purposeful resuscitation of West German steel production was aimed at facilitating remilitarization, despite U.S. claims to the contrary.¹³⁸ From 24 to 26 November, the French National Assembly held a fierce 32-hour debate over West European economic integration and the planned admission of the FRG to the Council of Europe. The PCF charged that Schuman’s efforts to achieve Franco–West German rapprochement posed a grave threat to French national interests, for they facilitated the reemergence of German economic might and the revival of German militarism. These views were shared by many non-Communist deputies, too, but the PCF’s efforts were ultimately in vain. Of the deputies, 327 voted in favor

137. Sergei N. Goncharov, John W. Lewis, and Xue Litai, *Uncertain Partners: Stalin, Mao, and the Korean War* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), p. 107.

138. Hungarian Legation in France, Report, 19 November 1949, in MNL, XIX-J-1-j France, 1945–1964, 5. doboz, 5/b, 953/1949; and Hungarian Legation in France, Report, 21 November 1949, in MNL, XIX-J-1-j France, 1945–1964, 5. doboz, 5/b, 954/1949. For an overview, see also Robert L. Beisner, *Dean Acheson: A Life in the Cold War* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 254–256.

of Schuman's foreign policy, and 249 (including 167 PCF members) opposed it.¹³⁹

This process ran counter to Soviet diplomatic aims, and policymakers in Moscow (who, thanks to the effectiveness of the Soviet intelligence network, obtained the complete minutes of the Acheson-Bevin-Schuman talks) were quick to express disapproval.¹⁴⁰ As early as 11 November, *Pravda* started to criticize the trilateral ministerial talks, and on 18 November it attacked them in a long signed article.¹⁴¹ Worse still, propaganda attacks were soon backed up by punitive measures. In the winter of 1949–1950, a Soviet-bloc regime in Eastern Europe held the first show trials whose thrust was directed against France rather than the United States or Britain. Arrested by the Polish authorities in the spring of 1949, Yvonne Bassaler, an employee of the French consulate in Wrocław, was tried in December 1949 on spurious charges of espionage and sentenced to imprisonment. Arrested on 18 November, Simon Robineau, an employee of the French consulate in Szczecin, met the same fate in February 1950.¹⁴² The French authorities retaliated by expelling numerous Polish citizens, whereupon the Polish authorities took further repressive measures.¹⁴³ The trials and the expulsions were extensively covered in *Pravda*.¹⁴⁴ In this hostile atmosphere, the Kremlin was presumably more willing to confront France over Indochina than in the pre-November 1949 period.

The progress of Franco-U.S. military talks must have also affected Soviet-French relations. On 6 October 1949, President Harry S. Truman signed the

139. Hungarian Legation in France, Report, 30 November 1949, in MNL, XIX-J-1-k France, 1945–1964, 7. doboz, 5/b, 13323/1949.

140. David E. Murphy, Sergei A. Kondrashev, and George Bailey, *Battleground Berlin: CIA vs. KGB in the Cold War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), pp. 82–83.

141. "Soveshanie ministrov inostrannykh del Anglii, SShA i Frantsii," *Pravda*, 11 November 1949, p. 4; and M. Marinin, "Shto skryvaetsia za parizhskim sgovorom Achesona, Bevina i Shumana?" *Pravda*, 18 November 1949, p. 3.

142. Krzysztof Bukowski, "Działalność siatki szpiegowskiej 'Robineau' na terenie Pomorza Zachodniego 1947–1949," *Przegląd Zachodni*, No. 3 (2010), pp. 148–167; and Maria Pasztor, "France and the Polish October of 1956," in Jan Rowinski, ed., *The Polish October 1956 in the World Politics* (Warsaw: Polski Instytut Spraw Międzynarodowych, 2007), p. 263.

143. Hungarian Legation in France, Report, 28 November 1949, in MNL, XIX-J-1-j France, 1945–1964, 5. doboz, 5/b, 1052/1949; and U.S. Embassy in Poland to Department of State, Telegram, 13 January 1950, in National Archives and Records Administration [U.S.] (NARA), Central Decimal Files 1950–1954, Record Group (RG) 59, Stack Area 250, Row 39, Compartment 27, Shelf 5, 648.51/101350; and U.S. Embassy in Poland to Department of State, Telegram, 18 January 1950, in NARA, Central Decimal Files 1950–1954, RG 59, Stack Area 250, Row 39, Compartment 27, Shelf 5, 648.51/1-1850.

144. "Nota MID Polskoi respublikii frantsuzskomu pravitel'stvu," *Pravda*, 21 November 1949, p. 4 (on Robineau's arrest); and "Protsess agentov frantsuzskoi razvedki v Polshe," *Pravda*, 19 December 1949, p. 4 (on Bassaler's trial).

Mutual Defense Assistance Act that authorized the U.S. government to provide substantial quantities of military equipment to the other member-states of the newly formed North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). In November, representatives of the U.S. State Department and the Department of Defense initiated negotiations with the representatives of eight European NATO countries (France, Britain, Italy, Belgium, Netherlands, Luxembourg, Denmark, and Norway) about the specific form of military cooperation. In this long and tortuous process, France played a crucial role, not only because of its own military potential but also because the smaller NATO states, as a U.S. memorandum stated, “appeared content to let France and England ‘carry the ball’ for them.” The representatives of the French Foreign Ministry (Minister Counselor Jean Daridan, Counselor Arnauld Wapler, and Legal Adviser André Gros) raised so many objections to the original U.S. proposal over various financial and legal issues that the frustrated author of the U.S. memorandum referred to Gros as “the world’s leading ‘nitpicker.’” The first breakthrough in the Franco-U.S. talks was achieved in mid-December 1949, but not until 16 January 1950 were all matters fully settled. On 27 January, the United States officially signed the Mutual Defense Assistance Program (MDAP) agreements with France and the seven other states.¹⁴⁵

Once again, Soviet officials were well aware of these events. Having repeatedly mentioned the PCF-organized campaign against the disembarkation of U.S. military shipments, *Pravda* on 16 January 1950 extensively described the role U.S. military planners had assigned to France in NATO strategy. On 30 January the paper devoted a comprehensive article to the conclusion of the MDAP agreements.¹⁴⁶ From Moscow’s perspective, French-U.S. relations had reached a watershed in the military sphere.

Soviet and Hungarian diplomats were inclined to believe that the United States had purposefully linked the issue of Indochina to its European strategy. In March 1949, the Hungarian legation in Paris reported that “according to well-informed local circles,” the U.S. representatives showed reluctance to extend the applicability of the North Atlantic Treaty (18 March 1949) to the Algerian departments of France unless the French government made a

145. Summary of Negotiations of MDAP Bilateral Agreements Entered into Pursuant to Section 402 of the Mutual Defense Assistance Act of 1949, 1 May 1950, in NARA, Defense—ISA, Office of Military Assistance, General Decimal Files 1950–1952, RG 330, Entry 18B, Box 8, SG 006, A53-217. On MDAP in general, see Chester J. Pach, *Arming the Free World: The Origins of the United States Military Assistance Program, 1945–1950* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), pp. 198–225.

146. “Za kulisami Severo-atlantsicheskogo pakta,” *Pravda*, 16 January 1950, p. 4; and “V obstanovke voennoi isterii,” *Pravda*, 30 January 1950, p. 4.

clear commitment to reach an agreement with Bao Dai.¹⁴⁷ On 21 November, a Hungarian report accurately noted that the Vietnamese question (and specifically the upcoming British recognition of the Bao Dai regime) was also discussed during the Acheson-Bevin-Schuman talks.¹⁴⁸ On 13 May 1950, Aleksei Pavlov, the Soviet ambassador in Paris, described the Schuman Plan as a brainchild of the United States that the French government felt compelled to embrace because otherwise the United States would not have provided aid for purposes related to the Indochina War.¹⁴⁹ The perceived existence of such linkages probably contributed to the shift in Moscow's Vietnam policy.

In the last analysis, Stalin's decision to recognize the DRV was likely motivated not by any single factor but by a combination of three factors. The "Chinese factor" was definitely a major one, for in the pre-1950 period the Soviet Union would have faced formidable logistical obstacles if it had attempted to provide direct military assistance to the DRV. Preoccupied with the European strategic theater and unable to project power into faraway Southeast Asia, the USSR had good reason to refrain from direct involvement in the Franco-Vietnamese War as long as the Chinese Communist forces were still at war with the Nationalists. The CCP's victory, and the resulting "division of labor" between Moscow and Beijing, enabled Stalin to solve this dilemma. Chinese leaders were both able and willing to play an active role in Indochina and elsewhere in Southeast Asia.¹⁵⁰

The "Chinese factor," however, must be examined in combination with the "French factor." Had Soviet-French relations remained relatively cordial from 1949 to 1950, Stalin may have cautioned the CCP leaders against a premature confrontation with France over Vietnam, or he may have encouraged them to direct their external operations against some other Asian target. Such a scenario was not impossible. In 1951, as Gaiduk pointed out, both the USSR and China were heavily involved in the Korean War and were warmly receptive to Indian Premier Jawaharlal Nehru's peace initiatives. Hence, Stalin

147. Hungarian Legation to France, Report, 22 March 1949.

148. Hungarian Legation to France, Report, 21 November 1949. See also Lawrence, *Assuming the Burden*, p. 247.

149. Hungarian Legation to France, Report, 13 May 1950, in MNL, XIX-J-1-j France, 1945-1964, 5. doboz, 5/b, 00772/1950.

150. On the post-1949 "division of labor" between the USSR and China, see, among others, Chen Jian, "Bridging Revolution and Decolonization: The Bandung Discourse in China's Early Cold War Experience," in Goscha and Ostermann, eds., *Connecting Histories*, pp. 143-146; Dieter Heinzig, *The Soviet Union and Communist China, 1945-1950: The Arduous Road to the Alliance* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 2004), pp. 206-207; and de Tréglodé, "Les relations entre le Viet-Minh, Moscou et Pékin," pp. 57-58.

dissuaded the CPI and the PKI from waging armed struggle against the Indian and Indonesian governments. But as Soviet leaders became increasingly dissatisfied with France's policy toward Europe, they probably felt they had little to lose by joining forces with China and establishing diplomatic relations with the DRV. The fact that the marked deterioration of Soviet-French relations started in mid-November (i.e., before the start of Sino-Vietnamese talks) puts the "China factor" into further perspective.

Still, neither the "China factor" nor the "French factor" can provide a full explanation for the dynamics of Soviet-Vietnamese relations from 1947 to 1949. The direct impact of these two factors was insignificant until November 1949, yet Soviet attitudes toward the DRV had undergone a perceptible change as early as the first half of 1948 and particularly in the spring of 1949. In all probability, Soviet leaders considered the creation of a French-controlled and U.S.-supported "alternative state" an unacceptable scenario, and this process sufficiently irritated them to confront France, first in the field of propaganda and later in diplomacy.

The Viet Minh's United National Front versus the Bao Dai Solution

Gaiduk, Goscha, Quinn-Judge, Selivanov, and other scholars have correctly emphasized that from 1945 to 1949, Soviet leaders viewed Ho Chi Minh's unusual domestic policies with considerable suspicion. Ho's political vulnerability was aggravated by the fact that his Soviet-trained intraparty critics repeatedly accused him of subordinating class struggle to his nationalist agenda.¹⁵¹ Suspicions of this kind continued to linger even after the establishment of Soviet-DRV diplomatic relations. On 10 May 1950, the Hungarian embassy in Moscow reported that a certain I. Ya. Podkopaev (who had published a collection of lectures titled "The Democratic Republic of Vietnam in Struggle against the French Imperialists" as early as 1948)¹⁵² had recently given a lecture about Vietnam in which he stated

The Viet Minh cannot be considered a Marxist-Leninist party; they are only similar to a Marxist-Leninist party. It is obvious that this form can be

151. Gaiduk, *Confronting Vietnam*, p. 3; Goscha, "Courting Diplomatic Disaster?" pp. 73–75; Sophie Quinn-Judge, *Ho Chi Minh: The Missing Years 1919–1941* (London: C. Hurst, 2003), pp. 254–256; and Selivanov, *Stalin, Kho Shi Min i "delo" Chan Ngok Dana*, pp. 52–68.

152. I. Ia. Podkopaev, *Demokraticheskaya respublika V'etnam v bor'be protiv frantsuzskikh imperialistov: K trekhletiyu provozglasbeniya respubliky* (Moscow: Pravda, 1948).

only temporary, and it is necessary in a specific stage of the revolutionary struggle.¹⁵³

Podkopaev noted that many Soviet cadres failed to understand that the dissolution of the ICP had been a correct decision. These cadres, he said, even drew inappropriate parallels with the “deviation” of Earl Browder, who had dissolved the Communist Party of the United States for tactical reasons. In rebuttal of these charges, Podkopaev described Ho Chi Minh as “a Communist who is armed with the theory of Marxism-Leninism and faithful to its teachings.” Nevertheless, his arguments apparently failed to convince the audience, for his lecture was followed by an unusually heated debate.¹⁵⁴

Although Podkopaev’s lecture was evidently aimed at justifying the Soviet decision to establish diplomatic relations with the DRV, certain foreign Communist observers—Hungarian diplomats and a prominent PCF official—had voiced similar views as early as 1949; that is, well before the act of recognition. On 29 March 1949, the Hungarian Foreign Ministry asked the Hungarian legation in Paris to prepare a detailed report on the internal and economic policies of the DRV, with special attention to the structure of the Viet Minh and the dissolution of the ICP.¹⁵⁵ On 3 May, the legation submitted the requested report, having consulted a DRV official and other members of the local Vietnamese community. The official admitted that the dissolution of the Indochinese party had been preceded by a long debate in the Central Committee and that the issue was raised again after the Soviet-Yugoslav rift, but he assured the Hungarian diplomats that the ICP continued to exercise effective control over the Viet Minh, despite the party’s formal dissolution. He explained that the Viet Minh’s struggle for national liberation was supported even by the “feudal” landowners and that this was why the DRV leaders had refrained from carrying out land reform. The Viet Minh expropriated only the landholdings of “traitors and collaborators,” whom he described as a small and insignificant group of pro-French and pro-American elements. In any case, the DRV official stressed, the Viet Minh had managed to alleviate the peasants’ yearning for land by increasing the area under cultivation and by distributing uncultivated land.¹⁵⁶

153. Hungarian Embassy to the USSR, 10 May 1950, in MNL, XIX-J-1-k Vietnam, 1945–1964, 4. doboz, 11/f, 021738/1950.

154. *Ibid.*

155. Hungarian Foreign Ministry to the Hungarian Legation in Paris, 29 March 1949, in MNL, XIX-J-1-k France, 1945–1964, 7. doboz, 5/b, 2372/1949.

156. Hungarian Legation in Paris, Report, 3 May 1949, in MNL, XIX-J-1-k France, 1945–1964, 7. doboz, 5/b, 4103/1949.

Because the non-Communist members of the Vietnamese émigré community also told the Hungarian legation that the majority of the Vietnamese population firmly supported Ho Chi Minh, Hungarian Minister-Counselor Péter Mód drew the following conclusion:

The work and development of the Viet Minh in Indochina illustrates in practice the observation made by Stalin, namely, that “in the colonial countries, in a certain stage of development, the national bourgeoisie may support the revolutionary movement of its own country against the external imperialism.” Facing this united national front, the primary effort of the French colonialists is aimed at splitting its unity.¹⁵⁷

The Hungarian Foreign Ministry was so satisfied with this report that it expressed its approval in a special message addressed to the legation. A ministerial official wrote that the report was “extremely well-written and [prepared] by the methods of Marxism.”¹⁵⁸ This favorable assessment suggests that Mód’s superiors agreed with his endorsement of the Viet Minh’s unusual practices, despite their initial suspicions.

In the fall of 1949, Jean Lautissier—an experienced “Asia hand” of the PCF who held a high post in the party’s colonial section—traveled to Indochina for a long visit, from which he returned at the end of October. Because he was ready to share his impressions with Hungarian Press Attaché Imre Gyomai on condition of strict confidentiality, his report likely found its way to Moscow. In response to the Hungarians’ inquiry, Lautissier provided a detailed description of the administrative system and state capabilities of the DRV regime, trying to assess whether it could exercise effective administrative control over the “liberated” territory. From the perspective of diplomatic recognition, this issue was of substantial importance. After all, in October 1949 the Soviet ECAFE delegation declared that the Bao Dai regime functioned only “on a small part of the whole territory.”

Lautissier readily admitted that Ho Chi Minh’s regime had not evolved into a full-fledged state:

In a European sense, it may be premature to speak about the public administration of the areas controlled by the partisans, not the least because the partisan-controlled areas do not constitute a unified territory. Furthermore, some of the major cities are still under the thumb of the colonialists, and thus a regular European-style public administration cannot come into existence. The administration of the partisan-controlled areas is undoubtedly based on democratic

157. Ibid.

158. Ibid.

principles. This means that whenever the partisans take over a territorial unit, they immediately elect the so-called commune council, which takes over the management of affairs. The commune council is subordinated to the district and provincial organs. The supreme forum over all these [institutions] is Ho Chi Minh's government. Again, this is not a full-fledged [government] in a European sense. Due to the fact that the conditions have not been settled yet, the government has no definite seat of administration.¹⁵⁹

At the same time, the peculiar conditions of the resistance struggle, inimical as they were to state-building, justified the DRV's inclusive sociopolitical approach, at least in Lautissier's view. The French Communist official showed perceptible sympathy for DRV practices that scholars have commonly regarded as ideological obstacles to Soviet-Vietnamese rapprochement. Having noted that large landholdings were distributed in the liberated areas, Lautissier observed,

Our [Vietnamese] comrades have been considerate of the middle landowners who, for the time being, provide support to the partisan movement. Thus one cannot speak yet of a completed agrarian reform. . . . When they tackled other problems, they similarly had to consider those strata that were ready to participate in the national liberation movement. But in matters that go further than this [aim], one cannot rely on [these strata]. . . . Of the negative features, one may mention that, unfortunately, the Communist party, having been dissolved in 1945, could not be revived yet. To date, the partisans who lead the liberation struggle have not informed the population about the existence and operation [of the party]. Once again, the explanation of this [practice] is that for a substantial time, our comrades will be compelled to reckon with the fellow travelers who are willing to follow them to a certain point. In the case of our comrade Ho Chi Minh, this means only that he correctly takes the actual circumstances into consideration. If our comrades want to bring their struggle to a victorious end, they must reckon with the masses who sympathize with the partisan movement but who are distant from us in a political sense.¹⁶⁰

Lautissier's favorable assessments of the Viet Minh's unusual practices were motivated by the view that these policies were of a temporary and tactical nature, to be pursued only for the duration of the war. M6d's report also suggests that the evolution of the "Bao Dai solution" may have considerably influenced Soviet attitudes toward the DRV's domestic policies. As long as the Bao Dai experiment showed little progress, the inclusive nature of the Viet Minh could

159. Hungarian Legation in France, Report, 9 December 1949, in MNL, XIX-J-1-j France, 1945-1964, 5. doboz, 5/b, 1101/1949.

160. Ibid.

be regarded more as an advantage than as a disadvantage, insofar as it hindered French efforts to “split the united national front.” But when France finally managed to set up the Associated State of Vietnam, the Viet Minh’s flexible position increasingly lost its *raison d’être*, and the Kremlin started to press for a more radical approach. In January 1950, Stalin criticized the policy of the DRV government for its “lack of realism” and urged Wang Jiaxiang, the Chinese ambassador in Moscow, to assist the Viet Minh in launching a land reform campaign.¹⁶¹

From the perspective of Stalinist political theory, the official Soviet attitude toward the Viet Minh’s domestic policies may have been at least partly affected by the emergence of the Bao Dai regime. In a speech titled “The Political Tasks of the University of the Peoples of the East” (1925), Stalin declared that the creation of a “united national front against imperialism” was a feasible strategy only in countries “where the national bourgeoisie has, as yet, no grounds for splitting up into a revolutionary party and a compromising party.” If “the national bourgeoisie has already split up into a revolutionary party and a compromising party,” and particularly if “the compromising section of this bourgeoisie has already managed . . . to strike a deal with imperialism,” the Communists could no longer strive for a united front. Instead, they should turn against the compromising national bourgeoisie.¹⁶² In Stalin’s political lexicon, the ratification of the Élysée Accords must have appeared as a clear-cut deal between “French imperialism” and the “compromising national bourgeoisie.”

The Vietnamese Communist leaders seem to have been thinking along similar lines. In January 1948—that is, shortly after the First Ha Long Bay Agreement—“for the first time the Party ordered the confiscation of the land and property of *Việt gian* [traitors]” but “did not yet attack landlords” as such. Thus, land distribution was still based on one’s political stance in the struggle for national liberation, rather than on class criteria. Nevertheless, the Viet Minh’s post-1948 campaign against non-Communist intellectuals was heavily based on class identity: the “bourgeois” proponents of judicial independence

161. De Tréglodé, “Les relations entre le Viet-Minh, Moscou et Pékin,” p. 58. In the end, the Viet Minh would launch a land reform campaign only in 1953.

162. J. V. Stalin, “The Political Tasks of the University of the Peoples of the East,” Speech Delivered at a Meeting of Students of the Communist University of the Toilers of the East, 18 May 1925, in J. V. Stalin, Works, Vol. 7 (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1954), pp. 135–154. In 1950, the theses of this article were evidently still considered applicable to Asian national liberation movements, for *Pravda* celebrated the 25th anniversary of its publication: “Vydayushcheesya proizvedenie po natsional’nomu voprosu,” *Pravda*, 22 May 1950, p. 2.

were accused of harboring counterrevolutionary inclinations.¹⁶³ The Élysée Accords led to further radicalization: “After the birth of the Bao Dai administration, the landlord class began to be seen as the obstacle to the DRV’s policies,” Ngoc-Luu Nguyen noted. “The timing of the harsh attack on this class in the second half of 1953 certainly had a connection with the Bao Dai administration’s land reform policy.”¹⁶⁴

Epilogue and Conclusions

The “Bao Dai solution” continued to affect Soviet-DRV and Soviet-French relations well after the establishment of diplomatic relations, not least because the ratification of the Élysée Accords constituted only the first step toward the full legal sovereignty of the State of Vietnam. In 1950, the French authorities still adamantly refused to consider allowing the Bao Dai regime to join the UN as an independent state.¹⁶⁵ They relaxed their stance only in late 1951. On 17 December 1951 the State of Vietnam submitted an application for admission to UN membership (S/2446). In response, on 27 December the DRV submitted its own application (S/2466).¹⁶⁶ DRV foreign minister Hoang Minh Giam sent a telegram to Trygve Lie in which he protested against “the steps being made by the French Government in an attempt to get the so-called ‘government’ of puppet Bao Dai admitted to the United Nations Organization.” Copies of the telegram were duly sent to the DRV’s Communist allies.¹⁶⁷

This new stage of competition between the DRV and the Bao Dai regime probably gave an additional impetus to the DRV’s integration into the Soviet bloc. For more than two years after the establishment of diplomatic relations, Ho Chi Minh’s government had no embassy in the USSR. On 15 February 1950, Ho was compelled to ask Zhou Enlai to authorize Chinese Ambassador

163. Tuong Vu, “‘It’s Time for the Indochinese Revolution to Show Its True Colours’: The Radical Turn of Vietnamese Politics in 1948,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 40, No. 3 (October 2009), pp. 519–542.

164. Nguyen Ngoc-Luu, *Peasants, Party and Revolution: The Politics of Agrarian Transformation in Northern Vietnam, 1930–1975* (Amsterdam: University of Amsterdam, 1987), pp. 260–265.

165. Lawrence, *Assuming the Burden*, p. 265.

166. *Yearbook of the United Nations, 1952* (New York: United Nations Department of Public Information, 1953), p. 332.

167. Hoang Minh Giam to the Secretary General of the United Nations Organization, Telegram, 29 December 1951 (in English translation), in Gadaad Khariltsaany Töv Arkhiv [Central Archives of Foreign Relations, Mongolia], F. 12, Kh/n. 1, khuu 3–5.

Wang Jiaxiang to represent the DRV's interests in Moscow.¹⁶⁸ In March 1952, the DRV finally managed to open an embassy in the Soviet capital.¹⁶⁹ On 17 April, Envoy Extraordinaire Nguyen Luong Bang arrived in Moscow.¹⁷⁰ In September, the USSR openly clashed with France over Bao Dai's application for UN membership. At a UN Security Council meeting, the French representative submitted a draft resolution recommending the admission of the State of Vietnam (S/2758). In response, Soviet representative Yakov A. Malik submitted the USSR's own draft resolution in favor of the DRV's admission (S/2773). The Soviet side again trotted out its usual arguments about the DRV's sovereignty and Bao Dai's illegitimacy. On 19 September, the two draft resolutions were voted on, ending in a predictable stalemate. The French resolution received ten votes in favor, but the USSR vetoed it; the Soviet resolution was rejected by ten votes to one.¹⁷¹

This episode reveals that certain patterns of Soviet-DRV relations persisted even after the act of recognition. In September 1952, the USSR categorically sided with the DRV against the Bao Dai regime, but the Communist countries still refrained from taking the first step: The DRV's application and the Soviet draft resolution were submitted only after the analogous actions of the State of Vietnam. To explain why the Soviet Union waited, the broader theoretical context of the Soviet position needs to be examined.

From 1945 to 1953, official Soviet attitudes toward the various Asian, Middle Eastern, and African "national liberation movements" were probably at least partly influenced by the existence or absence of an indigenous government in the given territory. If some kind of indigenous state structure did exist, Soviet officials seem to have been comparatively more willing to confront the metropolitan power visibly on behalf of the local population, particularly if they could expect at least a few non-Communist states to act likewise. In the case of Syria and Lebanon (1945–1946), Indonesia (1946–1949), Vietnam (1948–1952), and Morocco and Tunisia (1951–1952), the USSR explicitly expressed its standpoint at one or another UN forum (the Security Council, the General Assembly, ECOSOC, and ECAFE).¹⁷² Each of these territories

168. Ho Chi Minh to Zhou Enlai, Telegram, 15 February 1950 (in Russian translation), in Gadaad Khariltsaany Töv Arkhiv, F. 12, Kh/n. 1, khuu 1.

169. De Tréglodé, "Les relations entre le Viet-Minh, Moscou et Pékin," p. 61.

170. "Pribytie v Moskvu Posla Demokraticeskoi Respubliki V'etnam g. Nguen Long Banga," *Pravda*, 18 April 1952, p. 4.

171. *Yearbook of the United Nations*, 1952, p. 336; and "V Sovete Bezopasnosti," *Pravda*, 18 September 1952, p. 4.

172. Rami Ginat, "Syria's and Lebanon's Meandering Road to Independence: The Soviet Involvement and the Anglo-French Rivalry," *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, Vol. 13, No. 4 (2002), pp. 96–122; Efimova,

had some kind of indigenous government and a head of state (republican or monarchical), and most of them also received support from various non-Communist countries (Syria and Lebanon from Britain, the United States, and the Arab League; Indonesia from India, the Arab countries, and Australia; Morocco and Tunisia from the Arab states, Pakistan, India, and Indonesia).¹⁷³

In contrast, the Soviet UN delegates largely refrained from raising the issue of Madagascar (1947–1948), Malaya (1948–), and Kenya (1952–). The latter territories were also rocked by anti-colonial insurgencies, but the resistance movements did not reach the stage of state formation, and they received little, if any, political support from non-Communist states. These differences in Soviet attitudes were visible in the sphere of propaganda as well. In some months, *Pravda* covered Indonesia, Tunisia, and Morocco almost on a daily basis, and its articles accurately listed the non-Communist states that criticized the metropolitan powers in the UN.¹⁷⁴ In contrast, the paper paid considerably less attention to Madagascar, Malaya, and Kenya. In any given period, the number of *Pravda* articles on Malaya remained far lower than the number of articles on Indonesia or Vietnam.

From this perspective, the Soviet standpoint on Vietnam was anomalous: an unusual combination of legal firmness and diplomatic procrastination. Because the Soviet authorities regarded the DRV as a state, their legal approach toward it had more in common with their policy toward Indonesia than with their attitude toward Malaya. Their categorical juxtaposition of the two Vietnamese states actually implied a firmer position than the ambivalent attitude they adopted toward Indonesia from 1947 to 1949. Despite Moscow's evident dislike for Premier Mohammad Hatta, *Pravda* regularly called his administration the Hatta government (*pravitel'stvo Khatta*), without putting the term in quotation marks or adding the word "puppet." Nonetheless, in late 1949 the USSR initially questioned the legitimacy of the Republic of the United States of Indonesia to which the Netherlands transferred sovereignty. As the Dutch Communist leader Paul de Groot put it, "Sukarno and Hatta are incapable of exercising authority, nor are they entitled and authorized to liquidate the

"Towards the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations," pp. 185–189; and *Yearbook of the United Nations, 1952*, pp. 266–285.

173. Youssef Chaitani, *Post-Colonial Syria and Lebanon: The Decline of Arab Nationalism and the Triumph of the State* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2007), pp. 30–32; Samuel E. Crowl, "Indonesia's Diplomatic Revolution: Lining Up for Non-Alignment, 1945–1955," in Goscha and Ostermann, eds., *Connecting Histories*, pp. 238–257; and Martin Thomas, "France Accused: French North Africa before the United Nations, 1952–62," *Contemporary European History*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (2001), pp. 91–121.

174. "V Sovete Bezopasnosti," *Pravda*, 3 August 1947, p. 4; and "Vragi osvoboditel'nogo dvizheniya narodov kolonii," *Pravda*, 14 December 1952, p. 4.

Republic of Indonesia.¹⁷⁵ In the end, however, Stalin abruptly decided to recognize the new state (25 January 1950).¹⁷⁶ This vacillation stood in marked contrast to Moscow's attitude toward Vietnam, where one part (the DRV) was considered ipso facto legitimate and the other part (the State of Vietnam) was regarded as ipso facto illegitimate.

The closest Asian analogy to Moscow's standpoint was the Korean situation, where the USSR recognized the Communist-ruled Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) as the sole legitimate representative of the Korean nation and refused to establish contact with the U.S.-supported Republic of Korea (ROK). *Pravda* used the same terminology to refer to the South Korean state that it employed to discredit Bao Dai and Nguyen Van Xuan. *Pravda's* articles on the South Korean Constitutional Assembly elections (10 May 1948) put the word "elections" in quotation marks to emphasize that the process was illegitimate through and through.¹⁷⁷ Following the proclamation of the ROK, *Pravda* again put the term "Korean government" in quotation marks.¹⁷⁸ At the ECAFE session held in October 1949, the similarity between Vietnam and Korea became particularly evident. The two Koreas applied for associate membership in the same way the two Vietnamese states did, and the voting pattern proved nearly identical: "the commission by a vote of 11 to 1 approved admission of the Republic of Korea and rejected the application of the Korean People's Republic by a vote of 9 to 2."¹⁷⁹ The sole vote against the ROK was cast by the USSR, and India voted for the admission of both North and South Korea.¹⁸⁰

In Soviet practice, the absence of diplomatic relations with a country did not necessarily imply a categorical opposition to the latter's admission to the UN. For instance, in June 1952 the Soviet government offered to accept the admission of Portugal, Ireland, and Jordan (with which it lacked diplomatic relations and whose applications it had routinely vetoed since 1946) if the Western powers consented to the admission of Moscow's East European

175. Hungarian Legation in the Netherlands, Report, 18 December 1949, in MNL, XIX-1-j-k Netherlands, 1945-1964, 6. doboz, 5/b, 14221/1949.

176. Efimova, "New Evidence on the Establishment of Soviet-Indonesian Diplomatic Relations," pp. 222-225.

177. "Vybory v Iuzhnoi Korei," *Pravda*, 11 May 1948, p. 4.

178. "Peregovory 'pravitelstva' Iuzhnoi Korei s predstaviteliami SShA v Seule," *Pravda*, 19 August 1948, p. 4.

179. "Economic and Social Council," p. 117.

180. "Cold War' at E.C.A.F.E. Talks: West Takes Round," *Sunday Mail*, 23 October 1949, p. 2.

satellites. This proposal implied that the Soviet government tacitly recognized these countries as sovereign states.¹⁸¹ In contrast, Soviet officials treated the State of Vietnam as a non-state entity, in the same way they consistently opposed the UN membership of South Korea and the post-1949 Taiwanese government.

In practical diplomacy, however, the Soviet Union's pre-1950 support for the DRV proved far less intense than its diplomatic assistance to Indonesia or North Korea. From 1948 to 1949, Soviet officials raised the issue of Vietnam only in ECOSOC and ECAFE, rather than in the UN Security Council or General Assembly. Furthermore, each step Moscow took on behalf of the DRV seemed to be more a response to the gradual progress of the "Bao Dai experiment" than an independent initiative. The first Soviet proposal to recommend the admission of the DRV to ECAFE occurred shortly after the Second Ha Long Bay Agreement; the ECAFE session at which the USSR openly supported the DRV's application was preceded by the Élysée Accords; Soviet recognition of the DRV followed the ratification of the Élysée Accords; and the Soviet government sponsored a DRV application for UN membership only after the State of Vietnam submitted its own application.

This procrastination must have been considerably influenced by Soviet leaders' doubts about Ho's policies—doubts that were aggravated by the various manifestations of intraparty opposition to his leadership. Tran Ngoc Danh's unauthorized dissolution of the DRV delegation may have created even more trouble than his subsequent denunciation of Ho's "deviations." As Selivanov has noted, Danh's accusations attracted the attention of several high-ranking Soviet officials (such as V. G. Grigor'yan, I. I. Kozlov, and ultimately Stalin), but his memorandum—written in Prague, and sent first to Bucharest—was forwarded to Moscow as late as 19 December 1949; that is, probably too late to affect the process of Soviet-DRV rapprochement. In any case, Kozlov, and then Stalin, decided to side with Ho against Danh, rather than vice versa.¹⁸² But the confusion generated by the unauthorized dissolution of the delegation probably hindered Soviet leaders in figuring out whether the DRV government had actually decided to sever all ties to France. In October and November *Pravda* did not publish any article specifically on Vietnam (see Table 5). In Paris, Hungarian diplomats reported that the DRV delegation had become largely inoperative after Danh's departure, but his deputy,

181. *Yearbook of the United Nations*, 1952, p. 332.

182. Selivanov, *Stalin, Kho Shi Min i "delo" Chan Ngok Dana*, pp. 54–59, 70–77, 96–97.

Van Chi, was still present and continued to provide them with information about the situation in Vietnam.¹⁸³

Stalin's traditional preoccupation with European affairs was another likely reason. As long as Soviet leaders were able to capitalize on Franco-German disagreements, they had a stake in avoiding a direct confrontation with Paris over Indochina. They probably also took into consideration how isolated the DRV was from the non-Communist states—a situation that stood in sharp contrast to the support that Syria, Lebanon, Indonesia, Tunisia, and Morocco received from a wide variety of UN members. From 1945 to 1949, neither India nor Indonesia was willing to take a stand in support of the DRV. A champion of Indonesian independence, Nehru made no efforts on behalf of Vietnam: "Nehru was privately wary of the DRV's communist core," Goscha has pointed out. "The Indonesian Republic was not communist and India had no qualms when Sukarno and Hatta crushed the communist-led Madiun revolt."¹⁸⁴

The significance of the latter factor clearly manifested itself when the USSR attempted to represent the DRV's interests in ECOSOC, ECAFE, and the UN Security Council. On each occasion, the Soviet delegates found themselves badly outvoted, and even India, the sole non-Communist state casting a vote in favor of the DRV, refused to vote against the State of Vietnam. Judging from the fact that *Pravda* did not cover the ECOSOC and ECAFE sessions, these spectacular defeats were uncomfortable for Soviet leaders, at least from the perspective of propaganda. In ECOSOC and ECAFE, the Soviet Union lacked veto power, and even in the Security Council it could not use its veto unless the Western powers made the first move. Until 1951, the French government was unwilling to raise the issue of Vietnam in the UN, and if Soviet officials had attempted to do so, they would have remained hopelessly isolated. When necessary, they sided with the DRV even against overwhelming odds, but they evidently preferred to behave in a reactive, rather than proactive, way. In this respect, the emergence of the PRC provided a much-needed "helping hand," not only to the DRV but also to the Soviet Union.

Yet another factor that probably motivated Soviet procrastination was the slow and tortuous evolution of the "Bao Dai solution," which in turn reflected the polarization of views in the French National Assembly. Caught between leftist-socialist and rightist-nationalist criticism, the "Bao Dai experiment" frequently ground to a halt. The two Ha Long Bay agreements were never

183. Hungarian Legation in France, Report, 7 December 1949, in MNL, XIX-J-1-k France, 1945–1964, 11. doboz, 11/f, 13668/1949.

184. Goscha, "Choosing between the Two Vietnams," pp. 209–210, 227–231.

ratified by the National Assembly, and Bao Dai repeatedly backtracked on the deals when he felt that France was reluctant to make sufficient concessions.¹⁸⁵ Having been launched in September 1947, the “Bao Dai experiment” did not reach the stage of parliamentary ratification until January 1950. Moreover, not until December 1951 did Paris finally allow the State of Vietnam to apply for UN membership. Judging from the step-by-step intensification of Soviet propaganda attacks on the “Bao Dai solution,” and from *Pravda’s* initial distinction between Bao Dai and Xuan, Soviet officials were well aware of this gradualism. Under such circumstances, they probably found it advisable to pursue a similarly gradualist policy.

This approach was in line with certain patterns of Soviet diplomacy. If a country was divided between two competing states or quasi-states, Soviet leaders usually sought to create the impression that they bore no responsibility for the problem of national division. This is why the Soviet-inspired proclamation of the DPRK and the German Democratic Republic (GDR) was purposefully timed to follow closely, rather than precede, the creation of the ROK and the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), respectively. By presenting the establishment of the North Korean and East German states as a reactive process, the USSR tried to shift all the blame for the national division of Korea and Germany onto the United States.¹⁸⁶ In China, Soviet leaders, despite their obvious preference for the CCP, refrained from breaking off diplomatic relations with the Nationalist government until the very end. In February 1949, Soviet Ambassador Roshchin was the sole accredited head of a mission in Nanking who heeded the Nationalist government’s request that the foreign missions move to Canton, the new seat of the government. The USSR did not terminate its diplomatic relations with the Nationalist government until 2 October 1949, a day after the proclamation of the PRC.¹⁸⁷

Interestingly, Soviet attitudes toward the two Vietnamese regimes had much in common with the views the U.S. Department of State held about the situation in Vietnam. From 1948 to 1949, U.S. officials harbored serious doubts about the feasibility of the “Bao Dai solution,” either because they felt that Bao Dai was not sufficiently popular or because they worried that France

185. Irving, *The First Indochina War*, pp. 55–62.

186. Andrei N. Lankov, “Soviet Politburo Decisions and the Emergence of the North Korean State, 1946–1948,” in Byung-Kie Yang, ed., *Korean Peninsula: From Division toward Peaceful Unification* (Seoul: Korean Political Science Association, 2005), pp. 67–68; and Peter Ruggenthaler, *The Concept of Neutrality in Stalin’s Foreign Policy, 1945–1953* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2015), pp. 65–67, 187–190.

187. Heinz, *The Soviet Union and Communist China*, pp. 121, 127–131, 255.

would not grant genuine independence to the State of Vietnam, or both.¹⁸⁸ Still, they considered the “Bao Dai solution” at least potentially acceptable. In contrast, they regarded the DRV as an unacceptable option: “We have not urged the French to negotiate with Ho Chi Minh, even though he probably is now supported by a considerable majority of the Vietnamese people, because of his record as a Communist and the Communist background of many of the influential figures in and about his government.”¹⁸⁹ Soviet leaders, for their part, were considerably displeased by Ho’s domestic and foreign policies, but their reservations were increasingly overshadowed by their categorical rejection of the “Bao Dai solution.” The parallels between U.S. and Soviet attitudes created a sort of downward spiral, with the growth of U.S. support for the “Bao Dai solution” leading to an increase of Soviet support for the DRV and vice versa.

Acknowledgments

When writing this article, I accumulated debts to a great number of people. Without the assistance of Chen Bo, Olga Dror, Liang Zhi, Steven Smith, and Robert Winstanley-Chesters, I would not have been able to collect a full set of *Pravda* issues from 1947 to 1950. Batsaikhan Ookhnoi and Burmaa Peljee greatly helped me in my research in the Mongolian archives. Ang Cheng Guan, Christopher E. Goscha, Irina Konoreva, Charles Kraus, Mark Atwood Lawrence, Richard Mason, Qiang Zhai, Sophie Quinn-Judge, Alfred J. Rieber, Agnieszka Smiatacz, Jarosław Suchoples, Benoit de Tréglodé, and Tuong Vu read earlier versions of my manuscript, made various constructive comments, and kindly supplied me with invaluable information. The initial stage of my research was generously supported by a Fulbright Foundation research grant, for which I am especially grateful to László Borhi and Huba Brückner. In this period, my host institution was the Woodrow Wilson Center, where I received extensive assistance from Michelle Kamalich, Christian Ostermann, James Person, and Janet Spikes.

188. Lawrence, “Recasting Vietnam,” p. 29.

189. “Department of State Policy Statement on Indochina, September 27, 1948,” in *FRUS*, 1948, Vol. 6, p. 45.