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Factors Affecting the Establishment of the National Government of Vietnam in 1949

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Abstract

The National Government of Vietnam, led by Bao Dai, was established in 1949 under the patronage of France and with the strategic support of the United States, and it remained in existence until 1955. An examination of the circumstances surrounding its formation reveals a constellation of contributing factors, most notably the broader historical context of post-World War II decolonization and the geopolitical rivalry of the early Cold War. The influence of major powers - particularly France and the United States - was decisive in shaping the political trajectory of this entity, as both sought to construct a viable non-communist alternative to counter the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. Despite its relatively brief lifespan, the State of Vietnam established diplomatic relations with 35 countries and actively engaged with several international organizations, signaling an effort to secure international legitimacy and assert its presence on the global stage. This article examines the founding of the State of Vietnam in 1949 by analyzing its historical context, the motivations and interventions of external actors, and the internal political dynamics that facilitated its emergence.

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1. Introduction

Studies of Vietnamese history from 1945 to 1954 have been examined from multiple perspectives by numerous scholars and researchers. This decade marked a transformative period, beginning with the establishment of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) on September 2, 1945, which initiated a new phase in the country's political development. In parallel, another government - formally created in July 1949 under the patronage of France and supported by the United States - was established as a counterweight to the DRV and became known as the State of Vietnam. Notably, the exact nature and political character of the State of Vietnam remain subjects of debate, as existing studies have not yet reached a clear consensus. This ambiguity highlights the need for more comprehensive and systematic research into its formation, including the motivations behind its creation, the structure and operation of its state apparatus, and the conduct of its diplomatic activities during its existence.

2. Research Content

2.1. Factors influencing the global landscape after World War II.

At the end of World War II, two important international conferences were held in Yalta (February 1945) and Potsdam (July 1945) to address the issues of reconstruction and the redistribution of power in Europe following Germany's defeat. The surrender of Germany in May 1945 and Japan in September 1945 officially ended World War II, ushering in a new phase with issues of reconstruction and colonial liberation. The course of the war and international relations during the conflict significantly impacted the situation in Indochina and the Vietnamese revolution.

The relationship between the major Allied powers gradually shifted from cooperation in war to dialogue in peace. The consequences of World War II left Europe devastated and weakened in the international system, diminishing the roles of Britain and France, and leaving Germany on the brink of partition. Meanwhile, the United States and the Soviet Union emerged as world

superpowers, wealthy and powerful, intensifying their struggle for spheres of influence. In 1950, the US Gross National Product (GNP) was greater than the combined GNP of all other capitalist countries. Militarily, the US led the capitalist world in military strength and held a monopoly on atomic bombs in the early post-war period. Western European countries and Japan relied on US assistance for economic recovery. From this, the US rose to leadership within the capitalist system and pursued a new foreign policy befitting a superpower. After World War II, the Soviet Union's efforts to heal the wounds of war and rebuild the country quickly yielded significant economic, social, and military successes, making it a socialist superpower. In 1949, the Soviet Union successfully developed the atomic bomb, marking a breakthrough in science and technology and breaking the US monopoly on nuclear weapons. In 1950, Soviet industrial production increased by more than 70% from 1940 levels, and over 6,000 factories and enterprises were rebuilt (Pham, 2020)^[11] (Do, 2008)^[3]. The world order changed, forming a bipolar system, led by the US and the Soviet Union. According to the resolutions of the Yalta Conference, Eastern Europe and Mongolia fell within the Soviet sphere of influence and followed the socialist path. In contrast, Western Europe followed the capitalist path with US support. The world was divided into two camps, each led by a superpower, locked in fierce confrontation for nearly 4 decades, resulting in complex, tense international relations. In 1947, President Truman's "Containment Policy" began with the "Containment of Communism" strategy, aimed at curtailing the Soviet Union's and communism's expansion. From 1948, the US implemented the Marshall Plan, providing approximately \$13 billion in aid to Western European countries for post-war recovery. In 1949, the US, along with other Western capitalist countries, helped form the NATO military alliance.

Following the end of World War II, the Soviet Union expanded its influence in Eastern Europe and Asia. This led to the establishment of socialist countries around the world, including the German Democratic Republic, Bulgaria, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Albania, Mongolia, China, and North Korea. On May 14, 1955, the Soviet Union, along with other Eastern European nations, formed the Warsaw Pact to oppose NATO. The rivalry and arms race between these two opposing military blocs were the main Cold War confrontation in the latter half of the 20th century. The Soviet Union's successes included the successful testing of the atomic bomb (1949) and the hydrogen bomb (1953), which ended the US monopoly on nuclear weapons and enhanced the Soviet Union's standing on the international stage.

In Asia, on October 1, 1949, the People's Republic of China was established. In February 1950, the Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, Alliance, and Mutual Assistance was signed, connecting socialism from Europe to Asia. This treaty was of immense significance, guaranteeing the security of China and the Soviet Union in the Far East and Asia. The treaty also strengthened the Soviet Union's position in Asia.

2.2. Factors related to the characteristics of Southeast Asia after World War II

In Southeast Asia, many countries, through various paths of liberation, became independent nations but soon faced wars of re-colonial occupation by the British, French, and Dutch colonial powers. Following the success of the August Revolutions in Vietnam and Indonesia in 1945, the Lao

people rose to establish revolutionary governments across the country. On October 12, 1945, the Lao government declared independence. Vietnam and Laos successively established provisional revolutionary governments and became independent and free nations, but soon after, they embarked on resistance wars against France to defend their independence. The national liberation revolutionary movement also developed strongly in other Southeast Asian countries.

On July 4, 1946, the United States granted independence to the Philippines, but subsequently signed numerous agreements with the government that allowed the US to establish military bases there. In 1950, Indonesia gained complete freedom from Dutch colonial rule. Under Sukarno's leadership, the Indonesian people built their nation with an independent, peace-loving, and anti-imperialist foreign policy.

2.3. The Indochina factor from the major powers

The ideology of "France as the center" guided all plans for the "return" to Indochina and the "restoration" of French sovereignty and imperial integrity (Phillipe Deviller, 2003, p. 40)^[13]. Charles de Gaulle, head of the French government-in-exile, clearly demonstrated his unwillingness to grant complete independence to French colonies, especially Indochina. On March 24, 1943, General de Gaulle affirmed France's determination to regain control of Indochina with a reasonably detailed plan. France intended to establish a Federal Government of Indochina comprising representatives of the Indochinese states and representatives of French citizens residing in Indochina, headed by a French Governor-General. This government would enjoy certain internal and economic rights, while France would represent external interests. The Federal Government of Indochina would be a member enjoying its own freedoms within the French Union. On August 16, 1945, de Gaulle also instructed d'Argenlieu that the mission of the French High Commissioner was to restore French sovereignty over the territories of the Indochinese Federation and to use any necessary military means. (Phillipe Deviller, 2003, p. 109)^[13].

De Gaulle's objectives regarding the occupation of Indochina met with opposition from the United States. In 1943, Roosevelt rejected de Gaulle's proposal for French units to participate in the liberation of Indochina. Before World War II, the United States prioritized Europe and Latin America, so Americans paid little attention to French Indochina or knew little about it. In his speeches, Roosevelt consistently criticized French rule in Indochina and mentioned his intention to place it under international administration. "France has milked Indochina for 100 years. The people of Indochina deserve better" (Pham, 2006)^[12]. He stated that he was thus unwilling to see any French return to Indochina. In China, the United States advocated assisting Chiang Kai-shek's government, establishing a corridor to counter Japanese militarism, and leveraging American influence in the Far East after World War II. The British disagreed with the American approach, as it could disrupt the British colonial system and expand American influence in Southeast Asia (Nguyen, 2015)^[6]. Therefore, Britain opposed placing Indochina under international control, promising to assist France when British troops entered Indochina to disarm the Japanese. Britain allowed de Gaulle to establish a military mission at the British Southeast Asia Front Command in Sri Lanka, and a French platoon tasked with operations in

Indochina was integrated into the British forces. (Nguyen et al., 2022)^[9].

The Casablanca (October 1943), Tehran (November 1943), and Cairo (November 1943) conferences addressed the role of France after World War II. At the Cairo conference, Roosevelt proposed the application of an international trusteeship regime in Indochina. Although the US president supported the establishment of an international trusteeship regime to guarantee Indochina's independence, there was no official announcement; the US essentially maintained a neutral stance. The Indochina issue after World War II was discussed by the major Allied powers at most summit conferences, particularly in Cairo and Potsdam. The decision of the Tripartite Conference in Potsdam (July 17th to August 2nd, 1945) specifically divided the disarmament of Japanese troops. North of the 16th parallel was assigned to the Republic of China, and south of it to Great Britain. General Wedemeyer headed the US military command in the Asia-Pacific, and the Republic of China's military command was also quite hostile and uncooperative towards France.

The differences in attitudes and viewpoints of the Allied countries towards Indochina were essential prerequisites for establishing a pro-Western government, which later became the state of Vietnam, headed by Bao Dai.

2.4. Factors in Vietnam after 1945

The successful August Revolution of 1945 and the establishment of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam were momentous events in the nation's history, officially ushering in an era in which the Vietnamese people rose to take control of their own destiny and choose their own path. "Vietnam has the right to enjoy freedom and independence, and in fact, it has become a free and independent nation. (Ho, 2011, p. 1)^[4]." From this point on, Vietnam held the position of a sovereign nation in its relations with foreign countries, and the Ho Chi Minh government was the sole legitimate representative of the Vietnamese people. The newly established government faced a precarious situation, with countless challenges as the economy and finances were depleted; agricultural and industrial production were stagnant.

The emergence of an independent Vietnamese state in Indochina contradicted the expectations of the major powers. The Allied powers (specifically the British and the Republic of China armies) used the pretext of disarming the Japanese military to carry out their plot to occupy Indochina. The Vietnamese revolution had to confront multiple enemies simultaneously, so President Ho Chi Minh and the Party, from the very beginning, determined: "The Indochinese revolution at this time is still a national liberation revolution. This revolution is ongoing; it is not yet complete, because the country has not yet achieved complete independence." At the end of August 1945, 200,000 Kuomintang troops, along with the Viet Quoc (Vietnam Nationalist Party) and Viet Cach (Vietnam Revolutionary Alliance), invaded the North to eliminate the revolutionary government, causing numerous political, economic, and social security difficulties. The Republic of China's army also forced the Democratic Republic of Vietnam to implement a food requisition system, requiring it to supply 10,000 tons of rice each month, while the people of North Vietnam were suffering the consequences of famine. (Tran, 2013, p.13)^[14]. The crucial task for the entire Party and the entire people at this time was to protect the revolutionary government and the regime. In the spirit of

"The Fatherland first," "The Nation first," the Party advocated: "Consolidating the government, using politics, diplomacy, necessary weapons, and even military force to maintain independence. (Vietnam Military History Institute, 1999, p.24)^[16]."

Following their defeat in the 1947 attack on the Viet Bac base, the French colonialists passively shifted from a "quick victory" strategy to a "protracted war" against the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. Realizing the war could not end quickly, the French colonialists vigorously implemented a pacification policy, establishing "local administrative councils" to consolidate their control over the temporarily occupied areas in Southern Vietnam, South Central Vietnam, and the Northern Delta.

2.5. Results from the impact of various factors on the emergence of the Vietnamese State.

Alongside military activities, France vigorously pursued political activities. In 1947, the "Provisional Republic of Cochinchina" government of Le Van Hoach collapsed, and the French colonialists established the "Provisional Government of Southern Vietnam" (October 1947) with Major General Nguyen Van Xuan as prime minister. Simultaneously, the French colonialists began contacting Bao Dai and separatist forces, aiming to establish a State of Vietnam.

Bao Dai, whose real name was Nguyễn Phúc Vĩnh Thụy, was born in 1913 and ascended the throne in 1926 upon the death of Emperor Khải Định. Because he was still young, Vĩnh Thụy was sent to France to continue his studies. He returned to Vietnam at the age of 19 (1932) and became the Emperor of Đại Nam, taking the regnal name Bao Dai – the thirteenth emperor of the Nguyễn dynasty. On the afternoon of August 30, 1945, at the Ngọ Môn gate of Huế, Bao Dai announced his abdication, handing over the imperial seal and sword to the delegation representing the Provisional Revolutionary Government. From then on, he became a citizen of independent Vietnam with his original name, Nguyễn Phước Vĩnh Thụy (Pham, 1983, pp. 76-79)^[10]. In line with the policy of national unity, President Hồ Chí Minh invited Vĩnh Thụy to Hanoi to assume the position of Supreme Advisor to the Government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. In mid-March 1946, Advisor Vĩnh Thụy was sent to the Republic of China as part of a government delegation. However, Vĩnh Thụy did not return to Vietnam but remained in the Republic of China, then went to Hong Kong. In **The Vietnamese Dragon** (political memoir 1913-1997), Bao Dai recounts that he went to Chongqing on March 16, 1946. On June 23, 1946, Bao Dai met with Chiang Kai-shek. A few days later, Bao Dai met General G. Marshall, the American ambassador to China. On September 15, 1946, Bao Dai went to Hong Kong. There, from September 29-30, 1946, Bao Dai received 2,000 Hong Kong dollars per month from the French missionary society to spend lavishly on all-night revelry. (Bao Dai, 1990, pp. 239-240)^[2].

During his time in Hong Kong, Bao Dai attracted the attention of scattered Vietnamese political forces in China, who hastily rallied in the so-called "National United Front" (established on February 17, 1947). It proposed that Bao Dai negotiate with France to establish a new government. Assessing the emergence of this front, according to A. Patti: "This organization is described as a loose alliance of discredited former collaborators, ambitious schemers, incompetent factions, and some honest but shallow leaders

who lack popular support (A. Patti, 1995, p. 298)^[1]. ”

Bao Dai's departure from Vietnam and the relinquishment of his position as advisor to the Democratic Republic of Vietnam further convinced France that "the king's return might appease those who feared being accused of treason for siding with the Viet Minh" (Phillipe Deviller, 2003, p. 396). Therefore, as early as January 1947, France implemented the "Bao Dai solution," as proposed by D'Argenlieu.

The US supported the Bao Dai solution. Jefferson Caffery (US ambassador to Paris) told the leaders of the French government: "The US wants France to have a more liberal policy in Vietnam" (Ngo & Phan, 2013). The US government demanded that France establish a local government with relatively broad powers to create a facade of "independence," thereby uniting anti-communist forces within the country. At the same time, the US cited the British granting independence to India (1947) and Burma (1948), and the US granting autonomy to the Philippines (1946), as suggestions for France when the French colonialists established a local government to confront the Hồ Chí Minh government.

In January 1947, Jean Cousseau, former chief of the French secret police in Indochina, went to Hong Kong to invite Bao Dai to take power. In Indochina, in May 1947, Bollaert sent Paul Mus, the French representative, to negotiate with the Government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. Using the failed meeting between President Ho Chi Minh and Paul Mus as a pretext, Bollaert ordered Cousseau to persuade Bao Dai to take power. On September 10, 1947, Bollaert delivered a speech in Ha Dong, conveying the message that "all intellectual families and all social strata are asked to choose, in no form whatsoever, to represent themselves. (Bao Dai, 1990, p.284)." Bollaert's Ha Dong speech is considered to have paved the way for Bao Dai's later direct contact with French representatives.

On December 6, 1947, Bao Dai and Bollaert met on a warship anchored in Hạ Long Bay. Bao Dai signed the Joint Communiqué issued by France. However, it refused to sign the Regulations on Institutions because, in his opinion, "the implemented institutions were unacceptably restrictive of Vietnamese sovereignty (Bao Dai, 1990, p.295)^[2]." According to A. Patti, "The document forced France to grant Vietnam a minimum level of autonomy that Diệm, as well as most opportunists in the National United Front, immediately opposed (A. Patti, 1995, p. 301)^[1]." The outcome of this meeting marked the beginning of the relationship between Bao Dai and France after the August 1945 Revolution; in other words, Bao Dai returned to his former master: "French, restore to me the title of Emperor, King of independent Vietnam encompassing all three unified regions, including all ethnic minorities in the North, Central, and South (Bao Dai, 1990, trang 195). ” In early February 1948, French Prime Minister Robert Schuman met with Bao Dai in Paris. Bao Dai said: "I assure you (the French) that you can recognize the independence and unity of Vietnam as a means of restoring peace. I do not wish to sever ties with France, but I wish to retain my position (Nguyen, 1991, p. 29)^[7]."

On June 5, 1948, Bollaert and Nguyen Van Xuan, representing Bao Dai, met for the second time in Ha Long Bay. The two sides signed the Ha Long Declaration, which stated that France solemnly recognized Vietnam's independence and that Vietnam would freely pursue its reunification. Vietnam requested "full" membership in the French Union as a French-affiliated state. Vietnam respected

the rights and interests of French citizens, would prioritize seeking assistance from French advisors on domestic and economic matters, and would have representatives from both sides sign agreements on political, economic, financial, and technical issues. (Bao Dai, 1990, pp. 576-577)^[2].

The Ha Long Declaration (1948) met with resistance from Paris and Saigon. On June 8, 1948, during a meeting at the French National Assembly, French Minister of Overseas Territories Paul Coste Floret warned Bollaert that he had "abandoned Cochinchina as part of France," forcing him to "maintain the integrity of diplomacy and defense for the entire French Union," and that "the Vietnamese armed forces should focus only on security, to maintain internal security. (Vu, 2014)^[17]." In reality, we see that the French colonialists still held complete control over Vietnam and Indochina, which led Bao Dai to lament: "When that declaration reached Saigon, it was a disaster. We no longer had the position of 1945, but returned to the 1884 treaty... (Bao Dai, 1990, p.322)^[2]."

In 1948 and 1949, the domestic situation underwent significant changes. The Vietnamese people's resistance war intensified and achieved many victories. Meanwhile, the Chinese Communist Party continued to achieve great victories. On January 22, 1949, Chiang Kai-shek fled to Taiwan. The United States urged France to establish a local government in Indochina quickly. From February 22, 1949, to March 8, 1949, the French government held a meeting in Paris to study the status of Vietnam as outlined in the 1948 Ha Long Declaration. Herzog led the French delegation, while Prince Bửu Lộc led the Bao Dai delegation. As a result, the Agreement was signed at the Elysée Palace (the French Presidential Palace) on March 8, 1949. The agreement consisted of seven articles. France organized a referendum to decide on the annexation of Cochinchina into Vietnamese territory, and simultaneously "committed to recognizing the independence and unity" of Vietnam within certain limits. According to the agreement, Vietnam had to accept the French army, operating under the name French Union Army alongside the Vietnamese army and under the joint command of French officers. In internal affairs, Vietnam had to prioritize French personnel and use French currency in economic activities. In foreign affairs, Vietnam had to comply with French foreign policy; all decisions regarding the appointment or acceptance of ambassadors required French consent. In addition, scientific and educational institutions such as the Pasteur Institute, the French School of Far Eastern Studies, and the Museum would operate under special regulations, with French participation.

The Elysée Agreement "recognized the independence and unity" of Vietnam, but at the same time included many restrictions in critical areas such as military, diplomacy, culture, and education. Therefore, this agreement did not grant Vietnam true independence in the complete sense of the word. In reality, control remained with the French colonial government, and France continued to maintain power in Vietnam and throughout Indochina. In April 1949, the "Southern Regional Assembly" voted to annex Southern Vietnam into Vietnamese territory. On June 4, 1949, the French National Assembly officially passed Law 49-733, returning Southern Vietnam to Vietnam, permanently ending the status of "French overseas territory" for this region. Article 2 of Law 49-733 states: "The territory of Cochinchina was returned to the United Vietnamese State according to the

Joint Declaration of June 5, 1948, and the Declaration of the French Government of August 19, 1948. Cochinchina is no longer included in the French Overseas Territories (Nguyen, 2019, pp. 266-267)^[8]. "

On April 28, 1949, Bao Dai returned to Vietnam and chose Da Lat as his headquarters and workplace. On July 1, 1949, Bao Dai established the "State of Vietnam" government, with himself as Head of State and Prime Minister. In this government, Nguyen Van Xuan served as Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense, and Nguyen Phan Long as Minister of Foreign Affairs. On July 3, 1949, Bao Dai appointed Nguyen Huu Tri as Chief Minister of Tonkin, Phan Van Giao as Chief Minister of Annam, and Tran Van Huu as Chief Minister of Cochinchina. With the establishment of the State of Vietnam government led by Bao Dai, France hoped to gain favorable political influence, divide and weaken the resistance forces. The Bao Dai government, established and consolidated in the occupied territories, would become a powerful tool for France to continue the war (Vietnam Military History Institute, 1989, p. 87)^[15].

When France and the United States recognized the Bao Dai government in February 1950, the State of Vietnam's foreign relations were primarily recognized by capitalist countries. From its establishment until 1955, the Bao Dai government had established diplomatic relations with 35 countries worldwide. This regime also participated in many international organizations under the influence and control of capitalist countries. For example, Vietnam became a member of the World Health Organization (WHO) (May 17, 1951), the International Labour Organization (ILO) (June 21, 1950), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) (November 11, 1950), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (June 21, 1950), the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) (September 24, 1951), the Universal Postal Union (UPU) (October 20, 1951), the Economic Council for Asia and the Far East (ECAFE) (1949), the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) (April 1, 1955), the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) (September 21, 1956), the International Organization for Civil Aviation (OACI) (September 18, 1954)...

3. Conclusion

The establishment of the State of Vietnam resulted from strategic interventions by major powers, particularly the United States and France. After World War II, Soviet influence expanded significantly in Southeast Asia and in other regions, compelling the United States to adjust its strategy to contain the spread of communism. In Asia, the United States supported the creation of pro-Western governments such as those in South Korea and the Republic of China. Within this context, in Southeast Asia - especially in Vietnam - the United States encouraged France to form a political entity that could counter the Democratic Republic of Vietnam led by President Ho Chi Minh. At the same time, former emperor Bao Dai sought to restore the political authority he had once held. The convergence of external strategic objectives and Bao Dai's personal aspirations ultimately led to the creation of the State of Vietnam. Consequently, this political entity emerged as a compromise that served the strategic interests of both France and the United States during the early stages of the Cold War.

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