

DIEN BIEN PHU VICTORY – THE SYMBOL OF VIETNAM’S WILL AND CREATIVE POWER

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Abstract: Dien Bien Phu victory in 1954 was the greatest victory in the war against the French, leading to the signing of Geneva Agreements, ending the war and reunification of Vietnam. The paper aims at clarifying two important issues – reasons leading to the victory and lessons learnt from this victory. *First*, Dien Bien Phu victory resulted from the will and decisiveness of the whole nation in the war for independence and freedom of the country. *Second*, the power of Vietnamese nation which led to Dien Bien Phu victory resulted from the intelligence and creativity of Vietnamese people, forcing the French to fight in very difficult conditions and were defeated by the Vietnam army.

Key words: Dien Bien Phu, war, will, national solidarity.

The date of May 7th, 1954 has entered Vietnam history as one of the most remarkable days. On this day, soldiers of Vietnam army, after 56 days of brave fighting, defeated the French army base supported by the American in Dien Bien Phu.

With this victory, Vietnam army killed and caught into prisoners 16,200 officers and soldiers of the French army which were included in 17 infantry battalions and paratroops, 3 artillery and mortars battalions, 10 battalions of Vietnamese officers and soldiers which had just been added to the French army there and a big number of vehicles, tanks, and helicopters. Among those caught there was one brigadier general, 16 colonels and lieutenant-colonels, 353 officers from lieutenants to majors, 1,396 officers. Vietnam army also shot and destroyed at site 57 planes of different types of the French and managed to get quite a big

number of trophies, including 28 mortars, 64 vehicles, 5, 915 guns of different types, 20,000 liters of petrol, 21,000 parachutes, 20 tons of medicine and medical equipment and many grenades and ammunition, etc.

Dien Bien Phu victory of Vietnam destroyed the French Navarre plan, spoiling the plot of gaining military advantage in order to turn round the war situation in Indochina by the French and American.

Dien Bien Phu victory made a significant blow to the French will of invasion, creating favorable conditions for the diplomatic fighting of Vietnam, making aggressive colonial forces to sign the Geneva Agreements, leading to peace in Indochina on the basis of respect towards independence and territorial integrity of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia.

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Dien Bien Phu operation – the peak of the strategic Winter-Spring 1953 - 1954 operation contributed significantly to ending triumphantly the long-lasting war of Vietnamese people against the French colonists, resulting in liberation of North Vietnam, leading North Vietnam into the period of construction and development, serving as a strong foundation for the task of liberating South Vietnam, uniting Vietnam and contributing to the break-down of the colonial system in the world.

With the scale and importance of the operation in the war against the French colonists by Vietnamese people, Dien Bien Phu is considered to be one of the biggest and most important victories in the history of nations under domination against invading colonist armies.

Evaluating of the significance of Vietnamese nation's victory at Dien Bien Phu, Peter Macdonald, an England researcher writes: *“Compared to other siege battles (for example, the American were entrenched in Bantran for 66 days, the German enclosed Stalingrad for 70 days, the English army kept Toobruc for 24 days, and then one million soldiers of the Red Army enclosed 330,000 German soldiers at Stalingrad, etc.) Dien Bien Phu battle with 50,000 soldiers of Viet Minh enclosed 16,000 French soldiers is not a battle of big scale. What makes it famous is the way the Vietnamese army was fighting, the steps of the operation as well as the result and its consequences. All this has made the fighting at Dien Bien Phu become one of the most important fighting in history and brought*

the name Vo Nguyen Giap into history”⁽¹⁾

General Paul E'ly, Chief of the French Army remarked: *“Again, technic was defeated by people who have a soul and belief”*. The soul mentioned by him is the love towards country of each person and soldiers of Vietnam People Army, belief is their belief in the bright future of independence, freedom and happiness of the nation.

Ho Chi Minh, a Vietnam's respected leader evaluated Dien Bien Phu victory *“as a golden milestone in history”*⁽²⁾, because *“this is the first time in history, a small colonial country has defeated a big colonist. This is a great triumph of Vietnamese people, and at the same time, it is also the victory of all peace, democracy and socialism forces in the world”*⁽³⁾.

With its great significance in constructing and protecting the country by Vietnamese people, Dien Bien Phu victory has deserved *“to be recorded in history as a battle at Bach Dang, Chi Lang or Dong Da in the 20th century, and it has entered history as a great triumph, breaking down the colonial system of imperialism”*⁽⁴⁾.

Dien Bien Phu victory of Vietnamese people was really a motivation and encouragement for other dominated nations to struggle for their freedom and frighten colonial and imperialist forces.

(1) Peter Macdonald (1992), *Giap – An Assessment*. Perrin – 12, avenue d'Italie, Paris.

(2) Ho Chi Minh (1996), *Complete Works*, Vol.11, National Political Publishing House, Hanoi, p.201.

(3) Ho Chi Minh (1996), *Ibid.*, Vol.10, p.12.

(4) Le Duan (1970), *Under the Triumphant Flag of the Party, for Independence, Freedom and Socialism, Let's Try for the New Victory*, Truth Publishing House, Hanoi, p.50.

During his visit to Vietnam, Phidel Castro said: “*Dien Bien Phu victory made dominated nations head up. Dien Bien Phu “thunder” stroke the whole world, reaching far away regions which were still in the long-lasting night of domination and slavery, awakening them and creating trust for them to fight for their freedom*”⁽⁵⁾.

As about its influence on imperialist forces, Jules Roy – a researcher writes: “*In the world, Waterloo did not have such an impact as the frightening effect caused by Dien Bien Phu. This is one of the biggest failure of the West, fortelling the collapse of imperialism. Dien Bien Phu “thunder” has still echoed*”⁽⁶⁾.

The great meaning of Dien Bien Phu victory is in the fact that it has still remained the source of encouragement for Vietnamese nation in constructing and protecting their country for over half past century. Especially, the spirit of activeness and proactiveness, will of victory, genius leadership and strategic decisions of the communist party and President Ho Chi Minh as well as national solidarity and sacrifice of Vietnamese people during Dien Bien Phu operation has always been the source of encouragement for Vietnamese nation during the war against America and during the process of innovation and developing the country nowadays.

The power which helped Vietnamese people win in Dien Bien Phu operation primarily comes from the *will and decisiveness* of the communist party and the whole nation in struggles for independence and

freedom of the country. With this will and decisiveness, the communist party and government of Vietnam could manage to mobilize an enormous power of the whole nation for the war for independence, freedom and unification of the country. The feelings of humiliation to be people of a country under domination of a foreign invader made them be more aware of the pain of losing the country, therefore, they were ready to “*Die for the country to live*” when they were encouraged by an revolutionary organization with clear strategies. They were ready to die to protect their country. The active involvement of different classes of people from the river delta to mountainous areas, whether they were old or young, male or female, belonging to any belief or religion has been an evidence for the powerful will of the whole nation in a harmonious solidarity. As such, besides a big number of army forces such as Battalion 308, Battalion 316, Battalion 304, etc. with the total number of soldier of about 40,000 (55,000 if including both the second front) there were hundreds of thousands youth volunteers and people of the fire line of different ethnic minorities and coming from different provinces in Northern Delta, Northwest, Northeast, Thanh Hoa - Nghe An - Ha Tinh, etc. With support of the army logistic force, youth volunteers and people of the fire line, the Management Board of

⁽⁵⁾ Nhandan Newspaper, March 27th 2009, p.3.

⁽⁶⁾ Jules Roy (1994), *Dien Bien Phu Battle under the French Eyes*, Ho Chi Minh City Publishing House, p.579.

the operation provided soldiers fighting in Dien Bien Phu 1,200 tons of grenades, 1,783 tons of petrol, 14,950 tons of rice, 268 tons of salt, 577 tons of meat, 565 tons of food and 177 tons of other necessities, provided treatment to 10,130 wounded soldiers and 4,429 sick soldiers.

In order to have this big quantity of food to be provided to the front, the Logistics Committee managed to mobilize 25,056 tons of rice and 1,824 tons of food. As about human resource, the Operation Management Board mobilized 261,453 batches of people, spending nearly 12 millions working days, using 20,991 bicycles and 736 other similar simple vehicles⁽⁷⁾.

This is not the only important factor to be mentioned. The power of Vietnamese will in Dien Bien Phu victory was also multiplied by many times with cooperation of the whole nation from far away fronts such as Binh Tri Thien, Region V, the Highlands and South Delta.

We would not have managed to mobilize such great human and material resources if there had not been the national solidarity for the objective of the nation's independence, freedom and happiness and will and decisiveness. The lessons learnt of the power of national solidarity has been promoted in the war against America to release the South Vietnam and protect the North Vietnam and during nearly 30 years of innovations. The will and decisiveness of fighting for the nation's independence, freedom and happiness of each soldier helped them overcome every difficulty and

challenge, defeating the enemy and won triumphantly in Dien Bien Phu operation as well as in the war against the French.

The power of Vietnamese nation in the war against professional French army which was supported by American army also resulted from their *intelligence and creativity!*⁽⁷⁾

During the summer of 1953, facing big failures in Indochina front, French government appointed General Navarre to be the Chief Commander of the expeditionary force. Navarre put forward a strategic plan in which the French army would invade the South, avoiding fighting with the main force of Vietnam in the North front, using big forces to fight in the free areas and get deeper into the rear front of Vietnam's fighting forces in order to weaken and keep Vietnam's main force there, breaking Vietnamese army's advancing plan in the main front. At the same time, the French would mobilize resources to build a strong and big mobile force so that it would be able to defeat the main Vietnamese army's forces in a decisive fighting which was expected to take place during the dry season of 1955. The success of the military plan under the name of General Navarre, as expected by the French, "would create favorable military conditions so that they could be foundations for France to give forward a political solution, helping France get out of war with reputation".

⁽⁷⁾ Institute of Vietnam Military History (2000), *Summary of Operations during the War against French Colonists 1945-1954*, People Army Publishing House, Hanoi, pp.495 and 498.

For the part of Vietnam's revolutionary forces, in the end of March 1953, Politburo of Vietnam Labor Party had a meeting to discuss of policies for the Winter-Spring 1953-1954 operation and approved the proposal by General Military Commission with objectives of maintaining and promoting strategic proactiveness of the military forces. In order to deal with the Navarre's plan, Politburo and General Military Commission planned to attack their weak points, weakening their forces, forcing them to divide the mobile force so that when the conditions were favorable, Vietnamese forces would quickly gather all their strength and try to defeat the enemy, changing the war situation.

The motto for the Winter-Spring 1953-1954 operation is: *active, proactive, mobile and dynamic*.

The war against the French in the whole Indochina front during the Winter-Spring 1953-1954 operation took place in steps as planned by Politburo, General Military Commission and Commander-in-Chief Board: Vietnamese army started the attack by the main forces in many fronts, namely Northwest, North of the Highlands, Upper Laos, Central Laos, Lowland Laos (in cooperation with Laos Pathet's forces) and East of Cambodia (in cooperation with the Releasing Force Issarak of Cambodia), etc. These successful progresses broke the French army's plan of gathering a major mobile force in the Red River Delta. Instead, this mobile force was divided to go to five different places with the main objective of maintaining strategic areas rather than carry out their mobile tasks.

And Dien Bien Phu - from not being mentioned in Navarre's plan, became the focus of Navarre's plan as the French had to allocate a big part of the mobile force to support Northwest, protecting Upper Laos front in order to destroy Vietnamese army's plan. Dien Bien Phu became the place where the decisive battle between Vietnamese army and French army which had been supported by the American army so that it could become a strong military base, a Verdon in Indochina.

The most important factor leading to Dien Bien Phu victory is flexible leadership, destroying Navarre's plan in the most important stage.

The creativity of Vietnamese army can also be seen in the ability to mobilize an enormous major forces with great number of artillery forces which were very difficult to move in a long distant of bad mountainous roads. Besides, it is important to mention changes made so that the operation fitted into the context and situation, from the motto of "*fast fighting fast victory*" to "*fighting strongly and progressing strongly*" and this ensured victory of the operation into the military base which was considered "impossible to be defeated" of the French army in Vietnam.

Promotion of will and decisiveness, combined with excellent creativity of Vietnamese people were the most important factors to create Vietnamese power, leading to Dien Bien Phu victory 60 years ago. That's why we can say Dien Bien Phu victory is the symbol of Vietnam's will and creative power.

