

ĐIỆN BIÊN PHỦ VICTORY - THE VIETNAMESE POWER AND WORLD SIGNIFICANCE (Summary of International conference commemorating 60th anniversary of Điện Biên Phủ Victory)

TRẦN ĐỨC CƯỜNG^(*)

Along with the country's spirit towards 60th anniversary of historic Điện Biên Phủ victory (1954-2014), on 5th May 2014, Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences has held an international conference "Điện Biên Phủ Victory – The Vietnamese power and world significance" in Hà Nội. This is a great chance to educate the patriotism tradition and inspire the national pride for people as well as to review lessons of the power of people's war against intervention, of independent and freedom spirit of Vietnamese people; thereby, to draw necessary lessons for nations to build a peaceful and developing world together, and to avoid the occurrence of war in international relations based on respecting each other's independence rights and territorial integrity. This article is the summarization of speakers' reports presented in the conference on Điện Biên Phủ Victory – The Vietnamese power and world significance.

1. Điện Biên Phủ victory in 1954 is the most significant campaign of Winter-Spring Offensive Strategy 1953-1954 as well as the biggest victory of Vietnamese military during the Vietnamese resistance against France. This great victory made a breakthrough for development of Vietnamese resistance against France which led to the agreement of Geneva Conference, and to end the French intervention in Vietnam, the North was independent and started to develop towards socialist, to form the strong foundation for the war

against American to liberalize the South and finally to unite the country.

Điện Biên Phủ victory is forever a remarkable event and huge pride of Vietnamese people. This is not only the great victory for Vietnamese people but also the victory of national liberation movement and peace-loving people all over the world.

^(*) Assoc. Prof. and Dr., Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences.

A number of reports at the conference mentioned the war situation and battle plan of the French Expeditionary Corps and Vietnamese military and people. In May 1953, facing the crushing defeat on Indochinese battlefield, France appointed General Navarre (the 7th Commander-in-chief sent to Indochina by France) to replace General Salan as Commander-in-chief of French Expeditionary Corps. After 2 months of researching and surveying battlefield in Vietnam, Navarre established a strategic plan. The plan was to pacify the South, avoid fighting against Vietnam People's Army on the Northern main battlefield, use major force to attack free region, attack the rear of the resistance forces in order to undermine, hold off the regular army and disrupt the offensive plan of Vietnam People's Army on the main battlefield etc. The objective of Navarre's military plan was to "create the best military conditions that would allow a political solution which was favorable to France and help France to get out of this war honorably".

Therefore, in the Winter-Spring 1953-1954 campaign, Navarre gathered maneuver battalions in the Northern Delta in order to deal with possible offensive of Vietnam People's Army, to raid and pacify the region behind French Expeditionary Corps, let troops parachuted into Lạng Sơn, attacked Ninh Bình, threatened the base resistance of Vietnamese military and people in Việt Bắc and Thanh-Nghệ-Tĩnh.

Foreseeing warfare plots and tactics of French Expeditionary Corps, General Staff of the Vietnam People's Army advocated: to attack on important strategic directions, destroy the enemy, force French military to disperse maneuver for dealing, deepen the fundamental contradiction between troop concentration and dispersion of French army until possible to quickly gather forces to destroy important vitality forces of French army and change the outcome of the war. The battle plan for Winter-Spring 1953-1954 campaign was outlined and quickly implemented with the motto: "*active, initiate, mobile and flexible*".

The evolution of the resistance against France in Winter-Spring 1953-1954 campaign on the entire Indochinese battlefield took place proactively according to the plan of General Staff of the Vietnam People's Army: to start offensives in the Northern West, Northern Highland, Upper Laos, Central Laos, Eastern Laos and Eastern Cambodia etc., at the same time, to attack on the South, V Region and Northern Delta. The victories of offensives had smashed France's plan to gather large maneuver force. French strategic maneuver force was fragmented to 5 places with the main task was to keep the strategic areas; they were no longer "free" to perform maneuver tasks. Deepening contradictions of French Expeditionary Corps, between concentration of troops

to attack the opponent's military and dispersion to deal with Vietnam People's Army's advocate of stretching the enemy to attack, was revolutionary forces' first victory in Winter-Spring 1953-1954 campaign.

So from not being in Navarre's plan, due to the dispersion of an important part in maneuver force to support Northwest of Vietnam, protect Upper Laos in order to break the Vietnam People's Army's offensive plan, Điện Biên Phủ became the focal point in Navarre's plan. Điện Biên Phủ became the place where strategic decisive battle took place between Vietnam People's Army and French Expeditionary Corps who was very modernly equipped by America to become an entrenched powerful corporation, a French Verdon in Indochina.

2. The battle of Vietnamese military and people on Điện Biên Phủ battlefield was meticulously and thoughtfully prepared, with a great effort of the armed forces and the Vietnamese people in the North, Central and South with the cooperation of patriotic forces of Laos (Pathet Laos), Cambodia liberators... The focus was the fierce battle with full of sacrifices and hardships of Vietnamese military and people on Điện Biên Phủ battlefield. Another innovative and dynamic decision which was recognized by researchers as one of the reasons of victory was the change in warfare motto: *"from fast strike, fast victory to steady attack, steady advance"*.

The first factor contributing in the victory of Vietnamese military and people on Điện Biên Phủ battlefield was the correctness in the strategy of *all-people, comprehensive* during resistance against France, the correctness of policies and directions of the Politburo, Government of Vietnam and President Hồ Chí Minh. That was reflected in the President Hồ Chí Minh's direction *"only fighting when being sure to win, not fighting when being unsure to win"*, which was fully understood by Commander of Điện Biên Phủ battlefield, General Võ Nguyên Giáp – a talented, strong-willed General of Vietnamese military and people. Besides, there was effective coordination in struggling between Vietnamese military and people, Laos and Cambodian revolutionary armies, assistance from allies and international friends and support from peace-loving people all over the world.

Some reports stated clearly the significance of the historic victory of Điện Biên Phủ: Điện Biên Phủ victory in Spring 1954 has profound world significance. For Vietnam and the entire Indochina, Điện Biên Phủ victory had attacked decisively on French's invading spirit which was helped by America (by the end of French war, 80% of French war costs was granted by America), created favorable conditions for the fight of Vietnamese people in the field of diplomacy, forced belligerent forces to sign the Geneva Accords, restored peace in Indochina on the basis of mutual

respect for independence, sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia.

Điện Biên Phủ victory - the peak of Winter-Spring Offensive Strategy 1953-1954, was an important contribution to ending the prolonged, arduous resistance war of Vietnamese people. The greatest success was to complete liberating the North, to construct and develop the North to become a solid base for the liberation of the South and national unity, to contribute to the helpless disintegration of the colonial system of colonialism in the world. The victory of Vietnamese people in resistance against France, especially Điện Biên Phủ victory, had awakened the fighting spirit to gain independence in many countries, especially in Africa such as Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia etc.

It can be said that the victory of Vietnamese military and people fueled the national liberation movement in African countries. That movement had become the hurricane in revolutionary national liberation. Consequently, the strengthening culminated in 1960 which is called "Year of Africa" with the independence of 17 African nations, including all French colonies in West Africa and Equatorial Africa, French protectorates - Togo and Cameroon, British Nigeria, Belgian Congo, British Somalia and Italian Somalia etc. In the late '50s and '60s of 20th century, in anti-imperialist struggles, people chanted the slogan: Vietnam – Hồ Chí

Minh – Điện Biên Phủ as the source of inspiration for the intelligence and courage in fighting.

Regarding to the significance of Điện Biên Phủ victory, according to British researcher Peter Macdonald: "Compared with other sieges (for example, 66-day siege of America in Bantran, Germany surrounded Stalingrad for 70 days, British troops held Tobruk for 24 days and 1 million Soviet soldiers surrounded 330,000 German soldiers in Stalingrad etc.), Điện Biên Phủ battle with 50,000 Việt Minh surrounded 160,000 French soldiers is nothing. But what made it famous was the attack, the development process of the struggle as well as the outcome and consequences that it led to. All of those things have made Điện Biên Phủ battle to become one of the decisive battles of all time and placed Võ Nguyên Giáp into history books".

3. An important content mentioned by many reports is to promote the values of Điện Biên Phủ victory to build and defend Vietnam nowadays. Reports appreciated the clever, creativity and bravery spirit of Vietnamese military and people during the revolution 60 years ago. This spirit needs to be promoted in the process of building and defending the country, to prevent poverty and old-fashioned, to create the happiness and fullness for people. A lesson drew out is: even the most important decision must be based on the reality of life and in terms of Điện Biên Phủ, it is the reality of battlefield, to

stick with practice and people, to believe in people to make the right decisions with the principle of building and defending the country's process in a timely manner.

It can be said that the 60th anniversary of Điện Biên Phủ victory is a chance for the Party and Vietnamese people to stimulate national pride, to continue to inheriting and promoting patriotism and heroic revolutionary traditions, to use lessons of Điện Biên Phủ campaign flexibly and creatively, to promote industrialization – modernization of the country, to successfully complete two tasks of building and protecting the country in general and military and defense missions in particular in the rapid and complex changes of the world and regional situation. With the results stated, the Conference is considered to be a great success □

Some reports in the Conference

1. Assoc. Prof. and Dr. Phạm Xuân Biên: The South in Winter-Spring 1954-1953 and Điện Biên Phủ battles.
2. Dr. Bountheng Souksavatd: Điện Biên Phủ – The unity of Indochinese countries, flag of struggle against colonialism, national liberation.
3. Assoc. Prof. and Dr. Christian C. Lentz: Struggles in Điện Biên Phủ: The contribution of local people in Vietnam's victory.
4. Prof. Carl Thayer: The meaning of Điện Biên Phủ victory and Geneva Accords.
5. Prof. and Dr. Vu Hường Đông: A critical time for the era towards peaceful development and equal dialogue - Meaning of Điện Biên Phủ victory and the signing of the Geneva Accords in world history.
6. Assoc. Prof. and Dr. Đinh Quang Hải: International support and assistance in Điện Biên Phủ campaign.
7. Prof. and Dr. Trương Thuận hồng: Điện Biên Phủ victory from world's perspective.
8. Prof. People's Teacher Phan Huy Lê: Some bold, timely decisions indicating General Võ Nguyên Giáp's talent and strong-will.
9. Prof. and Dr. Marc Jason Gilbert: Điện Biên Phủ heritage about nuclear war in Southeast Asia 1954-1968.
10. Prof. and Dr. Phạm Xuân Nam: Điện Biên Phủ victory – Victory of Vietnamese culture.
11. Assoc. Prof. and Dr. Nguyễn Trọng Phúc: Leadership role of the Party and President Hồ Chí Minh in resistance against French colonialism and historic Điện Biên Phủ victory.
12. Assoc. Prof. and Dr. Pierre Aselin: Điện Biên Phủ, Geneva and the shift to “peaceful struggle”.
13. Dr. Rob Hurle: Hồ Chí Minh and the use of symbols to mobilize Việt Bắc

- people - The propaganda began for Điện Biên Phủ.
14. Assoc. Prof. Bùi Đình Thanh: Điện Biên Phủ victory contributed to changing world geography - politics in the second half of 20th century.
15. Lieutenant General Đỗ Bá Ty: Applying lessons of strategic advisory work from Winter-Spring Offensive 1953-1954 and Điện Biên Phủ campaign in the national defense today.
16. Prof. and Dr. Sc. Vladimir Kolotov: Điện Biên Phủ victory was a historic milestone in against foreign aggression process.

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