

From Ill-Will to Friendship: Examining the Republic of Vietnam - France Relationship from 1968 to 1975

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Abstract

This article aims to trace the evolution of the Republic of Vietnam - France relationship from a frosty relationship to friendship over the course of the Vietnam War (1968-1975). The author employed archival documents of the former Republic of Vietnam housed at the National Archives Center II, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam as well as a wide range of derivative research to periodize two phases of this tie. While maintaining a strong influence of the French in South Vietnam, South Vietnamese leaders of this country lost official contact with France since the pullout of the French troops in 1956. This relationship plummeted to the bottom in 1965 due to the decolonial policy of Ngo Dinh Diem and the no-nonsense intervention of the US in Vietnam. However, South Vietnamese leaders made an attempt to break the ice with France when this country was culled for the Paris peace talk conference avenue in 1968. The relationship underwent a rapprochement from 1968 to 1973 with a series of advantageous statements from France. As soon as the withdrawal of the US, France continued to keep up a correspondence with the Republic of Vietnam and rescued this country from Communist sabotage and impetuous and flagrant violations. However, the about-face of international relations with the Sino-American détente and a serious decrease in foreign aid brought this relationship to an end after the Fall of Saigon in 1975.

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“French preoccupation with Vietnam stems from reasons that are more realistic than the desire to nettle the young men in Washington.”

1. Introduction

The Fall of Dien Bien Phu egged France into signing the Geneva Accord.² However, the US government unpremeditatedly leave Southeast Asia for the Communists due to the leading theory of Containment. The strategic appearance of the US in Southeast Asia embarrassed the Vietminh's attempt to effortlessly sway Vietnam through a so-called free election in Vietnam after a two-year implementation of the regulated Accord. As a result, the US gave a full aegis to Ngo Dinh Diem³ was entrusted as Prime Minister of the State of Vietnam by Bao Dai.⁴ However, Diem benefited from this immensely helpful opportunity to shepherd his own state and become the first president of the Republic of Vietnam (RVN) thanks to a referendum with a consensus of monarchical abdication under the succor of the US government.⁵ The victory of Diem was concomitant to his rejection to reunite with the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRVN) and demarcated his sovereignty along the 17th parallel. As soon as seizing power, Diem attempted to mark France's termination in Indochina. With the purpose of eliminating French relics in various aspects of South Vietnam, Diem Vietnamized the national educational hierarchy and suppressed

² Phillip Davidson, *Vietnam at War: The History, 1946-1975* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 262; Ban Tong, *ket bien soan Lich su, Lich su Bo Tong tham muu trong cuoc khang chien chong Phap (1945-1954)*, (Hanoi, Vietnam: National Political Publisher, 1991), 799; George K. Tanham, *Communist Revolutionary Warfare: From the Vietminh to the Viet Cong* (Santa Barbara, CA: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2006), 51; Pierre Asselin, *A Bitter Peace: Washington, Hanoi, and the Making of the Paris Agreement* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 38.

³ Ngo Dinh Diem (1901-1963) was a Vietnamese Catholic intelligentsia and the first President of the Republic of Vietnam. Diem was generally elected as the President after the 1955 Referendum in Saigon to establish an anticommunism government in the south of Vietnam and deter the expansionist goal of Communism. Diem was overthrown and assassinated by the Army of Republic of Vietnam in the 1963 Coup d'etat in 1963.

⁴ Bao Dai (1913-1997) was the last Emperor of Vietnam's monarchy. Bao Dai surrendered Vietminh and dethrone his reign after the 1945 August Revolution. However, France administration connived with Bao Dai to restore his throne and assign him as the head of the State of Vietnam - an anticommunism independent state in the French Union. Bao Dai held power from 1949 to 1954. Then, he was dispelled by Diem after the 1955 General Referendum.

⁵ Ellen J. Hammer, "The Bao Dai Experiment," *Pacific Affairs* 23, no. 1 (March, 1950), 55; Jessica M. Chapman, "Staging Democracy: South Vietnam's 1955 Referendum to Depose Bao Dai," *Diplomatic History* 30, no. 4 (September, 2006): 671-703.

French-based obstructionists' mutinies in his country, which persistently discarded the signed Vietnam-France cultural agreement in 1954. The rising power of an Americanism president relegated France's influences of the South, it was a peripheral issue, and this decision of Diem entirely removed French totalitarianism.⁶ Instead of staying under the cloud of colonialism, Diem was more down-to-earth to ruminate himself over the threat of Communists, which became a joint vision of Southeast Asian countries and set up a net of comradeship on the way to anti-communism with the aid of the US.

The formation of the RVN admittedly originated from the independent state suggested by the French.⁷ On June 5, 1948, Ha Long Bay Agreement (Accords de la baie d'Along) was formally authorized by former Emperor Bao Dai. He was subservient to the affluent budget of France, and he was determined to undermine the fame of Ho Chi Minh, who formed the DRVN on September 2, 1945. When he abdicated in 1945, Bao Dai remained a heavy influence on Vietnam. French High Commissioners firmly believed that he was an influential figure to perform his governing style in a French-oriented anti-communist state in Vietnam. In 1949, the State of Vietnam (E'tat du Vietnam) was established, and Nguyen Van Xuan - a French-oriented intellectual, hoped to grow into his premiership of the nascent government. In the period 1949 to 1954, the State of Vietnam was comprehensively succored by the French and Americans.⁸ Owing to this source, the government of Xuan was able to muster up its strength to quash the uprisings of the Vietminh in the north of Vietnam.

Despite the fact that the final troops of the French Army left South Vietnam in 1956, French culture and education still propped up the rigorous policies of South Vietnamese politicians. In subsequent years, the French were coerced into restoring peace and independence in several African countries, and it globally marked a conclusion of French colonialism. Although losing power, the new French government resistantly upheld its influence as much as possible. The Marshall Plan to reconstruct Europe after

⁶ Edward Miller, *Misalliance: Ngo Dinh Diem, the United States, and the Fate of South Vietnam* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 119; Monique Brinson Demery, *Finding the Dragon Lady* (New York: Public Affairs, 2013), 94.

⁷ Stein Tønnesson, *Vietnam 1946: How the war began* (Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2010).

⁸ Pierre Montagnon, *L'Indochine française* (Paris, France: Tallandier, 2016), 325; Sandra C. Taylor, "Tracing the Origins of U.S. Involvement in Vietnam," *OAH Magazine of History* 1, no. 1 (April, 1985): 19.

the Second World War bound the government of Charles de Gaulle⁹ to US aid. From the end of the Second World War to 1965, France's government was congruent with US policy in the Vietnam War. However, it showed an about-turn of foreign policy when the US put its troops into South Vietnam's territory and expanded the war to the DRVN.¹⁰ De Gaulle resentfully placed his faith in the direct engagement of the US in Vietnam and indicated that the feature of the First Indochina War with the debacle of France was incomparable with the war of America in Vietnam. De Gaulle soon informed the US in 1955 that a president that captured power by virtue of foreign intervention would not earn the Vietnamese people's support.¹¹ The thesis of Douglas J. Snyder posited that the French-American relationship underwent discord as soon as the US troops showed a sharp escalation in the Vietnam War. The US muddled the water in Vietnam, which should not have occurred once France achieved the ambition of the US in Vietnam.¹² While grappling with the guerrilla war of Vietminh, the French presaged a bleak aftermath and led to the US's deeper engagement in the Vietnam War. Thereafter, France's government churned it into a non-aligned country in the Civil War of Vietnamese people.

It is undeniable that the Franco - American relationship had an influential impact on the war in Vietnam as a critical element. Despite being an ally of the US in Europe, France unsatisfactorily acceded to America's foreign policies in Vietnam and proclivity for a neutral stance in this conflict. In historiography, historians poured their ink on the Franco-American relationship in place of South Vietnam-France ties, which is a ripe area for the scholarship. Researching this tie was meaningfully significant as the outcome of France in the south of Vietnam was starkly substantial although the government of South Vietnam endeavored to hold aloof from it. Though pulling out from Vietnam in 1956, France still ranked its influence on top of foreign policies in an attempt to undertake

⁹ Charles André Joseph Marie de Gaulle (1890-1970) was a French army officer and a statesman who led Free France against Nazi Germany in World War II and chaired the Provisional Government of the French Republic from 1944 to 1946 in order to restore democracy in France. He held the Presidential position of France from 1965 to 1969.

¹⁰ Olivier Bergeron-Boutin, "Willful Blindness: Franco-American Relations and the Escalation of the Vietnam War," *FLUX: International Relations Review* 9 (January, 2019): 7-21.

¹¹ Max Paul Friedman, *Rethinking Anti-Americanism: The History of an Exceptional Concept in American Foreign Relations* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 174-175.

¹² Donald Snyder, "The Indochina Syndrome: War, Memory, and the Franco-American Conflict over Vietnam, 1963-1973," (Ph.D. thesis, University of Colorado, 2014).

a post-colonial role in international affairs. This relationship cooled from 1954 to 1965 for a dozen of reasons. First, Ngo Dinh Diem dismissed all impacts of French domination through his adamant policy. Second, the diplomatic recognition of France's government toward the People's Republic of China (the PRC) strained the bilateral relationship. Even though the government of South Vietnam broke the ice and ruptured bilateral relations with France's government in 1965, the National Liberation Front of Southern Vietnam (NLF) built by Southern Communists raised grave apprehension about Nguyen Van Thieu's¹³ government in contact with France. Paris was appointed to become the avenue of the Paris Conference for the peace talk in 1968¹⁴ subsequent to the failed escalation of the US in Vietnam. Hence, there was a resumption of South Vietnam-France ties. It showed elements of enormous progress in the following years according to the reliability archival documents. These sources would clarify an unheard history of Franco-Vietnamese relationship. Thereby, the research objectives of this paper concentrated on replying to the following research questions:

- Which factors influenced South Vietnam - France's diplomatic recovery in the period 1968-1975?
- How did the South Vietnamese government maintain rapport with France throughout the Paris peace talk conference and the post-conference period?
- What can be seen from this relation and its significance to the RVN in its existence?

2. Literature review

Historians have paid a great deal of scholarly attention to an attempt of France's government to conform to Gaullist theory, which determined to the fateful escalation of the US troops in Vietnam. Sean J. McLaughlin argued that De Gaulle expressed grave

¹³ Nguyen Van Thieu (1924-2001) was the elected President of the second Republic of Vietnam. Thieu served in the ARVN before engaging with the 1963 Coup d'etat. In 1965, the power of Thieu was rising in South Vietnam's political climate and he affiliated with Nguyen Cao Ky to form Uy Ban Lanh Dao Quoc Gia (National Leadership Council) to democratize the regime subsequent to political turmoils (1963-1965). He was officially appointed as the President of the RVN after the 1967 Universal Election and re-elected in 1971. He held this position until April 21, 1975, 9 days before the Fall of Saigon.

¹⁴ Ibid. Also see in Marianna, P. Sullivan. *France's Vietnam Policy: A Study in French-American Relations* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Pr., 1978), 115.

concern over the decision of Kennedy to scale up the war in Vietnam owing to the trauma in Dien Bien Phu. John F. Kennedy straightforwardly repudiated the suggestions of De Gaulle on the self-determination rights of the South Vietnamese people and kept Southeast Asia at bay for neutrality and prospects.¹⁵ Accordingly, Donald J. Snyder employed a handful of archival documents, including newspapers and periodicals, memoirs, and telegrams between Paris and Washington D.C. to chronologically document the progress of Franco-American debates over the Vietnam War. Quite similar to McLaughlin, Snyder also stated that De Gaulle performed his disgruntlement with the American policies in the Vietnam War under the administrations of John F. Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson. He also unveiled two countries called it even when Richard Nixon published his Guam Theory, which brought America to an all-out military disengagement in Vietnam.¹⁶ As analyzed, Snyder firmly believed in the effect of Gaullist intervening in France's policymakers, supposing that France obligatorily approach a bipolar war in another way and played a role of a moderator by disengaging with the American policy and alleviating tensions through setting up ties with Communist countries.

Interpretations of France's foreign policy were deeply analyzed in some articles concerning the leadership of Gaullists. Those ideas sprung from the adaptation of De Gaulle and Pompidou to the new political climate from the American involvement in the Vietnam War to the Sino-American détente. Sullivan argued that the post-colonial policy of France in Indochina sought to form a relationship with ex-colonial countries in a softer way and dissent from the rising Americanism in Vietnam as Johnson Administration sanctioned the "More Flags" campaign in Vietnam. Nevertheless, Sullivan also conceded that the versatility of France's foreign policy showed the influence of the Sino-American détente under De Gaulle and Pompidou.¹⁷ Likewise, Marianna Torikata Yoko fundamentally focused on the heart of the De Gaulle administration in Vietnam. The author employed a wide range of source materials and secondary sources from France and America's

¹⁵ Sean J. McLaughlin, "De Gaulle's Peace Program for Vietnam: The Kennedy Years," *Peace and Change* 36, no. 2 (March, 2011): 218-261.

¹⁶ Donald Snyder, "The Indochina Syndrome: War, Memory, and the Franco-American Conflict over Vietnam, 1963-1973," (Ph.D. thesis, University of Colorado, 2014).

¹⁷ Marianna P. Sullivan, *France's Vietnam Policy: A Study in French-American Relations* (London: Greenwood Press, 1978).

archives to insist on the tenacity of the Johnson Administration to vigorously decline the proposal of De Gaulle about "Neutralization". The target of De Gaulle stemmed from his desire to evade America's influence.¹⁸ Robert L. Lane outlined the foreign policies of France under the three presidencies of De Gaulle, Pompidou, and Giscard¹⁹. Lane drew analogies and differences between the three presidents and affirmed that Pompidou was more pragmatic than De Gaulle in consistently staying focused on internal and regional affairs rather than paying much heed to world affairs. Nevertheless, Lane still firmly maintained his belief in a prolonged Gaullist approach of Pompidou to sunder French ideology from Americanism though some formal conventions were fully resumed under the presidency of Richard Nixon. Pompidou conceded the Guam Theory of Nixon, which illustrates the greater influence of France in Indochina.²⁰

Meanwhile, there is a big scholarly gap in the Franco-Vietnam relationship during the Vietnam War. "The Waning Power of France in Vietnam" was compiled in 1956 as soon as Vietnam was dichotomized into two countries and it unveiled a propensity of France toward Ngo Dinh Diem in the South, which represented tokenistic support of the French government for the application of the Domino Theory of the US in Vietnam though Diem blighted the prospects of France after 1956.²¹ Philippe Devillers updated the reality that the French government was still firm with a stance of neutrality to be in opposition to the American policy. Devillers uncovered that the government of De Gaulle had deescalated the level of tensions in Europe and it would implement a similarity in Asia. This action showed an overriding desire to neutralize Indochina, and the French government implied a counter-attack policy. Similarly, it gave rise to problems of unclear manners toward Communists.²²

¹⁸ Yuko Torikata, "De Gaulle's Diplomatic Strategy and the Vietnam War," *Japanese Journal of International Relations* 2009, no.156 (March, 2009).

¹⁹ Valéry Giscard d'Estaing (1926-2020), was a French politician and became the President of France from 1974 to 1981.

²⁰ Robert L. Lane, "The Foreign Policies of the Fifth Republic: A Study in Presidential Styles," (Master's thesis, The College of William and Mary in Virginia, 1981).

²¹ B. C., "The Waning Power of France in Vietnam," *The World Today* 12, no.2 (February, 1956): 50-58.

²² Philippe Devillers, "French Policy and the Second Vietnam War," *The World Today* 23, No. 6 (June, 1967): 249-262.

Generally, the majority of works were well-employed papers, which conformed to historical methods and reliable documents to elucidate France's foreign policy in Indochina and the Vietnam War when this country declined its role in this region due to the Fall of Dien Bien Phu and the deeper engagement of America in Vietnam. Previous authors unanimously admitted that France's foreign policy was obviously piloted by De Gaulle, which showed the independence of France and created a better presentation through neutral ways in international affairs. The authors also conceded to a Franco-American discord regarding Vietnamese issues when France unsuccessfully prevailed in Johnson's Administration over the Vietnam War. On the contrary, there is a dearth of works thoroughly examining the South Vietnam - France relationship in this period. Even if there is a growing interest in this topic. Hence, this article hypothesized that South Vietnamese - French ties underwent an uneven road over the period of the Vietnam War owing to diplomatic recognition of France to the PRC, the DRVN, and the Provisional Revolutionary Government of South Vietnam (PRG). This paper would bridge the gap of this scholarship to unravel the RVN government's viewpoints on ties with France and trace the evolution of the RVN - France relationship predicated on major sources at the National Archives Center II, Saigon, Vietnam, where is brilliantly recorded all dispatches and directives of the former regime of the RVN.

3. Methodology

This paper employs a wide range of archival documents, including the Collections of the Second Republic of Vietnam's President (DIICH) and Prime Minister fond (PTTgII), well preserved at the Archive Center in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. The timeframe of the documents runs from the 1960s to 1975, and the author concentrated on documents, directives, and decrees of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to shed light on the RVN - France ties from 1968 to 1975. The primary source was gleaned from the archives of Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, including:

- PTTgII- Folder.2760, Profile no. 20315, *Ho so bang giao Phap - Viet nam 1965*;
- PTTgII- Folder.2755, Profile no. 20245, *Ho so bang giao Phap - Viet nam 1963-1964*;
- PTTgII- Folder.2771, Profile no. 20429, *Ho so bang giao Phap - Viet nam 1966-1967*;
- PTTgII- Folder.2788, Profile no. 20615, *Ho so bang giao Phap - Viet nam 1968-1970*;

- PTTgII- Folder.2819, Profile no. 21009, *Ho so bang giao Phap - Viet nam 1971-1975*;

This source of materials is supposed to be reliable to uncover this topic. All documents were scrutinized, read, and evaluated to select appropriate passages and information, which are conducive to the paper's thesis. Documents were written in Vietnamese, French, and English and arranged in a specific timeframe. Archives documents are instrumental in evaluating the progress of the RVN - France ties and reshaping the diplomatic history in the existing phase of the RVN in the south of Vietnam.

Furthermore, the desk research source provided the author with comprehensive knowledge about the academic background of this topic. It was committed to detecting research gaps to bridge in related fields. Particularly, the approach of secondary research assisted the author to gather a wide range of secondary documents. In this specific topic, most historians scarcely mention the role of the RVN in this relationship. At the Paris Conference, the role of the RVN delegate was barely analyzed, so it led to an opaque understanding of the RVN's responsibility and actions to shield the country from Communists. The author read and integrated all findings of previous authors to shape this desk-research paper, which aims to build an adequate norm of the position of the RVN in its international relations through the lens of the RVN - France tie.

4. Results and Discussions

4.1 The RVN - France reconnection: which factors are propelling?

According to the Geneva Accord, French troops moved below the 17th parallel and withdrew from the south of Vietnam by 1956 and then a general election would be supervised and reunite Vietnam. Nevertheless, the absence of France in Indochina altered the political climate in Southeast Asia profoundly, which was linked to a landslide victory of Communists and would communize all countries in Southeast Asia according to a norm of the Domino Theory. The State of Vietnam functioned as a gathering of Vietnamese Nationalists (Nguoi Quoc Gia). Those people had no stomach for Communism and partnered with French officials to rebuild a non-communist country that operated after the Ha Long Bay Agreement was signed in 1947. After the Geneva Accord, the majority of French troops departed for South Vietnam and those final divisions pulled out from Hai Phong in 1955. The government of Ho Chi Minh in the north of Vietnam approved of signing the Geneva

Accord and gave an impulse to forjude French troops in the DRVN territories as soon as possible in order to secure a benign security sphere in the North and deter flows of Tonkinese Catholic refugees moving to the south.²³

It was not until the establishment of the RVN in 1956 that the government of De Gaulle still performed its frantic effort to address the declining status of French culture in Indochina. At first, De Gaulle strenuously attempted to forge a tie with Vietminh forces, who were triumphant over France at Dien Bien Phu. De Gaulle had diplomatic recognition from the government of Ngo Dinh Diem and believed that Diem still patronized France's benefits in Indochina. However, Diem ignored that paper and fudged all of his promises to France in South Vietnam. As mentioned, France laid a firm foundation of culture in the south of Vietnam owing to the bilateral agreement of culture tie signed in 1954. The French language was the official language of South Vietnam²⁴ and the educational system retained a French-based paradigm pressing the role of French culture and literary heritage in Vietnamese history.²⁵ However, this educational model rationally superseded to shape a Vietnam-based education rather than Franco-Vietnamese education. All uprisings of his opponents, including Hoa Hao and Binh Xuyen forces supported by France, were completely vanquished by Diem's forces.²⁶ Despite striving to set up a tie with the RVN, the French government failed to sway Diem's administration through memoranda and his presidential wishes. Archival documents at the National Archives Center II divulged an ill will between Diem and De Gaulle from 1957. In other words, France's government temporarily lost its voice over both two governments of Vietnam until the engagement of America in the Vietnam War in 1965.

²³ Anita Lauve Nutt, *Regroupment, Withdrawals, and Transfers Vietnam: 1954-1955 Part 1* (Santa Monica, CA: The Rand Corporation, 1969), 113.

²⁴ The government of Ngo Dinh Diem recognized the French language was a national language in 1954. However, Vietnamese language gradually dominated over the French and this language was used more prevalently in the educational system of South Vietnam thereafter.

²⁵ Nguyen Thuy Phuong, "Hien dien cua giao duc Phap o mien Nam Viet Nam (1955 - 1975)," *Vietnam Journal of Education Studies Research* 31, no. 3 (May, 2005): 25-31. Also see at Luu Van Quyet and Nguyen Thi Mai Huong. "Chinh sach phat trien giao duc dai hoc o mien Nam Viet Nam (1955-1963)," *Thu Dau Mot University Journal of Science* 32, no. 21 (2021): 81-90.

²⁶ Edward Miller, *Misalliance: Ngo Dinh Diem, the United States, and the Fate of South Vietnam* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013).

Although Diem succeeded to minimize the presence of France in his country, it still considerably challenged a new education and cultural pattern. This difficulty can be ascribed to the fact of France has a deep-seated culture and this restrained the ambition of the US to strengthen the culture of the south. However, in the following year, France continuously failed to win the colonial people's allegiance in Africa. It marked a death knell for French colonists and paved the way for an about-turn of international relations, which henceforth certainly under the trajectory of bipolar orders of the US and Soviet Union.

The first factor of the RVN- France rapprochement ensues from France's foreign policy. The French government never fully gave up its presence in Vietnam, in fact increasing its role in other ways. Vietnam continued to become a key objective of France's foreign policy when being strife with thousands of US and allied troops in South Vietnam. This scheme was incipient under the administration of John F. Kennedy and cope with an outcry from France. De Gaulle shaped his own theory, which supported a neutral stance and was independent of America's foreign policy. De Gaulle justified his policy that France elevated its role in third-world countries, and this policy was a resumption of France's efforts to achieve its goals in Indochina and Vietnam. The first Republic of Vietnam was abdicated by the US and its military on November 1, 1963.²⁷ This event marked an increase in political chaos for South Vietnam and implied that the US was perplexed in its attempt to consolidate its control through foreign policies and ineffective directives to deal with the mutinous situation of Communists in rural areas of South Vietnam. Understanding Vietnam can be seen as a memorable lesson the French learned from Vietnam. Consequently, France vigorously objected to a potential onrush of the US Army when publishing the "More Flags" Campaign to directly patronize South Vietnam from the DRVN's invasion.

In 1963, De Gaulle proclaimed that "It belongs to the Vietnamese people, and only to them, choose the ways to solve their problems" and France would support peace

²⁷ Edward Miller, *Misalliance: Ngo Dinh Diem, the United States, and the Fate of South Vietnam* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013); Tran Van Don, *Viet Nam Nhan Chung* (California: Xuan Thu, 1989); Nguyen Cao Ky, *Buddha's Child*, (New York: St. Martin, 2002); Hoang Ngoc Thanh and Than Thi Duc Nhan, *Nhung ngay cuoi cung cua Tong thong Ngo Dinh Diem* (San Jose, CA: Quang Vinh & Kim Loan & Quang Hieu, 1994).

for the Vietnamese people.²⁸ France was apparently cognizant of a plummet in influences in South Vietnam once America jumped into this country, and it harbingered the irretrievable breakdown of the US Army to Communist guerrillas in South Vietnam. In this context, France averred to guarantee its interests in South Vietnam and tried to exhort its close ally not to release a military deployment. Meanwhile, the French government diplomatically recognized the PRC in 1964 to broaden its effort in the manner of neutrality in international affairs. Although the French government put a cryptic question on the relationship with the DRVN until 1973, France still accepted lenient regulations for the DRVN, the NLF, and the PRC then at the Paris Conference. It was a huge impediment between the RVN and the French government to reaching a sustainable level of diplomatic relations. This statement is analyzed in the following section of this paper. All actions of France to keep a balanced approach in both the DRVN and the RVN are proved by the fact that De Gaulle ostensibly rekindled his hope to achieve France's interests in ex-colonies by neutral ways on the side which would acquire a tactical advantage in the war.

South Vietnamese leaders reshaped their administration and included France in their foreign policy to put stress on international support and empower the objectives of anticommunism. However, France showed its hesitancy because of American troops in South Vietnam in 1965. It did not catch France off guard when they still kept in touch with each other until 1965. Although downplaying the significance of Franco-Vietnamese ties under the presidency of Diem, the foreign policy of the RVN obtained France's presence under the reign of Thieu. The policy of De Gaulle was a *bete noire* of Thieu as the neutral ways of France showed uncertainty about the anti-Communist visions and shared mutual interest with the RVN to safeguard its national and regional security. In a summary of the 1966 Foreign Achievements of the RVN, South Vietnamese diplomats voiced support with opponents of De Gaulle to reshape an anti-Communist policy of France in the Cold War.²⁹ However, Thieu tailored his policy on France's manner to rape the benefit from this country for propaganda, student movements, and overseas Vietnamese

²⁸ Maurice Ferro, *De Gaulle et l'Amérique: une amitié tumultueuse* (Paris, France: Plon, 1973), 355; Bethany S. Keenan, "Vietnam is fighting for us": French Identities and the U.S.-Vietnam War, 1965-1973," (PhD diss., The University of North Carolina, 2009).

²⁹ The RVN's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, BCC - Folder. 446, *Tai lieu nam 1966-1968 cua Bo Ngoai giao*, Cong tac ngoai giao nam 1966, 1-8 (Saigon: Vietnam National Archives Center II, 1967a), 5.

communities in France. South Vietnamese diplomats strategized the importance of diplomatic enlargement to have more friends and fewer enemies and aimed to challenge the propaganda actions of their opponents in the world. As for France, the government of South Vietnam stressed the establishment of social associations and supported South Vietnamese students in Lutece and Saint Jacques.³⁰

In addition, South Vietnamese diplomats mused over a more effective direction of diplomacy to discourage the competition of the DRVN propaganda campaigns in France. South Vietnamese diplomats cognized the presence of the DRVN in France to utilize diplomatic agenda news and undermine the reputation of the RVN, so they de reiguer play a resourceful role in bolstering its strategic presence in France. The RVN had a solid policy over the course of the Vietnam War, and its national interest aimed to forge a staunch collaboration with other countries to repress the uprising of Communists as its *raison d'être*. South Vietnam's politicians implied an ongoing effort to subdue all insurrections of Communists and secure national security. While endeavoring to gain military triumphs through continuous attacks on the People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN) and PRG, the RVN implied that a country of non-communists lies at the heart of the RVN's foreign policies.

In particular, in 1968, it was asserted that the consistent foreign policies of the RVN were opposing the world of Communism and located the RVN in the Free World.³¹ Because of the byzantine international sphere, the sovereignty of the RVN had been severely breached several times. Noticeably, South Vietnamese policymakers put emphasis on its political presence in international relations. The government should have encouraged the role of political groups, students, and religious groups to enhance the role of public diplomacy. Thereby, Thanh outlined three salient points of the RVN's foreign policies. First, sovereignty ranked as the top priority of the RVN as well as embracing multi-faceted cooperation with allies. The government of Thieu also stressed the independence of the RVN, which would not lean toward the opulent aid of allies. Also, the government of Thieu maintained an adamant direction toward the DRVN and the Communist world.

³⁰ The RVN's Ministry of Transportation and Public Work, BCC - Folder. 446, *Tai lieu nam 1966-1968 cua Bo Ngoai giao*, Duc ket thanh tich cong tac nam 1966 va thiet lap chuong trinh hoat dong nam 1967, 1-15 (Saigon: Vietnam National Archives Center II, 1967b), 4.

³¹ This statement was spoken by Tran Chanh Thanh - Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1968.

Thieu was repugnant to the aggression of Communists and furnished assistance to neutral states, including the Third World countries, Cambodia, Indonesia, African countries, and South African countries. Thieu also accentuated the RVN's strategic appearance in Middle Asia, Central Arica, Eastern Africa, Northern Europe, South America, France, Cambodia, and Indonesia.”³²

Besides, Tran Van Lam³³ interpreted national sovereignty and bolstered the legitimacy of the electoral regime once Communists demonstrated an overriding desire to annex territories of the RVN. Lam argued that the great succor of allies for the RVN was a critical element since the war in Vietnam would be prolonged. However, South Vietnamese politicians expanded their effort to ease the financial burden of its allies. South Vietnamese politicians assumed that territorial sovereignty was a critical aspect to deter the suzerainty goal of Communists in Vietnam and Southeast Asia. The RVN was fully aware of its responsibility of giving the US a hand and other countries of Southeast Asia to invest their power into crushing Communism in Southeast Asia. In late 1971, Tran Van Do³⁴ proposed that the pull-out of the US troop was inevitable to make the government more independent and self-made. Thieu sought to closely work for a formal dialogue with the DRVN in order to address their internal conflicts. Do underscored that it was the retention of South Vietnamese people's entitlements to self-determine their future and foster the growth of national diplomacy.

Until late 1971, the RVN was cognizant of the fact that the US government showed its volte-face in Southeast Asian strategy. Hence, Thieu showed his goodwill to restore interregional talks with the DRVN as long as foreign troops withdrew from South Vietnam. Meanwhile, Xuan Thuy rejected this proposal of the RVN given that Thieu still had a grip on the Saigon government. Thuy insisted that Thieu was a minion of the US and he pushed the conversation into an unconstructive direction. He required a Hanoi-appointed figure. Until Hanoi achieved this idea, North Vietnamese diplomats would contemplate an

³² The RVN's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, DIICH - Folder. 7436, *Ho so Luu cong van VP Dac biet Phu Tong thong tu ngay 11-20/12/1968*, *Chinh sach doi ngoai cua Viet Nam Cong hoa nam 1968*, Saigon: Vietnam National Archives Center II, 1968.

³³ Tran Van Lam (1913-2001) was a Vietnamese Ambassador and Pharmacist. He was also a Congressman of the Republic of Vietnam Congress (1973-1975).

³⁴ Tran Van Do (1903-1990) was a Vietnamese diplomat and lawyer. He was the Minister of Ministry of Foreign Affairs (1965-1967).

intergovernmental meeting. The obstinacy of the DRVN deviated from a formal chat with the RVN and showed that the DRVN had a simmering issue to swallow the southern land through its military attacks in place of peace talks to seek a plausible settlement.

As soon as defeated by a military junta, the diplomacy of Diem was fully replaced and the new government focused on normalizing and expanding its foreign relations. Although South Vietnamese leaders grudgingly have a favorable disposition to France's foreign policy, they still saw positive points once the RVN government establish a tie with France. It would be helpful to build a cordial bilateral relationship and challenge the power of propaganda actions from the DRVN and the NLF in France. In addition, the position of France in the Paris peace talk secured a great advantage of this relationship to earn the strong support of the French government for the progress of the RVN at the Paris Conference.

While being unable to coax the US to disengagement from the Vietnam War, De Gaulle consistently illustrated his neutralist stance to balance power in the Vietnam War.³⁵ Evidently, France would not see the aftermath of the US in Vietnam's bottomless military quagmire, which recalled the terrible defeat of France in Dien Bien Phu. While Hanoi received massive political and economic help from the Communist world, the RVN needed to await assistance from the capitalist world. The voice of France was substantial to maintain France's Vietnam interests and Indochina and precluding the rising influence of the US. The single obstacle of this relationship triggered a misunderstanding between the RVN and France since the South Vietnamese politicians assumed that France had a penchant for Communism by letting the NLF operate a News Agency office in Paris and recognized the PRC. This direction was diametrically opposed to the RVN's foreign policy and gave a pause in this relationship after 1965 when the US Army enlarged the Freedom World.

4.2 From ill-will to a normalization process (1968-1973)

The Paris peace talk was a splendid opportunity to resume diplomatic contacts between the RVN and France. Owing to this reason, France's government was enforced to maintain a neutral stance and not be poised on any side of the Vietnam War. This was a savory condition to alleviate concerns of Thieu about a cloud of Communists in Paris.

³⁵ Torikata, "De Gaulle's Diplomatic Strategy," 105.

The archive reveals that Dang Van Lam³⁶ had an informal meeting with Olivier Lange - France's Ambassador to the Philippines, during his visit to this country. This event heralded a warmer relationship between the two countries, and in this unofficial meeting, Lam groped to grasp France's viewpoint on the political climate in Vietnam. Olivier believed that he conveyed a proposal to end the bilateral diplomatic intermission during his talk with Couve de Murville - French Minister of Foreign Affairs. While Couve endorsed resettling bilateral ties with the RVN, he also petitioned that the RVN would be avant-garde in enhancing this relationship and argued that the French government performed great empathy with challenges the government of Thieu as it confronted building genuine democracy and safeguarding national security.³⁷ In an attempt to translate policies into reality, some South Vietnamese politicians, including Nguyen Van An,³⁸ Ho Ngoc Nhuan, and Nguyen Bien formally overtured with William Jacson (a politician of Union pour la defense de la Republique) with the intention of enlightening South Vietnam's policy and deepen the French-South Vietnamese conversation. Jacson presumed that De Gaulle consented to an anti-communist state in Vietnam, but he stressed that economic well-being would be preferred rather than a plan of the military offensive to elevate the level of war in Vietnam. Jacson proclaimed that there were a handful of benefits once re-establishing the South Vietnamese-French connection and he was eager to set up a Friendship Association in Saigon to foster mutual understanding and take a precaution of a similar formation with the DRVN founded by the Minister of Justice, Rene Capitant. In this caucus, the French representative was apprised of South Vietnam's policies and rectified the misinterpretation of the RVN about American-opposed policies and warmer relationships with East European countries.

³⁶ Pham Dang Lam (1916-1975) was a South Vietnamese diplomat, who served as Minister of Foreign Affairs of South Vietnam from 1963 to 1964, and again from 1964 to 1965, and the last South Vietnamese ambassador to the U.K. He was a chief negotiator at the Paris Conference (1968-1972).

³⁷ The RVN's Foreign Affairs Ministry, PTTgII- Folder.2788, Profile no. 20615, *Ho so bang giao Phap - Viet Nam 1968-1970*, Ban Tom luoc giao Xu ly Thuong vu voi Toa Tong lanh su Viet Nam Cong hoa tai Paris voi ong Manac'h - Giam doc Nha A Chau su vu tai Bo Ngoai giao Phap, 1-4, (Saigon: Vietnam National Archives Center II, 1968a), 3.

³⁸ Nguyen Van An was a South Vietnamese Ambassador in France (1968-1973)

On August 26, 1968, An met with Étienne Manac'h³⁹ to forcefully understand the perspective of France toward South Vietnamese-French ties since this country paid greater attention to the Vietnam War. Manac'h was filled with remorse for an interlude between the RVN and France owing to the fact that Saigon probably had a misconception of France's foreign policies when De Gaulle diplomatically recognized the presence of the PRC in 1965.⁴⁰ Manac'h supposed that France's recognition of the PRC was incommensurate with the fact that France's government conceded to all home and foreign policies of the PRC as the primary objective of the French government was still anticommunism and France's colonial benefits during the 1950s-1960s. There is no denying that the rapprochement with the PRC is a glaring illustration of De Gaulle's power-balance policies due to France's disagreement with the involvement of America in the Vietnam War. Because the power was on the wane, France sought to recover its presence and soft power in the new environment and the RVN was a potential stage to perform it.

In response to France's explanation, An also courteously demonstrated his remorse for South Vietnamese-French relations from 1965 to 1968 and proclaimed that the international context was not in concord with the two sides' goodwill. When Paris was assigned to the Paris peace talks, the South Vietnamese delegates supposed that its foreign policy and diplomatic actions in this forum enjoyed a special role in elevating the role of South Vietnam at the conference. It would contribute to embarrassing the DRVN's efforts to bombard the talks with nonsensical questions and petitions at the conference as Hanoi continued its flagrant violations in the south of Vietnam. As a result, the middle-of-the-road viewpoint of France would create leverage for South Vietnam's attempt at the peace-talk parley. In this meeting, An conveyed his great words to De Gaulle and recognized the tremendous influences of France in the south of Vietnam in an endeavor to impede the

³⁹ Etienne Manac'h (1910-1992) was a French diplomat and writer. He was a director of Asia-Oceania at the central administration of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Quai d'Orsay) from 1960 to 1969, where he played an influential role in the progress of negotiations between Washington and Hanoi during the Vietnam War. From 1969 to 1975, Manac'h served as French Ambassador to the People's Republic of China.

⁴⁰ The RVN's Foreign Affairs Ministry, PTTgII- Folder.2788, Profile no. 20615, *Ho so bang giao Phap - Viet Nam 1968-1970*, Trich yeu cuoc hoi dam voi ong Manac'h - Bo Ngoai giao Phap, 1-10, (Saigon: Vietnam National Archives Center II, 1968b), 1.

expansionist goal of North Vietnamese Communists and build a rock-hard anticommunism base.⁴¹ An was convinced by France's goodwill as France would facilitate its public press to deliver beneficial information to go up a higher position of influence at the peace-talk table. At least, the two parties were aware of their mutual voice in the Paris Conference.

After the floatation of the Paris Conference in March 1968, there were some French supportive protestors showed their commitment to the coherent policy of Thieu toward the invasion of the DRVN. The RVN archives recited a conversation between Politics Academy students with Adviser Tran Thanh Quan and they eagerly stimulated South Vietnamese politicians to take stronger actions to quell domestic insurgencies.⁴² However, the RVN government earned mild support from French political objectors to the French Communist Party and the expansionist goal of international Communism. It seems plausible that South Vietnamese diplomats created their power balance sphere in Paris and achieve popular legitimacy.

France admittedly saw its positive points in befriending Thieu. However, French politicians were irresolute to make a cozy relationship with South Vietnamese diplomats. They acknowledged that France's government was rather prudent in stepping forward with several concrete actions to accomplish this particular purpose.⁴³ As opposed to previous policies, the French government carefully watched the situation in Vietnam. Also, French politicians minimized their tragic misunderstandings to guarantee France's benefits in Vietnam and Indochina. French politicians and traders appealed to their economic and cultural advantages in the South Vietnamese-French rapprochement. It was harmonious with the policies of France's assembly and elite to guarantee French influence in Vietnam. Hence, South Vietnamese politicians opined that it was crucial to grant its rewarding opportunity to reinforce bilateral relations with France as a way to move up the level of diplomatic performance at the Paris Conference. Thieu continuously received a vast number of French government scholarships to offer educational chances for South Vietnamese

⁴¹ Ibid, 4.

⁴² Ibid, 1.

⁴³ The RVN's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, PTTg-20615, *Ho so bang giao Phap - Vietnam 1968-1970*, Mot vai y kien ve bang giao voi Phap, 1-2, (Saigon: Vietnam National Archives Center II, 1968c), 1.

students and permit the broadcast of French-language teaching as well as French Agenda in his country.⁴⁴

With regard to the NLF, the French government took a subdued manner to keep intact its neutralist position. De Gaulle kept his position at bay at the Paris Conference and had a forensic examination of two sides in Vietnam while still being in conflict with the US in the Vietnam War. De Gaulle weighed the power between the Nationalists and Communists in their fratricidal war. Meanwhile, South Vietnamese politicians excoriated the appearance of the NLF's News Agency as a massive effort to achieve its benefits on Algeria's battlefields from the US and thoroughly pondered upon the capacity of the DRVN and the NLF in this ferocious war.⁴⁵ Even though distressed by this action at the September 23 meeting, Pham Dang Lam failed to convince France to hinder the establishment of the NLF News Agency in Paris as this office was likely to lead to an abortive effort of the RVN in propaganda actions in the Paris Conference. Also, Lam stated that the RVN government continually allocated a huge part of the policy to guarantee France's influence in South Vietnam, provided that the incumbent government of South Vietnam was not dislocated by a so-called "coalition government."⁴⁶ The agency of the NLF in Paris was a diplomatic and political obstacle for the RVN government to be under skepticism.

When the Paris Conference was in its progress, this bilateral relationship remained intact, as promised by France, and it would not incline any parties to the conference. However, diplomatic visits and contacts of the RVN channeled their viewpoints to France about the war. In particular, Lam Son 719 was a campaign to intercept the DRVN's logistics and aid the Southern Vietnamese Communists throughout the territories of South Vietnam,⁴⁷ yet French leaders spewed out a wrong judgment that this action led to a further escalation in Indochina. Tran Van Lam expressed his frustration with the proclamations of France and

⁴⁴ Ibid, 2.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 3.

⁴⁶ The RVN's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, PTTg-20615, *Ho so bang giao Phap - Vietnam 1968-1970*, Trich yeu: Phong trao sinh vien, hoc sinh Phap ung ho Viet Nam Cong hoa, 1-2, (Saigon: Vietnam National Archives Center II, 1968d).

⁴⁷ Karnow Stanley, *Vietnam: A History* (New York: Penguin Books, 1997), 629; James H. Willbanks, *A Raid Too Far: Operation Lam Son 719 and Vietnamization in Laos*, (Texas: Texas A&M University Press, 2014), 172; James H. Willbanks, *Abandoning Vietnam, How America Left and South Vietnam Lost its War* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2008), 34-37.

implied that such statements probably raised grim prospects of South Vietnam and France's attempts to attain détente.⁴⁸ While positioning neutrally, France's government performed its about-face by approaching the Communist country so as to illustrate greater attention to its central role in Paris. As revealed in gleaned archive documents, Georges Jean Raymond Pompidou⁴⁹ stated that France's government showed its allegiance with its disinterested policies and stabilized Indochina with peace restoration, as shown in De Gaulle's speech in Phnom Penh, Cambodia.⁵⁰ In the eye of France, Indochina was in hours of need of neutralists in order to satisfy the demands of France that it was crucial to preserve its influence in Indochinese countries.

Similarly, the PAVN showed incremental progress in aggressive actions to overlap South Vietnam's territories in 1972. Maurice Schumann⁵¹ supposed that negotiations in Paris were vital to design a four-party peace table and attaining a political key if a fair election was held by the South Vietnamese people in place of the "coalition government" by Communists. On the contrary, France intentionally abandoned this point and was keen on the measurements of Communists. After his speech to Maurice on May 18, 1972, Lam lambasted that Thieu was furious and would not reach a consensus to approve solutions for Communists and true-blue to its eight-point solution, which implied a fair election for the South Vietnamese people. Subsequent to their speech of Maurice, South Vietnamese politicians strived to be in consultation with the French government to shape a solid policy to appease the frustration of the RVN. French politicians implied that it would not concede the annexation of the DRVN during the 1972 Easter Offensive and genuinely articulated mounting concern about a provisional demarcation between

⁴⁸ The RVN's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, PTTgII, Profile no. 21009, *Ho so bang giao Phap - Viet Nam 1971-1975*, "V/v phan ung voi thai do thieu vo tu cua chinh phu Phap", 1-2, (Saigon: Vietnam National Archives Center II, 1971a), 1.

⁴⁹ Georges Jean Raymond Pompidou (1911-1974) was a French Prime Minister (1962-1968) and elected as a President of France (1969-1974).

⁵⁰ The RVN's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, PTTgII, Profile no. 21009, *Ho so bang giao Phap - Viet Nam 1971-1975*, "Vv Tong thong Pompidou tuyen bo ve van de Viet Nam nhan dip "Phai doan chinh phu Trung Cong" và Tong thu ky Dang Cong san Lien Xo tham Phap, 1-2, (Saigon: Vietnam National Archives Center II, 1971b), 1.

⁵¹ Maurice Schumann (1911-1998) was a French politician, journalist, writer. He served as Minister of Foreign Affairs under Georges Pompidou from 22 June 1969 to 15 March 1973. Schumann was a member of the Christian democratic Popular Republican Movement.

the two countries.⁵² In response to Maurice's statement, Lam castigated France's government as it misinterpreted the essence of the Vietnam War and released cryptic statements that South Vietnamese people would crush subversive actions of the Communists to fulfill the wishes of South Vietnamese people. France's government was unable to achieve a consistent policy on account of this manner. Lam insisted that Thieu made an ongoing effort to restore peace for the South Vietnamese people with the retention of self-determination privileges and freedom, but he lacked complete assistance from France while he offered France government favorable conditions. With regard to neutralism theory, Lam laid stress on the freedom of the South Vietnamese people that uncompromisingly have a grip on the Communists' control or sanctioned the proposal of the Communists.⁵³

The RVN gave a pause to the Paris Conference owing to the vexatious plans of the DRVN and the PRG in 1972. Thieu upbraided France's government with underground support of the insurrectionary actions of the DRVN around the 17th parallel. This action, he said, was also condemned by the US. Maurice published a statement on May 9, 1972, in order to alleviate the exasperation of Thieu and Nixon. France's government justified big support for the new state of South Vietnamese people in lieu of a coalition government. On June 19, 1972, Pham Dang Lam had a formal consultation with Fromeny Meurice, Chairman of Asian affairs administered by France's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and was advised that France was discontented with the ferocious policies of the US, and gave rise to a growing concern about the presence of the PAVN divisions in South Vietnam. Meurice broached a discussion of Vietnam's peace. He averred French foreign policy to defuse the hostility of belligerents through peace talks.⁵⁴ Maurice action rekindled the hope of making a closer analysis of South Vietnamese-French ties when South Vietnamese politicians needed a reversion of the French opinion, while France administration unintentionally vexed Thieu and his government.

⁵² The RVN's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, PTTgII- Folder.2819, Profile no. 21009, *Ho so bang giao Phap - Viet Nam 1971-1975*, "Lap truong cua Phap doi voi cuoc chien o Viet Nam qua bai thuyet trinh cua ngoai truong Maurice Schumann truoc Uy ban ngoai giao Quoc hoi Phap hom 18/5/1972", 1-3, (Saigon: Vietnam National Archives Center II, 1972a).

⁵³ The RVN's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, PTTgII- Folder.2819, Profile no. 21009, *Ho so bang giao Phap - Viet Nam 1971-1975*, "Ngoai truong Tran Van Lam chi trich thai do cua Phap", 1-3, (Saigon: Vietnam National Archives Center II, 1972b).

⁵⁴ The RVN's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, PTTgII, Profile no. 21009, *Ho so bang giao Phap - Viet Nam 1971-1975*, "V/v su thay doi thai do cua Ngoai truong Phap doi voi chinh phu Viet Nam Cong hoa", 1-2, (Saigon: Vietnam National Archives Center II, 1972c).

When the Paris Conference entered the terminal stages of negotiation, the French government continued to moderate Henry Kissinger and Le Duc Tho's secret talks and intensified the effort of France to not heartily endorse a three-part government for South Vietnam on September 21, 1972.⁵⁵ France asserted its rebuttal to recognize such a solution proposed by the DRVN and the NLF. Neither France government admitted the proposal of Communists nor uphold a consistent policy to wholeheartedly support the RVN. Nevertheless, the two parties gained a greater degree of interaction thanks to Schumann's proclamation on November 17, 1972. He acknowledged the stupendous achievement of Vietnamization and stated that France had an above-board opinion for anticommunism policies of the RVN once Paris Accord was ratified.⁵⁶ Paris Accord was promising to France as it ended a long-drawn-out war in Vietnam. France's government forecasted all serious pretensions of the US were shattered and Hanoi would be unsympathetic to repress any adjustments on the signed agreement. Thereby, Paris Accord was the target of Maurice to restore the role of France in Indochina.

4.3 A friendship: terminal attempts to keep mutual interests (1973-1975)

The Paris Agreement was disadvantageous to the vista of the RVN since it regulated several detrimental outcomes to national defense and blurred issues of sovereignty to shield the country from deflected requirements of the DRVN. With the purpose of defending the country from Communists, the ARVN attempted to repacify territories to thwart the military plans of the Communists and other political groups in rural areas. Additionally, the presence of several divisions of the PAVN in the south seriously breached legitimate articles in Paris Accord and cast doubt on the RVN's future. The removal of the US troop led to dogged uprisings of Communists in rural areas and a cul-de-sac of peace. While South Vietnamese people were entitled to fulfill a bonafide peaceful settlement, the DRVN intentionally undermined the mutually beneficial cooperation between the two regions and turned down the goodwill of the RVN. It diminished the possibility of conflicts and saturate contradicting collaborative means in South Vietnam's politics.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ The RVN's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, PTTgII, Profile no. 21009, *Ho so bang giao Phap - Viet Nam 1971-1975*, "Vv tong thong Phap Pompidou tuyen bo ve lap truong cua Phap doi voi van de Viet Nam trong cuoc hop bao ngay 21/9/1972", 1-3, (Saigon: Vietnam National Archives Center II, 1972d).

The prompt withdrawal of American troops was not on par with the political progress of South Vietnam. While the withdrawal of the US was immensely helpful to appease home movements as well as revisions of France's foreign policy in the Vietnam War, France had the desire to supplant the American role in this country. As being recognized as a neutral third party, this tremendous opportunity reinforced the enormity of France's tone in warfare issues. After the Accord, France government was more active to engage with the RVN. On April 6th, 1973, Jacques de Folin, head of the consulate general of France in the RVN, formally met with Minister of Law Le Van Thu to discuss a Joint Communiqué regarding the RVN - France diplomatic tie. The previous meeting between Lam and Maurice Schumann gingered up the bilateral relationship and urged the two parties to reshape their diplomatic relations. In that caucus, Schumann proposed to give an impulse to the RVN - France ties at the ambassadorial level. He opined that the governments of the French Republic and the RVN, driven by the desire to develop a friendly relationship between the two peoples, have decided to restore diplomatic relations between the two countries and exchange ambassadors.⁵⁷ In the past, the two sides stood under the shadow of doubt and both France and South Vietnam squandered a great occasion to dig deeper into diplomatic relations. However, the withdrawal of the US troops was absolutely tactical for France to resettle its influence in South Vietnam. Thereby, it tended to fully fraternize with the RVN and pronto supported Thieu. France's government significantly tacked its foreign policy and it was an influence seeker in the politics of South Vietnam.

However, France avoibly enraged the DRVN, yet the political climate of the South was more beneficial to see the futility of French influence on cultural and social links. After the Paris Accord, the foreign policy of France was predisposed to the Third-World country, but anti-communism still lay at the heart of national interests. Concerning France, the RVN and France shared a mutual vision of a reconstruction plan because the development of the RVN was in tune with quick action to make a stronger impact on France in Southeast Asia and Vietnam. Michel Jobert, the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, assumed that a statement that four parties would frame a healthy

⁵⁷ The RVN's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, PTTgII- Folder.2819, Profile no. 21009, *Ho so bang giao Phap - Viet Nam 1971-1975*, "Phap cong nhan quan he ngoai giao voi Viet Nam Cong hoa cap bac Dai su", 1-5, (Saigon: Vietnam National Archives Center II, 1973a).

relationship peacefully. Thereafter, Pompidou acknowledged both Hanoi and Saigon, yet the PRG challenged itself as a legitimate government in South Vietnam. Admittedly, France's government had a sense of favorability toward Thieu as his regime ulterior supported France's interests more effectively. While the NLF cast doubt on a landslide victory in South Vietnam, the policy of France was tantamount to a hawkish policy of Thieu and satisfy the needs of France accordingly.

However, Thieu inadvertently dismissed an idea as it was critical for him to take a precaution regarding the PRG - France ties. In the past, the NLF was an influential party, which blunted the effort of Thieu to seize power in South Vietnam owing to the News Agenda.⁵⁸ The new context urged Pompidou to shelve the policy of recognition to the PRG. This significant obstacle in South Vietnamese-French relations was officially dismantled with a clear explanation that the U.S. withdrew military troops to gain its core interests of France in Indochina and Vietnam. The simultaneous recognition of the DRVN and the RVN was a far-sighted viewpoint of France to ambitiously guarantee its national interests in Indochina. While French-North Vietnamese relations showed uncertainty, French-South Vietnamese ties would become a prosperous relationship to restore its high position and coax Thieu more effortlessly.

Diplomatic interactions gained a higher degree of diplomatic level between Thieu and Pompidou. Since Communists escalated to the war in 1973, Thieu sought a resolution of negotiation after Paris Accord to achieve a diplomatic and bolster its strategic presence in its international relations. Evidently, the RVN Ambassador Nguyen Duy Quang⁵⁹ formally conversed with J. Sauvagnargues in Paris to credit France's aid to South Vietnam's post-war reconstruction and safeguard a peaceful future between the two countries on July 31, 1974. In 1974, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs closed the gap in formulating new directions of diplomacy to reinforce its autonomy and banish all prejudice that the RVN was a lackey government of the US and solely had recourse to the US. As for the RVN,

⁵⁸ The RVN's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, PTTgII- Folder.2819, Profile no. 21009, *Ho so bang giao Phap - Viet Nam 1971-1975*, "Phap van dong tai lap bang giao voi Viet Nam Cong hoa", 1-3, (Saigon: Vietnam National Archives Center II, 1973b).

⁵⁹ Nguyen Duy Quang was Ambassador of the RVN in France from 1973 to 1975. He was ever a Communist in the First Indochina War until 1953.

international support would speed up the integration of the RVN and glorious victory over the Communists.⁶⁰

Unfortunately, the juggernaut of Communists in the South ruined a fragile peace that the South Vietnamese people attempted to restore. The PAVN, with the collaboration of the PRG, impetuously assailed major cities and rural areas of South Vietnam. With Phuoc Long's victory on April 6, 1975, the Communists plainly probed America's reaction. The ARVN struggled to maintain its strength in South Vietnam's military zone. Owing to the contretemps, France's government floated a strategy to protect Thieu as his government was treading a tightrope at that time. Unluckily, Pompidou advised Thieu to weather the problem of a "coalition government" and deal with his embattled government. Quang was invited to France's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the President's Palace to debate political solutions with the RVN. France's government supposed that Hanoi would not restrain its overriding desire to annex South Vietnam and the transplanted coalition government probably would assist Thieu to make a stronger power concentration and tackle the lacuna of politics and the army. At least, France mentioned, it would not lead South Vietnam to a catastrophe caused by Communists. Geoffroy de Courcel and Pierre Brossolette - General Secretary of French Presidents, asserted that it was urgent to consort with Hanoi and the PRG to establish "a coalition government" in South Vietnam as a truce that relied on articles of the Paris Accords was likely to sidestep further bloodshed in South Vietnam. Pompidou insisted on the fact that Hanoi was unrelentingly broad in its effort to sway over the government of Thieu and skip an action of the cease-fire, notwithstanding it was a coalition government.⁶¹ Thieu was apparently peeved by this point since it would conclude his legitimate government. The political sphere in South Vietnam became a weighty problem for Thieu, but it was a stage for France's policy as a mediator. France's government could greatly benefit from its role and Pompidou was cognizant of the paralyzing effort of Thieu, so he no longer invested his power in this country. The last-ditch effort of Pompidou was tokenistic words not to irritate Thieu

⁶⁰ The RVN's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, PTTgII- Folder.2819, Profile no. 21009, *Ho so bang giao Phap - Viet Nam 1971-1975*, "Vv Tiep xuc voi ngoai trung Phap", 1-2, (Saigon: Vietnam National Archives Center II, 1974b).

⁶¹ The RVN's Foreign Affairs Ministry, PTTgII- Folder.2819, Profile no. 21009, *Ho so bang giao Phap - Viet Nam 1971-1975*, "Vv Loi phat bieu cua Tong thong Phap lien quan den tinh hinh Viet Nam", 1-4, (Saigon: Vietnam National Archives Center II, 1975).

when he was in the depth of despair. Though France government heightened the sense of South Vietnam, it was hardly able to rescue Thieu. Thieu apparently realized in hindsight the policy of Pompidou. It showed an incoherent policy of France adapting to its policy instead of showing enthusiasm to assist Thieu to defend a stronghold of anticommunism in Southeast Asia. A series of losses from January to April 1975 marked the conclusion of the strategic buffer zone of the Free World to subdue Communism and showed a change of heart of international relations.

5. Conclusions

This paper aims to uncover an unheard history between the RVN and France, and the findings unveil that there are peaks and valleys in Franco-Vietnamese relationship from ill will to friendship (1968-1975). First, France poised on Communists as recognizing the Beijing government and haze over the DRVN and the PRG. Gaullist theory heralded the inevitable failure of Americans in an attempt to excessively meddle with South Vietnam according to the obsession of France. This point damaged Franco-American relations and raise a mutual suspicion of the RVN - France relationship.

Although the French experienced a frosty relationship with the intervention of American troops in the RVN, the emergence of Paris as an avenue of the peace talk conference of the Vietnam War resumed their bilateral relationship. For this reason, the RVN had a strong desire to grow its influence in the conference, albeit its foreign policy was heavily impacted by the US and alliance. Nixon's presidency with Vietnamization put starch into an independent foreign policy of the RVN. Thieu calculated a practical policy to consort with Southeast Asia, the Middle East, and its influence in international organizations. France in the RVN's foreign policy became a closer friend to forge a healthy relationship and alleged that the RVN greatly made major concessions on French culture in South Vietnam. It was not until 1973 that France administration also considered South Vietnam as a critical stage for French growth. Pompidou and other French leaders recognized the legitimacy of Thieu several times as a unique government in South Vietnam. While showing a half-hearted effort toward the vista of the RVN, France government fueled its faith in its role after the Paris Conference in a continued effort to fill a political void in South Vietnam. However, Pompidou resorted to reassess his policy as the situation

in the South became more precarious than before owing to impetuous attacks by Communists in South Vietnam. When the RVN grappled with domestic fatigue, France jumped back to a neutralist stance, which ensured that France would be perceived as a political go-between in a dog-eat-dog fight between North and South Vietnam. It seems reasonable to state that a lack of diplomatic support aggravated the political turmoils of the South and run the chance of international support. Fundamentally, the reason comes from a volte-face of allies' foreign policy, along with various political and military reasons. Thereby, it shaped the fate of this relationship and perpetually ended after the Fall of Saigon.

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