

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF VIET-NAM

ORIENTALIA
SOUTH ASIA



CAUSES
OF THE CONFLICT
BETWEEN
FRANCE AND
VIET - NAM



VIET-NAM DELEGATION IN FRANCE
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I.-TEXT OF THE MEMORANDUM SENT BY THE VIETNAMESE GOVERNMENT TO THE FRENCH GOVERNMENT ON THE ORIGIN OF THE PRESENT CONFLICT

The people and the Government of Viet Nam wish to co-operate with the French Government. This desire for peace and co-operation is crystallised in the signing of the Preliminary Convention of March 6th and of the Modus Vivendi of September 14th, 1946.

Nevertheless, despite the March 6th Convention, hostilities have continued in Cochinchina and Southern Annam; despite the signing of the Modus Vivendi, after a short interval incidents have been multiplying in Northern Viet Nam, and, since December 19th, hostilities have broken out throughout the country.

Who is responsible for this fratricidal strife? An objective examination of events since March 6th, 1946, and of official documents signed by High Representatives of France in Indochina, will give us the answer to this question. It gives indisputable proof of the French colonialists' desire to re-establish their dominion over this country, systematically to sabotage the accords signed, and to make all sincere and friendly cooperation between France and Viet Nam impossible. It brings to light the methods of action they contemplated and to which they had recourse.

1. All kinds of daily infringements (military, political, economic, etc...) so as to « nibble away » the sovereignty of a free State granted to Viet Nam and to render the accords worthless;

2. Creating incidents, by use of force if need be, so as to carry out a minutely detailed offensive and then to lay all the blame upon Viet Nam;

3. And finally, when the moment arrived, the elimination of the present leaders of Viet Nam by a « coup d'etat » or a carefully thought out sudden attack carried out in accordance with the best police measures. Of especial relevance and significance in this respect are the instructions dated April 6th and 10th 1946, which Generals LECLERC and VALLUX gave to French troops. We print here some excerpts :

This defence (of French interests), shall be undertaken :

« In gradual stages, each day showing fresh progress;

« By force, if need be, either on the initiative of the different

leaders of detachments or by Commanding Officers, or else upon order from the Command if there is sufficient time for concerted action;

« In each garrison, immediately upon his arrival the Commanding Officer will draw up an initial plan of security; this will comprise in part a permanent plan for the protection of billets and above all, a plan of action for manoeuvres in the town... Once this plan is drawn up and settled in general outline, it must be completed as soon as possible by an examination of a series of measures to enable this so far purely military plan to be modified and transformed to meet conditions of a « coup d'Etat ».

« It is vital to gather together at the earliest moment all documentation available upon Chinese and Annamite Organisations in the town, as well as upon their local leaders (identity, customs, places where they spend the night, etc...).

« At the same time, special teams will be formed which will eventually be able to travel in disguise (as has been done in Cochinchina). The duty of these teams is to « neutralise » the heads and leaders until the Commandant considers the time ripe to set up a security system. These teams must be specially constituted and armed, and must be kept in constant touch with the lives and activities of those whom they are to « keep out of the way ». As regards regular and non-regular battle units, a similar method of action must be worked out...

« Once information is acquired concerning these organisations and the practices of their members, specially formed commandos will prepare to « neutralise » them by surprise attack. »

Violation of accords, incidents, local « coups de force », almost continuously interfered in Franco-Vietnamese relations right until the day when the plan which aimed at « transforming a purely military operation into a coup d'Etat » was put into action.

I. — VIOLATIONS OF ACCORDS

Representatives of France in Viet Nam began to violate accords on the morrow of their having been signed.

These violations were both military and political.

MILITARY VIOLATIONS

Military violations of accords signed can be grouped under two headings:

— continuation of hostilities and terrorism in Cochinchina and Southern Viet Nam;

— Breach of the military accord of April 3rd, 1946, concerning relief operations and the installation of troops north of the 16th Parallel.

a) Continuation of hostilities and terrorism.

It had been agreed upon that on March 7th, joint Armistice Commissions would leave for Northern Annam, Southern Annam and

Cochinchina. But, despite numerous approaches and proposals by the Vietnamese Government, the French authorities opposed the despatch of Armistice Commissions to Cochinchina.

Article 3 of the Preliminary Convention stipulates that necessary steps shall be taken « towards the immediate cessation of hostilities, the maintenance of troops in their respective positions, and the creation of a favourable atmosphere necessary to the immediate opening of friendly and frank negotiations. » Now, the French authorities in Cochinchina were demanding Vietnamese troops to lay down their arms before French positions. Once the Vietnamese troops had, with every reason, refused to comply with this order which, to obey, would have seemed like capitulation, French troops attacked them and, under the pretext of mopping-up and police operations, tried to seize hold of Cochinchina, carrying out at the same time a virtual reign of terror over the civil population — bombing, village blazes, arrests, arbitrary executions of patriots, etc...

Further violation of the same Article 3 of the March 6th Convention, relating to the cessation of hostilities and the maintenance of troops in their respective positions: French troops occupied the plateaux of Southern Annam just as the Franco-Vietnamese Conference at Fontainebleau was about to open (June 1946).

b) Breaches of the military accord of April 3rd, 1946.

1. Maintenance of French troops in Western Tonkin (Son La, Lai Chau) when, according to the accords, the French Army was only authorised to cross these regions in order to get from China to Laos;

2. Occupation, from August 1946, of coastal zones in Northern Viet Nam (Campha Mines, Campha Port, Tien Yen, Dam Ha, Vat Chay, etc...), and attacks launched after December 12th, 1946, towards Mon Cay, Dinh Lap, with the help of the « Tho Phi » bandits;

3. Maintenance of two companies at Phu Lang Thuong;

4. Occupation of Dong Dang on July 15th, 1946, followed by the above-mentioned complications;

5. Occupation of the town of Bac Ninh after having provoked incidents at Can Dong, Bac Ninh on August 1st and 3rd;

6. Irregular movements of relief and food-supply convoys between the centres of troop installation, displacements without warning, number of troops above the totals provided for by the accords, numerous incidents during the course of displacements (at Cau Duong, Bac Ninh, July-August 1946);

7. Use of non-metropolitan troops by the French Command, for purposes other than the guarding of Japanese prisoners, contrary to the March 6th Convention;

8. Violation of local accords concerning billeting, feeding, — occupation of public and private buildings and military positions (subject of local protest).

POLITICAL VIOLATIONS.

Political violations of accords signed fall into two groups :

- a) manoeuvres against the unity of Viet Nam;
- b) manoeuvres against the sovereignty of Viet Nam.

a) *Manoeuvres against the unity of Viet Nam.*

The aim of the manoeuvres against the unity of Viet Nam was the division of the country : Cochinchina, Southern Viet Nam, the High Plateaux, the Thai, Tho and Nung countries, thus :

1. In Cochinchina — creation of the autonomous Republic of Cochinchina on June 1st, 1946, with a Government chosen by French authorities;

2. In Southern Viet Nam — refusal of the French authorities to give back occupied centres to the Government of Viet Nam, setting up of French Administrative Centres, despatch of 60 representatives to this region, to the so-called Federal Conference of Dalat (August 1st, 1946);

3. On the Southern Viet Nam plateaux — occupation of the region by French troops in June 1946, despatch of 60 representatives to the region, to the so-called Federal Conference (August 1st, 1946);

4. In the Thai, Tho and Nung countries — interference of French troops in the administration of these regions, and manoeuvres to stir up the people against Viet Nam.

b) *Manoeuvres against the sovereignty of Viet Nam.*

Manoeuvres directed against the sovereignty of Viet Nam aimed principally at re-establishing, under the name of the Indochinese Federation, the former Governor General, thus to stifle the free State of Viet Nam, recognised by the March 6th Convention, by :

1. Creation of Federal Organs, although the statute of the Indochinese Federation had not yet been fixed either by treaty or accord, the institution of Federal Commissions of Justice, of Education, of Information, of political, economic, financial affairs, etc., the attempt to set up Federal Customs, Federal posts such as at Haiphong, Saigon, etc...;

2. Attack upon the fiscal sovereignty of the State of Viet Nam, obstructing the collection of taxes by Vietnamese authorities and their imposition on French and Chinese subjects in Viet Nam;

3. Interference in the administration of certain localities such as Son La and Lang Son, the setting up of a Municipal Police Commissariat at Haiphong, and of a Delegation of Public Works, a Post Office, and French Tribunals at Hanoi.

II. — INCIDENTS AND « COUPS DE FORCE »

A policy of force, incidents and atrocities, began from the first days of the landing of relief troops at Haiphong.

It is impossible to attribute them solely to the lack of discipline among the French troops.

SOME EXAMPLES.

1. Hongay incident of July 8th, 1946, causing widespread damage and a number of Vietnamese casualties;

2. Bac Ninh and Cau Dong incidents at the beginning of August;

3. Numerous incidents at Haiphong, especially during the months of August, September, October and November;

4. Numerous bitter incidents at Hanoi from April to November, causing many casualties;

5. Incidents provoked throughout and almost daily, causing numerous casualties among the population — throwing of grenades, shootings, plunder and pillage of all sorts, breaches of elementary police regulations, attempts and acts of aggression against Vietnamese policemen.

Such incidents, systematically provoked, are sufficient proof of the intention of the French authorities in Viet Nam to strain the good relations between the two peoples.

EVIDENCE OF BAD FAITH.

It was these same French authorities who gave evidence of a lack of good will in applying the *Modus Vivendi*. On so-called grounds of principle, they refused to allow the meeting at Hanoi or Saigon of the joint Commissions provided for in the *Modus Vivendi*, with the exception of the Commission for the cessation of hostilities.

Thus, Franco-Vietnamese relations became more and more strained until the day when widespread fighting broke out.

The final incidents and provocations were the immediate cause of the present struggle.

The wave of provocations and incidents rapidly grew to alarming proportions as from November. The policy of force reached a climax with the despatch of virtual ultimatums, each one as unacceptable as the other, which were destined to render useless all attempts at conciliation on the part of the Government of Viet Nam and to present the Blum Government with a « fait accompli ».

WITH WHOM DOES THE RESPONSIBILITY LIE?

In order to arrive at a clear understanding of the nature of the tragic struggle into which they have drawn us, and in order to ascertain upon whom the responsibility rests, we have only to cast a rapid glance over the series of incidents which took place :

1. The setting up of an import-export control at Haiphong and the blockade of the port. Bitter incidents resulted — sudden attack

by French troops upon Haiphong, a succession of ultimatums by Colonel DÉBES and General MORLIÈRE;

2. Occupation of Lang Son;
3. Attacks on Do Son;
4. Landing of reinforcements at Tourane on December 9th, contrary to signed accords (letter of protest from President HO CHI MINH to the President of the French Government, dated December 12th, 1946);
5. Attack by the French garrisons of Tien Yen and Dam Ha upon Dinh Lap and Mon Cay;
6. Numerous incidents provoked by French troops (especially by the S.A.S. parachute commandos) at Hanoi for three successive weeks (shootings, throwing of grenades, plundering, rape, attacks and acts of aggression against the Vietnamese police, systematic acts of provocation and sabotage against the offices of the Vietnamese Bureau of Information) which seriously interfered with public order in the Vietnamese capital and compelled the population to take measures in self-defence. On December 17th, serious incidents broke out in the capital of Viet Nam — shelling and sacking of several districts of Hanoi — houses set ablaze, some 50 Vietnamese massacred, most of them women and children — at the joint Guard's post at the Electric Plant, treacherous and unwarranted shots fired by a French sentry at his Vietnamese comrade, killing him outright;

7. Numerous incidents provoked by French troops in other centres of troop-installation (Hue, Nam Dinh and Hai Duong);

It should be pointed out in passing that there was a complete absence of incidents and provocations in Phu Lang Thuong, Bac Ninh and Vinh, where the number of French troops was small;

8. Occupation of the Ministry of Finance and the residence of the Minister of Transport of the Government of Viet Nam on December 18th. Intensified provocations and shelling in other districts of Hanoi (Rue Song To Lich, Rue Takou, Rue du Papier), followed by massacres and acts of terrorism and the undertaking of military enterprises by the French Command;

9. Letters of ultimatum dated December 18th and 19th signed respectively by Captain CHATELON, Major FONDE and General MORLIÈRE, demanding the destruction of Vietnamese defence provisions, the disarmament of Vietnamese forces and the handing over of the police service to French troops;

10. Widespread attack launched suddenly during the evening of December 19th.

III. — EFFORTS AT CONCILIATION ON THE PART OF THE GOVERNMENT OF VIET NAM

Notwithstanding the hopelessness of the situation during the days preceding the present conflict, the Government of Viet Nam made the

greatest efforts at finding a peaceful and friendly way out of the crisis:

— Telegram of December 15th sent by President HO CHI MINH to President LÉON BLUM, setting forth concrete proposals towards bringing to a peaceful close the grave incidents which daily became more frequent and more serious, and which were being provoked by French troops in the numerous towns of Viet Nam, especially in Hanoi; and requesting the Commissioner to take adequate steps towards putting an end to the situation which was deplored by the two peoples alike.

— Letter of the same date sent to the President of the French Government reporting a worsening of the situation in the North and Centre of Viet Nam and deploring the intensifying of the French representatives in Viet Nam's policy of a « fait accompli ».

— Telegram of the same date praying for the application of a French policy true to the Accords signed and for the sincere and friendly co-operation advocated by the President himself; recalling the concrete proposals of December 15th; and hoping for the despatch of a French Parliamentary Mission to Viet Nam.

— Personal letter of December 19th from President HO CHI MINH to M. SAINTENY, regretting the increased tension in Franco-Vietnamese relations and expressing the hope that M. HOANG MINH GIAM would succeed, together with the Commissioner, in finding a solution towards an improvement in conditions (this letter, sent at 11 o'clock, failed to produce an answer). On the same day, at 9.30 a.m., M. HOANG MINH GIAM, through the medium of the Franco-Vietnamese liaison, requested an interview with M. SAINTENY, but the latter refused to meet him.

— Letter of the same date from President HO CHI MINH to Presidents LÉON BLUM and VINCENT AURIOL, deploring the multiplication and increase in severity of the incidents in Viet Nam, reaffirming his respect for France and her people and the confidence he had in them, and imploring them to call to an immediate halt the provocations and bloodshed.

IV. — WHEREIN LIES A SOLUTION ?

The struggle which is staining red the soil of Viet Nam was wilfully instigated by the French Colonialists. The people of Viet Nam are bound to defend themselves by use of arms. Force must be opposed by the force of a people resolved to fight to the bitter end to safeguard its lawful rights. We nevertheless consider that peaceful means can be found towards putting an end to the fight. In her struggle to defend her territorial unity and her independence within the framework of the French Union, Viet Nam is still convinced that with the new France her twofold objective could be speedily realised by a policy of peace and mutual confidence, based upon the Accords already signed.

The referendum provided for in Article I of the Preliminary Convention of March 6th offers a solution to the question of the

territorial unity of Viet Nam. In granting to Viet Nam the status of a Free State and in respecting her diplomatic relations with foreign Nations, the Preliminary Convention has laid the foundations of her external and internal sovereignty.

Nevertheless, neither the Convention of March 6th nor the Modus Vivendi provided for sufficiently well-defined and concrete means of application, the former confining itself to principles and the latter falling back upon Joint Commissions to solve the difficulties. This lack of precision and the shortcomings of procedure have brought about the above-mentioned complications, which eventually led to the present conflict.

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Proposals by the Government of Viet Nam

In order to put an end to this confused situation, the Government of Viet Nam suggests the following concrete measures to be taken :

1. Order to be given for an immediate cease-fire on all fronts; Armistice Commissions to be nominated and to start functioning immediately to ensure the carrying out of the cease-fire order, to arrange for the return of troops to the positions defined by the Accords of March 6th and April 3rd, and the setting free of all prisoners of war and all persons arrested on political grounds — all this to be completed at the latest one week following the cease-fire order;

2. The immediate checking of the despatch of French reinforcement troops to Indochina;

3. A meeting to be arranged forthwith between qualified representatives of the two Governments, namely, Minister Moutet and President Ho Chi Minh, for the purpose of drawing up upon the basis of the March 6th Convention a sufficiently concrete and detailed scheme for a definite treaty bearing in particular upon the following points :

- a) Organisation of a referendum in Cochinchina;
- b) Diplomatic relations of Viet Nam with foreign countries;
- c) Organisation of the Indochinese Federation;
- d) Position of Viet Nam within the French Union;

Once this scheme is drawn up, the Franco-Vietnamese Conference will forthwith convene at Paris for the drafting of a conclusive treaty.

Hanoi, December 31st, 1946.

HO CHI MINH,

President of the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam.

II. - THE HAIPHONG AND LANGSON INCIDENTS

The Modus Vivendi of September 14th, 1946, has never been respected by France. In order not to have to set free their political prisoners, the French High Commissariat preferred to shoot them. Even before President Ho Chi Minh had landed back in Viet Nam, French military authorities had laid hands on Vietnamese internal trade, a step which caused the Acting President, M. HUYNH THUC KHANG, Minister of the Interior, to protest before the French authorities.

Thus, on October 30th, 1946, the date on which the Franco-Vietnamese accord came into force, everything pointed to the fact that the French in Indochina were not likely to respect France's signature. Nevertheless, from that day, the Government of Viet Nam, in accordance with the stipulations of the Modus Vivendi, did not hesitate to hand over the Pasteur Institute to the competent French authorities. Viet Nam prepared to carry out her commitment to set up delegations which were to constitute the joint Commissions provided for in the same accord.

But, by unilateral seizure of the Customs Service at Haiphong, the French authorities deliberately prevented the application of the Modus Vivendi of September 14th, 1946, and prepared the way for a reopening of hostilities against Viet Nam.

A) Text of a "Special Order"
seized by the Vietnamese from a Colonial
officer proving that the French attack
on Haiphong was premeditated-

COLONIAL INFANTRY
REGIMENT OF MAROCCO
TONKIN DETACHMENT
No 938-PC

SPECIAL ORDER

(Reference : Order No 13706-R/3S of the
Commanding Officer dated 21/10/46)

General : As the situation remains unstable, we might at any moment
be suddenly called upon to intervene on our own initiative. On
this hypothesis must be based a plan of attack.

PLAN OF ATTACK

A) OBJECTIVES :

1. to get possession of the French districts by wiping out Viet-
namese strongholds;
2. to seize vital points which will make us masters of the town;
3. to open up the route to Lach Tray.

B) THIS PLAN TO BE CARRIED OUT IN TWO STAGES :

- 1st. stage : realisation of objectives 1 and 2.
- 2nd. stage : realisation of objective 3.

C) DUTIES OF THE ARMoured GROUP :

1st. stage :

a) to reinforce the B.M.E.O. by a patrol of 2 tanks, 2 scout-cars,
1 heavy tank; to clean up the entry to the rue du Commerce and the
rue de Rivière;

b) to reinforce by a patrol the 2/23rd RIC in order to seize the
Theatre, the Water Works, and the Bonnel-Doumer crossroads;

c) to seize the Building of the local guard and to mop up Vietnamese positions in the Avenue de Belgique.

2nd. stage :

— to open up the Laeh Tray route, up to the bridge. Occupy the bridge. Get in touch with the Cat Bi garrison. Upon order of the commanding officer, get in touch with the Bo Son garrison.

D) WAYS AND MEANS :

A detachment ready for immediate action, of 3 patrols, 1 patrol of two scout-cars, 1 patrol of three half-tracks, 2 mechanised squads; A reserve detachment of 8 tanks and 4 scout-cars; 1 Section of Sappers; Artillery fire support and from the CCI of the 23rd RIC.

E) AIMS :

1. To seize as quickly as possible and to hold the Native Guard and the Bonnel-Doumer crossroad;
2. At the same time, to clean up rue de Belgique;
3. To free an armoured patrol as early as possible, in order to send it to Lach Tray bridge, to occupy the bridge and to get into contact with Cat Bi.

F) DIVISION OF FUNCTIONS :

1) The Lieutenant commanding the 3rd Squad will designate the two patrols to be put at the disposition of the 2/23rd RIC and of the B.M.E.O. This latter will be released by the B.M.E.O. at the end of its mission and placed at the disposal of the Lieutenant commanding the 3rd Squad;

2. Detachment Martin, 1 patrol ready for immediate action, 2 C.E.P. mechanised Squads, 1 section of Sappers, 2 scout-cars, 3 half-tracks. The carrying out of the three paragraphs of « Aims » (E).

G) LAUNCHING OF ATTACK :

The first phase to be launched upon order from the « Commandant d'Armes » : « Contact Horace at H ». The second phase will be launched on my orders.

Upon receiving the alert signal, radio network to be opened.

ARTILLERY SUPPORT

Plans of attack — Anticipated shots

- a) Preparatory firing on the Avenue de Belgique district from H to H plus 10;
- b) Firing on various points started at H, especially on :
 1. the native guard;
 2. boundary and P.C. of rue Sadi-Carnot;
 3. posts in rue d'Enhal;
 4. post at Lac Vien.

c) Firing on the Kien An and Hanoi routes.

PREPARATORY MEASURES

— Sub-Lieutenant Delayan will check and keep up to date the control of posts in Avenue de Belgique.

B' The Haiphong incident

(November 20th, 1946)

(Official Report, dated December 4th, 1946,
of the Haiphong Incident)

I. — PREPARATIONS

On 15/11/46, between 3 p. m. and 6 p. m., French soldiers seized the following Vietnamese :

Hoang Van Bach - Cook;
Trinh Van Lam - Hairdresser;
Phan Van An;
Tran Khan Du.

On 16/11/46, the arrests continued :

About 9.20 a.m., policeman No. 2229, rue Le Loi, was carried off by motor bicycle No. 806;

About noon, seizure of two more Vietnamese policemen, rue Ha Huy Tap;

About 2.30 p.m., six unknown Vietnamese carried off by a car belonging to the French;

About 4.30 p.m., seizure of two policemen.

On 17/11/46, during the morning, five further Vietnamese arrested in the docks area.

Repeated protests on the part of the Vietnamese against these acts are still being ignored.

On 19/11/46, at about 5.30 p.m., the French seized the canoe « Nam Viet » and a 12 ton launch Cua Cam, and cut off communications between Haiphong and Quang Yen (see document No. I — memorandum of the Vietnamese liaison).

II. — COMMENCEMENT OF THE INCIDENT AND VIETNAMESE EFFORTS TO LOCALIZE IT.

From 7 a.m. to 10 a.m. French soldiers, under the pretext of a smuggling charge, abducted a Chinese junk loaded with petrol, although it had passed the customs regulations. Vietnamese police on the spot intervened. French soldiers opened fire on the police. The Vietnamese police replied. A French craft, armed with machine gunners, also opened fire on the population : two Vietnamese wounded, one policeman killed. The French military lorry No. MF 4J380-10-40551, which was heading towards the scene of the incident, was stopped by Vietnamese from the Cho Sat market. The French soldiers in the

lorry, Jumeau, Dansas, Gavino (of the military Security), Danjou, Larcada and Lefevre, all of them armed, were escorted to a neighbouring post and placed under security, together with some French civilians found in the district.

At about 11 a.m., the Franco-Vietnamese liaison arrived upon the scene. Two French armoured cars had preceded them. After intervention by the Vietnamese liaison, the French liaison officers sent these armoured cars away.

At about 11.30 a.m. these cars came back, and halted in front of the « Place du Théâtre Municipal ». At the same time, French troops made a surprise entry into Haiphong Railway Station and occupied it.

At about 1.30 p.m., the two local liaisons decided by mutual agreement:

1. To set free the soldiers and officers held by the Vietnamese;
2. To send back the six tanks which were on the way to the market or had parked in the « Place du Théâtre »;
3. To remove all road blocks and mines which were hampering circulation about the town;
4. To send back the French troops who, without any motive, had occupied Haiphong Railway Station.

A French ultimatum was delivered verbally, demanding the evacuation of the police station in rue Henri-Rivière, before 2 p.m.

The Vietnamese liaison freed all the French who had been placed under security and protested against the ultimatum.

At 2 p.m. the tanks in the « Place du Théâtre » were still there, and a fresh set of conditions was laid down by Colonel Dèbes, in particular, the evacuation of Vietnamese positions in the Chinese districts.

Fruitless negotiations were followed by a return of the French liaison and the recall of the ultimatum. Conversations lasted once more for over an hour; then the French issued fresh conditions:

- evacuation of all the above-named positions;
- complete evacuation of the Tu Ve (Self-defence Corps) from the Chinese districts, so as to make a French zone there.

2.15 p.m. - Without awaiting the Vietnamese reply, French troops, reinforced by a number of French armoured detachments, launched a general offensive against several points in the town simultaneously. The offensive was aimed at:

a) Vietnamese public buildings situated in the French area — The Treasury, the Town Hall, the Mayor's Residence, the main Police Station, the Post Office, etc...;

b) A Vietnamese police station in the Chinese district (Boulevard Henri-Rivière);

c) Certain strategic points in the town (Municipal Theatre, etc.).

At 2.30 p.m. the Vietnamese central liaison drew the attention

of the French central liaison to the gravity of the situation. — a fruitless gesture.

At about 3 p.m. the Vietnamese central liaison once more warned the French central liaison of the gravity of the situation, caused by the renewal and generalisation of the French attack. From elsewhere, at 3.30 p.m. the Minister of National Defence renewed the order to Vietnamese troops in Haiphong to keep strictly on the defensive.

Taking advantage of these orders, French troops launched a general attack on the town, occupied the building of the former Treasury, Central Police station, Mayor's Residence and Post Office and the landing stage of Do Do Binh, and besieged the Municipal Theatre.

French mortars and cannon were shelling Vietnamese positions and civilian areas.

Vietnamese forces counter-fired. Major Camoin, a Liaison officer who was mixing with the crowd of officers directing the battle, and who wore no distinctive markings, was wounded.

At about 5.15 p.m. Major Lam Ngoc Huan, of the Vietnamese liaison, tried to contact the French liaison. The latter stated three conditions:

1. A cease-fire;
2. All barriers to be cleared away;
3. The Vietnamese post in Boulevard Henri-Rivière to be evacuated and all other five posts to be handed over to French troops. Failing this, all artillery and tanks would be put into action.

(See Document No. 2, conversations by telephone between the French and Vietnamese liaisons.)

III. — THE LAMI-NAM INTERVIEW, TOWARDS A CEASE-FIRE

At about 5.30 p.m., at Hanoi, Colonel Lami and M. Nam signed the cease fire order to all troops. (Document No. 3, Lami-Nam Accord.)

At about 6 p.m., at Haiphong, the Vietnamese liaison officer, Major Huan, called Lieutenant Stevenson on the telephone to tell him that Colonel Lami and M. Hoang Huu Nam were in conversation at Hanoi and that it was advisable to await the outcome of these negotiations.

At 7 p.m., Major Huan of the Vietnamese liaison, again telephoned Lieutenant Stevenson, informing him that the Lami-Nam Accord had been concluded, in the hopes of achieving a cease fire. Lieutenant Stevenson replied that no orders had come through from Hanoi.

At 8 p.m. Lieutenant Orsini telephoned Vietnamese Major Huan, reminding him of the conditions of the ultimatum; and upon being told that Vietnamese local authorities had received instructions from Hanoi to carry out the Lami-Nam Accord, he made it known that he was going to take all necessary steps in accordance with the ultimatum.

M. Hoang Huu Nam was wise enough to warn the French and Vietnamese Central Liaisons by telephone, and to follow this up by a letter of confirmation (Document No. 4). Colonel Lami replied that he was going to repeat his instructions.

At about 8.30 p.m., in spite of instructions given, the siege of the Theatre continued. Armoured cars were streaking through the town, spraying their machine gunfire everywhere.

At 8.40 p.m., Lieutenant Orsini made it known that he had now received a telegram from Hanoi, and he commanded his troops to cease fire.

At about 11.5 p.m. — salvoes from Cannon 37, and machine gunfire from French tanks.

Upon being questioned, the French liaison at Haiphong stated : — Mopping up operations, to clear the way for the Lami-Nam Mission due to arrive tomorrow.

On 21/11/46 :

At about 5.20 a.m., shots from Cannon 37 from around the Station and Theatre, — about one French company had just occupied the Jemot stadium, nearby the Vietnamese liaison.

IV. — ARRIVAL OF THE JOINT MISSION

About 10.15 a.m. — Arrival of the Lami-Nam joint Mission at Thuong-Ly station. Impossible for the train to reach Haiphong station because of firing from the station building which French troops were then occupying.

Towards 11 a.m. — joint Mission to H.P. of Colonel Dèbes. French firing continued. 4 aircraft flew over at low range.

The joint Mission once more stressed its firm desire faithfully to carry out the Lami-Nam Accord.

The Vietnamese Delegation left Colonel Dèbes's H.Q. and went to the offices of the Haiphong Administrative Committee.

At about 11.30 a.m. — renewal of the French attack, helped by the Tho Phi, upon the Vietnamese post on the Boulevard Henri-Rivière.

At about 12.15 p.m., French troops made an assault on the Vietnamese post, Boulevard Henri-Rivière, preceded by heavy firing which killed or wounded many.

M. Nam sent messages by telephone to Colonel Lami (Document No. 6).

At 2.30 p.m., — Hoang Huu Nam-Herckel-Lami interview. Colonel Herckel refused to carry out paragraph 4 of the Lami-Nam Accord. A joint Herckel-Nam order (Document No. 6) was signed, and a Lami-Nam verbal accord concluded (Document No. 7).

The night was calm, but food distribution (as called for in the Accord), was out of the question.

Officer Huton, of the Naval Security, placed under security the previous evening, was released by the Vietnamese.

On 22/11/46 :

At 7 a.m., Colonel Herckel flew to Hanoi for consultations with General Morlière.

7.30 a.m. — Telephone and telegraph communications between Hanoi and Haiphong taken over at Haly, a French occupied sector.

8.5 a.m., The Vietnamese released MM. Lacour, Mia Lou, and Fadalti;

The French released five Vietnamese civilians;

Release of MM. Ripper, Blanchette and Podert.

Opposition of Colonel Dèbes to the re-installing of a joint guard at the railway station and to the distribution of food to Vietnamese in the Post Office building. Threats by Colonel Dèbes to evacuate workers in the Post Office after 9 a.m.

10 a.m. Mechanics of the Post Office who went to repair telephone and telegraph wires at Haly were pursued by French soldiers.

12 noon. Colonel Herckel returned to Haiphong and set off again for Hanoi.

Colonel Lami invited M. Nam to go back to Hanoi for negotiations. M. Nam accepted. Before leaving, he confirmed that, in accordance with the Lami-Nam verbal Accord, all the French placed under security in a locality remote from the town, and who were about to be taken back to Haiphong, would be released as soon as possible on the day of their arrival.

« It could not be said that the Vietnamese didn't keep their promises, nor respect their signature » said M. Nam.

Colonel Lami and M. Nam left Haiphong and went back to Hanoi, after having reached agreement on the following points :

- maintenance of the status quo in Haiphong;
- peaceful settlement of the Haiphong Incident at Hanoi.

5 p.m. — Haiphong. All the French placed under security were released; Colonel Dèbes also set some Vietnamese civilians free, and promised to let the telephone and telegraph wires be repaired.

Upon arriving at Hanoi, Colonel Lami telephoned M. Nam, informing him that General Morlière was in agreement as regards the re-establishing of a joint guard at Haiphong Railway Station.

On 23/11/46 :

6 a.m. — Ultimatum by Colonel Dèbes to the Administrative Committee of Haiphong (Document No. 8).

8 a.m. Reply by the Committee that instructions were awaited from Hanoi. Whilst waiting, the Haiphong Committee kept to the Lami-Nam Accords.

9.3 a.m. 2nd ultimatum, bearing a reminder of the earlier one.

9.30 a.m. — Hanoi — M. Nam met Colonel Herckel and asked him the purpose of Dèbes' ultimatum, which was in striking contradiction with the peaceful assurances of Colonel Lami. Colonel Herckel took note of this and said he would consult General Morlière. — No further reply.

10.5 a.m. — Haiphong — Lieutenant Orsini came to collect the Haiphong Administrative Committee's reply, which was negative.

10.6 a.m. The French began their attack on Haiphong. Heavy artillery and aircraft brought into action.

Vietnamese troops reacted accordingly. The battle was fought along the streets of the French district, whilst the Vietnamese and Chinese civil population rapidly evacuated towards Kien-An, under bombardment from French aircraft.

The French evacuated Trang-Keng (Uong-Bi). Vietnamese troops occupied the airfield at Cat Bi, at 4.30 a.m., and captured equipment.

During the night of the 23/24th, Vietnamese troops recaptured the Municipal Theatre and Ngo Quyen bridge.

Fighting continued and became widespread.

French mortars were brought into action. During the afternoon of November 24th, a Vietnamese liaison officer was arrested at Haly. At 7 p.m. he was released, but another ultimatum was sent, recalling the previous one and, among other things, imposing a fresh set of conditions.

Evacuation of the Hanoi-Do Son route, of the Cat Bi route, etc...

It was stipulated that a reply to this ultimatum had to be given before 6 a.m. on November 25th, 1946.

On 24/11/46, the Vietnamese liaison at Haiphong was hit by three shells, destroying his H.Q.

On 25/11/46 — no reply from the Vietnamese to the ultimatum. Firing redoubled in intensity.

In the evening, the Vietnamese liaison had to evacuate.

On 25/11/46, French mortar shelled Vietnamese positions and buildings. Aircraft flew over the Haiphong-Kien-An and the Haiphong-Vat Cach routes (at the Haiphong-Hanoi axis), machine-gunning the population, which was still evacuating Haiphong.

French troops let loose on the town bands of pirates, the « Tho Phi », dressed Chinese-fashion, sometimes disguised as Vietnamese soldiers : — plunder, fires, assassinations, which sowed terror in the hearts of both Vietnamese and Chinese.

Aircraft and the Tho Phi guided the French artillery firing by means of signals.

During the night of November 25th, after some fierce street-battles, Vietnamese troops evacuated the town, leaving there only a few guerrilla troops.

The withdrawing troops protected the Chinese and Vietnamese civil population which was evacuating in great numbers, terrorised by the Tho Phi and the French soldiers.

On 26/11/46, at 7.40 a.m., French paratroops retook Cat Bi airfield.

On 28/11/46 — exchange of notes between General Morlière and M. Vo Nguyen Giap, Minister of National Defence (Documents No. 8, 9, 10, 11, 12 and 13).

The French tried to spread hostilities out towards two axes, Haiphong-Do Son and Haiphong-Kien An. During this time, guerrilla activity in Haiphong continued. Vietnamese troops patrolled the streets of Haiphong — as a result of encounters, 20 French killed, 2 tanks destroyed, 4 Vietnamese dead or wounded. Fierce battles in the grounds of Cat Bi. The French sprayed the straw huts with petrol and set them alight.

On the Can-Hiem (Kien-An) route, 6 French tanks tried to make

their way towards Cau Niam. They were repulsed by the Vietnamese defence. The bridge at Cau-Nien was destroyed. French cannon bombarded Kien-An.

On the Cau-Rac (Do-Son) route, French aircraft machine-gunned sampans and launches. Withdrawal in the face of heavy barrage of the Vietnamese defence.

On 29/11/46 — Fierce attacks by Vietnamese troops on the Tho Phi, (who were armed and equipped by the French), especially near the Pagoda of Dong-Thien. 20 French killed, 5 Vietnamese.

From 8 — 10 p.m., the French, after long preparation, attacked a Vietnamese position at Do-Son. The attack failed.

Withdrawal of a French armoured detachment from Cau-Niem.

On 30/11/46 — Vietnamese patrols in the Haly district. Vietnamese patrols entered Cau-Nien and Haiphong. The French, with the Tho Phi in the vanguard, launched fresh attacks on Cau-Niem, with mortars and machine guns. The attack was repulsed. French shelling of the whole Haiphong-Do-Son region. French shelling and machine-gunning of the village of My-Khe (between Cau-Rao and Cau-Niem), to protect a reconnaissance mission.

On 1/12/46 — French shelling continued — of no military significance, but civilian houses severely damaged.

On 2/12/46 — Severe fighting in Haiphong, especially at Thuong Ly. Fresh French attack on Cau-Niem from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., supported by aircraft. Attack repulsed.

Fighting continued at Cau-Rac. French incendiary bombs burnt out several farms.

On 3/12/46 — French shelling continued. Leaflets dropped by French aircraft.

On 4/12/46 — 1 French tank put out of order in the Haly district. French mortars directed against Cau-Niem. 8 fighter aircraft from Hanoi machine-gunned the region and killed or wounded many civilians. No military outcome.

The fight continues...

C) The Langson incident

(November 21st, 1946)

(Official Report, dated December 4th, 1946,
on the Langson Incident)

I. — PREPARATIONS

On 13/11/46, five kilometres along the Langson-Dong-Dang route, undisciplined French soldiers, concealed behind rocks, surprise-attacked a convoy of traders and looted their goods.

On 18/11/46, nine French soldiers climbed the mountains near the citadel to photograph Vietnamese military positions.

On the same day, in the evening, three French soldiers, accompanied by three Tho Phi, tried to climb up to Van-Vy, a Vietnamese post. They were driven back by the Vietnamese sentries.

On 19/11/46, in the evening, a group of French soldiers drove

tanks up to the Vietnamese sentry post, and pointed their machine guns and mortars towards our positions.

On 20/11/46, in the morning, and during the night of 21/11/46, French troops made feverish preparations. They took up their stand on Hang-De mountain, hardly by the citadel, overlooking the barracks. They hoisted the French flag; movements of French troops at Ky-Lua could be observed; French civilians were ordered to transport their belongings to various Chinese hotels.

II. — THE INCIDENT

On 21/11/46, French troops, under the pretext of going to exhume the bodies of victims of the Langson incident of 1940, carried out a reconnaissance of Vietnamese positions. — Destruction of barricades by French troops. — Summons by the Vietnamese sentry. The French replied by firing shots. The Vietnamese sentry counter-fired. It was 7.30 a.m.

Intervention by the French-Vietnamese liaison.
Cessation of hostilities.

During the discussions, French soldiers terrorised the population, shooting 14 young Tho and surprise-attacking and occupying the offices of the Administrative Committee, Ky-Lua, the Vietnamese police H.Q., the Information Office and Langson Railway Station. Vietnamese troops fought back. The fighting spread.

III. — FRENCH CONDITIONS

On 23/11/46, French troops attacked Naipha. Interview with Colonel Sizaïre, President of the Langson Administrative Committee.

French Conditions: Occupation of Hang-Do by the French. Removal of barricades by the Vietnamese. Release of 10 so-called Tho Phi arrested by the Vietnamese police. Freedom of movement between Ky-Lua and Dong-Dang (arbitrarily occupied by the French since July).

The Vietnamese, finding most of these conditions contrary to the Franco-Vietnamese Accords then in force, refused. Discussions dragged on until 25/11/46.

IV. — THE FIGHT

On 25/11/46, the French Commander recalled the conditions laid down, and issued an ultimatum.

At 11 a.m., fighting redoubled. The Administrative Committee of Langson and the civil population evacuated. Vietnamese troops resisted, and fierce street battles took place in the town itself.

At 4 p.m., French aircraft machine-gunned Vietnamese positions of Dong-Van at Ky-Lua, and civilian districts.

Armoured cars and artillery were also brought into play, and aimed at the citadel of Langson and Van-Vi bridge which the Vietnamese occupied.

On 26/11/46, machine-gunning of Loc-Binh.

Dong-Dang encircled by Vietnamese troops.

The fight has been continuing since that date, as much within Langson as around it.

D) An official text on the incidents

PRESIDENCY OF THE PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT
OF THE FRENCH REPUBLIC
NATIONAL DEFENCE GENERAL STAFF

Paris, 30.9.46.

Bulletin N° 46

THE HAIPHONG AND LANGSON INCIDENTS FROM NOVEMBER 20th-28th, 1946

Notwithstanding the apparent cordiality of official Franco-Vietnamese relations, the situation in Tonkin became tense during the months of October and November 1946. General Morlière, Commissioner of the Republic in Hanoi, was overwhelmed with protests on the part of the Government of Viet Nam against the customs régime set up in Tonkin in September 1946.

It was on September 10th that an « import-export » control had been established at Haiphong by the Commissioner of the Republic in Tonkin. *No account was sent to Paris of this measure which, in its application, became a virtual naval blockade of the port.* Similar control was set up at Langson. Reference to this can be seen in telegram N° 4642 of October 18th:— « Viet Nam protests against Naval action in Tonkin and the Langson Garrison ».

Not until after the incidents of November 20th was a telegram dated November 21st sent from General Valluy, Acting High Commissioner, explaining that this port control was « provisional » and was nothing more than an administrative measure « designed to prevent widespread contraband » (in particular concerning the despatch of rice to China), to safeguard Tonkin food supplies, and to protect the piastre by the control of exchange.

This control gave rise to protests from the Government of Viet Nam, protests which led to a tense situation between November 1st and 15th. From October 30th, the Government of Hanoi referred to article of the *Modus vivendi* of September 14th, applicable as from October 30th, in order to call for the cessation of the customs blockade at Haiphong. *The Ho Chi Minh-Moutet Modus Vivendi made provision for the setting up of a « joint Commission for customs co-ordination » to examine the question of customs.* This fact, was apparently disregarded locally. Discussions were opened on the site of the H.Q. of the future « Dalat or Hanoi » Commission. Things became more embittered.

On November 16th, Ho CHI MINH called upon President BIDAULT through the medium of Admiral d'ARGENLIEU. The telegram was not officially received by the President until November 20th.

III. - THE HANOI INCIDENT

(December 19th, 1946)

MEMORANDUM

by the Permanent Delegation of Viet Nam
in France

The war now being waged by France against Viet Nam is based, officially, upon the assumption of premeditated aggression on the part of the Vietnamese Government against French troops stationed in Viet Nam. This assumption has never been seriously questioned in France; even from the start it has however appeared to be a rather weak one. It was actually the French authorities in Indochina who advanced it. At once party to the fight and judge thereof, how can they be taken as sufficiently qualified to settle once and for all the question of responsibility? They declared that the Vietnamese authorities wanted to get rid of them, but these for their part have affirmed that it was the French authorities who took the initiative in commencing hostilities. From among the two armies, which attacked? Which considered itself sufficiently strong to attack the other? The French army, reconstituted after 1940, or the young Vietnamese army?

The claim of the French authorities, even if evidence seems to belie it, can refer, it is true, to the visit to Indochina made by the Minister of France Overseas in December 1946-January 1947. But it need hardly be pointed out that the findings of the members of the Mission rested solely on the statements of those same people who, according to appearances, provoked the crisis. Not a single attempt was made to contact our Government. In such circumstances, how can they claim their conclusions to be valid?

French opinion up till now has been kept informed of developments in Viet Nam only by means of distorted news coming from one source alone. At last we are for the first time putting at their disposal a short, overall appreciation of the hectic days which resulted in the opening of the present terrible Franco-Vietnamese conflict. This statement takes into account many details which the French colonial authorities disregarded and which, it seems to us, may help the French

to understand the Franco-Vietnamese drama more clearly. And, truth to say, even if on December 19th it was Viet Nam who took the initiative in military operations, it would be difficult to hold her as aggressor. Such lively events can be understood only in the light of 'what preceded and caused them. Secondly, if, tired of the colonial authorities' repeated « coups de force » against her, Viet Nam, on her own initiative, had taken up arms to defend herself, her action is surely justifiable on grounds of defence. Again, it must not be forgotten that, even after the Haiphong Incident (20/11/46), even after the many provocations undergone at Hanoi following the Haiphong Incident (plunder, civilian massacres, seizure of public buildings), the Government of Viet Nam did not cease to try conciliation. It was only on December 20th, 1946, that our Government called upon the people to put up a resistance against the attacking troops; the troops who, on the previous evening, had attempted to lay siege to the Residence of the President of the Republic.

May this objective account serve the cause of peace, by helping French people of good will to understand that Viet Nam has never wanted the present hostilities and that, driven to a legitimate self-defence, she fights in order to safeguard her threatened independence and national unity; that she bears no hatred against either France or the French; that she deplores French losses as much as her own; and that she will never cease to long for peace, whereby she may settle down to the conduct of her affairs.

I. — REPERCUSSIONS OF THE HAIPHONG INCIDENT

There is no longer any doubt as to the initial responsibility — that is, for the initiative in the Haiphong skirmish. Everyone is from now on in agreement on this point. It was French military units who provoked the scuffle on November 20th, 1946, trying to seize control of the Vietnamese customs and firing on customs officials and Vietnamese policemen. It was the French High Command which prevented the incident from remaining a purely local one, by ordering French troops to seize the town, in spite of agreement arrived at between the Vietnamese Under Secretary of State for the Interior and the Political Adviser to the Commissariat of the French Republic in North Indochina (the Lami-Nam Accord).

This French « coup de force » came on top of a whole series of violations, on the part of the colonial authorities, of diplomatic agreements reached between Viet Nam and France (see, among other documents, publications by the France-Viet Nam Association); seizure of the Mois Plateaux, followed by hostilities and the establishment of terrorist rule in Cochinchina and South Annam; occupation of Campha-mine, Campha-port, Tien-Yen, Dam-Ha, Vat-Chau and Bae-Ninh, in Tonkin; calling together of the 2nd Dalat Conference after the creation of a so-called Republic of Cochinchina. After the Haiphong Incident, Vietnamese public opinion was justified in thinking that the French colonial authorities wanted once more to conquer Viet Nam

by the same methods as she had employed 80 years ago — nibbling, provocative incidents, and unexpected « coups de force » after several half-hearted discussions.

The aerial, land and naval bombardment of Haiphong, which started barely half an hour after the evacuation ultimatum, came to the Vietnamese population in other towns as a warning of which, willy nilly, they had to take heed. Everywhere the French troops campaigned, trenches had to be dug, underground air-raid shelters built, barricades set up. Everywhere the people feared French military violence brutal and without warning, as at Haiphong.

They could hardly be termed aggressive measures, these defensive precautions which the Vietnamese civilians realised had to be taken, after the Haiphong Incident, in order to protect themselves as best they could against the attacks which probably would be launched by an openly hostile, modern, mechanised army. Carried out, moreover, in broad daylight, these undertakings gave no reason to suppose Vietnamese aggression, and could not, once hostilities had begun, be cited as proofs of a premeditated attack by the Government of Viet Nam. The evacuation of the town was a precautionary measure, made advisable by the recent bombardment of Haiphong, which killed or wounded at least 25,000 among the civil population — and it was the people themselves who, without being officially ordered, but terrorised by reports coming from Haiphong, took the initiative in this matter. As for the holes in the walls which are sometimes pointed to, these can hardly be considered as evidence of our offensive desires after the events at Haiphong, since they date from the time of the Chinese occupation.

II. — EVENTS IN HANOI AFTER THE ATTACK ON HAIPHONG

Just for a few days, Hanoi enjoyed a short respite after the attack on Haiphong. For several days, it was to be hoped that the Haiphong outburst, despite its violence, would not degenerate into a widespread battle. Unfortunately, the French authorities, instead of thinking of regulating the incident, tried to establish themselves in the town and to keep hold of it. Worse still, they forced our Government to help them seize Haiphong by allowing them to resume military transport between Hanoi and Haiphong. As soon as the French Commander was refused this authorisation by the Vietnamese Commander, groups of French soldiers, especially SAS parachute commandos overran the streets of Hanoi, creating a number of incidents. During the three weeks following, attacks against Vietnamese policemen, armed hold-ups and thefts of tradesmen, plunder, all sorts of aggression, brisk firing on the crowds, throwing of grenades, raping of women and children... Armed soldiers forced their way into the Central Office of Information, threw the people out, and insulted Vietnamese flags. Others, passing in lorries in front of the Residency of the President of the Republic, uttered profanities and threats.

The Government of Viet Nam did all it could to safeguard the peace which the French soldiers were so openly seeking to jeopardise. Whilst President Ho Chi MINH again and again addressed messages to the French people, the French National Assembly, and to the French Government, Vietnamese authorities launched appeal after appeal to the population, urging them to remain calm. Governmental orders were strictly obeyed by a people conscious of the danger it would be running into should hostilities break out. Unfortunately, it appears that the French interpreted this attitude as a sign of passivity and weakness.

Finally, on December 17th, under the pretext of taking reprisals for an imaginary crime, parachute commandos fired on a whole district of Hanoi; some 50 people were killed or carried off. On the following day, December 18th, the same thing happened in other districts: rue Song To Lich, rue Takou and rue du Papier. On the same day, the Ministry of Finance together with the house of the Minister of Works, was occupied by French armoured troops; Vietnamese authorities were summoned two days after having left the spot. At the same time, the French « liaison », through the intermediary of Major FONDE, made it known to the Committee for the National Defence of Viet Nam, that the French command would take charge of the maintenance of order in Hanoi, at the latest on the morning of December 20th, 1946.

On December 19th, General MORLIERE called for the destruction of barricades and the disarmament of the Tu-Ve (self-defence corps). On the same day, in several towns, the French Command proceeded to destroy the protective barriers put up by the civil population. At Hanoi, at about 8 p.m., French troops supported by armoured cars coming from the Institut Pasteur, from the Lanessan Hospital, from the Lo-due district and from rue DuVillier, drove along the neighbouring streets. Also at 8 o'clock, large French forces guarding the Bank of Indochina marched towards the Palace of the President of the Republic, Ho Chi MINH. The capital of Viet Nam and the seat of the political organs of the Republic were under the threat of a « coup de force ». French attacking columns hurled themselves at every one of our various posts that they came across. Fighting broke out, not all at the same time, but everywhere where the French troops were trying to force their way. Time-lags between local skirmishes which took place one after the other during that tragic night, prove that the Vietnamese authorities had not prepared a wholesale attack on the French. Moreover, neither the Chateau d'Eau nor the Pont des Rapides had been mined; if the Vietnamese had really planned aggressive action, it is scarcely to be believed that they would have missed embarrassing the French garrison by destroying the two, which they still had in their possession. Such an omission is inconceivable.

The events which occurred on the evening of December 19th give the lie to the allegations made by the French Command, according to which, having been informed in the afternoon that a Vietnamese attack would be launched that very evening, it had immedia-

tely to despatch troops, as a purely defensive measure, in order to avoid massacres. In fact, it was since the 17th that the Vietnamese « liaison » had been asking the French Command to consign troops to that area, at least in the evenings, so as to reduce incidents to a minimum. Hostilities which broke out on the evening of December 19th were not started by the Vietnamese, but by the French under the pretext that the Vietnamese were going to attack them. How can any other explanation be supported now that it is known that even President Ho Chi MINH himself, together with his guard, had difficulty in making his way out of burning Hanoi, under a rain of bullets and shells? A good number of Cabinet members were unable to leave Hanoi for several days after December 19th, and several Ministers or Under Secretaries of State, unable to make it in time, were taken prisoner.

It was only on the morning of December 20th, after having narrowly escaped from a veritable trap laid by the French colonial authorities, whose military presence right up to the capital had been accepted, that the Vietnamese Government was regretfully compelled to call upon the people of Viet Nam, and especially upon the population of Hanoi, to take up arms in a resistance which, despite the pretensions of the French colonialists, they had long since foreseen.

..

Premeditated attack, or legitimate defence, on the part of Viet Nam?

Sacrificing thus the best of her youth and soldiers, and of her wealth, Viet Nam gave proof of her resolve to guard her independence and unity at all costs; and this struggle will be carried on, if need be, by several generations, as if it had never subsided since the middle of the last century. But at the same time, the Government of Viet Nam has never ceased to appeal to France to put an end to this fratricidal strife. Like their leader, the Vietnamese people earnestly await the triumph of the cause of peace and their independence, together with that of Franco-Vietnamese brotherhood.

If Viet Nam fights with energy and resolve to safeguard her right to live freely, whatever the cost; if she resists the assaults of French colonial troops with success; if it was without any premeditation that she entered this war which she has never wanted and which she hopes will be drawn to a close as soon as possible. Faced with the cruel alternative of defending her very life or of falling once more under the yoke of servitude, driven to the last extremity, she agreed to wage the present war in order to safeguard her threatened independence and national unity, but it is with a deep sense of regret that she has been compelled to accept fighting: she has never planned aggression against the French. She struggles, but her struggle is no more than a legitimate defence, because what Viet Nam desired was peace. This desire for peace she has made manifest since the coming to power of President Ho Chi MINH, and confirmed by the Accords of March 6th and September 14th, 1946. She had need of peace in

order to devote herself to the work of national construction. Even with a powerful army Viet Nam was eager to enjoy, at last, a normal life; and she wanted peace. But she was aware that her young army, with insufficient equipment and primitive arms, could not dream of winning against the French colonial troops without the time factor. She knew that war would bring terrible sufferings for her civil population before the operations of her guerrillas could bear any effect.

That is why her Government attempted the almost impossible so as to escape the present crisis. Now that it has happened, Viet Nam never ceases to desire a speedy peace. Driven to fight, she fights, knowing that, in present times, all the most modern armies in the world and all the most effective weapons of destruction could never prevail against the will of a wholly united people, burning for their freedom.

Paris, June 1st, 1947.

TRAN-NGOC-DANH,
*Deputy for Nambo,
President, Delegation in France
of the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam.*

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