



## VYACHESLAV MOLOTOV'S DIPLOMATIC ACTIVITY AT THE GENEVA CONFERENCE OF 1954

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The article reveals an important event in the history of the cold war connected with Soviet Union participation in the war conflict settlement within the territory of Indo-China. V. Molotov, the Minister of foreign affairs of the USSR took an active part in preparing and holding the International conference aimed at conflict settlement within the territory of Indo-China in spring and summer of 1954. The author has investigated diplomatic activity of the head of the soviet delegation at all the stages of the conference. The author has come to the conclusion that Molotov's activity met the state interests of the USSR and the final documents worked out through his mediation became an example of political critical situations settlement in other world regions.

Key words: Foreign affairs at the period of the cold war, peaceful settlement of a war conflict, Molotov's diplomatic activity, history of relations between the USSR and Indo-China.

In April 2004 there was a sixtieth anniversary of the beginning of the Geneva Conference on the problems of conflict settlement existing around Korea and Indo-China's countries. The Geneva Conference of 1954 is considered to be one of the most important political events of the latter half of the twentieth century. It put the end of the First Indochina war of 1946-1954, which is thought to be the first great local conflict of the cold war. By the spring 1954 eight-year confrontation between French Armed forces and Indo-China divisions of the Left (Vietmin, Khmer Issarak and Pathet Lao) demanded to be settled. In this situation, the attraction of international diplomatic resources was the most reasonable way taking into account the volatile political situation, which put a range of serious tasks in the face of the world community.

The beginning of the process of the peaceful conflict settlement in Indo-China is mostly connected with the Soviet diplomatic activity. 9 delegations took part in the Geneva Conference on Indo-China problems. The Soviet delegation was headed by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the USSR, the outstanding diplomat Vyacheslav Molotov.

It should be mentioned that the political vision of Indo-China politics hadn't been worked out beforehand by the Soviet delegation but was done at the process of the Geneva Conference.

According to the evidence by the Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev, at the eve of the Geneva Conference the Soviet government didn't have definite plans on the conflict settlement around Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia<sup>1</sup>. It may be explained as for the international problems the one of nuclear war was of the utmost importance but not solving the problems of faraway Indo-China region.

Vyacheslav Molotov, who took the post of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the USSR after Stalin's death, had to be in the center of political events connected with Indo-China situation. Formerly, in 1949-1952 by Stalin's order he had already worked on this problem as Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars and as Vice Head of Cabinet Council, he had studied Indo-China problem<sup>2</sup>.

Vyacheslav Molotov had to study the core of the problem properly as the parties interested in peaceful conflict settlement had different motives.

In the Archives of Soviet foreign Policy there are documents characterizing the positions of the future participants of the Geneva Conference. Among them there is one on the Vietnam conditions written on the 5<sup>th</sup> of March 1954 by Prime-Minister of France J. Laniel. Fulfilling of them could have let to start negotiations. Among them there were Vietnamese army evacuation from Laos, creation of no-men's land around Tonkin Gulf and Vietnamese army evacuation there, concentration of Vietnamese forces in the definite region of Northern Vietnam, disarm-

<sup>1</sup> Hrushhev N.S. Ljudi. Vremja. Zhizn'. T. 3. M., 1999. S. 115.

<sup>2</sup> Selivanov I.N. Moskva—Ho Shi Min. Kontakty 1950—1952 gg. // Voprosy istorii. 2012. № 8. S. 3—23.



ment of all the Vietnamese forces in Southern Vietnam or their evacuation from there<sup>3</sup>.

France was ready to settlement through the negotiations but it wanted to weaken the opponent to provide the possibility to influence it.

Vietnamese delegation had no real possibility to follow its own policy and hoped to get help from Moscow and Beijing to defend its interests. It was due to absence of diplomatic experience and wish to show its confidence to the USSR and China again.

Understanding the complexity and ambiguousness of the present situation Ho Chi Minh suggested creating a hundred mile frontline to the north from 16 parallel and giving Tonkin to Democratic Republic of Vietnam. Plus, he suggested evacuating Democratic Republic of Vietnam army from Southern Vietnam.

In my opinion, Russian diplomat, the first ambassador to Democratic Republic of Vietnam A. Lavrishev gave an unbiased assessment that the position of French government meant that they didn't want to meet Democratic Republic of Vietnam interests and their attempt to gain time to continue the negotiations from the position of strength<sup>4</sup>.

According to C. Morelle, French scientist's opinion, who studied achieve documents inaccessible for Russian scientists, in 1953 Soviet leaders didn't already hold to account by the war in Indo-China for France but they preferred to accuse the USA in the present situation<sup>5</sup>.

Moscow and Beijing saw a reasonable compromise in dividing the territory of Vietnam into two parts on the 16<sup>th</sup> parallel in the case the opposite Vietnamese parties wouldn't be able to create a common national government. The experience of «temporary division» of the single country had been before: Democratic People's Republic of Korea and Republic of Korea, German Democratic Republic and Federative Republic of Germany, People's Republic of China and Republic of China in Taiwan.

Thus, before the beginning of the process of peaceful settlement in Indo-China the USSR and Democratic People's Republic of Korea had already decided on behalf of the Vietnamese what would be profitable for them and what wouldn't. But on the other hand, neither Moscow nor Beijing wanted to provoke the USA and their co-belligerents to apply cruel measures to the Left in this region.

Representatives of the USSR and those of Democratic People's Republic of Korea agreed upon dividing Vietnam at the beginning of April 1954 while consulting on the problem by Vyacheslav Molotov, Ho Chi Minh and Minister of Foreign Affairs of People's Republic of China Zhōu Ēnlái in Moscow. In 1979 famous diplomat M. Kapitsa declared it in details. He based upon his own reminiscences and achieves documents available for him as a person working in Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the USSR (but without references on them as it was used that time)<sup>6</sup>.

One more principle question important in the process of preparation for the Conference in Geneva was one of choosing plenipotentiaries for Laos and Cambodia. In these countries royal regimes had a great authority, they took part in negotiations with French authorities discussing of getting the status of independent countries. But the local Left were famous for their military opposition to French authorities. So the question on plenipotentiaries for Laos and Cambodia was to be discussed. As a result, Vyacheslav Molotov managed to persuade his conversers that the best way would be to give the rules to present Democratic Republic of Vietnam in Geneva to Khmer, Issarak and Pathet Lao in exchange for French agreement and that of other European countries which would be present at the future conference to admit delegations of People's Republic of China and Democratic Republic of Vietnam as full participants at the negotiations.

Soviet Union was ready to agree to accept representatives for Laos and Cambodia who would be representatives of their royal governments but interests of the Left would present a delegation from Democratic Republic of Vietnam. But the final decision on this question they supposed would be made by participants of the Geneva Conference themselves.

The delegations of People's Republic of China and Democratic Republic of Vietnam also

<sup>3</sup> AVP RF (Achieve of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation) F. 79. Op. 3. Por. №3. P. 3. L. 127–142.

<sup>4</sup> Lavrishev A.A. Indokitajskij vopros posle vtoroj mirovoj vojny. M., 1960. S. 112–113.

<sup>5</sup> Morel' Sh. Franko-sovetskie otnoshenija v konce vojny v Indokitae // Sovetskij Sojuz, Francija i mezhdunarodnye krizisy pjatidesjatyh godov XX veka. M., 2003. S. 26.

<sup>6</sup> Kapica M.S. KNR: tri desjatiletija – tri politiki. M., 1979. S. 109–110.



approved the position of the USSR (more precisely of Vyacheslav Molotov) which idea was to admit independence of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, not to allow to spread the war and to make France stop military activity, to create conditions which might encourage full liberation of Vietnam by communists.

Thus, Soviet and Chinese leaders didn't want the following confrontation with West. In People's Republic of China they were afraid of invasion to their territory by American forces if as it had been in Korea Chinese volunteers would fight in Vietnam on behalf of Democratic Republic of Vietnam. In the USSR they thought that the USA could use nuclear weapon in Vietnam against Vietnamese forces (this plan was discussed in Truman's Cabinet at the period of the war in Korea).

International Meeting on Korea and Indo-China started its work on the 6<sup>th</sup> of April 1954 in Geneva. At the first stage parties discussed the problems of Korean settlement having confirmed division of this state on the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel.

The participants of the Meeting started discussing Indo-China problems on the 8<sup>th</sup> of May. The very important for the further constructive work was the fact of establishing of Vyacheslav Molotov and Minister of foreign affairs of the UK A. Eden as co-Chairmen at the meetings on peaceful settlements in Indo-China.

Central events according to the force positions took place in Dien Bien Phu where Frenchmen had a humiliating defeat a day before. An important role in this defeat played Soviet military help to Vietnamese army in missile launchers. As a result the situation in France declined at the moment of starting negotiations on Indo-china problems in Geneva. Soviet and Chinese participants of the negotiations took the advantage of this fact.

Later in his memoirs Nikita Khrushchov compared the happening events in Dien Bien Phu with «miracle» because the situation on the solving Indo-China problem changed greatly in favor of Democratic Republic of Vietnam. It's quite natural that the head of the Russian delegation had an advantage in confirming interests of socialist world.

Till the 14<sup>th</sup> of May До 14 мая Vyacheslav Molotov was the head at the Conference meetings. According to the tactics worked out in April 1954 at the tripartite discussion in Moscow, he gave the delegations from People's Republic of China and Democratic Republic of Vietnam a possibility to present their common position.

The whole first month of the Conference till the 8<sup>th</sup> of June Vyacheslav Molotov forwent from propaganda speeches. He concentrated on the organizational work on agreement between the parties, on the search of compromises and available trade-offs. It was especially important at the moments when sharp contradictions of the parties could lead the negotiations into deadlock. That was the head of Soviet delegation who organized the first meeting of A. Eden and Zhōu Ēnlái and persuaded to arrange negotiations between French representatives and those of Democratic Republic of Vietnam, the final decision was taken on the 29<sup>th</sup> of May<sup>7</sup>.

Soviet delegation and its leader were negatively accepted in Geneva by the representatives from Vietnam. On the 9<sup>th</sup> of June its minister of foreign Affairs Nguen Kuok Din criticized Soviet Union which was guilty, in his opinion, in troubles of Vietnamese people, which was the only country that objected Vietnamese desire to enter United Nation<sup>8</sup>.

In his speech dated on the 10<sup>th</sup> of June 1954 Minister of foreign Affairs of the UK A. Eden declared that Vietminh tried to revive the idea of Indo-China Federation and to unify three countries being a part of French Indo-China under his leadership.

After such, declarations the representatives of Soviet Union couldn't be aside. The same day in his speech Vyacheslav Molotov noticed: «Soviet delegation think that this meeting should examine both political and military conditions of peaceful revival in Indo-China. It's necessary military activity not to appear a short break after which military actions will start in a bigger and more cruel way»<sup>9</sup>.

Soviet minister doubted on independent status of the Vietnamese representatives being at the Conference and royal governments of Laos and Cambodia giving an extraordinary argument: if they themselves think, that they are independent why «doesn't any Asian country admit

<sup>7</sup> Obichkina E.O. SSSR v uregulirovanii indokitajskogo konflikta (1954 god) // Sovetskij Sojuz, Francija i mezhdunarodnye krizisy pjatidesjatyh godov HH veka. M., 2003. S. 16.

<sup>8</sup> AVP RF. F. 79. Op. 11a. Por. №2. P. 10. L. 130.

<sup>9</sup> Tam zhe. L. 184.



it?»). Further he accused the USA government in deceleration of peaceful settlement in Indo-China. He said that the USA held the policy in this region which caused military activity still to continue and peace being waited by people in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia hadn't been established yet<sup>10</sup>.

In this situation, it should be mentioned that the fate of the negotiations could have been solved by improper behavior by the head of Soviet delegation. E. Obichkina noticed that failure of the negotiations could have discredited him as the head of Geneva Conference and as the Head of Soviet delegation<sup>11</sup>. In her opinion, it could have influenced his position in Soviet government. Nikita Khrushchev could have accused him in failure of the first attempt to overcome paroxysm of the cold war. Inner policy was of utmost importance for Vyacheslav Molotov that time and it determined the character of the main reductions made by People's Republic of China and Democratic Republic of Vietnam on the last days.

On the 18<sup>th</sup> of June Vyacheslav Molotov invited the leaders of the delegations for a close meeting. In his speech he analyzed the areas of common interests in the positions of the opposite parties. This areas could be a base for future Geneva agreements. This analysis resulted from a great work done in Moscow; in the headquarters of Ministry of foreign Affairs that may be proved with achieve documents.

The same day at the close meeting for communist delegations the Vietnamese agreed to compromise. Vyacheslav Molotov let Zhōu Ēnlái discuss the division of the country on the 17<sup>th</sup> parallel with the French party. Chinese Minister managed to do it on the 20<sup>th</sup> of July. Thus, the territory of Democratic Republic of Vietnam must be enlarged in comparison with the territory discussed before the Conference. Even this circumstance couldn't fully satisfy Democratic Republic's of Vietnam demands. The leaders of the country wanted to get all and at once.

At the end of 1970s in the heat of confrontation between two countries actions of People's Republic of China in Geneva would be characterized as «sell-out of Vietnamese people's interests» in the official documents of the Vietnamese government<sup>12</sup>.

On the 20<sup>th</sup> of July the agreement on military standstill in Vietnam was signed according to which French forces should be led behind the temporary military border line made on the 17<sup>th</sup> parallel. After that the French delegation declared that in the process of settlement of the problems connected with peace revival in Indo-China they would respect their independence, sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity.

It should be mentioned that Vyacheslav Molotov made the delegation from People's Republic of China agree upon the condition set by the leaders of the delegations from Cambodia and Laos. This condition was as follows: their states got the right to have recourse to the foreign military help in the case of possible threat from outside.

On the 21<sup>st</sup> of July 1954 the Final Declaration of the Geneva conference was approved. According to this document free elections should be held in Laos and Cambodia in the year of 1955. The settlement in Vietnam supposed to be set on the basis of its unity and territorial integrity. Free elections were planed to be held in July 1956 under international commission control formed from the representatives of the countries which controlled the agreement.

All the participants of the meeting promised to respect sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of the Indo-Chinese countries, to follow the principle of non-interference in their internal affairs, to consult on the questions examined by international commissions responsible for supervision and control.

As M. Kapitsa noticed in his papers «the main work at the Conference was done by Pham Van Dong and Mendès France, but Molotov and Zhōu Ēnlái and Eden in some ways constantly tried to bring together positions of the parties. The American delegation was like a donkey tied to the coach who constantly refused to go straight and pulled the coach back»<sup>13</sup>.

Vyacheslav Molotov gave an interesting estimation to the Geneva Conference. According to M. Kapitsa's reminiscences the Soviet Minister stopped at the square in front of the House of Nations, pointed at towering up Mont Blanc with its white cap on the top and he said: «The great mountain! We are too close to it. The farther we go from it, the better we see its greatness.

<sup>10</sup> Tam zhe. L. 186-188.

<sup>11</sup> Obichkina E.O. Ukaz. soch. S. 22.

<sup>12</sup> Pravda o v'etnamo-kitajskih otnoshenijah za poslednie 30 let. Hanoj, 1979. S. 26-30.

<sup>13</sup> Kapitsa M.S. Na raznyh paraleljah. M., 1996. S. 266.



The same happens with Geneva agreements. We have just approved them and don't understand their meaning yet. They will be thought out more properly as time passes»<sup>14</sup>.

Based on the above, we may say that the position of the USSR at the eve and in the course of the Geneva Conference in 1954 was quite realistic and fully met its state interests, besides provided the government of Democratic Republic's of Vietnam with conditions to hold the policy aimed at Vietnam consolidation. It gave to people of Cambodia and Laos to build new relations with outside world on the basis of principles of equality and neutrality. Although, the opinion in the modern Russian Historiography says that in Geneva «Soviet diplomacy managed to play the role of an attentive arbitrator capable to make compromises»<sup>15</sup>, it falters with essence of what happened.

It's more than likely that Soviet government didn't want to abandon their positions in Indo-China but the challenge of confrontation with western countries on the question of control in this region were excluded from their plans<sup>16</sup>.

According to Trojanovskii's opinion the idea of remission in relations between the USSR and western countries was not liked by Molotov. Nevertheless, being a disciplined communist he had to obey a new leader, Nikita Khrushchev who wanted to come into closer contact with the USA, France and Great Britain next to Malenkov<sup>17</sup>.

The estimation of the results of the Geneva Conference given by French scientist Maurice Vaïsse is rather interesting. He thinks that the agreements approved at the conference «proved the victory of the revolutionary movement over European empire and opened the way to eliminate the second great colonial empire of the world»<sup>18</sup>.

In my opinion, Molotov's role is very important in such outcome of diplomatic confrontation of the two systems. It is out doubt that Molotov's activity met state interests of the USSR and the final documents worked out with his active participation became an example for settlement of political crisis situations taking place in different world regions.

## **ДИПЛОМАТИЧЕСКАЯ ДЕЯТЕЛЬНОСТЬ В.М. МОЛОТОВА НА ЖЕНЕВСКОМ СОВЕЩАНИИ 1954 ГОДА**

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В статье рассматривается важное событие истории холодной войны, связанное с участием Советского Союза в урегулировании вооруженного конфликта на территории Индокитайского полуострова. Министр иностранных дел СССР В.М. Молотов принял активное участие в подготовке и проведении весной-летом 1954 г. Международной конференции по урегулированию Индокитайского кризиса. Автор исследовал дипломатическую деятельность главы советской делегации на всех этапах работы конференции и пришёл к выводу, что деятельность В.М. Молотова соответствовала государственным интересам СССР, а выработанные при его активном участии итоговые документы стали примером для политического разрешения кризисных ситуаций, возникавших в других регионах мира.

Ключевые слова: Международные отношения в годы холодной войны, мирное урегулирование вооружённых конфликтов, дипломатическая деятельность Молотова, история отношений СССР со странами Индокитая.

<sup>14</sup> Tam zhe. S. 266-267.

<sup>15</sup> Obichkina E.O. Ukaz. soch. S. 22.

<sup>16</sup> Konoreva I.A. Indokitaj: pervyj krupnyj lokal'nyj konflikt perioda «holodnoj vojny» (1945–1954) // Azija i Afrika segodnja. 2008. №7. S. 73–77; Selivanov I.N., Konoreva I.A. Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniya v Indokitae: geopolitika, diplomatija, pravovye problemy (1939–1954). Kursk, 2008. S. 270–286.

<sup>17</sup> Trojanovskij O.A. Cherez gody i rasstojaniya. M., 1997. S. 174–187.

<sup>18</sup> Vaiss M. Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniya posle 1945 goda. M., 2005. S. 72.