

**December 15, 1966**

**Record of a Conversation between CPSU CC General Secretary Cde. L. I. Brezhnev and Cde. Le Duc Tho, member of the Politburo and Secretary of the VWP CC**

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**Summary:**

Brezhnev and Le Duc Tho discuss the Vietnamese War.

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## RECORD OF A CONVERSATION\*

between CPSU CC General Secretary Cde. L. I. Brezhnev and Cde. Le Duc Tho,  
member of the Politburo and Secretary of the VWP CC

15 December 1966

\* The record of the conversation was not examined by the participants.

Present at the conversation were: CPSU CC Politburo member and Chairman of the USSR Council of Ministers Cde. A. N. Kosygin; Politburo member, Chairman of the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet Cde. N. V. Podgorny; CPSU CC Politburo member and Secretary Cde. M. A. Suslov; CPSU CC Secretary Cde. Yu. V. Andropov; and CPSU CC member and USSR Minister of Foreign Affairs Cde. A. A. Gromyko.

L. I. Brezhnev We are glad to meet you, Cde. Le Duc Tho.

Le Duc Tho We are also very glad for this meeting. We know that you are very busy right now, you have just had a CC Plenum and a session of the USSR Supreme Soviet has begun. Today's meeting is just one more evidence of the concern which the CPSU CC Politburo is showing about our country. It also shows that the friendship between our Parties and peoples is developing and strengthening.

L. I. Brezhnev This is actually so. At the CPSU CC Plenum, which concluded yesterday, the question of support of Vietnam was one of the most important. This is confirmation of our position with respect to the fraternal VWP and the Vietnamese people. The Plenum approved the activity of the CPSU CC Politburo and in a resolution stressed the need for giving further all-round aid to the fraternal Vietnamese people in their struggle against the aggression of American imperialism. The principled policy of the CPSU CC on the Vietnamese question, which is fully supported by all the members of our Party and the entire Soviet people, found reflection in this resolution.

You, Cde. Le Duc Tho, have already said that the VWP CC Politburo has given you instructions to inform the CPSU CC leadership about the situation in Vietnam, about assessments of the situation, and the prospects for the further development of events. We are ready to hear your information and offer you, as a dear guest, the opportunity to begin our conversation.

Le Duc Tho First of all permit [me] to pass on to you greetings and best wishes from Cdes. Ho Chi Minh, Le Duan, Pham Van Dong, Truong Chinh, and other members of the VWP CC Politburo.

A meeting of the CC Politburo of our Party was held recently at which the results of Cde. Le Thanh Nghi's trip to socialist countries were summed up. The VWP CC Politburo expressed gratitude to the socialist countries for [their] great help. In addition, a meeting of the CC Politburo was held not long before the trip of the VWP delegation to the congress in Hungary at which representatives of the National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam were present.

We analyzed the situation which is developing right now in Vietnam, and worked out our line in the military, political, and diplomatic spheres. Cde. Le Duan went to China and exchanged opinions on this question with the Chinese comrades. He also wanted to visit the Soviet Union to consult with the CPSU leaders. But inasmuch as we had already been charged with holding conversations in Moscow in connection with the trip to the congresses in Bulgaria and Hungary Cde. Le Duan could not go to the USSR. In addition, he has very much work right now.

During the stay in Moscow Cdes. Pham Van Dong and Le Thanh Nghi have already

provided information about the military situation in our country. Therefore I will talk briefly about the events which have taken place, and dwell mainly on the enemy's designs and plans.

A short respite came to us after the conclusion of the Geneva Accords in 1954 and a period of political struggle began. However, already in 1959 our people entered a new phase of the struggle with the use of revolutionary violence against counterrevolutionary violence, combining political and armed forms of combat in the fight against the enemy. Our Party has pursued this line up to the present time. The policy being pursued by our Party during the last seven years allows us to keep the initiative in our hands. We constantly attack the enemy and win victory after victory. During the seven years the enemy has been constantly on the defensive and suffered defeat after defeat. To put it briefly, this is the general conclusion about the situation in Vietnam.

As regards South Vietnam, we think that the enemy has suffered four defeats here of strategic importance.

1. We inflicted a defeat on the enemy, thwarting the plans of Ngo Dinh Diem, who was counting on suppressing the revolutionary forces in South Vietnam and marching on the North.

2. Right after this the American imperialists began to help the puppets and tried to carry out the Staley-Taylor plan, according to which they intended to "pacify South Vietnam" in 18 months, but this plan was doomed to failure. Diem was killed, and Taylor was recalled to the US.

3. Then the imperialists developed the so-called "McNamara plan", which had the goal of pacifying only the main regions. But this plan of the Americans also suffered defeat. The partisan movement in the South of Vietnam broadened; small partisan detachments created in the first period of fighting grew and became large.

Having suffered defeat in so-called "special warfare" beginning in 1965, the imperialists and their henchmen launched local warfare in South Vietnam. On the one hand, they began an air war against the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, and on the other, massive warfare in South Vietnam, where they sent their troops. Since 1965 the puppet army has played an essentially secondary role, but the US is trying to seize the initiative. In particular, during the last dry season they used 200,000 American troops for these purposes when conducting combat operations.

1. During the last dry season (the winter of 1965-1966), we concerned ourselves about the possibility of winning a victory over the American forces. But, as experience showed, we were able to achieve victory in the dry season of 1965-1966, which has very great military and political importance. It strengthened our people's faith in final victory over the American imperialists. If one evaluates this victory in a purely military aspect, then the main thing is that we killed a large number of puppet and American soldiers, and gained experience in fighting American troops.

The first time we did not have sufficient experience. During the dry season we probed the forces of the American troops and began to beat the enemy with the onset of the rains. Victories were also won during the rainy period, [but] not so great as during the dry season. This is explained by the fact that during the winter of 1965-1966 we had to regroup our forces and prepare to repel the enemy during the next dry season, the winter of 1966-1967. A new front was opened at the 17th Parallel in the province of Quang Tri, and several months ago our attacks against the American forces began here. A month of the 1966-1967 dry season has already passed. This was a time of an active combat against enemy troops, totaling 400,000 American soldiers and

servicemen of US satellite countries. During a month of the 1966-1967 dry season we won a number of victories which we assess as great achievements.

The Americans have undertaken large operations against our main base in the province of Tay Ninh, bordering Cambodia and the southern regions of Central Vietnam. The Americans used more than 30,000 of their soldiers, in the course of this operation, including the 196th Infantry Brigade and the 25th Infantry Division. They threw in the 1st Airmobile Division and the 73rd Parachute Brigade as reinforcements, and also a number of units of the puppet troops. They used B-52 bombers more than 25 times to bomb this region.

During 20 days of battles we killed 23,000 enemy troops, mainly Americans, shot down and destroyed 40 aircraft, and put 30 armored vehicles out of commission. As regards the 196th Brigade the enemy was forced to admit that it exists only nominally. We destroyed one battalion completely and badly mauled two others. Even the enemy assesses this operation as the largest which the Americans have ever conducted in South Vietnam, and admits that the situation has become very poor for the American troops and their satellites.

A. N. Kosygin How many enemy troops took part in this operation?

Le Duc Tho. The US threw in 30,000 troops, the overwhelming majority of them American, and part of them were puppet troops. As a result of this defeat the American major general who commanded the operation was removed from his post.

NFO [National Liberation Front] forces launched combat operations in the province of Kon Tum to support the operation in Tay Ninh. Here one battalion, eight American companies, and four puppet companies were destroyed. We destroyed 17 150-mm caliber guns and shot down 17 aircraft. We combined the actions of all three branches of troops in these operations: regular troops, local formations, and partisan detachments.

Partisan forces and subunits of local formations defeated many battalions and companies of the puppet troops in many places. During this same period a number of blows were delivered on the enemy rear areas. Patriots attacked a depot with bombs and weapons on Long Binh (the province of Bien Hoa) 20 km from Saigon. The Americans suffered great damage as a result of the liquidation of these depots [SIC, plural]. We also attacked the base of an armored regiment and destroyed over 100 vehicles. We attacked the Tan Son Nhut airfield twice. The enemy admitted that he had suffered great losses. Our fighters also blew up the American propaganda center in Saigon, the so-called "psychological warfare" headquarters [shtab]. Several days ago patriotic forces launched a strike on the petroleum storage depots in the province of Quang Tri. After these strikes Cabot Lodge himself admitted that the US cannot find the means to guard against these raids.

I have told only about the main strikes against the enemy rear areas. There have been many small clashes and battles besides these large actions. It could be said that we have fought very well recently. According to preliminary information 11,400 enemy soldiers have been killed in South Vietnam during this month, including 5,700 Americans, six battalions, of which four were American and two puppet, and 33 enemy companies were defeated.

As regards the "pacification plan" of South Vietnam the Americans now admit that they have suffered defeat. They have suffered uninterrupted defeats during the seven years beginning in 1959.

Viewing the situation in North Vietnam, we have come to the conclusion that the

Americans have suffered defeat in their air war against the DRV. They could not force us to halt support to South Vietnam by bombing DRV territory, and weren't able to force us to the negotiating table. They set these very two goals for themselves, but it turned out that the US has no ability to implement them.

In recent years American leaders Kennedy, Johnson, and McNamara have been convinced that the US could not defeat us. Having already begun a war against our people Kennedy admitted that the Americans had fallen into a tunnel from which there was no exit. Johnson also admitted that they could not defeat us by military means. A while back McNamara himself said that they would be able to withdraw their troops during 1965. Now he says that American military units will remain in South Vietnam for a long time. This demonstrates that the strategy of the Pentagon has suffered defeat and the US has been forced to wage a protracted war.

The "peace campaign" being pursued by the US government has a false nature. It also shows that the Americans are in confusion and do not know how to act further. In the situation which has been created we should win big victories in order to force the enemy to withdraw.

Fifty-eight billion dollars of the US budget goes for military purposes. Twenty-one billion dollars of it is spent for the war in Vietnam. As is well-known, Johnson has requested an additional \$10 billion. Thus, it turns out that the US is spending more than half of its entire military budget for this war, not counting the \$600 million going to give so-called "economic aid" to South Vietnam.

One American senator has admitted that the US is using one-third of all its troops in Vietnam, one-third of [its] naval forces, and half of its Air Force.

A. N. Kosygin. As has been officially announced, the US has 3,000,000 troops. The US military budget is \$65 billion, and they are spending \$10 billion for the war in Vietnam. This is official data.

Le Duc Tho. We are using American data. McNamara, for example, declared that the amount of bombs dropped in Vietnam exceeds the number of bombs dropped in Korea and are much greater than the quantity which was dropped in the Pacific Ocean theater of military operations in the Second World War.

A. N. Kosygin. I have read reports that the US military budget for 1967-1968 will be \$65 billion. They think that \$10 billion will be spent on the war in South Vietnam. This is information of the American press.

Le Duc Tho. I cited this information to show that the war has a savage nature. The losses are 1 to 5, that is, our 1 to their 5, killed and wounded.

A. N. Kosygin They say it's the other way around.

N. V. Podgorny. Are you counting only military losses?

Le Duc Tho We're not counting the victims of terror. They are very great. At times the correlation of losses grows to 1 to 8, 1 to 10. This happens when our regular troops take part in battles. We have special troops small in number for actions in the rear of the enemy forces.

L. I. Brezhnev Are these special sabotage detachments?

Le Duc Tho Yes. These detachments use mortars and other special weapons. They approach close to the target and make an attack. These are not partisans, but special military detachments. I would like to say that, although our losses are significantly less, this does not mean that we have no difficulties. The enemy has sufficient means to provide aid and treat their wounded. We don't have such capabilities. Soldiers of the Army of Liberation also experience difficulties with food. Our troops are forced to very long marches, sometimes up to 1,000 kilometers

A. N. Kosygin Is it impossible to throw food for these troops from planes?

Le Duc Tho It's possible, But we have no such ability, no transport aviation, and what is more the enemy air forces prevents this.

L. I. Brezhnev The food supply comes mainly from North Vietnam?

Le Duc Tho There are other routes, but the main one is the aid of North Vietnam.

L. I. Brezhnev How many kilometers is it from your border to the first bases in South Vietnam?

Le Duc Tho If we deliver weapons from Hanoi to the Mekong Delta, then the distance is about 3,000 kilometers. By rail from Hanoi to Saigon is about 2,000 kilometers. But we go along the mountains, but this route is considerable longer and more difficult. During the years of the Resistance War I personally went more than 700 km from the south to the north in four to five months. It is necessary to travel 600-700 km in order to get to intermediate bases. For example, from Hanoi to the 17th Parallel is more than 400 km by highway, but right now we are using country roads.

A. N. Kosygin But why is it impossible to throw food from planes flying at low altitude?

Le Duc Tho First, we have no such aircraft, and second, it [would] be necessary to prepare for this especially.

L. I. Brezhnev We are not asking about this from curiosity, we are concerned for you. Do the Americans attack airfields in North Vietnam?

Le Duc Tho They are making raids on airfields, but I will talk about this later.

In South Vietnam we have been forced to dig underground shelters. In many places the local residents also live underground. Underground corridors sometimes stretch for dozens of kilometers.

I would like to return to the situation in North Vietnam. Recently the Americans have very strongly stepped up raids on DRV territory. Where the personnel losses in the North in 1965 were more than 10,000 dead and wounded, in the 11 months of this year [they are] 37,000 dead and wounded, that is, three times that of last year. I just received a report from Hanoi that in the last two days more than 400 people in Hanoi and other places were killed and wounded from American raids and bombing. As regards the bombing of various objects, bridges, and enterprises Cdes. Pham Van Dong and Le Thanh Nghi have already informed you about this.

The fourth zone (from Thanh Hoa and to the south, to the 17th Parallel) is being subjected to fierce raids. In coastal regions the US is making raids from the air and shelling from the sea. There are villages where there were previously up to 500 homes, and now there are only several buildings. The population has been forced to

live in underground shelters, and peasants even shut cattle underground. The life of the population in these regions is difficult. Matters with food are more or less normal, but there are shortages in clothing and other materials.

Right now we are exerting maximum efforts to develop agricultural production in the country. Therefore the war has not influenced the level of agriculture very much.

Everything about which I have spoken above demonstrates our victories, on the one hand, but on the other, the difficulties in South and North Vietnam. We have won many victories over the enemy, but the US has great military and economic potential, and greater human resources. This is a question of the strongest imperialist power. The American imperialists have developed a two-year war plan for 1966-1968, even up to the 1968 presidential elections. The strength of their troops is already 400,000 right now, not counting the 7th Fleet and the troops on the island of Guam and other bases. If they cannot win a victory in the dry season which has begun they will bring the strength of their troops to 500,00 in 1967 or 700,000 in 1968.

We have to fight against the American imperialists for two dry seasons in 1966-1967 and 1967-1968 when large US forces will take part in combat operations.

At the present time the enemy has set a goal of waging intensified combat operations in the dry season which has begun. Where as the strikes will be mainly concentrated in the provinces of Quang Tri and Quang Nam where the NFOYuV [National Liberation Front of South Vietnam, the Viet Cong] launched operations during the rainy season. The American command is setting as its goal the waging of active operations in the Mekong Delta and the province of Tay Nguyen.

Right now the American forces are playing the role of the main strike force in attacks on our bases. The puppet army is performing secondary tasks of seizing and holding villages under the control of the Saigon authorities. The US will increase raids on North Vietnam. At the present time they have already launched a number of air strikes on Hanoi. The main targets of the bombings are lines of communications, depots, and military facilities. The US Air Force is also launching strikes on population centers in order to sow panic and fear among the population.

We are also ready for a such a turn of events when the Americans land assault groups in the region of the 17th Parallel in order to cut off North Vietnam from the South and try to block the route of our aid to South Vietnam. But, as we think, this will be the peak of their escalation of the war. It seems to us that matters have still not yet reached this.

L. I. Brezhnev What does the region of the 17th Parallel represent?

Le Duc Tho The Demilitarized Zone passes along a river, and a bridge has been thrown across it which is protected from either side. There are mountains on the west. One can pass through there.

We think that the Americans might land an assault group. But it is hard for them to use ground forces. On the one hand, they are afraid of the reaction of world public opinion. On the other, in such an event our military forces will be used in their entirety. And the American troops will become a target against which we will be able to launch powerful blows.

M. A. Suslov But what are the lines of communications in the direction toward the 17th Parallel from the direction of South Vietnam?

Le Duc Tho We have destroyed a large part of the lines of communications in this region. The American press reports that the railroad passing there has practically been put out of commission. It is cut in many places.

A firefight sometimes occurs in the Demilitarized Zone. Our units are located near this region.

I have spoken about the enemy's plans which he might carry out in the future. With respect to pacification in South Vietnam the US might undertake political measures and make bribes. But this won't bring them success. The entire administrative apparatus of the puppet authorities is rotten to the core. Bribe-taking and corruption flourish among the bureaucrats.

The US is trying to intensify its "peace campaign" in the diplomatic sphere. It is carrying out a policy in South Vietnam which has two aspects: armed and diplomatic. The armed one is the main aspect. The diplomatic activity is subordinated to the military [activity] and is called upon to speed up a military victory over the patriotic forces.

The US has been pursuing diplomatic overtures recently. Judging from their statements the terms proposed by Washington have somewhat softened. This was caused by the fact that the American troops have suffered a number of serious defeats and the American rulers are in confusion.

It can be said that the US policy with respect to Vietnam remains hypocritical. They speak about peace but in fact they want to intensify the war.

I would like to inform you about the conversations which the Polish representative to the MKK [International Commission for Control [[and Supervision]]] for Vietnam had with Lodge, the American Ambassador in Saigon, to make it clearer to show that the American policy is playing a double game.

Cabot Lodge requested a meeting with the Polish ambassador to the MKK. During the conversation the American ambassador expressed a wish to unofficially enter into contact with representatives of the DRV or the National Liberation Front. He declared the US readiness for negotiations, for a cessation of the bombing, and to conduct an exchange of opinions with our representatives. Lodge asked the Polish ambassador's point of view on this score. The Polish comrade presented our position. In reply to this Lodge repeated the well-known position of the US. The main ideas which the US ambassador put forward in this conversation can be reduced to the following:

1. The US is ready to stop the bombing in Vietnam if this will lead to a peace settlement of the Vietnam problem. The US will not demand any statements from the DRV that it is halting the invasion of South Vietnam or an admission, both before and now, of the presence of troops of the Vietnamese People's Army in South Vietnam.
2. The US has already expressed a readiness to withdraw its troops over six months, as was announced in Manila.
3. The US is ready to recognize such a government in South Vietnam which might be elected democratically under international supervision.
4. The question of the unification of the country should be decided by the Vietnamese themselves without outside interference. A representative body needs to be created to do this in order to find out the people's will.
5. The US is ready to leave South Vietnam, but not for their place to be taken by the troops of North Vietnam.
6. The US is ready to recognize the neutrality of South Vietnam.
7. The US is ready to exchange opinions officially or unofficially on all questions



touched upon or not touched upon in this conversation.

Lodge stressed that it was unrealistic to demand the US accept the four points. He also noted that everything he had said agrees with the point of view of the US government.

On receipt of this information we expressed our views to the Polish ambassador and asked [that it] be passed to Lodge that it is necessary to have a written presentation of the opinion he had expressed and to stress that it is similar to the opinion of Johnson. We also asked that the Polish comrade declare to Lodge that first of all the US should stop bombing the territory of the DRV.

The Polish comrade told Lodge that if the Americans have any document that they could pass it to the Vietnamese ambassador in Warsaw. Lodge replied that he would make a corresponding report to Washington and did not comment on our demand. During the second meeting with the Polish comrade Lodge reported that Johnson admitted that the opinion presented by him, Lodge, was like his own point of view, but stressed, however, that some positions from the conversation of the US ambassador did not entirely coincide with his, the President's, opinion. He said that this was an oral conversation and in the course of it mistakes could have been made in the translation, and there also might be another interpretation of his, Johnson's, words. He said that meetings will be held in Warsaw beginning 6 December. The last conversation between Lodge and the Polish ambassador was held already after the bombing of Hanoi. The Polish comrade asked Lodge why the US, when advancing an offer about contacts with the DRV, bombed Hanoi, which inflames the situation. In reply to this Lodge arrogantly declared that he "is acting according to an old plan".

Right now the bombing is being intensified, as is well-known. This is to what [degree] of cynicism the US has reached. Therefore we have given our ambassador in Warsaw instructions not to meet with the American representative. I would to again stress that the American policy in Vietnam is playing a double game. On the one hand, the US shouts about peace, but on the other - it is escalating the war.

The question right now is will we be able to win a victory if 400,000 American troops take part in operations in the upcoming 1966-1967 dry season and in the next, 1967-1968, dry season when the strength of these troops will reach 500-700,000 men? We have to give an answer to this question to our people so that they understand the situation and are confident in victory. On the other hand, we also have to give an answer to this question to our friends, to explain our line to them.

In a word, we have to hold out against the enemy for the upcoming two dry seasons under the condition that quite large enemy forces will operate against us. We have gained some experience in fighting the American imperialists. Relying on it we have to decide whether we will be able to win a victory over the enemy. If one speaks of the presence of modern weapons, then the advantage is on the side of the US. If one examines the correlation of the level of supply of light weapons then it needs to be said that our weapons are no worse than the American [ones]. But they have aircraft, helicopters, tanks, modern artillery, and their advantage is in this.

The Politburo of our Party has analyzed the reasons for our victory in such conditions. We have drawn historical lessons from the experience of our struggle, beginning with the period of the War of Resistance against the French colonizers to our day.

Vietnam is a small country and the Vietnamese people are a small people. Even 1,000 years ago when our forefathers were forced to resist feudal China the enemy had superior forces. However, in spite of this, the Vietnamese won a victory over the armies of the Ming Dynasty and repelled the invasion of the Mongols. Our people

have rich combat traditions.

L. I. Brezhnev How many years did you fight against the Chinese feudalists?

Le Duc Tho A thousand years.

A. N. Kosygin Do you note the day of liberation from the Chinese conquerors right now?

Le Duc Tho There are several dates which we note to instill a spirit of patriotism in the people.

When we fought the French colonizers our forces were somewhat weaker than right now. We did not have weapons then. There was only some quantity of old rifles which were used back before the First World War. But our people rose to battle, fully determined to liberate the country. Favorable international conditions developed during this period, but the victory of the August Revolution was won chiefly by the struggle of the Vietnamese people.

Right after the Revolution, in 1945, the French imperialists again came to Vietnam with their troops, aircraft, and cannon. Of course, it wasn't what the US has right now. But compared to us they were large forces.

Just a month after the establishment of people's power in the DRV the French began a war against us. After a year combat operations had spread to the entire country. The number of weapons in our hands at that time constituted only 1% of what the colonizers had. We still had no experience of waging war. Our leaders were not military specialists. But we had a firm determination to fight. The colonizers seized almost the entire country. During the first years we received practically no outside aid, but our strength grew as the liberation struggle intensified.

China was liberated by the end of 1949, [and] only beginning in 1950 did the Chinese comrades begin to help us. We have received access to the socialist world since that time. This fact had enormous importance for us.

However the victory at Dien Bien Phu was the decisive factor, and the Geneva Accords became the result of our victories. After the 1954 Geneva Accords all our troops and the professional cadre of state institutions were regrouped into North Vietnam. Our countrymen in South Vietnam were actually left with empty hands.

The people of South Vietnam made use of the fruits of people's power over the nine years of the period of the War of Resistance. They have received land and political rights from it. With the coming of the puppets the land was taken away from the peasants and democratic rights were eliminated. The population of South Vietnam has been subjected to harsh exploitation and oppression from the puppet authorities. The enemy had modern weapons, but we only had primitive means. But our manpower gradually grew. Right now the weapons and armament of the patriotic forces have grown considerably compared to the period of the War of Resistance. We constantly attack and win victory after victory in South Vietnam. If the historical path travelled by Vietnam in the battle against aggressors is examined our people were always in a position of weakness but, in spite of this, they have always won a victory.

We have come to the conclusion that once all the people have arisen to fight the enemy this determination leads to victory. We began with nothing and became strong. Our weakness was turned into strength. This is the main thing which will ensure us victory. Of course, we have to have weapons, experience, and wisdom. Of

course, we cannot resist the enemy with only our heroism and political consciousness. But the heroism of the people and their hatred for the enemy have very great importance. The experience of battle in South Vietnam shows that if there had been no nine years of the War of Resistance against the French there would not have been 10 years of battle against the imperialists of the US.

The population of South Vietnam knows what the Revolution gave them, and what people's power has given them. The South Vietnam patriots have experience of fighting, and the professional cadre have experience in leading the masses.

The socialist system in the north of Vietnam has gained a footing. It is easy for the workers of the South to tell which system is better for them, who are their friends, and who are their enemies. Our people are rich in the heroic traditions of fighting an enemy. All the Vietnamese rose up to vigorous battle with the enemy when the American imperialists came to South Vietnam to oppress our people together with their stooges.

Only on such a basis can our people wage a stubborn resistance and win victory. The actions of the American military clique are causing anger and hatred, and the hatred of an entire people gives rise to a universal heroism of a people. The American imperialists are causing our people suffering not only materially, but emotionally. They are implanting the so-called American way of life in South Vietnam, disparaging the national feelings of the Vietnamese people, and insulting their national dignity. All this is leading to a resentment of the national bourgeoisie and the intellectuals, to their protest against the actions of the American imperialists. Therefore the struggle front is expanding with each day. During the recent demonstrations of Buddhists in South Vietnam representatives of the intelligentsia and national bourgeoisie used the radio in order to denounce bourgeois American culture.

The situation of the population in the cities of South Vietnam is becoming ever worse because of the US intervention. Inflation is growing uncontrollably. The cost of living has rising by 10 times. In a word, the intervention of the Americans has increased the difficulties of our people both materially and emotionally. The Americans have not only not managed to stabilize the political situation in South Vietnam, but have even weakened it still further. This was officially admitted by the Americans after Dean Rusk's visit to South Vietnam.

[Jean] Sainteny, the former representative of the French government in Hanoi who recently visited the DRV, gave an interview to a correspondent of the American newspaper The New York Times, and noted that US intervention in the internal affairs of Vietnam is increasing the hatred of the entire Vietnamese people for the American aggressors and consolidating their ranks. We think these are completely justified words.

The US is intervening in the internal affairs of Vietnam at a moment when the puppet army has lost the initiative and the Army of Liberation has launched combat operations on the entire front, when not only battalions were formed in it, but even regiments and divisions. Thus, the American forces have ended up completely surrounded by the forces of a people's war.

When the Americans created the air bases in Chu Lai, in Da Nang, and in Saigon the patriots built a "partisan zone" around these bases. The population of these regions sympathize with the partisans and support their struggle, and they help them make raids on these bases.

The soldiers of the Army of Liberation can approach the American bases unnoticed at a distance of several hundred meters with the aid of the population, as was in Da

Nang, for example.

The dozens of battalions are located around Saigon and our armed forces are even in Saigon itself. The enemy cannot liquidate these forces because the people support and shelter them. These detachments display great heroism.

Although the forces of the United States in South Vietnam are larger, the mobile subunits constitute only 1/3 [of their strength], whereas the two other thirds of the forces are designated for protection of bases and posts. But these bases and posts are constantly surrounded by the partisans and subjected to the raids and attacks of our forces. The combat operations of the partisans and the Army of Liberation are leading to an expansion of the territory of the liberated regions. These successes are explained by the mobility and maneuverability of all our forces.

The Americans' forces are not unlimited. The strong aspect of the US is aviation, tanks, and artillery. Only with all these troop arms can the US pursue combat operations. If these troop arms are not represented [in the forces, v komplekse] the operations are not conducted. Therefore we have to find a means to reduce the effectiveness of these forces, which will be a demoralizing influence on the enemy troops.

The South Vietnamese patriots have found the means and equipment to fight against the tanks and the other modern troop arms of the US: they destroy the lines of communications. This [also] applies to aircraft and artillery; the effectiveness of their use is reduced by the patriots approaching close to the positions of the enemy in the course of combat operations, the airfields are also mined, and the military equipment is blown up. We keep to the tactic of close battle, and a quick withdrawal after launching the strike. Our slogan [is]: "Take the enemy by the belt [poyas] and beat him". The enemy cannot use aircraft and artillery in such a method of waging battle, for there exists a real danger of also killing his own troops. In addition, we use underground passages to move our troops. To fight enemy aircraft we also use anti-aircraft artillery on an ever-wider scale. Our soldiers have to have a high morale and political spirit in order to use these and other means of waging battle and, in particular, methods of fighting to reduce the effectiveness of the use of modern types of weapons.

However, our enemy also has the experience of waging partisan warfare obtained in the course of battles in the Philippines and in Malaya. But life shows that it will not save the imperialists from complete defeat. For example, in Malaya they created strategic villages, but they have not managed to do this in South Vietnam.

We think that the tactics pursued by the French colonizers at one time and the tactics of the US in our day are in the main no different from one another. However, the French dominated in Vietnam for a quite long time and accumulated fighting experience, whereas the American soldiers know about it only from books. Such book knowledge of Vietnamese conditions does not give the American army the ability to achieve the required result, and therefore it will fail.

This is what, for example, one commentator of a French bourgeois newspaper wrote about the tactics used by the American soldiers in conducting operations in the province of Tay Ninh: "The 196th Brigade", he wrote, "employed a tactic in battle which the soldiers studied in military school X. But the region where this school is located is not in Vietnam, but in an Arab country, and therefore the tactics developed in this school applied only the conditions of the Arab desert. But in the conditions of the province of Tay Ninh the American soldiers are not able to see the enemy not only from the air, but even from the ground. Thus, on paper everything turns out well, but in reality, in the conditions of fighting in the jungles, the situation changes completely. Highly-dispersed, the soldiers move close to the positions of their enemy

and initiate close combat. Both they and the others end up so close to one another that it is impossible to conduct artillery fire without inflicting losses on their own subunits. The commander of the battalion thinks that in these conditions he actually commands separate, disparate companies".

These are their tactics. Briefly put, they are trained to conduct combat operations in conditions when the front line is clearly marked. But in the conditions of South Vietnam there is practically no front nor rear.

L. I. Brezhnev This is all very interesting, but a war is going on, and the Americans are also drawing experience for themselves.

Le Duc Tho Yes, of course, they are also drawing experience.

L. I. Brezhnev But the main thing is that they are using aircraft and heavy artillery, bombing liberated regions, and there is nothing to counter this since it is impossible to supply heavy and anti-aircraft artillery to you. The enemy has indisputable advantages in this regard.

Le Duc Tho This is the passive aspect of our defense, but on the other hand we are stepping up our operations, attacking airfields, and destroying the aircraft in the bases. The total number of aircraft destroyed in South Vietnam exceeds the number shot down in North Vietnam. One hundred enemy aircraft were destroyed in just one night as a result of a raid on an airfield by patriots. Therefore we pay special attention to tactics capable of ensuring the success of our battle even without aircraft.

A. N. Kosygin. Do you directly manage the combat in South Vietnam? Does the NFOYuV turn to you for instructions on waging combat operations?

Le Duc Tho Yes.

A. N. Kosygin. Do you have continuous communications? How is coordination with the NFOYuV leaders organized? Is there a single command?

Le Duc Tho the entire course of combat operations in South Vietnam is directed by the VWP CC in which there is a CC Bureau for South Vietnam. Therefore it can be said that we have a single command which exercises continuous communication with the NFOYuV leadership and the Army of Liberation.

A. N. Kosygin. How do you organize the delivery of reinforcements to South Vietnam? If you send a division there, for example then how do you organize the feeding of the soldiers and the delivery of ammunition for this division? For the soldiers have to go almost 2,000 kilometers, and therefore while they're going to South Vietnam they eat more than they bring with them.

Le Duc Tho We have the logistical services more or less well-organized. We rely primarily on local forces to supply combat subunits with food and ammunition. We use vehicle transportation taken from the Americans to ship cargo. In addition, there are many rivers in the South, and the population has a quite large number of motorboats. Nevertheless, I have to say that we still encounter certain difficulties in the organization of the shipment of cargo.

A. N. Kosygin. How are things with the wounded and the units withdrawn to rest? Do you send them to the North or do you leave them in place for treatment or rest?

Le Duc Tho We organize all this work chiefly on site. Only professional cadre and officers go to the North for treatment for illness, or after a wound, or for rest.

L. I. Brezhnev Comrades have also said that the "Ho Chi Minh Trail" is no longer a trail, but a whole automobile road.

Le Duc Tho Yes, vehicles can travel on it. If one sector of the road is destroyed, we lay a route in another place. In general, one can travel on the "Ho Chi Minh Trail" in a vehicle, but in places only by foot.

A. N. Kosygin. I have read that after battles some of your units go to Southern Laos to rest or regroup. Is this true?

Le Duc Tho Yes. Our friends are there. And they help us.

L. I. Brezhnev How do the local ethnic groups regard these units?

Le Duc Tho The regions of southern Laos where our soldiers sometimes withdraw to rest are under the control of the Pathet Lao. These are our friends and we live [with them] like in one big family.

In a word, it can be said that the Americans have suffered a defeat tactically. Of course, they study the experience, but the conditions of battle are not like those which they imagined. We have three troop arms at the present time, and they are all very mobile, [so] therefore the enemy is constantly surrounded by our troops. Thus, what the enemy studies from books is completely unsuitable for the conditions of South Vietnam.

The Americans cannot understand what a people's war is when the entire people from the small to the great have risen up to battle against an aggressor. Recently I talked with a 13-year-old boy from South Vietnam. He has killed 14 Americans. Now they know his face and name. Therefore he has been forced to go to North Vietnam, where he is studying right now.

In studying the methods of waging war against our people the US imperialists cannot use them fully since after a certain period of service the American soldiers return home and [their] replacements arriving in South Vietnam do not have the experience that their predecessor had. The US is encountering great difficulties in supplying their army with food. They are forced to import meat from the Philippines and Thailand. Before, South Vietnam exported rice, but now it is forced to import [it]. Local resources cannot supply the needs since the rural population is under the control of the NFOYuV.

The ports in South Vietnam are not in a condition to accept all the goods coming into the country, although the Americans are making great efforts to expand them. American ships stand out in the harbor for many days, awaiting unloading. Theft and corruption are flourishing among the officials of the American army, in connection with which the Americans are suffering great losses in materiel. Our soldiers, for example, mainly use American boats bought in the cities of South Vietnam. As regards the puppet army of South Vietnam, its morale decays with every day. One hundred and eighty thousand men deserted from the puppet army in 1966.

L. I. Brezhnev Where do they go?

Le Duc Tho The soldiers who have deserted from the puppet army hide in villages

under the control of the NFOYuV or cross into the ranks of the Army of Liberation. There are sharp differences between the soldiers and officers of the puppet army.

A. N. Kosygin. Do you have your people in the puppet army?

Le Duc Tho Yes, there are a certain number of soldiers and officers. They have organized a number of revolts in the companies and battalions of the puppet army. For example, recently a tank regiment rebelled and then went completely over to the side of the NFOYuV, as a result of the work done by our people. Outbreaks of dissatisfaction arise almost constantly in the companies and platoons of the puppet army.

Not so long ago the Americans wrote that if the correlation of the strengths of the armies were 1:10 (one NFOYuV to 10 American soldiers) this would bring them victory; if the correlation were 1:8, then this would induce alarm; 1:4 would mean a threatening situation; 1:3, defeat. Morale in the puppet army is low. In addition, the morale of the American army is also falling. Recently anti-war acts/statements [vystupleniya] have become more frequent among American soldiers. Compared to the French army this process is developing much more rapidly in the American army.

We waged the War of Resistance against the French for almost nine years, but anti-war acts were a great rarity in the French army, but at the present time they appear quite often. There are many blacks in the American army. Racial differences are strong among the American soldiers, which sometimes leads to fights between blacks and whites. In order to show how low the morale of the American soldiers is, one can cite a statement of the UPI Agency from 21 November of this year, which declared that the most important task at the present time is the problem of maintaining the high morale of the American soldier.

In our opinion, this is one of the reasons for the defeat of the American army in South Vietnam.

On the other hand, the combat spirit of our army is very high. There have been cases when one of our battalions destroyed one and even two enemy battalions. The success of such battles depends on a number of conditions. We have to have numerical superiority, although this condition is also not obligatory. We often conduct ambushes and catch the enemy in a trap, as a result of which one squad [otdelenie] sometimes destroys an entire company of the enemy. In the course of combat operations the patriots exhibit very great initiative and employ various forms of combat. For example, one American company was surrounded by mine traps while sleeping, and then a squad of the Army of Liberation attacked it. The company was completely destroyed as a result of a brief battle and the explosions of the mine traps. Or another example. Once enemy soldiers, tired from the heat, decided to have a swim. When they were in the water the partisans sneaked up on their clothing, took away the grenades, and bombarded the swimmers, who suspected nothing, with these grenades.

Based on an analysis of the situation we drew the conclusion that the main thing for us is our determination, and the shortage of weapons is a secondary circumstance. As regards the enemy, the main thing that determines the situation is his weakness, but his strength is a secondary factor. We think that in the conditions of our battle of today the main thing is the person!

A. N. Kosygin. Does the Army of Liberation have enough ordinary small arms?

Le Duc Tho Yes, on the whole there are enough small arms. Of course, we do not undervalue modern weapons and in battle we combine them with primitive weapons.

We get captured American weapons taken in battles, but we also get weapons by way of aid from the fraternal socialist countries.

L. I. Brezhnev Are you using our weapons which we have sent you?

Le Duc Tho We have delivered your small arms and the weapons of other countries, for example, Chinese, to the South. Soviet and American small arms are approximately alike. But the US [weapons'] firepower is stronger. If our subunits had 80 mm and 57 mm mortars then the firepower of our and enemy subunits would be about the same. If all the detachments were armed with 57 mm mortars their firepower would be no less than the enemy's.

The US has superiority only in aviation and artillery. There was a case when one Australian battalion ended up surrounded and was defeated. Then the Americans dropped 3,000 bombs from aircraft on the area in which our forces were located, that is, approximately six bombs for each of our soldiers who took part in this battle.

L. I. Brezhnev Are there repair shops to repair the weaponry in South Vietnam? What is the situation with military enterprises in North Vietnam?

Le Duc Tho There are military repair shops in South Vietnam to produce ammunition, mines, shells, and to repair weapons. The military enterprises in North Vietnam have not yet been touched. Only some ammunition depots have been destroyed.

L. I. Brezhnev In what condition is the port of Haiphong? Is there destruction there, and what is its traffic [propusknaya] capacity?

Le Duc Tho The port has suffered insignificant damage from bombing, but the main difficulty which slows down the progress of unloading work is connected with the destruction of the lines of communications leading to the port. There have been raids on Haiphong, and several buildings in the city have been destroyed. Individual sections of the road connecting Haiphong and Hanoi have been damaged, but not so badly as the road leading from Hanoi to the 17th Parallel.

I would like to direct attention to yet one more fact. When we compare our forces with the forces of the enemy we ought to also take into account the situation in the international arena. We have to bear in mind that behind us is the socialist rear, that the fraternal countries are giving us aid. Such a situation radically distinguishes us from the situation that existed in Vietnam in the period of the War of Resistance.

The liberation struggle of our people is supported by world public opinion and the peoples fighting for national liberation. The international support of Vietnam right now is broader than in the period of the War of Resistance. On the other hand, it needs to be taken into consideration that the US is waging the most unpopular of all its wars. There are also differences in the ranks of the imperialists, for example the differences between France and the US. There are also deep differences in the US itself. The American people are opposing the war in Vietnam with increasing vigor. Therefore the domestic political situation in the US has considerably worsened.

As is correctly pointed out in the statement of the 1960 Conference of the fraternal Parties the international situation is developing in an unfavorable direction for the imperialists and a favorable [one] for the socialist camp, for the victory of the revolutionary forces.

Since the Second World War the US has suffered defeat in a number of regions: in China, in Korea, in Cuba, and in Vietnam during the years of the War of Resistance.



We are confident that in the current war in Vietnam, too, the American imperialists will certainly suffer defeat.

If one examines the liberation wars which have broken out in a number of regions since the Second World War, one cannot fail to take into account that there were also defeats in several places. For example, in the Congo and Indonesia. But there were no strong parties of the working class there.

Of course, if the world Communist movement were more cohesive then victory in Vietnam would be achieved more rapidly. The lack of unity and cohesion creates great difficulties for us, but it is not an obstacle to final victory. This is explained by those factors about which I have spoken above. Such is the analysis of the current situation in Vietnam made by the Politburo of our Party.

I will inform you of an assessment of the prospects and the specific measures which we ought to undertake in the near future in the next meeting.

The conversation was recorded by:

CPSU CC desk officer

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