

**December 16, 1966**

**Second Meeting: 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:**

Le Duc Tho assesses the prospects of the war in Vietnam.

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## SECOND MEETING

16 December 1966

Present were: Cdes. L. I. Brezhnev, A. N. Kosygin, M. A. Suslov, Yu. V. Andropov, and A. A. Gromyko.

Le Duc Tho Yesterday I informed you about the situation in our country and the enemy's plans. Right now I would like to briefly dwell on our decisions and our assessment of the prospects of the war in Vietnam.

The war in Vietnam might develop in two directions.

□□□ The Americans will suffer serious defeats and large losses during the next two dry seasons. Then it will be possible to come to some political resolution of the Vietnamese problem.

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□□□ At the end of this period the Americans will continue to be stubborn. Then the war will continue and could expand. Both before and now we think that we should be ready for such a development of events. We should prepare ourselves for such a prospect, but we think that the enemy will encounter very great difficulties in continuing a protracted war.

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The Americans cannot conquer South Vietnam, and what is more, they will not be able to defeat all of Vietnam. They should also count on the possibility of China taking part in the war; in the event the war expands China will not sit with folded arms. The Americans will then encounter a great war. This prospect does not suit them.

If they unleash a world war then they will encounter the forces of the entire socialist camp. Therefore we think that it is also necessary to be ready for such an alternative, but it is difficult for the enemy to pursue such a development of combat operations. In addition, if the Americans choose this alternative, they have to consider the possibility of difficulties arising in their own camp, among their own allies. Nevertheless, we have to keep both of these alternatives in mind. We need to prepare to withstand the enemy in the coming two and the succeeding dry seasons. We have to withstand the 400-500,000 soldiers of American imperialism and even greater forces in the next dry season.

Our strategic goals are expressed in concentrated form in points 4 and 5 which [you] know. We have nothing new in this respect. The basis of the solution of the Vietnamese problem should be the following[:] the Americans should cease the aggression and withdraw their troops.

A. N. Kosygin Before or after the negotiations?

Le Duc Tho We envision this as the end result of the negotiations.

A. N. Kosygin But when in practice will you offer these demands for negotiations or later on? Do you intend to enter them in negotiations?

Le Duc Tho I'll talk about this later. Our main strategic goal is for the Americans to halt the aggressive war in Vietnam and to withdraw their troops from South Vietnam. All other questions will be decided depending on this. We cannot consider any other questions as long as the American troops are in our country. Even de Gaulle has spoken in favor of the American troops being withdrawn from South Vietnam.

The main problem is the withdrawal of American troops from South Vietnam; before or after the negotiations, this is another matter. We have not yet carefully considered this question. It is impossible to solve the Vietnamese problem as long as they are stubborn in their desire to keep their forces in the South and refuse to halt the aggressive war. Cde. Ho Chi Minh's 17 July appeal spoke well of this determination of our people.

Of course, we don't want the war to last another 5-10 years. We want it to end tomorrow or the day after. But there is no other way out as long as the American imperialists continue the aggression against us, and as long as they keep their forces on the territory of our country. We should only fight.

In our opinion, the Vietnam problem should not be decided at the pleasure of the American imperialists or even on the basis of the Geneva Accords as they interpret them. For example, they want for both them and us to withdraw troops from South Vietnam, that is, they want to repeat 1954. But this is impossible. In any country the revolutionary government relies on the armed forces, which protect it. Inasmuch as our people in South Vietnam have risen up with weapons in [their] arms to fight the aggressors, they cannot put down [their] weapons until they have achieved their goal. We also cannot grant the desire of the American imperialists, which comes down to the future government in Vietnam

having the nature of a "troika" in which the "American horse" would be the main thing. There should be no government there like in Laos. If we come to the same solution for South Vietnam as in Laos in 1962, then wars will break out there and in the future. Such a situation is already present in Laos.

Therefore at the present moment the American imperialists will be obstinate. They still have great military potential, and we have to continue our struggle. But our main policy consists of winning victory in the shortest possible time and limiting the war to the current scope in South Vietnam. We have already told you about this once, and I will not dwell on this point.

In order to win a victory over the enemy we have to be able to fight and have to find a means to win a victory in the military, political, and diplomatic spheres. We think that these three sectors should mutually supplement one another. But the most decisive should be the military and political attack on the Americans in South Vietnam itself. Negotiations express the correlation of forces in the theater of military operations. If it is impossible to defeat the enemy in the theater of military operations in military and political terms then it is impossible to achieve victory over them at the negotiating table. We have the experience of 1954, when we were waging a war with the French. If not for our decisive victory over the French on the field of battle there also would have been a victory in Geneva.

Such is our general policy. But right now this question arises. Based on the situation which has developed at the present time is there not time for us to switch to another stage when a political and diplomatic struggle will be waged along with the military struggle? We have already told you once that a day will come before final victory over the American imperialists when we will fight at the same time against them and hold negotiations with them. We think that such a moment has come right now.

L. I. Brezhnev That is, to both wage war and enter into contact, into negotiations, with them.

Le Duc Tho Yes, just such a moment. When the American imperialists had just began the war in South Vietnam with the direct participation of their own troops it was premature to enter into negotiations. If we had agreed to negotiations at that moment they could have interpreted this as our weakness. It's another matter right now, when the American imperialists have suffered a serious defeat in the last dry

and rainy seasons and when we are winning victory after victory.

Therefore, if in such a situation we sit at the negotiating table this will mean that we are taking part in them as victors, that the American imperialists have been convinced of our strength in practice. Only in this event can [we] sit at the negotiating table. In addition, with every day public opinion in the entire world demands with increasing vigor that the American imperialists enter into negotiations. The demand of the public both in our socialist camp as well as in the entire world comes down to the American imperialists unconditionally and permanently stop bombing North Vietnam and sit at the negotiating table. This opinion was expressed by U Thant, in particular.

Right now we view the combination of armed struggle with the simultaneous participation in negotiations only as a tactic, because we cannot achieve our strategic goals at these negotiations. Although we have won a great victory in the recent dry and wet period and are now winning victories, the moment has still not come when the American imperialists have recognized that they will finally suffer defeat and we have finally won. They still have maintained military and economic potential, and they are exerting every effort to continue the aggression. As concerns us, at this moment we still cannot inflict such a defeat on the American imperialists with our forces so as to undermine their will and aggression against our country. Therefore, the upcoming period will be both a period of armed struggle as well as a period of negotiations. When this is happening we should apply quite great effort in the area of armed struggle.

If at this moment we sit at the negotiating table then our goal will be to achieve the maximum political advantage for ourselves and to isolate the American imperialists and their lackeys both in South Vietnam as well as in the entire world. If we achieve this through negotiations then it will also facilitate our victory in the theater of military operations. We have the experience of negotiations with the French in 1946 and 1954. Therefore the popular masses understand that the aggressors have been forced to seek negotiations, at which point they will suffer defeat. There will be a political upsurge among the popular masses, and confusion in the ranks of our enemy. In such an event we will win to our side an ever increasing number of people and isolate our enemy ever more strongly. We will be able to expand our front, in the process advancing the slogans of struggle [which are] the most appropriate to the moment. At the same time we will be actively conducting an offensive in military terms. Thus the moment will be prepared for a sharp turnaround. This is the goal which we are following in making a decision to sit at the negotiating table. At the same time I do not think that we can achieve a final strategic victory in such negotiations with the current correlation of forces. When the sides sit at the negotiating table we will submit our terms, and they [will submit] theirs.

A. N. Kosygin What will your conditions be?

Le Duc Tho The well-known four or five points.

A. N. Kosygin Do you intend to talk about these points right away, as soon as you sit at the negotiating table?

Le Duc Tho Of course, the sides will hold a discussion and exchange opinions. If we rely on the current correlation of forces in the war then both we and the Americans will not set the goal of finally deciding the question when entering into the negotiations. The Americans are still stubbornly insisting on their own [solution] and do not intend to seek to final solution of the problem. We are demanding the Americans withdraw their forces from South Vietnam. They will not demand the withdrawal of our forces from South Vietnam. And, of course, there will be no compromise on this question. I will cite this as an example. We have not yet gone into

detail during a discussion of this problem in the CC Politburo of our Party. We have only developed the main course of action. There will be no negotiations until the American imperialists stop the bombing of the DRV finally and unconditionally.

A. N. Kosygin Is it possible to think about such an alternative of your proposals to the Americans [in which] you take the four or five points as a basis and say on this condition that you agree to enter into contact. As to how to do business further, this is already a tactical question.

Can you, Cde. Le Duc Tho, say that there is a VWP CC Politburo decision that you are ready to hold negotiations on the basis of the four or five points if the US stops bombing the DRV? Do you have the authority to tell us about this? Can we say, for example, to Johnson that the Vietnamese agree to enter into negotiations with the Americans in Moscow, Hanoi, or in some other place if the four or five points are accepted as the basis and the bombing of the DRV is stopped? The most suitable place for you to go will evidently be Moscow or Hanoi, not to New York. Are you authorized to tell us about this?

Le Duc Tho I will give you the answer in the course of the presentation. I have already said and can repeat that what I have said here is the opinion of the Politburo of our Party. In this case I am speaking in the name of the VWP CC Politburo. Our single condition to begin negotiations is an unconditional and final cessation of the bombing of North Vietnam. When we sit at the negotiating table we will offer our four and [SIC] five points as the basis for discussion.

L. I. Brezhnev This is understood. But do you intend to offer four and five points right away as the conditions of such a meeting, or after the negotiations begin? It is important for us to clarify this for ourselves inasmuch as we regard your ideas with understanding.

Le Duc Tho Our only condition is that the American imperialists should stop the bombing of North Vietnam unconditionally and permanently and then the bilateral negotiations can begin. When both sides enter into the negotiations we will offer our conditions, four and five points, and they - their terms.

L. I. Brezhnev This is clear. Then the Americans might, for example, say: we are stopping the bombing, but you stop combat operations in the south of Vietnam or reduce the activity.

A. A. Gromyko. They are saying this.

Le Duc Tho They cannot demand such a condition of us. We are for the unconditional cessation of the bombing without any conditions.

A. A. Gromyko. They even raise the question of this without the adoption of mutual conditions so that such a situation is already created de facto.

Le Duc Tho There cannot be such a tacit agreement. Our only condition is the unconditional cessation of the bombing before the start of the negotiations. When the American imperialists officially and openly declare that they are halting the bombing of North Vietnam permanently and unconditionally we will be able to officially and openly declare our readiness to hold negotiations.

A. N. Kosygin. This probably should happen simultaneously. Evidently you will have to talk about this, otherwise they will not guess your decision.

Le Duc Tho They should first of all make a declaration, and we will reply right away.

A. N. Kosygin. But how can they guess? In all likelihood it is necessary to let them know to inform [you] of this somehow. A third party can be authorized for this or some other way chosen.

Le Duc Tho We have to let them know this but I will tell later how to best do this.

L. I. Brezhnev What Cde. Kosygin said has great importance. Through their representatives the Americans here, there, and everywhere are saying that they agree to stop the bombing if the Vietnamese side lets it be known that they agree to negotiations. They have also said this to Cde. Gromyko. We have informed you of this. It is very important to know how this mechanism will work.

Le Duc Tho I will talk about our ideas on this question somewhat later. I will end the presentation of our opinion about the general line of the VWP CC with this.

Now about our wishes with regard to how you can help us in this matter. After the Americans openly declare an unconditional cessation of the bombing we will talk about our readiness to hold negotiations. Where and on what level to hold negotiations, this is another question. We should discuss this again. For the time being we are offering such a condition in principle, but we haven't yet discussed the specific details - on what level, and where and how it will be more to our advantage to pursue this action.

How will events unfold if we simultaneously both wage an armed struggle and hold negotiations? It is possible that after we let them know the American imperialists will behave even more cynically, and increase the fight against us still further. A recent experience demonstrates this. I have already told you of the conversations between the Polish representative Lewandowski and Lodge. As soon as they finished the conversations the Americans struck our capital. Possibly they will continue to be stubborn before agreeing to negotiations. They might reason this way: if the Vietnamese are offering conditions for negotiations accordingly even greater pressure can be put on them. And in the conditions of such pressure we will fight vigorously and increase our struggle even more. This is the first possibility.

A second possibility. Both sides sit at the negotiating table. After this the Americans come to the conclusion that the negotiations won't lead to anything and renew the attacks. The offensive will be continued for some time, then the negotiations are renewed. They will continue for a long time in parallel with combat operations.

We have provided for several alternatives and some possible prospects. They are based on such a situation when there is still no sharp change in our favor in the theater of military operations. Regardless of whether the Americans agree to negotiations or not, we have to wage a vigorous armed fight. The experience of the Korean War also teaches this. At that time both sides were sitting at the negotiating table but a fierce war was still going on. We also have our own experience. When the negotiations were taking place in Geneva in 1954 both sides were exerting maximum effort to win victory in a military sense.

We think that at this moment it is necessary to pursue work in the ranks of our Party and our people to overcome two incorrect tendencies. First, some of our comrades might oppose holding negotiations simultaneously with armed combat, considering this disadvantageous, not understanding how important [it is] to win the sympathies of the public to our side, isolate the enemy, and to pursue armed combat even more. On the other hand, we ought to pursue explanatory work in order to overcome another incorrect tendency, which is expressed as follows. Some comrades in

Vietnam might think that in the event of negotiations both sides will seek their own goals, which might be to settle for an unprincipled compromise with the enemy. Therefore we think that at the present time [we] need to wage a stubborn battle with the enemy and in no event to slacken it.

War has been already going on in our country for 20 years. We want peace more than anyone. But we think that peace should be closely associated with independence. Therefore we will not settle for peace at any price. Fidelity to principle ought to be displayed here. Only when we can completely undermine the enemy's willingness for aggression in the theater of military operations can real peace be assured.

Now, the next question. How can you help us in accomplishing our policy of holding negotiations simultaneously with armed struggle? First, it needs to be noted that when implementing this policy the situation might be quite complicated. We still have to wage a fierce, difficult battle with the enemy. Therefore we very much need your military aid, but politically we would very much like for you to correctly understand our tactical approach. Of course, you have not acted and are not acting against our wishes. But when the sides sit at the negotiating table we should still further increase our work to expose the hypocrisy of the enemy. When we do this we take into account that in the event of agreement to negotiations that our enemy will exhibit even greater hypocrisy, and it is necessary to expose it. While the war is going on we should also continue to condemn the serious crimes of the aggressors against our people.

Diplomatically we would like to ask you to use your authority and your influence in the international arena in the interest of still greater support to our position and an increase of pressure on the American imperialists. In these terms possibly you will let the Americans know about our intentions through some channels. If proposals come from them they could be [put in] contact with our ambassador.

A. N. Kosygin. Where, in Moscow?

Le Duc Tho. In Moscow or in some other country. We still have not yet decided this. But it will be a direct contact. Exactly where, we will decide in Hanoi. For example, after the conversation with the Polish representative we said that in the event of any proposals from the Americans they should get in touch with our ambassador in Warsaw. The situation seems like this to us: we will maintain direct contact with the Americans in the course of implementing a policy directed at simultaneously waging war and holding negotiations, but you will give us aid with your experience in holding negotiations with Americans. We will systematically inform you of the progress of the negotiations.

We have exchanged opinions with the Chinese comrades regarding the policy of which I have told you. We have also informed you and the Korean comrades of this, no one else. During [our] stay in Budapest we did not inform the Hungarian comrades about all this.

A. N. Kosygin. When did you inform the Chinese comrades?

Le Duc Tho We informed them during Cdes. Le Duan's stay in Peking.

L. I. Brezhnev How did they regard this?

Le Duc Tho I will tell you about this. We thought that [we] should inform the Chinese and Korean comrades because we have direct ties between us. The Korean comrades have broad ties with the fraternal Parties of the countries of Southeast Asia. We are

informing you at this meeting. And [we] very much wanted to get help from you in this regard. As regards the Korean comrades they say that the revolutionary line in Vietnam should be pursued by the Vietnamese themselves. They completely support us, and they have no other opinion.

We have exchanged opinions with the Chinese comrades several times and have informed them that a moment will come, a situation will develop in the course of the war in Vietnam in which we can simultaneously wage war and conduct negotiations. They agreed with us in principle, but said that a specific resolution of the question about the time and conditions depends on us. We think that we should decide these very moments ourselves.

A. N. Kosygin. Did Mao Zedong said this or someone else?

Le Duc Tho We said it ourselves.

A. N. Kosygin. What did [they] reply?

Le Duc Tho They agree with this approach in principle. Not only right now, but also earlier, that is, to simultaneously wage war and hold negotiations. As regards the specific questions, time, and conditions of the negotiations, we should decide them ourselves. We did not go into detail during the discussion of specific questions with the Chinese comrades.

L. I. Brezhnev This was during the last talks with Cde. Le Duan in Peking?

Le Duc Tho Yes, they held to such a position in the last conversation. We discussed the question on a whole with the Chinese comrades without going into detail. They agree with us in principle, that a time will come when [we] will be able to hold negotiations and simultaneously continue the war. The Chinese comrades themselves told us about their experience of holding such negotiations. They fear that we might make some unprincipled concession and therefore told us about their experience. We will take their experience into account. The Chinese declared categorically that they will support us if we wage war. We replied that [we] certainly have to wage war against the American imperialists to win independence. I can say that we will also decide the questions as the time and conditions of conducting negotiations ourselves. This is our general policy and our specific proposals.

We understand that when both sides will enter into negotiations the situation will become very complex. Some circumstances might arise which we have still do not foresee at the present time. During the negotiations we can find out what are the real intentions of our enemies. And only then can these questions be studied more specifically.

That is what I intended to tell you about our general line.

Now I would like to very briefly to express some ideas about strengthening the unity in the international Communist movement. The American imperialists have created a quite tense situation in many parts of the world right now, especially in Vietnam. They are reviving military flashpoints in West Germany and Japan. The FRG is a US satellite. They are pursuing a quite reactionary policy in Europe. On the one hand, the US is increasing tension there, but on the other, they tirelessly trumpet their peaceful intentions in Europe. We think that this is a two-faced policy.

In our opinion, in order to strengthen and defend peace it is necessary to mobilize still further, and to concentrate all our efforts on exposing the American imperialists and



their stooges depending on the specific conditions in each country, using all forms of combat, from low to high. We completely share the statements of Cde. Brezhnev that there should be no improvement of relations with the US as long as the American imperialists are waging a war against the Vietnamese people. Cde. Kallai spoke of this at the 9th VSRP [Hungarian Socialist Worker's Party] Congress. He said, at the present time there are some signs demonstrating that the Americans want to improve relations with the countries of Eastern Europe. As Cde. Kallai declared, the US should understand that the European socialist countries vigorously oppose the aggression of the American imperialists in Southeast Asia and as long as the American imperialists wage aggression in Southeast Asia against a socialist country there cannot be an improvement of relations between the US and the European countries of socialism. We consider such statements of the leaders of the fraternal Parties to be correct. In our opinion, at this moment it is impossible to allow such a situation in which the American imperialists could free their forces in one country in order to concentrate them in another place. We should intensify the fight against them in order to overextend their forces. This is very important from the point of view of the situation in South Vietnam.

But in order to wage a successful battle against the American imperialists we ought to first strengthen the unity of the international Communist movement and firstly the unity between the Soviet Union and China. We have expressed our opinion on this question more than once. It is known that many differences exist among the fraternal countries at the present time. In order to overcome them we have to proceed from unity, and also from the fact that the differences objectively exist. In order to overcome them, we have to proceed from unity, and also from the fact that the differences exist objectively. We cannot quickly overcome these differences once and for all. In our opinion, which we have repeatedly expressed, the fraternal Parties have to pursue consultations to overcome the differences. Unanimity will be achieved on those questions on which it is possible that a unanimity of opinions can be achieved in the process of discussion between the fraternal Parties. But on other questions the existing differences in opinions might remain. In the course of practical struggle these differences might be gradually eliminated, and unity strengthened. We ought to proceed from this.

When pursuing direct combat against the American imperialists we are very well conscious of and value the unity of the international Communist movement. However, inasmuch as such differences exist, before as now, we favor not pursuing open polemics. It does not lead to a strengthening of unity. We said this to both the Chinese and Albanian comrades, and to the comrades from other fraternal Parties. Taking advantage of today's meeting we would like to tell you of this again. This is our point of view.

Of course, if any Party criticizes another Party then it in turn has the right to respond to this criticism. We are expressing only our point of view and our desire in the name of common interests. But if criticism of another side is permitted in the course of open polemics or by way of a reply to criticism it is undesirable for it to be done by name so that crude expressions are used along with an analysis of theoretical questions. All this only increases tension. No one can escape from the truth, the same as any shortcomings or incorrect actions cannot bar the way to the general course of history. Therefore we ought to have patience and provide an opportunity for time to work it out.

I would like to also express my opinion about the international conference of Communist Parties. We favor a conference of fraternal Parties in order to resolve differences, but in our opinion conditions are still not ripe for such a conference at the present time since a great many different opinions exist among the fraternal Parties. If a conference were convened in such an atmosphere it would be impossible to solve questions; on the contrary, the differences would only become stronger. As before, we oppose entering into contact with those Parties which were created as a result of

a split. We also oppose such Parties meeting together and grouping in one bloc.

A. N. Kosygin. Even if they meet, whom will they represent?

L. I. Brezhnev What kind of "Parties" are these if there are several dozen people in them! Some of them, for example, the Malaysians, generally sit in Peking all the time.

Yu. V. Andropov. Whom, for example, do Hill or Grippa represent?

A. N. Kosygin. Perhaps there are guarantees that five delegates will come from you from Vietnam and not say that they represent the Party!

Le Duc Tho Therefore our consistent position is not to enter into contact with such Parties. We have not had any contacts with the representatives of such Parties. We think that that if an international conference of fraternal Parties is convened at this moment, in conditions where there exist serious differences between the various Parties both in Asia as well as in Europe, then it will not lead to anything, but our differences will be laid bare even more openly. We have expressed our opinion for you to keep it in mind.

L. I. Brezhnev We have a very friendly and serious conversation. I would like to ask you, Cde. Le Duc Tho, two questions. First, what are these differences and with whom? How do you imagine them, and what are they? You know the Chinese comrades well, and are often with them. Tell [us], please, what in your opinion are the differences between China and us? Does the Politburo of your Party know about these differences?

And one more question, which bothers us, and the other fraternal Communist Parties. Do the Vietnamese comrades know why the Chinese comrades do not want to unite with the socialist countries, even if on one question, for joint actions in defense of Vietnam? Can you confidentially tell us about this. We won't tell anyone.

Le Duc Tho You yourself know that we also have differences with the Chinese comrades. If you follow the articles published in our press then you will see that our position on several questions is not the same as the opinions of the Chinese comrades. For example, we and they treat the CPSU differently. I have already had occasion to talk with Cde. Suslov on this question. We have never had and do not have any such assessment of the work of the CPSU as do the Chinese comrades. They have said, for example, that you are not giving us aid. We have said daily that you give us much aid. This is not a small difference. We always give a high appreciation of your aid.

L. I. Brezhnev This is correct. Our working class, our people know about this. But why do the Chinese comrades not join with us, even on the one question of which I spoke. They curse the imperialists, and we also curse them. We keep an enormous army in Europe restraining the American and West German imperialists.

A. N. Kosygin Otherwise, they would crush the GDR.

M. A. Suslov. Not only the GDR, but also Hungary.

L. I. Brezhnev We not talking now about insults. We are throwing this aside right now, although the working class and our people are actually offended to hear the insults from the Chinese, for the workers of our country are making weapons which go to Vietnam. At the last CC plenum we talked privately about the dimensions of our aid.

We will continue to give you further aid. The CPSU CC Plenum approved our actions. The Chinese say that the aid of the Soviet Union to Vietnam is insignificant. But let's leave this aside, too. Why do they not want to join together to help you?

Le Duc Tho And on this question there exists a difference in opinions between us and the Chinese comrades. You also know about this. We are waging a fight with the imperialists directly at the front and we want cohesion of the Communist movement and a strengthening of unity more than anyone else. I spoke about this in a conversation with Cde. Andropov this morning. The lack of cohesion has a negative effect on our fight and creates difficulties. But the situation at the present time is such that the differences exist objectively. How should we approach the elimination of these differences? In our opinion, we should demonstrate patience in this situation and not rush with solutions; otherwise, this might lead to still greater differences. We saw [vidim - SIC] your efforts in this direction after the October CPSU CC Plenum. We think that the other fraternal Parties also see this. As long as such differences exist, we very much want these differences not to be aggravated while fighting the American imperialists, but reduced. Attention needs to be concentrated on the fight against the American imperialists. We understand your position when the Chinese comrades criticize you.

A. N. Kosygin. They don't criticize, they verbally abuse, with the most abusive words.

L. I. Brezhnev. They call us "the enemies of the Soviet people".

Le Duc Tho As experience prompts, if the differences are not overcome an aggravation will lead to nothing good. We know from experience that verbal abuse is not evidence of correctness. The popular masses already have a certain theoretical training right now, and their consciousness has grown. The fraternal Parties have also grown and can well distinguish the correct from the incorrect. No one can resist general laws.

L. I. Brezhnev You know our position after the October CPSU CC Plenum. We have undertaken persistent steps to return to good relations with China. We have unilaterally stopped the polemics, have written nothing about the policy of the CPC leaders, and have not talked about them at a single meeting. For two years we have been silent, although they have continued to verbally abuse us. And the more we are silent the stronger is their verbal abuse of us. The Chinese evidently thought that we are weak, are afraid of them, and have begun not only to verbally abuse us, but to also demand removals [of officials], declaring that the people will throw us out.

Le Duc Tho I think that when you are silent and the Chinese comrades verbally abuse you, they achieve the opposite results. We have come to such a conclusion from the experience of our country, on the basis of the opinion of our people. Both theory and tactics are importance in a revolutionary cause.

L. I. Brezhnev You have correctly noted that the popular masses and the Communist movement have grown up. Marxist-Leninist Parties have become stronger and are taking an active part in international affairs, and wonderfully understand the situation themselves. During meetings with Communist Parties we said nothing to China and did not push them [to do] anything. Seventy-three Parties attended the 9th congress of the BKP [Bulgarian CP], for example. I did not talk with any of them except your comrades. Only the Syrian comrades met with us about their domestic matters. But you heard what the delegations of the fraternal Parties said at the congress. They were indignant at the behavior of the Chinese, and condemned them primarily for them not wanting to coordinate actions in support of Vietnam. This is justified criticism. The representatives of the fraternal Parties also criticized the Chinese for the "Cultural Revolution", expressing their disagreement with their methods. You have been convinced yourselves what position the fraternal Parties at the 9th VSRP

Congress. They did not want to allow the Chinese diktat to exist. No one wants this. The Chinese declare enemies those who don't accept the "ideas of Mao Zedong". But what are the ideas, what is their essence?

We understand your position very well, better than anyone else can. We have the very highest feelings of friendship toward you and the most noble striving to help you in the fight against American aggression.

Le Duc Tho We understand this.

A. N. Kosygin. I want to direct attention to this factor. We are speaking about the Communist Party of China, but take the last speech of Zhou Enlai or Tao Zhu. They are no longer addressing the Communist Party, but the Red Guards. They do not speak of the Party anymore. They have essentially broken up the Communist Party of China and the Komsomol. They are calling for the Red Guards to smash the career Party officials.

L. I. Brezhnev In the speech of Tao Zhu Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping are called bourgeois counterrevolutionaries, inasmuch as they do not support Mao Zedong. These, they now say in the PRC, are the main enemies of the Party. Calling upon the Red Guards to smash the "black band" they direct blows first of all against Party organizations. It is necessary to look into this process. Where might this lead?

A. N. Kosygin. How can Communists pass this by? And you probably need to analyze these processes somehow. This is not a simple question. They are smashing the Party, which has a long history of revolutionary struggle. It is impossible to judge what is going on in China as just their domestic matter.

Le Duc Tho It cannot be said that we are not exhibiting concern with respect to the domestic matters of the Chinese comrades and their "Cultural Revolution". But the situation is very complex, and much of what is happening with them is hard to understand. They are not informing us about this. What kind of domestic matters do they have? Why do they have such chaos? We don't know this. However, it can be said that this is the most serious period in the history of the Chinese Communist Party. But as long as we cannot look into [it], that's what this is all about.

A. N. Kosygin. This is not a simple process, we are not simplifying it.

Le Duc Tho This is a very complex process. The head aches from the Chinese problems.

L. I. Brezhnev Not for the first time are we holding discussions with you and meeting. In whatever form we meet, we meet mainly at the highest level, with Cdes. Ho Chi Minh, Le Duan, Pham Van Dong, with you, and with other members of the Politburo, and always we speak in the name of our Politburo, our Party, and our government, and in the name of our people. And right now, when a CPSU CC Plenum has just been held at which we reported on our work and at which the question of the support of the struggle of the Vietnamese people was one of the main questions, we declare to you that we are talking with you in the name of our Party and our government. We would like to say that the policy and practical activity of the CPSU leadership in rendering aid to the Vietnamese brothers in the fight against American aggression was unanimously approved at the CPSU CC Plenum. We request this be passed to Cdes. Ho Chi Minh, Le Duan, Pham Van Dong, and the Politburo of your Party. This is the first [thing].

We also would like to thank you for the information. We are always grateful to you for

a frank discussion, inasmuch as we think that openness helps pursue matters correctly in the fight against the American imperialists both politically and militarily. Therefore we highly value this information of yours. [I] would like to stress that the more often we frankly inform one another the more often we talk, the better will be the mutual understanding and the better it will be for the cause of aid to Vietnam.

The Chinese question with respect to the CPC would evidently be left aside. We understand everything and do not want to complicate the matter.

We view your efforts and your fight as our cherished cause. Your successes are also our successes, the successes of the entire world Communist movement.

You have raised a very important and interesting question about the use of military and diplomatic combat. We attach great importance to our exchange of opinions today. That is why individual questions have arisen among us in the course of the conversation since we would like to clarify our positions. We have always proceeded and do proceed in our relations from the position that each Party has the sovereign right to design its political life. We have always supported this and we are speaking to you about this right now.

For the past two years in this complex, exacerbated situation we have invariably followed what you have recommended, what [your Party] requested, and for what your Party and government turned to us. In previous conversations, especially during the meeting in Crimea with Cde. Pham Van Dong, we frankly said that we are supporters of your heroic struggle against the aggressors, which we admire, and which was also supplemented by a political struggle. When doing this we took into account not only the domestic situation, not only the fact that political struggle can always be useful, but we also proceeded from [the point of view] that on your side [is] the majority of the Communist Parties, and on your side [is] all progressive humanity. Right now there is no longer a need to show that almost the entire world is condemning the Americans, supporting your struggle, and fighting for the isolation of American imperialism ever more actively. This is now a generally-recognized fact. Taking this into consideration we thought that the development of a political struggle will undoubtedly also help other forces expose the Americans and achieve their departure from Vietnam.

Today you have informed us about an important VWP CC decision that you have come to the conclusion about the need, along with fighting, to also step up the political [struggle] and engage in negotiations, taking into account the fact that the Americans are in no position to win in Vietnam, and they cannot break the heroic defense of the DRV. In our opinion, this decision is a very important step, and we also evaluate it as such. Inasmuch as we are speaking today only about the principled position which you have presented, then we consider it our duty to declare that we agree with this decision of the VWP CC Politburo and are completely in solidarity with it. Of course, what we have spoken here is also very important, namely the question of tactics, how to approach this matter, where and how to get in contact with the Americans, and how to make this question public. All this has great importance.

Your Party has great experience not only of combat operations, but also of political struggle. You have used forms of military and political combat against the Japanese and the French, and we have no doubt that the VWP CC is developing the most acceptable and most advantageous forms and methods of waging political combat in negotiations. It is entirely your right to develop the forms and methods. But [we] would like to express our firm confidence that your actions will bring benefit. Of course, it is necessary to take all factors into consideration. We completely agree with you that the Americans want to extract a little more advantage for themselves from this entire situation. In the military sphere the picture is already more or less clear, although of course it is not easy for you; there are losses. The task is to expose the

Americans in political terms.

They have again committed barbaric raids recently. Possibly these are fitful attempts to exert pressure and to again probe your flexibility. This can be also approached from another side. Although this action is barbaric, it is possibly directed at bringing this to [priblizit'] negotiations. Such a maneuver from the US is not excluded here.

We immediately came out with a Soviet Government statement in connection with the lawless raids on Hanoi. Protest rallies are being launched throughout the country. We are confident that the other fraternal countries will also support this on this question.

You have touched on a question about the place of the negotiations, how to initiate contacts, and with whom. We think that you should think a little about these questions yourselves. This is your right. But inasmuch as we are having a friendly conversation we could also express some ideas.

Le Duc Tho This is very good.

L. I. Brezhnev The enemy is not only evil, but is also perfidious. And his nature is known. Such an enemy is regarded only with force. It is no accident that several times the Americans have tried to approach us in various ways in order for us to get in contact with them regarding negotiations on the Vietnamese question. They see strength in the USSR. They know that the Soviet Union is a strong nuclear power, that we have an enormous army in Europe, in the GDR, in Hungary. And although the Americans gone around us, we have not once yielded to their tricks. We have always strictly held to the advice of the CC Politburo of your Party in this question.

We would like to note that you yourselves need to think a little about whom it would be best to make arrangements about negotiations and what contacts to establish to do this.

Le Duc Tho We intended for you to help us, and advise through what channels it would be best to pass this to the Americans. But this should not have the nature of an open letter.

L. I. Brezhnev I want to again return to the question about which you have informed us. Did we correctly understand that there is a VWP CC Politburo decision to entrust us with conveying this idea to the Americans[?]? If we understand you on this question incorrectly then a mistake might occur, but we don't want to make this.

Le Duc Tho Yes, this is so.

L. I. Brezhnev We would request this part of your report be repeated to us. This is a very important factor.

Le Duc Tho The Politburo of our Party has discussed this question and adopted a decision to inform only the Chinese, Korean, and Soviet comrades about the Politburo decree. In reporting to you about this decision of our Politburo we did not set ourselves the task of only informing you. We also thought that we could inform the Americans through unofficial channels about our intentions.

L. I. Brezhnev Maybe you are suggesting to us how to do this. If you want us to also think a little then we can do think and design a plan. We will coordinate this plan with you at first and act only after this.

A. N. Kosygin. Of course, the level of negotiations has great importance. We think that this question needs to be raised at the highest level. You need to decide and tell us at what level you would like to begin contacts: through channels of ambassadors, special envoys, or maybe through ministry of foreign affairs channels. You should say this yourselves.

Le Duc Tho You could let the Americans know about our agreement to negotiations through some US representative. The main thing is that your information be conveyed to the US government.

A. N. Kosygin. We could pass a report to Johnson; we will find an appropriate channel.

Le Duc Tho A reply at the level of bureaucrats will yield nothing.

A. N. Kosygin. Yes, this should be excluded.

L. I. Brezhnev Such a question needs to be dealt with at a serious level.

Le Duc Tho I want to again repeat that this information should be of a confidential nature.

L. I. Brezhnev Of course.

Le Duc Tho As regards the time of sending such a report or information, think about this yourselves and coordinate with us. We have said only that in principle such a moment has come. This is a delicate question. Just right now they are making raids on our capital. And if they are informed of such an important decision right away, they can assess this as our weakness.

L. I. Brezhnev We fully realize this.

Le Duc Tho As soon as they made the first raid on Hanoi we immediately gave instructions to our ambassador in Warsaw to avoid contacts.

L. I. Brezhnev We will use the entire arsenal of political means which we have at our disposal. And one more thought. In this situation it is very important for your government not to give the Americans any categorical replies right away. [You] ought to act flexibly, and not close the door to negotiations.

A. N. Kosygin. And don't put all [your] cards on the table right away.

Le Duc Tho I didn't understand you at all.

L. I. Brezhnev Let's assume they have destroyed a facility. The aggressors need to be sharply condemned, but possibly for tactical considerations don't say right away that there will no longer be any negotiations. They need to be vigorously denounced [razoblachat'], but do not shut the door to contacts.

Le Duc Tho Of course, we will also act that way. After the first bombardment of Hanoi the CC Politburo of our Party gave instructions to our ambassador in Warsaw to avoid contacts, but we did not report anything about this in the newspapers officially. I have received a telegram of our Politburo in which it says that our representative in Warsaw will avoid contacts with the Americans. Nevertheless, we have received instructions to inform you of our tactics.

Now I would like to reply to your specific questions. As regards the level of representatives during the contacts or negotiations, this will depend on the US. We agree to meet at the level of minister of foreign affairs, deputy ministers, or ambassadors.

A. N. Kosygin. If after our report Johnson says that he is ready to meet with a representative of Vietnam at any time, what will you answer?

Le Duc Tho Possibly they are recommending their own envoy. We also agree.

L. I. Brezhnev Of course, we will then inform you about this.

Le Duc Tho As regards the place of the meeting, to avoid complications we have decided to hold such a meeting in any neutral country. We have an opinion to hold it in Cambodia.

L. I. Brezhnev Decide this yourselves and then inform us.

Le Duc Tho We are asking you to express your views on all these specific questions, inasmuch as you have great experience.

L. I. Brezhnev It is better if you decide these questions yourselves. The choice of country has great importance, of course. Cambodia is one thing, but a socialist country in the Warsaw Pact is another. All this matter needs to be weighed and thought over. In this case not just the territory has significance, but also the politics. If the Americans come to one of the socialist countries which is a Warsaw Pact member then they will have to reckon with where the negotiations will be held. In Cambodia they might use outside forces [postoronnie sily] but, let's say, in Prague, Budapest, or Warsaw they will be in entirely different conditions.

A. N. Kosygin. They will be forced to reckon with public opinion.

Le Duc Tho We will study this question some more.

L. I. Brezhnev As regards military aid, we are giving it in accordance with our agreement. Cde. Kosygin has recently received a new letter from Cde. Pham Van Dong. It is being considered right now. You can tell your comrades that we will reply to it in the near future. We have already found an opportunity to favorably decide part of the questions, but others are still being considered. Acceptable solutions will probably be found.

If [we] return to the question of which of the socialist countries is most suitable to hold negotiations there then, in our opinion, it would be better to dwell on such countries as Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Bulgaria, and possibly the Soviet Union.

Le Duc Tho This is a very important opinion. We will report about it to the Politburo of our Party and study the question some more.

L. I. Brezhnev If [we ] speak of the Soviet Union then it is not obligatory to meet in Moscow. Possibly in Novosibirsk, in the Far East, or in Central Asia.

A. N. Kosygin. For example, in Tashkent one could continue a good tradition of negotiations.



M. A. Suslov. Maybe in Yalta. This is also a good place for a meeting.

L. I. Brezhnev There might be various alternatives.

Le Duc Tho If the Americans want to talk with us or send some documents then they can meet with one of our ambassadors. We will inform you later with whom specifically.

L. I. Brezhnev Right now we won't examine in detail the questions contained in the letter of Cde. Pham Van Dong. We will evidently completely grant the request about the MIG-17[s]. The problem is that we still have not received the complete request and specifications. As soon as we receive it we will try examine your requests closely and quickly.

Le Duc Tho By the way I would like to inform you that just before my departure our Minister of Defense, Vo Nguyen Giap, asked [me] to pass on our following wishes. It is desired that you give us new types of surface-to-air missiles, in particular, mobile missiles. As regards aircraft, we would ask you to ensure the coverage of our losses, and also to provide our military students finishing training in the USSR with the appropriate equipment, that is, give one regiment of MIG-17 aircraft and a MIG-21 regiment. We also need equipment to fight radar jamming. It would also be desirable for you to send specialists in these questions to us. Vo Nguyen Giap also requested that you help us in strengthening coastal defenses with coastal defense missiles or guns. We are asking you to also send an additional number of specialists in radar equipment.

L. I. Brezhnev We will consider all these requests.

Le Duc Tho We are very glad that you have listened to our information with great attention and support us. This shows your concern about our situation.

L. I. Brezhnev How could it be otherwise? It has never been and could not be otherwise.

Le Duc Tho We believe that you are giving and will give us comprehensive assistance. Besides the military and political assistance and diplomatic aid, we also want to use your experience. We would like you to think about the questions raised and, if you will have any advice, we ask [you] to express it.

L. I. Brezhnev In principle we have already expressed our opinion and we ask [you] to give us an opportunity to think about it some more. You can have no doubt that we will act in full harmony with you and will give [you] all the necessary aid.

Le Duc Tho We understand that you are the first among those who can help us diplomatically.

L. I. Brezhnev Thank you for that assessment. We will try to the end to justify it.

Le Duc Tho This shows your deep faith in us. In conclusion, I would like to say that we have informed only you, the Chinese, and the Korean comrades about this. We would like to ask you to keep this information secret.

L. I. Brezhnev We understood that [we] ought not to tell anyone, even the fraternal socialist countries. Is it necessary to give a brief report about our meeting in the press?

Le Duc Tho When our comrades were in China there was no report published there. And this time on instructions of the Politburo of our Party we came for unofficial discussions. Therefore we would not like to give our meeting publicity.

L. I. Brezhnev One more question. The situation right now is complex. Any circumstances might arise. If one of you will need to fly to us for a day or two, we [would be] glad to receive you and you can expect that we will always find time for this, and we'll send a plane. We ask [that] you pass this to your comrades. It is very important to consult personally, and circumstances might require this. So, expect a benevolent attitude from us. It's not necessary to hesitate. And the routes might be different. Now it's possible to fly by different routes, it doesn't have to be via China.

Le Duc Tho Once the question was raised in that order I think that our contacts will be even closer.

L. I. Brezhnev You, and even Cde. Pham Van Dong before you, have told us about the decision of your Party not to expand the war beyond South Vietnam in order not to turn it into a big war. We then said and now declare that [we] completely agree with this opinion.

Le Duc Tho We need the decision about negotiations which we adopted not only to isolate our enemy but also to keep the enemy within the framework of the current war.

At the end of the conversation Cde. Brezhnev passed a fraternal greeting and good wishes to Cdes. Ho Chi Minh, Pham Van Dong, Le Duan, and the other Vietnamese comrades.

The conversation was recorded by [illegible] V. Zelentsov  
[illegible signature] I. Karpeshchenko

[illegible name]  
two copies