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Discussion between Mao Zedong and Cambodian Prince Sihanouk

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Summary:

Mao Zedong discusses previous and present Chinese-American relations, focusing especially on Taiwan

Original Language:

Chinese

Contents:

Translation - English

MAO ZEDONG AND CAMBODIAN PRINCE SIHANOUK[1]

Beijing, 28 September 1964

Mao Zedong: The United States bombarded the [military] bases of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam on August 5. The support from you [to DRV] has surpassed some socialist countries. Some socialist countries are not as good as you are. They make friends with the Americans, as well as talk about friendship with them. You are struggling against the Americans. Only by struggling will you be able to survive. In order to struggle, you need to rely on the vast masses. Those who talk about unity with the Americans and who fear the United States will eventually suffer.

....

We have established partial diplomatic relations with Britain. [Ed. note: This was done already in 1950.] At first, they proposed to exchange ambassadors and elevate the chargé d'affaires level relations to ambassadorial relations. But we disagreed. There are two reasons: First, they claim that Taiwan's status has not been determined. Second, they carry out a "two-China" policy at the United Nations.

The Americans have done all kinds of stupid things. Probably it will take nine years or ten years before they are forced to expel Jiang Jieshi's [Chiang Kai-shek's] representatives from the United Nations. Perhaps this cannot be done at the moment. But you may say that Taiwan should be expelled immediately. In actuality, it will take several years, or even longer. [Ed. note: It in fact happened in 1971.]

Our policy line is to win over such countries as Japan, West Germany, and Italy to oppose the United States. This is because Italy, West Germany, and Japan are defeated countries. The monopoly-capitalists want to make money, and the big capitalists in these countries hope to stand up. In order to stand up, they will need to have colonies, which will cause their contradictions with the United States.

....

We have been engaged in wars for 25 years. During these years, we have fought Jiang Jieshi for 14 years, Japan for eight years, and the Americans in North Korea for three years.

It is possible to defeat the American troops. At first, among our soldiers and cadres only twenty percent were confident of defeating the Americans, and another twenty percent were unwilling to cross the [Yalu] River to fight the war. They said that the Americans should not be attacked, and that the Americans were something special. Sixty percent [of our soldiers and cadres] were middle-of-the-roaders, for whom it did not matter whether or not we were to fight [the Americans]. Subsequently, all went to [Korea].

Sihanouk: When they were there, one hundred percent of them fought well.

Mao Zedong: Not bad. But we also committed some mistakes. This was because the general in command was politically backward. That was Peng Dehuai.[2] Why did we dispatch him and not someone else there? This was because he was in good health at that time, and he was a marshal. The other marshal was ill, and was not in such good health as he was.[3] Generally speaking, we fought quite well. But if the commander had been a more skillful general, we could have fought even better. To fight a war, it is important to be prepared. Once you are prepared, the enemy dares

not to come, and if he comes, it is easy to deal with him.

....

I began to study Marxism when I was already 28 years old, and, before that time, I had learned nothing but feudalism and capitalism. I once believed in Kant's philosophy. I did not begin to study Marxism and dialectical materialism until I was 28 years old. Before that time, I had not studied them, and it was the Russians who exposed me to them. I was taught by the Russian Revolution of 1917. I did not even know who Marx and Engels were before 1917. I only knew the names of Napoleon, [George] Washington, [Jean Jacques] Rousseau, and [James and/or John Stuart] Mill, plus the stuff of Chinese feudalism, such as Confucius and Mencius, and plus some stuff of capitalism.

The last time I met you, I asked you to read a book, that is, a part of Engel's Anti-Dühring, "Socialism: from Utopian to Scientific."

Sihanouk: Yes, I have read that book.

Mao: If you are interested, you may want to read another book, it is called The Communist Manifesto. This is the first book of Marxism.

Sihanouk: I know the book.

Mao Zedong: You know it. But you must make the determination to stand on the side of the majority. There might be some difficulties. I encountered the difficulty myself at first, and I changed my stand by making the determination. Then I turned to learning how to fight a war. I used to be a primary school teacher, and I had neither learned nor taught how to fight a war. My teacher was Jiang Jieshi. Because he murdered people. When he murdered people I began to learn from him, and I learned for ten years, and had learned almost everything. Then the Japanese invaded China, and we Communists again cooperated with Jiang Jieshi and the Guomindang. That was the year 1937. (Mao asks Wang Guangmei: Were you born at that time? Wang: Yes, I was already born.) We fought the Japanese for eight years. After the Japanese had left, Jiang again attacked us. After Jiang Jieshi's defeat, the Americans played the role as our teacher. Their troops approached the Yalu River at the border of our country. We dispatched our troops to fight them for three years before the armistice was reached.

Now, the United States is our adversary. But we are negotiating. We have negotiated in Warsaw for nine years. In the past, we met once a week, or once every two weeks, or once a month. Now we meet once every two to three months. We talk about nothing but repeat those old statements.

Our first statement is that the United States should pull the Seventh Fleet and its troops out [of Taiwan]. Our relations with Jiang Jieshi belong to China's internal affairs, in which you should not interfere. But it will not follow us. It requested the release of several American prisoners we have detained in our prisons, and the dispatch of journalists [to China]. We refused. The [American] special agents have committed crimes and should be dealt with in accordance with China's laws. Not a single journalist will be allowed to come. As the first step, the United States should withdraw its troops. We now announce that our territorial water covers 12 sea miles, but it refuses to recognize this and makes intentional invasions. We have issued warnings, but cannot stop it. We have issued over three hundred warnings and are prepared to issue three thousand warnings.

[1] Sihanouk (1922-), King of Cambodia 1941-55, Prime Minister 1955-60 and chief of state 1960-70, when he was deposed in a coup led by General Lon Nol. Returned to Phnom Penh with the Khmer Rouge in 1975. Went once more into exile after the Vietnamese invasion 1978-79. Returned as King in 1993. A year before this conversation (November 1963), Sihanouk had renounced US aid and had instead accepted economic assistance from the PRC and the Soviet Union. This meeting with Mao took place on the second day of a nine-day visit, leading to substantial Chinese military and economic aid.

[2] Peng Dehuai (1898-1974) was the first commander of the “Chinese People’s Volunteers” during the Korean War. He was a member of the CCP Politburo and the PRC’s vice premier and defense minister until 1959, when he was purged by Mao and disappeared from China’s political scene.

[3] Mao is probably referring to Lin Biao.