

April 10, 1967

Discussion between Zhou Enlai and Pham Van Dong

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Summary:

Zhou Enlai discusses expansion of Vietnam War, as well as the development of a new front in Cambodia; also, a discussion on Prince Sihanouk and Lon Nol.

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Chinese

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Translation - English

ZHOU ENLAI AND PHAM VAN DONG

Beijing, 10 April 1967

Zhou Enlai: ...Regarding the transit shipment, the agreement reached was that the quota is 10 thousand tons a month. Now, they want to increase to 30 thousand. They, however, don't refer to any concrete items, so we don't want to reply to the proposals in an unclear way. ...For the new Soviet military items, the Soviets should inform Vietnam first, and Vietnam will consider whether their utility is suitable and effective or not. It means that you will not take all of it. Then, you will inform us [of the amount]. Finally, we'll have to check. If it is correct, we will increase the quota.

At present, Hai Phong port has not been blockaded. Therefore, the use of China's ports has not been considered yet. The Soviet Union once said that the US would not attack Soviet ships. Of course, in case Hai Phong port is blockaded, and there are no other ports accessible in Vietnam, foreign shipments to Vietnam will have to be transported through China's ports. We have an agreement for this contingency. But as far as the utility of China's ports for Soviet aid to Vietnam is concerned, we will consider the factual situation and circumstances and then negotiate another agreement. The Soviets want to have access to China's ports not only for shipments of aid to Vietnam but for other ulterior motives as well.

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Zhou Enlai: There is another front, namely Cambodia. Cambodia is as attached to France as Laos and South Vietnam are to the US. France is determined not to abandon Cambodia. Sometimes Sihanouk curses us out of his anger, which is understandable. We have to win his sympathy, but at the same time, we have to understand his nature. The connections are like this: because France will not abandon Cambodia, the latter will not abandon us either. If Cambodia does so, it will be at odds with the coalition government in South Vietnam in which the pro-French faction will be invited to take part. And if Cambodia worsens its relations with China, the French influence in the Far East will be further reduced, thus weakening the French leverage in relations with the US. The possibility for the US to open another front in Cambodia is not great. So exerting pressure on Cambodia can make it agreeable to our policies. Recently, the Australian prime minister [Harold Holt] visited Cambodia. He asked Sihanouk whether Cambodia helped the NLF. Sihanouk did not totally deny [this], saying that he helped a little in matters of transportation. I have known Sihanouk for more than 10 years and see that he is wiser than Sukarno. [1] Perhaps Sukarno was afraid of the people's movement, but Sihanouk is not that afraid.

The possibility of winning Sihanouk's sympathy is quite good. At the same time, however, we have to consider the possibility of a blockade. Therefore, we think that transportation of materiel during this rainy season will not be only for this year, but should cover next year's needs. We should always exploit the chances when they are available.

Vo Nguyen Giap: At present, the US wants to use the pro-US faction in Cambodia to conduct sabotage and coup d'etats. Do you have any opinion on that matter?

Zhou Enlai: We should not rule out the possibility of a coup d'etat. Sihanouk is similar to Sukarno to the extent that he is mastering all contradictions in order to hold power. Yet, he is unlike Ne Win[2] who controls the armed forces. Ne Win is, at the same time, increasingly critical of many factions in Burma, and therefore becomes more and more unpopular. I have talked with him several times on the strategy to govern, advising him to limit his number of opponents. What I know of him through U Thant[3] is that he is receptive to the Americans, but also to the British and French, to a lesser extent. He maintains relations with China and the Soviet Union as well.

Pham Van Dong: What about the state of civil war in Burma?

Zhou Enlai: The revolutionary movement over there is not developing fast and there have been some changes in the policy of the Party. Conditions and situations there have been good, but I do not know why revolution did not develop.

Pham Van Dong: What do you think about Lon Nol?[4]

Zhou Enlai: He is not trustworthy.

Pham Van Dong: He used beautiful words to talk about China with us.

Zhou Enlai: He did the same with us. He also said that he had Chinese blood. Phoumi Nousavan[5] is also said to have Chinese blood. But their blood is feudal, capitalistic.

Chen Yi: Lon Nol is pro-American. Sihanouk also knows about this.

Zhou Enlai: Lon Nol once visited China and he made some impression. If we spend money on him, he can be exploited for some time. Sihanouk's mother is also doing politics, the way some Chinese empresses did. The mother and the son are at odds with each other. But they are also exploiting each other. Sihanouk's disadvantage is that he, unlike Ne Win, does not control the armed forces.

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Zhou Enlai: As far as our assessment of the prospect of the war is concerned, we indeed should consider two or three possibilities. First, the war may continue and may even further expand. The rule of war is not determined by human will, neither that of the enemy's, nor that of ours. War has its own rule. Even when the enemy wants to stop, it is difficult for him to do so. Therefore, when we assess the prospect of the war, we should prepare for its continuation and further expansion. Another possibility is that the enemy may blockade the coastline. If he begins a overall blockade, that means it is preparing for expanding the war, a total war. But if the enemy uses a blockade to force you to compromise and if you refuse to compromise, what will he do? He must do something as a follow-up. It is not simple for him to conduct an overall blockade along the coastline, which requires deploying many ships. This is a huge action, and will cause high tension in his relations with other countries. The third possibility, as you two have mentioned, is that the dry season of the next year will be a crucial moment, and that it is possible to defeat the enemy, forcing him to recognize his defeat and to withdraw from Vietnam. Is it possible that the war would neither end nor expand, but would continue like it is now? This is impossible. The war will end sooner or later, this is only a matter of time. It is impossible that the war would be protracted like this, neither dead nor alive. With regard to the question of political struggle, there is no doubt that the political struggle should be continued under any circumstance. War is the continuation of politics in its highest form, it is thus impossible to wage a war without conducting political struggle. To strengthen international propaganda, to win sympathy, to weaken and divide the enemies, and to utilize the contractions between the enemies are all different forms of political struggle. You have done this in the past. You should continue to do this in the future.

[1] Sukarno (1901-70), president of the Republic of Indonesia 1945-67. Lost power to General Suharto during a military coup in October 1965.

[2] Ne Win (1911-), Burmese general, head of state in Burma (now Myanmar)

1962-81.

[3] U Thant (1909-74), Secretary General of the UN 1962-71.

[4] Lon Nol (1913-1985), Cambodian Army General, Prime Minister from 1966 to April 1967. Returned to the government in April 1968, first as defence minister and then as acting premier. Appointed prime minister in August 1969. Seized power in a coup on 18 March 1970, while Sihanouk was abroad. Lon Nol was President of the Khmer Republic 1972-75.

[5] Laotian general, right-wing strong-man in the government, 1960-1965.