

May 7, 1968
Discussion between Zhou Enlai, Chen Yi and Xuan Thuy

Citation:

"Discussion between Zhou Enlai, Chen Yi and Xuan Thuy", May 7, 1968, Wilson Center Digital Archive, CWIHP Working Paper 22, "77 Conversations."
<https://wilson-center-digital-archive.dvincitest.com/document/112177>

Summary:

Zhou Enlai draws on differences between the Korean War and the Vietnam War as a way to show the importance of strong negotiating tactics in Vietnam, he also asks Xuan Thuy to keep negotiations secret from the Soviets.

Original Language:

Chinese

Contents:

Translation - English

ZHOU ENLAI, CHEN YI, AND XUAN THUY^[1]

Beijing (The Great Hall of the People), 9:45 p.m., 7 May 1968

Zhou Enlai: The situation of the negotiation on the Korean issue was different from your situation. At that time, [the Korean issue] concerned half of Korea, but the situation you are facing now concerns the unification of Vietnam. Half of Vietnam was the problem [we were facing] fourteen years ago. When Comrade Mao Zedong met President Ho Chi Minh the last time,^[2] he said that it was possible that our signing the [1954] Geneva agreement was a mistake. After we signed the agreement, many soldiers of South Vietnam retreated to the North. The United States refused to sign the agreement. If we also refused to sign the agreement, there were reasons for us to do so. But President Ho said that there were benefits involved in [signing the agreement]. By doing so, after a period of difficulty, during which Ngo Dinh Diem made arrests, detentions, and suppression, causing the deaths of over 200,000, the people of South Vietnam, with this painful experience, had been awakened to make revolution, which led to today's situation. Therefore, the situation of the Korean negotiations was quite similar to the situation around the Geneva Conference of 1954. The Korean negotiations were conducted on the battlefield. The war lasted for almost three years, and the negotiations lasted for two years. But when the Korean issue was discussed at the Geneva Conference in 1954, the war had already stopped, and it was then difficult to solve the problem through negotiation. Whatever we said they would not agree. Therefore, the Korean negotiations resulted in only an armistice, and no other political agreement had been reached. On the issue of withdrawing [foreign] troops from Korea, they refused to discuss. We withdrew our troops [from Korea] in 1958, but they refused to withdraw their troops. The situation you are facing this time is different. You are negotiating with the Americans step by step. This might be fine. Take one step and you may watch for the next step. But the fundamental question is that what you cannot get on the battlefield, no matter how you try, you will not get at the negotiation table. Dien Bien Phu set up the 17th parallel, therefore the Geneva Conference could reach an agreement. Probably Comrade Pham Van Dong had conveyed our attitude after returning to Vietnam. It is our opinion that you have agreed to [negotiate] too fast and too hurriedly, which might have left the Americans with an impression that you are eager to negotiate. Comrade Mao Zedong told Comrade Pham Van Dong that negotiation is acceptable, but [first] you must maintain a lofty stance. Secondly, the Americans, the subordinate countries, and the puppets have a military force of over 1,000,000, and, before their backbone has been broken, or before five or six of their fingers have been broken, they will not accept the defeat, and they will not leave.

...

Chen Yi: You should not inform the Soviets about developments in the negotiations with the US because they can inform the US.

Zhou Enlai: You should not inform them what you plan to do as there have been cases of disclosure of military and diplomatic secrets by the revisionists. You should be highly vigilant.

^[1] Xuan Thuy (1912-), first worked as a journalist and senior official in Communist front organizations during the First Indochina War. Minister of Foreign Affairs 1962-65, cabinet minister and head of the DRV delegation to the quadripartite negotiations in Paris 1968-73.

^[2] Not specified, but possibly in the winter-spring of 1968, when Ho is reported to have been in Beijing for medical treatment. Our thanks to William Duiker for clarification on this point.