

**April 13, 1966**

**Discussion between Zhou Enlai, Deng Xioaping,  
Kang Sheng, Le Duan and Nguyen Duy Trinh**

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**Summary:**

China stresses the importance of Chinese aid in Vietnam, while pointing out Vietnam's seeming mistrust; Vietnam relies on Chinese support.

**Original Language:**

Chinese

**Contents:**

Translation - English

ZHOU ENLAI, DENG XIAOPING, KANG SHENG AND LE DUAN, NGUYEN DUY TRINH[1]

Beijing, 13 April 1966

Deng Xiaoping: You have spoken about truth as well as mentioned fairness. So what are you still afraid of? Why are you afraid of displeasing the Soviets, and what about China? I want to tell you frankly what I now feel: Vietnamese comrades have some other thoughts about our methods of assistance, but you have not yet told us.

I remember Comrade Mao criticizing us—the Chinese officials attending the talk between Comrade Mao Zedong and Comrade Le Duan in Beidaihe[2]—of having “too much enthusiasm” in the Vietnam question. Now we see that Comrade Mao is farsighted.

Le Duan: Now, when you talk about it again, it is clear for me. At that time I didn't understand what Comrade Mao said because of poor interpretation.

Deng: We understand that Comrade Mao criticized us, that is Comrade Zhou Enlai, me and others. Of course, it doesn't mean that Comrade Mao doesn't do his best to help Vietnam. It is clear to all of you that we respond to all your requests since they are within our abilities. Now, it seems that Comrade Mao Zedong is farsighted in this matter. In recent years, we have had experiences in the relations between socialist countries. Is it true that our overenthusiasm has caused suspicion from Vietnamese comrades? Now we have 130 thousand people in your country. The military construction in the Northeast as well as the railway construction are projects that we proposed, and moreover, we have sent tens of thousands of military men to the border. We have also discussed the possibility of joint fighting whenever a war breaks out. Are you suspicious of us because we have so much enthusiasm? Do the Chinese want to take control over Vietnam? We would like to tell you frankly that we don't have any such intention. Here, we don't need any diplomatic talks. If we have made a mistake thus making you suspicious, it means that Comrade Mao is really farsighted.

Moreover, at present many hold China to be disreputable: Khrushchev is revisionist, and China is dogmatic and adventurous.

So, we hope that in this matter, if you have any problem, please tell us straightforwardly. Our attitude so far has been and from now on will be: you are on the front line and we are in the rear. We respond to all your requests within our abilities. But we shouldn't have too much enthusiasm.

The construction in the northeast islands has been completed. The two sides have discussed that the construction along the coast will be done by our military men. Recently, Comrade Van Tien Dung[3] proposed that after completing the construction in the northeast, our military men help you build artillery sites in the central delta.. We haven't answered yet. Now I pose a question for you to consider: Do you need our military men to do it or not?

Zhou Enlai: [The proposal is about] the construction of 45 artillery sites close to the Soviet missile positions.

Deng: We don't know whether it is good for the relations between two parties and two countries or not when we sent 100,000 people to Vietnam. Personally, I think it's better for our military men to come back home right after they finish their work. In this matter, we don't have any ill intention, but the results are not what we both

want.

Not long ago, one thing happened, which we think not incidental: On its way to Hon Gai for coal, a Chinese ship was not allowed to enter the port. It had to stay offshore for 4 days. A request to make a call from ashore was refused. This ship was on duty under a trade agreement, it was not a warship.

Le Duan: We did not know about [this].

Deng: Our foreign ministry has sent a memorandum to yours, but the Vietnamese government has not yet replied. Nothing like this has occurred for the last 10 years.

Zhou Enlai: Even a request made by the Chinese ship to enter the Vietnamese port to hide from US planes, for getting supplies of fresh water and making telephone calls, was refused. One of our cadres, who is in charge of foreign trade, later had to come for discussions with the port authorities several times, and then the ship could enter your port. The comrade who is in charge of Cam Pha port even said: It is our sovereignty, you can only come when you are allowed to. Meanwhile, we are saying that all the ships and planes of Vietnam can have access to the ports and airports of China at any time if they are pursued by US planes.

Deng: Now, I want to talk about another aspect of the relations between the two parties and two countries. Among 100 thousand Chinese military men, who are now in your country, there may be someone who committed wrongdoing, and on your side there also may be some others who want to make use of these incidents to sow division between two parties and two countries. We should, in a straightforward manner, talk about it now as there is not only the shadow but some damages in our relations as well. It is not only the matters concerning our judgment on the Soviet aid. Are you suspicious that China helps Vietnam for our own intentions? We hope that you can tell us directly if you want us to help. The problem will easily be solved. We will withdraw our military men at once. We have a lot of things to do in China. And the military men stationed along the border will be ordered back to the mainland. [4]

Le Duan: I would like to express some opinions. The difficulty is that our judgments are different from each other. As the experience in our Party shows, it takes time to make different opinions come to agreement.

We don't speak publicly [about] the different opinions between us. We hold that the Soviet assistance to Vietnam is partly sincere, so neither do we ask whether the Soviets [will] sell Vietnam out nor [do we] say the Soviets slander China in the matter of transportation of Soviet aid. Because we know that if we say this, the problem will become more complicated. It is due to our circumstances. The main problem is how to judge the Soviet Union. You are saying that the Soviets are selling out Vietnam, but we don't say so. All other problems are rooted in this judgment. Concerning China's assistance to Vietnam, we are very clear and we don't have any concern about it. Now, there are more than a hundred thousand Chinese military men in Vietnam, but we think that whenever there is something serious happening, there should be more than 500,000 needed. This is assistance from a fraternal country. We think that as a fraternal socialist country, you can do that, you can help us like this. I have had an argument with Khrushchev on a similar problem. Khrushchev said the Vietnamese supported China's possession of the atomic bomb so China could attack the Soviet Union. I said it was not true, China would never attack the Soviet Union.

Today, I am saying that the judgment by a socialist country on another socialist

country should be based on internationalism, especially in the context of relations between Vietnam and China. In our anti-French resistance, had the Chinese revolution not succeeded, the Vietnamese revolution could hardly have been successful. We need the assistance from all socialist countries. But we hold that Chinese assistance is the most direct and extensive.

As you have said, each nation should defend themselves but they also should rely on international assistance. So, we never think that your enthusiasm can be harmful in any way. To the contrary, the more enthusiasm you have, the more beneficial it is for us. Your enthusiastic assistance can help us to save the lives of 2 or 3 million people. This is an important matter. We highly value your enthusiasm. A small country like Vietnam badly needs international assistance. This assistance saves so much of our blood.

The relations between Vietnam and China will exist not only during the struggle against the US but also in the long future ahead. Even if China does not help us as much, we still want to maintain close relations with China, as this is a guarantee for our nation's survival.

With regard to the Soviets, we still maintain good relations with them. But we also criticize the Soviets if they are receptive to our criticism.

In the relations between our two parties, the more agreement we have the better we feel, the less agreement we have, the more we are concerned. We are concerned not only about your assistance but also about a more important matter, that is the relations between the two nations. Our Party Central Committee is always thinking of how to strengthen the friendly relationship between the two parties and two countries.

On the incident of the Chinese ship having difficulties to enter a Vietnamese port, I don't know about it. We are not concerned about your 130 thousand military men in our country, why should we be concerned about one ship? If it is the mistake of the person in charge of the port, this person may well be a negative agent trying to provoke. Or a mistake by this person can be used by other agent provocateurs. It is a personal mistake. The way we think about China has never changed.

We think that we should have a moral obligation before you and before the international Communist movement. We keep on struggling against America until the final victory. We still maintain the spirit of proletarian internationalism. For the sake of the international Communist movement and international spirit, it doesn't matter if the process of socialist development in the south of Vietnam is delayed for 30 or 40 years.

I would like to add some of my personal opinions. At present, there is a relatively strong reformist movement in the world, not only in Western Europe but also in Eastern Europe and in the Soviet Union. Many nationalist countries adopt either the path of reformism or that of fascism, as those countries are ruled by the bourgeoisie. So I think that there should be some revolutionary countries like China to deal with the reformist countries, criticizing them, and at the same time, cooperating with them, thus leading them to the revolutionary path. They are reformist, so on the one hand, they are counter-revolutionary, that is why we should criticize them. But on the other hand, they are anti-imperialists, that is why we can cooperate with them. In the history of the Chinese revolution, you did the same thing. Comrade Mao Zedong established the anti-Japanese United Front with Jiang Jieshi [Chiang Kai-shek]. So my personal opinion is that China, while upholding the revolutionary banner, should cooperate with reformist countries to help them make revolution. It is our judgment as well as our policy line. This is not necessarily right, but it is out of our sincere commitment to revolution. Of course, this matter is very complicated. As

you have said, even in one party there are three parts: rightist, centrist and leftist, so is the situation in a big [Communist] movement.

The differences in judgment bring about difficulties which need time to be solved. It is necessary to have more contacts in order to reach agreement in perception.

It is not our concern that China is trying to take control over Vietnam. If China were not a socialist country then we [would be] really concerned. [We believe that] Chinese comrades came to help us out of proletarian internationalism.

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Deng: On the question of "enthusiasm," please have more understanding for Chairman Mao's wish to refer to the fact that relations between two countries [and] parties are not simple. [Neither] is the relationship among comrades [simple].

[1] Kang Sheng was then an alternate member of the CCP Politburo and a member of the CCP Central Secretariat. He would soon, during the early stage of the Cultural Revolution, become a member of the CCP Politburo Standing Committee and an advisor to the "Cultural Revolution Group," the leading authority during the Cultural Revolution.

[2] Beidaihe is a coastal sightseeing site northeast of Beijing where CCP leaders frequently vacation and have important meetings during the summer.

[3] Van Tien Dung (1917-) was second to Vo Nguyen Giap in the DRV military leadership. Chief of PAVN General Staff 1953-78, commanded the Ho Chi Minh offensive 1974-75. He was a VWP politburo member from 1972-86, vice minister until he became defense minister of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam sometime between 1978 and 1980. Retired in 1986.

[4] In a separate conversation on the same day, Zhou Enlai said: "After Kosygin visited Vietnam and promised to assist Vietnam, we have new disagreements with the Soviets over their demand to use two of our airports and their proposal to create an airlift for transportation of weapons to Vietnam. It is OK that you praise the Soviets [for giving] great aid. But that you mention it together with Chinese aid is an insult to us." Deng Xiaoping added, "So, from now on, you should not mention Chinese aid at the same time as Soviet aid."