

September 17, 1970

Discussion between Zhou Enlai and Pham Van Dong

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Summary:

Pham Van Dong outlines two new diplomatic offensives the NLF is taking against the US. Zhou Enlai proposes sending Chinese representatives to the front to observe the situation in South Vietnam.

Original Language:

Chinese

Contents:

Translation - English

ZHOU ENLAI AND PHAM VAN DONG^[1]

Beijing, 17 September 1970

Pham Van Dong: We always think that political and military struggles have decisive importance. Yet, in the case of Vietnam, to a certain extent, the diplomatic struggle is effective and has proven itself to be so for the past several years. I would like to address the question of how the diplomatic struggle will be effective at the time when Nixon is carrying out his "Vietnamization" of the war. We hold that Nixon's Vietnamization is still aimed at gaining a military victory in South Vietnam. It, however, does not mean that Nixon does not think of diplomacy. But we understand well that when they are talking of diplomacy, peace, they are trying to deceive the world, and they do not have any illusion about diplomacy. That they sent [US official David] Bruce to Paris is also aimed at deceiving the world. What should we do in facing Nixon's calculations? As a matter of course, we will be persistent in the military and political struggles, holding that these struggles are decisive to the victory. At the same time, we are doing our best, as the situation allows, to step up the diplomatic struggle. For us and for Nixon, diplomacy is a play of words. Neither we nor he has any illusion about diplomacy. Yet, we also see some advantages of the diplomatic struggle. First, we have to win the sympathy of the people in South Vietnam, especially the ones in the urban areas. Furthermore, we have to influence the anti-war public opinion in the US that includes not only the people at large but also the political, business, academic, and clerical circles to ensure a stronger support by them. The world public opinion has been mobilized. Yet, it will be better if the opinion of political groups can be influenced. From this calculus, we hold that the diplomatic struggle can serve as another front. Therefore, the NLF delegation is conducting new diplomatic offensives.

We are focusing on the following two points:

- The unconditional withdrawal of American troops. What is new here is that we ask for a timetable for the withdrawal.
- The question of a coalition government. This is a more important issue. The focal point is the demand to remove Thieu, Ky,^[2] and Khiem.^[3]

These points are not quite new as they have been mentioned in the previous 10-point proposal. But the reason we focus on them is that we want further to corner Nixon by influencing public opinion in the US and the rest of the world. These points are also aimed at supporting the military and political struggles in the South. We do not have any illusion that they will bring about any results.

Zhou Enlai: I would like to talk about cooperation between North Vietnam and China. Comrade Mao has often reminded us of understanding your difficulties and helping you to solve them, of considering these difficulties ours because our relations are the ones between the front and the rear. I have to say clearly that we have basically to satisfy your demands. We have also reviewed some issues that have not been brought up by you. From now on, if new difficulties come up, we would like you to inform us and we will try our best within our capacity to help you. Some kinds of weapons that you ordered have now become obsolete. We have improved them, making them more effective and less heavy. So we propose them for you to consider. The Great Rear has to help the front. Yet the Great Rear has to go to the front to understand the problems in order to solve them. The report by comrade Fang Yi about his recent trip to Vietnam is a good document for us to learn about the situation in Vietnam. We are bureaucratic. There are many people who suffer from this in our embassy in Vietnam. Chairman Mao once got angry with the reports by the Embassy. He said that he did not want to read them because these reports were

written by [people] who spent all their time inside their offices. We therefore want to send our people to the front line to observe the situation. If you agree, we will not only send high-level officials, but also representatives of the armed forces, revolutionaries, and workers to Vietnam as important steps to prepare for war. At present, China is encircled. Yet, the fighting has begun only in Indochina. We cannot understand our enemies. There is no fighting in Korea. The border with the Soviet Union is sealed off. So we have to look to the front in Vietnam.

[1] This conversation took place on the same day as all four delegations to the Paris Peace Talks listened to the presentation of the PRG's new eight-point peace plan.

[2] Nguyen Cao Ky (1930-), Air Marshal, commander of the South Vietnamese Air Force, prime minister 1965-67 and vice president under Nguyen Van Thieu 1967-71.

[3] Tran Thien Khiem (1925-) a South Vietnamese General, was a key figure in the coup against Ngo Dinh Diem in 1963. After he had participated in Nguyen Khanh's coup in 1964, he was sent into honorable exile as ambassador to Washington. In 1968 he returned as Minister of the Interior, and served as Prime Minister under Thieu from 1969-75.