

June 5, 1973

Discussion between Zhou Enlai, Le Duan, Pham Van Dong and Le Thanh Nghi

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Summary:

The role of China and Vietnam in the Cambodian revolution; also a discussion on the current situation in South Vietnam.

Original Language:

Chinese

Contents:

Translation - English

ZHOU ENLAI AND LE DUAN, PHAM VAN DONG AND LE THANH NGHI[1]

Beijing, 5 June 1973

Zhou Enlai: The world is now in a state of chaos. In the period after the Paris Agreements, the Indochinese countries should take time to relax and build their forces. During the next 5 to 10 years, South Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia should build peace, independence, and neutrality. In short, we have to play for time and prepare for a protracted struggle. Each country has enemies of its own. So each has to prepare, both by increasing production and training armed forces. If we are not vigilant, the enemy will exploit our weakness. If we are well-prepared, then we will be ready for any move by the enemy.

At present, the cease-fire is well observed. The Cambodian problem is not solved. Yet, the people, after 20 years of fighting, wish to relax. So it is necessary that you restore production and effectively use the labor forces. These are big things to do. We agree with you that we have to restore production and train armed forces at the same time.

Le Duan: The US was aiming at political objectives when fighting in Vietnam. Strategically speaking, they did not use a consistent strategy. Instead, in this neocolonial war, they changed several strategies, from one of special war to limited war and "Vietnamization." Their objective was not only to turn South Vietnam into their colony, but also to realize their global strategy in Vietnam. That means, they wished to control the South, then attack the North of Vietnam, thus damaging the defense system of socialism in Southeast Asia and threatening the national independence movement in the world.

Zhou Enlai: So you fought, and were not patient as Lin Biao advised. Patience is the maxim of Lin Biao's strategy. He knew of nothing else.

I would like to share with you some intelligence information that we have just received. The US wants Saigon to decrease fighting. [US envoy William] Sullivan[2] has to fly to Saigon to tell the same thing that he told Tran Van Huong[3]—Saigon's Ambassador to Washington: Nixon is in trouble and Saigon should not make the situation more complicated. This is true, because it explains why Kissinger wants to have a joint declaration with you.

I also would like to stress that the US should definitely drop Lon Nol to let the Cambodian people solve the problems themselves. This is a Cambodian civil war so the US should leave Cambodia. As for FUNK, this war is to punish Lon Nol. So we have to consult with Prince Sihanouk whether to negotiate. We at the same time are not representing GRUNK.[4]

Le Duan: Cambodian comrades are making much progress. They are doing very well.

Zhou Enlai: There is still uncertainty in the situation. I recall that last year, Lon Nol went to China for the 20th anniversary celebration of the Chinese National Day and met with comrade Pham Van Dong. He was so confident. At that time, he still controlled all the transportation of materiel for South Vietnam.

Pham Van Dong: We did not anticipate that things would change in a very short time afterward. But he deserved it.

Zhou Enlai: Things always happen beyond our wishes. At that time, you had military and medical bases in Cambodia and we did not know about this. But Lon Nol did.

And when Lon Nol asked for road fees for transportation of materiel via Cambodia, we had to pay.

Le Duan: We would like to talk about our policy in the South. The situation will be clear in three or four years' time. At any rate, the government there eventually must be a democratic and nationalist one. This government can exist for ten or 15 years. And then the name can be changed. So we are not in a hurry to turn South Vietnam into a socialist entity.

Pham Van Dong: In this struggle, our objective is independence and democracy. We are not in a hurry with the goal of national unification. One thing we should do is to highlight the NLF role and the Provisional Revolutionary Government with a neutral foreign policy.

Zhou Enlai: And the main problem is the leadership of the Party.

Pham Van Dong: That is correct. Lenin also discussed this problem in his book entitled "The Two Strategies." The whole problem is the leadership. We will highlight the NLF role both in internal and external policies.

Le Duan: In carrying out "Vietnamization," the enemies are clearly expanding the war. We hold that the US has great strength and it can accept defeat to a certain extent. It is difficult to defeat the US because it is a strong country. You have advised us to solve the problem of US withdrawal first and solve the Saigon problem later. We think this is correct.

[1] Later that same day Le Duan met with Mao Zedong (Zhou Enlai and Ye Jianying were also present). Records show the following exchange took place:

Le Duan: The Chairman's correct judgment is for us a tremendous encouragement.

Mao Zedong: Our Foreign Ministry has issued a circular, in which it says that the strategic emphasis of the United States lies in Asia and the Pacific. I say that this is not true. The United States has many problems in Europe, the Middle East, and America itself. Sooner or later it needs to withdraw some of its troops, and it will not stay in Asia and the Pacific forever. Therefore, Comrade Le Duc Tho's negotiation in Paris would result in something.

...

Mao Zedong: Lin Biao knew only guerrilla warfare with a view to keeping the US bogged down in Vietnam. I, however, wish to see you fighting mobile warfare and destroy their forces.

Zhou Enlai: We mean their regular forces.

[2] William Healy Sullivan (1922-) was Deputy Assistant Secretary of State from the end of his term as US ambassador to Laos in 1969 until he became ambassador to the Philippines in 1973; he later served as envoy to Iran until the Iranian Revolution in 1978-79.

[3] Tran Van Huong (1903-), former mayor of Saigon who twice served as Prime Minister in the Republic of Vietnam November 1964-January 1965, and May-August 1969. Later became Vice President to Nguyen Van Thieu and served as President for 7 days in April 1975.

[4] The Beijing-based Royal Government of National Union of Kampuchea (Cambodia) formed by Sihanouk and the Khmer Rouge in 1970.