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Record of Conversation from Chairman Mao's Reception of the Algerian Militia Delegation

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Summary:

Mao and Mahmoud Guenez discuss the Algerian revolution, the lessons of the Chinese experience, and developments in the Congo (Léopoldville).

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Chinese

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Time: 6 pm to 6:45 pm, December 26, 1964

Venue: Peking Hall, Great Hall of the People

Head of Delegation Mahmoud Guenez: First of all, I want to pass along greetings from General Secretary of the Politburo, Ben Bella, to Chairman Mao.

Chairman Mao: Thank you very much. Please convey my greetings to President Ben Bella. Have you solved the problems you had when you came this time?

Mahmoud Guenez: All problems solved.

Chairman Mao: I

am afraid I cannot meet your needs. We are doing too little (referred to assistance).

Mahmoud Guenez: Our Chinese brothers are already providing enough assistance.

Chairman Mao: You can build your own factories. You can be self-reliant. In in eight or ten years you can make steel. You can temper iron. You can build planes. You can build ships. You can make your own weapons. Yes, you can! If eight or ten years are not enough, well you can do it in fifteen or twenty years. You must believe that if France has it, you can have it too! I believe that whatever the imperialists can do, you can do too. Could it be that only Western countries can accomplish certain things but Africans can't and Asians can't? I don't believe it. Didn't you defeat the French? France has more than 800,000 troops. You only have tens of thousands. Didn't you defeat France? Are you saying you are capable or that France is capable? Ho Chi Minh defeated France. We defeated Chiang Kai-shek and defeated the Japanese and the Americans. We fought for 25 years. We also made many mistakes, yet in the end we still won.

We are all poorly educated. More than 95% of us were illiterate or could only read just a few words. I and him (referring to General Luo) did not get much of an education. We did not go to university, I went to a teacher training secondary school to train me to be a primary school teacher. He (referring to General Luo) had a little middle school. He was a student of Chiang Kai-shek but studied in military school for less than seven months. The same is true of our Defense Minister Marshal Lin Biao, who had less than four months of military education. More than 95% of them are people (referring to Deputy Chief Peng Shaohui and Minister Fu Qishou) took cattle to pasture for their landlords. I don't believe in those big experts, in those well-educated people. I am not criticizing you. You may be a well-educated person. There are many kinds of well-educated people. Some are revolutionary. Some are moderates while still others counter-revolutionary.

Mahmoud Guenez: My country is the same way. These brothers (referring to the delegation members) are all peasants. Our knowledge and culture we too learned from the revolutionary struggle.

Chairman Mao: Yes! Learn as you make revolution. Have you read some

Marxist-Leninist books?

Mahmoud Guenez: Yes, I have read some.

Chairman Mao: It is good to read some of them. If you read too many, you will become a bookworm. The revisionists Bernstein, Kautsky and Plekhanov read a lot of books. Marx, Engels, and Lenin read a lot of books, but they don't have the air of bookworms. I see hope in your country. I see the hopes of Africa in your country. Could it be that only you can succeed but not Africa? I can't see it. There are also reactionaries in Africa. Most are revolutionaries or centrists. Is Moïse Tshombe a revolutionary?

Mahmoud Guenez: Everyone knows that Moïse Tshombe is a tool of imperialism, and the Congolese people will be able to defeat Tshombe.

Chairman Mao: We are very happy to help the revolutionaries of the Congo (Leopoldville) when you have just liberated. You only have one plane to take the weapons to the Congo. You have an excellent internationalist spirit. Counter-revolutionaries blew up one of your ships. We will give you another one we bought in the United Kingdom, the Twilight, 10,000 tons, but it hasn't arrived yet. In the future, you will have your own shipbuilding industry to build your own ships in the future. Can't Norway build ships? You have more people than they do. You are over ten million. The Norwegian shipbuilding industry is very large. It ranks second or third in the world. They are one of the countries North Atlantic and the Baltic Sea and you are a Mediterranean country.

The Atlantic Ocean is called 'Atlantic' [in English in the original] what does 'Atlantic mean'. I don't know what it means. The Pacific Ocean is the 'Pacific Ocean'. Pacific means peace, the Pacific is not too flat, it is not very flat at all! [Note: the literal meaning of the Chinese characters for Pacific is "too flat".] You are not too flat there. The Mediterranean (Mediterranean) is not too flat. The North Atlantic is not too flat. You have the Sixth Fleet there, and we have the Seventh Fleet here. The Americans harass us and the harass you. The paper tigers are harassing us. Imperialism is a paper tiger. The French have an army of 800,000 and you are only several tens of thousands. Did you not defeat them?

Do you speak French?

Mahmoud Guenez: Yes, I speak French.

Chairman Mao: You took the knowledge you got from France and used it against them.

Mahmoud Guenez: We have gotten patriotic education ever since we were little. Our fathers and elder brothers taught us to love the motherland.

Chairman Mao: Language is a tool, just like a gun. Guns have no class nature, language has no class nature. Chiang Kai-shek speaks Chinese, we also speak Chinese but we fight politically.

Mahmoud Guenez: Most of our Algerian people speak Arabic. A few teach French and speak French.

Chairman Mao: You can learn a few foreign languages. You could study English and German too. But that only applies to a few people. Most ordinary people are still

Arabs. People often look down on Africa just as people look down on Asia. The Chinese were known as the sick man of East Asia and thought to be of no use at all. Educated Chinese used to worship foreign countries. If they studied in the United States, they idolized the US; if they studied in the UK, they idolized the British; if they studied in France, they idolized the French; if they studied in Japan, they idolized the Japanese. They always said that the moonlight in foreign countries was more beautiful than the moonlight back home in China. People used to call it being friendly with America, idolizing America, and fearing America.

We did political and ideological education, being friendly with America turned into scorning America; idolizing America became opposing America and fearing America turned into regarding America as a paper tiger. All the world's paper tigers will fall down in defeat. The Chinese Empire fell in 1911. Chiang Kai-shek fell in 1949. In 1945, Imperial Japan fell. In 1953, the United States was defeated in the Korean War. In 1954, France fell at Dien Bien Phu. In what year did you win your war?

Mahmoud Guenez: The day our revolution broke out should be counted as the day we won. That was in 1954. We declared our independence in 1962.

Chairman Mao: That was 1962. In what year was the agreement with France (the Évian Accords) signed?

Mahmoud Guenez: That was in 1962 as well.

Chairman Mao: Is French imperialism a paper tiger?

Mahmoud Guenez: Yes, our Algerian people relied on their own strength to defeat French imperialism. France really is a paper tiger.

Chairman Mao: Hitler occupied all of Europe, including your North Africa. Where is Hitler now? He is not there anymore. Hitler too was a paper tiger. Be careful and diligent. That goes for everything whether it be warfighting or economic construction.

Mahmoud Guenez: So we think that the armed struggle is simpler and that socialist construction is much more complicated. Therefore we must be vigilant.

Chairman Mao: Some of our weapons have fallen into the hands of counter-revolutionaries. Did you give weapons to poor peasants?

Mahmoud Guenez: Our weapons are sent to ideologically awakened and tested peasants and workers.

Chairman Mao: Over the past fifteen years, some of our weapons fell into the hands of counter-revolutionaries and newly appeared reactionaries. This is very dangerous. They are pointing the gun at us. We have changed a lot in 15 years. You have already seen 1962, 1963 and 1964. If you look again in fifteen years, you will see that some people will have changed. Didn't Ferhat Abbas change a lot! I have heard that some people who came to China also oppose you. They served their purpose at the time. If a Frenchman changes as soon as he leaves, I have heard people say that they are corrupt.

Mahmoud Guenez: For those reasons, we have to organize our militia in levels.

Chairman Mao: You should learn from the lessons that China has to teach. Have you

been studying China's experience? Keep this in mind. The Pacific Ocean is not peaceful, our country is not peaceful. Some people are still corrupt and opportunistic. Some talk of peaceful evolution. Some people pretend to speak in the name of the Communist Party. These people are really something.

I don't want to give you the impression that the Chinese government has collapsed. It can't fall! These people are scattered while we are concentrated. We still have millions in the People's Liberation Army. We can mobilize hundreds of millions of workers, lower and middle peasants to fight the bad elements. We don't kill them. We don't imprison them. We ask them to work, to reform themselves through labor. We need to kill a few individuals. Haven't you killed a few people yourselves? Killing a few people is also necessary. Didn't you also kill a few people? Perhaps you haven't killed as many people as we have. But killing a lot of people is not good. Their sons and daughters will hate you. They will want to avenge their fathers. That is not advantageous. We also lose their labor. That is also disadvantageous. So we keep the number we kill down to a low number. Those who have committed murder or arson or excite popular anger should also be executed. Not many people commit these crimes.

Counterrevolutionaries should also be repressed. Those people are sent away for reform through labor under the supervision of the masses or brought together on a reform through labor farm or a reform through labor factor where ideological work is done with them. In the Beijing suburbs there are thousands of these people working on reform through labor farms. There after a few years of political and ideological work, most of the counter-revolutionaries and other bad elements do change. They learn to fabricate machinery, or become engineers, physicians and professors. This is recycling waste.

Mahmoud Guenez: Waste becomes useful.

We are very grateful to Chairman Mao for giving us this talk. We will always remember today's unforgettable meeting.

Chairman Mao: Everything I said is only for your reference. Act according to your own specific situation. Do not slavishly copy foreign experience. We have suffered from doing that.

(As Chairman Mao accompanied his guests to the door, the head of delegation again thanked Chairman Mao for giving the great honor he has given to the delegation by receiving them.)

Chairman Mao: Please say hello to President Ben Bella for me.

Mahmoud Guenez: Certainly conveyed. Finally, I would like to thank the Chinese people and the father of the Chinese revolution Chairman Mao for the assistance they have given to the Algerian revolution.

Chairman Mao: You are welcome, you don't need to thank us.