

November 12, 1966

**From the Diary of Shcherbakov I.S., 'Record of
Conversation with DRV Prime Minister Pham Van
Dong, 2 November 1966'**

Citation:

"From the Diary of Shcherbakov I.S., 'Record of Conversation with DRV Prime Minister Pham Van Dong, 2 November 1966'", November 12, 1966, Wilson Center Digital Archive, AVP RF, f. 79, op. 21, p. 51, d. 8, ll. 174-180, and RGANI, f. 5, op. 58, d. 260, ll. 320-326. Obtained by James G. Hershberg and Sergey Radchenko and translated by James Person, Sergey Radchenko, and Gary Goldberg.
<https://digitalarchive.umd.edu/document/208393>

Summary:

I. Shcherbakov and Pham Van Dong discuss Soviet-Vietnamese relations, the last developments on the battlefield, and American "peace maneuvers."

Credits:

This document was made possible with support from MacArthur Foundation

Original Language:

Russian

Contents:

Translation - English

Secret

Diary of
Shcherbakov I.S.

[...]

RECORD OF CONVERSATION

with DRV prime-minister Pham Van Dong

2 November 1966

I met with Pham Van Dong at our request. On behalf of the Center, I informed the Prime Minister about the meeting of the Foreign Minister of the USSR, comrade A.A. Gromyko with leaders of the USA during the XXI Session of the UN General Assembly.

After listening attentively to the information and personally taking notes on the separate situations, Pham Van Dong asked to convey his thanks to the CC CPSU. He stressed that the Soviet comrades inform the CC WPV not only of issues related to Vietnam, but also about many others, that this attests to the confidence that the CPSU renders the working-people of Vietnam and "we value this confidence."

We, declared Pham Van Dong, attach great importance to the issues raised in the information of the CPSU. The USSR supports contact with the leaders of the United States and this, in the opinion of the WPV, has a positive meaning since in these meetings you represent the Soviet Union and its policies. We consider that it is necessary for us in the future to coordinate joint actions in the diplomatic struggle. "The position of the USSR, declared at the time of the meetings with the Americans is absolutely correct: the Soviet Union emphatically refuses to carry out the role of the middle-man between Vietnam and the USA, refuses to hold talks on behalf of Vietnam." The Vietnamese comrades consider the position of the Soviet Union correct and of fundamental importance. At the time of the meeting with the Americans, you, continued Pham Van Dong, have the ability to specifically, in person, study the behavior of the enemy, his attitude toward various international and domestic issues. Furthermore, at the time of these contacts the Soviet comrades have the propitious opportunity for clarifying the position of the DRV and the NFLSV and "you increasingly demonstrate to our enemies the correctness of our position." For this very reason the Vietnamese comrades, continued Pham Van Dong, "welcome the fact that the USSR maintains regular contact with the USA on the issue of Vietnam." In this plan we, said the Prime Minister, "steadily adhere to the joint position worked out at Yalta." The Vietnamese side, the Prime Minister stressed, thoroughly studies and interprets all considerations of the Soviet comrades expressed at the negotiations in the Crimea. At the time of the meetings between comrades Leonard Maurer and Mikhailov, we informed them on this question. With regards to the exchange of thoughts on this with Soviet leaders, then, in the opinion of Pham Van Dong, the Vietnamese and Soviet sides will have numerous opportunities to do this.

Pham Van Dong expressed several observations of the Vietnamese side on the issue of regularization. In the opinion of Pham Van Dong, first of all it is necessary to be aware of the true intentions of the USA. At the present time, the American imperialists with all of their might are expanding the aggressive war in South and North Vietnam. It can not be ruled out that they are carrying out their aggressive actions from Thailand in lower Laos. In the opinion of Pham Van Dong, you can not ignore and underestimate the recent events that occurred in Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia. It was by no means a mistake, continued Pham Van Dong, that all of these events happen simultaneously for they are all most intimately connected with

the Manila agreement and the trip of President Johnson to a number of South East Asian countries. These events, in the words of Pham Van Dong, are connected with the Vietnamese issue and above all with the aggression of the USA in South Vietnam where the Americans, under the direction of General Westmorland, steadily augment their military potential. They focus their attention on the militant declaration of the former president of the USA, Eisenhower. In the plan that Johnson always dutifully follows the line of the Republicans, we, like the Soviet leaders, said Pham Van Dong, focus our [attention?] [word apparently missing; possibly vnimanie-trans.]to the abovementioned events and facts.

We must clearly see and perceive, continued Pham Van Dong, the meaning of the "peaceful" proposal of Johnson and his actions in achieving peace; it is necessary to know exactly what Johnson wants - peace or war? Up to now, all of the actions of the right-wing of the USA - the intensification of the brutal war in Vietnam, the augmentation of their military on Vietnamese territory - have convincingly attested to their tendency to achieve a military victory in South Vietnam and to their tendency to achieve that, so that North Vietnam recognized it. Hence, declared Pham Van Dong, it is necessary to give a correct assessment to the "peaceful" activities of the right-wing of the USA and "not have any illusions" on this. The miscommunication of this issue is extremely dangerous since the position would be created that the enemy could carry out an attack at the very moment that we thought about peace, in other words, in the opinion of Pham Van Dong, it is extremely dangerous to draw any premature conclusions on this reckoning. The proposition of the Americans, continued Pham Van Dong, is characterized by fogginess and vagueness. This fact found its concentrated expression in the declaration of Goldberg, the aim of which is to mislead public opinion of the entire world and conceal the American plan for expanding aggression.

If the Americans, declared Pham Van Dong, truly desire peace, then "from our side they will not encounter any difficulties," since our position has been clear and has been repeatedly supported by peaceful public opinion. In connection with this, Pham Van Dong pointed out an article in a French newspaper "Le Monde" under the headline "The Key For Peace is Located in Washington," in which it was declared specifically that the Americans must give an answer to the position of the government of the DRV from the 4 points, that give voice, essentially, to the position of General de Gaulle, that is, concluded Pham Van Dong, the USA must make the first step in that direction, for the reason that it was they who unleashed war in Vietnam, sent troops to South Vietnam, carry out air raids on the territory of the DRV.

I widened the theme of discussion, stressed Pham Van Dong, in order to draw attention to the fact that it was the USA that broadened the war and "we must continue our struggle," in the direction of repelling aggression. It is clear to everyone, said Pham Van Dong, that the USA is escalating the war at the present time, and this shows that the USA does not have the good will to begin talks, this precisely explains the hardness of their positions, their unwillingness to accept the 3rd point of the DRV government. It is impossible, said Pham Van Dong, to accept the proposals made in Goldberg's statement, one cannot agree with the point about North Vietnam's reciprocal measures in response to the end of American bombing of the DRV territory. This is a principal/principled question, remarked [in text, mistakenly, "responded"] Pham Van Dong, and the US has no right to demand reciprocity and promises from the DRV on this account. Comrade A.A. Gromyko was exactly right, continued Pham Van Dong, when he declared that the USA must immediately and unconditionally stop air raids against the DRV territory. This, in Pham Van Dong's opinion, "would be a trial stone [sic], a test of the USA's good will," or at least would express the USA's readiness to take the 4 points as the position, on the basis of which one could find a solution to the Vietnam problem.

Pham Van Dong categorically denied the statement of Rusk in a discussion with comrade Gromyko that the USA at the present moment is in contact with the DRV

(about the contacts of the USA with the PRC on the Vietnam issue, about which Rusk spoke, Pham Van Dong said nothing).

I, stressed Pham Van Dong, did not say anything new today, I simply wanted to repeat that we must and will develop with the USSR in the future joint consultation on this question in the spirit of Yalta. It is necessary to coordinate joint efforts in the political and diplomatic struggle, display the maximum initiative in order to "place the enemy firmly against the wall." We are clearly aware, continued Pham Van Dong, that at the present stage it is necessary to achieve a close union for the political and diplomatic struggle. However, it will be extremely difficult for us to consider and assess at the same time all sides of the struggle.

Pham Van Dong declared that the Soviet Union renders Vietnam vast material assistance and political support so that we are forever grateful to the CPSU and the Soviet government.

Pham Van Dong declared, we think that without fail we will need to coordinate our efforts in this field in the future.

Touching further on that part of our information which spoke of the state of relations between the USSR and the USA, Pham Van Dong, stipulating that he was expressing "a personal opinion," declared that he would like to stress attention to the fact that, it was his conviction that possibly the Americans intended to use contacts between the USSR and the USA for the purposes of carrying out their own selfish designs, first of all on the Vietnamese question. Pham Van Dong declared, this is what explains the American desire to more or less preserve "a soft attitude [myagkie otnosheniya s] toward the Soviet Union." Pham Van Dong declared, in this connection we consider that statement of the Soviet comrades and in particular Cde. Gromyko's statements on this score, that is, let the USA not count on an improvement of Soviet-American relations as long as it continues the aggressive war against Vietnam, to be very correct. Pham Van Dong declared, we think that such an attitude by the Soviet Union [in] this problem is correct from the principled, moral, and political point of view and clearly expresses our feelings and thoughts. The Vietnamese comrades have repeatedly expressed themselves in these terms, being confident that only such an attitude can force the USA to think about it and change their position with respect to Vietnam, and also to reconsider their point of view on the most important world problems. Concluding, Pham Van Dong said, for we see in the form of the Soviet Union, the world's first socialist country, defending the revolutionary forces of the entire world in the face of the aggressive actions of the USA, vigorously raising its impartial [spravedlivyy] voice and expressing the aspirations of the peoples of the entire world. We are telling you all this based on a feeling of deep love, sympathy, and respect for the USSR, the CPSU, and the Soviet people.

For our part we spoke in the spirit of the conversations with the Vietnamese delegation in Crimea and the information passed to Pham Van Dong about Cde. Gromyko's meeting with Johnson and Rusk. I noted that we agree with the Vietnamese friends on the question of the necessity to closely study the maneuvers and political steps of the USA, including their "peace maneuvers". I noted that the fact that the peace demagoguery of the USA is exerting a definite negative effect on world public opinion could not fail to be taken into consideration. That is why it is necessary to expose the political maneuvers being undertaken by the USA in a timely manner, wage a consistent fight at both a political and diplomatic level as well as a practical one in order to keep the political initiative in our hands.

In the course of further conversation I asked Pham Van Dong to explain the report published in the newspaper Nhan Dan on 3 October of this year which said that on the night of 22-23 September in the province of Binh Dinh in a 12-minute battle the liberation forces of the NFOYuV [National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam]

killed up to 1000 American soldiers, a battalion of puppet troops, more than 80 aircraft, an ammunition depot, and much other military equipment. Pham Van Dong noted that the DRV leadership "still has not received internal reports" on this matter, and explained this success of the patriots as a well-prepared operation, adding that then it is nothing surprising.

Naturally, continued Pham Van Dong, the question of the level of the technical equipment of the liberation army and the significance of the military aid of the Soviet Union play a considerable role in this connection in the victories of the South Vietnamese people.

I asked what in the opinion of the Vietnamese comrades were the results of the trip to the DRV of the experts headed by General of the Army P. F. Batitsky which, being composed "of excellent specialists, experts in their fields, expressed very valuable opinions" on the question of strengthening the defensive capacity of the DRV. The views of the Soviet comrades, stressed Pham Van Dong, are especially valuable in terms of the fact that previously the Vietnamese comrades could not deal with such modern military equipment. Therefore it will be hard for the Vietnamese to quickly implement all the recommendations.

In concluding the discussion I expressed my satisfaction with the basic preparations carried out in the DRV for the 49th anniversary of the Great October Socialist Revolution, invited personally Pham Van Dong and other Vietnamese leaders to the reception being held by the embassy in connection with that momentous date. Pham Van Dong declared that he, comrade Ho Chi Minh and other Vietnamese leaders will definitely be at the reception.

Pham Van Dong expressed his satisfaction that in celebrating the anniversary of October in the DRV the cosmonaut Titov came and in connection with that spoke about the achievements of the USSR in the study of space. We answered that once the Soviet government and the Academy of Sciences of the USSR suggested to the Vietnamese comrades for consideration the joint study of space, in particular the organization of an observatory in the DRV. Pham Van Dong promised to look into the matter.

At the discussion assisted comrade Phan Kim, deputy director of the section for the USSR and countries of Eastern Europe of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, DRV, translator from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, DRV Vu Khoan and the translator of the embassy M. Isaev.

/I. Shcherbakov/

II.XI.66

No. 1190

[Note: Bold-faced section censored in AVP RF, f.079, op. 21, p. 51, d. 8, ll. 178-9, (pp 5-6 of document), but available in RGANI, f. 5, op. 58, d. 260, ll. 324-6.]