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Discussion between Chinese and Vietnamese delegations

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Summary:

Zhou Enlai recounts previous relations concerning Taiwan and the GMD, America and the Soviet Union within the context of China's recent history. He also emphasizes the need for Cambodian support.

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VIETNAMESE AND CHINESE DELEGATIONS

Beijing, 11 a.m., 11 April 1967

Zhou Enlai: ...So, we hold that the closer to victory your struggle is, the fiercer our struggle with the Soviet Union will be. Because when you are closer to victory, the US wants to exert more pressure in order to cease the war, so that they can have some parts of the South of Vietnam, not losing totally. At present France is critical of the US, but when you are closer to victory, France may come closer to the US, and other nationalist countries which want to compromise may come to speak like the US.

The Chinese have a saying that you really start a 100-mile journey after traveling the first 90 miles. Because traveling the last 10 miles is always as hard as traveling the first 90 miles. On a level path, you cannot see it clearly, but it's clearer to you when you climb the Himalayas. We believe that you will try your utmost for the final victory and we will encourage the world's people to support you. But the Soviet Union will give up.

Here, I want to tell you the truth: even Stalin did so once. In 1945, Japan surrendered. The US sponsored Jiang Jieshi. The Soviet Union was victorious but suffered great war damages. So the Yalta conference was one of compromises on the spheres of influence between the Soviets and the US after the Second World War. It was an erroneous conference. To consider compromise as a tactic is correct, but it is wrong to consider it as a policy. The two US atomic bombs shook Stalin, making him eager for a compromise. So he signed an agreement with Song Ziwen,^[1] recognizing [that] the US had the greatest influence in China, in exchange for the recognition of the US of the influence of the Soviet Union in the Northeast [of China] and in Xinjiang as well as in Mongolia.

Stalin sent a telegram to Comrade Mao Zedong, saying that the Chinese Communist party should cooperate with the Guomindang, [and] not start a civil war because this might lead to the annihilation of the Chinese nation. It was very clear that Stalin had felt threatened by the two US atomic bombs. At that time, Lu Dingyi^[2] was most supportive to this. Stalin also proposed that Comrade Mao Zedong should go to Chongqing for negotiations with Jiang. And shortly after that, there was a message of invitation conveyed to Comrade Mao from Jiang. At that time, we faced the fact that the Comintern no longer existed; neither did its role in issuing general instructions. But we thought that China was a part of the common movement, and we had to serve the general cause. Based on the thoughts of Comrade Mao Zedong, we held that a civil war could not annihilate the Chinese nation. We also could prove that the civil war was caused by the Guomindang, not by the Chinese Communist party. But the problem at that moment was whether Comrade Mao Zedong should go to Chongqing or not. If not, it would be said that the Chinese Communist party was to blame for the civil war. So, now you see, Khrushchev's thoughts have their roots. [Later] Khrushchev held that the Chinese killed the Indians, so the Sino-Indian border conflict was caused by China. Of course, Stalin didn't say so. Therefore, Comrade Mao Zedong decided to go to Chongqing. At that time, the whole CCP position was unanimous: messages of protest against negotiations were sent from all parts of the country to the central committee. But Comrade Mao, Comrade Wang Ruofei^[3] and I had already departed. At that time, Comrade Mao appointed Liu Shaoqi to act on his behalf. This was 22 years ago.

The results of our trip to Chongqing was that Jiang, with one hand, signed an agreement, and with the other hand started the civil war. After the signing, Comrade Mao returned to the liberated zone and a negotiating group consisting of three people, Zhang Zhizhong, [U.S. envoy George C.] Marshall, and Zhou Enlai remained in Chongqing. Many talks were conducted and many agreements were signed. But in

July 1946, the Guomindang launched large-scale attacks, first of all on the troops commanded by Comrade Chen Yi in the liberated zone of Northern Jiangsu. Jiang's troops occupied some cities, especially Zhangjiakou, Andong...Thinking that they could definitely win, they convened a meeting of the puppet National Assembly without consulting us. We, the negotiators, then returned to Yanan. In early 1947, Hu Zongnan[4] waged an attack on Yanan, and after less than six months, by July 1947, he occupied all cities and towns in this area. At that time, Comrade Mao commanded the guerrilla warfare in Shanbei and concurrently led the nationwide struggle. I was with Comrade Mao. A Soviet doctor,[5] who accompanied us at that time, conveyed a message from Stalin expecting Comrade Mao to come to Moscow. We didn't know why; we thought that it was for discussions on conducting the war. Due to the situation inside the country, however, Comrade Mao could not go. Shortly after that, we received the news that troops under the command of Comrade Liu Bocheng[6] had crossed the Yellow river and attacked the Dabie mountain area. This happened only one year after the civil war started. Before that, almost all liberated [from Japanese] cities and towns were lost to Jiang's troops. So, the majority of Jiang's troops were then busy in the newly occupied areas. When Liu Bocheng's troops attacked the Dabie mountain area, this seemed to be a strike at Jiang's heart. He was very much frightened and had to resort to a trick. Through Song Ziwen—the younger brother of Madame Song Qingling[7]—Jiang met with Federenko, who at that time was the Soviet chargé d'affaires, requesting Moscow to inform the CCP that he was willing to negotiate with a view to ceasing the war. At that time, although Jiang suffered defeats, he still enjoyed advantages. The Soviets conveyed his message to us and implied that we should go to negotiations. With regard to Jiang, we did not close the door to negotiations.

When I left Nanjing at the end of October 1946—Comrade Dong Biwu[8] left Nanjing in January 1947—I said it was the Guomindang that had closed the door to negotiations. We, however, saw that it would be a disadvantage if negotiations started in July 1947. Because, like you said, the balance of forces was not to our advantage. As a result, we continued to fight until 1949, the year we could ensure our victory in a decisive way. At that time, Jiang had retired and asked Li Zongren[9] to lead negotiations on his behalf. It was OK! We accepted negotiations and put forward some principles. Zhang Zhizhong[10] headed the GMD side. He arrived in Beijing and negotiations went on for 20 days. We proposed [a draft with] 8 chapters and 24 clauses. In the meantime, our armed forces were ready to cross the Yangtze. If the draft were signed, nothing would happen. If not, we crossed the river. The GMD delegation agreed to sign the draft, but when brought back to Nanjing, the draft was rejected by the American Ambassador. So Li retired and a million troops of ours crossed Yangtze. During the campaign, the armies under Comrade Lin Biao's command captured Wuhan.

There was an ironic development: when the negotiations were going on, Li Zongren moved his government to Guangzhou, [and] the Soviet Ambassador went with him. The American counterpart, however, stayed in Nanjing. When Nanjing was liberated, he was still there. He told a Chinese intellectual that if the Chinese Communist Government wanted diplomatic relations with the United States, then the US would not withdraw its Embassy from China, and would even be the first to recognize the new China and be willing to render China aid worth \$5 billion. The US ambassador wanted to buy us, but the liberation armies did not care, storming the [embassy] compound and he had to escape. Britain was sillier, sending a gunboat that fired at us. We terminated this boat.

Yet, at any rate, we still think that Stalin is a great Marxist-Leninist. After Shanghai was liberated, Liu Shaoqi went to Moscow. Stalin rendered self-criticism—in an implicit way—asking this question: “Did my telegram sent in August 1945 obstruct your war of liberation?” Liu Shaoqi answered “No.” and did not say [anything] further. Maybe Comrade Jiang Qing[11] was also at that meeting because she was in Moscow for medical treatment. When proposing a toast, Stalin even said: “Now I am quite old. My concern now is that after my death, these comrades—he pointed to

Voroshilov, Molotov and others—will be afraid of imperialism.” The reason Stalin said so was that his worry about atomic bombs had not cleared. But maybe, the atomic issue had found some solution as it was 1949 at that time—i.e., the Second World War had ended five years [earlier], the Chinese Revolution had ended—yet the US had not used its atomic weapons. What Stalin spoke of now has come true.

That is to support my opinion that the closer your war comes to victory, the more obstructive and treacherous the revisionist Soviets—who for sure cannot compare to Stalin—will be. Maybe I am overstating. It will be better if this prediction is not proven true. But I refer to past experiences in order to make you vigilant.

Vo Nguyen Giap: It is said that when the liberation armies reached the Yangtze, Stalin advised you not to move further southward. Is it true?

Zhou Enlai: Our armies attacked Dabie in mid-1947 and crossed the Yangtze in 1949. The Soviet Embassy accompanied Li Zongren's [Nationalist] government to Guangzhou. At that time, Jiang was in Ningbo. The US Embassy remained in Nanjing.

The US ambassador stayed in Nanjing because he understood that Jiang could not stop us. But the Soviets went to Guangzhou because Soviet intelligence had predicted that the liberation armies could not cross the Yangtze. According to them, if we did so, the US would intervene, and use atomic bombs. So they believed that the Yangtze in the end would be the dividing line: the North would be controlled by the CCP and the South by the GMD. The US thought otherwise: if they supported Jiang, the situation would not be different. If they intervened, they would have an additional burden at the time when the European issues had not been settled.

....

Zhou Enlai: Now I turn to the second issue. You have heard about the recent incident in Battambang. It is said that this was caused by the Red elements [in Cambodian forces]. However, maybe it was caused by the US-backed forces with the aim of dividing our forces.[\[12\]](#)

Pham Van Dong: Perhaps. This area is under the influence of the Son Ngoc Thanh[\[13\]](#) group which came from Thailand.

Chen Yi: Not under the influence of the Cambodian Party?

Pham Van Dong: Concerning the Cambodian Party, we cannot say whether they played any role [in this incident] or not.

Zhou Enlai: Is there any suspicion that the weapons we sent to you through Cambodia were distributed to Chinese [living in Cambodia] by the Cambodian Party?

Pham Van Dong: No, maybe these are old weapons. But we are not sure. When we return to Hanoi, we will ask and then inform you about it.

Zhou Enlai: On Sept. 30th, Douc Rasy, Cambodian vice premier, said that Lon Nol might reform his cabinet. Sihanouk once said that Lon Nol should invite some red elements into his cabinet, according to which Chau Seng[\[14\]](#) will be appointed vice premier in charge of financial affairs, So Nem[\[15\]](#) will replace Douc Rasy and be minister of planning. Maybe So Nem is a real leftist, so he was rejected. Chau Seng belongs to Sihanouk's faction. Yet, he is said to be leftist. He also said that the Lon

Nol cabinet should be reformed. He suggested a list of nominees but Lon Nol disagreed. This news was disclosed by Meyer.^[16] If the Lon Nol cabinet collapses, Sihanouk will invite Pen Nouth,^[17] who is neutral to form a government.

On 4 April 1967, the Cambodian National Assembly held an urgent session. A resolution giving Sihanouk special powers passed after heated debates. Some people held a demonstration in front of the Royal Palace. They were then invited inside the Palace and were received by the Queen. Sihanouk announced the resolution of the National Assembly and said that he was determined to be neutral, against both rightists and leftists. Our embassy there came to the conclusion that he was mainly against the leftists. But why did he appoint Pen Nouth to set up the government? There are some contradictions here. Later, the Queen called on the people to unite against the enemy. In Kamdan province, there were leaflets against Khimsamthan who might be leftist. And in Kompong Chom and Stungstreng, there were demonstrations supporting Sihanouk's policy against the leftists.

In short, the situation is still changing after the Battambang incident. In Cambodia, there are two cabinets: the official and the shadow one. The shadow cabinet wrote: "Our country is under a threat. The Vietminh is opening a front in Battambang. We have to deal with the enemy on two fronts: against the liberal Khmers and against the Red elements. In the past, the Cambodian Government had to fight only the US imperialists and now the Communist imperialists as well. Our attitude towards the Communists is always correct. So why do they attack us now?" Why does Cambodia have such an attitude towards the NLF? The reasons as I see it are: the NLF tries to pull the US troops to the Cambodian border in order to cause Cambodian troops to shoot at them, thus getting Cambodia involved in the war. The NLF intentionally ordered more than 2,000 people to come to Cambodia as refugees. There are 7 medical doctors operating among these people, rendering medical care and influencing the Cambodians. Lon Nol was criticized by the leftists and he was also unhappy. Lon Nol said that because of the serious situation, he suspended helping the NLF. Yet, he did not mention the weapons that had arrived in Cambodia. He also suspended the transportation of rice. In addition, Lon Nol ordered a stricter control over border smuggling to threaten the NLF. This, however, was for show only, [and did] not have important substance.

Vo Nguyen Giap: Some cases occurred recently in the border areas between South Vietnam and Cambodia. These include: an attack by an American battalion across the border. Forces from our Liberation Army helped units of the Cambodian armed forces to fight back. The American battalion had to withdraw. During the US Junction City Campaign, Vietnamese civilians and troops evacuated to Cambodia.

Pham Van Dong: Some Vietnamese medical doctors came there to treat [Cambodian] people. However, we have to be very careful with this.

Zhou Enlai: That's correct. Because misunderstanding can originate from small matters. According to our sources, representatives of the NLF, with directives from the Front, met with representatives of the "people's" faction in Cambodia [Ed. note: the Khmer Rouge, led by Pol Pot] and exchanged opinions with them on the situation in Cambodia. Disagreements are mostly on policies to deal with Lon Nol. We wish to win the sympathy of Lon Nol, but they oppose him. Struggle can be intensified, but it is not necessary to conduct armed struggle in Cambodia. At this moment, Vietnam's victory is the first priority. If the Vietnam-Cambodian border areas are blockaded, armed forces in South Vietnam will be facing difficulties, [and] then the Cambodian revolutionary forces will not proceed. The struggle of Vietnam is in the common interest of the Indochinese and Southeast Asian peoples, and the victory of this struggle is of a decisive nature. In this situation, the Cambodian struggle, even an armed struggle, has limited objectives. Therefore even in case victories are gained, they are also limited, and indecisive in nature, not to mention that they are easily lost. So on this matter, one has to know how to place the overall interest above the

limited ones. However, if the struggle is initiated by the people themselves, the story will be different. In that case, the struggle is irresistible, because the people will naturally stand up against oppression. They will have to undergo repression, but will also learn lessons. The job of a revolutionary party is to lead the struggle. In sum, in the event that the struggle of the South Vietnamese people succeeds, there is hope for the struggle in Cambodia. This logic should be made clear to the “people’s” faction in Cambodia.

Pham Van Dong: We have often tried to persuade them. And we have to continue to do so.

Zhou Enlai: That’s correct, as each party has its independence.

Vo Nguyen Giap: But before they agreed with us.

Pham Van Dong: We still do not know fully to what extent the struggle is organized, and to what extent it is provoked by the enemy.

Vo Nguyen Giap: Our comrades in the South have sent people to talk with the “people’s” faction.

Pham Van Dong: The information that the NLF contacted the “people’s” faction is correct because we asked COSVN [Central Office for South Vietnam] to contact directly the faction.

Zhou Enlai: Comrade Nguyen Thuong^[18] said that it was necessary to develop good relations with Cambodia. I see two possibilities. One, Sihanouk uses this situation to exert pressure on Cambodian revolutionary forces with a view to balancing the left and the right forces. This is the maneuver that he usually resorts to. Two, to show his policy of neutrality: all forces in Cambodia, whether they are pro-Chinese and pro-Vietnamese or pro-US, are controlled by him. In general, as I told you before, we have to win his sympathy, and at the same time, be ready for delivering goods through Cambodia when the situation permits. Frequent contacts with the Chinese General Staff and Ministry of Transportation and Communication, therefore should be maintained.

^[1] Song Ziwen (T.V. Soong) was Jiang Jieshi’s brother-in-law and Nationalist China’s prime minister and foreign minister.

^[2] Lu Dingyi was an alternate member of the CCP Politburo, a member of the CCP Central Secretariat, head of the Propaganda Department of the CCP CC, and vice premier of the PRC until his purge early in 1966.

^[3] Wang Ruofei was a CCP Politburo member who died in a plane crash in 1946.

^[4] Hu Zongnan was one of the leading GMD generals.

^[5] A.Y. Orlov (?-1949), also known as Zhelepin, also known as Terebin, Soviet military intelligence agent who served as liaison with the CCP leadership in Yanan and later in northern Shanxi and Hebei.

^[6] Liu Bocheng was one of the most important CCP military commanders during the Chinese civil war from 1946 to 1949.

^[7] Song Qingling (Soong Chingling) was Sun Yat-sen’s wife and Jiang Jieshi’s sister-in-law. She was the only pro-Communist member of the Song family.

^[8] In the 1940s, Dong Biwu was a CCP Politburo member and, second to Zhou Enlai, deputy secretary of the CCP’s Southern Bureau.

^[9] Li Zongren was acting president of the Chinese Nationalist government in 1949 after Jiang Jieshi’s resignation in January that year.

[10] Zhang Zhizhong was head of the delegation representing the Nationalist Government in peace negotiations with the CCP in spring 1949.

[11] Mao Zedong's third wife, who was in Moscow for medical treatment in the summer of 1949.

[12] A reference to the early 1967 "Samlaut uprising" in western Battambang province, which was directed against then provincial governor Lon Nol's collection of rice at prices far below market value.

[13] Leader of Cambodia's small nationalist movement in the 1930s, held power briefly as Prime Minister August-October 1945, opposed Prince Sihanouk in the 1960s, prime minister again under Lon Nol from March to October 1972.

[14] Cambodian leftist politician.

[15] Son Ngoc Minh (Achar Mean) (1920-72), a Cambodian Buddhist monk who composed his pseudonym from his two heroes Son Ngoc Thanh and Ho Chi Minh when he joined the struggle against the French. Chairman of the Khmer Issarak Front in the 1950s. After the 1954 Geneva Agreements, he and 500 other Cambodians went into exile in North Vietnam. Many of them returned to fight with the Khmer Rouge in 1971-72, and disappeared shortly thereafter. Rumors in Vietnam have it that Son Ngoc Minh was poisoned to death by Ieng Sary in Beijing.

[16] Charles Meyer, a close adviser of Sihanouk.

[17] Pen Nouth (1906-?) was Sihanouk's closest political adviser, serving as prime minister 1948-49, 1952-55, 1958, 1961-62, and 1967-69. He also headed the Royal Government of National Union, set up in Beijing in May 1970, and greeted Sihanouk when he returned to Cambodia in 1975.

[18] Nguyen Thuong, career diplomat and lawyer who, after having served as ambassador to Guinea, became DRV representative to Cambodia in 1966, and ambassador when the DRV recognized Cambodia in August 1967. Served until 1975 (from 1970 with Sihanouk's GRUNK government). Later President of Vietnam's Association of Lawyers (until 1989).