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Record of Conversation between Soviet Ambassador to China S. V. Chervonenko and Chinese Prime Minister Zhou Enlai on 13 April 1965 (excerpt)

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Summary:

Zhou Enlai, in a conversation with Soviet Ambassador to the PRC, S. V. Chervonenko, draws parallels between the Algerian War for independence and the struggle of the Vietnamese people. Zhou Enlai recounts his conversation with Algerian leader Ben Bella about the Vietnam War.

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RECORD OF CONVERSATION

of Ambassador of the USSR in the PRC Chervonenko S.V.

with the Premier of the State Council of the PRC, Zhou Enlai

On 13 April 1965 Premier of the State Council of the PRC Zhou Enlai invited Ambassador of the USSR in the PRC c[omrade] Chervonenko S.V. to a dinner in connection with the forthcoming departure of the Ambassador for the motherland. Zhou Enlai, on his own initiative, started a conversation, which continued for over two hours. [...]

[Zhou Enlai:]

In some countries, where I visited, the intensity of struggle in Vietnam, the heroism and decisiveness of the Vietnamese people in the struggle, are not clearly appreciated. Therefore we consider it useful to make visits, which offer an opportunity to talk about these events, to tell about events.

Let's take Algiers, for example. After all, the Algerians themselves came to a victory as a result of a prolonged struggle against the French aggressors. Algerians are also concerned about the struggle of the Vietnamese people against American imperialism, they allow the thought that the Americans could suppress the struggle of the Vietnamese people. The Algerians' concern is also caused by the fact that they allow the thought that the [North] Vietnamese could opt for talks in the face of bombardment. When we were in Algiers we told the Algerians that the situation in South Vietnam now is the same as it once was in Algiers. After all, the Algerians also fought against an 800,000 strong army of the French colonialists, but were not intimidated by them. But in Vietnam the population is higher than in Algiers. In South Vietnam alone the population is 14 million, and in North Vietnam - 17 million. Thus, Vietnam's population on the whole exceeds 30 million people. To this one must add that the Vietnamese are fully determined to struggle against the aggression. After our explanation the Algerians began to understand more clearly the situation in Vietnam.

We also informed the Algerians, he continued, that now in South Vietnam the numbers of regular and semi-regular armies on the whole do not exceed 500,000 people. And there are about 30 thousand American soldiers there now. When I spoke to Ben Bella I told him that their number is only slightly higher than 20 thousand. The South Vietnamese hold the American aggressors in disdain, they will continue the struggle, even if new [U.S.] forces arrive in South Vietnam.

Recently President Ho Chi Minh said that even if there were several tens ["hundreds"? sic] of thousands of American soldiers in South Vietnam, the struggle would have to be continued, and the war brought to the end.

We also gave another example. During the war in Algiers, some members of the provisional government stood for compromise, for negotiations, but the majority in the leadership spoke for resistance, for taking the struggle to the end. And then, as a

result of that part of the leadership prevailing, after 7 years of war Algerians entered into negotiations and won a victory. If during the first period of the war, those would prevail in Algiers, who stood for agreement-making [soglashatelstvo], for compromise, then the victory would not have been achieved. The victory in Algiers was achieved precisely thanks to the present Algerian leadership. This question is absolutely clear.

When I was in Algiers last time, Ben Bella himself talked about this. This time I told him that South Vietnam is at the stage of struggle, in which the Algerian people were several years ago. I suggested that Ben Bella think about the following question: before, they were under the yoke of the French aggressors; the Vietnamese people were also under the yoke of the French aggressors, and now they are under the yoke of American aggressors. How can the Vietnamese people not take the struggle against American aggressors to a victorious end? We also told the Algerians that, as the Vietnamese comrades think, if one is to opt for a compromise now, this would result in more victims than if one were to continue the struggle to the end. Once Ben Bella heard my explanations, he understood the situation in Vietnam and came to a conclusion that if the Vietnamese seized ceased fire and entered into negotiations, this would result in more victims in South Vietnam and South Vietnam would not achieve its independence.

Then Ben Bella said that he feels the error of his participation in the [September 1961] Belgrade conference of non-aligned countries. In connection with this, when the appeal of the 17 non-aligned countries reached President Ben Bella, he did not put his signature under it.