

October 9, 1965

Discussion between Zhou Enlai and Pham Van Dong

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Summary:

Zhou Enlai addresses Pham Van Dong, not supporting the idea of Soviet volunteers entering Vietnam and discussing Cambodian involvement in the war.

Original Language:

Chinese

Contents:

Translation - English

ZHOU ENLAI AND PHAM VAN DONG

Beijing, 4 p.m. 9 October 1965[1]

Zhou Enlai: ...During the time Khrushchev was in power, the Soviets could not divide us because Khrushchev did not help you much. The Soviets are now assisting you. But their help is not sincere. The US likes this very much. I want to tell you my opinion. It will be better without the Soviet aid. This may be an ultra leftist opinion. Yet, it is mine, not the CCP Central Committee's.

...Now, the problem of international volunteers going to Vietnam is very complicated. But as you have mentioned this problem we will discuss it and then you can make your decision.

As you have asked for my opinion, I would like to tell you the following: I do not support the idea of Soviet volunteers going to Vietnam, nor [do I support] Soviet aid to Vietnam. I think it will be better without it. It is my own opinion, not the opinion of the Party Central Committee. Comrades Peng Zhen and Luo Ruiqing[2] who are present here today also agree with me.

[As to] Vietnam, we always want to help. In our mind, our thoughts, we never think of selling out Vietnam. But we are always afraid of the revisionists standing between us. [3]

Zhou Enlai: ...The war has been expanded to North Vietnam. It is, therefore, impossible for Laos and Cambodia not to get involved. Sihanouk understands it. When we were on a sightseeing tour on the Yangtze, I asked him how he would deal with the situation and whether he needed weapons. At present, China has provided Cambodia with 28,000 pieces of weapons. Sihanouk told me that this amount was enough to equip Cambodian regular and provincial forces and that all US weapons have been replaced.

I also asked him whether he needed more weapons. Sihanouk replied that because he could not afford to increase the number of troops, the weapons were enough. He only asked for anti-aircraft artillery and anti-tank weapons.

This is what he replied to my questions about weapons. He also added that if war broke out, he would leave Phnom Penh for the countryside where he had already built up bases. Last year, President Liu [Shaoqi] told Sihanouk: "large-scale fighting in your country is not equal to the [fighting] at our border." If the US launches attacks along the Chinese border, China will draw its forces there, thus reducing the burden for Cambodia. Sihanouk now understands and prepares to leave for the countryside and to regain the urban areas whenever good conditions prevail. That is what he thinks. Yet, whether his cadres can carry out this policy is a different thing.

These changes in the situation show that Sihanouk has been prepared to act in case of an invasion by the US. At present, Sihanouk strongly supports the NLF because he knows that the more you fight the US the fewer difficulties there will be for the Cambodians. In addition, Sihanouk understands that he needs China. But at the same time, Sihanouk does not want to take sides because he is afraid of losing the support of France, losing his neutral position. At least, what he says shows that he seems to think of and understand the logic of the war: if the US expands the war to North Vietnam, it will be spread all over Indochina.[4]

[1] Pham Van Dong talked with Zhou Enlai in Beijing before he went on to visit Moscow. This was the third meeting of the Vietnamese delegation in Beijing.

[2] Luo Ruiqing was a member of the CCP Central Secretariat and chief of staff of the PLA until he was purged in December 1965.

[3] In talks held in Guangdong province, 8 November 1965, Zhou told Ho Chi Minh that "The purpose of Soviet aid to Vietnam [is]: (a) to isolate China. (b) to improve Soviet-US relations, (c) to conduct subversive activities as well as acts of sabotage, make problems in China, and maybe also in Vietnam."

[4] This conversation should be seen in the light of the triangular relationship between the Chinese, Vietnamese, and Cambodian communist parties. Pol Pot (1923-98), who had become secretary general of the Workers Party of Kampuchea in 1963 (the party later changed name to the Communist Party of Kampuchea, and was generally known as Khmer Rouge), had arrived in Hanoi in June 1965 and went on to Beijing in late 1965. In both countries he met prominent party leaders. Serious disagreements developed between him and Le Duan in Hanoi: see Thomas Engelbert and Christopher E. Goscha, *Falling Out Of Touch: A Study on Vietnamese Communist Policy towards an Emerging Cambodian Communist Movement, 1930-1975* (Clayton, Victoria, Australia: Monash University, 1995); and also David Chandler, *Brother Number One: A Political Biography of Pol Pot* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1992), pp. 73-77. Pol Pot wanted already at this stage to take up armed fighting in Cambodia, but at this juncture both the Vietnamese and Chinese were keen to avoid any struggle against Sihanouk. They preferred to see Sihanouk continue his neutralist policy, and if the US were to intervene in Cambodia, they hoped that Sihanouk and the Cambodian communists would join forces.