

**May 12, 1965**

**Record of Conversation between Premier Zhou and  
Nguyễn Minh Phương**

**Citation:**

"Record of Conversation between Premier Zhou and Nguyễn Minh Phương", May 12, 1965, Wilson Center Digital Archive, PRC FMA 106-01515-03, 23-28. Translated by Stephen Mercado. <https://digitalarchive.umd.edu/document/165484>

**Summary:**

Zhou Enlai and Nguyen Minh Phuong discuss the possibility of convening an international conference on Cambodia.

**Credits:**

This document was made possible with support from Henry Luce Foundation

**Original Language:**

Chinese

**Contents:**

Translation - English

Secret Document 396

Foreign Ministry File

Record of Conversation Between Premier Zhou and Nguyen Minh Phuong  
(Premier has yet to review or approve)

Time: 3 o'clock p.m., 12 May [1965]

Place: Lounge, Beijing Workers Stadium

Premier Zhou said that the Soviet Union recently asked for our view regarding the international conference on Cambodia, saying that Sihanouk had changed his attitude and that there was difficulty in convening the conference. Britain urged them to reply and asked us how to respond. We intend to cable Ambassador Zhu Qiwen and ask him to inform the Vietnamese comrades of the situation and our view, because the Soviet Union will notify the Vietnamese comrades about this situation at the same time.

Our view is:

First, Cambodia's attitude has not changed. It is the situation that has moved forward. The Soviet Union says that Cambodia's attitude has changed, which is not correct. Two years ago, Sihanouk proposed convening an international conference to guarantee Cambodia's neutrality and territorial integrity. If it had been convened at that time, the issue of representation for the Saigon government in south Vietnam would not have been a major one. Now, after two years, the objective situation has changed. The Saigon government has completely turned into a puppet shielded by the United States. Particularly since Ngo Dinh Diem and his younger brother died, the United States does as it pleases. The National Front for the Liberation of Southern Vietnam's statement of 22 March stated that the Saigon regime is a puppet of the United States and cannot represent south Vietnam. The National Liberation Front alone is the sole legal representative of the people of south Vietnam. Relations between south Vietnam and Cambodia provides this point. South Vietnam's border dispute with Cambodia and the report of the United Nations investigation team both heed what the United States says.

Sihanouk said in Indonesia that the Vietnam bogus regime cannot represent south Vietnam. On 24 April, after returning to Cambodia, he again reaffirmed this point. Sihanouk said that it fully accords with the National Front for the Liberation of Southern Vietnam's statement of 22 March, the four-point position that Prime Minister Pham Van Dong reported in the National Assembly, and the Vietnamese-Soviet joint communique.

Second, as for China's attitude regarding the international conference on Cambodia, we support the three-point position that Sihanouk has issued, considering this to be an international conference on Cambodia, that it should be based on the scope of the 1954 Geneva Conference, through the participation of 14 countries, because the conference that time concerned the issue of Laos.

The international conference to guarantee Cambodia's neutrality and territorial integrity should not involve the Vietnam issue. It should be limited to discussion of the Cambodia issue.

We think that the Saigon bogus regime has no right to participate in the international conference on Cambodia. Therefore, on 2 May the Chinese Government issued a statement in support of the Cambodian government's three-point position and added

a point: the National Front for the Liberation of Southern Vietnam is the sole legal representative of south Vietnam. We are still now continuing to support this position. Following the Chinese Government's statement, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam has also cabled Cambodia its support of its three-point position.

Third, we think that the Soviet Union, having sought our view, should follow the position of Sihanouk and Cambodia's government in handling the matter, because Cambodia is the country involved. It should resemble the Vietnamese-Soviet joint communique, which stated that the National Front for the Liberation of Southern Vietnam is south Vietnam's sole legal representative, that it must be invited to participate in the conference, and only it has the decisive right to speak. Therefore, if Britain's government does not approve the two chairmen jointly issuing an invitation to the National Liberation Front, this will show that Britain follows the United States' policy of war. If the United States refuses to participate in the conference, it will show that it is continuing to carry out a policy of aggression and would show that it lacks sincerity. If the international conference to guarantee Cambodia neutrality and territorial integrity is unable to convene, the responsibility will not be with we socialist countries but with the United States and even Britain.

Fourth, would the conference being unable to convene not affect Cambodia's neutral status? Would Cambodia's neutrality not be able to obtain a guarantee? I think that Sihanouk's speech and the Cambodian government's three-point position have already answered this question.

The Cambodian government's not recognizing the Saigon government as the representative of south Vietnam is reasonable. Even if the Saigon government participated in the conference, it cannot represent south Vietnam. Its guarantee is unreliable. Only by inviting the National Front for the Liberation of Southern Vietnam to participate in the conference can Cambodia's neutrality and territorial integrity be guaranteed.

Sihanouk in his speech said that, of the nine countries, there is only a need for six countries, other than Cambodia, to guarantee its neutrality and territorial integrity. The United States and the Saigon government need not participate. Sihanouk's attitude is firm. He believes in the guarantee of the six countries and does not believe in the United States and the Saigon government. Why is that? Seven countries signed the 1954 Geneva Accords; the United States and the Saigon government did not sign it. This is one aspect. The other one is that, even if the Saigon government were allowed to participate, it is not reliable. It would be better not to have it participate. At the same time, US Secretary of State [Dean] Rusk recently sent a letter to Cambodia stating that the United States was willing to participate in the international conference to guarantee Cambodia's neutrality and territorial integrity. If unable to participate, the United States is still willing to guarantee Cambodia's neutrality and territorial integrity, even though the United States has already severed relations with Cambodia. Therefore, whether or not the international conference to guarantee Cambodia's neutrality and territorial integrity convenes is not a major issue. The key point is using the international conference on Cambodia is to test whether or not the United States is sincere. If it has the Saigon government participate in order to convene the international conference on Cambodia, it shows that the United States lacks sincerity. Doing so, on the contrary, would restore Saigon's lost legal status, which would be very disadvantageous to us. We are very clear in regard to this issue. The Soviet Union would feel that convening the conference would be difficult, if this issue were raised.

We have still not replied to the Soviet Union on this issue or sought your views and those of Vietnam's government.

Nguyen Minh Phuong said that he would report back Premier Zhou's views.

Premier Zhou asked Nguyen Minh Phuong for his personal views. Nguyen said that he personally considered this issue to be utterly clear and Sihanouk's position to be completely clear-cut.

Premier Zhou said, right, how can one recognize the Saigon government as representing south Vietnam? Would it not be a total negation of our efforts over the past several months? Could it possibly be that the National Front for the Liberation of Southern Vietnam's statement of 22 March is ineffective? Could it possibly be that Prime Minister Pham Van Dong's four-point position is ineffective? Could it possibly be that the Vietnam National Assembly's appeal is ineffective? Could it be that our support is bogus? Could it possibly be that the Vietnamese-Soviet joint communique is bogus? How could we cancel the promises that we have made? We are now working on Algeria. I have spoken with [Ahmed] Ben Bella several times. After I left, Ben Bella has several times sought out your representative in Algeria and said that the south Vietnam issue must be resolved on the basis of the guiding principle of the National Front for the Liberation of Southern Vietnam: the foreign troops must withdraw from south Vietnam. Sihanouk and Ben Bella, they are nationalists. They have already done so. How could we retreat? Would this not be a betrayal?

Nguyen Minh Phuong said that this is primarily Cambodia's issue and that their views play the decisive role.

Premier Zhou said that Cambodia has put forth such a position, that we should firmly support it, and we should not retreat. If Cambodia does not refer to the National Front for the Liberation of Southern Vietnam as the sole legal representative of the people of south Vietnam, our we also should urge it to do so. How could we retreat?

Nguyen Minh Phuong said that Sihanouk's not recognizing the Saigon government as south Vietnam's representative is quite correct. Sihanouk recently twice publicly declared support for us, which shows that he has made progress. As Premier Zhou has just said, he will report back.

Copies: Political Bureau Standing Committee, Peng Zhen, Chen Yi, He Long, [Lu] Dingyi, Kang Sheng, [Nie] Rongzhen, [Luo] Ruiqing, [Yang] Shangkun, Confidential Affairs Bureau (2), Office of Foreign Affairs (6), Investigation Department (1), Ministry of National Defense(7), Military Intelligence (2), Third Department (2), [Wu] Lengxi, [Zhu] Muzhi

Liu, Zhang, Luo, Ji, Qiao, Han, Liu, Gong, Dong, General Office (3), Research Department, First Asian Affairs Department, Soviet Affairs Department, Second Asian Affairs Department, West European Affairs Department, Asian and African Affairs Department, American and Australian Affairs Department, African Affairs Department, International Organizations and Conferences Department, Information Department, Archive, Ambassador, 3 file copies, 67 copies printed in total

Received 12 May 1965      Submitted for printing 12 May 1965