

June 19, 1968 Discussion between Zhou Enlai and Pham Hung

Citation:

"Discussion between Zhou Enlai and Pham Hung," June 19, 1968, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, CWIHP Working Paper 22, "77 Conversations."
<http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/112178>

Summary:

Zhou Enlai discusses the role of China and Vietnam in the Cambodian revolution.

Original Language:

Chinese

Contents:

- English Translation

ZHOU ENLAI AND PHAM HUNG ^[1]

Beijing, 19 June 1968

Zhou Enlai: I would like to mention that I do not know how the Khmer Communists solve the class contradictions between them and the reactionary forces in Cambodia. The Khmer Communist Party conducted an armed struggle in the area bordering with Vietnam. The Khmer government oppresses them and also does not want the supply line of rice to the Vietnamese revolutionary forces to go via Cambodia. Thus, the Vietnamese comrades have to face difficulties.

It is said that weapons that China sent to Vietnamese comrades once fell into the hands of Khmer Communists and Sihanouk was not happy with that. Did it really happen, or did Khmer Communists seize Chinese weapons that the Khmer government's armed forces already possessed?

Have you met Khmer Communists when you were traveling via Cambodia? Comrade Son Ngoc Minh ^[2] does not have any contacts with his comrades inside Cambodia, does he? We do not want the Chinese Embassy in Cambodia to have any relations with the Khmer Communist Party because the problem will be too complicated.

Recently, our embassy in Cambodia reported that the Khmer Communist Party complained that Vietnamese comrades did not supply them with weapons when the opportunity had been ripe for an armed struggle. It will be good if the opportunity arrives. But if it does not and an armed struggle starts anyhow, it will not be good.

We have told Comrade Pham Van Dong and later President Ho that we did not have direct relations with the Khmer comrades. It will be easier if Vietnamese comrades can directly exchange opinions with them. Comrade Pham Van Dong said that we should not interfere in the internal affairs of the Khmer Communist Party. However, I hear them complain that Vietnamese comrades have a chauvinist attitude, do not want to help, to discuss with them, or give them weapons. This matter is very complicated. Even when you have weapons, it is still difficult to give them. Is it because of Vietnamese cadres at the lower levels? Do they have improper attitudes in dealing with Khmer comrades, thus causing misunderstandings? Maybe you should educate Vietnamese troops passing through Cambodia to be more attentive to the question of relations with the Khmer Communist Party.

Of course not all your troops are involved in these contacts. But you should let officers in charge of political affairs at some levels know about this issue and ask them to show attitudes of equality, [and] to clearly explain the policy of the Vietnamese Party. You should make them understand the overall context, be aware of the greater task of defeating the US. Defeating the US will create favorable conditions for the Cambodian revolution. In short, you should make them understand the international approach and understand that one cannot fight many enemies at the same time.

I propose that you report this to President Ho and the Central Committee and ask for permission to inform certain officers in charge of political affairs of this issue in order to avoid trouble. We have to face a situation where Cambodians may ask for weapons when Vietnamese troops are marching through Cambodia. Will you give them weapons? If you do, Sihanouk will be displeased. If you do not, what will the revolutionary people in Cambodia think?

The problem is very complicated. The Cambodian comrades wish to develop the armed struggle. Sihanouk will oppress them, and you can no longer go through Cambodia. And if Sihanouk oppresses the Cambodian Communists, China can no longer provide Cambodia with weapons.

If the whole of Indochina joins the efforts to drive the US out of Vietnam, then the Laotian

and Cambodian revolutions will be successful, although not as fast as expected. As our cadres in the [Chinese] Embassy in Cambodia are of low rank, we do not want them to contact the Cambodian Communists. So I propose that you should consider the situation and if it is suitable, you should invite Cambodian comrades to Tay Ninh or Tay Nguyen [in the Central highlands] to discuss how to join efforts to fight the Americans first and then fight the reactionary forces in Cambodia. You should also see whether this will be more beneficial or it will be better if each party conducts the struggle in its own way.

I heard from Comrade Pham Van Dong that the present General Secretary of the Khmer Communist Party graduated from France and used to travel to Hanoi.

[1] The Vietnamese delegation included Pham Hung, Ba Long, Ngo Minh Loan, and Tran Van Quang. Pham Hung (1912-88), member of the VWP politburo from 1957, from 1967 directed the war in the South as secretary of the Central Office for South Vietnam (COSVN) and as political commissar of the People's Liberation Armed Forces (PLAF). Deputy Premier from 1976 and Prime Minister of SRV from June 1987 until his death in 1988. Ba Long (alias Le Trong Tan, Le Trong To) received military training in China and the Soviet Union and served as a PAVN divisional commander during the First Indochina War. Director of the Army War College 1954-60, Deputy Chief of Staff 1961-62. Went south to serve as PLAF Deputy Commander 1964-69, and took up several essential posts during the campaigns in South and Central Vietnam and Laos 1970-75, most notably as Deputy Commander of the Ho Chi Minh Campaign in April 1975. Ba Long succeeded Van Tien Dung as PAVN Chief of Staff when the latter became minister 1978-80. Tran Van Quang (alias Tran Thuc Kinh; 1917-), veteran of the 1945 revolution in north central Vietnam, member of the VWP CC 1960-76. Deputy Chief of the PAVN General Staff 1959-61, and played a crucial role in the COSVN during the first half of the 1960s. Later held important commands in central Vietnam while also serving as a member of the Central Military Committee in Hanoi. Again Deputy Chief of the General Staff 1974-77, and commanded the Vietnamese forces in Laos 1978-81. In 1992 elected President of the Vietnam War Veterans' Association.

[2] Cambodian Communist leader who for many years stayed in exile in Hanoi. He lost touch with party developments inside Cambodia when Pol Pot rose to power in the Cambodian Communist Party during 1960-63. See also note 175.