

May 11, 1970 Discussion between Mao Zedong and Le Duan

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Summary:

Mao Zedong advises Le Duan not to fear the United States.

Original Language:

Chinese

Contents:

- English Translation

MAO ZEDONG AND LE DUAN^[1]

Beijing, the Great Hall of the People, 6:45-8:15 p.m., 11 May 1970

Mao Zedong: When did I meet you the last time?

Le Duan: In 1964. We see that Chairman Mao is in good health, and we all feel excited. This time Chairman Mao finds the time to meet us, we are very happy. At present, the situation in Vietnam and in Indo-China is complicated, and there exist some difficulties.

Mao Zedong: Every country is facing some difficulty. The Soviet Union has its [difficulty], and the United States has its [difficulty].

Le Duan: We are very much in need of getting Chairman Mao's instructions. If our Central Committee and Politburo learn that Chairman Mao has given instructions about how we should do our job, they will certainly be very happy.

Mao Zedong: You have done a very good job, and you are doing better and better.

Le Duan: We have tried our best to do our job. We have been able to do a good job because we have followed the three instructions Chairman Mao gave us in the past: first, no fear, we should not fear the enemy; second, we should break up the enemy one piece after another; third, we should fight a prolonged war.

Mao Zedong: Yes, a prolonged war. You should prepare to fight a prolonged war, but isn't it better if the war is shortened?

Who fears whom? Is it you, the Vietnamese, Cambodians, and the people in Southeast Asia, who fear the U.S. imperialists? Or is it the U.S. imperialists who fear you? This is a question which deserves consideration and study. It is a great power which fears a small country—when the grass bends as the wind blows, the great power will be in panic. It is true that during the Gulf of Tonkin Incident in 1964 you hit the U.S. imperialists, but it was not your intention to fight a war with the U.S. Navy. In actuality, you did not really hit it [the U.S. naval ship], but they themselves became nervous, saying that Vietnam's torpedo boats were coming and began opening fire. At the end, even the Americans themselves did not know if there had been a genuine [Vietnamese torpedo attack] or not. The journalists in various places of the United States believed that there had never been [such an attack], and that it was a false alarm. Since the war had already begun, there was no other choice but to fight it. The munition makers and dealers are benefiting from it.

American presidents have had much less sleep every night [since then]. Nixon says that he uses his main energy in dealing with Vietnam.

Now there is another person, Prince Sihanouk. He is not an easy person to deal with either. When you offend him, he will come out to scold you.^[2]

Some of our embassies, in my opinion, need to be rectified. Great-power chauvinism exists in some of the Chinese embassies. They only see the shortcomings of the others, paying no attention to the interests of the whole. Who was the last [Chinese] ambassador to Vietnam?

Zhou Enlai: Zhu Qiwen.^[3]

Mao Zedong: Zhu Qiwen had very bad relations with you. As a matter of fact, Zhu Qiwen was a member of the Guomindang, and he planned to escape abroad. We did not know that he was a Guomindang member. Since you were coping with the Guomindang, how could he fail to make trouble for you? We did not know at that time, but we were not happy when we saw those telegrams [he sent back].

Le Duan: We Vietnamese people keep Chairman Mao's great goodness always in our mind. During the nine years of the war of resistance against the French, if there had not been the support from the Chinese Communist Party and Chairman Mao, it would have been impossible for us to win the victory. Why are we in a position to persist in fighting a prolonged war, especially in fighting a prolonged war in the South? Why dare we fight a prolonged war? This is mainly because we have been dependent upon Chairman Mao's works.

Mao Zedong: This is not necessarily true.

Le Duan: Of course this is true. We also need to apply [Chairman Mao's teachings] to Vietnam's practical situation.

Mao Zedong: You have had your own creations. How can one say that you do not have your own creation and experience? Ngo Dinh Diem murdered 160,000 [of your people]. This was reported to me, and I did not know if it was accurate, but I know that over 100,000 people had been killed.

Le Duan: Yes, 160,000 had been killed, and many others had been put into prison.

Mao Zedong: I think this is good. You can kill our people, why can't we kill your people?

Le Duan: Exactly. In 1969 alone we have killed and wounded 610,000 enemies, among whom 230,000 were Americans.

Mao Zedong: The Americans do not have enough manpower to distribute in the world, since already they have been overextended. Therefore, when their people were killed their hearts were broken. The death of several dozens of thousand is a huge matter for them. You Vietnamese, both in the North and the South, in my opinion, it is inevitable for some of you also to be killed.

Le Duan: Our current ways of fighting cause low casualties. Otherwise, it is impossible for us to persist for a long time.

Mao Zedong: That is true. Maybe the situation in Laos is more difficult. Are there any people of Lao nationality living in China?

Zhou Enlai: There are some. Mao Zedong: Where are they? Zhou Enlai: In Yunnan province, the areas bordering Laos. Mao Zedong: Is that Xishuangbanna? Huang Yongsheng: There are some living in Xishuangbanna. Zhou Enlai: Our Zhuang people are very similar to them.

Mao Zedong: When the fighting has entered a decisive stage in Laos in the future, we may recruit some Zhuang people in Guangxi and some Dai people in Yunnan. The Zhuang people have a great fighting capacity. In the past the warlords Bai Chongxi and Li Zongren were dependent upon the Zhuang people. How many are the Zhuang people now? Eight million?

Zhou Enlai: There are more now, over ten million.

Mao Zedong: This is the ethnic group of Wei Guoqing's, which he did not acknowledge. I once asked him, to which nationality he belonged and if he belonged to one of the minority nationalities. He said that he was a Han. Only later did he acknowledge that he was a Zhuang.

Zhou Enlai: The soldiers of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom were capable of fighting. Some of them were Zhuang people.

Mao Zedong: Some of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom's troops were from Guangxi.

Le Duan: The Nung nationality in Vietnam are also capable of fighting. They and the Zhuang people in Guangxi belong to the same nationality.

Mao Zedong: Southeast Asia is a hornets' nest. The people in Southeast Asia are awakening day by day. Some pacifists think that cocks like fighting. How can there be so many cocks? Now even hens like fighting.

Le Duan: There is no way out if one does not fight.

Mao Zedong: Yes, there is no way out if one does not fight. You [Mao speaks rhetorically to the Americans] compel the others [to fight] and leave them no other way to go. You are bullying them.

Le Duan: The people in Cambodia and Laos are believers of Buddhism who do not like fighting. Now they have also become fond of fighting.

Mao Zedong: This is true. You cannot say that they are not fond of fighting because they believe in Buddhism. The Chinese are also believers in Buddhism, but the 1911 Revolution was followed by seventeen years of fighting. Later it became the fighting between two factions [among the revolutionaries], and thus the people had been educated. Then the Northern Expedition War began, and then the Red Army emerged. Then the Japanese invaded China. After the surrender of the Japanese, Jiang Jieshi fought a war against us. The war lasted for less than four years, he could not continue and fled to Taiwan. He now claims at the United Nations that he represents the whole China. He had very close relations with several of us. I met with Jiang Jieshi quite a few times. When the Guomindang held its Central Committee plenum in Guangzhou I met him. I was a member of the Guomindang. I was a person who shared the membership of two parties. I was a Central Committee member of the Communist party and I was an alternate member of the Central Committee of the Guomindang. During that period several of us joined [the Guomindang]. Our premier [Zhou Enlai] was director of the Political Affairs Department of Jiang Jieshi's Huangpu Military Academy and deputy party representative of Jiang Jieshi's First Army. I do not need to mention Comrade Lin Biao. He was Jiang Jieshi's student. He studied at Huangpu for nine months. In China, there are very few among the people of the old generation who had not dealt with him [Jiang Jieshi].

Lin Biao: I was also a member of both parties.

Mao Zedong: Even the party branches of the Guomindang were all organized with our help. Without the help from the Communist Party, it would have been impossible for the Guomindang to conduct the North Expedition. At that time, the Guomindang had no party organization, no party branch, in areas along the Yellow River in the North. It depended upon the Communist Party to help it.

In addition, we also conducted workers' movements and farmers' movements. The Guomindang made use of this thing; it was beneficial to [the Guomindang]. For the first year of the Northern Expedition it made use of [our organizing], and the second year it massacred us. 1926 was the Northern Expedition, and in 1927 [they] massacred us. Now this Cambodian prince remains on our side; this, too, is very rare. It's been sixteen years, and to look at him it seems he is still not afraid of the Communist Party.

Zhou Enlai: On the contrary, Prince Sihanouk now often makes mention of the country's jungle fighters, and does not emphasize Communists like Xiu Mu.^[4]

Mao Zedong: Aren't you going to see him?

Zhou Enlai: Comrade Le Duan is going to see him.

Le Duan: In 1956, when I was working in the south, I heard of Sihanouk's visit to China, and I was very happy. I immediately left the south and went to Phnom Penh; we also convened the Cochinchina [Southern Administrative Division] Party Committee there. *(Note: When France ruled Vietnam, it divided the latter into three "administrative divisions"[q]: South, North and Central; the*

“Southern Administrative Division Party Committee” refers to the Party Committee meeting in Vietnam’s southern area.) At the time I asked Sihanouk whether he would allow some of our resistance fighters^[5] to go to Phnom Penh. He sympathized with us at the time.

Mao Zedong: Now there is no way he can leave you [plural]. If he left you and the Khmer Rouge, what could he do?

Le Duan: In my observation, ever since the victory of China’s revolution he has been mulling over [the idea that] that Southeast Asia will surely all be the Communist Party’s one day.

Mao Zedong: Right.

Zhou Enlai: He also said when talking to reporters, It might be better if I could become pink ^[6] right now!

Kang Sheng: He said that Chairman Mao told him to read books on Marxism.

Mao Zedong: Many years ago I said to him, “Why do you have to be the king? I told him to read two books on Marxism: one was the *Communist Manifesto*, the other was *Socialism from [Utopian] Fantasy to Scientific Development*.^[7] He said, I can’t, I’m old; this is my son’s affair.

The world is a very strange place. 190 years ago, when the Americans were opposing the British, America’s population was only three million, while the British popular was perhaps 20 million or more; there were British colonies all over the world. In fact, the main body of Americans, the main portion [of America] was British people. [As] British people, they wanted to oppose the British people, wouldn’t you say that’s strange?

Le Duan: Recently Nixon claimed that the United States had never been defeated in the past 190 years. He meant that this time it would not be willing to be defeated by Vietnam.

Mao Zedong: Never defeated?

Le Duan: In actuality it has been defeated several times. In China, in Korea, and during the anti-French war in Indo-China. The Americans covered 80 percent of France’s military expenditures. Still it was defeated.

Mao Zedong: That is true. You mentioned a moment ago that first of all one should not fear the imperialists. After all, who really fears whom? Small countries. There exists such a problem on the part of small nations. It will gradually try. After trying for a few years, it will understand.

During China’s Tang Dynasty there was an author, Liu Zongyuan, who wrote a fable called “The Guizhou Donkey Has Exhausted His Tricks.”^[8] [We] can translate it and read it to you. It’s all ways the big who fear the small,^[9] then the small gradually test [the situation] and [realize] the big ones aren’t scary at all. In the beginning, this Party of ours had only 70 people, everyone looked down on us; it was only after many setbacks that [we] started to gradually learn a thing or two. You are all probably more or less clear on this.

As for the Cultural Revolution going on now, there are many people who do not understand it. It is not only foreign comrades or friends who do not understand; there are many among us who do not understand, either.

I’ll give an example: near Beijing is the February 7th Locomotive Factory. This factory had over 8,000 people; 40,000 people including the families. But it had never been [politically] cleaned up. Now the moment [we] started to clear it [we found] there were three branches of the Guomindang; they are called district branches. Besides that, there were three branches of the Guomindang’s Three Principles of the People Youth League. That is what is being cleared out this time. Beijing

has a big printing factory with several thousand workers called Xinhua Printing Factory: it prints paper money, books and leaflets. In the Beiyang warlord era it served Yuan Shikai, and after the Northern Expedition it served the Guomindang; when the Japanese invaded, it served the Japanese; after the Japanese surrendered, it served the Guomindang again, and after we defeated the Guomindang it served us. You see, those who served all those different masters^[10] hadn't been cleared out, and there was a whole mess of characters in there. All the country's factories are like that, more or less. Most of the country's villages have their people^[11] too: landlord elements, rich peasant elements, Guomindang elements. More or less all university professors, middle school instructors and elementary school instructors were absorbed from the Guomindang side, and have never been campaigned against. Tell me, how could [we] not do [these cleaning-up campaigns]?

We have a bunch of people who criticized the Communist Party in Guomindang newspapers; they wrote articles in newspapers turning themselves in,^[12] and followed Jiang Jieshi. They are people like Liu Shaoqi, Peng Zhen and Lu Dingyi. Peng Zhen is in charge of the city of Beijing, as well as part of the [Party] Central Secretariat. Lu Dingyi is also Guomindang. Has he admitted it himself?

Zhou Enlai: Yes, he wrote [the confession] himself. Besides that, there is also circumstantial evidence.

Mao Zedong: He is in charge of the Propaganda Department. The head of the Organization Department, An Ziwen, is also Guomindang. As for Deng Xiaoping, he's a bit different from them; he has not been found to have these problems.

So, I say that we only have half of Beijing, at most.

Our former Chief of the General Staff Luo Ruiqing was a Communist Party member who had never entered the Communist Party.

Lin Biao: A fake Party member.

Mao Zedong: He had never entered the Party; he was a phoney. China has many people, and there are many things going on; it's extremely complicated, we [as a] minority are at a loss. Whether it's veiled struggle or open strife, we cannot defeat them; [but if we] mobilize the masses, there's nothing they can do. Foreign friends don't understand this part; they say, What are you up to? Today it's down with Zhou Enlai, tomorrow it's down with Ye Jianying, the day after tomorrow it's down with Li Xiannian. Now [they] understand, there was this clique, a secret clique, called the May 16th Regiment, which took this as an opportunity to try and seize power. So, we didn't understand some of it ourselves: why was it that today it was down with Zhou Enlai, tomorrow down with Li Xiannian, the day after tomorrow Ye Jianying, Chen Yi, Nie Rongzhen, Zhu De, Chen Yun – [why] it was down with all these old comrades. [We] only knew later that it was all mainly their doing. We couldn't even understand it, how could you?

Le Duan: Speaking honestly, we did not understand. None of our Politburo comrades understood very well; even Chairman Ho [Chi Minh] said he didn't understand.

Mao Zedong: Now [they] can slowly begin to understand.

Le Duan: Right.

Mao Zedong: A Red Guard pamphlet was also published that criticized Comrade Kim Il-sung. I haven't seen that pamphlet, have you?

Zhou Enlai: I have seen it.

Mao Zedong: It got so that [even] the Korean comrades started getting nervous, too. Some people

want to run over to where you all are and join the army. In every province, in every county, [people] are divided into two factions, conducting armed struggle [against each other]. We explained that it should be a verbal struggle, not armed struggle, but they've just got to do armed struggle. Let it be armed struggle then if you must. Only now do [we] know that there were bad people behind it, pulling the strings. At the time, we said, It's all-out civil war. It's just that it wasn't in the newspapers, that's all. The all-out civil war is fundamentally a struggle between the Nationalist [Guomindang] and Communists; a continuation of the struggle between the two parties. It has also hurt some good people, but the issue has been mostly cleared up. Schools didn't hold classes for four years; I said, The earth is still revolving, isn't it.

Zhou: The satellite was still launched.^[13]

Mao Zedong: The old professors have to be protected, though, even if they are Guomindang; it is fine as long as the issue is cleared up. [They're] still to collect a salary, and allowed to teach and to write articles; that's called First Criticize and Second Put To Work.^[14] If we don't use you, we haven't got anybody. The issue is cleared up and [the criticized professor] is willing to change, too! For the elderly -- 70 years old and older -- and the ill, it's First Criticize and Second Provide For. If you don't take care of him, he's got no way out.

During the French Revolution, Napoleon also did some good things, but later on [he] was no good; later, he became a representative of the big bourgeoisie. Washington played a role in history, too, so the Americans brag and say that America was a frontrunner in [making] revolution, France came after, Russia came third, and we in the East are even further behind. According to the order they come in history, that is how it is. One can't dismiss the contribution that Washington and others made. Napoleon made an impact, too, turning some European states into big nation-states: Germany and Italy used to be split into lots of little countries.

Zhou: Big principalities and little principalities.^[15]

Mao Zedong: [They've] done just about enough bragging now.

Le Duan: When I returned from North Korea, Chairman Mao told me that the three countries of Southeast Asia and Indochina would definitely triumph first.^[16] After I returned to my country, I reported to Uncle Ho and [my] comrades at the Politburo. Now the truth is becoming more and more obvious: America arrested Souphanouvong in Laos, and the Laotian people rose up [in opposition]; they killed our people in South Vietnam, and the people rose up; now they have driven Sihanouk out of Cambodia, and the people there have risen up, too.

Mao Zedong: That is certainly the case. At that time, I also told you that if the Americans did not come to China's borders, and if you did not invite us, we would not dispatch our troops [to enter the war].

Le Duan: This was also what we thought. When we are still able to continue the fighting, we hope to make our "great rear" more stable. When we Vietnamese are fighting the Americans, China is our "great rear." Therefore, we once issued such instructions that even though our planes had been attacked they should not land at the airports in China.

Mao Zedong: You can [land at our airports]. We do not fear. If the American air force come to attack the "shelters" of Vietnamese air force, let them come.

Le Duan: Although we issued such instructions, still we needed to rely on your support. At that time, you dispatched several divisions to Vietnam, also engaged in fighting American planes.

Mao Zedong: That is true. The Americans are afraid of being beaten, and they have no guts. You may negotiate [with the Americans]. I am not saying that you cannot negotiate, but your main energy should be put on fighting. Who sabotaged the two Geneva conferences? Both you and us

truthfully abided by [the resolutions of the conferences]. But they did not. It is better that they did not.

Therefore, even Premier Kosygin of the Soviet Union, when making a public speech, had to say that as long as convening an international conference was concerned, Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia must be consulted. Many of their current leaders I am not familiar with, I do not know them. I know Kosygin and have talked with him. The newspapers in the West frequently make rumors about them, saying how divided is their leadership. I am not clear about this either. It is said that the common people are more interested in Kosygin as a leader.

Le Duan: We have also heard it.

Mao Zedong: You have also heard it? In my opinion, Stalin is alive again. The main tendency in the world today is revolution, including the whole world. There exists the possibility that the big powers may start a world war. But, because of a few atomic bombs, no one dares to start the war. This mainly concerns the two superpowers. At present many say that there are three big powers. China should not be included. China's study of making nuclear weapons is a recent experience.^[17] We are at the stage of research. Why should someone fear us? China is populous and therefore they fear China. But we also have our own fear, we need to feed and to provide clothing for such a large population. Therefore we have now begun the study of birth control so that the large population will be reduced a little bit.

Let us stop talking for now. You aren't going to invite him to eat?

Zhou Enlai: I have already invited him.

Le Duan: Now the spirit of anti-imperialism is very strong across the whole world, and among these anti-imperialist forces, the most powerful is still that of China. So all the world's people hope for Chairman Mao to be healthy. Today we see that Chairman Mao is very healthy; we are very happy. All the oppressed people of the world are very happy.

Mao Zedong: Thank you. I'm no good now, ^[18] I'll be seeing God soon; the world is theirs, it belongs to you. ^[19] I am following in Chairman Ho's footsteps.

Lin Biao: Chairman Mao is still very healthy.

Zhou Enlai: Even Sihanouk said, Chairman Mao's health is the happiness of all the people of the world, including the people of Cambodia. That feeling is, in fact, genuine.

Lin Biao: It is possible for the Chairman to live into his eighties or nineties.

Le Duan: We, too, are expressing our genuine feelings. We have been able to continue our fighting, this is because the Chairman has said that the 700,000,000 Chinese people are firmly backing the Vietnamese people. The United States is scared. This is very important.^[20]

Mao Zedong: Why should it be scared? You invade another country, why is it wrong for us to back that country? You dispatch hundreds of thousands of naval, air and land forces to bully the

Vietnamese people, who forbids China to become the rear [of the Vietnamese people]? Which law has set up this?

Le Duan: The Americans say that they can mobilize 12 million troops, but they can only dispatch half a million troops to Vietnam. They are scared if they cross this limit.

Zhou Enlai: China has a large population, which makes them fear.

Mao Zedong: Because we have a large population sometimes we do not need to fear. In the final analysis, we do not have relations with you. You have occupied our Taiwan Island, but I have never occupied your Long Island. There [you] go bragging again.

Le Duan: Once again, we sincerely thank Chairman Mao.

^[1] The participants on the Vietnamese side included Ly Ban (DRV vice minister of foreign trade) and Ngo Thuyen; on the Chinese side Lin Biao, Zhou Enlai, Kang Sheng, and Huang Yongsheng (CCP Politburo member and PLA chief of staff).

^[2] On May 5, Sihanouk had formed a Cambodian government in exile, based in Beijing.

^[3] Zhu Qiwen was Chinese ambassador to Vietnam from August 1962 to 1968, when he was purged and labeled a “Guomindang agent.”

^[4] Pinyin romanization of “秀木” (name).

^[5] Lit., “War of Resistance personnel” (kangzhan ren yuan)

^[6] That is, more red (Communist).

^[7] May refer to Engels’ Socialism: Utopian and Scientific.

^[8] 黔驢技窮 qiánlǘjìqióng: someone who has exposed his limited ability; the donkey in Guizhou has exhausted its tricks—at one’s wit’s end; at the end of one’s rope. (Source: <http://www.theepochtimes.com/n3/448008-the-donkey-has-exhausted-its-tricks/>)

^[9] This phrase would seem to make more sense if it were reversed: “the small always are always scared of the big, then the small gradually test [the situation] and [realize] the big ones aren’t scary at all.”

^[10] Literally, “the ministers who served under five different emperors.”

^[11] That is, the enemy’s people.

^[12] Apparent reference to Communists who, prior to the Communist victory, were forced to make confessions (or were instructed to by CCP superiors) and publicly “convert” to the Nationalist side.

^[13] Apparent reference to the launch several weeks earlier of China’s first satellite, The East is Red (Dongfang Hong).

^[14] Literally: “First criticize, second use.” (一批二用)

^[15] Or: “big and small duchies/dukedom.”

^[16] The particular phrasing (先取得胜利) matches the usual Chinese rendering of a quote from Lenin, “the revolution can triumph first in a relatively backward country.” It is possible that Le Duan is referencing Lenin’s “law of uneven development.” (Source: On Trotskyism [Routledge Library Editions: Political Science Volume 58] by Kostas Mavrakis, p. 25)

^[17] China exploded its first fission bomb in 1964 and its first thermonuclear weapon in 1967.

^[18] In the context: “I have no more energy, I can’t keep going.”

^[19] Plural.

^[20] A week earlier, four American students, demonstrating against the war, had been shot to death by National Guard troops at Kent State University in Ohio.