

February 08, 1964
Record of Conversation from Chairman Mao Zedong's
Reception of the Cambodian Ambassador to China
Sisowath Sirik Matak

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Summary:

Mao and Matak discuss Western imperialist collaboration with India, attempts to overthrow the Cambodian government, and the situation in Vietnam, among other topics.

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Record of Conversation from Chairman Mao Zedong's Reception of the Cambodian Ambassador to China Sisowath Sirik Matak

(Not reviewed by the Chairman)

Time: February 8, 1964, 1:30 pm

Location: Zhongnanhai

Escorts: Vice Minister Ji Pengfei, Deputy Director Ge Buhai

Interpreter: Yan Ningchuan

Notetaker: Xu Wei (?)

Ambassador Sirik Matak: My respects to the Chairman.

Chairman Mao: Are you leaving?

Ambassador Sirik Matak: I am going back to my country. I am very grateful to the Chairman for granting me this interview. I take this opportunity to express my deep gratitude to the Chairman.

Chairman Mao: Thank you, you have done work for the friendship between China and Cambodia.

Ambassador Sirik Matak: Thank you very much, Madam President, I have done very little. My stay in China has been very short.

Chairman Mao: What language are you speaking?

Ambassador Sirik Matak: French.

Chairman Mao: How much time have you been in China? **[missing response]**

Chairman Mao: Of course.

Ambassador Sirik Matak: Before independence, the population mortality rate in our country was very high. After independence, we adopted health and welfare measures, and the mortality rate of the population fell.

Chairman Mao: You are making progress and moving ahead. Some people say that you have a feudal royal system, which is even more backwards than U.S. democracy. India is also a democratic republic but I see that you are making better progress than they are.

Ambassador Sirik Matak: Thank you.

President: The United States is imperialist. India stands together with imperialism. You oppose imperialism and are defending your national independence, territorial and sovereign integrity, and dare to fight imperialism. Imperialism has not treated you well.

Ambassador Sirik Matak: It can even be said that the imperialists hate us very much.

Chairman Mao: Yes, they hate you and want to assassinate Prince Sihanouk and the Queen, to subvert you, set up anti-Cambodia radio stations, are trying everyday to incite the masses to overthrow the Royal Government of Cambodia.

Ambassador Sirik Matak: This is exactly right. The radio broadcasts three times a day, slandering the Cambodian government and Prince Sihanouk.

Chairman Mao: They are trying to overthrow your government. If they overthrow your current government, it would be bad to change to a pro-American one!

Ambassador Sirik Matak: I believe that the entire Cambodian people will oppose it.

Chairman Mao: You must not only oppose imperialism, but also be vigilant. With vigilance you can avoid it. Don't be like Prime Minister Kasem of Iraq. They fell for the revisionist's tricks. The Iraqi Communist Party is also revisionist, and it opposes China every day. As a result, imperialism instigated a coup d'etat, killing the government leaders in the morning and killing many leaders and of the Communist Party and progressives. We, being so far away from them, don't understand why they are against us. Your policies are different from theirs. You are friendly with us and oppose imperialism.

Ambassador Sirik Matak: We must always oppose imperialism and all forms of old and neo-colonialism.

Chairman Mao: Of course.

Ambassador Sirik Matak: Historically, we have had a lot of contact with imperialism and feel that we have to oppose it.

Chairman Mao: But French imperialism is different from US imperialism. French imperialism dares to fight the United States.

Ambassador Sirik Matak: France is also angry with the United States.

Chairman Mao: Yes, it is also angry. Their economy has now improved. In the past, they owed the US\$3.1 billion to the United States. Now it they have nearly paid it all back with only about more 500 million US dollars still to pay. French gold reserves used to be just 500 - 600 million US dollars. Now they have increased to 3 billion US dollars. The French economy has also grown faster than the U.S. economy over the past few years. You should be independent in economics as well.

Ambassador Sirik Matak: For this reason, Prince Sihanouk and the Cambodian government decided to undertake some reform measures. We believe that the independence of the real economy is a long-term task, and it will take several years.

Chairman Mao: It may take more than ten years.

Ambassador Sirik Matak: Prince Sihanouk estimates that it will take 10 years.

Chairman Mao: We must gradually get rid of foreign restrictions. Relying on the US for military assistance will not work. That way the U.S. will just cause mischief. The U.S. will control your military officers and engage in intelligence activities and spying. You need to gradually get rid of US military and economic assistance.

Ambassador Sirik Matak: Yes, Prince Sihanouk and the Cambodian government have decided to sever all US military, cultural and economic assistance from January 1964.

Chairman Mao: That's good.

Ambassador Sirik Matak: Of course this is a serious measure, but the Cambodian people do not think it will cause great difficulties because the Cambodian people have already prepared for it.

Chairman Mao: Well, you may want some temporary assistance from other countries.

Ambassador Sirik Matak: Yes, after the severance of US aid to Cambodia, France took the initiative to seek out Cambodia and expressed its willingness to provide unconditional assistance to Cambodia.

Chairman Mao: Yes, it must be unconditional. After some economic progress is achieved, you should gradually get rid of assistance from France, China, the Soviet Union and other countries.

Ambassador Sirik Matak: Yes, after the economy has improved, we will gradually get rid of foreign aid.

Chairman Mao: Yes, you must be completely independent in politics, economy and culture. In Southeast Asia, you can build a completely independent country. This is your hope and our hope. The last few years have been difficult ones, a period in which you are crossing the river. You need to be cautious, to be vigilant, and not allow the enemy to subvert your government, and to gradually develop your economy. If the people feel that things are better than in the past, they will actively support and assist the government. Some people oppose reform. I heard that Prince Sihanouk said that without reform the country is doomed. Is this true?

Ambassador Sirik Matak: The Prince said this.

Chairman Mao: He is right about that.

Ambassador Sirik Matak: We will take part in Prince Sihanouk's reform plan. We also support the Prince's plan.

Chairman Mao: If you resist the United States and engage in domestic economic reforms, US imperialism will not agree. They will want to subvert and get rid of you. They are going too far.

Ambassador Sirik Matak: Of course, US imperialism still wants to try to impose its norms on people throughout Southeast Asia. But I believe that their policies can't accomplish that. Prince Sihanouk has reminded the United States more than once of this in his writings and speeches, but they did not listen.

Chairman Mao: You see that two governments, the governments of Ngo Dinh Diem and of Duong Van Minh, were overthrown in just a few hours.

Ambassador Sirik Matak: In fact, these two governments were one and the same.

Chairman Mao: I think the third government will not be very stable.

Ambassador Sirik Matak: Yes, the failure of the United States in South Vietnam will continue.

Chairman Mao: Because that it is a government that opposes the people.

Ambassador Sirik Matak: As long as the people of South Vietnam cannot choose their own policies, I believe they will not stop fighting.

Chairman Mao: The National Liberation Front of southern Vietnam, in fact, has an Education and Labor Party, which is in fact the Communist Party. Throughout its history this party

has inspired the people to oppose US imperialism, to oppose the traitor Ngo Dinh Diem, to oppose the second traitor Duong Van Minh, and to oppose the third traitor Nguyen Khanh. The United States and these traitors are busy dealing with the Communist Party. This alleviates the pressure on you.

Ambassador Sirik Matak: We are also aware of this.

Chairman Mao: If there were no South Vietnamese Communist Party then Ngo Dinh Diem, Duong Van Minh, and Nguyen Khanh would be used to deal with you.

Ambassador Sirik Matak: There is a conflict between Cambodia and Vietnam, but in fact, this kind of conflict is not a real conflict. The South Vietnamese often sent people to attack Cambodia and then withdraw. So Prince Sihanouk and the Cambodian government called for the convening of an international conference to protect Cambodian neutrality.

Chairman Mao: Could such a conference be convened?

Ambassador Sirik Matak: More countries are accepting the proposal now that the United Kingdom, one of the two co-chairs of the Geneva Conference, has accepted it.

Chairman Mao: Oh.

Ambassador Sirik Matak: Only the United States opposes it now. However it said that it could agree to sign a multilateral agreement that would guarantee Cambodia's neutrality, but is unwilling to convene an international conference.

Chairman Mao: So, is it not willing to attend an international conference?

Ambassador Sirik Matak: The United States is not willing to for a meeting to be held. We have been working hard to convene an international conference. If we cannot hold an international conference, we will be unable to discuss and determine the details and measures to ensure Cambodia's neutrality.

Chairman Mao: Yes, that's right. The United Kingdom agrees but the United States, Thailand and Vietnam do not agree. That won't work.

Ambassador Sirik Matak: I don't know if it can be convened now, but we believe that, now that the attitude of the United Kingdom has changed, the US may follow along. We can't make an estimate now. Dealings with the United States are unpredictable.

Chairman Mao: For a meeting to convene, the struggle would have to become more intense, making the Nguyen Khanh government collapse again, and then several more governments collapse in succession. Only after the national liberation struggle of the people of south Vietnam has developed further will there be hope for convening a conference.

The issue of South Vietnam will be resolved in the future. France has called for an international conference on the South Vietnam issue. South Vietnam itself also proposed to hold an international conference on an independent and neutral South Vietnam.

Ambassador Sirik Matak: I personally believe that the United States' policy in South Vietnam cannot be the correct one. If they really want to solve their current problems, they must change their current policies. Prince Sihanouk and the Cambodian people think that only the people of South Vietnam can solve their own problems and no one else can do it for them.

Chairman Mao: Yes, the people of South Vietnam still have to fight for one or two to four or five years, or even for eight or nine more years in order to drive the United States out. There is no alternative. Then the Americans will say yes to neutral and independent. Let the South

Vietnamese people solve their own problems.

Ambassador Sirik Matak: This is a pity for the Americans. I believe that the Americans are still a great and intelligent people but their current practices are neither smart or great.

Chairman Mao: No, they are stupid and very petty. Why do I say that they are stupid? They wanted to send troops, they wanted to kill Ngo Dinh Diem and persecute Duong Van Minh. Why do I say that they are petty? They have nine divisions in South Vietnam --- over 16,000 naval, army and air force personnel in South Vietnam but they keep on losing year after year. The strategic hamlet strategy failed. Their large-scale attacks failed every time. If imperialism should attacks you, you also deal with it in this way. Look at Cuba -- the Cubans started with just a few dozen people. Look at Algeria, You see Algeria, France had several hundred thousand people there. The Algerians started with a few dozen people. Later Ben Bella had an army of 20,000 or 30,000. But France at its peak had 800,000 troops. But who won in the end? [possible omission of ambassador's comment here]

Chairman Mao: But that is difficult for them to accept.

Ambassador Sirik Matak: I can't take up any more of the Chairman's time. My greatest honor is that when I left China and Chairman received me. Although my assignment in China has been very short, but I will continue to participate in the work of strengthening the ties between the two countries.

Chairman Mao: We are help you in all sincerity. We will not work against you because you are against imperialism and making reforms at home. We worked against the United States and against Ngo Dinh Diem. But we did not engage in any secret plots. We wrote articles to state our position openly. Doing that is not plotting, that is openness. We say to the imperialists, revisionists, and reactionaries who are unhappy with us that you are going to perish. We support all who oppose imperialism, revisionism, and colonialism. You know what we stand for. We state our opinions openly. We have no secret views different from what we say in public. We want to help you. Our offer of help comes with no conditions attached. We hope that your country will be free and independent. We don't say that we are great. We don't say that we are great for providing a little help. No, on the contrary, we say that others are helping us and also helping the people of the entire world oppose imperialism. This is true. The struggle of your prince against imperialism helped us. Your standing firm and opposing imperialism helps us and helps the people of the entire world oppose imperialism. When people see that a country with a population of just several million people. People are happy to see, and admire, a country of only several million people that dares resist a big imperialist power. Your resistance to imperialism and De Gaulle's resistance to imperialism are different. France is a big country and you are a small country. The United Kingdom is a big country but it dares not resist the United States. I think that one day the UK will also oppose the United States. Some famous British people are very dissatisfied with the United States. [Field Marshal] Bernard Montgomery is a member of the Conservative Party. We had two conversations when he came to China. Albania has only 1.6 million people but opposes both Khrushchev and Tito. They are surrounded by capitalist countries. People admire small countries that dare to resist. Cuba has a population of just a few million people and Algeria not much more -- only about one-thousandth of the world's population. That is why we all admire those countries.

Ambassador Sirik Matak: I am very grateful, thank you.

Chairman Mao: I hope that your country will develop properly. I hope that counter-revolutionaries will not harm Prince Sihanouk. The imperialists are willing to do any evil thing. Several attempts were made on President Sukarno's life without success. There were also several attempts to assassinate Ghanaian President Kwame Nkrumah. Recently, there was an assassination attempt against Ben Bella. He had not pay much attention to the danger and had said that it didn't matter. Now, after that assassination attempt, he is more vigilant. Your prince has not paid much attention to this.

Ambassador Sirik Matak: Fortunately, after the Chairman spoke with him about this several times, he began paying attention to it.

Chairman Mao: Yes, I reminded him to study the lessons of Iraqi Premier Abd al-Karim Qasim. I asked him if he had studied it. He said no. Qasim was someone whose security was completely handled by others. He didn't know anything about it. One morning he was murdered. We opposed Ngo Dinh Diem but did not approve of assassinating anyone anywhere. He transferred several thousand guards away from Saigon to attack the people of southern Vietnam. One day he had them transferred, the next there was a coup d'etat and he was killed. Imperialists and counter-revolution are unscrupulous.

Ambassador Sirik Matak: Now we pay much more attention to security.

Chairman Mao: Sometimes they bribe people within your ranks. You may not know it yet.

Ambassador Sirik Matak: They are willing to use any means. Only vigilance enables the country to survive. We must fight to the end.

Chairman Mao: Prince Sihanouk appointed his son as his heir. This is a good way. Did you know that our Party has already decided on my successor? Who knows when I might die. Maybe I will be killed in a plane crash. Maybe I will die in a train wreck. I like to swim so maybe I will drown. There is a saying "Fate is unpredictable so blessings and disasters arrive unannounced", The main murderer who killed Ngo Dinh Diem was not Kennedy but he too went to see God. He had no premonition about it. It is very strange that nothing has come out about that case.

Ambassador Sirik Matak: It is very strange.

Chairman Mao: Let's not talk about it. I wish you all the best. And please give my regards to Prince Sihanouk and other friends I have know including Penn Nouth, Songshan [Chinese transliteration from Chinese character name], and Diaolong [Chinese transliteration] .

Ambassador Sirik Matak: I will certainly let them know. That you to the Chairman for giving me this honor. It makes me feel proud.