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November 17, 1968
Discussion between Mao Zedong and Pham Van Dong

Citation:

"Discussion between Mao Zedong and Pham Van Dong", November 17, 1968, Wilson Center Digital Archive, CWIHP Working Paper 22, "77 Conversations." https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/112181

Summary:

Mao Zedong advises Vietnam to use low US morale and new President Nixon to their advantage. Mao Zedong also withdraws unneeded Chinese troops, promising to return if needed.

Original Language:

Chinese

Contents:

Translation - English

MAO ZEDONG AND PHAM VAN DONG[1]

Beijing, 17 November 1968

Mao Zedong: You have been here some days, haven't you? I am a bit bureaucratic.

Pham Van Dong: How are you, Chairman Mao?

Mao Zedong: Not very well. I have had a cough for some days. It is time to go to Heaven. It seems that I am summoned to meet the Good God. How is President Ho?

Pham Van Dong: [He is] well. He is better than [when] he was in Beijing. The main reason is that he received good medical treatment in Beijing, and since he came back, he is doing well.

Mao Zedong: The weather in Beijing may not be suitable for President Ho.

Pham Van Dong: Very suitable.

Mao Zedong: In my opinion, maybe Guangzhou is better.

Pham Van Dong: On behalf of our President Ho, our Politburo, I would like to convey to you, Chairman Mao, Vice Chairman Lin and other comrades our honorable greetings.

Mao Zedong: Thank you.

Pham Van Dong: Today, in our delegation there are two comrades from the South (pointing to Comrade Muoi Cuc, and Comrade Le Duc Anh[2]).

Mao Zedong: Is it the first time Comrade Le Duc Anh came to China? (Shaking Muoi Cuc's hands, Chairman Mao said that they had met each other in 1966.)

Le Duc Anh: I came to China once, in 1962, but it is the first time I meet Chairman Mao.

Mao Zedong: I am bureaucratic. You came here, but I haven't met you. You may dismiss me from my post because of my being bureaucratic. We are going to convene a Party congress, and the congress may dismiss me. It may be good, too. Maybe now I should relax, only do small things such as sweeping my house. Recently, I haven't engaged in any battle.

You want to have talks with the US, and so do they with you. The US has great difficulties in their undertaking. They have 3 problems to be dealt with, namely the issues in America, mainly in the US, in Europe, and in Asia. They already have been involved in Asia for 4 or 5 years now. It is not even-handed. The US capitalists who invested in Europe should be displeased and disagree. And in US history, the Americans always let others engage in wars first and only get involved when the wars are half way over. But after the Second World War, they started fighting in Korea and then in Vietnam. They mainly fought these wars themselves, with little involvement of other countries. You call it a special war, a limited war, but for the US, they concentrate all their forces on it. At present their allies in Europe are complaining a

lot, saying that [the US] reduces the number of its troops [in Europe] and withdraws its experienced troops and good equipment [from Europe], not to mention the troops withdrawn from South Korea and Hawaii. The US has a population of 200 million people, but it cannot stand wars. If they want to mobilize some tens of thousand of troops, they must spend a lot of time and money.

(The transcript at this point contains a conversation between Chairman Mao and a young woman who entered, serving him a cup of hot tea. He turned to her. Young woman: Please do not wipe your face!

Mao: Why not? Does the towel contain poison? I will not comply.

Mao picks up a pack of cigarettes. He tries, but fails to open it. Then, he gives the pack to the young woman.

Mao: I cannot open it. You open it. What is your name?

Young woman: Leng Feng.

Mao: Does it mean cool summer breeze?

(Then he turned back to the Vietnamese guests: Please try these cigarettes!)

Mao Zedong: After some years of struggling against them, you should consider not only your difficulties but also your enemy's. You have been fighting for more than a dozen of years. 23 years have passed since the Japanese surrender in 1945 but your country is still existing. You have fought the Japanese, French, and now you are fighting the Americans. But Vietnam still exists like other countries, and more than that, it has developed to a greater extent.

Pham Van Dong: That is true.

Mao Zedong: Why was the Geneva Conference convened? ([he] asks Comrade Zhou Enlai). In the past, I did say that we had made a mistake when we went to the Geneva conference in 1954. At that time, President Ho Chi Minh wasn't totally satisfied. It was difficult for President Ho to give up the South, and now, when I think twice, I see that he was right. The mood of the people in the South at that time was rising high. Why did we have the Geneva conference? Perhaps, France wanted it.

Zhou Enlai: It was proposed by the Soviet Union. Khrushchev at that time was in power. And in January 1954, the Soviets wanted to solve the problem.

Mao Zedong: Now, I cannot remember the whole story. But I see that it would be better if the conference could have been delayed for one year, so the troops from the North could come down [to the South] and defeat [the enemy].

Pham Van Dong: At that time, we were fighting in the whole country, having no division between the North and the South.

Mao Zedong: We had to fight in a sweeping manner. The world public opinion at that time also wanted to have this conference. In my opinion, at that time the French wanted to withdraw, the US was not yet [ready] to come, and Diem was facing many difficulties.[3] I think that to withdraw our forces [to the North] meant that we lent them a helping hand. I once talked about it with President Ho, and today I talk about

it again with you. Maybe my opinion is incorrect. But I think that we lost an opportunity, as in the treaty, there is a provision on the withdrawal of troops.

Zhou Enlai: To withdraw the armed forces.

Mao Zedong: But it is not a very serious problem. It is the simple question of killing. And killing led to war. When the war broke out, the Americans came, at first as advisers, and then as combat troops. But now, they again say that the Americans in Vietnam are advisers.

Pham Van Dong: It is impossible for them to be advisors.

Mao Zedong: I, however, think that they will be advisors.

Pham Van Dong: Let Comrade Muoi speak on that.

Muoi Cuc: Dear Uncle Mao! Our President Ho, Political Bureau and Party Central Committee give us the order to fight until there is no American left in our country, even as advisors. Our blood has been shed for several years now. Why do we have to accept them to stay as advisors?

Mao Zedong: So, it will take some time if you do not accept them as advisors.

Muoi Cuc: It is correct, Uncle Mao. We are persistently fighting until the South becomes entirely independent and free, until national unification is attained. By so doing, we adhere to the order by our President Ho as well as your [orders]. This is what our Party Central Committee thinks and also what the entire Vietnamese people desire.

Mao Zedong: It is good to think that way. It is imperative to fight and to talk at the same time. It will be difficult if you rely only on negotiations to request their departure.

Pham Van Dong: They will not go anywhere and just stay.

Mao Zedong: As far as fighting is concerned, the US relies on its air force. There are about 9 or 10 US divisions. The number of American troops fighting in the Korean War was bigger. It is said that they have 5 divisions—approximately 200 thousand troops—deployed in Europe. But this number is overstated. The number of airplanes has been reduced. Some troops have been sent to reinforce the Seventh Fleet. I do not know how many divisions are deployed in the US.

Wang Xinting: Nine divisions. [Ye Jianying corrected: 6 divisions and 4 regiments.]

Pham Van Dong: The best American divisions are deployed in South Vietnam.

Mao Zedong: [The US faces three problems:] First the lack of troops; second the lack of equipment and last the lack of experienced people.

Zhou Enlai: They have 6 divisions and 6 regiments deployed in the US.

Mao Zedong: But the battlefield in Vietnam is of first priority. There, they have 9 divisions and 4 regiments. But as far as I remember, they had 7 divisions there.

Zhou Enlai: Later, they were reinforced.

Mao Zedong: I still have not understood why the US imperialists went to Southeast Asia and what interests the American capitalists found there. Exploitation of natural resources? Of course, the region is rich in natural resources. Oil, rubber in Indonesia. Rubber in Malaysia. Is there rubber in your country?

Pham Van Dong: Plenty.

Mao Zedong: Rubber and tea. But I do not think that the US needs food or plants.

Pham Van Dong: The US is looking further than that when fighting in Vietnam.

Mao Zedong: They fight in the South, but target the North and further, China. They are not strong enough to target other areas.

Pham Van Dong: But they are imperialists.

Mao Zedong: Of course, imperialists must have colonies. They want countries like ours to become their colonies. Before, China used to be a semi-colony of imperialists for over 100 years. What did they rob us of? China's technology and agriculture did not develop.

Zhou Enlai: They robbed materials.

Mao Zedong: What materials?

Zhou Enlai: Soybean.

Mao Zedong: Britain exploited Chinese coal. The US does not need Chinese coal. They say that China does not have oil. Basically, they do not involve themselves in steel production and engineering. They do some textile production, but Japan and Britain do the most. I, therefore, see that their target is to put out the fire, because fire has burst out in your country. Because the capitalists want to put out fire, they must design machinery to do so, thus making money. How much money do they spend in Vietnam every year?

Pham Van Dong: More than 30 billion [dollars].

Mao Zedong: The US cannot prolong the war. Approximately 4 years at best. At present, the fire is not put out, but to the contrary, [it has] become fiercer. Some capitalist groups gain more benefits, but others do not. Since benefits have not been divided equally, they are at odds with each other. This contradiction can be exploited.

Additionally, the capitalists who enjoy fewer benefits now become less committed. I have seen this in different speeches during the election campaign. Recently, there was an article by an American reporter warning of another trap. The reporter's name is [Walter] Lippman. [He wrote that] the US is now trapped in Vietnam and trying to get of out the quagmire. Yet, it is afraid of getting into another quagmire. That is why your cause is hopeful. In 1964, in a 5-hour conversation with President Ho, I said that that year might be decisive because it was an election year in the US. Every presidential candidate has to face this problem. Will the US continue to fight or get

out of the quagmire? I think that it will be more difficult for them to continue to fight. But Europe has not participated, which is different from the Korean War.

Pham Van Dong: That's correct.

Mao Zedong: During the Korean War, Britain and Turkey participated.

Pham Van Dong: So did France.

Mao Zedong: Only nominally and really not much.

Pham Van Dong: There was a regiment from France.

Mao Zedong: We were not impressed by the French participation.

Zhou Enlai: There were totally 16 countries participating in the war, including South Korea.

Mao Zedong: Japan and Taiwan do not participate in the Vietnam war.

Pham Van Dong: They are wise. At times, we were very much afraid that Japan would.

Mao Zedong: Japan will not, generally. It may involve itself financially. At least, Japan benefits in terms of weapons.

The US overestimated their forces. They again committed the same old mistake: scattering their forces. It is not my opinion but [US President-elect Richard M.] Nixon's. He said that American forces were too scattered. Their forces are now scattered in America, Europe and Asia. Even in Asia, American forces do not concentrate. There are 70,000 American troops, including 2 divisions of marines, in South Korea. There is a division in Hawaii. Other naval and air bases need more reserve troops. You, therefore, can understand how the American ruling circles think. If you were American presidents, what would you think? I never thought that they would attack North Vietnam. But my prediction was wrong when they bombed the North. But now, when they stop, my prediction is proven right. If, in the future, they resume bombing, I will be wrong again. Anyway, I will be right one day.

It is good, nevertheless, that you have prepared for several alternatives. For all the years of fighting, the US armies have not attacked the North, Haiphong port has not been blockaded, and the streets of Hanoi have not been bombed. It shows that the US is keeping a card in reserve. At one time, they warned [that they would] pursue your planes to your air bases. But in fact, they did not. This shows that their warnings are empty.

Pham Van Dong: We have noticed this.

Mao Zedong: Later, they did not reiterate this warning. They did not mention the movement of your planes. They also know how many Chinese people are working in Vietnam, but do not mention this, just ignoring it. Maybe we should withdraw the [Chinese] troops which are not needed. Have you discussed that matter?

Zhou Enlai: We shall discuss this with Comrade Ly Ban, with our Ambassador and military experts.

Mao Zedong: In case they come, we will be back. There will be no big deal.

Pham Van Dong: Let us think again.

Mao Zedong: You do think again. Keep what you still need and we withdraw what you no longer need or do not yet need. In the future, when you need [assistance], we shall be back. The same will be with your air force: if you need China's air bases, you just use them; if you do not need them, you do not use them.

We agree with your slogan of fighting while negotiating. Some comrades worry that the US will deceive you. But I tell them not to [worry]. Negotiations are just like fighting. You have drawn experience, understood the rules. But sometimes they can deceive you. As you said, the US did not keep their word.

Pham Van Dong: They are very wicked.

Mao Zedong: They in many cases even said that the signed treaties were worthless. But things have their rules. The Americans cannot do this all the time. Will you negotiate with them for 100 years? Our Comrade Prime Minister said: If Nixon cannot solve the problem in two years' time, he will be in trouble. Are you the chief representative in negotiations?

(Asking Le Thanh Nghi[4])

Zhou Enlai: Comrade Le Duc Tho is. This is Comrade Le Thanh Nghi.

Mao Zedong: Both have the family name of Le!

Pham Van Dong: As Chairman Mao said, we conduct fighting while negotiating. But fighting should be conducted to a certain extent before negotiations can start. Sitting at the negotiating table does not mean [we] stop fighting. On the contrary, fighting must be fiercer. In that way, we can attain a higher position, adopt the voice of the victorious and strong, who knows how to fight to the end and knows that the enemy will fail eventually. This is our attitude. If we think otherwise, we will not win. In this connection, the South must fight fiercely, at the same time carry out the political struggle. At present, conditions in the South are very good. The convening of talks in Paris represents a new source of encouragement for our people in the South. They say that if the US fails in the North, they will definitely fail in the South.

Mao Zedong: Is it true that the American troops were happy when talks were announced?

Muoi Cuc[5]: I would like to tell you, Chairman Mao, that the Americans celebrate the news. Thousands of them gather to listen to radio coverage of the talks. When ordered to fight, some wrote on their hats: "I am soon going back home, please do not kill me."

Saigon troops are very discouraged. Many of them openly oppose Thieu,[6] saying: "If Mr. Thieu wants to fight, just let him go to Khe Sanh and do it." The morale of the Saigon troops and government officials is very low. Our people, cadres, and troops in the South are encouraged and determined to fight harder. We see that because we are strong, we can force the US to stop bombing the North. Therefore, [this] is the time we should fight more, thus defeating them. This is the common aspiration and spirit of our people, cadres, and troops in the South, Uncle Mao.

Mao Zedong: Is the number of American troops welcoming talks [and] wishing to go home big or small?

Muoi Cuc: Big. We will fight more, and at the same time, push the task of mobilizing the people and demoralizing the enemy.

Mao Zedong: That is good. I was told that the American troops have to stay in underground shelters. You also have to do so. How is it in the rainy season?

Muoi Cuc: We have to use water-proof cloth to cover [the soldiers].

Mao Zedong: How long is the rainy season?

Muoi Cuc: Six months each season, dry and rainy ones.

Mao Zedong: That long?

Muoi Cuc: But it rains most during three months.

Mao Zedong: Which months?

Muoi Cuc: May, June, and July.

Mao Zedong: Is it now the dry season?

Muoi Cuc: The end of rainy season and beginning of the dry one.

Pham Van Dong: Seasons are different in our country.

Mao Zedong: Seasons in the North are different from those in the South, aren't they?

Muoi Cuc: Uncle Mao, this time, like before, we are summoned to the North to report the situation in the South and receive new directives from President Ho and the Political Bureau. Then, President Ho and our Central Committee asked Comrade Le Duc Anh and me to accompany Comrades Pham Van Dong and Le Thanh Nghi to China to report to Chairman Mao, Vice-Chairman Lin Biao, and other Chinese leaders about the situation in the South. The day before yesterday, through Prime Minister Zhou Enlai, we know that Chairman Mao praised us. We felt very encouraged.

Mao Zedong: We mentioned it here, in this room.

Muoi Cuc: We know that every time when a victory is gained, Chairman Mao sends us a letter of praise. This is really a great encouragement for our people, cadres, and troops in the South. Our victories gained in the South are due, to a great extent, to the assistance, as well as the encouragement, of the Chinese people and your [encouragement], Chairman Mao.

Mao Zedong: My part is very small.

Muoi Cuc: Very big, very important.

Mao Zedong: Mainly because of your efforts. Your country is unified, your Party is unified, your armed forces are unified, your people, regardless in the South or North, are unified, which is very good.

Muoi Cuc: We hold that the spiritual support offered by China is most important. Even in the most difficult situations, we have the great rear area of China supporting us, which allows us to fight for as long as it takes.

Material assistance is also very important. That we force the American troops into underground shelters [is] also because of pieces of artillery that China gave us.

Pham Van Dong: That is true.

Muoi Cuc: We even used Chinese weapons to attack Saigon. The enemy is frightened.

Mao Zedong: You seem to be receptive to the logic of weapons.

Pham Van Dong: It is true that we rely on Chinese weapons.

Muoi Cuc: We rely on the strength of our people, but without Chinese weapons, it will be more difficult.

Mao Zedong: Bare hands cannot do. There must be good weapons in [those] hands.

Muoi Cuc: As Uncle Mao said, we have to fight the enemy with guns and bags

of rice.

Mao Zedong: Maybe I am receptive to the logic of weapons, too.

Pham Van Dong: China has provided us large amounts of weaponry and rice.

Muoi Cuc: Our troops are very moved when they know that Chairman Mao pays attention even to their health. In addition to weapons, we receive from China rice [and] food so that our troops can be better fed, thus being stronger.

Mao Zedong: Have the supplies arrived?

Muoi Cuc: Some have. For example, egg powder, soybean, seasoning.

Pham Van Dong: Very good.

Mao Zedong: More supplies may be available. We have to thank Sihanouk too.

Pham Van Dong: We have considered his role.

Mao Zedong: Some road-fees are needed. It is worth spending for this.

Pham Van Dong: We estimate that this amount is even bigger than that of American

aid.

Muoi Cuc: Before, the US gave Cambodia $20 million a year. Now, the amount China pays Sihanouk for rice and road-fees exceeds $20 million. In helping us, Sihanouk gains both good reputation and benefits.

Pham Van Dong: He also benefits from our defense of Cambodia's eastern border with the South of Vietnam.

Muoi Cuc: Plus Chinese sympathy.

Mao Zedong: As far as politics is concerned, he still sometimes surprises us. Recently, he may have felt abandoned by the US, so he has twice stated that the US should withdraw some of its troops, but not all. Recently, he has stated on Paris Radio that the US should withdraw its troops but not bring them to the US, and that the US should not deploy its troops [in] Cambodia but in Thailand or in the Philippines, so that China will not invade his country. He often talks in an anti-Communist tone. According to what he said, there is evidence of the US wanting to withdraw its troops. If they do withdraw, Sihanouk will be worried, and so will Thailand and the Philippines. In the South [of Vietnam], the first person to be worried is Thieu. Every one of them really wants US troops to stay.

So, the world now is in great chaos. Those countries that lack their own strength need the help of superpowers, as in the case of Sihanouk. Even Japanese capitalists still need US support. The Japanese seem to welcome negotiations. However, in fact, they do not, because as capitalists they get a lot of profit from the war. Many US weapons are made in Japan.

Pham Van Dong: We have been attentive to this point. We are very surprised that Japan seemingly wants to make a contribution to solving the war. But we have to consider their real attitudes.

Mao Zedong: Some people talk one way and think another way. When the Korean war ended, many Japanese industries went bankrupt. When the US starts to fight, Japan starts to benefit.

Pham Van Dong: It's the best policy of Japan.

Mao Zedong: The Filipino capitalists do the same. They do not contribute many troops to US war efforts in South Vietnam. But since the US troops are based in the Philippines, the Filipino capitalists gain a lot from that. So do the Thai capitalists.

Pham Van Dong: It's very clear in the case of Thailand. But it is not they who make decisions. It is the Vietnamese who decide whether the US will stay or go. We, all the Vietnamese people, are determined to fight and to drive them away. We are preparing to concentrate our forces and fight the US in the South. Probably, we will engage in large-scale battles in the coming period. Certainly, the war will be fiercer.

Mao Zedong: Early this spring you fought quite well. We have suggested that you fight large-scale battles like the one in Dien Bien Phu. At that time we didn't know that your liberated zones were terribly divided. Is this [still] the situation in every province?

Pham Van Dong: Yes, but this situation doesn't affect our efforts to encircle Saigon and other bases or blockade important points in their communication and

transportation network. We have also thought of large-scale battles like Dien Bien Phu, but we must calculate carefully and thoroughly before we do so.

Mao Zedong: You should have your bases geographically interrelated with each other. Without this condition, it's difficult for you to concentrate your forces for large-scale battle. And there is another matter: Thieu's regime is afraid of the NLF. This fact proves that the NLF enjoys influence among the people in the South, not Thieu. Their mass media have talked about it, not in an official way, but based on official sources.

Which government has real prestige in South Vietnam? Nguyen Huu Tho's[7] or Nguyen Van Thieu's? Both of them have the family name of Nguyen. Recently, Thieu has tried to play hard, pretending that he didn't want to attend the Paris conference. But in fact, the US has very clearly seen that the Vietnam problem cannot be solved without the participation of the NLF. You have read all these [facts], haven't you?

Muoi Cuc: They are perplexing.

Mao Zedong: The US now respects the Party and Government in Vietnam led by President Ho, respects the NLF led by President Nguyen Huu Tho. The US also does not think highly of the Thieu clique, considering them ineffective.

Pham Van Dong: That is correct.

Mao Zedong: The US gives Saigon a lot of money, but much has been embezzled.

Pham Van Dong: In Paris, Thieu's representatives verbally opposed the US. We then asked the American representatives why the US allowed Saigon to do so. Harriman replied that Saigon by so doing tried to show that they are not puppets.

Mao Zedong: They have been ordered to show opposition to the US, that's why. Maybe the Harriman team will be replaced. Nixon probably will assign new negotiators.

Pham Van Dong: Of course.

Le Duc Anh: Chairman Mao, our armies in the South are undergoing political education and military training. We are prepared to receive weapons provided for by Chairman Mao, [and] the Chinese Communist Party, and to set up battlefields for coming fierce campaigns. We are also prepared to inflict severe damages on several elite contingents of American troops in the South. Following the directives by President Ho, drawing on our most recent experience, we believe that we are going to achieve great victories.

Chairman Mao, since the beginning of this year, we have inflicted heavy casualties on some American elite contingents, such as the 25th division, the 1st division, and their armored vehicle units. In a battle in August in Tay Ninh alone, we killed and wounded 12,000 troops, the majority of which were Americans, destroyed 1,100 tanks, armored vehicles, more than 100 pieces of artillery. When our infantry troops were advancing, American tanks and armor retreated—they were very afraid of our troops equipped with weapons provided by Chairman Mao. Such weapons included [the] B40, for example.

Mao Zedong: Is that weapon powerful?

Le Duc Anh: Very effective for fighting tanks.

Mao Zedong: Did we have this weapon before? (Asking Wang Xinting)

Wang Xinting: No, we did not.

Ye Jianying: We used the B90 during the Korean War.

Pham Van Dong: Tanks will melt when they are hit by this weapon.

Le Duc Anh: And the drivers will be burnt to death.

Mao Zedong: Good. Can we produce more of this?

Wang Xinting: Yes, but to produce ammunition for this weapon is more difficult than to produce the weapon.

Le Duc Anh: The enemy has internal contradictions. Saigon troops criticize Americans for being cowards [and] do not believe in them any more.

Mao Zedong: Saigon troops criticize Americans?

Le Duc Anh: American and Saigon troops do not believe in each other. They are both afraid of the Liberation Armies.

Mao Zedong: It may well be so.

Le Duc Anh: In the recent incident occurring from October 25 to November 7, a unit of the American First Infantry Division refused to fight. During the August campaign, we killed a division commander. Troops in that division celebrated his death.

Muoi Cuc: This General was brutal.

Mao Zedong: Not civilized.

Le Duc Anh: In Tay Ninh, we eliminated 14 companies of the 25th Division. The US has acknowledged that.

Mao Zedong: Where is Tay Ninh?

Le Duc Anh: 60 kilometers northwest of Saigon and close to the border with Cambodia.

Mao Zedong: We know the 25th Division fairly well. We fought against it in Korea. At that time, due to the mistakes of Peng Dehuai, it was not totally crushed. Our 40th Army under the command of Ye Jian-ying first fought it. We do not know much about the First Division.

Ye Jian-ying: We terminated a regiment. At that time, the First Division had not been in Korea.

Mao Zedong: Do American cavalry units fight well? In fact they are infantry units, aren't they?

Le Duc Anh: They are cowardly infantry units.

Mao Zedong: In Korea, they were arrogant. But now, since being beaten by you, they also became cowards. Were they deployed in Western Korea? (Asking Ye Jianying)

Ye Jianying: In Eastern Korea.

Mao Zedong: The mistake we committed in Korea was that we wanted to swallow one or two divisions in a single battle. But we could not. The battles showed that we could only swallow a regiment. If we used all of our forces in order to terminate the 25th Division, it would take several weeks.

Hoang Van Thai[8]: At that time, there was not the B40.

Mao Zedong: At that time, there were 800 pieces of artillery for each enemy division. On our side, there were 800 pieces of artillery for three armies. 9 Chinese divisions put together were not equal to one American division.

Pham Van Dong: At present, they are very well equipped.

Mao Zedong: Certainly, as 18 years have passed since 1950.

Le Duc Anh: Chairman Mao, we are now able to penetrate and fight anywhere. We can even penetrate the most heavily guarded bases.

Mao Zedong: That is why they curse you for fighting indiscriminately. They want to imply that they are the only ones that are discriminate.

Muoi Cuc: The more they are defeated, the more they curse us.

Le Duc Anh: Now, the American troops in Saigon and other cities cannot relax. They have to stay in underground shelters. They know that we are fighting them with Chinese weapons. So we are fighting more, focusing our forces on fighting them in the countryside as well as on their big bases. We are going to fight more fiercely.

Mao Zedong: It is necessary to have political education for your troops. You should take advantage of the negotiations for political education. Before every big battle, it is always an imperative to spend time on political education. There should be only two or three, or four at most, big campaigns every year. The regular troops should spend the remaining time on political education.

Pham Van Dong: That is what we do.

Mao Zedong: When we were fighting the Japanese in the war of liberation, every year, we only fought a couple of campaigns. However, we found that we still lacked time for political education. It is impossible to fight every month. We need time for military training, recruiting, and getting more supplies of weaponry and ammunition as well as consolidating the rear. There are a lot of things to do in-between battles.

Muoi Cuc: We are trying to be ready in every aspect. That is why we see the

imperative of politically educating our troops.

Mao Zedong: It is necessary. There should be at least one big period of political education conducted. It may take two or three months, or several weeks. The interval between battles is the right time for that.

Muoi Cuc: It is what we are doing now. We are drawing experience, getting more prepared both materially and psychologically for the coming big battles and big victories. While negotiations are going on, we continue to fight as we see that it is the battlefield that decides the final outcome. During the period of political education, we have to prevent the thought of expecting too much to develop from negotiations.

Mao Zedong: This kind of thought can emerge. There always is a trend of thinking at any given time. But every trend is short-lived and temporary.

Muoi Cuc: This time, when we were summoned to the North, President Ho and the Politburo told us that the enemy was suffering big defeats, so they had to accept negotiations even though they were still persistent. In this connection, we have to maintain the thought in favor of patience, of total revolution and of big battles. And we are strictly following this guidance.

Mao Zedong: Good.

Pham Van Dong: Comrades Muoi Cuc, Le Duc Anh, other comrades and I are grateful for the fact that you, Chairman Mao, have taken time to receive and talk with us. What the Chairman told us today and what Comrade Prime Minister Zhou Enlai and Comrade Kang Sheng told us the other day have made us all the more encouraged. We think that what Chairman Mao has said is very correct, very suitable for the situation in our struggle against the US for national salvation.

Mao Zedong: Some [of my thinking] is not necessarily correct. We have to refer to the actual developments.

Pham Van Dong: Ultimately, it is we who make the decisions based on the actual situation in Vietnam and on how we understand the rules of the war. This is also what Chairman Mao has told President Ho and other Vietnamese comrades. Once again, we would like to reiterate before Chairman Mao and other leaders of the CCP that we are determined to fight until the final and total victory is gained. It is the best way to express our gratitude for the support and aid provided to us by Chairman Mao and the CCP as well as the fraternal Chinese people. We wish you, Chairman Mao, good health.

Mao Zedong: I wish President Ho good health, longevity. I also wish other comrades in your Politburo good health.

Pham Van Dong: Thank you, Chairman Mao.[9]

[1] In November 1968, a DRV delegation headed by Pham Van Dong (on his way back from Moscow) and a COSVN delegation headed by Muoi Cuc (Nguyen Van Linh) visited China. They had three meetings with Zhou Enlai, on November 13, 15, and 17, during which Pham Van Dong informed the Chinese about his talks with the Soviets and the negotiations in Paris. After seeing Zhou Enlai, the delegations asked for a meeting with Chairman Mao Zedong. On the evening of 17 November 1968, Mao received the delegation at his home in Zhongnanhai. Present were Lin Biao, Zhou

Enlai, Chen Boda, Kang Sheng, Wang Xinting (Deputy Chief of Staff of the PLA), Ye Jianying, and others on the Chinese side, and Pham Van Dong, Le Thanh Nghi, Nguyen Van Linh, Le Duc Anh, and others on the Vietnamese side.

[2] Le Duc Anh (1920-), an army officer who was PAVN Deputy Chief General Staff 1963-64, Chief of Staff and subsequently PLAF Deputy Commander 1964-68 (a function he still held when he visited China together with Nguyen Van Linh in 1968), commander of Military Zone 9 (the Mekong Delta) 1969-74. One of the deputy commanders of the Ho Chi Minh offensive in April 1975, and overall commander of the forces invading Cambodia in 1978. Member of the VCP politburo 1982-97, and President of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam 1992-97.

[3] In fact, Ngo Dinh Diem first became prime minister on 16 June 1954, during the Geneva Conference.

[4] Le Thanh Nghi (1911-), a long-standing member of the ICP who had been on the CC already during the First Indochina War. From the 1960s until the 1980s a politburo member and a Deputy Premier in charge of economic affairs, including economic assistance from foreign countries.

[5] Nguyen Van Linh (Nguyen Van Cuc or Muoi Cuc) (1913-98), a long-standing member of the ICP who originally came from northern Vietnam, but spent most of his life in the south. Became the main party leader in the south when Le Duan went to Hanoi in 1957, and later served as the principal deputy to Nguyen Chi Thanh and his successor Pham Hung in the COSVN leadership. After 1975 became responsible for administering South Vietnam, and served as VCP General Secretary during the reform period 1986-91.

[6] Nguyen Van Thieu (1924-), Army General, President of the Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnam) 1967-75.

[7] Nguyen Huu Tho (1910-95?), a lawyer and secret member of the ICP, who was vice-chairman of the Saigon Peace committee following the 1954 Geneva agreements, was detained by the Diem government for several years, then liberated by NLF forces. NLF Chairman from its founding in 1960, and from 1969 chairman of the advisory committee of the PRG. SRV Vice President 1976-80.

[8] Hoang Van Thai, alias Hoang Van Xiem (1906-86), an army officer who directed a military-political school at the Viet Minh's HQ in Tan Trao before the August 1945 Revolution. Served as the first chief of the PAVN General Staff 1945-53, commanded several of the main campaigns during the First Indochina War, became member of the VWP CC in 1961, and a member of the National Defense Council in 1964. Commander of Interzone 5 (south central Vietnam) 1966-67. Commander of the PLAF 1967-73, Deputy Chief of the PAVN General Staff and Deputy Minister of Defense 1974-81. Member of the VWP/VCP CC 1960-76, and again 1982-86.

[9] An edited version of this conversation was published in Beijing in 1994 (Mao Zedong waijiao wenxuan, pp. 580-583). This version follows:

Mao Zedong: Because there has been no battle to fight recently, you intend to negotiate with the Americans. It is all right to negotiate, but it is difficult to get the Americans to withdraw through negotiations. The United States also wants to negotiate with you because it is in a dilemma. It has to deal with problems in three regions: the first is the Americas—the United States, the second is Europe, and the third is Asia. In the last few years, the United States has stationed its major forces in Asia and has created an imbalance. In this regard, American capitalists who have investments in Europe are dissatisfied. Also throughout its history, the United States has always let other countries fight first before it jumps in at halfway. It is only after World War II that the United States has begun to take the lead in fighting, first in the Korean War and then in the Vietnam War. In Vietnam, the United States is taking the lead, but it is followed by only a small number of other countries. Whether the war is a special war or a limited war, the United States is totally devoted to it. Now it cannot afford to pay attention to other countries. Its troops in Europe, for example, are complaining, saying that there is a shortage of manpower and that experienced soldiers and commanders have been removed and better equipment has been relocated. The United States has also redeployed its troops from Japan, Korea, and other areas of Asia. Did not the United States claim that it has a population of 200

million? But it cannot endure the war. It has dispatched only several thousand troops. There is a limit to its troops.

After fighting for over a dozen years you should not think about only your own difficulties. You should look at the enemy's difficulties as well. It has been 23 years since Japan's surrender in 1945, but your country still exists. Three imperialist countries have committed aggression against you: Japan, France, and the United States. But your country has not only survived but also developed.

Of course, imperialism wants to fight. One purpose for its war is to put out fire. A fire has started in your country, and imperialism wants to put out the fire. The second purpose is to make money through producing munitions. To put out fire they must produce fire-extinguishing machines, which will bring about profits. Every year the United States expends over 30 billion dollars in your country.

It has been an American custom not to fight a long war. The wars they have fought average about four to five years. The fire in your country cannot be put out. On the contrary, it has spread. Capitalists in the United States are divided into factions. When this faction makes more profit and that faction makes less profit, an imbalance in booty-sharing will occur and trouble will begin domestically. These contradictions should be exploited. Those monopoly capitalists who have made less money are unwilling to continue the war. This contradiction can be detected in election speeches made by the two factions. In particular, the American journalist Walter Lippmann has published an article recently, warning not to fall into another trap. He says that the United States has already fallen into a trap in Vietnam and that the current problem is how to find ways to climb out of that trap. He is afraid that the United States may have fallen into their traps. Therefore, your cause is promising.

In 1964, I had a conversation with President Ho Chi Minh in Hangzhou. At that time, the United States had already resumed its attacks on North Vietnam, but had not renewed bombing. I said that the United States might end the war that year because it was an American election year. No matter which president came to power, he would encounter the problem of whether the United States should continue the war or withdraw now. I believed that the difficulties that the United States faced would increase if it continued the war. Countries in all of Europe did not participate in the war. This situation was different from that of the Korean War. Japan probably would not enter the war. It might lend some help economically because it could make money by producing ammunition. I think the Americans overestimated their strength in the past. Now the United States is repeating its past practice by overstretching its forces. It is not just us who make this argument. Nixon has also said so. The United States has stretched its forces not only in the Americas and Europe but also in Asia. At first I did not believe that the United States would attack North Vietnam. Later the United States bombed North Vietnam, proving my words incorrect. Now the United States has stopped bombing. My words are correct again. Maybe the United States will resume bombing, proving my words incorrect a second time. But eventually my words will prove correct: the United States has to stop bombing. Therefore I believe that it is all right for you to make several contingency plans.

In sum, in the past years the American army has not invaded North Vietnam. The United States has neither blockaded Haiphong nor bombed the city of Hanoi itself. The United States has reserved a method. At one point it claimed that it would practice a [policy of] "hot pursuit." But when your aircraft flew over our country, the United States did not carry out a "hot pursuit." Therefore, the United States has bluffed. It has never mentioned the fact that your aircraft have used our airfields. Take another example. China has so many people working in your country. The United States knew that, but has never mentioned it, as if such a thing did not exist. As to the remaining people sent by China to your country who are no longer needed, we can withdraw them. Have you discussed this issue? If the United States comes again, we will send people to you as well. Please discuss this issue to see which Chinese units you want to keep. Keep the units that are useful to you. We will withdraw the units that are of no use to you. We will send them to you if they are needed in the future. This is like the way your airplanes have used Chinese airfields: use them if you need to and do not use them if you do not need to. This is the way to do things.

I am in favor of your policy of fighting while negotiating. We have some comrades

who are afraid that you may be taken in by the Americans. I think you will not. Isn't this negotiation the same as fighting? We can get experience and know patterns through fighting. Sometimes one cannot avoid being taken in. Just as you have said, the Americans do not keep their words. Johnson once said publicly that even agreements sometimes could not be honored. But things must have their laws. Take your negotiations as an example, are you going to negotiate for a hundred years? Our Premier has said that if Nixon continues the negotiations for another two years and fails to solve the problem, he will have difficulties in winning another presidential term.

One more point. It is the puppet regime in South Vietnam which is afraid of the Nationalist Liberation Front of South Vietnam. Some people in the United States have pointed out that the really effective government popular among the South Vietnamese people is not the Saigon government but the Liberation Front. This is not a statement attributed to someone in the U.S. Congress. It is reported by journalists, but the name of the speaker was not identified. The statement was attributed to a so-called U.S. government individual. The statement raises a question: Who represents the government with real prestige in South Vietnam? Nguyen Van Thieu or Nguyen Huu Tho? Therefore although the United States publicly praises Nguyen Van Thieu, saying that he will not go to Paris to attend the negotiations, it in fact realizes that problems cannot be solved if the NLF of South Vietnam does not participate in the negotiations.