

December 1, 1965

**Speech Given by Party First Secretary Le Duan to
the 12th Plenum of the Party Central Committee**

Citation:

"Speech Given by Party First Secretary Le Duan to the 12th Plenum of the Party Central Committee", December 1, 1965, Wilson Center Digital Archive, Pham Thi Vinh, ed., Van Kien Dang Toan Tap, Tap 26, 1965 [Collected Party Documents, Volume 26, 1965] (Hanoi: National Political Publishing House, 2003), 593-596, 607-616. Translated for CWIHP by Merle Pribbenow. <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/113970>

Summary:

In this secret policy speech, Vietnamese Communist Party First Secretary Le Duan outlines the North Vietnamese negotiating strategy with United States, including the conditions under which talks between the two sides might first begin.

Credits:

This document was made possible with support from Blavatnik Family Foundation

Original Language:

Vietnamese

Contents:

Translation - English

Speech Given by Party First Secretary Le Duan to the 12th Plenum of the Party Central Committee^[1]

[December 1965]

Advance Enthusiastically, Using All the Power of the People of both North and South to Defeat the American Imperialists and their Lackeys

[...]

III - The Question of Fighting and Talking

The question of fighting and talking is not an entirely new issue. In our own nation's history, Nguyen Trai^[2] implemented the strategy of using weakness to fight strength and of fighting and talking in order to defeat the Ming dynasty's feudal army. Our Chinese comrades decided to fight and talk simultaneously when they were fighting against the American-Chiang Kaishek clique. During the war against the Americans in Korea, the Koreans also utilized the policy of fighting and talking at the same time.

As I said before, with respect to our political strategy, we have decided that the South Vietnamese revolution must go through a transition period before we advance forward to unify our nation and then move our entire nation forward into socialism. In military terms, we do not advocate fighting until the enemy is totally destroyed, right down to the last American soldier in South Vietnam, and the American imperialists are compelled to accept unconditional surrender. Instead, we advocate fighting until the puppet army has essentially disintegrated and until we have destroyed an important portion of the American army so that the American imperialist will to commit aggression will be shattered and they are forced to recognize our conditions [for peace]! That means that the question of fighting and then talking - fighting until we win and then talking - or of fighting and talking at the same time is a matter involving the correct stratagem, and it is directly linked to our political and military policies mentioned above. All of these policies and stratagems are included in our strategy of using weakness to attack strength.

Currently, the American imperialists are still planning to intensify and expand the war in order to recover from their current situation, which is one of defeat and stalemate. However, they also are eager for us to sit down with them at the negotiating table so that they can force us to make concessions. As for our side, we believe we cannot sit down at the table until we have caused the puppet army to disintegrate and until we have crushed the American imperialist will to commit aggression. This is very secret, and we have not yet advised any of the fraternal [communist] parties of our position on this matter. We cannot accept the level of success that our side attained in Laos, because the balance of forces in South Vietnam, including both the balance of political forces and the balance of military forces, is completely different than it was in Laos.^[3]

However, this issue is very complicated because there are many differing opinions on the question of holding talks.

There is the American concept, which is the concept of negotiating from a position of strength. There is the concept of the neutral countries, which is to pave the way for the American imperialists. There are the concepts of countries that sincerely support us, but who have their own specific diplomatic and domestic considerations and who, because they do not have a clear understanding of our situation, are worried that in prolonged combat our side's losses and sacrifices will be too great. And then there are the concepts of a number of large nations in our camp whose strategic goals in the world are different than ours, and for that reason everything about their concepts, from the contents of their ideas to the tone of voice in which they couch them, is different than ours.

The strategy of using strength to fight strength is different in many respects from the strategy of using weakness to fight strength, so the stratagems that are used in each case cannot be completely identical. We use weakness to fight strength. Our most fundamental, our most basic strength is political; it is that we have the just cause. For that reason, we must present our concept in a very skillful manner in order to illuminate our good will, to win more widespread sympathy from the peace-loving governments and the peace-loving peoples of the world, to incite the anti-war struggle conducted by the American people, to expose the phony and deceitful peace campaign of the American imperialists, and to further isolate the American imperialists around the world.

Maintaining solidarity within our camp and winning the sympathy and assistance of our camp is a strategic problem. The question of fighting and talking, on the other hand, is an issue involving a stratagem. However, the stratagem is also very important, because if our stratagem is incorrect, not only will we be unable to consolidate and expand the world people's front opposing the American imperialists on the Vietnam question, but we might also cause the war to drag on and become protracted, thereby forcing our people to sacrifice more lives and more blood when we might have been able to reduce such losses.

In our situation, we may not have to wait until we have essentially won victory before we agree to begin talks. Instead, at some point in time and under certain specific conditions, we may be able to fight and talk simultaneously with the goal of restricting our opponent's military actions, of winning broader sympathy and support throughout the world, and of concealing our own strategic intentions. The issue right now is the question of a favorable opportunity to employ this stratagem. The opportunity will come when our forces have won greater and more complete victories on the battlefield, when the enemy's situation has become more desperate and confused, and when the enemy's will to commit aggression has deteriorated further. That opportunity will also be the result of an agreement reached between the fraternal socialist nations and parties about the concept of fighting and talking.

The Resolution of the 11th Plenum of the Central Committee mentioned this subject, and it laid out a number of basic principles for it. Based on the ideas expressed by a number of comrades during this plenum, when the conditions are ripe the Politburo, using the spirit of the resolution of the 11th Plenum as its foundation, will make a concrete decision about employing this stratagem.

[...]

VI - A Number of Thoughts About International Aspects of the Problem of South Vietnam

During the time that we worked to lay out the path of the revolution in South Vietnam, we concluded that South Vietnam is a place where all of the fundamental contradictions of the entire world are concentrated: the contradiction between the national independence movement and the imperialist aggressors, the contradiction between the two camps, the contradiction between the proletarian class and the capitalist class, and the contradiction between peace and war.

Because this is the content and the nature of the problem, today the problem of Vietnam in general, and of South Vietnam in particular, has become the center of all the world's issues. The resolution of the problems of Vietnam and of South Vietnam are linked to a host of other international problems. That is why the entire world is now concerned about the Vietnam problem. In addition, because we have chosen the correct path for the revolution in South Vietnam and for other international issues, we have been able to win widespread sympathy and tremendous assistance throughout the world.

However, we are faced with one unfortunate fact: the revolutionary war in the southern half of our country is raging a time when our camp, and the international communist movement, is not of one accord about the path of the world revolution. At certain times the public disagreements and arguments quieted down for a while, but recently the situation has reemerged and developed so that the tension is now even greater than it was when Khrushchev held the leadership role in the Soviet Union. That is a fact. Previously, before Khrushchev was removed from office, the three fraternal communist parties of the Soviet Union, China, and Vietnam, joined by the Lao Communist Party, sat down together in a meeting to discuss the problem in Laos. Now, however, the prospect for united action by our camp, or for a three-sided or four-sided discussion aimed at joining together to combat the American imperialists on the Vietnam problem is very dim. In the face of this difficult situation, our Party Central Committee has had to be very cautious. We have had to think carefully and weigh many factors, and we have had to work with all of our might to win the most effective support and assistance from the nations in our camp as well as to try to avoid allowing the worst effects of the disagreement to harm our people's cause of combating the Americans to save the nation.

Our party has always and will always advocate solidarity in the international communist movement, solidarity in our camp, and solidarity between the Soviet Union and China, a solidarity that is based on Marxism-Leninism and on the ideology of the international proletariat. We sincerely believe in such solidarity, because we believe that the Vietnamese revolution in general and the revolution in South Vietnam in particular are integral parts of the world proletarian revolution. We believe that the revolutions of all the nations of the world, from the time the October Revolution succeeded right up to the present, and irrespective of whether they were proletarian revolutions or national democratic revolutions, are all part of the proletarian revolution. That is Lenin's path, and it is also a fact that has been confirmed by history. We once again reaffirm that assessment, and we raise this issue in order to continue to steadfastly follow our Party's course of international solidarity.

However, from another standpoint, when we work to win support and assistance from parties and nations in our camp and from the international communist movement, we must consider the strategic missions and the political positions of each individual party and country in order to present these parties and countries with logical requests for the correct level of assistance, because we must clearly understand that while the parties and nations that belong to our camp, and the parties that are part of the international communist movement, are connected to one another through the spirit of international proletarianism, there are also differences in the concrete relationships between specific, individual nations, differences created by their geographic locations, their histories, by whether their strategic missions in the world are similar or different, and by regional issues. If we fail to clearly understand those concrete differences, then we are not being objective, and at the same time we will not have the necessary foundation for correctly understanding many of the other complete international issues in the world today.

With respect to the Party Central Committee's domestic and foreign policies, generally speaking all cadres and Party members basically agree with and support these policies. Recently, however, in light of the public arguments within the international communist movement about issues related to the revolutionary situation in our nation of Vietnam, a small number of our party members have evidenced anxiety and suspicion that, in their eyes at least, it seemed that our Party's international path might have changed. We have not discussed international issues during this plenum of the Central Committee, but in order to expel all these suspicions I believe it is necessary to discuss a few vital points.

Ever since the resolution on international issues was passed by the Central Committee's 9th Plenum, our Party's Central Committee has held a steady course and

has correctly implemented the policy laid out in that resolution.^[4] However, a number of comrades have mistakenly concluded that our Party's policy has changed. This is because these comrades do not correctly understand the basic spirit of the 9th Plenum's resolution and because a number of locations did not adequately or properly disseminate that resolution.

The resolution of the 9th Plenum of the Party Central Committee clearly laid out our Party's thoughts regarding the strategy and stratagems of the world revolutionary movement and the world communist movement, but the resolution did not analyze the differences between our Party's concepts and policies and the concepts and policies of other fraternal communist parties in any significant detail. This was because our Central Committee decided that such things should only be discussed up to a certain point in order to maintain solidarity within our camp and solidarity within the world communist movement. However, if we correctly understand the basic spirit of this resolution, we must recognize that the strategic policy of our Party differs from the policies of the Soviet Communist Party and the Chinese Communist Party.

Our Party has concluded that the world revolution is now in an offensive position, and our Party advocates an intensification of the revolution's attacks against imperialism, which is led by the American imperialists, in order to maintain world peace and to push back, one step at a time, and overthrow individual components of world imperialism so that we can achieve victory for the world proletarian revolution. This revolutionary strategy is fundamentally different than the defensive strategy of détente, of seeking peace at any price, that is being followed by the Soviet Communist Party ...

When we delve more deeply into ideas about current international issues, we can also see many points of difference between the policies of our Party and the policies being followed by the Soviet and Chinese Communist Parties. However, I will only mention a few basic points in order to demonstrate that these differences in strategy are the reasons that our Soviet comrades and our Chinese comrades have different attitudes about the Vietnam problem, and that in fact our policy has not changed.

On our side, just because we have differences does not mean that we place the Vietnamese revolutionary movement outside of the world proletarian revolutionary movement or that we place our nation outside of the socialist camp, and it does not mean that we are not determined to maintain solidarity with the Soviet Union and with China. Naturally, if we agreed on policy, then our solidarity would be truly tight, but even though we have not yet reached agreement on policy, our Party is still striving to maintain solidarity and is still doing everything in its power to build solidarity with the Soviet Union and China.

As we always have in the past, and as we will always continue to do in the future, our Party views the Soviet Communist Party as the Party of Lenin, and we view the Soviet Union as the first Fatherland of the world proletariat. In the same way, our Party views the Chinese Communist Party as a Party that holds an extremely important position in the world and in Asia, and we view our country's relationship with China as being as close as that between the lips and the teeth - we will live or die together. For that reason, our Party's policy is to defend the Soviet Union, to defend China, to maintain solidarity with the Soviet Union, and to maintain solidarity with China in order to unite and protect the entire socialist camp and the international communist movement. We are determined never to deviate from that path.

If we want to maintain solidarity with the Soviet Union and with China, then our Party must be independent and self-reliant. Independence and self-reliance represent the spirit of high responsibility of a Marxist-Leninist party toward the fate of the citizens of its country, toward its entire nation, and toward the international communist movement. It represents the correct and creative use of the principles of

Marxism-Leninism, viewed in the context of our own national situation and of the realities of the world revolution, to determine the policies of our Party. Independence and self-reliance are not built mechanistically by merely following the policies of another party. Independence and self-reliance are the correct attitudes and ways of thinking of a Marxist-Leninist party. They are not contrary to the true spirit of international proletarianism, and it is in fact because of our spirit of international proletarianism that we must firmly maintain a spirit of independence and self-reliance.

We need this spirit of independence and self-reliance, but we must always be very modest and we must always view the Soviet Communist Party and the Chinese Communist Party as our older brothers, our elders, as parties with vast experience in revolutionary struggle that we must study and as parties from whom we must learn. We also greatly value the experiences of all other fraternal communist parties and we must study their experiences. However, studying their experiences is one thing, but independence in policy direction is something altogether different. In order to be creative, we must be independent and self-reliant. Mechanical imitation can lead to errors, and sometimes it is even "reactionary," as Comrade Mao Zedong himself has said.

Our Party's experiences and our revolutionary realities have demonstrated that whenever we firmly maintain a spirit of independence and self-reliance we are able to be creative in our development of policies and directions, and we achieve success.

In regard to the experiences of the Russian revolution, we have studied the basic issues involved, such as the need to establish and maintain a dictatorship of the proletariat, the need to form a worker-peasant alliance, the need to use revolutionary violence to combat counter-revolutionary violence, the need to have a stalwart, indomitable Marxist-Leninist party, etc. However, when we took these principles and applied them to our nation's revolution, we created a revolutionary path that bore distinctly Vietnamese characteristics. This is easy to understand, since the Russian October Revolution was a proletarian revolution that was carried out in a relatively developed capitalist nation, while our own August Revolution was a popular national democratic revolution that was led by the proletariat and that was carried out in a colonial and semi-feudal nation.

There are many similarities between China and our nation, so we have studied and learned a great deal from the Chinese Revolution. The Chinese revolutionary experience has given the Vietnamese revolution many valuable lessons, such as that the peasants are the main force troops of the revolution, the protracted war, building base areas, guerrilla warfare, etc. However, our Vietnamese revolution has its own unique characteristics. While we have studied the experiences of the fraternal parties in other countries, we used a spirit of independence and self-reliance to set policies and directions that were suitably adapted to suit the realities and the circumstances of our nation. I will cite a few examples:

-During the 1936-1939 period, Comrade Le Hong Phong^[5] returned from abroad with the policy line of forming a Popular Front based on the Chinese experience. At that time, however, after concluding that the balance of forces in our country was different than it was in China, our Party's Central Committee did not approve that policy line and decided instead to form the Indochina Democratic Front.

-During the August [1945] General Insurrection, we built base areas and captured the rural countryside, but when an opportunity presented itself, we quickly launched insurrections in the cities instead of using the rural countryside to surround and besiege the cities. Because of the fact that we conducted both military and political struggles simultaneously and that we seized control of both the rural countryside and of the cities, we were able to win a glorious victory in the August Revolution.

After peace was restored [in 1954], we again devoted a great deal of attention to studying and learning from the Chinese experiences, but in our policies we continued to maintain a spirit of independence and self-reliance. We decided that after the imperialists and the feudalists were overthrown, we would form a popular democratic dictatorship, which was actually a proletarian dictatorship, and our socialist revolution in North Vietnam is actually composed of three revolutions: a revolution in production relationships, a revolution in technology, and a revolution in thought [ideology] and culture [education]. When we collectivized our agricultural production, we also carried the collectivization process out in stages that involved all three of the above-named revolutions. The content of our agricultural collectivization differed from the way our Chinese comrades collectivized agriculture in both the way we addressed the problem and in the way we carried it out. With regard to socialist reform in the mountainous areas, the Chinese experience was that if democratic reform was not implemented first, then socialist reform would be impossible. We, however, decided to combine democratic reform with the introduction of agricultural collectivization in 3,000 villages in the mountainous regions of our nation.

With regard to the problem of South Vietnam, our Party took the initiative in launching a revolution that applied policies, formulas, and methods we had learned through the course of the August Revolution and during the first resistance war [the war against the French]. When we made the decision to launch the revolution in South Vietnam, Khrushchev did not approve, and our Chinese comrades counseled us that we should view this as a long-term effort and that we should hold back to wait for an opportunity. However, we did not do that, and the tremendous victories won by the South Vietnamese revolution over the past several years clearly cannot be separated from our Party's spirit of independence and self-reliance.

In summary, I want to stress that we must work hard to study the experiences of the fraternal parties, and especially of the Soviet and Chinese parties, but our policies and positions must be independent, and we must control the fate of our Party and of our nation. The reason I have spoken so much about the spirit of independence and self-reliance is that I believe our party has a serious problem, in that it lacks independence and self-reliance. Because of this lack of independence and self-reliance, a number of cadre and Party members can be easily swayed and lured off course, especially on international issues, and in that way they begin to suspect the correctness of our Party Central Committee's policies and programs.

Our Party's sacred historical mission and its heavy but glorious responsibility is to defeat the American aggressors. The defeat of the American imperialists will not only be a great victory for our nation and our people; it will also be a major victory of profound international significance. For that reason, we will put aside all disagreements and will seek every way possible to strengthen solidarity within our camp and to maintain solidarity with the Soviet Union and China. We do not always have to talk about combating revisionism and expanding the struggle when we talk about each and every problem. We will criticize the ideas of making agreements with and surrendering to the American imperialists, we will criticize the trend toward self-isolation and failing to seek the help of fraternal nations within the socialist camp, and we will oppose revisionism on the specific issue of combating the American imperialists in Vietnam, but on other issues that involve differences of opinion and differences in policy, we will fight to keep these matters internal, just among ourselves, in a spirit of maintaining a dialogue among comrades.

I have not talked about these matters in order to make us feel pessimistic and downhearted. The tremendous victories that our people are winning in the resistance war against the Americans to save the nation cannot be separated from the sympathy and the support we have received from the people of the world, from the international communist movement, and, in particular, from the support and assistance provided to us by the fraternal socialist countries, especially the Soviet Union and China. Even though there are profound differences of opinion between the two sides, both the Soviet Union and China are continuing to provide us with ample, effective, and ever increasing assistance. We are sincerely thankful for the precious

assistance provided to us by the Soviet Union, China, and the other fraternal nations. These are not just polite words spoken from the tips of our tongues, but they come instead from the bottoms of our hearts. Long into the future, we will continue to teach our children and grandchildren that they should feel profoundly grateful toward the Soviet Union and China, and we will build eternally friendly relations with the Soviet people, the Chinese people, and the people of the other countries in the socialist camp.

With respect to the current international problems, Uncle Ho and the Politburo are extremely concerned and extremely worried about solidarity within our camp and within the international communist movement. However, we know that this is a very complex problem that cannot be solved in a short period of time. While our nation is still at war, we need to maintain a truly high degree of agreement and unanimity. The entire Party must unite around the Central Committee. The entire Party must study and absorb the policies and positions of the Central Committee. The entire Party must speak and act in strict accordance with the policies and positions of the Central Committee, maintaining a spirit of discipline and vigilance, and we must never let personal feelings control our actions. We must expunge all of the incorrect suspicions I mentioned earlier in order to be able to concentrate our strength and our will on the work of fighting the Americans to save the nation and of defeating the American aggressors.

[....]

[1] Pham Thi Vinh, ed., *Van Kien Dang Toan Tap*, Tap 26, 1965 [Collected Party Documents, Volume 26, 1965] (Hanoi: National Political Publishing House, 2003), 593-596, 607-616.

[2] Nguyen Trai was a famous Vietnamese 15th century mandarin who served as chief advisor on military and diplomatic strategy to Vietnamese national hero and future emperor Le Loi during a successful decade-long struggle to drive out the Chinese Ming dynasty army that had invaded and occupied Vietnam.

[3] Translator's Note: This refers to the "success" Vietnam and the Pathet Lao had achieved through the signing of the 1962 Geneva Agreement on Laos

[4] Translator's Note: The Party Central Committee held its 9th Plenum in December 1963. One of the resolutions approved by this plenum was a resolution on the problem of "modern revisionism," which expressed Vietnam's opposition to Soviet Leader Nikita Khrushchev's policy of détente with the West and was interpreted to mean that Vietnam had aligned itself with China and against the Soviet Union in the growing Sino-Soviet split.

[5] Le Hong Phong was the first General Secretary of the Communist Party of Indochina. After studying in the Soviet Union and working for the COMINTERN in China, he returned to Vietnam in 1936. Le Hong Phong died in a French prison in 1942.