

December 14, 1965

**Memorandum of a Meeting of Minister Erich Mielke
with Nguyen Minh Tien on 13 December 1965**

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Summary:

The East German Minister of State Security, Erich Mielke, meets with the head of North Vietnam's Technical Operations Sector, Nguyen Minh Tien. Tien requests the transfer of expertise from East Germany in a number of different areas, including covert photography, remote surveillance (e.g. "bugging") and counterfeiting.

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M E M O R A N D U M

Regarding a meeting of the Comrade Minister
With the Vietnamese Comrades

NGUYEN MINH-TIEN Director of the OTS of the MfS of the Democratic Republic of
Vietnam

[REDACTED] Interpreter

On 13 December 1965 from 16:00 until 19:00

Comrade Nguyen Minh-Tien

Our Comrade Minister has written a letter to you, that you have already received, conveying the warmest greetings to you and your family. In the letter, our Minister could not write everything that he wanted to express. Therefore, he instructed me to explain this in detail.

I asked to be allowed to explain things regarding [our] situation and:

- + regarding the general situation
- + regarding the situation of the security institutions

We believe that you have already heard much about Vietnam.

I would like to report once more about something.

Firstly, some information about the situation in South Vietnam.

As you know, in 1954 our armed forces were brought out of the south and into the north in accordance with the Geneva Accords. Only the foundations of the party remained behind in order to carry on with the movement. We wished to strictly observe the Geneva Accords.

However the Americans destroyed much of the foundation of the party organizations. In many areas, only 10 of 100 party organizations remain. Beyond this, they terrorized the masses very gruesomely. The masses could not forever bear such acts of terror, therefore they rose up to fight the aggressors. You see, if they lead the fight, we can then defend our own forces and organize. At first only political battles were conducted – but with political battle alone, one cannot fight against terror. The Americans, as well as their South Vietnamese lackeys, have continued to kill the people.

The Americans are the advisors and they command the lackeys that carry out the orders. The advisors are based in the center as well as in the neighborhoods and districts.

After completing the political battle, one moves to armed warfare.

The hatred of the population is so strong that they sometimes spontaneously wage battle and therefore it is considered urgent by the Party that they take leadership into their hands.

From this battle one draws the conclusion that whom fights lives and whom does not fight dies. One also draws the conclusion that with armed war one can also defend oneself with one's own power. After that, the National Liberation Front was founded to consciously guide and lead the battle. So it was that the battle fronts were combined in South Vietnam, that is, the armed battle and the political battle – the illegal war and the legal war. In this way we could defend our fighters and eliminate the forces of the enemy. In South Vietnam, many new forms of warfare were imported, hence the political and armed groups.

The political methods are mass demonstrations through which political pressure is exerted on the enemy. There are also demonstrations that many people took part in. The puppet troops also have great fear of such demonstrations.

However there must be armed forces for the political battle to have a core.

There are also cases where enemy tanks and type M 113 amphibious vehicles began to destroy the crops of the population. However, the population drove back these tanks and amphibious vehicles through demonstration alone. There are also cases where women with bare hands went to the soldiers and grabbed their weapons with their bare hands so that they could not shoot.

In South Vietnam, the armed forces were established in three groups:

- a) Partisans and Militia;
- b) Local army units;
- c) The regular liberation army.

In South Vietnam, a people's war is breaking out.

The partisan war in South Vietnam has also taken on new steps in its development.

In the Soviet Union the partisan war was a tactical question, in China it was a strategic question, in South Vietnam it has taken on the form of a people's uprising.

In South Vietnam there is fighting everywhere – in the plains, in the highlands, in the country, in the cities, and in the midst of the enemy. Therefore the enemy is confused and the battle movement has developed very quickly.

The American imperialists support themselves by the following three elements:

- a) Strategic hamlets;
- b) The puppet authorities;
- c) The puppet troops.

The Americans adopted the experiences of the English. The English have built such strategic hamlets in Malaysia to fight against the communist movement.

The Americans wanted to build 15,000 strategic hamlets.

They have planned to attack the north after the construction of the strategic hamlets. They have calculated that when they have built only two thirds of the strategic hamlets, [the attack] would be successful.

They have built 8,000 strategic hamlets in South Vietnam. However the population has begun to destroy these strategic hamlets.

The Americans concentrate the population in these strategic hamlets and want thus separate them from the Army.

In Malaysia the imperialists were successful in using these strategic hamlets, however in South Vietnam the imperialists have not successfully built these strategic hamlets. They were destroyed. Under the leadership of the National Liberation Front the population has already destroyed 7,000 strategic hamlets. There remain only 1,000 more, however even these do not all fight for the purposes of the imperialists. There are areas where these strategic hamlets were converted into our battle-villages. These politics with the strategic hamlets have not succeeded.

In many areas the puppet authorities are not secure. They were destroyed. The puppet troops are currently on the way to destruction. Many desert and defect. The Americans are very concerned. If these troops collapse, it will give them very great difficulties. Therefore the Americans send their troops to South Vietnam to

1. occupy different strongholds;
2. raise the morale of the puppet troops;

However they cannot save the puppet troops. They go further along the way to their downfall. The Americans have [taken over] many strongholds to free up the puppet troops from these strongholds to make battle against the National Liberation Front.

However this cannot compensate for the destroyed troops. The American troops that were sent to South Vietnam are attacked by the Liberation Army. They have brought very modern weapons with them, however the Liberation Army has developed tactics of man against man, that is, close quarters battle. Therefore these modern weapons lose their effect. Under these circumstances the air force cannot attack, as they would strike their own troops. Therefore they have used the B 52 strategic aircraft. However, they also cannot strike the liberation troops with these, as they are always close to the enemy. Therefore they have flung their bombs onto the population and not on the troops. The liberation forces continue to further develop and the puppet troops are forced further into the ground.

The Americans have fallen into much confusion in South Vietnam. They meet many contradictions and many difficulties. If they do not raise the number of American soldiers, they fear that the puppet troops will collapse, but if they raise the number of these troops, they then worry about being able to support them.

Furthermore, we strike at the contradiction between the American troops and the puppet troops. A further contradiction is that if they widen the occupied area, they must spread their forces across a broader area and cannot as effectively strike back against the Liberation Army. But if they concentrate their forces, then they widen the area controlled by the Liberation Army. That is also a contradiction.

One tactic of the Liberation Army is to encircle the strongholds in order to destroy the reinforcements. If the enemy does not send reinforcements to the stronghold the stronghold will be destroyed, yet if they do send reinforcements, then these [reinforcements] will be destroyed. Thereby they fall into confusion. It is very hard for the Americans to go on further, but the retreat is also difficult.

They think the forces in South Vietnam are so strong only because of the aid from North Vietnam that they have received. Therefore they want to attack there, so that North-Vietnam will fear sending further aid to South Vietnam. They think that through the bombardment fewer people in South Vietnam will fight. Therefore they want to make it such that the population of North Vietnam will not help South Vietnam. They want to make the battle in South Vietnam go no further. Therefore the American imperialists have bombarded the transportation links in North Vietnam so that no more aid can be sent. They bombard our military strongholds in the North, so that our military forces will be somewhat weaker. They carry out a gradual bombardment that is continually extended to the north, beginning from the border area and following the traffic routes to the border with China. We can say that they have not achieved their goal, because we are prepared in North Vietnam against this destruction of war. We have organized firebases to fight the American aircraft

In combat are:

The Army,

The armed security forces

/similar to emergency police/,

The people's militias

Around flak installations, the people's militias have made a security perimeter using machine guns in order to protect the installations. In the population there is a competition for downing American aircraft. Educational work is being done amongst the public. As a result, this movement to shoot down aircraft is very strong. There is an island named "Conga" near us, directly on the border of North and South Vietnam at the 17th parallel. This island is only 2.8 km² large. The Americans have attacked this island multiple times with their air force and marine units, but they could not capture this island. The officers and soldiers on this island fight very bravely and heroically.

They have shot down many aircraft and fought back many marines. There have been days when they have fought 30 battles. The Americans have brought warships there, but they always fought them back. Therefore this island is known as an "Island of Heroes". There is also a bridge in the south from Hanrong, at the bridge there is only a small group of armed security forces. In one day they shot down 6 American aircraft. The shoot-downs were done with machine guns and rifles.

Although the soldiers are very young, they fight very bravely. Shoot-downs with rifles and machine guns are possible because the Americans have not been successful in attacking the bridge from high altitudes. Therefore they must fly very low. There are comrades who were wounded and nonetheless continued to fight. The first attempt to bomb this important bridge was on 4.4.1965. Despite some minor damage it still stood. This is an important bridge for all connections from North to South Vietnam. This group of soldiers was therefore awarded high awards and decorations. There are many heroic deeds of the People's Militia, the Army, and the armed security services. In the war of resistance against the French we had a hero who used his body as a machine gun mount. Now there are already many such heroes. There is a comrade that weighed only 42kg, but in a battle against American aircraft her hatred was so strong that she carried two ammunition crates weighing 98kg, i.e. twice her body weight. Normally she could not carry so much weight, but her hatred gave her strength and allowed her to do it. In response to the question "why?", she said that

she didn't know herself but that her hatred of the Americans gave her strength. Outside of the Army, the comrades of state security have a large role in the battle against the American aircraft. As I reported to you, the comrades of the armed security institutions have shot down many aircraft.

In addition, the comrades of the police and the fire department have acted very bravely. During the bombing they worked very bravely to keep order as well as fight the fires that broke out. The population is very calm, because they know that the police are there to maintain order. When a bombing takes place, the employees of state security go to the factories to provide guidance for the protection of the factory. Operations employees [state security personnel] follow their targets during attacks.

When we departed [Vietnam], 748 aircraft had been shot down at that time, but today we have heard that it is already 814 aircraft. Recently, the soviet comrades have given us missiles. Using these, our battle has become even more successful.

The Americans had calculated that with their air superiority they could suppress us in a few days. They have not achieved this goal. Naturally they have inflicted upon us certain losses of both human and material value. However this has had no great influence on our fight. They have mostly destroyed transport routes. In the beginning, our preparation was not so good and we had little experience. Therefore we had great difficulties, especially with transportation routes. Now we immediately perform the necessary repairs. The Americans wanted to undermine the fighting spirit of the population through this bombardment. This has not been accomplished. In the beginning there were people who were fearful, but if one has lived through [the bombardments] once, then one sees that it is not so bad as one thinks. Now it is normal to work and to fight [through the bombardment]. Now the peasants divide the work in the fields, even into shifts, because the Americans attack day and night.

If one can only hear it from a distance, one would think that the situation is very tense, but in fact life is proceeding quite normally. Naturally these things create many difficulties, but we believe that the Americans cannot win this war.

The people of South Vietnam are the determining factor. When the puppet-troops in South-Vietnam are destroyed, the Americans will lose the war, even now when the Americans are still strong. Our people are determined to win this war against the Americans. We must free our nation from this oppression and unite our land once more. Therefore we also fulfill our duty to defend this outpost of the socialist camp and to support the national liberation movement. If the Americans can suppress the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, they will also attack other socialist states. If the Americans can suppress the liberation movement in South Vietnam, then they will also seek to suppress the national liberation movements in other parts of the world. Therefore our party and our people are ready to fight to the end and to achieve victory. If the Americans expand the war to North Vietnam, we will also fight. We are firmly convinced that we will defeat the Americans, We have already seen that the American troops cannot withstand the attacks of the liberation army.

Earlier, during the war of resistance against the French, the French had more experience in Vietnam than the Americans do now. Despite that we were victorious. The Americans do not know this area as well as the French and also do not tolerate the climate as well. Therefore we are firmly convinced that the Americans cannot be victorious over us. Our party and government is firmly resolved to fight this battle to its end, even if it lasts 5-10 more years. This resolution – to fight 5 or 10 more years – is no empty resolution. We have calculated that we can endure a war of long duration, but the Americans cannot. The Americans are currently impeded everywhere in South Vietnam and are in disarray. The call for peaceful negotiation is only a tool in order for them to gain time to re-consolidate their forces.

They now continuously send troops to South Vietnam. This is done very quickly, because they worry that the marionette-troops will be destroyed.

Our supplies are already in place, but the Americans must bring their supplies to South Vietnam. Therefore we know that our battle is still difficult and prolonged, but we are confident in victory because it is not a broad civil war as before. The fight against the French was not so difficult and our armed forces are now stronger than before. The local institutions are now stronger than the regular army from before. In the war of resistance against the French, Vietnam was isolated from the socialist camp, but now Vietnam enjoys the help of the entire socialist camp. The Americans had a great deal of support in the Korean War from other states. Now they are more isolated. Not only politically isolated, but they must also deal with resistance in the USA. Therefore we believe that through the help of the socialist camp and the determination of our people, victory will be won.

Some remarks on the battle against agents in South and North Vietnam.

In South Vietnam the Americans have organized a strong network of agents – not only in the cities but also in the villages. They equip their agents with technical resources, etc. In South Vietnam, under the leadership of the National Liberation Front, a mass movement to combat agents was prepared. Through this much was achieved. The masses lead one such battle to isolate these agents. At the same time they educated the relatives of agents.

In the resistance struggle against the French, a "No"-movement was developed:

Have you seen something - no
Have you heard something - no
Do you know anything - no.

Now have develop a "Yes"-movement:

Are there many communists here - yes
Do you have many weapons - yes
Are there many of you - yes.

This brings the agents into confusion. With this battle against the agents there are many difficulties, because they have many hidden bases. The Americans have calculated that they cannot win the war quickly. In North Vietnam they have also reinforced their espionage. They have used all of the means available to smuggle espionage and sabotage groups into the North. They send spies through the border between Laos and Vietnam, between North and South Vietnam, and along the coast. In addition, they drop spies from the air with parachutes. The agents work both for espionage and sabotage. They are equipped with refined technology with which they can conduct their sabotage and espionage. There are cases where they have brought small rockets with them to carry out sabotage. These rockets are around 1m long and have a diameter of 115mm. The launch of these rockets is very simple. To adjust the elevation it is only necessary to support it on a simple dirt ridge. It has an explosive effect and can be launched to a distance of 8km. Launch is caused by triggering a contact using a battery from a distance of about 30m. After impact only shrapnel remains of the rocket. It has not yet been possible to disarm these rockets in order to remove the explosive warhead. These rockets use solid propellant.

The arrested agents report that these rockets were used for the first time in Vietnam.

There are some mountain areas in the border zone with national minorities that were

freed from the ruling circles. The agents are mobilizing these old reactionary forces. In North Vietnam we have developed a movement to protect the social order. In the state institutions there is a movement to protect state secrets from agents. Through these two movements we have discovered many spies and agents. But in our battle against the agents, we have had still more difficulties – especially in technical regards. The agents have modern technical equipment, but our technical level is still very low. Earlier we had no technical resources at all. When I was here in 1959, the comrades showed me something regarding the technical equipment. At home I reported to the minister about this. I had not known that I would then be charged with this work. Therefore I had not studied closely what this comrade had told me. After my report I was charged with this work – therefore we have begun with the development of technology within the MfS, but we have many difficulties with this development. We have no experience and also no knowledge and therefore also have difficulty with development. During the last year our Comrade Minister has continuously said that we should properly assemble a technical main department. But we also want to sincerely say that we have had many difficulties because the whole country is in a difficult position.

In the last year the socialist states have given us help, the GDR included amongst them. The government of the GDR has granted help to the DRV with technical equipment and our government has allocated a part of this help to our ministry in order to equip the technical main department.

In this development work we have little experience, we do not know how one should organize this sector – which cadres with which qualifications are required. In addition, we do not know which technical resources are necessary and how the buildings should be erected.

In the battle we have many difficulties, because the enemy is very sophisticated and we are very primitive. Therefore, we have cannot be grasped by our enemies. I have now reported the situation to you in broad strokes. Our Comrade Minister knows that the comrades of the GDR are in daily contact with the enemy and are in constant battle with the enemy. Here you have much initiative in battle with the enemy and a good tradition of science and technology. Therefore I ask of you to allow the study of your valuable experience in order to be able to better conduct our work. The following problems are of interest:

1. Study of experience in the following areas:

- Eavesdropping technology (microphones, telephones)
- Countermeasures against eavesdropping technology
- Securing documents against theft
- Safecracking (lock technology)
- Clandestine photography
- Surveillance of persons
- Mail control
- Technical resources for the equipment of IMs
(among other containers)
- Research and production of special equipment for security work (?)

2. Transfer of experience

- Establishment of institutions for control of the mail
- Establishment of institutions for the use of eavesdropping Technology
- Establishment of institutions for document production
- Establishment of institutions for research and production of devices and apparatuses necessary of operational work.

3. Transfer of Recommendations

- For the selection and qualification of cadres
- For the technical equipping of the technical operations sector
- For project planning of the technical operations sector (buildings, etc.)

4. Study of experience at the Criminal Technology Institute

(concrete requests are contained in a letter to the Minister of the Interior, Comrade DICKEL)

We would like to develop such institutions, but with modern equipment in order to perform our duties in a well-rounded manner. We ask you to allow us a meeting with Comrade Minister DICKEL.

We hope that you understand our position and help us, so that we can better fight against the imperialists. We are convinced that the aid will increase the fighting ability of the Ministry of State Security and will thereby help to fulfill our mission. Our Comrade Minister asks you to help our state security institutions, to improve our technical foundation and to improve the battle in technical regards.

We ask you to give the possibility to negotiate the basis of the list for needed equipment with the Foreign Trade Ministry, so that can deliver the correct equipment and supplies to us. Our Minister is very thankful for your aid in the earlier years and now.

Comrade MIELKE:

Thank you very much for the information about your position. There is no doubt that there are number of very important, interesting political and operational aspects contained within.

Naturally, as the MfS we follow the battle of comrades in North and South Vietnam against the Americans with great interest. Although here we battle the different secret services daily – the Americans, English French, West German, and others -, it is something different from yours, where the Vietnamese comrades lead the fight against the Americans and their lackeys in armed combat. Under the effects of bombs and other technologies of war, it is even more difficult to fight. What is required of us to support our comrades, we naturally want to do. The extent that our resources are available for use in the war in Vietnam – whether in North or South Vietnam – I cannot say exactly. A whole series of questions that were made by comrade TIEN must be checked by our specialists in order to determine what extent our experiences can be of assistance under the conditions in Vietnam. We had already begun, but unfortunately this link was broken. We have lost many years to assemble experience. We were already prepared to deliver an entire series of technologies and suddenly there was no opportunity to realize this plan. We lost some years of experience and the [opportunity to] test of our technology in Vietnam. Naturally it is such that these experiences are very important to us, because we do not overestimate our own forces.

We are of the opinion that our Vietnamese comrades know much and have a good deal of technology, otherwise they could not fight so effectively against the enemy. A great amount of experience and technology must be transferred to you – so we must first check our resources to see how much can be supported. Therefore we will consider the first set of questions regarding operations technology, to check which possibilities we have and also to deliver helpful aid and to better say which experiences can be transferred. The issue is that you have come alone. It is good to

master each question on an individual basis, because there are a lot of individual work areas [in your request]. In each area we have competent specialists with whom you may speak concretely to ensure that the result is useful. The second remark about aid concerns the orders to the industries of our republic – we ask you to hand over these orders, so that we can check whether our industries can deliver them and check what influence we can use to ensure quick and expedient delivery. Regarding the organizational structure and physical equipment, I do not know if they have studied these issues in other areas. Perhaps they have already assembled a great deal of expertise, so that it would not be a great task for our side to deliver them. Perhaps you already know a great deal more and we would only embarrass ourselves. You certainly were already in other countries. On such a long trip one certainly takes along something more. I do not know if we can add a great deal more to this question. That would have to be discussed further. The question regarding cadres and what one needs is difficult to assess. One can only say with certainty from experience. The situation in Vietnam is very different from that in the GDR. I think that our Vietnamese comrades have already found the right answer regarding how many cadres are needed. With some technologies one can concretely say – for the correct functionality of this technology one needs so and so many operating forces. For other problems it is naturally different.

The other question concerns the Mdl – we will organize [the meeting] with Comrade Minister DICKEL. The KTI is also very huge, there one cannot do everything alone. For this work, one requires more people. How much time is available?

Comrade Minister NGUYEN MINH-TIEN:

The time was not fixed. It is dependent on the work. We should not go into every technical area in full detail, instead we would like to clarify the fundamental questions, because in this area we still have the greatest difficulties. At the last time we began, we had found that one can do some things and cannot do others.

Since the trip abroad in 1959 I have not been to other countries to study. On the present trip we have made a trip to Hungary to study signals security there. I have not been to Moscow to study yet. The soviet Comrades have helped us, but I was not there personally. I was only in the GDR in 1959. At the founding of the OTS I was alone as the leader [of the delegation], I did not have any deputies. I always wanted to come [back], but I didn't want to burden you. Whenever I asked the question I was always told that I just wanted to go abroad. Recently I have received a comrade from the leadership, now I can already go away. Our comrade minister was also at the visit and has determined that you have a lot of experience. My later visit is related to my diffidence.

Comrade MIELKE

Due to the long duration of the interruption many possible experiences were lost, that is the only reason I asked the question. I can understand all of the reasons – the fact remains that six years are lost. If communists do not come together, then the enemy will profit from it. We are not opposed to meeting annually. I say this deliberately, because we currently do not know what is needed.

Now we must begin anew, but everything needs time. I say this only from this point of view, otherwise as a polite host I would not have spoken of it. Because we are really fighting, we could not understand why the thing broke off suddenly – as fighters we did not understand this.

Your presentation was very educational, but there are still a number of outstanding questions. We will meet again, but on this occasion I will pose these questions that

are of interest to us. I want to reflect on something further. You should have come earlier, communists need to meet one another more often. Fighters must always share their experiences. We do not want to come into a position to speak about questions that are not valuable to you; we are unpretentious. We know very well that everyone has something [to share] and that they have specific achievements and good results. Therefore, it is very good if you can meet more often; the exchange of experience is mutual. One should not only take, but also say their opinion.

Comrade NGUYEN MINH-TIEN:

I would like to be sincere. There was no foreign currency available for a trip.

The list for the order is worked out. The soviet comrades have already given suggestions to revise this list a few years ago. However, at that time there was no money available for it. The government of the GDR has now given aid. From this aid, the MfS receives a portion. Our minister has spoken with the deputy chief minister, so that we will be paid for all of the equipment from the aid-sum.

We ask for your recommendations for equipment.

Comrade MIELKE

We would have sent you the plane tickets; that would not have been a problem; when one fights, one also finds the necessary funds. We ask for the list of equipment to be handed over, so that it can be revised corresponding to the results of our exchange of experiences.

Following the meeting, in the presence of the deputy ministers – Comrade BEATER and Comrade WOLF – gifts from the MfS of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam were given to the MfS and to the Comrade Minister by the Vietnamese comrades.

4. Copies