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Reception by Soviet Vice Foreign Minister V. V. Kuznetsov for the General Director of the Polish Foreign Ministry, Cde. Jerzy Michalowski

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Summary:

Polish official, Jerzy Michalowski, discusses the Vietnamese situation after meeting with several high ranking officials there. He asserts that the Vietnamese misguided in their belief that the US is not willing to fight a broadened war. He also notes that, although Vietnamese allies recognize this, they discourage Vietnam from opening negotiations.

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I received Comrade Michalowski [on 15 January 1966] at his request.

Michalowski said that in addition to the information on his talks in Beijing and Hanoi,[1] which he has already sent to Moscow, he would like to give his impression on the course of the talks on the whole. In his opinion, regardless of the lack of concrete results, the trip was useful. The Vietnamese comrades did not conceal their astonishment about the candid expositions of views, which were characteristic for the talks by Comrade Michalowski in Hanoi. They constantly stressed that they trust the Polish side and highly value its help and attention.

In the words of Comrade Michalowski, the character of the meetings and talks with the leaders of the DRV sharply contrasted with the reception that had been given in Beijing, when he conferred with the vice minister for foreign affairs of the PRC, Wang Bingnan, and the head of the PRC FMA department, Yu Zhan. Michalowski remarked that he briefly laid out to them the contents of the talks with [US Ambassador-at-Large Averell] Harriman in Warsaw, but did not say anything about the Polish point of view. The Chinese sharply criticized the American 14 Points aimed at solving the Vietnamese problems, which they characterized as yet another trick, aimed at the masking of their preparations for the broadening of war in Vietnam. They also greatly stressed that the Americans run into great difficulties in the course of their military activities, that even within the United States the wave of protest against the war in Vietnam increased and that the Vietnamese cdes. threaten the well-being of the military allies of the US in view of the negative views of some of the partners on the American policy in Southeast Asia. In the words of the Chinese, peaceful negotiations are in principle possible, but only after a military victory, because "nobody [ever] won [a war] at the green table." Wang Bingnan, in particular, stated that he cannot speak for the Vietnamese, but he believes that they [will] answer in a similar way. He raised the astonishment that the Polish comrades transmitted such "one-sided proposals," [and] that they refuse to expose and condemn the maneuvers of the Americans. It is noteworthy, Comrade Michalowski said, that, on the day of my arrival, an article on "the black spirit, which flies over Asia" was published in one of the Beijing newspapers.

Furthermore, Michalowski talked about his meetings in Hanoi, where he was received by cdes. [Pham] Van Dong and Ho Chi Minh, and also conferred with the vice prime minister and minister for foreign relations, Cde. Nguyen Duy Trinh. According to the words of Cde. Michalowski, he spoke in detail on the talks with Harriman and laid out, without any reference to the PUWP [Polish United Workers' Party], their [the American] point of view on the question.

The essence of the answer by Cde. Nguyen Duy Trinh was similar to the Chinese. In essence, he said that we have to wait, that a new victory of the type of the battle of Dien Bien Phu is necessary, and only then can [one] dictate one's own conditions.

In Comrade Michalowski's evaluation, the talk with Cde. Pham Van Dong was the most interesting. The latter stressed that the Vietnamese leaders "think day and night of how to end the war," however, they consider that "it has been still insufficiently proven to the Americans how difficult this war is for them, the Americans."

Cde. Pham Van Dong attentively listened to the communication by the Polish side about [the view] that a more complicated, peaceful settlement of the Vietnamese problem [will] follow [only after] the further escalation of the war in Vietnam, [and] that the DRV negates the possibility of the American public to speak out against the war. As an answer, he said, the DRV trusts the PUWP, that the Polish friends acted correctly, giving the DRV the contents of their talk with Harriman, and that he [Pham] does not agree with regard to the criticism of the Chinese.

The talk with Cde. Ho Chi Minh left a hostile impression on Michalowski. It was a pathetic moment; he spoke in pompous, vague phrases. Comrade Ho Chi Minh stated that the situation is well known to him, but the DRV [will] win the war, that at their time the French also were strong, but there was Dien Bien Phu. Now the DRV has become much stronger, and it has a great socialist family. Cde. Ho Chi Minh also mentioned his disagreement with the Chinese criticism with regard to the mediation of the PPR [Polish People's Republic], however, this was the only critical statement at the address of the Chinese.

The minister for foreign affairs, Cde. Nguyen Duy Trinh, in the course of the talk stated that, although now is not the time for talks, one should not let slip the banner of political struggle from the hands. It is necessary to conduct political work as well, and the statement of the DRV MFA of 1 January of this year should be judged just on that level. He gave to understand that the Vietnamese comrades do not completely reject the thought of the possibility of negotiations. What concerns the trip of the American public figure [Norman] Cousins, he said that the Vietnamese comrades agree to speak with him, but only outside of Hanoi. It will be better if he turns to one of the ambassadors of the DRV in any country. It would be good if he also would meet with representatives of the NLF.

Comrade Michalowski further said that he has the impression that, besides the channels known to them for contacts of DRV representatives with Americans, the Vietnamese comrades still have some possibilities to maintain direct contacts with the American side. This, in particular, the vice-head of the permanent representation to the UN [Charles W.] Yost gave to understand at the time of the meeting in New York with the permanent representative of the PRP to the UN, [Bohdan] Lewandowski.

As a result, Cde. Michalowski gave the following conclusion.

1. The Vietnamese leaders see their situation in a rosy light, overestimate their military successes, do not realize the readiness of the US for war on a broad scale, [and] underestimate the military potential of the US
2. The Vietnamese comrades do not see that they lose on a political level [by] turning down negotiations, do not take into consideration the changes in the correlation of forces in Asia and Africa (the events in Indonesia, the military revolutions in Africa), and overestimate the possibility of public opinion in the US to speak out against the war in Vietnam.
3. The Vietnamese friends understand the serious character of their difficulties, but do not want peaceful negotiations at the current time. They fight against a peace conference, because, in their views, the start of peace negotiations will be perceived in the whole world as capitulation of the DRV.
4. The impression emerges that relations of the DRV with the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam, whose leaders are under great influence of the Chinese, are highly complicated. Hanoi fears that if the DRV joins negotiations, the NLF could perceive this as a concession from the side of their northern allies [in exchange] for the cessation of [American] bombardments of the DRV. They [the North Vietnamese] observe that success is making the leaders of the NLF increasingly dizzy. They [the NLF leaders] think that, [after] winning light battles, they could go from victory to victory. Besides military action, they do not know other possible means of struggle.

They [the NLF leaders] are frightened by the possibility of the establishment of a coalition government, which supposedly would lessen the influence of the NLF. The complicated character of relations between Hanoi and the Front, in particular, was

supported by the talk with the minister of defense of the DRV, Vo Nguyen Giap, who is most often forced, given his position, to deal with the leaders of the NLF.

Furthermore Comrade Michalowski remarked that a great part of armaments of the South Vietnamese patriots at the time are Chinese-produced since Soviet armaments remain in the DRV.

5. It is felt that some people in the DRV do not agree with the Chinese; however, the influence of the PRC on the Vietnamese friends remains still great. This can be shown by the negative answer of the DRV to the Polish mediation. According to a series of signs, one can judge that the Chinese tried to render pressure on the DRV before the trip to Hanoi of the Soviet delegation headed by [CPSU Secretary] Cde. [Alexander N.] Shelepin and at the evening of the preparations for the 23rd CPSU Congress.

According to the evidence we have, a center for the coordination of armed activities in Southeast Asia was created not long ago in Beijing. Given Beijing's view of the war in Vietnam, one of the units is called "struggle against imperialism."

6. In the talks, the Vietnamese friends hinted at the desirability that the socialist countries render more aid to the DRV. If they said earlier that they do not want to drag the socialist countries into a world war, now they do not stress that proposition. Moreover, Cde. Nguyen Shu Chin stated in one of the talks that, if the Americans broaden the conflict and unleash a great war, then this will be a war of the socialist camp against the capitalists.

7. The Vietnamese comrades, using their channels of contacts with the Americans, will try to delay in every way the resumption of the bombardments of the DRV, [and] strive to suspend the unfolding of the American military machine.

According to Cde. Michalowski, on the way back he was informed in Delhi that in the last days, large military actions from the side of regular parts of the Army of Liberation could not be observed in South Vietnam. It is possible that this is simply a coincidence of circumstances, Cde. Michalowski said, but it is [also] possible that this is the response to Harriman's proposal "to lower the temperature in South Vietnam."

At the end of the talk, Cde. Michalowski was interested in our opinion on how the Polish side should act with regard to Johnson's communication and how they should reply to the Americans. According to the words of Cde. Michalowski, when he asked Cde. Ho Chi Minh, what to transmit to the Americans as an answer to their communication, he advised them [to read] the statement of the representative of the DRV MFA of 4 January 1966. In addition, cdes. Ho Chi Minh and Pham Van Dong stressed in the talks that a temporary cessation of bombardments of its [North Vietnam's] territory is not convenient for the DRV because the Americans must [first] stop the constant blackmailing of the DRV through air raids.

I thanked Cde. Michalowski for the information. I remarked that his conclusion corresponds to our conclusions. I said that we can give a more complete answer to Michalowski's question after the Soviet delegation headed by Cde. A. A. Shelepin returns to Moscow; the Polish side will be given corresponding information about the results of that visit.

[...]

[1] Michalowski traveled from Warsaw to Moscow, Beijing, Hanoi, and returned via India through Moscow and on to Warsaw between 30 December 1965 and 15 January 1966.