

## **February 1963**

### **Soviet Memorandum on the Polish Peace Initiative on Vietnam**

#### **Citation:**

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#### **Summary:**

Soviet memorandum on the meeting between US Ambassador John Kenneth Galbraith and Polish officials Michalowski and Rapacki. Describes the meeting as a sign of US weariness of involvement in Southeast Asia. Asserts that a neutralized Vietnam could be useful to the socialist countries as well.

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#### **Original Language:**

Russian

#### **Contents:**

Translation - English

1. Our Polish friends have informed us that a meeting has taken place in Delhi between the general director of the Polish MFA Comrade [Jerzy] Michalowski, who accompanied Comrade [Adam] Rapacki on the trip to India, and American Ambassador [John Kenneth] Galbraith, on his [Galbraith's] initiative. During the course of the conversation the US ambassador put forth a plan for the neutralization of South and North Vietnam, emphasizing that he is laying out his own point of view, although it is based on the opinion of US President Kennedy, which is well known to him. According to Galbraith's own words, Kennedy and part of the administration do not want Vietnam to turn into a second Korea and stand for the quick withdrawal of American troops from South Vietnam leaving Vietnam for the Vietnamese. Galbraith said that it would be possible to bring about the neutralization of Vietnam on the Laos model, but for that to happen it would be necessary to conclude an agreement for a six-month truce between the two sides. During this time the two sides would stop all military activity and military propaganda and would start talks on the withdrawal of foreign troops from South Vietnam and the neutralization of Vietnam.

The US Ambassador to Delhi further claimed that the USA has experienced difficulties with Diem and that in Washington the opinion of him is negative, but the Kennedy administration cannot reject aid to Diem, since this would not be understood in the USA. Furthermore, Galbraith said he does not see forces on which to base a new government in South Vietnam, since Diem has destroyed the oppositional elements in the country. In the conclusion of the conversation Galbraith expressed his hope that his suggestion would be given some consideration.

2. Galbraith's appeal to the representatives of Poland, which is a member of the International Commission on Supervision and Control in Vietnam, is, in our estimation, clearly calculated to ascertain the attitude of Poland as well as of the DRV and other Socialist countries to the idea of the neutralization of Vietnam. This overture is along the line that was first marked in US politics regarding Southeast Asia after the departure Eisenhower from the office of President and manifested during the settlement of the Laos problem. The current US government inherited certain responsibilities in the region of Southeast Asia; this concerns both Laos and South Vietnam, which are now viewed as a serious burden for American foreign policy. This was expressed directly by President Kennedy during his meeting with Comrade N.S. Khrushchev in Vienna in [June] 1961. The many-year-long and wearisome war against the nationalist-patriotic forces of South Vietnam, it seems, has forced the ruling circles of the US to understand that American armed forces will not win laurels in the jungles of South Vietnam. The USA are substantially entangled in this war, which for the most part falls on the shoulders of American armed servicemen, sent to a foreign land far from the USA.

As is well known, the Americans have tried using "guerrilla war" methods against the people's liberation movement, and have even created educational formations for that purpose. But it's one thing when the war is led by guerrillas - avengers of the people, patriots fighting for freedom and independence of their country, and another when intervention-punitive forces, attempting to strangle a national liberation movement, pose as guerrillas. It is one thing to brag about plans for a guerrilla war, another to be faced with guerrilla war and popular anger in a foreign land.

All of this speaks to the fact that the government of the USA, which now puts forth the idea of a neutralization of Vietnam, is searching for a way out of the military and political dead end into which it was led by an aggressive policy in Vietnam. Galbraith spoke to the Polish representative of concluding a truce between the two countries, although legally speaking there is no war. Most important is that the question of withdrawing foreign forces has been raised, and that is a favorable formula for us, since there are no such forces in the DRV, and foreign forces are only present in South Vietnam. Offering equal conditions in this question, the Americans are really trying to save face. Without there being formally equal conditions, they would have difficulty finding support for their offer in their own country.

3. Of course, it would be possible to ignore the overture of the American ambassador and not to react to it. But for us, and, possibly, for our Vietnamese friends, the question arises whether it might not be best, for the benefit of the DRV and the socialist countries, to take the opportunity created by the US government's desire to somehow untangle itself from the situation in which it has found itself in South Vietnam. In other words, would it not be worthwhile to think over how to turn the idea of neutralization of Vietnam in such a way as to make it strengthen the DRV, to create a more favorable basis for the struggle of national-patriotic forces of South Vietnam and along with that to liquidate the center of tensions in the Southeast Asia region? In our view, this opportunity, particularly while it is only an opportunity, exists and is worth exploiting.

We are proceeding from the fact that the subject of any international talks and agreements regarding the neutralization of Vietnam could come out of the foreign politics of this problem. Naturally, all questions regarding the sphere of domestic affairs which might in some way touch on the social-political structure of the DRV or to some degree hold down the democratic-patriotic forces in South Vietnam cannot come under discussion. One must assume that the Americans themselves are so shortsighted [не дальновидны] that they are hoping for some sort of deal which would allow for a change in the domestic order of the DRV.

We believe that the neutralization of South Vietnam means first the obligation not to take part in any military alliances or alignments and not to allow the arrival of foreign troops or positioning of military bases and footholds [опорных пунктов] on its territory. The obligation would be formally accepted by the DRV and South Vietnam, but in practice this order places the obligation specifically on South Vietnam; the USA, like other countries, if they have troops there, will have to withdraw them from South Vietnam. This would bring to an end the armed intervention of the USA in South Vietnam.

In this conception the neutralization of Vietnam would obligate both Vietnams only formally - the north and the south, but in reality it would only affect South Vietnam, since in the DRV there are not now foreign troops or bases. In accordance with the Geneva accords of 1954 it is not a part of a military alliance. It follows that neutralization would not force any new obligations in this regard on the DRV and nothing would change in its relations with socialist countries which with all their might dependably guarantee and will continue to guarantee her security.

The situation in South Vietnam is a different affair. There are American troops there, American military advisers, who play a direct role in military operations against South Vietnamese patriots. The territory of South Vietnam has practically turned into a military base for the USA. Finally, South Vietnam, as was once the case with Laos, is included in the SEATO sphere of activity. With the neutralization of South Vietnam all these attributes of aggressive politics on the part of the USA with regard to Vietnam would be overturned. Naturally, all this would create new, more favorable conditions for the South Vietnamese people's will to manifest itself in the choice of a socialist-political order.

4. The USA, of course, might try to reach an agreement which would allow them to strengthen, in South Vietnam, a government and regime favorable to them, and to prevent DRV efforts to help the national-patriotic forces of South Vietnam. It is wise to keep these intentions of the US in mind. Such attempts must be rebuffed.

Our Vietnamese friends are better judges of how the situation in South Vietnam will unfold after the American troops leave, if it would be possible to reach an agreement on that. But one thing is clear: whether the Americans want it or not, the withdrawal of their troops from South Vietnam would significantly weaken the reactionary forces of South Vietnam, the main support of whom has been American bayonets.

In looking at the idea of a neutralization of Vietnam, we are guided [by the idea that] its achievement should by no measure mean a refusal of the sovereign rights of the Vietnamese people to strive for the establishment in South Vietnam of such an order as they consider appropriate for themselves. This means that if there were to be international talks, the socialist countries would not assume any obligations guaranteeing the existence of the Ngo Dinh Diem regime, and would not allow the inclusion of international agreements on positions directed against the patriotic forces of South Vietnam.

5. The agreement on the neutralization of Vietnam could strengthen and develop the corresponding positions of the Geneva accords of 1954, which, as our Vietnam colleagues emphasize fairly, are not a bad weapon in the hands of the people of both Vietnams in the fight for reunification on a democratic basis.

It would be possible to use the Geneva accords which were, with the consent of and pressure from the USA, violated by Diem, and to return, in part, to the fight for general elections, as stipulated in these accords, as well as other Geneva positions, favorable to the DRV.

It is not impossible that the Americans might try to lead things to where they would cross out the Geneva accords which foresee unification of Vietnam. This is an important question and we believe that concessions must not be allowed. Keeping in mind that our Vietnamese friends have already created a flexible program for the gradual unification of the country in stages, the challenge for the socialist countries in potential talks would be to decisively press for this program of unification, responding to national expectations of the Vietnamese people and the interests of securing peace in Southeast Asia.

6. In the case of its neutralization and the departure of American troops of South Vietnam, the DRV might free up certain resources for the further expansion of the peaceful aspects of its economy, an additional benefit of a neutral Vietnam. It would likely increase the possibility of establishing contacts and reaching agreements between the DRV and South Vietnam on certain questions of normalization of relations between the two countries which in the past were brought up multiple times by our Vietnamese friends. The doors would open for cooperation between the DRV and South Vietnam in the economic sphere, in part, for the development of trade, as well for scientific- technological and cultural exchange. All this, taken together, would allow for the strengthening of DRV influence on South Vietnam and pour additional energy into the Vietnamese people's movement to unite their motherland, and in general would increase the impact of such influence on South Vietnam, which under known conditions could lead to the downfall of the reactionary regime there, and possibly even the unification of the country on a basis favorable to the DRV, that is, on the basis of socialism.

7. If we evaluate the significance of a possible agreement on the neutralization of Vietnam, favorable to us from the point of view that this would reflect on the overall picture of the international situation, then, it seems, there is no reason to doubt that such a step would lead to the relaxation of international tensions. The neutralization of South Vietnam, accomplished under the flag of neutralization of all Vietnam, would mean the widening of a breakthrough in the position of international governments and first of all that of the USA in Southeast Asia, and would destabilize such Western military alliances as SEATO and in part CENTO, and would allow for a further displacement of the Americans from Asia.

Weighing all the "pros" and "cons" of the idea of a neutralization of Vietnam, we also take into consideration that it is founded on a political program close to the National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam, which accelerates the termination of

American armed intervention, the withdrawal of military personnel by the US and its satellites, the liquidation of American military bases, as well as the termination by all interested sides of all military activity and the reestablishment of peace on the basis of a South Vietnamese settlement by the South Vietnamese people. This program includes positions on the conduct by South Vietnam of a political peace and neutrality, the creation, along with Cambodia and Laos, of a neutral zone, in which each country would have full sovereignty and would reject participation in any military or political alliances. In the program of the national front for the liberation of South Vietnam there is an emphasis also on the necessity of concluding an international agreement which would guarantee the respect of independence, sovereignty of international territorial integrity and the neutrality of South Vietnam.

All this induces us to address the Vietnamese comrades with our thoughts. Of course, this question is closer for our Vietnamese friends, and for that reason they can see more clearly all the pluses and minuses of the realization of a neutralization of Vietnam. Because we have formed the conviction that the pluses in this case significantly outweigh the minuses, we consider it our duty to state our reasoning. If it does not, in principle, coincide with the opinion of the Vietnamese comrades, then it seems it would be necessary to agree on a way to proceed.

First of all we, of course, mean that the relevant consultations will take place between the interested socialist countries with the goal of developing a single coordinated position, as it was on the eve of the Laos meeting. Along with that it would be possible, in a form acceptable to all of us, to react to the American overture (for example, through the Polish representatives to whom they turned,) and to let the US government know that the socialist countries would not object to the conduct of the talks regarding the proposal of Vietnamese neutrality.

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Information of Comrades Rapacki's arrival in India, and in particular the conversation between Comrade Michalowski and American Ambassador Galbraith, in which, on his own initiative, and, it appears, without Washington's knowledge, the question of Vietnam's neutralization was raised, was given much attention in the CC CPSU. This information, relayed to us by a representative of Polish MFA who arrived in Moscow specifically for that purpose, is undoubtedly of interest.

It is apparent that Kennedy is not opposed to finding a compromise solution regarding South Vietnam, as was earlier attempted for Laos. It seems that the Americans have arrived at the conclusion that the continued intervention in Vietnam does not promise victory and have decided to somehow untangle themselves from the difficult situation they find themselves in over there.

It is our view that the idea of neutralizing Vietnam could be used by socialist countries for the purpose of trying to untangle the dangerous knot of international tensions in Southeast Asia and also to strengthen the international-political position of the DRV.

Our thoughts regarding the neutralization of Vietnam are laid out in detail in our message to Comrade Ho Chi Minh; we would first like to consult you regarding its contents.

If you do not have any doubts regarding the possibility of using the idea of neutralization of Vietnam in the interests of Socialist countries and you share our thoughts, then we believe that you could, possibly, inform our Vietnam friends yourself, should you find that expedient. This would be completely understandable, considering that Poland is a member of the International Commission of Supervision

and Control in Vietnam and that the Americans undertook their overture through Polish representatives.