

LETTER OF INSTRUCTIONS NO. 878, June 20, 1979

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SUBJECT :

Re-assessment and Re-definition of the Policy of the Philippine Government re Kalayaan Island

TO :

The Minister of National Defense

The Chief of Staff, Armed Forces of the Philippines

In the negotiations between China and Vietnam, Chinese Foreign Minister Han Nianlon travelled to Hanoi to meet with Vice Premier and Foreign Minister Phan Hien.

Vietnam made three proposals:

- In the creation of a demilitarized zone to secure peace in the border region and the exchange of prisoners.
- Restoration of normal relations between the two countries including rail, air and postal communications.
- The settlement of the border and territorial dispute on the basis of the Franco-Chinese agreements of 1887 and 1895.

Vice Minister Hans reply ignored the demilitarized zone, repeated the principle of the Sino-French accords to be the basis of a negotiated settlement, but unlike the Vietnamese whose demilitarized zone of three to five kilometers would extend from "the line of actual control prior to Feb. 17, 1979, the Chinese proposed maintenance of status quo of the boundary "at the time when the central committees of the Chinese and Vietnamese parties exchanged letters in 1957-58".

The Chinese reply called on Vietnam to recognize Peking's sovereignty over the disputed Paracel and Spratley Islands "and withdraw all its personnel from those islands in the Nansha (Spratley) group which it has occupied.

The history of the dispute over the islands underlines the problems faced by the two countries over territorial questions. Moves to deal with the problems in 1973-75 led to attempts by Vietnam and China to strengthen their claims by actual occupation, which in turn led to further aggravation of the disputes.

A document recently released by Hanoi shows that on December 26, 1973, the Vietnamese informed China of their intention to prospect for oil in the Gulf of Tonkin and proposed negotiations to delineate the border in the gulf. On January 18, 1974, Peking replied agreeing to talks but asked Vietnam to keep third parties away from the gulf. The following day, China mounted an operation to seize the Paracel islands from the Saigon regime. A year later, Hanoi forces, continuing their offensive against the Nguyen Van Thien regime, "liberated" the Spratley Islands, thus forestalling any possible Chinese move to occupy them.

The proposal of the Ministry of National Defense to lengthen the airfield in Pagasa Island to turn it into a base for fighter planes poses the most serious tactical and strategic question.

Can we defend the Kalayaan Islands against the Chinese or the Vietnamese in the various possible situations posed by the open position frankly stated of the United States that they will not help us defend the "Spratley Islands" but only the Metropolitan territory defined by the Treaty of Paris of 1898 and our Constitution?

Even if we can defend the Kalayaan Islands, is not the cost of defending them too high for the supposed advantage.

What are such advantages?

You are hereby directed, therefore, to make a staff study and submit to me your recommendations for final action by the Military Council to be called by the President on the matter.

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