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**Record of Conversation between R.G. Casey and
Chou En-lai [Zhou Enlai], Geneva, 18th June 1954**

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Summary:

Record of conversation in first person by Australian official R.G. Casey during the Geneva Conference 1954. Casey discusses his first meeting with Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai and describes Zhou's attitude toward the situation in Korea and Indochina.

Original Language:

English

Contents:

Original Scan

RECORD OF CONVERSATION BETWEEN R.G. CASEY AND CHOU EN-LAI
GENEVA, 18th JUNE 1954.

I went to see Chou en-Lai at a pleasant villa about 8 miles north of Geneva. The meeting had been arranged by Trevelyan (British Chargé d'Affaires at Peking). I took John Rowland with me, as the conversation was likely to be largely about Indo-China.

I was very well received and the talk was quite an interesting one. He had a first-class young interpreter with him as well as the Director of the "American and Australian Division" of the Chinese Foreign Ministry. The talk started slowly for the first ten minutes, which meant that I had to do most of the talking. However, Chou warmed up and the discussion was quite a good one although, in the circumstances, it was not easy to get down to anything fundamental.

Chou has quite a good face, is about of middle height and with a good-looking eye. (I remembered how Chou was supposed to have "captivated" General George Marshall. I can understand this. He has quite a "reassuring" face.) He wore a sort of greenish-khaki suit or uniform, buttoned right up to the neck. He uses his hands a good deal in conversation. He made certain gestures from time to time, at each of which a Chinese servant in a smart white jacket appeared from nowhere with a tray of rather tart China tea, of which I felt myself obliged to drink many cups.

I started by saying that one of the good results of the conference had been the better relationship that had been established between his Government and the British Government. I said that I had heard a good deal about him (Chou) from Eden, and that I believed it was fortunate that they had established a relationship of considerable confidence. He said something to the effect that he had formed a good opinion of Eden. I built on this a bit and said that I had known Eden most of my life and that he was a model of integrity and honour, at which Chou bowed.

He deplored the lack of any useful result in the Korean discussions, and I said that it was traditionally difficult to get oil and water to mix. I said that I had hoped that it might have been possible to have got down to some modus vivendi that might at least have opened up some trade between North and South Korea, but the attitude disclosed in the earlier plenary meetings had crystallised the point of view of each side in a way that inhibited their getting together, even on the most modest lines. He said that the Korean talks had been followed by an outburst by Pyun (R.O.K. Foreign Minister) seeking to destroy the armistice. I confined myself to saying that a great many people deplored this.

I said that I believed that Eden had told him (Chou) that there was no doubt in his mind that China would be invited to be a party to any future discussions on Korea. I had heard that he (Chou) had had some doubts as to whether such an invitation would be given to China again. I said that, for my part, I felt sure that there was no doubt that China would be so invited. Chou bowed again.

We then got onto the Indo-China problem. I said that his (Chou's) initiative in respect of Laos and Cambodia was something to be welcomed and that I hoped that the proposal would survive the detailed discussion to which it would no doubt have to be submitted.

He said (as he had said to Eden before) that both sides wanted the integrity, autonomy and unity of Laos and Cambodia to be established and safeguarded. He (Chou) wanted each of these countries "to be like other South-East Asian countries".

However, he quickly went on to say that it must be firmly established that there should be no American bases, military or air, in Laos and Cambodia. I said that I did not think that this would be an impossible provision -

provided that it was mutual. He asked what I meant by mutual. I said that my country was not a party principal in these discussions and I had no mandate to speak for others, but that I would not be surprised if they were to insist on a similar provision in reverse - that there should be no Chinese bases or air fields created in the south of China in the general vicinity of the northern border of Laos and of Viet Nam. He boggled a bit at this and said that if any such bases were created they would be purely defensive - at which I smiled and said that this was where mutuality came in and that "defensive" and "offensive" had a different significance depending on who used them. He made a few strange noises at this but I think he got the point.

(By the way, in the course of interpretation of the above, the interpreter first of all interpreted Chou as having said "no bases in South-East asia", at which Chou corrected him and asked him to tell me that what he had said was "no bases in Laos and Cambodia". This had a little significance and also showed that Chou knows at least some English.)

I said that I had heard that he (Chou) had laid some stress on the existence of resistance movements ("free Laotian" and "free Cambodian") in these two countries. I said that I had had talks with the Foreign Ministers of Laos and Cambodia and they had both repeatedly assured me that "resistance movements" in their respective countries were, practically speaking, non-existent. I said that anyhow there was only one real way to clear up this point and that was by elections in these countries. Again I said that I had no mandate to speak for either of them, but that I did not believe that they would have any reluctance to have elections in due course.

I asked if he had met the Foreign Ministers of Laos and Cambodia. He said that he had met them in the

9-power conference here, but not otherwise. I suggested to him that I thought it would be useful if he were to create an opportunity to meet them under the same private circumstances as I was meeting him.

Chou said that China had no aggressive or expansive intentions and that all she wanted to see was that the peoples of South-East Asia were free and independent and had democratic governments of their own choosing. I said that I believed that this was common ground between us, but that the implementing of this might take a little time. I said that, although unfortunately I had never been to China, I believed that the Chinese people had a proper appreciation of the healing property of time. He immediately took this up and said that there would have to be elections in Viet Nam quite soon. I said that the country was very much disturbed and that I believed that an appreciable time would have to go by before free elections could be held that would properly reflect the wishes of the people. He asked how long I meant. I said again that I had no authority to express other than my own view on this, but that I believed that at least 12 months must go by before elections could properly be held. He thought for a moment and then said that he agreed that some appreciable time must pass (I think this was the way he put it - at any rate it is the impression left on my mind),

He then said that of course there were two governments in Viet Nam, the government of the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam and the government of Bao Dai. I lent forward with raised eyebrows and said that I did not quite understand this. I asked if the first government that he had mentioned was what we called the Viet Minh and he smiled and said yes, it was.

Getting the conversation back to more general lines, I said that I felt it difficult to believe that he (Chou) thought that we (the democracies) had any

aggressive intent. I said that I had always believed that peaceful co-existence was quite possible between international communism and the democracies. Chou agreed and said that provided neither side had any aggressive intent (which, he emphasised, was certainly the case with China) such peaceful co-existence was a thing to aim at. I asked him if there was anything else that he thought that I could say that he thought might help him on the road towards believing what I knew to be the truth - that we, on our side, had no aggressive intent whatsoever. He contented himself by laughing a bit at this.

I said that I believed a great deal depended on a successful outcome of this conference on Indo-China. I said that we had a great deal more to lose than he had and that I believed that a generous and helpful attitude on his part would pay great dividends. He said that China had nothing to gain, but that he understood the importance of this conference.

I said that it was of course much too early to talk about "recognition" or the United Nations, as there were many hurdles to be overcome before it would be possible to talk of these things from a practical point of view. He made no direct comment on this, but said that China was being "denied her legitimate rights by being kept out of the United Nations". He also made some reference to Formosa that was not very clear and which I did not pursue.

He said that America was "ringing China round" with bases. I asked him if this was really meant to be a precise statement, to which he made no reply, except to say that wherever he looked he found evidence of intense American hostility. I admitted that there was a lack of confidence on each side, but that a successful outcome to this conference might improve this condition a good deal.

He said that the ideal relationship that China sought with all countries was the relationship that

existed between China and India.

As we had been talking for three quarters of an hour by this time, and as I had to go off to catch an aircraft, I said that unfortunately I would have to go, after thanking him for the time that he had given me.

I said that I thought that personal contacts like this were most useful. I said that for my part he (Chou) had been, up to now, merely a name in the newspapers, whereas now he was a personality and a man whom I had looked in the eye. He made some graceful remark. As a parting shot, I asked the interpreter to tell Chou that I thought he had a first-class interpreter, at which the boy did the nearest thing that a Chinese can do to blushing.