

August 21, 1961

**Record of Conversation between Premier Zhou Enlai
and Comrade Foreign Minister Ung Van Khiem**

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Summary:

On the attempts of Ho Chi Minh to mediate between Albania and the Soviet Union.

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Foreign Ministry File

Record of Conversation between Premier Zhou Enlai and Comrade Foreign Minister
Ung Van Khiem

On Chairman Ho Chi Minh Mediating the Controversy between the Soviet Union and
Albania

(Premier has yet to review and approve)

Time: 5:30 p.m., 21 August 1961

Place: Xihua Hall

Accompanying person: Vice Minister Ji Pengfei

Interpreter: Zheng [illegible]

Recorder: Ni Liyu

Premier Zhou: Did you see Chairman Ho in the Soviet Union? He went to Sochi.

Ung Van Khiem: I returned from Geneva via several fraternal countries. I saw several
embassies and in Moscow saw Chairman Ho.

Premier Zhou: When did Chairman Ho go to Sochi?

Ung Van Khiem: He went five days ago.

Premier Zhou: Did you set out from Moscow the evening before yesterday?

Ung Van Khiem: I set out from the Soviet Union on the 19th and arrived here in
Beijing yesterday at 3 o'clock in the afternoon.

Premier Zhou: Did you leave Geneva after Comrade Hoang Van Hoan arrived there?

Ung Van Khiem: We met in Moscow. Comrade Xuan Thuy at present has gone from
Geneva to Moscow to convalesce. Is Comrade Chen Yi well?

Premier Zhou: He is fine. He is now in Shanghai and may return here tomorrow. Are
you leaving tomorrow?

Ung Van Khiem: I will not be able to see him. Chairman Ho went to Sochi after
arriving in Moscow. He originally had planned to go to Tirana and later did not go.

Premier Zhou: I have not yet received any news from Albania. I would like to ask you
to convey what Chairman Ho and I discussed to Comrade Pham Van Dong. Chairman
Ho came very suddenly. We did not know of it in advance. At that time, Comrade
Pham Van Dong arrived in the morning, and Chairman Ho arrived in the afternoon.
We did not expect them to arrive so quickly. Comrade [Liu] Shaoqi and I talked with
him on the 13th. We asked Chairman Ho if it had been him who had taken the
initiative to go to Europe to mediate the dispute between Albania and the Soviet
Union Ho, or had the Soviet Union proposed it. Chairman Ho said that he had done it
on his own initiative. Chairman Ho said that he had made the proposal and obtained
the agreement of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) Central
Committee. At that time, he had not yet received an answer from the Albanian Labor

Party Central Committee. He then set out. Our view at that time was that Chairman Ho meant well, and at the time it was necessary to do so, but the method required examination. We also encountered such an affair last year. Last year relations between China and the Soviet Union were very unpleasant, and there was a serious controversy over principles. At that time, Chairman Ho, too, was anxious to mediate. Chairman Ho at that time sought out Comrade Shaoqi, thinking that it would be good to have both Comrade Shaoqi and [Nikita] Khrushchev come to him and bring them together. We said to him at that time that he had a good heart but that his method was incorrect. Following a day and a half of controversy, we found a way out. The Soviet Union in the statement took out three points that we could not accept. Out of consideration, we talked over the 20th [CPSU] Congress and found a means of a compromise. As a result, a day and a half later Chinese and Soviet party delegations met to resolve the issue. That day, Comrade Shaoqi informed Chairman Ho that his heart was good, but that his method was not appropriate. The reason was that he understood neither the situation concerning the controversy between the Chinese and Soviet parties nor the seriousness of the issue. The two sides later worked out a compromise, achieving a relatively good result. Chairman Ho this time asked us our views. We said again that his heart was good but that this matter was more serious than the Sino-Soviet issue and that mediation was very difficult. At that time, we felt that Chairman Ho did not listen to our view. Chairman Ho and I have known each other for 40 years. I said that if a young man and woman do not want to fall in love, if you insist on bringing them together in a room, is it possible that this is then marriage? This is feudal. It is necessary first to understand the situation and, after making preparations, only then can one have some results. Chairman Ho understands less about the Albanian-Soviet situation than he does about that between China and the Soviet Union. This is the first issue.

The second issue is that one must understand that the controversy between Albania and the Soviet Union is even more difficult to resolve than that between China and the Soviet Union. Because the CPSU and the Communist Party of China are two large parties, and China and the Soviet Union are both large countries, the issue of one fearing the other does not arise. Everything is a controversy over principles. One can always find a means to a solution. The relationship between the Soviet Union and Albania historically is that of a large party versus a small one and a party relationship of father and son, with the CPSU laying down the law. In the past two years the Albanian Party has not been listening and the CPSU has been very dissatisfied and so wants to punish it. We have difficulty imagining that such a large party as that of the Soviet Union would be modest towards such a small party as that of Albania and would think of gently resolving the issue. On the contrary, Khrushchev may use Chairman Ho's going to Europe to give him another ticket and, further, ask to punish Albania. At the last meeting in Moscow of the Warsaw Pact, the CPSU wanted to expel the Albanian Labor Party and gained the support of the six [other] European countries and Mongolia. We are very concerned about this situation. They are thinking to use Uncle Ho to put pressure on Albania. I am afraid that it will be very difficult to resolve the relations between the Soviet Union and Albania.

The third issue is the side on which lies the major responsibility for such tension in Soviet-Albanian relations. We feel that the major responsibility lies with the Soviet Union, not with Albania. As for why one would say this, there are two issues that can prove it. First, in the past the Soviet Union criticized Albania, saying that Albania caused the tensions in relations between Albania and the Soviet Union. We feel that tensions in the relations are an issue of attitude, dealings, and work. These issues all are on both sides, not on one. This is an issue of contradiction among the people. It can be resolved by talking things over and can be discussed internally. However, two things that the Soviet Union did in regard to Albania are not an issue of normal relations but a serious and cardinal issue of right and wrong. (1) The Soviet Union withdrew eight submarines stationed in Albania from the Dardanelles Strait and withdrew Soviet experts from Albania, including general experts and military experts. This has weakened the force struggling against the enemy. This is because Albania is a member country of the Warsaw Pact. The Soviet Union has the responsibility of

deploying forces in Mediterranean seaports. At present the enemy knows that the Soviet Union has withdrawn the submarines. Relations between Albania and the Soviet Union are not normal, which makes the enemy happy and the comrades distressed. Regarding this matter, we tried to persuade the Soviet Union not to withdraw, but to no effect. (2) This time, at the meeting in Moscow of Warsaw Pact country first secretaries, Albania sent a Politburo member to participate. They expelled Albania, saying that it was not qualified to participate. We, attending as an observer, protested this. I assume that you already knew this. We feel that, regardless of whether or not Albania has made a thousand or ten thousand errors in Albanian-Soviet relations, it is all an issue of relations. But the two aforementioned steps taken are both cardinal issues of right and wrong. The first issue has already been divulged. If the second issue is divulged, it would break apart our own forces and weaken the struggle against the enemy, as well as make the enemy happy and the comrades distressed. Seen from these two points, the main responsibility for the error lies with the Soviet Union, not with Albania. Furthermore, the issues that arose at this meeting of Warsaw Pact countries also can prove who is afraid of whom. One cannot imagine that the Soviet Union fears Albania or that Albania's opposing Khrushchev undermines him. But [Enver] Hoxha and [Mehmet] Shehu are very much afraid that the CPSU wants to pressure them and isolate Albania. Seven of the fraternal countries oppose them. Once the people know, tensions will arise. The seven fraternal countries are not friendly to them. The enemy, knowing it, will further oppress them. In particular it is Yugoslavia that further wants to subvert Albania. This time Hoxha and Shehu, afraid of the Soviet Union, in the end did not dare go to Moscow for the meeting. This is very easy to understand. Therefore, we must conclude that the error lies mainly on the side of the Soviet Union and that the error that the Soviet Union has committed is a cardinal issue of right and wrong. Comrade Shaoqi has said that even if Albania's errors are a thousand or ten thousand, still they cannot equal those two. To repeat, it is Albania that is afraid of the Soviet Union, not the Soviet Union that is afraid of Albania.

The fourth issue is, as we said to Chairman Ho, in going this time to Europe he absolutely could not allow Khrushchev to use the prestige of Uncle Ho to pressure Albania and force Hoxha and Shehu to go to the Soviet Union to apologize. This is absolutely impermissible. If he did this, it would turn into Vietnam taking the place of Khrushchev to put pressure on Albania. This should not be something that Uncle Ho does. At that time, Chairman Ho, somewhat moved, seems to have listened and gone. At present, according to what the Albanian Party has made known to us, this is not the case for Chairman Ho, so please report this situation to the Workers Party of Vietnam (WPV) Central Committee. The Albanian Labor Party Central Committee's telegram to the WPV was sent on the 13th. Before Ho went to Moscow, Albania agreed to mediation and said that after mid-November it would again invite Chairman Ho to visit Tirana. Ho, arriving on the 14th in Moscow, saw this telegram, sought out Albania's envoy to the Soviet Union, and said that he would go and that he first would go to Tirana. He also said that resolution of the issue was on the Albanian side. If so, then the responsibility is put on Albania. At that time Albania, very nervous, quickly responded by telegram that it did not want Chairman Ho to visit. Ho, having received the second telegram and unable to go to Tirana, went to Sochi. We feel that Chairman Ho did not listen to what we discussed in Beijing. Uncle Ho pressured Albania with his own prestige. We feel sorry for Chairman Ho. Albania is a small party. How can it bully the Soviet Union? Albania is weak and the Soviet Union is strong. How can the weak bully the strong? According to the reaction of the Albanian Party, they already feel that Chairman Ho's going to Tirana would be to ask Hoxha and Shehu to go to the Soviet Union to admit their error and request punishment. How can they do that? At that time, we in Beijing said that if Khrushchev wanted Chairman Ho to go to Tirana to request that Hoxha and Shehu go to the Soviet Union or to another European fraternal country for a meeting, he could not go and that it would be best to refuse. Khrushchev would thus not readily exert pressure on Albania. We do not know whether this is the situation for Chairman Ho or not, whether or not he wants to go to Tirana and say that the responsibility lies with Albania. We do not know whether or not it is true. If true, we feel very sad.

Ung Van Khiem: It is not at all like that. When in Moscow, Chairman Ho and I talked with Vietnam's ambassador to the Soviet Union about this issue. I can speak a bit about this situation. Chairman Ho has a good heart. When leaving Vietnam, he first examined the issue at the WPV Politburo. Some Politburo comrades agreed with his going but also thought it very difficult. Ho said that he could go speak as an old comrade, that he wanted to speak of both "sentiment" and "reason," and that he would speak mainly of "sentiment." That is because both sides were reasonable and unreasonable. In light of the situation last time, "sentiment" also played a role.

Premier Zhou: Is it a controversy between China and the Soviet Union? It is not the same as a situation between China and the Soviet Union.

Ung Van Khiem: Later, Chairman Ho decided to go do it and the Politburo agreed. The WPV Central Committee sent a telegram to the embassy in Moscow to ask the Soviet view. The Soviet Union agreed. At that time, we sent a telegram to Albania. There was no reply from Albania. Chairman Ho assessed that Albania would not refuse and was very anxious to depart Vietnam. His intent was not to go first to Tirana but to go first to seek out Khrushchev. His view from start to finish was this. When Chairman Ho went to Moscow, he still had not received Albania's reply to Vietnam's telegram. At that time, Vietnam's ambassador had already gone to see Albania's charge d'affaires. The next day, we finally received Tirana's reply to Vietnam's telegram. It said that the Soviet Union's attitude was not a Marxist-Leninist one, that relations between the parties, the countries, and the peoples of Albania and the Soviet Union were not good, and that the responsibility lay with the Soviet Union. It recommended that Chairman Ho lead a Vietnamese party and government delegation to Albania in November. At that time, Chairman Ho did not intend to go first to Tirana. Ho went to Sochi with the intention of seeing Khrushchev and talking with him for several days. At that time he did not intend to request that Hoxha and Shehu go to the Soviet Union or another European country.

Premier Zhou: This is what we say. We assess that Khrushchev will make such a demand. The Albanian Party says that if Chairman Ho goes to Albania, he will ask Hoxha and Shehu to go to Moscow.

Ung Van Khiem: After receiving Albania's telegram, Chairman Ho asked Albania's charge d'affaires to come to his residence and informed Albania's charge d'affaires what he meant. Chairman Ho wrote another telegram, asking whether or not he could go to Tirana. The next day, the Albanian Party reiterated that it would invite Chairman Ho in November. It also suggested that Chairman Ho, before going to Tirana, first talk to the fraternal parties of Eastern Europe and then go. Chairman Ho went the next day to see Khrushchev. I said at the time that I wondered whether or not it was necessary for the ambassador to go. He said that it was not diplomacy and that it would be better for one person to talk. I said that I wanted to accompany him. He did not want that. He would go alone. As far as I know, Ho went to Sochi to see Khrushchev twice, stay there for five days, then return to Moscow or Beijing. He still has not returned to Moscow. Perhaps he will return in the next few days, because he needs to return to Vietnam before National Day. The character of Chairman Ho's trip this time lays particular stress on ties of friendship. He has no intention of asking Albania to confess guilt. It may be that in passing on the message, there arose a misunderstanding in the issue of where he would go first and go later. When Prime Minister Pham Van Dong saw Chairman Ho this time, he also discussed this issue. Pham said that when he saw Khrushchev, Khrushchev spent more than half the time talking about Albania. Prime Minister Pham feels that resolving the controversy between Albania and the Soviet Union is very difficult.

Premier Zhou: They called them all types of names, and in front of us. Albania said that Khrushchev was opportunistic. Khrushchev then called Hoxha a pirate and all the people of Albania pirates. He also said that, "Other fraternal countries will have as much of the Soviet Union's food as they want. If Albania wants food, then ask God,"

and "There are things that I would give a dog that I would not give Albania." It is not in the least reasonable. We cannot listen. We said to Chairman Ho that mediating this is not easy. You have a good heart. We originally assessed that Chairman Ho's going could temporarily ease relations between the two sides. The current international situation requires unity in the face of the enemy, so let us talk later about who is right. In light of the present situation, this assessment cannot yet be realized. Therefore, Albania is suspicious of whether or not the Soviet Union will suggest that it wants Chairman Ho to go to Tirana and use Chairman Ho's status to pressure Albania. This is understandable. For a small country and small party, one is on the defense at all times. Compared to Asia, you are also a small party and a small country. If we, a large country, show you not the slightest respect, you will feel it. Therefore, we have always stressed the need to be alert to our own large -power chauvinism, no matter what issues you have there. For example, Vietnam has the small Hai Ba Trung Temple. Your national heroes [the Trung sisters] are there. If I had not at that time gone to lay a wreath, you would not dare say that they are national heroes. When I went to lay a wreath, I said that Ma Yuan's invasion was wrong. I admitted the error to you. Your press has only begun to vigorously publicize it. This is only one example. This explains that a large country, a large party, needs at all times to be alert to whether or not a small country, a small party, respects them. When Chairman Mao sees Chairman Ho and Comrade Kim Il Sung, he always asks if our specialists have made some mistakes and hopes that you will point them out. If a large country, a large party, unaware, says something a little wrong, then it offends people. Therefore, in these past few years we have constantly opposed large -power chauvinism. Lenin, too, mentioned this issue. Then, when a small country makes a mistake, when a small country is unfriendly towards a large country, the large one still should rally it. Last year, at the Bucharest Conference, Comrade [Yumjaagiin] Tsendenbal also made rumors about me. In May last year I visited Mongolia and signed the Sino-Mongolian Treaty on Friendship and Mutual Assistance. At that time, he asked me to discuss the international situation. I discussed international issues and emphasized that opposition to imperialism and construction first of all requires self-reliance. Later is the time to strive for foreign aid. Revolution is often cut off, foreign aid does not come, and one can only rely on oneself. Construction also has this type of situation: when a problem arises and foreign aid does not arrive, one has to rely on oneself. It is this way not only for a large country, but for a small country as well. We have also discussed this point with Vietnam and Korea. At that time we were assisting Mongolia with many projects and hope that Mongolia gradually will be able to achieve self-reliance. We are encouraging them. Our help is auxiliary. The decisive force is the country's own people. At that time I gave an example, saying that Albania had been cut off by in Europe by Yugoslavia and would have to rely mainly on its own efforts. As a result, Tsendenbal said that I wanted to win over Mongolia and change it into an Albania. This is, of course, starting rumors. It makes no sense and leaves people unconvinced. Even so, we do not care, because Tsendenbal has no alternative. He wants to gain benefit from the Soviet Union. We told Khrushchev that, in spite of Tsendenbal's unfriendliness towards us, we did not care. Our aid remains as it has been. We are not withdrawing our experts. That is, unless it is due to the expiration of worker contracts. For that, naturally, they have to return. We mean to persuade Khrushchev not to abruptly withdraw experts and aid from Albania. Because a small country is in a difficult position, it is necessary to make allowances.

Ung Van Khiem: Regarding the Tsendenbal affair, I do not know whether or not it is a language issue.

Premier Zhou: It is not a language issue. Nor is it this matter alone. This is only an example. He branded us as disgraceful. There is no need to discuss it here. At the time he came to talk with an attitude of complete opposition to the Chinese Party and used this example to prove this argument.

Ung Van Khiem: Last year relations between China and the Soviet Union were tense and the comrades were very concerned. At present, relations between Albania and the Soviet Union are tense. I do not know what China's attitude is or whether they will

be allowed to go on as they are now.

Premier Zhou: At present we cannot rush things. There is still hope for the original assessment. In light of the present situation, it is still early. Conditions are not ripe. Let me repeat what I have just said. Please convey to Comrades Le Duan and Pham Van Dong not to tell many people. It is their decision. First, Chairman Ho has a good heart, but his manner of working requires attention. Sometimes having a good heart and an incorrect method will often make matters worse. Do not make arbitrary use of Uncle Ho's prestige. Do not let yourself be dragged down into such a vortex. On this point, Chairman Ho does not much listen to people's views. Chairman Ho and I have been old comrades for 40 years. I have nothing but respect for his views, of which he speaks frankly. Second, it is very difficult to mediate relations between the Soviet Union and Albania. Third, the main responsibility for the error lies with the Soviet Union, not with Albania. There are two points to prove: 1. Regardless of whether Albania has made a thousand or ten thousand mistakes, it cannot keep pace with the Soviet Union's two errors made in fighting the enemy. 2. Albania fears the Soviet Union; the Soviet Union does not fear Albania. The Soviet Union wants to undermine Albania's leaders. When relations between China and the Soviet Union have been tense, they planned to do the same against China. The Warsaw Conference specified first secretaries to go. Albania did not dare go, rightly so. The fraternal parties are equal and cannot refuse sending plenipotentiary delegates. If the Soviet Union convened an international conference and specified that Chairman Mao go, we would not go. We would be afraid. We would be unable to go. Our Central Committee would not approve it. It seems as though, if we need not worry, I would dare to go. There are many people like us. If the Soviet Union does not recognize this, it will be unable to resolve the issue. Fourth, the Soviet Union has already put great pressure on Albania. If one goes to the fraternal parties and says that the Albanian Party is wrong, it would enhance Khrushchev's prestige and make Albania more afraid, which would be detrimental to unity. Fifth, at first I hoped that Chairman Ho would be able to play a moderating role. In light of the present situation, it is still early.

Just now Comrade Ung Van Khiem asked about prospects for the future. I see it as deadlocked for a period of time. Because it is a controversy over principle, it will not be so simple. The form that the Soviet Union has put forth is not right. Even if it is Albania that is wrong, the Soviet Union cannot use such a vile manner. It may still be necessary to develop, and possible to do so. The CPSU is going to hold its 22nd Congress and after that hold a conference of foreign ministers from socialist countries talk over the issue of a German peace treaty. The Albanian Party is very worried, fearing that around October Revolution Day the Soviet Union will make Albania suffer. There is a basis to the Albanian Party's worry. The Soviet Union at the Bucharest Conference made us suffer. It was a sudden attack. We went to Bucharest to congratulate the Romanian Party. No one expected them to come. Because the Chinese Party is large, we dared to resist and dared to persevere in the struggle for the goal of unity. It came to an end after six months of struggle, producing the Moscow Conference Statement. This was good, and the unity of the socialist countries grew stronger, but the Soviet Union again has turned to counter Albania. There is also the possibility of such a thing taking place on October Revolution Day, when the CPSU holds its 22nd Congress. But also possible is something else to restrain its development. The struggle against the enemy is now very intense. West Berlin is very tense. The German peace treaty is going to be signed. The United States used the vice president's visit to West Berlin to bring in 1,500 troops through the corridor to West Berlin. Other Western countries also said that they would increase their troops. Such a sharp and intense situation requires even more unanimity in foreign and domestic affairs. How can we still quarrel? Berlin is tense. The United States continues to make trouble in Laos. Taiwan, too, is tense. Japan's militarization is intense. The United States wants further control of the Congo. France wants further control of Algeria and Bizerte. Why do we not unite against them? Therefore, it may also be that all is not broken. We are all communists and should act according to Marxism-Leninism. This is how we will try to persuade Albania to be patient and not make things even more intense. We assess that Albania will do so. However, it would

be very difficult to ask Albania to admit error. Asking Hoxha and Shehu to go to the Soviet Union or another country in Europe for a conference would also be impossible. A large party, a large country, has to understand this type of situation and be considerate of a small party, a small country. Relations between the Chinese and Vietnamese parties are close, so we have no secrets to keep from one another. Please convey these views to Comrade Le Duan. When Chairman Ho passes again through Beijing, I may not be in Beijing. I would like to ask Comrade Chen Yi again to tell him.

Ung Van Khiem: I will certainly convey to Comrade Le Duan and Comrade Pham Van Dong the several points about which Premier Zhou has just spoken.

[...]