

July 18, 1955

Minutes of Conversation between Premier Zhou Enlai and British Charge d’Affaires Con O’Neill

Citation:

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Translated by Yafeng Xia.

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Summary:

O’Neill passed on a draft joint news release from the US regarding the date of the first Sino-US Ambassadorial Talk. Zhou first disputed with O’Neil that the US calling the PRC capital "Peiping" instead of "Beijing/Peking" in the draft was disrespectful to China. Then, Zhou said that the Chinese government needed some time to consider the time suggested by the US as well as the wording of the draft. He did not accept the explanation from O’Neill regarding the draft per se and the name the US used in the draft.

Credits:

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Original Language:

Chinese

Contents:

Translation - English

Time: 18 July 1955, 4:40-5:05 p.m.

Location: Xihuating, Zhongnanhai

Chinese in Attendance: Director-General Huang Hua; Pu Shouchang (interpreter and recorder)

British in Attendance: Joude

O'Neill says that he received further instructions from Foreign Secretary MacMillan. MacMillan is now in Geneva, [and] so is [US Secretary of State John Foster] Dulles. MacMillan said Dulles asked him to transmit to Premier Zhou that Dulles was glad that the US government's proposal was endorsed by the Chinese government. But Dulles raised two points regarding China's draft joint communiqué. The first is about the date of the first meeting. Dulles suggested 1 August in lieu of 21 July for the first meeting. Dulles explained that 21 July is too early for the US government, which is presently focused on the Geneva Conference [of four powers] and it is impossible to appoint an ambassadorial level representative and instruct him to arrive at Geneva. Thus, Dulles asked Foreign Secretary MacMillan to suggest to Premier Zhou that, if the Chinese government agrees, the Chinese government and the US government simultaneously should release the following announcement.

O'Neill handed over Dulles' suggested "News Announcement:"

"As a result of communication between Peiping [Beijing][i] and Washington through the diplomatic channels of the United Kingdom, it has been agreed that the talks held last year between consular representatives of both sides at Geneva should continue on the ambassadorial level in order to promote the settling of the matter of repatriation of civilians who desire to return to their respective countries and to facilitate further discussions and settlement of certain other practical matters now at issue between the two sides. The first meeting of ambassadorial representatives of both sides will take place on 1 August 1955 at Geneva."

O'Neill says that he is willing to explain the difference between the US draft and the Chinese draft. He says, first of all, the first three lines of the US draft [in English] are different from those in the Chinese draft. The Chinese draft states, "After consultations, it has been agreed that China and the United States ..." The US draft states, "As a result of communication between Peiping and Washington through the diplomatic channels of the United Kingdom, it has been agreed ..."

Premier Zhou asks, why [do the Americans] use the word "Peiping?" There is an old Chinese saying, "Name from the Master." What if we don't use "Washington," and give it another name? The Americans are always unreasonable. Here the Americans refer to US rulers, not the American people. British friends, as etiquette, you should not transmit this name.

O'Neill says that he was instructed to convey this name, and he is obligated to carry out this instruction. He says, maybe it could be seen as a matter of translation. He says Premier Zhou must know why the United States uses the names of the two cities. The name which the US employed here is commonly used in the United States. Of course, he believes that the US does not expect China to use this name when releasing this communiqué in both Chinese and English.

Premier Zhou asks, why do [they] want us to even correct the name of a city? The US always attempts to impose its view on others. Peking [Beijing] is an old name, which has been in use for several hundred years. The US intends to provoke our feelings, but we would not treat the US like this. In our draft communiqué, we have not said, "after consultation, it has been agreed that the People's Republic of China and the United States ..." We know that the British friends are different, and they know our feelings. We also know the feelings of our British friends. For example, China no

longer has an emperor. But when we mention the British queen, we address her as Her Majesty. This shows that we respect British custom.

O'Neill says that this is because we recognize each other and have established diplomatic relations.

Premier Zhou says it is not right even for countries not recognizing each other to provoke the feelings of each other. Right now, we need to create a genial atmosphere.

O'Neill says that he knows, and he believes that the US also acknowledges that, in the Chinese proposed draft communiqué, the use of the wording "China" and "the United States" indicates that China has taken some extra steps to attend to US difficulties. He says this name which the US government employs has been used to call this city for many years. There is no particular reason. American people still read this name in their newspapers. He says Premier Zhou mentioned just now that the US wants to force this [name] on to others. As to this issue, he could guarantee that the US imposes [this name] on itself, not China. The US could only use this name in its released communiqué. The US is not imposing [the name] on China, [nor] asking China to use this name in its released communiqué.

Premier Zhou says we are not discussing the content of the communiqué, but only mentioning that the name provoked our feelings. As to whether we agree to the US proposed communiqué or not, we have to study it. We cannot accept Mr. Chargé d'affaires's explanation on behalf of the US, although we won't argue with each other.

O'Neill says that he is awaiting Premier Zhou's further reply. He also explains other differences between the US proposed communiqué and the Chinese draft communiqué. He says that in the US proposed communiqué, it says "the talks held last year between consular representatives of both sides at Geneva should continue to be held on the ambassadorial level." But in the Chinese draft, it says that "China and the United States raise the consular level talks held last year at Geneva to the ambassadorial level." He says this is not a fundamental difference. The other difference is on the return of civilians, which the US proposed communiqué reverses to its original formulation. Otherwise, there is little difference. He says, the instruction he received mentioned that Dulles suggested 2 o'clock Greenwich time on 20 July to release the communiqué, which is 6:00 p.m. tomorrow [19 July] Beijing time (Note: it is actually 10:00 a.m. on 20 July). He says he hopes that Premier Zhou would inform him of his decision as early as possible.

Premier Zhou says we have to think it over. Just now, I only stated my feelings. Mr Chargé d'affaires, please convey my thanks to the British Foreign Secretary for transmitting this news announcement. It is not, however, possible to release it tomorrow.

O'Neill asks, does Premier Zhou have any suggestion regarding the US proposed date for releasing the communiqué for him to report to his government? Is this also part of the issue that Premier Zhou needs to further consider?

Premier Zhou says we regret that the US government couldn't agree to 21 July as the date which we proposed. We need to review this issue.

[i] Zhou Enlai felt offended when the US used Peiping (Beiping), not Peking (Beijing) in its document. Peiping in Chinese means peace in the north, while Peking means northern capital. Peking was called "Peiping" by the Chinese Nationalists from 1928 to 1949, when its capital was in Nanjing (southern capital). In late September 1949, the

Communists named Beijing, the capital of the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing Dynasties (1644-1911), as the new seat of government for the PRC. The US refused to use this name. In the document, Zhou's hand-written notes could be seen. Zhou crossed "Peiping" and "Washington" and replaced them with "the People's Republic of China" and "the United States". Zhou ordered the typing and printing out of the US news announcement in Chinese.