

**July 20, 1954**

**Minutes of Conversation between Zhou Enlai and  
Cambodian Foreign Minister Tep Phan (Summary)**

**Citation:**

"Minutes of Conversation between Zhou Enlai and Cambodian Foreign Minister Tep Phan (Summary)", July 20, 1954, Wilson Center Digital Archive, PRC FMA 206-Y0008.

Translated by Gao Bei.

<https://wilson-center-digital-archive.dvincitest.com/document/111055>

**Summary:**

Zhou Enlai and Tep Phan discuss the Vietnamese proposal for conflict resolution. The Cambodian side discusses issues on which they agree with the Vietnamese (that the Vietnamese will not be discriminated against in Cambodia, that there will be no combatant personnel in Cambodia, etc.) and issues on which they disagree (military issues, Viet Minh withdrawal timetable, etc.). Zhou expresses hope that these issues will be resolved in an upcoming meeting with the Vietnamese, and that he will do what he can to assist in the resolution.

**Original Language:**

Chinese

**Contents:**

Translation - English

Time: 20 July 1954, 11:00 a.m. to 12:45 p.m.

Place: Prime Minister Zhou Enlai's residence

[Attendees on] the Chinese side: Zhou Enlai, Chen Dingmin (interpreter and recorder)

[Attendees on] the Cambodian side: Tep Phan, [Head of Cambodian military delegation at the Geneva Conference, Nhiek] Tioulong, [personal delegate to the King of Cambodia] Sam Sary, Thao Lenam.

Zhou Enlai: We have almost finished our working documents except for some problems concerning the Cambodian issue. We will work harder on them and hopefully we can reach an agreement at the same time [with the other agreements] at today's meeting. I have already read two documents concerning Cambodia: one was [issued on] 16 July, the other was [issued on] 19 July. We have already discussed the longer document, but have not yet discussed the shorter one in detail.

Tep Phan: We have not yet read the document of 19 July. We received a new proposal from the Vietnamese side on Sunday evening [18 July]. Our opinions still have differences regarding political issues and some on military issues as well.

Zhou Enlai: We also have something in common. We can discuss the differences.

Tioulong: It is difficult for us to accept some of the suggestions from the Vietnamese side. We have currently prepared a joint statement for the conference. We also have a unilateral statement to be presented to the conference by the Cambodian delegation. Some points we referred to in the unilateral statement can also be included in the joint statement. There are also some differences regarding military issues. We have not yet exchanged our opinions with the Vietnamese delegation. I wanted to meet with the Vietnamese delegation yesterday but was not able to do so since they were very busy. I hope I can meet with them today. As the Cambodian delegation claimed in the unilateral statement presented to the conference, we will not discriminate against Vietnamese elements in Cambodia. They will enjoy the same rights and freedoms as other Cambodian citizens. We definitely will not discriminate against them. We will make no reprisals against either themselves or their families. After they have returned to civilian life, they can be employed by administrative organizations on the same terms as other citizens.

We would also like to talk with you about [military] personnel. After peace is restored, they can enter military institutes, military academies, and military training schools.

Regarding the issue of foreign military personnel, [we believe that this issue] should be distinguished from [other military issues]. There are French combatant personnel in Cambodia; there are also technicians and experts here, and they are not soldiers.

We accept the provisions of the joint statement claiming that there should be no combatant personnel in Cambodia; however, we should be allowed to keep foreign technicians and experts there. The number [of such people] will not be too many.

In addition, there is [a difference regarding] the issue of the introduction of weapons and armaments. We have already talked about that last time. Under the condition that we do not threaten our neighbors, we wish to be allowed to introduce a certain number of weapons and armaments for our own security reasons. Our troops are in the process of being consolidated. This is for the protection of our own country's security.

Now I would like to talk about other differences [between the Vietnamese and us]:

First of all, the Viet Minh suggested a six-month period for withdrawal. This is too long. According to our side's estimate, it will only take one month to withdraw the Viet Minh troops and elements from Cambodia.

Zhou Enlai: The areas are too spread out. There are some difficulties for them to withdraw.

Tioulong: But six months is still too long. There is another suggestion that we cannot accept: the Viet Minh suggested that people who were originally non-Cambodian nationals should remain armed until the general elections or even until the realization of the unification of Cambodia.

Tep Phan: It is unreasonable for us to keep these armed elements gathered in local areas. We hope that all people in Cambodia can join the national community life. It does not matter whether they originally grew up in Cambodia or came here later. In addition, according to our constitution, [military] personnel cannot participate in general elections.

Zhou Enlai: Why is that?

Tep Phan: According to our constitution, people on active service do not have the right to participate in elections or to be elected either.

Zhou Enlai: Don't you have a system of military service?

Tep Phan: Yes, we do have one. France and many European countries all have this system.

Zhou Enlai: American servicemen can participate in elections.

Tioulong: French police officers can participate in elections. In our country, servicepersons cannot participate in elections; monks do not participate in elections either.

Tep Phan: There are about 60,000 monks in our country. None of them participate in elections.

Zhou Enlai: Why?

Tep Phan: Because they renounce the world, and stand aloof from worldly affairs. They are not interested in politics. The monks I am talking about are people who wear the yellow kasaya robe. In our country everyone is Buddhist.

Tioulong: There is another issue. Some people also ask us to declare that we will not establish military bases within our own territory.

Tep Phan: Our country is an independent country. We need to have our own military bases and airports for defensive purposes.

Zhou Enlai: This is ridiculous. Of course [you] should not make strict rules like these.

Tep Phan: It is completely for self-defense. Every Cambodian believes in the independence of our country. We should have the right to build our own bases and

airports within our own territory.

Zhou Enlai: You surely can build your own airports.

Tioulong: In addition, the Vietnamese proposal suggested that we should withdraw our troops two kilometers from each side of the road along which they are to withdraw their troops. We cannot accept that either, since the width of two kilometers extends to places we live. However, our side agreed to guarantee their security when the Viet Minh withdraw their troops. We are also getting ready to provide them all with conveniences and we will provide the means of transportation such as trains, trucks and ships on the railway, on the road and on the sea. We are willing to do so. The above are the differences concerning military issues I would like to point out.

Sam Sary: There is another difference regarding the type and amount of the military personnel and weapons imported to Cambodia. [Although they said to] discuss it separately, it is not clear enough to us. With whom on earth should we discuss this? When should we discuss it? And where should we discuss it? I was wondering if we can present the issue in the unilateral statement of the Cambodian delegation on whether we are allowed to introduce a certain number of weapons and military personnel for the requirements of territorial defense.

[Passage excised by the Department of Archives of the PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs.]

Tioulong: [Mr. Prime Minister,] our opinions on general and even practical issues can be quite close to [yours] when we discuss them with you. However, they are different [when we talk with] the [Vietnamese] side.

It is also worth studying the way we express ourselves. [For example,] what issues we need to raise in the joint statement for the conference, and what issues we can raise in the unilateral statement of our delegation.

It is stipulated in Chapter 3 Article 5 of the draft armistice agreement of Cambodia: after the restoration of peace in Cambodia, the original non-Cambodian elements can be accepted in the Cambodian Royal Army or local police forces or can be demobilized based on their own free will. After they are demobilized and become civilians they can be employed by all administrative or other organizations of the Royal government of Cambodia.

Zhou Enlai: I appreciate that you raised all these differences in detail.

Tioulong: We fully intend to make more efforts to help reach the agreement. We hope that we can revise the documents. Moreover, we believe that it is necessary to let our counterparts understand that the agreement should be reached on an equal footing.

I would also like to discuss the suggestion that we should gather these elements together and not disarm them temporarily. However, if they do not enter the military academy, they cannot obtain military ranking. They will be trained at the military academy and should pass their exams. Other service persons will oppose them if these people obtain military positions without military training and passing exams.

Tep Phan: We would like to have the Premier's opinions on the issues we presented.

Zhou Enlai: I appreciate the differences you presented. We all hope that we can reach an agreement at today's meeting. We do not have much time left, so let's make some efforts together. I deeply regret that agreements on all other issues have already been reached except the issue of Cambodia.

What we have to do now is to work to resolve our differences. We believe that we can

settle the differences. I have already said many times that the basic principles concerning restoration of peace in Cambodia are independence, foreign non-intervention, unification and the integrity of sovereignty. We said on 16 June that we had been insisting on and giving support to such an argument. [We hope that we can] reach a reasonable solution that will not interfere with the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Cambodia and will take care of both internal and external [issues].

The Vietnamese People's Volunteer Forces [Passage excised by the Department of Archives of the PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs.] will definitely withdraw. Regarding the issues of the period of withdrawal and of passing through the withdrawal route, if [you think] the period is too long, [we can ask them to] cut it short. [However,] one month is too short. Sooner or later they will withdraw.

Regarding the security issue of the withdrawal, the issues of the joint commission and international supervision and the issue of the means of transportation, [we believe that] all these issues can be solved since you have already said that you are willing to cooperate.

Regarding internal issues, you should categorize all the soldiers in Cambodia taking their wishes into consideration. Some of them originally lived there and do not want to leave. Some of them are from Cochinchina. However, [you] should not discriminate against them. If some of them hope to stay in Cambodia, you surely cannot expel them. However, they should obey the Kingdom's laws.

Tioulong: Do you mean those elements who joined the resistance movement? People who enter Cambodia from Cochinchina need passes. We inspect all persons who enter Cambodia from foreign countries. [Only after we check] whether they are honest and act dutifully, will we allow them to enter. We have already informed the Vietnamese side about this.

Tep Phan: They surely can choose to leave or stay in Cambodia of their own free will. However, we have to check whether or not they are honest. Only people who act dutifully can stay in our country. We cannot let those dishonest people, even bandits, stay in our country. We must take the necessary measures since we are worried about our national security. Mr. Premier, can we make decisions for our internal affairs?

Zhou Enlai: You surely have the right to deal with [your] internal affairs. However, you should not expel them and create tension. The Royal government should not persecute those who want to stay in Cambodia and are willing to obey the laws. [The Royal government] should not discriminate against those who used to cooperate with the other side, either.

Tep Phan: We have our own constitution and laws. Our constitution is democratic.

Zhou Enlai: Regarding the armed forces of Cambodia, [you] can first gather them on the spot, and then settle problems with peaceful and political solutions. Try your best to accept them into military and administrative services. As you just said they can enter the military academy or have other choices based on their own will. Regarding political issues, [you] should pay attention to three points:

1. Do not persecute people who used to cooperate with the other side.
2. Arrange suitable jobs for them.
3. Since they still have some political organizations, parties and other groups, you should recognize their legal positions based on the constitution. You can meet and

negotiate with the leaders of local political organizations.

Tep Phan: We have always gotten in touch with them until now.

Zhou Enlai: It is possible. As long as you keep the door open, you can reach an agreement. Regarding general problems of military issues, [you should] not introduce new troops and weapons from abroad, establish foreign military bases, or join military alliances. The necessary type and amount of weapons that are defined as [being] for the self-defense of Cambodia is not included in this limitation.

Tep Phan: The word "self-defense" can be described by two words in French. One is autodefense, the other is defense a l'interieur du pays (domestic defense). We prefer the second one since the first, "self-defense," which can also be translated as local defense.

Zhou Enlai: I can agree with this.

Tioulong: Mr. Pham Van Dong also used the word self-defense. Regarding the prohibition of the introduction of weapons, we also cannot agree with their interpretation. They even included shotguns. Meanwhile, we need to add "when Cambodia is not invaded by foreign countries or threatened by foreign invasion" to the provision [that Cambodia] "should not establish foreign military bases and join military alliances."

Zhou Enlai: We can consider that.

Tep Phan: Our country is an independent country. Don't we have the right to sign agreements with foreign countries?

Zhou Enlai: Of course you do if you sign a trade agreement.

Tep Phan: What if we sign a military agreement with China?

Zhou Enlai: China has never signed any agreement of military alliance with any country. Regarding French military personnel who are training the troops [of Cambodia]?

Tioulong: (Interrupting) France or foreign countries?

Tep Phan: It's not limited to France. Regarding France, we?

Tioulong: (Interrupting) We have the experience of being ruled by France for several decades. We will not be interested in French ?aid? anymore.

Zhou Enlai: You should not be pro-America, either.

Tep Phan: We won't. Even Mr. [General Walter Bedell] Smith said that the United States has no intention of providing aid.

Zhou Enlai: Smith can speak like that. However, there are still people like [US Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Arthur W.] Radford and Vice President [Richard] Nixon in the American government.

Sam Sary: We can still establish technical collaboration with countries like India and China.

Tep Phan: However, we are cautious about France.

Tioulong: We are cautious about the cooperation of French experts and technicians, too.

Zhou Enlai: France has somehow changed its attitude recently.

Tep Phan: We still have to reconsider joining the French Union. Last time when we discussed drafting documents with the French delegation, we asked them not to add the point regarding joining the French Union to the documents.

Tioulong: Personally, I have already met with the Premier three times. However, I have never met Mendes-France.

Tep Phan: We are not interested in joining the French Union [since] we do not want to be ruled by them anymore. France is no better than the Viet Minh.

Zhou Enlai: However, being pro-America is even worse. China has its experience [of dealing with the US]. Sino-British relations have a long history. The United States was a newcomer. America's attitude was relatively moderate at first. However, it changed after the United States excluded British influence [from China] after World War II.

Tep Phan: I understand that.

Zhou Enlai: It is good that you understand it. The time for the meeting is approaching. I hope that you can reach an agreement with the Vietnamese delegation regarding these issues at the meeting in the afternoon. We will also push the Vietnamese side forward so that the meeting can be successful.

Tep Phan: Thank you very much for your help. [Passage excised by the Department of Archives of the PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs.]

Zhou Enlai: I am sure that Vietnam does not have any such intention. Chairman Ho Chi Minh firmly clarified the position of Vietnam when I met with him on the Guangxi border this time. He promised that Vietnam would not invade any countries because an invasion is destined to fail. I am telling you the truth since we are all relatives.

Tep Phan: Yes. We need to protect our independence because we want to survive. Our situation is very difficult since our neighbors, such as Thailand and Vietnam, are all big countries. Since our country is a small country, we have no intention of attacking others and only hope that we can survive. In addition, the religion in which we believe does not allow us to attack others.

Zhou Enlai: Your situation is relatively good. The conference will publish a joint statement to guarantee [the armistice], and you have the support of the participants of the Colombo Conference [India, Ceylon, Pakistan, Indonesia, Burma]. It is much better than [the situation in] Korea.

Tioulong: I understand this. Cambodia will be a new country after peace is restored. As in China, all the people [of Cambodia] need to make efforts to build up [our country]. The Chinese and Cambodian people also have a blood relationship. For

example, I myself have Chinese blood. My grandfather is Chinese. You can tell that from my name. My [last] name is Tioulong.

Zhou Enlai: Very good.

Tioulong: Our peasants cultivate [crops] and merchants do business. We all hope to live in peace. It will make our economy develop. We are currently opening up wasteland for development.

Zhou Enlai: We all want peace. The Chinese people are also conducting peaceful development.

Tep Phan: The help we get from you can speed up the achievement of the agreement, and will therefore help us obtain peace and independence. We will need China's help at all different levels in the future.

Zhou Enlai: Yes. We also welcome you to come to visit China in the future if you have the chance.

Tep Phan: We would love to. Thank you.

Zhou Enlai: We will even have diplomatic relations in the future.

Tep Phan: Yes. (Standing at the door and leaving.)

Tep Phan: We appreciate the Prime Minister's help. We hope that Cambodia will become an independent and free country and will peacefully coexist with all its neighbors after peace is restored.

Zhou Enlai: I also hope that the friendship between the people of our two countries will be improved.