

June 1, 1954

Record of Conversation between Zhou Enlai and Georges Bidault

Citation:

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Summary:

Bidault and Zhou discuss the need to come to an agreement on troop regrouping and the composition and role of the supervisory committee for Indochina.

Original Language:

Chinese

Contents:

Translation - English

Time: 1 June 1954 , 10:15 p.m. - 11:20 p.m.

Location: Gleystt Mansion

Chinese participants: Zhou Enlai, Zhang Wentian, and Dong Ningchuan (translator)

French participants: Georges Bidault, Jean Chauvel, Jacques Guillermaz, and one translator

Zhou Enlai: We are sorry for arriving a little bit late.

[Georges] Bidault: Thank you very much for coming. We can discuss the future of this conference together. By now the conference has entered a critical juncture. It can't be delayed, since [a delayed conference would] not bring any positive result. I consider the following two specific issues need immediate solutions:

(1) The meetings of the military representatives from both high commands should determine the regrouping areas for their troops.

(2) The restricted sessions should arrive at an agreement on the supervision issue.

Since there is no one else around, hopefully we can exchange our opinions sincerely on these two existing and imminent problems in order to reach our common goal-peace. I think that time is running out. If the quarrel continues, the situation [in Indochina] will get worse and will aggravate the international situation seriously. Thus, my desire is that the commanders quickly determine the areas on their maps within which the forces of both sides shall be regrouped, and that the [restricted] sessions can reach an agreement on the supervision issue as soon as possible. The danger of a worsened situation could only be prevented by solving these problems. Nobody wants to see a deteriorating situation, but that is almost inevitable. I believe an enlarged war will hurt everyone.

Zhou Enlai: The reason for us to come to Geneva and attend the conference is to restore peace in Indochina. Our participation shall help make the conference a success, not cause its failure. As long as we have the same determination, the conference will make genuine progress toward a settlement. We are in the position to push the meeting forward. Hopefully solutions will soon develop to deal with these problems. Certainly it needs our common effort.

Mr. Bidault said a little while ago that the military representatives from both high command headquarters have met and discussed the troop regrouping. We consider such a direct meeting as the best way. Mr. Pham Van Dong pointed out in his proposal of 25 May that discussions on these specific matters can start as soon as the principle issues are settled. So far, the commanders from the two sides have been enabled to fully exchange their opinions. Both sides were separated in the past. They have established their contacts so it is now easier to solve the problems.

Mr. Bidault again mentioned a risk of the war's expansion. In our opinion, the war should be ended according to the interests of the Indochinese people and the national interests of France. Speaking as a neighboring state and for international affairs, we believe that the war can be ended and should be stopped. We should not anticipate a possible enlargement of the war.

If China can make any contribution to the conference at this stage, we must try our best to bring this war to an end and by all means prevent an internationalization of the war. Based upon Mr. Pham Van Dong's proposal, the opinions from both sides are approachable. The basic requests in his proposal do not go beyond the reality [on the ground]. He doesn't want to get from the conference table what he didn't get on the battleground.

In our opinion, the risk exists-America's intervention. It will hurt France, Indochina, and Southeast Asia; and will threaten the security of Asia and China. That is what we are concerned about.

Bidault: I am in full accord with Mr. Zhou Enlai's statement. The purpose for our coming to Geneva is to restore peace in Indochina. Nevertheless, we must recognize the fact that, if the conference fails, it is inevitable that the situation will take a turn for the worse. We are a country with a long military tradition, and we don't like failure. Leaving aside America, our common interest [is] a need to end the Indochina war, and to eliminate all the possibilities for the war's expansion. Our desire is a reasonable settlement. But if we can't obtain this, I have to suggest to my government a laissez-faire policy. I believe that your government does not want to see this happen. Thus, we should think reasonably and realistically about the problems.

Zhou Enlai: I remember Mr. Bidault's statement that France shall achieve a glorious peace. We agree that a glorious peace can be achieved. The restoration of peace is glorious for both sides. So there is no need to mention the laissez-faire policy. Mr. Pham Van Dong emphasized in his speech that after Vietnam receives its independence, it will consider joining the French Union. In his proposal, Mr. Pham Van Dong also accepts the Bao Dai [regime]. These [statements] are based upon the spirit of mutual equality. Our expectation is that both sides can make their common efforts on an equal ground. The French people are peace-loving. To restore peace is the hope of the French people.

Bidault: As Mr. Zhou Enlai said, the French people love peace. We, however, have to live with our history and tradition. Hopefully, this is understood.

Currently, our specific requests are: (1) The two commands conclude their negotiations in a timely fashion on troop regrouping, otherwise the war will continue. (2) The conference soon reaches an agreement on the International Supervisory Commission issue in order to avoid additional delay.

Zhou Enlai: These two problems should be solved. With respect to your first issue, the military representatives from both sides have their meetings. Direct contacts are the most efficient approach. Regarding your second issue, the conference is discussing the problem, and it will be solved. What I am saying is that we should think about ways to reach an agreement, but should not worry about the contingency of there not being a settlement, or ways to reinforce the military and internationalize the war. If the war broadens, it will not help with the glory of France. Its outcome would be nothing but just what our Chinese saying characterizes as another "fisherman's catch." The peoples of Indochina and France will suffer miserably, and the traditional glory of France will be damaged. I think this is obvious.

Bidault: Of course, it is obvious. All we ask for is peace, nothing else. What I have brought up are the facts that are evident to anyone. If the problems are not solved reasonably and promptly, a worsening situation could be imminent. As you know, I don't want to see an internationalization of the war. Mr. Zhou Enlai's points will be taken well into our consideration.

Zhou Enlai: Therefore I see that Mr. Bidault has a responsibility to prevent such a risk from occurring.

Bidault: The newspapers always say, even though I never read them, that I came to Geneva to prepare World War III. This is so naïve. While asking for an agreement, we can't accept [just] any kind of agreement. We want a reasonable settlement, not a preparation for war. I have experienced two world wars, and I am really tired of war.

During the first war, I served as corporal. During the second war, I was a sergeant. I don't want to be promoted to staff sergeant in the third war. I'd like to repeat one more time here what we request: (1) to conclude an agreement promptly, at least a reasonable, temporary agreement; (2) to have the commanders of both sides draw a map of regrouping areas; and (3) to solve the supervision problem.

Zhou Enlai: All of these three points are for peace. We fully support any suggestion that is favorable for peace. Peace is our goal. Hopefully, we can cooperate in order to arrive at a point where our common goal can be achieved. A worsening situation is unfavorable for either side. Thereby, the three main problems pointed out by Mr. Bidault need to be and can be solved soon.

Bidault: We will be very happy, if [these problems] can be solved. Thank you very much, Mr. Zhou Enlai, for your being willing to spend time here tonight and exchange our opinions. I'd like to take this opportunity to present Mr. Zhou Enlai with my precious book as a gift in order to show my respect.

Zhou Enlai: To achieve peace, we are willing to make additional efforts and work harder with you. But there are indeed some people intending to use threats. I hope that Mr. Bidault can stop the attempt of destroying peace so that it can be achieved faster in a more practical way.

Since we have established our contact by now, this kind of contact should continue in order to make our efforts for peace together. I have been to France and know a lot about the wonderful traditions of the French. The French people have a strong sense of national pride. I hope to see that the national status of France in the world rise through your peace efforts.

Bidault: Thank you so much, Mr. Zhou Enlai, for your wonderful memories and praise of France. We hope not to mention the threat, but follow the reality, when we work out solutions for the problems later on.

France hopes to achieve a Southeast Asian settlement that can be accepted by all the parties. Thereafter, the people in this region can be eventually released from disastrous war conditions, breathe freely, and hopefully the entire world won't be disturbed by either the Cold War or a hot war.

Zhou Enlai: The Cold War and any hot war should end. What we want is peace.

Bidault: As long as we have trust, we can achieve peace and enjoy a relaxation.

Zhou Enlai: This needs our joint efforts. China and France getting closer will help improve the situation.

Bidault: I firmly believe this. Hopefully, Sino-French closeness, which depends on the conference's progress, will advance forward.

I hope there will be other opportunities to see you again.

Regretfully Mr. Zhou Enlai arrived this evening after the sun set. Otherwise, you could have enjoyed the beautiful view of the lake here.

Zhou Enlai: There are plenty of opportunities. We are neighbors; it is very convenient to see each other.

Bidault: Our opinions have already gotten pretty close, just like next door neighbors.

Zhou Enlai: The proximity of our residences can also bring our opinions closer.