

April 2, 1965

**Excerpt from a Conversation between Zhou Enlai
and Pakistani President Ayub Khan**

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Summary:

Zhou Enlai addresses African and European concerns relating to the war in South Vietnam. He attempts to answer the questions of: the possibility of the war's worldwide expansion, China's role and the possibility of negotiation.

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Chinese

Contents:

Translation - English

ZHOU ENLAI AND PAKISTANI PRESIDENT AYUB KHAN^[1]

Karachi, 2 April 1965

Zhou Enlai: I have recently visited two countries in Africa, they were both very much concerned about the development of the situation in Southeast Asia. I know that during [PRC Foreign Minister] Marshal Chen Yi's visit to Pakistan, he also had some discussion with Your Excellency.

Ayub Khan: We are very much worried. We don't know when the large-scale bombing will end.

Zhou Enlai: The Americans think that by expanding its aggression in South Vietnam and escalating its bombing in North Vietnam, they can bring Vietnam to its knees. This kind of thinking will fail completely.

During my recent visit, the African and European friends were all concerned about this issue. In sum, there are three questions. (1) Under the circumstance that the United States is expanding its aggression and strengthening pressure, even if the people of Vietnam and Indo-China are able to resist America's aggression, they will suffer heavy losses; if they are unable to resist, they may compromise in the face of the tremendous threat. They (the friends in Africa and Europe) worry that if Vietnam is to yield to America's pressure, [the people] in other parts of the world will also suffer from heavy losses. (2) The worry that the war may expand, gradually developing into a world war. (3) Between compromise and world war, does there exist the possibility of [solving the issue through] negotiations?

I have analyzed and answered these questions.

(1) There exists no possibility that Vietnam will yield [to American pressure]. On March 22, the NLF [National Liberation Front] of South Vietnam issued an extremely strong statement. They firmly believe that they can defeat the puppet troops, and that the puppet troops in South Vietnam will collapse gradually. The troops the United States is able to send can only occupy a small portion of cities and sea ports. According to America's planning, they can only dispatch, at the most, three divisions to South Vietnam: one is an infantry division from America, one is a marine division from Okinawa, and the last one is put together by units from the Philippines, South Korea, and Thailand. These troops can only be used to defend sea ports, cities, and military bases in South Vietnam. The Americans hope to use these troops to replace the formal units of the puppet troops in South Vietnam, using the latter to deal with the people in South Vietnam. The NLF in South Vietnam is confident that the puppet troops will be eliminated. The American authorities worry what their troops should do if the puppet troops are eliminated. If they are far away from their strongholds, they will face the same fate of being defeated. Now their air and land forces are being eliminated continuously. The puppet regime in South Vietnam has changed about a dozen times, and the Americans can trust virtually none of them. The Ngo Dinh Diem brothers were assassinated by the Americans. The Americans are considering signing an agreement with the puppet regime, making it clear that America sends troops to Vietnam in accordance with the request of the puppet regime. But if the puppet regime in Saigon no longer exists, will the agreement still be effective? This indeed will become something unheard of. The United States signed many treaties with Jiang Jieshi. But after the People's Liberation Army occupied Nanjing, these treaties could no longer be maintained—only Taiwan is an exception. Now the Americans again try to use agreements to serve their purpose in South Vietnam. In actuality, the United States has long realized that it will certainly be defeated in South Vietnam, but it is unwilling to withdraw, and it tries to use this tactic to put up a last ditch struggle.

On the other hand, the United States tries to use the bombardment of North Vietnam to force the North to surrender. In August and September last year, the United States bombed North Vietnam once or twice a week. From late March this year to now, there is bombing almost every day. In the face of this, the NLF in South Vietnam stated that no matter how long the bombing lasts, it will continue the fighting, until winning victory. The government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam supports the

NLF's statement, and is preparing to provide it with all kinds of assistance. The government of [North] Korea has also issued a statement to echo [that of the DRV's]. China published an editorial on March 25 in *Renmin ribao* [People's Daily], expressing determination to support the people in South Vietnam to win victory, preparing to offer all kinds of support, including weapons, to the people in South Vietnam. When the people in South Vietnam are in need, China will send its personnel to fight together with the people in South Vietnam. Although this is only an editorial, it has caused strong reaction in foreign opinions, especially in the United States. Foreign Minister Chen Yi, in his response to the foreign minister of the DRV, has also confirmed this stand. The public opinion in the world has condemned the United States. In the face of American bombardment, the DRV has started evacuating the population and is determined to support the brothers in South Vietnam to carry the resistance to the end.

Under these circumstances, what is America's policy? The propaganda in the United States has reflected the contradictions it is facing. On the one hand, American propaganda claims that if Vietnam does not stop its "aggression," the United States will expand the war of aggression. This is the most ridiculous bandit-style logic of imperialism. According to this logic, South Vietnam's resistance to American aggression is "aggression," and North Vietnam's support to South Vietnam is "aggression" against one's own compatriots. If so, the resistance by the NLF in Algeria to the French colonists becomes Algeria's "aggression" against Algeria, and Egypt's taking back the Suez Canal becomes the Egyptians' "aggression" against the Egyptians. This question became crystal clear as soon as I discussed it with the Algerians and Egyptians. This is nothing but America's bandit-style logic.

On the other hand, the United States is propagandizing that the expansion of the war will be limited to South Vietnam, and that it only wants North Vietnam to stop its support to South Vietnam. The United States is hoping to separate South Vietnam from North Vietnam, thus isolating the South.

When the United States escalates the bombardment of North Vietnam, it again claims that the expansion of the bombing will be limited to North Vietnam, and that it has no intention to fight a war with China. It has not only propagandized this way, it has also made statements along this line in the Sino-American ambassadorial talks in Warsaw.

After meetings in Washington, the British Foreign Minister said that the United States had confirmed to Britain that it will not expand the war to China. The British Prime Minister thus said that he had no worries at all. This means that the United States is now aimed at separating China from Vietnam, making Vietnam isolated.

The policy of the United States is a wavering one. First, it asks the Vietnamese to stop "aggression" against the Vietnamese, this is groundless. Second, it has been wavering on expanding the war. Whenever it takes a step, it will look around for taking the next step. It does not have a fixed policy. [US Ambassador to South Vietnam Maxwell] Taylor^[2] returned to Washington to discuss this issue, that is, whether it is beneficial for the United States to send troops to South Vietnam, and to what extent should the bombing be expanded.

After the publication of the *Renmin ribao* editorial and response from Foreign Minister Chen Yi to the Foreign Minister of the DRV, the United States said that the Chinese were only paying lip service, which would play no role in the resistance by the people in South Vietnam. Sometimes the United States has said that it was uncertain if China would really enter the war. This means that America's policy is not established on a clearly defined foundation. It has conducted aggression, realizing however that the reasoning is not on its side and that its position is not sound, yet it is unwilling to accept defeat and to withdraw. Because the reasoning is not on its side, its policy is wavering. To withdraw is the best way for it to save face, but to continue to act recklessly will cause it to lose more face.

Ayub Khan: If the United States continues to put pressure on North and South Vietnam, China will have to send its troops. It seems that the United States has no doubt about this. What it doubts is whether or not the Soviet Union will provide support.

Zhou Enlai: What you have said has some ground. I will discuss it later when I discuss whether the war will develop into a world war. Now, let me first discuss the first question, namely, the question concerning American pressure. Vietnam will not

surrender under pressure. America has devoted a large portion of its strength to Vietnam and the whole of Indo-China, the result can only be [America] being defeated and losing face.

When Your Excellency visits the United States, if the Americans ask what China will do, Your Excellency may convey the following three points to the United States: First, China will not take the initiative to provoke a war against the United States. Taiwan is a case in point. We have every right to recover Taiwan, but we have never used armed force. Although the Seventh Fleet of the United States is stationed in the Taiwan Straits, still we have been conducting talks with the United States in Warsaw.

Second, China means what it says, and China will honor whatever international obligations it has undertaken.

Ayub Khan: We know this.

Zhou: There is proof for the second point. Less than one year after China's liberation [in October 1949], the United States initiated a war of aggression in Korea, while at the same time dispatching the Seventh Fleet into the Taiwan Straits, attempting to prevent China from recovering Taiwan. China, via India's then ambassador to China, told the United States: If the United States crossed the 38th Parallel and approached the Yalu River, it is certain that China will not stand by without making a response. The Indian government indeed informed the US government at that time. But the United States would not listen, not believing that China would support Korea. When Your Excellency visits the United States, please convey these points to them. Maybe they will again not believe us. Maybe, as Your Excellency has predicted, they will believe us. Both possibilities exist. However, our friend has changed this time, it is not India but Pakistan.

Ayub Khan: The United States should understand that if it puts too much pressure, China will provide support. Everyone with a mind should understand this. The United States says that it will not expand the war to China. It means to see to what extent the Soviets will be involved. The United States believes that probably the Soviet Union will not be involved, and whether or not it will expand the war will depend to what extent the Soviet Union will provide support.

Zhou Enlai: (2) Will the war be expanded into a world war? Your Excellency is a marshal. You know that the rules of war are not based on human will. The United States believes that if it does not expand the war in Vietnam to China, China will not support Vietnam. Our position is that even if the war is not expanded to China, still China will support Vietnam, so long as the DRV requests it, so long as the NLF in South Vietnam requests it. When the war expands, it is impossible to draw a line. This is like the spread of a fire. The United States wants to play with fire and to take the risk. China hopes to extinguish the fire. The United States is not willing to do so, and is putting gas to the fire. As a result, the fire will be larger and larger. The expansion of the war is caused by the United States, not initiated by us. Although China has adopted an attitude of restraint, if the United States expands the war on this battlefield, the war flame will spread. The United States says that this is a regional war, and that it is doing limited bombing and limited expansion. But, even though it may want to limit the expansion of the war, in reality it cannot limit the war's expansion. Although the United States threatens that if the war in Indo-China develops into a Korean-type war, it will not, as it did during the Korean War, limit itself to a regional war, but will expand the war to China, so that China will no longer be the shelter. We know this. China is prepared.

We are prepared. This is the third point Your Excellency may want to convey to the United States. The United States says that China has not made war preparations, using this to deceive its people. China does not want to fight a war with the United States. In the broadcast speech Your Excellency made yesterday, you said that China is a peace-loving country. When Your Excellency was visiting Beijing and Shanghai, you saw no signs of war preparations among the people there. But, in a military sense, we cannot but make due preparations. If the United States brings the war flame to our side, we have to extinguish it. The United States tries to scare China by saying that a Korean-type war will not be limited to the DRV and Indo-China, this is completely useless.

If the United States expands the war, the war will gradually be expanded to China. We are prepared both materially and spiritually. We hope that when our friends in Asia have the opportunity to talk to American people, they should tell them that they should see the danger involved in American government's playing with fire. The possibility of an expanding war exists, and the American people will be brought into a great war.

The question is: after the expansion of the war, will it continue to expand? Your Excellency asked a moment ago if the war expands to China will the Soviet Union intervene. We are not going to answer this question, because you will be visiting the Soviet Union tomorrow. You can ask the Soviet friends, and let them answer it. As far as we are concerned, we are not considering this issue, and not expecting support from the Soviet Union.

If the United States expands the war to China, it will really suffer. Two marshals in the world have said this, you are the third marshal. Britain's Marshal [Bernard Law] Montgomery twice visited China. He advised his American friends that if America is to attack China, it may enter China, but will not get out. A new front is created on the front-line, but the rear will be in confusion. Before his death, [US Gen. Douglas] MacArthur also told this to Eisenhower and Kennedy. Johnson may remember this. If the United States imposes war on the Chinese people, the Chinese people will resist to the end, and there exists no other outcome. Under this circumstance, a faction in the United States says that the United States may only conduct bombing and will not use land forces. Your Excellency is a marshal, you know that a war fought in such a way will not solve the problem. If the United States conducts bombing from the air, we may carry out activities, using other strategy, everywhere on the ground. If the United States is to carry out an extensive bombing in China, that is war, and a war has no boundaries. Every person in the military knows this. China will be [strong] enough to make the United States suffer, how can it expand the war to other parts of the world? Therefore, it is unnecessary to answer whether or not the Soviet Union will be involved, and we do not need to expect Soviet support. If the United States bases its policy on the premise that China and the Soviet Union will not cooperate to resist aggression and thus expand the war, it will cause an even earlier defeat. The Chinese people will bear more sacrifice for the interests of the people in the world, that is worth it.

To summarize, the three points are: (1) China will not provoke a war against the United States. (2) We Chinese mean what we say. (3) China is prepared.

We are intimate friends, and this is why I tell you the truth. Especially since you are going to visit the Soviet Union and the United States, it is even more necessary to tell you the truth in clear language. [Ed. note: Khan's trip to the United States was subsequently postponed.]

It is impossible for the United States to pass China's test. [If the war is to] expand into a world war, the United States will be defeated even more badly.

(3) Is it possible the problem will be solved through negotiations? China does not fundamentally oppose holding negotiations. Any question, in the final analysis, has to be solved through negotiation. However, the conditions and timing for holding negotiations on the South Vietnam question are not mature. The United States has introduced conditions to begin negotiations, that is, Vietnam should stop "aggression," the NLF in South Vietnam should stop resistance, so that the puppet regime will be given some breathing space, and the United States will continue to oppress South Vietnam. The United States claims that any action on the part of the South Vietnamese people has been directed by North Vietnam. It is impossible to conduct negotiations under these conditions. Such negotiations will not solve the question even if they are to last for ten years.

The Chinese-American negotiations have lasted for ten years, and have resulted in nothing. We are patient. Taiwan is that much land, and will not grow any larger. Jiang Jieshi is getting older and older, and he will die sooner or later. China is becoming stronger day by day. Some day the question will be solved through negotiations. This is what is workable on the Taiwan question. But the same is not workable on the South Vietnam question. If the resistance is stopped, even if the negotiations will last for only one year, more people will die during this period than during war time. The NLF in South Vietnam points out that this is not the time for

negotiations. This stand is correct.

[\[1\]](#) Muhammad Ayub Khan, 1907-74, military leader and president (1958-69) of Pakistan.

[\[2\]](#) Maxwell Taylor, US Ambassador to South Vietnam August 1964-August 1965.