

**May 21, 1965**

**Politburo Talk by Zhou Enlai on Receiving a Group of  
Central Military Commission Operational Meeting  
Comrades**

**Citation:**

"Politburo Talk by Zhou Enlai on Receiving a Group of Central Military Commission Operational Meeting Comrades", May 21, 1965, Wilson Center Digital Archive, Dang de wenxian (Party Historical Documents), no. 3 (1994): 27-28. Translated by Neil Silver. <https://wilson-center-digital-archive.dvincitest.com/document/114363>

**Summary:**

Speaking at the Politburo, Zhou Enlai explains how nuclear weapons capabilities have won China newfound admiration in the non-aligned world and instilled fear in the other nuclear powers, particularly the United States and Soviet Union.

**Credits:**

This document was made possible with support from Carnegie Corporation of New York (CCNY)

**Original Language:**

Chinese

**Contents:**

Transcript - Chinese  
Translation - English



The present international situation is one of development, especially with regard to the national democratic revolutionary movements in Asia, Africa and Latin America. Take a look at Asia, take a look at Africa, take a look at Latin America, things are bubbling everywhere, and they all directly stem from American imperialism. It has stirred things up everywhere, with the masses rising in rebellion and its friends deserting it. The best proof is our atomic bomb test this time. This year we have decided that since our second atomic bomb explosion will be by air-drop, the time fixed [for the explosion] will be in May or June, too early is not good, so the time chosen will be during the two months of May and June. If we choose May, won't there be even more opposed to us than last year? Exactly the opposite. We have chosen a time during the Asian-African Unity Conference, and this will be a test. The Chairman [Mao] has decided to explode [a device] since whatever we do there will be the criticism. Of course, in setting which day, we have given the power to the Special Commission and, concretely, to the front-line to decide, with consultations in the rear-area between Comrade Luo Ruiqing and me. This time, viewed politically, we are running into a meeting of the Asian-African Unity Conference in Ghana. There is an historical precedent. When the First Non-Aligned Conference convened in 1961 in Yugoslavia, Khrushchev, seeking to play his hand, and motivated purely by a desire to intimidate and scare, wanted to test a large one [nuclear weapon], with the result that he stirred up universal opposition. Sending a delegation to the United States, the Soviet Union begged forgiveness and halted testing. Last year, even before we exploded [a bomb], India proposed a motion, urging that China not carry out the nuclear test, but, with only two votes. It failed to pass by only two votes, and we then exploded [a bomb]. Last year we chose to explode [a bomb] after the Second Non-Aligned Conference. This time we have chosen [to do so] before the Second Asian-African Unity Conference, and even considered [doing so] during the Asian-African Unity Conference; the situation now may have changed. We have met many people in Asia and Africa who outwardly express regret, stating that it would be best to halt testing, but behind our backs congratulate us. This illustrates nationalist ambivalence. Owing to their opposition to imperialism, they support us. Our possession of the atomic bomb inspires them and also strengthens [their] power. On the other hand, under imperialist pressure and under Soviet cajoling and coercion, there is still a measure [of support for] the treaty to prohibit nuclear testing, and this is why they express regret. Wherever we go in these places, we run into this situation. But we never foresaw that so many people would cheer us on this time. This year only the response in the United States has been limited, since they want to downplay our role. Outwardly, they don't say much, but in their heart of hearts they are worried. This time the people of the world, including the Japanese, whose response has been the greatest, acclaim and congratulate us, and are happy.

I even performed this kind of test. We were right in the middle of carrying out our nuclear explosive test when two Japanese art troupes were in China. Japan endured two atomic bombs. They sacrificed and they oppose atomic bomb testing. But these people were all middle-of-the-roaders, some middle-of-the-road leaning left, and some middle-of-the-road leaning right. I spoke twice to them, saying that if we possess the atomic bombs this is the same as the Japanese possessing the atomic bomb, and we both oppose the atomic bomb. You had two atomic bombs fall on your heads, and you made a contribution to the whole world, since everybody in the whole world opposes atomic warfare. If there had not been the sacrifices [caused by] those two atomic bombs, how could the world's attention have been focused? If there had been no harm wrought by poison gas, how could there have been opposition to poison gas warfare? There is always a price to be paid. As Chairman Mao has said, once a price was paid, no one will dare use the bomb. Now there is the atomic bomb, and later there will be the hydrogen bomb, and there will also be long-range missiles. The United States may use strategic atomic weapons in Vietnam, and later use them on China. We Chinese have this type of lofty aspiration. No matter how many people we may sacrifice in a nuclear war, we will in the end attain world peace. Just as Chairman Mao has said, we will gain progress, peace and victory in an anti-imperialist war. If they attack us, that means we will face the inevitable destruction of nuclear war, since, if atomic bombs are exploded over our heads, naturally we will suffer some losses, but that will stir up all the people of the world, even including Americans

among them. If the Soviet Union sits back without getting involved, it will [constitute] watching in safety while others fight, then reaping the rewards when both sides are exhausted. The Americans and the Japanese need to realize that if atomic bombs fall on their heads, their losses will be greater than ours. Japan has a population of 100,000,000 concentrated on those not so large islands, and with so much industrial infrastructure. Now Japan is in an opposite position from us. It is not constructing subways, but [rather] constructing an over-ground railway from Tokyo to Osaka. We can't do that. If we do that, and there is a nuclear war, we don't know how great the losses will be. Therefore, we have to prepare to pay some price and, in that way, gain world sympathy to support for us. Most of these people from Japanese artistic circles still fear war, but when I say this, they have confidence if they stand with China. Moreover, some of them speak frankly, saying that we hear you are still not satisfied after your test, and, on hearing this, on the contrary we feel that [we] should cheer you on and stand together with you. We can work on this. From this point of view, our international prestige has now been raised.

Now the Soviet Union is purposely underestimating us, [but] actually it also fears [us]. [Soviet Premier Alexei] Kosygin told [Indian Prime Minister [Lal Bahadur] Shastri that the second Chinese atomic bomb was a small toy, [but] in fact he is also fearful. Now the United States is afraid. Britain is also concerned. France also thinks it's falling behind, and knows that it cannot replicate our production method. Despite the fact that they've been at it for so many years, they have only exploded a couple devices; they cannot air-drop; and their Uranium-235 plant will only be in production in 1969. Since this is the situation, if the United States decides on a massive strike [on Chinese nuclear facilities], and the Soviet Union joins in, this will necessarily entail a number of steps, and will not be that easy. We must prepare for this. The more prepared we are, the more they will back off. This is [the law of] dialectics.