

April 23, 1955

Zhou Enlai's Speech at the Political Committee of the Afro-Asian Conference

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Summary:

Zhou Enlai discussed communist expansion, subversive activities and the prospect of peace, during which he mentioned the relation between Pakistan and China. He also put forth the Chinese motion that the Conference should have a peace declaration of seven points: Mutual respect of sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual non-adoption of invasive action or threats, mutual non-interference of internal affairs, acknowledgment of racial equality, acknowledgment of equality of countries, recognition of people's right to decide their own political and economic systems, and mutual non-detriment.

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[...]

Chairman,
Delegates,

Yesterday and today I heard opinions from many representatives. I have also read the motion brought forth by eight delegations. I am now willing to combine everyone's common opinions and bring forth the motion from the Chinese delegation.

The current world situation is indeed tense. However, peace is not without hope, and those who protect peace are increasing in numbers. 29 Afro-Asian countries are here together in a meeting, all calling for peace. This proves that over half of the world's population wants peace and solidarity. This kind of expression is supported by the majority of the countries and peoples of this world. This also proves that the dangers of war can be delayed and even halted. The issue of furthering world peace and cooperation which we are discussing at this conference should take such a position. We should push aside differences in ideology, differences in systems, differences in the past, and [we should also push aside differences in] current international commitments. We should have peaceful cooperation as our common foundation to resolve issues that we are currently discussing.

For example, some delegates seated here said that peaceful co-existence is a term used by communists. [If that is the case,] then we can change the term to avoid causing misunderstanding on this point. The delegate of Lebanon led the discussion from this point to a discussion about ideology; no results would arise from this. We should be able to agree that in the preamble of the United Nations Charter, there was the mention of "peaceful co-existence." We should be able to seek peaceful cooperation from the position of the United Nations Charter.

Now, since we said that we want to cooperate, then the 29 countries in the Afro-Asian region should cooperate peacefully, and [we] should unite and conduct international cooperation in order to seek a collective peace. This kind of peace is not an attempt to oppose the participation of countries outside the Afro-Asian region; it is merely to say that we are beginning to push for peace and oppose war starting from the Afro-Asian countries.

Take China for example. We are a country led by the communist party. We disagree with military alliances that cause confrontation in the world and increase the dangers of war. The North Atlantic Treaty [Organization], the Manila Pact, and other similar kinds of treaties are [all items] we disagree with. If the world continues to develop like this, then we will be forced to find some countries and form a military alliance with them. This will not be in the interest of protecting world peace and opposing war. Basically, we are against confrontational military blocs, but today we are meeting here to discuss the issue of collective peace; [therefore,] we can push and not discuss the issue of military blocs because they are already a reality. We should first unite.

I visited the prime minister of Pakistan [Muhammad Ali Bogra] one afternoon two days ago. He told me that Pakistan did not join the Manila Pact for the purpose of opposing China, nor does Pakistan suspect China of having aggressive intentions. Just like that, we have obtained mutual understanding. The prime minister of Pakistan even guaranteed that if the United States undertook aggressive actions or started a world war, then Pakistan would not participate—just as Pakistan and India did not participate in the Korean War. I am very thankful for the explanation from the prime minister of Pakistan, because it led to mutual understanding and allowed us to know that this treaty does not obstruct us from cooperating and reaching agreements for collective peace. I think the prime minister of Pakistan will not be opposed to my opinion.

In order to avoid misunderstandings, I wanted to make some explanations for the prime minister of Pakistan; just as General [Carlos] Romulo and the prime minister of Pakistan said, the Manila Pact is defensive. I did not believe this point. Then [I] mentioned the United States undertaking aggressive action or launching a world war, etc., under the Manila Treaty because I provided a hypothetical question to [the prime minister of Pakistan], prompting him to provide the above described answer.

As for the so-called communist expansion and subversive activities, certain delegates seated here are very polite; they only talked about the Soviet Union and did not mention China. However, China is also a communist-led country. Therefore, we could not but think that these delegates also meant to include China. As for this issue, there needs to be an answer.

We should first confirm some principles, [and then] let us all follow them; do not conduct expansion and do not subvert other countries. If we cannot confirm some common principles, how can we restrict each other? After the Chinese premier visited India and Burma, the prime ministers of India, Burma, [and the Chinese premier] jointly brought forth and recognized the five principles; therefore, we are restricted by this. This eliminates many countries' suspicions towards China. Since then, the countries that agree with the five principles are increasing daily in numbers. Many [delegates from] countries seated here have all expressed agreement [with the Five Principles]. Prime Minister Nehru told me that British Prime Minister [Anthony] Eden also expressed agreement with the Five Principles. This made me really happy. If Prime Minister Eden is willing to issue a joint statement with the Chinese premier to support the Five Principles and promises to follow through, then I will sign first. Of course, it is impossible that all the delegates seated here agree with the wording and numbering of the Five Principles. We believe that because we are seeking to affirm our common wishes in the interest of guaranteeing collective peace, the wording of the Five Principles can be revised, and the number [of principles] can be modified.

There are also some representatives that mentioned international organizations; for example, the representative of Iraq mentioned the communist intelligence agency. However, this is not an issue of the Afro-Asian region. If [one country] requests to dissolve another's international organizations, then there are still many other international organizations in this world. For example, we are discontented with the Vatican's control over Chinese believers; we are also dissatisfied with the United States Central Intelligence Agency. The truth is that China is suffering greatly [from these organizations]. However, we do not mention these issues at this conference, because even if these issues are related to the Afro-Asian region, we will not be able to produce consensual opinions. At the same time, these issues are outside of our conference agenda and should not be mentioned for discussion.

Now I will bring forth the motion from the Chinese delegation and provide explanations.

The title of this motion is called the Peace Declaration. This is adopting the suggestion of the Japanese delegation. We believe the suggestion from the Japanese delegation is excellent. Adopting the term, peace declaration, can express our solidarity.

The content of this motion is to have the Afro-Asian Conference declare the resolution of Afro-Asian countries to further our mutual shared interests: peaceful co-existence and friendly cooperation. "Peaceful co-existence" is a term taken from the United Nations Charter. Therefore, it will not cause misunderstanding and can obtain everyone's agreement. Upon what foundation can these objectives be reached? We took items that everyone can agree upon from various delegations' motions. [From these items,] we came up with seven points instead of five points. We hope that everyone can agree upon this.

China is willing to guarantee that it will follow through with this seven-point foundation. China is a large country and also a communist-led country; [therefore] many people feel that China wants to threaten others. Hence, here we are willing to mention our guarantees. We also hope that others will make the same guarantees.

The first point is mutual respect of sovereignty and territorial integrity. China abides by this principle. China's relationship with Burma proves this point. Since the beginning, we have [always] respected Burma's sovereignty and territorial integrity. China does not have, and should not have, territorial requests. China borders twelve countries, and with some countries, certain parts of the border have not yet been defined. We are prepared to confirm these borders with neighboring countries, and before that, we agree to maintain the current state, acknowledging uncertain borders as uncertain. We restrict our government and our people to not cross the border by even a step. If any incident of this kind occurs, we are willing to point out our mistake and immediately return people to our own borders. As for how we are going to confirm borders with our neighboring countries, there can only be a peaceful method; no other method can be allowed. If negotiations fail once, we will negotiate again. There cannot be any violation of the current state.

The second point is mutual non-adoption of invasive actions or threats. China also abides by this principle. Our neighboring countries [such as] Thailand and the Philippines are fearful of China. For the people that do not understand us, we allow them to be suspicious. This time, through contacts with the representatives of Thailand and the Philippines, I guaranteed them that China will not threaten or conduct any invasion against their countries. I told the prince that before the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Thailand, Thailand can also send a delegation to visit China's Yunnan province, especially the Thai people autonomous region, and see if China has any invasive intentions. I also told Prime Minister U Nu that I am willing to travel with him to our two countries' border for a visit. Unfortunately, we did not have the opportunity. We will find an opportunity next time. A sea separates China and the Philippines; [the two countries] do not share a common border. Prior to the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and the Philippines, we also welcome the Philippines to send a delegation to visit China, especially various coastal regions such as Fujian, Canton, etc., so as to see if China has any threatening activity against the Philippines.

The third point is mutual non-interference or non-intervention on internal affairs. This is the issue that Indochina countries worry about. During the Geneva Conference, we once made guarantees to Cambodia and Laos; we also told Prime Minister [Anthony] Eden and [Soviet] Foreign Minister [Vyacheslav] Molotov about this guarantee. Afterwards, we also told Prime Minister Nehru and Prime Minister U Nu. This time, once again, we continued to provide our guarantee to the delegations of Cambodia and Laos, and again expressed our hopes that they become peaceful countries like India and Burma. China never intended to interfere with these two countries and is the same towards all [other] countries. I mention Cambodia and Laos simply as examples.

The fourth point is acknowledging racial equality. There is no need to explain this point. We view all races as equal. There is no racism in the new China.

The fifth point is acknowledging the equality of countries no matter their size. We particularly value this issue because we are a large country and [may] easily disrespect small countries. We often mention to our people the issue of the idea of great powers. Due to the traditions of history, large countries easily ignore and disrespect small countries. Therefore, we often review ourselves. If anyone from the 29 delegations present at this conference feels that the Chinese delegation has been disrespectful towards any other country's representative, please point it out. We are willing to accept this opinion and make corrections.

The sixth point is respecting that people of all countries have the right [and] freedom to decide their own lifestyle and political and economic systems. This is something that everyone can accept. The Chinese people chose the lifestyle and political and economic system of the new China; they are unwilling to [accept] interference from others. China is willing to respect other people's chosen lifestyle and political and economic systems, such as the American people who chose their current lifestyle and political and economic systems. We respect that. We also discussed with the Japanese delegation. We respect the Japanese people and the Japanese people's selection of Shigeru Yoshida's government. We acknowledge that the [choice] represents the Japanese people, and the Japanese people now chose the Ichiro Hatoyama government. We acknowledge that it represents the Japanese people.

The seventh is mutual non-detriment. We should be caring for each other's interests. It should not be only one-sided. We propose to conduct trade on the basis of equal and mutual benefits; [we] cannot request special rights or conditions. China guarantees that in conducting peaceful cooperation and economic and cultural exchanges with [Afro-Asian] conference countries or other countries, [China] will not request special rights or conditions. [All countries] will all be treated as equal.

If we can conduct peaceful coexistence and friendly cooperation upon the foundation of these seven points, then we can make peace last, starting from our midst.

Other than [the above], we added another point in our motion, which is to use peaceful methods to resolve international disputes, support all currently undertaken measures or possible measures that eliminate the tense international situation, and further world peace. This is something everyone can agree on. On this aspect, we would like to thank the five Colombo [Conference] countries and many other countries for their support of the [reaching of the] Indochina agreement. Similarly, the Korean armistice also received the support of many countries seated here, especially the promotion and support of India; this led to the possibility of a gradual diminishing of hostilities on the battlefield.

As for the relationship between China and the United States, the Chinese people are unwilling to fight with the United States. We are willing to use peaceful methods to resolve international disputes. If everyone is willing to push China and the United States to use peaceful methods to resolve disputes between China and the United States, then it will greatly help ease the tense situation of the Far East and be in the interest of preventing a world war.

Regarding the issue of disarmament, we agree with the opinion of many delegations. Regarding this issue and the issue of banning atomic weapons, we have already organized a draft resolution committee. We should place the final passed resolution regarding these issues into the peace declaration, making the declaration a complete declaration.

We hope that this document provided by the Chinese delegation can be accepted by delegations of various countries at this conference because it is drawn from material, which originate from various delegations' proposals, with the potential of reaching an agreement. It will not harm anyone's position.

Chairman, various delegates, I initially did not prepare to talk so much. I only wanted to explain our attitude. However, since everyone is paying attention to the communist-led countries, we could not but clearly explain our position. This is in the interest of jointly guaranteeing peace. Please forgive me for taking up so much time. Thank you.