

June 19, 1965

Record of Conversation between Premier Zhou and Premier Sabry

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Summary:

Zhou and Enlai and Ali Sabry discuss developments in Algeria, prospects for the Second Asian-African Conference, Egypt's tenuous food situation and trade relations with countries such as Argentina, Canada, and the US, and the latest news from Vietnam.

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Record of Conversation between Premier Zhou and Premier Sabry
(Premier has yet to review and approve)

Time: 9:00 to 10:00 p.m., 19 June 1965

Place: Residence of Premier [Ali] Sabry, Cairo

Participants: Chinese side: Vice Minister Zhang Hanfu, Vice Minister Qiao Guanhua,
and Ambassador Chen Jiakang

United Arab Republic (UAR) side: Ambassador to China Zakaria El-Adly Imam

Content Summary

1. Algeria and indicated that the UAR wished to decide on measures after the situation had become clear.
2. Premier Zhou discussed recent developments in the Vietnam situation.

Premier: I first would like to convey to Your Excellency the greetings of China's leaders. Your Excellency's last visit to China made a profound impression on them.

Sabry: How is Chairman Mao?

Premier: He is quite fine. He is now traveling outside Beijing. Several days ago I saw him in Hangzhou. I recall that when Your Excellency visited China, you saw him in Shanghai.

Sabry: That is right.

Premier: For a time recently, our press did not publish news about him. The outside world then started many rumors. The source of these rumors was Moscow's foreign press agency [note: likely the Novosti Press Agency].

Sabry: Doesn't the Premier feel tired, travelling around this way?

Premier: I am used to it.

When we had dinner just now, we received a statement of the Algerian Council of the Revolution. I assume that Your Excellency has already seen it. Does Your Excellency also have some new information?

Sabry: Most of it is speculation from various sources -- Spanish, French, and British -- and various interpretations. We have still not received any new telegram from our embassy, as decryption takes time. Regarding the conversation between Bouteflika and our ambassador, I must add that [Abdelaziz] Bouteflika said that he had arrested [Ahmed] Ben Bella and would put him on trial.

(Sabry's son then entered the room and shook hands with the Premier, who in passing welcomed Madam Sabry's October visit to China.)

Premier: The Council of the Revolution's statement spoke of eliminating Ben Bella's influence.

Sabry: Bouteflika told our ambassador that he would put him on trial and that, if found guilty, would certainly receive a felony conviction. Our Presidency Secretary-General [Abdel Magid] Farid is now in Algiers, participating in the preparatory work of the Asian-African Conference. On the basis of information obtained from a close assistant to Ben Bella, they all believe that the coup d'état sold out Ben Bella. They say that Boumedienne the day before was among those who went to the airport to welcome Ben Bella on his return from an inspection of Oran, and then early the next morning launched the coup d'état, which shows that these people's course of action is very treacherous. They believe that the coup d'état will not easily succeed and that there will certainly be a reaction. Farid observed that the masses on the street were quiet and without reaction, with only a universal feeling of surprise and astonishment regarding the coup. As the situation is difficult to judge, having still not decided on a course of action or how to respond to Bouteflika's two requests, our approach is to wait for the situation to become a bit clearer before speaking.

Premier: What has been the reaction of other countries?

Sabry: No government has yet given an official response. The Indian Express has reported a sentiment of doubt in regard to the Second Asian-African Conference, saying that it probably would be impossible to convene it as scheduled. According to our embassy's reporting, all members of the government and of the National Liberation Front (FLN) Central Committee, except for Ben Bella and [Mohamed Seghir] Nekkache, will continue to hold their original posts. In addition, I have also learned that an Algerian labor organization in France has issued a statement condemning the coup and calling on the Algerian people to remain vigilant and calm in regard to the future of Algeria and the coup d'état against Ben Bella. This was from Radio Paris.

Premier: Is this labor organization related to the government?

Sabry: It has a relationship with the Party.

Premier: So far no country's government has issued an official response?

Sabry: Not one.

Premier: Are the conference-place projects for the Asian-African Conference completed yet?

Sabry: According to our information, all the conference-place projects, including the meeting hall and residences, will be completed on schedule. We have sent many workers, technical personnel, and hotel administrators. Following the incident, we have instructed them to stay there, continue working, and await new instruction from the government. We have also sent a telegram to the Presidency Secretary-General for him to stay and not return for the time being.

Premier: Has the foreign minister arrived there yet?

Sabry: Not yet.

Premier: Will Subandrio be passing through here?

Sabry: Yes. Yesterday he went to Addis Ababa. He will later go to Kenya and Morocco before arriving in Algiers. The situation is very complicated.

Premier: In the last two months, relations between Algeria and Morocco seem to have improved. Ben Bella and [King] Hassan met twice.

Sabry: Bouteflika indicated that one of the reasons for their opposition to Ben Bella was in his having conceded too much to Morocco and Tunisia in Algeria's border disputes with Morocco and Tunisia. Bouteflika also was critical of Ben Bella for wishing to go see [Charles] De Gaulle before the Asian-African Conference, knowing well that De Gaulle was against the Asian-African Conference and against Algeria. He believes that Ben Bella's actions were tantamount to treason. As we see it, however, in the current situation, Algeria has no choice but to have good relations with its neighbors and with France.

Premier: We hear that the negotiations between Algeria and France over oil have reached a preliminary agreement.

Sabry: According to our experts, this agreement is the best agreement reached between an oil-prospecting country and an oil-producing country. The reason is that in such oil-producing countries as Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Iraq, the benefit that foreign-capital enterprises of such countries as the United States, Britain, and France provide the producing country is the extraction of an oil export duty of 50 percent, but administration of this oil is entirely in the hands of the foreign-capital enterprises, which will make the calculations as they please. There is no way of knowing whether their calculated 50 percent is truly 50 percent. Secondly, the oil price is determined by the foreign-capital enterprises; moreover, after the oil is loaded onto the ship and exported, how its price will be set is unknown. In short, the price for crude oil is low; prices for shipping, refining, and exporting to international markets are high. The extracting companies make a great deal of money through these four procedures, with profits coming from the three processes of transport, refining, and sales on international markets. However, with Algeria's reaching an agreement with France this time, it can benefit from each procedure, particularly through Algeria's oil pipelines, with 100 percent of the transportation paid to the Algerian government. The signing of this agreement will greatly change the relationship between the eastern Arab countries and other countries receiving oil exploitation and the oil-prospecting countries. De Gaulle accepted this agreement in order to oppose the United States, giving the United States more trouble, because this way other oil-producing countries also would put forward the same conditions. France's sole condition for accepting this agreement is that Algeria not withdraw from the franc zone. No new government can obtain better conditions.

Premier: There is information on Ben Bella going to Paris and signing an oil agreement before the Asian-African Conference.

Sabry: Yes. Agreement has been reached on the main projects. All that remains are some technical difficulties.

Premier: At present can you still not see some foreign country behind the scenes?

Sabry: It is hard to say. All I know is that recently the United States has been terribly active in this area, with the Central Intelligence Agency, in particular, intensifying its activities not only in Algeria but in the UAR and Iraq as well. It is hard to say whether this coup d'état is something that the United States prepared or something domestic. But the first reaction of the US ambassador in Cairo was a happy one. I do not know whether this simply is his own point of view or whether it represents Washington's viewpoint but he, at least, was happy. The United States is quite satisfied in regard to

this coup d'état, if for no other reason than, at a minimum, the very good relations between Ben Bella and [Gamel Abdel] Nasser.

Premier: How have negotiations for the United States to provide food aid to you been proceeding?

Sabry: Several days ago, the Congress of the United States decided to stop providing aid to the UAR and Indonesia as long as those two countries continued to adopt policies opposing the United States. This was passed last week by the Congress.

Premier: This is a deliberate stance of the United States government to have Congress come and apply pressure.

Sabry: They easily say that this is an issue for the Congress. In fact, of course, it represents the government's attitude. If not, how could the senators propose it and a majority pass it? The United States is also closely watching the situation of our food purchases in other countries. For example, we sent a team to purchase food in Argentina. At first the negotiation were going smoothly when, suddenly, the other party announced a halt to negotiations. This is the result of US pressure. Argentina proposed to us a condition difficult for us to accept, that we pay in advance with cash. It goes without saying that our negotiations with Argentina are beneficial. We are willing to sign with Argentina a long-term agreement for five years. For the UAR, this would be the first long-term agreement for the purchase of food signed with a foreign country. For Argentina, there is a surplus of food and no way to store it, which requires a way out.

Premier: Does Argentina also export corn?

Sabry: We previously imported corn from the United States. In addition to the United States, we also imported from Sudan and Mexico. We now also import from Indonesia. Subandrio has indicated that Indonesia can sell corn to us. If we had an agreement with China, this year's corn problem would be solved. Our difficult period is from now until the end of October.

Premier: When I passed through Cairo at the beginning of April, Your Excellency said that the food difficulties were mainly after the October harvest.

Sabry: We are short of food mainly in summer. In August there is a small harvest. In October, there is a large one. After the two harvests, there was still not enough, and there was tension in the summer of the second year. We hope that this year the technical measures adopted increase production, but at this point we cannot be sure. If there can be an increase in production, this year's food shortage problem will not be too serious. This year we can import food from China and solve the problem. Our main difficulty at present is that August's first harvest will be small. One should begin planting the crops in May and harvest them in early August, but now the wheat and beans from May have still not been harvested, so it was not possible in May to plant corn over a large area. This year we received wheat and beans in advance and used tractors to speed up the planting, so this August's harvest is expected to be 40 percent greater than that of previous years. The problem now is that cultivating wheat is not economical, requires irrigation, has a high cost of production, and cannot be harvested in two seasons. In addition, if one grows wheat, one cannot grow much cotton, and cotton production is low in cost and high in volume. We have to use laws to force farmers to grow wheat.

Premier: Growing wheat will also resolve the water issue. After the great reservoir is built, canals need to be built and water used.

Sabry: We are already well prepared before the building of the great reservoir, with both carried out at the same time. Despite our adopting these technical measures, we will still have to import wheat for a while.

Premier: When can you start using the high dam's irrigation equipment?

Sabry: This year we started using some of the water of the high dam, 5 billion cubic meters in all, first of all in a large area of the south. In the past this area was cultivated by river floodwaters, with only one growing season per year. This year, we can irrigate 700,000 mu [sic; 1 mu = 1/6 acre]. Next year, with a little better irrigation measures, we will be able to grow rice. The problem is that May and June, when rice is planted, is just the time when water is at its scarcest, because this is before the river flooding, the time when the Aswan and other reservoirs are at their lowest. Then it is necessary to rely on water from Lake Victoria, but the level of water in Lake Victoria often rises and falls with the amount of rainfall. There is thus no way to calculate in advance the area of land to cultivate, because the area of land to cultivate can only be determined by the amount of rainfall in the area of Lake Victoria.

Premier: How about the water flowing from the Blue Nile?

Sabry: The floodwaters of the Blue Nile, whose origin is Ethiopia, come in July and August, so the water for planting rice must come from Lake Victoria. Once the high dam's water is stored, we can confirm the amount of land for growing rice.

Premier: Are such Commonwealth countries as Canada and Australia not providing food to you?

Sabry: We bought 100,000 tons from Australia.

Premier: You have not bought any from Canada?

Sabry: We still have no diplomatic relations with them and their prices are higher. The volume of our trade with Canada is very small.

What is the situation in Vietnam?

Premier: South Vietnam has had another coup d'état. That is a place in need of a coup. When passing through Cairo last time, I mentioned to the President and Your Excellency that [Maxwell] Taylor, due to fear of a coup taking place, was delayed in returning to the United States. Now, following his return, a coup d'état has indeed taken place and, rather than produce a civilian government to maintain order in accord with the United States' way of thinking, they have chosen a military man to be president. Recently, the United States also increased its number of troops, the rainy season is coming, and the National Front for the Liberation of Southern Vietnam is going to expand the war. Taylor, with no way to deal with this, a real headache, went back and requested more troops, which is an escalation, with around 10,000 provided each time. I discussed with Your Excellency the last time that by the end of the year the United States could increase its number of troops to 70,000. At present this remains a possibility. The problem is that these US troops are only stationed to guard bases and ports, sending out the puppet army to fight. But the puppet army does not want to go out and fight, fearing the loss of its bases and the loss of its military strength, which would leave it without capital. Young officers in the puppet regime also demanded that they be given command power. They do not approve of joint military command with the United States. Although more than a few among them have received US military training, there are also many who have received French

military training. These men are all self-contradictory. Each time they fight, their self-contradiction will erupt. This is Johnson's greatest headache.

Sabry: Now there is also a great deal of opposition within the United States.

Premier: The first time since the war.

Sabry: [J. William] Fulbright is also opposed to it.

Premier: There are so many people within the Democratic Party who oppose it. The press is also critical of it. The United States faces a dilemma at home and abroad. De Gaulle recently made a public criticism of the United States.

Sabry: I hear that the United States has used in Vietnam the B-52 bomber, but there has not been a single person killed by the bombing.

Premier: Their own aircraft suffered a mid-air collision.

In the Korean War, there were many senior and junior military men who had also participated in the Second World War. Now, in Vietnam, not only the junior military men but the senior ones as well did not participate in the Second World War. Most of the Pentagon's commanders are staff officers who have not participate in actual combat. Frontline soldiers complain that the commanding officers do not know how to command and ask to return after completing their mission. Bombing, too, starts from the viewpoint of completing missions without regard to objectives. Therefore, a large bomber can be knocked out by a small aircraft. In fact, one cannot blame the military staff if the war is not going well. One has to blame [Lyndon B.] Johnson for being personally unsuited to command. The United States' press says that Johnson is both a president and a sergeant, busy dealing with issues from morning until night. Only after issuing orders could he go to bed, but then he was awakened at 3:30 in the morning by a telephone call reporting the collision of a bomber with a Chinese aircraft. So each time the telephone rings it is something good or bad, giving him an acute sense of trepidation. This is what his wife herself told reporters. Your Excellency, too, is a military man. Tell me, how can someone fight well like this?

This is all I have to discuss today. I may have to stay here with you a few days longer and trouble you some more.

Sabry: Your Excellency is welcome to stay here a few days longer.

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