

**May 12, 1973**

**'Cablegram from Australian Embassy, Peking,  
'Meeting with Premier Chou En-lai [Zhou Enlai]'**

**Citation:**

"Cablegram from Australian Embassy, Peking, 'Meeting with Premier Chou En-lai [Zhou Enlai]'", May 12, 1973, Wilson Center Digital Archive, National Archives of Australia, A1838, 3107/38, Part 13. <https://digitalarchive.umd.edu/document/175970>

**Summary:**

The cable indicates the key issues regarding Sino-Australian relations, including the settlement in Vietnam and a more close relationship with Australia.

**Original Language:**

English

**Contents:**

Original Scan

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## INWARD CABLEGRAM

CPT2

FROM

AUSTRALIAN EMBASSY  
PEKING

I.51772

TOD 12.5.1973...2030

TOR 12.5.1973...2235

AMENDED COPY

CONFIDENTIAL PRIORITY  
 ADDRESSED CAMBERRA 336 REPEATED WASHINGTON OP 53,  
 HONG KONG 167, DACCA OP 54, NEW DELHI OP 55.

MEETINGS WITH PREMIER CHOU EN-LAI.

LATE LAST NIGHT (9 MAY) I WAS SUMMONED FOR A CALL ON PREMIER CHOU EN LAI. I WAS INFORMED ON ARRIVAL THAT THIS WAS A COURTESY CALL, BUT CHOU HIMSELF DID NOT TREAT IT AS SUCH AND DISCUSSED A WIDE RANGE OF INTERNATIONAL PROBLEMS, MOSTLY RELATING TO ASIA. CHOU WAS ACCOMPANIED BY VICE MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS HO YING AND SENIOR OFFICIALS OF THE MFA. NORTH AND WARNER WERE PRESENT. RECORD BY BAG. FOLLOWING ARE MAIN POINTS.

2. SOUTHEAST ASIA (UNDERLINE TWO). CHOU SAID CHINA SUPPORTED THE NEUTRALISATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIA. WHEN PRESSED ON WHETHER THIS APPLIED TO INDO-CHINA HE SAID THE INDO-CHINA STATES MIGHT NOT NECESSARILY ALL BE NEUTRAL, BUT THEY WOULD ALL BE FULLY INDEPENDENT IF THE UNITED STATES WOULD CEASE ITS MILITARY INTERVENTION. CAMBODIA COULD BE NEUTRAL, AND IF SIHANOUK RETURNED IT WOULD BY NO MEANS BE "COMPLETELY RED". BUT UNITED STATES INTERVENTION HAD PUSHED SIHANOUK TO THE LEFT. "HE IS EVEN MORE LEFT THAN WE ARE". SINCE HIS RETURN FROM CAMBODIA SIHANOUK HAS BEEN SAYING THAT HE WILL FIGHT ON FOR FIFTY YEARS IF NECESSARY. "HE NEVER SAID THAT BEFORE".

3. UNITED STATES WITHDRAWAL (UNDERLINE 3). CHOU SAID INTERNAL PROBLEMS BETWEEN THE STATES OF SOUTHEAST ASIA COULD BE SETTLED THROUGH PEACEFUL NEGOTIATIONS, BUT NOTHING COULD BE SOLVED UNTIL THERE WAS A COMPLETE UNITED STATES MILITARY WITHDRAWAL. THIS SHOULD BE BROUGHT ABOUT AS SOON AS POSSIBLE. THE UNITED STATES WAS AUGUING THAT FOR IT TO WITHDRAW WOULD LEAVE A VACUUM IN SOUTHEAST ASIA. THIS WAS NOT TRUE, AND CHINA DID NOT ACCEPT THE ARGUMENT. WITHDRAWAL WOULD LEAVE BEHIND THE PEOPLE OF SOUTHEAST ASIA, AND NOT A VACUUM INTO WHICH THE SOVIET UNION WOULD BE DRAWN. CHOU WAS EXTREMELY EMPHATIC ON THIS POINT, AND DID NOT AT ANY STAGE EVEN HINT THAT WOULD PREFER THE UNITED

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STATES NOT TO WITHDRAW PRECIPITATELY.

4. NEW REGIONAL ORGANISATION (UNDERLINE THREE).

CHOU REFERRED TO THIS ONLY OBLIQUELY. HE SAID CHINA HAD CONSIDERED INVITING AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND TO PARTICIPATE IN THE BANDUNG CONFERENCE, BUT THAT THE TIME THEN WAS NOT RIPE. IT WOULD NOW BE APPROPRIATE. "NOW IT IS YOUR TURN TO PROPOSE SUCH A CONFERENCE TO THE SOUTHEAST ASIAN COUNTRIES". (THIS TALLIES WITH EARLIER SUGGESTIONS WE HAVE HAD THAT CHINA APPEARS TO ACCEPT AUSTRALIA AS BELONGING TO THE REGION).

5. SUBCONTINENT (UNDERLINED). THIS WAS THE SUBJECT OF A LENGTHY EXCHANGE. AMBASSADORS FOR NEPAL AND CANADA HAD ALREADY INFORMED ME THAT IN RECENT DISCUSSIONS THEY HAD FOUND THE CHINESE ABSOLUTELY IMMOVABLE, AND DISCUSSION WITH CHOU CONFIRMED THIS. IT PUT TO HIM OUR OWN POSITION AND THAT OF THE BENGALIS, AND ASKED WHY CHINA DID NOT APPLY TO BANGLADESH THE POSITION OF REASONABLE PEACEFUL DISCUSSION HE HAD JUST OUTLINED TO ME AS A FUNDAMENTAL TENET OF CHINESE POLICY. THE ESSENCE OF CHOU'S RESPONSE WAS THAT THERE WOULD BE NO IMPROVEMENT IN CHINA'S RELATIONS WITH EITHER INDIA OR BANGLADESH UNTIL THE QUESTION OF THE PRISONERS HAD BEEN SETTLED. CHINA DID NOT CARE IF THE WHOLE WORLD RECOGNISED BANGLADESH, CHINA ITSELF STILL WANTED TO SEE THE TERMS OF THE UN RESOLUTIONS CARRIED OUT. CHINA HAD TAKEN A LOT OF CRITICISM ON THE ISSUE. CHINA HAD SUFFERED BEFORE ON PRISONER OF WAR QUESTIONS IN KOREA. HOW COULD WE SAY CHINA'S POSITION WAS INFLEXIBLE? FOR A MERE SIX HUNDRED ODD PRISONERS THE UNITED STATES HAD BOMBED THE DAYLIGHTS OUT OF VIETNAM. IN THIS CASE, THE LIVES OF 90,000 PRISONERS WERE INVOLVED. WHO ELSE PROTESTED? WERE WE SAYING THAT ASIAN LIVES WERE WORTH LESS THAN THE LIVES OF WHITE PEOPLE? WHAT WOULD WE DO IF THERE WAS AN ATTEMPT TO DISMEMBER WHAT REMAINED OF PAKISTAN? CHINA WOULD CERTAINLY RECOGNISE BANGLADESH WHEN THE CENTRAL ISSUE WAS SOLVED. CHINA EVEN STOOD READY TO NORMALISE RELATIONS WITH INDIA DESPITE INDIA'S PAST RECORD. (INTERESTINGLY, AS THE MOST RECENT EVIDENCE OF CHINA'S POSITION, HE SAID THAT CHINA HAD DELIBERATELY REFRAINED FROM COMMENT ON THE RECENT EVENTS IN SIKKIM SO AS TO AVOID FURTHER IRRITATION IN SINO-INDIAN RELATIONS). I ATTEMPTED TO COUNTER HIS POINTS, BUT THERE WAS LITTLE ROOM FOR ACCOMMODATION AND THE EXCHANGE WAS TOUGHLY WORDED, AND ENDED WITH A BASIC DIFFERENCE OF OPINION. BUT AS HE WAS WALKING TO THE DOOR, CHOU SUDDENTLY SAID SOFTLY AND SOMEWHAT EARNESTLY, "PLEASE BELIEVE THAT WE WILL RECOGNISE BANGLADESH. BUT I HOPE YOU WILL TRY TO UNDERSTAND THAT WE HAVE TO SEE THIS PROBLEM SETTLED FIRST."

6. CHOU SPOKE AT LENGTH ABOUT THE WORLD SHORTAGE IN FOOD GRAINS, AND CHINA'S POOR HARVEST IN 1972 ("A FOUR PERCENT FALL, THAT IS TEN MILLION TONS").

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HE DID NOT OFFER OPTIMISTIC COMMENT ABOUT THE 1973 HARVEST, AND HE EXPRESSED APPRECIATION WHEN I SAID THAT WE MIGHT NOT BE ABLE TO MEET ALL THE REQUIREMENTS OF OUR CUSTOMERS BUT THAT WE HOPED WE COULDSUPPLY SOME WHEAT TO CHINA.

7. CHOU DID NOT RAISE THE SUBJECT OF OUR PROTEST ON NUCLEAR TESTING.

8. CHOU WAS DISINCLINED TO DICUSS BILATERAL RELATIONS IN DETAIL, BUT SINCE WE ARE STILL TRYING TO GAUGE WHAT THE CHINESE ARE ABOUT, WHAT HE DID HAVE TO SAY IS OF INTEREST. HE EXPRESSED A POSITIVE ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE PRIME MINISTER AND TOWARDS THE GOVERNMENT'S FOREIGN POLICIES.. WHEN ASKED WHETHER HE SAW ANY SCOPE FOR A SUBSTANTIVE RELATIONSHIP BEYOND THE CORDIAL PLATITUDES HE DID NOT INDICATE THAT HE SAW ANY SUCH SUBSTANCE YET. BUT HE DID IMPLY THAT WE MIGHT HAVE SUCH A RELATIONSHIP, WHILE LEAVING OPEN THE QUESTION OF WHETHER THIS WOULD IN FACT BE THE WAY THINGS WOULD GO. HE DREW ON HIS DISCUSSION LAST YEAR WITH MALTESE AMBASSADOR FORACE CONCERNING THE PURCHASE OF AUSTRALIAN WHEAT (CONFIRMING FORACE'S OWN ACCOUNT) TO MAKE TWO POINTS. FIRST, HIS REACTION TO FORACE'S COMMENTS DEMONSTRATED THAT CHINA WAS CONCERNED TO HAVE A POSITIVE RELATIONSHIP WITH AUSTRALIA AS FORESHADOWED BY MR WHITLAM. SECONDLY, FORACE'S FORTHRIGHT AND BLUNT REMARKS REFLECTED AN ATTITUDE RARELY ENCOUNTERED BUT VERY MUCH APPRECIATED (SO MUCH SO THAT IT SEEMS TO HAVE MADE QUITE AN IMPRESSION ON CHOU AND HE SAYS HE REPORTED THE EPISODE TO MAO). THIS WAS THE KIND OF RELATIONSHIP CHINA WANTED, CHINA NEEDS SUCH FRIENDS. HE RETURNED POINTEDLY TO THE POSITION AT THE END OF THE INTERVIEW. HE INVITED US TO ADOPT A CRITICAL ATTITUDE TOWARDS CHINESE POLICIES AND CHINESE OFFICIALS AND TO EXPRESS OUR VIEWS FRANKLY AND FREQUENTLY. "IF NECESSARY YOU SHOULD COME DIRECT TO ME. CHINA HAS NEED OF SUCH FRIENDS.

10. SUCH EXPRESSIONS, OF COURSE, CAN BE APPLIED GENERALLY, AND WE SHOULD NOT OVER-INTERPRET THIS EXCHANGE. BUT CHOU CHOSE HIS WORDS CAREFULLY AND REPEATED THEM, DIRECTING THEM BOTH TO THE GOVERNMENT AND TO ME PERSONALLY. WE CAN PROBABLY ASSUME FROM THIS THAT CHINA IS AT LEAST OPEN TO THE POSSIBILITY OF NOT NECESSARILY CLOSE RELATIONS WITH AUSTRALIA.

11. GIVEN THE RECEPTION I HAVE BEEN ACCORDED, I WOULD URGE THAT ARRANGEMENT BE MADE FOR WANG TO PRESENT HIS CREDENTIALS AND TO CALL ON THE MINISTER AS SOON AS POSSIBLE, IF THIS HAS NOT ALREADY BEEN DONE. VICE-MINISTER CH'IAO KUAN-HUA IS TO HOST A DINNER FOR ME TOMORROW.

FRANK IF

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PRIME MINISTER  
MINISTER OF STATE  
FOREIGN AFFAIRS  
MIN AND DEPT DEFENCE  
JIO  
PMS

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ACTION: NA

SEC DEPSEC(A) (B) PR MCO FAS(A) NA SA SEA FAS(PW)  
PC EAME FAS(DEF) DP IC FAS(DVP) ICR FAS(10) FAS(CL)  
FAS(MS)  
BANGKOK JAKARTA KUALA LUMPUR LONDON MANILA MOSCOW  
NEW YORK (IIN) PARIS SINGAPORE TOKYO WELLINGTON

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