

July 18, 1954
**Minutes of Conversation between Zhang Wentian
and Harold Caccia**

Citation:

"Minutes of Conversation between Zhang Wentian and Harold Caccia", July 18, 1954, Wilson Center Digital Archive, PRC FMA. Translated by Zhao Han.
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Summary:

Caccia informs Zhang that Eden will not bring up the issue of the Indochina countries joining Southeast Asian if an agreement is reached at the conference. Zhang notes that both the French and Vietnamese feel they've made enough concessions regarding regrouping areas in Laos. Caccia mentions Vietnam's rejection of the proposed make-up of the NNSC, and Zhang and Caccia discuss the need for a definite election date in Vietnam.

Original Language:

Chinese

Contents:

Translation - English

Time: 18 July 1954, 12:00 p.m. to 12:30 p.m.

Location: Villa of the Chinese delegation

Chinese Participants: [Ambassador to the Soviet Union and Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs] Zhang Wentian, Huan Xiang, Zhang Wenjin (interpreter)

British Participants: [Deputy Under Secretary for Foreign Affairs for Administration Harold] Caccia, Ford (interpreter)

Caccia said that Eden had dispatched him because the day before Premier Zhou had mentioned certain issues regarding the Southeast Asian pact. Eden had contacted his friends and allies, and it could be said now that if the two sides could reach an agreement here, then the inclusion of the three Indochinese states in the Southeast Asian pact [Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia] absolutely would not be mentioned. The British side believed that in the resolution to be reached, these states would be neutralized so that they would not form any alliance with any side.

Ambassador Zhang then asked the question of foreign military bases. Caccia said that it was a different issue. But it was understood that such questions as bases, armed forces and military equipment would all be mentioned in the draft. So far as he knew, the agreement would include the following four issues: military alliances, military bases, entrance of foreign personnel from outside the country, and foreign arms and munitions. These decisions should apply to both sides.

Ambassador Zhang said that Premier Zhou had stated repeatedly that the binding force is equal on both sides: China would not form an alliance with Vietnam, and the three Indochinese states should not enter into any alliance with other countries.

Caccia then said that he had two issues which Eden had instructed him to raise:

First was the question of Laos. Eden had heard the day before that during the French-Laotian and Vietnamese military talks, Vietnam had demanded that half of Laos be marked as the regrouping area. Eden asked China to look into the matter. Laos would soon come up with a counter-proposal detailing a series of regrouping areas, and everyone would recognize it as a sincere and good proposal. The United Kingdom hoped that everyone would deem this as a satisfactory solution. Caccia added that both Premier Zhou and Ambassador Zhang were aware that countries like India and Burma regarded the Laos question as a touchstone for testing whether we were serious about our work.

Ambassador Zhang said that we have not seen the proposal by Laos. As to our attitude towards the question of Laos, Premier Zhou has said that a regrouping area in northeastern Laos should be marked out, that it should be provisional, and that it would be reunified with Laos once the question of the resistance forces is solved in the future. As to the demand by the Vietnamese military representative, it was based on the status quo. They have not formally proposed a final regrouping area. Premier Zhou's opinion has not changed. The French delegation has proposed a series of smaller areas, which are quite scattered. We are not very supportive of this proposal. We are in favor of a single assembly area in the northeast.

Caccia said that a meeting is going to be held this afternoon, and many questions have yet to be solved. Time is short, too. Take two examples: acting on Premier Zhou's advice, [Pierre] Mendes-France went to visit Pham Van Dong and discussed the questions of demarcation and the membership of the supervisory commission. Regrettably no agreement was reached. Eden hopes that at the meeting this afternoon, the participants' attitudes will not be too stiff and polarized, which will make it even harder to solve many of the questions. Hopefully after this afternoon's meeting, everyone will come closer rather than walk farther away from each other. Mr. Ambassador certainly knows that if a delegation is attacked, its friends will come

out to protect it, and such is the case with the other side. As a result, opposition groups will be formed. The Chinese delegation can rest reassured that the British delegation will never do anything to heat up the temperature, and it hopes that the Chinese delegation will adopt the same attitude.

Ambassador Zhang said that the Chinese delegation also hopes to see everyone come closer rather than standing divided, but both sides must be willing to come closer. For example, the reason why the demarcation question has dragged on is that although the Vietnamese side has conceded to the 16th parallel, the French side still insists on the 18th parallel. If France could adjust its attitude, things would be much easier.

Caccia said, France feels that its concessions in the north could not be compensated by the Vietnamese concession from the 13th parallel to the 16th parallel.

Ambassador Zhang said, this is the opinion from the French perspective. In Vietnam's view, they have made much greater concessions, giving away their traditionally controlled zones. Both sides say that they have made enough concessions, and the question now is how to solve the problem.

Caccia said, France's basic attitude is that under no circumstances should Route 9[1] leading to Laos be controlled by Vietnam completely and unrestrictedly. Fortunately this route does not fall on the 18th parallel, otherwise we would all have to buy our return tickets home.

Ambassador Zhang said, there is also the question of the Neutral Nations Supervisory Commission. This question has been under discussion for a long time, and the other side has not explicitly stated its attitude.

Caccia said, at the talk between the British, French, and Soviet foreign ministers yesterday, Eden has said that he was personally prepared to agree to have seven member states: one communist state, one non-communist state, and the five Colombo states [India, Ceylon, Pakistan, Indonesia, and Burma]. Despite the rather large number of states, some of them could not supply many people. He emphasized that their side had made concessions concerning two principal issues: 1) agreeing to have a communist state as a member, and 2) agreeing to require a unanimous vote on certain issues in the voting procedures. He heard that the other side might accept this new proposal, and Molotov said he would discuss it with Pham Van Dong. Due to late time, it has not been discussed yet. Eden also mentioned a point that would have impact on both sides, which was that choosing yet another state from the Colombo states would be difficult and unfavorable to both sides, or at least the UK thought so.

Ambassador Zhang said that we have chosen two states. Moreover, the fewer the states, the easier it is for our work.

Caccia said that these states, particularly Ceylon, supplied many people.

Ambassador Zhang asked what to do with the specific date for elections. If a deadline is not set, it would be hard to explain to the Vietnamese people. With a specific date, the Vietnamese people could feel hopeful.

Caccia said that we all have to be realistic, and it is better not to promise something that one cannot reasonably accomplish. In fact, even without wars, countries such as India took two to three years to hold elections. He admitted that a specific date would be encouraging. He said that another solution would be not to set a definite date but stipulate that "after the armed forces are assembled, a meeting shall be held by the

elections commission, a neutral nations commission, or a certain institution to determine the date for elections." Every country has its own experience regarding elections. For example, China has its own experience, France has post-World War II experience, and the UK has experience in the elections in India and Burma.

Ambassador Zhang said that our proposal for a definite date is not merely based on China's experience, but we have also sampled experience from various sides. Once a date is set, there is a goal, and the Vietnamese could see that the reunification of Vietnam is being brought about. Without a definite date, the Vietnamese would have no idea when the elections are postponed to, and when they cannot see good prospects, the people will begin to doubt.

Caccia asked Ambassador Zhang whether he felt that between the two proposed solutions, the former was better, even if the date for elections was far away, for a realistic time had to be found.

Ambassador Zhang said that a definite date has to be set. If we refer to everyone's experience, we can always find a realistic time. Time, after all, cannot be unrealistic.

In the end, Ambassador Zhang said that he would debrief Premier Zhou on the talk. Caccia also asked the Ambassador to convey the opinions on elections to Premier Zhou, and hoped that the meeting in the afternoon would not be too heated up.

[1] Route 9 is an east-west roadway located in Quang Tri province. It stretches from Dong Ha in the east to the Laotian border, via Ca Lu, Khe Sanh, and Lang Vei.