

July 17, 1954
**Minutes, Zhou Enlai's Conversation with
Mendes-France (Exerpt)**

Citation:

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Summary:

Mendes-France and Enlai discuss the Indochina issue during their first meeting together. Both men feel they are in agreement with each other regarding several points (establishing a cease-fire before discussing political issues, that no US military bases should be established in Indochina, elections in Cambodia and Laos, cooperation between France and Vietnam and between the two sides in Vietnam). They end on a positive note, both sure that their few differences of opinion will be worked out.

Original Language:

Chinese

Contents:

Translation - English

Time: Beginning at 4:45pm, 17 July 1954

Location: Mendes-France's Mansion

Chinese participants: Zhou Enlai, [Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs of the PRC] Li Kenong, [Director of the Staff Office of the PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs] Wang Bingnan, and Dong Ningchuan (translator)

French participants: Pierre Mendes-France, [French Ambassador to Switzerland] Jean Chauvel, [Counselor to the French delegation, Colonel] Jacques Guillermaz, and one translator

Zhou Enlai: Our opinions are gradually getting closer now. We don't have much time, and we should reach some solutions quickly. At the present, the two issues that have been most debated are how to draw the [demarcation] line and when to hold elections. I talked to Mr. Prime Minister during the last two meetings [and said that] that we wanted to push the conference forward for a settlement. [Passage excised by the PRC Foreign Ministry] Now two problems remain. The three-person talks tonight and the meeting between Mr. Prime Minister and [Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV)] Mr. Pham Van Dong should find some solutions. However, I'd like now to discuss another problem, that is, the so-called the Southeast Asia defense organization.

After the Paris meeting, there is some recent propaganda that the United States intends to organize a Southeast Asian group, and that it also push the three countries in Indochina to participate in the organization. That is much different from what Mr. Mendes-France, Mr. Eden, and I have been talking about. This problem causes us concern. Our wish is that a restoration of peace will be realized in Indochina, and that Laos and Cambodia will become peaceful, independent, friendly, and neutral countries. If they join America's alliance and establish American bases, then the restoration of peace becomes meaningless. It will increase America's influence, and decrease the influence of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. This is not beneficial for the Indochinese people or the French people. According to our conversations in the past meetings, I think it shouldn't happen like this. But there are so many rumors out there, as if Paris has some kind of promise. Thus, I'd like to talk to Mr. Prime Minister directly and frankly.

Mendes-France: I appreciate that Mr. Premier recalls our conversations in the past meetings and intends to maintain a consistent stance. I also want to maintain my previous stance.

After our two meetings, as Mr. Premier knows, there has been some development in the situations. Our deadline-I should say my deadline-is now coming soon. But we still face many difficulties.

[Section excised by the PRC Foreign Ministry]

Zhou Enlai: I can't talk about this issue in detail. It should be dealt with directly by Mr. Pham Van Dong and Mr. Prime Minister. Mr. Prime Minister had said that the current problems are not only to draw the line, but also including the political problems. I have told this to Mr. Pham Van Dong and [Soviet Foreign Minister] Mr. [Vyacheslav] Molotov. I guess that it may be easier to solve the two problems if we can connect them together. Tonight's meeting may bring us some results.

Mendes-France: I can now respond to Mr. Premier's concerns about the alliance of Southeast Asia. I think it unnecessary for Mr. Premier to worry about this. The Paris meeting did not consider any kind of alliance of Southeast Asia to include the three countries of Indochina. As far as I know, the United States does not have any intent to establish any military bases in Indochina. Therefore we don't need to worry about any change to our previous position in the past meetings. Certainly, if the war can't be stopped, it will be a different story. If the cease-fire becomes a reality, some country

may come up with its own separate statement to strengthen its original position. Nevertheless, I want to assure Mr. Premier that we do not consider any alliance of Southeast Asia to include the three countries of Indochina. Please trust me, this is my word without any reservation.

Zhou Enlai: Thank you for your explanation. What we hope to see is the expansion of a peaceful region. If the United States fixes a Southeast Asia pact, including the three countries of Indochina, then, all of our efforts to push these compromises will become fruitless. That is why I want to mention my concerns.

Mendes-France: The best way to consolidate future peace is to solve the current problems reasonably. If Laos can be an example, we hope that Laos can join the French Union, and that it won't sign any military pact with other countries. Following the regulations under the France-Laos agreements, no foreign military base can be established there. But Laos' problems remain unresolved. The Vietnamese government put forward some unrealistic requests. They suggested their regrouping area stretch from north to south nearly 1,000 kilometers. It is difficult to accept. I hope Mr. Premier can give Mr. Pham Van Dong some advice as you did on many occasions and ask him to make more realistic considerations.

Zhou Enlai: It is proper to discuss the Laos problems with Vietnam's problems such as drawing the [demarcation] line and [when to hold] elections. We have read the draft of the second political statement of the French delegation. We think it should include these issues, such as non-establishment of foreign military bases and no military alliances with foreign countries. I have mentioned this in my speeches on 16 and 19 June. Otherwise, there won't be any guarantee.

It is said that French military representatives have drafted a cease-fire proposal for Laos. [The proposal] requests that, after foreign troops withdraw, local resistance forces should regroup at certain points. Vietnam, however, asks for some pre-determined areas for the regrouping of the resistance forces, instead of regrouping at [certain] points. I think that the military staff through their negotiations can solve this problem. Moreover, this also relates to the problem of drawing the [demarcation] line in Vietnam. My hope is that Mr. Mendes-France can talk directly to Mr. Pham Van Dong again. The three-person meeting tonight may also discuss this problem.

Mendes-France: I have asked the staff of the French delegation to contact the staff of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. Hopefully, there will be some progress. Of course, the meeting with the two presidents tonight is also very important for me. Mr. Chauvel said a little while ago that the French delegation staff had suggested to the staff of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam's delegation [that France and the DRV should] work together and draft a political statement based on common ground. However, this task is somehow suspended right now. Hopefully, Mr. Pham Van Dong can give a push to this task.

Zhou Enlai: Besides political issues, the discussions over the cease-fire should also identify some of the main common points that may produce an agreement. Otherwise, the whole package of the truce agreement can't be put together overnight as a booklet.

Mendes-France: I fully agree with such an idea.

Zhou Enlai: Today is the 17th. It will be a success only if some agreements can be achieved on the major issues within the next two days.

Mendes-France: I am very glad to hear this word. I fully agree.