

September 21, 1964

Letter from Zhou Enlai to Mao Zedong on the Nuclear Explosion

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Summary:

Zhou Enlai offers multiple dates on which the first nuclear test explosion may take place and asks Mao Zedong for his preference.

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Chinese

Contents:

Transcript - Chinese
Translation - English

周恩来关于核爆炸致毛泽东函
1964年9月21日

主席：

瑞卿同志送给主席的这个报告，想已阅及。

中央十五人专门委员会于本月十六、十七两日开了两次会，讨论了关于核爆炸及其有关问题，急需待主席回后，当面报告，以便中央早作决定，时间以不迟于二十四日为好。因为如决定今年爆炸，以十月中旬到十一月上旬为最好，而事前准备时间至少需二十天；如决定明年四五月与空投航弹连续试炸，也需要在十月作过冬准备；如需从战略上进行考虑，推迟爆炸，使之与第二套新的基地的建设和导弹及核弹头生产相衔接，也需要有方针上的决定。

同时，瑞卿同志拟于明(二十二)日出外视察，国庆节前回来，如主席能于明日约谈，可告他晚走一天；如明天分不出时间，他出去后，还有张爱萍、刘西尧、刘杰等同志可以报告。开会时，除常委外，还请约彭真、贺、陈二同志参加。

究如何，请告林克或徐业夫以电话告瑞卿和我。

周恩来

9月21日下午7时

Chairman [Mao Zedong]:

I think you have already read this report sent by Comrade [Luo] Ruiqing.

A Central Committee 15-member special commission held two meetings this month on the 16th and the 17th, discussing the nuclear explosion and other related issues. They are urgently waiting until the Chairman's return to report in person, so the Central Committee can make an early decision, hoping [to meet with you] no later than the 24th. If the decision is for an explosion this year, the best time would be between the middle ten days of October and the first ten days of November, with preparations taking at least twenty days. If the decision is for a test explosion next year in April or May together with continuous aerial bombing practice, winter preparations will be also needed in October. If the nuclear explosion is put off based on strategic considerations, and is linked with the second round of new base construction and the production of missiles and nuclear warheads, a policy decision is also needed.

At the same time, Comrade [Luo] Ruiqing plans to travel outside [Beijing] on inspection tomorrow (the 22nd), returning after National Day [October 1st]. If the Chairman is able to meet us tomorrow, we can tell him to leave a day later. If you cannot spare the time tomorrow, after he leaves, Zhang Aiping, Li Xiyao, Liu Jie and other comrades can give you a report. In [your] meeting, besides the [Politburo] Standing Committee members, also ask Comrades Peng Zhen, He [Long] and Chen [Yi] to participate.

After you have decided what to do, please have Lin Ke or Xu Yefu tell [Luo] Ruiqing and me by phone.

Zhou Enlai

21 September [1964], 7 p.m.