

April 20, 1960

**Record of Conversation between Jawaharlal Nehru
and Zhou Enlai**

Citation:

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Summary:

Record of conversation between Nehru and Zhou discussing the Sino-Indian border dispute and recent situation in Tibet. Two leaders exchanged their views on the issues.

Original Language:

English

Contents:

Original Scan

TOP SECRET

Premier Chou En-Lai accompanied by Marshal Chen Yi, Vice Premier and Minister of Foreign Affairs and some of the more important members of the party called on P.M. at 11 A.M. on 20th April, 1960. After about 15 minutes, the two Prime Ministers retired to another room and commenced their talks.

At the outset it was decided that the two Prime Ministers initially would have talks between the two of them only, in the afternoons starting at 3.30 and mornings at 10 A.M. Premier Chou agreed with the Prime Minister that the talks should be conducted in a manner of free exchange of views rather than having a conference. Premier Chou enquired as to what should be the form and procedure for the talks. He said that apart from the talks of the two Prime Ministers, there could perhaps also be talks between Premier Chou and some of the Ministers of the Indian Government. Another way of having talks might also be to include some of the colleagues on both sides.

It was agreed that initially the two Prime Ministers will talk only between themselves but that later on the advisers on both sides, not exceeding the total number of 6, should also participate. P.M. suggested that Premier Chou might meet the Minister for Home Affairs as well as the Minister of Defence. At the end of the morning talks Premier Chou said that he would like to meet the Defence Minister before coming to P.M.'s residence for further talks in the afternoon. It was, therefore, decided that the Defence Minister would call on the Chinese Prime Minister at 3 p.m. at Rashtrapati Bhavan and then Premier Chou would come to P.M.'s residence

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at 4.30 p.m. for further talks.

Premier Chou at the outset said that the Chinese Government had already stated their views in full through the large number of communications which they had sent to the Government of India. Each side had also studied the arguments of the other side and he did not want to repeat what he had already said in so much of the correspondence.

P.M. said:-

The first thing I would like to place before Premier Chou is that all these developments in regard to our frontier area have been of recent origin. As we all know this border has been peaceful except for a few minor incidents, for a long time. Why have all these difficulties arisen? We on our side have done nothing especially to create them. Therefore, these difficulties have been created because of something happening on the other side and this has caused a great deal of perturbation and distress in India. I would not like to say anything ^{at this stage} about the merits of the dispute. We have no doubt about our own frontiers which have been clearly defined on our maps and have been repeatedly described in Parliament and elsewhere and in communications to the Chinese Government. Therefore, as far as we are concerned, there has been no problem about that apart from a few minor questions. On the last occasion when ^{you were} Premier Chou ~~was~~ here I mentioned ^{to you} ~~to him~~ that there are no major problems before us but only a few minor ones and which could be discussed and settled by mutual consultations. That was our belief. 5
Therefore we were greatly surprised to find that steps had been taken on the Chinese side which,

according to us, clearly infringed our frontiers. What distressed us most was that if the Chinese Government did not agree with us, they should have told us so. But, for nine years nothing was said, despite our ~~xxx~~ stating our views to them in clear terms. These developments, therefore, came as a great shock. We further feel that they are opposed to the spirit of mutual accommodation and discussion between friendly countries. I may only state that right from the beginning of our independence, friendship with China has been the corner-stone of our foreign policy. We thought it right not only historically but also in the ^{exact} present context of the Asian situation. We pursued that policy in the U.N. and elsewhere and throughout this period we felt that it was of the greatest importance to Asia and the world that our two great countries should cooperate. We also felt that although internal policies may differ, this need not come in the way of broader cooperation. It did not seem to us that there were any major matters of conflict or dispute between us. Then came the agreement of 1954 and Bandung and all that which helped ~~to create~~ ^{the} growth of our relations and served to removed the idea that there was any basic conflict between us. But then in the last year or two the frontier question loomed up. When the Chinese maps came to our notice, we brought it to the notice of the Chinese Government many times. The answer we received was that these maps were old and had to be revised and that the Chinese Government did not attach very great importance to them. Although these maps were old and the Chinese Government themselves had said that they were incorrect and required to be revised, it seemed odd

to us that they should continue to be produced. I believe it was in September last that for the first time it was stated on behalf of the Chinese Government that the area covered by these maps was Chinese territory and claims were laid to it. Even after many years of our drawing attention to these maps, nothing was said and in fact, we were led to believe that the maps were incorrect. Our maps, on the other hand, were correct and precise giving the longitude and latitude. Therefore, it came as a great surprise and distress to us that some six months or eight months ago China should lay claims to these areas. We just could not understand it and this produced a feeling of great shock, as happens when firm beliefs ^{are} and upset suddenly. I do not wish to go into the merits of the dispute ^{how} but there is a powerful feeling in India regarding the Himalayan mountains. These are tied up with ancient culture and history and whatever happened, these mountains have always been looked upon as the frontiers of India. All this produced a very powerful reaction and we could ^{not} understand why all this should have happened when the frontier was peaceful one and there was no trouble and we did nothing on our part to create any trouble. There was not even military personnel. We have only policemen to check the people coming in and going out. This represented our outlook on the frontier. I do not wish to refer to the events in Tibet now but I may refer to them later if you wish me to do so.

The Chinese Government have stated that the entire frontier is undefined and not delimited. We do not agree with this proposition. It is true that the boundary is not marked on ^{the} ground, but if delimitation can take place by definition of high

~~and Ladakh~~
mountain areas and if it is normally accepted principle of demarcation, then it is precisely defined in the past. There may be some dispute regarding some minor areas about a village or two, or a mile or two, but as far as we are concerned our border has been precisely defined after repeated surveys and so clearly defined except for a few minor places and it is delimited by the high~~er~~ watershed which is normally accepted as a principle for delimitation of boundary and which is as clear as physical markings. Moreover, physical markings in such a mountainous area also are difficult. I wish to stress the point that the boundary is delimited not only by history and tradition but also by records of surveys and other uses on the basic fact of the watershed. This frontier has been considered to be a firm one and there were never any doubts in our minds about it. It is true that there are different periods in history and in the hundreds of years changes occurred and no period can be called a firm period, but even then, historically our view has been supported. Normally we cannot go back to hundreds of years except for getting historical background. In the changing situation one must accept things as they are otherwise there is no stability. Therefore, we feel that the question of demarcation of ^{the} entire frontier does not arise. It has been surveyed and precisely defined and described in numerous accounts. I remember that as a youngman I used to go to the mountains. Fortyfour years ago I went to Ladakh, not on a political mission but for mountain trekking. I was interested in knowing ^{about} how far Ladakh went and I studied, out of interest, books, charts etc., regarding that area. This is

only to show how firm this idea has been through this long ~~ti~~ period.

For China these areas are distant areas in a vast country. In India, although big, they are near, almost ^{in some other ways} ~~in~~ the heart of the country and, therefore, apart from other questions, the effect on India has been very great.

To us one of the distressing features of recent events has been the shock it has given to our basic policy of friendship and cooperation between our two countries which has been the corner-stone of our policy and its consequences in Asia and outside. Those countries or people who opposed this policy naturally wanted to take advantage of our conflict for their benefit. That seemed a bad thing for the present but is even more so for the future.

What I have mentioned are not specific matters but broad aspects as they strike us and my distress is that anything should come in the way of our long established and growing friendship which we consider of high importance to us and the world. There is no real basic conflict of interest between our two ^{both countries} countries. We have vast resources which require to be developed and, therefore, possibility of such a conflict is painful and it is exploited by countries who wish us apart.

PREMIER CHOU:- You mentioned about Tibet. If there is anything you would like to say about it, I would very much like to hear it. I would think it over and then speak about it in the afternoon.

P.M. So far as our frontiers are concerned, apart from some local areas, there has been no dispute ⁽²⁾ in Tibet. I do not know what exactly Premier Chou


has in mind. Is he referring to the internal developments?

PREMIER CHOU: Of course both aspects are related -

- (i) internal developments in Tibet, and
- (ii) border question arising out of Tibet.

Whatever you have to say in the matter will be useful for clarifying my understanding.

P.M. As far as border question with Tibet is concerned there is no trouble excepting the last year or so. There were three or four minor areas where there was a dispute and we referred to them when we met some three years ago. Otherwise, we have no political or frontier question with Tibet. In olden days when the British were here, that is to say, about fifty or seventy years ago, the British policy was governed considerably by fears of Czarist empire and they were not concerned so much with China but they thought that the Czar would come down and they did not want Russia to have a dominating position in Tibet. They made surveys and sent expeditions and they imposed some conditions on Tibet. But that gradually faded out. The British had obtained extra territorial right in Tibet which we had no desire to hold on to. Therefore, when the Chinese Peoples Republic came to power we gave up these rights since we were not interested in them. We were merely interested in Tibet not as a government but as a people and more culturally. Large number of pilgrims, both Hindus and Budhists go annually to the Mansrover and the Kailash which are holy places to the Indians; and trade has been



continuing between Tibet and India for a long time in the past. It was these cultural and trade contacts which were discussed in the Tibet Agreement and some decisions were arrived at then. When your Excellency spoke to me about Tibet some 3½ years ago, you told me that you did not consider Tibet as a province of China although it was part of the Chinese State ~~and~~ that you had no desire to interfere in its internal affairs since the area was still very backward. Therefore, when the developments of last year took place, we in India were disturbed and pained by the accounts which we heard and with the refugees coming in and Dalai Lama and others coming in and by a feeling that the old cultural relations with Tibet are put an end to. Because of the cultural contacts, it disturbed the Indian people. We had no desire to interfere in anything. We, of course, received the refugees and we also received the Dalai Lama with due courtesy because he is highly thought of by a large number of people in India. But, we made it clear to them that they must not function in a political way and broadly speaking they accepted our advice. But occasionally they did ^{some} thing which we did not approve and we told them so.

Three and a half years ago ^{the} Dalai Lama ^{when he came to India,} was advised by some of his followers not to go back to Tibet and you then wanted me to induce him to go back and I advised him strongly to go back to Tibet, and he did so. And, then

*China is not a province
region of China*

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we had no contact with him till he came 2 or 3 years later. Our interest in Tibet has nothing to do with politics or territory but is tied up culturally for ages in the past. Moreover, reports came here of suppression of cultural and religious institutions in Tibet which produced reactions in India. But it had nothing to do with our wish or capacity to interfere in any way in Tibet. In fact, we felt that it will be harmful in every way.

The Chinese Government has said that we incited rebellion in Tibet. All I can say is that there is no basis for that statement. Maybe there were some refugees in Kalimpong and elsewhere who sympathised with the rebels and occasionally exchanged letters but they were not allowed to function as such. The legal system here is such that a good deal of freedom is allowed to opposition parties who run down the government ^{and} excite the people. We do not approve of what they do. But to say that the rebellion in Tibet was brought about by people in India is entirely wrong and without foundation. If your Excellency has got any questions I would answer them.

PREMIER CHOU: The activities of Dalai Lama and his followers have far exceeded the limits of political asylum. There are many objective facts to prove this. What is your view about this ?

P.M. What particular activities are you referring to ?
Dalai Lama issued some statements. Some of his followers have gone abroad and apart from that our own people have held conferences or conventions which we did not approve; but we cannot stop it legally. We expressed our disapproval in Parliament

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and outside. After we had expressed our disapproval to Dalai Lama he stopped making such statements but in all these things it is difficult to draw a strict line because our normal laws here allow a great deal of freedom and opposition parties exploit them to their advantage. Moreover, there are also public sympathies with them. Dalai Lama has tried to carry out our advice to him although occasionally he said something or made some statements.

PREMIER CHOU: I am grateful to you for telling me your main ideas. You were quite right when you said that we have no basic conflict of interest. But on the other hand, if we develop our friendship it would be useful to Asia and the world. I came here with the same hope of seeking avenues for a reasonable settlement of the boundary question and I have come with the same desire which you expressed in your telegram. I would reserve my answers till the afternoon when I will try to explain on what principles our stands differ. But most important of all, I would like to remove misunderstanding between us, which should not have arisen.

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