July 20, 1954
Telegram, Zhou Enlai to Mao Zedong and Others, Regarding Zhou’s Meetings with Pierre Mendes-France and Eden, as well as Discussions Outside the Conference

Citation:
“Telegram, Zhou Enlai to Mao Zedong and Others, Regarding Zhou’s Meetings with Pierre Mendes-France and Eden, as well as Discussions Outside the Conference,” July 20, 1954, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, PRC FMA. Translated by Li Xiaobing
https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/111057

Summary:
Zhou reports on his meeting with Medes-France and Eden. Though Zhou notes they have found a solution for the election date in Vietnam, the parties still must work out issues of regrouping areas and troop withdrawal.

Original Language:
Chinese

Contents:

- English Translation
Chairman [Mao], Comrade [Liu] Shaoqi, and the Central Committee:

(1) Mendes-France and Eden visited me in the afternoon of the 19th and focused their talks on the problems of Laos. Mendes-France said that the French troops, about 3,000 men, stationed in Laos for security reasons, [were] not threatening anyone. He agreed to numerical limit of French troops there, but didn't agree to a time limit. I said that the question of how long, which area, and how many French troops should remain stationed in Laos could be discussed with other related issues. Regarding the regrouping of the Laos resistance forces, he said that the resistance forces had only 2,000 men, not enough to control a special administrative region. I told him that the resistance troops should regroup in one area, not spread to eleven points (the French proposal suggested eleven points). With respect to their local administration, it is their own domestic affairs that should be discussed through the local contacts between Royal government and resistance force representatives. Mendes-France said that the regrouping points could be reduced, but it would become complicated if all the troops had to move from the south to the north for regrouping since the resistance forces were all over the country. Determining certain regrouping points in the south may be considered, since most people over there have become used to the way of their local life, so that it should be solved locally. I said that the eleven points for regrouping in Laos would not bring peace and stability, and could cause some local conflicts. The resistance forces are local troops that should group together, not disperse to eleven points. They should be protected. After their assembly, they will gradually participate in the life of the state under international supervision. Laos is different from Vietnam. Its Royal government will be responsible for the armed forces so that they will not worry. If someone doesn't want to go to the north, the resistance movement and Royal government could send representatives to meet and discuss this matter. Then Eden asked me whether I oppose one regrouping area in the south. I didn't answer him. Lastly, Mendes-France said that our opinions are not too far apart and that [we should] let the experts continue their discussions. He also agreed that the main regrouping areas be in the northwest, and said that there still may be a regrouping area in the south. The specific limits of the areas can be determined on the spot. After the regrouping, the commanding officers of the resistance troops can establish contact with the local governments in order to cope with all the issues after regrouping.

(2) After my meeting with Mendes-France and Eden, Eden's assistant, Caccia, who came with Eden, stayed and talked to Ambassador [to the Soviet Union and Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs of the PRC] Zhang [Wentian] about the problem of drawing the line. Caccia said that France definitely wanted to have Route 9. "If this cannot be not negotiable, we all have to buy our train tickets and go home." He also demanded to have enough areas north of Route 9 in order to secure the [French troops'] safety. He suggested that one of the two rivers between Route 9 and the 18th parallel could be chosen as the line. Regarding the election date, he proposed it [be held] during 1956. Talking about the military alliance, Caccia described the position of [the United Kingdom and British Commonwealth] as the following. If an agreement accepted by all the delegations were reached here and the agreement stipulates that the three countries of Indochina [Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos] cannot participate in any military pact, Britain thereby believes that the three countries are not supposed to be invited [to the Southeast Asian military pact]. And Britain itself won't [invite them]. He said that Laos and Cambodia would make their [own] announcements respectively, saying that they will not joint any military alliance.

(3) The delegations of the Soviet Union, China, and Vietnam have discussed the final proposal this afternoon, and have presented it to Britain. The main points of the proposal have been telegraphed [to Beijing] yesterday.

(4) I met [V.K. Krishna] Menon this evening. I told him about the proposal that had been presented to Britain. He said that France hopes to draw the line in the area near a river. Regarding the election date, Menon suggested not having a scheduled election date, but scheduling the date for forming an election committee. I firmly opposed his suggestion and said that there is an agreement that the election will be under international supervision. If an election committee is formed, it needs to have both sides plus another country. This may cause foreign intervention in domestic affairs. Both sides in Vietnam won't accept this kind of suggestion. And China does not
agree [with it] either.

(5) Comrade Pham Van Dong met Mendes-France again during the night. Mendes-France proposed to draw the line along the provincial border between Quang Binh and Quang Tri, that is, the 17th Parallel. Pham did not respond. Mendes-France agreed to set up the troop withdrawal deadline within 245 days. But he asked for two more months as a psychological preparation period. He agreed with our proposing the election date, that is, two years. The first year is for discussions and negotiations. Mendes-France disagreed with the gradual withdrawal. Regarding the protection of French economy and business in Vietnam, he presented a new proposal asking for much more than that [contained in] the previous proposal. In short, the only solution so far is the election date.

Zhou Enlai
20 July 1954, 12:00 p.m.