

July 13, 1954
Minutes, Zhou Enlai's Meeting with Mendès-France
(Excerpt)

Citation:

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Summary:

The minutes of the meeting between Zhou Enlai and Pierre Mendès-France. The topic of the discussion mostly revolves around the question of the demarcation line in Vietnam and the progress of the Geneva Conference.

Original Language:

Chinese

Contents:

Translation - English

Time: 10:30 a.m. - 11:45 a.m., July 13, 1954

Location: The residence of the Chinese delegation

Chinese participants: Zhou Enlai, Zhan Wentian, Li Kenong, Wan Bingnan, and Dong Ningchuan (translator)

French participants: Pierre Mendès-France, Jean Chauvel, Jacques Guillerma, and the translator

Mendès-France: Very happy to meet you again, and to work together for the final stage of the Geneva Conference. I do not know if Mr. Premier has brought us some good news.

Zhou Enlai: I met with the Indian prime minister, the Burmese prime minister, and also President Ho Chi Minh. I am satisfied with these meetings. We share common ideas and common goals, that is, to restore peace in Indochina. As I told Your Excellency Mr. Prime Minister in Berne, we hoped to see a fair and reasonable peace, a peace that was glorious on both sides.

After returning to Geneva, I exchanged opinions with our delegates, and I learned the efforts that the French delegation - and the effort by Mr. Prime Minister in particular - have been made toward this direction. I am very happy about this. This makes it clear that Mr. Chauvel and Mr. Li Kenong, who have stayed here, have tried their best in the past three weeks. Although the progress is made slowly, it has played the role to promote the conference. Now we are all back here. I am willing to discuss the methods for resolving the problems in the future. The French side is restricted by the schedule. I hope to know the opinions of Mr. Prime Minister, so as to try our best to promote the realization of our common wish for restoring peace

Mendès-France: When in Berne I told Mr. Premier that we shared the same spirit. After I came to Geneva, I have respectively met with the heads of various delegations. Now there are many points commonly shared. However, on one main point, that is, the point of the demarcation line, the solution is yet to be achieved. I had two very candid and lengthy conversations with Mr. Pham Van Dong. I told him that if an agreement could be reached on this issue, it would be easier for the other issues to be resolved. Now I am willing to listen to the opinion of Mr. Premier.

Zhou Enlai: Now there are quite many commonly shared points. We should be able to resolve the problem. You just mentioned the question of the demarcation line in Vietnam. I believe that if the two sides are to make further efforts and also make concessions, an agreement is easy to be reached. In appearance the distance between the two sides is large. However, so long as the two sides approach each other, there should be ways to shorten the distance. I do not know if Mr. Mendès-France has any concrete opinions, and I would like to listen.

Mendès-France: It seems that Mr. Zhou Enlai already has learned our opinions. Now I would like to give a brief introduction. As you also have hoped, we already have conducted direct negotiation with the Viet Minh. Now the distance between the two sides remains big. I believe that the resolution does not just require the two sides to retreat a few kilometers and to find a line in the middle. If the Viet Minh is willing to make concessions on the issue of the demarcation line, we will make concessions in the political field. For example, we may issue a final political statement. Therefore, we believe that it is not necessary that the two sides should make the same concessions, and still a solution fitting the requests of both sides could be reached.

Originally the Viet Minh said that they were mainly interested in the north, which is an important region in terms of economy, politics and population. We are willing to consider this proposal, and hope to receive reasonable compensations. However, in terms of geography, history, and logic, the line should be at Don Hui, close to the

18th parallel. This line is also compatible with the criteria that Mr. Pham Van Dong put forward in early May. At that time, Mr. Pham Van Dong asked for a demarcation line that was historical, traditional, and short. We believe that Don Hui should serve as a normal partition line. Further, France controls such an important city like Hue close to the partition line. Therefore it is appropriate for the temporary partition line to be drawn close to Don Hui.

It is true that the Viet Minh controls some areas in the south, and it is naturally difficult for them to give up these areas. However, our sacrifices in the Red River Delta area far surpass the interests that the Viet Minh will be giving up. So we believe that such requests are reasonable, which we hope that Mr. Pham Van Dong will accept. Our request is not for conducting bargaining, but for avoiding incidents in the future, and for being compatible with the hope of the nine countries participating in the conference.

Zhou Enlai: I know some of the explanations by Mr. Prime Minister, but there is another situation, which I hope that you should know. The Democratic Republic of Vietnam indeed has close connections with the people in central and southern Vietnam. And, in order for them to withdraw from these areas, it requires a lot of explanation. Although this withdrawal is only temporary, still it requires time. As far as territorial space is concerned they will be withdrawing from a rather big area. I hope that you will learn this situation and understand the difficulty facing the Vietnamese side. Now, what needs to be resolved is the question of ceasefire. Mr. Prime Minister said a moment ago that you would pay attention to the interests of the people in politics. This is good. We hope that France.... will establish friendly and equal relations with Vietnam on new basis. I mentioned this point to Indian prime minister, Burmese prime minister, and President Ho Chi Minh. We believe that on the question of peace no one should be excluded. This was already mentioned in the Chinese-Indian and Chinese-Burmese joint statements. I think that Mr. Prime Minister has already learned the true significance of the two statements.

Now we have encountered a deadlock on the partition line issue. This is not good. The two sides should make steps forward. One side makes one more step, and the other side will make one fewer step. The question can be resolved. If no progress is to be made, it is not beneficial to either France or Vietnam.

[...]

Mendès-France: Mr. Premier's opinions are same as ours. I know that in a political sense it is difficult to give up areas loyal to the Viet Minh for many years. I once told Mr. Pham Van Dong that if the difficulty were only this much, then we would be willing to change our original opinions, and to give a big-size area in the south to be controlled by the Viet Minh. Of course we will put forward the same requests in the north. But Mr. Pham Van Dong still wants to have a zone that is intact. I believe that this is realistic, and that this is reasonable. I raise the question of setting up a big-size area, and that means that I understand the opinions of Mr. Zhou Enlai. However, to establish two big concentrated zones will avoid incidents. We also agree to this. That means that the two sides will have to make some painful concessions. Mr. Zhou Enlai said that the Viet Minh would withdraw from a larger area. I think that the comparison cannot be made only in terms of territorial space. As a matter of fact, such cities like Hanoi are much more important in terms of population, politics, and economy than the areas from which the Viet Minh will be withdrawing. Take the population as an example, the people we will need to withdraw are 300,000, whereas the Viet Minh, only 30,000. This factor is more important than territorial space. I am not stubbornly persisting in a negative attitude; I am hoping that the difficulties of the two sides can be truly resolved. We are prepared to demonstrate our sincerity for concessions in the political sphere.

Zhou Enlai: [...] I am told that Mr. Prime Minister will meet Mr. Pham Van Dong again before leaving for Paris. I hope that you will give additional consideration [to my opinions]. The distance is not big. I believe that so long as we all make efforts, an agreement can be reached.

Mendès-France: I thank Mr. Zhou Enlai for the talk. I do not want to waste more of your time. Now I will raise two points as my conclusion: (1) I will go to Paris this afternoon and Mr. Eden will also go. We will be meeting with Mr. Dulles. At present we do not know what final decisions the government of the United States will make. However, for the sake of consolidating the interests of peace, we believe that the agreement at the conference should be guaranteed by all participants of the conference. Yesterday I told Mr. Pham Van Dong that if I were in his position, I would rather give up two more parallels and get America's guaranty, but not gain two more parallels and lose America's guaranty. Our common interest is to obtain the agreement of the overwhelming majority. (2) I will go to Paris only for a short time, and I hope that the discussions at Geneva will continue. Now we have drafted a political statement, which Mr. Pham Van Dong has already studied and made comments. We have made some revisions in accordance with his comments. This document will be ready this evening. We will give Mr. Zhou Enlai a copy, and hope that he will study it as early as possible.

Zhou Enlai: Thank you for the notice and for sending us the document. The United States is trying everything possible to sabotage the conference. The foreign ministers of all countries have returned to Geneva, except for Dulles. We are not satisfied with this attitude. Dulles now has arrived in Paris, but he will not come to Geneva. We feel that this is quite strange. The Americans do not observe the agreements, but they claim that the others do not observe the agreements. In fact, the ones who are least willing to observe the agreements are the Americans.

Mendès-France: I do not quite agree to this point. Probably we have different opinions. But our efforts are for the purpose of making the opinions of all become closer. This is for the direct interest of enhancing peace.

Zhou Enlai: I agree to the last point. As a matter of fact what I have said is also the opinions of French and American papers.