

**July 17, 1954**  
**Minutes of Conversation between Zhou Enlai and  
Anthony Eden**

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**Summary:**

Eden assures Zhou that the US has no intention of establishing military bases in Indochina, and that although it has not been suggested that Cambodia and Laos join the Southeast Asian Pact, such an agreement would not threaten China. Zhou expresses concern over the pact, and suggests another model for peace in Indochina. The two debate over these issues.

**Original Language:**

Chinese

**Contents:**

Translation - English

Time: 17 July 1954, 11:30 a.m. to 12:40 p.m.

Location: Eden's residence Chinese Participants: Zhou Enlai, Zhang Wentian, Li Kenong, Huan Xiang, Pu Shouchang (interpreter and note-taker)

British Participants: Anthony Eden, William D. Allen, Anthony Rumbold, Ford (interpreter)

Eden: Last night we had a talk, and I think you have learned the contents of it. It seems that the biggest questions are those of demarcation and the date of the elections. Other issues can all be resolved.

Zhou Enlai: Yes, Mr. Molotov has notified me. The three of you had a long talk on these two questions, and I believe a solution can be found in the end. Therefore, I would like to discuss another question with you today. It is the question of a Southeast Asian defense pact. Since the Paris talks, there has been much information from various sources, as well as a lot of publicity. Does the United States intend to sabotage the reaching of an agreement on restoring peace in Indochina with this question? Rumor has it that the three Indochinese states [Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam] will be included in this pact. If this were to be so, then peace would have no meaning other than preparation for new hostilities. So I would like to ask Your Excellency directly, for I could obtain first-hand information from Your Excellency.

Eden: There has been no sudden change regarding this question. As I have said in Parliament, two issues are involved here.

First, to be honest with you, the US might not like any agreement that could be possibly reached here. But we are hoping that they will at least like it enough that they will issue a statement. This is what we are trying our best to urge them to do. Then every one of us will likewise issue a statement to support the agreement. Your Excellency mentioned that you would like the Colombo Conference countries to be involved, and perhaps they can issue a statement, too. Thus the arrangements made here could be reinforced.

Secondly, our Southeast Asia pact with the US [SEATO]: this is a defensive arrangement.

A research group is evaluating it in Washington. This is an arrangement that is symmetrical to the Sino-Soviet alliance, and it is defensive just like the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, with duties exactly like those in NATO.

As to the other point you asked about, I can only give you a personal answer. So far as I understand, there has been no proposal for the three Indochinese states to join in the Southeast Asian pact, but as sovereign states they are free [to do so]. They can issue statements for the conference to notice.

Many things will depend on how we solve the questions here. If an arrangement could be made that is acceptable to all of us, then the atmosphere will improve and confidence will increase. I hope that Laos and Cambodia could become a "buffer" for both of us. So I hope that Your Excellency could help us obtain a guarantee that Laos and Cambodia will be independent. This way, confidence will grow.

[Passage excised by the Department of Archives of the PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs.] It is precisely for this reason that I am delighted to hear the Premier say that the introduction of arms should be allowed into Laos and Cambodia for self-defense. This illustrates that the two countries can be independent. This has been greatly influential.

I can say with much confidence that the US has no intention of establishing military bases in either of the countries.

Zhou Enlai: Thank you, Mr. Eden, for your explanations.

In order for an agreement to be reached on the issue of restoring peace in Indochina, this question needed to be clarified at this important stage. All efforts must come from both sides.

First of all, regarding Laos and Cambodia, our attitude has not changed since I spoke with Mr. Eden on 16 June, and we will keep our promises. During the three weeks while I was away from here, my activities also highlighted this point and proved that I am making an effort in this regard.

We have had Mr. Eden's repeated assurance; as Mr. Eden just said, it would benefit both sides for Laos and Cambodia to become a peace zone. In order for these two countries to become a peace zone, they must be made peaceful, independent, and friendly to all countries. The two countries must not have any foreign military bases, must not establish military alliances with other countries, and they should have guarantees from both sides, or even from various sides. If the circumstances remain unchanged as Mr. Eden and Mr. [Pierre] Mendes-France have promised and as [Indian] Prime Minister [Jawaharlal] Nehru, Prime Minister [of Burma] U Nu and Chairman Ho Chi Minh have witnessed, then our attitude will not change. Thus, peace in Indochina will have a basis. This is the first situation.

Another situation would be that the US includes the three Indochinese states in the so-called Southeast Asian Defense Pact, and the United Kingdom, France, and the three Associated States have agreed to the US requests or have made promises. In such a situation, circumstances would be different. Peace would have no meaning other than to diminish the battlefield of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam for American purposes, and to prepare for new hostilities. In that case we would have to be concerned, for it would differ from our 16 June talk.

Eden: If I remember correctly, the Americans themselves have said in past meetings that they had no intention to establish military bases in Laos and Cambodia. If you do not object, I will raise your concerns with General Smith when I see him this afternoon.

Zhou Enlai: Thank you. I would like to ask foreign Secretary Eden to clarify whether the US is already engaged in activities to include the three Indochinese states in the so-called Southeast Asia Defense Pact. This is, in principle, the same as the question of military bases. When we discussed the questions of Laos and Cambodia on 13 July, I said that Laos and Cambodia must not have any foreign military bases and that the two countries must not enter into military alliances with foreign countries. Mr. Eden agreed with me at the time.

Eden: As I said just now, the Americans have told me that they have no intention of establishing military bases in Laos and Cambodia. Of course, if the Viet Minh wants to take over Laos and Cambodia before or after an agreement can be reached, then we and the US will express our concern.

I have said just now that I will [confer] with General Smith to get further clarification.

Zhou Enlai: This brings us to the second question. Regarding the so-called Southeast Asian Defense Pact, Mr. Eden presented an argument just now that because there is an alliance between China and the Soviet Union, the UK, the US, and France needed a

defense pact. But the Sino-Soviet alliance is concerned with the revival of Japanese militarism and not with Southeast Asia. The problem in Southeast Asia is of a different character. Precisely for this reason Prime Minister Nehru and I are trying to create a peaceful region and expand it. When I was in India, both Prime Minister Nehru and I thought highly of a Southeast Asian Locarno Pact<sup>[1]</sup> [as] proposed by Mr. Eden. I do not know if our interpretation is correct, but we thought that your proposal meant putting all the Southeast Asian states together to form a collective peace pact. Such a pact would not exclude anyone: if the US wanted to join in, it would not be rejected. Thus regional peace could be guaranteed, and it would include not only the two hostile sides, but also third-party states. This way we can experiment with peaceful co-existence in Southeast Asia. If Mr. Eden thinks along similar lines with Prime Minister Nehru, Prime Minister U Nu, Chairman Ho Chi Minh, and me, then an opposing alliance should not be established in Southeast Asia, for it would undermine the idea of collective peace as well as the idea of a Locarno Pact proposed by Mr. Eden. We would like to know how far Mr. Eden has gone with that effort. Of course, the US opposes it, as we have read in the newspapers. But for peace in Indochina, we should try to persuade the US.

Eden: I have run into some trouble. I used the word "Locarno," not knowing that the US did not like it. I still do not know why they don't like it. They say that it belongs with things like [the 1938] Munich [Agreement], but in fact it is not so. Mr. Churchill and I have always been in favor of such an idea. This could be connected to the first part of our discussion just now. If an agreement could be reached here, and if every one issues a statement announcing their support for the agreement and opposing any sabotage of the agreement, then it would be a Locarno-style arrangement. Perhaps we should not use the term "Locarno." I agree with you that not only the participating countries in the Geneva Conference, but also the Colombo Conference countries should be involved in this arrangement. I do not see how such an arrangement would be incompatible with a NATO-style Southeast Asian pact. The Southeast Asian pact is concerned with a potential situation. An important issue at the Paris talks was to ask the Americans to come here. We hope that as a result of coming here, they will feel delighted and issue a statement to honor the agreement reached here, agree not to undermine the agreement, and to oppose anyone else sabotaging the agreement. Every one of us should do the same.

Zhou Enlai: If an agreement could be reached on restoring peace in Indochina, and it could have the support of not only all the participating states at the conference but also of the Colombo Conference countries or even more countries, then it would be the result of an effort for collective peace. It would also affirm the idea of a Locarno Pact as proposed by Mr. Eden. Although the US opposes this term, in essence it is so. Given this, if an opposing alliance is formed, it would create an unstable situation. We could promote solidarity in Southeast Asia and bring about regional peace, but if an opposing alliance is established, it would only divide the scene. In this regard, due to more interactions with the Associated States, Mr. Eden must know that some of these states support it but others oppose it, or at least it is so among the Colombo Conference countries. In consequence, as soon as some positive results are achieved, they would be undermined in some negative ways. This would generate fear, suspicion, opposition, disunity, and disquiet. When I was in Delhi, I discussed this issue with Prime Minister Nehru from various perspectives, and we both believed that it would not be beneficial. At that time we thought that Mr. Eden was trying to counter a Southeast Asian defense pact with [the] Locarno [idea]. If the two were to exist at the same time, it would be unthinkable.

Eden: It is not as bad as that. The idea of a Southeast Asian pact is an old one; it was proposed a few years ago. It is purely defensive in nature, just like NATO. As I have explained in Parliament, two things are involved here: first, everyone has to join in to support the agreement reached; second, our own defense arrangements. It should not cause concern, for, just like NATO, it is defensive in nature. I do not know how many states will join in, and nothing has been drafted yet, but it does not threaten anyone, just like NATO is defensive. I want to add that it is not just about Southeast

Asia; it includes the western Pacific, for Australia and New Zealand are included. Australia and New Zealand had had prior arrangements in the [1952 Australia, New Zealand, and United States Security Treaty] ANZUS pact. If it is to be expanded, it will not be a bad thing, but a good thing. You will agree that Australia and New Zealand will not attack others. We are confident that the US will not attack others either.

Zhou Enlai: The ANZUS pact is directed against the possible resurgence of Japanese militarism, just as the Sino-Soviet alliance, and therefore it is somewhat justified. This is because all these countries face the menace of Japanese militarism. But the problem in Southeast Asia is of a different nature.

NATO has created confrontation in Europe, and people are looking for ways to repair the damage. NATO has made it difficult to achieve peaceful co-existence. Now the possibility exists in Southeast Asia, but some people want to create disunity. We not only disdain it but also oppose it. Prime Minister Nehru, Prime Minister U Nu and Chairman Ho Chi Minh all gave similar feelings. We are all very pleased by the British effort here, for it brings close together the Southeast Asian countries, and therefore we welcome it. We also welcome the improvement of Sino-British relations. But the creation of disunity separates us. It brings trouble, and it is not beneficial to future development. Undoubtedly the people in Southeast Asia oppose it just like we do, for it will generate fear and suspicion.

Eden: The idea of this pact has no new content. Six years ago I myself pressed for NATO. When [US Secretary of State] Mr. [John Foster] Dulles visited London this April, we openly expressed our support for this idea. Therefore there have been no sudden or bad changes. The better our relations here, the less reason there is for making defensive arrangements elsewhere. I am above all opposed to the creation of disunity.

Zhou Enlai: I agree with your last sentence. Hardly have we promoted peace here when someone is trying again to create disunity. Our attitude towards the Paris talks is this: if they create disunity, then we oppose them; if they invite Smith to come back, then we welcome them. If they bring about disunity in Southeast Asia, then we oppose them.

We are in favor of peace and against disunity. This is our attitude.

Eden: The Southeast Asian pact is not a new idea, and it was not invented at the Paris talks but has been around for some time. I have just said that the better we do things here, the less we need to consider defensive arrangements.

Zhou Enlai: You can say that sentence in reverse: if someone tries to create disunity, it would bring trouble to achieving peace.

Eden: In any event, relations between our countries are good. Please do not worry about this.

[1] Eden had proposed a "Locarno type" system for guaranteeing the security of neutral states through collective defense. "Locarno" references the 1925 Locarno Treaties.