

June 23, 1965

**Record of Conversation between Premier Zhou Enlai
and the Foreign Minister of Algeria Abdelaziz
Bouteflika**

Citation:

"Record of Conversation between Premier Zhou Enlai and the Foreign Minister of Algeria Abdelaziz Bouteflika", June 23, 1965, Wilson Center Digital Archive, PRC FMA 107-01081-11, 70-86. Translated by Stephen Mercado
<https://wilson-center.drivingcreative.com/document/165579>

Summary:

The conversation was about the domestic incidents within Algeria. Zhou expressed China's standpoints on these incidents. Zhou and Bouteflika also discuss the fate of the Second Asian-African Conference.

Credits:

This document was made possible with support from Henry Luce Foundation

Original Language:

Chinese

Contents:

Translation - English

Secret Document 636

Foreign Ministry File

Record of Conversation between Premier Zhou Enlai and the Foreign Minister of Algeria Abdelaziz Bouteflika

(Premier has yet to review and approve)

Time: 3:15 to 3:45 a.m., 23 June 1965

Place: Qubba Palace, Cairo

Summary

1. Bouteflika's introduction of the cause and course of the incident of 19 June
2. Premier Zhou's mentioning the five points of understanding regarding the incident in Algeria
3. Premier Zhou's expression of his hope for holding the Asian-African Conference, holding it well
4. Regarding the issue of inviting U Thant

Bouteflika: I am sorry to come so late and disturb Your Excellency the Premier. The time in Algeria at present is twelve o'clock midnight. It is already three o'clock in the morning in Cairo.

Premier: You are very busy. Early tomorrow morning you have to return to Algeria, do you not?

Bouteflika: I will return immediately after talking with Your Excellency the Premier. It seems that Vice Premier Chen Yi will arrive today (note: referring to 22 June) in Algeria. I was unable to meet him before coming to Cairo.

Premier: Our embassy in Algeria did not inform you of the news that Vice Premier Chen Yi delayed his departure time, causing you to wait in vain to welcome him on the 21st. I am sorry for this incident. How is Chairman Boumedienne?

Bouteflika: He is fine, and a little tired.

Premier: Are our other friends all fine?

Bouteflika: They are all fine.

Premier: Are you coming alone this time to Cairo?

Bouteflika: The Foreign Ministry has another person who is coming with me.

It is already very late. I do not want to take up too much of Your Excellency the Premier's time. I am only thinking of simply discussing the most urgent matters.

We give our warm thanks to Premier Zhou Enlai and the Chinese people for adopting an amicable and fraternal position towards Algeria's Revolution. Your support has been exceptionally timely and has been of great support and encouragement to us, enabling us to have an even more resolute confidence for what we should do.

Premier: We have consistently advocated non-interference in the internal affairs of

other countries. We support Algeria's continuing to advance in accord with an anti-imperialist revolutionary line. The present leaders have all been very familiar to us. I believe that you will advance along the revolutionary line.

Bouteflika: It is precisely because of the fraternal and amicable relations between us that we feel the responsibility to tell you why we had to take the recent action.

Of course, this person (note: indicating Ben Bella) has a certain international prestige, and in Algeria once received the support of the people. Even though this support was continuously weakening, he was unable to recognize it. He still has a certain influence among the people.

In the three years that Algeria has obtained independence, we gave him the greatest power in the hope that he would better be able to serve Algeria.

In speaking of this, it is necessary to take a simple review of the past. From the end of 1961 to the beginning of 1962, there were conflicting views between us and the provisional government at that time, resulting in crisis. On account of this I personally went to France and made contact with him. Later we drew up the Tripoli Program, convened a conference of the National Liberation Front (FLN), and in affirming this program, made it Algeria's present constitution. At the time there was no difference between us and Ben Bella on such issues as visiting socialist countries. Since there were no differences, then why would the situation develop to this point?

First, speaking of the economic aspect, Algeria's economy is at present on the edge of bankruptcy. Take agriculture, for example. In the era of French rule, the French residents every year from agriculture obtained in profit as much as 128 billion old francs. At present, the annual income from agriculture is only 80 billion old francs. Expenditures amount to 70 billion, not including taxes. This is how it is for agriculture. Other aspects of the situation are more or less the same. We warned him many times because of the deteriorating economic situation. But each time he was blindly optimistic that the economic situation was good.

Second, the social problems are serious. The problems left to us by 130 years of colonial rule and eight years of war cannot, of course, be swiftly and completely resolved. But they should not have been made so unmanageable. For example, in the issue of the transition to civilian life and employment of the moudjahidine, there has been a resolution only for several hundred men at most. Basically, we have not resolved it. He nevertheless said that there had been a resolution for at least 50 percent of them. In the area of public health, too, the problem is grave. Each month we must spend as much as four billion old francs on extra-budgetary expenditures.

He has been capricious in politics: Today he could say that [Mohammed] Khider is a gangster, and tomorrow he could also say that Khider is not a thief. Today he could say that Said Ahmed is against the revolution and that he is an operative; tomorrow he could also make a public announcement that there has never been a problem between the two of them. Regarding [Ferhat] Abbas, he first locked him up for a year, and then set him free, saying that he had never thought that Abbas had reactionary thought. Furthermore, he also systematically removed national cadres, developed within the party propaganda campaigns to say that those who disagreed with him were corrupt and embezzlers, that they were antirevolutionaries and reactionaries. In this way, other than the People's National Army (ANP), he eliminated all the forces that supported his coming to power at the time.

He has thought to use the Second Asian-African Conference in confronting the ANP. He thought that he could use the Asian-African Conference to greatly enhance his own prestige at home and abroad. The ANP would not have the power to contend

against him. Not a few state leaders want to visit Algeria around the time of the Asian-African Conference. Before the conference there will be Zhou Enlai, and after the conference - in the period of 8 to 14 July - there will be [Gamal Abdel] Nasser and [Abdul Salam] Arif. During the conference there will also be over 1,200 journalists coming to visit. On 7 July he would visit France. He would later in Algeria also hold a youth festival. He has believed that all this would help improve his prestige at home and abroad. He has prepared to use these opportunities to greatly publicize his position and put forward the slogan of national solidarity in opposition to the ANP.

We asked him to report his work and elaborate on his own policies to the party and government organs. We also raised with him the issue of personal dictatorship. Of course, we have also considered his placing not a few of his trusted followers in both party organs and the National Assembly. One could not solve the problems in relying on these organs. However, we thought that such an approach could produce some positive effects and perhaps be able to push these organs in indulging him. But he rejected our request and was unwilling to go to these organs. We said to him, you are the president, the premier, the party secretary-general, commander-in-chief of the three military forces, and you also serve as minister of the interior, finance, information, and planning ministries. You hold so many positions, yet you are still not satisfied. One person, no matter much a genius he may be, cannot rely on personal power alone to manage everything. No one has the right to treat the state as his private property or to bend the popular will to that of an individual.

Of course, the problem of personal dictatorship is not a new one. Prior to the FLN Congress, the ministers for such ministries as National Defense, Interior, Foreign Affairs, National Guidance (including education, information, and youth), and Tourism resigned over the issue of confidence. At the time, Ben Bella refused to accept everyone's resignation. Since then, the domestic situation has grown worse and worse. Everyone in his life and at work is constantly in a state of fear, with mutual suspicion and a lack of trust. The national regime has become a police mechanism. Anyone who merely has a different position than him will be considered a political opponent or counterrevolutionary, arrested, and jailed. He pretends to be a savior, the symbol of Algeria's Revolution and socialism.

We raised with him the issue of dictatorship, saying, you should abide by the Charter and laws, or it will be to your disadvantage.

Algeria has only one party. Why did you want to sign that communique with [Hocine Ait] Ahmed of the Socialist Forces Front (FFS)? No matter how much authority you have, you have no right to go beyond the central leadership, act alone, and recognize the existence of another party.

In talks with the leader of a country bordering Algeria, he was thinking to revise the border and hand over Algeria's sacred territory to others. We pointed out to him: You do not have the right to undertake this obligation without authorization.

After he rejected our suggestions, we thought that there were only two prospects: (1) If we resigned en masse, that would be exactly what he wants. He would have used the usual means to smear and slander us. (2) With our eyes set on the future prospects of Algeria's Revolution, we did not fear threats and persisted in fighting with him. After consideration, we adopted the second approach. We considered that for revolutionaries the issue of resigning does not exist. Later he took the initiative to provoke a crisis. Within a few days, the situation developed seriously, becoming a life-and-death struggle. We could not but decide to act quickly. Since those involved in this incident all had been FLN members, they made decisions as a revolutionary council and the ANP cadres promptly carried them out.

Many who do not understand Algeria's situation judge this incident according to their

own conceptions. According to their logic, those who instigated this incident are soldiers. Certainly, they must be militarists and, as militarists, they must be reactionaries. They also ask why this happened just before the Second Asian-African Conference. The Asian-African Conference is an anti-imperialist, anti-colonial conference. Therefore, those who instigated this incident are objectively allies of the imperialists. To put it more bluntly, the Algerian Communist Party committed many errors in the past on issues of the Revolution. Under the complicated circumstances at present, they could commit even more serious errors.

In our statement, we did not make reference to the issue of the Second Asian-African Conference. At that time we thought that many people in the world did not understand the character of the incident in Algeria and could adopt some attitude of reservation. Therefore, it would be better to declare our position after discussions.

The agents of imperialism would think that we would consciously or unconsciously want to use the Asian-African Conference to obtain trust. To avoid this, we convened the Standing Committee. The Standing Committee decided to hold the Asian-African Conference as scheduled. We then issued our statement. However, in spite of the adoption of this measure, the Asian-African Conference will still encounter every kind of intrigue and difficulty. Yesterday, Ghana's representative at a meeting of Britain's Commonwealth said that the Commonwealth's 14 Asian and African member countries would formally request the conference's postponement. Tunisia, Burma, Japan, and Libya will also request a postponement of the conference. If we had some way to bring together and push these countries to join our ranks, this would of course be good. However, at the time I left Algiers, only 25 of the 50 countries that had originally expressed their participation in the conference had reiterated that they would participate as scheduled. Speaking of the domestic situation, we also have a certain difficulty there. We cannot exclude the possibility of persons making demonstrations and provocations. Of course, this cannot be the reason to postpone the conference. With regard to the Asian-African Conference, we would like to seek the views of Your Excellency the Premier. We hope that Your Excellency the Premier will discuss what we should do and how we can cooperate with one another, what we should do and what we should not do.

Premier: I have listened with much attention the introduction of the Foreign Minister, my brother, regarding the various factors in the development of Algeria's domestic situation. Today I received a report on the meeting between our ambassador in Algeria with you and Chairman Boumedienne. In addition, we have learned of the situation from President Nasser and Marshal [Abdel Hakim] Amer.

Taking everything into consideration, the leaders of the United Arab Republic (UAR) and I agree that this incident in Algeria is due to the accumulation of domestic issues over a long period. To the best of our knowledge, this incident does not have any foreign factors. We have always respected your sovereignty and opposed interference in internal affairs. I said this the first time that I visited Algeria. Under the present circumstances, we should respect even more your views and persist in not interfering in internal affairs.

After talking it over with UAR leaders, we think it necessary to support Algeria's new leaders. Of course, there are also issues with this. Marshal Amer indicated to you leaders concerning Ben Bella that he has a certain influence in the Arab world and in Africa. At the same time, countries far from you are not necessarily clear in regard to the true situation. It is therefore understandable that some Arab countries and African leaders have raised the issue of Ben Bella's security. Whether arising from personal feeling or from surface phenomena, everything will produce such a response. However, what President Nasser said was correct. The relations between the UAR and Algeria, as well as relations between African and Arab countries, should not be built on the basis of personal relationships but built on the basis of striving for common goals. This point of view is correct. Therefore, the issue of Ben Bella's security is only

a side issue. Of course, such an issue does not exist for us because we respect the sovereign acts of an independent country. At the same time, however, as the leaders of Arab and African countries ordinarily have many personal contacts, we also understand their feelings. Therefore, in regard to this issue it will take a certain time to carry out the necessary explanations.

In addition to the letter sent to the relevant Asian and African countries, hoping that their leaders and foreign ministers participate as scheduled in the Second Asian-African Conference, and after hearing Marshal Amer's presentation and having discussions with UAR leaders, today we also further sent telegrams to the relevant Asian and African countries. Our major points of understanding are:

1. The incident that has taken place in Algeria is the product of internal causes, with no foreign factors.
2. Algeria's new leaders can control the current situation.
3. Marshal Amer has said that Ben Bella's security is guaranteed.
4. The Chinese government has consistently pursued a policy of non-interference in internal affairs. Regarding this incident in Algeria, we continue to adhere to abiding by this principle.
5. China, after discussions with the UAR, considers it necessary to support Algeria's new leaders. If not, imperialism will exploit the situation to harm the revolution in Asia and Africa.

The above five points are a way of looking at the Algerian incident itself. In addition, China and the UAR think that the Second Asian-African Conference should be held as scheduled. China and the UAR also completely support the Standing Committee with regard to the resolution of this issue.

I hope that that each country's leader to whom I sent the telegram can adopt this kind of attitude towards this and positively push the countries involved to participate in the conference. When the time comes, if a minority of countries should refuse to participate, we will not press them, and the conference can proceed as scheduled. If a majority of countries should refuse to attend, the conference then possibly will not open. We should do our utmost to try to avoid the emergence of this possibility. We have informed them that Vice Foreign Minister Chen Yi left today for Algeria.

This time I sent a total of 15 telegrams to relatively familiar heads of Asian and African countries, among which four went to London for delivery to [Kwame] Nkrumah, [Julius] Nyerere, [Milton] Obote, and Ayub Khan. I also telegraphed [Modibo] Keita, [Ahmed] Sekou Toure, [Alphonse] Massamba-Debat, Sukarno, [Norodom] Sihanouk, Ne Win, Nepal's king, Afghanistan's premier, Arif, Syria's Hafez [al-Assad], and [Abdullah al-] Sallal.

I believe that what I said will attract their attention. If they agree with our view, it would also influence other countries. In conversation with President Nasser at last night's banquet, I brought up this issue, expressing the hope that the Second Asian-African Conference would take place as scheduled and go well. President Nasser said to me that he had already let Nkrumah and Toure know his view on the issue. He is also waiting for Sukarno's coming to Cairo on the 24th to discuss it with him. With Sukarno's coming to Cairo, if the three countries together push for it, it could have an even greater effect. As I mentioned in my speech today, the Second Asian-African Conference concerns not only the host country, Algeria, but also

concerns each country's common interests. The Algerian side has already given its guarantee of security. Therefore, the conference should be held as scheduled. We believe that it is not only that Algeria wants to hold the conference as scheduled. More important is that the people of Asian and African countries all have such a demand.

In summary, what I have said comprises two parts. The first part concerns the incident in Algeria. I have clearly expressed our attitude and am unsure whether there remains anything to discuss. If necessary, I can discuss it in detail after I go to Algeria on the 24th. The second part is that the Second [Asian-African] Conference should be held, and held well. This is our common responsibility. Today I received a message from Vice Foreign Minister Zhang Hanfu, in which he anticipated that on the 24th the foreign ministers of 25 countries could arrive in Algiers. Should too few foreign ministers arrive there, it would be possible to first talk over matters and wait a day or two before opening the meeting. Foreign Minister Chen Yi yesterday left for Algeria. Subandrio, too, arrived there yesterday. The UAR's foreign minister left this morning. Foreign ministers of several major countries can quickly talk over the matter after their arrival.

Once the foreign ministers' meeting opens, we certainly make it a success. As for the foreign ministers' meeting possibly encountering some problems, we have already discussed this with the UAR side. Our spirit basically is that of the memorandum recently passed to Mr. Yazid. I do not know whether or not you have seen this memorandum.

Bouteflika: I have not seen it.

Premier: After you return to Algeria, Foreign Minister Chen will give it again to you.

Bouteflika: Thank you. Yazid can pass this memorandum to Ben Bella.

I am grateful to Your Excellency the Premier's brotherly talk. The substance of the conversation has been objective and realistic. I am very happy to be able to represent Algeria to Your Excellency the Premier and express the conviction of the Algerian people. This conviction is: opposition to imperialism and struggle for socialism.

Under the present new circumstances, we expect to encounter various domestic and foreign difficulties, and the domestic difficulties perhaps will be more numerous than the foreign ones. Speaking of foreign relations, in the two years I was able to serve as foreign minister, I had many contacts with the leaders of African countries; relations were close. I am not lacking compared to Ben Bella in my familiarity with them.

Of course, no matter what difficulties encountered on the domestic or international side, we absolutely will not allow imperialism or any other force to hinder Algeria's advance. Some revolutionary African countries may have some hesitation regarding us at the start, but we cannot for this reason abandon our own basic policy and go seek relations with neocolonialists or with countries manipulated by neocolonialists, such as the African and Malagasy Common Organization. Nor can we go hold out our hands to US imperialism. Our decisions are all based on profound conviction. This faith is imprinted deep within our hearts. We hope that Your Excellency the Premier believes in us. We pledge never to betray the trust that Your Excellency the Premier has given us.

As for the Second Asian-African Conference, we will do our utmost to make it a success. This is not only because we are revolutionary, but also because this conference concerns the fate of the Third Force.

Following my return, I will conduct talks with [Vice] Premier Chen Yi, Subandrio, and [Mahmoud] Riad on the basis of the wishes I have just expressed and convince countries that are still hesitant now.

Premier: I hope that both sides work together. I will continue in Cairo to promote this and will probably go to Algeria on the 24th or 25th, because I want to meet with Sukarno there. If Sukarno arrives there on the 24th, I am ready to go on the morning of the 25th. If he arrives on the morning of the 25th, I can then go that afternoon. President Nasser is ready to leave on the 28th and has already scheduled a meeting with Nkrumah.

I am very pleased to hear the Foreign Minister, my brother, express his confidence and determination to continue advancing Algeria's Revolution. This is the basic force that determines the strength of any country. We understand that you may encounter some difficulties. As long as the revolutionary forces join together, relying on the people, they certainly can overcome those difficulties and continue to advance.

As for the foreign ministers' meeting, we have already discussed with the UAR a basic view that is roughly the same as the memorandum. Now I would like to raise an issue, which is that of inviting guests. Ben Bella has left you with a difficulty. This issue surely has been resolved by now.

Bouteflika: Inviting guests?

Premier: For example, there is the issue concerning the inviting of U Thant. I propose that for persons other than those from Asian and African countries, if they are invited, that they only be able to attend the ceremonies as guests of the Algerian government and not be able to participate in the conference.

Bouteflika: As for this issue, the Standing Committee has already discussed it and decided that we could invite the secretaries-general of regional and state organizations to come participate in the conference. On the basis of this decision, we have already invited the secretaries-general of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and the League of Arab States (LAS), as well as U Thant. In our published statement, we expressed respect for all international obligations. Because past obligations are all accomplished facts, if we were to somehow change them now, people would make all kinds of speculation, believing that there was some change in our policy direction and adding to it every kind of implication. In fact, this situation is only the result of the accumulation of internal conflicts.

Premier: I do not recall the Standing Committee having discussed this issue.

The preparatory meeting in Jakarta stipulated that the secretaries-general of Asian and African organizations can attend the conference as observers with the right to speak but without the right to vote. This refers to such Asian and African regional organizations as the OAU and the League of Arab States. As for international organizations outside Asia and Africa, that scope is really large.

We think that the host country, before having discussing the matter with Asian and African countries, has no right to issue an invitation to an international organization outside Asia and Africa. If the head of the host country did so, it would resemble what the Foreign Minister, my brother, just said: a personal dictatorship. At the time of the First Bandung Conference, President Sukarno did not invite any observer without the agreement of the conference. Also, observers at that time did not participate in the conference. I recall that at that time Yazid, as representative of Algeria's revolutionary organization, acted an observer. We met each other outside the conference.

Before this incident in Algeria happened, I read in the newspaper that Algeria would invite U Thant in the name of the government to participate in the ceremonies as a guest of the Algerian side. I thought that Ben Bella had accepted my view and that the issue was resolved. Now, apparently, this issue still is not resolved.

Bouteflika: This is a political issue. Therefore, it requires a certain time for its resolution. I will soon return to Algiers, and upon my return I will discuss this issue with Vice Premier Chen Yi. Issuing an invitation to U Thant was completely Ben Bella's idea. Although the invitation was issued in my name, in fact it was carried out on Ben Bella's instructions. But now, personally speaking, also it would be difficult to take back my promise. I will discuss this with those concerned after my return.

Premier: I am not against your examining this with Vice Premier Chen Yi after your return. But I would like to explain that we have always been opposed to inviting U Thant. Our ambassador before the end of March brought up this issue with the Algerian side. I personally at the end of March raised it with Ben Bella. At that time Ben Bella said that he would certainly think of a way to resolve the issue, but he has never put forth a solution. On 2 June I met Brother Yazid in Rawalpindi. I mentioned our solution, which is that U Thant can participate in the ceremonies as the guest of the president or government of Algeria.

Regarding the issue of inviting U Thant, it is not only China that is against it. Indonesia also is against it. China has been excluded from the United Nations for 15 years. If U Thant now were to sit with us, it would be an insult to us. We could not participate in such a conference. Ben Bella at that time did not have China in mind. As it is known that the United Nations has excluded China for 15 years, why must its secretary-general come and hold the conference with us? If Ben Bella had trouble, he should have consulted with us in advance.

Bouteflika: After my return I will consider this issue and consult with those concerned.

Premier: This incident is hard for us to take. I discussed this issue very seriously with Ben Bella. He agreed to resolve it, but in fact it has not been resolved.

Bouteflika: Of course, this issue is not the only one that requires resolution.

Premier: One can say that there are reasons for other issues, but there is reason at all for this issue. I do not understand why one wants to invite him.

[Alex] Quaison[-Sackey] has now been appointed as Ghana's foreign minister. Nkrumah put him there and solved this problem.

Bouteflika: Let us hope that U Thant is also appointed foreign minister. Perhaps Ben Bella also has this hope.

Premier: But Ne Win does not like U Thant. It cannot be helped. Ne Win himself does not want to come.

Bouteflika: Ne Win's not coming, of course, is not because of the U Thant issue.

Premier: Of course not. On the issue of inviting U Thant, we must also consider Sukarno's view.

Bouteflika: I have already occupied a great deal of Your Excellency the Premier's time. I know that Your Excellency the Premier tomorrow afternoon wants to go to Alexandria.

Premier: I very much want to talk with you. I feel that it would be better for us to speak clearly about these issues. In the past we spoke only through Ben Bella. The issues, on the contrary, could not be resolved. At present the issue is before you. It must be settled.

Please give my regards to Chairman Boumediene and other old friends.

No matter what, after seeing President Sukarno, I will definitely go to Algeria.

Bouteflika: Thank you, and until we meet again.

General Office, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
17 July 1965

Printed and distributed