

Primary Source:

*Record of Conversation between Soviet Ambassador S. V. Chervonenko and Chinese Prime Minister Zhou Enlai (1965)**



PRIMARY SOURCE

INTRODUCTION

RECORD OF CONVERSATION

Introduction

In April 1965, the leaders of China and the Soviet Union were actively involved in promoting decolonization. Chinese First Premier Zhou Enlai held a series of conversations with the Soviet Ambassador to China, S.V. Chervonenko, who was about to return to the Soviet Union. They were particularly interested in events in Vietnam and Algeria, both former French colonies that there then engaged in wars.

Vietnamese anti-colonial nationalists under the leadership of Ho Chi Minh had waged war against French colonialism since 1946. From 1950, the nationalists were receiving military aid in their struggle from China. In the spring of 1954, they had a major victory at the Battle of Dien Bien Phu, which convinced the French government to pull out of southeast Asia altogether. By 1959, though, all-out war was waging between Communists in the north and anti-Communists in the south. A month before this meeting between Chervonenko and Zhou, the United States had sent combat troops to prevent the imminent defeat of the anti-Communists.

*Record of Conversation between Soviet Ambassador to China S. V. Chervonenko and Chinese Prime Minister Zhou Enlai on 13 April 1965 (excerpt), <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/112454>. Edited and annotated by Jesse Spohnholz.

Meanwhile, in Algeria, anti-colonial nationalist, the Front had been waging a war for independence from France since 1954, in part inspired by the Vietminh victory at Dien Bien Phu. Three years before Chervonenko and Zhou's meeting, the Algerian resistance, led by the Front de Libération Nationale (National Libération Front, or FLN) had ended with a French withdrawal and recognition of Algerian self-governance in 1962. The government of Algeria's' new president Ahmad Ben Bella, declined to take sides in the Cold War. But in 1965, Prime Minister Zhou hoped to draw Algeria away from non-aligned status and into firmly supporting the communist states in the Cold War.

**Record of Conversation
between Soviet
Ambassador S. V.
Chervonenko and Chinese
Prime Minister Zhou Enlai
(1965)**



*Zhou Enlai, first premier of the
People's Republic of China, c. 1940s*

Embassy of the USSR
in the PRC[†]

20 April 1965
Outgoing No. 212

RECORD OF CONVERSATION
of Ambassador of the USSR in the PRC Chervonenko S.V.
with the Premier of the State Council of the PRC, Zhou Enlai

On 13 April 1965 Premier of the State Council of the PRC Zhou Enlai invited Ambassador of the USSR in the PRC c[omrade] Chervonenko S.V. to a dinner in connection with the forthcoming departure of the Ambassador for the motherland. Zhou Enlai, on his own initiative, started a conversation, which continued for over two hours. [...]

[Zhou Enlai:]

In some countries, where I visited, the intensity of struggle in Vietnam, the heroism and decisiveness of the Vietnamese people in the struggle, are not clearly appreciated. Therefore we consider it useful to make visits, which offer an opportunity to talk about these events, to tell about events. Let's take Algiers, for example. After all, the Algerians themselves came to a victory as a result of a prolonged struggle against the French aggressors. Algerians are also concerned about the struggle of the Vietnamese people against American imperialism, they allow the thought that the Americans could suppress the struggle of the Vietnamese people. The Algerians' concern is also caused by the fact that they allow the thought that the [North] Vietnamese could opt for talks in the face of bombardment.

[†] People's Republic of China.

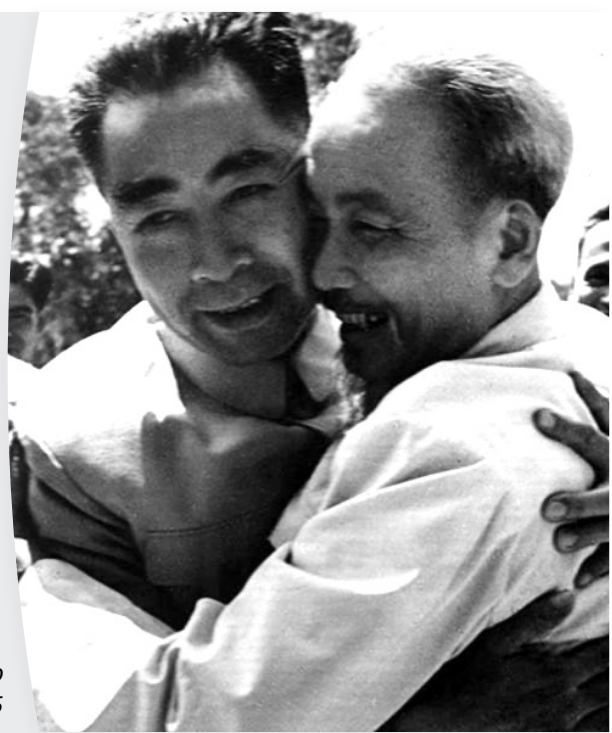


Map illustrating the locations of the Soviet Union (orange) and China (green)

When we were in Algiers we told the Algerians that the situation in South Vietnam now is the same as it once was in Algiers. After all, the Algerians also fought against an 800,000 strong army of the French colonialists, but were not intimidated by them. But in Vietnam the population is higher than in Algiers. In South Vietnam alone the population is 14 million, and in North Vietnam - 17 million. Thus, Vietnam's population on the whole exceeds 30 million people. To this one must add that the Vietnamese are fully determined to struggle against the aggression. After our explanation the Algerians began to understand more clearly the situation in Vietnam. We also informed the Algerians, he continued, that now in South Vietnam the numbers of regular and semi-regular armies on the whole do not exceed 500,000 people. And there are about 30 thousand American soldiers there now. When I spoke to Ben Bella I told him that their number is only slightly higher than 20 thousand. The South Vietnamese hold the American aggressors in disdain, they will continue the struggle, even if new [U.S.] forces arrive in South Vietnam.

Recently President Ho Chi Minh said that even if there were several tens ["hundreds"? sic] of thousands of American soldiers in South Vietnam, the struggle would have to be continued, and the war brought to the end. We also gave another example. During the war in Algiers, some members of the provisional government stood for compromise, for negotiations, but the majority in the leadership spoke for resistance, for taking the struggle to the end. And then, as a result of that part of the leadership prevailing, after 7 years of war Algerians entered into negotiations and won a victory. If during the first period of the war, those would prevail in Algiers, who stood for agreement-making [soglashatelstvo],[‡] for compromise, then the victory would not have been achieved. The victory in Algiers was achieved precisely thanks to the present Algerian leadership. This question is absolutely clear.

Zhou Enlai and Ho Chi Minh, c 1965



[‡]Communists used this Russian word - meaning 'agreementism' as a derisive term to describe those willing to compromise with those representing the political status quo in order to achieve the Communists' revolutionary goals. Its meaning is thus similar to 'appeasement' in English.

*Stepan Chervonenko, Soviet
Ambassador to Peking*



When I was in Algiers last time, Ben Bella himself talked about this. This time I told him that South Vietnam is at the stage of struggle, in which the Algerian people were several years ago. I suggested that Ben Bella think about the following question: before, they were under the yoke of the French aggressors; the Vietnamese people were also under the yoke of the French aggressors, and now they are under the yoke of American aggressors. How can the Vietnamese people not take the struggle against American aggressors to a victorious end? We also told the Algerians that, as the Vietnamese comrades think, if one is to opt for a compromise now, this would result in more victims than if one were to continue the struggle to the end. Once Ben Bella heard my explanations, he understood the situation in Vietnam and came to a conclusion that if the Vietnamese seized a ceasefire and entered into negotiations, this would result in more victims in South Vietnam and South Vietnam would not achieve its independence.

Then Ben Bella said that he feels the error of his participation in the [September 1961] Belgrade conference of non-aligned countries.[§] In connection with this, when the appeal of the 17 non-aligned countries reached President Ben Bella, he did not put his signature under it.

*Ahmed Ben Bella, revolutionary
and first President of Algeria*

[§] September 1-6 1961, twenty-five countries send delegates to Belgrade, Yugoslavia to participate in the Summit Conference of Heads of State or Government of the Non-Aligned Movement, established to form a coalition of countries that refused to align themselves in the Cold War. The initiative came from governments in Yugoslavia, India, Egypt, Ghana, and Indonesia. A major topic at the meeting was the fate of a large number of African states that had decolonized since 1957. Ben Bella's Algeria had been part of the more radical nationalist Casablanca Group. Ben Bella, however, did not personally attend the Belgrade Conference, because he was imprisoned at the time, but the organization he helped lead, the FLN, sent delegates. However, Algeria did join the Non-Aligned Movement, starting in 1963 and Ben Bella did not abandon it, as Zhou thought. Instead, two months after Zhou's meeting with Chervonenko, in June 1965, Ben Bella was deposed in the bloodless coup by his Minister of Defense, Houari Boumédiène shortly after the latter had returned from a visit with Soviet authorities in Moscow in May. Boumédiène's government developed strong ties with the Soviet Union.

Image Citations:

Page 1:

Zhou Enlai at No.17 Meiyuan Xincun, Nanjing, 1946, Public Domain,

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Zhou_Enlai_MeiyuanXincun17_Nanjing_1946.jpg

Page 2:

Zhou Enlai in 1940s, Public Domain,

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Map highlighting relative positions of Mainland and the USSR, CC: SA BY, PlanespotterA320,

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Comrads-in-arms: Ho Chi Minh and Zhou Enlai Hug, probably Beijing, 1965, Covell Meyskens,

<https://everydaylifeinmaoistchina.org/2015/03/12/ho-chi-minh-and-zhou-enlai-hug-probably-beijing-1965/>

Page 4:

Meeting dedicated to the anniversary of establishing diplomatic relations between the USSR and France, 1 November 1984, RIA Novosti Archive, image #768457, CC: BY SA,

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:RIAN_archive_768457_Meeting_dedicated_to_the_anniversary_of_establishing_diplomatic_relations_between_the_USSR_and_France.jpg

Ahmed Ben Bella, Arquivo Nacional, Public Domain,

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