

Meeting with PRC Deputy Chief of Staff of PLA General Li Ta on 2 July 1977

On 1 July, Mr. Fan explained to me that Minister of Defense Yeh, in his seventies, was too old to be able to spend time with foreign visitors, that Teng Hsiao Peng had been Prime Minister and Chief of the General Staff until the "Gang of Four" had forced him out, that the post of Chief of General Staff had then remained vacant, and that "one of the senior" deputies, Deputy Chief of General Staff Li Ta, would see me at 3 PM on 2 July with several of his staff, including Mr. Tchai, Chief of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Defense. He asked for a summary of what it would cover. I said that it would cover the military trends, the Soviet strategy, arms control negotiations, the future of U.S.-PRC cooperation, and regional problems if time permitted.

The meeting took place at General Staff Headquarters on the edge of town at 3:30 PM (30 minute drive from Peking Hotel). Present were Madame Kang, Mr. Fan, General Li Ta, General Tchai, Admiral Yang Kuo-Yu, Commander PRC Navy, plus a young PLA interpreter.

After the amenities, I told General Li that I was here as one interested in four sets of problems: (1) military considerations, especially the balance between the U.S.S.R. and U.S. and the triangular equation--PRC, U.S.S.R., U.S.-- as well as PRC views on arms control issues; (2) as a business man, the future economic situation of PRC and foreign trade questions; (3) as a Democrat who had some ties with the Administration, although in no way a spokesman for the Administration; and (4) as a politician considering running again for the U.S. Senate. I reported that Dr. Brezinski had asked me to make quite clear that the recent New York Times story was inaccurate in suggesting that a decision had been made not to assist PRC in arms technology, that a working level draft had so suggested but that at the policy level it was changed, that in fact no decision on arms technology for the PRC had been made. I stressed that this Administration is of the view, contrary to the pessimistic historical vision of the last one, that the future of the U.S. can be viewed with optimism, that if the Soviet Union's conduct warrants, we will compete and do what is necessary.

General Li asked if Secretary Vance was of this view. I said I had not talked to him but that he, as a good Secretary of State and good lawyer, would represent his client, the President, that I had talked to the President, during the campaign, and recently Dr. Brezinski enough to know that my description was accurate. General Li said that since Mr. Vance is coming in August to PRC they would find out from him if he personally was confident of the future.

General Li asked the views of the Pentagon and White House on the state of the military balance--U.S. vs U.S.S.R.--and how that compared with my views.

I said that I believed that the White House and the Pentagon, the Committee on the Present Danger of which I am a member and indeed most well informed and honest people in the U.S. believed that the U.S.S.R. had outspent the U.S. for military capability for a number of years, that most agreed that trends were therefore running against us, and that the real disagreement was over how soon the shift in relative power would occur and what must be done about it. I suggested he could get a more authoritative view from Secretary Vance in August but that I personally was of the view that we must not accept permanent strategic nuclear inferiority either from inadequate budgets or through faulty arms control agreements.

General Li said, "You know the PRC position on arms control agreements with the Soviets and that it disagrees with the U.S. on this, what do you think?"

I said that I believed that the SALT I deal represented a certain risk partly because the U.S. future security rested on certain Congressional performance in order to make negotiation of a future balanced SALT II possible and because ambiguities in the agreement made Soviet violation of the agreements, as interpreted for the Congress, possible. I said that I believed the White House was less concerned than I.

General Li said "our position is more like yours. the Soviet Union has been talking disarmament for many years but she has never cut back on anything. She has not cut troop strength but rather increased by 1 million, therefore we had no hopes for disarmament agreements with such deceitful leaders."

I asked if he was aware that the Soviets were in violation of the SALT I deal, as explained by the then Administration, in some 7 or so ways. He was-- he said, "as far as disarmament and so called permanent peace are concerned, the PRC judges such talk as deceitful designed to deceive peace-loving people - even the Soviets tell us this; what does the U.S. think?" He went on to suggest that there are more than one group in the U.S. - he believes one group, just like the Soviets, agree that arms control agreements are a good way to deceive the people, another group is itself, "like Kissinger," deceived.

I disagreed with his categories. I said there are some who have no views on the matter; some, believe that military power is irrelevant and that details of arms control agreement are therefore unimportant; others have a tragic view of the future and believe that almost any deal the Soviets will give must be accepted; still others are optimistic about the U.S. and believe through intelligent budgets and intelligent agreements we can achieve strategic nuclear parity. General Li asked if the Committee on Present Danger fell into any of these groups. I placed it in the last of these.

General Li said the PRC view tended to agree with the Committee view about the uncertainty of the U.S. continuing to have strategic nuclear parity and of the need for it. PRC sees the Soviets' military capability going up and up. They are "wildly ambitious" and want to control Europe, extend influence into all regions possible, undermine the areas they cannot control. He said, "we have been dealing with the Soviet Union for years; we have been harmed by them; they talk of good things and do bad things; they have honey in their mouth and salt in their heart."

General Li stated his conviction that Europe was Russia's first objective after consolidating Africa and that the U.S. was next. I discussed some of the issues concerning Soviet strategy against NATO.

General Li said that China has been dealing with the Soviet Union for decades; they were following Mao's teaching about how to deal with the enemy especially with the Soviets--always struggle, never compromise, don't be like Chamberlain and appease, "appeasing the Soviets is like picking up a rock to drop it on your own feet;" practice has taught the PRC that the Soviet Union is a paper tiger--superficially strong--but whenever faced down, a paper tiger - one can't adopt a policy of appeasement - to do so is to deceive your own people. He asked me to relay these thoughts to our leaders. I suggested he give them to Secretary Vance in August himself.

I outlined for General Li what seemed to me to be the Soviet long-term strategy - overwhelming military superiority to permit them to win political and economic objectives against the non-Soviet world. I stressed the particular vulnerability of the West to oil embargo until and unless the U.S. energy problem changes the picture. I pointed out the future prospect that the Soviet Union could confront PRC in a crisis while denying the U.S. any credible capability to assist PRC by its control over our oil sources. I suggested that rapid development of PRC's oil especially off-shore, with U.S. assistance, could therefore be a strategic plus for both countries as well as a lucrative source of dollars for PRC. I said I intended to talk with other officials about this but that I thought the PRC military ought to favor the strategic advantage.

General Li agreed completely with my concept of Soviet strategy; he did not take up the oil development point; he reiterated the paper tiger theme and expressed disappointment that the West does not resist but instead feeds the paper tiger with grain and technology.

I told General Li that in my experiences the U.S. public is generally ahead of Congress and the Executive Branch with regard to distrust of detente and of Soviet behavior, that as Soviet mischief continues the U.S. will increasingly be inclined to seek relationships which will checkmate Soviet progress against us, that PRC/U.S. relationships could play an important stabilizing role, and that economic cooperation if mutually acceptable could play a key role.

General Li asked how much U.S. assistance could help.

I said that in my judgment a U.S. energy consortium could be producing 1 million barrels of oil per day 5 years after signature of the formal contract if suitable advance preparations were made.

General Li said that regarding petroleum, the PRC had achieved greatly in the last 5 years; that first they must satisfy their future usage; many parts of China still lack oil; but that after their own usage is met they would certainly want to trade in oil with those who want it; PRC must assure itself that it will not be affected by the vast energy crises; but again trade would be permitted if such requirements were met; PRC has its famous

oil field, Ta Ching; "we have called on the people to use Taching as their example of efficient peoples production. We need 10 more to be opened in the future; the PRC is determined to follow the teachings of Chairman Mao, that we must have full modernization by the end of the century; this includes sufficient oil. I can assure you of one thing, in this problem we will never pity the Soviet Union, even if they want oil we will not provide it so long as they seek to harm the people of the world; we hope the U.S. will think like that too."

General Li went on, "the facts tell us that Soviet Socialist Imperialism leads them to develop their military capability rapidly; to a large extent this is because they wish to be like Germany with Munich; in the not too distant future the Soviet Union will surpass the U.S.; we doubt that the U.S. will keep its position as a big power; we think that your people reflect the pessimism of Kissinger; if the White House and the Pentagon adopt policies of resistance it will be good for the world. The U.S.S.R. is a paper tiger; it seeks to kill the weak but if fears the strong; for example, when the UAR decided it would not be bullied and threw the Soviet forces out, the Soviet Union did nothing; similarly in Sudan, when the Soviet Union's policies were seen by the Sudanese to be harmful, Sudan threw the Russians out and the Soviets acquiesced; all governments must deal firmly with those harming them; Chairman Mao said, "don't be kind to robbers, rather use the robbers means in dealing with robbers."

I disputed General Li's views of the U.S. public. I pointed out that we have an administration which has an optimistic view of the future, which intends to compete with the Soviet Union if the Soviet's behavior calls for it; and which is currently able to muster wide support.

General Li again stressed that through long historical experience in China, the Chinese people have no illusions on the prospect of making any deals with the Soviets. "We are not afraid of their 1 million troops along the border; nor their stronger Navy; let them come into China if they dare; we think that the Soviet Union is afraid of the PRC; but we welcome them to come if they dare to come; the outcome will not be as the Soviet Union

predicts; their view that a quick decision will be achieved by Soviet power will not be realized; let me report an example--a few years ago the famous Marshal Montgomery visited us and saw a great deal of China; he went home and wrote a book in which he made the point that no matter which country in the world, none should invade China, that once such a country intrudes it will never be able to come out, just as in the case of Japan, it will come to no good end--Montgomery was right."

Li went on: "On the other hand as we witness the Soviet Union's 1 million troops in Siberia, there are other explanations; it could be Soviet strategy to prepare for an attack on China or it could be that they are afraid (as I believe); the alternative and likelier purpose of these forces is to deal with the U.S. and Japan."

At this point Admiral Yang Kuo Yu made his only comment of the day: "In some of the nuclear weapons areas the Soviet Union has not only a big lead over us but has also passed the U.S. Navy--for example, in nuclear guided missiles; the Soviet Navy is quite powerful; we are therefore following Chairman Mao's dictum to 'dig trenches deep, match the enemy preparations, and prepare for war.'"

Li said: "Sometime ago we heard that Soviet ships reached Hawaii and that there was no U.S. reaction. We were surprised."

I said that the prevailing view was that the exercise by the Soviets of their right to passage on the high seas and free transit in territorial seas in new areas need not be challenged and that our governments' policy was one of detente at that time.

Li said: "Kissinger must be very powerful."

I reminded him that the American people had voted Mr. Ford out of office partly from concern over the implementation of detente policies.

Li said: "Their decision was correct; the Chinese people and their leaders are strong and the Soviets know it and fear them."

I said that in my view no one should misjudge the latent strength of the American people nor the philosophical vigor of its present leaders.

Li said: "I certainly hope you are correct." He then asked how the Committee on the Present Danger operated.

I described the COPD public education effort. I then described my view of the importance of the PRC's own unilateral economic and foreign policy decisions being made while keeping in mind that to the extent they are helpful to U.S. policy vis a vis the Soviet Union they are also helpful to the PRC. I used as an example the PRC development program for their oil and again made the point that rapid development of PRC off-shore oil was a non-zero sum action in the U.S./PRC equation.

General Li then said, "with regard to arms technology, which would be one of the benefits of increased dollar income, in dealing with Soviet Socialist Imperialism, advanced technologies is not the most important weapon; most important is the confidence of the people; we must arouse the people against Soviet Socialist Imperialism; Chairman Mao instructed us to engage in four modernizations; one of these is national defense; still the factor of the people is the decisive one; the making of war rests with the people; if they are not properly mobilized with spirit, it is not good for the countries of the world who face the Soviet threat; in the war with Japan we had no weapons-- we had millet plus rifles--but in the end we defeated Japan. In dealing with Chiang, we found the same thing--in a few years we dispatched 8 million Kuomintang troops and at the end had upgraded our entire weapons inventory with captured equipment; so I hope that the people of the U.S. and the rest of the world will awake with vigilance heightened; if the people are mobilized even the weaker can defeat the bigger invading power."

I said: "General Li, I must go now but I know you have not forgotten that Japan had fought a long and essentially successful war against China for many years before U.S. technology and armed forces were brought to bear against them with the U.S. entry into World War II and that our operations did the lion's share of the job." I suggested that that lesson be remembered as they think through their insular approach to a much more powerful adversary, Soviet Union.

General Li replied: "Chairman Mao taught us that each one, no matter how small, can do his part in a large cause. If the people of our two countries and the world are mobilized, each country can make an significant contribution."

Occupational
oil fields

TUNNELS DEFECTOR

Tchai like Asst Sec Dy for Int'l Sec. Affairs
frowned by briefs that he'd been
met me, 3 months & then replied

PRC's talk w/ great intention
but really are quite concerned about Sov's
That's why they lecture us for Munich like policies,
they cite Zaire, — Vance goes next month
They are concerned about the useful stock
of their weapons systems.

No grain & water in tunnels.

Gross mapping of Chinese system is no central
supply & repair but in atomic warfare they'd
be very efficient

It's clear to me they are saying in this
discreet way — Don't withdraw from Korean
peninsula.

They believe SU will use force, not just pressure.

They view Africa as a huge market like China

Chinese say we should never have recognized
Israel

Tsing's slogan is "I'll take a cow
of any color as long as it's bulls size."

No roads below Co. level
just bridges & fords.

Army at a huge pt. Played
key role in Sino-Soviet Gang 74
Active duty 11 years serving as head
committees at almost every level