



MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

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February 5, 1972

MEMORANDUM FOR: THE PRESIDENT
FROM: HENRY A. KISSINGER *HK*
SUBJECT: Your Encounter with the Chinese

A New Experience

Your meetings with the Chinese will be totally unlike any other experience you have had. This memorandum seeks to give you some of the flavor of their style and suggestions on how to deal with them.

Your encounter is unprecedented on many levels. There are the obvious facts that we have had no dialogue with this country for over two decades; that you have never talked to these people or visited their country; and that your personal experiences, philosophy, world outlook and personality are fundamentally different. The drama and color of this state visit will surpass all your others.

The conversations will be at a far greater intensity and length than any previous diplomatic talks you have conducted. There will be plenary sessions at the beginning and end of your trip with Chou and the official parties; two private meetings with Mao and Chou; several private meetings with Chou; and four banquets, two in Peking and one each in Hangchow and Shanghai. In addition, Chou will accompany you everywhere in your sightseeing tours in all three cities and on planes between them.

The most important difference about this journey, however, remains the character and style of the Chinese themselves.

The Chinese

You have heard sufficiently from me and others about Chinese hospitality, graciousness, delicacy, efficiency, sense of humor, etc., so I won't belabor these attributes in this paper. You and your party will be superbly treated and will have to resist being seduced by the charm of the hosts. They are, in short, Chinese as well as (or despite) being communists.

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These people are both fanatic and pragmatic. They are tough ideologues who totally disagree with us on where the world is going, or should be going. At the same time, they are hard realists who calculate they need us because of a threatening Soviet Union, a resurgent Japan, and a potentially independent Taiwan.

The Chinese leaders are deadly serious people who will not be swayed from their convictions by anything that in their view smacks of opportunity or convenience. They take a very principled approach, but within that framework they are willing to be realistic. This reflects the tension between their sense of history and their imperative for movement. On the one hand, they have been surmounting towering internal and external obstacles for some fifty years. They take a long view. They see history on their side.

On the other hand, these leaders are in their seventies, and they surely want to reach certain goals before they depart the scene. Assuring the security of their country and their system for their successors must preoccupy them. In addition, the mysterious events last fall and the alleged Lin Piao challenge underline the great gamble Mao and Chou have taken in dealing with us and inviting you. Thus they will need to show some immediate results for their domestic audience.

It is worthwhile for them to deal with us now because of their fear of foreign attack; they need the outside support of the less threatening of the superpowers. But if we turn out to be flaccid, they get nothing in return for the price they pay in turning to us.

Their essential approach is likely to parallel the one they took in July and October: firm on principle but willing to be flexible on details. Thus they assert that the U.S. should agree to military withdrawal from Taiwan, but this could be phased over time. The same applies to other US withdrawals in Asia (except Indochina which they consider urgent) -- these have to take place as a matter of principle, but a fixed schedule isn't required. Of course, the Chinese flexibility on details can be traced more to pragmatism than reasonableness. They don't want us out of Taiwan precipitously only to see the Japanese move in. They don't want us to withdraw from Asia generally and leave the field to Moscow.

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If the Chinese are willing to wait on the future, they must also be confident about that future. We can set certain directions and make pledges about eventual actions, but there is little we can - or should - do for them right away. Their major concern will be to judge whether we will keep our word, and be meticulous in implementation.

Your conversations will be on two levels. There will be the customary discussion of specific issues. All the while, there will be a more profound conceptual level at which they will be seeking the answer to their decisive question - "does this American leader know where he is going?" Indeed Chou told me that the Chinese really turned on the Russians after Khrushchev stopped off in Peking after the Camp David meeting. His performance at that time convinced the Chinese that he was a bully who did not know where he was heading over the longer term.

Thus it is important that you begin discussion of each issue with a broad philosophic touch to demonstrate your grasp of the strategic outlines. Most leaders you have met follow their briefs to score points on tactical questions; their focus is on what you say about the concrete issues. The Chinese will be beautifully briefed, but their main attention will be on the perspectives you paint. They will be primarily interested in your judgment of the future and the principles and reliability of your policy.

In short, they will be sizing you up in the following terms. Do you understand their view? Will your own policy framework be compatible with theirs? Can you be counted upon to carry out what you foreshadow? Can they gear their policies to ours?

Accordingly, one basic task is to get across to them that we can make certain moves they want in the future because it is in our own self-interest, and that we will make such moves because we are reliable. Conversely, they won't be interested in what they would consider shoddy trade-offs -- e. g. if they purchase a large volume of grain from us, we can be more accommodating on Taiwan.

In like vein, they won't constantly press you for petty gains. Unlike talking to the Russians (or the North Vietnamese) one doesn't always have to be prepared for tactical elbowing, for haggling over details, for grudging implementation. The Chinese showed contempt for the Russian ploy of different translation of a joint text, like the May 20 SALT announcement or last summer's Berlin agreement. Once the Chinese agree on the basic question (such as on your visiting China before May 1972) the details fall into place gracefully (such as the nature of the trip).

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Similarly, a Russian negotiator would never have made the gesture Chou did in one of our communique drafting sessions in October: he suggested we keep in the joint draft some language that we had proposed even though I had said we were prepared to take it out because we were deleting some of their proposed language.

The Chinese "principled" attitude also means that they will respect a similar approach from you. Chou told Bhutto a few days ago, for example, that much of the outcome of your visit would depend on our posture: "China had principles which guided it in relations with other states and it would respond to evidence of the U.S. attitude.

The Chinese reject the notion that compromise is a desirable end in itself. They are, however, willing to make tactical adjustments on the road to their goal and may consider how these fit together with adjustments we make as we move toward our goal. It is essential to keep in mind that certain phrases carry totally different meanings for the Chinese than for us. For example "peace" in the abstract is not a virtue for them: In October Chou gave me a long lecture that justice is the fundamental objective. True peace can only result from justice; without it peace is oppressive and transitory.

Thus you should be candid on our disagreements. While sticking to our point of view you should indicate your comprehension of theirs. They would challenge any artificial submerging of differences. They would be unimpressed with vague protestations of "good will" and "friendship." And they would show contempt for any abject posture such as James Reston assumed in his interview with Chou last summer, even while taking advantage of any openings this offers to reinforce their point of view.

What they need to be clear about is whether you know your own objectives, understand theirs, and are serious about both.

Chou En-lai

Chou is the premier exhibit of these Chinese qualities. As I have already told you, he ranks with De Gaulle as the most impressive statesman I have ever met. Whereas De Gaulle was unparalleled in his grandiose, beautifully structured, monologues, with Chou one can have a dialogue. I think you will enjoy the give-and-take with Chou on several planes, on all of which he is equally at home -- historical discussion, philosophic dissertation, tactical jousting, hard bargaining, light repartee.

You can be sure that he has done his homework, not only on the issues but also on America and you personally. He has a good command of American politics and society, although his picture must be distorted.

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He keeps up on events -- thus his close reading of your July 6, 1971 remarks in Kansas City before I had heard of them. And he obviously has been studying you psychologically -- he knows you like the movie Patton (he surmised that like the General, you like to act unconventionally), and he has read at least parts of Six Crises.

A few specific points on Chou's negotiating style are in order. If he states a position in absolute terms, he will stick by it. There is no sense battering at this position in the expectation that he will edge off it. He is not to be pressed if he is not ready to be pressed.

If, however, he is at all evasive or ambiguous, this suggests room for exploration. In this case it is better to go at the issue circuitously rather than frontally. Either later in a meeting, or on an informal occasion, you could pick up the subject again and suggest another approach. He might then absorb this and come back subsequently with a new statements incorporating elements of what you said but presenting it as the Chinese view.

For example, in October, Chou in an early session was emphasizing U.S. withdrawal from Taiwan. When we later got to Japan, one of my basic themes was how our alliance with Tokyo served to restrain the Japanese; they could be much more dangerous if cut loose from their American moorings. At our last meeting Chou indicated, while sticking to the general principle of U.S. withdrawal, that the Chinese wouldn't necessarily want all U.S. forces out of Taiwan before its status was determined because this might allow the Japanese to move into the island.

The indirect approach, the use of analogy, is typical of the Chinese in general and Chou in particular. Almost everything he says, no matter how far it seems to stray from the subject at hand, is making a relevant point. This technique can be subtle -- when he is discussing an aspect of the Indochina problem he may really be making a point about the Soviet Union. It can be quite obvious -- Chou applied the principle of the American and French Revolutions to the struggles of the Vietnamese communists. And it can be just charming -- Chou's first mention that Mrs. Nixon was welcome in China was to say that you would probably spend a night in Hangchow because once your wife saw the Guest House there she wouldn't want to go on to Shanghai.

This oblique style is not at all inconsistent with candor. Indeed, frankness was one of the dominant elements in our talks with Chou. Because we haven't really talked to these people in over two decades, I decided to be more candid than we have been with any other communist country. To take just one example, I freely admitted that our negotiations with the USSR in Europe could have the objective consequence of releasing Russia's resources from its Western front for use on its Eastern front. Chou acknowledged this but said "it doesn't matter."

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I believe the rather unconventional approach of genuine (as opposed to feigned) frankness would serve you well in your conversations with Chou. If a subject is especially sensitive -- such as our opposing Soviet pressures against them -- it naturally should be reserved for the most restricted sessions.

It goes without saying that Chou can be extremely - and suddenly - tough. Both General Haig and I have been treated to withering blasts, although Chou has never been vituperative or harsh in personal terms. In dealing at your level, he may round a few edges, but I think it prudent to assume that you will get some very hard speeches, spoken with a simple eloquence and perhaps just after some cordial small talk.

You should not, of course, let such statements stand but rather respond firmly, though non-abusively. If you start pulling back before his attacks he will stay on the offensive. If his thrust is philosophic, you should counter with your own viewpoint without attacking his. If he makes a frontal assault on a specific issue, however, you must retort directly.

Chou was an actor briefly in his youth and he probably still is. He usually is quite impassive in meetings, listening intently (both to you because he understands English quite well, and his interpreters, to make sure they translate accurately). Although he will sometimes state agreement with what you say, he will often merely nod, and you cannot be sure whether this gesture means comprehension or accord. He will introduce passion in his ideological treatises but otherwise talks quite matter-of-factly. The only time I have really seen him display anger was when he was talking about Dulles' "dirty trick" in breaking the 1954 Geneva Accords (he has also been piqued ever since then that Dulles refused to shake his hand). Chou actually struck the conference table with his fist as he hissed out his point. I couldn't be sure if he was acting, or genuinely agitated, as he talked. I suspect the latter.

Chairman Mao

We have to rely on third party impressions and biographic sketches, of course, to form an impression of Mao. Couve de Murville (who saw him

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last year) and John Service (who saw him in his prime in his Yenan days over thirty years ago) both consider Mao even more impressive than Chou. If true, this is sobering indeed. There are some indications that due to his health and age, Mao is now uneven in his performances. Thus he may have "good days" when his full mental powers come into play, and "bad days" when the years show.

In comparing Mao and Chou, it is probably more relevant to talk about their different styles, which are treated at some length in the biographic material I have sent you separately. Chou will talk on philosophic and historic planes, but his main thrust will be on the concrete substantive issues. He is the tactician, the administrator, the negotiator, the master of details and thrust and parry.

Mao is the philosopher, the poet, the grand strategist, the inspirer, the romantic. He sets the direction and the framework and leaves the implementation to his trusted lieutenant. Thus he can be counted on to speak in broad, philosophic, historic terms and leave the negotiations to Chou. He will want to talk about the long view, the basic tides running in the world, where China and the US are heading, with each other and with others.

Relationship between Mao and Chou

In both July and October Chou made clear that Mao was the boss, although he left day-to-day administration and tactics to his Prime Minister. Chou - both in meetings and social conversations - invoked the Chairman's authority and prescience with what seemed total sincerity.

For example, at a July luncheon when he was discussing the excesses of the Cultural Revolution, Chou said he was hesitant to discuss mistakes but that the Chairman, with his greater inner strength, was free in admitting past errors. When we were dealing with a draft of the July 15 announcement, Chou made clear on the last morning that Chinese movement on the wording (e.g. to put the date as any time before May 1972) was due to the Chairman's personal intervention and desire to make things easier for us.

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In October, we gave Chou our first draft of a possible joint communique, and he indicated the next evening that they were prepared to discuss it, though of course they would have some changes to make; the Foreign Minister would start a drafting process with us the next morning. Instead, Chou showed up the following morning, made clear he had talked to the Chairman, and delivered a blistering attack on the approach of our draft communique, which was the conventional one of emphasizing agreement and papering over differences. His sharp speech was certainly directed by Mao. (It is conceivable that he was only play acting and that his pretended recourse to Mao was for theatrical effect; but I seriously doubt this.) Its themes were that peace is not an end in itself so long as there is oppression; and that our two countries have fundamental differences which should be clearly stated rather than dishonestly pretending there were accords where none existed.

As a result of this session, we shifted to a different type of communique which, as I have told you, is much more honest as well as reassuring to our friends who might see secret deals behind vague compromise formulas. In this case, Mao was not only authoritative; he was also wise.

The most recent evidence of Mao's frank, principled approach comes from Bhutto's conversations in Peking last week. In discussing Chinese assistance in the India-Pakistan war, Chou apparently stated that there had been no prior understanding on the nature of help to Pakistan or where it would be required. According to Bhutto, Mao was much bolder: Despite what others might say, "we let you down." At the same time, Mao pointed out that the Pakistani military leaders had committed some blunders.

Chou made clear to me that the Chairman wants him present at all meetings with you. They will make a truly imposing and formidable pair.

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