

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

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MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

PARTICIPANTS:

The President  
William P. Rogers, Secretary of State  
Dr. Henry A. Kissinger, Assistant to the  
President for National Security Affairs  
Ronald L. Ziegler, Press Secretary to  
the President  
Marshall Green, Assistant Secretary of  
State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs  
John A. Scali, Special Consultant to the  
President  
Alfred le S. Jenkins, Director of Office of  
Asian Communist Affairs, State Department  
John H. Holdridge, Senior Staff Member, NSC  
Winston Lord, Senior Staff Member, NSC  
Charles W. Freeman, Jr., State Department  
Interpreter

Prime Minister Chou En-lai  
Yeh Chien-ying, Vice Chairman of the  
Military Commission  
Li Hsien-nien, Vice Premier of the State  
Council  
Chi-Peng-fei, Minister of Foreign Affairs  
Ch'iao Kuan-hua, Vice Minister of Foreign  
Affairs  
Hsiung Hsiang-hui, Secretary to the Prime  
Minister  
Chang Wen-chin, Director of Western Europe,  
North American, and Australian Affairs,  
Ministry of Foreign Affairs  
Han Hsu, Acting Chief of Protocol  
Wang Hai-jung, Deputy Director of Protocol  
Chi Chao-chu, Interpreter  
Tang Wen-Sheng, Interpreter  
Peng Hua, Shen Jo-yun - Leading Members  
of Departments Concerned

DATE AND TIME:

Saturday, February 26, 1972 - 9:20 am-10:05 am

PLACE:

Peking Airport, Peking

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DECLASSIFIED

Prime Minister Chou: Would Mr. President like to begin?

President Nixon: Mr. Prime Minister, we have had very extensive talks, perhaps the most extensive talks that have been conducted, at least since I have been in office, between two heads of government. The Secretary of State and Foreign Minister have had talks at the same time. As a result we have covered our bilateral relations and have had an opportunity also to discuss in a less formal way the problems of mutual interest to the world.

Prime Minister Chou: Yes.

President Nixon: This was necessary because we had to find some common ground. I think what is important is that as we conclude our talks, as we issue our statement at the end it will reflect honestly what the talks were, rather than the usual kind of communique in which you have diplomatic double-talk to cover up what may be serious differences of opinion. Honesty and goodwill and direct talk has characterized our relationship up to this point. On this basis we will have a solid foundation to build for the future. And I think the Prime Minister perhaps has some views on this point you may want to express.

Prime Minister Chou: Thank you very much. Indeed, as Mr. President has just now said, our meetings and discussions in the past five days have truly been going along the direction that you have just now pointed out. We have both put forward our differences of principles in various fields and, but also in this process we have also been able to find common ground. And I also agree with Mr. President when you said just now we should both declare to the world, and first of all to the people of our two countries, our differences while at the same time we should also declare to them our common ground so as to reflect the real situation of our talks, and in this way we will be able to break through some diplomatic conventions. And, Mr. President, both you and Chairman Mao have this characteristic, that is to do away with superfluous coverings and also to do away with all the diplomatic language and various other coverings.

President Nixon: And in our talks we came to the point very quickly.

Prime Minister Chou: And this was also showing a new face to the world. Why should we cover up our differences in front of them with diplomatic language? In this way we can at the same time show to the people of our two countries the true situation of our talks and also show to the world a new style of work. Perhaps at the first -- at the beginning -- they may not be able to accept this new style, but I believe through a gradual process they will finally come to say that this is a good way of doing things. Just as Mr. President mentioned in the first meeting on the first day that we had that we would be able to do more than we will say.

President Nixon: Right.

Prime Minister Chou: I believe that will be better. On the contrary, it would not be good and it would be disappointing to the peoples of the world and our two countries to feed them illusions. And if we present them, on the contrary, with the true situation of our talks, and do not engage in something behind their backs that we cover up, that will be a new style of frank, honest and serious discussions.

President Nixon: I think it can also be said that we do have differences, and you can't build a bridge covering 16,000 miles over 22 years in one week. But on our part, and I think the Secretary of State will agree, on our side there is more common ground as a result of these frank discussions than we anticipated and hoped. We want to emphasize not just the negative but the positive. The world wants to hear that these two great countries who have had this gulf between them do find that there is common ground between us.

Prime Minister Chou: That will be a very good point -- that you can't build a bridge over 16,000 miles over 22 years in one week.

President Nixon: I am a fast learner. After hearing Chairman Mao and also the Prime Minister has the ability as a poet. . .

Prime Minister Chou: That's your talent -- your original talent. And how are we going to begin? How can we start? This is the first step in the long march over hundreds of thousands of miles, so once we have begun the first step the next one will come easily.

President Nixon: But not 10,000 years.

Prime Minister Chou: That will be too long. As you mentioned at that point, 10,000 years is too long. "Seize the day, seize the hour," as you quoted in your speech and your toast.

So we shall also listen with pleasure to anything supplementary Mr. Secretary of State and our Foreign Minister would like to say in this regard. Would you agree?

Secretary Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Prime Minister and Mr. President, I am sure the Foreign Minister agrees with me when I say our discussions were conducted in the same spirit as the discussions the President and Prime Minister were conducted. They were frank, but never at any time unfriendly, and we agreed that in order to build the bridge we were speaking about, or to make the long march we were talking about, it was necessary to have communications and contacts. And for our side I pointed out we were prepared to engage in activities involving communications and frequent contacts in a way that best suited your government.

Prime Minister Chou: Both sides.

Secretary Rogers: Also, it was clear from these discussions that the talks and communications helped clear up misunderstandings. For example, the Foreign Minister was under the impression that our visas required fingerprints of Chinese who visited the U.S., and he said that was unacceptable from his standpoint. I said I didn't think that was the case, but to make certain we went out into the adjacent room, picked up the phone, called Washington and in ten minutes notified the Foreign Minister that fingerprints were not required on visas.

President Nixon: I think the practice, Mr. Prime Minister, was stopped when Secretary Rogers was Attorney General under Eisenhower.

Secretary Rogers: To make certain we made the phone call.

Prime Minister Chou: That's a very serious and earnest attitude.

Secretary Rogers: But it does indicate how misunderstandings can be cleared up when we have fast communications and contacts. I just want to close by thanking the Foreign Minister and his associates for the very generous hospitality at every step of the way, and in every way possible, that has made our trip here a most pleasant and enjoyable one.

Prime Minister Chou: That's what we should do. But I would believe that there are some places in which we have not done enough. I have found, for instance, a shortcoming that your press pointed out to us. For instance, for your visit to the Great Wall we did some preparation which we believe was necessary, and it was earnestly, honest. But it was quite unnecessary to put up a show in the Ming Tombs, because it was quite cold that day. Some people got some young children there to prettify the Tombs, and it was putting up a false appearance. Your press correspondents have pointed this out to us, and we admit that this was wrong. We do not want to cover up the mistake on this, of course, and we have criticized those who have done this.

I did not go myself to the Ming Tombs, and I admit that I did not know about it previously that they would do that. I came to know that only through your press last night, and when I investigated the matter I found out that that had truly been the case, and I must thank that correspondent. I may have a chance to do that when we arrive in Hangchow and Shanghai. This is Chairman Mao's spirit -- that is, we should not cover up our errors and you will understand it is not easy indeed to implement a policy. Although that is a very simple thing, it is bad. And therefore we would like to express this before Mr. President and Mr. Secretary of State and Dr. Kissinger. And to our guests we believe we should admit what we have done wrongly, but, of course, we cannot admit anything we have not done wrongly. Only by doing this can we improve our work. And only in this way will it be made possible to decrease our bureaucracy. It is not easy, indeed, to do away with bureaucracy even when you have a large state apparatus and so many requirements in that apparatus.

I have been saying too much. Let our Foreign Minister say something.

Foreign Minister: As for the recent days of talks between our side and the Secretary of State's side, I am in full agreement with the opinion expressed

just now by Mr. Secretary of State. The general atmosphere of our talks has been characterized by friendliness. Both of our sides have been adopting the attitude of looking forward in a positive spirit to seek common ground, to improve the relations between our two countries and in this manner I believe that both sides have been working together. And in order to seek common ground we have at certain points reviewed history and touched upon differences in opinions and differences of principles that we have had in the past. However, in order to make a good start in the beginning of the normalization of relations between our two countries and to move forward in this field, we have both discussed some concrete issues and also some general principles. And with regard to how we can move forward in specific areas, we have discussed questions of people-to-people visits and exchanges in the sports and scientific areas, and also exchange of medical personnel.

Prime Minister Chou: And cultural exchanges, also.

President Nixon: And teachers.

Foreign Minister: And in these fields we have agreed with each other. We have also considered that the matter of trade between our two countries would also be helpful to the promotion of the normalization of relations between our two countries. And this would also have political significance and therefore we have reached an agreement -- a meeting of the minds -- with regard to the initial beginning of trade.

But also we have reached the common view that before the relations between our two countries have been normalized we believe that it would be better for these above matters to be conducted through people-to-people channels, with the assistance of our respective governments, and they should also facilitate this. We have also reached the common view that these matters should be developed gradually and progressively. At the beginning our quantity may not be very large, but that will be developed very progressively.

Chou: 10,000 years is too long. Yet to finish the long march in one year probably will not be enough time, so that the time perhaps will have to be longer than that. But we must start -- we must first seize the day and seize the hour, and in fact the President agreed with Chairman Mao on that. So we will have to ask Mr. Secretary of State and Mr. Foreign Minister to share the major part in seeing that it is done.

Rogers: I would like to remind the Foreign Minister that under our system President Nixon only has five years.

Chou: Five years is quite enough to do that.

President: Maybe only eight months.

Chou: But you see that your Secretary of State still supports you so why be so pessimistic?

Foreign Minister: And I also would like to express my appreciation and thanks to the Secretary of State in our talks.

President: I would like to add one point that is very important in terms of our future relations. The Prime Minister has been very forthright in talking about a press story that he saw with regard to our visit to the Ming Tombs. I would only say that I would not reprimand whoever set that up because I liked the little girls. I enjoyed seeing them. But the incident poses a problem that could poison our relations in the future that I think we must avoid. I think that the Secretary of State and Dr. Kissinger and all our party could agree that in the U.S. this new relationship with the People's Republic of China is the big story of the century. We have 1,000 newspaper columnists who consider themselves experts. We have 1,000 politicians, Congressmen and Senators who also will want to comment on this. And they have a right under our system to make statements. They do not consult with us before they make these statements. For example, the story that came out yesterday was that the President had made a decision to recognize Bangladesh at a certain time. We are considering it, but I have not made a decision. The columnist made it up because it was what he wanted.

Now there will be stories written by columnists. There will be statements made by politicians that many people abroad will consider to be authoritative and representing the policy of our government. And it seems to me that at this early stage of our relationship we must develop between ourselves at the highest level what I would call mutual trust. Ayub Khan once told me that trust is like a thin thread -- once it breaks it is very hard to put it together again. And I think it is

important for us all to recognize that when statements are made, as they will be made, about this great historic event in the future, the Prime Minister and his government should realize that until the President speaks or the Secretary of State speaks, or someone authorized by the President to speak speaks, it is not the policy of our government. And we cannot control what others say, but we will be absolutely scrupulous and trustworthy and honest in the discussions that we have and the communications that we have. I would like the Secretary of State to say whether he agrees.

Rogers: I think what the President said is of tremendous importance. I mentioned to the Foreign Minister the other day that I would appeal to him when a misunderstanding appears to be developing if he would get in touch with me.

Chou: Directly?

Rogers: Yes.

President: And then we will clear it up.

Rogers: I mentioned to the Foreign Minister that I have an arrangement with any Foreign Minister that they just pick up the phone. If we have a problem with Home of the United Kingdom or Schuman of France they call me. If we have a way to communicate together we will be very happy to clear it up. I think if we stay in touch we will be able to clear it up.

President: I would like to say to the Prime Minister and to his colleagues that never in my term, and I am sure the Secretary of State and Dr. Kissinger will agree, have we dealt with a government in which that government has been more meticulously and absolutely trustworthy in our communications. There have been no leaks and it is on that basis that we should try to develop for the future.

I noticed, for example, that we were criticized by one of the TV correspondents because we on our side have not informed the press about what we were talking about to each other. We have done that because that is

the understanding we have had with the Prime Minister, and we have tried to keep that understanding. And that is the role that I want all of our people to understand and that the Secretary of State and I will convey when we get back. Our interest with regard to this great step forward in our dealings with the People's Republic should never be the headline that we make today but the history we make for tomorrow.

Chou: Right. I agree with this idea, that is, that in order to make communications more accurate, the relations between our two governments should be done directly and the communications should be done directly; that is, between Mr. President, Mr. Secretary of State or anyone who is authorized by the President to talk directly with our government, only to make things more accurate. As for the general public opinion we should accept what is correct because there are always those correct in public opinion, but we should not believe that which is wrong. And in that way we can avoid misunderstandings.

And we would also like them to know that the Chinese can also stand up to criticism, and if we are in the wrong we will change that, and if we are mistaken we will correct our mistakes; and there is always good from that.

We still have two days in which we can finalize our communique, and I hope that our task in this field will be fulfilled. Do you agree with that Mr. President?

President: Yes. And I think that will answer the understandable questions that the press raise as to what we have been talking about. I can only say now that we have not been talking about the weather.

Rogers: Mr. Prime Minister, if I could just add one other word. We have had people in our party who have had experience in China before, and they have been impressed with the progress that you have made in conditions for your people. We wish you well in that program and hope that you have great success in that program for your people.

Chou: I thank Mr. Secretary of State for your good wishes, but we have done not enough and we still have quite more efforts to make.

In view of this final plenary session meeting we are holding in Peking, I would like to suggest, Mr. President, that if you would like Mr. Ziegler to say something to the press about this meeting, you could just say that we have held this meeting, and we can also say this to our own news agency. Would you agree to that?

President: Yes.