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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

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PA/HO, Department of State  
E.O. 12958, as amended  
Date: 6-30-05

*Memorandum of Conversation*

DATE: February 26, 1972

SUBJECT: Plenary Session

PARTICIPANTS: PRC

Prime Minister Chou En-lai  
Foreign Minister Chi Peng-fei  
Vice Foreign Minister Ch'iao Kuan-hua  
Hsiung Hsiang-hui, Secretary to the  
Prime Minister, Foreign Affairs  
Chang Wen-chin, Director European, American  
and Australasian Affairs  
Ch'ien Ta-yung, Deputy Director European,  
American and Australasian Affairs  
Interpreters: Chi Ch'ao Chu,  
T'ang Wen Sheng,  
Shen Jo-yun  
Han Hsu, Director, Protocol  
Wang Hai-jung, Deputy Director, Protocol

US

President Richard Nixon  
Secretary of State William P. Rogers  
Dr. Henry A. Kissinger, Assistant for  
National Security Affairs  
Mr. Robert Haldeman, Assistant to the President  
Mr. Dwight Chapin, Special Assistant to the President  
Mr. Ronald Ziegler, Press Secretary  
Mr. John Scali, Special Consultant to the President  
Mr. Alfred Jenkins, Director for Asian Communist Affairs  
Mr. John H. Holdridge, National Security Council Staff  
Mr. Winston Lord, Office of the Assistant for  
National Security Affairs  
Mr. Charles Freeman, Interpreter

PLACE: Peking Airport, VIP Lounge, Prior to take-off

COPIES TO: S J EA WH - Dr. Kissinger  
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*(Drafting Office and Officer)*

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After brief amenities Prime Minister Chou asked whether the President had anything he wished to say at this point.

The President observed that long talks have been held bilaterally both at the summit and between the Secretary of State and the Foreign Minister concerning problems of interest to the whole world. This has been necessary in order for us to find common ground. The important thing is that we reflect honestly the substance of these talks, and that we avoid diplomatic doubletalk. We have been honest and candid. If we can continue on that basis we have a solid foundation on which to build for the future. The President asked whether the Prime Minister had anything further to add.

The Prime Minister said that the discussions at both levels had indeed been proceeding as the President indicated. Both sides have set forth differences in principles, but we have also been able to find common ground. We have also agreed that we will declare to the peoples of both our sides, and to the world, both our differences and our common ground. In this way we will break through some of the usual diplomatic conventions. President Nixon and Chairman Mao have a characteristic in common: they do away with the superfluous.

The President said that in the discussions we had come to the point very quickly.

The Prime Minister agreed, saying, why should we cover up our differences? If we show to the peoples of our two countries the truth, and show it to the world, we shall have a new style of work. At first, people may not be able to accept this, but it will come to be viewed as a good way of dealing. It would not be good to feed illusions to the world or to our two peoples.

The President said that we do have differences, and we cannot build a bridge spanning 16,000 miles and 23 years in one week. Nevertheless, we have found more common ground than we anticipated. The world wants to find that these two great nations do have common ground.

The Prime Minister said that the President's statement, "We cannot build a bridge spanning 16,000 miles and 23 years in one week" would make a good poem. He added that we have at least taken the first step in a long march of 10,000 miles.

The President observed, however, that we must not take 10,000 years for that march. The Prime Minister agreed that would be too long.

The President then asked whether the Secretary wished to make any observations. The Secretary said he was sure the Foreign Minister would agree that their talks had been conducted in the same spirit as those at the summit: they were frank, but never unfriendly. In these talks it was agreed that in order to build a bridge or take a long march together we must have contact. He had indicated that we were prepared to carry on contacts in a manner which the Chinese found most suitable under existing circumstances.

The Prime Minister interjected, "Suitable to both sides."

The Secretary said that the talks had also helped clear up a number of misunderstandings, for instance concerning the matter of a requirement for fingerprinting of some visitors to the United States. The Chinese had indicated that this was an unacceptable procedure, for historical reasons. (Feudal landlords had required fingerprinting of tenants.) In less than ten minutes a phone call to Washington had confirmed our understanding that fingerprinting was no longer required. The President said he believed that this practice had been stopped during the time when Secretary Rogers was serving as Attorney General. The Prime Minister said that was to his credit. The Secretary said that the phone call had demonstrated how quickly misunderstandings could be cleared up when there was a means of fast and frequent communication. The Secretary concluded with an expression of appreciation to our Chinese hosts, saying that in every possible way this had been a most pleasant and unforgettable visit.

The Prime Minister said that in some ways they had not done enough. There were shortcomings. During the visit to the Great Wall, and the Ming Tombs, for instance, there was a serious problem. It was quite unnecessary to put on a false show of children dancing along the route of the President at the Ming Tombs. The American press had pointed this out. We have admonished our people who did this. We had not known previously of this. In the spirit of Chairman Mao, we are determined not to cover up our errors. This was a simple thing, but it was bad. It is right to admit our wrongs; but we will not, of course, admit to having done wrong when we have done no wrong. Only in this way is it possible for us to control our bureaucracy; but this is not easy. The Prime Minister then laughed and said, "But I have been talking too much." He wondered whether Foreign Minister Chi Peng-fei had anything to say.

The Foreign Minister said that he was in full agreement with the opinions expressed by the Secretary. The general atmosphere had been characterized by friendliness. Both sides adopted an attitude of looking forward in a positive spirit in order to improve our relations. In the attempt to find common ground we had reviewed history and touched on the differences of opinions and of principles which we have had in the past. In order to make a good start in the normalization of our relations both sides discussed some concrete issues as well as general principles. We discussed how to move forward in people-to-people exchanges in the fields of sports, science, medicine, culture and education. We also considered trade relations, which we believed would be helpful in promoting the normalization of relations. We reached a meeting of minds concerning the initial, beginning steps in trade. We also reached the common view that before relations are normalized it would be better for the above matters to be conducted on a people-to-people basis, with governmental facilitation. It was also the common view that these matters should be developed gradually and progressively. Ten thousand years are too long, but to take this long march in one year is too short. Still, we must "seize the day, seize the hour." The Secretary and the Foreign Minister would be primarily responsible to see that these programs were carried out.

The President said that he wanted to make a point which was very important for our future relationship. The Prime Minister had been very forthright concerning the press story about the little girls dancing. The President only wanted to say that he hoped no one would be reprimanded for the incident, because he liked it. The incident nevertheless does illustrate how misunderstandings could poison our relations. We must make every effort to prevent this.

The President said that all agree that this is the story of the century. There will be much comment. Newsmen consider that they are experts and have the right to express their opinions. Members of Congress, too, have the right to make statements freely, without consulting with us. For instance, there was a story yesterday that the President had made the decision to recognize Bangladesh at a certain time. We are considering this step, but I have not made a decision. There will be stories by columnists and statements by politicians. Many people abroad will consider these to be authoritative.

From the beginning we have developed between ourselves at the highest levels a spirit of mutual trust. Ayub Khan once said to me, "Trust is like a thin thread: once it breaks, it is hard to put it together again." It is important that all of us recognize that when statements are made in the future, the Prime Minister and the Chinese Government should realize that until the President or the Secretary, or some authorized person speaks, it is not the position of our government. We cannot control what others will say, but we will be honest in our statements, as we have been in our discussions here.

The Secretary emphasized that what the President had just said was most important. He would appreciate it if, when there is any misunderstanding, the Foreign Minister would get in touch with him. He said he had many foreign ministers who simply picked up the phone and called him. If we could have a way to communicate quickly, we could straighten things out by keeping in touch.

The President said he would like to state that never in his term of office had we talked with a government which had been more meticulous and trustworthy in our communications. There had been absolutely no leaks. This is very important to our relations, which must progress on this basis. We have been criticized because we on our side have not kept the press informed. We have so acted because this was the understanding which we had with the Prime Minister. The rule which we want our people to understand is that this great step we have made will never be served by the headline we make today, but by the history we make tomorrow.

The Prime Minister said that was quite right. For communication to be more accurate, it must be accomplished directly: with the President, the Secretary, or with anyone whom they authorize to communicate. This is necessary in order for the general public opinion to accept what is correct but not pay attention to that which is wrong. We should also like everyone to know that socialist China can stand up to criticism. If we are wrong, we can correct it.

The Prime Minister observed that there were still two days in which to finalize the communique. He hoped that the remaining talks would continue to be productive.

The President said that soon we would have to answer press questions. He said that up to now he had only "not talked about the weather."

The Secretary said that he thought all had been impressed with the progress made so far. He hoped that progress which had been so successfully started would continue.

Both the President and the Secretary expressed their sincere appreciation for the hospitality which the Chinese had shown them and their party in Peking.

The Prime Minister thanked them, but said that the Chinese had not done enough. They should have made more effort.

The Prime Minister suggested that the President allow Mr. Ziegler to tell the press that this final plenary meeting of the Peking phase of the President's visit had been held.