

Kissinger's Second Visit to China in October 1971

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After Dr. Kissinger—President Nixon's Assistant for National Security Affairs—secretly visited China in early July 1971, the Chinese and American governments simultaneously issued a statement on July 15 announcing President Nixon's intentions to travel to China. This news shocked the whole world. It indicated that the Sino-American relations would change greatly from the previous long-term opponent relations to a new cooperative one. Both governments took the coming summit very seriously. Although Nixon considered his trip to China to be a historic event, the political risk to him was also huge. In order to ensure the success of this diplomatic visit, Nixon decided to send Kissinger to China a second time to discuss the details of dates, agendas of meetings, media and security issues. The two governments negotiated through the Paris channel and issued a joint statement on October 5 that “in order to make basic arrangements for President Nixon's visit,” a delegation led by Kissinger would visit China on October 20, 1971.

The number of people in Kissinger's delegation would be exactly the same as that of President Nixon's planned entourage. Also, the delegation would take the presidential jet, which had never before flown over China's territory. The details that Kissinger was planning to discuss with China included not only crucial political issues but also complicated technical ones. Kissinger divided his delegation into four groups by different information-collecting domains: Kissinger and his assistants Lord and Holdridge would be in charge of the details on China's policies and some technical issues. The president's deputy assistant and the leader of the advance party Dwight Chapin would take charge of all technical issues. The security staff and media technicians would handle issues related only to their work. And the State Department representative Alfred Jenkins, although he was a China expert and had been participating in the Sino-American ambassadorial talks for the past twenty years, was only expected to “feel that he participated” but would not actually be allowed to participate in the

discussions on crucial geopolitical issues, especially the draft of communiqué. Among the delegation, Lord was in charge of doing everything “systematically and accurately.” Then the American guests suggested to their Chinese hosts that arranging different meetings based on the different “information-collecting” domains simultaneously. This was due to the fact that Kissinger and a select few did not want to be disturbed while discussing the more sensitive issues with the Chinese side. Therefore the other members of the delegation would be occupied in their own meetings.

At the time, Premier Zhou Enlai was unable to join in the preparation for Kissinger’s second visit until mid-October because he was busy preparing for the Fourth People’s Congress as well as handling the Lin Biao Affair¹ afterwards. On October 17, based on sufficient consideration of the world situation at the time, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs drafted a plan of reception and suggested guidelines and positions regarding international and Sino-American relations. The Foreign Affairs Ministry decided to receive Kissinger in the same manner as his previous visit, but to publicize it this time. Also, they would arrange the different meetings and schedules to meet the needs of the Americans. The reception plan was revised by Premier Zhou himself and then sent to Chairman Mao Zedong for approval. Chairman Mao responded on October 19 and indicated that he agreed with most of the plans, but that he may have to change some details during the meetings.

A False Alarm

Kissinger called his second trek to China “Polo Two,” and he was immensely confident this time in comparison to his first journey, “Polo One.” In order to test the flight plan for President Nixon, Kissinger not only came to China openly, but also took the presidential plane –Air Force One. The delegation led by Kissinger set out on October 16th and flew along the planned route for President Nixon. Considering that the time difference and the high speed flying would tire the president and his entourage, and eventually affect their health and the visit, Kissinger decided that the plane should make rest stops at Hawaii and Guam, and then fly to Shanghai.

¹ On September 13, 1971, Lin Biao, Mao’s designated successor and then China’s number two leader, fled from Beijing and his plane crashed in Mongolia.

Before landing in China, Kissinger and his party remembered that the Lin Biao Affair had occurred just a month earlier² and began to worry whether the event would bring an “unpleasant political climate” to their visit. Under these circumstances, they felt treated somewhat coldly when they arrived at the Shanghai airport, and found only Zhang Wenjin—whom they last met in Pakistan, waiting to greet them with four other people and two representatives from the Shanghai Foreign Affairs Office on October 20. When they arrived at Beijing airport at noon of the same day, it was just like their last visit, Marshal Ye Jianying led several high-ranking officers to exchange courtesies. However, this time the Deputy Foreign Minister Ji Pengfei was also on hand to greet them. Although it was an open visit, the Chinese hosts did not meet their American guests as warmly as they had expected. It made the Americans feel uneasy.

From the Beijing airport to the Diaoyutai State Guesthouse, the traffic was cut off and the streets were full of police as the American delegation drove through. The Americans also saw several slogans against American imperialism in the streets. After the delegation members entered their hotel rooms, they found that there was a sign in English with the slogan of “People of the World, Unite! Overthrow the American Imperialists and their Running Dogs!” in each room. Kissinger was very displeased and worried that the new and fragile process of the Sino-American reconciliation would be suspended again. He ordered all the signs gathered and handed them to a Chinese protocol officer, telling him that “the dispatches must have been left behind by the delegation who stayed at the hotel before.” The Americans did not react more than this.

Premier Zhou was very angry when what had occurred was reported to him. He asked the head of the Protocol Department for the reasoning behind the signs in the hotel rooms. He was told that it was an old custom of the Xinhua News Agency. Afterwards this incident was reported to Chairman Mao. Mao said: “Tell the Americans, these are nothing but empty words.” Subsequently, Premier Zhou would mention the “empty words” and indicated that “we do not always have ‘empty words’, we keep our promises.” The following day, Deputy Foreign Minister Ji Pengfei explained about the slogans to Kissinger when he accompanied the latter to the Great Hall of the People. Ji said that every country had its own ways of communicating with their people, “Americans use newspapers and

² Wei Shiyang’s statement about the Americans’ knowledge of the Lin Biao Affairs is uncorroborated.

television, and we use slogans on the walls.” Then he pointed out the slogans on the wall and explained that the slogans against American imperialism, which the Americans saw the other day, had already been changed to slogans of welcoming the Asian-African Table Tennis Championship. Afterwards, Premier Zhou also emphasized that during the meetings that Americans should pay attention to how China acted and not spoke, because some of the talks might be “empty words.”

Tension Relaxed

After the incident, Premier Zhou met with the American delegation at the Great Hall of the People on the afternoon of October 20th. After shaking hands and taking commemorative pictures with his guests, Premier Zhou sat down and started the discussion. Premier Zhou welcomed and greeted Kissinger and his entourage naturally but gracefully. With his great memory, Zhou remembered every member’s educational background and experience as if they were old friends, and highly praised the visit that promoted friendship between the two countries. Speaking to Jenkins from the State Department, Zhou said that he had lived in China 22 years ago and was very familiar with China; Jenkins was an old friend of China. He was very moved by the premier’s kind words.

Afterwards, the two sides held their first talks and finalized the agendas and the style of the meetings smoothly. Kissinger was very satisfied.

After the initial meeting, Premier Zhou gave a banquet and improvised a speech to greet his guests. He said: “Sino-American relations will open a new chapter after contact between the two countries had been suspended for 22 years. We owe all our success to Chairman Mao Zedong and President Nixon. Of course, we need someone to be our guide and that guide will be Dr. Kissinger.” Afterwards, Zhou linked his words to a past speech by Kissinger in which he had said that China was a “mysterious land” during his last visit, and humorously praised Kissinger for his courage in making a visit to the “mysterious land.” Zhou said: “Visiting China is a brave thing. This is Dr. Kissinger’s second visit to this country, China should not be thought of as ‘mysterious’ any longer. Dr. Kissinger came as an old friend, and he has brought us many new friends, too.” The Americans applauded when they heard these nice and appropriate words. Then Premier Zhou mentioned the meaning of the “philosophy” that Kissinger mentioned in his last visit, and

said that although the social systems and the worldviews—Kissinger’s so-called “philosophy”—of the two countries were totally different, it would not hinder their people from seeking things in common. Zhou also added that although China and the United States had been holding talks for the past sixteen years, they had not found anything in common yet. “Now President Nixon himself will come talk with us in Beijing, and Dr. Kissinger is his advance party. We wish this summit to achieve success.” Zhou further indicated that both the Chinese and the American peoples are great peoples, “although we are separated by the Pacific Ocean, friendship links our peoples together. I wish we could greet this new era with a new spirit.” At last, Zhou toasted to the friendship of Chinese and American peoples and the health of his guests. Before the banquet ended, the Premier walked around and socialized, shook hands and clinked glasses with every member of the delegation including secretaries, security staff and the flight crew. The Americans were greatly moved by Premier Zhou’s warm and sincere words as well as his modest and unassuming manner. At the time, Kissinger and his party did not feel coldly treated any more, and the warm and friendly mood lasted until the end of their visit.

Group Meetings

The group meetings started on October 21, 1971. Premier Zhou and Dr. Kissinger were engaged in a discussion of the essential issues. Since Kissinger had suggested not allowing Jenkins to participate this discussion, Zhou’s assistant Xiong Xianghui discussed general issues with him. Yu Sang was in charge of discussing security, media and other technical issues with the Americans; experts from both sides participated, too.

Primer Zhou and Kissinger held ten meetings in total, five meetings to discuss situations and policies and five meetings to discuss the summit communiqué. In order to help both sides relax and avoid situations such as Kissinger reading from scripts while he talked with Zhou as had occurred during his last visit, Premier Zhou said, “Please talk first as last time, I am ready to listen to piles of things you might write.” Kissinger said that he felt very ashamed for what he had done last time. Zhou stopped him and said, “Do not feel like that, it was your first time here, and you needed to feel well prepared.” Kissinger said, “You do not have any scripts but still speak better than I.” Zhou responded, “Not at all, you flatter me.” Regarding Nixon’s visit, Kissinger said, “When we met in July you

indicated that announcement of President Nixon's visit would shock the whole world. It did shock the whole world. Our two countries started a new trend in the world, and it provided new choices for many countries when they implement their foreign policies. We promoted a reform in world affairs. President Nixon showed great courage in taking this step."

Kissinger suggested that February 21 or March 16, 1972 for President Nixon's visit.

Premier Zhou chose February 21. In the following days, the two sides exchanged views on Taiwan, Indochina, Korea, Japan and the South Asian subcontinent issues. Kissinger reaffirmed the opinions that he had given in the last visit, and made them profoundly this time. On every issue, Premier Zhou always talked from its historical background to present situation, so that he explained China's attitude and position clearly and comprehensively.

Xiong Xianghui and Jenkins's meeting was also very successful. Although Jenkins was a China expert in the State Department and the Sino-American ambassadorial talks, his attitude and views to China was partially influenced by tradition. However, at the time he said: "I have been participating the Sino-American talks since they began in 1955. During this period of time, relations between China and the United States were described as a ship sailing in the dark... Fortunately, we are not in the dark any more, now we are sailing during the day."

Other meetings were also going smoothly. Media (including news interviews, reports and TV broadcast) issues had reached an agreement after serious discussions. Only the U.S. chief of the security made a spectacle of himself when he asked his opposite to give him lists of troublemakers in areas that President Nixon might visit. He also objected to the request that Nixon take cars and planes provided by the host country during his stay in China. His opposite criticized the security chief's ignorant and arrogant manner. Afterwards, the Americans accepted China's arrangements completely after being persuaded by Kissinger.

Drafting the Communiqué

Due to the fact that Kissinger never mentioned drafting the communiqué of Nixon's visit, China did not prepare anything in their agenda. However, Kissinger had asked about the communiqué since the first meeting in China. Afterwards he mentioned the communiqué in every meeting since, and wished to reach a general understanding

before he left because he said that some people in the world hoped for the failure of Nixon's visit. Premier Zhou told the Americans as the first he had heard of this was during the initial meeting, China did not have enough time to prepare, and wished to discuss the communiqué issue after the general and limited meetings. Zhou also indicated that if the Americans had prepared the communiqué already, they could show their draft first. Kissinger agreed.

The Americans thus provided the draft for the communiqué of President Nixon's visit in the afternoon meeting of October 22. The draft was approximately 3,000 words long and included the situation regarding the President's visit, general principles on the Sino-American relations, views on the international situation, and the Taiwan issue. It was written in the style from the period of the Sino-American [ambassadorial] talks. The draft emphasized unimportant points in common, but tried to conceal the divergences. Especially on the Taiwan issue, instead of merely not including the issue of American army's withdrawal from Taiwan, the Americans tried to force China into agreeing that they would use only peaceful methods to solve the Taiwan issue.

Premier Zhou was very dissatisfied with the American draft and said that China could not accept it. Zhou then indicated to Zhang Wenjin to draft a new one and told him to use the experience of negotiating with the Guomindang government—that is to point out the divergences clearly, absorb the beneficial parts from the other side at the time and emphasize points in common—for reference. After finished the draft, Zhang Wenjin handed it to Chairman Mao.

Chairman Mao then met Premier Zhou, Ji Pengfei, Xiong Xianghui and Zhang Wenjin at the night of October 23, and said that first of all he disagreed with preparing the communiqué. Premier Zhou explained that it was a request from the American side and might be difficult to reject. Then the chairman said: "I only read it (the draft by Zhang Wenjin) once, but I think it has no voice. I am not satisfied with it." Premier Zhou then explained: "We have not discussed it yet. We wanted to send it to you first and revise it as you advised." The Chairman said, "I have mentioned on the international situation several times that the world is in chaos. It is good for us to insist on what we need clearly. They are talking about peace, security and not seeking hegemony, aren't they? We have to emphasize revolution, liberating the oppressed nations and peoples in

the world, and [that] major powers should not treat minor powers unequally. It is not appropriate if we do not emphasize these facts, and we will be criticized as “empty talks.”

It is difficult to let Nixon agree to liberate the oppressed nations, too. What he said, such as supporting old friends, non-interference in other countries’ internal affairs, not to seek hegemony, is all empty talk. Even he could not say that major powers should treat minor powers unequally. They act differently from what they say and have the freedom to do things as they wish because they are a free country, a free world. They said that they did not seek hegemony, if they did not seek hegemony, how could America expand from 13 states to 50 states? And then they tried to expand to the whole world... now even Nixon admits that they are in trouble. The Americans were talking about two-and-a-half wars before, then one-and-a-half wars, but it is even impossible to talk about one-and-a-half wars nowadays... Finally, tell them it is better to say what everyone wants to say.”

After the meeting, Premier Zhou indicated that Xiong Xianghui would revise the draft per the chairman’s advice, and the chairman agreed.

The planned meeting between Deputy Foreign Minister Ji Pengfei and Kissinger on the communiqué issue on the next day was changed to a meeting between Premier Zhou and Kissinger, because the Chinese side had not finished preparing the draft. Following what Chairman Mao indicated, Premier Zhou started the talks by criticizing the American draft communiqué, and said that it was difficult for China to agree with it in principle. Kissinger took it seriously and asked, “What kind of principles are you talking about?” Zhou answered: “We could not agree with you on the views and perspectives on the international situation. We also have different, sometimes very different opinions on the Taiwan, Vietnam, Indochina, Korea, Japan and the South Asian subcontinent issues.” Then the premier mentioned that the world was in chaos to Kissinger once again. Talking about the local conflicts and turbulent situation in Taiwan, Vietnam, India and Pakistan, and the Middle East at the time, Zhou said that wars had not ended yet and the world was not peaceful and hence, the objective world was in fact in chaos. Zhou emphasized that the main trend then was revolution—and the important question was, whether war would provoke revolution or revolution would stop the war. “We would not agree with you if we do not make the appraisal of the situation and explain the

divergences between our two countries clearly.” The American side made excuses afterwards, and then Kissinger said that the purpose of their visit was not only to remember the different “philosophical” views between the two countries, but also to make a progressive plan for the future. Then Premier Zhou mentioned his thinking on drafting the communiqué, and said that the Chinese side would provide its own draft after lunch.

The draft of the communiqué, revised by Xiong Xianghui, followed Chairman Mao and Premier Zhou’s indication. The draft was in a totally new style and broke old conventions. The introduction of the draft summarized President Nixon’s visit to China. The two sides were asked to set forth their views and positions on the international situation and crucial issues in the first part of the draft. The Chinese side described their views on the existing situation and added revolutionary language such as, “Where there is oppression, there is resistance.” “Countries should be independent, nations should be liberated, people should make revolution, and all this has become an irresistible historical trend. All countries irrespective of their statuses as major powers or minor powers, should be treated equally. China is unwilling to be a superpower and will also object to any hegemonism and power politics, and support the oppressed peoples and nations’ struggle for freedom and liberation.” Then the Chinese side left the part of the U.S. blank and let the Americans write by themselves. Part Two absorbed what the two sides had in common and made the principles and joint statement of establishing diplomatic relations clear. Part Three was for both sides to set forth their positions and assertions on the Taiwan issue. There were detailed suggestions in Part Four for improving Sino-American relations.

In the afternoon of October 24, Chairman Mao said to Premier Zhou that the revised draft was good and had a voice.

During the meeting in the evening, Premier Zhou let Deputy Foreign Minister Ji Pengfei read the whole draft and the Americans recorded it. Kissinger felt that “the expressions are too sharp” and “all the positions were posed in the most uncompromising words,” so that it was difficult for the American side to accept it at first. Premier Zhou explained that a typical communiqué with beautiful diplomatic language to conceal divergences only would prove to be the root of the trouble. Presenting the divergences

could be the beginning of solving problems and a first step towards the future. Then Zhou suggested a break in order to give Kissinger more time to think about the draft. During the break, after discussing with his entourage, Kissinger was suddenly enlightened and found that such an original style might well solve their problems. When they came back to the meeting, Kissinger told Premier Zhou that the American side would accept the draft by Chinese side but only wished the Chinese side not use too sharp expressions. Then the Americans provided their new draft on October 25. Kissinger delayed his time of returning to the U.S. in order to discuss the draft. The two sides almost reached an agreement on the draft of the communiqué except the Taiwan issue on the 26th. They were unable to reach the agreement because the American side insisted on not giving up their old friend Jiang Jieshi, breaking off the diplomatic relations with Taiwan and withdrawal of all American troops from there. Kissinger eventually found an equivocal expression and suggested, “the United States understood that, all Chinese people on both sides of the Taiwan Straits think that there is only one China. Taiwan is a part of China and the United States would not challenge this position.” However, the American side insisted that they should add, “the American government would emphasize that Chinese people should realize their goal through peaceful negotiations,” and they did not mention the exact timeline for withdrawing all American troops from Taiwan. Although the Chinese side was very dissatisfied with it, they had no choice but to wait until President Nixon came.

The discussion on the draft of the communiqué finished in the morning of October 26, and then Kissinger started his return trip to the U.S. at 9 am.

(Translated by Gao Bei)