

Haig's Preparatory Mission for Nixon's Visit to China in January 1972

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In October 1971, after Kissinger's second visit during which the dates of Nixon's visit to China and the draft communiqué were negotiated, the U.S. side transferred a message through the secret channel in Paris that Alexander Haig, Deputy Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs of the United States, would head a delegation to visit China to make logistical arrangements for President Nixon's visit to China. The Chinese side agreed to the visit.

Drawing up a reception plan

To receive Haig's visit, the Chinese side tentatively decided that since the contents of the talks and the activities plan for Nixon's visit had already been affirmed, this time the main task was to appoint special people to negotiate the logistics with the U.S. side. Except for the wording of the sentence regarding the Taiwan issue in the communiqué and the India-Pakistan situation, there was not much to talk about, and it was decided that Acting Foreign Minister Ji Pengfei was to have two talks with Haig. Based on this judgment, Zhang Wenjin and Xiong Xianghui drafted an outline of a talk. First they pointed out that the situation had become even more volatile since Kissinger's second visit to China: the U.S. had expanded its bombing of northern Vietnam, India had invaded eastern Pakistan, the conflict between the U.S. and the Soviet Union on the South Asian sub-continent had escalated, and China had joined the United Nations and further rallied medium and small countries. Secondly, it was estimated that Haig would brief China on such issues as the India-Pakistan situation, American-Vietnamese talks and U.S.-Soviet relations; and he was likely to discuss the unresolved issues in the draft communiqué, especially new wording regarding Taiwan. Thirdly, brief answers to the above-mentioned issues. It was also planned that China would tell the U.S. side that the Chinese Ping-Pong team would return a visit to the U.S. after Nixon's visit to China, and that the U.S. request for a giant panda would be considered.

After the outline was laid out, Wang Hairong delivered some instructions from Chairman Mao after he read the draft communiqué: 1. The situation of the South Asian sub-continent had changed, and this part in the draft communiqué should be revised; 2. last time Kissinger said that the draft was too long, and said that if Nixon flew 12,000 li (6,000 km) to China only to be lectured, it would embarrass him; 3. the U.S. hoped to do business with us, and so we could give them some hint. In accordance with the instructions delivered by Wang Hairong, the original draft communiqué was revised, and sent along to the Premier for review as an attachment to the outline.

On January 2, Premier Zhou told Ji Pengfei to convene a meeting of Xiong Xianghui, Zhang Wenjin and Qiao Guanhua to discuss the outline. By no means should the wording of the part regarding Taiwan in the communiqué be changed, and as to whether the part on the international situation should be changed, and how to make the changes if it were to be revised, they were free to raise their own opinions. After discussions, some comrades suggested major changes. Except for the general situation part, other parts such as the India-Pakistan, Vietnam and Korean issues should all be revised, because they believed that if different opinions of the two sides were highlighted, people would feel that Nixon's visit would not look successful. Other comrades insisted that no major changes were needed, as the draft had been negotiated many times, the U.S. side had agreed to it and so far hadn't raised any objections. They recommended that everything remain the same except some revisions of the India-Pakistan issue. The two plans were both presented in the outline submitted on 3 January. Premier Zhou wrote: "Already discussed with the Chairman" on the outline, and returned it on the same day.

Haig delivers an oral message

On January 3, 1972, accompanied by Zhang Wenjin and other people, Haig's delegation arrived in Beijing from Shanghai. Vice Premier Li Xiannian went to the airport to meet the delegation. In the evening, Ji Pengfei held a banquet for Haig and the delegation, where both sides toasted to the success of the visit. After the banquet, Haig told Ji Pengfei that Kissinger had an important message that he wanted to deliver to a person designated by the Premier. The Premier decided to meet with Haig immediately.

Early on January 4, Premier Zhou met with Haig. Haig said that he would like to

deliver Nixon and Kissinger's message in a frank, soldier's fashion. He didn't expect that Premier Zhou would receive him immediately, and he was both excited and nervous, and thus his sentences were broken. His message contained mainly the points below:

1. The India-Pakistan Issue. He said, "The Soviet government's policy towards the sub-continent is to keep the sub-continent's state of separation and re-separation." However, the Soviet Union now "decided to rapidly and drastically change its original policy. They want to surround the People's Republic of China by bolstering some of your enemies and the enemies' proxies."

2. U.S.-Soviet relations. He said that since the beginning of the India-Pakistan crisis, "the Soviet Union has many times invited Dr. Kissinger to visit Moscow as a personal guest of Brezhnev's. They also suggested that they were willing to reach an agreement on avoiding accidental wars and military confrontations." We declined all these suggestions mainly because of two reasons: first, "we felt obligated to Pakistan," "and we couldn't allow the Soviet Union to separate Pakistan." Second, "we declined the suggestions also because we felt that the viability of the People's Republic of China was in the interest of our country. I'm speaking in the frank language of a soldier," not because we "have suddenly developed an affection of some kind for you," "but because we think the strategy of the Soviet Union was first to nullify the People's Republic of China, and then to attack the United States. Therefore, our decisions are totally based on selfish national interest reasons."

3. The Vietnam Issue. He said, "The U.S. government has recently decided to air-raid the territories of northern Vietnam." The U.S. has made all kinds of concessions, but Vietnam was still attacking the U.S. "The explanation of this act could only be that Hanoi is endeavoring to insult the U.S., and this kind of insult is unacceptable to any big country." He continued, "Our conclusion could only be that the continuation of the war in Southeast Asia would only bring opportunities for Moscow to boost its influence on Hanoi, and then to develop its siege plan of the People's Republic of China."

4. Nixon's visit to China. He said, "Based on all of the above situations, we also believe that this visit by President Nixon will carry a more urgent significance." "Considering the strategic interests of the United States that I just mentioned, we quite positively believe that the viability of the People's Republic of China must be protected."

“We acknowledge that many disagreements exist between China and the U.S. Just as Kissinger said, Churchill was willing to cooperate with Stalin to cope with a bigger threat—Hitler’s Germany. Therefore, we feel that the U.S. and the People’s Republic of China need to make a joint effort at a crucial time like this.” “We should try to cancel out the Soviet Union’s threat to the People’s Republic of China, so as to protect the independence and viability of the People’s Republic of China.”

Haig went on to say that they could provide an estimation of the Soviet Union’s threat to China and various kinds of technology. He also mentioned that pro-Soviet Union, pro-Taiwan bureaucratic forces in the U.S. had joined hands to oppose Nixon’s China visit. So President Nixon and Dr. Kissinger both would work hard to make this trip a success not just in actuality, but also with regard to representation. “It is crucial that there be no public embarrassment to the President as a result of his visit to Beijing. We believe that this visit will boost the President’s image as a world leader, and this will benefit us both.” In the end, he delivered again the message that no one from the State Department should participate in the essential talks.

Hearing this, Premier Zhou said: “What you have just said was not very specific, but I have got the general idea. Of course, I still need to report it to Chairman Mao and discuss it with my colleagues, and I do not plan to give you a formal answer now. But first I’ll give you my initial comments:

1. Our approaching each other, the normalizing bilateral relations and relieving the far eastern situation will not only benefit the U.S., but also the People’s Republic of China, and the people of our countries and of all the countries in the Far East.

2. Regarding the South Asian sub-continent and the Indo-china issue, I don’t think the Soviet Union’s interference comes from a change in its strategic line, but rather because China and the U.S. are approaching each other, and it necessarily will adopt such a counter strategy. Regarding this issue, I have pointed it out when I first met with Dr. Kissinger. We must shoulder the aftermath of approaching each other, and we have made preparations. This is nothing surprising to us. As to the three internal factors you just mentioned, Kissinger also talked about them, and we have realized them.”

The Premier continued: “And the Doctor raised two questions concerning the communiqué:

1. The trade issue. We understand the significance of his raising this issue. From the perspective of American media, it will influence many people, and we have noticed this issue.

2. The paragraphs concerning Taiwan. You have brought Kissinger's suggestions. To us, in those two paragraphs about China's and the U.S.'s stance, the U.S. wording proposed by us has taken into consideration the difficulties the U.S. is encountering from the left and the right." In the end, the Premier said: "But since the Doctor has come up with a new suggestion, you leave it with us and we are willing to study it."

Finally, the Premier suggested that Haig change his itinerary and conduct negotiations in Beijing first. Then he should go to Shanghai and Hangzhou, and not returning to Beijing, he should depart from Shanghai, so that Haig's questions could be discussed.

Group Meetings

On the morning of January 4, Ji Pengfei held a talk with Haig and his delegation. Haig first said that both sides had reached a successful agreement concerning President Nixon's visit to China during the last talk between Premier Zhou and Dr. Kissinger. We now needed to lay down the technical issues and special issues more specifically within the boundaries of what had been agreed upon. He admired the high efficiency on China's side. He emphasized the historic significance of the meeting between Chinese and American leaders, and said that in no way should we allow logistical problems to bother us. The Chinese side agreed. In the afternoon, the two sides were divided into protocol, press, communications, safety and flight logistics groups to hold meetings.

These meetings mainly focused on two issues: first, expanding the promotion for Nixon's activities during his visit to China, especially live TV broadcasting. The Chinese side not only agreed to an increased number of American journalists, from 367 to 374, but also agreed to set up ground satellite stations and rent them to the U.S. side. A contract was signed, in which the rental fee was set as \$607,038, and it was stipulated that only when the Chinese approved could the U.S. side use the satellite equipment. The fee would be charged to an account. It was estimated that a fee of \$500,000 could be collected for the usage, more or less equal to the rental fee. Second, the security issue. Security must be guaranteed, but our sovereignty must not be sacrificed. It was

negotiated that once President Nixon reached Shanghai, he would switch to special Chinese planes and cars and stop using American plane or vehicles. The U.S. side studies the venues of activities, routes and residences in Beijing, Shanghai, and Hangzhou, and expressed satisfaction with China's security measures.

On the morning of January 6, Ji Pengfei held a political talk with Haig. Haig first said: "Last time I spoke to the Premier about our hopes to strengthen some proactive elements in the draft communiqué. The Premier said that in this regard the trade issue would be considered (note: the Premier said that the issue had been noticed)." He also said he "noted the Chinese stance, and admitted that the issue must be realized very slowly."

Then Haig mentioned the sub-continent issue. He said: "Between now and Nixon's visit to China, our policy towards the sub-continent will focus on winning time, so that Pakistan can improve its self-defense capabilities."

Regarding the Southeast Asian situation, he said: "Dr. Kissinger wanted me to reiterate that it is Moscow that is obstructing a resolution to the conflicts there through peaceful negotiations." "We understand that New Delhi is planning to fast upgrade its representative in Hanoi. This is a bad omen, and it further shows that the Soviet Union want to do something to the south of the People's Republic of China." "I hope that before I leave, we can further exchange opinions regarding the recent increase of Soviet influence in Hanoi, and the Soviet strategy to surround directly the People's Republic of China."

On the evening of January 6, Premier Zhou and Marshal Ye Jianying met with the American delegation in three groups. Premier Zhou naturally told the President's press secretary [Ronald] Ziegler: "We have met with your Ping-Pong team in this room. In the past 20 years, we started in April 1971 to meet with our American friends again. Ping-Pong has linked our two countries. We have been invited, but haven't returned a visit. Mr. Ziegler, please convey our message to your Chairman of the Table Tennis Association, the head of the delegation who has been in China, that we will return a visit in the warm spring when flowers bloom." The Premier couched his message in artistic language, hinting that after Nixon's visit in February, Sino-U.S. relations would begin to thaw and the flower of friendship between the peoples of China and the U.S. would

blossom in the spring. Ziegler said: "I certainly will pass the message." Then the Premier asked how the communications issues had been negotiated. Haig praised the Chinese staff for their high degree of professionalism, and said that their requests were very quickly met, and the work usually exceeded the expectations. After the meeting, the U.S. side was very glad and satisfied.

The Premier Replies to the Message

On the morning of January 4, after he heard Haig's message, Premier Zhou gave instructions to Xiong Xianghui to draft a "Reply to the U.S. Message." After he read and revised it himself, the premier forwarded the draft reply to Chairman Mao for approval. On the evening of January 6, Chairman Mao discussed the matter with Premier Zhou. Because he had not read the memorandum of the conversation between Haig and the Premier, he listened to Premier Zhou's report as he gave his own opinions.

When the Premier reached the India-Pakistan Issue, Chairman Mao said, "The bigger a country gets, the less courage it has. It was not proper in the first place to divide India into two [in 1947]. Why divide it into two? Now they are separating eastern Pakistan. This is fine!" When the premier mentioned that Haig said the current U.S. policy was to win time and to improve Pakistan's self-defense capabilities, the Chairman said, "Good then. The India-Pakistan Issue illustrates that the entire world is in chaos."

The Premier then reported that Haig said the Soviet Union was changing its strategy and plotted to surround China using the sub-continent. Chairman said, "Surround China! It would be such a big deal if we asked them to come to our rescue." "Its concerns for us are just like a cat feeling sad for a mouse! Surrounding China on the sub-continent, Indo-china is also a part of the Soviet Union's surrounding of China. [Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei] Gromyko goes to Japan, does that mean Japan is surrounding China, too? This is too serious, worry about us! And then there are Taiwan, the Philippines, South Korea; are they not surrounding us? All of these need its protection, and if China's independence and viability need your protection, then it's really dangerous!"

When the Premier mentioned that Haig said Nixon was seeking to restore his image as a world leader, the Chairman said: "The Americans are strange. He admits that the so-called pro-Soviet, pro-Taiwan and bureaucratic forces all oppose him

domestically. As the President of the United States, Nixon can't even be the leader of the U.S. How can he talk about being a world leader! Surround, surround, we only have two persons here, come surround us!"

Then the Premier showed the draft reply to the oral message to the Chairman. The Chairman said: "Good. I think we can tell him this. After we tell him this, the worst thing that could happen would be that the visit is cancelled. If he hasn't come in twenty-two years, he could wait another 100 years! These Americans, after two nights of good sleep, they have forgotten again. If you don't push him, he's not comfortable... All in all, the worst case would be that the visit is cancelled. In my opinion, in a few years he will come after all."

Finally the Premier asked: "The U.S. side didn't mention anything about the draft joint communiqué except the Taiwan Issue. Shall we leave it as it is?" The Chairman said: "That's fine. If we want to make some change, let's change 'the people want progress' to 'the people want revolution.' Revolution is exactly what they fear. The more they fear it, the more we need to mention it. In fact the essential question has not been included in this communiqué. The essential question is that it doesn't matter whether China or the U.S. can fight wars on two fronts. We say that we can fight wars on two, three, four or five fronts, but we simply can't do it in reality. Of course it would be bad if we included this."

At about 11:30 p.m. on January 6, the Premier met with Haig the second time. The Premier first said lightly: "Today they have treated you to a bit too much wine, haven't they?" Haig said amusedly: "A bit too much." Then the Premier said: "This afternoon I heard Acting Foreign Minister Ji convey the oral message you brought from Kissinger. Now I'll reply to your oral message of early 4 January. We have studied your message, and your frank attitude is conducive to our understanding of the U.S. side's thoughts on the current situation and Sino-U.S. relations. We will talk about our opinions with the same frankness."

The main points of the Premier's reply to the messages are as follows.

1. As the talk approaches, it is to be expected that some hostile forces have stepped up their sabotage efforts, and China is ready for this.

2. After the announcement of Nixon's visit to China was issued, the Soviet Union

hastily made concessions in Europe and reached an agreement with the West regarding the Berlin issue; in Asia, it formed with India a de facto military alliance in the name of “peace and friendship;” then it supported India’s invasion of Pakistan and occupation of eastern Pakistan. This was a continuation of the Soviet Union’s consistent hegemonic policy under new circumstances, and not really a strategic change. In fact, it has exposed further the Soviet Union’s expansionist features, and in the world and the United Nations, the Soviet Union has sunk into unprecedented isolation. The development of the situation illustrates that the sub-continent will remain in continuing disturbance.

3. On the Vietnam Issue, a basic disagreement exists between China and the U.S.. The U.S.’s blatant bombing of northern Vietnam has generated resentments from many sides. Vietnam is a victim, and of course China will support it. If the U.S. really wants to withdraw its troops and put an end to the Vietnam War, then it has no reason to refuse to accept the seven-point suggestions of the Vietnam side. In fact it was not Hanoi insulting the U.S., but the U.S. insulting Hanoi. If a big country could invade a small country at its will, and the small country’s self-defense comes as an “insult,” what logic is that? Such a policy by the U.S. will not only fail to defeat Vietnam’s determination to win, but will also impede its own withdrawal of troops and the release of its Prisoners-of-War. It will also bring unfavorable factors for the President’s visit to China.

4. Half a year ago, President Nixon called China one of the five major forces in the world, but now the U.S. side is all of a sudden questioning China’s “viability,” and claims that it will “protect” China’s “independence” and “viability.” This is truly surprising. China believes that no country should depend on external forces for its own independence and survival, otherwise it would only become other countries’ protectorate or colony. The new Socialist China was born and grew up in the struggle to resist foreign aggression and oppression, and surely it will keep its existence and keep developing. China has said that it’s ready for enemies to pour in from all directions, that it’s ready for the biggest national sacrifice to fight until the end, and to make contributions to the progressive undertaking for the human race. It has been proved and will continue to be proved that all plots to isolate, surround, contain or overthrow China will end in shameful failure.

5. Sino-U.S. relations have not been normalized yet, but the Chinese side will receive

President Nixon with due protocol, and will make its own efforts to seek positive results in the high-level Sino-American talks. The oral message from the U.S. side has expressed hopes to boost the President's image as a world leader through this visit; the Chinese side finds it hard to understand these hopes. A person's image is determined by his own actions and not other factors. China never believes in self-appointed world leaders.

6. The U.S. side has requested that the Chinese side reconsider the wording of the part on Taiwan in the draft joint communiqué due to concerns of some American forces that oppose the normalization of Sino-U.S. relations and the Sino-U.S. summit. However, it must be pointed out that the Chinese side has tried its best to respond to the difficulty of the U.S. side in the draft. On the Taiwan Issue, the Chinese people have strong feelings. If the U.S. truly has wishes to improve Sino-U.S. relations, it should adopt a proactive attitude towards the resolution of this key issue in Sino-U.S. relations. If the U.S. side yields to some forces that oppose the normalization of Sino-U.S. relations and back off from its original stance, it won't benefit China or the U.S.

Premier Zhou also commented on the oral message of the morning of January 6. The main points follow:

1. Regarding the trade issue, the Chinese side has noted the opinion of the U.S. side, and will put it in the communiqué. Doubtlessly, Sino-U.S. relations have not been normalized, and the development of trade is limited, and it must be slow. However, both sides should look far ahead, as Sino-U.S. relations will surely be normalized.

2. Regarding the South Asian sub-continent issue, the Chinese side appreciates the current U.S. policy of winning a respite for Pakistan to increase its strength, as stated in the message.

After Haig heard the Premier's reply and comments, he explained again and again that he had delivered the message according to his personal understanding of the general idea, and therefore he was afraid that in many places his soldier's plain language might have had overly frank effects, which might have caused misunderstandings.

Finally, the Premier put the Taiwan Issue on hold, and said that it would be discussed when President Nixon and Dr. Kissinger came to visit. And then the Premier asked whether Haig would come next time. Haig said: "When the President and the Doctor go out for visits, I'm always home." The Premier said, "You can only come out when they

are home.” Haig said, “It is at times like that that I make mistakes.” The Premier laughed and said, “You still have chances. After the President’s visit, he still needs to send people here.”

On the afternoon of January 7, Haig and his delegation departed for Shanghai and Hangzhou. On January 10, Haig and his delegation, which had been sent to lay the logistical groundwork for Nixon’s visit to China, successfully completed their visit to China.

(Translated by Zhao Han)