

April 30, 1975
**Telegram from L.L. Mehorta, Charge d’Affaires in
Beijing**

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Summary:

China’s stance towards India and Pakistan, and a Pakistani proposal for a nuclear-free zone in South Asia

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BY "A" BAG

FROM: L.L. MEHORTA, Charge d'Affaires, Beijing

TO: Shri A.S. Chib, Joint Secretary (PAK), MEA

You must have seen by now the text of various speeches made by both sides during the visit of Vice-Premier Li Hsien-nien of China to Pakistan from 20th to 25th April 1975. We have already sent to Kiran Doshi a copy of dispatch No. PEK/104/75 of 29th April 1975, of our Second Secretary, Shyam Saran, on the subject.

Two points strike me most about this visit. Firstly, to the best of my knowledge, there was no reiteration of the Chinese stand that "Come what may, the Chinese government and people will, as always, firmly support Pakistan in her struggle in defence of national independence, state sovereignty and territorial integrity." This commitment was made by Teng Hsiao-ping to Bhutto in his speech on 12th May 1974, during the latter's visit to Peking. Why have the Chinese dropped it this time? Should it mean a signal to Bhutto that if Pakistan runs into a situation of war once again in the sub-continent, the Chinese might sit on the fences as on the previous two occasions? It is quite possible that Bhutto is actually aware of China's determination not to involve itself directly in a war at least in the foreseeable future, and, therefore, in his own speech kept completely silent on controversial issues affecting the climate of relations in the Indian sub-continent. I shall be grateful for your own thinking in the matter.

Simultaneously, however, with this - and this is the second point I wish to make - Li Hsien-nien has been much more strident in his tirade against hegemonism, and expansionism, i.e. against the Soviet Union and India, than Teng Hsiao-ping during the Bhutto visit to China last year. Teng Hsiao-ping did refer to the resolute support of the Chinese Government and people to the peoples of South Asia in their struggle against hegemonism and expansionism, but had left the matter at that. In contrast, Li Hsien-nien has gone ahead spelling out the threat. His resolute support to the Pakistani proposal of a nuclear-free zone in South Asia is meant to protect the countries of South Asia from Soviet hegemonism and Indian expansionism. In the same context, the struggle of the people of Kashmir for self-determination and the resistance of the people of Sikkim "against the naked annexation by Indian expansionists" has been cited. It is again in this context that support has been expressed to the proposal of the King of Nepal to declare Nepal a zone of peace. Li Hsien-nien's support to Sri Lanka's proposal to make Indian Ocean as a zone of peace cannot be treated as a concession to us because the Chinese objective seems to be to project not only Soviet hegemonism but also Indian expansionism as a source of disturbing the peace in the Indian Ocean.

Actually it is in their formal statement on Sikkim yesterday that the Chinese government have expounded further their theme of Indian expansionism. For the first time, the Chinese have charged that "Indian expansionism has, over the past 20 years and more years, indulged in the fond dream of a Great Indian Empire" adding that the dream "has been subjecting neighboring countries to its control, interference, subversion and bullying. The Chinese are clearly scaring all our neighbors away from us. The Chinese campaign against the so-called Indian expansionism has not only acquired more depth but has become more extensive also. Thus just before visiting Pakistan, Li Hsien-nien spoke to his hosts in Iran of "the expansionism of Big Powers," possibly including India in that category as different from Super Powers about which he spoke separately.

There is no doubt that China continue to suffer from the siege mentality, i.e. that Soviet Union wants to encircle China with a ring of hostile countries and India has agreed to collude with the Soviet Union for the fulfillment of that objective; in return,

therefore, China must establish a cordon sanitaire against India. China must also demolish that ring by establishing a sound buffer between India and the Soviet Union, consisting of Pakistan, Iran, other countries of the Middle East and Turkey. China has, therefore, already given its blessing to the revival of the CENTO as a military force in the region. China has also encouraged USA to lift the embargo on supply of arms against Pakistan and has succeeded in its objective. It welcomes the close association existing between Iran and Pakistan and wants to see it strengthened further. Together with Iran, it wants to play an active role in bring Pakistan and Afghanistan together; and it wants the petro-dollars of the Middle East countries to flow easily into Pakistan so that maintaining Pakistan's military strength will not be at a tremendous cost to herself. Finally, China wants to boost the image of Pakistan not only as an Islamic country but also as a developing third world country with some revolutionary fervor so that it can truly emerge as a counterpoise to India in the region. China is also telling us that while it wants to develop good neighborly relations with all the countries in the sub-continent, it would be without permitting any shadows to be cast on her relationship with Pakistan.

In their regional and global calculations, the Chinese seem to attach so much importance to their relations with Pakistan that even when Pakistan chooses to remain silent on sub-continental issues, they deem it necessary to air their views on them trying to touch the most sympathetic chords in the heart of the Pakistanis. For the same purpose, they also sing unusual hymns in praise of Bhutto but whether Bhutto will play ball with them through and through probably remains a big question mark in their minds.

Collaboration in the nuclear field might have been one positive outcome of Li Hsien-nien's visit to Pakistan. As you would have noted his delegation visited the Atomic Power Station at Karachi. You would recall that a high-powered scientists' delegation which visited Pakistan from 9th to 29th December 1974 had included Mr. Kuo Pei-shan, Chairman of the Institute of Physics of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, who is also suspected to be a nuclear scientist. Whether Li Hsien-nien's long halt in Sinking before flying to Rawalpindi had anything to do with this collaboration would be conjectural at this stage. But it can be surmised that such a collaboration would prove advantageous to both countries. It would give the Chinese on occasion to acquaint themselves with the technical knowhow of the Western countries, such as Canada, who have been collaborating with Pakistan, and give to Pakistan opportunities which it has been seeking in the field from any place whatsoever.

It is possible that China's view of India is undergoing some change. Before India's independence, the usual Chinese view was that independence would leave India dependent on the West. Soon after independence, we were branded by them as lackeys of US imperialism. This view underwent a trifling change after India asserted itself as an independent force during the days of Nehru but since the 1962 war, we progressively emerged as a Soviet satellite in Chinese eyes. The Chinese still continue to refer to the Soviet Union as the boss in relation to India but India's role in the emergence of Bangladesh in 1971, her nuclear explosion of May 1974 and now the launching of a satellite by her must make the Chinese wonder whether India is coming up fast as a force to reckon with in its own right in the region. It is probably this recognition which impels her to alert all our neighbors and to rally them against us. Geographically Pakistan remains the biggest of this circle of neighbors and geopolitically is the only country in the region linked to China, although through Indian territory gifted by Pakistan to her in Kashmir. It is this that makes Pakistan so very important in Chinese eyes. Pakistan also forms the bridge-head for China to the Gulf region, the Middle East and further on through the Suez to the Mediterranean. China's foreign policy always keeps long-term objectives in view and Pakistan has to be seen not only in the light of their short-term goals but also the long-term ones.

I shall be grateful for your comments.