

## **December 2, 1975**

# **Memorandum of Conversation between Mao Zedong and Gerald R. Ford**

### **Citation:**

"Memorandum of Conversation between Mao Zedong and Gerald R. Ford", December 2, 1975, Wilson Center Digital Archive, Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library, Kissinger Reports on USSR, China and Middle East Discussions (Box 3 - December 1-5, 1975 - President Ford's Visit to Peking (1)). <https://digitalarchive.umd.edu/document/118073>

### **Summary:**

President Ford and Secretary Kissinger met with Chairman Mao and spoke about Chinese-U.S. relations, Japanese-U.S. relations, Chinese foreign relations with Japan and Western countries, NATO, the Sinai Agreement, and Soviet attempts to expand influence in Africa.

### **Credits:**

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### **Original Language:**

English

### **Contents:**

Original Scan



## DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Washington, D.C. 20520

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## MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

PARTICIPANTS: Chairman Mao Tse Tung  
 Vice Premier Teng Hsiao-P'ing  
 Vice Premier Li Hsien-Nien  
 Foreign Minister Chiao Kuan-hua  
 Ambassador Huang Chen,  
 Chief of the PRC Liaison Office  
 Vice Foreign Minister Wang Jai-Hung  
 Chang Han-chih, Interpreter,  
 Deputy Director, MFA  
 Tang Weng-shen, Interpreter,  
 Deputy Director, MFA  
 Nurse/Interpreter

President Gerald R. Ford  
 Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger  
 Ambassador George Bush,  
 Chief of the United States Liaison Office  
 Mr. Brent Scowcroft, Assistant to the  
 President  
 Mr. Winston Lord, Director, Policy Planning  
 Staff, Department of State

DATE AND TIME: Tuesday, December 2, 1975  
 4:10 p.m. - 6:00 p.m.

PLACE: Chairman Mao's Residence  
 Peking, People's Republic of China

(At approximately 3:00 p.m. the Chinese informed the United States party that Chairman Mao wished to see President Ford. The President, his wife and daughter, and other members of the United States party left the President's villa at 4:00 p.m. and drove to Chairman Mao's residence through a front gate of the Forbidden City complex. They were greeted at the entrance to the

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 CLASSIFIED BY: HENRY A. KISSINGER

DECLASSIFIED  
 E.O. 12958, SEC. 3.5  
 STATE DEPT. GUIDELINES, 5/16/03  
 BY           , NARA, DATE 4/13/12

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residence by Vice Premier Teng and the other Chinese officials and were escorted into the Chairman's den. The Chairman stood up to greet the American guests. While photographers took pictures, he shook hands and exchanged brief greetings with each of the following: President Ford, Mrs. Ford, Susan Ford, Secretary Kissinger, Ambassador Bush, Mr. Scowcroft, Under Secretary Sisco, Assistant Secretary Habib, Mr. Lord, and Mr. Solomon. After these greetings and pictures, the American guests left the room except for President Ford, Secretary Kissinger, Ambassador Bush, Mr. Scowcroft, and Mr. Lord. The Chinese officials present were those listed above. The group sat in a semi-circle on large arm chairs and the conversation began.)

Chairman Mao: So how are you?

President Ford: Fine. I hope you are too.

Chairman Mao: I am not well. I am sick.

President Ford: I think you look very well, Sir.

Chairman Mao: My appearance is not so bad. And how is Mr. Secretary of State?

Secretary Kissinger: I am very well. I am happy to be here.

Chairman Mao: And how are all the other American friends?

President Ford: They are all very healthy. We had a very good discussion this morning, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman Mao: So what did you discuss?

President Ford: We discussed the problems we have with the Soviet Union and the need to have parallel actions as we look at the overall circumstances internationally, the need for your country and mine to work in parallel to achieve what is good for both of us.

Chairman Mao: We do not have much ability. We can only fire such empty cannons.

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President Ford: I do not believe that, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman Mao: With regard to cursing, we have some ability in that respect.

President Ford: We can too.

Chairman Mao: And you also? Then we shall reach an agreement.

President Ford: We can also use force against a country which causes much trouble.

Chairman Mao: That is not bad. Then we have reached another agreement.

President Ford: We were very specific this morning in discussing whom we were talking about.

Chairman Mao: It can be none other but the Socialist Imperialists.

President Ford: There was some strong language used this morning, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman Mao: (pointing to Teng) That is, you criticized him.

President Ford: We strongly criticized another country

Chairman Mao: The one in the North.

President Ford: Yes

Chairman Mao: Your Secretary of State has been interfering in my internal affairs.

President Ford: Tell me about it.

Chairman Mao: He does not allow me to go and meet God. He even tells me to disobey the order that God has given to me. God has sent me an invitation, yet he (Secretary Kissinger) says, don't go.

Secretary Kissinger: That would be too powerful a combination if he went there.

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Chairman Mao: He is an atheist (Secretary Kissinger). He is opposed to God. And he is also undermining my relations with God. He is a very ferocious man and I have no other recourse than to obey his orders.

Secretary Kissinger: We are very glad.

Chairman Mao: Yes indeed. I have no other way out, no way at all. He gave an order (Secretary Kissinger).

President Ford: To God?

Chairman Mao: No, to me.

(Chairman Mao speaks with Ambassador Huang in Chinese.)

How are things going, Mr. Huang Chen? Are you still going back (to the United States)?

Ambassador Huang: I listen to the Chairman's instructions.

Chairman Mao: Mr. President, do you want him?

President Ford: We certainly want him back. Our relationship has been excellent. It is important that the Ambassador be back and that Mr. Bush be here in Peking.

Chairman Mao: (to Ambassador Bush) Are you staying?

Ambassador Bush: Just a few days.

Chairman Mao: You have been promoted.

President Ford: Yes, he has been. We are going to submit a name for a replacement within a month.

Chairman Mao: We are very reluctant to let him go.

President Ford: He is an outstanding person and that is why I have asked him to come back to the United States. But we will replace him with an equally good man.

Chairman Mao: That would be good. And it seems to me that it will also be better for Huang Chen to go back to the United States.

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Ambassador Huang: I will firmly carry out the Chairman's instructions. I do want to come back (to China) because I have been abroad too long. But I will do what the Chairman says.

Chairman Mao: You should stay there one or two years more.

Ambassador Huang: All right, I definitely will go back and firmly carry out the Chairman's instructions.

Chairman Mao: There are some young people who have some criticism about him (Ambassador Huang). And these two (Wang and Tang) also have some criticism of Lord Chiao. And these people are not to be trifled with. Otherwise, you will suffer at their hands -- that is, a civil war. There are now many big character posters out. And you perhaps can go to Tsinghua University and Peking University to have a look at them.

President Ford: I would not understand the signs.

I hope your telling the Ambassador to stay two more years means that we are going to continue the good relations between our two countries, Mr. Chairman.

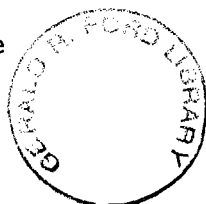
Chairman Mao: Yes. Yes, relations between our two countries should continue. It seems to me at present there is nothing very much between our two countries, your country and mine. Probably this year, next year, and the year after there will not be anything great happening between our two countries. Perhaps afterwards the situation might become a bit better.

President Ford: In the meantime, Mr. Chairman, I think we have to work in trying to achieve better coordination on the international scene, with emphasis on the challenges from some countries such as the Soviet Union.

Chairman Mao: Yes. Anyway we have no confidence in the Soviet Union. And Teng Hsiao-P'ing does not like the Soviet Union either.

President Ford: We have similar feelings as to their overall designs to expand on a worldwide basis -- territorially, economically and otherwise. But we are going to meet the challenge.

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Chairman Mao: Good. We are also going to meet their challenge.

President Ford: We expect on a bilateral basis, Mr. Chairman, to improve our relations after next year. We think that is the time real progress can be made on a bilateral basis.

Chairman Mao: You mean between us?

President Ford: Yes.

Chairman Mao: That would be good.

President Ford: In the meantime, Mr. Chairman, if your country and mine work to meet the challenge, in the East and West, from the Soviet Union, it will develop greater support in the United States toward continued progress for normalization between the United States and the People's Republic.

Chairman Mao: Good. Anyway, this is just talk. And how the Soviet Union will actually act is something we will still have to wait and see.

President Ford: Mr. Chairman, in the meantime we will have to convince the Soviet Union by what is done by the United States and the People's Republic -- not words, but backed up by action. We will continue to keep the pressure on them. I hope the pressure from the East will be strong like our actions on our side.

Chairman Mao: Just firing of some empty cannon, cursing.

President Ford: We will do more than that, Mr. Chairman, as we have in the past. And the American people expect their President to be firm. We have, and we will in the future. More than words and more than empty cannons.

Chairman Mao: So you have solid cannons?

President Ford: Yes, and we will keep our powder dry unless they seek to challenge us, and then it will not be kept dry.

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Chairman Mao: That is all right. That will not be bad. Yes, now you peacefully coexist.

President Ford: But that does not mean that we will not meet a challenge of any expansionist country. As a matter of fact we have met those challenges and will continue to do so.

Chairman Mao: That is good. Shall we reach an agreement?

President Ford: (nodding yes) And we can with an effort that achieves the same result. You put pressure from the East, and we will put on pressure from the West.

Chairman Mao: Yes. A gentleman's agreement.

President Ford: That is the best way to achieve success against a person who is not a gentleman.

Chairman Mao: They are not gentlemen.

President Ford: Those are kinder words than we used this morning.

Chairman Mao: I thank Mr. President very much for having come to see me. And I hope that in the future our two countries can be friendly to each other.

President Ford: Mr. Chairman, that is the great hope of the American people and myself. I want it clearly understood that the historic steps taken over the last three years by your country and my country are fully supported by the American people. They recognize, as we do, that there must be strength to prevent actions by expansionist countries such as the Soviet Union. We will maintain our military capability and be prepared to use it. In our opinion this is the best way to maintain the world in a stable and better position.

Chairman Mao: Good. So we don't have any conflicts.

President Ford: That's correct. And if we do have conflicts, we can sit down and discuss them and understand them and hope to eliminate them.

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Chairman Mao: Indeed. Yes, there are bound to be conflicts because our two countries, China and the United States, have different social systems and different ideologies.

President Ford: But that should not interfere with our capability for looking at the broad international scene and working in parallel and working firmly for results that are in the best interests of both countries and all the peoples.

Chairman Mao: (After a brief coughing spell.) For instance, we have not had discussions, conversations with the Soviet Union like the ones we have had with you. I went to Moscow twice and Khrushchev came three times to Peking. On none of these occasions did the talks go really well.

President Ford: Mr. Chairman, I have met with Mr. Brezhnev twice. Sometimes the talks went well, sometimes badly. I think this is an indication of our firmness because we do not agree to all that they propose, and we will not. We are going to be firm and have the military capability to be firm. They understand it, and I think it is in the best interests of your country and our country if we are firm, which we intend to be.

Chairman Mao: Good.

How are your relations with Japan now? Better than before?

President Ford: Yes they are. As you know Mr. Chairman, I visited Japan about a year ago. It was the first time a President in office visited there. About a month ago the Emperor and Empress came to the United States, the first time their Majesties came to our country. We feel relations with Japan are the best they have been at any time since World War II.

Chairman Mao: Japan also is threatened by the Soviet Union.

President Ford: I would agree and therefore, Mr. Chairman, I think it is important that China and Japan have better and better relations -- just as Japan and U.S. relations are getting better, in fact the best they have been.

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Chairman Mao: And for Japan, its relations with you come first and their relations with us are second.

President Ford: Are your relations with Japan very good?

Chairman Mao: They are not bad. Nor are they so good.

President Ford: You want them to be better, don't you?

Chairman Mao: Yes. They have a pro-Soviet faction that is opposed to talking about hegemony.

Secretary Kissinger: Or just afraid.

Chairman Mao: Yes, indeed.

President Ford: How are your relations with Western European countries, Mr. Chairman?

Chairman Mao: They are better, better than our relations with Japan.

President Ford: It's important that our relations with Western Europe as well as yours be good to meet the challenge of any Soviet expansion in Western Europe.

Chairman Mao: Yes. Yes, and on this we have a common point there with you. We have no conflict of interests in Europe.

President Ford: As a matter of fact, Mr. Chairman, some of us believe that China does more for Western European unity and the strengthening of NATO than some of those countries do for themselves.

Chairman Mao: They are too scattered.

President Ford: Some of them are not as strong and forthright as they should be.

Chairman Mao: As I see it, Sweden is not bad. West Germany is not bad. Yugoslavia is also good. Holland and Belgium are lagging a bit behind.

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President Ford: That's correct. And the Soviet Union is seeking to exploit some weaknesses in Portugal and Italy. We must prevent it, and we are trying to do so.

Chairman Mao: Yes, and now Portugal seems to be more stable. It seems to be better.

President Ford: Yes, in the last forty-eight hours it has gotten very encouraging. The forces we support have moved with great strength and taken the action that is needed to stabilize the situation.

We agree with you that Yugoslavia is important and is strong in its resistance against the Soviet Union, but we are concerned about what might happen after Tito.

Chairman Mao: Yes, perhaps after Tito it will be Kardelj.

Secretary Kissinger: But we are concerned about outside pressures and within the country. And we are working on this now. Various factions are working with outside groups:

Chairman Mao: Yes, it has so many provinces and it is made up of so many former states.

President Ford: I had a very interesting trip, Mr. Chairman, to Romania this summer, and I was impressed by the strength and independence of President Ceausescu.

Chairman Mao: Good.

President Ford: We are very concerned about the situation in Spain as well, Mr. Chairman. The King we do support. We hope he will be able to handle the elements that would undermine his regime. And we will work with him in trying to have the necessary control of the situation during this period of transition.

Chairman Mao: Yes. And anyway we think it would be good if the European Common Market accepted them. Why doesn't the EEC want Spain and Portugal?

President Ford: Mr. Chairman, we urged the NATO alliance to be more friendly to Spain even under Franco. And we hope with the new King that Spain will be more acceptable

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to the NATO alliance. In addition we feel that the EEC ought to be responsive to movement by the Spanish Government toward unity with Western Europe as a whole. We will work in both directions as much as we can.

Secretary Kissinger: They are not radical enough for the Europeans.

Chairman Mao: Is that so? Yes, in the past they had fought each other. Yes, and in the past you did not curse Franco.

President Ford: No. And we support the new King because the whole southern belly of Western Europe must remain strong -- Portugal, Spain, Italy, Greece, Turkey, Yugoslavia. All that must be strengthened if we are to meet any expansionist efforts by the Soviet Union.

Chairman Mao: Good. Yes, and we think Greece should get better.

President Ford: Yes, they went through a difficult time, but the new government we feel is moving in the right direction and we will help them. And we hope they will come back as a full partner in NATO.

Chairman Mao: That would be good.

President Ford: There is a radical element, of course, in Greece that would not be favorable from our point of view and would tend to weaken NATO and give encouragement to the Soviet Union.

Chairman Mao: Oh?

President Ford: As we move further east in the Mediterranean, Mr. Chairman, we think the Sinai Agreement has helped reduce the Soviet influence, but we recognize there cannot be any stagnation in advancing toward a broader peace. As soon as the next election in the U.S. has taken place we expect to move with vigor to try and achieve a broad, just and permanent peace in that area.

Chairman Mao: Permanent peace would be difficult to achieve.

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President Ford: Yes they have not had it there for centuries. But the effort to achieve it, a successful effort, would eliminate a great deal of Soviet influence in that area of the world. If there is stagnation, that gives the Soviet Union the opportunity to stir up trouble. Therefore, we are convinced that there must be continual movement. And the Sinai Agreement has helped us develop good relations with Egypt. And if we move forward after the next election and help move others toward a broader peace, it will have a significant impact in keeping the Soviet Union's influence out of that part of the world.

Chairman Mao: I don't oppose that.

President Ford: As we move into the subcontinent, we expect to have influence there with our base in Diego Garcia. Of course, we continue to improve our relations with Pakistan. We have lifted our arms ban so that they can help themselves and develop sufficient military capability to convince India that it would not be a successful venture if the Indians should attempt any military operation.

Chairman Mao: That would be good.

President Ford: What is your appraisal, Mr. Chairman, of the situation in Bangladesh?

Chairman Mao: The situation there now is better, but it is not yet stable. And we are prepared to send an ambassador there. Perhaps he will take some time in getting there.

President Ford: Are you concerned that India will move in and take any military action against Bangladesh to take advantage of the current situation?

Chairman Mao: There is such a danger, and we must beware.

President Ford: India has been known, Mr. Chairman, to do some unwise things against other nations. I would hope that they would not do it here (Bangladesh).

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Chairman Mao: Indeed. If they should take such action in that area we would oppose it.

President Ford: We are working with Pakistan and Iran to prevent any such action, and we would condemn any such action by India.

Chairman Mao: Yes. We have reached another agreement.

President Ford: I am sure you are as concerned as well as we about the Soviet Union in the Indian Ocean, and of course their efforts on the east side of Africa. These developments are vigorously opposed by us. I speak here of course about Angola where we are taking forthright actions to prevent the Soviet Union from getting a stronghold in that part of that great continent.

Chairman Mao: You don't seem to have many means. Nor do we.

President Ford: I think we both could do better, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman Mao: I am in favor of driving the Soviet Union out.

President Ford: If we both make a good effort, we can.

Chairman Mao: Through the Congo -- Kinshasha, Zaire.

Vice Premier Teng: (Talks in Chinese to the Chairman)  
The complicating factor here is that of South Africa, the involvement of South Africa. This has offended the whole of black Africa. This complicates the whole matter.

Chairman Mao: South Africa does not have a very good reputation.

President Ford: But they are fighting to keep the Soviet Union from expanding, and we think that's admirable. We are putting substantial money through Zambia and Zaire. We believe that if there is broad action by ourselves, the People's Republic and others, we can prevent the Soviet Union from having a very important naval facility and

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controlling substantial resources in Angola. And we are violently opposed to the substantial participation of Cuba. They now have five to six thousand troops in Angola. We think that's not a healthy thing; and the Soviet Union.

Vice Premier Teng: You mean you admire South Africa?

President Ford: No. They have taken a strong stance against the Soviet Union. And they are doing that totally on their own, without any stimulation by the United States.

Vice Premier Teng: In Angola.

President Ford: South Africa is against the MPLA.

Chairman Mao: This is a question that needs study.

President Ford: Time is of the essence.

Chairman Mao: It seems to me that the MPLA will not be successful.

President Ford: We certainly hope not.

Secretary Kissinger: If the other two forces get enough discipline and we can give them equipment, then we can prevent them (the MPLA) from being successful. They (the FNLA and UNITA) need training from those who understand guerrilla war. We can get them the equipment if others give them the training.

Chairman Mao: We supported them in the past through Tanzania, but Tanzania has a hold on certain things that were supposed to go through. Perhaps now we should work through Zaire.

Vice Premier Teng: Perhaps it is better through Zaire.

Secretary Kissinger: Through Zaire. And the Chinese side could perhaps use its influence with Mozambique. It would have a moral significance in Africa if Mozambique did not support the soviet group, the MPLA. (There is discussion among the Chinese).

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Chairman Mao: But, you know, Mozambique supports the MPLA. It would probably be difficult.

Vice Premier Teng: Impossible.

Secretary Kissinger: I know. They may not understand what they are doing because they also look up to China very much.

Chairman Mao: We might make a try

Secretary Kissinger: I don't think Mozambique understands the issue in Angola. They need advice and they listen to China more than to us.

Chairman Mao: We can make a try.

Vice Premier Teng: We can make a try but it might not necessarily be effective.

Secretary Kissinger: That's true.

Chairman Mao: Zaire is probably more reliable.

Secretary Kissinger: Zaire should be a base for active assistance. We can't get help from Mozambique, but maybe they will stay out of it. We can't get help from Mozambique, but maybe at least they will stay neutral.

Chairman Mao: We can make a try.

President Ford: I say again that time is of the essence because the other two forces need encouragement. They were doing well up until recently. There is a stalemate at the moment. It would be tragic if the MPLA should prevail after the efforts that have been made by us and by you and others.

Chairman Mao: That's hard to say.

So you think that's about all?

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President Ford: I might say in reference to Angola, just before I left Washington I approved another \$35 million to help the other two forces. This is a solid indication to meet the challenge of the Soviet Union and defeat the MPLA.

Chairman Mao: Good. (Chinese photographers enter room and take movies.)

President Ford: I wish to thank you, Mr. Chairman, for the opportunity to discuss the world situation and indicate our desire to expand our bilateral relations and work in parallel on many, many problems on the global scene.

Chairman Mao: Yes there are now some newspaper reports that describe relations between us two as being very bad. Perhaps you should let them in on the story a bit and maybe brief them.

Secretary Kissinger: On both sides. They hear some of it in Peking.

Chairman Mao: But that is not from us. Those foreigners give that briefing.

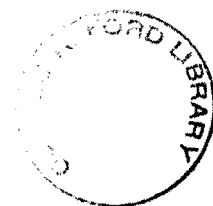
President Ford: We don't believe all we read in our papers, Mr. Chairman. (The photographers leave the room.) I think it is vitally important that both countries create the impression on a world-wide basis that our relations are good. When I return to the United States I will report that they are good, and I hope your people will do the same. It's not only important to have good relations, but to have the world believe that they are good.

Chairman Mao: We can go at it bit by bit.

President Ford: We will work on it, too.

Chairman Mao: So.

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(The group stood up and the American guests shook hands and said good-bye with the Chairman as the photographers took pictures. The Chairman then indicated that he would escort the President to the outside room. With the help of the nurse, he walked with the President to the outer room where once again the American guests said good-bye to the Chairman as pictures were taken. President Ford thanked the Chairman and said that he thought that the talks were mutually beneficial. Secretary Kissinger said that he was glad that the Chairman obeyed his orders, i.e. not to go to heaven. President Ford said that he hoped to straighten the Secretary out so that the Chairman could go to heaven, but he and the Secretary added that they hoped that this would not be soon. Chairman Mao indicated that he could not go since he was under orders from the Secretary. Secretary Kissinger said that he would maintain those orders. The other Americans thanked the Chairman and said good-bye. The party was then escorted outside by Vice Premier Teng and the Chinese officials. The Americans entered their cars and drove away.

The Chinese later issued a press announcement of the meeting which is attached at TAB A.)

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