

## **June 6, 1973**

### **Telex from Ambassador Pauls, Beijing, to Foreign Office**

#### **Citation:**

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<https://digitalarchive.umd.edu/document/119992>

#### **Summary:**

Ambassador Pauls reports a conversation with Chinese Deputy Foreign Minister Qiao Guanhua about the possibility of a Soviet attack on China and Chinese "Second strike capability."

#### **Credits:**

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#### **Original Language:**

German

#### **Contents:**

Translation - English

Ambassador Pauls, Beijing, to Foreign Office

114-12220/73 confidential

Telex Nr. 242

Sent: June 6, 1973, 12:00 hours[1]

Received: June 6, 1973, 10:05 hours

Some time ago, during an evening conversation between the two of us about the Chinese-Soviet relationship, Deputy Foreign Minister Qiao Guanhua asked me how NATO would react in case of a Soviet attack on China. I responded this case is completely unreal. The Soviet Union will not attack China since this goes against all the former's interests. Some days ago, he now told me he wants to continue the conversation.[2] The day before yesterday he came to meet me just on his own for dinner. During the course of the conversation he asked me where I base my opinion on. I explained to him that for the Soviets, who are very cautious people, the current military concentration of forces [north of the Chinese border] does not even faintly suffice for an attack. Rather they have reached the upper limit of what infrastructure allows for supply [of those military forces]. Though the Russians certainly possess vast nuclear superiority, Chinese nuclear armament has made such progress during past years that the moment has passed, where the Russians could have acted without the risk of a Chinese nuclear [counter]strike. I said I could not assess Chinese "second strike capability".

Political reasons appear to be of no lesser importance to me. With an attack on China the Soviet leadership would destroy the entire concept of its policy they have built over recent years. It would meet with fierce rejection, not just in Europe but also in the Third World and in world communism. In this context the development of Chinese-American relations plays an important role. The political fate of Brezhnev and his colleagues is so closely interrelated with the conduct of their current policy that one cannot expect suicidal intentions on their side. I would be hard for me to judge what repercussions [a Soviet attack on China] would have on Russia's interior and on the communist countries of Eastern Europe controlled by Russia; yet it would also have some weight.

Qiao replied this argumentation has many merits. On the Chinese side as well, one does not expect an attack either immediately or over the next couple of years. There is the belief, however, that the critical time will come in about four to five years. Otherwise, China would already possess a certain "second strike capability". The nuclear component [though] does not have to be the decisive category. The Russians are working on the improvement of their Siberian infrastructure. In four to five years, this will allow for the supply of much larger troop contingents than today. Still, the Chinese leadership is convinced that a Soviet attack will come to a halt in the depth of Chinese territory and will turn into a defeat. It would be difficult to assess today how the political constellation will look like four to five years from now.

On the state of Chinese-Soviet negotiations Qiao spoke in essence as explained in our Telex No. 231 from June 2.[3] All Soviet proposals made there would be incomplete and refer to partial aspects only, and therefore do not appear useful; there is an interest on the Chinese side, however, to continue with negotiations even when they remain without results - just in order to maintain the contact.

In light of Germany's special situation, the Chinese government has complete understanding for the conduct of our foreign policy. It has confidence that we will continue to pursue it with vigilance, which in our case as well is a result of insight and experience. Of decisive importance for the future balance of forces in the world would

be Europe's unification, the actual formation of a European Union based on a more and more growing common will, the maintaining of not just a strong but also determined NATO, as well as a positive clarification of the European-American relationship. Therefore utmost importance lies in the continuation of the American presence in Europe. Every reduction of this presence creates a power vacuum that could become dangerous. It might be probably correct to call the Russians cautious people. However, they would be such only to the extent as there would otherwise run a large risk. Qiao concluded his remarks on this subject with these lines: "We are poor and tough. We can and will fight, if necessary. Are you not too rich already in order to fight and actually defend yourselves?"

I suggest submission to Federal Chancellor, Foreign Minister, and State Secretary. Absolute protection of the source requested.

[signed] Pauls

VS-Bd. 9965 (204)

[1] The telex was forwarded by Section Head Jesser to State Secretary Frank on June 7, 1973. He remarked on it: "The report merits special interest in the context of American press speculations about a possible military confrontation between the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China, and the strong Soviet reaction against those. Furthermore, the course of conversation [between Rolf Pauls and Qiao Guanhua] shows that the Chinese value a political exchange of opinions with us and display a major extent of open-mindedness."

Was submitted to Frank on June 17, 1973 who remarked in handwriting: "D 3: We have to provide Embassy Beijing well with pertinent information."

Submitted to Department Head Lahn on June 18, 1973 who noted in handwriting for Sector 313: "Discussed in sector meeting. - Please proceed accordingly."

Was submitted to VLR Graf von Matuschka on July 12, 1973 who noted in handwriting: "201 and 213 have promised to supply Beijing more intensively." See the accompanying note; VS-Bd. 9914 (312); B 150, File copies 1973.

[2] On June 6, 1973, Ambassador Pauls reported in addition that Chinese Deputy Foreign Minister Qiao Guanhua had voiced the interest of his government in a visit by Federal Chancellor Brandt: "There is only one problem, namely the one of a return visit by Prime Minister Zhou Enlai. The Prime Minister is 75 and has to be economic with his body. He is extremely busy in particular with the guidance of domestic affairs that rest exclusively with him. Thus visits to foreign countries are more than problematic. Qiao Guanhua underlined this so seriously that I gained the impression the reasons are not just Zhou's age and work overload; but that the domestic situation is not like that the man, who holds all strings in his hand and has everything under control, can leave his post even for a short break. It confirmed an impression I got during past weeks: Current Chinese foreign and domestic policy does not enjoy the internal stability claimed by the very sparse information [officially] provided. To the contrary, the process to fully implement this policy against resisting forces is still in full swing, and it will be like that for probably a longer time. I responded to Qiao, we highly welcome the Chinese desire to welcome the Chancellor. We have complete understanding for considerations concerning the age and workload of the Prime Minister with regard to a return visit." See Telex No. 243; VS-Bd. 9914 (312); B 150, File Copies 1973.

[3] Ambassador Paul, Beijing, submitted a memorandum on the border conflict with the USSR, handed to the embassy by the Chinese Foreign Ministry. It stated: "The People's Republic of China inherited certain historically disputed border issues. With some neighbors (like Pakistan, Burma, Nepal, and Mongolia) a resolution of those issues was possible, but not with the Soviet Union. Current Chinese-Soviet borders rest in essence on the 'unequal' treaties of 1858, 1860, and 1881. Since border line drawings were back then done only imprecisely and on maps with large scales, the Soviet Union is today even claiming territories beyond the border lines from those

treaties accepted by the Chinese. All in all, China lost in the 19th century about 1.5 million square kilometers. China has always held the position that the resolution of border issues with the Soviet Union can be achieved with diplomatic negotiations. Also, China is ready to negotiate on the basis of the unequal treaties, of which neither the Soviet nor the Chinese people were a part. China is demanding three things: a) the admission by the Soviets that these were unequal treaties; b) smaller border corrections concerning especially those areas the Soviets received beyond those conceded in the treaties; c) a concrete border definition in order to avoid future border issues." See Section 313, Vol. 100101.