

INTERVIEW WITH THE PRIME MINISTER

BY MR. HENRY KAMM, NEW YORK TIMES

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HENRY KAMM: Prime Minister, do you feel there has been a significant change in China's attitude towards the world? Or do you think that the present apparent relaxation of her attitude toward the outside world is a matter of tactics rather than of a change in objectives?

PRIME MINISTER: Nobody can be sure if there has been any change in the power position in Peking. It is still Chairman Mao, number one; Marshal Lin Piao, number two; and Chou En-lai, number three. It is difficult to believe there has been any significant change in basic attitudes. Of course, because of the more relaxed conditions in Peking, Shanghai and Canton, naturally they would like to have visitors see how stable and good conditions are, after all the reports of turmoil and upheaval during the Cultural Revolution. Whether there is any

significant change in basic objectives, is very difficult to say. I think Mao like de Gaulle, are great men who in the evening of their lives have fixed views of what the world should be, not what the world is. At the same time, the Chinese are also realists. They face a very long frontier with the Soviet Union and difficulties over boundaries. Therefore a slight thaw on a people to people basis is useful.

HENRY KAMM: Could you say something on how would you define in your judgement China's objectives -- the ones that we mention have perhaps change, perhaps not change?

PRIME MINISTER: They can be grouped broadly into two categories: one, China's national objectives; as a nation whether it is communist, whether it is the KMT, there are certain things which a Chinese Government representing China's 800 million people, would want to do, namely, to establish herself as one of the truly great powers of the world and to be accepted and acknowledged as such by other great powers. As one of the super

powers she must have a say on how the forces around her immediate boundaries should be ordered. No hostile forces will be allowed in this vicinity that can threaten her. That is a national objective. Of course, the ideological objective is that the Chinese Communist Party should be the vanguard of revolution -- particularly in the third world -- the world of the dispossessed, which in their eyes the Russians have betrayed through revisionism.

HENRY KAMM: It seems presently the tension seems to be focussing on the relationship between China and the United States. Do you feel that the United States and China are capable of reaching the sort of modus vivendi that has been reached over the years between the Soviet Union and the United States?

PRIME MINISTER: I would think so. The United States and China do not share any common boundary, there are no disputes over territory. The only friction is in the Straits of Formosa. As the Chinese know, in the end it will be

resolved between China and Taiwan. And that is what even President Nixon had said. But it may take a long while.

HENRY KAMM: When you say a long while, Prime Minister -- years roughly?

PRIME MINISTER: Difficult to predict. When is it no longer become feasible for either the United States, or any other super power, to prevent China from exercising her rights over what both sides, in Taipeh and in Peking, say is one China.

HENRY KAMM: If such a modus vivendi is attainable and if it can be recalled the kind of modus vivendi reached by the Soviet Union and the United States, it turned out to be rather costly to a number of countries in central and eastern Europe.....

PRIME MINISTER: Mr. Roosevelt was a very sick man in Yalta.

HENRY KAMM: Do you foresee that China and the United States could reach a modus vivendi that would not in some way create a sphere of influence that would make some countries in this region under Chinese hegemony?

PRIME MINISTER: This will probably be a phase by phase development. The first phase would be a modest modus vivendi in which the United States withdraw all her forces from Asia. That will bring a slight thaw. The next phase could be that the United States will be discouraged or find it impolitic to send arms and other weapons, in accordance with the Nixon doctrine, to help independent countries to defend themselves. It is a phase by phase extension of what is regarded as

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China's preserve depends how rapidly the People's Republic of China develops in its economic and military sinews.

HENRY KAMM: There is a great deal of talk in the region I found in my travels that the millenium might be attained if a modus vivendi could be reached not only by the Soviet Union and the United States on one side, and China and the

United States on the other, but that these three great powers could strike the balance among the three of them. Do you think that this is an unrealistic hope?

PRIME MINISTER: No, if the world, if humanity, is to survive, then there must be a nuclear stalemate between the super powers. Then a SALT type agreement which includes the Chinese and the West Europeans all -- could be a prelude to a gradual reduction of conventional forces. Even now this is being talked about by Mr. Brezhnev. Mr. Trudeau has urged NATO to negotiate seriously for these objectives.

HENRY KAMM: I think we agree that this would indeed be the safest way of assuring the survival of the world. But in the view of the implacable hostility particularly between China and the Soviet Union, is there any hope that this can be reached?

PRIME MINISTER: I would prefer to approach it from the other end of the telescope. The Soviet Union now with a pre-emptive

strike capability and the Chinese now either without a first or a second strike capability, both do not want nuclear conflict. Otherwise there would have been one. That is already a good assumption that both nations want to survive. With the passage of time the possibility of one side being totally destroyed and the other side surviving, becomes less and less. Therefore the danger of a nuclear collision should be less.

Hence, the dangers of a conventional conflict, harrassment, border conflict, may increase, each tests the nerves and will of the other. But in the end it is not worth the while of either side to really find a solution of their problems even at a conventional level.

Because if one side finds it is losing at the level of conventional warfare, the temptation is to use nuclear tactical weapons. Then we are back to the arguments about why beyond a certain point a super power does not need more nuclear bombs or missiles, beyond a second strike capability, taking A.B.M.'s into consideration.

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HENRY KAMM: If the United States and China do reach a certain modus vivendi, what do you suppose is the best that the countries in Southeast Asia, particularly, Singapore could hope for?

PRIME MINISTER: It will be a good thing if first there is a settlement of the Vietnam war. If neither the Chinese would help the North Vietnamese, nor the Americans the South Vietnamese, the North and South Vietnamese should sort things out for themselves. Given what arms they have got now, perhaps they will find some balance and seek a political formula which over a longer period will allow the South Vietnamese to exercise their right of self-determination, on what kind of government they like to live under. That would be a most valuable contribution towards peace and stability in this part of the world. As an adjunct to such an understanding, the Chinese should not be aiding other insurgency movements whether in Thailand or Burma or elsewhere in Southeast Asia. Then the Americans will not send arms to help the Thais defend themselves against

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guerillas who are not being helped by the Chinese or North Vietnamese. If there is no conflict by proxy, then trade and economic co-operation between the countries of Southeast Asia both with America and China will increase. This is the best to be expected in the short term.

HENRY KAMM: Could this trade be of benefit to Singapore?

PRIME MINISTER: Yes. We are already trading with both. But as you know there are certain commodities, even wigs made with Chinese hair from China are not allowed to be imported to America. And all these easing of trade restrictions will help.

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HENRY KAMM: Do you feel that China has sufficient hold on the North Vietnamese to oblige them to stop from pursuing their objectives?

PRIME MINISTER: I do not think either China or Russia have got the power to coerce the North Vietnamese to do things they

do not want to do, or to desist from doing things which they consider vital for their own national aspirations.

But if neither China nor Russia supplies North Vietnam with the wherewithal to carry on the war, then they will have to re-assess what they can do on only their own strength.

HENRY KAMM: Can China afford to risk to its international standing as the leader of the third world to let down a country engaged in a national liberation struggle?

PRIME MINISTER: There will be no question letting down either the North Koreans or the North Vietnamese. You will notice in the case of the people to people ping-pong diplomacy,

both the North Koreans and the North Vietnamese have said nothing. But China has gone ahead on a people to people basis, whatever the unhappiness of North Koreans and North Vietnamese, watching American ping-pong players being feted by the Chinese.

HENRY KAMM: On the corollary of this question, Mr. Prime Minister, what could be the worst result of a Chinese-American modus vivendi for the countries of Southeast Asia?

PRIME MINISTER: It is highly unlikely that the Americans, at least the Nixon Administration, will give away a whole sphere of influence, like what was done at Yalta. In any case even if America did, as some one put to me, two were invited to dinner, and three came. The Russians are in the Indian Ocean and in the Pacific. It is not for America alone to give anything away. She can opt out and make it a dinner for two. But there will still be dinner for two.

HENRY KAMM: I notice that Singapore, unique among the nations of the region, has taken no public initiative for China to extend what she is doing to Singapore too?

PRIME MINISTER: The reason is because we had already taken up a position which makes it unnecessary for us to get

effusive -- our trade missions have regularly been going to Peking.

HENRY KAMM: Governmental trade missions?

PRIME MINISTER: Non-government, like Japanese-style trade missions. The Chinese have always had a bank here. We did not close their bank, although their bank was closed down in Malaysia, in Kuala Lumpur. At one time we had to suspend clearance arrangement because they did not comply with certain legal requirements relating to minimum assets and liquidity. But when they complied with the regulations, we restored the clearing rights. We have always said that the admission of China is not an important question. And this is a position which our neighbours have not taken until recently.

HENRY KAMM: It is said, Prime Minister, that you are trying to hold down the Chinese presence here at a time when Singaporean national identity is not yet fully established.

PRIME MINISTER: I do not think there is going to be a sizeable Chinese presence anywhere in Southeast Asia for a long while. I do not see a Chinese Navy, a Chinese Seventh Fleet complete with missile cruisers and aircraft carriers in the South Pacific or the Indian Ocean in the 1970's. More trade, particularly the simpler manufacture, cheap garments, foot-wear, processed foods, lathes, and simpler machinery, yes. Meanwhile, a whole new generation is growing up in our schools. The older generation, the first generation migrant, men born and educated in China, they are in their late 40's and 50's. And a new generation is growing up which is conscious not only of China but of the whole world.

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There are Russian students studying at Nanyang University, our Chinese language University. There are also American foreign service officers learning Mandarin at Nanyang University. Some Swedes and other Europeans. We are a centre of communications, and our people must be alive to the influence of all big powers in the world.