

September 30, 1944

**Letter No. 340 from L.D. Wilgress, Canadian
Embassy, Moscow, to the Secretary of State for
External Affairs, W.L. Mackenzie King**

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CANADIAN EMBASSY

China ~~SECRET~~
328280TOP SECRETNo. 340Moscow,
September 30th, 1944

Sir,

I have the honour to report that Dr. Foo Ping Sheung, the Chinese Ambassador, called upon me at this Embassy on September 29th and stayed with me for two hours and fifteen minutes during which I had the usual interesting and informative talk I have become accustomed to having with this distinguished member of the diplomatic corps of Moscow. Naturally we covered in this talk a good deal of ground, but the Ambassador was most interesting about what he had to say on the subject of China and Sino-Soviet relations, so I shall confine myself in this despatch to reporting that part of his conversation which related to this topic.

2. He started off by telling me of the visit to Moscow at the end of August of Mr. Donald Nelson and Major General Patrick * Hurley, who came here prior to proceeding to Chungking on a special mission for the President of the United States. Dr. Foo had two long and frank talks with Mr. Nelson while he was in Moscow. The latter explained that the purpose of their mission was to investigate the military and economic situation in China, both of which were reported to be critical. While the immediate objective was to find out what assistance the United States could render now in order to further the war against Japan, Mr. Nelson felt that a very important part of his task would be to investigate the possibilities of the United States extending financial and economic cooperation to China after the war. Since loans would have to be granted after the war not by the United States Government but by private financial institutions, the view of Mr. Nelson was that confidence in the stability of China was essential to such cooperation by the United States. This in turn depended upon the fulfilment of two conditions - one was the absence of civil strife and the other satisfactory relations between China and the Soviet Union. The latter was the chief reason why they had come to Moscow before proceeding to Chungking.

3. Dr. Foo said that he was able to reassure Mr. Nelson on both points. He told him that there would be no civil strife in China after the defeat of Japan. The central government was strong enough to assert its authority all over China and there would be no serious threat to its supremacy, not even from the Communists. Once the war was over none of the forces which might challenge the authority of the central government was strong enough seriously to do so and they would submit when they realized that the situation from their point of view permitted no other course. This in the view of Dr. Foo applied to the Communists.

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The Right Honourable,
The Secretary of State for External Affairs,
OTTAWA, Canada

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4. As regards Sino-Soviet relations Dr. Foo told Mr. Nelson that fundamentally the position was most satisfactory. It was important not to be misled by reports of friction over incidents of a localized or relatively temporary character. Such incidents were inevitable between two large countries with a long common frontier. The main considerations were that the Soviet Union disclaimed any territorial ambitions in regard to China and that owing to the need for a long period of peace to complete the internal reconstruction of the country the Soviet Union was anxious to allay mistrust and suspicion abroad. The Soviet Government, therefore, was desirous of maintaining satisfactory relations with China. This same desire was shared by the Generalissimo and by the Government of China. When there are two countries each of which is earnestly desirous of maintaining satisfactory relations with the other, it is unlikely that any serious clash of interests will be permitted to develop.

5. Mr. Nelson and Major General Hurley received confirmation of what Dr. Foo said about Sino-Soviet relations when they called upon Mr. V.M. Molotov, People's Commissar of Foreign Affairs. They explained to him that the President was sending them on a mission to China to see what the United States could do to make that country stronger militarily and economically. While it was not necessary to consult with any third country before undertaking such a mission, the President realized the great interest of the Soviet Union in the future of China and for this reason they had decided to visit Moscow before proceeding to Chungking. Mr. Molotov thanked them most warmly for this explanation and said that he was very glad they had come to Moscow. He could assure them that the Soviet Government was desirous of seeing a strong and united China. It would not be possible for the Soviet Union either during the war or in the immediate post-war period to extend to China the economic assistance she required. In fact the United States was the only country in a position to extend such assistance and, therefore, he not only approved of the purposes of their mission but he also wished them every success. Naturally Mr. Nelson and Major General Hurley were delighted at this frank and apparently sincere statement of Mr. Molotov and they came away encouraged by their interview.

6. After the Chinese Ambassador had given me this account of the visit to Moscow of Mr. Donald Nelson and Major General Hurley I asked him if there had been an improvement in the Soviet attitude towards China's handling of questions relating to the border territories. I mentioned having seen the announcement of the removal of the Governor of Sinkiang and said I had been wondering if this had been a move to appease the Soviet Union. This led Dr. Foo to give me a long account of Governor Sheng's relations with the Soviet Union, during which he disclosed more details than he had done on any previous occasion at which I had discussed this topic with him.

7. He began by explaining that Sheng was a Chinese educated in Japan who had been appointed Governor of Sinkiang. As so often happened in China, he had then attempted to consolidate his position by building up a private army of his own. He thus became a warlord. When Japan attacked China and the central government was not able to pay much attention to Sinkiang, Sheng conceived the idea of making himself independent, with Soviet support. He visited Moscow in 1938 and asked to be admitted into the Communist Party. The Soviet Government while not adverse to using Sheng were most careful to avoid taking steps which would lay themselves open to the charge of infringing the Sovereignty of China. They refused his request for membership in the Communist Party but permitted him to have some connection with the Communist International. They sent Soviet troops to Sinkiang to help Sheng

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cope with the mohammedan rebellion and they provided him with economic assistance. All this time, however, Sheng was careful not to permit Soviet or any other interference with his private army. This was a force of some 50,000 men, of which the core was a mechanized detachment commanded by Sheng's younger brother.

8. Events commenced to take a different turn with the outbreak of the Soviet-German war. In 1942 Sheng's younger brother was murdered by his own wife, a Sinkiang girl who like her husband had been educated partly in the Soviet Union. When questioned after the murder she revealed that she had acted on the instigation of the Soviet military adviser and the Soviet commercial agent. Apparently it had been a plot to gain control of Sheng's mechanized detachment and thus break his power. Sheng wrote a letter to Molotov complaining about this Soviet interference. He received a long reply in which Molotov recited the machinations of Sheng and pointed out the precautions the Soviet Government had taken to respect the sovereignty of China.

9. It was then that Sheng decided to turn from Moscow to Chungking for support. Although Dr. Foo did not say so, this move may not have been unconnected with the rapid advance of the German army towards Stalingrad. He sent the Chinese Government a copy of Molotov's letter. At that time Dr. Foo was Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs at Chungking and he was assigned the handling of the Sinkiang incident. He realised the vital need of proceeding with the utmost caution. They first of all approached the Soviet Government and secured their concurrence to the reassumption by the Chinese Government of control over Sinkiang. Agreement was reached regarding the withdrawal of the Soviet troops. Dr. Foo stopped off for three days at Urumchi on his way to the Soviet Union in February, 1943. He had a long talk with the Governor and cautioned him on the need for the greatest care in respect of relations with the Soviet Union. Mr. Chaucer Wu was appointed by the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs as their representative at Urumchi and adviser to the Governor. Mr. Chaucer Wu visited the Soviet Union before taking up this post (see paragraph 4 of my despatch No. 10 of April 6th, 1943). The central government appointed education, public health and civil affairs administrators to Urumchi. A branch of the Kuomintang was also established in Sinkiang. The intention was to do everything possible to establish the control of the central government over the whole of Sinkiang.

10. This policy did not succeed in putting an end to Soviet dissatisfaction about the state of affairs in Sinkiang. It became clear that they mistrusted Governor Sheng and that the situation would not be stabilised until he could be removed. This, however, was not an easy matter for the Chinese Government. Sheng still had his army and precipitous action could provoke civil war. Gradually the central government moved their own troops into Sinkiang and a month ago felt that action could be taken to remove Governor Sheng and transfer him to a ministerial post in Chungking. When Dr. Foo advised the Soviet Government they said that this step was very satisfactory in itself, but they would reserve judgment until they saw how the new governor would act and the degree of control which the central government would be able to exercise over his actions.

11. I then asked Dr. Foo if there had been anything new in relation to Outer Mongolia. He replied that there had been no new developments and that the incident reported in paragraph 3 of my telegram No. 115 of April 8th and paragraph 10 of my

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despatch No. 180 of May 31st had really been a reflection of Soviet displeasure with the Governor of Sinkiang. It had been Sinkiang troops of Governor Sheng who had been rounding up Kazakh brigands when they were attacked by a Soviet plane.

12. From Outer Mongolia I directed the conversation to Manchuria, but Dr. Foo refused to be drawn into any admission that this territory might prove to be a future source of conflict between the Soviet Union and China. I asked him if the Soviet Union might not wish to have transit rights over the Manchurian railways and port facilities on the Kwantung Peninsula. He replied that the Soviet Government might seek to obtain economic concessions, and, if so, the Chinese Government would be prepared to negotiate with them, but he did not believe they would infringe Chinese sovereignty in this region because this would give rise to that mistrust and suspicion abroad which they are trying so hard to allay in the interests of world peace and stability. When I asked if Soviet participation in the war against Japan might make a difference to their attitude towards Manchuria, Dr. Foo replied that he did not think so.

13. From Manchuria my mind naturally turned to the problem of the Chinese Communists, in view of the fears expressed that in the event of Soviet participation in the war against Japan the Soviet Government might lend its support to the establishment of a semi-autonomous Communist-led government in North China and Manchuria. I asked Dr. Foo if any progress was being made in the solution of this problem. As usual he attempted to minimise the potentialities of the Communists for making trouble in the future. He said that efforts to find a common basis of understanding had failed but the Chinese Government had made public all the facts relating to the negotiations so that the Chinese public and foreign observers were fully aware of what had taken place. Hence most people would be inclined to side with the Chinese Government in this dispute. Moreover, a new attempt to reach a settlement was now being made with the appointment of an impartial Commission which would proceed to Yen-an to investigate the situation on the spot. They would then draw up a report for submission to the Chinese Government and this report would include their recommendations for solving the Communist problem. The members of the Commission were the General Manager of the Commercial Press, the editor of a Chungking newspaper and three professors. Not one of them was either a member of the Kuomintang or of the Communist Party so that it could be claimed that the Commission was an impartial body.

14. Dr. Foo then mentioned that recent reports of the fighting showed clearly that the Communist army was not engaged in fighting the Japanese because no battles had been reported near any of the districts under Communist control. All of the fighting, he affirmed, is now being done by the armies of the central government. This gave me the excuse of asking him if he considered justified the pessimistic character of the recent reports about the war in China. He replied that he had to smile when he read some of these reports since, although the situation was serious, it was not critical. What was now happening was what anyone who knew the facts might expect.

15. It was always possible, Dr. Foo explained, for the Japanese to mass forces and drive their way through level country. The Chinese could not resist such an advance because they lacked the equipment with which to confront the modern armament of the Japanese. They had few tanks, no heavy artillery and very few

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planes. In other words they had practically nothing except rifles. Dr. Foo then said that he would tell me in strict confidence that often they had asked the 14th United States Air Force to help them in their battles by tactical bombing of the Japanese troops, but the United States Commander had always refused saying that they were in China exclusively for strategic bombing.

16. It was this situation which made it impossible for the Chinese armies effectively to resist a mass attack of the heavily armoured Japanese columns on level ground. The position, however, became very different when the Japanese ventured into mountainous territory. Here they could not deploy their tanks and mobile artillery and experience had proved that the Chinese could hold defence lines in the mountains. To Dr. Foo it had been no surprise that after capturing Hengyang the Japanese had gone on over the comparatively level plains to Kweilin instead of attempting to cross the mountains and join up with their forces around Canton.

17. On paper it might look, Dr. Foo said, that the Japanese had driven a wedge between two sections of Free China, but this was not so. It was always possible for isolated groups to dodge the Japanese patrols and cross the line of communications stretching from Changsha to Kweilin. At any time also the Chinese could mass troops and cut this line of communication, although it would remain cut only until such time as the Japanese in their turn massed forces and reopened the line of communications. For this reason he did not look upon the recent Japanese operations as being in any way of an offensive character. On the contrary he regarded them as purely defensive and a sign of Japanese weakness. They were attempting to open a line of retreat to North China for all their forces in South-east Asia threatened with isolation by the United States approach to the Philippines.

18. Dr. Foo then said that the only way to provide the Chinese armies with tanks and heavy artillery was by sea. The reopening of the Burma road would be of great help to China in respect of other supplies, but the frail bridges on this route did not permit the transport of heavy armament. It was for this reason that the key to the final defeat of Japan lay in an Allied landing on the South coast of China after the Japanese had been deprived of the sea route to South-east Asia. He did not mean to imply that the Burma campaign was not important. On the contrary the Chinese Government, like the United States Government, had been very disappointed when the British Government had not carried out their undertaking to send three more British divisions to India. These divisions had been kept in Egypt and some of the troops had been used in the abortive attack last spring on the Dodecanese Islands.

19. The best way to dislodge the Japanese from Burma, continued Dr. Foo, was to cut their sea communications. This could be done by the British executing a series of landing operations similar to those so successfully undertaken by the United States forces in the Western Pacific. For instance, they could spring from Ceylon to the Nicobar Islands, from thence to the tip of Sumatra and then attempt to recapture Singapore. Such an operation coinciding with the United States recapture of the Philippines would wrest the whole of South-east Asia from Japanese control. They would have no alternative to evacuating from Burma and the other conquered territories to the South of China. The way would then be paved for an Allied landing in force on the China coast, after which full use could be made of the Chinese armies and Chinese bases for the final

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overthrow of Japanese military power.

20. I suspect that the purpose of the Chinese Ambassador in thus detailing possible future military operations was to instil into me some optimism as an antidote to the pessimistic accounts I had been reading of the progress of the war in China. You will have observed that in this despatch the account of my conversation with Dr. Foo on the subject of China commenced with Moscow, then took in Sinkiang, after which we briefly touched on Outer Mongolia and Manchuria before dwelling on Communist China and military operations in South China. This then led to a survey of possible military operations in South-east Asia ending with those likely to be conducted from Ceylon. We thus covered a lot of ground, particularly as before talking about Sino-Soviet relations we had roamed for some time around Europe and paid a brief visit to Dumbarton Oaks. As I escorted him to the door I felt that I had spent a very profitable and stimulating two hours and fifteen minutes with the Chinese Ambassador.

I have the honour to be,
Sir,
Your obedient servant,

ldw/ef

(Sgd) L.D. Wilgress

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