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DEPARTMENT OF STATE
DEPUTY UNDERSECRETARY
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April 26, 1966

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

SUBJECT: Discussion with Mr. Rice on Far
East Problems

1. The following is an informal record of the highlights of a discussion held on April 13. Participants were Mr. Ed Rice, Consul General Hong Kong; General Allison, Admiral Curtis, Col. Dunwoody and Capt. Howe; Mr. Weiss and Col. Lindjord.
2. The meeting was arranged to bring General Allison and his team together with Mr. Rice, so that they might have the benefit of his insight and judgment concerning US-Chinese relationships, and in particular concerning potential hostilities between the US and Communist China. General Allison and Admiral Curtis described in outline the study they are undertaking concerning alternative US military courses of action affecting Communist China. Mr. Rice suggested that the group address questions to him as the best way of proceeding.
3. Admiral Curtis asked concerning recent reports that the Chicoms had expressed anxiety over alleged US invasion plans. Mr. Rice said there has been a growing tendency on the part of the Chicoms to consider a clash with the US as very likely. The Chicoms presumably argue that mechanistic pressures on the US, plus frustrations over developments in Vietnam, will push the US into an attack on China. Mr. Rice added that the Chicoms have probably lost their perspective after viewing the US "threat" for such a long time. They are also frustrated by a series of set-backs abroad, including Ben Bella, their hollow ultimatum to India during the Pakistan conflict, and Indonesia (where they may have intended to put a squeeze on Southeast Asia from the South). All this may have given them an "encirclement complex", and they have also probably learned about some GRC planning for offensive action against the mainland. All these considerations may have led them to believe that war is likely, probably taking the form initially of US attacks on air-fields in South China.

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4. Mr. Weiss asked how the Chinese masses view the government they live under, and how they view the threat from the United States. He asked whether a US attack, on South China for example, would create cohesion or chaos within China. Mr. Rice said the short answer was cohesion. He said the Chinese have declared they will respond if they are attacked and that they would not limit the area in which they would respond. They would, however, prefer a defensive war, both because of international reactions and because of the cohesive effect it would have on their population. The people, while they may not be enthusiastic, would support the Chicom Government. During the Sino-Japanese war, the Chinese in the bombed cities consistently supported the Government against the Japanese. Communist China today would, if necessary, fight a broken-back war. They might try to induce the invaders to move well into China, where the attackers would find it difficult to support themselves. Mr. Rice summed up by saying he did not believe China can be conquered on its own territory.

5. General Allison asked at what point or under what conditions the Chicoms would intervene militarily. Mr. Rice said they would come in if we invaded North Vietnam on the ground, and they might also come in if North Vietnam loses a large number of troops in the South; under these conditions, the Chinese might replace some of these losses. It is probable that the Chinese do not want to become involved, but they are fatalistic. It is also a fact that they have become more involved in North Vietnam during the past 6 to 8 months by sending in personnel to assist in making repairs, etc.

6. In response to a question concerning the militia in Communist China, Mr. Rice said it varies widely in competence and organization. Militia elements have been useful in local defense tasks, for coast watching and catching infiltrators from Taiwan. The militia are increasingly well armed, and provide an enormous reservoir

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for guerrilla warfare and for replacements for the regular forces. There are perhaps 12 million men in the militia. It seems clear that the Chinese Communists would rely heavily on guerrilla and partisan warfare in a conflict with the U.S.

7. Admiral Curtis said one facet of their study involves use of GRC forces. He asked concerning Generalissimo Chiang's view that his forces would quickly win support on the mainland. Mr. Rice said that by the time Chiang left the mainland, both he and his troops had lost prestige, and the GRC image was badly tarnished. Young people who would fight today have no knowledge of the GRC except through hearsay, which is nearly all bad. Mr. Rice pointed out, however, that it would be helpful to have GRC personnel who speak the language participate with US or other forces in the event of operations in China. Mr. Rice reported that General Wedemeyer had expressed the view, concerning a possible GRC invasion of Hainan, that GRC units are well trained but it is doubtful whether the GRC has a general who could manage an operation of the scale required to invade Hainan. (A mainland invasion would of course mean a very much larger undertaking.)

8. Mr. Rice expressed the view that very few people in Communist China would join the GRC cause. There is much dissatisfaction with the Chicom regime, but this does not mean that the people would not support the Government. Mr. Rice expressed the view that the Chinese Communists probably provide the most effective government that China has ever had. He did not believe that the U.S. is capable of imposing its political will on the Chinese, although we could of course inflict great damage on them.

9. General Allison asked what will happen with the passing of the leaders of the Long March. Mr. Rice described them as a peculiar breed; to rise to the top during the period 1920-1949 meant an extremely difficult struggle for survival. These people are tough and are accustomed to hardships. They are also generalists, who can fight, direct armies, administer territory, operate a de facto

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government, run communications systems, collect taxes, administer punishment and use propaganda. The permanent members of the Poliburo now have an average age of 69. They are all accustomed to struggle and strife and all have had similar experiences and have developed similar viewpoints. The next group of leaders is likely to be different: more specialized and with more variations in outlook. It is unlikely that the new leadership will be so completely made up of individuals who enjoy struggle; some, for example, may have more interest in nation building. However, if we invade China, we will recreate the conditions of struggle, and tend to perpetuate the attitudes and policies of the present leadership.

10. General Allison said he understood the current regime is rather hard on intellectuals. Mr. Rice agreed that this was true, except for intellectuals engaged in scientific work. General Allison asked whether, when the Long March leaders disappear, we will be better able to apply political pressure against the Chicoms. Mr. Rice said some observers think there are strong reasons for hope in this direction. Mao has said the younger generation has not learned to struggle, and that it would take a war to teach them to struggle.

11. Mr. Rice said the Chicom Army lacks strategic mobility, and they would become rapidly less effective militarily as they moved away from their home base. He reiterated the view that the Chinese are unconquerable on their own territory. He pointed out that in spite of Japanese advantages, the Japanese were unable to prevail in China; now China is far more united and its government is far more effective than it was in the 1930's and 1940's.

12. Mr. Rice said Hong Kong is not a British strong point. There are 7,000 troops there who are used to back up the local police. There is no real British Naval base there. The population is 98% Chinese. The British are militarily in the Chicoms' pocket and have to proceed very carefully in their relations with the Chicoms. The British are as cooperative as they can be with the U.S. in Hong Kong.

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The British troops are there partly so that overt aggression could be identified; they cannot defend Hong Kong against attack. On balance, the Chicoms probably want to keep the Hong Kong situation as it is; the foreign exchange they obtain through Hong Kong is valuable.

13. Mr. Weiss asked how the Chinese Communists would react to limited U.S. use of nuclear weapons. Mr. Rice said Mao likes to down-grade the capability of any modern weapons. The Chicoms have always adopted the stance that nuclear weapons are not necessarily decisive. Mr. Rice expressed the view that the political disadvantages to the U.S. in using nuclear weapons would be very substantial. In Japan, for example, the reaction would almost automatically be strongly unfavorable, and the use of U.S. bases in Japan would become doubtful. Mr. Weiss asked whether Mao really believes what he says on this point. Mr. Rice said he doesn't think Mao would be much worried about the loss of 10,000,000 Chinese lives. The Chinese have a characteristic disregard for human life in statistical terms.

14. General Allison asked about Chinese concern for preserving their industry against atomic attack. Mr. Rice said he thinks this has restrained the Chicoms, but he believes the Chicoms would probably accept extensive industrial losses rather than capitulate. He believes they would probably literally go underground on a large scale. Admiral Curtis asked whether the Russians would be greatly concerned with a Viet Cong defeat. Mr. Rice said the Soviets certainly do not want this to happen, but he doubted that it would greatly affect US-Soviet relations. He suggested that the possible Soviet reaction should certainly not deter us from trying to win, but on the other hand we should try to avoid posing an unnecessary challenge to the Soviets. He pointed out that the Soviets could withdraw from Cuba much easier than they would be able to withdraw from Haiphong; if we should mine the harbor at Haiphong this would present a serious problem for the Soviets. For example, it would force the movement of supplies to North Vietnam to go overland, giving the Chicoms more leverage and the Soviets less in dealing with North Vietnam.

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15. Mr. Weiss asked, in the event the U.S. got into direct military action with the Chicoms, whether the Chicoms would be likely to make an accommodation with the Soviets. Mr. Rice expressed the view that the Chicoms in such a situation would try to call on the Soviets as Communist brothers, and the Soviets might respond positively. He noted that we are imperialists to both the Soviets and the Chicoms.

16. General Allison asked what options are open to us if the Chicoms enter Vietnam in force. Mr. Rice expressed the view that we should meet them on the peninsula and interdict their supply lines. He pointed out that they are at a maximum disadvantage when operating farthest from their home base. He suggested that it would be better not to play to their strength, (i.e., attack them where they are strong). He assumed we would have to interdict their lines of communication through Laos. In this connection, he noted that we are coming to realize that it is harder than we had supposed to knock out bridges and supply lines and to keep them knocked out. General Allison agreed that it was hard to shut off enemy ^{supply} lines entirely, but pointed out that we can make it more difficult for the enemy. Mr. Rice added that the Chicoms have a considerable capability for man-pack supply operations, but he emphasized that the Chinese Communist national lack of strategic mobility is an important consideration. He said the Chinese have no significant R&D program to modernize their military equipment, and they must be generally far behind us in military technology.

17. General Allison asked what would be the likely outcome of a military conflict with China, and what alternatives could be foreseen. Mr. Rice said this problem is what people had in mind when they warned against US involvement on the Asia mainland. He said the more we do in North Vietnam, the more risk we run of Chinese Communist intervention. He suggested that we could probably do most anything in South Vietnam without an overt reaction from the Chinese Communists. He said probably the most succinct advice he could give regarding waging war with China is don't. He noted that the Chinese are trying to get their

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people to shift from a rice diet to a wheat diet, and are increasingly dependent upon wheat imports. If they got into war with us, their wheat imports would presumably be stopped by our naval blockade. He said trade with Japan is very important to the Chicoms; Japan might agree to clamp down on exports to Communist China in the event of hostilities. He said it might be possible to mobilize other pressures on the Chicoms, as responses to a Chicom move southward, without initially attacking mainland China itself.

18. Mr. Weiss suggested that although we might not be able to prevail militarily in China, the Chicoms would also find it hard to prevail outside China because of the enormous US resource base. Mr. Rice said he assumed the US would knock out the air bases in North Vietnam if the Chicoms came South.

19. General Allison asked concerning the use of air strikes against Chinese production centers. Mr. Rice pointed out that extensive air operations deep into China would result in losing US pilots. He also suggested that it was doubtful whether loss of their industry would deter the Chicoms much once they got into a war with us. (He said the threat of losing their industry might deter them from getting into war with us in the first place.) He added that he did not consider Southeast Asia worth getting the US into a nuclear war.

20. Admiral Curtis asked concerning the small-scale use of tactical nuclear weapons. Mr. Rice said he opposed this on the ground that it was likely to escalate. Mr. Weiss recalled Chiang's warning regarding the implications of using nuclear weapons in Asia. If Chiang's analysis is correct, using nuclear weapons might be the worst way for us to maintain influence in the area.

21. Mr. Rice reiterated that if we use nuclear weapons against the Chicoms, we might lose Japan as an ally and lose the use of Japanese bases. We might also lose the support of the Taiwanese. (He noted that the Chinese in Taiwan and Hong Kong took some pride in the Chinese Communist successes in North Korea and against India.)

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22. Regarding the Vietnam conflict itself, Mr. Rice stressed the importance of keeping the initiative on our side. He said the more Viet Cong storage areas we can uncover and seize, the worse will be the problem for the Viet Cong. He did not think we should press our efforts northward; the center of gravity of our effort should be in the South.

cc: G - Mr. Johnson
S/AL - Ambassador Thompson
G/PM - Mr. Kitchen
Mr. Garthoff
FE - Mr. Berger
Mr. Unger
S/P - Mr. Owen

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