

**December 18, 1968**

**Memorandum from Department Head Egon Bahr,  
'Establishment of Relations with the Communist  
States in Asia'**

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**Summary:**

Bahr discusses the possibility of West Germany establishing relations with China, Mongolia, North Korea, or North Vietnam.

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German

**Contents:**

Translation - English

Memorandum from Department Head [Egon] Bahr

Strictly confidential

December 18, 1968

Subject: Establishment of Relations with the Communist States in Asia

RE: Instruction of the [Foreign] Minister's Office from November 21, 1968

1. The attached memorandum[1] summarizes deliberations about above subject in three chapters:

I. Situation, II. Alternatives, III. German Interests.

2. A review of our position towards the communist states in Asia is based on the possible ending of the Vietnam War, which might result in a gradual change of the overall situation in Asia. In particular US policy might be interested in linking the People's Republic of China to a peace settlement in Vietnam and thus come closer to a gradual adjustment of its relationship with Beijing.[2] The Chinese side for its part could link an agreement to a Vietnam settlement to make progress in Sino-American relations. The positive American reaction to the Chinese-proposed resumption of Sino-American ambassadorial talks on February 20, 1969[3] indicates that both sides are interested in bilateral contacts already during the Vietnam negotiations[4] in Paris.

3. However, one cannot expect a rapid improvement of American-Chinese relations .[5] (A basis for an armistice and subsequent peace settlement in Vietnam will be hard to come by; a solution of the Taiwan problem is hardly possible as long as Jiang Jieshi [Chiang Kai-shek] is alive[6]; finally, Washington will not want to jeopardize prospects for the priority of American-Soviet summit arrangements[7] through too far-reaching, parallel American-Chinese contacts.) Revealing in this context was a remark by Democratic Senator Henry Jackson (Washington) during his recent visit to Bonn.[8] He said it will not be easy for a Republican administration to agree to a peace settlement in Vietnam; it would be even harder to overcome the Republican trauma of recognition of the People's Republic of China. Anyway, it could be assumed that an American recognition would at best come at the end of a longer process.[9]

4. German policy cannot be interested in devaluing its potential decisions to be made due to the new development by falling behind American steps. At the same time, we may not charge ahead and make the position of the American government, burdened by a much higher responsibility for Asia, more difficult. This leads to the following conclusions:

- our political deliberations have to be finalized so early that we will be in a position to adapt to any American initiative;

- at the right moment we have to assert our legitimate interests in the implementation of our decisions, if necessary also vis-a-vis the United States;[10]

- in case they are started, we have to conduct negotiations with the communist states in Asia in such a way that they will be about finalized before the Vietnam talks are ending in Paris.

5. We could envisage the following:

- For the People's Republic of China an exchange of official trade representations, or at best signing a trade agreement with the establishment of an officially supported, private business representation in charge of the agreement's implementation.[11] A decision on the level to be chosen could be made contingent on the course of exploratory talks with Beijing where, we should enter the full range of options (including diplomatic relations) into discussion;[12]

- For the People's Republic of Mongolia an according agreement; however, due to showing consideration for Beijing we should adhere to a timeline, and doing so after an agreement with Beijing;[13]

- For North Korea, with consideration for the division of the country and our diplomatic relations with South Korea, the establishment of an officially supported, private business representation;

- For North Vietnam, with consideration for the division of the country, our diplomatic relations with South Vietnam, and in light of the yet lacking armistice, the establishment of a branch of German charity organizations and the exchange of journalists.[14]

6. Forming an opinion about the question of establishing relations should be postponed until about late February/early March because until then

- the policy course of the new American administration can be assessed better;

- the Paris Vietnam negotiations should have come into gear, so that their probable development could be projected;[15]

- the meeting scheduled for February 20, 1969, between the American and Chinese ambassador in Warsaw[16] and other indicators will provide additional clues about the tendency of the new Chinese policy towards the United States, the Soviet Union, and Southeast Asia;

- results of talks by the Foreign Minister in five Asian capitals during the second half of January, [17] and also for the first meeting between the German and Japanese planning staff in early February,[18] will be available.[19]

7. Until the point in time where we have formed an opinion, any direct exploration of Chinese intentions should be avoided,[20] unless the Chinese make efforts in response to the Foreign Minister's statements in "Publik." [21] Also to be avoided until then, is a German initiative to establish contacts in the context of the arrest of German citizens in China[22], since this could lead to misinterpretations and set precedent for later decisions. After the interview of the Foreign Minister in the weekly newspaper "Publik" from December 6, 1968, for now the China issue is supposed to be no longer officially mentioned in public.[23]

8. After the conclusion of internal discussion, intensive preparatory talks should be held with our Western main allies and the most important Asian states. Then explorations with the Chinese could follow.[24] In case they are successful, we should then inform the Soviet Union as well as other European and Asian states about our plan[25] in order to create the largest possible understanding.

Herewith submitted via the State Secretary[26] to the Minister. [27]

Bahr

VS-Bd. 11577 (Planning Staff)

[1] Attached to the file. [Not attached to this translation]. For planning staff memorandum "Establishment of Relations with the Communist States in Asia (Policy Proposal)" from December 13, 1968 see: VS-Bd. 11577 (Planning Staff); B 150, File Copies 1968.

[2] This sentence got highlighted by [Foreign Ministry] State Secretary [Georg Ferdinand] Duckwitz. He added in handwriting: "American policy in Vietnam is based on Ho Chi Minh's hostility against the Chinese. This is its [policy] foundation."

[3] Already in 1965 talks were held in Warsaw between diplomatic representatives of the US and the People's Republic of China. See here AAPD 1965, II, Document 228.

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n February 18, 1969 the People's Republic of China canceled the meeting scheduled for February 20, 1969 between the Chinese Ambassador in Warsaw, Wang Guo Xuan, and his American colleague Walter J. Stoessel. As a reason, it mentioned the American refusal to extradite a former Chinese diplomat in the Netherlands, Liao Ho Shu, who had been in the United States since February 4, 1969. See Europa-Archiv 1969, Z 43 and Z 55.

[4] Since May 10, 1968 talks about ending the Vietnam War were held in Paris between the United States and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam.

[5] This sentence and the words "rapid improvement" were highlighted by State Secretary Duckwitz. Handwritten addition: "You can never know."

[6] The phrase "solution of Taiwan problem ... possible" was highlighted by State Secretary Duckwitz. He added in handwriting: "Also not desirable, in particular not by Red China."

[7] On December 6, 1968, Ambassador Knapstein, Washington, informed about constant speculations by the American press about an upcoming resumption of American-Soviet strategic armament limitation talks or an American-Soviet summit. These speculations were said to be based on a TV statement by the US Secretary of State where [Dean] Rusk did not want to exclude such a summit. However, President Johnson emphasized to the press that there were currently no plans for such a meeting. See here telexes No. 2480 and No. 2481; Sector II A 6, Vol. 277.

[8] On the visit by the American senator in Bonn on November 15, 1968 see Document 421, footnote 3.

[9] This sentence was highlighted by State Secretary Duckwitz. Handwritten addition: "Currently China is not at all interested in this."

[10] For this paragraph handwritten addition by State Secretary Duckwitz: "The United States are today not a problem for us any more. They would even welcome our presence in the Chinese theater. Our problem is the Soviet Union."

[11] The term "private business representation" was highlighted by State Secretary Duckwitz. Handwritten addition: "Maximum!"

[12] On the phrase "where we should enter ... into discussion" handwritten addition by State Secretary Duckwitz: "That we actually should not do right now."

[13] This paragraph was highlighted by State Secretary Duckwitz. Handwritten addition: "Politically and economically completely uninteresting."

[14] The last two paragraphs were highlighted by State Secretary Duckwitz. Handwritten addition: "I can only strongly warn before this. It would gain us nothing."

[15] The last two paragraphs were highlighted by State Secretary Duckwitz. Handwritten addition: "Still too early."

[16] Walter J. Stoessel and Wan Guo Xuan.

[17] The planned travel between January 19 and 31, 1969 to Pakistan, Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia, and India did not take place due an illness of Foreign Minister [Willy] Brandt.

[18] The meeting of Planning Staffs from the Federal Republic and Japan took place between February 3 and 6, 1969 in Bonn. See here the memorandum by Department Head Bahr from February 19, 1969; AAPD 1969.

[19] This paragraph was highlighted by State Secretary Duckwitz. Handwritten addition: "These talks will advise me to exercise utmost caution."

[20] The phrase "any direct exploration ... avoided" was highlighted by State Secretary Duckwitz. Handwritten addition: "c[orrect]."

[21] On December 6, 1968 Foreign Minister Brandt spoke in an interview with the weekly newspaper "Publik" about development of future policy towards the communist states in Asia, like the People's Republic of China, the Mongolian People's Republic, and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea). Regarding China he said that bilateral trade relations are not just of interest to the Federal Republic but also to the Chinese side. Otherwise the latter "would not participate in the expansion of trade. So far this was possible without formalizing relations. It is another question whether this always has to remain that way." Brandt emphasized that policy of the federal government is not just determined by the Vietnam War and the relationship between the United States and the People's Republic of China, but also by its own interests: "German policy on China has to be integrated in tasks and objectives of our general foreign policy, namely to further economic and social development of the states in this important region of the world, and thus to contribute towards its stabilization and its peace." See Bulletin 1968, p. 1374.

On the Chinese reaction see document 428.

[22] On December 16, 1968 Parliamentary State Secretary [Gerhard] Jahn replied in writing to SPD parliament deputy Günther Müller that the exact number of people from the Federal Republic currently held in custody in the People's Republic of China against their will is unknown to the [FRG] Foreign Ministry. "In one individual case of arrest the Foreign Ministry is in contact with the relatives. In another case so far only the name of the arrested person is known. Four additional cases have come to the attention of the Foreign Ministry just recently without details on names. All cases are concerning employees of German companies operating in China. The Federal Government has no means to intervene with the Chinese authorities regarding the release and departure of Germans who are held in the People's Republic of China against their will." See Section II A 8, Vol. 817.

[23] The phrase "weekly newspaper ... public" was highlighted by State Secretary Duckwitz. Handwritten addition: "c[orrect]."

[24] On the phrase "after the conclusion ... could follow" handwritten comment by State Secretary Duckwitz.: "In my opinion this is a decision for our autonomous foreign policy. (With the exception of the United States)."

[25] The term "our plan" was highlighted by State Secretary Duckwitz. Handwritten addition: "About which one?"

[26] Arrived with State Secretary Duckwitz on December 18, 1968.

[27] Arrived with Foreign Minister Brandt on December 23, 1968. He noted in handwriting: "Right now the statement is sufficient that nothing is supposed to happen externally [of the Foreign Ministry]. At the beginning of the year, the memorandum should be revised, respectively discussed, in consideration of comments made by the State Secretary".