

## China Watch by Gregory F. Buhyoff

### Peking has Washington guessing

*New initiatives toward Africa and Cuba include a debt moratorium for Zaire.*

**F**or the first time since 1963, a Chinese head of government has made a major tour of Africa bearing messages of unwavering Chinese support for the nations of the continent.

Premier Zhao Ziyang wound up a month-long 10-nation tour of Arab and Black Africa the second week in January—a tour designed to test the saleability of its new “independent” foreign policy to a Third World that has grown suspicious of Peking’s decade of strategic collusion with Washington.

The Chinese are eager to convince their Third World brethren that they are no longer anybody’s card, and that China identifies with the causes and aspirations of the developing sector. Peking is also keen on establishing itself as a leader of the Third World in preparation for the March Non-Aligned summit, in order to protect its own strategic interests.

Zhao emphasized to his African hosts that China wants to pick up where former Premier Chou En-lai left off in the 1960s. China’s relations with the Third World hit their peak at that time, before the interruptions brought about by the Cultural Revolution and subsequent Sino-U.S. machinations.

But the Chinese are aware that rhetoric alone will not dispel African reservations. So while Zhao was declaring China’s deep sympathy for the struggles of the Arab and African peoples, the 64 military and economic experts accompanying him were busy meeting with their counterparts. Before leaving Cairo, Zhao promised the

Egyptians 60 to 80 new F-7 jet fighters, the Chinese version of the Soviet MiG 21. In Zaire, Zhao announced the cancellation of that country’s \$100 million debt, presumably reckoning that since it was unlikely to see the debt repaid, China might as well win itself points in the Third World.

Most interesting from the standpoint of strategists trying to gauge the substance of China’s foreign policy shift was Zhao’s treatment of the situation in Angola, where Cuban troops and Soviet advisers remain. While heaping criticism on the “racist regime” in South Africa and referring to the “superpower behind it,” Zhao neglected to directly attack the “Cuban mercenaries” whom only a short while back Peking referred to as “the Vietnamese of Africa.” Instead, remarks on foreign interference were limited to a broad attack on “hegemonism” involving “both superpowers.”

Meanwhile, back in Peking, on Jan. 5 a visiting Cuban trade delegation concluded a new trade protocol between the two countries, capped by a cordial meeting between Minister of Foreign Economic Relations and Trade, Chen Muhua, and the Cuban Vice-Minister of Foreign Trade. The following week, as Zhao flew from Zimbabwe to Tanzania, China established formal diplomatic ties with Angola.

Uncertain about China’s foreign-policy orientation, Secretary of State George Shultz called on Henry Kissinger to organize a special briefing for himself, National Security Advis-

or William Clark, Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger and 20 other ranking administration officials who heard a dozen China experts (including Carter Defense Secretary Harold Brown) air their views on recent Sino-Soviet and Sino-U.S. developments.

As preparations proceed for Shultz’s February visit to Peking, pessimism about the current state of U.S.-China relations has made administration officials unsure about where to try to take the relationship from here.

According to informed sources, despite recognition at the Kissinger meeting that Peking-Washington relations have hit the doldrums, no one urged that the United States must “head the Russians off at the pass” with placating concessions to Peking.

Participants generally agreed that Shultz should focus on broad themes of agreement, i.e. “shared strategic concerns,” and increased economic and scientific ties, while avoiding areas of bilateral disagreement such as Taiwan or the textile dispute.

Varying degrees of opposition emerged to the idea of bringing up arms sales to the Chinese, on the grounds that this might provoke the Soviets at a crucial juncture in the arms reduction debate.

Premier Zhao, who is expected to visit Washington later this year, should be welcomed, according to the views of many, but few saw any reason for President Reagan to visit Peking this year.

Peking, for its part, seems as eager as ever to pursue economic relations with the United States but not if political strings are attached. However, the failure of textile negotiations and the imposition of new restrictions on Chinese textile imports to the United States could dampen Chinese enthusiasm for U.S. cooperation in its modernization plans.