

Turmoil in China; U.S. AND CHINESE SEEK TO RESOLVE RIFT ON DISSIDENT

By THOMAS L. FRIEDMAN and SPECIAL TO THE NEW YORK TIMES JUNE 13, 1989

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The State Department and Chinese diplomats continued talks today on the increasingly bitter dispute over China's most prominent dissident, who has taken refuge in the United States Embassy in Beijing. United States officials said no resolution appeared imminent.

Secretary of State James A. Baker 3d, who has been personally involved in the issue, met for the second time in three days with the Chinese Ambassador, Han Xu, in an effort to find an acceptable solution.

The dissident, Fang Lizhi, and his wife, Li Shuxian, have been staying in the embassy in Beijing for the last week. Both are physicists, and Miss Li is an outspoken dissident in her own right. Chinese Issue Warrants

On Sunday, the Chinese authorities accused the couple of "counterrevolutionary activities" and issued warrants for their arrest. Today, Administration officials said they would not turn Mr. Fang and Miss Li over to the Chinese authorities if it appeared that that they would be imprisoned or harmed.

Western diplomats said the controversy over the couple began on June 4, hours after the military crackdown in Beijing. A friend of the couple telephoned the embassy, saying that Mr. Fang and Miss Li felt that their lives were in danger and

that the couple wanted to take refuge in the American diplomatic compound. Initially, an American diplomat told the couple to go to a Beijing hotel while the embassy contacted the State Department for instructions. The embassy hesitated because it is against standing rules for an American embassy to grant refuge to a foreign national on the national's own territory. Question of 'Personal Danger'

On June 5, the matter was brought to Secretary Baker at the regular morning staff meeting, during which the major topic at hand was the violence in Beijing. The diplomats said Secretary Baker's position was that the United States should "not deny refuge or sanctuary" if the couple was "in personal danger."

Since the embassy had concluded that the couple were indeed in such danger, they were granted sanctuary within the American compound, the diplomats said. The couple had no trouble entering the embassy, and no Chinese authorities were in "hot pursuit" when they arrived, the diplomats said.

At no time did the couple ask for political asylum, in the sense of seeking to flee to the United States and acquire American citizenship, Administration officials said. Rather, Mr. Fang asked for physical protection, and it was on that basis that he was allowed into the embassy under the diplomatic principle of "temporary refuge."

Administration officials said Mr. Fang was very sensitive about the question of asylum and has reiterated to his embassy hosts that he considers himself a Chinese patriot who wants, if at all possible, to remain in his country. No Details of Talks

Both White House and State Department officials refused to discuss questions about the substance of Mr. Baker's talks with the Chinese Ambassador regarding the couple, except to say that the officials preferred to characterize the talks as "discussions" about the case and not as "negotiations" over the couple's fate.

The officials emphasized that the discussions were not confined to the Fang affair, encompassing instead the full range of Chinese-American relations. Ambassador Xu was first summoned for a meeting with Mr. Baker on Saturday, and then again on Sunday, when he met with the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, Robert M. Kimmitt.

Speaking generally about United States policy, the State Department spokeswoman, Margaret D. Tutwiler, said: "You should know that we don't offer political asylum in a foreign country. An American diplomatic post can only provide temporary refuge to an individual in an immediate life-threatening situation. Political asylum can only be considered after an individual has reached

the United States." 'A Longstanding Practice'

"The United States has a longstanding practice of granting temporary refuge in exceptional situations of immediate personal danger," Ms. Tutwiler added. "This has nothing to do with politics, but rather is based on overriding humanitarian concerns. It does not constitute interference in host country internal affairs, but rather reflects the international principle of protection of and respect for human life."

Jozsef Cardinal Mindszenty, who took similar refuge in the United States diplomatic mission in Budapest when the Hungarian revolt was smashed on Nov. 4, 1956, spent 15 years as an exile in his own capital. The Cardinal, who lived in a three-room apartment in the embassy, was finally given safe passage to Rome as part of a three-way deal between the United States, Hungary and the Vatican.

Administration analysts say resolving the Fang case is extremely difficult because Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping and President Yang Shangkun are to some degree "obsessed" with Mr. Fang and Miss Li. They dislike them, consider them dangerous domestic political agitators and want them arrested, an analyst said.

The 53-year-old Mr. Fang, who in recent years has emerged as an advocate of sweeping political change in China, has a record of conflict with the Chinese authorities. His ability to take advantage of his international standing as an astrophysicist to shield himself from arrest has particularly irritated the Chinese authorities. Fang Reportedly Disliked

The fact that China's leaders were ready to disrupt President Bush's visit to Beijing in February by physically barring Mr. Fang from attending a dinner with the President was a measure of how much the leaders dislike the man and how far they are prepared to go in curbing his activities, analysts said.

Although Mr. Fang played no apparent public role in the pro-democracy demonstrations in Tiananmen Square, the Chinese authorities apparently saw him as an inspiration behind the movement, prompting Sunday night's charges that he and his wife were responsible for "crimes of counterrevolutionary propaganda and instigation."

The Chinese authorities "have a lot on their plate right now and what they are most interested in is restoring order at home," said a China expert at the State Department. "That means arresting demonstrators, student leaders and charismatic figures. They see arresting Fang as part of that. They are ready to pay a price in terms of their relations with us in order to get him." Tactics Denounced

On another front, Ms. Tutwiler denounced the latest Chinese Government campaign intended to present the democracy movement as a rowdy mob that attacked soldiers without provocation.

"The whole world has seen what happened in Tiananmen Square," Ms. Tutwiler said. "Large numbers of peaceful demonstrators were killed by army units. We condemn the use of live fire against unarmed civilians, which is what happened in Tiananmen Square."

The spokeswoman said the demonstrators were seeking basic human rights. "Labeling such people counterrevolutionaries and hooligans will do nothing to alter the reality of what happened in Tiananmen Square," she said.

In its strongest criticism yet of the repression of the pro-democracy students in China, Ms. Tutwiler added that if China's senior leader, Deng Xiaoping, was behind the action, he had undercut the process of change he sought to foster.

"That's a tragedy for China, its people and for the legacy he sought to pass on," Ms. Tutwiler said.

Ms. Tutwiler declined to discuss the status of the two Chinese consulate officials, Zhang Liman and Zhou Liman, who announced in San Francisco on Sunday that they were seeking political asylum in the United States.

The two have been referred to the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Immigration and Naturalization Service, Ms. Tutwiler said, adding, "I cannot comment on any other details concerning those two gentlemen."

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