

JUST HOW DANGEROUS IS RED CHINA?



Are China's Communists—beset by internal discord—getting ready to start a war as a means of masking their monumental problems? If so, what kind of war? Has Peking really got the strength to fight anybody, anywhere, on any terms?

One of Japan's political leaders—Masumi Esaki—has just come out of China after a four-week visit that included talks with Red leaders and inspection of military installations. In this interview he tells what he saw and heard about Communist China. . . .

OldMagazineArticles.com

RED CHINA

Masumi Esaki, a member of Japan's Parliament, is on the executive board of the ruling Liberal-Democratic Party, and is one of the party's defense specialists. He has long been active in political affairs of postwar Japan, and was head of the Japanese Defense Agency in 1960.

Q Mr. Esaki, what are the key impressions you brought back from your four-week trip to Communist China?

A After talking with a number of top Chinese leaders, inspecting a commune and a Red Army Camp, and traveling several thousand miles across China, a number of things seem clear:

A grand housecleaning is now in progress on the mainland, to make sure the Communist revolution of Mao Tse-tung survives his death. In Peking, they talk of "finishing up" their revolution and getting rid of all the enemies of the revolution—people who might rise up against the regime if mainland China were invaded.

Publicly, at least, they are playing upon invasion fears to justify preparations for a defensive war.

Q What makes you believe these war preparations are primarily defensive?

A In reality, China is not able to start a war. It does not have the eco-

RED CHINA

conomic ability to wage a successful war of aggression. For example, the per capita income of Chinese peasants is only \$55 to \$110 a year, one tenth that of a Japanese farmer. And, politically, comrades have been purging comrades, leading to considerable confusion.

Q Do you discount this war talk in Peking, then?

A To a considerable degree, yes. It's all part of their housecleaning program—to get the Chinese people to make greater sacrifices. They believe that strong verbal attacks on the United States are the easiest way to unify public opinion behind them.

Incidentally, I feel that the real target of Chinese antagonism is not the United States so much as the Soviet Union. You should not underestimate the Chinese hostility toward what they call Soviet revisionism.

Q You mentioned visiting a Red Army camp. Was it difficult to secure permission?

A They volunteered to show it to us. While visiting a commune near Canton, our hosts asked us to watch their militia at target practice. Then, during our stay in Peking, they suggested we inspect a People's Liberation Army camp.

Q Was it a showplace, specially prepared for visitors like yourself?

A Not exactly. We visited the camp of the 196th Division, which

RED CHINA

participated in the war of resistance against Japan, the "liberation" war against the Chinese Nationalists, and the Korean War. This division is composed of three infantry battalions, one artillery battalion and one tank battalion, so it might more properly be called a regiment. But their camp seemed to be legitimate enough.

However, it seems significant that they insisted on our visiting this camp when we did not particularly request a visit, even knowing that we were pro-American politicians, neither socialist nor Communist.

Q What was their objective?

A I suppose they wanted us to get and pass on "the message." I suspect they wanted us to see just how capable the Red Army is under certain circumstances—guerrilla warfare, in particular.

What was demonstrated for us were such things as regular drilling, obstacle-course training, signaling with flags, target practice on the ranges, mock tank battles, and booby-trap mines. All in all, it was an impressive performance.

Q What impressed you the most?

A The mining. They explained that the antipersonnel mine is their most unusual weapon, developed primarily to sap the enemy's morale. For example, a small demonstration cottage had been erected in the mid-

RED CHINA

dle of a field with two soldiers dressed in U. S. uniforms standing beside it. The instant they try to tear off a poster pasted on the wall, a mine explodes. When they sit on a chair, a mine explodes. When they remove the lid from a pot, a mine explodes. Virtually everything connected with that house was mined.

Q In your tour of the camp, were you forbidden entry to some parts?

A As far as we could tell, nothing was off limits. But we were not allowed to take photographs, and they would not give us any details about their strength or equipment.

However, we did get an interesting insight into their military psychology when we witnessed a hand-grenade demonstration.

Q In what way?

A When Defense Minister Lin Piao visited this camp in 1961, he explained to the soldiers that the Red Army was most effective at close-in combat, and stressed the need to lure the enemy within a killing range of 200 yards.

Consequently, particular emphasis is put on practicing with hand grenades. When we were there, a model of Lyndon Johnson was set up as a target at which about a hundred soldiers heaved hand grenades, one after the other.

Q How would you rate the Chinese Communist fighting man?

RED CHINA

A Any attacker would encounter strong resistance. The soldiers are well-trained in guerrilla-type warfare, and supported by a large militia.

Q In your opinion, could Communist China fight a sustained war of any kind?

A Defensively, yes—I think so. The Chinese living standard is so low it does not take much to keep them going. For instance, during the Yen-an days of the 1940's, the Communist armies used to farm as well as fight in places where they were stationed for lengthy periods.

Men of the 196th Division we visited help the local farmers during busy times, and help feed themselves.

Q How good are their weapons and equipment?

A Most are old and antiquated. Their artillery is comparable to that used by the Imperial Japanese Army during World War II. The equipment we saw was of the same vintage. And they don't have many trucks. Even their battalion guns are pulled by horse or man.

They may have more modern weapons and equipment, but we were not shown any.

Q Is the militia well-armed?

A They told us all their weapons were captured years ago from the Nationalist armies. They boast that one of their best tricks is to capture

RED CHINA

and use their enemies' weapons.

Q Are the Red Army soldiers better clothed than the peasants?

A Not a bit better. Uniforms are made out of cotton, without any rank or insignia. I asked them if the lack of distinguishing marks was not inconvenient, and they replied: "We did without rank during the days of the Eighth Route [Communist] Army, and we have now returned to those good old days. The rank system is harmful."

Q Is morale high?

A Morale, and the quality of their training, is much higher than in the Chinese Army during World War II. And they seem to be getting a much better-caliber man in their new army, which numbers somewhere between 2.7- and 3.5-million men. Men enlist at twenty for three years' service and can remain in the army afterward if they wish to.

In addition, China has 200-million in the militia. About half of the militia are women. I saw twenty of them at firing practice. Some were being trained to shoot down paratroopers. And two women with a mortar fired four shots at a target 400 yards away and scored four hits.

Q Who was in charge of the army camp you visited?

A Authority was divided equally between a political commissar and the division commander. All orders

RED CHINA

are apparently made after joint consultation. Differences of opinion are resolved through reference to the *Thoughts of Mao Tse-tung*.

Q How about the rank and file—do they seem to be politically sound?

A As far as we could see, yes. The Liberation Army manual adopted last January quotes Mao Tse-tung on everything, and the troops in this camp at least were studying their manuals hard, with enthusiasm rather than reluctance. On the walls of the barracks are pasted large “four firsts” slogans—the human factor is first, political work is first, ideological work is first, and the living ideas of Mao Tse-tung are first.

Their political indoctrination is extensive. And, for whatever the reason, these soldiers are quite different from the Chinese Army rabble in the old days—clean, alert, and well-disciplined.

Q On the basis of your observations, how dangerous do you think Red China is today?

A There is little likelihood of their attacking anyone anywhere, including Vietnam. But they are preparing to repulse any invasion of Chinese soil. And, according to their reasoning, atomic bombs and modern weapons cannot conquer a nation willing to fight on indefinitely as guerrillas.

Q After talking with Red China's leaders, do you feel they mean what

RED CHINA

they say about war with the United States being inevitable?

A They belittle the U. S., brand it a paper tiger, point out that China won a victory over the U. S. in Korea, and keep harping that the U. S. may invade China at any time. But Foreign Minister Chen Yi told us:

“The U. S. is afraid of China a little, while China also thinks the U. S. is a strong foe. So there is little likelihood that war might occur tomorrow.”

It seems to be a bit of a standoff.

Q Is there a possibility that Red China may become less belligerent in the future, once the present leadership struggle is settled?

A They will probably maintain a belligerent attitude for a long time as a means of keeping their people keyed up, even though they have no intention of fighting.

Their biggest concern is economic development. At an industrial exhibition in Shanghai, a wall poster read: “It will take twenty to thirty years for China to reach the level of an advanced nation industrially.”

Their leaders realize how backward the Chinese economy is. So, while publicly proclaiming that the enemy may attack at any moment, they will be laying stress on industrialization and economic growth. ♣

RED CHINA

Coronet

February, 1967

p. 12