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CHINESE CIVIL WAR AND U.S.-CHINA RELATIONS: RECORDS OF THE U.S. STATE DEPARTMENT'S OFFICE OF CHINESE AFFAIRS, 1945-1955



The U.S. State Department's Office of Chinese Affairs, charged with operational control of American policy toward China, amassed information on virtually all aspects of life there immediately before, during, and after the revolution. Declassified by the State Department, the Records of the Office of Chinese Affairs, 1945-1955, provide valuable insight into numerous domestic issues in Communist and Nationalist China, U.S. containment policy as it was extended to Asia, and Sino-American relations during the post-war period. This product comprises all 41 reels of the former Scholarly Resources microfilm product entitled Records of the Office of Chinese Affairs, 1945-1955.

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Detailed Description:

The files of the Office of the Chinese Affairs tell the story of a U.S. policy toward China from 1945 through 1955 that began in confusion, developed in misperception, continued in hostility, and ended in success that had little to do with the conduct of U.S. diplomacy. For the most part, that policy was an afterthought more determined by a preoccupation with Europe and the containment of Soviet communism and influenced by domestic politics than based on accurate information of directly relevant facts, realistic alternatives, or clearly defined goals. Although the Office of Chinese Affairs, the branch of the State Department most responsible for operational control of policy toward China, had access in the early part of that period to the most expert advice, it seems to have been among the weakest of the bureaucratic players in the formation of that policy. The "China Lobby", the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the more hard-line elements within the department, like Undersecretary of State Dean Rusk, had a greater influence on the determination of policy.

China emerged from World War II, which for it began in 1937, devastated by the conflict and militarily and politically divided between the Kuomintang (KMT), led by Chiang Kai-shek, and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), led by Mao Tse-tung. Despite Franklin D. Roosevelt's

hope that China would become one of the "Four Policemen" that would safeguard peace in the postwar world, the KMT government was regarded by several Americans who had served in China, such as Gen. Joseph Stillwell and many members of the U.S. embassy, as corrupt and incompetent. Even Roosevelt believed that it would take years of tutelage before China was ready to take its place as a regionally dominant power friendly toward the United States. American impressions of the CCP were less well formed because Chiang, over the objections of Americans in the field, had opposed wartime contracts between U.S. personnel and the CCP. The Communist leadership, however had welcomed the "Dixie Mission", a group of U.S. liaison officers that had gathered meteorological and intelligence information and coordinated the rescue of downed U.S. airmen, and Mao had even expressed his desire to meet with Roosevelt. Both Chinese factions had tried to use the war to enlist U.S. support for their differing positions (Chiang to obtain military aid to prosecute the civil war against the CCP and the Communists to obtain reforms of the Chinese political system), but the CCP seemed, of the two, the more interested in defeating the Japanese.

The growing estrangement of the Soviet Union from its Western allies, the presence of Soviet troops in Manchuria and northern China, together with conflicting aims among the Western countries and a shocking misunderstanding of Chinese culture and politics, made the formation of U.S. foreign policy in the region increasingly difficult. The mediating mission of Gen. George C. Marshall illustrates the basic problem for the United States in China. It was the intransigence of Chiang to reform the political system or to pursue any solution to the conflict in China other than a military one that brought about Marshall's failure; Marshall, however, was under instructions not to abandon Chiang because U.S. policymakers saw no alternative to Chiang if Washington was to pursue its goal of having a Chinese government friendly to the United States, open to U.S. commercial interests, and prepared to be a counterweight to Soviet power in northwest Asia. Although Stalin gave only minimal support to the CCP (and had no interest in seeing a strong and united China under either Chiang or Mao) American political conservatives, members of the Truman administration as well as of the China Lobby, increasingly saw the Chinese Communists as agents of a Moscow-directed, inherently expansionist, international Communist conspiracy—a "Slavic Manchukuo," in Dean Rusk's famous phrase.

Whether by accident or design, the Chinese Communists took actions, the effects of which pushed the United States to a more hard-line position. The difficulty in dealing with the Communist administration (the CCP did not have a foreign ministry in the early days of the People's Republic); the detention, trial, and expulsion of the U.S. consul-general in Mukden on charges of espionage; the seizure of U.S. legation property in Peking, the hostility shown by local officials toward Westerners in general and Americans in particular, and Mao's "leaning to one side" speech of 30 June 1949 all contributed to anti-Communist sympathies in Washington. Furthermore, regardless of whether or not the government of the People's Republic was comprised of good Communists, it was made up of Chinese nationalists who sought to overturn the system of Western political domination and commercial penetration in China that had existed since the Opium War and had been codified in the series of unequal treaties, and from which the United States had sought to benefit from the time of the First

Open Door Note. When the United States required, as a condition of recognition, that the PRC live up to its international obligations, it was demanding in diplomatic code that the new government abide by the very treaty system that it was bound to overturn; this it could not do without destroying its own domestic legitimacy. By the same token, Washington could not back away from this demand without admitting the inherent injustice and ultimate failure of its foreign policy in Asia over the previous half century. The short-term failure of U.S. policy toward China in the decade following World War II—like the U.S. debacle in Vietnam—stemmed largely from the inability of policymakers in Washington to understand, much less exploit, Asian nationalism.

Part of the tragedy of Sino-American relations during the 1945-1955 period was that the Chinese civil war, the founding of the People's Republic, and the final expulsion of the KMT from the mainland occurred during the formative years of the Cold War. These years also saw the enunciation of the Truman Doctrine, the development of the Marshall Plan, and the creation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Containment became the watchword of U.S. foreign policy, and Europe was its primary focus. It was the necessity of securing domestic political support for aid to Europe that made the State Department hostage to the China Lobby in continuing aid to Chiang in the China Aid Act of 1948, when most policy makers in the State Department, including Secretary of State George Marshall and then Undersecretary Dean Acheson, viewed the Generalissimo as a lost cause and were trying to distance the United States from the KMT. The ongoing assistance to Chiang, in turn, increased the hostility toward the United States on the part of the CCP, which demanded its cessation. The irony is that the KMT and the CCP agreed that there was only one government of China and that no foreign power, including the United States, could have governmental relations with both. Despite its own best judgment, the Truman administration was trapped by its European preoccupations and its domestic political situation from pursuing a less aggressive policy toward the PRC. Contrary to its original formulation, containment was well on its way to becoming globalized.

Containment in Asia also was an increasingly virulent domestic issue. Charges made by Ambassador Patrick Hurley that staff members in the U.S. embassy in China were pro-Communist when they voiced criticism of Chiang, and that State Department policy was being formulated by Communist sympathizers, were taken up by U.S. supporters of the Generalissimo, such as Representative Walter Judd and Senator William Knowland, and became a vehicle of partisan attack by the Republicans, particularly after Truman's surprise victory in the 1948 election. The China White Paper, which Acheson had hoped would preempt criticism of administration policy in the wake of Chiang's then imminent defeat, provoked the heated debate over "who lost China" that was to continue throughout the Truman years, threatened the more general bipartisan foreign policy, and contributed to the full flowering of McCarthyism, one of the results of which was the purge of the last of the remaining "China hands" from the Department of State.

The formation of a policy toward China was complicated further by division within the U.S. government. The U.S. ambassador to China, J. Leighton Stuart, remained in Nanking after the KMT abandoned its capital; made unofficial contact with the CCP through Philip Fugh,

his private secretary, and Huang Hua, a former student and newly appointed head of the Office of Alien Affairs in Nanking; and favored responding to Chou En-lai's demarche of May 1949, Acheson, with a better understanding of domestic politics and overall policy concerns, opposed formal contacts with the CCP, at least until the Mukden situation had been resolved, but sought to disengage the United States from Chiang and encourage the CCP to move China away from Moscow in much the same fashion that Tito had recently moved Yugoslavia. Louis Johnson, the secretary of defense, supported by members of the Joint Chiefs, campaigned for additional aid to Chiang. Gen. Omar Bradley, the chairman of the JCS, however, argued that U.S. military resources were insufficient to save Chiang on the mainland (or even to protect Formosa), particularly in the light of U.S. commitments to Europe and Japan. Although Acheson eventually triumphed over the secretary of defense, due in part to Johnson's political disloyalty to Truman, U.S. efforts to promote Chinese Titoism were largely rendered moot by the outbreak of the Korean War.

The war served the interests of the more extreme elements in both the United States and the People's Republic. The fighting on the Korean peninsula, for which PRC troop deployments were initially ill-prepared and the spread of which threatened Chinese economic development, validated the opinion of those in Washington who saw communism as an expansionist international conspiracy. On the other side, Mao, who lost a son in Korea, hoped to demonstrate to Stalin, by his support of the North, that he was not another Tito. MacArthur's advance to the Yalu led to the introduction of Chinese "volunteers" into the conflict and some two years of fighting between U.S. and Chinese military forces. It also increased the strategic importance of Formosa in American eyes, led to the stationing of the Seventh Fleet in the Taiwan Straits, and prompted U.S. aid for Chiang's attacks on the mainland. Furthermore, PRC participation in the Korean War became linked with the deteriorating situation in French Indochina and rendered the Peking regime the primary target of U.S. containment in Asia.

Several issues prevented the normalization of Sino-American relations after the signing of the cease fire in Korea; the continued virulence of McCarthyism in the United States, the hostilities in Indochina, intermittent conflict in the Taiwan Straits (particularly the PRC shelling of the islands of Quemoy and Matsu), and the problem of Formosa. Of these, the most intractable was that of Formosa.

The problem of Formosa (or Taiwan) was—and is—complicated by both history and geography. First, Formosa was part of Japanese empire rather than China from 1895 to 1945, and although the retrocession of Formosa to China was promised to Chiang at the Tehran Conference in 1943, the island was technically under the control of the Supreme Commander Allied Powers (SCAP) until the signing of a Japanese peace treaty. Second, the native Formosans were ethnically different from the mainland Chinese, who treated Taiwan as captured territory and the natives as a conquered people. Third, Taiwan straddles the sea lines of communication between Japan, the Philippines, and Southeast Asia that formed the forward U.S. defense perimeter in the early 1950s; although originally regarded as of little strategic importance by the JCS, the island came to be referred to as an "unsinkable aircraft carrier" during the Korean War. Fourth, both the Nationalist regime in Taipei and the

Communist government in Peking insist that Taiwan is part of China and that there is only one legitimate government of China.

Despite the various obstacles, the People's Republic and the United States began the slow process of rapprochement as early as 1955. Following the informal contacts between U.S. and Chinese diplomats at the Geneva Conference on Indochina in 1954 and the conciliatory comments of Chou En-lai at the Bandung Conference the next year, the two countries initiated a series of discussions at the ambassadorial level in Warsaw in 1955. Both Acheson and John Foster Dulles believed that the long-term hope for Sino-American relations lay in the inherent conflict of interests between China and the Soviet Union in northwest Asia. They thought that the Soviet Union would be either unable or unwilling to provide China with the economic assistance that the country needed to modernize its economy, and Dulles, in particular, operated on the assumption that the best way to exacerbate Sino-Soviet conflicts was to maintain pressure on the Chinese.

The estrangement between the two major Communist powers was well under way by the mid-1950s when Mao reacted negatively to Nikita Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin and when the Soviet Union refused to provide the PRC with more modern military equipment. It reached its highpoint with a series of armed clashes along the Amur River in 1969 that helped produce one of the major diplomatic revolutions of the century. President Richard Nixon's visit to China followed in 1972, and the People's Republic and the United States established diplomatic relations on 1 January 1979. Despite almost two decades of mutual hostility, armed conflict, and rhetorical excess, to say nothing about a series of unresolved problems, China has achieved the position that Roosevelt desired for it as a regionally dominant power, open commercially to the United States, and willing and able to serve as a counterweight to Soviet power in the area.

[This text comprises the Introduction to the Scholarly Resources microfilm guide to Records of the Office of Chinese Affairs, 1945-1955, and was composed by Philip G. Johnson.]

Publisher's Note: This collection comprises, in its entirety, the Scholarly Resources microfilm collection entitled *Records of the Office of Chinese Affairs, 1945-1949*.