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President Truman's Decision Not to Extend Diplomatic Recognition to the People's Republic of China

Setting and Overview of Truman's Decision

When the Chinese Communists marched into Peking in the fall of 1949 and established the People's Republic of China (PRC) on October 1, they established a dramatically new pattern of rule. It was to have tremendous repercussions not only for China, but for all of Asia and indeed the whole world.

On one issue the United States government officially was certain. The State Department's white paper released in the summer of 1949 maintained there was nothing the United States could have done to have avoided the "loss" of China to the Communists. The United States could not have sustained Nationalist rule under the corrupt and ineffectual leadership of Chiang Kai-shek.

Other issues seemed far less clear. The changing of the guard in China presented the United States with a number of thorny questions. Would the new Chinese regime be a likely satellite of the Soviet Union, its ally, or enemy? Would the Cold War now extend into East Asia, and with what consequences? Was Washington's Europe-focused containment strategy and assumptions applicable to Asia? Was Asia as important a theater for the Cold War as Europe? Should the United States continue to support Chiang Kai-shek and militarily defend the Nation-

alist regime on Formosa? And lastly, did the Chinese Communist victory necessarily mean the end of U.S. friendship with the Chinese people and the inevitability of serious conflict between the American and Chinese Communist governments?

Both before and after the Chinese Communist victory on the battlefield, there were opportunities for the United States to have dealt more cooperatively with the Communists. What difference these "lost" opportunities would have made in future U.S.-Chinese relations is highly debatable. Perhaps most controversial is the decision Truman made not to extend diplomatic recognition to the new Chinese Communist government. Would recognition have been the wiser policy? Would it have been politically feasible? Would it have significantly influenced developments inside China and future U.S.-Chinese relations? We will now examine why and how Truman made his decision and what its main consequences were.

President Truman's Decision

PRESIDENT TRUMAN DECIDED NOT TO EXTEND DIPLOMATIC RECOGNITION TO THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA. HE HAD NUMEROUS OPPORTUNITIES TO DO SO, BUT EACH TIME HE DECLINED.

Truman's decision was controversial for several main reasons:

1. It highlighted the question of what criteria the President should consider in extending diplomatic recognition beyond those established by international law.¹
2. It was made at the beginning of another "Red Scare" soon to sweep the country.
3. It became enmeshed in an intensely partisan debated ignited by Republicans and the China lobby that criticized Truman, Acheson, and Far East experts in the State Department for "losing" China to the Communists.
4. The United States broke ranks with Great Britain, its main European ally, which extended diplomatic recognition almost immediately.
5. Truman was faced with the dilemma of a "two China policy." Particularly vexing was what to do about China's membership in the United Nations, especially China's permanent seat on the Security Council, and Chiang's newly established Nationalist government on Formosa.

6. There was serious doubt whether the Chinese Communists wanted U.S. recognition.
7. There was debate over whether the Chinese Communist Revolution was mainly an indigenous nationalist movement or part of an international Communist conspiracy directed by the Kremlin.
8. There was concern whether recognition was consonant with the Truman Doctrine of 1947.
9. There was anguish over how much damage the Chinese Communist Revolution had inflicted on America's "special relationship" with the Chinese people, developed over the years through a variety of missionary, cultural, and economic activities.

Background of the Decision

Historical Context

U.S. policy toward China, since Hay's Open Door, was forged by a combination of commercial, religious, cultural, humanitarian, and national security interests. Americans always considered themselves friends of the Chinese people, if not their government. When the Chinese Communists gained power in 1949, the United States had to decide how to relate to a Communist regime that viewed it as the center of world imperialism and exploitation and that was soon befriended by its major Cold War enemy, the Soviet Union.

Roosevelt's China Policy

President Roosevelt's main goals for postwar China were as follows:

1. Stave off resumption of the Civil War between Nationalist and Chinese Communist Party (CCP) armies. The war had begun in the late 1920s and was interrupted by Japanese military aggression in the 1930s and early 1940s.
2. Establish a strong, united, democratic, and pro-American China. Postwar China would be one of Roosevelt's "Four Policemen" to maintain the peace.
3. Prop up China to serve as a buffer against anticipated Soviet expansionism in Asia. China would also fill the power vacuum that would be left by Japan's defeat and the disintegration of the European colonial empires.

Roosevelt hoped that China would settle its civil war and take its rightful place among leading nations of the world. This should happen despite the fact that China was a weak ally during the world war and its ruling Nationalist government under Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek was authoritarian, corrupt, manipulated by warlords, and very unpopular. Roosevelt expected China to be a continuing partner in postwar reconstruction and maintenance of world peace. He thus insisted on making her a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council and tried to raise Chiang to the status of world leader. Roosevelt supported Chiang while pressuring him to make political, economic, and social reforms.

Roosevelt's China policy failed on all accounts. The civil war resumed with new ferocity; China became even more unstable, disunited, and weak; Chiang proved incapable of democratic reform, could not win the support of the Chinese people, and lost the civil war; and the new Communist Chinese regime soon allied itself with the Soviet Union and threatened the security of both Asia and the United States. Once close friends, the United States and China became bitter enemies. Were all these developments inevitable? Or did the United States have any opportunities which, if she had chosen differently, could have significantly altered the course of history?

By 1944, with China's war against Japan stalling, Lieutenant General Joseph W. Stilwell ("Vinegar Joe"), commander of the China-Burma-India theater, pressured FDR to drop reliance on Chiang and let him control the war in China himself. This meant, among other things, using Communist armies which would be equipped with U.S. Lend-Lease weapons. U.S. leaders were at odds over the command issue and working with Chiang and the Communists. Vice President Henry Wallace, sent by Roosevelt to China in June 1944 to influence Chiang to work with the Communists, reported back that Chiang did not have "the intelligence or political strength to run postwar China." John Patton Davies, State Department adviser to Stilwell, noted the foolishness of continued U.S. support to Chiang. In a dispatch to Washington on November 7, 1944, he stated: "The Communists are in China to stay. . . . And China's destiny is not Chiang's but theirs."² This became the main thrust of advice from foreign service officers in China and in Washington. As events unfurled, it was repeatedly ignored or rejected outright. When the Communists won the civil war, opponents of this position vilified its advocates as Communist sympathizers or even traitors. During the "Red Scare" of the early fifties,

they were driven from the government. Their expertise and advice would be sorely missed.

Initial U.S. Contacts with Chinese Communist Leaders

From the summer of 1944 through the summer of 1945, Chinese Communist leaders Mao Tse-tung and Chou En-lai sought aid, cooperation, and recognition from the United States. In China, they discussed possible cooperation with officers of the U.S. Foreign Service and Office of Strategic Services (OSS), the main U.S. war-time intelligence agency and precursor of the Central Intelligence Agency. The Chinese Communists had cooperated closely with the U.S. military and OSS, supplying vitally needed intelligence about the Japanese and rescuing downed U.S. flyers.

On July 22, 1944, a small U.S. Army observer group, known as "the Dixie Mission," landed in Yen-an. Its main goal was to assess the potential of the Communists in allied resistance against the Japanese. CCP leaders were friendly to these Americans. Both publicly in their press and privately, they signaled their willingness to establish close postwar economic and political ties. They stressed that their armies were much more effective against the Japanese than those of the dying Nationalists. They also told U.S. Foreign Service Officer John Service that they hoped for a more democratic China, and that they sincerely looked forward to a positive relationship with the United States.³

Keenly aware of U.S. military power and economic might, which could be used for China's postwar reconstruction, and mindful of Roosevelt's strong stance against colonialism, Mao sent Roosevelt congratulations on his reelection in 1944. The president replied that he looked forward to "vigorous cooperation with all the Chinese forces" against Japan.

On January 9, 1945, Mao and Chou forwarded to Washington a secret message asking Roosevelt if they could fly to Washington to discuss prospects for U.S. aid and recognition. They sought an opportunity to tell Roosevelt personally that the Nationalists were corrupt and that the Communists deserved U.S. support. The Communists would accept partnership in a coalition government if they could receive U.S. military aid like that given Marshal Tito, the Communist leader who was leading the battle against Nazi forces in Yugoslavia. They insisted that this message remain secret, for if they did not see the president, its revelation would damage their relationship with Chiang.

Roosevelt never responded to this message. Major General Patrick J. Hurley, named ambassador to China on January 8, had blocked its transmission. He had cast his lot with Chiang and with the possibility of a coalition government under the Generalissimo. Earlier Hurley had agreed with the State Department's China experts, known as the old "China hands," that Mao and his followers were not true communists. In a visit to Moscow in August 1944 he had heard Soviet Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Molotov refer to Chinese Communists as "radish communists" (red on the outside only) who "had no relation whatever to Communism."⁴ Perhaps, then, they should be considered "populists" or "agrarian reformers."

But soon Hurley changed his mind and began feuding with the "China hands." He believed they were deliberately exaggerating Communist strength and were trying to undercut his position by urging FDR to work with Mao. Moreover, he believed that Mao (whose name he pronounced as "Moose Dung") and his supporters were the main cause of China's problems. If they had not won the sympathy and even support of "traitorous" American foreign service officers who were conspiring against Chiang and Roosevelt, China's war against Japan would have been going much better. This blast became the basis of later charges by Senator Joseph McCarthy (R, Wisconsin) and others that China was not "lost" to the Communists by the inexorable march of historical events, but was handed over to them by disloyal Americans in the State Department.

Hurley prevailed in his struggle with the "China hands." He had influenced the president after his return from the Yalta Conference to give unqualified support to Chiang. Roosevelt eventually had learned of Mao's and Chou's request to visit him in Washington through a second telegram of February 7 (which arrived in Washington after the president left for Yalta). But by this time Roosevelt did not want to rock the China boat unnecessarily. At Yalta, Roosevelt thought he had won Stalin's support for the Nationalist government. The president anticipated this would force the Communists to join in a coalition under Chiang. Roosevelt, therefore, did not pay attention to those urging him to recognize the inevitability of a Chinese Communist victory over the Nationalists.⁵

Roosevelt listened more to supporters of Chiang, who had influential friends inside and outside Washington. For several years the American media had built up Chiang's image and that of his attractive wife (the "Missimo"), a graduate of Wellesley College, as great leaders. In 1937, for example, *Time* magazine, published by Henry Luce who

was the son of an American missionary in China, had named them "Man and Wife of the Year." The *Time* article presented a romanticized image of the ruling couple, who had converted to Christianity, as patriotic democratic leaders worthy of U.S. commitment and aid. This would be the prevailing view on Chinese leadership when Roosevelt died on April 12.

Truman's China Policy

When Truman became president, his main preoccupation was winning the war, first in Europe and then in Asia. Truman knew little about foreign affairs, and even less about Asia. When he became president, he believed Chiang "was on the road to real reform."⁶ Truman relied on Roosevelt's key personal advisers on China (Hurley, General Albert C. Wedemeyer, and Fleet Admiral William D. Leahy), who were all strongly anti-Communist and committed to Chiang. Thus when the war ended Chiang had strong support both from the White House and the American people, whereas Mao had virtually none. Truman, wanting to win Congressional support for his own policies, went with the tide.

Initial U.S. Support for Chiang

After Japan's defeat, Truman's goals in China were to keep Soviet forces in Manchuria from helping the Chinese Communists, forestall serious fighting between Nationalist and Communist forces, and sustain U.S. influence. Truman took steps to support Chiang. For example, he ordered Japanese troops to surrender to the Nationalists. The president also used the U.S. military to pursue political objectives. He ordered the Marines to transport almost a half a million Nationalist troops to the north, where Chinese Communist military power was strongest. Ignoring Wedemeyer's advice, the Nationalists sent troops into Manchuria where they and U.S. Marine units reportedly fought the Chinese Communists. Truman did not start withdrawing the almost 100,000 U.S. military personnel until early 1947.

At the same time, Hurley became enraged when he concluded that certain U.S. State Department officials were plotting to support Mao. In September 1945, Service and several other foreign service officers sent a telegram to the State Department urging Truman to enlist the aid of the Chinese Communists before they sought Russian aid or intervention. When he saw this telegram, Hurley blew up: "I know who drafted that telegram: Service! Service! I'll get that S.O.B. if it's the last thing I do." Hurley then arranged for Service and the other signers to be

recalled to the United States. Once again an opportunity to work with the Communists was lost. When Hurley returned to Washington on leave, he resigned as ambassador. His resignation was a political bombshell. In his letter of November 27, he loudly protested that "a considerable section of our State Department is endeavoring to support Communism generally as well as specifically in China."⁷

Hurley's outburst caused political sparks to fly in Congress. Republican critics of Truman's China policy, such as senators Robert Taft of Ohio and Styles Bridges of New Hampshire, damned U.S. policy as "soft" on Communism and too tolerant of "pinko" officers in the State Department. They also wanted Truman to disclose the entire Yalta agreement whereby, they claimed, the United States sold out not only Eastern Europe, but China as well. Although a Senate investigation in December found no substantiation for Hurley's accusations, the flurry of charges did find considerable sympathy in the media and the American public. To blunt this criticism, Truman decided to turn to General George C. Marshall for help. After the war, Marshall had retired to his home in Virginia. But when Truman called, once again the general would serve his country.

The Marshall Mission to China

At the end of 1945, Truman realized that civil war in China was about to resume and that his China policy was in disarray. On December 11, Marshall met at the White House with Truman, Secretary of State James F. Byrnes, and Leahy. All three agreed that U.S. desertion of Chiang would most likely result in a divided China and Soviet control of Manchuria.⁸ At another meeting on December 14 to discuss Marshall's mission, Marshall, Truman, and Under Secretary of State Dean Acheson determined that even if Marshall could not win concessions from Chiang, the United States would still have to back the Nationalists.⁹

On December 15, 1945, Truman sent Marshall to China. His goals were incredibly difficult: to end Nationalist-Communist hostilities as fast as possible; to absorb Communist armies into the Chinese National Army; to establish a coalition government under control of the Nationalists; and to work for Nationalist supremacy in Manchuria, which meant withdrawal of Soviet troops by the February 1, 1946 deadline. When they finally pulled out in the spring, Marshall was to see they did not return. If both the Nationalists and Communists accepted Marshall's proposals, the United States would grant significant amounts of

aid for economic reconstruction. If not, even though Truman had determined that the Nationalists would still receive aid, they would be told U.S. aid would end. That day Truman made his first public statement on China. He held that the Nationalists were "the only legal government in China" and that they were "the proper instrument to achieve a unified China."

Marshall almost miraculously arranged a truce between the warring Chinese sides in January, but it proved temporary. In the meantime, the American public became increasingly divided over U.S. China policy. A growing China lobby, backed by American and Chinese money and led by Representatives Walter Judd (R, Minn.), a former medical missionary to China, Clare Booth Luce (R, Conn.), wife of the publisher of *Time* and *Life* magazines, and Senator William F. Knowland (R, Calif.) urged increased support for Chiang. On May 15, 1946, these "Asia firsters," along with sixty-three other notable Americans, strongly criticized Roosevelt for selling China out to Russia at Yalta, and Truman for being soft on Communism. Opposing this group were those (mainly Democrats) who supported the Roosevelt-Truman China policy and who considered Chiang hopelessly corrupt, authoritarian, and consequently undeserving of U.S. aid. Partisan political considerations would continue to play an important role in determining Truman's China policy.

On August 10, 1946, frustrated by Chiang's actions, Truman sent him a message. It threatened a reexamination of U.S. China policy and curtailment of U.S. aid unless "convincing proof" was "shortly forthcoming that genuine progress is being made toward a peaceful solution of China's internal problems."¹⁰ Truman was exasperated with Chiang. Then in a futile effort to look impartial and prod Chiang to cooperate with the Communists, he acceded to Marshall's request to place an embargo on the export of U.S. munitions to China. This lasted until May 1947. On December 18, 1946, Truman made another statement on China. He hoped for a peaceful solution" to the crisis, and "pledged not to interfere in the internal affairs of China."

During this period of publicly stated American neutrality, the United States continued to give Chiang significant economic and military aid. This emboldened the Nationalists to try to win a military victory over the Communists, while it infuriated the Communists. In late June 1946, the United States gave the Nationalists credit of \$51.7 million in Lend-Lease supplies.¹¹ When the truce expired on June 30, the "third revolutionary civil war" began.

On January 7, 1947, Marshall returned to the United States. He had determined he could not deter China's opposing forces from engaging in a fight to the finish. His mission to end the civil war had failed, mainly, as Marshall said himself, because of the "complete, almost overwhelming suspicion with which the Chinese Communist Party and the Kuomintang [Nationalist Party] regard each other."

Despite Marshall's failure to arrange a lasting truce, Truman still held out some hope of stopping the war. In late winter of 1947, Congress accepted the Truman Doctrine. This called for containment of communism in Greece and Turkey and help for free people everywhere who were resisting outside pressures and aggression. Truman feared Republican opposition to the Marshall Plan for reconstruction of post-war Europe. He also responded to criticism by Judd and others of a double standard of U.S. opposition to communism in Europe but not in Asia. The president thus felt he had to demonstrate he was doing more for China.

The Wedemeyer Mission

In May, Truman ended the U.S. embargo on aid to Chiang. Then in July, almost as a last resort to learn whether there were any new reasons for increased U.S. aid to Chiang, Truman sent General Wedemeyer on a fact-finding mission to China. When this ended, in a public statement issued on August 24 before he left China, Wedemeyer saw little possibility that a coalition government could be established. "To gain and maintain the confidence of the people," Wedemeyer added, "the Central Government will have to effect immediately drastic, far-reaching political and economic reforms. Promises will no longer suffice. Performance is absolutely necessary. It should be accepted that military force in itself will not eliminate communism." Despite this pessimism, Wedemeyer recommended "moral, advisory, and material support to China and that Manchuria be placed under a Five Power Guardianship or under a United Nations Trusteeship." He then added that "the American mediation effort has been to the advantage of the Chinese Communists and conversely to the disadvantage of the Nationalist Government."¹²

Wedemeyer's report submitted to Truman on September 19, 1947, had no significant effect on American China policy. Marshall personally suppressed it.¹³ He feared a backlash both from Chiang, who would not like the proposal on Manchuria, and from the Soviet Union, which might use the report to call for a trusteeship for Greece. Marshall was especially disturbed that "when his report came back, a great deal that

was happening elsewhere in the world, particularly that part of the world dominated by the Soviets, was not considered."¹⁴ The China Lobby called for its release, complaining that Truman did not want it known publicly that he favored more aid for Chiang. New York Governor Thomas Dewey, soon to be the Republican nominee for president in 1948, also began calling for more aid for Chiang.

Chiang supporters in the United States found some solace in the highly publicized "Report on China," by William Bullitt, former ambassador to the Soviet Union. Writing on October 13, 1947, in publisher Henry Luce's pro-Kuomintang *Life* magazine, Bullitt proposed a three-year U.S.-aid plan to save China under Chiang. He then warned ominously, in an early version of the domino theory: "If China falls into the hands of Stalin, all Asia, including Japan, sooner or later will fall into his hands. . . . The independence of the U.S. will not live a generation longer than the independence of China." Bullitt concluded by recommending that General Douglas MacArthur be appointed "Personal Representative of the President" in China to "prevent subjugation of China by the Soviet Union." Bullitt's article got widespread public attention, which caused concern in the Truman administration.

The China Aid Act

Truman was staying the course in his China policy, though he did bow somewhat to Republican criticism. On February 18, 1948, Truman asked Congress for a \$570 million aid program for China. There was no recommendation for military aid, though the message stated that this aid would allow the Nationalist government "to devote its limited dollar resources to the most urgent of its other needs." Truman, who respected Marshall immensely, agreed with his conclusion that limited U.S. aid was necessary to help Chiang keep Soviet forces out of northern China. Too much aid though, especially of a military nature, would probably encourage Chiang to avoid making the political and economic reforms that Marshall and a growing number of critics in the United States considered necessary. On April 2, 1948, Congress passed the bill appropriating \$338 million. But against Marshall's advice, it added \$125 million for Chiang to use as he wanted, presumably for military purposes.

The State Department's China White Paper

When Truman surprisingly won reelection in 1948, he seemed bent on making no major shift in U.S. China policy. But events in China were moving fast. By early 1949, the Nationalists had lost the civil war.

Chiang resigned from the presidency on January 21, 1949, ironically the same day that Acheson was sworn in as secretary of state.

Both Acheson and Truman maintained that no amount of U.S. aid could have saved the Nationalists from defeat by the Chinese Communists. Their political, economic, and military weaknesses were far too serious. Finally, it seemed, U.S. support for Chiang and involvement in the Chinese civil war had ended. This was the major conclusion of the China white paper released by the State Department on August 5.

The Truman administration chose this approach as a giant public relations ploy to deflect criticism of its China policy. Yet as such it was not very successful. The report was criticized widely not only by the Republicans and China lobby, but by the Communist Chinese leadership. Among other things, Mao objected strongly to Acheson's contention in his letter of transmittal that the Communist leaders had "forsook their Chinese heritage" and had "publicly announced their subservience to a foreign power, Russia, which during the last 50 years, under czars and Communists alike, had been most assiduous in its efforts to extend its control in the Far East." Mao was particularly offended by Acheson's assertion that "ultimately the profound civilization and the democratic individualism of China will reassert themselves and she will throw off the foreign yoke." Mao chafed at the charge his movement was not independent. Moreover, he inferred from this statement that the United States intended to foment fifth column (insurrectionist) action inside China to overthrow CCP leaders.

U.S. China policy had clearly failed, but why? Republicans and the China lobby had already begun leading the drumbeat attack against the Truman administration for "losing" China to the Communists. With this controversy swirling around him, Truman had to face the next very difficult choice in his China policy: whether to recognize the new Communist regime in China, officially established on October 1, 1949.

Countdown to the Decision

When the Manchu dynasty fell, the United States was the first treaty power to recognize the revolutionary republican government of 1912 and then the Nationalist regime established in Nanking in 1928. But the United States did not recognize the Chinese Communist regime until 1979, almost thirty years after it was established.

When support for Chiang seemed a lost cause, Acheson favored accommodation with the Chinese Communists. He believed recogni-

tion of the PRC was just a matter of time. Perhaps at first the United States would recognize the Communists on a *de facto* basis. This meant only acceptance of the fact that the Chinese Communists were in control of China. *De jure* recognition could come later, after the PRC had earned it by demonstrating acceptable behavior.

Overtures for Recognition by CCP Leaders

Beginning in the spring of 1949, the Communist Chinese made several bids for U.S. recognition, all of which the United States rejected. In May and June, Huang Hua, director of the Chinese Communist Alien Affairs Office in Nanking, approached John Leighton Stuart, U.S. Ambassador in China. According to Stuart's telegram to Washington of May 14, the previous evening "Huang expressed much interest in recognition . . . on terms of equality and mutual benefit." Stuart responded that "it was customary to recognize whatever government clearly had support of people of country and was able and willing to perform its international obligations," but that U.S. recognition was premature because the Chinese Communists had not yet established a government.

Huang called on Stuart again on June 28. This time Huang invited Stuart, former president of Yenching University in Peking for almost thirty years and his former teacher, to return for a visit. There he could meet with Mao and Chou. But Truman seemed extrasensitive to likely Congressional charges of appeasement and softness on Communism. Just a few days earlier, on June 24, twenty-one senators (16 Republicans, 5 Democrats) had written him a letter opposing recognition and urging increased U.S. aid to the Nationalists. Truman, unwilling in effect to sign the death warrant for the Nationalists, decided that "under no circumstances" would Stuart be allowed to make this visit.

Between Huang's two meetings with Stuart, both Chou and Mao had made important overtures to establish good relations with the United States. On June 1, Chou reportedly sent a "top secret" message through Michael Keon, an Australian journalist, to O. Edmund Clubb, the American consul-general in Peking. It stated that the Communist Party leadership was divided into two major groups. The radicals wanted an alliance with the USSR. The liberals (Chou included), wanted to establish amicable relations with the United States. This meant U.S. trade and investment (for mutual benefit) that the USSR would be unable to provide. Indicating that Mao would make his decision on the basis of practicality, Chou hoped that "American authorities . . . would believe [that] there were genuine liberals in [the] party who

are concerned with everything connected with [the] welfare [of the] Chinese people and peace in our times, rather than doctrinaire theories."¹⁵ Chou wanted to establish *de facto* relations with the United States. Finally, Chou indicated that he and Mao would be receptive to a positive U.S. response, which might buoy the liberal wing of the party. But Truman, not wanting to appear soft toward the Communist Chinese, decided not to respond favorably to Chou's *démarche*. Instead, he approved the State Department's reply that the U.S. would judge the Communists' intentions by their actions.

On June 15, Mao announced he would establish diplomatic relations with any foreign government on "the basis of the principles of equality, mutual benefit, and mutual respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty, provided it is willing to sever relations with the Chinese reactionaries, stops conspiring with them or helping them and adopts an attitude of genuine, and not hypocritical, friendship toward People's China." Truman also ignored this initiative, in part because of Mao's condition of severing ties with Chiang.

On June 30, Mao made his soon to be famous "lean to one side" (i.e., toward the Soviet Union) speech. Mao and his colleagues may have feared U.S. military intervention in the Chinese Civil War on the side of the Nationalists, just as the U.S. and its allies had intervened militarily in Russia at the end of World War I to crush the Bolsheviks.¹⁶ Truman, however, interpreted Mao's words as fresh evidence that the CCP leaders were closely tied to the Soviet Union.

In September, Secretary of State Acheson seemed ambivalent toward the Communist Chinese. On the one hand, he indicated that the United States might recognize the Communists on a Jeffersonian basis, stating: "We maintain diplomatic relations with other countries primarily because we are all on the same planet and must do business with each other. We do not establish an embassy in a foreign country to show approval of its Government." On the other hand, he was looking for ways to aid anti-Communist forces in those regions of China not yet under Communist control. He also still clung to his contention expressed in his letter of transmittal for the white paper that the Communist Chinese were controlled by Moscow.

Washington faced the issue of formal recognition when the PRC was officially established on October 1. Then Chou, the new premier and foreign minister, invited the United States and other countries to establish official diplomatic relations. This was yet another overture that the Chinese Communists made toward Washington.

The U.S. Hesitates to Extend Recognition

The Soviet Union recognized the PRC on October 2. The United States hesitated. On October 3, Truman's position was that the United States "should be in no hurry whatever to recognize this regime."¹⁷ The president noted that the United States had waited to recognize the Soviet Union until 1933, sixteen years after the Bolshevik Revolution. The State Department announced that the United States would not recognize the PRC without consulting Congress and its allies. Moreover, it remained unconvinced the PRC would honor its international obligations.

From October 6 to 8, a special Round Table Conference of experts on China met to review U.S. East Asian policy. When the transcript of this meeting was published two years later, it was revealed that "a prevailing group" advocated withdrawal of recognition from the Nationalist government and recognition of the PRC "fairly soon." It argued "that a stabilization of relationships through quick recognition would be desirable from the viewpoint of commercial considerations, the ideological effect on the Chinese people, and to put the political orientation of the Communist leadership towards the Soviet Union under strain."¹⁸

At a news conference on October 12, Acheson reiterated three requirements for recognition: the PRC had to control the government; it should honor its international obligations; and it must rule with the consent of the governed. He doubted especially that the PRC met the second requirement.

At that time Truman seemed to oppose recognition. When asked off the record on October 19 under what circumstances he would recognize the PRC, Truman replied: "I hope we will not have to recognize it." Truman then also was privately pulling for the success of the newly established Nationalist blockade of mainland ports.¹⁹

Acheson, however, though still uncertain whether the Chinese Communist regime was independent of Soviet control, still leaned toward recognition. On October 12, for example, he testified before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that the Chinese Communist government was "really a tool of Russian imperialism in China." By then, however, he had started to agree with the recommendation by the American Embassy in Moscow that the United States should recognize the PRC to facilitate a "Titoist"²⁰ communist regime, free from Moscow's control. This argument was consistent with that of the State Department's China specialists. They insisted that the Chinese Communists had come to power independently of Moscow, and possibly against its wishes. To maintain Communist Chinese independence,

Acheson wanted the United States to continue trade with Peking (in nonstrategic items) and stop aid to the Nationalists.²¹

Based on this assessment of the Communist Chinese, Acheson began paving the ground for U.S. recognition. On November 17, he presented Truman with two options. The first was "to oppose the Communist regime, harass it, needle it and if an opportunity appeared to overthrow it." The second, which he and his China specialists and consultants favored and which indicated recognition, was to try to unyoke the PRC "from subservience to Moscow and over a period of time encourage those vigorous influences which might modify it." Acheson then concluded: "The President thought that in the broad sense in which I was speaking that this was the correct analysis."²²

Though Acheson was arguing for recognition, he also felt that the PRC had to demonstrate its willingness to get along with the United States. Opponents of recognition kept referring to Mao's "lean-to-one-side" speech. But it was the incident involving Angus Ward, the American Consul-General in Mukden, Manchuria, that placed a dark cloud over the prospect of early recognition.

On October 24, the Chinese Communists arrested Ward and several associates on charges of assault against a Chinese employee. The Communists had placed these Americans under house arrest for over a year, after accusing them of spying. After the Communists arrested Ward, they refused to let him communicate with Washington and disregarded all U.S. protests. One month later, the Communists deported Ward, who returned to the United States. But the damage was done, providing powerful ammunition to those who opposed recognition.

Truman was incensed over the Ward affair. Played up by the media, it stirred anti-Peking sentiment among Americans and caused further divisiveness in the Truman administration. Some policy advisers, like Soviet expert George Kennan, chief of the State Department's Policy Planning Staff, pushed for immediate U.S. recognition of the PRC. Kennan's view was that the Soviet Union, in retaliation for Washington's arrest of Soviet trade officials for spying and plotting to turn the United States and the PRC against each other, had prevailed upon the Chinese Communists to arrest Ward. Kennan told Acheson and other leading State Department officials that "the greatest single external threat to the complete Stalinization of China is that the U.S. should establish normal relations with the Chinese Communists and once more bring its influence to bear in that country, even if on a more re-

stricted basis." Kennan maintained that the Communists would be "open to recognition," as Chou had indicated on October 1, 1949. Criticizing the anti-recognition position, Kennan argued that "if recognition had all the moral tones and implications of friendship which is being imputed to it in connection with the Chinese Communists, we could not possibly now be maintaining official relations with Tito, not to mention the Soviet and Satellite Governments."²³

But Kennan soon became a minority voice. On November 22, James Reston of the *New York Times*, a columnist with close ties to "informed sources" in the government, reported that Senator Arthur Vandenberg (R, Michigan), chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and a champion of bipartisan foreign policy, was arguing that the United States should not recognize the PRC because it was not prepared to fulfill its basic obligations under international law. And on December 29, piqued by the Ward case, influential Senator Tom Connally (D, Texas) stated that he opposed recognition until the PRC gave satisfactory assurances of respect for international law.

By the end of 1949, Acheson started to pull back from his pro-recognition position. He concluded that the PRC might not want U.S. recognition. Writing in the *New York Times* on December 31, Reston reported that Truman, at a meeting with the National Security Council the day before, had found strong divisions among his defense and foreign affairs advisers. According to Reston, Acheson, concerned about congressional passage in January of the European Recovery Program and the next stage of the European Military Assistance Program, had shelved recognition for the time being at least. Reston concluded: "In short, while the air is now full of rumors about the formation of some new, clear and positive United States policy [toward China], the chances are that the Administration will change its policy very little."

Reston had reliable sources, for at the December 30 meeting Truman had approved National Security Council Document Number 48/2 (NSC 48/2). This held that the United States should use "covert, as well as overt means" . . . to "exploit . . . any rifts between the Chinese Communists and the USSR and between Stalinists and other elements in China, while scrupulously avoiding the appearance of intervention." Although it was decided that the United States would adopt a strategy of using Titoism to weaken Soviet influence in Communist countries, the United States would not recognize the PRC "until it is clearly in the interest of the United States to do so."²⁴

The Formosa Issue

A series of events in late 1949 and the first half of 1950 solidified the anti-recognition view. In December, Chiang finally fled from his last base on the mainland to Formosa,²⁵ where he joined about 300,000 Nationalist troops. When Chiang announced he planned to attack the mainland and recover it by force, Truman faced the immediate problem of how to respond. To Democrats, still chafing from accusations of having "sold out" Eastern Europe to the Soviets at Yalta, it was one thing to "lose" the mainland. It would be another, especially in light of growing opposition of the Republicans and the increasingly shrill voice of the China lobby, to "lose" Formosa.

Some leading Republicans, such as former President Hoover and Senators H. Alexander Smith (R, New Jersey), Robert Taft (R, Ohio), and William Knowland (R, California), wanted Truman to defend Formosa and even establish a military base there. This would demonstrate that the United States would let communism go no farther in Asia. Truman's key foreign policy advisers were split over what to do. Deputy Under Secretary of State Rusk argued for establishment of a United Nations trusteeship over Formosa. Kennan had argued in a memorandum to Acheson in July 1949 that the U.S. should force Chiang and the Nationalists off Formosa, thereby removing even the possibility of rallying to the Generalissimo. But these proposals were never adopted.

The most serious conflict was between Secretary of Defense Louis Johnson and Acheson. Johnson, a strong supporter of Chiang, lobbied for U.S. military support to protect Formosa. But Acheson, though recognizing Formosa's strategic importance, strongly opposed Johnson's position. Acheson believed that forceful advocacy of political reform of the Nationalist government on Formosa, or lacking this, covert support for a native Taiwanese uprising against the Nationalists, would be more prudent options to keep the island out of Communist hands. Truman, relying more on Acheson's judgment, sided with his secretary of state.

On December 23, a State Department memorandum stated that Formosa held "no special military significance" for the United States. NSC 48/2 further signaled the end to U.S. support of Formosa. On January 3 the State Department informed all its posts that the public would soon learn that it expected Formosa to fall to the Communists but that this would not adversely affect U.S. security. Then at a press conference on January 5, Truman announced that the United States would supply economic assistance to the island, but would not seek to "establish military bases on Formosa at this time." Acheson later that day explained

to the press that the phrase “at this time,” inserted at the suggestion of Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Omar Bradley, was “a recognition of the fact that, in the unlikely and unhappy event that our forces might be attacked in the Far East, the United States must be completely free to take whatever action in whatever area is necessary for its own security.”²⁶

Despite stiff pressure to the contrary, U.S. policy of not using military force to defend Formosa continued until the outbreak of the Korean War. In a speech before the National Press Club on January 12, Acheson repeated his argument that the United States must exploit the conflicting interests between the PRC and USSR. Yet his speech, understandably, would be remembered more for having placed Formosa (and Korea and Indo-China) outside the U.S. defense perimeter. But because of Formosa’s strategic importance, and because of administration fears of appeasement, the United States continued to offer Formosa limited diplomatic and economic support. Although two days after the North Korean invasion of June 25 Truman ordered the Seventh Fleet to patrol the Formosa Straits, at that time the U.S. most likely would not have fought to protect the island from a Communist attack.

In his January 12 speech, Acheson also tried to soothe conflict in the administration over the China problem by proposing to “let the dust settle.” But things were happening fast. On January 14, the Communist Chinese “requisitioned” the premises of the American Consulate General in Peking. Their motives were unclear. Perhaps the radical wing of the CCP wanted to demonstrate its anti-Americanism, or maybe some leaders wanted to use this incident to pressure the United States into offering recognition. Whatever the motive, Truman reacted angrily. He ordered the withdrawal of all American diplomats from China, which was completed by April. At a press conference on January 18, Acheson concluded that the seizure of the American consulate meant that Communist China did not want U.S. recognition.

The consulate incident also turned the minds of many China “moderates” in the State Department, such as Clubb and Davies, against the possibility of rapprochement with the Communist leadership. When Clubb left China, he concluded that the CCP leadership was “as perverted in some respects as that of Hitlerite Germany,” and it had “attached China to the Soviet chariot, for better or worse.” Davies then recommended sponsoring “counter-revolutionary movements in China and North Korea” to overthrow those Communist governments.²⁷ No doubt, both Clubb and Davies also had been influenced by the PRC’s

signing on February 14 of a thirty-year alliance with the Soviet Union. To Truman, Acheson, and most other China advisers in the government, this signaled a drawing of the battlelines between East and West. The next day, Acheson stated that the USSR would use this treaty to turn the PRC into a Soviet satellite.

The Korean War

What virtually sealed Truman's decision not to recognize the PRC was the outbreak of the Korean War in June 1950, especially the Chinese Communist military intervention in November. Whatever faint hope Truman and Acheson may have had that the PRC might demonstrate its independence of action from Moscow vanished. Though lacking hard evidence, the Truman administration assumed that the North Korean attack was orchestrated by Moscow and that Chinese military intervention, as stated by Acheson, was a clear and blatant act of aggression "directed by the Russians." Containment of communism on a global basis had been the implied goal of the Truman Doctrine. With Korea, globalization of containment became reality.

The Korean War also eliminated any possibility that the United States might support the PRC's admission into the UN to take the "China" seat. Although the issues of diplomatic recognition and UN representation were legally separate, in reality they were very closely tied together. The Nationalist government's presence on the Security Council was necessary for continuation of the UN "police action" in Korea and official UN condemnation of the Chinese Communists as "aggressors." In addition, continued nonrecognition by the United States meant continued blockage of Communist China's admission to the UN. The U.S. "two China" policy would continue until 1971, when the PRC replaced the Nationalists in the UN and the United States began its move toward recognition of the PRC.

President Truman as Decision-Maker

Foreign Policy Context of Decision

When Truman suddenly became president after Roosevelt's death, he had virtually no preparation or experience in foreign affairs, and none at all regarding China. Indeed, in the classic sense, as vice president, Truman had been kept in the dark about almost all important issues, in-