

THE TURNING POINT: PERCEPTIONS AND POLICIES CONCERNING
COMMUNIST CHINA DURING THE KENNEDY YEARS

A Thesis

by

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ABSTRACT

When analyzing the policies of the John F. Kennedy administration towards the People's Republic of China, previous historians have focused on the lack of substantive change, emphasizing the continuity of action with the prior policies of the Dwight D. Eisenhower administration. At the same time, a number of historians have noted that it was during the years Kennedy was in office that a majority of the American people began viewing communist China as a greater threat to world peace than the Soviet Union. However, none have sought to explain this sizeable shift in public opinion, or analyze its potential impact on policy. This thesis incorporates archival materials with contemporary print and visual media to make a connection between the sources of public opinion shifts and a change in the assumptions upon which U.S. China policy was based.

Almost from the moment the new president assumed office, Robert Komer at the National Security Council and Chester Bowles at the State Department began pushing for changes in China policy based on the assumptions that the communist regime was not a "passing phase," would only become more powerful and over time constitute an inexorable greater threat to U.S. interests in Asia, and that rapprochement, rather than isolation, was the best means of ameliorating this threat. Together with James Thomson, Roger Hilsman, and eventually Walt Rostow, they pushed for the adoption of what A. Doak Barnett would later term "Containment Without Isolation." While the Sino-Soviet split accentuated charges of Chinese anti-white racism and the Great Leap Forward reinforced the sense of Mao's irrationality, the Sino-Indian War confirmed both rising

Chinese power and their leadership's capacity for rational calculation. Meanwhile, in the popular culture, particularly motion pictures, the Yellow Peril enjoyed a revival as Chinese villains stepped to the fore, beginning to free themselves of their Soviet masters. However, while foreign Chinese were feared as never before, Chinese in America gained new acceptance. Laying the groundwork for the next five decades of China policy and enemy images, Kennedy's Thousand Days constituted a turning point.

DEDICATION

To My Parents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I write this at the culmination of the research, writing, revising, and defending of my Master's Thesis, a moment which I hope will be less of an ending than a beginning. This project occasioned my first archival research trip, my first attempts at cultural analysis, and my first in-depth investigations of media and public opinion. The first, I intend, of many.

I plan to make the material in this work the hinge of my dissertation, both chronologically and thematically. My title, "The Turning Point," came to me while filling out the first request form for document boxes at the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library on a Monday morning in Boston in July 2011. The triplicate form included a line requesting a title for the research project. The presence of this question, which inspired my title that sunny morning, was the least the staff at the JFK Library did for me over the next three days. I would like to offer them my sincere thanks, as well as the archivists at the Sterling Memorial Library at Yale University in New Haven, where I spent an enormously productive day, and the National Archives and Records Administration at College Park, where I concluded my archival research over the course of two days. This work would not exist without all of their prompt and efficient assistance.

This thesis would not exist in its present form without the comments, critiques, and criticisms of my adviser in the Texas A&M University History Department, Dr. Jason Parker. For more than one year, he has guided this work from piles of document

snapshots and magazine page scans into this collection of prose, footnotes, and, I hope, cogent and potentially provocative arguments. I must also thank my other committee members from the History Department, Dr. Terry Anderson and Dr. Di Wang, for their participation. I wish to offer special thanks to Dr. William Norris from the Bush School, who was kind enough to join my committee a little more than a month before my defense. I look forward to working with all of you on my dissertation.

Finally, I must thank my colleague, David Villar, for bringing to my attention the relevance of the novel *Starship Troopers*. Without his mentioning of the Chinese subject matter in that work, my sixth chapter would have been far less interesting. As it turned out, Robert Heinlein's 1959 bestseller allowed me to connect my cultural analysis of Kennedy-era films with an eight decade-long American literary tradition of exploiting and inflaming the *gelbe gefahr*. The early 1960s were the years when an old fear, previously groundless, became for the first time remotely plausible. Without David, my attempts at cultural analysis would have been lacking in historical context.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: LAYING THE FOUNDATION FOR CHANGE

“Ultimately there is no such thing as an inscrutable people – only uninformed onlookers.”¹

Perhaps more than anything else, what frightened the Kennedy administration about communist China was its apparent lack of fear. Mao Zedong habitually referred to the United States, hegemon of the Pacific, and most powerful nation on the planet, as a “Paper Tiger.” Chinese leaders extolled the virtues of the sorts of asymmetric “Wars of National Liberation” which had preserved their own ragtag forces during the decades before they seized power, drove the French out of Indochina, and were proving a mighty nuisance to the British in Malaya. Most frightening of all were Mao's stated refusals to be intimidated by America's massive nuclear arsenal. At a time when the leaders of both superpowers made a point of proclaiming their horror at the prospect of a nuclear holocaust, Mao's apparent welcoming of such a global calamity was positively terrifying, and did much to cement his image as a bloodthirsty madman. The lives of millions may have meant little to Joseph Stalin, but Mao talked calmly of losing hundreds of millions of his own countrymen.

¹ Valentin Chu, “China: a Monster Devours Itself,” *Life*, May 3, 1963, 87.

This was because Mao believed the superpowers would lose an even greater proportion of their populations. As the Cold War heated up again in the early 1960s, and the extent of China's demographic and economic expansion during the previous decade became widely known, fears grew that China was biding its time and waiting for the two superpowers to batter each other into oblivion. Within weeks of Kennedy assuming the presidency, Richard Hirsch at the National Security Council addressed this fear in a memo to then-Deputy National Security Adviser Walt Rostow. He began by claiming he was adding a piece to “the Chinese puzzle,” a presumed reference to their Oriental inscrutability. However, Hirsch proceeded to analyze the Chinese as if they were in fact highly scrutable. Hirsch's concern was Mao's supposed belief that “the Chinese would win in the event of a U.S.-USSR thermonuclear war.” His goal was “to disabuse the Chinese of this notion.” His solution was bloody-minded in its own right. Hirsch wondered if it would be “reasonable to set aside a certain number of extremely dirty bombs and the means of laying them down a north-south line, and let Mao know through suitable channels that they will be reserved for China in the event of a U.S.-USSR clash.”² If the United States and the Soviet Union were going to destroy each other, Hirsch wanted the Chinese to know they would be going down with them.

Besides a willingness to use nuclear weapons against a nation which at the time did not possess them in a conflict that nation might not be a direct participant in, this demonstrated that policy makers perceived the Chinese as perhaps not so puzzling after

² Richard Hirsch, Memorandum for Mr. Rostow, February 14, 1961, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library, National Security Files, Box 21a, Folder 2.

all. A true madman cannot be deterred. Yet Hirsch clearly believed that signals sent by the U.S. government could discourage Mao's belligerence and adventurism. During the Kennedy administration, prominent officials reviewing China's seemingly reckless behavior during the past decade came to the conclusion that Mao, for all his tough talk, was in fact a low-stakes gambler who invariably backed down when confronted with superior force. At the same time, Mao's popular image in the United States worsened, in part because of revelations regarding the consequences of his domestic policies. The widespread famines occasioned by the Great Leap Forward, coupled with concurrent border crises, a war, and a zealous push to acquire the very atomic weapons he professed to disdain, cemented Mao's image as a fanatic who starved his own people in order to gain the means to terrorize his neighbors and threaten the United States. Rather than disagree, in the aftermath of the Cuban Missile Crisis, Kennedy chose to stoke the flames, comparing Mao to Hitler and contrasting him with the newly reasonable Soviet leadership.³

Yet if the Great Leap Forward emphasized Mao's seeming irrationality and China's continuing weakness, it paradoxically demonstrated the regime's strength and staying power. If the Chinese communists could survive a three-year famine of unprecedented proportions with nary a sign of open rebellion, perhaps it could survive anything. And if the Chinese communists were there to stay, they could not officially be ignored for much longer. Membership in the United Nations, and eventual diplomatic

³ Leonard A. Kusnitz, *Public Opinion and Foreign Policy: America's China Policy, 1949-1979* (Greenwood Press: Westport, Connecticut, 1984), 106.

recognition by the United States, were only a matter of time. This sense that U.S. China policy since 1949 was untenable existed in certain official circles from the beginning of the administration, and eventually spread to sections of the media, particularly on the center-left. By the end of 1963, a turning point had been reached in how American elites both inside and outside of government discussed relations between the United States and communist China. Government officials and leading newspapers advocated previously unspeakable ideas, such as the permanence of Mao's regime and the futility of continuing to isolate the nation he led. China was still feared, by the American public more than ever before. But the new goal was to contain, not overthrow, this menacing power, and perhaps make it less menacing.

It would take years for advocates of this new approach to convince the American public, particularly Republicans who had harvested such immense political capital from Mao's victory over the Guomindong during the Truman administration, that it was the correct one. And, at least during the Kennedy years, few wanted to try, particularly those such as Secretary of State Dean Rusk who bore career scars from Truman's tumultuous second term. By the time Richard Nixon shook Zhou En-lai's hand in February 1972, he was standing on the shoulders of men who worked for the man who defeated him for the presidency more than a decade before. Men such as Chester Bowles, James Thomson, Robert Komer, and Roger Hilsman largely failed to prevail in the bureaucratic skirmishes in the State Department and the National Security Council between 1961 and 1963. But they were the first individuals with any modicum of official power both to admit that U.S. policy towards communist China was unsustainable and to concoct

pragmatic proposals intended to remedy this policy's fundamental deficiencies. China's leaders would prove even more stubborn than the Republicans who demonized them, and far more unpredictable. But in the end, what was once unspeakable in both nations became official policy.

The standard story of America's changing China policy during this period may be accurately characterized as a temporal comet, with Richard Nixon's and Henry Kissinger's dramatic actions in 1971 and 1972 the massive and bright head, Lyndon Johnson's tentative attempts at outreach the fainter but still visible tail, and the seeming stasis of the Kennedy years the isolated fragments of ice trailing in the distance. Previous historians' interpretations of the Kennedy Administration's policies towards communist China have emphasized the continuity of these policies with those adopted by the Eisenhower administration. As carried out by Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, Dwight Eisenhower established a strategy of isolation coupled with tactical hostility. In 1954, Dulles went out of his way to avoid shaking his Chinese counterpart Zhou En-lai's hand in Geneva before they conducted negotiations over the future of Indochina. Eisenhower treated the People's Republic as an illegitimate regime which posed a mortal danger to its neighbors, as well as its own people. Most of the incoming officials who would specialize in east Asian affairs under President Kennedy believed this overt hostility had proven counterproductive in the court of global opinion, making the United States, rather than the communist Chinese, appear to be the unreasonable party. They were determined to reverse tactics, offering the Chinese a chance for dialogue and negotiation. If the Chinese accepted, it would reduce the risks of war and the prospects

for communist expansion in Asia. If they refused, the Chinese would be the ones who looked unreasonable. Essentially, the plan was to adopt towards China the tactics which Eisenhower employed concerning the Soviet Union. The Chinese would be contained, but not shunned or insulted.

None of this was to transpire during Kennedy's lifetime. He offered no olive branch, in part because the Chinese made clear they would promptly break it in two, and in part because at that time the domestic constituency for hostility was far larger and better mobilized than the constituency for outreach. An official change in policy promised no reward either at home or abroad. This was the conclusion reached by James Fetzer in his chapter on China policy in *Kennedy's Quest For Victory*, published in 1989. The chapter's title, "Clinging to Containment," revealed much of what has been wrong with the admittedly small number of scholarly works concerning this subject. It emphasized policy continuity in a manner which, if taken literally, means U.S. China policy still has not changed, and will not for the foreseeable future. Every U.S. administration since 1949 has endeavored to contain the expansion of Chinese territory and regional influence. Yet it would be extremely difficult to find an informed observer who would argue nothing has changed in relations between these two powers.

In part because of the space allotted, as well as due to the book's overall theme of policy failures, Fetzer merely skimmed the surface. And this surface was not terribly interesting. Not only was there no appreciable change in policy, but there were none of the momentous crises which defined the Eisenhower administration's interactions with the Chinese communists. The first historian to delve beneath the surface was Noam

Kochavi, with his 2002 monograph *A Conflict Perpetuated*. As the title implies, Kochavi also emphasized continuity. To his credit, Kochavi extensively documented the considerable ferment within the Kennedy administration on this subject, though his analysis of the relevant documents was thin. Most importantly, he failed to conclusively connect the ideas presented in these documents with the policies of future administrations.

Evelyn Goh made these connections in 2005's *Constructing the U.S. Rapprochement with China, 1961-1974*. Goh identified a “turning point in official American thinking” in 1965.⁴ In addition, this new consensus for outreach, which she termed “revisionist,” came to dominate both “official and public discourse” in 1966.⁵ This thesis pushes both events back at least two years, to 1963 and 1964 respectively. Unlike Goh's work, it seeks to chronicle the connection between these two related events. Since Goh identified and analyzed competing discourses and in the process heavily employed constructivist international relations theory, she clearly valued the importance of ideas in shaping policy. Yet Goh failed to account for the process of dissemination, particularly the interlocking relationship between administration officials, academic experts, and journalists. Not only did members of these three groups communicate frequently, they were often one and the same. The few China experts who then existed in America served in and advised administrations, talked to reporters, and published articles in both the academic and the popular presses. Goh observed, as did

⁴ Evelyn Goh, *Constructing the U.S. Rapprochement with China, 1961-1974* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 95.

⁵ *Ibid.* 92.

Rosemary Foot, that during the mid-1960s public opinion on China policy was ahead of the actual policy.⁶ Yet neither scholar explained why that was the case.

While both Kochavi and Goh noted both the constraining effects of public opinion on Kennedy's foreign policy and the fact that opinion towards China was beginning to change, they neglected to document manifestations of this opinion, or analyze in any depth the interactive relationship between, to use James Rosenau's three-step pyramid – which he developed during this period – the mass public, the informed public, and the elite.⁷ Rosenau's model was unidirectional and top-down, with elites influencing the informed public, who in turn influenced those members of the mass public paying attention to foreign affairs. Fellow political scientist V.O. Key, who focused – also during this period – on the bottom-up influence of opinion on policy, viewed mass opinion as creating “a system of dikes” which worked to set “the range or limits of policy.”⁸ Both scholarly models were applicable to Kennedy's China policy. Widespread public opposition to any sort of significant change in the nation's official approach towards the Chinese communists limited Kennedy's room for maneuver to almost nothing. The only hope for those desiring a change in policy would have been to move public opinion, which according to Rosenau would entail first converting elites, who would then evangelize informed observers, who would in turn convert the mass

⁶ Ibid. 94; Rosemary Foot, *The Practice of Power: U.S. Relations with China since 1949* (Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1995), 84.

⁷ James N Rosenau, *Public Opinion and Foreign Policy* (New York: Random House, 1961).

⁸ V.O. Key, *Public Opinion and American Democracy* (New York: Knopf, 1961).

public. As George Edwards has demonstrated, this is an exquisitely difficult if not impossible task for any presidential administration to achieve.⁹

Adam Berinsky has argued that it is possible to mobilize those individuals predisposed toward policy change on a given issue by altering “elite discourse.”¹⁰ Using the Vietnam War as an example, he concluded that the end of elite consensus for the continuation of that war, and the public expressions of doubt about or opposition to the war by leading politicians, foreign policy experts, and journalists led to a decrease in support for the war as revealed through opinion polls. John Zaller had previously termed the influence of elite consensus the “Mainstream Effect.”¹¹ According to Berinsky, the breakdown of elite consensus caused substantial numbers of undecideds to shift from uncertainty to dissent. In the case of communist China, the percent of undecideds on questions of diplomatic recognition never exceeded ten percent, and the number of China “doves” remained low. Thus, dissent within the elite would not be sufficient. Only the forging of a new elite consensus in opposition to the existing policy could move mass opinion. Zaller's Mainstream Effect, which nearly always resulted in a continuation of an existing policy, would instead exert a subversive influence. This process would require substantial exogenous shocks in the form of momentous foreign events, as well as signals from often dissident government officials that it was permissible for elites to respond to these shocks by calling for policy alterations.

⁹ George C. Edwards III, *On Deaf Ears: The Limits of the Bully Pulpit* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).

¹⁰ Adam J. Berinsky, *Silent Voices: Public Opinion and Political Participation in America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 106.

¹¹ John Zaller, *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 99.

Chinese Communist Party Chairman Mao Zedong could be counted on to produce these shocks. Whether they would move American sentiment in the direction desired by men like Bowles, Thomson, Komer, and Hilsman was another matter. Since coming to power, Mao's repeated provocations had only served to harden American opinion against any outreach to his regime. Kennedy's ascension did not dampen Mao's proclivities for provocation. Yet the changing structure of international relations caused these provocations to lead to a seemingly counterintuitive softening of American elite opinion. Mao's increasingly contentious relationship with his strongest ally inspired U.S. policymakers to, in the phrase of Gordon Chang, play the "Russia Card" against China, rather than the other way around.¹² It moved the majority of American mass and elite opinion to view the Chinese, rather than the Russians, as the greatest threat to world peace for the first time during the Cold War. That this occurred in the context of the failed Vienna summit, the building of the Berlin Wall, and most of all the Cuban Missile Crisis was intriguing in its own right. That this heightened assessment of the Chinese threat coincided with increasing calls in the United States to improve relations with the Chinese seemed even harder to explain. Victor Kaufman saw it as a contradiction.¹³ It would have been, provided it was anticipated at the time that increased expressions of hostility toward China would be viewed in the U.S. as more productive than acts of conciliation.

¹² Gordon H Chang, *Friends and Enemies: The United States, China, and the Soviet Union, 1948-1972* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990).

¹³ Victor S Kaufman, *Confronting Communism: U.S. and British Policies toward China* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2001), 175.

The assumption of the increasing numbers of experts calling for a rethinking of U.S. policy was that, despite persistent misrule, communist China would only become stronger over time. Unlike the Soviet Union, it was not destined to fracture or collapse. The lack of any significant unrest or loss of control during the worst of the famine occasioned by the Great Leap Forward appeared to prove that much. The successful projection of military force across the Himalayas and humiliating defeat of the Indian army emphasized both Chinese operational prowess and strategic self-control. Finally, China's inexorable march towards developing a nuclear weapon, which neither the Soviets nor the Americans desired nor proved willing or able to arrest, added to the growing sense that this was a regime which could not be ignored and must eventually be engaged. In his seminal work *America's Response to China*, Warren Cohen referred to this policy as a “taming” of the Chinese, allowing them to be “brought back into the family of nations, ready to live in peace with her neighbors.”¹⁴

The year John F. Kennedy was elected president, the China scholar A. Doak Barnett, who enjoyed great media influence because of his moderation and seeming even-handedness, called for the acquisition of greater American knowledge concerning China and the Chinese. He did not endorse increased diplomatic outreach as a means of acquiring that knowledge. Essentially, he still backed the Eisenhower-Dulles status quo, though he objected to the theoretical assumptions upon which it was based.¹⁵ Within a

¹⁴ Warren I. Cohen, *America's Response to China: An Interpretive History of Sino-American Relations* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1980) 235.

¹⁵ A. Doak Barnett, *Communist China And Asia: Challenge to American Policy* (New York: Harper Brothers, 1960).

year after Kennedy's death, Barnett began calling for “containment without isolation.” This would become a rallying cry for China doves, widely penetrate the media, and eventually become the basis for a new American policy which survives to this day. It would also cause Barnett to be lumped by those who opposed any changes to the Eisenhower-Dulles status quo as a leading member of the “Red China Lobby.”¹⁶ Other members of this “lobby” included John K. Fairbank and Hans Morgenthau, who had opposed the status quo for much longer, and thus enjoyed far less political influence. Barnett coined his slogan in the aftermath of Roger Hilsman's December 1963 speech on China policy in San Francisco, the same city where six years earlier Dulles had declared communist rule over mainland China to be a “passing phase.” By expressing the belief that this regime was in fact here to stay, and must therefore be dealt with, Hilsman publicly proclaimed what many inside the Kennedy administration had been saying for nearly three years, and provided official sanction for those outside the administration to express similar sentiments. This breaking of the China Lobby's “Code of Silence” ended the hegemony of one set of arguments, and initiated the establishment of a new hegemony. What was once heresy soon became conventional.

Chapter One of this work introduces the individuals who first attacked existing assumptions within the corridors of power, and reveals the alternative approaches they developed but were unable to have implemented during their tenures. Chapter Two

¹⁶ The Red China Lobby. Speech by Representative John M. Ashbrook, June 28, 1966, 2, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University, Right-Wing Pamphlets Collection, Group No. 775, Box No. 10, Folder 166.

describes how many of these same individuals reacted to events such as the Great Leap Forward, and adjusted or reiterated their ideas accordingly. Chapter Three explores the level of awareness in the American government and the American media regarding the Sino-Soviet split, and the various initial proposals for exploiting this epochal Cold War event. Chapter Four follows the course of the brief but pivotal Sino-Indian War, and its paradoxical effect on American perceptions of Chinese intentions. Finally, Chapter Five places the depictions of Chinese and Chinese-Americans during these years in the context of longstanding stereotypes and fears. As a whole, the work endeavors to present as complete a picture as possible of American diplomacy, public opinion, and popular culture concerning China during the Kennedy years.

This thesis investigates the relationships between ideas and events, opinion and policy, image and reality, and threat and response. For the first time, it provides detailed exposition and analysis of the American image of China and the Chinese during this period of revived Sinophobia. Given China's increasing aggression and unpredictability during these years, the shift in American sentiment away from isolation was by no means foreordained. Had Richard Nixon become president in 1960, a very different consensus would most likely have emerged. Only Kennedy – or more accurately those who worked for Kennedy – could lay the ground work for Nixon to go to China.

CHAPTER II
CHESTER BOWLES AND ROBERT KOMER:
RETHINKING U.S. CHINA POLICY AMIDST AMERICAN FEAR
AND CHINESE LOATHING

“China – there lies a sleeping giant. Let him sleep, for when he wakes he shall shake the
world.”

Napoleon Bonaparte¹

As president, John F. Kennedy promised, or at least hinted at, far more change that he could or even probably wanted to deliver. One area in which he promised little was U.S. policy regarding communist China. Yet this silence did not prevent speculation, hope, and particularly fear that change was imminent. The State Department noted in 1962 that “one of the more notable developments in the public discussion of U.S. China policy” during that calendar year “has been the upsurge in speculation that the U.S. is considering a change in that policy.”² While a number of individuals within the National Security Council and the State Department fervently desired significant changes, there was never a serious chance they could have convinced their superiors to convince the president to take the sizable political risks any altering of perhaps the most

¹ “A Long Look at China,” Saturday Evening Post, Final Draft, December 31, 1958, 1, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University, Chester Bowles Papers, Group No. 628, Series No. 11, Box No. 238, Folder 0604.

² Special Report on American Opinion, Department of State: 1962 Public Attitudes Toward U.S. Policy On China, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library, James C. Thomson Papers, Box 15, Folder 4.

sensitive aspect of U.S. foreign policy would no doubt have entailed. However, the writings those individuals produced contained the seeds of what would over the next decade germinate into the nation's eventual new China policy. Containment and isolation with the hope that communist China might someday collapse were replaced by containment without isolation in the hope that engagement might moderate a regime which was not going away.

The two individuals who initiated this process of change could not have been more different. Chester Bowles was a Democratic Party politician and diplomat who had loathed the previous administration's foreign policy. Unlike many Democrats who criticized Eisenhower, he was not primarily seeking to score political points. Bowles had profound philosophical objections to Secretary of State John Foster Dulles's strategy of containment. He was a strategist in the Cold War but not of it, who in 1964 drafted an article for *Foreign Affairs* entitled "American Foreign Policy After The Cold War."³ Robert Komer, by contrast, had worked proudly for Eisenhower, though not as a political appointee. He believed the primary purpose of U.S. foreign policy was to contain communism, though he doubted the ability of U.S. allies in Asia to offer assistance. Komer was an incurable pessimist who saw the worst in human nature where Bowles saw the best, who spotted faults where Bowles glimpsed potential. He minced no words when writing to his colleagues, yet long prospered in a federal bureaucracy where Bowles quickly foundered. These two men, one working at Dean Rusk's State

³ Sterling, Bowles Papers, Group No. 628, Series No. 11, Box No. 341, Folder 0316. Howard B. Schaffer appropriately subtitled his biography of Bowles "A New Dealer in the Cold War."

Department, the other at McGeorge Bundy's National Security Council, independently came to strikingly similar conclusions about the challenges U.S. policy towards China would face in the near term, and how to overcome them. Both assumed the current policy was living on borrowed time, that the clock was ticking down to zero, and change, while sure to be agonizing, must come sooner rather than later.

That these changes ultimately came later rather than sooner would appear to render the efforts of Bowles and Komer of trivial interest to historians. The types of policy changes they advocated occurred in a different decade under a different administration representing a different political party. One cannot compare their memos and policy papers to, for instance, George Kennan's Long Telegram or Paul Nitze's NSC-68. The effects of their writings were both less profound and less immediate. That historians of U.S.-China relations have regarded them as unconnected footnotes is thus understandable. It also reflects of a striking discrepancy between the studies of U.S.-Soviet and U.S.-China relations during the Cold War. To historians who study relations between the U.S. and U.S.S.R., ideas matter a great deal, and the archival documents which put forth those ideas are almost sacred writ. Regarding the origins of the Cold War, John Lewis Gaddis and Melvyn Leffler may not agree on much with Walter LaFeber and Bruce Cummings, and each pair of scholars would disagree with each other on a large number of matters as well. But, in their writings, all four have maintained that the documents recording the debates within the Truman administration mattered, even while they sharply disagree as to why they mattered. This was because the ideas expressed in these documents appear connected to subsequent actions.

That relationship is far less obvious with regards to U.S. relations with communist China. Actions did not appear to follow ideas. They superseded them. When Chinese troops attacked U.N. forces in Korea, they rendered moot whatever Truman's and Acheson's existing plans were for dealing with Mao's regime. Whether or not he wanted to, Johnson could not go to China while he was ordering hundreds of thousands of American troops into South Vietnam and Mao was unleashing the Red Guards. However, once those soldiers were on their way home, the Red Guards dispersed, and the Soviets had both achieved nuclear parity with the U.S. and engaged in sizable border skirmishes with the Chinese, the geopolitical stars were finally aligned for Nixon's and Kissinger's diplomatic masterstroke. If there was a defining internal document on that matter, it was on the Chinese side, and took the form of the report of the Four Marshals calling for a rethinking of Chinese policy concerning the United States.⁴ The Nixon administration produced no comparably seminal documents.

In part, that was because it would have been contrary to Nixon's secretive approach to foreign policy. Yet it was also because such documents had already been produced within the Kennedy administration. Their proposals had found their way into Nixon's writings and speeches even before he became president, not because he had read them, but because they had by then become elite conventional wisdom. Kennan in 1946 and Nitze in 1950 could rely on events quickly pushing the American people, and their elected leaders, in their direction. Bowles and Komer could not. Their opponents would

⁴ Jeremi Suri, *Power and Protest: Global Revolution and the Rise of Detente* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2003), 234.

have called them appeasers, and claimed they were advocating rewarding an enemy government for its bad behavior. One of these detractors would no doubt have been Richard Nixon. But by the middle of 1967 at the earliest and the beginning of 1969 at the latest, Nixon had come to think differently. That cannot be credited to China behaving in the intervening years in a more predictable manner that was more conducive to U.S. interests. Nor had the Sino-Soviet split devolved by then into outright armed conflict, opening an obvious path for a new form of triangular diplomacy. What had changed were the ideas and assumptions governing the U.S. response to China's unpredictability, belligerence, and inexorably increasing power. Those ideas were first articulated in 1961 by Robert Komer and Chester Bowles. Whether an idea takes ten weeks or ten years to be transformed into policy, it is still influential.

First, it is important to note the proximate reason for policy formulation was quite different than that for policy implementation. Given the decade of separation, it would be shocking if that were not the case. The Sino-Soviet split would eventually play an important role in President Richard Nixon's decision to establish diplomatic contacts with communist China and acquiesce to that regime's admission to the United Nations. In this earlier period, such a connection was not especially evident. If anything, the opposite was the case, with the split significantly delaying U.N. admission and increasing the reasons to diplomatically isolate China. Both Bowles and Komer quickly identified friction between the two great communist powers, and correctly predicted a future split. Yet neither offered this rift as a justification for changing policy towards communist China. The immediate reason both men offered for the necessity of a new

approach was the growing likelihood that the U.N. General Assembly would override U.S. opposition and vote to admit the People's Republic as a member state in the very near future. The Sino-Soviet split helped delay this event for nearly a decade. Furthermore, the Kennedy administration responded to Sino-Soviet divisions by establishing closer relations with the Soviets, not the Chinese. Thus, for the most part, the rethinking of China policy and the recognition of the end of monolithic communism moved on separate tracks during these years. Only later, and after the once highly-charged issue of U.N. admission for communist China became an afterthought in U.S. domestic politics, did a connection emerge.

In the late-1950s, Chester Bowles thought more about China than probably any other Democratic member of the House of Representatives. This may have been because being a congressman was among the least impressive items on his resume. Previously serving as governor of Connecticut, and before that as ambassador to India, Bowles had long been one of the leading foreign policy authorities within his party, particularly when it came to Asia. He was, in fact, that rare Democratic “Asia-Firster,” though in a vastly different way than standard conservative Republican “Asia-Firsters” such as Senator William Knowland, Representative Walter Judd, or General Douglas MacArthur. In the first draft for a 1959 *Saturday Evening Post* article on China's future, Bowles wrote that “what happens in China in the next ten years may have a more profound influence on our lives than developments in the Soviet Union.”⁵ Furthermore,

⁵ “A Long Look at China,” *Saturday Evening Post*, First Draft, July 30, 1958, 1, Sterling, Bowles Papers, Group No. 628, Series No. 11, Box No. 238, Folder 0604.

“Moscow and Peking view our fast-changing world from rather different perspectives and these differences may grow.” China was “an explosive new force” which “will be with us for the foreseeable future” and “constitutes a potential threat to the Soviet Union.”⁶ A little over one year after Secretary of State John Foster Dulles termed Communist China “a passing phase,” and when the monolithic nature of the Communist Bloc was official U.S. policy, Bowles challenged both presumptions.

Yet Bowles did not go so far as to advocate any alternative policy to regional containment. Based on his travels and experiences, he informed the *Saturday Evening Post's* readers that “gradually the Communist colossus to the North is creating alarm among thoughtful observers in Indonesia, Burma, Thailand, Cambodia, and even in India.” Bowles predicted that “India's growing skepticism of China's intentions holds promise that her leaders may ultimately see the need for a new power balance in South and Southeast Asia.”⁷ Bowles had made clear in previous statements that what he had in mind was not a new round of Dulles-inspired “Pactomania” binding China's neighbors to the U.S. militarily. In a 1957 speech at the Naval War College, Bowles termed containment as currently being practiced “left-over American isolationism” which reflected an atavistic desire to keep the world at arm's length. This approach was both lopsided and counterproductive, since “in our failure to balance the military factors with the economic and political factors – we have often made ourselves appear, not as the promoters of peace, but as the promoters of pure militarism.” People the world over

⁶ “A Long Look at China,” *Saturday Evening Post*, Final Draft, December 31, 1958, 4, 21, Bowles Papers, Group No. 628, Series No. 11, Box No. 238, Folder 060.

⁷ Ibid 22 – alternate ending not in published article.

wanted the same things Americans wanted in 1776 – political freedom and economic prosperity.⁸ By failing to fully support independence movements and wholeheartedly embrace an anti-colonialist foreign policy, the current administration was denying them the former. By neglecting to provide sufficient economic aid, they were failing to help them achieve the latter.

This was nowhere more evident than with the problematic U.S. relationship with India. More than an Asia-Firster, Bowles was an “India-Firster,” and would remain so throughout his political and diplomatic career. His professional experiences in that nation bred a deep personal affection for its culture and people. On a strategic level, he saw the world's largest democracy as the continent's vital pivot. Whereas Republicans condemned Truman's “loss” of China, Bowles warned of Eisenhower's “loss” of India. In this he was of one mind with Senator Kennedy. Like Bowles, Kennedy never missed an opportunity to criticize President Eisenhower's prosecution of the Cold War. Unlike Bowles, he preferred to attack the president's dealings with the Soviets not from the dovish left but from the hawkish right. However, India brought out his humanitarian idealism. In a 1959 speech, Kennedy labeled “the struggle between India and China” as a contest between a democracy and a dictatorship “for leadership of the East, for the respect of all Asia, for the opportunity to demonstrate whose way of life is the better.” During that decade, India had fallen behind China in terms of economic development. Kennedy argued that it should be the goal of the U.S. government to help India catch up

⁸ “The Power of Public Opinion,” September 24, 1957, 12, 17, 6, Sterling, Bowles Papers, Group No. 628, Series No. 11, Box No. 172, Folder 0885

to and surpass China through “a serious long-range program of long-term loans, backed up by technical and agricultural assistance.” Seconding Bowles's calls for the United States to match its policies to universal aspirations for political freedom and economic prosperity, though in the far more stirring language with which the nation – and the world – would soon gain familiarity, Kennedy ended by proclaiming “as a nation we think not of war but of peace; not of crusades of conflict but of covenants of cooperation; not of the pageantry of imperialism but of the pride of new states freshly risen to independence.”⁹ It would appear that the Massachusetts senator and the Connecticut representative were on the same page, if not concerning China, then certainly with regards to India.

Bowles's hopes for India extended beyond the subcontinent to Southeast Asia, where Chinese empires and various Indian states had long ago competed for cultural, economic, and political influence. India was the largest and most important link in a chain extending throughout the “Arc of Crisis,” to quote the title of a 1962 book by Stanford Professor Charles Russ.¹⁰ In a proposed 1959 article for the *New York Times Magazine* which was never published, Bowles wrote that “the principle military threat in Asia during the next decade may take the form of a major Chinese push into Southeast Asia.”¹¹ Though Bowles never spelled this out, given his previous utterances and writings, one would assume his strategy for containing China in this region would

⁹ India and China Folder, 1, 3, 5, JFKL, JFK Pre-Presidential Papers, Box 915.

¹⁰ William Henry Chamberlain, “The Bookshelf: A Look at the Troubled Countries That Lie at the Doorstep of Red China,” *Wall Street Journal*, January 15, 1962, 12.

¹¹ 1959 Spring – Proposed Article for the *New York Times* on China Policy, 21, Sterling, Bowles Papers, Group No. 628, Series No. 11, Box No. 240, Folder 0643.

involve not an expansion of the Southeast Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO), but economic aid to enable China's neighbors to build up their own military forces and form their own regional alliances.

In that same unpublished article, Bowles for the first time raised the issue of a “Two Chinas” policy, meaning recognition of the People's Republic of China as the official government on the mainland and the Republic of China as sovereign ruler of the island of Taiwan. Official U.S. contacts with Communist Chinese officials during the Second Quemoy Crisis in 1958, as well as intermittent negotiations with P.R.C. diplomats in Warsaw, proved that the U.S. already had a de facto Two Chinas policy. In addition, the Guomindong were becoming progressively less obsessed with renewing the Chinese Civil War, for “under the brittle crust of nationalist rule, a new national identity is emerging that is predominantly Chinese by culture but Formosan in outlook.”¹²

Bowles made precisely this proposal in an April 1960 article which appeared in *Foreign Affairs*. Published during the Democratic Party primaries, this piece by a close Kennedy foreign policy adviser garnered much attention, and was correctly assumed to reflect at least some of the senator's own beliefs. The article was in many ways a revised draft of the unpublished *New York Times Magazine* piece from the previous year. Bowles predicted that “mainland China, with an inadequate resource base, spiraling population, ruthless Communist leadership and intense nationalist spirit, will develop fiercely expansionist tendencies directed toward the weaker neighboring states to the south.” The states of “free Asia” were beginning to recognize this threat, and “seem to be

¹² Ibid. 2, 10.

moving closer together in the face of the common danger.” An independent Taiwan, along with a strong India, would prove vital to containing Chinese expansion. But if the American goal was to foster the creation and international acceptance of a Taiwanese nation, “our exposed position on Quemoy and Matsu makes very little sense.”¹³

Abandonment of the Offshore Islands would physically separate Chiang Kai-shek's forces from Mao's, eliminate the Guomindong's threat to the Mainland, and foster goodwill towards America throughout Asia, including within China itself. This was vital, both for establishing a de facto alliance of China's southern neighbors and for changing Chinese attitudes. To achieve that end, “we should be striving by all reasonable means to establish people-to-people contacts with mainland China.” Bowles recognized that “the Communists serve their own interests best by keeping us their Public Enemy.” However, this could change, particularly if the U.S. and its current and future Asian allies ensured that Chinese aggression would not pay. When that realization dawned on the Chinese, they would have no choice but to abandon the Soviets, with whom “*deep potential differences exist,*” and move closer, at least economically, to the capitalist industrial powers. As Bowles presciently put it, “in the longer perspective it seems clear that China's only practical alternative to an effort to seize the resources of Southeast Asia by force was to embark on a greatly expanded trade program.”¹⁴

Bowles's article generated controversy. It had been less than two years since Dulles and Eisenhower last threatened to use nuclear weapons to ensure continued

¹³ Chester Bowles, “The 'China Problem' Reconsidered,” *Foreign Affairs*, April 1960, 479, 477, 484, 481.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* 485, 484, 486. Italics in original.

Taiwanese control of the Offshore Islands. Kennedy backed Bowles to an extent, declaring in a debate with Nixon that fall that as president he would consider supporting the evacuation of the islands, the only instance in which he differed with Nixon on a major issue in a non-hawkish direction. Bowles's unpublished *New York Times Magazine* article and his *Foreign Affairs* piece notably differed in the latter's lack of the phrase "Two Chinas," a clear concession to acceptable public opinion at the time, and a sign of the "China Lobby's" continuing influence.

Bowles served as Chairman of the Platform Committee for the 1960 Democratic National Convention in Los Angeles. In that capacity, he received three letters from the Committee of One Million against the Admission of Communist China to the United Nations, the China's Lobby's organizational arm since 1954. James Thomson, a missionary's son who spent his childhood in China, worked for Bowles's congressional office and served as his chief foreign policy aide on the Platform Committee. He termed the "tone" of the third letter from the Committee of One Million "outrageous," and found the enormous number of Democratic representatives and senators who signed the note "curious." Thomson concluded that "the pressure at Los Angeles will be enormous."¹⁵ Bowles did receive a letter from private citizen Cae Soule commending him on the open-mindedness of his *Foreign Affairs* article and wishing him the best of luck in resisting the pressure from those who demanded the status quo regarding

¹⁵ Thomson to Bowles, Sterling, Bowles Papers, Group No. 629, Series No. 111, Group No. 258, Folder 947.

Communist China. In a letter of reply, Bowles told Soule that “in all frankness, I must admit that this campaign irritates me a great deal.”¹⁶

Bowles's professed openness to significant change in U.S. China policy created potential difficulties when President-elect Kennedy chose him to be Undersecretary of State. On the eve of his confirmation hearings, Senator Norris Cotton of New Hampshire wondered whether Bowles believed opposition to American recognition of “Red China” or that nation's admission to the United Nations “are bedrock foundations of our policy.”¹⁷ At this point, Bowles had not publicly endorsed either proposition, though his strong allusions to a desire for an independent Taiwan appeared to imply eventual support for neither. Bowles quickly put the matter to rest at his Senate hearing on January 19. In his opening remarks, Bowles declared “we are going to defend Formosa at whatever the cost and whatever the risk.”¹⁸ This was an eliding of the fundamental question, but his militant tone convinced the Republicans on the committee that he possessed sufficient antipathy to the Chinese communist regime to warrant confirmation.

While Bowles was the highest-ranking member of the new administration to openly call for a rethinking of U.S. policy towards Communist China, he was far from alone in his concerns and proposed solutions. University of Rochester Professor Alexander Eckstein, one of the leading dozen American experts on China, wrote Thomson shortly after the election to tell him the incoming administration's policy

¹⁶ Bowles to Cau Soule, June 30, 1960, Sterling, Bowles Papers, Group No. 629, Series No. 111, Group No. 258, Folder 947.

¹⁷ “Bowles' Attitude On Red China Questioned,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 18, 1961, 4.

¹⁸ “Bowles Raps Red China, Wins OK of Senate Unit,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 20, 1961, 2.

should be based on two premises: “the Chinese Communist regime is here to stay” and “the admission of Communist China in the United Nations is only a matter of time.”¹⁹ Pressure was also building from abroad. British Foreign Secretary Lord Home told the House of Lords in February 1961 that “the facts of international life require that Communist China get a seat in the United Nations even though it has few of the credentials of a peace-loving nation.”²⁰ Within the administration, officials openly feared that “support was running out for the moratorium” and that “if the Chinese representation this year came up as a simple credentials question, our position would be technically weak, since the issue could be decided by a bare majority.”²¹ In 1960, which the U.N. declared the “Year of Africa,” 17 nations on that continent gained their independence.²² Incoming administration officials had every reason to expect dozens more to join the international organization in the coming years, potentially shifting the balance of power on this and other issues against the positions advocated by the U.S. and its allies.

Komer recognized these trends, and intended to launch a preemptive policy strike while there was still time. The only prominent holdover from the Eisenhower administration, Komer was a former Central Intelligence Agency analyst who had spent

¹⁹ Memorandum on China Policy, Alexander Eckstein, November 1960, 8, 9, JFKL, Thomson Papers, Box 14, Folder 5.

²⁰ “Briton Urges Red China in UN,” *Christian Science Monitor*, February 9, 1961, 5.

²¹ Memorandum of Conversation, February 3, 1961, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963: Volume 22: Northeast Asia* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1996), 5.

²² Thomas Borstelmann, *The Cold War and the Color Line: American Race Relations in the Global Arena* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2001), 118.

a decade on the staff which wrote National Intelligence Estimates. Beginning in 1956, he served as chief C.I.A. liaison to the N.S.C.²³ A committed Cold War hardliner on every major issue with the exception of China, Komer would go on to object to the removal of Jupiter Missiles from Turkey during the Cuban Missile Crisis, calling the matter “non-negotiable.”²⁴ During the Johnson administration, he became General William Westmoreland's de facto civilian second-in-command overseeing the pacification effort in Vietnam. Nicknamed “Blowtorch Bob” by Ambassador to Vietnam Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr., Komer was blunt, hard-charging, and usually achieved his bureaucratic objectives.²⁵ A Harvard graduate twice over (B.A. 1942, M.B.A. 1947), he quickly developed a close bond with his boss, National Security Adviser McGeorge Bundy, who previously served as Dean of Harvard's Graduate School of Arts and Sciences.²⁶

In Vietnam, Komer insisted upon and received a four-star ranking so that generals below Westmoreland would be compelled to obey him.²⁷ But in 1961, he did not yet have the stature to match his ambition. That did not stop him from trying to influence sensitive matters of policy. On March 1, 1961, when Kennedy's foreign policy team was still moving into their new offices, he suggested to Bundy that “we should prod State to get started pronto on a broad-scale rethinking exercise.” He proposed that the administration “disengage, as skillfully as we can, from unproductive aspects of our

²³ John Prados, *Keepers Of The Keys: A History of the National Security Council from Truman to Bush* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1991), 118.

²⁴ Komer to Bundy, October 27, 1962, JFKL, National Security Files, Box 322, Folder 12.

²⁵ Douglas Kinnard, *The War Managers* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1977), 104.

²⁶ “Some people thought him brash and intrusive,” Bundy recalls, “I just thought him a marvelous staff man.” from Prados, *Keepers of the Keys*, 118-119.

²⁷ Kinnard, *The War Managers*, 104.

China policy, e.g. UN membership where we're likely to get clobbered and later on Offshores in order to rationalize our posture for long term struggle with hard-line CPR.” But avoiding getting “clobbered” by world opinion risked getting clobbered by domestic opinion. Komer admitted that “this one is going to be painful as hell to us,” but added the caveat “the longer we wait the more painful (and costly) it's going to be.” Negative reaction from Congress and the American public was “a real problem,” but one which “will be just as great later as now.” To blunt the expected backlash, Komer proposed “we give a few public hints we're rethinking now, lest we later look like [we're] being dragged into such changes” by world opinion and events.²⁸

Komer's memo to Bundy and Rostow was a preview of his April 1961 report “Strategic Framework For Rethinking China Policy.” Komer's argument for such a rethinking was based on the assumption that “time is not working in our favor in the Far East.” He offered two reasons for this. The first involved America's allies. Komer believed that the United States faced “a striking increase in Free World dissent from our China policy,” and that “the secular trend is toward increasing acceptance of a powerful Red China as a fact of political life.” The second was China's increasing military and economic strength, which meant that the situation of “containment without too great an allocation of US resources is unlikely to persist.” A NATO-style regional military alliance was out of the question because of “the essential weakness of the target areas around the CPR periphery.” The one exception was the Soviet Union, technically China's closest ally and the United States's leading adversary. The emergent Sino-Soviet

²⁸ Komer to Bundy, Walt Rostow, March 1, 1961, JFKL, NSF, Box 21a, Folder 4.

dispute created future opportunities for the United States to make a “tacit agreement with the USSR at Chinese expense” since “Moscow too fears Peiping” and there was “growing competition between” the two communist giants. Even so, the Soviets were highly unlikely to prevent the Chinese-backed North Vietnamese from conquering South Vietnam, an eventuality Komer considered “far more devastating” than even the loss of Taiwan.²⁹ Chinese-backed expansion southwards could therefore not easily be stopped with military force, certainly not that of China's neighbors. This necessitated a more novel, and perhaps controversial, approach.

To sell this new approach, Komer reverted to a textbook example of outlining three putative options, only one of which appeared reasonable and feasible. This tactic would later become commonplace during the escalating American commitment to South Vietnam.³⁰ He presented two extreme proposals, which he labeled “hostility” and “accommodation,” as well as his own preferred plan, which he labeled the “middle road.” The communist Chinese regime could not be overthrown with continued hostility. It could be appeased with accommodation only at the cost of U.S. hegemony in the Western Pacific. What Komer offered instead was a new mixture of containment and outreach. The outreach would be a combination of rhetorical ploys designed to sway overseas opinion and serious attempts to moderate the mainland regime and make it less dangerous. The central rhetorical gambit would be American acceptance of communist

²⁹ Strategic Framework For Rethinking China Policy, Draft by Robert W. Komer, April 7, 1961, 3 2, 3, 5, 12. JFKL, NSF, Box 22, Folder 1. Underlined in original.

³⁰ For numerous examples, see David Halberstam, *The Best And The Brightest* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1969).

China in the United Nations. An independent Taiwan would remain in the U.N., but the P.R.C. would take the R.O.C.'s seat on the Security Council. Komer assumed that Taiwan would be expelled from that organization within “several years.”³¹ Yet that was bound to happen with or without U.S. support, and if it did happen in the face of continued U.S. intransigence, this would constitute a severe blow to American prestige. Acting preemptively could rebound to the United States's favor and to China's detriment.

Komer knew the Chinese would reject any proposal that allowed the government of Chiang Kai-shek to retain membership in the United Nations, even (in fact especially) as the de facto government in Taiwan. But this refusal would make the Chinese, not the U.S., appear to be the intransigent party, and “demonstrate sufficient [American] flexibility to calm neutralist fears, and to shift the onus for continued tensions as much as possible to Peiping.” This would only be the opening move, and future proposals would be made by the United States which would continue to put “the onus of refusal” upon the Chinese.³² Whatever damage Dulles's uncompromising rejection of Communist China's legitimacy had done to America's global reputation would thereby quickly be undone.

Komer recognized his proposal would be unpalatable not only to China, but to many Americans as well. The administration “must fight a two-front war” because “any revision of China policy unfortunately requires, perhaps more than any other facet of US foreign affairs, considering the impact at home.” However, times were changing.

³¹ Strategic Framework For Rethinking China Policy, 6, 30, 31.

³² Ibid. 27, 32.

Because nearly a decade had passed since the end of the Korean War, Komer had a hunch that “the original fervor of popular and Congressional anti-Peiping feeling has abated somewhat.” The key would be to stress that what he proposed would not be “a shift in policy but an effort to adjust this policy to the facts of life” and “make our China policy more parallel to our policy toward the USSR.” As with the Soviet Union, the United States must engage with communist China “precisely because it is an enemy, not despite this fact.” Komer believed the U.S. “must plan for a power conflict with Communist China lasting at least a generation,” due both to “our basic conflicts of interest in the Far East” and because “the sturm und drang phase of Mao's revolution requires an external devil.” Yet while the United States was endeavoring to contain and resist Chinese expansion, American leaders must also demonstrate a new-found “flexible willingness to explore the possibilities of influencing the long-run evolution of the Peiping regime.”³³

This was the first instance of a government official putting forth what would by the end of the decade become official U.S. policy towards communist China. Almost exactly one year later, Chester Bowles offered a striking similar proposal in a policy memorandum, albeit with important additions. Bowles call for the U.S. to use its “leverage” to “weaken China's expansionist tendencies and military capacity, encourage the opening of its society to non-Communist influences, enlarge its economic ties to the West, and gradually modify its hard-shell Communism.” Due to the previous administration's “sterile, inept and unrealistic” policies in Asia, the current

³³ Ibid. 36-40.

administration was burdened with “a complex of contradictory policies many of which had their root in domestic partisan conflicts.”³⁴ Bowles belittled the American policy of “non-recognition and U.N. exclusion” as “a national posture rather than a national policy.” China's “re-entry into the family of nations,” including American diplomatic recognition and a seat in the United Nations, should become the “desirable long-term goal of U.S. foreign policy.” Neither was possible in the near-term because of Chinese demands. But, as Komer had recognized, this created opportunities. Echoing Komer, Bowles wrote that “it is to our clear advantage to place the onus for the present communication impasse squarely on the Peiping regime.” This could be accomplished by offering communist China U.N. membership at the cost of Chinese acceptance of continued Taiwanese membership. Since the P.R.C. would be certain to refuse such a deal, “it will leave the situation unchanged.”³⁵

As a man who openly detested all things Eisenhower when it came to foreign policy, Bowles would have almost certainly been quite reluctant to recognize that he was applying to the Chinese a tactic Eisenhower employed multiple times in his dealings with the Soviets. Eisenhower intended proposals such as Open Skies and Atoms For Peace to appeal to global opinion, particularly in poorer nations not aligned with either the U.S or the U.S.S.R., by making the United States look generous and peace-loving. Even better, the Soviets were certain to reject them, and thus appear to be the

³⁴ U.S. Policies in the Far East – Review and Recommendation Memorandum, April 4, 1962, 29, 52, 2, Sterling, Bowles Papers, Group No. 628, Series No. 1, Box No. 311, Folder 0607.

³⁵ Ibid. 29, 30, 36.

unreasonable party in the Cold War competition.³⁶ Though, according to Kenneth Osgood, neither Eisenhower, Dulles, nor any subordinate official talked about placing the “onus” on the Soviets through such methods, at least not in those exact words,³⁷ that was clearly their intention. Komer never explained when he “rethought” China policy, or if he was influenced by Eisenhower's methods of appealing to world opinion. Still, the tactical parallel is unmistakable.

Perhaps unlike Komer, in the near-term Bowles had more in mind than mere rhetorical gambits. He made concrete proposals which he believed the Chinese might accept. Bowles focused on two substances - wheat and uranium. China currently lacked and needed both. Bowles believed it had the capability to produce sufficient quantities of the latter, but not the former. He correctly predicted that “by 1964 China will almost certainly detonate a nuclear device.” Any changes in American policy after that date would be viewed by the world as “a defensive U.S response to increased mainland power.” Once again, time was not on the American side. But it was not on the Chinese side in important respects either. Bowles believed the ongoing acute scarcity of food in China was not a passing phase. He asserted that crisis was “endemic” to communist Chinese agriculture due to the fact that, even in good years, yields were increasing slower than population.³⁸ The seemingly unbridgeable Malthusian gap between Chinese agricultural productivity and the population's fecundity provided the U.S. with

³⁶ Kenneth Osgood, *Total Cold War: Eisenhower's Secret Propaganda Battle at Home and Abroad* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2006), 184, 187, 190-198.

³⁷ Based upon personal correspondence with the author regarding recollections of his archival research.

³⁸ U.S. Policies in the Far East – Review and Recommendation Memorandum, 2-4, Sterling, Bowles Papers.

unprecedented leverage. The promise of wheat sales could be employed to encourage Chinese cooperation in Northeast and Southeast Asia.³⁹ China was powerful and dangerous, but its people would likely remain on the verge of hunger so long as food imports were not substantially increased. If the Chinese government refused such a quid pro quo, they would appear not only intransigent but heartless, willing to starve their own citizens rather than forgo foreign aggression.

While Komer confronted concerns about domestic public opinion head-on, Bowles was more circumspect, and at times contradictory. He chided the previous administration for having “side-stepped and postponed the essential, long-overdue decisions in Asia on the ground that the American people could not be persuaded to support the moves which were necessary.” Yet he also recommended that “every effort should be made to keep the operation in lo [sic] key. All talk of a 'new Asia policy' should be discouraged.” Important decisions must be made, but apparently they must be kept from the public, a curious stance from a man who gave a speech five years earlier extolling the wisdom of public opinion. Further tying himself in knots, Bowles later declared that “here in the United States we will be undertaking an educational task as momentous and necessary as those relating to Lend Lease and the Marshall Plan.”⁴⁰ Much like Kennedy himself, Bowles was not quite able to reconcile his idealistic faith in the American people with his cynical but well-founded fear of their reactions to change on an emotionally sensitive matter.

³⁹ Ibid. 38.

⁴⁰ Ibid. 53, 33, 51.

The way to slice this Gordian Knot was to successfully mobilize public opinion. The simplest, but also the riskiest, method of achieving this result would be a direct presidential appeal for change. In November 1961, officials working under Bowles in the State Department felt sufficiently emboldened to have an unnamed speechwriter craft an address for President Kennedy to read on national television calling for an epochal change in the U.S. approach to China. No historian of the administration's policy towards communist China has ever mentioned this address, most likely because it was never actually given. Yet it is an important artifact for two reasons. First, its very existence, and the manner in which its content was debated and analyzed, demonstrated the boldness of those pushing for change, particularly during the first year of the administration. Second, and much more importantly, the words President Kennedy never uttered bore an unmistakable similarity to those spoken by President Nixon eight to ten years in the future. They demonstrated a continuity, if not in actions or words, then in thoughts and hopes. On China, Nixon would ultimately fulfill the dreams of Chester Bowles, much as Bowles would have hated to admit it. Much as Nixon and Henry Kissinger would have hated to admit it, their vision of a new Asia after Vietnam had been glimpsed long before that war began in earnest.

As bold as the speech's words were, nowhere in the text, entitled "Proposed Presidential Speech on a Two Chinas Policy," did the words "Two" and "Chinas" appear consecutively. Chester Bowles noted after reading the speech that "the key point is the

establishment of the two China concept, although, of course, we must not call it that.”⁴¹ Similar to Lyndon Johnson's approach to Vietnam, the strategy would be creeping escalation coupled with public obfuscation. By the time the public realized what was happening, events would have already taken their course. However, there was no “Vietnam Peace Lobby” in the United States to warn of that president's devious intentions. The speech itself contained plenty of phrases to prick the ears of the China Lobby and their supporters. The most notable was the repeated usage of the word “Peking.” The U.S. government officially referred to the Chinese capital as “Peiping,” which was what the Guomindong had called it. No American president publicly uttered the word Peking until 1969, at which time it was seen as a major, and meaningful, innovation. Not coincidentally, the Committee of One Million had ceased to exist by 1969.⁴²

The speech began with the recognition that the American relationship, or lack thereof, with the Chinese communists was anomalous, stating that “with no other nation in the world has the United States maintained a similar relationship.” The text went on to claim this was in large part because of lingering bitterness regarding the Korean War, but added “although this emotional reaction is understandable, we cannot allow it to shape our policy toward Communist China in the new decade of the '60's.” The new era Kennedy had proclaimed at his inauguration demanded new policies unburdened by the

⁴¹ Chester Bowles note, November 30, 1961, JFKL, Thomson Papers, Box 14, Folder 14. Underlined in original.

⁴² Stanley D Bachrack, *The Committee Of One Million: “China Lobby” Politics, 1953-1971* (New York: Columbia University Press: New York, 1976), 265.

old rancor. Without a doubt, communist China was a threat, and not just because it was communist. There was “a 2000-year tradition of imperialism which has seen one Chinese dynasty after another in its early dynamic years attempt to expand at the expense of its neighbors.” Compounding this dynastic imperative was the fact that China lacked the food to feed its people and the raw materials to industrialize. This created “a classic aggressor situation similar to that which fed the expansionist armies of Nazi Germany and pre-war Japan.” The Chinese dilemma demanded not only containment but outreach. With this in mind, “we must welcome every opportunity to encourage more moderate attitudes on the part of the Peking government.”⁴³

The Chinese government might at the moment be akin to that of the Nazis, but “the lessons of history clearly show that no conflict between nations is permanent. People change, governments change, and nations change. It is the rigid, the inflexible, and the arrogant who fall by the wayside.” The words would have been vintage Kennedy in their soaring optimism, faith in future progress, and implicit criticism of previous leaders. Mao was not the only one who had been rigid, inflexible, and arrogant. The conclusion of the speech made this even more plain, and for the first time obliquely took on the China Lobby, declaring that the United States can no longer afford to “allow our national policies to be shaped by shrill charges and sterile slogans.”⁴⁴ The final line Kennedy was supposed to have spoken - “soberly, thoughtfully and without rancor the time has come for us Americans to consider what in many ways is the most perplexing

⁴³ Bowles to Hughes, November 30, 1961: Proposed Presidential Speech on a Two Chinas Policy, 3, 6, 15-18, JFKL, Thomson Papers, Box 14, Folder 14.

⁴⁴ Ibid. 19-21.

and explosive question of our age” - was a sort of plea for the “Silent Majority” to overcome the noisy “China Lobby” minority and end their vise grip on policy.

The speech would have also been Kennedy-esque because it was heavy on symbolism and light on substance. In fact, the speech proposed no actual policy changes. At its heart, it was merely a plea for both the American people and the Chinese leadership to change their conceptions of one another. It asserted “how much better it would be for the people of China if Peking were to choose the road of peace, of trade, and of trust.” The mention of trade was the closest the text came to making any allusion to policy matters then under discussion. For the most part, the writer contented himself with normative statements such as “in the months and years ahead it must be our fervent hope and prayer that the government of Communist China will adopt more reasonable policies towards the world as a whole.” Absent were any possible means to bring this about. Perhaps this was because the writer believed that the time “is not yet here, and I can see no signs that point to its coming in the near future.” Nevertheless, “the door remains open; we for our part will never close it.”⁴⁵

Coming at the end of a year which included Kennedy's consecutive humiliations at the Bay of Pigs and the Vienna summit, as well as the building of the Berlin Wall, such conciliatory words would no doubt have been taken at home and abroad not as an act of magnanimity, but a sign of weakness. A similar speech given one year later, in the immediate aftermath of the Cuban Missile Crisis, might have been received differently. But by then, China appeared even less amenable to such appeals. In either year, it would

⁴⁵ Ibid.

have been an audacious address for a careful politician. The closest equivalent would have been Kennedy's 1963 address on civil rights, which boldly attacked the morality of segregation and thereby risked alienating southern whites, something Kennedy had previously been extremely wary of doing. Yet that speech was not a mere plea for dialogue or understanding, but an announcement of support for new legislation. The proposed China speech lacked this element. It was thus both too bold to be uttered and not bold enough to be worth uttering. Finally, the civil rights speech occurred in the context of a groundswell of non-violent black activism and violent white responses, both of which received ample press and television coverage. It had become difficult for the president not to take a stand on the matter. The matter of China presented no equivalent political urgency.

As it was, even those most supportive of the speech's message were unenthusiastic about the text itself. Bowles wrote "this needs more work. It is right and awkward in several areas, and I don't want it to go unless it is good."⁴⁶ He told his subordinate Tom Hughes that while "this is no time to send the President a controversial memorandum and proposal," that day was fast approaching as "with Averell [Harriman] and the new team I believe we may soon be prepared to move." In addition to Harriman, Bowles believed the American Ambassador to the United Nations, who had just succeeded in keeping communist China out of that organization, was supportive, writing "I discussed this (the speech) in general terms with Adlai, who thought it would do

⁴⁶ Chester Bowles note, November 30, 1961, JFKL, James C. Thomson Papers, Box 14, Folder 14. Underlined in original.

wonders for our position domestically and abroad.” In terms of congress, he surmised the Democratic senator from Montana and noted Asia expert Mike Mansfield “would buy it.” Finally, and most hopefully of all, “the general line appears to me reasonable and in line with the President's instincts.”⁴⁷ No mention was made as to what Dean Rusk would think of the speech. This, along with all other contemporary evidence, would indicate Rusk was opposed to such a change in China policy. In his memo on the speech, Bowles was clearly eager to mention every prominent official who might be supportive of a Two-China policy, from Ambassador Stevenson up to the president himself. To have excluded his own immediate superior from the list would have been a most uncharacteristic omission.

Rusk was not to remain Bowles's immediate superior for long. The mention of “the new team” was an allusion to a substantial bureaucratic reshuffling of State Department personnel which the press quickly dubbed the “Thanksgiving Day Massacre.” The massacre's chief victim was Bowles himself. Technically “promoted” to the position of “President's Special Representative for Africa, Asia, and Latin America” as well as “Ambassador at Large,” he would spend most of the next eighteen months traveling to those three continents and reporting on economic development and foreign aid projects. Harriman ceased being an “Ambassador at Large” and assumed the formal position of Undersecretary for Far Eastern Affairs, the one aspect of this series of moves

⁴⁷ Bowles to Hughes, 1, 2, JFKL, James C. Thomson Papers, Box 14, Folder 14.

which Bowles appeared to have supported and lobbied for.⁴⁸ Harriman would remain in that position until April 1963, when he was replaced by Roger Hilsman. Harriman and Hilsman would carry on Bowles's attempts to change China policy, though Harriman would waver, at times seeking to exploit the U.S.'s and the U.S.S.R.'s mutual suspicions of China's growing power to improve relations with the Soviets. James Thomson, who had been serving as Bowles's Special Assistant, remained in this position until 1963, at which point he became Hilsman's Special Assistant. Returning to a position where he could attempt to change China policy, Thomson would within the year successfully push Hilsman in that direction.

There is no evidence Bowles's views on China had anything to do with his reassignment. In fact, he had yet to produce his lengthy memorandum calling for significant changes in U.S. China policy. He lacked Komer's sense of urgency. Bowles's writings going back to 1959 indicate that he shared Komer's beliefs on how to handle growing Chinese power, and his longing to take on the China lobby probably went back even further. Bowles also lacked Komer's ability to make important allies. His chief achievement during his brief tenure as Undersecretary of State was to become a leading enemy of the president's brother. According to Harris Wofford, Attorney General Robert Kennedy termed Bowles a “gutless wonder” after he prevented U.S. military intervention in the Dominican Republic following the death of Rafael Trujillo. In addition, Bowles was known to be “upset and troubled” by Kennedy's consent to the Bay

⁴⁸ Chester Bowles, *Promises To Keep: My Years In Public Life* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 363.

of Pigs operation. Within the State Department, Bowles had been warned that the Undersecretary's job was now seen as that of a “Chief of Staff,” and even James Thomson confessed that his boss possessed poor aptitude for that sort of administrative position.⁴⁹

Regardless of these other, unrelated conflicts and shortcomings, Rusk was not a supportive superior when it came to China policy, and would have disapproved had Bowles put his thoughts on China in writing as early as Komer had. In later decades, after China policy had changed drastically under both Republican and Democratic administrations, Rusk claimed he was personally supportive of significant policy changes during this period, including the specifics of Bowles's proposal. In 1977, he told Warren Cohen that he supported a “two Chinas” policy as early as the mid-1950s. However, Kennedy was opposed to such a change. According to Rusk, this was not simply because Kennedy feared a domestic political backlash, but rather because “he seems to have retained an enduring hostility” towards the People's Republic, unlike his more flexible and evolving views on the Soviet Union.⁵⁰ Rusk went into greater depth in his memoirs, published over a decade later, declaring that “I was leaning toward a two-China policy in 1961.” However, Rusk recognized that “any change on China would have been one hell of a battle,” with Republicans from former President Dwight Eisenhower on down opposing any such moves. Rusk added Kennedy knew that “he

⁴⁹ Howard B Schaffer, *Chester Bowles: A New Dealer in the Cold War* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1993), 220-222.

⁵⁰ Warren I. Cohen, *Dean Rusk* (Totowa, New Jersey: Cooper Square Publishers, 1980), 164-167.

would have been cut to ribbons by the China Lobby, the Republicans, and many members of Congress.”

Rusk claimed his open-minded views on the matter were not known, even within the administration, because, since he worried about “that leaky Kennedy administration,” when Stevenson or Bowles tried to discuss China “I stonewalled them and play [sic] the role of 'village idiot.’” By that time, Rusk had come to agree with Kennedy confidants such as Arthur Schlesinger that the president did not hold any personal animus towards Communist China, and would have made significant changes in U.S. policy towards the regime in his second term.⁵¹

One thing all relevant parties agreed upon, either at that time or long after the fact, was the power of the China Lobby. In his seminal *Friends and Enemies*, Gordon Chang claimed that the lobby was a “spent force” by the time Kennedy entered office.⁵² However, the administration and those who covered it almost universally disagreed. Representative Charles O. Porter, a Democrat from Oregon, and the only member of Congress who dared to publicly question Eisenhower's China policy, was defeated in the 1960 election by a member of the Committee of One Million.⁵³ More than two-thirds of Porter's colleagues – 296 Representatives, along with 55 Senators - consented in 1962 to have their names appear on Committee mailings. Republicans comprised 180 of the total, and Democrats 171 since the organization, though run by conservative activists

⁵¹ Dean Rusk, as told to Richard Rusk, Daniel S. Papp, ed. *As I Saw It* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1990), 196-197, 283-284.

⁵² Gordon H. Chang, *Friends and Enemies: The United States, China, and the Soviet Union, 1948-1972* (Stanford University Press: Stanford, California, 1990), 163.

⁵³ Bachrack, *The Committee Of One Million*, 206.

such as Marvin Liebman and Arthur Kohlberg, was always scrupulous about maintaining its bi-partisan image.⁵⁴ At that time, only the *Nation* magazine agreed with Chang's retrospective assessment, calling it the "Lobby of a Million Ghosts" in 1960. But this was not because the Committee lacked popularity among politicians, but because few if any actual voters supported the organization.⁵⁵ It was thus, in their view, a paper tiger, if only the politicians would dare recognize it as such, former Representative Porter's fate to the contrary.

There was evidence that the American people were moving, however tentatively, away from the China Lobby and towards Porter and the *Nation*. A March 1961 Gallup poll for the first time showed significant increases in support for improved relations with communist China. Anticipating precisely the arguments which would begin to be made within the corridors of power during the Kennedy years, gain increasing and influential adherents outside government during the Johnson administration, and become policy under Nixon, a Long Island housewife called China "a tremendous force that we can't and don't wish to annihilate," adding "we are going to have to work out some way of getting along."⁵⁶ A majority of respondents supported selling the Chinese foodstuffs and making trade deals with them. Only 20 percent supported seating the P.R.C. in the United Nations, though this was double the percentage who had supported this action in 1955. However, when asked if the United States should "go along with a decision to seat

⁵⁴ Fundraising letter, Committee of One Million, May 11, 1962, Sterling, Right-Wing Pamphlets Collection, Group No. 775, Box No. 10, Folder 170.

⁵⁵ "Don't Give Up The Ship: Sink It," *The Nation*, March 4, 1961, 178.

⁵⁶ George Gallup, "Public Approves U.S. Move to Improve Red China Relations," *Hartford Courant*, March 19, 1961, 22.

Red China,” support jumped to 59 percent, again nearly double the proportion in 1955.⁵⁷ Though significant, this hardly indicated a groundswell for significant policy change. The State Department summarized the poll at the time as indicating that “the American public would like to see the U.S. take steps to improve our relations with Communist China.”⁵⁸

Standing in the way of any such steps were not only congress, the Committee of One Million, and the Taiwanese government they supported, but the Chinese communists themselves. Roger Hilsman wrote in 1967 that “it almost seemed that the Communists feared a change in U.S. policy toward China as much as the China Lobby did.”⁵⁹ The P.R.C. made this clear the same week the Gallup poll came out by presenting a series of conditions the United States had to meet to improve relations, conditions they knew the United States would find unacceptable. In response, the magazine *America*, normally an advocate during this period for changing China policy, announced “Red China's intransigent demands should make academic the whole matter of its admission to the UN until such time as Chairman Mao and his cohorts decide to join the human race.”⁶⁰ This came on the heels of Mao's post-Inaugural statement that Kennedy was “worse than Eisenhower,” which wounded the new American president more than Mao could have known. On the surface, Mao intended to convey his belief that the smooth-

⁵⁷ George Gallup. “Public Yielding a Bit on Seating Red China,” *Boston Globe*, March 25, 1961, 16.

⁵⁸ Public Opinion Studies, Folder 1961-1963, March 19, 1961, National Archives Records Administration, Record Group 59, Box 33.

⁵⁹ Roger Hilsman, *To Move A Nation: The Politics of Foreign Policy in the Administration of John F. Kennedy* (Doubleday: Garden City, New York, 1967), 304.

⁶⁰ “Rebuff from Red China,” *America*, March 25, 1961, 806.

talking Kennedy was deceitful and tricky. Deeper down, he might have been afraid the new president was serious. The candidate's consideration for abandoning Quemoy and Matsu appeared to signal that Kennedy supported recognition of both "Chinas."⁶¹ Such a move on the part of the Americans would conflict with Mao's attempts to portray the United States as a "devil figure," and limit its ability to serve as the enemy he needed for domestic mobilization.

These actions would appear to support Komer's and Bowles's strategy of offering dual recognition as a means of "putting the onus" on the Chinese. Yet scoring points abroad at the cost of fallout at home would provide a merely pyrrhic victory. Kennedy had anticipated this, telling the Prime Minister of New Zealand in early March that "he would be prepared to tackle the very deepseated and emotional opposition through the country from such groups as the Committee of One Million" if this could lead to concrete results. "However, it quickly became apparent that the Chinese Communists were just as hostile to the new administration as they were to the old, and were attacking him personally already."⁶² Kennedy, who had a gift for telling an audience what it wanted to hear, was most likely putting on a brave face by pretending not to fear the China Lobby and their supporters. His future public comments would bear this out.

The next few months witnessed a number of warning shots in the press from those who feared Kennedy was being pushed by foreign leaders and certain advisers to allow the P.R.C.'s admission to the United Nations. A writer with the ironic name of

⁶¹ Roderick MacFarquhar, *The Origins of the Cultural Revolution: The Coming of the Cataclysm, 1961-1966* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 131.

⁶² Memorandum of Conversation, March 3, 1961. In *FRUS, 1961-1963: Volume 22*, 21.

Chamberlain warned of a “Far East Munich,” with the United States giving in to British pressure on the matter. He called for mobilization of domestic public opinion to nip in the bud such a threat to America's strategic position in the Far East.⁶³ After meeting with Kennedy the following month, British Prime Minister Harold MacMillan reported that Kennedy was willing to “explore” his options with Red China after he had been informed that the British and the Canadians both favored changes in American policy.⁶⁴ In May, the *Los Angeles Times*, a fervent opponent of any change in U.S. China policy, announced the existence of a plan “to appease Red China into the United Nations.”⁶⁵

The villain in this case was a not wavering ally but the old China Lobby target Dean Acheson, who supposedly had Kennedy's ear on China. It was true that, shortly after the P.R.C.'s founding, Acheson had called for the U.S. “to attempt to detach China from subservience to Moscow and over a period of time encourage those vigorous influences which might modify it.”⁶⁶ But this was always a low-valence issue for an Atlanticist focused on Europe first and last. In 1956, Acheson inserted a plank into the Democratic platform calling for a policy of “intelligent neglect” towards Communist China.⁶⁷ In his grand strategic vision, China was always of limited economic and

⁶³ William Henry Chamberlain, “Far East Munich?” *Wall Street Journal*, March 14, 1961, 16.

⁶⁴ Robert T. Hartmann, “Kennedy 'Explores' Red China,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 19, 1961, B4.

⁶⁵ Henry T. Taylor, “Acheson Casts the Die on Red China Policy,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 17, 1961, B5.

⁶⁶ Nancy Bernkopf Tucker, “China's Place in the Cold War: the Acheson Plan.” In Douglas Brinkley, ed. *Dean Acheson and the Making of U.S. Foreign Policy* (London: MacMillan, 1993), 110.

⁶⁷ Douglas Brinkley, *Dean Acheson: The Cold War Years, 1953-71* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 48.

strategic significance.⁶⁸ It was therefore unlikely Acheson would use whatever access he enjoyed with the new president to lobby for changes in China policy.

Facts aside, these stories demonstrated growing alarm among supporters of the status quo. The *Congressional Quarterly* reported in April that Taiwan was once again marshaling its supporters in Congress and seeking the “support of American public opinion in any showdown over China policy.” The article noted their effectiveness was evident by the fact that in the past decade Congress has passed no fewer than 16 resolutions opposing the seating of the Chinese communist regime in the U.N. Only four representatives voted against the previous resolution, and three of them had failed to secure reelection.⁶⁹ On the eve of the United Nations vote, the State Department noted that “congressional, editorial and public opinion remains overwhelmingly opposed to Communist China's seating in the UN.”⁷⁰

Alienating allies was thus a small price to pay for preventing a domestic political firestorm. However, as indicated by the statements of Komer and Bowles, the administration was not optimistic. Kennedy went so far as to ask Henry Luce “and others whether they had any better ideas about how to keep the Nationalists in the UN.”⁷¹ The anticipation of further erosion in international support for the moratorium led to an attempt to have the General Assembly declare the seating of Communist China an “important question” which in the future would require a two-thirds majority to seat the

⁶⁸ Tucker, “China's Place in the Cold War: the Acheson Plan,” 111.

⁶⁹ “China: Trouble Ahead,” *Hartford Courant*, April 30, 1961, 2B.

⁷⁰ Public Opinion Studies, September 21, 1961, NARA, RG 59, Box 33, Folder 1961-1963.

⁷¹ Memorandum of Conversation, Washington, May 24, Harlan Cleveland. In *FRUS, 1961-1963: Vol. 22: Northeast Asia*, 64.

communist Chinese. This motion passed by a margin on 61 to 34 in November 1961.⁷² The *Washington Post* attributed this strategy to a fear that “if China were invited into the U.N. the entire Republican Party would reconstitute a China Lobby that for the past few years had become a fading, but unchallenged bugaboo.”⁷³ This would appear to support Gordon Chang's contention, though it differs with nearly every other piece of contemporary journalistic and archival evidence. The Committee of One Million, while no longer as confident as it had been during the Eisenhower administration, would remain unchallenged for at least a few more years, both organizationally and politically.

During these years, it would still be appeased by the highest elected officials. In order to reassure his detractors, Kennedy went so far as to reiterate the stance he took in 1949 that the United States should have done more to prevent the communists from winning the Chinese Civil War. This was a right-wing view when he first enunciated it, and remained so in 1961. Kennedy argued that history had proven him correct, explaining that “I always felt that we did not make a determined enough effort in the case of China. Given the problems we now see, a more determined effort would have been advisable.”⁷⁴ From the standpoint of both Mao and Chiang, the civil war was ongoing. The premise of Chester Bowles's proposals was that this situation must be changed, lest the war reignite and draw in the United States. In a December 1961 newspaper column, the first prominent pundit agreed with him. Walter Lippmann wrote

⁷² James Fetzer, “Clinging to Containment: China Policy.” In Thomas G. Paterson, ed., *Kennedy's Quest For Victory: American Foreign Policy, 1961-1963*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1989, 187.

⁷³ Warren Unna, “U.S. To Switch U.N. Tactics To Defer Red China Issue,” *Washington Post*, December 1, 1961, A 16.

⁷⁴ “Views on China Not Changed, Kennedy Says,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 30, 1961, 20.

that given “the existing stalemate in the Civil War there can be no solution of the China question in the U.N. except by *admitting both Chinas, or neither of them.*”⁷⁵ Less than a month after the drafting of the speech Kennedy never gave, a prominent voice outside of the administration was in agreement with the text's spirit.

Ultimately, Communist China's entry into the United Nations occurred long after Bowles and Komer feared would be the case. The status of Taiwan remained, and continues to remain, a hindrance to improved relations between the U.S. and the P.R.C. But numerous other issues would intrude in subsequent years and push the matter of the “Two Chinas” into the background. The sleeping giant had awoken, but stumbled and repeatedly fell down as it struggled to firmly stand on its own two feet. Like many influential memoranda and policy papers from long ago, the works of Bowles and Komer appear alternately myopic and far-sighted. Their alarmism about the sustainability of the current policy were misplaced, but the visions inspired by that alarmism proved enduring. They knew implementing even a small piece of these visions would be an uphill battle. Both men recognized the difficulties of fighting a “two-front war” for change against adversaries foreign and domestic. Both believed Chinese resistance could be made to rebound against them in a sort of diplomatic jujitsu. Domestically, they differed. Komer, who had no experience running for elective office, wanted to rip off the band-aid rather than prolong the inevitable agony. Bowles held a different view. In practice, he feared the power of public opinion which he theoretically

⁷⁵ Walter Lippmann, “China in the U.N.,” *Hartford Courant*, December 5, 1961, 18. Italics in original.

had championed. In 1958 he had lost the Connecticut Democratic primary for the U.S. Senate to Thomas Dodd, who went on to be a leading supporter of the Committee of One Million. Honesty was too dangerous an approach. It risked arousing the not-quite-sleeping giant that was the China Lobby.

1961 was a good year for theorizing about China policy because it was comparatively tranquil. The status quo in Vietnam had yet to become untenable. Relations between the Chinese and the Soviets were clearly troubled, but few informed individuals saw a complete break as a likely outcome. It was increasingly obvious that the Great Leap Forward had been a failure, and that China faced a humanitarian crisis. How serious a crisis it would become could as yet not be determined, particularly given the utter lack of official or unofficial U.S. contacts behind the “Bamboo Curtain.” While China's intentions to acquire nuclear weapons were readily apparent, how soon they could do so, particularly without Soviet technical assistance, could not easily be predicted. The potential storm of U.N. membership had been averted with far greater ease than most anticipated. But this brief period of tranquility would soon come to an end.

CHAPTER III
TAMING THE COLOSSUS IN TIME:
CHINA AS A THREAT TO ITSELF AND OTHERS

On December 17, 1962, the Kennedy White House hosted a Nobel Laureate. She had not come to receive an award, attend a banquet, or discuss the arts. She was there to plead her case. Pearl Buck's cause, as usual, was China. She believed the people of Taiwan lived under grave danger from Mao Zedong's communists. Rather than support Chiang Kai-shek, much less “unleash” him on the mainland, Buck was willing to offer him – and the island he ruled - as a sacrifice for peace among the Chinese, and between Communist China and the western world. According to Michael Forrestal, “Miss Buck expounded at length on her fear that unless something was done in the very near future, the people of mainland China would become the permanent enemies of the Western World. She felt it was essential for the United States to make an attempt to reach a modus vivendi with Red China before the death of Chiang Kai-shek.” Buck predicted Chiang's death would bring about “a collapse of the Taiwanese political and economic structure, leading to war.” To prevent this catastrophe for the sake of all involved, “Miss Buck proposed that we make a discreet but very strong effort to convince the Generalissimo that his place in history can only be assured by a reunion under the auspices of the Formosa Chinese with their Mainland brothers.” The method of this reunion would involve the preservation of the “de facto independence of Formosa for a

10 to 25-year period with an agreement at the end of the period for a negotiated settlement based upon a plebiscite or some some other device.”¹

Buck maintained the United States would not be acting alone on this matter, insisting “throughout the conversation” that there was “communication and a basis for accommodation between Mao and Chou En-lai on the one hand and the Gimo (Chiang) and his followers on the other.” What was needed to reach an agreement and preserve peace in East Asia was American involvement. At that moment, Kennedy was the man to provide it. According to Forrestal, Miss Buck said that she had been “convinced by the President's handling of the Cuban crisis that it might be possible in his Administration for this problem to be tackled, and that was why she had come to Washington with her proposal.”² Kennedy's increased foreign policy stature after the Cuban Missile Crisis afforded him potentially far greater room to maneuver on China policy that he had previously enjoyed. In reality, there was not much. But during his first two years in office, there had been virtually none.

Buck made her case at a pivotal moment not only in Kennedy's presidency, but in the history of modern China. Whichever position a watcher of that nation took, their observations and prognostications were bound to be both confirmed and confounded. The situation within China was both stable and catastrophic. Its leaders were cautious and unpredictable. They led a rising power which might be in terminal decline. China was less a puzzle than a paradox. It could be resolved in two ways. The first, and most

¹ Memorandum for the Record, Michael Forrestal, Conversation with Miss Pearl Buck, December 17, 1963, 1, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library, National Security Files, Box 23, Folder 6.

² Ibid. 1-2.

appealing for Americans, was that the sword of Chinese communist power was hard and sharp, but brittle. Inevitably, it would shatter, so long as the U.S. did not succor the outlaw regime with diplomatic legitimacy or economic assistance. China was bluffing, and the U.S. had to keep calling that bluff, no matter how high China raised the stakes. Buck appeared to represent an alternative assessment. According to this view, time was on China's side. It was strong despite its manifold weaknesses and failings. More importantly, it was resilient, and would only get stronger. China's weaknesses and failings were the passing phase. Even worse, the preconditions for communist containment did not exist in East Asia the way they did in Western Europe. If the Chinese communists remained in control, and their nation continued to grow in power, it would prove to be the U.S. that was bluffing. The events of these years would increase the ranks of those in the U.S. who subscribed to the second assessment, particularly among members of the administration and their natural political supporters in certain sectors of the press.

In 1961 and 1962, Communist China had never seemed more threatening - or more vulnerable. It sought to develop nuclear weapons, massed troops across from Taiwan, worked to bring all of Indochina under communist rule, and sent several divisions across the Himalayan Mountains. At the same time, it suffered the monumental domestic calamity of mass famine due to the economic policies of the Great Leap Forward. If ever there was a time to test whether Chinese communism was indeed a "passing phase," that had been it. Yet the regime had survived, with nary a trace of unrest. With past assumptions about the regime's fragility in tatters, future policy

appeared to be in need of a substantial revision. An unprecedented number of voices, for the time being concentrated exclusively on the center-left, advocated outreach instead of hostility as the best means of containing the Chinese threat. If China could not be stopped, it must be changed, and change within China could only be achieved through outreach from abroad.

At first glance, that Pearl Buck was proposing to surrender Taiwan “on the installment plan” is shocking. More than any other factor, Buck's books, particularly *The Good Earth*, created American affection toward the Chinese people in the 1930s and 1940s, convincing many in the United States that peasants in China were very much like them.³ This affection and paternalistic identification had made the Communist takeover in 1949 and the following year's attack across the Yalu particularly traumatic. Given how the Chinese communists treated missionary families like her own, to say nothing of their local converts, one might have expected Buck to have sided with the burgeoning China Lobby. In fact, she did the opposite. Buck blamed Chinese militancy on the U.S.'s policies of isolation and hostility, writing in 1954 that “had we kept the doors open, I believe that China would not have been compelled to follow Russia as her sole friend. But we closed the doors as fast as we could, not knowing what we did.” She even maintained her affiliation with the Institute for Pacific Research, founded in the 1940s

³ For a somewhat critical view of Buck's influence, as well as a discussion of how this increased affection for the Chinese did not extend to Chinese-Americans, see Karen J. Leong, *The China Mystique: Pearl S. Buck, Anna May Wong, Mayling Soong, and the Transformation of American Orientalism* (University of California Press: Berkeley, 2005), particularly 164-169.

by Owen Lattimore and John Fairbank and accused by Senator Joseph McCarthy and his supporters of being a communist-front organization.⁴

Given this information, it was actually unsurprising that Buck made these sorts of arguments in December 1962. But it was still significant that she chose to make them in the White House at that precise moment. China had survived the self-inflicted disaster of the Great Leap Forward, and had even crushed the Indian army during the worst of the suffering. The date when China would acquire nuclear weapons was seen to be rapidly approaching. By the end of 1962, Chiang had given up all hope of returning to the mainland. Ngo Dinh Diem's regime in South Vietnam was beginning to unravel as the Chinese supplied his National Liberation Front enemies with increasingly sophisticated medium and small arms. Just as Robert Komer had predicted, the period of easy, almost costless containment of communist China was coming to an end. Many within and beyond the government began to wonder if containment alone could suffice. While few went as far as Buck, they came to believe some sort of accommodation had to be reached with the Chinese Communists. Since 1949, the U.S. had refused to recognize the Chinese regime because it violated treaties and flouted international norms. Any change in this policy was contingent upon better Chinese behavior. Now, some in high places suggested the sequence be reversed. Engagement would be the cause of Chinese changes, rather than their result.

⁴ Theodore F. Harris, in consultation with Pearl Buck. *Pearl S. Buck: A Biography, Volume Two: Her Philosophy as Expressed in Her Letters* (New York: John Day Company, 1971), 340..

No one in the Kennedy administration doubted that Communist China was an expansionist nation. What its members differed upon was whether China was reckless and adventurous, or merely opportunistic. Mao's rhetoric certainly seemed to indicate the former. His actions, according to some, proved that the latter was closer to reality. Roger Hilsman concluded that “caution and flexibility” had characterized Chinese behavior in Korea and the two Taiwan Straits crises. He noted how in 1958 “Chinese Communist forces exercised extreme caution to avoid hitting US ships and planes.” This pattern suggested “extreme caution in the planning and implementation of strategy” on the part of the Chinese.⁵ The repeated invocation of the word “caution” was meant to counter the belief that Mao was irrational. Hilsman wrote the memo in the context of communist Chinese troop concentrations along the coast across from Taiwan. Mao claimed the movement of hundreds of thousands of soldiers from the northern provinces more than a thousand miles away was a purely defensive measure. Detractors countered that half a million men was beyond the number needed to repel the Taiwanese forces, and thus Mao must have offensive intentions – if not to take Taiwan, then at least to once and for all seize the offshore island groups that he had attacked twice before.

Chiang had made no secret of his desire to exploit the calamity of the Great Leap Forward by launching massive raids onto the mainland in the hopes of inciting a general rebellion. American leaders saw this as a potential Bay of Pigs repeated on a far larger scale. In a March meeting with the president, Rusk had “intervened with great vigor and a strong opinion” to declare that “this operation just wouldn't wash,” that “the plan was

⁵ Hilsman to Harriman, June 22, 1962, 5, JFKL, NSF, Box 2, Folder 4.

nonsense, and the idea that we could keep it covert was also nonsense.” Neither Kennedy, McGeorge Bundy, Ray Cline, General Pat Carter, or Mike Forrestal disagreed with this assessment. However, Roger Hilsman wondered whether the best course of action was to be honest with the Taiwanese and “reject the plan outright,” or if the administration should “temporize.” Hilsman expressed the fear that if given an outright rejection the Taiwanese “would immediately start a public campaign to arouse the China lobby.”⁶ Regardless of the methods used, Chiang must be convinced, one way or another, to stay on the defensive. But even if the Taiwanese remained off the mainland, it was uncertain the communists would be content to remain on it. As Hilsman conceded, “Chinese Communist troop movements appear capable of serving both defensive and offensive objectives.” Given this, “we cannot rule out the possibility that the Chinese Communists are preparing for a sudden all-out effort” to conquer Quemoy and Matsu. Still, he did not think this to be “either imminent or likely because of China's lack of marine troop transports.”⁷ In addition to being cautious, the Chinese were also comparatively backward. This was something even those who believed the Chinese were highly incautious had no choice but to concede.

An opportunistic and prudent China of limited offensive conventional capabilities could still be a cause for major concern. A National Intelligence Estimate released on the eve of the “Third Straits Crisis” began with the declaration, similar to those of Hilsman, that “we believe that over the next few years Communist China will

⁶ Memorandum For The Record, Subject: White House Meeting on GRC Plans, March 1, 1962, 1, JFKL, Roger Hilsman Papers, Box 1, Folder 4.

⁷ Chinese Communist Intentions, June 8, 1962, 6, JFKL, Hilsman Papers, Box 1, Folder 8.

follow relatively conservative and rational policies of the kind recently instituted.” This was no excuse for the United States to rest easy. The NIE raised the specter of unconventional capabilities Hilsman overlooked. It predicted that Communist China “will be constantly probing for weaknesses, trying to push the US out of the Western Pacific, and causing trouble wherever else it can.” The Chinese planned to engage in a “two-level campaign of overt seduction and covert subversion.” In addition, there were signs of “a third and especially ominous motif in Communist China's foreign policy. This is racism.”⁸ Other Americans drew similar conclusions. Having previously refrained from joining the Soviet Union in condemning the United States for systematic discrimination against its black citizens, the Chinese entered the fray in September 1962 by broadcasting “to color-conscious Asia a detailed report” regarding “the University of Mississippi's refusal to admit a Negro.”⁹ But for at least the next year, such rhetorical blasts would remain only an intermittent and tentative weapon in the Chinese propaganda arsenal. In terms of the conventional military threat, the report defined China as fundamentally defensive in outlook, concluding that “Communist China almost certainly does not intend to attempt the open military conquest of any Far Eastern country during the period of this estimate, although it would almost certainly be willing to take military action to defend Communist interests in North Vietnam and North Korea

⁸ National Intelligence Estimate 13-4-62: Prospects for Communist China, May 2, 1962, 2, 8-9. From *Tracking The Dragon: National Intelligence Estimates on China During the Era of Mao, 1948-1976*. (Washington, D.C.: National Intelligence Council, 2004.)

⁹ “China Radio Reports Mississippi U. Fracas,” *Hartford Courant*, September 23, 1962, 28.

and, probably, in Laos.”¹⁰ The human waves would remain at low tide, so long as the the United States did not stir the waters too much.

During the first two years of the Kennedy administration, the press expressed far more alarm, and the administration did nothing to counter these sentiments. Norman Cousins, who in two years would help lead the call for a friendlier attitude towards China, played up its menace in 1961 as fervently as any supporter of the Committee of One Million. “Throughout Southeast Asia,” he began with seeming authority, “there is a growing sense of foreboding about China.” This was due to a combination of rapid Chinese population growth and chronic food shortages. The clear implication, which would become popular in the American press, and was alluded to in the proposed Kennedy speech calling for a Two-Chinas policy, was that the Chinese regime would seek to alleviate its people's hunger by taking food surpluses from its southern neighbors. But the people in these nations were not the only ones who needed to fear China. Cousins defined the hatred the Chinese people felt for the United States as “consuming,” to the point where “few nations in history have been more deeply hated than the United States is today in China.” In a novel argument, he claimed the Chinese people blamed the United States for high Chinese defense expenditures, which had led to declines in their standards of living. Finally, Cousins predicted that “Communist China may now be only a matter of months away from the successful development of its first

¹⁰ National Intelligence Estimate 13-4-62: Prospects for Communist China, May 2, 1962, 2. From *Tracking The Dragon*.

atomic bomb.”¹¹ A starving nuclear power whose citizens hated the United States would hardly prove a fount of reasonableness and calm calculation. Intriguingly, Cousins made no statement about how these characteristics should affect American policy. In fact, when he did finally call for policy changes, it was not because he had come to the conclusion that the Chinese threat had lessened. Rather, Cousins decided the current American approach would not be sufficient to allay that threat in the long-term.

John F. Kennedy assumed the office of the presidency at a time of renewed American interest in China's internal situation and external intentions, as evidenced by “the considerable increase in the number of books about the Red colossus” with such titles as *The Anthill*, *The Endless Hours*, *Ten Years of Storm*, and *Diary From Red China*.¹² In March of 1961, Gallup asked a sample of Americans “Looking ahead to 1970, which country do you think will be the greater threat to world peace – Russia or Communist China?” Thirty-two percent answered China, compared with 49 percent who responded Russia. According to George Gallup, most of those who chose China cited its “huge population” and “war-like policy.” He concluded that China remained the “lesser evil” in the eyes of most Americans, but led with the statement that China “has yet to displace Russia as our chief opponent in the cold war struggle.”¹³ That day was coming, and the fact that Gallup chose in 1961 to ask that question for the first time was itself significant.

¹¹ Norman Cousins, “The Fact of China,” *Saturday Review*, March 4, 1961, 32-33.

¹² John B. Tsu, “Behind the Bamboo Curtain,” *America*, April 15, 1961, 158.

¹³ George Gallup, “Russia Still Feared More Than Red China.” *Hartford Courant*, March 22, 1961, 16. Emphasis mine.

1961 was also the year General Douglas MacArthur reappeared on the national stage for a series of speeches on the grave threat China had come to pose. In his view, China's expanding power in the decade since he was relieved of command in Korea only demonstrated the wisdom of the proposals which led to his dismissal. Because of the American failure to fight for victory in Korea, China had become “a mighty military colossus to threaten the future of all men.”¹⁴ The “fatal consequences” of Truman not allowing MacArthur to expand the war and crush the Chinese communists had allowed them to develop “into a mighty colossus which threatens all of continental Asia and bids fair to emerge as the balance of military power in the world.” Such a result “would jeopardize the freedom of all continents.”¹⁵ Even America's backyard was at risk. According to *Reader's Digest*, “the Chinese have preempted the subversion lead in Latin America from their Russian partners.” Latin America, with its predominately rural population and weak, corrupt, and unpopular central governments, bore “striking similarities to the China” the communists conquered. No doubt with Cuba's recent fate in mind, the article concluded with the call to arms “it is very late, and we must hurry.”¹⁶

Numerous experts and informed observers expressed doubts about Chinese capabilities in the second half of 1962, though this appeared to be only tangentially related to increased knowledge of China's three-year famine. Reviewing the most recent book by influential China expert A. Doak Barnett, William Henry Chamberlain, who in the previous year had been fearful of appeasement, claimed “the author is too optimistic

¹⁴ “China's Growth Blamed on U.S. by MacArthur,” *Boston Globe*, February 21, 1961, 16.

¹⁵ “M'Arthur Say U.S. Helped China Rise,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, June 12, 1961, 2.

¹⁶ Lester Velie, “Chinese Red Star Over Latin America,” *Reader's Digest*, March 1961, 97-102.

about Red China's actual achievements and prospects.” He also opined that the professor's “scholarly objectivity” prevented him from making attempts at “moral evaluation.”¹⁷ In September, two leading magazines ran stories downplaying China's military prowess. In the judgment of *Newsweek*, “Communist China is the strongest nation in Asia but is still not a first-class military power. As a world factor, her power is potential, not actual.”¹⁸ Writing in *The New Republic*, Richard Hughes, a *New York Times* writer who wrote frequently on East Asia in other major publications, noted that China had only “a handful” of armored or motorized divisions, and a small air force.¹⁹ Still, as *Newsweek* stressed, its “potential for causing trouble far exceeds China's present military capacity,” and “only U.S. commitments in Asia can block eventual Chinese Communist expansion.”²⁰ Appearing in the pages of the only major news weekly which entertained the notion of normalizing relations with the P.R.C., these were strong words indeed.

While the press began to express less alarmist sentiments, the public paradoxically became more alarmed. This was revealed by a March 1963 Gallup poll. When asked “Looking ahead the next few years, which country do you think will be the greater threat to world peace – Russia or Communist China?,” 46 percent chose China, and 33 percent Russia, a reversal from two years earlier.²¹ Perhaps in response, at an

¹⁷ William Henry Chamberlain, “The Bookshelf: Growling Behemoth: A View of Red China,” *Wall Street Journal*, August 24, 1962, 6.

¹⁸ Thomas D. White, “Weakness and Strength,” *Newsweek*, September 3, 1962, 34.

¹⁹ Richard Hughes, “Red Army Out of Step,” *The New Republic*, September 17, 1962, 10.

²⁰ Thomas D. White, “Weakness and Strength,” *Newsweek*, September 3, 1962, 34.

²¹ William G. Mayer, *The Changing American Mind: How and Why American Public Opinion Changed between 1960 and 1988* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992), 422.

August 1, 1963 press conference, John F. Kennedy called China “menacing” and “Stalinist,” while defining the Soviet Union as a status quo power.²² Around this same period, in an article which led by noting “news reports” which “suggest a Red China becoming increasingly menacing,” U.S. government experts went public with the knowledge that “they remain calmly assured that China raises no great threat to peace now.” Reflecting Hilsman's views, they maintained that the “whole history of Mao and his minions” showed “caution [in the presence] of superior force.” Thus, he could be deterred.²³

However, reflecting the judgment of the previous year's NIE, the Chinese could fight asymmetrically, and would use racial arguments in addition to guerrilla proxies to achieve their goals. The analysts expected “Chinese propaganda to stress the race issue more and more, claiming the yellow and brown races have common interests against the whites – American or Soviet.” The article mentioned how in August, on the day of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s March on Washington, “all Peking theaters displayed a documentary film with shots of anti-Negro demonstrations in the Southern U.S., a Mao Tse-tung speech pledging support for American Negroes, and portions of a huge Peking rally at which Asiatic and African speakers voiced similar support.”²⁴ While Mao had long made racist arguments when courting the support of Africans and Asians, the attempt to appeal to black Americans marked a watershed.

²² Radhe Gopal Pradham, *America and China: A Study in Cooperation and Conflict, 1962-1983* (Delhi: UDH Publishers, 1983), 49.

²³ Alan L. Otten, “U.S. Analysts Discount China Threat to Peace Despite Rising Militancy,” *Wall Street Journal*, September 17, 1963, 1.

²⁴ *Ibid.* 1.

Administration officials were by no means unanimous regarding the Chinese threat. George Ball later claimed that he did not at the time “share the view then popular in some quarters that China – more than the Soviet Union – was the nation we should fear in the future.” He viewed its large population as “more a source of weakness than of power” since it created “simply too many mouths to feed.” Still, he conceded that “the fear of a militarily powerful China on the march was to become an obsession within some Administration circles.”²⁵ Before his death, McGeorge Bundy told Kai Bird that Rusk “saw China as the ultimate strategic enemy,” an assessment he attributed to the fact that “Rusk was obsessed” with the previous war in Korea.²⁶ Warren Cohen wrote in 1980 that Kennedy shared Rusk's conclusion about China being more dangerous than the Soviet Union, if not to the United States, than at least to “world peace.”²⁷ This coincidentally reflected the wording of the Gallup poll question. Since the United States was the leading global power, any nation which threatened world peace by definition threatened U.S. national interests. As events had shown by then, even Chinese attacks on nominally neutral neighbors could inspire swift United States reaction and alarm.

China's nuclear weapons program also occasioned alarm within the administration, though not for the reasons one might assume. At least in the near-term, a Chinese atom bomb was seen within the National Security Council as purely a weapon of public opinion. If it became the first Asian nation to weaponize this advanced

²⁵ George W. Ball, *The Past Had Another Pattern: Memoirs* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1982), 179.

²⁶ Kai Bird, *The Color of Truth: McGeorge and William Bundy, Brothers in Arms, A Biography* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998), 354-355.

²⁷ Warren I. Cohen, *America's Response to China: An Interpretive History of Sino-American Relations* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1980,) 231.

technology, China would stand to garner great esteem in the region. Shortly after assuming his position as National Security Adviser, McGeorge Bundy wrote to Dean Rusk that “the impact might even be like that of Sputnik I, which radically altered popular views as to the backwardness of the Soviet Union.” Bundy appointed his by-then highly-trusted subordinate Robert Komer as “White House liaison concerning this matter.”²⁸ In a memorandum Komer received around this time, his own subordinate Joseph O. Hanson, Jr., reflecting Komer's penchant for anticipating problems and attempting to neutralize them before it was too late, warned that “if we do not take advance action to offset expectable [sic] heavy ChiCom propaganda exploitation of their first atom bomb test, we can expect unnecessarily large psychological gains for the Chinese, especially in Asia and the underdeveloped areas.” Hanson worried less about regional leaders, whom he considered sufficiently sophisticated to realize the limitations of nuclear weaponry, than the populations they ruled over, who were more ignorant and easily frightened. Hanson proposed telling these leaders that “while the ChiCom atomic threat is a paper tiger, we realize that it might cause real concern in their government or in public opinion, and that we would be ready to reassure them” with security guarantees against Chinese threats.²⁹

If there was one region where the Chinese could pose an immediate threat to the interests of the United States, it was Southeast Asia. During the Kennedy administration,

²⁸ Bundy to Rusk, undated March 1961, 1-2, JFKL, NSF, Robert Komer Papers, Box 410, Folder 5.

²⁹ Joseph O. Hanson, Jr. to Komer, March 3, 1961. Subject: Blunting Expected ChiCom A-Bomb Propaganda, 1, 3, JFKL, NSF, Komer Papers, Box 410, Folder 5.

American involvement in Southeast Asia was based less on Chinese strength than on Chinese weakness and a supposed lack of resolve when faced with American might. The popular press presented a very different picture. Both the press and the administration agreed that China wanted to dominate its neighbors. They merely disagreed as to how the Chinese planned to bring this about. Both recognized that China had an overwhelming military advantage throughout Asia if one subtracted the United States, far greater than that the Soviets would enjoy in Europe without the presence of American forces. This was especially true all along China's southern borders. A Special National Intelligence Estimate prepared on the matter in 1961 noted that the “preponderance of Chinese Communist power is already a matter of growing concern to other countries in the Far East.” Despite, or perhaps because of, this preponderance of power, “the Chinese Communists feel little need to resort to overt military invasion in order to enlarge their influence or communize other countries. Instead, China's leaders believed they could achieve these objectives “at far less cost and risk through the techniques of Communist political warfare.” Yet while the Chinese preferred proxy wars, “Peiping has no compunctions about openly using its military forces to extend its control when it can do so with little or no risk.”³⁰

It was thus the two-fold duty of the United States to ensure such military action would entail great risks and costs for the Chinese communists as well as counteract “Communist political warfare” within the borders of China's neighbors. In a clear

³⁰ SNIE 13-3-61: Chinese Communist Capabilities and Intentions in the Far East, November 30, 1961, 1-6. From *Tracking The Dragon*.

reference to the Great Leap Forward, the report inferred that “domestic difficulties thus far do not seem to have had a direct effect on Peiping's foreign policy.”³¹ Economic calamity had neither reduced Chinese capabilities nor made their intentions more desperate. All this had been taken into consideration the previous month in an intelligence estimate concerning possible Chinese and North Vietnamese reactions to a buildup of American advisers in South Vietnam and Laos. The authors stated “we do not believe Peiping would consider assignment of SEATO forces to South Vietnam as an immediate and direct threat to their own internal security.” At most, China might consider stationing air units in North Vietnamese territory. The same applied to the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, whose leaders were assumed to be in lock-step with the Chinese. The estimate predicted “the DRV would probably seek to avoid having its regular units enter into a direct military engagement with SEATO, and in particular US, forces.”³² While the estimate proved correct regarding the Chinese, it was deeply erroneous concerning the North Vietnamese, as the United States would later discover.

The media provided little coverage of Chinese intentions towards and potential actions in Southeast Asia before 1964, but what did appear was pointed in tone, emphasizing Chinese strength and its neighbors' weaknesses. An April 1962 *Saturday Evening Post* article concluded that “no matter what we do, the future of Southeast Asia will be troubled and grim.” The author presciently observed that Diem's “prospects for victory” over the communist forces in South Vietnam “are not encouraging.” Regarding

³¹ Ibid. 3.

³² SNIE 10-3-61: Probable Communist Reactions to Certain SEATO Undertakings in South Vietnam, October 10, 1961, 7, 2. From *Tracking The Dragon*.

the recent negotiated settlement in neighboring Laos, which led to the formation of a coalition government which included communists, the article stated “we may be sowing troubles which we won't be able to harvest without a war,” predicting that “our policy in Laos, by its timidity, will lead to disaster.” The chief beneficiary from this course of events would be the Chinese, since though “North Vietnam appears to be oriented toward Russian-style Communism, there is little doubt that if the time of conquest comes it will join the Chinese.”³³ In this regard, the author proved rather less prescient. Like American government officials, he discounted the chances of balance-of-power behavior and nationalistic antagonisms and emphasized “bandwagoning” and ideological solidarity. All American observers assumed China could intimidate and overawe its neighbors, whether through conventional or unconventional weapons, irregular or regular warfare. Only the direct involvement of the United States could prevent the spread of communism in Asia.

The only other actors who could check China's drive for regional hegemony were China's leaders themselves. Their domestic policies might destroy Chinese power on the ground more thoroughly than MacArthur could ever have achieved from the air. During these years, Mao and his cohorts appeared put this supposition to the test. Next to the Sino-Soviet split, no aspect of Chinese policy received more attention from the American media during the Kennedy years than the failure of the Great Leap Forward. At first, the debate both within government and in the media centered around the extent

³³ Don A. Schanche, “Have We Lost Southeast Asia?” *Saturday Evening Post*, April 7, 1962, 86-89.

of the suffering, specifically whether there was extensive famine, or merely widespread hunger. Once the existence of a massive famine became apparent, the debate shifted to whether the communist regime could survive. When it became obvious rebellion was non-existent, observers took note of the stability of Mao's regime under the strain of a massive shock, and wondered what this portended for the future. Regarding the future, additional debates revolved around whether China's food shortages were chronic or temporary, and if the economic lurch backwards and the consequent erosion of support for Mao both within the party and among the people might lead to a moderation in rhetoric and behavior towards the rest of the world.

Within the U.S. government, members of the Defense Department recognized the true extent of the famine quite early. An April 1961 memorandum from then-Deputy Assistant for Special Operations Edward Lansdale to Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara declared flatly that “The Great Leap Forward' in China has landed in the soup.” Discussions with the staff of outgoing Director of the Central Intelligence Agency Allen Dulles as well as “Chinese friends” presented Lansdale with a “picture of China weakened by overwork and malnutrition, a political regime being forced by growing discontent to start relaxing its stringent rules, and clear indications of more trouble to come.” Citing “the old Chinese political saying 'Three bad harvests and the mandate from heaven changes,’” Lansdale wondered if “it might well be time to initiate some actions inside China” in order to “keep the pressures on.” Making clear that he was not arguing the regime was on the brink of collapse, Lansdale stated flatly “it is not believed that China is on the point of general rebellion. Chinese are realists and know that they

have little chance of succeeding, unless helped from the outside.” Lansdale did not propose providing assistance to any would-be rebels. His reference to “actions” to “keep the pressure on” appeared to be intended to simply weaken the regime to the point where it could not pose a threat to American interests. To this effect, Lansdale concluded with the observation that while “the threat of China has hung heavy over our heads in Asia,” he hoped that “it may well be that we can start changing this in 1961.”³⁴

Many periodicals recognized the extent of the famine early in 1961. Perhaps because of an inability to actually send reporters or use stringers to cover the famine first-hand, reports quickly shifted from description to speculation, producing numerous articles on the potential for revolt and collapse. Though most discounted the chances after entertaining them for sufficient space to capture the reader's attention, the press was more evenly divided on the matter than the government. This, of course, was not difficult, since no leading official in the government believed the communist regime could fall so long as Mao was alive. In a February 1961 article entitled “China's Grim Winter,” Bernard Ullman wrote in the *New York Times Magazine* that “never since the inauguration of the Communist regime in 1949 has poverty been so widespread as it is this year.”³⁵ Fittingly, old P.R.C. enemy *Time* was the first to write “Communist China faces mass starvation.” In the same article, the magazine also alluded to the possibility of rebellion, claiming there was “a crisis in public morale” and calling the regime's

³⁴ Memorandum From the Deputy Assistant for Special Operations to the Secretary of Defense (Lansdale) to Secretary of Defense McNamara, Washington, April 3, 1961. *FRUS, 1961-1963, Vol. 22: Northeast Asia* (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1996), 38-39.

³⁵ Bernard Ullman, “China's Grim Winter: A Reporter's Notebook,” *New York Times Magazine*, February 19, 1961, 14.

predicament “damn serious.”³⁶ There were still dissenting voices regarding the seriousness of what the Chinese people faced as late as 1962, when *Business Week* wrote that “although China is hungry, it is not starving” due to the fact that food shortages were dispersed throughout the entire country.³⁷ In October of that year, Richard Hughes wrote in the *New York Times Magazine* that “the tough Chinese peasants, despite their hardships, are not yet confronted with the terrible famines which were once their normal lot.”³⁸ Journalists also debated whether this was primarily a natural or man-made catastrophe. *U.S. News*, no sympathizer with the communist Chinese, stated in early 1961 that “nature refused to submit in 1959, and went out of control in 1960.”³⁹ As with the *Business Week* story, and unlike the *Time* article, the *U.S. News* piece discounted the chances of revolt, indicating that those in the media who correctly gauged the extent of Chinese suffering incorrectly assumed this meant revolt was possible. As of yet, no one was willing to say the regime could survive a massive famine. If revolt was not a possibility, conditions could not be that horrendous.

Of those who believed a revolt was likely, the most fervent, persistent, and prominent was Joseph Alsop. Echoing Lansdale's line about a Chinese dynasty losing the Mandate of Heaven after three consecutive bad harvests, Alsop wrote in May 1961 that “conditions are beginning to exist in which a small spark can light a gigantic fire, as has happened before in China in comparable circumstances.” Recognizing the key actors

³⁶ “Reds Have Troubles, Too,” *Time*, May 26, 1961, 25.

³⁷ “Red China's troubles pile up,” *Business Week*, July 2, 1962, 33.

³⁸ Richard Hughes, “The 'Great Leap' Is Now The 'Great Retreat,’” *New York Times Magazine*, October 7, 1962, 86.

³⁹ Robert P. Martin, “Communist China In Real Trouble?” *U.S. News & World Report*, February 20, 1961, 43.

were in the army, and that “the army may well remain dependable,” he labeled “the other result” as “far from unimaginable.”⁴⁰ In a column nearly a year later, Alsop wrote “it is clear that the Chinese have reached a grave turning point.”⁴¹ To make certain what he meant by “a grave turning point,” in August 1962 Alsop published a lengthy article in the *Saturday Evening Post* entitled “The Coming Explosion in Red China.” This leading foreign affairs pundit argued that for the past three years, “Communist China has been caught in a remorseless descending spiral, each year growing hungrier and hungrier, producing less and less, and suffering more and more painful internal strains. It even begins to look as though this downward spiral may be self-perpetuating.” He saw Chinese troop movements into the coastal region across from Taiwan as a sign of “inner weakness,” and discounted, for “logistical reasons,” a “major Chinese move into Southeast Asia.” Instead, the forces of the People's Liberation Army would be occupied with putting down internal rebellions, or possibly participating in them, the pundit noting that “any system of human society will automatically break down if the people rebel and the army sides with the people.” Alsop predicted that “the next down-twist of China's spiral is likely to be disturbingly dramatic in character.”⁴² In other words, the regime which he hated, and so many Americans still feared, was on its last legs.

Alsop was not the only one making such predictions, particularly in early 1962. In February of that year, the *Atlantic Monthly*, which had been one of the first magazines

⁴⁰ Joseph Alsop, “Can China Explode?” *Hartford Courant*, May 17, 1961, 14.

⁴¹ Joseph Alsop, “China Is in Grave Trouble, and ‘One Good Harvest’ Won’t Help,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 10, 1962, B6.

⁴² Joseph Alsop, “The Coming Explosion in Red China,” *Saturday Evening Post*, August 11, 1962, 79-82.

during the previous decade to entertain the notion that Communist China was here to stay, wrote that since “700 million Chinese are now struggling on the brink of starvation,” it was the case that “unrest and dissatisfaction have penetrated every corner of China.” Where Alsop merely speculated, the *Atlantic* flatly declared. Government officials had become demoralized, since “pessimism and defeatism prevail within the ruling class.”⁴³ In April 1962, *U.S. News*, which the year before had downplayed the chance for revolt, claimed that prominent government officials were beginning to think differently. Citing newly-appointed Undersecretary of State for Asian Affairs Averell Harriman's recent statements, the magazine reported that “a crackup in Red China, long held by the West to be impossible, is beginning now to be regarded by Western authorities as something that could happen.” But while acknowledging a belief among influential individuals in this possibility, the magazine stuck to its previous assessment, reporting that “there have been no solid signs that a military rebellion might be brewing.” Nevertheless, and no doubt with a memory of what happened in the Soviet Union in the 1930s, the article concluded with the speculation that “a vast purge of top party and military leaders” might be underway.⁴⁴

The “vast purge” did not occur during this period. Instead, in lieu of Stalinist scapegoating, the Chinese leadership appeared to be acknowledging their errors and trimming their sails before it was too late. As early as September 1961, *Time* reported that “Red China's leaders these days no longer talk of the great leap forward, but of the

⁴³ “The Atlantic Report: Red China,” *Atlantic Monthly*, February 1962, 16, 20.

⁴⁴ “Signs Of A Crack-Up In Red China,” *U.S. News & World Report*, April 30, 1962, 58-60.

'law of undulating progress.'⁴⁵ A month later, *Newsweek* seconded this assessment, noting the official Chinese announcement that "The Great Leap Forward" was being replaced by "The Great Readjustment."⁴⁶ In April 1962 they reported that "the Chinese Communist Party admitted to its most dedicated followers that the 'great leap forward' had been a flop."⁴⁷ *The New Republic* declared that same month that the Great Leap Forward "has at last been given a decent public burial," and praised a new "realism" among the Chinese leadership.⁴⁸ The *Newsweek* article went on to speculate about the foreign policy implications of this admission of error. The guiding assumption was that loss of legitimacy at home would lead to weakness abroad, with a possible acquiescence to the Soviets coupled with a new cautiousness. Life inside China might be "an Orwellian nightmare,"⁴⁹ to quote an in-depth article in Henry Luce's *Fortune*, but it was a stable dystopia. Jacques Jacquet-Francillon, one of the multiple French intellectuals who ventured behind the "Bamboo Curtain" during this period and reported what they saw to curious Americans, concluded "according to all eye-witness accounts, the mass of the Red Chinese people are indifferent to everything which does not touch on the immediate interests of the family circle or, at most, the limited community represented by the village in rural areas and the local district in the cities."⁵⁰ According to this

⁴⁵ "Now, Undulation," *Time*, September 15, 1961, 35.

⁴⁶ "Readjustment," *Newsweek*, October 16, 1961, 46.

⁴⁷ "Hungry Admission," *Newsweek*, April 30, 1962, 45.

⁴⁸ "Realism' in Peking," *The New Republic*, April 30, 1962, 6

⁴⁹ Stanley Karnow, "How Communist Economics Failed in China," *Fortune*, July 1963, 159.

⁵⁰ Jacques Jacquet-Francillon, "China Today: II. Go Forward Step by Step," *New Republic*, March 23, 1963, 18.

observer, Mao had not succeeded in wrenching the Chinese populace out of its traditional provincialism, and this proved to be his saving grace.

Others begged to differ, though not in a way which could prove threatening to Mao's rule. These observers recognized that Mao's mass mobilization schemes could not have gotten off the ground without some degree of popular consent, or even temporary enthusiasm.⁵¹ Mass starvation appeared to have brought that era of tempestuous social revolution to a close. A May 1962 NIE predicted that the regime “will no longer be able to count on a high degree of revolutionary, almost frenetic enthusiasm.”⁵² *U.S. News* seconded this assessment in August, quoting an “expert” who declared definitively that “never again will the Communists be able to manipulate the Chinese people the way they once did.” China had entered an era of stasis. According to this expert, “most specialists on China say the people probably are not in the mood to revolt. But neither can they be enlisted into a mass drive by the Communists to lift the country out of its woes.”⁵³ Such American sentiment inside and outside of government made the eruption of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution four years later a complete and inexplicable surprise.

Traveling in mainland China in the aftermath of the famine, Sir Fitzroy Hew MacLean found conditions “harsh, but slowly improving.” Despite isolation from and antagonism towards both superpowers, “China's strength is growing.” Given that

⁵¹ Chen Jian made this point in *Mao's China and the Cold War*.

⁵² NIE 13-4-62: “Prospects for Communist China.” May 2, 1962, 6. From *Tracking The Dragon*.

⁵³ “From An Expert: ‘Communists Have Lost The Chinese,’” *U.S. News & World Report*, August 6, 1962, 50.

Communist China was there to stay, and getting stronger by the day, “it is unrealistic for the United States government to maintain no relations with it.”⁵⁴ The colossus could neither be defeated nor ignored. If the assumption was that the Chinese regime was not going to fall, the next question for U.S. policymakers was how dangerous it would remain. The consensus within both the administration and the media, though not the public, was that the Great Leap Forward had made the Chinese significantly less of a threat. Rostow wondered in a letter to Maxwell Taylor “whether Chinese development has been retarded for tens of years,” and stated definitively that “it is pretty clear for the 1960's Communist China is not going to be a major industrial and military power.”⁵⁵ In the *Los Angeles Times*, Theodore Chen concluded that “the Communists seem to have reached a high peak of success in 1958,” adding “we have good reasons to doubt the oft-repeated statement that the Chinese Communist regime is becoming stronger and more stable all the time.”⁵⁶ The tens of thousands of refugees who were allowed to flee the mainland for Hong Kong gave the impression of “disillusionment and apathy” inside China.⁵⁷ Even *Time* called the 1962 troop movements along the Taiwan Straits a “diversion” engineered by the government as “a big smoke screen” meant to distract the “masses from China's domestic troubles and upheavals.”⁵⁸ Averell Harriman

⁵⁴ Sir Fitzroy Hew MacLean, “Inside Red China,” *Saturday Evening Post*, November 16, 1963, 96, 103.

⁵⁵ Letter From the Counselor of the Department of State (Rostow) to the President's Military Representative (Taylor), Washington, July 31, 1962 *FRUS, 1961-1963, Vol. 22: Northeast Asia* (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1996), 298-299.

⁵⁶ Theodore H.E. Chen, “Red China May Have Passed Peak,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 10, 1961, B4.

⁵⁷ “Red China Facing Drop In Prestige,” *New York Times*, December 31, 1961, 2.

⁵⁸ “Diversion in the Strait,” *Time*, July 6, 1962, 16.

downplayed both China's capabilities and intentions, telling reporters in July 1962 that “it looks like they are in no position to undertake military adventures at the present time” and that there was a “less aggressive spirit in Communist China now.”⁵⁹ Reporting on Mao's 70th birthday celebrations in October 1963, *Newsweek* speculated that “perhaps it has finally dawned on Mao that, tactically at least, gun waving is not the best way of making friends and influencing people.”⁶⁰

Mao's appearance was his first at a public banquet since he gave up his position as Chairman of the Republic in 1959. *Newsweek* thus described “the barely scrutable protocol of the Communist Chinese Mao's appearance” as “a significant event.”⁶¹ The article also mentioned that Mao shook hands at this important event with black American militant Robert Williams, who had been living in exile in Cuba after engaging in a gun battle in North Carolina with police and Ku Klux Klan members. A picture of this encounter also appeared in *Time* magazine. While in China, Williams asked Mao twice to make a statement on American race relations. He responded with the August 8, 1963 declaration “Mao Tse-Tung supports the American Negroes.”⁶² Released weeks before the March on Washington, it claimed the Kennedy administration wanted “to lull the fighting will of the Negro people and deceive the masses throughout the country.” The C.I.A. expressed surprise earlier in the year that “in contrast to the heavy play given to US racial problems by Moscow since early May, Peiping has given the Birmingham

⁵⁹ “Less Aggression Seen in China,” *Christian Science Monitor*, July 26, 1962, 6.

⁶⁰ “Birthday Party,” *Newsweek*, October 14, 1963, 45.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Roderick MacFarquhar, *Sino-American Relations, 1949-1971* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1972), 197.

story routine treatment in both press and radio.”⁶³ Mao's newfound interest, and Williams's presence, inspired fear in some corners of white America of a rising tide of black militants taking their cue from the Chinese, and even resorting to guerrilla warfare.⁶⁴

China's weakness at home had apparently led to moderation abroad, at least for the time being. Many wondered how long this would last, particularly in light of China's success against India in October and November of 1962, when they were supposed to have been reeling, chastened and, in Harriman's words, “in no position to undertake military adventures.” Writing in the *Chicago Tribune* around the time of Mao's 70th birthday, John Roderick claimed “the Chinese giant which stumbled and fell into an economic morass six years ago, has begun to use his wobbly legs. Next year he may walk.” This rejuvenated strength was “bad news for the west, and for Khrushchev.”⁶⁵ The administration reacted to these developments internally by seeking to balance continued containment with tentative outreach and publicly offering “trial balloons” hinting that some changes in policy could be under consideration. In November 1962, the Policy Planning Staff under Walt Rostow presented a dual goal of making “more effective our present policy of keeping the regime under pressure” while being prepared, if “given convincing evidence of a basic shift in Chinese policies and purposes,” to

⁶³ Central Intelligence Memorandum, Subject: Peiping Propaganda on Birmingham Bombing, May 27, 1963, 1, JFKL, NSF, Box 24, Folder 2.

⁶⁴ This fear was most explicitly expressed in William Worthy's October 1964 *Esquire* article “The Red Chinese American Negro.” Worthy himself had been a leftist black journalist punished for visiting Cuba without authorization from the State Department, inspiring Phil Ochs's 1964 protest song “The Ballad of William Worthy.”

⁶⁵ John Roderick, “. . .and What in China?” *Chicago Tribune*, September 8, 1963, A1.

“adjust our own policies to the extent necessary to nail down the shift and to use it as a basis for seeking a lasting resolution of the China problem.” In the short term, the “principal area of maneuver should be in the trade field,” and the United States “should be prepared to move progressively to a point where our trade policies toward mainland China would correspond to those toward members of the Soviet Bloc.” Before this could be put into effect, the American public needed to be informed “more fully” that “our stance of reciprocal hostility, which will be maintained as long as necessary, is not an end in itself but a means to effect changes in China that will enable us to live at peace with whatever regime is in power.”⁶⁶ This marked the internal triumph of the central strategic aspect of the Bowles/Komer approach to taming rather than overthrowing communist China.

Rusk later said he had realized by then that the United States should try to tie China with “little threads” that would draw them into the “community of nations.”⁶⁷ Kennedy gingerly reflected this new consensus in what would turn out to be his final press conference on November 14, 1963, when he stated that “if the Red Chinese indicate a desire to live in peace with the United States, with other countries surrounding it, then quite obviously the United States would reappraise its policies. We are not wedded to a policy of hostility to Red China.”⁶⁸ One day later, State Department Policy Planning Staff member Mose Harvey released his “Guidelines of U.S. Policy Toward

⁶⁶ Paper Prepared in the Policy Planning Council, Washington, November 30, 1962, “U.S. Policy Toward Communist China,” *FRUS, 1961-1963, Vol. 22: Northeast Asia* (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1996), 326-331.

⁶⁷ Warren I. Cohen, *Dean Rusk* (Totowa, New Jersey: Cooper Square Publishers, 1980), 164.

⁶⁸ China Speech Material, 2, JFKL, James Thomson Papers, Box 14, Folder 10.

China,” which summarized this new sentiment, stating flatly that “our vital interests are disturbed, not by Communist China's existence, but by its expansionism.” Rejecting the notion that the Great Leap Forward had set China back significantly and possibly inaugurated an extended period of stagnation, Harvey predicted that “we face the likelihood that the Chinese Communists' present importance in the Far East will further expand if they succeed in modernizing and industrializing.” Given this “likelihood” of ever-expanding Chinese power and influence, the best course of action for the United States would be to use “a combination of policies which makes belligerence unattractive and a favorable evolution of policies attractive.”⁶⁹ Communist China could not be overthrown, but perhaps it could be taught to behave.

1963 also proved to be the year when an increasing number of voices in the press, albeit still entirely to the left-of-center ideologically, began to argue for wholesale changes in United States policies towards China. These voices used reasoning strikingly similar to that being advanced within the administration. The overriding sentiment among those calling for change was that the United States had more to lose than to gain from continuing to isolate a dangerous and unpredictable regime. China's communists could change for the better, and the United States could do a great deal to help them along that path. Among the first to make this argument was Charles Burton Marshall in *Commonweal*. Less than a week after the election of the liberal and Catholic Kennedy as president, this flagship liberal Catholic journal predicted hopefully that “time may work

⁶⁹ Guidelines of U.S. Policy Toward China, November 15, 1963, 8, 2, 9, JFKL, Thomson Papers, Box 15, Folder 14.

its changes on Communist China” because the regime was “evolving into a gerontocracy.” Anticipating Kennedy's comments almost exactly three years later, Marshall suggested the United States “be prepared to exploit whatever breaks may come our way,” but “to keep our guard up, not expecting too much,” in the meantime.⁷⁰ Crucially, and reflective of how little had yet to change, Marshall made no suggestion of outreach on the part of the United States. China must take the lead.

More typical of the prevailing sentiment at the time Kennedy took office was a piece by Holmes Alexander in the *Los Angeles Times* calling the current policy of isolating Communist China “the right one,” since “our sworn enemies in Asia would have far more to gain” from any improvement in relations, particularly an increase in trade, “than we would.”⁷¹ The notion that the Chinese regime was capable of changing for the better, and that “the American recognition of Communist China would accelerate the process of liberalization of the internal regime,” was confronted directly in a 1962 *Saturday Review* assessment of Professor Harold S. Quigley's book *China's Politics in Perspective*. The reviewer called Quigley's argument to this effect “a wish rather than a plausible hypothesis” which was “hardly supported by argument.”⁷² The author seemingly rebutted Bowles's accusation that the status quo was a “posture” rather than a “policy” with the rejoinder that altering that policy would be an exercise in blind faith

⁷⁰ Charles Burton Marshall, “The Chinese Puzzle,” *Commonweal*, November 11, 1960, 170.

⁷¹ Holmes Alexander, “Our Policy on China Is the Correct One,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 3, 1961, B4.

⁷² Hebert S. Dinerstein, “What Cost Chinese Recognition?” *Saturday Review*, May 5, 1962, 17.

rather than a realistic assessment of the evidence. Absent Chinese moderation, for which there was no sign, what those calling for reform needed was a reason to believe.

That reason, as is the case with so many belief systems, was fear – the fear of war expressed by Pearl Buck, among others. In November 1962, around the time of the Cuban Missile Crisis and the Sino-Indian War, Oscar Gass of *Commentary*, at the time a “Cold War Liberal” publication, sounded a pessimistic note over what a perpetuation of the current bitter antagonism could mean for Asia and the world. Gass wrote darkly that “the continuation of peace between the China and the United States, during the rest of the 20th century, depends on changes in China as well as the United States. And we cannot be confident those changes will occur.”⁷³ Four months later, the journal published a letter from A. Doak Barnett praising Gass's “provocative article” which “effectively disposes of many oversimplified assumptions that people have about United States relations with China.”⁷⁴ Less than three years earlier, Barnett had published a book on the topic which argued for continuing the policy of “containment with isolation.” But he was beginning to abandon this conventional wisdom, and take a prominent role in creating a new consensus.

Those who had long opposed current policies sensed the moment was ripe for action. Former Oregon Representative Charles Porter, ousted from office by the supporters of the Committee of One Million in 1960, formed The Committee for a Review of our China Policy in the spring of 1963. The *Nation*, long an opponent of the

⁷³ Oscar Gass, “China And The United States,” *Commentary*, November 1962, 397.

⁷⁴ *Commentary*, March 1963, 257.

Committee of One Million, welcomed the new organization as “the right committee in the right place at the right time.”⁷⁵ This group would go on to have little direct effect on the debate over China policy, but it inspired the formation of similar organizations by academics and other China experts which would exert an indirect influence upon the Johnson administration. Even the *Nation* expected the organization to, at most, “disrupt the conspiracy of silence that currently sustains our so-called China policy.” Though there is no evidence the new organization played such a role, the silence was beginning to end. And that silence had, in fact, been what was sustaining the Committee of One Million, as revealed by how stridently its leaders would react to any future public statements by government officials questioning the continuation of the policies they supported.

That future would arrive sooner than supporters of the current policy could have imagined. Undersecretary of State Averell Harriman may have publicly stated in June 1963 that U.S. recognition of Communist China “would merely aid aggression against China's neighbors,” but this by no means meant he was closing the door to any and all changes in policy.⁷⁶ A month later, shortly before traveling to Moscow to reach an agreement on the Limited Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, an early attempt to use the Soviets against the Chinese, Harriman made an announcement “welcoming a debate” on U.S. policy towards Communist China. This set off alarm bells among steadfast supporters of the current policy such as the conservative *Los Angeles Times*. The paper claimed

⁷⁵ “Reviewing A Policy,” *Nation*, May 25, 1963, 435.

⁷⁶ “Harriman Sees Peril In Tie To Red China,” *New York Times*, June 5, 1963, 9.

Harriman's "out-of-the-blue declaration" was "the first in a series of trial balloons" sent aloft by the president "aimed at sounding out voter sentiment on possible overtures to Red China" which had "long" been under deliberation within the administration. The story identified Harriman, McGeorge Bundy, and Walt Rostow as the leading advocates of an "open door" policy, a term which would become popular within the Johnson administration among people who had also worked for Kennedy, though not with these three individuals in particular. The supposed goal of this "inner circle" was the ultimate adoption of a "two-China" policy.⁷⁷ While there were numerous members of the administration advocating precisely that course, some of whom worked directly under Bundy and Harriman, those two never officially endorsed such a policy. Of the three, only Rostow could be seen as overtly sympathetic. Nonetheless, changes were under discussion, and those who opposed such discussions, let alone actual policy alterations, began to notice, and worry.

At this time, the strongest voices for change outside the halls of government came from religious publications, particularly the liberal *Christian Century*, a fervent supporter in decades past of Protestant missionaries in China such as the parents of Pearl Buck. Anticipating by nearly four years Richard Nixon's famous declaration that "we simply cannot afford to leave China forever outside the family of nations, there to nurture its fantasies, cherish its hates and threaten its neighbors,"⁷⁸ the magazine argued in August 1963 that "keeping Mainland China in its resentful isolation, increase there the

⁷⁷ Allen, Robert S. and Scott, Paul. "New U.S. Policy Toward Red China." *Los Angeles Times* (July 8, 1963), p. A5.

⁷⁸ Richard M. Nixon, "Asia After Vietnam," *Foreign Affairs*, October, 1967, 121.

scourge of hunger, and we create not a suppliant vassal state but a reckless outcast.”⁷⁹ A month later, *Commonweal* seconded its Protestant counterpart by arguing that “in the long run our isolation of the Chinese will produce only calamitous results.” Spurring these sentiments was a fear of China's inevitable rise to true great power status. Only an end of the U.S. policy of isolation could ensure that “when China becomes a developed industrial and military power in the 1970's it will no longer be spoiling to tear the world asunder.”⁸⁰

For the time being, it appeared China still very much wanted to do exactly that. The *Christian Century* further developed its fears into policy prescriptions, arguing “China should be brought into the United Nations” in order to make that polity “a responsible nation in an ordered and peaceful family of nations.” The magazine based this call on the future prospect for change in Chinese posturing and policies, rather than on their current utter absence. The arguments of those who supported hard-line policies were being turned on their head. China must become a member of the United Nations precisely because Mao was a madman. The article minced no words. In words that could have been written by Marvin Liebman himself, Mao's “call for worldwide racial war reflects a degree of hatred and desperation which can only be described as psychotic.” But this desperation was not a sign of the success of U.S. policy, but rather of its failure. China's leaders “have been isolated so long and so completely that they have lost touch with the realities of the modern world.” U.S. policy was not the result of irrational

⁷⁹ “Reckless Outcast,” *Christian Century*, August 21, 1963, 1020.

⁸⁰ China Prospect,” *Commonweal*, September 6, 1963, 523-524.

Chinese belligerency, but its cause. Given this reality, a continuation of such a policy could only lead to disaster. Referencing the racialized terminology then swirling around China's threat to the world, the article concluded with the solemn declaration “the color of the peril to mankind may appear now red, now yellow; but the ultimate peril is the color of death.”⁸¹ Perhaps China could not shoot its way into the United Nations. But it might be able to become a member of that international organization by threatening the world at gunpoint.

Communist China's behavior during this period did much to vindicate the evaluations of those who opposed any and all American outreach to that regime. The Great Leap Forward's failure had demonstrated both the communist leadership's economic ineptitude and cruelty to their own people, providing further evidence that communism was a literal crime against nature. All the while, the regime continued to divert precious resources to the development of nuclear weapons, invaded a neighboring power, and supported the armed subversion and attempted communist takeovers of several other states in the region. As the China Lobby had long maintained, the P.R.C. was externally menacing but internally weak. Continued isolation would only increase this weakness and thereby decrease the menace that regime posed to U.S. interests in Asia and the Western Pacific.

Yet a growing number of individuals drew an opposing lesson from these events. The Chinese communists had endured the most grievous of self-inflicted wounds and survived. Their economy had been set back for a while, but their people remained

⁸¹ “Rethinking China,” *Christian Century*, September 11, 1963, 1091-1092.

quiescent and obedient, if perhaps no longer enthusiastically so. The P.L.A.'s performance against India and the government's increased support for the North Vietnamese belied any implication that internal disaster had diminished the regime's ability to project power. Furthermore, their ongoing nuclear program, if it succeeded, and it surely – and perhaps swiftly – would, could only redound to their benefit and to the detriment of the U.S. in the views of the region's population. Isolation had not brought the Chinese to their knees. Mao had come closer to achieving this, but even he had failed in this endeavor. There was nowhere for China to go but up, and the further that nation climbed, the more bankrupt and counterproductive the current U.S. policy would appear. China could not be defeated with hostility. Rather, it must be altered through outreach.

In Harriman's often inconsistent comments, there were hints that by early 1963 at least some in the administration were considering a variation on the triangular diplomacy Nixon embarked upon nine years later, albeit this time with an initial outreach to the Soviets cowing the Chinese into some form of cooperation, rather than the other way round. The Test Ban Treaty was the first step. With the Chinese isolated from the Soviets, and the specter of Soviet-American cooperation hanging over their heads, they would have nowhere to turn but the United States. However, the same seemingly self-destructive behavior which had estranged the Chinese from the Soviets did not bode well for any friendly tidings to the Americans. Neither did the continuing intense mutual animosity between the American and Chinese people. Given this sentiment, a split

between the Chinese and their Soviet allies was more likely to be an occasion to punish, rather than reward, the troublesome Chinese.

CHAPTER IV

“THE MONOLITH NO LONGER EXISTS”:

HOW AMERICANS VIEWED THE EMERGING SINO-SOVIET SPLIT

On January 2, 1962, Secretary of State Dean Rusk convened a meeting of his Policy Planning Staff to discuss United States options regarding the Sino-Soviet “conflict.” For a matter of such immense importance, there appeared to be few, if any, available, at least for the time being. Director of Policy Planning Walt Rostow began the meeting by declaring frictions between the two leading communist powers to be a “historic and unprecedented development” about which “no one knows what to do.”¹ In the words of staff member Mose Harvey, “the monolith no longer exists.”² Over the long term, Rostow believed such a development was “essentially favorable” to the United States.³ Rusk, as was his wont on matters regarding China, expressed skepticism. He asked Harvey if, even assuming the Soviets and the Chinese were no longer on good terms, their “objectives” were not still “the same.” Harvey bluntly replied that “their objectives are no longer the same.”⁴ Rusk hinted at such differences between Mao and Khrushchev when he termed the Chinese leader's foreign policy a combination of “Chinese imperialism as well as left-wing deviationism.”⁵ Agreeing with him on this matter was former Ambassador to the Soviet Union Charles Bohlen, who opined that

¹ S/P Meeting, 1/2/62: Sino-Soviet Conflict, 1a, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library, James C. Thomson Papers, Box 15, Folder 1.

² Thomson to Harriman, January 12, 1962, 3, JFKL, Thomson Papers, Box 15, Folder 1.

³ S/P Meeting, 1/2/62: Sino-Soviet Conflict, 1b, JFKL, Thomson Papers.

⁴ Thomson to Harriman, 3, JFKL, Thomson Papers.

⁵ S/P Meeting, 1/2/62: Sino-Soviet Conflict, 2, JFKL, Thomson Papers.

“the essence of the quarrel is that the Russians have become the Mensheviks, while the Chinese are Bolsheviks.” Emphasizing the ideological nature of the divisions within the Communist bloc, Bohlen argued further that “the evolving situation was not in fact a parallel to the divisions that exist within NATO.”⁶ In other words, Soviet troubles with China were in no way analogous to American quarrels with France, and Charles de Gaulle was no Mao Zedong.

The public phase of the progressive estrangement between the leaders of the Soviet Union and the People's Republic occurred almost entirely during the presidency of John F. Kennedy. His administration, along with academic experts and journalists, avidly followed developments, trying to discern the underlying causes of the acrimony so frequently on display, predict the future course of events and, based on their answers, propose how the United States government could take advantage of the evolving situation to enhance American security and lessen Cold War tensions. A variety of factors militated against bold action of any sort, and any kind of outreach to the Chinese in particular. Observers within and outside the government, and with or without expertise in the region, quickly reached the consensus that Chinese ideological extremism and racial chauvinism were to blame for worsening relations between the two regimes. These conclusions implied that increasing Chinese hostility to Moscow would entail more of the same for Washington. Conversely, a lessening of tensions within the communist bloc, and a revitalization of the alliance, would eliminate whatever slim chances there were to improve U.S.-Chinese relations. Experts outside of government

⁶ Thomson to Harriman, 2, JFKL, Thomson Papers.

persistently predicted such a result nearly up to the point when this split had become definitive and undeniable. Government analysts and spokespeople tended to agree with the assessment of these informed opinion leaders.

At the same, administration perceptions of mass public opinion, whether accurate or not, further discouraged bold initiatives involving either communist power.

Government officials persistently underestimated the public's potential exposure to information on this subject, which was nearly as plentiful as their own. It would have been politically perilous to attempt to exploit enemy divisions the voting public might not have even known existed. Polling evidence that increasing numbers of Americans viewed Peking as a greater danger to world peace than Moscow suggested otherwise, but also indicated a growing fear of that nation. At the elite level of policy and opinion makers, those who least feared the Chinese communist regime, and believed its hold on power to be tenuous, tended to discount the extent of difficulties within the Sino-Soviet alliance and downplay the significance of whatever differences might have existed between the two nations. They were most likely to express a belief in the notion of monolithic communism, and to resist the idea of even tentative rapprochement with either adversary, but particularly with communist China. Those who viewed the monolith as an outdated notion also tended to see the Peking regime as permanent, and thus one the U.S. must eventually deal with in a more official diplomatic manner.

This was the significance of the dispute between Rusk and Bohlen on one side and Rostow and his Policy Planning staffers on the other. The first faction represented the past, albeit one which still held the commanding heights of policy making. The

second represented a future which would not be realized during the governmental careers of nearly all the them. In part, this would be the consequence of one policy area both factions agreed upon – the necessity of increasing U.S. financial and military commitments to the South Vietnamese government. Such actions would presumably both contain a militant China's desire to foment “Wars of Liberation” and not alienate a Soviet regime satisfied with the global status quo.

As implied by Rostow's opening comments, participants in the January 1962 meeting offered almost no short-term policy changes. The lone proposal was Rusk's suggestion that the Sino-Soviet conflict created “a strong argument for establishing diplomatic relations with Outer Mongolia.”⁷ This lack of policy discussion might account for the fact that considerations of domestic and foreign opinion were also absent from this particular discussion. For whenever anyone within the administration proposed policy changes regarding “Red China,” public opinion was a factor under consideration. Complicating a shift in strategy or tactics were considerations of two audiences, one foreign, the other domestic, both potentially quite hostile and damaging to Kennedy. Numerous officials understood that blatant attempts to exploit Sino-Soviet tensions stood the chance of backfiring and bringing the two parties closer together. Outrage at being manipulated by a common enemy could override anger at a troublesome ally. Equally worrisome was the potential for domestic backlash. The Chinese and the Russians were both viewed by the American public as enemies. Positive sentiment

⁷ Ibid. 3. That possible recognition of Outer Mongolia was the major public controversy regarding Chinese policy during the Kennedy Administration showed both the sterility of public debate at the time and the hair-trigger fears of any policy changes within the “China Lobby.”

toward either was scant. Attempts to improve relations with either were apt to anger conservatives eager to accuse any Democratic administration of softness towards communism. Thus, even if Rostow was wrong, and there were officials in the White House or at Foggy Bottom who had figured out what to do about the matter, there was little chance, for the time being, of transforming their ideas into policy.

As befitted their rank, Rusk and Rostow dominated the meeting, with Rostow advocating boldness and Rusk urging caution. As much as Rusk would deny it in later decades, he still operated under Eisenhower-era assumptions that communist rule over mainland China was, in the 1957 words of John Foster Dulles, “a passing phase.”⁸ Near the end of the meeting, he raised the possibility of the People's Republic coming undone after the death of Mao, who was nearing age 70. Observing that there were an “awful lot of Chinese,” presumably making centralized rule difficult, Rusk asked his subordinates to investigate the history of executive turnover in China, particularly those moments when dynasties lost the “Mandate of Heaven.” The Secretary even speculated about a return to “warlordism” or “regionalism,” with the communist government losing effective control of Chinese territory south of the Yangtze River.⁹ Veteran Foreign Service officer Edward Rice, perhaps the only American “China Hand” from the pre-1949 period to survive the purges of the McCarthy Era, was less sanguine, responding that “the Mandate of Heaven will be lost when the party, army, and security forces are

⁸ The foremost example of Rusk's revisionism appears in his informal memoirs, Dean Rusk as told to Richard Rusk, Daniel S. Papp, ed. *As I Saw It* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1990); For an earlier example, see Warren I. Cohen, *Dean Rusk*. Totowa, (New Jersey: Cooper Square Publishers, 1980). Regarding China policy, Cohen relied extensively and credulously on interviews he conducted with Rusk in 1977.

⁹ S/P Meeting, 1/2/62: Sino-Soviet Conflict, 4, 4b, JFKL, Thomson Papers.

no longer responsive to orders from the top,” and that there was “no evidence as yet of such a development on the Mainland.”¹⁰

Rostow also considered the possibility for changes in China following Mao's departure. Yet he was thinking along far different lines than Rusk. Utilizing the example of Soviet moderation after the death of Stalin, he wondered if “we could give them a vision of possibility if they calm down?” An alternative policy, again marking a continuation of the Dulles approach, would be to “buckle them in even more tightly to the Russkies.”¹¹ Tethering the Chinese to the Russians implied a cessation of their conflict, which many at the time assumed would occur with the death or overthrow of either Mao or Khrushchev. Implicit in Rostow's remarks was the assumption that personality played a large role in the conflict in addition to, and perhaps over and above, ideology, economics, and power. The Soviets, the Americans, and the western (or, to be more precise, white) nations in general had long expressed trepidation about rising Chinese power. As early as 1955, Khrushchev pleaded with West German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer “help us cope with Red China!”¹² A revived and supercharged Yellow Peril had a way of dissolving East-West tensions, or at least held out the prospect of such a development. Rusk, on the other hand, warned near the end of the meeting that “we must be careful not to overemphasize Chinese Communist military and economic

¹⁰ Thomson to Harriman, 5, JFKL, Thomson Papers.

¹¹ S/P Meeting, 1/2/62: Sino-Soviet Conflict, 3b, JFKL, Thomson Papers. Thomson's memo to Harriman was largely a transcription of his original handwritten notes taken during the meeting. In that memo, he replaced “Russkies” with “Russians,” his only apparent change. I have made the assumption that the original was a more accurate rendering of Rostow's words.

¹² Gordon H. Chang, *Friends and Enemies: The United States, China, and the Soviet Union, 1948-1972* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 155.

power.”¹³ When it came to American views of the Chinese threat, in contrast to opinions regarding the U.S.S.R., the hard-liners and the alarmists were not one and the same. A rising global power could not constitute “a passing phase.” One could not simply wait for it to collapse. It would have to be engaged, and might be worthy of formal diplomatic recognition.

In an October 1962 memorandum entitled “Being Nasty to Khrushchev,” written during the Cuban Missile Crisis, Robert Komer suggested one way of discrediting the Soviet leader would be to “publicize the Sino-Soviet dispute more widely.”¹⁴ But by then, the American press had long ago beaten the NSC to the punch, publicizing every stage of the dispute far and wide. Though it largely elected not to cover events over the subsequent and critical two years, Henry Luce's *Time* magazine alluded to tensions within the Communist Bloc as early as February 1960. *Time's* two weekly news magazine competitors, the liberal-leaning *Newsweek* and the arch-conservative *U.S. News & World Report*, provided extensive coverage in August 1960 of Khrushchev's announcement that the Soviets were removing all their economic and military advisers from China.¹⁵ Dozens of additional magazines and newspapers on both sides of the political spectrum began reporting on developments during the first year of the Kennedy Administration. Coverage dramatically intensified in 1962 to the point where, by the

¹³ Thomson to Harriman, 4, JFKL, Thomson Papers.

¹⁴ Komer to Bundy, October 25, 1962, JFKL, National Security Files, Box 322, Folder 12.

¹⁵ “Creaking Axis,” *Time*, February 22, 1960, 24; “Mao Versus Khrushchev: From Bitter Words to Angry Actions,” *Newsweek*, August 29, 1960, 42-44; “Khrushchev Acts To Show Red China Who's Boss,” *US News & World Report*, , August 29, 1960, 49-50. The *Saturday Evening Post* published a speculative article in March 1960 on tensions between the Chinese and the Russians.

time of Komer's proposal, few informed Americans could have remained unaware that all was far from well within the supposedly monolithic enemy coalition.

This informed public would have also been cognizant of expert opinion and analysis included in the news stories, which invariably poured cold water on the breathless reportage of the journalists. The pattern was set in one of the first major stories on Sino-Soviet tensions, which after talk of a “momentous power struggle” which had “suddenly flared into flames,” concluded with the qualifier that experts believed “each needs the other too much to risk an outright rupture in relations.”¹⁶ Speaking with an almost monolithic party line, disparate experts on Communist China in an ideologically diverse collection of periodicals predicted reconciliation. In October 1960, *U.S. News* had five academic experts – three from the United States, one from Britain, and one from India - prognosticate the future course of events. None predicted rupture, agreeing that, in the words of Hugh Seton-Watson, “the Chinese will gracefully surrender.” A. Doak Barnett claimed “neither side is likely to ignore the immense price that a split would involve for them.”¹⁷ Both parties had too much to lose from even the appearance of a rift, to say nothing of an actual break in relations. The Chinese and the Soviets would each be weaker without the backing of the other party, particularly the Chinese, who desperately needed Soviet economic and military assistance to develop their industry and modernize their armed forces. Thus, it was only a matter of time before the Chinese relented and accepted the continuation, at least for the time being, of

¹⁶ *Newsweek*, August 29, 1960, 43.

¹⁷ “Will Russia And Red China Break?” *U.S. News & World Report*, October 24, 1960, 72, 74.

Soviet predominance. Missing from the analysis of experts were considerations of prestige. Ever present were assumptions of the rationality of state actors. Leading officials within the administration oscillated between the experts and the journalists, migrating over time from the skepticism of the former to the credulity (and, from an American point of view, optimism) of the latter.

Even before the founding of the People's Republic on November 1, 1949, Americans had been predicting that Communist China would become a “Second Tito” and detach itself from the Soviet orbit. Sharing the world's longest border, the location of which had long been in dispute, particularly from the Chinese point of view, and being ruled by two communist parties whose relations in the past had frequently been frosty and occasionally poisonous, there seemed to be more pulling them apart than keeping them together. However, as Chen Jian and numerous other historians have recently pointed out, Mao chose the United States as his regime's primary enemy, and needed Soviet support to have any hope of pursuing that rivalry.¹⁸ Brutal and protracted fighting between American and Chinese troops across most of the length and breadth of the Korean peninsula between November 1950 and July 1953 sealed their mutual enmity in blood. Stalin's death four months before the Korean cease-fire served to, at least temporarily, bring the Chinese and the Soviets closer together, leading to a four year-

¹⁸ Chen Jian, *Mao's China and the Cold War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 21-40.

long “Golden Age” in Sino-Soviet relations.¹⁹ But as Khrushchev's 1955 comments to Adenauer indicated, all was not well with the alliance even then, particularly from the Russian point of view. Writing in his diary from the Geneva summit in 1955, British Foreign Minister Harold MacMillan noted that the Soviet diplomats he interacted with on that occasion “are not keen on their Chinese connection,” since the Chinese absorbed Soviet resources while growing stronger, perhaps one day strong enough to challenge the Soviets for primacy within the bloc. He recounted a Swiss diplomat telling him that one day Russia would seek “a situation of peace with the West” and “friendship with other Asiatic peoples” to contain the rising Chinese colossus.²⁰

Americans recognized the tension inherent in the Sino-Soviet relationship in the 1950s, but believed any potential split was far in the future. Dulles did not anticipate the possibility of one before the 1970s, and believed the best way to bring it about was through a “stick” approach of antagonizing the Chinese – thus forcing them to rely on the U.S.S.R., to the Soviets' consternation – rather than the “carrot” approach initially attempted by President Harry Truman and his Secretary of State Dean Acheson.²¹

American political scientist and future Kennedy administration State Department official Allen S. Whiting wrote in 1955 that while “certain groups in Communist China remain

¹⁹ Odd Arne Westad, *Brothers in Arms: The Rise and Fall of the Sino-Soviet Alliance, 1945-1963* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 14-19. More than any other historian, Westad emphasized the affection the two peoples felt for one another, and that their falling out was hardly preordained.

²⁰ Harold MacMillan, *Tides of Fortune: 1945-1955* (London: MacMillan, 1969), 622, 630, 648.

²¹ I borrow the “carrot and stick” metaphor from Noam Kochavi, *A Conflict Perpetuated: China Policy During the Kennedy Years* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 2002), 200. He labeled the “stick” as the “wedge” strategy, mixing metaphors.

dubious about complete and exclusive reliance upon the Soviet Union,” these factions were “too distant from the policy-making center” to have much influence.²² Soviet expert Henry I. Roberts wrote in 1956 that while from the Russian point of view a split “would be an incalculable setback in prestige and potential strength,” this did not eliminate “the possibility of differences” which the United States could at times exploit.²³ In a 1959 article published in the *Saturday Evening Post*, Chester Bowles predicted that “Moscow and Peking view our fast-changing world from rather different perspectives and these differences may grow.” Furthermore, the “explosive new force” that was Communist China “constitutes a potential threat to the Soviet Union.”²⁴ The problems China's increasing power posed for the future health of its Soviet alliance were also cited by A. Doak Barnett in 1960, when he wrote “it is clear that relations between Peking and Moscow have steadily become more complex as Communist China's stature within the bloc has increased.”²⁵

Ultimately, it would be changes in Soviet Cold War tactics, not the evolving balance of power, which began to break the Soviets and the Chinese apart.²⁶ Khrushchev's pursuit of “Peaceful Coexistence” with the U.S. in the final years of the 1950s alienated the Chinese, who believed the concept should only apply the the

²² Alan S. Whiting, “Communist China and 'Big Brother',” *Far Eastern Survey*, 24:10 (October 1955), 145, 150.

²³ Henry I. Roberts, *Russia and America* (New York: Harper, 1956), 217.

²⁴ “A Long Look at China,” *Saturday Evening Post* (April 4, 1959), 4, 21 – from final draft, written December 31, 1958, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University, Chester Bowles Papers, Group No. 628, Series No. 11, Box No. 238, Folder 0604.

²⁵ A. Doak Barnett, *Communist China And Asia: Challenges to American Policy* (New York: Harper Brothers, 1960), 382.

²⁶ David Allen Meyers, *Cracking The Monolith: U.S. Policy Against the Sino-Soviet Alliance, 1949-1955* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1986), 6.

“Intermediate Zone of Nations,” the less economically developed nations outside of Europe, North America, and northeast Asia.²⁷ While Khrushchev's conciliation irked the Chinese, Mao's militancy estranged the Soviets. Furthermore, differing tactics led to a lack of policy coordination. Khrushchev refused to support Mao after his forces began shelling the Quemoy island group in 1958, precipitating a crisis which led to the United States threatening nuclear strikes in order to maintain Taiwanese control over the islands.²⁸ Other historians have traced the tensions to the beginnings of the Sino-Indian border disputes in 1959, which escalated after China's suppression of the Tibetan rebellion and India's granting of asylum to the Dalai Lama.²⁹ This rivalry pitted the U.S.S.R.'s closest and largest non-communist friend against its closest and largest ally within the Communist Bloc, placing Moscow in a delicate and ultimately untenable position. These tensions emerged for the world to see at the Bucharest Conference in June 1960 and the Moscow Conference that November, when Soviet and Chinese delegates exchanged insults and engaged in public arguments over foreign and domestic policy.³⁰ Thus, by the time John F. Kennedy assumed the presidency, it was clear to all who cared to notice that the Soviets and the Chinese no longer saw eye-to-eye on a number of important matters.

²⁷ Partha S. Ghosh, *Sino-Soviet Relations: U.S. Perceptions and Policy Responses*. (New Delhi: Uppal Publishing House, 1981), 233; Ronald C. Keith, *The Diplomacy of Zhou Enlai* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989), 69.

²⁸ Vladislav Zubok and Constantine Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War: From Stalin to Khrushchev* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1996), 210.

²⁹ Roderick MacFarquhar, *The Origins of the Cultural Revolution, Volume 2: The Great Leap Forward, 1958-1960* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1983), 254, 291.

³⁰ Intelligence Report: Chronology of the Sino-Soviet Dispute, April 1958 – January 1961, June 2, 1961, JFKL, Thomson Papers, Box 14, Folder 8.

One of the first recorded mentions of the matter occurred in a June 28, 1961 memo from Komer to Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. stating “the Sino-Soviet dispute may well prove to be one of the key determinants of the shape of the 1960s.”³¹ Most of Komer's colleagues at the NSC proceeded with greater caution, hewing to the academic experts' recognition of differences with a belief that these differences would not lead to an outright split. In an August 1961 National Intelligence Estimate, analysts predicted that “it seems to us unlikely” that the two sides “will soon find a way to resolve their differences.” At the same time, “each side is aware of the immense danger that would result from an open rupture.” Thus, Sino-Soviet relations would in the future be “erratic, cooperative at some times and places, competitive at others.”³² The communist giants would find it in their respective national interests to muddle along. A Special National Intelligence Estimate the following month extended this muddle-through period until at least 1971, concluding that their “common commitment to the Communist cause” and “common enmity toward the anti-Communist world” would enable the Chinese and the Soviets “to act in concert against the West, especially in times of major challenge.”³³ The reasons for this were that, should a break occur, “the very foundations of communism would be shaken.”³⁴

³¹ Memorandum for Mr. Schlesinger, June 28, 1961, JFKL, NSF, Robert Komer Papers, Box 410, Folder 3.

³² NIE 10-61, Authority and Control in the Communist Movement, August 8, 1961, 14, 15. From *Tracking The Dragon: National Intelligence Estimates on China During the Era of Mao, 1948-1976* (Washington, D.C.: National Intelligence Council, 2004).

³³ SNIE 13-2-61, Communist China in 1971, September 28, 1961, 2. From *Tracking The Dragon*.

³⁴ SNIE 13-3-61, Chinese Communist Capabilities and Intentions in the Far East.” From *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963. Volume XXII: Northeast Asia*. (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1996), 174.

While members of the State Department did not dispute these conclusions, at least a few were eagerly planning for the contingency of worsening Sino-Soviet relations, as well as looking for ways the United States could accelerate this process. In the administration's first major internal statement on policy towards the communist Chinese in October 1961, the Policy Planning Staff identified “weakening the ties that link the Sino-Soviet Bloc” as their second most important goal, behind containment of Chinese expansionism and power. Employing Walt Rostow's favorite term during this period, the report predicted that “a timely spread of polycentrism in the Communist world could assist us enormously.”³⁵ At the moment, there was little sense of how to further this process, or even how far along the process had already gone on its own. It would not be until the first half of 1962, over a year after Kennedy took office, that the State Department fully comprehended the extent of the rift.

Among the first outside of the government to spot the extent and permanence of the split was British journalist Edward Crankshaw. A longtime writer for *The Observer*, Crankshaw had served as an intelligence analyst during the recent world war, when he spent several years in Moscow, becoming something of a Soviet expert. Though not an academic, he did cross the line between journalist and expert on Sino-Soviet affairs, and ultimately revealed the expert's tendency to assume the two sides had no choice but to eventually patch things up. Writing in the *Los Angeles Times* in early 1961, he described

³⁵ S/P-b/159: US Policy Toward Communist China, 10/26/61, 1, 12, JFKL, Thomson Papers, Box 14, Folder 12.. The term “Polycentrism” was coined in 1956 by Italian Communist Party leader Palmiro Togliatti, according to Philip E. Mosely, “The Chinese-Soviet Rift: Origins and Portents,” *Foreign Affairs*, October, 1963, 19.

the “conflict” as “violent, acrimonious and fundamental.” Though recognizing the two parties had their differences going back to the 1920s, he placed the beginning of the “quarrel” in 1958, a presumed reference to the Second Straits Crisis.³⁶ In an article published a few months later in the *Atlantic Monthly*, Crankshaw reminded readers that in 1956 he had told them in those same pages “all was not well between China and the Soviet Union.” Crankshaw placed the blame on Khrushchev's “too great eagerness to seek an accommodation with President Eisenhower,” which had made the Chinese “very angry indeed.” While presaging Mose Harvey by writing “so much, anyway, for the Communist monolith,” Crankshaw still concluded the Chinese “depend far too much on support from the Soviet Union to cut adrift entirely.”³⁷

The focus on power discrepancy as both a reason for the conflict as well as why it would fail to lead to a complete rupture was also evident in other pieces published during Kennedy's first year as president. Writing in *Commentary*, Richard Lowenthal identified the “growth of Communist China into a great power” as “the beginning of the end of the single-centered Communist movement.”³⁸ Reviewing a book by Marvin Kalb on the state of the alliance, Alexander Dallin in the *Saturday Review* agreed with the author that “it would be supreme folly to anticipate a dissolution of the alliance.”³⁹ A few months later, the *Boston Globe* declared that recent evidence appeared to indicate Moscow had “battered down Red Chinese resistance to total Kremlin control of the

³⁶ Edward Crankshaw, “Russia-China Rift A Gaping Chasm,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 12, 1961, 11.

³⁷ Edward Crankshaw, “Khrushchev and China.” *Atlantic Monthly*, May, 1961, 43-47.

³⁸ Richard Lowenthal, “The Sino-Soviet Dispute,” *Commentary*, 31: 5 (May 1961), 393.

³⁹ Alexander Dallin, “The Tie That Binds Two Giants,” *Saturday Review*, May 30, 1961, 40.

Communist push for world supremacy.”⁴⁰ These assessments turned out to erroneous and premature. Two weeks after the *Globe's* declaration of Khrushchev's victory, *Newsweek* reported on “new quarrels between Moscow and Peking.” Still, the magazine, which the previous year had been among the first to point to the serious nature of the rift, concluded at this stage that “they need each other too much” to fight and “still face a common enemy in the West.”⁴¹ In October 1961, the *Wall Street Journal* quoted an unnamed “expert” concluding no matter how much communist leaders may fight amongst themselves, they “have always shown an ability to close ranks against the common Western enemy.”⁴² A few days later, the *New York Times* echoed these predictions of Mao knuckling under by observing that “the time when Communist China could pose any real challenge to the Soviet Union in a power sense seems remote and may never be realized.”⁴³

In the absence of new polemics or public spats, the journalists seemed to have no choice but to listen to the experts. Meanwhile, even among those who viewed a split as a serious possibility at this stage, there was a belief that the fight was merely over, to paraphrase Kennedy at a later date, how best to bury the United States. Comparing Khrushchev's strategic approach to Mao's, the editors of *Time* wrote that “while the differences may be immensely important, for the West, both flowers remain Red.”⁴⁴

⁴⁰ “Looks Like K Tops Red China In Power Test,” *Boston Globe*, July 2, 1961, 18.

⁴¹ “Moscow and Peking: How Deep the Rift?” *Newsweek*, July 17, 1961, 35, 36.

⁴² “Soviets May Be Preparing for Showdown With Red China on Communist Leadership,” *Wall Street Journal*, October 26, 1961, 3.

⁴³ Tillman Durdin, “In China: Latest Ideological Rift With Moscow Threatens to Erupt Into an Open Breach,” *New York Times*, October 29, 1961, E3.

⁴⁴ “Peking: Reasons for the Long Quarrel,” *Time*, November 3, 1961, 21.

Such sentiment echoed Rusk's question in the State Department meeting less than two months later, which Mose Harvey emphatically answered in the negative. During this period, Rusk said as little as possible to the public on the matter. In a National Press Club Speech on July 10, 1961, the Secretary of State admitted “there is solid evidence of tension between the two giants of the communist world,” but that “he could not evaluate the severity of the rupture.”⁴⁵ These carefully-chosen words told his audience nothing they had not already known for at least a year.

New evidence of increasing tensions was provided in November 1961, when a Chinese delegation walked out of a global gathering of Communist Party officials in Moscow. Alexander Werth of the *Nation* concluded “something clearly has gone very, very seriously wrong in Soviet Chinese relations,” yet he still predicted Khrushchev could keep the Chinese in line.⁴⁶ Others were beginning to think differently. The *Boston Globe* reported at the end of that month that Averell Harriman's appointment as head of the Far Eastern Affairs Division of the State Department occurred “at a time when it may be possible to exploit tension between Moscow and Communist China.”⁴⁷ This proved to be an apt prediction, because in subsequent years Harriman would become the only member of the administration to actually exploit the rift. However, at this time, while

⁴⁵ “Red China, Russia at Odd, Rusk Says,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, July 11, 1961, 2.

⁴⁶ Alexander Werth, “Walkout In Moscow,” *The Nation*, November 11, 1961, 371, 372.

⁴⁷ Doris Fleeson, “Harriman, Far East Expert, May Exploit Rift Between Moscow and Communist China,” *Boston Globe*, November 29, 1961, 17.

predicting that “differences will grow,” Harriman “did not foresee a complete break.”⁴⁸

The monolith may have been dying, but it could still cast a powerful spell.

One can infer just how troubled a particular writer or speaker believed Sino-Soviet relations were at a given moment by which word or words they utilized to describe the problems in the relationship. What started as a “dispute” or “conflict” in 1960 became a “split” or “break” by 1963, with various other terms being employed in the intervening years depending on one's assessment of the relationship. The significance of terminology was alluded to in the introduction to the first State Department assessment of the deteriorating relationship in February 1962:

“The words break, breach, rupture, rift, and split have all been used more or less accurately to describe a marked change for the worse in the special complex of relationships between Communist states. Whichever word one uses, it is obvious that there are meaningful degrees of change, just as there are meaningful degrees of deterioration in quarreling, sleeping in separate rooms, going home to mother, getting a legal separation, and being divorced, not to speak of arranging or undertaking the murder of the other party.”⁴⁹

After outlining the significance of the terms one employed, the unnamed author, perhaps reflecting the imperfect state of information he and other American officials possessed at the time, concluded with equal glibness that “by some definitions, the USSR and Communist China have already broken, breached, ruptured, rived, split, or whatever.”

⁴⁸ “Harriman Sees Widening Of USSR-Red China Rift,” *Hartford Courant.*, December 27, 1962,

17.

⁴⁹ Prospects for the Sino-Soviet Conflict, 2/20/62, 1-2, JFKL, Thomson Papers, Box 15, Folder 2.

He went on to qualify this assessment with the caveat “by strict definition, however, the word 'break' would be reserved for the cessation of a given relationship (or of any part of the relationship) rather than for a deterioration in it.” According to this stricter categorization, a break could only be said to have occurred between the Chinese and the Soviets within the ideological dimension of their relationship.⁵⁰

Like the experts outside of government, this author assumed rationality on the part of state leaders. However, by 1962 this assumption no longer led to a prediction of eventual reconciliation. Focusing on China, the author noted the ruling party has had “18 months” to consider “the consequences of its defiance of Moscow,” specifically the loss of economic and military aid China needed to become a modern power. Based on this, he concluded that Chinese leaders had made a rational decision to wait out the present Soviet leadership in the hopes that “a post-Khrushchev Soviet leadership will correct Khrushchev's errors, including his China policy.” This was a risky calculation, because if Khrushchev's successors proved just as unwilling to accede to Chinese demands, their nation would have “lost decades” in terms of development.⁵¹

With the benefit of hindsight, the author recognized that “there was little prospect of a genuine resolution” after “at least the mid-1960s,” so long as each nation's present leadership remained in power. This assessment was based on events which had occurred in the previous six months and forced the State Department to conduct “a new

⁵⁰ Prospects for the Sino-Soviet Conflict, 2/20/62, 3-4, JFKL, Thomson Papers, Box 15, Folder 2.
⁵¹ Ibid. 17-18.

assessment of the prospects for a break.”⁵² Another State Department report written three months later advanced this altered perception even further by describing relations between the two communist party leaderships as “in a state of near-complete rupture.” The operating assumption by May 1962, slightly over four months after the first major meeting on the subject, was that both leadership groups would attempt “to avoid a final, open break with its far-reaching deleterious consequences,” but would ultimately fail because “the differences that divide them are rooted in fundamental factors and are thus not subject to permanent reconciliation.”⁵³

According to this report, the primary differences centered around matters of economics, geography, culture, and race.⁵⁴ Missing from this list, interestingly, was ideology, which was front-and-center in the previous report, as well as in journalistic accounts of the subject. Based on periodicals searchable through Proquest and the *Reader's Guide To Periodical Literature*, as many articles appeared in 1962 in American newspapers and magazines on Sino-Soviet relations as had appeared in the two previous years combined, and those in 1963 would prove to be as numerous as in the previous three years put together. Nearly all mentioned ideological differences, which were occasionally cast as theological from the communist point of view.⁵⁵ In early 1962, *Commonweal*, the *New York Times Magazine*, and *Newsweek* all labeled ideological

⁵² Ibid. 35, 36.

⁵³ Sino-Soviet Relations: Current Status and Prospects, May 22, 1962, 1, JFKL, Roger Hilsman Papers, Box 1, Folder 7.

⁵⁴ Ibid. 14.

⁵⁵ Walter Lippmann, “Dealing With the Soviet Union, *Newsweek*, July 22, 1963, 17.

differences as the leading cause of the dispute.⁵⁶ In this the journalists of the time would find themselves in complete agreement with historian Lorenz Luthi's retrospective assessment.⁵⁷ Another explanation was more nationally, and at times racially, specific. It was expressed, perhaps in its most sanitized form, by Charles de Gaulle, who told his Minister of Culture Andre Malraux, who had been one of the few westerners to travel extensively through China during the 1950s, that "every time China becomes China again, she becomes imperialist."⁵⁸ Even the *Nation*, located on the opposite side of the ideological spectrum, and a fervent supporter of diplomatic recognition of communist China, wrote of that nation in July 1961 that "when she is strong, she is an incubus of massive proportions."⁵⁹

The notion of an aggressive national character formed a potent combination with the belief in the natural expansionist tendencies of revolutionary communism. Secretary of State Rusk had made just this connection in the January 2, 1962 meeting when he referred to "Chinese imperialism combined with left-wing deviationism." Mao's rhetoric about China being better positioned than the United States or the Soviet Union, based on its immense and largely rural population, to survive a nuclear war as a functioning society, further added to fears. As *Time* magazine put it, "in Peking's view, war is

⁵⁶ Harold C. Hinton, "Tiger at the Gate," *Commonweal*, January 19, 1962, 428; Richard Lowenthal, Richard, "Cracks in the Communist Monolith." *New York Times Magazine*, February 25, 1962, 88; "Moscow and Peking: How Wide the Split?" *Newsweek*, March 26, 1962, 33.

⁵⁷ Lorenz Luthi, *The Sino-Soviet Split: Cold War in the Communist World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 2-5.

⁵⁸ Andre Malraux, translated by Terence Kilmartin, *Anti-Memoirs* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1967), 137.

⁵⁹ "The Wave of the Future," *The Nation*, July 1, 1961, 2.

inevitable anyway.”⁶⁰ Gordon H. Chang was the first historian to point out that the Chinese were seen, in the old mold of the Fu Manchu stories and the more recent incarnations of “Dr. No” and “The Manchurian Candidate,” as both fanatical and inscrutable, equally capable of blood-curdling violence and underhanded trickery.⁶¹ According to the *New York Times*, which one was of the least likely forums for such rhetoric, there was a “temperamental incompatibility” between “the devious, secretive Chinese and the more extroverted Russians.”⁶²

In addition, China was viewed as playing the race card in an attempt to undercut Soviet influence, particularly on the African continent. Writing in *Foreign Affairs*, Robert A. Scalapino noted how “Moscow has repeatedly charged Peking with using racism to advance its cause in Africa.”⁶³ American government officials leveled similar accusations internally. A May 1963 NIE referred to the “xenophobic emotions inherent in the Chinese racial, nationalistic, and cultural pride and practices.”⁶⁴ A Central Intelligence Agency memorandum from the same month found a racial basis in China's success in courting Asian communist parties away from Soviet tutelage.⁶⁵ Furthermore, there was the fear this approach might prove successful not only against the Soviets, but against the Americans as well. Writing from Hong Kong in 1963, Consul-General

⁶⁰ “Peking: Reasons for the Long Quarrel,” *Time*, November 3, 1961, 21.

⁶¹ Gordon H. Chang, *Friends and Enemies*, 172

⁶² Tillman Durdin, “Absent, Yet All-Present, Giant,” *New York Times Magazine*, January 15, 1961, 20.

⁶³ Robert A. Scalapino, “Sino-Soviet Competition in Africa,” *Foreign Affairs*, April, 1962, 648.

⁶⁴ NIE 13-63: Problems and Prospects in Communist China, May 1, 1963. From *Tracking The Dragon*.

⁶⁵ Central Intelligence Agency Memorandum: The Growth of Chinese Influence in the World Communist Movement, May 8, 1963, JFKL, NSF, Box 24, Folder 2.

Marshall Green argued that “In the long run China's greatest threat may derive from its status as the world's leading underdeveloped, non-white nation.” A break with the white-led Russian Communist Bloc placed the Chinese “in a better position to exploit hard to handle, white-versus-colored antagonisms and differences between poor and prosperous nations.” Green concluded with an allusion to America's own racial vulnerabilities, warning his highly-placed readers that “as always, our success in foreign policy is heavily dependent upon our success in handling domestic issues.”⁶⁶

Charges of Chinese racism appeared from the earliest days of the dispute, when *Newsweek* reported that Czechoslovakian President Antonin Novotny and Polish President Wladislaw Gomulka talked of the appearance of racial prejudice at the November 1960 Communist Party Congress. “The Chinese treat us like pariahs,” a Polish delegate was quoted as saying. Chinese Premier and Mao's then-designated successor Liu Shaoqi was described as displaying “Chinese madness.” According to Novotny, the “Chinese delegates' total Asiatic disregard for the value of human life and material well-being came as a shock even to the Russians.”⁶⁷ In his memoirs, transcribed after he had been out of power for several years, Khrushchev declared that “Mao Tse-tung has played politics with Asiatic cunning.”⁶⁸ It was “impossible to pin these Chinese down.” Overlaying this portrait of sophisticated inscrutability with images of primitive savagery, Khrushchev opined that “the Chinese don't recognize any law except power

⁶⁶ Department of State Airgram, Hong Kong: Trends and Prospects in Communist China; Implications for U.S. Policy, August 16, 1963, 11, JFKL, NSF, Komer Papers, Box 410, Folder 1.

⁶⁷ “How Deep the Red Feud – And a 'Summit',” *Newsweek*, December 12, 1960, 34-36.

⁶⁸ Nikita Khrushchev, Nikita, translated by. Strobe Talbott, *Khrushchev Remembers* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1970), 461.

and force. And if you don't obey, they tear your head off.” But Khrushchev disclaimed any prejudice of his own, warning that “if we started reviling the Chinese people, we would be stepping over the line that separates objective analysis from nationalistic prejudice,” and that was exactly “how Nazism got started.”⁶⁹ Like Novotny, Khrushchev deflected his own expressions of racial prejudice by accusing his targets of their own deficiencies in tolerance.

Recent historians have placed the racist albatross around Russian necks. Utilizing Russian archives Chang did not have access to in 1990, Sergey Radchenko made similar points about the “cultural and implicitly racist notions of supposed Chinese expansionist designs, perfidiously concealed by cunning.”⁷⁰ As the split became irrevocable in late 1963, the Chinese and the Soviets actually exchanged polemics debating which party was more racist.⁷¹ Yet even while reporting this development, *Newsweek* declared that “for almost a full month Peking's propaganda machine has maintained an inscrutable silence in its bitter duel with Moscow.”⁷² It would seem that neither Americans nor Russians could discuss Chinese prejudice without inadvertently revealing their own.

At the time, there was almost no one willing to point this out on either side of the political spectrum. Former British diplomat Michael Gordey was an exception. While not using the term racist, he concluded based on personal observation that “the Russians

⁶⁹ Nikita Khrushchev, Nikita, translated by. Strobe Talbott, *Khrushchev Remembers* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1970), 461, 474-478.

⁷⁰ Sergey Radchenko, *Two Suns in the Heavens: The Sino-Soviet Struggle for Supremacy, 1962-1967* (Stanford University Press: Stanford, California, 2009), 166.

⁷¹ “Warm-up Time,” *Newsweek*, November 4, 1963, 46, 48; Victor Zorsa, “China Seeks Race Strife, Russia Says,” *Washington Post*, October 22, 1963, A17.

⁷² *Newsweek*, November 4, 1963, 46.

have always feared and hated the Chinese,” and that remarks made to him in Moscow reflected “a historic Russian fear of the Chinese 'hordes.’”⁷³ But such observations were rare at the time. Western observers viewed prejudice as an almost exclusively Chinese characteristic. At an early stage in the split, *Commonweal* flatly declared “the [Chinese] regime is at once dogmatically Communist and unequivocally racist.”⁷⁴ A few years later, the same magazine noted “the inescapable touch of racism in Chinese tradition.” Yet on the same page, the author approvingly reported that Charles de Gaulle proposed outreach to the Russians in order to “combat the Yellow Peril.”⁷⁵ *Christian Century* claimed Mao's calls for a “worldwide racial war” revealed him to be “psychotic.”⁷⁶ Conservative standard-bearer the *National Review*, in one of its few acknowledgments of tensions within the Communist Bloc, argued that “as part of the the non-white world, Communist China is tempted to project the Manichaeistic conflict of class struggle on to the plane of racial struggle.”⁷⁷ *New York Times* journalist Max Frankel, writing in the *Saturday Evening Post*, stated that “the Chinese demonstrate an insistent and ostentatious sense of superiority.”⁷⁸ While acknowledging that “economic, national, racial, and ideological” factors all played a role, the *Wall Street Journal* noted in July 1963 that “racial overtones have bulked larger in the recent rivalry as the Chinese bid

⁷³ Michael Gordey, “Behind the Russian-Chinese Split,” *Look*, February 12, 1963, 33.

⁷⁴ Charles Burton Marshall, “The Chinese Puzzle,” *Commonweal*, November 11, 1960, 167.

⁷⁵ James O'Gara, “Battle of the Giants,” *Commonweal*, March 22, 1963, 654.

⁷⁶ “Rethinking China,” *Christian Century*, September 11, 1963, 1091.

⁷⁷ Jules Monnerot, “What About the Sino-Soviet 'Split'?” *National Review*, June 4, 1963, 448.

⁷⁸ Max Frankel, “Who will bury us?” *Saturday Evening Post*, April 13, 1963, 32.

openly for yellow, brown and black support against 'Europe oriented' (white) doctrine.”⁷⁹

In a September 1963 speech before the the Massachusetts State Legislature, Averell Harriman argued the “racial issue” had been “injected by the Chinese” into the dispute.⁸⁰ No one in the United States accused the Russians of anti-Chinese racism.

Finally, there was the argument, advanced both then and now, that the P.R.C. and the U.S.S.R. were simply too big to succeed as allies for very long. Radchenko elegantly summarized this dilemma with the title of his book on the split, which alluded to the old Chinese saying that there cannot be two suns in the heavens.⁸¹ A 1963 dispatch to Robert Komer put the matter more bluntly by stating “the two countries are anyhow too big to be comfortably allies.” The same note observed that “Soviet actions towards China have shown, whatever the provocation, a deep and deliberate meanness.”⁸² As with Michael Gordey's similar observation, it was not made by an American.

Analysis about and speculation concerning the causes the friction between the Chinese and the Soviets increased in 1962 and 1963 as the depths of their disagreements and the vitriol of their mutual denunciations became apparent to all. President Kennedy first alluded to the ongoing split on January 6, 1962 when he mentioned “the fragmentation of the Communist empire.”⁸³ Throughout that calendar year, the Soviets repeatedly denounced Albania, China's one stalwart European ally, while the Chinese

⁷⁹ Alan. L. Otten, “Bitter Clash Between China, Russia Will Have A World-Wide Impact,” *Wall Street Journal*, July 1, 1963, 14.

⁸⁰ Saville R. Davis, “Harriman on China,” *Christian Science Monitor*, September 27, 1963, 20.

⁸¹ Radchenko, *Two Suns in the Heavens*, 18.

⁸² Summary of Peking Despatch No. 19 'S' of the 26th of March, 1963: Sino-Soviet Relations, JFKL, NSF, Box 24, Folder 1.

⁸³ Edward T. Folliard, “Meaning of the Peking-Moscow Feud,” *America*, March 31, 1962, 850.

condemned Yugoslavia, the “revisionist” regime with which Khrushchev was attempting to repair relations. No one was fooled as to whom the true targets were. By the fall of that year, leading American press organs began describing differences as irreconcilable. In October 1962, the *New York Times* predicted that “a complete and open break” was imminent, while *Newsweek* concluded the rift had grown “beyond the point at which it can still be spanned.”⁸⁴

The Cuban Missile Crisis and the Sino-Indian War, which began almost simultaneously that month, pushed the two sides even further apart. Mao condemned Khrushchev for backing down in the Caribbean, while Khrushchev, after supporting the Chinese in the Himalayas while the Missile Crisis lasted, soon retreated to a position of official neutrality once matters in Cuba had been settled.⁸⁵ *Time* reported that the “split is getting wider” after Mao said Khrushchev was “jealous of China's growing strength as only a bourgeois woman could be.”⁸⁶ A week later, the magazine declared “the split is real” and that “no one any longer pretended harmony.”⁸⁷ Responding to this growing public awareness, Roger Hilsman, at the time Director of the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research, delivered the administration's first public address on the matter in Dallas on November 8. This speech reflected the government's continuing public caution and official adherence to the skepticism of the experts. While acknowledging that Sino-Soviet differences were “very serious,” Hilsman maintained

⁸⁴ Harry Schwartz, “New Frictions Sharpen The Struggle Between Russia And China,” *New York Times*, October 7, 1962, E3; “The Big Schism,” *Newsweek*, October 15, 1962, 52.

⁸⁵ Neville Maxwell, *India's China War* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1970), 379.

⁸⁶ “That 'Bourgeois Woman',” *Time*, November 23, 1962, 16.

⁸⁷ “The Split Is Real,” *Time*, November 30, 1962, 28.

that shared enmity towards the United States would lead the two sides to “patch over their differences.” Yet so long as Mao and Khrushchev remained in power, he did not foresee the possibility of “genuine reconciliation.”⁸⁸ Therefore, Hilsman's public line was that tensions within the alliance were driven largely by personality. Unnamed State Department officials told the *New York Times* in late December that Sino-Soviet relations were “badly strained but far short of a complete fracture.”⁸⁹ This contradicted internal State Department assessments from earlier that year.

Though their numbers were decreasing, not everyone subscribed to the notion that the split was genuine and its implications profound. In January 1963, in the lone piece written on the subject during these years by a member of the *National Review's* editorial board, Managing Editor James Burnham, the magazine's chief spokesman on foreign affairs, predicted that “the next twelve months of newsprint will tend to be dominated by oceans of such nonsense concerning Sino-Soviet relations.” While denying that “the Sino-Soviet conflict is just a fake,” he argued that China's meager capabilities, particularly its lack of nuclear weapons, precluded an autonomous foreign policy.⁹⁰ The fact that Burnham, a strident advocate of maintaining the Dulles-era American hostility towards Communist China, fervently downplayed the Chinese threat was also significant. Once again, a China hawk was attacking the China alarmists. A nation need not change its policy towards an odious regime it did not sufficiently fear.

⁸⁸ Roger Hilsman, “How Real Is The Break Between Russia and Red China?” *U.S. News & World Report*, November 26, 1962, 74-75.

⁸⁹ David Binder, “China and Soviet Widen Their Rift,” *New York Times*, December 24, 1962, 2.

⁹⁰ James Burnham, “Sino-Soviet Sense and Nonsense,” *National Review*, January 15, 1963, 16.

Mao stopped mincing words and had the Chinese press mention the Soviets and Khrushchev by name in a lengthy January 1963 polemic. The American press almost immediately recognized this as the point of no return. *Newsweek* termed it “a turning point in the history of Communism” and, adding metaphorical flourish, opined that “Asian Communism, as hungry as a Manchurian wolf, is challenging the European brand of Communism.”⁹¹ *Time* also noticed the rapid escalation in tensions.⁹² In February, Dean Rusk termed the rift “encouraging,” “ideological in nature,” and of five years in duration.⁹³ Concurrent with this assessment was the coalescing view among both the general public and the administration that the split was making China a greater threat to the United States than the Soviets were. Echoing a Gallup poll from the previous month, a State Department spokesman told reporters in April that China’s “red star, despite the crushing reversal of its great leap forward, will rise menacingly in the long run and perhaps become a greater danger to free world enterprises than Russia is today.”⁹⁴

Over the next few months, the print media eagerly anticipated a meeting between Chinese and Soviet officials in Moscow scheduled for early July. This was seen in advance as a last-ditch attempt to avert a complete break. Some expressed optimism. East German leader Walter Ulbricht predicted Chinese capitulation, and warned that western nations would be disappointed in their hopes for a split between “the white and

⁹¹ “Mao on K: A Betrayer and Timid as a Mouse,” *Newsweek*, January 14, 1963, 37.

⁹² “Reading The Reds,” *Time*, January 18, 1963, 25.

⁹³ “China, Russia Rift Seen Encouraging by Rusk,” *Hartford Courant*, February 12, 1963, 1.

⁹⁴ Peter Lisagor, “Red China Looms As Biggest Danger.” *Boston Globe*, April 28, 1963, 56.

yellow races.”⁹⁵ After traveling through both nations, John Massey-Stewart reported “few outward signs of disharmony” between the Chinese and Soviet masses.⁹⁶ Soon after the arrival of Chinese envoy Deng Xiaoping (referred to in the story as “Teng Hsiao-ping”), whom *Life Magazine* described as a “little Chinese tough man” with a “vulpine smile,” it was clear no progress could or would be made.⁹⁷ The “gloves were off,” and international communism was “now grievously – perhaps irreconcilably – split.”⁹⁸ *Isvestia* quickly placed the blame on the Chinese, arguing they wanted war with the West.⁹⁹ *Time* agreed with their Soviet counterpart, writing that Deng's proposal in Moscow confirmed “the Chinese were ready to prolong the quarrel indefinitely” and that they “still sneer at the Russians as 'Big Noses',” once again accusing the Chinese of racial prejudice.¹⁰⁰

Isvestia turned up the vitriol in August, comparing the Chinese to past “outrageous aggressors and villains” such as Genghis Khan, Napoleon Bonaparte, and Adolf Hitler.¹⁰¹ Observing the escalation in “mutual recriminations and vituperation,” *Newsweek* predicted in September that “an open break between the U.S.S.R. and China will probably occur soon.”¹⁰² While not denying the reality, some American conservatives still doubted the significance of the split. Tom Lambert reminded readers

⁹⁵ “Ulbricht Says Russia To Prevail over China,” *Hartford Courant*, June 1, 1963, 18B.

⁹⁶ John Massey-Stewart, “Behind the Curtains – Bamboo and Iron,” *New York Times Magazine*, June 16, 1963, 12.

⁹⁷ “Chinese Come Smiling to Moscow; Rift Widens,” *Life*, July 19, 1963, 29.

⁹⁸ “Russia vs. China: 'Flames Grow Hotter',” *Newsweek*, July 15, 1963, 31; “Soviet-Chinese split looks permanent,” *Businessweek*, July 13, 1963, 24.

⁹⁹ “China Want War?” *Boston Globe*, July 16, 1963, 4.

¹⁰⁰ “Wait Till Next Year,” *Time*, July 19, 1963, 25; “The Confrontation,” *Time*, July 12, 1963, 25.

¹⁰¹ “Isvestia Hits China; Open Break Seen,” *Hartford Courant*, August 24, 1963, 7A.

¹⁰² “*Ne Kulturnyi!*” *Newsweek*, September 23, 1963, 54.

of the conservative *Los Angeles Times* that “the Russians and Chinese, as Communists, are united in a common hostility for capitalism and the West.”¹⁰³ But by this point, nearly everyone not on the political right saw the split as genuine, irreversible, and, if handled properly, to the benefit of the United States.

Considering Rostow's declaration at the start of 1962 that no one knew what to do about the Sino-Soviet split, it was perhaps surprising that so little was subsequently produced within the Kennedy administration to fill this obvious gap. A May 1962 State Department report helped explain why. It concluded that “too blatant a propaganda exploitation of the Sino-Soviet dispute, or conciliatory gestures to either party to woo them further apart, might well have the counterproductive effects of strengthening the forces tending to drive them together, or of easing the strains of their alliance.” Still, the report's introduction predicted that “a far-reaching Soviet-US detente would almost certainly” lead to “an open rupture of the alliance.”¹⁰⁴ The implication was that the United States should seek improved relations with the Soviet Union in part to apply a death blow to their alliance with China, but must refrain from making this intention apparent to the Soviets.

Given the opportunity to divide one's enemies in order to conquer them, it was understandable that, according to Hong Kong Consul John Lacey, “one is accordingly tempted to look for lines of action which the US might take to accelerate the collapse of

¹⁰³ Tom Lambert, “Soviet Union, Communist China Are Still Red Birds of a Feather,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 12, 1963, A6.

¹⁰⁴ Sino-Soviet Relations: Current Status and Prospects, May 22, 1962, 16, 1, JFKL, Hilsman Papers, Box 1, Folder 7

Communism and the weakening of the Sino-Soviet Bloc.”¹⁰⁵ Those in Washington resisted this temptation, declaring a complete break would neither “end the cold war” nor “result in a decisive shift in the balance of forces that could be brought to bear” in either a global war or limited regional conflicts. At the same time, “a break would, nevertheless, profoundly affect the nature and course of the cold war” by reducing the risk of regional conflicts escalating into world war. In other words, the split reaffirmed the Kennedy administration's belief the U.S. could win limited “Brush-Fire Wars.” This was perhaps the optimistic reason the report concluded by arguing the split was an important reason for the U.S. to increase its military commitments in Laos and South Vietnam.¹⁰⁶ A more pessimistic reason was offered early the following year by C.I.A. analyst Ray S. Cline, who warned that “the emergence of a separate Asian Communist Bloc, under the leadership of China, could have grave implications for U.S. security interests in the Far East because of Peiping's militant and intense anti-Western line.”¹⁰⁷ This reflected the common belief that the split would end whatever restraining influence the Soviets still exerted upon China, giving free reign to their expansionist impulses.¹⁰⁸ The split thus made a fight in Vietnam both easier to win and more important not to lose.

¹⁰⁵ Lacey to Thomson, July 25, 1962, 4, JFKL, Thomson Papers, Box 15, Folder 4.

¹⁰⁶ Sino-Soviet Conflict and U.S. Policy, April 30, 1962, 35-37, 54, JFKL, Thomson Papers, Box 14, Folder 13.

¹⁰⁷ Memorandum: Sino-Soviet Relations, *FRUS 1961-1963, 22: Northeast Asia* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1996), 340.

¹⁰⁸ For expressions of this belief, see Joseph Alsop, “Final Break of Russ and China Will Split Up World Communism,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 26, 1962, A6; James O’Gara, “Battle of the Giants,” *Commonweal*, March 22, 1963, 654; Edward Crankshaw, “Cold War of the Communisms,” *New York Times Magazine*, May 26, 1963, 25.

At no point was there mention, even by those within the administration who supported improved relations with China, of exploiting the split to achieve that end, at least for the time being. On the one hand, there was the well-founded belief that at that juncture the Chinese would reject such overtures. Second, there was some desire to let China, as Lacey put it, “stew in its own juice.” Instead of affirming the need for an altering of America's policies towards China, Lacey saw the split as vindication of American containment. It was “the harvest time of our policies which have these last dozen years contained the expansionist forces of Chinese Communism and forced them in upon themselves.”¹⁰⁹ A State Department analysis of mass American opinion concluded that, among the general public, “few see reason to 'exploit' the Sino-Soviet right by 'overtures' to Peiping. Indeed, some of those polled cited Red China's troubles as proof of the wisdom of the U.S. boycott.”¹¹⁰ Much had changed since Truman and Acheson hoped Mao would become the next Tito. By 1962, Khrushchev had long ago assumed that role, in both American and Chinese eyes.

Journalists and pundits tended to be bolder in their recommendations, while experts largely hewed to the White House's caution. As early as June 1962, Walter Lippmann forecast the emergence of a de facto alliance between the Soviets and the Americans to contain Chinese expansion into Southeast Asia.¹¹¹ Others, particularly James O'Gara in *Commonweal*, advocated using the split to induce the Soviets to agree

¹⁰⁹ Lacey to Thomson, 4, 6, JFKL, Thomson Papers.

¹¹⁰ Special Report on American Opinion, Department of State: 1962 Public Attitudes Toward U.S. Policy On China, 1. JFKL, Thomson Papers, Box 15, Folder 4.

¹¹¹ Walter Lippmann, “Russians Helping to Contain China,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 5, 1962, A5.

to “acceptable controls of thermonuclear weapons,” particularly before the date “Communist China gets nuclear weapons of its own.”¹¹² This was exactly what occurred on July 5, 1963, when Averell Harriman and his Soviet counterpart signed the preliminaries for the Limited Nuclear Test Ban Treaty in the Soviet capital while a Chinese delegation sat only miles away. Observers immediately recognized the connection between the Sino-Soviet split and this treaty, which began – however tentatively - the era of detente.¹¹³ Europeans expressed great optimism, with reports that British officials “see current events as the beginning of a historic switch in alignments which may see the Soviet Union an ally of the West in the decades ahead, with mainland China as the bete noir of the world.” The *Los Angeles Times* reported that American officials were “more modest” in their hopes.¹¹⁴

Throughout this period, the belief that two independent enemies might not be better than a monolithic foe remained a prevalent though minority opinion. The crux of this argument was that, since “Russia and China are unalterably bent on world domination,” they adhered to a common cause, even if they practiced different methods. A related argument was the fear that “the rift will spur them to try to outdo each other as capitalism's enemies.”¹¹⁵ Tactical and doctrinal diversity could have its advantages, since

¹¹² “Open Rift,” *Commonweal*, December 21, 1962, 328; James O’Gara, “Battle of the Giants,” *Commonweal*, March 22, 1963, p. 654.

¹¹³ “Khrushchev to See Harriman Today; China Feud May Speed Up Test Ban,” *Hartford Courant*, July 15, 1963, 1A.

¹¹⁴ Louis Fleming, “China Hovers Over East-West Talks,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 6, 1963, M1.

¹¹⁵ Both were made in “The Moscow-Peking Rift,” *Saturday Evening Post*, June 9, 1962, 96. The latter was also put forth in Alan L. Otten, “Bitter Clash Between China, Russia Will Have A World-Wide Impact,” *Wall Street Journal*, July 1, 1963, 14.

“Communism now has something for everybody.”¹¹⁶ A more autonomous China could prove, if not a more formidable foe, than at the very least a more dangerous and unpredictable one. In this vein, Gerald W. Johnson wrote in *The New Republic* that “it would profit us little to have the Bear desist from growling, if it were only to give place to the Dragon spitting fire.”¹¹⁷ Americans had come to know the Soviet devil quite well, and grown rather comfortable with it.

In between these two poles stood Edward Crankshaw, who declared bluntly less than two months before the signing of the Test Ban Treaty that there was “no obvious way in which we can accelerate or exploit the great division between Moscow and Peking.” To his credit, Crankshaw did concede that “fear of wishful thinking” caused him previously to predict a Sino-Soviet reconciliation, which proved to be “wide of the mark.”¹¹⁸ In this belief, he had been far from alone. In his admission of error, he was certainly anomalous. Having downplayed the chances of a complete break in a book published in early 1962, by October of that year Donald Zagoria was downplaying the effects of a complete break, writing in *Foreign Affairs* that “no vast opportunities have been given Western diplomacy, no magic doors opened to the end of the cold war.” In his one policy prescription, Zagoria agreed with those in the Kennedy administration who argued that tensions within the communist camp enabled the United States “to take

¹¹⁶ China vs. Russia: The New Game,” *U.S. News & World Report*, July 29, 1963, 27.

¹¹⁷ Gerald W. Johnson, “The Bear and the Dragon,” *The New Republic*, November 10, 1962, 14.

¹¹⁸ Edward Crankshaw, “Cold War of the Communisms,” *New York Times Magazine*, May 26, 1963, 92, 25.

firmer positions” in Southeast Asia “without increasing the risks.”¹¹⁹ Thus, the only “safe” way to exploit the rift was to increase the U.S. commitment of resources and prestige in Southeast Asia.

George Kennan agreed with other experts when he warned against “a fatuous fawning on any Communist regime that shows the first signs of independence,” a clear admonition against trying to make a deal with the Chinese. Anticipating what historians would discover much later, Kennan astutely observed that Chinese leaders needed high levels of Cold War tensions for internal reasons.¹²⁰ Because of this need, the Chinese would refuse any deal deemed reasonable by the United States. A. Doak Barnett offered the conventional view that “this situation is difficult for the West to exploit.”¹²¹ Zbigniew Brzezinski was more ambitious, and his proposals evolved quickly. Declaring in April 1963 that “no empire or church has ever maintained itself with two capitals,” Brzezinski saw the schism as one of “those few moments in history that can rightfully be described as turning points.”¹²² At that time, he echoed the consensus that “it would be unwise to rush into a political and diplomatic, or economic, courtship of China.” Rather, the United States should continue its “isolation and repulsion of China.”¹²³ By November, his views had undergone a sea change. Arguing that China’s “basic national territorial interests are more directly in conflict with those of the Soviet Union than with America,” he now

¹¹⁹ Donald S. Zagoria, “The Sino-Soviet Conflict And The West,” *Foreign Affairs*, October, 1962, 190, 188.

¹²⁰ George F. Kennan, “Can we deal with Moscow?” *Saturday Evening Post*, October 5, 1963, 42, 40.

¹²¹ “The Widening Sino-Soviet Split,” *Newsweek*, March 18, 1963, 50.

¹²² Max Frankel, “Who will bury us?” *Saturday Evening Post*, April 13, 1963, 34; Zbigniew Brzezinski, “Threat and Opportunity in the Communist Schism,” *Foreign Affairs*, April, 1963, 525.

¹²³ Brzezinski, “Threat and Opportunity in the Communist Schism,” 523, 525.

proposed that “we should gradually extend options to the Chinese for the purpose of inducing them to moderate their policies.” This goal was a variation on Truman's and Acheson's original carrot strategy. In the first American articulation of balance-of-power triangular diplomacy – and what would actually prove to be one of the few – Brzezinski concluded that “a stronger China might press the Soviet Union into a better relationship with the West.”¹²⁴

During the Kennedy years, such a policy proved impossible for a variety of reasons, one of which was fear of inciting public opinion by appearing soft on China, an acute concern for any Democratic administration in that era. Two months after their first meeting concerning the Sino-Soviet dispute, the State Department issued public relations guidelines for how to discuss these developing events with the American public. The guidelines stressed that “constant care” must be taken “to avoid exaggerating either the nature or implications of the dispute.” In addition, “any suggestion that the US is taking sides in the dispute is to be avoided.” Thus, official policy for the time being was to downplay Sino-Soviet differences and eschew the impression the U.S. was in any way trying to exploit or enhance such differences. In part, this reflected actual policy. Yet it also intentionally concealed some of what the administration was doing, particularly regarding the proposed Test Ban Treaty and other aspects of improving Soviet-American relations. It also somewhat contradicted the admonition that “the American and other peoples should be fully informed” about events concerning the dispute.” Compared to other foreign policy obfuscations promulgated during this period, this was comparatively

¹²⁴ Zbigniew Brzezinski, “Calculations and Suggestions,” *Newsweek*, November 25, 1963, 52.

minor. While the government was not to overstate the extent of the dispute, it was not to minimize it either, or to deny its existence. One of the goals of public relations activities was “to counter Communist efforts, as to the present, to gloss over the seriousness of their differences and to maintain the fiction of a monolithic unity that no longer in fact exists.”¹²⁵ The communist monolith had by then officially devolved from gospel to obsolete shibboleth, a Big Lie promulgated by the enemy. This represented both a revolution in official perceptions and in how those perceptions were communicated to the American people.

Fears about the dangers of appearing to take sides briefly became reality less than one month after President Kennedy's assassination. On December 17, Rusk and his State Department found themselves trying “to untangle itself from reports that the United States wants to help the Soviet Union in its rivalry with Red China.” According to the *Washington Post*, the source of this impression was “not clear,” but “in one swoop,” their policy, understood by the press to be “never appear to be taking sides, or you will get the worst from all quarters” appeared to be in danger of coming apart.¹²⁶ That this occurred less than one week after a well-covered Roger Hilsman's speech in San Francisco speech where he explicitly and ostentatiously refuted John Foster Dulles's 1957 contention that Communist China was “a passing phase,” was certainly intriguing.

¹²⁵ S/F Draft, 3/16/62: Guidelines for Co-ordinated Information Policy in the Sino-Soviet Dispute, 2-4, JFKL, Roger Hilsman Papers, Box 1, Folder 7.

¹²⁶ Murrey Marder, “Rusk's Comments On Soviet-China Rift Explained,” *Washington Post*, December 18, 1963, A10.

The breakdown of the Soviet Union's relationship with its closest and largest ally may have provided a catalyst for improved superpower relations.¹²⁷ There was little progress regarding the Test Ban Treaty until Sino-Soviet relations irrevocably worsened in early 1963. However, it would soon prove a hindrance to the further improvement of this relationship when arms control negotiations beyond the NTBT began to be discussed. Years later, Rusk recalled how “in our bilateral talks they often seemed to be looking over their shoulders at China.”¹²⁸ The Soviets no longer saw the strategic balance in bipolar terms, leading to divergent views as to what constituted nuclear parity. The Soviets tried to count the Chinese as a rival, or even an enemy, one for which they needed substantial conventional and nuclear forces to defend against. Thus, the Soviets claimed they needed to maintain nuclear superiority over the United States, not to overawe the U.S., but to deter the Chinese. This was not an argument American negotiators, to say nothing of the American public, were prepared to accept.

Like their Soviet counterparts, U.S. leaders believed they needed to increase military capabilities to contain and deter a hostile and dangerous Communist China. This helped lead to deepening involvement in South Vietnam, which also greatly complicated superpower relations. The Chinese appeared simultaneously bent on expansion but susceptible to containment because their supposed intentions vastly outran their technological and logistical capabilities. Their bluff had to be called. What those who advocated containing the Chinese in Southeast Asia universally failed to take into

¹²⁷

Ronald J. Terchek, *The Making Of The Test Ban Treaty* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1970), 2.

¹²⁸

Dean Rusk, as told to Richard Rusk, Daniel S. Papp, ed. *As I Saw It*, 356.

account was that those who controlled the North Vietnamese Army and the National Liberation Front were certainly not bluffing. Polycentrism extended further down the power gradient than Walt Rostow wished to acknowledge. Had the North Vietnamese been nothing more than mere Chinese proxies, American escalation would no doubt have succeeded. But just as the Soviets could no longer control the Chinese, if they ever could, the same was true of the relationship between Mao Zedong and Ho Chi Minh. The monolith no longer existing created opportunities for United States foreign policy makers. But most of those opportunities would not be fully exploited for many years to come. The perils of polycentrism, on the other hand, would become apparent far sooner.

CHAPTER V

THE “YEAR OF ACTION”:

DILEMMAS OF CONTAINMENT AND THE SINO-INDIAN WAR

In 1962, Communist China appeared to be on the defensive. Wracked by famine, increasingly estranged from its most powerful ally and leading patron, and facing growing hostility from the United States and its allies, Mao should have been in no position to foment any new crises, much less launch a foreign military expedition. If Chinese soldiers were to fight that year, it would surely be on their own soil, and most likely against their own countrymen. This was no doubt what General Chiang Ching-kuo had in mind when he visited Washington in March of that year to meet with leading figures in the Kennedy administration on behalf of his aging father. According to Roger Hilsman, who talked with Chiang Ching-kuo for 90 minutes on March 8, the Taiwanese heir apparent told him that this was the time for his father's forces to “counterattack on the mainland.” Referring to “much trouble” in Vietnam, South Korea, Laos and other places around China's borders, he declared that “so long as the Chinese Communists were permitted to exist there would be no peace in the Far East.” The regime was more vulnerable than ever, and “we must not let (Mao) escape the tight spot he is in today.” 1962 provided “the best opportunity” for the United States and Taiwan to achieve their

shared and cherished goals. It was to be, in the words of Chiang Ching-kuo, “the year of action.”¹

In this prediction, Chiang Ching-kuo was correct. However, it would be Mao, and not Chiang's father, who would do the acting, and in the Himalayas, rather than along the Taiwan Straits. By 1962, Mao's perpetual fears of encirclement were rapidly becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy. His attempts to claim the position of leader of worldwide communist revolution had transformed the Soviets from benefactors into rivals. The United States maintained sizable military bases in South Korea, and was expanding its presence in South Vietnam. The de facto U.S. protectorate of Taiwan had built up its forces to alarming levels, and Chiang Kai-shek escalated his rhetoric to match. Japan remained a painful memory and ever-present specter in Mao's mind, and in the minds of hundreds of millions of his countrymen. To complete the ring of hostility, relations with India, once friendly, had been deteriorating roughly in tandem with relations with the U.S.S.R., albeit mostly for different reasons. Taiwan, through its American patron, could be restrained. But India, the world's second most populous nation and leader of the Non-Aligned Movement, formally created the previous year, could not. It would be the one to poke the dragon, and get badly mauled for its impertinence. Lashing out at the weakest link in the apparent chain of encirclement, China demonstrated that even at its lowest, it was still by far the strongest military power

¹ Memorandum for the Record: Meeting with General Chiang Ching-Kuo, March 19, 1962, 1-3, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library, Roger Hilsman Papers, Box 1, Folder 3.

on the continent, and capable of projecting that power across the most formidable of natural barriers.

As discussed in previous chapters, the Thousand Days of Kennedy's presidency witnessed unprecedented fear of rising Chinese power, with polls showing a decisive plurality of the American people – soon to become a clear majority – professing for the first time to believe that the People's Republic presented a greater threat to world peace than the Soviet Union. Journalists and academics, along with senior government officials, fretted about China's demographic, industrial, military, and economic potential. But all of this, with the possible exception of demographics, was still entirely potential. Unlike the previous two, begun by China in 1954 and 1958, Taiwan initiated the “Third Straits Crisis” of 1962. Both sides mobilized substantial forces, but neither fired a shot, and no U.S. personnel participated in any manner. The same could not be said with regards to the Soviets, who compared to the Chinese were paradoxically appearing ever more reasonable and peaceful in the eyes of U.S. policymakers and citizens. American and Soviet tanks stood barrel-to-barrel in Berlin, their ships steamed hull-to-hull in the Atlantic, their nuclear weapons ready to launch at a moment's notice if either crisis escalated even incrementally. For some reason, Americans sought to put the Cold War behind them – at least regarding its primary Soviet aspect – during the most perilous period of that entire era.

Was this because Mao acted abroad in a manner even more reckless than Khrushchev? The lone foreign military action the communist Chinese undertook during this critical period of changing perceptions was a very limited foray into India. American

editors decided this merited front-page coverage, and their journalists labeled the Chinese the aggressors, and the Indians the valiant but helpless – and usually hapless – victims. One would thus expect to find hints of a cause-and-effect relationship between this action and perceptions of Mao as a new Hitler. All available evidence is contrary to this intuitive assumption. U.S. officials and the American press were shocked not by Chinese aggression, but by Chinese restraint. Mao Zedong's behavior, while in many ways counterproductive, was controlled and rational. Unlike the U.S. in Korea, China resisted the temptation to escalate. Its armed forces proved they could violate the territory of their most populous neighbor at will and annihilate whatever forces were brought to bear against them, but their autocratic master, unlike the actual Hitler, decided that was enough. While Chinese actions in no way removed the American stigmatization of Mao as a madman, neither did they further degrade his, or his regime's, negative reputation.

The Sino-Indian War of 1962 did inflict irreparable damage upon China's image within the Non-Aligned Movement. Friendly relations with India had been the cornerstone of that nation's outreach to the leaders of these states. It also contributed to the estrangement between the Chinese and the Soviets. The conflict offered the possibility of a split between India and the U.S.S.R., which in the war's aftermath the United States did its best to foment. As a senator, Kennedy advocated closer relations with India. Along with many of his advisers, he felt a genuine affection for that nation not shared by the previous administration. No group of U.S. foreign policy makers at that time could have been more inclined to exploit this apparently golden opportunity.

However, their sincere attempts ran aground on the shoals of the deep antagonism between India and Pakistan. Subcontinental diplomacy could not be refashioned based upon a Cold War template. South Asia was on the periphery of the Cold War, and its ideological struggles proved peripheral to the concerns of that region's leaders and peoples.

Kennedy and his advisers had long viewed democratic India as a symbolic, rather than a strategic, rival to communist China. The two giants would compete, not directly on the battlefield, but indirectly in the realms of state-building and economic development, each seeking to be the model for the non-white and post-colonial world. Yet the processes of state-building and national consolidation led with seeming inexorability to military confrontation. A successful modern nation-state must both exercise control over the entirety of its territory and protect that territory from armed outside incursion. This process requires expansion of state institutions into areas where central authorities previously made their presence felt indirectly, if at all. China and India found their interests in conflict almost as soon as their armed forces came into close proximity. Tibet's long-time status as a buffer was definitively ended when China inserted hundreds of thousands of troops into that region to suppress a 1959 rebellion against communist rule. During the revolt, the Dalai Lama fled Tibet for India, and soldiers from both nations clashed for the first time that October in Ladakh, along India's far northwestern frontier, near where Tibet meets Xinjiang, as well as along the border

of India's North East Frontier Agency, on Tibet's eastern border near Bhutan, in August of that year.²

It was not supposed to have come to this. India was one of the first nations to formally recognize the People's Republic of China. Beset by internal insurgencies, locked in an intractable territorial dispute with Pakistan, and lacking a large army, India was in no position to challenge Chinese power. Nor did its leaders desire such a course of action. Jawaharlal Nehru's foreign policy was based on independence and autonomy, which required good relations on both sides of the Cold War divide, as well as with nations on neither side. The culmination of this approach was Indian acceptance of Zhou En-lai's Five Principles at the 1955 Bandung Conference, which also proved to be the high point of Zhou's early diplomatic career. The principles to which India agreed were territorial integrity and sovereignty, non-aggression, non-interference in internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence. Zhou outmaneuvered John Foster Dulles for India's attention, embarrassing the United States and providing ammunition to Democrats who believed Dulles was needlessly alienating the world's largest democracy.³ In NSC 5409, the National Security Council had stated in 1954 that India and China were becoming antagonists.⁴ This proved to be excessively forward-looking.

² Robert J. McMahon, *The Cold War on the Periphery: The United States, India, and Pakistan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 267; Srinath Raghavan, *War and Peace in Modern India* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 252, 257.

³ Ronald C. Keith, *The Diplomacy of Zhou Enlai* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989), 61, 87.

⁴ Noam Kochavi, *A Conflict Perpetuated: China Policy During the Kennedy Years* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 2002), 3.

By the time there was sufficient conflict to exploit, Dulles was dead, and Eisenhower about to leave office.⁵

The events which directly led to the border war began near the end of the first year of the Kennedy administration, and were initiated by India, albeit in response to Chinese provocations which had previously gone unanswered. For several years, the Chinese had been constructing military roads in Aksai Chin, within the far northern section of Indian Ladakh. This was an entirely barren square-shaped plateau about one hundred miles on each side, elevated approximately four miles above sea level. The region contained no permanent human population, but was an ideal location for a highway connecting Tibet to Sinkiang, which would greatly improve military communications along China's western borders. The area held no clear strategic value for India, and they had never stationed soldiers in the wasteland, which was shielded from the rest of Ladakh by the Karakorum mountain range, part of the formidable Pamir chain.⁶ Regarding how little value this territory held for India, U.S. Ambassador to that nation John Kenneth Galbraith quipped in his diary during the war in 1962 that the Chinese had “occupied it for two years before the Indians seem to have discovered they were there,” an assessment which was only a slight exaggeration.⁷ The Chinese entered Aksai Chin in 1957. India did not lodge a complaint until 1959, and did not station

⁵ In fairness to the Eisenhower Administration, the Indian government had feared China since the early 1950s, but assumed the Chinese threat would take the form of small-scale infiltration and the fomenting of internal revolts. See Raghavan, *War and Peace in Modern India*, 234.

⁶ Steven A. Hoffmann, *India and the China Crisis* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 11; Neville Maxwell, *India's China War* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1970), 236.

⁷ John Kenneth Galbraith, *Ambassador's Journal: A Personal Account of the Kennedy Years* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1969), p. 378.

soldiers in the disputed region until December 1961, when Nehru established his “forward” policy, largely in response to nationalistic outcries in parliament regarding violations of national sovereignty. This action violated an agreement Nehru made with Zhou in 1959.⁸

Scattered voices in the press quickly noticed something momentous was occurring on the proverbial roof of the world. That month, *Time* magazine proclaimed the end of *Panch Shila*, declaring that “Nehru's claim to a special neutralist magic in his dealing with Communism” was “not dead but severely damaged.” It also mockingly quoted the Indian slogan from the previous decade “*Hindi Chini bhai bhai*,” Hindi for “Indians and Chinese are brothers.”⁹ In January 1962, *Reader's Digest* reprinted an article written by John E. Frazier for the conservative Swiss weekly magazine *Die Weltwoche* the previous November, entitled “Struggle for the Himalayas.” Based on his travels to the Indian front, Frazier wrote that “amid the glacial ravines and snow-capped turrets of earth's greatest mountains, one of history's decisive political battles is gathering momentum. In simplest terms, it is a conflict over borders; in far greater terms it is part of the protracted struggle for the world.”¹⁰

In March, *U.S. News* reported growing sentiment in Washington that “sooner or later India is going to have to fight Red China.” Declaring the terrain “an impossible battlefield for conventional warfare,” the magazine claimed American military experts had reached a consensus that this would be “a guerrilla war that could take on

⁸ Maxwell, *India's China War*, 291.

⁹ “End of *Panch Shila*,” *Time*, December 15, 1961, 30.

¹⁰ John E. Frazier “Struggle for the Himalayas,” *Reader's Digest*, January 1962, 172.

dimensions dwarfing the present combat against the Communists in South Vietnam.”

The writer added that “the Chinese Communists are guerrilla specialists” and the Indian army was “ill-equipped.”¹¹ The two-fold assumption behind these predictions was these nations were incapable of conventional warfare in such forbidding terrain and that if they chose to fight, it would not be a fight over mere strips of border territories. Instead, the Chinese were looking to challenge the internal legitimacy of the Indian state. Though the predictions of imminent war would prove to be accurate, prognostications as to how the war would transpire were well off the mark.

During these months, experts within the administration repeatedly downplayed the chance of war. A Special National Intelligence Estimate from November 1961 stated “we do not believe that Peiping will launch a major military effort against India during the next two years or so.”¹² A National Intelligence Estimate released the following May did opine that “Peiping apparently desires to improve relations with India but it will be very difficult to resolve the border differences.”¹³ But this only meant the dispute was likely to continue, not that it would escalate into outright war. In the January 2, 1962 meeting regarding the Sino-Soviet conflict, Secretary of State Dean Rusk warned of the dangers of overestimating Chinese power. As his example, he mentioned that “relative Chinese power on the North India border” was “considerably less than Chinese power

¹¹ “If Red China Pushes India Too Far,” *U.S. News & World Report*, March 12, 1962, 72-74.

¹² SNIE 13-3-61: Communist Capabilities and Intentions in the Far East, November 30, 1961, 6. From *Tracking The Dragon: National Intelligence Estimates on China During the Era of Mao, 1948-1976* (Washington, D.C.: National Intelligence Council, 2004).

¹³ NIE 13-4-62: Prospects for Communist China, May 2, 1962, p. 9. From *Tracking The Dragon*.

elsewhere.”¹⁴ The accuracy of this assessment depended on what Rusk meant by relative. The Secretary of State was correct that, relative to the Chinese military forces stationed on its other borders, those abutting India were slight. However, compared to what India could muster to oppose them, they were quite formidable. Four-fifths for India's half-million man army (one-fifth the size of China's) were stationed opposite Pakistan, leaving at most 100,000 regulars to guard the more than thousand mile-long border with China.¹⁵ China would thus face a potentially easier task concentrating decisive force in the Himalayas than along other disputed borders such as the Taiwan Straits. Of additional importance was the fact that this was the rare Chinese border well-removed from American or Soviet military forces.

In August 1962, *Time* took note of the pressures Nehru faced, particularly “fears in Parliament that India will yield on China's terms” and “cries of 'appeasement'” occasioned by reports of possible negotiations.¹⁶ On what would turn out to be the eve of the war, *Business Week* predicted “a few weeks of skirmishing, followed by military hibernation.” Only in the following year would the fighting “escalate into a major conflict.”¹⁷ Meanwhile, *Newsweek* wondered if Mao's “aggressive policies on India's frontiers could conceivably provoke an open break between the two Communist

¹⁴ Memorandum From James C. Thomson, Jr. to the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs (Harriman), Washington, January 12, 1962. Subject: Secretary's Policy Planning Meeting, January 2, 1962: Discussion of the Sino-Soviet Conflict and U.S. Policy. From *FRUS, 1961-1963, Vol. 22: Northeast Asia* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1996), 179.

¹⁵ D.K. Palit, *War in High Himalaya: The Indian Army in Crisis, 1962* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991), 12; G.S. Bhargava, *The Battle of NEFA: The Undeclared War*. (London: Allied Publishers Private Limited, 1964), 26; Maxwell, *India's China War*, 230.

¹⁶ “On China's Terms?” *Time*, August 17, 1962, 28.

¹⁷ “Will Asia's two giants risk an all-out war?” *Business Week*, October 20, 1962, 41.

giants.”¹⁸ Nehru shared many of these assumptions. The Prime Minister and his Defense Secretary, Krishna Menon, made numerous references during this period to their fear of domestic public opinion if they were seen to be appeasing China in Aksai Chin. Along with the Kennedy administration and the American press, Nehru believed that any war between Asia's two giants would escalate into a massive conflict. In his view, the superpowers would not tolerate such a development.¹⁹ Domestic conditions thus necessitated that Nehru provoke China, while he believed the international situation would prevent the Chinese from responding too forcefully.

Because of a combination of greater public accountability and reduced fear of a political leader's wrath, democracies should engage in a more thorough processing of information – particularly negative information – within and between military and civilian bureaucracies, than autocracies. This would provide leaders of democratic nations with a more accurate picture of foreign threats and domestic capabilities. For this reason, democratic regimes are theoretically less likely than their authoritarian counterparts to initiate wars they stand a poor chance of winning.²⁰ Yet India's showing against China in 1962 displayed just the opposite. Chroniclers of the war consistently and insistently highlighted a failure among the India's political leaders to acknowledge reality and process unfavorable information. Neville Maxwell, a British journalist who

¹⁸ “Blood on a Mountain Border,” *Newsweek*, October 22, 1962, 51.

¹⁹ Srinath Raghavan, *War and Peace in Modern India* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 262, 279-281.

²⁰ For both quantitative and qualitative evidence of this, see Dan Reiter and Allan C. Stam, *Democracies at War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002). Reiter defended his work in a July 2011 H-Diplo Roundtable entitled “Democracy and Victory:” www.h-net.org/~diplo/ISSF/PDF/ISSF-Roundtable-2-12.pdf.

published the most widely-cited book on the conflict, wrote of a “process of mutual delusion” between Nehru and demoralized, sycophantic generals.²¹ G.S. Bhargava, an Indian journalist who wrote the first lengthy account of the war, claimed that “only intelligence which suited the political thinking of the men at the helm of affairs was well received.”²² D.K. Palit, who was Director of Military Operations at the time, and wrote the most-detailed analysis of the conflict's military operations, called the conduct of India's generals and politicians “so inept that it verged on the bizarre” and talked of “a structured gap in communications between the government and the military” which led to the “carrying out of flag-waving operations in a logistical vacuum.”²³ These comments could just as easily be applied to Gamal Nasser's performance in 1967 when, like Nehru, he believed provocative actions designed to appease domestic opinion would not lead to a vigorous counterstroke by a powerful enemy, and failed to behave as a leader who understood his army was unprepared to face such an attack.

According to Palit, the Indian General Staff destroyed all records pertaining to the conflict shortly after the war's conclusion, another action more typical of an autocracy according to those who believe in the superior war-fighting abilities of democracies. None of the other sources made this claim, and the absence of these primary sources from historical accounts could merely reflect an unwillingness on the part of the Indian armed forces to make them available. Surviving diplomatic records do provide a clue into what India's political leaders were thinking. The December 1961

²¹ Maxwell, *India's China War*, 342.

²² Bhargava, *The Battle of NEFA*, 4.

²³ Palit, *War in High Himalaya*, 1, 2, 94.

invasion and annexation of the Portuguese colony of Goa, the same month Nehru moved soldiers into Ladakh, displayed a new-found aggressiveness on the part of the Indian leadership. The success of Operation Vijay against token Portuguese resistance left political and military leaders overconfident.²⁴ The seizure of Goa, along with Diu and Daman, from a NATO member nation distressed American policymakers at the time, but resulted in no negative repercussions for India.²⁵ Palit recalled that General Bijji Kaul, commander in the Northeast Frontier Area, or NEFA, assumed Chinese troops were demoralized and incapable of taking offensive action.²⁶ This was probably the best explanation for why the Indians would provoke the Chinese on two widely separate fronts. In September 1962, Indian troops seized the Thag La Ridge in the far west of NEFA, near the Bhutan border.²⁷ The Thag La Ridge was four miles north of the border claimed by India.²⁸ Even by its own estimation, India had launched an armed incursion into Chinese territory.

India never expressed any hope that it could concentrate sufficient men and materiel on the Ladakh frontier to overpower Chinese forces in Aksai Chin. Furthermore, the legitimacy of their claim to the region was open to question, since even some maps from the British colonial period showed the territory as belonging to China.²⁹

²⁴ Ibid. vii, 113.

²⁵ McMahon, *The Cold War on the Periphery*, 281.

²⁶ Palit, *War in High Himalaya*, 110; the same point was made by a former Kennedy State Department official in Allen S. Whiting, *The Chinese Calculus of Deterrence* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1975), 220.

²⁷ A Chronology of the Sino-Indian Border Dispute, 1, JFKL, Hilsman Papers, Box 1, Folder 19.

²⁸ Maxwell, *India's China War*, 298.

²⁹ Steven A. Hoffmann, *India and the China Crisis* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 11; Maxwell, *India's China War*. (London: Jonathan Cape, 1970), 12.

The border in NEFA, however, had been delineated by the 1914 McMahon line as part of the Simla Convention between British India and Tibet. No Chinese government ever recognized the legitimacy of this demarcation. Both nations officially based their respective claims on the borders of pre-colonial polities, the Kashmiri princes in the case of Aksai Chin for India, and Tibetan rulers in the case of NEFA for China.³⁰ The irony that the Kashmiris and Tibetans were each fighting for independence from the nations which drew upon their past for territorial legitimacy was no doubt lost on the Indians and the Chinese. India's curious moves in NEFA in August 1962 could thus be seen as linked with those in Ladakh the previous December. Tactically, India might have been trying to coerce the Chinese by luring them into a fight on more favorable terrain. Strategically, Nehru hoped to barter part of Aksai Chin for formal Chinese acceptance of the McMahon Line. Finally, India's Prime Minister drew from U.S. experiences with the Soviet Union the lesson that communist regimes respected shows of force and displayed contempt for weakness and offers of compromise.³¹ Troop movements were thus an attempt at diplomacy by other means.

NEFA may have been the more favorable theater for confronting China, but it was still far from ideal. India stationed several divisions in the area, while all of Ladakh contained less than one.³² The terrain in NEFA, consisting of a 60-mile deep band of heavily forested jungles and mountains between three and four miles above sea level, superficially appeared to be excellent defensive terrain. Upon closer examination, it was

³⁰ Maxwell, *India's China War*, 27.

³¹ Raghavan, *War and Peace in Modern India*, 244, 260, 252.

³² Maxwell, *India's China War*, 236.

anything but, particularly in the face of an attacking force which had become adept at high-altitude fighting and logistics due to years of experience in Tibet. On the Indian side of the border, the northernmost roads terminated ten miles south of the McMahon Line.³³ Indian soldiers closer to the border, to say nothing of beyond it on Thag La, had to be supplied by air. The mountain valleys south of the McMahon Line in NEFA ran north-south, perpendicular to the front line, precluding lateral defensive adjustments to counter enemy concentrations. General Kaul thus faced the unenviable choice of dispersing his soldiers in order to defend every possible avenue of approach, risking destruction in detail, or keeping his front-line forces concentrated but susceptible to being outflanked and cut off from reinforcement. On the Chinese side of the border, the landscape was quite different. The terrain was less forested, less undulating, and snowfall less common, making road-building and maintenance far easier. The Chinese could thus concentrate their soldiers for the attack with much greater ease than the Indians could for defense.³⁴ Upon entering Indian territory, the Chinese would face this challenging terrain, and have to fight nature in addition to the enemy. But they would prove quite adept at both.

The Chinese reacted to India's encroachment onto their territory in a deliberate and methodical manner, setting the standard for their behavior throughout the conflict. On September 16, nearly two weeks after the initial incursion, and while a brigade of Indian soldiers was busy entrenching itself on or near the Thag La Ridge, they formally

³³ Palit, *War in High Himalaya*, 202.

³⁴ Maxwell, *India's China War*, 301.

protested India's "nibbling" at Chinese territory.³⁵ There was a certain internal logic to India's actions. Once the assumption had been made that it was imperative to defend the McMahon Line, taking the Thag La Ridge was advisable, since it overlooked and commanded Indian positions. However, it was vulnerable to envelopment, and all sources agreed that the Indian brigade in question, along with most of the soldiers in NEFA, were poorly-clothed and ill-supplied with weapons, ammunition, and entrenching tools. The Chinese north of Thag La, equipped with chainsaws, reportedly laughed within earshot of the Indian positions when they observed their adversaries attempting to use pick-axes and shovels to cut down trees to buttress their defensive works.³⁶ This lack of respect may help explain why the Chinese took their time engaging the Indian forward position even while the enemy was strengthening its defenses.

After repeated entreaties to the Indians requesting a mutual withdrawal of all military forces 20 kilometers from the disputed McMahon Line, on October 20 the Chinese attacked Thag La in force, quickly overcoming resistance and crossing the border. By October 22, the day Kennedy announced the naval blockade of Cuba, an entire Indian brigade had been annihilated, and the rest of their forces in that sector were in full retreat to well south of the proposed 20 kilometer buffer zone.³⁷ Also on that day, Republican Senator Bourke B. Hickenlooper asked John McCone, the Republican head of the C.I.A., if any intelligence indicated a connection between Soviet moves in Cuba

³⁵ A Chronology of the Sino-Indian Border Dispute, 1, JFKL, Hilsman Papers.

³⁶ Bhargava, *The Battle of NEFA*, 35.

³⁷ Maxwell, *India's China War*, 367.

and Chinese actions in India. McCone responded there was none.³⁸ Two days later, after Nehru rejected mediation offers from Khrushchev and Nasser, the Chinese captured Tawang, the region's largest town, located 17 miles south of the McMahon Line.³⁹ The Indians elected to make a stand at the Se La massif three miles south of Tawang, concentrating their crack 4th Division – which was better trained and equipped than any other Indian force in the region – at this major pass. Running more than 20 miles from east to west, and parallel to the border, this formidable mountain ridge was the northernmost defensible position in the western sector of NEFA.⁴⁰ The Chinese prepared for an assault on Se La by building roads from the border to Tawang. They also concentrated a division on the eastern end of NEFA near the town of Walong.⁴¹ On November 8, the Indians rejected yet another offer by the Chinese for a mutual withdrawal beyond the proposed buffer zone. Despite the previous intransigence displayed by Nehru, this action surprised Ambassador Galbraith.⁴² The Indians maintained that, given the contrasting geography and infrastructure on both sides of the McMahon Line, such a buffer zone would in the future allow the Chinese to attack with impunity, effectively rendering the Indian side of the border defenseless.⁴³

During this lull in the fighting, the United States weighed its options, particularly after the conclusion of the Cuban Missile Crisis. In a November 2 memorandum, Roger

³⁸ Ernest R. May and Philip D. Zelikow, *The Kennedy Tapes: Inside The White House During The Cuban Missile Crisis* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 254.

³⁹ Chronology of the Sino-Indian Border Dispute, 4, JFKL, Hilsman Papers.

⁴⁰ Palit, *War in High Himalaya*, 252.

⁴¹ Maxwell, *India's China War*, 409.

⁴² Ibid. 367; Galbraith, *Ambassador's Journal*, 403.

⁴³ Raghavan, *War and Peace in Modern India.*, 276.

Hilsman, while recognizing the opportunity presented by China's actions for "increased understanding of and sympathy" for the United States among neutral nations, worried about "overcommitment" to Nehru to the point where "our prestige is in his hands." Still, Hilsman predicted that if the war were to be "enlarged," China would come under financial strain while the "free world nations" could subsidize India's efforts.⁴⁴ At this point, the United States preferred a protracted war, and believed India was making similar calculations. An SNIE from November 9 recognized that the "Indian strategy is to hold the Chinese advance through the winter," and predicted an Indian counteroffensive the following spring. China's intentions were labeled "uncertain."⁴⁵ Opposing this view was Ayub Khan, the military dictator of Pakistan, who during this period told Galbraith he believed the Chinese had "very limited intentions." Given this assessment, Khan saw no reason to take the pressure off India on his borders so his nation's chief enemy could reinforce in NEFA.⁴⁶ According to the SNIE, a continuation of the conflict into the following spring would lead to the involvement of far larger numbers of soldiers on both sides. At the time, the United States estimated force strengths of about 7,000 men on each side in Ladakh/Aksai Chin. The NSC claimed total Indian forces in NEFA stood at 35,000, with 15,000 currently in the front lines at Se La and Walong, facing approximately 20,000 Chinese.⁴⁷ Robert Komer, whom historian Robert J. McMahon called "the administration's most effective advocate of a pro-Indian

⁴⁴ Memorandum on United States Policy in the Sino-Indian Conflict, November 2, 1962, 1-4, JFKL, Hilsman Papers, Box 1, Folder 17.

⁴⁵ SNIE 13/31-62: Short-Term Outlook and Implications for the Sino/Indian Conflict, November 9, 1962, 3. From *Tracking The Dragon*.

⁴⁶ Galbraith, *Ambassador's Journal*, 400.

⁴⁷ SNIE 13/31-62, 4, 7, 8.

policy,” wrote to McGeorge Bundy on November 14 that “our real problem is to keep up Indian will to throw the Chinese back next spring.”⁴⁸ It hardly seemed conceivable that the Chinese would be able to bring the war to a successful conclusion in a week's time.

Before the fighting climaxed, Roger Hilsman composed an analysis of the strategic implications of the war for the United States and the region entitled “The Five-Fold Dilemma.” After reading it, Komer told Hilsman it was “the best job, bar none, that I have seen to date. As you know, we got it right to the President.”⁴⁹ That Komer wrote these words after the war's unexpected conclusion demonstrated Hilsman's far-sightedness. The five dilemmas were ascertaining communist Chinese intentions, the future regional strategic situation, the Soviets' dilemma in choosing between China and India, and U.S. relations with India and Pakistan respectively. These last two were at cross-purposes and in many ways zero-sum, much like Soviet relations with China and India. “Minimal aid” would “probably not satisfy the Indians,” but any significant military assistance to India would antagonize Pakistan. That nation, while not about to become fully “neutralist,” would “persist in pursuing a more independent foreign policy than in prior years.” Meanwhile, India's pleas for U.S. military assistance were “bringing about a de facto change in its policy of non-alignment.”⁵⁰

China's goals were, at a minimum, the security of Tibet, and at a maximum the transformation of Nepal, Sikkim, and Bhutan into Chinese “satellites.” Hilsman astutely

⁴⁸ McMahan, *The Cold War on the Periphery*, 275; Komer to Bundy, November 14, 1962, JFKL, National Security Files, Box 322, Folder 13.

⁴⁹ Komer to Hilsman, November 21, 1962, JFKL, Hilsman Papers, Box 1, Folder 20.

⁵⁰ The Five-Fold Dilemma: The Implications of the Sino-Indian Conflict, November 17, 1962, 2, 4, JFKL, Hilsman Papers, Box 1, Folder 20. Underlined in original.

recognized that China faced multiple constraints. At the operational level, there were the “problems with supply lines and maintaining troop concentrations in rugged territory in winter.” Strategically, the P.R.C. had to worry about raids from Taiwan.⁵¹ In fact, that week *U.S. News* published an article entitled “With Mao Attacking India – Time to Unleash Chiang?” While not going so far as to propose that course of action, the magazine reported that Chiang was making noises to that effect.⁵² Finally, the suffering of the Chinese people meant that “little nationalistic fervor could be aroused for military advances into India.” If the Chinese communists behaved prudently, they would keep the war limited. Yet even if that were so, “Moscow can be hoisted by its own petard that communist aggression is a contradiction in terms.”⁵³ Washington and Moscow would each have to choose which of its allies to favor, and lose some support among the other. But China and India were far more important to the Soviets than Pakistan and India were to the U.S. Even so, regardless of how the war concluded, U.S. exploitation of the situation would be a delicate process.

After the Indians launched an unsuccessful spoiling attack on November 14 from their redoubt at Se La, the Chinese struck on November 16 at both Se La and Walong.⁵⁴ Though it could be outflanked on foot a few miles to both the east and west, the Indian

⁵¹ Ibid. 5, 7.

⁵² “With Mao Attacking India – Time To Unleash Chiang?” *U.S. News & World Report*, November 19, 1962, 91. Chiang's position regarding the war was somewhat ambivalent. While he would no doubt have welcomed Mao's defeat on any front, the Guomindong, as the self-styled titular rulers of all of China, opposed formal recognition of the McMahon Line, and made that clear to the U.S. at the time.

⁵³ The Five-Fold Dilemma, 7, 13.

⁵⁴ Maxwell, *India's China War*, 393; Hoffmann, *India and the China Crisis*, 186.

Army believed the Se La position “impregnable.”⁵⁵ Even if surrounded, the generals argued, the 4th Division had access to enough food and ammunition to hold out until winter, which would arrive in early December. On November 18, a Chinese division overpowered Indian forces in Walong, and those at Se La embarked upon a chaotic withdrawal, during which most members of the 4th Indian division were either killed or captured.⁵⁶ That same day, the Chinese launched a final offensive in Ladakh as well, clearing Aksai Chin of Indian troops.⁵⁷ Successful on all fronts, and facing no remaining organized resistance, over the next two days the Chinese rapidly advanced 30 miles further south into NEFA. Their soldiers now stood to the edge of the rich plains of Assam, a center of Indian tea and petroleum production. Galbraith wrote that November 20 was “the first time I ever witnessed the disintegration of public morale.”⁵⁸ Two days earlier, Nehru had declared a state of “total war.”⁵⁹ The day before that, after the Soviets only pledged to deliver six MIG-21 fighter jets, Nehru asked Kennedy for 12 U.S.-piloted fighter squadrons.⁶⁰

Such an immense air armada was intended to both deter the Chinese from descending into Assam and to protect Indian cities from strategic bombing. Hilsman worried that “Indian morale might break in the face of Chinese attacks on cities,” which were in range of planes stationed at bases in Tibet and had almost nothing in the way of

⁵⁵ Bhargava, *The Battle of NEFA*, 99.

⁵⁶ Palit, *War in High Himalaya*, 306, 322. In 1965, India reported their total casualties in NEFA as 1,383 killed, 1,696 wounded, and 3,968 captured, meaning official losses of one-fourth their strength in theater, and much higher for units engaged: Maxwell, *India's China War*, 424.

⁵⁷ A Chronology of the Sino-Indian Border Dispute, 11, JFKL, Hilsman Papers, Box 1, Folder 19.

⁵⁸ Galbraith, *Ambassador's Journal*, 423.

⁵⁹ A Chronology of the Sino-Indian Border Dispute, 11.

⁶⁰ Ibid; McMahon, *Cold War on the Periphery*, 292.

air defenses to protect them.⁶¹ Such fears had deterred the Indian Air Force from providing tactical air support to besieged or retreating Indian ground forces in NEFA. According to D.K. Palit, the Tibetan bases lacked the extended runways and sophisticated maintenance facilities necessary for conducting long-distance sorties from extremely high altitudes, of which he claimed the Indian Army and the United States were both aware.⁶² Given the overall low state of maintenance in the Chinese air force, and their shortage of trained personnel, this was most likely the case. In the end, Chinese strategic bombing capabilities, and Nehru's request for American planes and pilots, became moot. Before Kennedy could answer Nehru, Mao intervened, ordering the retreat of all Chinese forces from NEFA on the night of November 20. According to his unilaterally declared cease fire, India must cede all of Aksai Chin and refrain from entering the previously proposed buffer zone in NEFA. China would do the same north of the McMahon Line.⁶³ In the words of John Kenneth Galbraith, “like a thief in the night, peace arrived.”⁶⁴

China's restraint shocked both the American press and the administration. *Time* opened its cover story on the war with the line “Red China behaved in so inscrutably Oriental a manner last week that even Asians were baffled.” Henry Luce's magazine was left to conclude that “the Chinese had less ambitious aims to begin with.”⁶⁵ In their cover

⁶¹ Undated Memo: Implications for the US of the Indian Defeats, 1, JFKL, Hilsman Papers, Box 1, Folder 17; Roger Hilsman, *To Move A Nation: The Politics of Foreign Policy in the Administration of John F. Kennedy* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1967), 332.

⁶² Palit, *War in High Himalaya*, 168, 375.

⁶³ Maxwell, *India's China War*, 417.

⁶⁴ Galbraith, *Ambassador's Journal*, 426.

⁶⁵ “Never Again the Same,” *Time*, November 30, 1962, 23, 27.

story, *U.S. News* told its readers that “Mao Tse-tung caught the whole world by surprise when he pulled back from what looked like total victory.”⁶⁶ Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs Paul Nitze, who acted as the Pentagon's point man on the war, admitted in his memoirs that “the Chinese Communists surprised us all” with their actions. According to Nitze, the original assumption that “Chinese intentions were limited, more political than military,” had been superseded in the war's final days by a belief that “their appetite for more territory” might become “whetted by their successes.”⁶⁷ In his memoirs, Hilsman quoted a Kennedy aide asking him “can you imagine the difficulty we would have with the Pentagon in pulling back and giving up territory that had cost that many casualties, no matter how great the political end it served?”⁶⁸ Lord Caccia, a former undersecretary for the Foreign Office in Great Britain, claimed in 1966 that this was “the first time in recorded history that a great power has not exploited military success by demanding something more.”⁶⁹ If only on this one matter, Mao appeared in American eyes less like Hitler and more like Bismarck. According to the *Boston Globe*, “the Chinese never operate recklessly on the strategic level.”⁷⁰ Some had sensed this even before the final attack. In mid-November, the *New*

⁶⁶ Robert P. Martin, “Behind China's Strange Moves,” *U.S. News & World Report*, December 10, 1962, 51.

⁶⁷ Paul H. Nitze, with Ann M. Smith and Steven L. Rearden, *From Hiroshima to Glasnost: At the Center of Decision, A Memoir* (New York: Grove Wiedenfeld, 1989), 240.

⁶⁸ Hilsman, *To Move A Nation*, 338.

⁶⁹ Maxwell, *India's China War*, 419.

⁷⁰ James D. White, “Why Did Red China Act Now?” *Boston Globe*, November 22, 1962, 55.

Republic claimed “China needs only to demonstrate her basic power. That is what she now is trying to do.”⁷¹

Galbraith wrote in his journal at the time that the war's ending “would have been extremely confusing to Napoleon.”⁷² Searching for a more appropriate military figure through which to view Mao's actions, the *Los Angeles Times* quoted a resident of Singapore telling one of their reporters that if he was surprised, “go and read Sun Tzu.”⁷³ Yet the seemingly strange conclusion to the Sino-Indian War can also be understood in a Clausewitzian strategic framework as a limited war for limited aims fought with limited means. Mao recognized that, in a mere border struggle, India's center of gravity was its forces in NEFA, and once these had been rendered helpless, he could dictate terms. Furthermore, Chinese divisions were at the end of a tenuous logistical tether which the heavy winter snows would soon sever. Just as they had to attack quickly, they had to retreat hastily as well. A wintertime raid into Assam would have served no discernible strategic objective, and only further alienated global opinion.

Already, there were press reports of criticism from African nations and “disillusionment with Peking's talk of 'brotherhood.’”⁷⁴ On a tour of African capitals shortly after the war, Zhou En-lai confronted “the reservations of several African leaders” regarding the war. The Sino-Indian War thus led to a convergence of global opinion regarding China, making it seem less reasonable to those who previously held

⁷¹ Mark Mancall. “What Red China Wants,” *The New Republic*, November 17, 1962, 9.

⁷² Galbraith, *Ambassador's Journal*, 426.

⁷³ Dennis Bloodworth, “Ancient Strategy Guides Red China,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 2, 1962, F1.

⁷⁴ “Red China's Invasion of India Jolts Africa,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, November 11, 1962, 14.

the nation and its leaders in some esteem and more reasonable to those in the U.S. who thought the worst of the Chinese communists. Even as internally the war was seen as demonstrating Mao's capacity for rationality, American propaganda abroad used the conflict as proof of the "ideological craziness" of Mao's regime.⁷⁵

Mostly, the American press enjoyed partaking in a mixture of *schadenfreude* at Nehru's expense and hope for increasing friendship and cooperation between the United States and India. According to *Time*, nonalignment "was ending in disaster." In the aftermath of the humiliating defeat, "India will never be the same again, nor will Nehru." Gone were the beliefs that communism was not a threat, and that the Soviets could restrain the Chinese.⁷⁶ *Newsweek* claimed that, by arousing Indian anger and moving that nation towards the U.S., "the Chinese have made a miscalculation of major proportions."⁷⁷ Nehru had been moved, in the words of A.M. Rosenthal of the *New York Times*, "out of a world of dreams."⁷⁸ The prevalent notion was that India was attacked not for its territory, but its ideology. During the war, the *Los Angeles Times* claimed that China's attacks were "motivated by the jealousy of the progress of the democratic India."⁷⁹ Writing several months after the war in *Current History*, Vidya Prakash Dutt theorized that "India had done too well for China's liking," which feared that nation's experiment with democracy "gave promise of success."⁸⁰ This was in keeping with what

⁷⁵ Keith, *The Diplomacy of Zhou Enlai*, 141, 138.

⁷⁶ "Never Again the Same," *Time*, November 30, 1962, 23.

⁷⁷ "Slowly, the Elephant Stands Up," *Newsweek*, November 26, 1962, 29.

⁷⁸ A.M. Rosenthal, "Awakening for India – and the 'Nonaligned'," *New York Times Magazine*, November 19, 1962, 122. Reprinted in *Reader's Digest*, February 1963.

⁷⁹ I.C. Sharma, "Red China Fears Democracy," *Los Angeles Times*, November 11, 1962, K3.

⁸⁰ Vidya Prakash Dutt, "China: Jealous Neighbor," *Current History*, March 1963, 140.

Chester Bowles and John F. Kennedy had said in the late 1950s regarding the stakes of India's success or failure as the world's largest democracy. In addition, the editors of the *New Republic* grasped the aspects of power which were involved, writing during the war that from China's point of view "India must be cut down to size and forced to acknowledge Chinese primacy, if not, in the last analysis, hegemony."⁸¹

Such fears inspired Nehru's pleas for support. The day after the cease-fire was announced, Hilsman from the State Department, Nitze from the Pentagon, and Carl Kaysen from the White House staff flew 18 hours from Washington to New Delhi. Averell Harriman led the delegation in his first high-profile diplomatic assignment for Kennedy. They traveled on what was known as a "McNamara Special," a converted KC-135 jet tanker normally used for mid-air refueling, which the cost-conscious Defense Secretary preferred to chartered jets that included such pricey amenities as sound-proofing, windows, and climate control. Nitze termed the flight "unbelievably uncomfortable," and Hilsman agreed.⁸² Though beds were installed on the plane, the men arrived exhausted, examples of Galbraith's quip earlier that month that "one of the great problems of the world is that all crises are almost certainly handled by tired men."⁸³ When he wrote these words, Galbraith had Nehru in mind. Hilsman observed at the time that Nehru gave "the impression of a tired and very old man," as well as someone "embarrassed" to have been put in the position of a beggar.⁸⁴ Nitze, by

⁸¹ "China on the March," *The New Republic*, November 10, 1962, 4.

⁸² Nitze, *From Hiroshima to Glasnost*, 240; Hilsman, *To Move A Nation*, 328.

⁸³ Galbraith, *Ambassador's Journal*, 392.

⁸⁴ Memorandum For The Record: Meeting with Prime Minister Nehru, November 22, 1962, 1, 2, JFKL, Hilsman Papers, Box 1, Folder 17.

contrast, recalled Nehru as “a charming, impressive man” who appeared “dapper and handsome,” perhaps the only positive words about the Indian Prime Minister's appearance and demeanor during this period which have made it into the historical record.⁸⁵

According to Hilsman' report, “our welcome was not warm; it was pro forma, it was withdrawn, it was very limited.” Harriman did not start the meeting off on a positive note when he reminded Nehru of “our association with India in World War II and the magnificent performance that Indian troops had given in the Middle East and in the Burma campaign.” According to Hilsman, Nehru “did not really respond” to this reminder of Indians giving their lives for the British Empire he worked for decades to expel from the Subcontinent. Conversely, the Americans were both amused and offended by the experience of having to walk by the numerous pictures of leaders of non-aligned nations which lined the hallway to the meeting room. None of these leaders had lifted a finger to help India in its hour of need. “The irony,” according to Hilsman, “was more than funny – it was oppressive.”⁸⁶ No participant recorded observing the other great irony of the situation, which was that participants in the China-Burma-India theater such as Hilsman were returning less than two decades later to deal with a threat to Assam not from the Japanese, or the Soviets, but from the then-prostrate Chinese.

With the exception of Carl Kaysen, who was “very much in favor of a war over the Chinese incursion into Indian territory,” the Americans were largely of one moderate

⁸⁵ Nitze, *From Hiroshima to Glasnost*, 241.

⁸⁶ Memorandum For The Record: Meeting with Prime Minister Nehru, 2, JFKL, Hilsman Papers, Box 1, Folder 17.

mind on the matter, Nitze, for once, played the dove, arguing for Indian acceptance of the cease fire in order to buy time to both revive Indian military strength and possibly resolve the Kashmir dispute with Pakistan. In his memo, Hilsman recorded Galbraith as arguing to Nehru that “a settlement of the Kashmir issue is fundamental to the problem before us,” namely containing China.⁸⁷ Contradicting Hilsman, Nitze recalled Galbraith opposing putting pressure on Nehru regarding Kashmir, terming the matter “too sensitive.”⁸⁸ In his published diary, Galbraith appeared to resolve the discrepancy by claiming he believed the initiation of a dialogue between India and Pakistan might bring about a “thaw” in relations, rather than a swift and comprehensive solution to the Kashmir question, which was what Harriman and the other visitors from stateside were pushing for.⁸⁹

After a brief tour of what had been the NEFA front, the dignitaries flew to Islamabad, where they were once again reminded of how little the Cold War mattered in South Asia, even to a formal ally and recipient of U.S. military aid. Nitze recalled that rather than being distressed at China's actions, the Pakistanis “were hopeful that enough military pressure from Communist China would induce Nehru to concede the disputed territory in the Kashmir to them.”⁹⁰ In a telegram, Hilsman reported to Washington that

⁸⁷ Memorandum For The Record: Meeting with Prime Minister Nehru, 1, 3, JFKL, Hilsman Papers, Box 1, Folder 17.

⁸⁸ Nitze, *From Hiroshima to Glasnost*, 241.

⁸⁹ Galbraith, *Ambassador's Journal*, 446.

⁹⁰ Nitze, *From Hiroshima to Glasnost*, 242.

“some in Pakistan really believe China was Pakistan's natural ally.”⁹¹ After ten days on the region, the party returned home, having made no progress with either nation.

Historians have generally regarded the Sino-Indian War, coupled with the concurrent Cuban Missile Crisis, as a turning point in the American image of the Chinese communists relative to the Soviets, an event which, in the words of Noam Kochavi, “consolidated the perceptual distinction between a hopeless renegade Chinese leadership and a more civilized Kremlin.”⁹² Kochavi was echoing the earlier conclusions of Warren Cohen, who two decades prior wrote that China's actions “undermined the argument that the People's Republic was not aggressive or expansionist.”⁹³ The recollections of those Americans involved painted a very different picture. Thomas Hughes from the State Department's office of the Director of Intelligence and Research wrote at the time that China “stands to gain political capital by following a display of strength with a display of forbearance.”⁹⁴ Five years after the fact, and writing at the height of the Cultural Revolution, Hilsman claimed the “most portentous lesson” of the war was “the skill and sophistication demonstrated by the Chinese Communists.” The attack had been “a masterpiece,” a “single, limited, disciplined and controlled operation directed to and subordinated to a political end.”⁹⁵ Nitze recalled how the

⁹¹ Telegram, November 30, 1962, 2, JFKL, Hilsman Papers, Box 1, Folder 17.

⁹² Noam Kochavi, *A Conflict Perpetuated: China Policy During the Kennedy Years* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 2002), 200.

⁹³ Warren I. Cohen. *America's Response to China: An Interpretive History of Sino-American Relations* (John Wiley & Sons: New York, 1980), 233.

⁹⁴ Thomas Hughes, Memorandum For The President: Implications of the Chinese Communists' Cease-Fire Proposal, November 21, 1962, 5, JFKL, Hilsman Papers, Box 1, Folder 18.

⁹⁵ Hilsman, *To Move A Nation*, 338.

Chinese “handled the situation with political sophistication and military skill.”⁹⁶

American press outlets normally quite hostile to the Chinese communist leadership also highlighted Mao's forbearance and moderation, using the war largely as an occasion to heap scorn upon Nehru rather than stoke fears of China. There had already been plenty of opportunities for that, and there would be many more in the future.

Stereotypes about the communist Chinese way of warfare were belied not only by their limited aims, but also by the methods used to achieve them. Komer wrote to Bundy that early reports indicated victory was less the result of “overwhelming Chicom superiority than Indian ineptitude.” On the contrary, the “Indians seem to have had numerical superiority at certain points.”⁹⁷ G.S. Bhargava claimed in 1964 that the Chinese followed the pattern established during the Korean war of combining outflanking maneuvers with “human sea” frontal attacks.⁹⁸ D.K. Palit, in his more thorough account from 1990, countered that “Chinese strengths were greatly exaggerated” and that Indians had local numerical superiority in certain key battles, concurring with Komer.⁹⁹ At most, China deployed three divisions to the NEFA front, about equal to the Indian forces they faced.¹⁰⁰ Rather than rely on their proverbial hordes, the Chinese prevailed with superior weapons, training, and logistics. In other words, they behaved very much as a modern western army would aspire to.

⁹⁶ Nitze, *From Hiroshima to Glasnost*, 242.

⁹⁷ Komer to Bundy, November 24, 1962, JFKL, NSF, Box 322, Folder 13.

⁹⁸ Bhargava, *The Battle of NEFA*, 111.

⁹⁹ Palit, *War in High Himalaya*, 354.

¹⁰⁰ Maxwell, *India's China War*, 425.

Before this final offensive, Gerald Johnson of the *New Republic* wrote that “it is possible that we may discover that we had been giving almost all our attention to the secondary, rather than the primary crisis. While Castro was making threatening gestures toward the US, the Chinese were actually spilling into India.”¹⁰¹ In the aftermath of the conflict, the greatest fear among U.S. policymakers was that, now that China had proved they could attack Indian border posts with impunity, they might do so again. Hughes wrote to Rusk on the day of the cease-fire that “the long-range threat from Communist China will persist even if negotiations are successful.”¹⁰² Hilsman's November 30 telegram from Pakistan predicted that China was “unlikely [to] attempt [an] invasion now, but at some time in [the] long run might well.”¹⁰³ As an academic, Allen Whiting wrote in 1975 “the fact that China had crossed the Himalayas in military force for the first time in modern history was a fact of overriding importance whose implications were to be felt throughout Asia for at least the rest of the decade.”¹⁰⁴ As an official in Kennedy's State Department, he warned “so long as Peiping's supply lines remain intact through Sinkiang and Tibet, Communist China will enjoy the strategic advantage in raising the ante and threatening further military action as compared to India's ability to maintain adequate defense strength.” Given this unsettling fact, Whiting suggested that “attention might be given” to supporting guerrilla operations in Sinkiang, Tibet, and

¹⁰¹ Gerald W. Johnson, “The Bear and the Dragon,” *The New Republic*, November 10, 1962, 14.

¹⁰² Hughes to Rusk, November 20, 1962, 5, JFKL, Hilsman Papers, Box 1, Folder 18.

¹⁰³ Telegram, November 30, 1962, 1, JFKL, Hilsman Papers, Box 1, Folder 17.

¹⁰⁴ Allen S. Whiting, *The Chinese Calculus of Deterrence* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1975), 169.

Yunnan to cut these supply lines.¹⁰⁵ The Chinese communists rapidly crushed the Tibetan insurgents who were in part armed and trained by the C.I.A. during the previous decade, making future uprisings in that region unlikely, to say nothing about the adjacent provinces. That Whiting would make such a proposal indicated the extent it was believed the U.S. needed to go in order to effectively deter China on its southern flank.

The Sino-Indian War demonstrated both the inability of even China's largest Asian neighbor to stand up to the communist giant without substantial American assistance and the unwillingness of China to take unnecessary risks to exploit that fact. It thus proved to be a poor example of China posing a grave threat to world peace and an American-dominated global order. Those who during the next few years used the threat of Chinese expansionism to argue in the American press for an increased military presence in Southeast Asia failed to employ China's actions towards India as proof of that nations' menace. Marvin Liebman, leader of the Committee of One Million, did bring up the war in an internal memorandum on December 31, 1963, writing “with the retreat from the Great Leap Forward came the invasion of India. Does this indicate any real change – except for the worse?”¹⁰⁶ But this line of thinking was not echoed by the many media outlets sympathetic to Liebman's point of view, or in his organization's press releases. Their attention shifted to China's worsening relations with the Soviets, the

¹⁰⁵ The Five-Fold Dilemma, Whiting Contribution: Implications For US Policy, 1, JFKL, Hilsman Papers, Box 1, Folder 20.

¹⁰⁶ Committee of One Million, Informational Memorandum, Marvin Liebman, December 31, 1963, 4, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University, Right-Wing Pamphlets Collection, Group No. 775, Box No. 10, Folder 170.

Chinese nuclear program, and events in South Vietnam. An inconvenient war for both superpowers, it would soon be forgotten by each of them, as well as many others.

CHAPTER VI

YELLOW PERIL WITH A TINGE OF RED:

CHANGING IMAGES OF THE CHINESE IN THE TIME OF CAMELOT

Robert Heinlein's bestselling science fiction novel *Starship Troopers*, published in 1959, depicts a future global society very different from that of his own time. The differences are as much political as technological, and the former were brought about in large part by the rise of communist China. In Heinlein's imaginary future, by the 1980s the Cold War had become a thing of the past, and a world war was fought “between the Russo-Anglo-American Alliance and the Chinese Hegemony.” The war ended inconclusively with “the negotiated treaty of New Delhi,” which notably failed to mandate the return of 60,000 Alliance prisoners-of-war from Chinese custody. This would seem to indicate the Chinese, though fighting alone, got the better of their combined adversaries, as would the fact that shortly after the war the societies and governments of their opponents quickly collapsed. Jobless, bitter, but trained to fight, the veterans from what had been Britain, Russia, and the United States stepped in to “fill the vacuum” and end the anarchy. They may have “lost a war” abroad, but they would win the peace at home.¹

The veterans established a praetorian democracy in which only the few who had served in the armed forces possessed the franchise, albeit only after they had completed their service, thus preventing complete praetorianism. Armies would be numerically

¹ Robert A. Heinlein, *Starship Troopers* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1959), 139, 212, 214.

small but extremely well-armed, the mass conscription forces of the past having been discredited as untrained mobs from the first stalemated war with China in Korea until the last failed effort against that nation in the 1980s. China's position at the pinnacle of power would itself prove fleeting, as evidenced by the soldiers having read “Tsing's classic *Collapse of the Golden Hegemony*.”² Government by military veterans would thereafter become a global phenomenon, enabling a unified planet to successfully defeat giant communistic alien insects in the distant future. Left unsaid, but heavily implied, was that such a post-democratic polity might have been the only way to defeat the Chinese. Either way, the rise of China meant the death not only of western supremacy, but of western liberal democracy.

Heinlein was not the first American author of fiction to envision a war between the united white nations of the world and an expansionist China, nor was he the first to predict a Chinese victory. But he was the first to have done so in over a generation, one of the few to place the war within his – and his readers' – own potential lifetime, and the first to forecast a Chinese victory unaided by allies or overseas “Fifth Columns.” Coming only six years after the end of the Korean War, when Chinese armies compelled U.S. soldiers and marines to embark on the longest retreat in their nation's proud military history, and at a time when communist China appeared to be on a path of unprecedented and inexorable demographic and economic growth, Heinlein's vision of the near future

² Ibid. 246.

had a certain surface plausibility, one that would be echoed four years later by the historian Arnold Toynbee.³

More than six decades earlier, in the aftermath of China's humiliating military defeat at the hands of the neighboring Japanese, the editors of *Harper's Weekly*, in an essay which assessed the potential Japanese threat and found it wanting, made reference to widespread speculation about China's potential. They noted how “a great many thoughtful people have believed that if we should succeed in teaching our methods to the Chinese we might pay dearly for it.” They warned, with measured understatement, that “if we could teach China to use her resources in war as Germany has used hers, the result might be unpleasant.” Swiftly shifting tone, the authors speculated that “a Mongolian domination of the human race would be a calamity worse than the Deluge.” Still, they concluded “this danger, if it ever existed, was always remote.”⁴ After all, at that time, the western powers were waxing, and the backward, corrupt, seemingly incurious Qing Dynasty was rapidly disintegrating.

The global picture in 1961 was very different. Germany and Japan had spectacularly risen and fallen. The British and the French were ingloriously unwinding their once globe-spanning empires. The U.S. and the U.S.S.R. stood supreme, at least for the time being. The Chinese – united, modernizing, and aggressive – seemed to be on the precipice of outgrowing and challenging their Soviet patron. On its immediate periphery, China had been challenging, confounding, and at times humiliating their American

³ Arnold J. Toynbee, “Is a 'Race War' Shaping Up?” *New York Times Magazine*, September 29, 1963, 23, 88-90.

⁴ “The Competition of Japan,” *Harper's Weekly*, February 15, 1896, 147.

adversaries for more than a decade. As the superpower conflict seemed to be entering a new, more stable epoch, the Chinese threat loomed ever larger in the American psyche. Longstanding racial fears combined with more recent geopolitical realities to revive the old Yellow Peril with a new reddish tinge. Though it would later extend to a variety of media, during the years of the Kennedy administration these fears were reflected most prominently in the motion pictures “The Manchurian Candidate” and “Dr. No,” as well as “55 Days At Peking” and “Satan Never Sleeps.” Chinese villains became more prominent, more worldly, and more ambitious. They gradually escaped from Russian servitude. Hollywood repurposed past stereotypes for the Space Age and the Cold War.

This process entailed an unprecedented decoupling in American culture of the foreign Chinese from the Chinese residing in America. As the foreign Chinese became bloodthirsty communists, their cousins in the U.S. became genuine full-blooded Americans. The experience of Chinese-Americans during the Cold War came to diverge drastically from that of German-Americans during the First World War or Japanese-Americans during the second. The perceived threat of Chinese-Americans seemed to decrease in direct proportion to increases in the perceived threat from the People's Republic. This process was reflected most indelibly in the movie adaptation of the Rogers and Hammerstein musical “Flower Drum Song.” As the proverbial Chinese hordes threatened to overrun Asia, across the Pacific the “Heathen Chineese” was on his way to becoming the “Model Minority.”

Those who have most closely studied the history of the Chinese experience in America, as well as the history of the American image of Chinese people and Chinese

culture, unanimously conclude that white America's fear and loathing of all things China long preceded the first appearance of actual Chinese people on U.S. soil. According to these scholars, the wave of anti-Chinese prejudice and mob violence which culminated in the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, the first U.S. immigration law to single out and exclude a specific ethnicity or nationality, was not a reaction to competition for low-wage jobs between Chinese and European immigrants in places like San Francisco. Instead, these acts were merely the sprouting of seeds which had been planted long ago and were regularly reflected in American media and cultural artifacts both high and low. According to Stanford Lyman, who in 1974 wrote the one of the first general histories of the experiences of the Chinese in America, “by the time the Chinese made their appearance on American shores they had been preceded by a richly embellished but almost entirely negative stereotypy.”⁵ Stuart Creighton Miller, who in 1969 published the first study of early American images of the Chinese, concurred, writing that “the unfavorable image of the Chinese is discernible among American opinion makers long before the first Celestial gold seeker set foot upon California soil.”⁶ The American press described China as “an unalloyed despotism,” its people a “godless, immoral, and vice-ridden body of pagans.”⁷ Whereas colonial American elites frequently felt a sort of naïve and sentimental fondness for Chinese culture and civilization similar to that of contemporaneous Enlightenment-era European elites, the new republic viewed China as

⁵ Stanford M. Lyman, *Chinese Americans* (New York: Random House, 1974), 56.

⁶ Stuart Creighton Miller, *The Unwelcome Immigrant: The American Image of the Chinese, 1785-1882* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 112.

⁷ Lyman, *Chinese Americans*, 56-57.

its mirror opposite, “singularly impervious to nineteenth-century ideals of progress, liberty, and civilization to which an emergent modern America was fervently committed.”⁸ This assessment ultimately served to “arouse fear and suspicion about Chinese immigration to America and to transfer the horror imputed to the Chinese polity onto individual Chinese immigrants.”⁹ These sentiments were evident in newspapers and magazines published throughout the United States, not merely on the west coast where the Chinese arrived and settled in the largest numbers.

Basing his assessment on Edward Said's concept of Orientalism, Gary Okihiro identified the origins of the Yellow Peril in “Asiatic stereotypes going back to ancient Greeks such as Herodotus, Hippocrates, Aristotle, and Arrian.”¹⁰ William Wu dated it to the 13th century Mongol invasions of Europe, which he defined as the only time East Asians and Europeans met in large numbers and “resided permanently in the same land until they both entered the Pacific coast of the United States from opposite directions.” Wu's research led him to agree with Lyman and Miller that “when the Chinese

⁸ Moses Rabin, foreword to *The Unwelcome Immigrant*, vii.

⁹ Lyman, *Chinese Americans*, 57.

¹⁰ Gary Y. Okihiro, *Margins and Mainstreams: Asians in American History and Culture* (Seattle, University of Washington Press, 1994), 7-8. In his seminal 1978 work *Orientalism*, Edward Said limited his analysis to British and French views of the Middle East and the Muslim world, writing that “Americans will not feel quite the same about the Orient, which for them is much more likely to be associated very differently with the Far East (China and Japan, mainly).” Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin Books, 1978), 1. In the revised 2003 edition, he argued Americans have an Orientalist view of the Muslim world, but not East Asia. This has not stopped numerous scholarly admirers of Said from applying his theory to Americans' views of East Asia. See Colin Mackerras, *Western Images of China, revised edition* (New York: Oxford University Press: New York, 1999); Karen J. Leong *The China Mystique: Pearl S. Buck, Anna May Wong, Mayling Soong, and the Transformation of American Orientalism*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); and especially for this historical period Christina Klein, *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination, 1945-1961* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

immigrants first arrived in the United states, they came into a society that already viewed them with hostility and condescension.”¹¹

The first novel to depict a Chinese invasion of the United States was P.W. Dooner's 1880 bestseller *Last Days of the Republic*, in which rural and urban capitalists welcome low-cost Chinese labor onto southern plantations and into New England mills. Expanding numerically and geographically, Chinese-Americans gain political rights and power, conduct military training, and eventually rebel from and conquer the American nation.¹² Dooner set the standard for future works by depicting the Chinese as “masses of mindless automata.”¹³ In his view, Chinese immigrants were the “Trojan horse of Chinese imperial ambitions.”¹⁴ Ten years later, Arthur Dudley Winton published *Looking Further Backward*. An unauthorized sequel to Edward Bellamy's landmark work of futurism from three years earlier, its narrator was Professor Wun Lung Lai, the successor to Bellamy's narrator Julian West as professor of modern history at Shawmut College. He regaled readers with the story of the Chinese takeover of the United States in the year 2020, two decades beyond the setting for Bellamy's American socialist utopia.¹⁵ In 1893, William Ward Crane introduced the specter of an imminent black-yellow alliance in his short story “The Year 1899,” the tale of an unsuccessful attack on

¹¹ William Wu, *The Yellow Peril: Chinese Americans in American Fiction, 1850-1940* (Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1982), 10, 210.

¹² Ibid. 36.

¹³ Ibid. 40.

¹⁴ H. Bruce Franklin, *War Stars: The Superweapon and the American Imagination* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2008), 33.

¹⁵ Edward James, “Yellow, black, metal and tentacled: the race question in American science fiction.” in John Philip Davies, ed., *Science fiction, social conflict and war* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), 29.

United States by a rejuvenated China and militant black West Indians. In that story, the Japanese allied with the white nations, and helped provide the margin of victory.¹⁶ This positive perception of the Japanese changed after their military triumph over Russia in 1905.¹⁷ Ray Norton's 1907 book *The Vanishing Fleets* and John Ulrich Giesy's 1914 *All For His Country* both described the successful use of technological superweapons to defeat Japanese invasions of the American mainland.¹⁸ Unlike in the Chinese invasion stories, the Japanese always lost.

By then, Chinese villainy had assumed individual, rather than mass, form in the character of Dr. Fu Manchu, the creation of English writer Sax Rohmer. Described by William Wu as “the first Asian role of prominence in modern literature to have a large American readership,” Fu Manchu was introduced in a trilogy of novels published between 1913 and 1917. In the first of these books, *The Insidious Fu Manchu*, which was reprinted in 1961, he is described as “the yellow peril incarnate in one man,” possessed of “all the cruel cunning of an entire Eastern race, accumulated in one giant intellect.” In these novels, Fu's arch-enemy was British secret agent Sir Denis Nayland Smith. Capitalizing on the American popularity of his works, which had been set on the British Isles, Rohmer wrote additional short stories featuring Fu Manchu in *Collier's*

¹⁶ Franklin, *War Stars*, 35-36.

¹⁷ Philip P. Choy, Lorraine Dong and Marlon K. Hom. *Coming Man: 19th Century American Perceptions of the Chinese* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994), 161.

¹⁸ Patrick B. Sharp, *Savage Perils: Racial Frontiers and Nuclear Apocalypse in American Culture* (Norman, University of Oklahoma Press, 2007), 111.

Magazine in the late 1920s, and produced dozens of additional Fu Manchu novels, often with American settings and American heroes, from the 1930s until 1959.¹⁹

While Wu focused extensively on the depiction of Chinese in the pulp detective fiction of the early and middle 20th century, he notably failed to take note of the Chinese presence in American science fiction, even while mentioning that the Fu Manchu novels featured numerous elements of that then-emerging genre.²⁰ This was unfortunate, because when it came to science fiction, the yellow peril was literally present at the creation. Hugo Gernsback, who coined the term “science fiction,” published Philip Francis Nowlon's short story “Armageddon 2419 A.D.” in his magazine *Amazing Stories* in 1928. That story, which was novelized as *Armageddon 2419* in 1962, featured Anthony Rogers, who fights a “Mongol” invasion of the United States launched in that year.²¹ In 1929, Nowlon teamed up with artist Dick Calkins, changed Anthony Rogers's first name to Buck, and began producing *The Adventures of Buck Rogers in the 25th Century*, the “first science fiction comic strip.” In 1934, Alex Raymond started the comic strip *Flash Gordon* to compete with Buck Rogers. Raymond created a world “dominated by the yellow peril,” in which the hero battles “Ming the Merciless” from planet Mongo.²² Flash Gordon soon became the basis for a popular series of movie

¹⁹ Wu, *The Yellow Peril*, 164-169.

²⁰ Ibid. 169.

²¹ Patrick B. Sharp, *Savage Perils: Racial Frontiers and Nuclear Apocalypse in American Culture* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2007), 112; James, “Yellow, black, metal and tentacled: the race question in American science fiction,” in Davies, 31. The 1962 novelization removed many of the original's racist depictions of blacks, but not of the “Mongol” invaders. An additional novelization appeared in 1978.

²² Sharp, *Savage Perils*, 113-114.

serials, which George Lucas later credited as the original inspiration for his “Star Wars” films.

Isaiah Lavender III has connected the spate of such invasion stories to “the growing sense of American nationalism,” as well as the intellectual prevalence of Social Darwinism.²³ Perhaps no work better reflected this milieu than Jack London's controversial short story “The Unparalleled Invasion,” written in 1907 and published in *Collier's* in 1909. London traveled through Korea and into Manchuria with the Japanese army during their war with Russia in 1904, publishing in the *San Francisco Examiner* on September 25 of that year a soon-to-be famous essay on the epochal significance of that war entitled “The Yellow Peril.” Written in Manchuria that June, the essay argued that Japan's military successes would soon “awaken” the Chinese people who – rather than the Japanese – constituted the true yellow peril and threat to white dominance.²⁴ This essay formed the basis for “The Unparalleled Invasion,” and parts of it appeared verbatim in the story's text. London was pioneering in locating China's threat as primarily economic rather than military. “The Chinese was the perfect type of industry,” he wrote in both the story and the essay, adding in the essay that “he is not so ill-disposed toward new ideas and new methods as his history would seem to indicate.”²⁵ In the story, Japan's economic and military penetration of China “awakens” that nation to

²³ Isaiah Lavender III, *Race in American Science Fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), 13.

²⁴ Jack London, *The Asian Writings of Jack London: Essays, Letters, Newspaper Dispatches, and Short Fiction by Jack London* (Lewiston, Maine: Edwin Mellen Press, 2009), 297-305.

²⁵ Jack London, “The Unparalleled Invasion.” In Earle Labor, Robert C. Leitz II and Milo Shepard, eds., *Short Stories of Jack London: Authorized One-Volume Edition* (New York: Macmillan, 1990), 273; “The Yellow Peril,” in *The Asian Writings of Jack London*, 297, 298.

modernity. The people rise up and expel the Japanese in 1922, driving them not only out of China proper but also Korea and Taiwan. However, “contrary to expectation, China did not prove warlike,” and “after a time of disquiet, the idea was accepted that China was to be feared, not in war, but in commerce.”²⁶ Industrial development and trade enabled China to break the Malthusian shackles and increase its already gigantic population by hundreds of millions. In the 1970s, tens of millions of Chinese migrated to French Indochina and British Malaya, Burma, and Nepal. When the French colonial army resisted, it was annihilated by China's massive and “splendidly efficient militia,” which it chose to develop in lieu of a professional standing army. A large-scale invasion and naval blockade by an outraged France proved fruitless, the army annihilated on its march to Peking and the blockade ineffective against a nation able to provide completely for its own material needs.²⁷

“The world trembled,” not because of China's territorial expansion (Britain, interestingly, did not protest or resist Chinese penetration of its colonies as the French had) but because “there were two Chinese for every white person in the world.” All conventional uses of force proving useless, the western powers – upon the suggestion of an American scientist – resort to large-scale biological warfare, dropping vials containing “a score of plagues” onto Chinese territory on May 1, 1976 from thousands of “tiny airships” launched from warships parked off China's coast. Massive armies join the

²⁶ London, “The Unparalleled Invasion,” in Labor et. al., 273.

²⁷ London, “The Unparalleled Invasion,” in Labor et. al., 273-274. Given China's ballooning population and extensive trade, it seems odd that it would be unaffected by a cessation of its overseas commerce, though it is necessary for the logic of the story.

combined navies in preventing the stricken Chinese people from fleeing, and soon they are exterminated. According to “the democratic American program,” the “howling wilderness” China had become was resettled by whites in “a tremendous and successful experiment in cross-fertilization,” essentially creating a second United States of America. Shortly afterward, on the eve of a war between France and Germany over Alsace-Lorraine, the white nations sign a treaty, pledging to never use such weapons of “ultra-modern war” upon each other.²⁸

Many scholars have taken London's story at face value, most recently Bruce Franklin, who called it an “exultation of the superweapon and Asian genocide.” He noted how it was the only work of American fiction before the Second World War which “condones unrestrained bombing of the civilian population,” something the U.S. would engage in during that war, as well as during the wars in Korea and Vietnam.²⁹ Recent scholars of London's work have claimed the author “satirized the West's paranoia about Asians” with that story.³⁰ Rather than an example of racism, the story was “a very stern warning of what can happen if racial hatred is allowed to flourish” as well as “an ironic indictment of the behavior of imperialistic governments per se.”³¹ London's essay “The Yellow Peril” appears to support this revisionist contention. In that dispatch, London

²⁸ Ibid. 275-281. At the start of the story, told in the early 21st century, the author explicitly connects the extermination of the Chinese to the Bicentennial. However, his “Chinese” China, with its burgeoning population, settler-based continental expansion, militia-based defenses, and rapid industrialization was already an idealized 19th century America.

²⁹ Franklin, *War Stars*, 39, 102.

³⁰ Jeanne Campbell Reesman, *Jack London's Racial Lives: A Critical Biography* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2009), 101. Reesman also argued that London was sympathetic, rather than hostile, to Jack Johnson, expressing complimentary opinions of the controversial boxing champion which did fit standard black stereotypes.

³¹ Danel A. Metraux, “Jack London and the Yellow Peril,” in *The Asian Writings of Jack London*, 75.

heaps contempt upon Koreans, whom he views as backward and cowardly, finds the Japanese gifted only in military matters, but has nothing but praise for every facet of the Chinese individuals he meets after crossing the Yalu into Manchuria. He terms them a people “deft, intelligent, and unafraid to die,” who are brave in battle, industrious in labor, insistent but honest in business matters, and “not dead to new ideas.”³² London contradicted nearly a century of conventional American wisdom concerning the Chinese people. His affection for them was unmistakable. One was left with the impression that it is highly doubtful he would wish to see them wiped off the face of the earth. The inescapable conclusion would be that Jack London intended “The Unparalleled Invasion” to be at least in part a dark satire, though readers of *Collier's* most likely failed to appreciate this.³³

The idea of the Chinese as an existential threat to the United States in particular and western civilization in general had a long pedigree in popular American literature when Robert Heinlein wrote his debut novel “Sixth Column.” Serialized in the first three months of 1941 under the byline Anson MacDonald, and published in book form in 1949 under both its original title and “The Day After Tomorrow,” it told the story of white American scientists in the far distant future resisting an invasion of the U.S. by “four hundred million” bloodthirsty individuals identified as “Pan Asians.”³⁴ John W. Campbell Jr. suggested in 1940 that Heinlein write a novel about a “Chinese” invasion,

³² Jack London, “The Yellow Peril,” In *The Asian Writings of Jack London*, 301-302.

³³ The same probably applies to that magazine's editors and publishers, who a generation later commissioned Sax Rohmer's first Fu Manchu stories in over a decade.

³⁴ James Gifford, *Robert Heinlein: A Reader's Companion* (Sacramento: Nitrosynthetic Press, 2000), 170; H. Bruce Franklin, *Robert Heinlein: America as Science Fiction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 49.

though Heinlein reportedly claimed singling out the Chinese was “racist.”³⁵ The number of invaders was, however, suspiciously identical to the traditional American estimate of China's population. The scientists ultimately defeat the invasion by inventing a ray gun which can only kill those possessing “Mongolian blood.” Heinlein does include a Japanese-American character named Franklin Roosevelt Matsui who, despite being of Asian ethnicity, is persecuted by the invaders, who identify him as culturally American and therefore their enemy.³⁶

Heinlein's racial politics were thus far from straightforward.³⁷ The hero of *Starship Troopers* is Johnnie Rico, the son of a wealthy Filipino businessman, and his squad of what Franklin aptly termed “an interstellar Green Berets” is multiracial and multinational.³⁸ In his biography of Heinlein, Leon Stover claimed Heinlein modeled the communistic alien bugs after “Soviet expansionism.”³⁹ But the novel's text makes clear the model is Red China, Johnnie Rico observing that “the Bug commissars didn't care anymore about expending soldiers than we cared about expending ammo. Perhaps we could have figured this out about the Bugs by noting the grief the Chinese Hegemony

³⁵ Gifford. *Robert Heinlein: A Reader's Companion*, 170-171.

³⁶ Franklin. *America as Science Fiction*, 50-51. “Sixth Column” was written before Pearl Harbor, and thus before Japanese-Americans were interned by Matsui's namesake. The irony is thus unintentional. The Matsui character did make Heinlein the first author of an Asian invasion novel not to depict Asian Americans as a disloyal Fifth Column.

³⁷ Heinlein's *Stranger in a Strange Land*, his second most popular work, also second most controversial, after, in both cases, *Starship Troopers*, delves heavily into black-white race relations and colonialism, particularly in the Caribbean.

³⁸ Franklin. *America as Science Fiction*, 116.

³⁹ Leon Stover, *Robert A. Heinlein* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1987), 48.

gave the Russo-Anglo-American Alliance.”⁴⁰ The global alliance thus triumphed over Chinese stand-ins, a new society successfully re-fighting an old war.

The films of the early 1960s therefore employed long-established archetypes concerning Chinese villainy. In addition, most of them were based on bestselling novels published in the 1950s, thus reflecting beliefs and fears from that decade. Disentangling what Ken Ono and Vincent Pham referred to as “the complex relationship between media representations and historical events and contexts” is always difficult.⁴¹ In addition to a close reading of the material, three temporal approaches appear useful. The first is to attempt to discern how the works were interpreted in their own time. The second is to see how that have been interpreted ever since, noting the ways subsequent interpretations match or differ from contemporary assessments. A third is to place the works within the contexts of past representations of similar themes. The threat posed by China was a staple of American culture long before that threat could plausibly be claimed to exist. By the time of the Kennedy administration, the day of reckoning prophesied for eight decades seemed worryingly close to realization. This was reflected in newspapers, magazines, and National Security Estimates. For it not to be reflected as well in popular entertainment would have been most odd.

Since the trauma of the Korean War, Chinese had been presented as villains, though secondary ones at first. The 1954 film “The Bamboo Prison” presented Chinese communists as veritable slaves to their Russian masters. When a Chinese interrogator

⁴⁰ Heinlein, *Starship Troopers*, 184.

⁴¹ Ken A. Ono and Vincent N. Pham, *Asian Americans and the Media* (Malden, Massachusetts: Polity Press, 2009), 27.

attempts to turn a black American prisoner of war against his nation by reminding him of his degraded status back home, the black soldier retorts that his Chinese interrogator is no better off vis-a-vis his de facto Russian masters.⁴² Gradually, this began to change. It was television which first introduced what Darrel Hamamoto termed the character of “the Yellow Red” with the show *Adventures of the Falcon*, which ran in 1955 and 1956. Banished from the silver screen when China became an ally of the U.S. against Japan, Fu Manchu reappeared on the small screen between 1956 and 1958 on the syndicated program *The Adventures of Fu Manchu*.⁴³ In his exhaustive study of portrayals of Asians in American motion pictures between 1935 and 1975, Eugene Franklin Wong claimed that “by the end of the 1950s, the industry had clearly re-established the Chinese as America's main enemy, overshadowing the Russians if only on the basis of race.” Wong also argued that starting in the early 1960s “the American motion picture industry gradually began to turn away from a Cold War posture.”⁴⁴ Lawrence Alloway concurred, arguing that “the cold war did not survive the 60s, as a different view of communism developed.” He dated the introduction of this development to sometime before 1964.⁴⁵ As with U.S. China policy, Hollywood's depictions of the Chinese at home and abroad during the Kennedy years were beginning to change, though that change would not become fully apparent until after 1963. Just as the Chinese had yet to split from their

⁴² Eugene Franklin Wong, “On Visual Media Racism: Asians in the American Motion Pictures,” Dissertation, University of Denver, 1977, 179-180.

⁴³ Darrel Y. Hamamoto, *Monitored Peril: Asian Americans and the Politics of TV Representation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 110-111.

⁴⁴ Wong, “On Visual Media Racism,” 180-183.

⁴⁵ Lawrence Alloway, *Violent America: The Movies, 1946-1964*. (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1971), 63.

Soviet allies, Chinese villains had yet to fully liberate themselves from Russian tutelage, though that process was well-advanced. Russians were still bad guys, though their role was becoming more that of advisers, with their nominal Chinese underlings moving to the fore and showing increased initiative.

Ian Fleming's 1958 novel *Doctor No* and the 1963 film of the same title both begin outside of the Queen's Club on Richmond Road in Kingston. Fleming lovingly describes this thoroughfare as the most exclusive street in Jamaica's capital city and a bastion of colonial privilege before adding ruefully that “such stubborn retreats will not long survive in modern Jamaica. One day Queen's Club will have its windows smashed and perhaps be burned to the ground.”⁴⁶ This sense of late colonial foreboding is absent from the film, which was released one year after Jamaica became independent, and which presents the island as a sunny, sexy vacation spot, albeit a particularly dangerous one for British secret agents. The danger is from the henchmen of the title character, the half-Chinese son of a German Methodist missionary whom Stanley Kauffmann of *The New Republic*, in his lukewarm review of the film, described as “a kind of space-age Fu Manchu.”⁴⁷ In the book, No is very tall, thin, and bald, just as Rohmer described his classic Yellow Peril personification.⁴⁸ Played in the film by the white Canadian actor Joseph Wiseman, he is a debonair evil mastermind, sporting slicked-back hair and attired in Nehru jackets, which his dark-skinned assassins also favor.⁴⁹ The novel chooses to

⁴⁶ Ian Fleming, *Doctor No* (New York: Macmillan, 1958), 8.

⁴⁷ Stanley Kauffmann, “The First Roses of Summer,” *The New Republic*, June 15, 1963, 36.

⁴⁸ Fleming, *Doctor No*, 127. As with Fu, No's nemesis is a British secret agent.

⁴⁹ Brendan Gill of the *New Yorker* described Wiseman's “depraved Chinese” villain as “spooky and debonair.” Brendan Gill, “Yes to 'No',” *The New Yorker*, June 1, 1963, 66.

accentuate the German side of No's character. When conversing with Bond in his underground lair, No quotes Clausewitz on strategy, paraphrases Freudian theory to explain why he is evil, and praises the Nazis for conducting sadistic scientific experiments on human subjects.⁵⁰

This is not to imply Fleming completely downplays Chinese villainy. In fact, every Chinese – or even part Chinese – character in the novel is a villain. After several close calls, Bond instructs Quarrel, his faithful local black guide and confidant, to “watch out particularly for any Chinese near you.”⁵¹ The assassins who massacre the staff of the local British intelligence office, prompting Bond's visit, are all “Chigroes – Chinese negroes,” with “yellowish skin and slanting eyes.” Fleming has the Colonial Secretary, in a panoramic description of the numerous foreign merchant clans who dominate the island's commerce, describe the Chinese as “the most powerful clique in Jamaica.”⁵² In both the book and the film, No defends his private island of Crab Key with an armored flame-throwing tractor costumed to look like a dragon, which incinerates the unlucky Quarrel. The higher one moves up No's organization, the more Chinese it becomes. In the film, Chinese soldiers in vaguely Maoist uniforms capture Bond and defend their leader's lair, while Chinese technicians keep his nuclear reactor running.⁵³ In the book, No is working on a freelance basis for the Russians, endeavoring to jam the guidance systems on American nuclear missiles near the Caribbean basin, but

⁵⁰ Fleming, *Doctor No*, 131, 133, 146.

⁵¹ Ibid. 43. Quarrel, a fisherman from the Caymans, assisted Bond on his previous mission to Jamaica five years earlier. In the movie however, Bond and Quarrel are strangers.

⁵² Ibid. 8, 1, 50.

⁵³ In the book, No runs a far less glamorous guano mine.

would be willing to help the Chinese if the price was right.⁵⁴ In the film, he seeks to sabotage the U.S. space program, had his services refused by both that nation and the U.S.S.R., and says of the Cold War “east, west, just points of the compass, each as stupid as the other.”⁵⁵ The movie set a trend for the rest of the decade for espionage thrillers on both the big and the small screen by seeking to move beyond the Cold War while vaguely acknowledging its continued existence.

The major critics leaned slightly in favor of the film, most of them viewing it as superficial escapist fun, though they had doubts as to whether the intended franchise had a bright future. Much of this doubt was based on their low estimates of Fleming as a writer. Stanley Kauffmann quipped “I find Fleming not objectionable, but unreadable.”⁵⁶ Brendan Gill of the *New Yorker* found the novel a “trashy failure,” but the film a “trashy success.”⁵⁷ The most common complaint was the violence, and the enjoyment Sean Connery's Bond appeared to feel while dishing it out. *Newsweek* quipped that “until he [Fleming] invented James Bond, there was absolutely no one with whom the *cultivated* sado-masochist could identify.”⁵⁸ None saw the film as having any geopolitical import whatsoever, despite its setting near Cuba in the immediate aftermath of the Missile Crisis, or No's obsession with missiles and nuclear power.

⁵⁴ Fleming, *Doctor No*, 143.

⁵⁵ *Dr. No* [DVD], MGM Home Entertainment, 2000.

⁵⁶ Kauffmann. “The First Roses of Summer,” 36.

⁵⁷ Gill, “Yes to 'No',” 66.

⁵⁸ “Blended Bond,” *Newsweek*, May 13, 1963, 106. Italics in original. Arthur Knight of *Saturday Review*, as well as Philip Hartung of *Commonweal* and the unnamed critic from *Time* all seemed mildly offended by the tone of the violence, indicating how norms and expectations for movies have changed since the early 1960s. Arthur Knight, “Spring Cleaning,” *Saturday Review*, June 1, 1963, 16; Philip T. Hartung, “Tricks of the Trade,” *Commonweal*, June 21, 1963, 355; “Hairy Marshmallow,” *Time*, May 31, 1963, 80.

The same could certainly not be said for *The Manchurian Candidate*, which entered theaters the previous October. Critics took that film very seriously, as historians and cultural analysts still do today, although they viewed it on the whole far less favorably than future generations would. One gets the distinct sense that few would have predicted that it would one day be seen, according to the historian Christina Klein, as “one of the definitive works of Cold War filmmaking,” a work which would warrant an entire book of academic essays analyzing its many facets, and what each of them said about Cold War culture.⁵⁹ The 1962 movie was based on a bestselling 1959 novel by Richard Condon. Both works revolve around the brainwashing of U.S. soldier Raymond Shaw in Korea by Chinese psychiatrist Yen Lo, whom in the film the hero Captain Bennett Marco, played by Frank Sinatra, helpfully describes as “that Chinese cat standing there smiling like Fu Manchu.”⁶⁰ Though Yen Lo works on behalf of the Russians, serving as director of the “Pavlov Institute” in Moscow, Condon makes clear in the novel that all but two of his technicians and assistants who help administer the brainwashing are Chinese.⁶¹ The notion of a Chinese villain with a special aptitude for mind control goes back in fiction at least to Fu Manchu, and was reinforced by Chinese attempts to turn American prisoners-of-war against their nation during the Korean War. In his landmark 1958 book *Scratches on our Minds*, the first major scholarly work on

⁵⁹ Christina Klein, *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination, 1945-1961* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 37. The book is Matthew Frye Jacobson and Gaspar Gonzalez. *What Have They Built You to Do? The Manchurian Candidate and Cold War America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006).

⁶⁰ *The Manchurian Candidate* [DVD], MGM Home Entertainment, 1998.

⁶¹ Richard Condon, *The Manchurian Candidate* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1959), 28. The other two are Uzbek, and are looked down upon by their Chinese colleagues.

American images of the Chinese, the political scientist and former journalist Harold Isaacs noted – based on interviews of American national and regional elites – the prevalence of “the image of the Chinese as *brainwashers*.”⁶² (italics in original) Condon's novel refers to Marco's desire to “unlock all of the great jade doors” and liberate Raymond's mind from its Chinese captors.⁶³

Presciently anticipating the Sino-Soviet split, as well as pinpointing one of its causes, Condon notes how the audience for the brainwashing, a mix in both the book and the film of Chinese and Russian communists, was “divided, physically and by prejudice.”⁶⁴ Screenwriter George Axelrod has Yen Lo tell the Russians, who are impatient to witness the brainwashed Raymond murder a member of his squad, “I apologize to my dear Dmitri. I keep forgetting that you're a young country, and your attention span is limited.” On another occasion, however, Yen appears to identify with the Russians, insisting he does not mean to insult “our brave Chinese allies” with the cover story that Raymond and his squad annihilated an entire company of Chinese soldiers.⁶⁵ While the details of Yen Lo's loyalties and personal identifications are ambiguous, the broad brush strokes of his characterization are entirely Asian. Paraphrasing Rohmer's description of Fu Manchu, Jacobson and Gonzalez called him “the satanic concentration of an entire continent's cruel cunning,” while Christina Klein

⁶² Harold R. Isaacs, *Images of Asia: American Views of China and India*, originally titled *Scratches On Our Minds* (New York: Harper, 1958, reprinted 1972), 218.

⁶³ Condon, *The Manchurian Candidate*, 298.

⁶⁴ Ibid. 35.

⁶⁵ *The Manchurian Candidate* [DVD], MGM Home Entertainment, 1998.

contextualized his Cold War-era yellow peril by saying the movie “pulled together more than a decade of anti-Chinese discourse.”⁶⁶

A secondary villain, the Korean interpreter Chunjin, who betrays the squad to the communists and later comes to the U.S. to be Raymond's “houseboy,” seems to be a prototype of a new kind of Asian villain, what Robert Lee called the “gook,” a deceitful young Asian male who pretends to be meek and friendly towards whites in order to betray them.⁶⁷ The character is largely remembered for a protracted karate fight he has with (and loses to) Sinatra's Marco, which Frankenheimer claimed was the first “martial arts” fight in American cinematic history.⁶⁸ Interestingly in retrospect, but entirely characteristic of Hollywood during this period, neither Asian villain was played by an Asian actor. Yen Lo was played by Khig Dhiegh, a New Jerseyan of North African descent. Chunjin was played by Henry Silva, a Brooklynite of Puerto Rican descent. Silva generally portrayed “ethnic” villains, East Asians as well as Native Americans, Mexicans and Italians.⁶⁹ Dhiegh made a career playing updated Fu Manchus, most famously the recurring communist Chinese villain Wo Fat on “Hawaii Five-O,” which

⁶⁶ Jacobson and Gonzalez, *What Have They Built You to Do?*, 108; Klein, *Cold War Orientalism*, 37.

⁶⁷ Robert G. Lee, *Orientalism: Asian Americans in Popular Culture*. (Temple University Press: Philadelphia, 1999), 8. Naturally, the “gook” stereotype is largely associated with film and television depictions of the Vietnam War.

⁶⁸ Director's Commentary, *The Manchurian Candidate* [DVD], MGM Home Entertainment, 1998.

⁶⁹ One of Silva's Asian villains was the lead in *The Return of Mr. Moto*, a 1965 revival of a Fu Manchu knock-off popular in the 1930s, and brought back – like other Asian villains – during that decade. Jacobson and Gonzalez, 128.

ran from 1968 until 1980. Later, he retired to New Jersey and – embracing his fictional Asian identity – founded an institute for the study of Taoism.⁷⁰

Critics were not quite unanimous when it came to identifying the movie's primary villains. *Life* identified them as “Chinese Reds,” while Brendan Gill of the *New Yorker* claimed the “Russians” were the bad guys.⁷¹ Arthur Knight of the *Saturday Review* wrote that he quickly came to the realization that “this was not Yen Lo, the Red superman, but our old childhood friend, the insidious Dr. Fu Manchu.” Curiously, this connection made the film “a good deal more enjoyable” for Knight.⁷² In a 1988 conversation with director John Frankenheimer and Frank Sinatra, which was included as part of the original VHS release of the film, George Axelrod defended the film against charges of prejudice, though interestingly not anti-Chinese or anti-Asian prejudice. Axelrod recalled people saying the film was “so anti-Russian, which it wasn't.” Frankenheimer added, “we set out to do Dick Condon's book, and that's what we did,” abjuring political intent on their part. Axelrod recalled that as he was crafting the script in 1961, he expressed to Sinatra his worry that “when the picture is released, if Kennedy is just about to have some sort of rapport with the Russians, it's going to embarrass him.” Sinatra recalled reassuring the writer by recounting that he had just visited Hyannisport, where President Kennedy asked him what his next film project would be. Sinatra recalled replying it would be an adaptation of *The Manchurian Candidate*, to which

⁷⁰ Ibid. 125.

⁷¹ “Deck of Deadly Queens,” *Life*, November 9, 1962, 93; Brendan Gill, “Bad Men and Good,” *New Yorker*, November 11, 1962, 116.

⁷² Arthur Knight, “The Fu Manchurian Candidate,” *Saturday Review*, October 27, 1962, 65.

Kennedy replied “great – who's going to play the mother?”⁷³ That dispelled any concerns Axelrod had about possible negative geopolitical ramifications.

The film was only mildly popular with audiences, barely breaking even at the box office in its initial run. It appears to have made some immediate headway into the culture. This is evidenced by a January 1963 *Newsweek* story about Nikolai Fedorenko, who had recently assumed the post of Soviet Ambassador to the United Nations. A fluent speaker of both Chinese and Japanese, who was rumored to have spent part of his childhood in East Asia, Fedorenko quickly acquired the nickname “The Manchurian Candidate.”⁷⁴ Critics largely concluded the film was a decent if flawed thriller. The *Saturday Review* called it “gripping,” *Life* termed it “the season's kookiest thriller,” and the *New Yorker* claimed it was “guaranteed to raise all but the limpest hair.”⁷⁵ Several argued it tried to cram too much into two hours, Stanley Kauffmann concluding it had enough “gimmicks to furnish three or four other films,” *Time* that “it tries so hard to be different that it fails to be itself,” and *America* that “in part” it was “brilliant” but that the critic was “unable to suspend disbelief in a couple of its main premises,” while *Commonweal* termed it both “spell-binding and ill-conceived.”⁷⁶

⁷³ “Exclusive Interview with Frank Sinatra, John Frankenheimer, and George Axelrod,” included in *The Manchurian Candidate* [DVD] MGM Home Entertainment, 1998.

⁷⁴ “Manchurian Candidate,” *Newsweek*, January 7, 1963, 24.

⁷⁵ Knight, “The Fu Manchurian Candidate,” 65; “Deck of Deadly Queens,” *Life*, November 9, 1962, 93; Gill, Brendan, “Bad Men and Good,” 115.

⁷⁶ Stanley Kauffmann, “From Chekhov to China,” *The New Republic*, December 1, 1962, 26; “Down South in North Korea,” *Time*, November 2, 1962, 101; Moira Walsh, “The Manchurian Candidate,” *America*, November 24, 1962, 1158; Philip T. Hartung, “Are Mothers Necessary?,” *Commonweal*, November 23, 1962, 231.

Many of the critics addressed what appeared to be a public debate over whether the film was, to use a phrase employed by two of them, “irresponsible.”⁷⁷ *Commonweal*, which took no position on the apparent controversy, merely noted it was “a rather risky film” which presented a “sleazy picture of American mores and politics.”⁷⁸ *Life* claimed the movie was “enlivened by pot-shots at phony war heroism, momism and right-wing fanaticism,” each of which decades later would merit at least one chapter in Jacobson's and Gonzalez's book.⁷⁹ *Newsweek* credited the movie with “the courage to lampoon.”⁸⁰ On the other hand, Arthur Knight of the *Saturday Review* argued that “it is always disturbing when melodrama plays fast and loose with serious, even incendiary material.”⁸¹ Seemingly in response, Moira Walsh of *America* declined to “join the chorus denouncing the film as irresponsible” because “this charge seems to emanate from positions fairly far out on both ends of the political spectrum.”⁸² Given that the plot revolves around a foreign leftist plot to take over the U.S. government using domestic conservatives as their patsies, the respective but separate outrage at either end of the ideological spectrum was understandable.

The novel is even more pointed politically. Condon has guests at a party hosted by Republican Senator Johnny Iselin – who is Raymond's stepfather – exchange “opinions they rented that week from Mr. Sokolsky, Mr. Lawrence, Mr. Pegler, and that

⁷⁷ Knight, “The Fu Manchurian Candidate,” who claimed it was; Walsh, “The Manchurian Candidate,” who argued it was not.

⁷⁸ Hartung, “Are Mothers Necessary?,” 231.

⁷⁹ “Deck of Deadly Queens,” *Life*, 93.

⁸⁰ “Right Flanked,” *Newsweek*, October 29, 1962, 88.

⁸¹ Knight, “The Fu Manchurian Candidate,” 65

⁸² Walsh, “The Manchurian Candidate,” 1158.

fascinating younger fellow who had written about men and God at Yale.”⁸³ Condon also intended for Raymond's brainwashing to be a metaphor for how the mass media, particularly advertisers, brainwashed the general public. Axelrod and Frankenheimer smoothed out some of these rough satirical edges, as well as excising Raymond's mother's heroin and cocaine addictions and merely alluding to her incestuous relationship with her son. But for them to disclaim political intent with the argument that they were merely faithfully adapting Condon's book to the screen is highly dubious, since the source material itself was politically provocative.

When Mao's “Volunteers” crossed the Yalu River, the Chinese in America had every reason to believe they would share a fate similar to that of the Japanese during the world war which had ended only five years earlier. The U.S. Congress quickly passed the McCarran Internal Security Act in late 1950 over President Harry Truman's veto.⁸⁴ Also known as the Emergency Detention Act, Title II of the new law authorized the internment of enemy aliens.⁸⁵ Chinese communities had been warned. Yet, in contrast to recent actions towards the Japanese, the law primarily targeted behavior, while merely casting suspicion based on ethnicity. Unlike Japanese-Americans, Chinese-Americans were offered an opportunity to escape punishment and prove their loyalty by rejecting

⁸³ Condon, *The Manchurian Candidate* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1959), p. 252. To call Senator Johnny Iselin a thinly-veiled caricature of Senator Joseph McCarthy would be to give too much credit to Condon's imagination. Interestingly, right-wing columnist Lawrence Pegler had long made it his mission to red-bait Frank Sinatra.

⁸⁴ Lee, *Orientalism*, 152.

⁸⁵ Jack Chen, *The Chinese of America* (San Francisco: Harper & Sons, 1980), 214.

their ancestral nation's current official ideology.⁸⁶ This was further indicated when the conservative McCarthyite Nevada Democratic Senator Pat McCarran co-sponsored the McCarran-Walter Act of 1952. This law removed race-based bans on non-white immigrants, replacing the system established in 1924 with national quotas. The annual quotas for non-white nationalities remained small, and such simultaneous restrictions and expansions made American immigration law, in the words of attorney Dan Danilov, “an abysmal mess.”⁸⁷ But the new law was of a piece with the 1943 repeal of the Chinese Exclusion Act and the 1947 War Brides Act, the latter of which allowed for the entry of 6,000 Chinese women.⁸⁸ Whether because of increased tolerance or Cold War imperatives, the old purely race-based animosities towards Chinese living in the United States were fast disappearing.⁸⁹

They were replaced by “a mixture of tolerance and pity.” While the miniscule quotas by themselves would not have altered the demographics of American Chinatowns, tens of thousands of new immigrants arrived outside the quota system as political refugees.⁹⁰ The arrival of large numbers of often wealthy and well-educated families with women and children forever transformed Chinese-American communities,

⁸⁶ Rose Hum Lee, *The Chinese in the United States of America* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1960), 18.

⁸⁷ Chen, *The Chinese of America*, 213.

⁸⁸ Lee, *The Chinese in the United States of America*, 18.

⁸⁹ Roger Daniels, *Asian America: Chinese and Japanese in the United States since 1850* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1988), 285; Lee, *Orientalism*, 145-146. Daniels credited the fact that the Cold War meant “American racism was no longer just a domestic affair,” and Lee similarly cited “the racial logic of the Cold War.” Both works were published before Mary Dudziak's *Cold War Civil Rights*, which applied the same concept in detail to black Americans. Mary L. Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

⁹⁰ Lee. *The Chinese in the United States of America*, 367. Lee wrote that “the settlement of families was equated with wooing the Chinese from Communism.”

which only a few years before were shrinking bachelor societies of aging men. Yet, as was often the case for minority groups, the path forward was not to be smooth. Diverging from McCarran, Joe McCarthy raised the alarm of Mao intentionally planting Communists among the refugees fleeing to Hong Kong. Meanwhile, continuing restrictions, quotas, and inconsistencies in the law encouraged document fraud, with immigrants pretending to be the relatives of legal aliens, the so-called phenomenon of “paper sons.” These fears created a rare bureaucratic alliance between the U.S. State Department, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and the Immigration and Naturalization Service. The ensuing investigations lasted into the early 1960s. Officials granted amnesty to Chinese immigrants suspected of fraud if they identified those who assisted them, or those they themselves suspected of also committing fraud. Ultimately, federal authorities interviewed well over 30,000 individuals, or nearly one-third of all Chinese-Americans.⁹¹ Few were deported, but it cast a fearful pall over the community.

The novel, musical, and musical film *Flower Drum Song* reflected all these developments, albeit to varying degrees. Published in 1957, C.Y. Lee's novel was one of a number of works by Chinese-American authors to achieve popularity during that decade, in marked contrast to the neglect at that time of works by Japanese-Americans.⁹² Christina Klein credited this to “the emotional bond that Americans felt with the people of China” due to their status as allies during World War II, though this fails to account

⁹¹ Xiaojian Zhao, *Remaking Chinese America: Immigration, Family, and Community, 1940-1965* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 152, 161, 174.

⁹² Karla Rae Fuller, *Hollywood Goes Oriental: CaucAsian Performance in American Film* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2010), 193.

for that nation's more recent status as a bitter enemy.⁹³ Whatever the reason, the most successful composing duo on Broadway quickly optioned the novel. A stage musical premiered in 1958 and ran for two years.⁹⁴ The film version, released in late 1961, was the fifth out of six Rogers and Hammerstein stage works to be adapted for the screen, and would become the only one not to turn a profit. Unlike the racially-mixed Broadway cast, the film's cast was nearly entirely Asian, making it the first such Hollywood production, and the only one until 1993's "The Joy Luck Club."⁹⁵

The musical and its film version, which diverge substantially from the novel in tone, substance, and plot, center around a romantic rhombus which, in standard comedic fashion, must be sorted out by the final curtain or reel. The picture bride Mei Li and her father Dr. Li, a former Peking University professor of Philosophy, stow away from Hong Kong to San Francisco aboard a cargo ship, illegally entering the U.S. so Mei Li can marry Sammy (Samuel Adams) Fong, a night club owner with an outer-borough accent and a street-wise vocabulary straight from Frank Loesser's "Guys and Dolls." Sammy loves Linda Low, a burlesque dancer in his club, who is dating law student Wang Ta. Wang's wealthy and tradition-minded immigrant father, Wang Chi-Yang, ends up taking in the Li family, and fancies his son marrying Mei Li. Sammy's wealthy and controlling mother insists he go through with the arranged marriage until Mei Li reveals on her

⁹³ Klein, *Cold War Orientalism*, 227.

⁹⁴ By the standards of Richard Rogers and Oscar Hammerstein, this made it only a moderate commercial success. Four of their musicals ("Oklahoma!," "South Pacific," "The King and I," and "The Sound of Music," ran for over four years. "Carousel" also ran for two years, though critics regarded it as their greatest artistic work, and place it with the above four as one of their five "classics." Their three other stage musicals each closed after less than a year, and were thus commercial failures.

⁹⁵ Klein *Cold War Orientalism*, 232.

wedding day that she came to the U.S. illegally, declaring – based on a movie she had seen on television about Mexican immigrants, “my back is wet.” Wang Ta's father does not share Sammy Fong's mother's concern with immigration law, agrees to let his son marry Mei Li – who loved Wang Ta anyway – and Sammy's mother is forced to allow her son to marry Linda, who is a natural-born citizen. All ends happily with Mei Li concluding the film by telling Wang Ta “tomorrow we must go to the Temple of Ding-Hao and thank the Goddess of Heaven for television.”⁹⁶

Along the way, the film presents a vision of a self-contained, yet very American, Chinatown featuring Chinese cops, Chinese hoods, Chinese businessmen, Chinese entertainers, and even Chinese beatniks. “Flower Drum Song” thus engages in a sort of “reverse yellowface,” with Asian actors playing parts that would normally be reserved for white actors, and in fact are “played” by white characters in Lee's novel, which aims for a semblance of realism. The male leads of Sammie Fong and Wang Ta are essentially trust fund children (though Sammie is in advanced middle-aged, and Wang Ta his late-20s), their parents subsidizing their business enterprises and education, respectively. This Chinatown is a far cry from the crowded slums of the late-19th century, or for that matter the actual Chinatown of 1960s San Francisco.

The film was thus an update of early 20th century “melting pot” immigrant stage dramas, with Chinese standing in for Irish, Italians, and Jews, and the setting suitably upgraded with the latest in consumer goods and luxurious postwar living. The “Grant

⁹⁶ *Flower Drum Song* [DVD], Universal Studios, 2006. Early in the film, Mei Li reveals she entered the U.S. illegally because waiting in Hong Kong to fill the legal quota could have taken up to a decade, by which time she would no longer be of marriageable age.

Avenue” scene is set during a Chinese New Year parade which features a Chinese marching band playing “Stars and Stripes Forever” while Chinese children walk behind dressed in Revolutionary War costumes.⁹⁷ Its most analyzed and deconstructed scene in this regard is the song-and-dance number “Chop Suey,” sung by Wang Chi-Yang’s willful sister Madame Liang at a party celebrating her completion of citizenship classes. Before bursting into song, Liang – who wears traditional Chinese clothing but throughout the movie quotes the Constitution, the Declaration of Independence, and Abraham Lincoln – declares “I am happy to be both Chinese and American,” to which Wang Chi-Yang replies “you are like the Chinese dish the Americans invented. Everything is in it – all mixed up.”⁹⁸ After her vocal, the younger, more assimilated guests perform, in rapid succession, a square dance, a waltz, the Charleston, and various swing and rhythm and blues steps. The notion that Liang can become fully American without sacrificing her Chinese heritage reflects the librettist Hammerstein’s left-leaning tolerant liberalism.⁹⁹ Juanita Hall, an African-American who had previously played the Vietnamese character Bloody Mary in “South Pacific,” portrayed Liang on both stage and screen. She is the film’s only primary non-Asian actor.¹⁰⁰ In the 2006 commentary to

⁹⁷ Chinese New Year Festivals in San Francisco during this period, like other ethnic festivals, though perhaps far more so, given the international climate and past prejudices, “adopted the ideology of conformity and integration. See Chiou-ling Yeh, “Contesting Identities: Youth Rebellion in San Francisco’s Chinese New Year Festivals, 1953-1969,” in Susan Lan Cassel, ed., *The Chinese in America: A History from Gold Mountain to the New Millennium* (Lanham, Maryland: Altamire Press, 2002), 345, n. 8.

⁹⁸ *Flower Drum Song* [DVD], Universal Studios, 2006.

⁹⁹ In 1953, at the height of his popularity, Dulles’s State Department nearly denied Oscar Hammerstein a passport for his continued defense of Paul Robeson, as well as for past generous financial support for numerous Popular Front organizations. Klein, *Cold War Orientalism*, 186-187.

¹⁰⁰ The only other non-Asian to appear onscreen is a white man who mugs Wang Chi-Yang on his doorstep.

the DVD, Nancy Kwan, who played Linda Low, expressed surprise when she was told by the musical theater expert interviewing her that Hall was African-American, Low having assumed Hall was at least part Asian.¹⁰¹

There are numerous revealing differences between the musical and its source material. There is no Sammie Fong, for instance, in Lee's book. In the novel, Mei Li does marry Wang Ta. But she and her father enter the country as legal refugees, the latter having been a master cook for an American general who assisted the Guomindong, and the former a singer of traditional Chinese songs, hence the book's title.¹⁰² The widower and former landlord Wang Chi-yang fled Hunan for San Francisco five years earlier in 1949 with his two sons, largely because he objected to Mao's westernizing and modernizing tendencies, specifically communist insistence on the wearing of western-inspired clothing. San Francisco is one of the few places left where he can live a nominally traditional Chinese life, although his teenage son has already forgotten Chinese, and Wang has a hard time being understood by the coastal natives who dominate Chinatown, which in the book is both much more Chinese than in the musical, while also containing far more white people. His wealth, unexplained in the musical, is described in the book as largely derived from generous remittances from a wealthy uncle in Hong Kong.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ Kwan, a native of Hong Kong, was half Chinese and half Scottish. She was the only cast member to be part-Chinese, all the other major actors being of Japanese heritage.

¹⁰² C.Y. Lee, *The Flower Drum Song* (Farrar, Straus and Cudahy, 1957), 133. Along with Wang Chi-yang, Mei Li is the only major character to emerge almost unchanged from page to stage to screen.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.* 5, 13. This explains why he is never seen working in the film.

Though ending happily like the musical, the novel is at times quite melancholy. For instance, Linda Low is a minor character who ultimately commits suicide. Lee highlights the continuing bachelor culture of Chinatown, where young men like Wang Ta have an exceedingly difficult time finding American-born Chinese wives. In the book, he is a medical student, and spends much of his time with Chinese-American men who have post-graduate degrees but can only find menial jobs. Most prominent among them is his friend Chang, who has a doctorate in political science and works in a grocery store, perhaps the first of his kind, he quips. “I hear there is a Ph.D. washing dishes at Fisherman's Wharf,” Wang Ta informs him with all seriousness. Chang, an erstwhile Hans Morgenthau, tells Wang Ta that “China – I mean Red China – is like an inflated bullfrog which is more of a bluff than a great power.”¹⁰⁴

A genuine work of literature – unlike *Doctor No* or *The Manchurian Candidate* – *The Flower Drum Song* is perhaps the only source material Rogers and Hammerstein adapted but did not do justice to. Reviewers, already familiar with musical's charms and limitations, gave the film mixed reviews. Curiously, they found its depiction of Asian-American life patronizing. *Newsweek* joked the movie “makes plain that all Chinese are cute as little dolls and most of them are rich as Mme. Chiang.”¹⁰⁵ *The New Yorker* declared that “the settings are every bit as authentic as Fu Manchu.”¹⁰⁶ Even the unprecedented use of a nearly all-Asian cast came in for criticism because almost none of the actors were Chinese. “Honest fellows, they don't all look alike,” scolded *Time*

¹⁰⁴ Ibid. 20, 104.

¹⁰⁵ “Musical Chop Suey,” *Newsweek*, November 27, 1961, 89.

¹⁰⁶ Brendan Gill, “Paper Problems,” *New Yorker*, November 18, 1961, 207.

magazine, no paragon of ethnic sensitivity when it came to reporting news from China during this period.¹⁰⁷ Brendan Gill of the *New Yorker* spotted “the oddest glimpses of 'The Jazz Singer' and 'Abie's Irish Rose,’” two obvious inspirations, and Philip Hartung of *Commonweal* correctly recognized that Jack Soo's Sammy Fong was a “sort of Chinese-American version of a Damon Runyon character,” Loesser's “Guys and Dolls” having been based upon Runyon's stories.¹⁰⁸ Thus, Rogers and Hammerstein's attempt at humanizing, celebrating, and Americanizing Chinese-Americans was deemed insufficiently authentic, even in its own time.

Two other films about China released during the years in question, both of which were set in China and touched heavily upon the potential threat to the West posed by that nation, have escaped scholarly attention, and perhaps for good reason. “55 Days At Peking,” released in the summer of 1963, was produced by Samuel Bronston, the self-styled “King of the Epics,” who had found box office success in 1961 with both “El Cid” and “King of Kings.” As its title indicates, the film focuses on the siege of the foreign legations in the Qing capital during the Boxer Rebellion in 1900. Charlton Heston, who starred in “El Cid,” plays the Marine Major Matt Lewis, who in this telling leads the defense of the legations. David Niven plays British diplomat Sir Arthur Robinson, who seeks at first to conciliate the Boxers, ingratiate himself with China's rulers, and stoically endure their humiliations. Early in the film, his wife asks him “you remember what Napoleon said about China?,” to Robinson replies “I'll never forget it. Let China sleep –

¹⁰⁷ “No Tickee, No Worry,” *Time*, November 24, 1961, 66.

¹⁰⁸ Philip T. Hartung, *Commonweal*, December 1, 1961, 260.

for when she wakes, the world will tremble,” citing the same quote Chester Bowles used to preface his 1959 *Saturday Evening Post* article on the potential Chinese threat.

Robinson tells the Dowager Empress “China's greatest virtue is her patience, and if she will exercise that now, she will achieve everything,” advice neither the Dowager then, nor Mao in the film's own time, heeded. Meanwhile, Robinson warns Lewis “you're not in the Wild West now, you know. You don't go around shooting Chinese like you do red Indians.” Though a man of action, Heston's Lewis is introduced to the audience as a sort of “non-ugly” American, instructing his men as they march to Peking “this is an ancient and highly cultured civilization, so don't get the idea you're any better than these people just because they can't speak English.”¹⁰⁹

Before long, all attempts at cultural sensitivity and conciliation are cast to the winds as the Empress's duplicitous advisers convince her to unite with the bloodthirsty Boxers and unleash their Oriental hordes upon every white person they can get their hands on. The Boxer Rebellion was the last time before the movie's own period that the world's powers were united as one against the Chinese, and the film both celebrates this multinational coalition and hints at its fragility. It would, however, be stretching matters to find much intentional political symbolism in this particular movie. Its writer, Philip Yordan, declared that “it's pictures we're making, not history” in reply to criticisms of the considerable liberties the scripts he wrote for Bronston took with the

¹⁰⁹ *55 Days At Peking* [DVD], Garry's Trading Co., 2003.

historical record.¹¹⁰ As with “Dr. No,” critics' low expectations were largely met. They praised the film's high production values, particularly the lavish sets Bronston had constructed on the plains of Spain.¹¹¹ The ethnic stereotypes and use of white actors to play the main Chinese characters were noted but not disapproved of, *Time* joking that “Prince Tuan, complete with jeweled-gold fingernail scabbards” appeared “about as welcome as Dr. Fu Manchu at a meeting of the A.M.A.,” and Moira Walsh observing that English actors “oddly, but not ineffectively,” played all the Chinese officials.¹¹² The critic from the *National Review* claimed to enjoy watching “thousands of evil-eyed Chinese villains” being mowed down by modern western weaponry.¹¹³ *Newsweek* did take note of the fact that Heston's on-screen love interest, the Russian Baroness Natalie Ivanoff, played by Ava Gardner, was killed off with a half-hour remaining in the film. Finding this odd, the critic surmised that “after all, Ava is a Russian, and she *has* an affair with a Chinese general, so for her to live and marry Heston would have been controversial.”¹¹⁴ Thus Cold War politics and racial anxieties might have intruded into even this confection.

The Cold War is ostensibly at the heart of “Satan Never Sleeps,” such as that 1962 film can be said to have one. Director Leo McCarey, whose career had been on the

¹¹⁰ John Gregory Dunne, “Movies in Brief,” *National Review*, July 30, 1963, 72. In Dunne's assessment, Yordan's scripts were “not so much written, they're manufactured.”

¹¹¹ *Newsweek* called the battle scenes “splashy,” *Time* praised the cinematography as “magnificent,” and *America* termed the production “stunning.” “Nobody Eats Rats,” *Newsweek*, June 3, 1963, 84; “Foreign Devils Go Home,” *Time*, May 21, 1963, 80; Moira Walsh, “55 Days At Peking,” *America*, July 6, 1963, 26.

¹¹² “Foreign Devils Go Home,” 80; Walsh, “55 Days at Peking,” 26.

¹¹³ Dunne, “Movies in Brief,” 72.

¹¹⁴ “Nobody Eats Rats,” 84. Italics in original.

decline since the commercial and critical triumphs of “Going My Way” in 1944 and “The Bells of St Mary's” in 1945, returned to the the subject of the Catholic priesthood, albeit in southwest China rather than midwestern American. William Holden stars as Father O'Banion, a former Marine and newly-minted Chinese missionary, who is followed to his new assignment by the smitten Siu Lan, played by Vietnamese actress Frances Nuyen. O'Banion intends to replace the wise old Father Bovard, played by Clifton Webb, who worries about abandoning his local converts to both the new priest and the advancing communist forces, O'Banion having picked late 1949 as a propitious moment to begin a career as a missionary in the Chinese interior. Leading the Red Chinese forces is Colonel Ho San, a former parishioner of Bovard's, played by Weaver Lee. To mock Christian non-violence, Ho San repeatedly slaps O'Banion, yelling out “he's a paper tiger!,” which inspires the former Marine to thrash the communist, much to Bovard's disapproval and Siu Lan's delight¹¹⁵ Ho San sacks and loots the church, rapes and impregnates Siu Lan, and imprisons Bovard and O'Banion. But he is purged by a visiting Soviet official for treating the priests and their congregants with insufficient brutality. The Russian has Bovard tortured in order to extract a public confession. Yet the priest remains defiant, inspiring the villagers to rise up in revolt. The loyal Christians, including Ho San's parents, are promptly massacred by Chinese soldiers, inspiring his reconversion. He leads Siu Lan and O'Banion across the border – presumably to Burma – and eventually to Hong Kong, Bovard sacrificing himself to ensure the escape's success.

¹¹⁵ *Satan Never Sleeps* [DVD], Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2004.

The film, a commercial failure, is essentially a screwball comedy set during an apocalypse. Critics noted this “unfortunate mixture” of “pseudo-romantic fun-and-games and the extremely serious Red oppression.”¹¹⁶ The strained relationship between the older and younger priest was dismissed as a tired retread of “Going My Way.”¹¹⁷ The redemption of the rapist, and his marriage to his victim, was universally condemned as offensive. “The colonel, it turns out, isn't really a nasty, Red rapist after all, see? He's a nice Christian rapist,” *Time* rancidly concluded.¹¹⁸ Of Ho San's transformation into a “comic hero,” *Newsweek* responded “Aw. McC'mon.”¹¹⁹ As Moira Walsh put it, “it takes real talent to produce a film that everybody will hate, but this may be it.”¹²⁰ Nonetheless, the making of the film indicated that a famous director believed the time was propitious for him to revive his career by exploiting anti-Chinese sentiment.

In this assessment of his audience at least, Leo McCarey was correct. The remainder of the decade would feature, among other attractions, the Chinese assassin Odd Job in “Goldfinger,” no less than five “Fu Manchu” remakes, and the musical film “Thoroughly Modern Millie,” a comedy about the white slave trade which revived Chinese stereotypes not seen in Hollywood productions since the 1920s, the film's setting.¹²¹ On television, beginning in 1964 an American and a Russian secret agent joined forces on “The Man From U.N.C.L.E.” to battle mostly Asian villains in a distant

¹¹⁶ Philip T. Hartung, “Ennui Anyone?,” *Commonweal*, March 16, 1962, 645.

¹¹⁷ Moira Walsh, “Satan Never Sleeps,” *America*, March 10, 1962, 774; Hartung, “Ennui Anyone?,” 645.

¹¹⁸ “Nothing Sacred,” *Time*, March 9, 1962, 91.

¹¹⁹ “Taint Funny, McCarey,” *Newsweek*, March 12, 1962, 102.

¹²⁰ Walsh, “Satan Never Sleeps,” 775.

¹²¹ Jacobson and Gonzalez, *What Have They Built You to Do?*, 124.

post-Cold War future. “Get Smart,” which premiered in 1965, featured an assortment of predominately Asian henchmen.¹²² In a 1966 episode of “I Spy,” the American heroes, after saving the world from a Chinese Communist, are decorated in the Kremlin by the K.G.B. To quote Khigh Dhiegh from that year, “we're getting back to the era of the 'Yellow Menace.’”¹²³ The earlier part of the decade witnessed the tentative beginnings of that era's revival. The Chinese had yet to fully emerge as villains in their own right, and the Russians were not yet associated with the good guys. But that was the emerging trend.

This was also reflected in comic books which, for the first time since “Buck Rogers” and “Flash Gordon” in the 1930s, embraced Yellow Peril stereotypes. The first of many examples to come was the character of Radioactive Man, formerly Chinese nuclear scientist Chen Lu, who turned himself into a super-powered mutant in order to serve his nation. He made his debut on American newsstands in June 1963, crossing the Himalayas and invading India, as the P.L.A. had done the previous year. There he is confronted by Thor, who nearly succumbs to Radioactive Man's powers of mind control.¹²⁴ Modern geopolitics thus converged with old stereotypes, giving them new life, and the American people new enemies who were variations upon old themes.

¹²² Hamamoto, *Monitored Peril*, 117-119.

¹²³ Norman Sklarewitz, “The New Bad Guys: Orientals Take Over As TV, Film Villains,” *Wall Street Journal*, October 12, 1966, 1.

¹²⁴ For a description of Radioactive Man, see <http://comicbookdb.com/character.php?ID=4415>. For a list of his appearances, see http://comicbookdb.com/character_chron.php?ID=4415. For the cover of his debut issue, where he is depicted hypnotizing Thor, see http://comicbookdb.com/graphics/comic_graphics/1/394/57553_20100430095242_large.jpg. Thor was one of The Avengers. The arch-villain of fellow Avenger Ironman was the Mandarin, who first appeared in 1964. The Avengers series was replete with other minor Chinese villains.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION: POSTURING AND POLICY

As a member of Merrill's Marauders, fighting in Burma behind Japanese lines, Roger Hilsman established both a personal familiarity with the Chinese and a pattern of putting himself in the vanguard. He and his fellow commandos did not constitute a strong enough force to win the campaign. But they could blaze a trail and set an example for the larger, better-equipped forces in the rear who would prevail. Such was the case nearly two decades later in San Francisco on December 13, 1963, three weeks after the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. At infinitely less personal risk, he became among the first to engage a new enemy in open battle. That enemy was the China Lobby. Like the Japanese in 1944, they were well past the peak of their power, but still formidable, intimidating, and unwilling to yield without a fight. Kennedy had demurred from antagonizing them. But in his speech before the Commonwealth Club, Hilsman attacked many of the China Lobby's most cherished beliefs and assumptions, declaring – or at the very least heavily implying – that the new administration no longer subscribed to them, and the previous one may not have either. It was a rhetorical reconnaissance-in-force, of no decisive value in and of itself. But it gave hope to other enemies of the China Lobby, and began the process of that faction's marginalization within the foreign policy elite. Hilsman's words marked the posthumous end of the Kennedy administration's China policy, and the beginning of a new approach, one that is still being followed to this day.

The ideas Hilsman expressed that afternoon were years in the making. The decision to publicize them had been made several months earlier at the very latest. In his memoirs, published in 1967,¹ the former Assistant Secretary of State claimed the speech was given primarily due to “pressure from the public press.” It was thus an attempt to move public opinion given in response to manifestations of that opinion, specifically the seemingly widespread sentiment that a continuation of Eisenhower-era policies and postures in the context of the Sino-Soviet dispute had become “increasingly ridiculous.” Erstwhile “China Hands” such as James Thomson, Allen Whiting, and Robert Barnett, who had pushed for years within the State Department for a change in policy, helped Hilsman write the speech. They intended the speech to be an open rebuke of the late John Foster Dulles, who in San Francisco in 1957 had declared the Chinese communist regime to be a “passing phase.”² The speech's primary purpose was to make clear those in power in the United States no longer believed that to be the case.

At its heart, Hilsman's speech was a less evocative and minimally provocative rewriting of the speech some in the State Department had crafted for President Kennedy two years previously, but which he never gave. Hilsman declared his support for “policies of strength and firmness, accompanied by a constant readiness to negotiate,” which had long been the approach taken towards the Soviet Union.³ Hilsman closed with

¹ Hilsman's were the only memoirs produced by a Kennedy foreign policy official before Nixon's visit to China. Thus, he had no reason, unlike Dean Rusk, to retrospectively reinterpret events to put himself and the administration on the “right side of history,” so to speak.

² Roger Hilsman, *To Move A Nation: The Politics of Foreign Policy in the Administration of John F. Kennedy* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1967), 344, 351.

³ Roger Hilsman, “United States Policy Toward Communist China,” *Department of State Bulletin*, January 6, 1964, 16.

the sound bite “we pursue today toward Communist China a policy of the open door,” a phrase with an obvious pedigree concerning Sino-American relations, and one the Kennedy State Department had long toyed with. Like the crafters of the shelved presidential address endorsing a “Two Chinas” policy, Hilsman's speechwriters intended to demonstrate that the United States would no longer participate in the rhetorical hate spiral which had existed for so long between the governments of both nations.

According to Hilsman, China “has used hatred as an engine of national policy,” but from now on “we will not sow the dragon's seed of hate.”⁴ If Hilsman was correct, the Johnson administration would take the high road in an attempt to curry favor with global opinion, as Chester Bowles and Robert Komer had previously advocated.

Hilsman laid the lion's share of the blame for China's isolation upon the Chinese leadership themselves, but did not entirely exonerate his own side. Like a bleeding-heart judge sentencing a criminal who had endured a rough childhood, Hilsman assumed the Chinese communists were not irrevocably depraved, but capable of reform and able to learn from their mistakes. The People's Republic might be “the torchbearer of a rigid totalitarian ideology that threatens all its neighbors,” but it was led by men who “have seen extraordinarily little of the world.” Expose these leaders to new ideas, and new policies might follow. The Chinese communists were not incapable of learning and adaptation. They had proven themselves to be “pragmatic when their existence is

⁴ Roger Hilsman, “United States Policy Toward Communist China,” *Department of State Bulletin*, January 6, 1964, 16, 17. The previous year, James Thomson expressed his support for the publicizing of the phrase “an open back door” as the term for a revised China policy. See Thomson to Rice, December 27, 1962, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library, James C. Thomson Papers, Box 15, Folder 4.

threatened.” Mao was therefore not Hitler. He need not be vanquished, and could be engaged, provided he remained contained. As for the American people, they had proven themselves all-too-willing to misunderstand the Chinese people and their influence over them. American involvement with China have been both “intense” and “not wholly real,” implying the intensity existed largely in the imaginations of Americans. This intensity of feeling “was fed by illusions as well as good will.” Americans had overlooked “the depth and fervor of Chinese nationalism” and were unaware of the “sense of repeated humiliation” that Mao had proven so adept at exploiting.⁵

Eisenhower and Dulles had failed to take these factors into account. Even worse, they had fed, rather than sought to dampen, the sentiments of bitterness and betrayal felt by so many Americans towards the Chinese. They had embraced irrational emotion rather than hard-headed sobriety. It was now “time to take stock – dispassionately,” of U.S. policy in that region. Chiang Kai-shek's American supporters had long called those who wanted to engage with Mao naïve. Hilsman was now accusing them of excessive sentimentality. Mimicking a line from the proposed Kennedy speech, Hilsman observed “there has been perhaps more emotion about our China policy than about our policy toward any single country since World War II.”⁶ Hilsman was openly proclaiming himself, and by extension his State Department and his president, to be the dispassionate, reasonable, and hard-headed faction.

⁵ Ibid 11-13.

⁶ Ibid. 12, 15.

While Hilsman attacked Taiwan's most ardent American supporters, he expressed support for the Taiwanese people and their rulers. He praised Taiwan's strong economic growth, claiming its rapid development provided a model for “less developed nations everywhere,” exactly what mainland China had desired but so manifestly failed to offer. America's support for the continued de facto independence of Taiwan was sacrosanct. “So long as Peiping insists on the destruction of this relationship” as the “*sine qua non*” for any improvement of relations with the U.S., “there can be no prospect for such improvement.”⁷ The United States would not sacrifice a small ally to gain a colossal potential friend. But if Mao did not demand this surrender, relations could improve. Though Hilsman never uttered the words “a passing phase” or mention Dulles by name, the message was clear. The U.S. government now recognized that the Chinese communists were not going anywhere, and was prepared to work with that regime to bring it in from the diplomatic cold.

In a letter written to United Nations Ambassador Adlai Stevenson six days after delivering the speech, presumably to provide him with media talking points, Hilsman declared that “our policy towards Communist China is one of firmness, flexibility and dispassion.” The speech “signifies no change in U.S. policy, no new departure.” It was instead “significant primarily as the first attempt in some time to articulate the policies we have been pursuing toward Communist China for several years.”⁸ In this statement, the Assistant Secretary was instructing the Ambassador to tell the press nothing

⁷ Ibid. 14, 16.

⁸ Letter to Adlai Stevenson, December 19, 1963, 1, 2, JFKL, Roger Hilsman Papers, Box 1, Folder 9.

journalists had not already figured out for themselves. Max Frankel of the *New York Times* termed the speech “an important summary of their [the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations] long-held but rarely articulated views on Communist China.”⁹ Numerous stories in major newspapers alluded to the “open door” phrase in their headlines.¹⁰ The *Baltimore Sun* did not, but included the phrase in the article's lead, stating Hilsman “unveiled a new kind of 'open door' policy toward Red China.”¹¹ This was the only intimation that a change had been made in more than rhetoric. Regardless, the rhetoric was immediately seen as significant in its own right. The *Christian Science Monitor* called the speech “the most articulate and complete statement of American policy on mainland China to have been made in many years.”¹²

Only Frankel went beyond the text of the speech to attempt to confirm precisely who Hilsman was speaking for, beyond himself. This would soon become a very important and highly disputed matter. He reported that a White House spokesman explained that the text of the speech was approved within the “higher levels of the Administration, but not by President Johnson personally.”¹³ The phrase “higher levels” was a vague one, and this choice of words was most likely deliberate. An editorial in the *Hartford Courant* noted that the State Department distributed the text of the speech to

⁹ Max Frankel, “U.S. 'Door Open' To Talks If China Gives Up Hatred,” *New York Times*, December 14, 1963, 1.

¹⁰ Murry Marder, “Door Is Open To Red China, Hilsman Says,” *Washington Post*, December 14, 1963, A5; Robert Brunn, “U.S. Door Ajar for Peking,” *Christian Science Monitor*, December 16, 1963, 1.

¹¹ Howard Norton, “U.S. Reviews Peking Policy,” *Baltimore Sun*, December 14, 1963, 1.

¹² Brunn, “U.S. Door Ajar for Peking,” 1.

¹³ Frankel, “U.S. 'Door Open' To Talks If China Gives Up Hatred,” 1, 2.

media outlets, implying they believed it to be important.¹⁴ The *Washington Post* expressed disappointment Hilsman had not gone farther. Comparing his statements to those of Dulles, the editors found all too many similarities in substance, the “chief difference” between the two speeches being their “tone.” The *Post* lamented “after six years, has the United States nothing more to say than if China changes, the situation might improve?”¹⁵ However, in a piece of news analysis, Frankel expressed the emerging consensus that “the most remarkable fact” concerning the speech “was that it was made at all.” Throughout the Kennedy years, China had been the foreign policy issue which must not be named, as the president let his administration “slide into timidity” in the face of pressure from the China Lobby and its supporters.¹⁶

The China Lobby itself, in the form of the Committee of One Million, immediately recognized the threatening implications of Hilsman's remarks. They charged him with “promoting a 'two Chinas solution.’”¹⁷ In this assessment, the Committee was correct. Hilsman stated the U.S. would enter into negotiations with communist China and welcome it back into the family of nations if that regime ceased to demand the destruction of the Taiwanese regime as a precondition for negotiations. This would constitute a “Two Chinas” policy in all but name. In a December 31 internal memorandum, Marvin Liebman, the director and usually the sole paid employee of the Committee, castigated “the demoralizing softness of Mr. Hilsman's major theme of

¹⁴ “Hot Air Through The Open Door,” *Hartford Courant*, December 16, 1963, 18.

¹⁵ “Open?” *Washington Post*, December 15, 1963, E6.

¹⁶ Max Frankel, “Looking Toward Peking.” *New York Times*, December 16, 1963, 3.

¹⁷ “Anti-Peking Group Assails Hilsman Speech on China,” *New York Times*, December 31, 1963, 22.

conciliation and tolerance.”¹⁸ This was the first time the Committee had felt compelled to condemn the actions of a member of any administration. From that moment on, its utterances to the media and to supporters would take on an increasingly strident tone, reflecting opposition to the growing acceptance of an alternate point of view and the increasing fearlessness of their adversaries. Especially symptomatic of the organization's shortcomings was the fact that it took them more than two weeks to issue a statement.

The Committee of One Million was most likely reacting to and reinforcing statements made by the Taiwanese government, though even if they were waiting for Chiang's response, there was still a considerable lag time. Within a week, Chiang's government let it be known that they had immediately reached out to the Johnson administration expressing “disagreement” and requesting “clarification.”¹⁹ According to the *Christian Science Monitor*, the speech provoked “eager interest in Japan, scorn in Peking, and intense disapproval on Chinese nationalist Formosa.”²⁰ Chinese spokesman Ta Kung Pao claimed Hilsman was requesting that China “open the door to welcome the thief.”²¹ The *People's Daily* headline read “Hilsman grieved at the United States being trapped in a blind ally of opposing China but vainly attempts double-faced maneuver to recoup failure.”²² The newspaper had previously used the phrase “blind alley” to

¹⁸ Informational Memorandum, Marvin Liebman, December 31, 1963, 5, Sterling Memorial Library. Yale University, Right-Wing Pamphlets Collection, Group No. 775, Box No. 10, Folder 170.

¹⁹ “U.S. Official's China Views Irk Nationalists,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 20, 1963, 22; “Alarmed,” *Hartford Courant*, December 20, 1963, 12.

²⁰ Tajashi Oka, “Asian Capitals Watch Open Door,” *Christian Science Monitor*, December 17, 1963, 1.

²¹ “Chinese Reds Deride Speech By Hilsman,” *New York Times*, December 15, 1963, 18.

²² “Peking Scorns Hint By U.S. Of Policy Change,” *Chicago Tribune*, December 16, 1963, C9.

describe Eisenhower and Dulles's confrontational approach.²³ The use of that term in this instance was reflective of Mao's belief that Kennedy was “worse than Eisenhower” because he was duplicitous in maintaining the same hostile policy while employing conciliatory rhetoric. Had Mao adopted that approach, the U.S. media would no doubt have accused him of “Oriental trickery” or, perhaps, inscrutability.

Instead, they soon said that about their own government. For the first, but by no means the last time, Secretary of State Dean Rusk undercut a junior administration official who hinted at a softening of policy toward communist China. Shortly after Taiwan lodged its complaint, Rusk reassured them that there was no change in American policy, “seeming to cancel the conditional policy toward Communist China that Hilsman had proffered in his speech.” According to veteran pundit Arthur Krock, Rusk merely “thickened this fog” which already “suffuses American Far Eastern diplomacy.”²⁴ Ten days later, while formally announcing the United States was taking the Soviet side in the Sino-Soviet dispute, confirming what had been evident for at least one year, Rusk assured China hard-liners that Hilsman's speech “simply referred to the longest possible range future.”²⁵ Rusk said he saw no sign of “significant change” in relations with the Chinese, but was hopeful regarding near-term improvement of relations with the Soviets.²⁶

²³ “Asian Capitals Watch Open Door,” 1.

²⁴ Arthur Krock, “In The Nation,” *New York Times*, December 19, 1963, 32..

²⁵ “Diplomatic Shuffle,” *Washington Post*, December 29, 1963, E6; Murrey Marder, “Rusk Foresees Peace Probes In Year Ahead,” *Washington Post*, December 29, 1963, A2.

²⁶ Don Irwin, “Rusk Sees No Change in Red China Hostility,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 29, 1963, F1.

Hilsman sent his talking points to Stevenson the day after Rusk appeared to have disowned his speech. Later that day, the U.N. Ambassador made a statement on the matter which sought to resolve the contradictions within the State Department. The *Christian Science Monitor* summed up Stevenson's remarks by claiming the Johnson administration was now pursuing a “two-pronged policy” coupling no change in the existing policy of nonrecognition with “a new disposition to keep the subject under open discussion and in the public eye.”²⁷ This aptly summed up Hilsman's intention, which was to begin the process of policy change by moving the debate beyond the corridors of Foggy Bottom. As the *Guardian* in Britain aptly predicted, “time will be allowed to erode the old policy.”²⁸

This approach understandably created confusion and gave the appearance of inconsistency. A *New York Times* editorial noted the role reversal of the now forthright, honest Chinese and the scheming, backhanded Yankee by claiming Rusk had “made American policy seem even more of a Chinese puzzle than before.” Echoing Hilsman's speech by writing that “the Chinese Communists have shown prudence on issues involving national survival,” the editors called for “normalization of contacts with the Chinese,” including “open diplomatic relations” once “Peking accepts the 'two China' concept.”²⁹ This was the first time the nation's most influential newspaper had called for normalization. That it did so within a month of Hilsman's speech, and in doing so

²⁷ Earl W. Foell, “U.S. Policy Firm: Line Restated By Stevenson,” *Christian Science Monitor*, December 20, 1963, 2.

²⁸ “Opening the door to China,” *The Guardian*, December 14, 1963, 6.

²⁹ “Policy Toward Peking,” *New York Times*, January 12, 1964, E12.

utilized his arguments and proposals, demonstrated how that speech had altered the elite conversation by legitimizing advocacy of policy change. Hilsman's plan to prepare public opinion was beginning to bear fruit. The Committee of One Million had declared in 1962 that “the only force that has so far blocked a U.N. seat for Red China has been American public opinion.”³⁰ Popular support was easier to maintain when the other side was mute. Increasingly, that would no longer be the case.

For those who in the tradition of Bowles and Komer believed time was not on America's side when it came to the policy of isolating communist China, the conversion of the *New York Times* could not have happened soon enough. If the communist monolith was no more, the Free World monolith was beginning to crumble as well. By the end of January, France had established full diplomatic relations with the People's Republic. In his first public statement after this event, Rusk reiterated that the U.S. “will never abandon” the Chinese nationalists.³¹ He said so in Tokyo, while visiting a Japanese ally eager to resume trade with mainland China. At one time willing to employ Yellow Peril rhetoric with a zeal not seen since the heyday of Kaiser Wilhelm II, Charles De Gaulle now found common cause with China over their mutual desire to develop a nuclear capability in defiance of the recently-signed Limited Nuclear Test Ban Treaty. Chinese moral and material support for the FLN in Algeria was moot after the signing of

³⁰ Letter, September 24, 1962, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University, Right-Wing Pamphlets Collection, Group No. 775, Box No. 10, Folder 170.

³¹ Donald Neff, “U.S. Will Never Quit Nationalists, Rusk Vows,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 29, 1964, 5.

the Evian accords.³² Given France's current foreign policy priorities, a rapprochement with China made sense beyond its certainty to irritate the Americans.

This was the latest and most pertinent example to date of the notion that, in the words of columnist Louis Fleming, “as the years have passed since the victory of the revolution in 1949, it is Washington, more than Peking, that has been isolated by its China policy.” Hilsman's speech was the first sign that “reluctantly, the United States is speaking about the unspeakable.” Though Fleming supported Hilsman over Rusk, it was not because he discounted the Chinese threat. Citing incursions into Korea, Tibet, Russia, India, and Indochina, Fleming declared that “of all the postwar powers, China has proved the most predatory.” This was the language of the Committee of One Million. But he employed these facts to draw a very different conclusion. China must now be engaged not in spite of its menace, but because of it. One must accept “the realities of China,” and Hilsman's attempt at doing so “was critically new in terms of State Department policy. He had opened a dialogue that must now be pursued, and cannot but lead to change.”³³

Noam Kochavi wrote that Hilsman's speech “comprised no less, but also no more, than an important midstage” in the evolution of U.S. policy toward the People's Republic of China.³⁴ In this assessment, Kochavi went farther than any previous historian of Kennedy's foreign policy. But he did not go far enough. According to the

³² For examples of France's *volte face* concerning Western and white solidarity, see Matthew A Connelly, *A Diplomatic Revolution: Algeria's Fight for Independence and the Origins of the Post-Cold War Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

³³ Louis B. Fleming, “U.S. Reviewing Its China Policy,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 5, 1964, N1.

³⁴ Noam Kochavi, *A Conflict Perpetuated: China Policy During the Kennedy Years* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 2002), 230.

traditional, purely archival approach to diplomatic history, Kochavi was exactly correct. But he ignored public perceptions as influenced by and reflected in the popular press. This is inadequate, particularly on this issue. Hilsman himself wrote that the primary reason he gave the speech was to answer the prodding and taunts of the media. It is thus essential to bring the public into the picture. Until Hilsman's San Francisco speech, the public was entirely in the dark about the new ideas that had been bandied about for years within the Kennedy administration. For the American people, this was no midpoint. It was the beginning. In terms of the opinions expressed by the most influential press organs, it was the beginning as well. Hilsman had raised the checkered flag. A race to endorse changing China policy was now on.

Assessing the impact of Hilsman's speech two days after it had been given, Max Frankel concluded that "it did not change policy, but it changed Washington's posture."³⁵ There was an irony in the truth of this observation. In an April 1962 memorandum outlining many of the ideas Hilsman would later publicly express, Chester Bowles called the isolation of China "a national posture rather than a national policy."³⁶ Yet Bowles objected to the posturing of Eisenhower and Dulles not because it was empty posturing, but because it was the wrong kind of empty posturing. As a politician who gave a speech on "The Power of Public Opinion," Bowles understood the value of symbolism and rhetoric for rallying opinion to change a policy or, in the words of Hilsman, "to move a

³⁵ Frankel, "Looking Toward Peking," 3.

³⁶ U.S. Policies in the Far East – Review and Recommendations Memorandum, April 4, 1962, 29, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University, Chester Bowles Papers, Group No. 628, Series No. 1, Box No. 311, Folder 0670.

nation.” This would take time, and the shocks of unexpected events, as is invariably the case. All of Kennedy's foreign policy officials who advocated changing China policy would be out of government by the time that policy had been significantly altered. It was the man their president had defeated who would realize their visions and reap the political benefit. During his fabled visit to meet with Zhou En-lai and Mao Zedong in Beijing in February of 1972, Nixon toasted his hosts by reminding them of the Chinese saying that the journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step. The first of those thousand steps were made during Kennedy's Thousand Days. They marked the turning point.

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