

WITH FEAR AND FAVOR:  
A RISING CHINA THREAT AND THE PATH TO NORMALIZATION, 1954-1971

A Dissertation

by

JEFFREY PETER CREAN

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Chair of Committee,	Jason Parker
Committee Members,	Terry Anderson
	Di Wang
	William Norris
	Andrew Johns
Head of Department,	David Vaught

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## ABSTRACT

Why did President Richard Nixon visit communist China in February 1972? And why was his July 1971 announcement of that trip the subject of such public euphoria, particularly given the intense antipathy towards the Chinese communists during the previous two decades? To answer these questions, this dissertation travels on two interconnected paths. First, it is the backstage story of a diplomatic revolution, chronicling how initially mid-level and then upper-level Executive Branch officials sought to change first the preconceptions which supported existing China policy, and then the policy itself. Second, it details how first the informed public and then the mass public reversed their once-steadfast positions on this issue, making change not only possible but profitable. The efforts of these officials inspired pundits and academics to call for change, which in turn altered the opinions of prominent senators and congressmen, who went from enforcing the status quo to calling for its upending. Underlying everything, particularly after 1960, was growing fear of a rising China. Now that a hostile communist regime ruling the world's most populous nation was no longer "a passing phase," the question of how to come to terms with Chinese power became pressing. A new policy of "Containment Without Isolation" became increasingly popular as a means of taming a powerful China and incorporating it into a U.S.-led global order.

## DEDICATION

To my mother and father

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Similar to the events discussed within it, this dissertation began with an idea, before gestating very slowly, and finally concluding with a flourish of activity built upon previous plans, assumptions, and efforts. Its inspiration was an observation of two seemingly contradictory pieces of early 1960s polling data discovered in a book of old Gallup results in the fall of 2008. Everything which followed grew out my initial hypothesis – as encapsulated in this dissertation’s title – that what was seemingly counterintuitive in fact fit together perfectly. Eight years, eighteen archives, and many shelves of books later, this is the result.

First and foremost, I would like to thank my adviser Jason Parker, who guided me along the path of turning a scattershot social science notion into a completed work of historical scholarship. Early on in the writing process, he greatly assisted my efforts to organize my voluminous and often disparate evidence and arguments into something coherent. David Villar, John Huntington, Ian Abbey, and Matthew Yokell assisted me in discovering and acquiring relevant cultural sources from the historical period under consideration. Thanks to them, there is more in this work than the fruits of my archival findings, and I believe that is something the reader can appreciate.

As for that archival research, I wish to thank Texas A&M University’s College of Liberal Arts, Melbern G. Glasscock Center for Humanities Research, Office of Graduate and Professional Studies, and the History Department for their funding assistance.

Finally, and most importantly, I wish to thank my parents, Peter and Dorothy, for all

their help along the way, as well as my sister Tara Crean and her husband Nathan Newman. Ultimately this is the sort of work one must produce alone, though never in isolation.

## CONTRIBUTORS AND FUNDING SOURCES

### **Contributors**

This work was supervised by a committee chaired by Jason Parker and includes as members, Terry Anderson and Di Wang from the Texas A&M University History Department, William Norris from the Bush School of Government and Public Service, and Andrew Johns from the Brigham Young University History Department. It contains no contributions from individual students or contributions of others.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION: BANNED IN D.C.:

### RISING POWERS AND BREAKING TABOOS

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

Napoleon Bonaparte<sup>1</sup>

Having fought the Chinese to a stalemate on the Korean Peninsula in July 1953, the U.S. Army finally surrendered in November 1954. In New Jersey. Rather than debate the Rutgers University forensics team over whether or not the U.S. should grant diplomatic recognition to the People’s Republic of China, the West Pointers forfeited the contest. That fall, the Department of Defense had forbidden debating teams from the military academies from participating in any competitions which touched upon this specific issue. According to the Pentagon, this was because “it is a controversial subject” upon which “national policy has been established.” Therefore, to have military personnel offering opinions the matter would be “inappropriate.”<sup>2</sup> That debating season, the question of diplomatic recognition of China was the most frequently asked in U.S.

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<sup>1</sup> “A Long Look at China,” Saturday Evening Post, Final Draft, 31 December 1958, 1, Folder 0604, Box 238, Series 11, Group 628, Chester Bowles Papers, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut.

<sup>2</sup> “Midshipmen, Cadets Can’t Debate China,” *Washington Post*, 17 November 1954, 15.

intercollegiate forensics competitions.<sup>3</sup> It was thus considered a topic of great interest and import at the time. Yet it was apparently too interesting, and too important, for Cadets and Midshipmen, who might in the future fight the Chinese, as their predecessors recently had, to even pretend to have an opinion on in a competition.

After the forfeit led to the revelation of the ban, officials at Princeton University protested to their distinguished alumnus, Secretary of State John Foster Dulles. Believing the ban was due to influence exercised over the Pentagon by Dulles's State Department, they appealed to him as a Princetonian to uphold the principles of academic freedom and open debate.<sup>4</sup> They did not receive a response. When asked about the ban, President and West Point alumnus Dwight Eisenhower claimed to be in opposition, arguing that "debaters should be allowed to argue any question that troubled the world." However, he declined use his authority as Commander-in-Chief to rescind the ban. As with acts of censorship during the recently ended McCarthy Era, Eisenhower opposed actions after the fact, but only symbolically and half-heartedly. Rear Admiral W.F. Boone, who was the Superintendent of the Naval Academy, affirmed that he would lift the ban with a "cheerful aye, aye" once ordered to do so by a higher authority.<sup>5</sup> But that order never came, and for its part West Point affirmed the continuation of the China Debate ban two weeks later.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Elie Abel, "President Sorry Academics Forbade Red China Debate," *New York Times*, 24 November 1954, 1.

<sup>4</sup> "Midshipmen, Cadets Can't Debate China."

<sup>5</sup> "President Sorry Academics Forbade Red China Debate."

<sup>6</sup> "West Point Keeps Ban on Red China Debate," *New York Times*, 27 November 1954, 14.

This long-forgotten and seemingly trivial episode was in fact a microcosm of U.S. policy towards communist China not only during the 1950s, but well into the following decade. The Defense Department's claims that the issue of recognition was both controversial and settled were seemingly contradictory. But it was the fact that it was "settled" which created the controversy. For those opposing the existing policy, the anathematizing of public discussion of the issue was galling. For those among this group who had been personally targeted by McCarthy and his allies in the previous years, it represented an especially painful continuation of that era, at least on this one issue. Supporters of the policy, on the other hand, viewed any questioning of that policy as a sort of heresy. Such speech might not have been technically forbidden, but it was most unwelcome. Public figures who questioned China policy risked ostracism, unless they were fortunate enough to be ignored.

Ultimately, the value of this minor controversy was to reveal that, especially on this issue, especially between the mid-1950s and the mid-1960s, words possessed immense power. Supporters of the status quo sought to either shut down the debate or, at times when that proved impossible, monopolize the conversation. The goal was to have no individual of official stature publicly question the policy of isolating the Chinese communists on four levels: diplomatic nonrecognition, exclusion from the United Nations, a ban on all U.S. trade with the Chinese mainland, and a ban on all travel by U.S. citizens to the Chinese mainland. Buttressing this strategy of containment through isolation was a belief that communist rule in China was inherently unstable and liable to collapse eventually, if not imminently. Outreach to the communists through a breaching

of any of the four levels of isolation would only legitimize and strengthen the regime, allowing its unnatural rule to continue. Thus, claims that communist rule over China was permanent, or at the very least would survive for the indefinite future, were also forbidden.

That words had such power showed the fragility of this policy consensus. Unable to withstand sustained attack, its supporters had no choice but to intimidate potential attackers into silence. That the policy survived not only the Eisenhower years but for over a decade after he left office illustrated its strength. Those who believed in it saw the Chinese communists as being like a sword whose blade was hard but brittle. With its immense population, massive armed forces, and deep control over the populace, it appeared formidable. In reality, they believed, it was liable to shatter under the stress of one hard strike. History would prove the irony that while the People's Republic of China was anything but brittle, the forces who opposed U.S. engagement with the regime most certainly were.

To endure, that side of the debate required a strong shield, and that shield was the overwhelming support of informed and mass public opinion in the United States. So long as the public remained angry over Chinese involvement in the Korean War and fearful of appeasing a threatening regime, even politicians who came to oppose the policy would be wary of speaking out, let alone of taking action. This created a classic Catch-22. Only through speaking out could those who supported policy change convince the public to agree with them. Yet such individuals only dared speak out if they believed the public was no longer adamantly opposed to their point of view. Therefore, before

these leaders could say the magic words, events in China had to intervene which would begin to cause public opinion to shift, if only slightly. Specifically, the fear Americans felt towards the Chinese communists would have to switch from a reason to oppose outreach into a reason to support a new approach. Fear would have to lead to favor. The path to this shift, while long and winding, was quite simple in terms of reasoning. The present policy at its core was based on a belief in the impermanence of communist rule over China. If one believed the regime to be for all practical intent permanent, that individual might very well decide outreach was now the best policy, lest a powerful and hostile China prove a far graver threat to U.S. interests and world peace than a powerful and at least partially friendly China. Once people believed the regime was there to stay, the game would eventually be up, and policy change would become an inevitability.

With this conception in mind, the path taken by policy reformers made perfect sense. The first major breach in the wall of silence was a 1963 speech by Undersecretary of State Roger Hilsman. In this address, he did not propose any concrete policy changes, not even minor ones like relaxing the travel and trade bans. Instead, the Kennedy and Johnson official emphasized his belief in the permanence of communist rule in China, and the consequent need to open the door to engagement with that regime. That the speech was well-received by the media and occasioned no significant condemnations emboldened others to speak out, at first in the media and then in the congress. This led to well-publicized 1966 hearings conducted by Senator William Fulbright's Senate Foreign Relations Committee, where leading academics who were acknowledged experts on China did call for wholesale policy alterations. Once again, press coverage was

overwhelmingly positive, with many leading outlets celebrating the lifting of the taboo on speaking out against the China policy status quo. The hearings converted both liberal Democrats and Republicans, showed moderates active opposition to change on this issue was no longer politically beneficial, and left conservative true believers isolated. Over the next three years, momentum for change only increased, such that by the time Eisenhower's former Vice-President assumed the presidency, if he chose to change China policy he would be pushing on an open door, rather than running into a great wall.

The central research question of this dissertation is two-pronged: why did Richard Nixon decide to travel to China in 1972, and why was his 1971 announcement of that trip greeted with such overwhelming public approval? The existing conventional explanations focus on triangular diplomacy, specifically the need for an insecure United States, reeling from its negative experiences in Vietnam, to balance against the apparently rising power of the Soviet Union. Such a move was made possible by the Sino-Soviet split, a complete rupture between the two great communist powers having been confirmed by a series of armed border clashes in 1969 along the Ussuri River. Nixon was simply playing the weaker adversary against the stronger in a classic application of balance of power politics.

This explanation, while parsimonious and not without a certain measure of validity, has several shortcomings. Nixon's private writings and public utterances on the subject focused far more on his fear of the long-term rise of Chinese power to the exclusion of any emphasis on the short-term augmentation of Soviet power. This reflected domestic concerns of a rising and hostile China going back to the start of the

1960s, as well as similar concerns among prominent allies in both Europe and Asia which Nixon heard during the extensive travels he undertook before commencing his 1968 presidential campaign. Nearly all evidence indicates that the Sino-Soviet split affected the timing of the shift on China policy, but not the decision to undertake it. Second, such a cynical exercise in *realpolitik* has rarely if ever occasioned the sort of widespread public euphoria experienced in the U.S. in the summer of 1971. There was much more going on than eagerness to gain an advantage over a Cold War adversary, or even bring about an accelerated end to the Vietnam War. To understand the public's reaction in 1971, one must go back at least a decade. It was during the early 1960s that polls showed Americans by a wide margin had come to view the Chinese as a greater threat to world peace than the Soviets. That continued to be the case throughout the rest of the decade, and in fact even a month after Nixon's celebrated announcement, which was the last time the question was asked.

Over that same decade, other public opinion polls showed gradually but inexorably increasing numbers of Americans coming to support such steps as lifting the travel and trade bans, allowing the Chinese communists into the United Nations, and even according the regime diplomatic recognition. Since the questions measuring views of China and those measuring support for rapprochement were never asked in the same survey, it is impossible to quantitatively discover a correlation between the two. Yet there is abundant qualitative evidence among the utterances of individual citizens, opinion leaders, and policy makers to support such a contention. The vast majority of the

voices calling for an end to the policy of containment through isolation claimed to be doing so out of a fear of present – and particularly future – Chinese power.

The theoretical explanations of how such a shift in opinion can occur are simultaneously sparse, diverse, and contentious. However, certainly prominent scholarly theories of both recent and distant vintage seem applicable to the historical evidence in this particular case. James Rosenau divided public opinion into a three-step pyramid, with the mass public on the bottom, the informed public above, and the decision-making elite at the pinnacle.<sup>7</sup> Coincidentally, he developed this model during the early 1960s, when opinion on this particular issue began to shift. The model is unidirectional and top-down, with elites influencing the informed public, who in turn influenced those members of the mass public paying attention. This roughly though inexactly conforms to the case of China policy. Hilsman's speech inspired academics to speak out, leading to the Fulbright Hearings, causing a decisive shift in the media, which influenced the mass public and encouraged decision-making leaders to eventually change policy in accord with the new consensus. Thus, while largely top-down, the process was not entirely unidirectional. There was feedback between the various levels. Nonetheless, the pyramidal conception of public opinion is useful to this particular example.

Fellow political scientist V.O. Key, who focused – also during early 1960s – 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.”<sup>8</sup> This is applicable to the

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

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



halting and cautious China policies of both the Kennedy and Johnson administrations. Widespread public opposition to any sort of significant change in the nation's policy towards the Chinese communists appeared to limit 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 convert the mass public. As George Edwards has demonstrated in more recent times, this is an exquisitely difficult if not impossible task for any president to achieve.<sup>9</sup>

Filling the remaining theoretical gaps is the work of Adam Berinsky, who has argued that it is possible to mobilize those individuals predisposed toward policy change on a given issue by altering “elite discourse.”<sup>10</sup> 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. According to Berinsky, it was the substantial numbers of undecideds who shifted from uncertainty to dissent. However, 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” who could be mobilized was always lower than the number of Vietnam “doves.” Thus, dissent within the elite would not be

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

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

sufficient. What was needed to move mass opinion was elite unanimity – unanimous opposition to the existing policy. This required substantial exogenous shocks in the form of momentous foreign events, and signals from government officials that it was permissible for elites to respond to these shocks by calling for policy alterations. The Vietnam War itself would provide the most obvious exogenous shock, reinforcing the danger of a hostile China with which the U.S. had limited means of communicating.

Multiple monographs have appeared in recent years on U.S. China policy during this period, inspiring the obvious question of why one more is necessary. First, the fact that numerous scholars have investigated this subject indicates it is worthy of study. Second, it would seem to imply that the issue is not yet settled, that existing evaluations have yet to be deemed definitive. Third, and most importantly for this work, nearly all these recent volumes have focused on either a specific fragment of time or a particular theme. Thus, they lack narrative sweep and topical totality. Grasping only a portion of the proverbial elephant, these previous works have been unable to tell the full story and adequately answer my research question. Nancy Bernkopf Tucker's 2012 effort *The China Threat: Myths and Realities in the 1950s* sought to overturn the prevalent notion that the Eisenhower administration's approach to China was inflexible. Tucker viewed him as desiring change, but trapped by adverse public opinion.<sup>11</sup> Despite what the title would indicate, the author failed to consider the full implications of a threatening China

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<sup>11</sup> Nancy Bernkopf Tucker, *The China Threat: Myths and Realities in the 1950s* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 184.

to U.S. policy, specifically the question of whether an increasing perception of threat could lead to a greater desire for outreach.

Noam Kochavi's 2002 *A Conflict Perpetuated: China Policy during the Kennedy Years* provided a valuable overview of what I view as the turning point in the process of policy change. As his title would indicate, Kochavi emphasized continuity over change.<sup>12</sup> While acknowledging policy ferment among mid-level officials in the State Department and on the National Security Council, he downplayed their importance. This dissertation differs from Kochavi by categorizing the Kennedy years less as a continuation of Eisenhower's tenure than as the beginning of the push for undoing Eisenhower's policy by first questioning presumptions on which that policy was based. The most important of these presumptions was that Mao's regime was fragile and liable to fall. Once that was no longer assumed to be the case, change became inevitable, if by no means imminent. Michael Lumbers' 2008 *Piercing the bamboo curtain: Tentative bridge-building to China during the Johnson Years* fulfilled the promise of its title by emphasizing the "policy innovation" of that administration, and sought to cast Kennedy's successor as a would-be peacemaker held back by his impressions of public opinion.<sup>13</sup> However, Lumbers said little about what was influencing this public opinion, and therefore failed to make more than a cursory mention of the role played by academics and senators in shifting public sentiment decisively during these years. It is an

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<sup>12</sup> Kochavi, Noam, *A Conflict Perpetuated: China Policy During the Kennedy Years* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 2002), 5.

<sup>13</sup> Michael Lumbers, *Piercing the Bamboo Curtain: Tentative bridge-building to China during the Johnson Years* (New York: Manchester University Press, 2008), 246.

excellent overview of the work of an administration at a time when the administration was the least interesting, and possibly also the least consequential, actor on this matter.

In contrast to Lumbers, whose general argument about Johnson's approach I support, Chris Tudda's 2012 *A Cold War Turning Point: Nixon and China, 1969-1972* used the most recently available U.S. archival materials to counter that Johnson and his foreign policy team had a "skeptical" or "pessimistic" attitude towards Chinese receptivity to American outreach, which Nixon "boldly" rejected.<sup>14</sup> Tudda roundly dismissed the notion of continuity, and endeavored to restore Nixon's primacy, albeit while accepting the longstanding notion of a president trying to play a "China Card" in a game of triangular balance-of-power diplomacy. Tudda was correct to argue that Nixon was willing to take risks Johnson was not. Yet he failed to acknowledge the debt Nixon owed his predecessor for laying the groundwork for his own actions. Also, unlike his historical subjects, Tudda did not consider public opinion to be a significant factor. He provided almost no information on its shifts, Nixon's awareness of those shifts, or how Nixon sought to mold and influence public opinion in the period leading up to his trip to China. Tudda's top-down, or rather top-only, focus failed to consider Nixon's political motivations, which allowed the author to employ a realist framework emphasizing triangular diplomacy to the exclusion of the issue of China's long-term threat. Thus, his highly competent chronicle of Nixon's actions was analytically incomplete.

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<sup>14</sup> Chris Tudda. *A Cold War Turning Point: Nixon and China, 1969-1972* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2012), 6-7.

By compartmentalizing the subject matter through their focus on a single administration, all these albeit highly informative works were unable to track the common threads existing across the period, as well as actors and trends which reappeared throughout. This most likely accounted for their eliding of the roles of influential outside actors, specifically the media, academics, and members of congress. These three sets of participants were interconnected both with each other and with policymakers within the various administrations. They created the feedback loop which both established the elite consensus of the need for policy change and altered public opinion in its favor. Both steps were essential preconditions for Nixon's actions, and the primary reason those actions were so well-received and politically influential. At the center of these activities were a small group of academic China specialists who presented their ideas in newspapers and magazines, testified before congressional committees, and consulted with presidents. Their contribution has to date been little noted, and never investigated in-depth.<sup>15</sup>

Guangquiu Xu did bring the U.S. Congress into the picture with his 2007 work *Congress and the U.S.-China Relationship, 1949-1979*. That author noted the “educational” effect of a series of hearings held beginning in 1965 in which academic experts made public pleas for significant changes in China policy and pointed out how Nixon valued the efforts in 1969 of Senator (and former East Asian history professor) Mike Mansfield to reach out to Zhou Enlai at a time when members of the executive

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<sup>15</sup> Even Paul Evans's *John Fairbank and the American Understanding of China* devotes at most five pages to the influence of China scholars on China policy: Paul M. Evans, *John Fairbank and the American Understanding of China* (New York: Blackwell, 1988).

branch could not.<sup>16</sup> Xu made use of valuable archival and published Chinese-language primary sources to illustrate the influence of congressional actions on Chinese perceptions, which was the strongest part of his work. But for the U.S. side of the story, which was ostensibly his primary subject matter, Xu relied almost entirely on transcripts from congressional hearings, and made little use of the archival records of individual members of congress. That left the author unable to explain how and why senators like Mansfield, or Jacob Javits, or William Fulbright, came to change their views on the issue, or why others such as Paul Douglas did not.

There are two works focusing on the executive branch which did cover my subject over a longer time period. Gordon Chang's 1990 monograph *Friends and Enemies: The United States, China and the Soviet Union, 1948-1972* set the benchmark for all future studies of the subject, including my own. Given the overlap between his time period and mine, one might conclude I am simply rewriting or updating his work. Yet fully half of the content of *Friends and Enemies* dealt with the Eisenhower administration, while half of the rest covered the Truman years. Thus, fully eighty percent of this work addresses a dozen-year-long stretch of time to which Chang only devoted a quarter of his work. In addition, due to limited archival access at that time, his discussion of the periods of the Johnson and particularly the Nixon administrations were by necessity cursory at best. In addition, I come to differing conclusions from that author on at least two matters. First, Chang considered the "China Lobby," as represented by

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<sup>16</sup> Guangqiu Xu. *Congress and the U.S.-China Relationship, 1949-1979*(Akron: Oh.: University of Akron Press, 2007), 193, 211.

the Committee of One Million, to have been “spent” by the end of the 1950s.<sup>17</sup> Utilizing the extensive archival documents produced by its leaders, as well as the sentiments expressed by members of the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, I argue this lobby had more staying power than Chang and other historians have given it credit for. Even if by the mid-1960s its influence was based largely on a bluff, it was one which had yet to be called. Second, Chang made much of the influence of the racial prejudices of Eisenhower and Dulles on their policies. Much as I searched for evidence of this sort of “Yellow Peril” mentality in the halls of power, I found it either oddly lacking or decidedly non-influential. To discover this phenomenon, one must look to the artifacts of popular culture at that time, where it existed in abundance. However, few if any historians concerned with this topic have incorporated considerations of popular culture into their diplomatic histories.

Evelyn Goh benefitted from the availability of archival documents denied to Chang in her 2005 work *Constructing the U.S. Rapprochement with China, 1961-1974*. As indicated by the title, Goh worked within a consciously constructivist framework, and drew heavily from notions of discourse promulgated by postmodernist thinkers such as Michel Foucault who served as inspirations for early constructivist international relations theorists such as Alexander Wendt. Goh did allude to the theories of Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci when she mentioned the creation of an “epistemic

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<sup>17</sup> Gordon H. Chang, *Friends and Enemies: The United States, China, and the Soviet Union, 1948-1972* (Stanford, Ca.: Stanford University Press, 1990), 163.

community” around the desire for policy change between 1964 and 1965.<sup>18</sup> Yet Goh’s focus on the writings of mid-level government officials and senior policy makers blinded her to the interaction between her subjects and the outside community of China experts, or to the role of congress. Thus, she treated her subjects largely in isolation, which was not how they existed or acted at the time. Such an isolated, administration-centric approach to the subject matter led this student of Tucker’s to focus far more on the creation of ideas than on their promulgation. Therefore, Goh only told half the story.

My approach is two-fold. On one level, like the works I have already discussed, it is an interior tale, the backstage story of a diplomatic revolution. Unlike these previous works, it contains a complete narrative arc, covering the entire period from the establishment of the initial policy until its overthrow and replacement by the policy of, to use the phrase of one-time Columbia University Professor of Government Arthur Doak Barnett, containment without isolation. With minor alterations, this is the U.S. policy towards China still being followed. On a second level, it is an exterior story of how the American people, primarily elites but also to as great an extent as possible the mass public, viewed China during the early Cold War. This exterior focus confirms the essential role of a threatening and rising China to support for rapprochement. On this issue, the public and the government moved together, if not always at the same pace. Both evaluated similar if in all cases limited evidence of Chinese actions and intentions, and altered their views accordingly. Those pushing for policy change were acutely aware

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<sup>18</sup> Evelyn Goh, *Constructing the U.S. Rapprochement with China, 1961-1974* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 58.



of the need for the public's backing. Often, they were afraid it was lacking, though some searched desperately for signs of its existence. No one would consider acts of policy change unless they believed they would prove popular. On this matter, above all others in U.S. Cold War diplomacy, public opinion mattered. How over the course of a decade dealing with the Chinese went from being the political Third Rail of U.S. foreign policy to something a president could exploit to help secure reelection is a vital question which has yet to be adequately addressed by the literature.

This dissertation proceeds chronologically over the course of five chapters. The first covers the establishment during the Eisenhower administration of the policy of isolating China, as represented by the "Four Nos" of nonrecognition, no U.N. membership, a trade ban, and a travel ban. I argue that, contrary to the received historical memory, Eisenhower's contemporaries continually expected this policy to be a passing phase, and refused to believe the repeated denials of the president, his Secretary of State, or others within his administration. While possessing doubts about the wisdom of this policy, Eisenhower felt constrained not only by his perception of public opinion but also, and perhaps even more importantly, by a fear that outreach toward a Cold War adversary would be seen as a sign of weakness at home and abroad. But his efforts to avoid the appearance of appeasement led to two militarized crises with the Chinese which raised the specter of nuclear war, discredited his New Look policy, and most importantly over the long-term encouraged the Chinese leadership to maintain a posture of hostility towards the U.S. The second chapter investigates the Kennedy years, when I argue the process of policy change began. Believing both that Eisenhower's and especially

Dulles's hostile actions and words made the U.S. appear to be to blame for bad relations with the Chinese, and that the P.R.C. was not going to collapse, officials within the administration such as Chester Bowles, Robert Komer, and James Thomson pushed for short-term tactical alterations in posture which would enable a long-term alteration of policy. Their efforts culminated in Roger Hilsman's address less than a month after Kennedy's assassination. This well-received repudiation of Dulles and his approach began the public debate over China policy, ending nearly a decade of almost complete silence from the existing policy's opponents.

The third and fourth chapters cover the years of the Johnson administration. Fulbright's March 1966 hearings provide a convenient dividing line. During the first half of his tenure, Johnson avoided discussing the issue, and those working for him on the matter felt little urgency to push for even the most minor policy changes. As during the Eisenhower years, the focus was on crisis management, specifically France's diplomatic recognition of the regime and China's successful test of an atomic weapon in 1964, increasingly close U.N. votes on admission, and of course the onset of direct U.S. combat involvement in the Vietnam War. This last action risked direct military confrontation with the Chinese, highlighting the need for contact with the regime, if only to avoid a repeat of the Korean War experience. After the hearings, Johnson became the first president to directly address China policy, presenting conciliatory words and the hope of more amicable relations in the future. But that future seemed distant, and was not expected to arrive until after Mao Zedong's death. The goal was to encourage

moderation among future Chinese leaders and undo the hostility spiral initiated by Dulles and Eisenhower. Still, the policies established in the 1950s remained in force.

Nixon built upon the debate begun during Kennedy's time and the actions of Johnson to achieve a breakthrough. He benefitted from shifts in public opinion which began in the early 1960s and accelerated after the 1966 hearings. He also was able to exploit the increasing moderation of a Chinese regime trying to reign in the Cultural Revolution internally, manage the Soviet threat on its borders, and reestablish diplomatic contacts overseas. Nixon differed from his immediate predecessor in his willingness to take a chance on the possibility of rapprochement while Mao was still alive. Yet he would not have taken such a risk in political isolation. He needed to build upon the prior efforts of the members of previous administrations as well as those of academics, journalists, and congressman, actors whose advice he and Kissinger sought on this issue. This study concludes before Nixon set foot on Chinese soil because by that point three of the "Four Nos" had become yesses, while the fourth was well on its way out. To paraphrase Woody Allen, in terms of what occurred during the February 1972 visit, 80 percent of Nixon's achievement was showing up.

To tell this story, I utilize the archival collections of presidents, senators, professors, lobbyists, and other prominent individuals, as well as abundant news sources and relevant artifacts from popular culture. Overseas sources, particularly those from China, will be conspicuously lacking. While some of this documentation would no doubt shed light on the wisdom of U.S. actions throughout the period, particularly whether other courses of action were at various times possible, some of that information can be

discovered indirectly in existing secondary works utilizing such documentation. More importantly, such sources are not directly relevant to answering my research question, which focuses on the U.S. image of China, rather than its reality. For the purposes of this dissertation, it matters less what the Chinese did, said, and desired than what Americans both inside and outside of government thought was the case at the time. Threat perception, rather than its reality, is the issue at hand.

Finally, I should offer a few comments on my chapter titles. As those of you of a certain age and musical taste might have noticed, they are all the names of songs by independent acts from the 1980s who were part of what was then known as the musical genre of college rock.<sup>19</sup> In addition to matching the content and themes of each chapter, they serve another, more symbolic purpose. When alternative rock went mainstream in the fall of 1991 with the commercial success of Nirvana's "Smells Like Teen Spirit," it appeared to the general public as if this new sound had come out of nowhere. Subsequent histories, such as noted music critic Robert Palmer's otherwise authoritative 1995 Public Broadcasting Service documentary "Rock & Roll: An Unruly History" followed this narrative. Its episode on the history of punk rock jumped from the Clash's "London Calling" album to Nirvana as if nothing happened in the interim. In reality, Nirvana emerged out of an infrastructure of clubs, publications, radio stations, and record labels created and nurtured during the decade between the implosion of the initial

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<sup>19</sup> "Banned in D.C." by Bad Brains, 1982; "Recipe for Hate" by Bad Religion, 1993; "Don't Let's Start" by They Might Be Giants, 1986; "Begin the Begin" by R.E.M., 1986; "Waiting for the Great Leap Forward" by Billy Bragg, 1988; "I Will Dare" by the Replacements, 1984. "Rise Above" by Black Flag, 1981. While "Recipe For Hate" was not released in the 1980s, Bad Religion emerged out of the early 1980s Southern California hardcore punk scene, and thus had roots in a faction of the 1980s College Rock genre, even if they achieved their greatest success in a later era.

punk rock wave and the emergence of commercial alternative rock. It was a scene that produced Kurt Cobain's foremost musical role models, such as the Fins, the Wipers, and the Vaselines. Just as they – and the artists whose songs I use for my chapter titles – paved the way for the success of Nirvana and the bands who thrived in its wake, Nixon built upon the efforts of a network of individuals inside and outside of government who had labored largely in obscurity for nearly a decade. And just as those college rock bands built an audience for a new style of music, these historical actors built an audience for a new China policy. This is the overlooked story of how that audience was built.

## CHAPTER II

### RECIPE FOR HATE: EISENHOWER'S INTRANSIGENCE AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A HOSTILITY SPIRAL

“The President added that he was not afraid of Communist China – not in this decade, at least.”<sup>20</sup>

In late May of 1971, as some in the media began to anticipate a diplomatic breakthrough by President Richard Nixon involving communist China, leading journalist Roscoe Drummond claimed that, nearly twenty years earlier, incoming President Dwight Eisenhower argued for early diplomatic recognition of the People's Republic. However, according to Drummond, Secretary of State John Foster Dulles prevailed upon the president that “the time was not ripe” for such a bold step, while Eisenhower worried about strident opposition from the U.S. public to any outreach to the Chinese communists, who less than a year earlier had been killing Americans on the Korean Peninsula. Nonetheless, Drummond recalled conversations with President Eisenhower in which he would “periodically burst out with his own animate feelings on the subject,” and surmised that he must have done the same with Vice-President Nixon, no doubt influencing the future president's actions.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Folder 271<sup>st</sup> Meeting of NSC, 22 December 1955, 7, Box 7, NSC Series, Ann Whitman File, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, Kansas.

<sup>21</sup> Roscoe Drummond, “Roots of new China policy,” *Christian Science Monitor*, 29 May 1971, 16.

While contradicting the scholarly consensus on Eisenhower's China policy, this retrospective assessment did not in fact depart from how journalists evaluated Eisenhower's views on the subject while he was president. The year 1954 began with a number of stories predicting the imminence of China policy breakthroughs, claiming the administration was taking a "new look" at "the problem of the future relationship of the most powerful country in the world with the most populous."<sup>22</sup> Administration officials like Undersecretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs Walter Robertson and Vice-President Nixon quickly denied the validity of these rumors.<sup>23</sup> Yet leading pundits like Drew Pearson remained unconvinced. A year later, Pearson in fact would claim that "the President has just made up that when the time is ripe he will recognize Red China" and that Dulles had also felt this way "for some time."<sup>24</sup> Eisenhower occasionally fanned the flames, musing about future policy flexibility. In August 1954, while answering a question on the subject, he noted how much the U.S. relationships with Germany and Japan had changed over the past decade, and how no one could have foreseen these two former enemies becoming close U.S. allies.<sup>25</sup>

Such utterances worried those who opposed any policy shifts. Alfred Kohlberg, a leading right-wing hard-liner on the subject who liked to joke that "I am the China Lobby," called the State Department in November 1954 demanding to know if the

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<sup>22</sup> Joseph C. Harsch, "'New Look' at China," *Christian Science Monitor*, 5 January 1954, 1.

<sup>23</sup> "No Policy Shift on Red China, U.S. Aide Says," *Washington Post*, 8 January 1954, 23; Peiping Recognition Is Opposed By Nixon," *New York Times*, 10 January 1954, 2.

<sup>24</sup> Drew Pearson, "President's Strategy on Red China," *Washington Post*, 9 February 1955, 51.

<sup>25</sup> Joseph A. Loftus, "President's Stand on China Flexible," *New York Times*, 5 August 1954, 1, 2.

rumors were in any way accurate, particularly a recent report by Walter Winchell that Eisenhower was considering granting the communist Chinese formal diplomatic recognition.<sup>26</sup> Dulles's office wrote back the next day to assure Kohlberg that such reports had "absolutely no basis" in fact.<sup>27</sup> In public remarks in April 1954, Dulles conceded "a good deal of uncertainty" among officials in the earliest days of the administration on the issues of diplomatic recognition and admission to the United Nations, but that this "uncertainty has been dissipated," and the U.S. government had no intention of changing its opposition to such actions.<sup>28</sup> Yet such assurances usually fell on deaf ears. Even after multiple military crises involving the Chinese which nearly caused the U.S. to launch nuclear strikes, even after repeated public snubs by Dulles of tentative offers of Chinese outreach, and even after China shifted to a more intransigent foreign policy in line with increasingly radical and repressive domestic policies, the media still expected change. Seemingly nothing could convince the leading observers of the day that a breakthrough was just around the corner, or dissipate the fears of those who opposed any such policy changes.

The policy of the Eisenhower administration toward communist China was based on propositions that the regime was weak, or fragile, or both at the same time. A communist-led China could only threaten U.S. security and American hegemony in East

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<sup>26</sup> Memorandum, Special Assistant to the Secretary Roderic L. O'Connor to Dulles, 15 November 1954, Folder Kohlberg, Alfred, Box 83 (1954), Series Selected Correspondence, Dulles, JF Papers, Mudd Library, Princeton University, Princeton, New Jersey.

<sup>27</sup> O'Connor to Kohlberg, 16 November 1954, Folder Kohlberg, Alfred, Box 83 (1954), Series Selected Correspondence, Dulles JF Papers, Mudd.

<sup>28</sup> Impromptu Remarks of the Honorable John Foster Dulles before the Republican Women's Centennial Conference, Washington, D.C., 7 April 1954, 5.



Asia and the Pacific Rim if the leadership of the United States allowed that to happen. Eisenhower hoped to deter the Chinese from any aggressive actions by threatening them with weapons they did not yet possess. That approach was tested – and proved to be at least temporarily successful – during two military crises in the Strait of Taiwan. At the same time, Eisenhower endorsed low-level negotiations with Chinese diplomats for the release of U.S. citizens being held in China, but was unwilling to make any concessions which would have secured their release and resulted in higher-level meetings. Reifying his chosen course of intransigence was persistent fear of public opinion, which the president believed to be unalterably hostile to any outreach towards China. Belying this assumption was evidence that congress was far from unified in its support for these policies. Eisenhower ignored chances for an opening due to his belief that the domestic political risks were not worth the overseas diplomatic rewards. China in his opinion was not too great a threat to be ignored. It could be managed crisis by crisis, conference by conference, U.N. vote by U.N. vote. Though Eisenhower understood the strategic weight of Asia, he would not let concerns over a China menace he saw as overrated detract from his “Total Cold War” with the Soviet Union.<sup>29</sup> In a reverse of the Macartney Mission to the Emperor Qianlong’s Qing court, China offered nothing of use to him.

### **Fragile Colossus**

Though Eisenhower assumed office in January 1953, and the Korean Armistice was signed in July 1953, the year 1954 is the appropriate place to begin assessing U.S.

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<sup>29</sup> Kenneth Osgood, *Total Cold War: Eisenhower’s Secret Propaganda Battle at Home and Abroad* (Lawrence: Ks.: University Press of Kansas, 2006).

peacetime policy towards communist China due to a combination of factors domestic and foreign. That year witnessed the ultimate decline and disgrace of Senator Joseph McCarthy. Though the ghost of McCarthyism would haunt all future debates about China policy until 1971, particularly among Democrats, his era – much of which focused on assessing blame for the “loss” of China – was officially over. It was also the year of the Geneva Conference, where the Chinese communists, led by Zhou Enlai, made their debut on the international diplomatic stage. The French evacuation of Indochina and the division of Vietnam resulting from that conference created a new front for conflict between the Americans and the Chinese. In the fall of 1954, the first U.N. vote occurred on the subject of seating Mao Zedong’s government in place of Chiang Kai-shek’s. That summer, inspired in large part by fears this vote might go against U.S. preferences, Cold War hardliners decided to form a lobbying organization which they called the Committee of One Million Against the Admission of Communist China to the United Nations. It was therefore the beginning of an era where the dominant question was how much the U.S. should seek to diplomatically isolate China, or whether or not it should isolate China at all. This era would end in 1971 with the official abandonment of isolation, exemplified by Kissinger’s meeting with Zhou, Nixon’s announcement of his visit to China, the ending of the travel and trade bans, and the admission of the P.R.C. to the U.N.

That the era lasted so long, in fact that it can be termed an era at all, would have shocked observers at the start of 1954. As with Truman at the start of 1950, they expected Eisenhower to make an accommodation with Mao once the metaphorical dust

had settled. Unlike Truman, Eisenhower's hand was not forced by events. He had options, and made fateful early choices. The strategic groundwork for the choices he would make in 1954 was laid by a series of policy papers crafted in 1953 which applied his preferred strategic approach to East Asia. Eisenhower viewed Truman's foreign policy, particularly during his second term, as largely an exercise in failure and futility. This view was shared by Dulles, who wrote in 1954 that Truman's reactive approach to containment gave the initiative to the Soviets, who felt free to strike where they and their clients pleased, bogging down U.S. forces in desultory ground wars which played against America's comparative strengths. The goal of the new administration's foreign policy would be to prevent such conflicts from ever occurring. It would achieve this by relying "primarily upon the deterrence of striking power," particularly the power of nuclear weapons, where the U.S. enjoyed a pronounced advantage.<sup>30</sup> Eisenhower would not allow the U.S. military to be bled by its adversaries as Truman had.

A 1952 campaign memo attacked "the tragic inadequacy of Foreign Policy of the Democratic Administration in the last seven years," particularly "its lack of serious purpose in Asia." According to this memo, "the only real policy which has been consistently followed is watch, wait, and shiver." Further communist advances in Asia would result in a crippling "psychological" blow to the U.S. strategic position.<sup>31</sup> Fear of the psychological fragility of U.S. allies in the region would guide Eisenhower's policies

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<sup>30</sup> Strategic Concept, 21 December 1954, 1, Folder 12/21/54: Statement Re "Strategic Concept" in the Reduction of U.S. Military Forces, Box 332, Series Speeches, Statements, Press Conference, etc., Dulles, JF Papers, Mudd.

<sup>31</sup> Memorandum for General Eisenhower, Re: United States Pacific Policy, 8, 9, 3, 7, Folder Formosa (China) 1052-1957 (1), Box 10, International Series, Ann Whitman Files, DDE Library.

toward China, as well as the rhetoric of those who served him. In 1953, Dulles worried any sign of U.S. retreat would “set up a chain reaction.” In a speech two years later, the Secretary of State discussed the “great danger” which would result if the “non-Communist peoples” of Asia came to doubt U.S. resolve to halt any and all communist expansion on the continent.<sup>32</sup> This stated goal would ultimately determine Eisenhower’s China policy in a manner which foreclosed nearly all options to change the temporary policies enacted during the Korean War. Actions the president deemed necessary to prevent any speck of additional territory from falling under communist rule made the Bamboo Curtain in Asia even less permeable than its Iron counterpart in Europe.

The administration laid out its policy approaches over the course of 1953 in three policy papers produced by the National Security Council: NSC 148 on East Asia, NSC 146 on the Chinese Nationalists on Taiwan, and NSC 166 on the Chinese communists on the mainland. These papers viewed the Chinese communists as the Soviet Union’s de facto viceroys in Asia, and stressed the internal fragility of the regime. With this in mind, NSC 148 proposed “fostering and supporting anti-communist Chinese elements both outside and within China,” with the ultimate goal being “to bring about changes in China which will eliminate the threat from that country to Free World security.”<sup>33</sup> In terms of the scope of U.S. actions to achieve this goal, NSC 146 proposed backing not only

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<sup>32</sup> Dulles, Notes on Remarks at NSC Meeting, 31 March 1953, 2, Folder General Foreign Policy Matters (2), White House Memoranda Series, Dulles, John Foster Papers, 1951-1959, DDE Library; Dulles, “Our Foreign Policies in Asia,” Before the Foreign Policy Association, New York, N.Y., 16 February 1955, 8, Folder 2/16/55: Speech Re “Our Foreign Policies in Asia,” Foreign Policy Association, NY, NY, Box 333, Series Speeches, Statements, Press Conferences, etc., Dulles, JF Papers, Mudd.

<sup>33</sup> Draft, NSC 148: United States Policies on the Far East, 6 April 1953, 6, 14, Folder NSC 148 – Far East, Box 4, White House Office, Office of the Special Assistant for National Security Affairs, NSC Series, Policy Papers Subseries, DDE Library.

Nationalist raids against the Communist mainland and seaborne commerce with Communist China,” but ensure they would be able to conduct “large-scale amphibious operations,” clearly with an eye towards eventual invasion and reconquest of the mainland.<sup>34</sup> A memo from the Joint Chiefs of Staff supported the “ultimate objective of the replacement of that regime,” showing the military and civilian officials were on the same side of this question.<sup>35</sup>

These arguments reached their culmination in NSC 166, which called for the policy goal of “reorientation of the Chinese Communist regime or its ultimate replacement.” While so far the communists had proven successful in consolidating control and achieving early economic success, they still faced critical long-term problems they might well not be able to overcome.<sup>36</sup> With this in mind, concessions on the part of the U.S. would only strengthen the regime, as well as lessen the chance of a rivalry developing between it and the Soviets. Furthermore, the U.S. should work towards “denying the Chinese Communist regime full status in the international community.”<sup>37</sup> Achieving legitimacy would only make the enemy stronger, and less liable to collapse. Outreach would actually lessen the chance of it losing the support of

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<sup>34</sup> NSC 146/2: U.S. Objective and Courses of Action with Respect to Formosa and the Chinese National Government, 6 November 1953, Folder NSC 146/2 – Formosa & Chinese Nationalist Government (2), Box 4, White House Office, Office of the Special Assistant for National Security Affairs, NSC Series, Policy Papers Subseries, DDE Library.

<sup>35</sup> Joint Chiefs of Staff for the Secretary of Defense, Subject: NSC 166 – U.S. Policy Toward Communist China, 3 November 1953, 1, Folder NSC 166/1 – Communist China, Box 7, White House Office, Office of the Special Assistant for National Security Affairs, NSC Series, Policy Papers Subseries, DDE Library.

<sup>36</sup> NSC 166/1: U.S. Policy Toward Communist China, 6 November 1953, 5, 12, in *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.* 6, 34.

its vital patron. Thus, before 1954, the administration had mapped out a plan of not only containment and isolation, but also of subversion. However, it had not had a chance to put it into effect, or test its worth.

Events would temper the boldness of early proposals, if at first only around the edges. NSC 5429, an update to NSC 148 composed after the Geneva Conference and during the early stages of the first Taiwan Straits crisis, still maintained regimes like that currently ruling China unavoidably “have elements of rigidity and instability which sometimes produce crises” which could in due time be exploited. Thus, the administration stuck to its original plan to “utilize all feasible and covert means” in order to “create discontent and internal divisions.” However, perhaps with the current external crisis in mind, it cautioned against agreeing to “offensive actions against mainland Communist China” and warned of “deliberately provoking” a war with China.<sup>38</sup> After the second Taiwan Straits crisis in 1958 and the resignation of Dulles early in 1959 due to terminal illness, assumptions began to change, specifically those concerning the regime’s staying power. In January 1959 presidential aide Gordon Gray, while still holding out hope for the “possibility” of rebellion in the future, found no evidence for it occurring in the near future. He also proposed a new policy paper in light of events since 1953.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Draft, NSC 5429/4, Current U.S. Policy in the Far East, 10 December 1954, 1, NSC 5429/5: Current U.S. Policy in the Far East, 22 December 1954 (revised 15 January 1955), 13, Draft 5429/5: Review of U.S. Policy in the Far East, 3, all in Folder NSC 5429/5 – Policy Toward the Far East (2), Box 12, WHO, OSNSA, NSC Series, Policy Papers Subseries, DDE Library.

<sup>39</sup> Gray to Robertson, Subject: Communist China, 14 January 1959, 2, 1, Folder Communist China (1959), Box 5, NSC Series, Briefing Notes Subseries, OSNSA, WHO, DDE.

The resulting paper, NSC 5913, produced that September during the tenure of the new Secretary of State Christian Herter, raised the need “to cope with the growing threat to Free World security posed by increasing Communist power in Asia.” The regime had only become stronger in the intervening years, and future planning must take into account the new assumption “that for the predictable future the Peiping regime will continue to exercise effective control over mainland China” as well as that “its military and economic strength and its resultant power position in Asia will continue to increase.”<sup>40</sup> One might be tempted to see this as a turning point, indicating the China threat was being reassessed even before Kennedy took office. Yet the paper itself, and the officials who control policy from Eisenhower and the new Secretary of State Christian Herter on down, failed to process the implications of this altered assumption. They did not reconsider their approach to the U.N. question, or consider new attempts at outreach. More importantly, they did not make their new conclusion public, and thus did not contribute to the debate. Therefore, while admitting reality had proven initial predictions incorrect, NSC 5913 refused to realize the implications of this realization.

### **A Tale of Two Crises**

Having established by 1954 the hardline grand strategic approach to China which would endure long after its central assumption was no longer considered valid, the heart of Eisenhower’s China policy moving forward centered around two perilous crises in the Taiwan Straits which were in large part a natural outgrowth of that policy, if not

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<sup>40</sup> NSC 5913/1: Statement of U.S. Policy in the Far East, 25 September 1959, 1, Folder NSC 5913 – Far East, Box 27, WHO, OSANSA, NSC Series, Policy Papers Subseries, DDE.

necessarily its inevitable result. Both crises had identical endings, yet the president was praised for his handling of the first and pilloried for his actions during the second. Eisenhower raised the possibility of communist “diversionary attacks” on the offshore island groups of Quemoy and Matsu, both located directly opposite Taiwan and less than 10 miles from the Chinese coast, in an NSC meeting on 5 August 1954. The president also mused about a large-scale invasion of Taiwan “by a fleet of junks,” which would in his opinion “be a good target for an atomic bomb,” indicating his almost insouciant willingness to consider the tactical utilization of nuclear weapons.<sup>41</sup> Less than a month later, on 3 September, the communists began a significant shelling of the largest island of the Quemoy group opposite the city of Amoy in Fujian Province. With 450,000 soldiers in the region, as well as air superiority, there was nothing the Nationalists could do to prevent the communist forces from taking Quemoy, as well as the smaller Matsu Islands to the north, provided their leaders were willing to take the necessarily steep casualties. Making the situation potentially critical was the fact that the offshore islands were garrisoned by approximately 100,000 soldiers, fully a third of Chiang’s regular army. The loss of this many man would severely jeopardize the regime’s stability, if not the defensibility of Taiwan itself.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Minutes, 19, Folder 209<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the NSC, 5 August 1954, Box 5, NSC Series, Ann Whitman File, DDE.

<sup>42</sup> Report, The Chinese Offshore Islands, Central Intelligence Agency, 8 September 1954, 7, 21, 32, Folder Formosa (1), Box 9, International Series, AWF, DDE.



Faced with this situation, Chairman of the Joint Chief of Staff Admiral James Radford proposed the insertion of U.S. ground forces.<sup>43</sup> Believing this would both fail to render the islands defensible and violate his entire “New Look” strategy, Eisenhower stated “he was firmly opposed to any holding back like we did in Korea.” This meant withholding ground forces and instead using nuclear weapons on the Chinese forces stationed on the mainland. He understood such drastic escalation of the situation meant “the rest of the world would condemn us, as well as a substantial part of the U.S. people.” But of paramount importance to the president was to demonstrate to the communist world that they would not be able to “tie down U.S forces” at will as they had for three years in Korea.<sup>44</sup> China’s timing coincided with the announcement of the formation of the Southeast Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO) as well as talks for establishing a formal U.S. security alliance with the Nationalists on Taiwan. The communists wanted to demonstrate to the U.S. the dangers of making security guarantees with their civil war opponents.

With winter storms coming, the initial artillery bombardments proved but a prelude, giving U.S. leaders time to consider their options. Eisenhower remained committed to his course of action. In January he argued that threatening nuclear attack “would decrease the risk of war” as well as “halt the dangerous drift” East Asian security policy had taken since 1949.<sup>45</sup> In his view, the communists were not after just Quemoy

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<sup>43</sup> Minutes, 6, Folder 213<sup>th</sup> Meeting of NSC, 9 September 1954, Box 6, NSC Series, AWF, DDE.

<sup>44</sup> Minutes, 8, 9, 7, Folder 214<sup>th</sup> Meeting of NSC, 12 September 1954, Box 6, NSC Series, AWF, DDE.

<sup>45</sup> Minutes, 13, 14, Folder 232<sup>nd</sup> Meeting of NSC, 20 January 1955, Box 6, NSC Series, AWF, DDE.

and Matsu. “They were after Formosa.” The initial attacks were but a prelude to larger action.<sup>46</sup> Knowing he needed public support to take such risks, Eisenhower sent a message to congress on the situation in late January. Rather than being alarmed by news of a possible nuclear war over a couple rocks in the ocean, the press applauded both Eisenhower’s firmness as well as what they took to be hints of a newly flexible approach to China policy. The *New York Times* called it a “tour de force” which reclaimed China policymaking from the Senate, where the writer believed it had been for the past five years, opening the possibility that the U.S. approach might begin to “soften.”<sup>47</sup> The public appeared less hopeful, with mail to the White House running 3-to-1 against the president’s approach.<sup>48</sup>

This example of a threat of what came to be known as “Massive Retaliation” was, while disproportionate, still intended to be limited in scope. Low-yield atomic weapons would be used solely against local military targets, avoiding large concentrations of civilians “except in one or two instances.” Thus, it be tactical, rather than strategic, bombing, targeting only front-line units. Conventional ordinance was not seen as sufficient to destroy artillery batteries and airfields “in the face of Chinese manpower and the capacity to replace and rebuild.”<sup>49</sup> Part of the reason Eisenhower had

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<sup>46</sup> Minutes, 3, 5, Folder 233<sup>rd</sup> Meeting of NSC, 21 January 1955, Box 6, NSC Series, AWF, DDE.

<sup>47</sup> William S. White, “New U.S. China Policy Slowly Taking Shape,” *New York Times*, 13 February 1955, 170.

<sup>48</sup> William Hopkins to Ann Whitman, Re: Correspondence Regarding Formosa, 27 January 1955, Folder Formosa (2), Box 9, International Series, AWD, DDE.

<sup>49</sup> Memcon, Dulles and Walter George, 7 March 1955, 1, Folder George, Sen. Walter F. 1/54-12/56 (memos of conversation, etc.) (4), Box 5, Dulles, John Foster Papers, 1951-1959, Subject Series, DDE.

faith in the deterrent value of his threat was that he believed his doubters “are underestimating the sanity of the Chinese Communists.”<sup>50</sup> An irrational adversary cannot be easily deterred. Thus, Eisenhower did not believe Mao to be a madman. Still, considering the administration’s goal of regime change, Dulles wondered if it was in Chiang’s “long-range interest” to use such extreme methods, since even a limited atomic attack on the mainland “might destroy any hope of good will and future favorable reception of the Republic of China by the Chinese people.”<sup>51</sup> Yet this risk, among many others, was seen by the administration as absolutely necessary.

This seemed necessary because the administration viewed the fate of Taiwan, and in fact the entire U.S. strategic position in the Western Pacific, as being at risk. The loss of the Offshore Islands would both embolden the communists and dishearten the nationalists.<sup>52</sup> The islands represented the nationalists’ last existing link to the mainland, and according to Eisenhower their army was “held together by a conviction that some day they will go back.”<sup>53</sup> As he explained to supporter Lew Douglas, “internal disillusionment” and “despair” on Taiwan would lead to the fall of the non-communist government.<sup>54</sup> If Quemoy went, so would Taiwan, and with it “the whole U.S. security

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<sup>50</sup> Minutes, 11, Folder 243<sup>rd</sup> Meeting of NSC, 31 March 1955, Box 6, NSC Series, AWF, DDE.

<sup>51</sup> Draft Memorandum, Formosa, 8 April 1955, 8, Folder Dulles, John Foster, April 1955 (1), Box 5, Dulles-Herter Series, AWF, DDE.

<sup>52</sup> Dulles to Eisenhower, 25 February 1955, Folder Dulles, John Foster Feb. 1955 (1), Box 4, Dulles-Herter Series, AWF, DDE.

<sup>53</sup> Eisenhower to Dulles, 10 February 1955, 2, Folder Dulles, John Foster Feb. 1955 (2), Box 4, Dulles-Herter Series, AWF, DDE.

<sup>54</sup> Eisenhower to Douglas, 12 April 1955, Folder DDE Diary April 1955 (1), Box 10, DDE Diary Series, AWF, DDE.

position” in the region.<sup>55</sup> Dulles explained in a February 1955 speech carried on national television that regional allies would conclude “that the United has no real intention of standing firmly behind them.”<sup>56</sup> Eisenhower emphasized the “psychological” effect of losing these islands.<sup>57</sup> In the past six years, the Chinese mainland had been conquered by communists, North Korea had survived the Korean War, and the Vietminh had driven the French out of Indochina and established a communist regime in North Vietnam. The U.S. could not afford another such defeat. On a visit to Bangkok, Dulles wrote Eisenhower predicting that the loss of Formosa would even “convince Japan communism wave of future.”<sup>58</sup> Domino theories were not just applied to South Vietnam.

Some in the press accepted this speculative narrative, *U.S. News* writing that “one more advance by the Reds will collapse the morale of anti-Communist forces” throughout the region.<sup>59</sup> While this might have worked adequately with a domestic audience, the leaders of important allies were another matter. Eisenhower and Dulles used the same arguments with these leaders they used in their own internal debates and in communications with the American public. In Ottawa, Dulles emphasized the importance of “morale” and “psychology” to the situation, and reiterated the domino

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<sup>55</sup> Memorandum of Conference with the President, 4 April 1955, Folder ACW Diary April 1955 (6), Box 5, ACW Diary Series, AWF, DDE.

<sup>56</sup> Speech, Dulles, “Our Foreign Policies in Asia,” Foreign Policy Association, New York, New York, 16 February 1955, 7, Folder Dulles, John Foster Feb. 1955 (2), Box 4, Dulles-Herter Series, AWF, DDE.

<sup>57</sup> Eisenhower to Dulles, Subject: Formosa, 5 April 1955, 5, Folder DDE Diary April 1955 (2), Box 10, DDE Diary Series, AWF, DDE.

<sup>58</sup> Dulles to Eisenhower, 25 February 1955, 2, Folder Dulles, John Foster Feb. 1955 (1), Box 4, Dulles-Herter Series, AWF, DDE.

<sup>59</sup> “Will Red China Risk War?,” *U.S. News & World Report*, 25 March 1966, 30.

theorizing, arguing that if Quemoy and Matsu were lost the U.S. would be driven back to New Zealand and the Aleutians.<sup>60</sup> Eisenhower wrote to Churchill that “we have come to the point where every additional backward step must be deemed a defeat for the Western world,” while arguing communism’s postwar advance “has been much faster and much more relentless than the 1940 sweep of the dictators,” a point upon which Churchill of all people could have corrected the president.<sup>61</sup>

After the weather cleared and the seas calmed in early April, some in the press expected an imminent communist attack before the beginning of the Afro-Asian Conference in Bandung.<sup>62</sup> Whether because Mao took Eisenhower’s threats seriously, or because he realized a bloody battle on the eve of Zhou Enlai’s charm offensive would create too much cognitive dissonance, the attack never came. During the crisis, Eisenhower attempted to convince Chiang to significantly reduce the size of his garrisons on the offshore island chains, both because 100,000 men were excessive for defensive needs and because, were a large-scale attack to come, the loss of much smaller garrisons would not impair Taiwanese morale or overall defensive capabilities. Eisenhower complained about the difficulty of U.S. security being placed in “a fellow who hasn’t anything to lose,” implying that he believed Chiang – and not Mao – was the

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<sup>60</sup> Summary of Remarks, Dulles, Cabinet Meeting, Ottawa, 18 March 1955, 2, 1, Folder Dulles, John Foster Mar. 1955, Box 5, Dulles-Herter Series, AWF, DDE.

<sup>61</sup> Eisenhower to Churchill, 29 March 1955, 5, 6, Folder DDE Diary March 1955 (1), Box 10, DDE Diary Series, AWF, DDE.

<sup>62</sup> “War With Red China Soon?,” *U.S. News & World Report*, 8 April 1955, 24; “Atomic War Over Matsu?,” *Washington Post*, 29 March 1955, 14.

irrational Chinese leader.<sup>63</sup> To make matters worse, Eisenhower recognized the islands' utter irrelevance in the event of an actual invasion of the mainland, writing from considerable firsthand experience "you do not conduct an amphibious operation against a hostile coast going into some tiny islands and then launching a second amphibious attack."<sup>64</sup> The ultimate absurdity was that, due to the underdeveloped infrastructure in Fujian Province at that time, if the communist regime was on the verge of collapse, and an invasion were to become feasible, the 100,000 troops on Quemoy and Matsu would need to be evacuated from within sight of the mainland, transported back to Taipei, and then re-embarked to a more promising landing point further north near the Yangtze Delta region. Simply put, Chiang's force dispositions were the height of absurdity.

Yet they were also, in part, Eisenhower's own handiwork. When he took office, Quemoy and Matsu were lightly garrisoned, as he wished them to be. Only after Eisenhower decided the "Unleash Chiang" by removing the 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet from the Taiwan Strait in order to encourage amphibious raids did the nationalist leader begin increasing the garrison sizes to levels Eisenhower found alarming.<sup>65</sup> The U.S. president never reckoned with the dangers of indulging an ally he could not control because of his indispensability. Chiang recognized Eisenhower's lack of leverage, and refused to reduce the sizes of the garrisons in the aftermath of the first crisis, to say nothing of abandoning them all together in exchange for an increased U.S. naval commitment,

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<sup>63</sup> Minutes, 10, Folder 237<sup>th</sup> Meeting of NSC, 17 February 1955, Box 6, NSC Series, AWF, DDE.

<sup>64</sup> Eisenhower to Douglas, 9 March 1955, 1-2, Folder DDE Diary March 1955 (2), Box 10, DDE Diary Series, AWF, DDE.

<sup>65</sup> "Atomic War Over Matsu?," *Washington Post*, 29 March 1955, 14.

which Eisenhower offered Chiang that May through his envoys Walter Robertson and Admiral Radford.<sup>66</sup> The president already recognized he was “on the horns of a dilemma” due to the need to ensure that Chiang “save face.”<sup>67</sup> He explained in 1956 to British Prime Minister Anthony Eden that “if we tried to press Chiang too hard to give up the islands, Formosa might well be lost,” and with it the entire region.<sup>68</sup> By late 1957, when then-Governor Christian Herter visited Chiang, nothing had changed. The U.S. still clung to its domino theory, and “the Chinese leader still dreams of returning to the mainland.”<sup>69</sup> So long as both propositions held, there was no reason events could not repeat themselves.

In the meantime, the administration sought to celebrate its success. The foremost example of this was Dulles’s January 1956 *Life* Magazine interview. Its celebratory title, “How Dulles Averted War,” only hinted at his level of boasting. Dulles claimed the threat to use nuclear weapons not only saved the offshore islands in 1955, but limited Vietminh gains at Geneva in 1954 and ended the Korean War in 1953. Though the phrase “to the brink of war” was the author’s and not Dulles’s, and no one in the piece used the word brinksmanship, it was this article which led Adlai Stevenson to coin the term to describe what he – and many Democrats – viewed as the reckless foreign policy

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<sup>66</sup> Memorandum for the Record, A.J. Goodpaster, 3 May 1955, Record of Robertson and Radford meeting with Chiang that day, Folder ACW Diary May 1955 (7), Box 5, ACW Diary Series, AWD, DDE.

<sup>67</sup> Eisenhower to Dulles, 26 April 1955, 2, 1, Folder DDE Diary Series, April 1955 (1), Box 10, DDE Diary Series, AWF, DDE.

<sup>68</sup> Memcon, Eisenhower and Eden, 31 January 1956, 3, Folder Jan ’56 Goodpaster, Box 12, DDE Diary Series, AWF, DDE.

<sup>69</sup> Governor Herter’s Far East Trip Debriefing, 26 September 1957, 3, Folder Far East, Box 2, Subject Subseries, OCB Series, OSANSA, WHO, DDE.

of Eisenhower and Dulles.<sup>70</sup> In addition, the article reinforced the notion that Dulles was in charge. This was understandable, since the article concluded that “all of the major decisions since Dulles took office have either been handled personally by him or decided on the basis of knowledge he had acquired on his worldwide trips.”<sup>71</sup> More than two years later, a *New York Times* article stated “Dulles enjoys the respect and confidence of a President who defers to his judgment with something akin to devoutness.”<sup>72</sup> Historians have offered a severe corrective to this assumption. Records of Eisenhower’s numerous National Security Council meetings, among other evidence, consistently show a president firmly in control of a foreign policy Dulles only appeared to lead because his actions so closely followed the president’s directives and desires. But at the time, Dulles’s public prominence reinforced the then-prevailing narrative of a hands-off executive.

The Second Straits Crisis began about a month before the four year anniversary of the first. Like all sequels that recycle the original plot, it left the public deeply unsatisfied. In addition, unlike during the later stages of the first crisis, U.S. observers did not think the communists were serious about launching an attack this time. Nonetheless, everyone had to show up and try to convincingly mouth their lines one more time. Dulles pointed out the importance of “morale” and the dangers of a

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<sup>70</sup> James Shepley, “How Dulles Averted War,” *Life*, 16 January 1955, 72.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.* 77.

<sup>72</sup> Peter Lisagor, “How Our Foreign Policy Is Made,” *New York Times*, 28 September 1958, SM7, 57.



“cumulating rollback effect.”<sup>73</sup> Eisenhower reiterated his belief that “there is no military reason for the Chinese Nationalists to hold the offshore islands,” again pointing to the pointlessness of the crisis from the U.S. point of view.<sup>74</sup> But this time Dulles doubted communist intentions to assault the islands, noting how they “exercised considerable caution” in attempting to avoid encounters with nationalist patrols.<sup>75</sup> For his part, Eisenhower once again sent envoys to attempt to convince Chiang to abandon the islands entirely to ensure there would be no Third Straits Crisis.<sup>76</sup> In exchange, the U.S. would offer him additional amphibious landing craft in the case of a breakdown of communist control on the mainland.

Eisenhower recognized the U.S. was “at a great disadvantage in terms of world opinion.”<sup>77</sup> Regardless, as Dulles pointed out, more was at stake than global image. The New Look was on the line. Once again, the communists would back down if threatened with ten kiloton atomic bombs.<sup>78</sup> If they did not, there would be the potential for all-out

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<sup>73</sup> A.J. Goodpaster, Memorandum of Conference with the President, 12 August 1958, 1, Folder August 1958 – Staff Notes (2), Box 35, DDE Diary Series, AWF, DDE; Memorandum, Dulles, 4 September 1958, 1, Folder WH Meetings with the President July 1, 1958 – December 31, 1958 (7), Box 7, White House Memoranda Series, Dulles, John Foster Papers, 1951-59, DDE.

<sup>74</sup> A.J. Goodpaster, Memorandum of Conference with the President, 14 August 1958, 1, Folder August 1958 – Staff Notes (2), Box 35, DDE Diary Series, AWF, DDE.

<sup>75</sup> Minutes, 6, Folder 337<sup>th</sup> Meeting of NSC, 21 August 1958, Box 10, NSC Series, AWF, DDE.

<sup>76</sup> Telcon, Eisenhower and Dulles, 26 September 1958, Folder Telephone Calls – Sept. 1958, Box 36, DDE Diary Series, AWF, DDE.

<sup>77</sup> Memorandum of Conference with the President, Generals Twining and Goodpaster, 30 September 1958, Folder Staff Notes – Sept. 1958, Box 26, DDE Diary Series, AWF, DDE.

<sup>78</sup> Dulles, Memorandum, 4 September 1958, 2, Folder Staff Notes – Sept. 1958, Box 36, DDE Diary Series, AWF, DDE; Memorandum, The Case for U.S. Intervention, 2 September 1958, 2, Folder State Department – September 1958 – January 1959 (1), Box 3, State Department Subseries, Subject Series, Office of the Staff Secretary, White House Office, DDE.

nuclear war. But if the U.S. did not make the threat, Eisenhower's entire foreign policy – for which Dulles was the public face – would be discredited. The Chinese were not the only ones obsessed with “face.” Dulles explained to Eisenhower, who surely already understood this fact, that “we have geared our defense to use of these (atomic weapons) in case of hostilities of any size,” and that “if we will not use them when the chips are down because of adverse world opinion, we must revise our defense setup.”<sup>79</sup> Dulles made the same point to British Prime Minister Harold MacMillan the same day, albeit in a less self-serving manner, arguing that if nuclear weapons were taken off the table in all but the most serious security situations “then we face a very grave situation indeed in the face of the massive manpower of the Sino-Soviet bloc.”<sup>80</sup> The test was not so much of U.S. resolve as of the viability of the administration's strategy of containment.

The crisis was over by early October, approximately two months after the communists began shelling. But the danger had ebbed weeks before, Eisenhower noting on 25 September that “we have had our first evidence that the Chinese Communists have some realization of the dangers inherent in a nuclear conflict with the United States.”<sup>81</sup> Evidently he had forgotten making the exact same observation during the first crisis. But the media – and the general public – had not forgotten. This made the victory decidedly Pyrrhic. The public reaction demonstrated the non-replicability of brinkmanship as a

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<sup>79</sup> Memorandum of Conference with the President, 4 September 1958, 1, Folder Staff Notes – Sept. 1958, Box 36, DDE Diary Series, AWD, DDE.

<sup>80</sup> Letter, Dulles to MacMillan, 4 September 1958, 3, Folder WH Meetings with the President July 1, 1958 – December 31, 1958 (6), Box 7, White House Memoranda Series, Dulles, John Foster Papers, 1951-59, DDE.

<sup>81</sup> Minutes, 1, Folder 380<sup>th</sup> Meeting of NSC, 25 September 1958, Box 10, NSC Series, AWF, DDE.

tactic in a democracy. Eisenhower succeeded not only in saving Quemoy and Matsu – which he no longer desired Chiang keep. He also succeeded in discrediting the New Look. Editorial opinion ran heavily against Eisenhower in the first month of the second crisis, the *Minneapolis Morning Tribune* expressing the thoughts of many when its editors wrote “if there ever was a war that would be fought at the wrong place, at the wrong time and for the wrong reason, it would be a war with Communist China over the islands off the coast of the mainland of China.”<sup>82</sup>

Eisenhower felt compelled to give a televised address defending his conduct. While the press lauded his January 1955 remarks, his September 1958 address was greeted derisively, and the Democrats sensed weakness in an election year. The *Washington Post* claimed the speech “provoked the sharpest split to date in bipartisan support of the President’s foreign policy.”<sup>83</sup> The normally sympathetic *Wall Street Journal* noted the irony that the New Look had fallen directly into the trap it was intended to bypass, stating that the crisis proved that “every place the Communists choose to create a provocation the United States must stand ready to fight – and fight in fact if it comes to that. And if that is what Mr. Eisenhower means, it is a policy without much hope.”<sup>84</sup> Eisenhower saved American lives only by dramatically raising the stakes of failure. In addition, the intervening period of peace and quiet been wasted. The next week, the same newspaper asked “were there no acceptable alternatives, especially in the

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<sup>82</sup> Excerpts of U.S. Editorial Opinion on Quemoy-Matsu, 8 September 1958, 5, Folder Quemoy-Matsu – Washburn Abbot, Box 29, Administration Series, AWF, DDE.

<sup>83</sup> Carroll Kilpatrick, “Ike Talk Splits Policy Support, *Washington Post*, 13 September 1958, A6.

<sup>84</sup> “The President’s Premise,” *Wall Street Journal*, 15 September 1958, 10.

more than three years since we specifically reaffirmed our determination to defend Formosa?”<sup>85</sup> The president noticed the criticism, remarking to Dulles his belief that “as much as two-thirds of the world, and 50% of U.S. opinion opposes the course we have been following.”<sup>86</sup> Dulles in turn told Walter Robertson that “we have a public relations problem of our own” and that the administration “can’t put us into war without public opinion supporting it.”<sup>87</sup> As the crisis neared its conclusion in early October, pollster George Gallup wrote that it was hurting Republican congressional candidates among a crisis-weary and war-fearing public.<sup>88</sup>

Once again, after the guns fell silent, U.S. officials tried to convince Chiang to remove most if not all troops from the islands. Once again, he refused. From Taipei, Dulles cabled the president “I trust your talks with the voters are more surely persuasive than my talk with the Generalissimo.”<sup>89</sup> The president raged to Herter against Chiang’s “illogical position,” adding that “he was just about ready to tell Chiang Kai-shek where he got off.”<sup>90</sup> In June 1960, the nationalists still stationed 100,000 fighting men stationed

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<sup>85</sup> “Another Brink,” *Wall Street Journal*, 23 September 1958, 16.

<sup>86</sup> Memcon Dulles and Eisenhower, 23 September 1958, 2, Folder WH Meetings with the President July 1, 1958 – December 31, 1958 (6), Box 7, WHMS, Dulles, John Foster Papers, 1951-59, DDE.

<sup>87</sup> Telcon, Dulles and Robertson, 25 September 1958, Folder Memoranda of Telephone Conv. – Gen. August 1, 1958 – October 31, 1958 (3), Box 9, Telephone Conversations Series, Dulles, John Foster Papers, 1951-59, DDE.

<sup>88</sup> George Gallup, “China Crisis, Slump Cost GOP Advantage,” *Los Angeles Times*, 1 October 1958, 18.

<sup>89</sup> Telegram, Dulles to Eisenhower, 21 October 1958, Folder Dulles – October 1958, Box 10, Dulles-Herter Series, AWF, DDE.

<sup>90</sup> Herter to Dulles, 6 October 1958, Folder Miscellaneous Memoranda 1958 (1), Box 9, Herter, Christian A. Papers, DDE.

on the offshore islands.<sup>91</sup> Chiang had learned nothing, the American public had forgotten nothing, and Eisenhower felt alienated from both.

Utilizing Chinese sources nearly four decades after the events, political scientist Thomas Christianson concluded “recovery of the islands was not a primary goal at the onset of China’s military operations.” Instead, Mao exploited the crisis for mass mobilization at the start of the Great Leap Forward’s attempts at rapid rural industrialization.<sup>92</sup> Observers at the time intuited this to be the case, a British diplomat in Beijing hypothesizing that Mao’s “domestic policy of perpetual ‘campaigns’ and ‘leaps forward’ thrives on the stimulus of external crises.” The crucial term in his mind was crises “rather than wars.”<sup>93</sup> The *New York Times*, without having a single correspondent in the country, realized Mao was using the crisis “to induce the Chinese people to make record exertions and to accept the most radical change in their way of life yet attempted.”<sup>94</sup> This knowledge no doubt added to the absurdity of the entire episode, which each side making threats the other knew they did not intend to follow through on. But while Eisenhower failed to rally his domestic audience, Mao failed by succeeding in doing so with his, as would become apparent to the world within a few years.

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<sup>91</sup> Marshall Green, Taiwan Straits and Offshore Islands Problem, 28 June 1960, Folder Meetings with the President 7/30/57 to 1/20/61 (1), Box 21, Herter Papers, DDE.

<sup>92</sup> Thomas J. Christenson, *Useful Adversaries: Grand Strategy, Domestic Mobilization, and Sino-American Conflict, 1947-1958* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996), 230, 200.

<sup>93</sup> Excerpt of Personal Assessment by British Charge, Peiping, 9 September 1958.

<sup>94</sup> Harry Schwarz, “Peiping Shooting for Big-Power Status,” *New York Times*, 14 September 1958, E3.

## Negotiations and Debates

During the First Straits Crisis, Eisenhower wrote to Dulles that “I devoutly hope that history’s inflexible yardstick will show that we have done everything in our power, and everything that is right, to prevent the awful catastrophe of another major war.”<sup>95</sup> Some historians have seen events the way Eisenhower wished they would. But in 1958, his contemporaries did not. He had failed to improve relations with the Chinese communists or bring the Chinese nationalists to heel when he had the chance, and the world was now paying the price with an unnecessary war scare, and a nuclear one at that. But once again, reporters hoped that now, at last, changed would have to come. Perhaps what one reporter referred to as “the strange vest-pocket war over Quemoy Island” would breathe new life into “Uncle Sam’s drift toward diplomatic recognition of Communist China.”<sup>96</sup> At the height of the crisis, the *Washington Post* expressed the hope that it would serve as the catalyst for change.<sup>97</sup> Near its conclusion, the *New York Times* claimed to notice a “somewhat belated flexibility” in Eisenhower’s China policy which could lead to its “realignment,” although the editors pointedly added “the pity is that this more flexible policy was not adopted long before the Chinese Communist attack put us

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<sup>95</sup> Eisenhower to Dulles, 10 February 1955, 4, Folder Dulles, John Foster Feb. 1955 (2), Box 4, Dulles-Herter Series, AWF, DDE.

<sup>96</sup> John R. Gibson, “Peiping Recognition,” *Wall Street Journal*, 10 November 1958, 12.

<sup>97</sup> “The Case on China,” *Washington Post*, 11 September 1958, A14; “Ike’s Ideas on China,” *Washington Post*, 19 September 1958, B15.

in our present dilemma.”<sup>98</sup> In other words, Eisenhower had missed an opportunity to wage peace.

This is not to say Eisenhower made no attempts to alter the status quo between the two crises. He did make efforts, but they were halting and limited, largely due to the president’s unwillingness to make concessions for fear of displaying weakness towards an adversary. Contrary to press speculation, the administration never considered offering diplomatic recognition. Dulles explained in 1953 to conservative California Senator William Knowland that “unfortunately” Woodrow Wilson had set the precedent of diplomatic recognition implying “approval of a government,” and under that standard he was against recognizing the communists as the legitimate governing force in China.<sup>99</sup> On the other hand, the administration was always willing to interact with that regime “on a de facto basis when circumstances make this useful.”<sup>100</sup> Any consideration of formal recognition at a future time was contingent upon changes in Chinese behavior.<sup>101</sup> In the meantime, Eisenhower was willing to consider “dual recognition” – the “Two Chinas” policy conservatives who supported Eisenhower’s approach feared his Democratic successors would adopt – but he knew that would not prove acceptable to either side.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> “Realigning Our China Policy,” *New York Times*, 2 October 1958, 36.

<sup>99</sup> Supplementary Notes, Legislative Leadership Meeting, 19 May 1953, 3, Folder Staff Notes January – December 1953, Box 24, DDE Diary Series, AWF, DDE.

<sup>100</sup> Dulles to Eisenhower, 19 October 1954, 3, Folder Dulles, John Foster Oct. 1954, Box 4, Dulles-Herter Series, AWF, DDE.

<sup>101</sup> Memcon, Dulles and Eisenhower, 22 December 1954, Folder Meetings with the President 1954 (1), Box 1, WHMS, Dulles, John Foster Papers, DDE.

<sup>102</sup> Memcon Eisenhower and Knowland, 26 January 1955, Folder ACW Diary January 1955 (1), Box 4, ACW Series, AWF, DDE.

Thus, while Eisenhower had his doubts about nonrecognition, and did not see such an approach as a virtue in itself, he did not believe it useful to alter to existing situation.

In contrast to Dulles's alleged shunning of Zhou at Geneva in 1954, the immediate aftermath of the First Straits Crisis in 1955 witnessed the first sustained negotiations between the two parties and rampant speculation on what these activities might lead to. China's performance at the Bandung conference was largely considered a success, even though the final declaration was more to the U.S.'s liking than to China's.<sup>103</sup> It was during this "Bandung Moment," less than a month after the two nations were nearly at war, that ambassadorial talks began in Geneva which were later relocated to Warsaw. The primary issue discussed was the release of several dozen U.S. military and civilian personnel currently being held in China. Eisenhower claimed to favor expanding the talks to additional subjects, over the objections of Knowland and the editors of *Time* magazine, based in their case on their distrust of communists in general and Chinese communists in particular.<sup>104</sup> Within a month, four U.S. airmen had been released.<sup>105</sup> Yet the talks soon bogged down over the unwillingness of the U.S. to reciprocate China's good faith gestures. Admiral Radford had already leaked that he desired a blockade of the Chinese coast until all prisoners were released, further complicating the situation both abroad and at home, while shortly after the start of the

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<sup>103</sup> Chalmers Roberts, "Chou at Bandung . . ." *Washington Post*, 7 May 1955, 17; "Chou Enlai: 'It Was a Famous Victory'," *New Republic*, 30 May 1955, 3.

<sup>104</sup> Robert T. Hartmann, "Eisenhower Favors Red China Talks," *Los Angeles Times*, 28 April 1955, 1; "Backs Talks with Peiping, Grants Rebuff was Error," *New York Times*, 28 April 1955, 1; "Lulling Words," *Time*, 2 May 1955, 19.

<sup>105</sup> "Red China's Opening Gesture," *Christian Science Monitor*, 1 June 1955, 20.



negotiations Eisenhower refused to allow China to be represented at the upcoming Big Four Conference in Geneva, a clear insult to Chinese prestige.<sup>106</sup>

Despite such self-imposed stumbling blocks, speculation built up that additional meetings might soon occur at a higher level, specifically between Dulles and Zhou. First to publicize the idea was Democratic Senator Walter George of Georgia, Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. A conservative on most issues, George was perhaps the earliest China dove in Congress, and before Mike Mansfield the most influential.<sup>107</sup> Eisenhower hinted that he supported such higher-level talks, and Dulles appeared to welcome them as well.<sup>108</sup> Yet by September their position had hardened, with the administration now stating a foreign ministers' meeting would only occur after the release of all 41 Americans currently being held in China.<sup>109</sup> Either out of sincerity or a desire to score diplomatic points from U.S. intransigence, Zhou formally offered to meet with Dulles in 1956, an invitation the administration rejected. According to the press, this "put Washington in a very bad light indeed."<sup>110</sup> Officials in the next administration highlighted actions such as this as cardinal errors they would not repeat.

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<sup>106</sup> "Dulles Advises U.S. Patience with China," *Washington Post*, 12 January 1955, 8; U.S. Cold on Red China at Big 4 Meeting," *Los Angeles Times*, 13 May 1955, 6.

<sup>107</sup> "President Backs Talk With Peking," *Christian Science Monitor*, 18 May 1955, 1.

<sup>108</sup> A.M. Rosenthal, "President Wants a U.S.-China Talk," *New York Times*, 23 July 1955, 1; Dana Adams Schmidt, "Dulles Prepared to Talk to Chou After Aides Meet," *New York Times*, 27 July 1955, 1; Dana Adams Schmidt, "Eisenhower Hints Wider China Talk," *New York Times*, 28 July 1955, 1.

<sup>109</sup> "Bid for Chou Talk Rebuffed by U.S.," *New York Times*, 15 September 1955, 1.

<sup>110</sup> Neal Stanford, "U.S. Puts Red Offers to Work," *Christian Science Monitor*, 13 June 1956, 18.

Instead, in the 1960s, emphasis would repeatedly be placed on “putting the onus” for bad relations back upon the Chinese by making offers similar to Zhou’s in 1956.

Over time, Zhou’s rejected 1956 invitation came to be seen as Eisenhower’s lost chance to change the situation for the better. In early 1971, Kissinger described the renewed potential for an opening of high-level contacts with the Chinese as a return to 1955, reflecting this sentiment. Whether Dulles and Zhou could have accomplished much had they met is doubtful. Even if such a meeting led to the release of all U.S. prisoners, there was still the travel and trade bans. Even if the U.S. unilaterally lifted these restrictions, the Chinese would likely not reciprocate by allowing travel and trade unless the U.S. relented and allowed the P.R.C. to join the U.N. This step would have been even less acceptable to Eisenhower than recognition. While he toyed with the latter, he never expressed interest in considering the former. Though later erstwhile policy reformers proposed incremental steps, China policy was a seamless garment, a fabric whose strings could not be tugged at without risking wholesale unravelling. Unlike their Democratic successors, Eisenhower and his officials understood this, as would Nixon later on. Still, such a high-level meeting might had prevented the Second Straits Crisis, which would have proven politically useful to Eisenhower, given its negative effect on domestic opinion of his leadership.

But even such a symbolic step was too much, given the administration’s commitment to denying the Chinese communists international legitimacy and its fears of showing weakness. Dulles defended this intransigence in 1956 by claiming the Chinese were using their American captives as “political hostages.” He refused to exchange a

meeting with Zhou for the release of many, if not most, of them. To Dulles, such an agreement would imply the Chinese could “impose their will upon the United States.”<sup>111</sup> Eisenhower blamed his opposition on the fact that “the feeling of the American people against Red China was so strong that it would be almost impossible to have such a meeting.”<sup>112</sup> But as Dulles’s remarks indicated, the true issue was not domestic opinion, or even the prisoners, but face. The administration would not lessen tensions at the risk of humiliation.

While worrying about psychological factors among Asian allies, they also had their own concerns with image and morale. Foreign policy adviser and Time-Life editor C.D. Jackson acknowledged that nonrecognition “is slowly being undermined by the de facto land, population and administrative mass of the Mainland regime.” However, formal recognition would be seen by the world not as “real-politik” but as “an act of appeasement.”<sup>113</sup> Domestically, the effect of U.N. admission would, according to Eisenhower, “be catastrophic in this country” due to fresh memories of American losses in Korea.<sup>114</sup> Even superpowers could feel fragile.

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<sup>111</sup> Memorandum Dulles, 28 August 1956, 1, Folder China, Peoples Rep. of, Box 101 (1956), Series Selected Correspondence, Dulles, JF Papers, Mudd; “Red China ‘Negotiates’”, *New York Times*, 20 October 1956, 18; Memcon, Dulles and Nehru, 16 December 1956, 1, Folder Memos of Conversations – General – N through R (1), Box 1, General Correspondence and Memoranda Series, Dulles, John Foster Papers, DDE.

<sup>112</sup> Memcon Eisenhower, Selwyn Lloyd, Harold Caccia, Newport, Rhode Island, 21 September 1958, 5, Folder Staff Notes – Sept. 1958, Box 36, DDE Diary Series, AWF, DDE.

<sup>113</sup> Jackson to Shu-Chin Tsui, 18 June 1956, 2, Jackson to Michael Heilperin, 18 July 1956, 1, both in Folder Log – 1956 (2), Box 68, Jackson, C.D. Papers, 1931-67, DDE.

<sup>114</sup> Memcon, Eisenhower and Eden, 31 January 1956, 2, Folder Jan ’56 Goodpaster, Box 12, DDE Diary Series, AWF, DDE.

Eisenhower used this alleged fragility based on fears of negative domestic opinion to justify his intransigence to frustrated allies. He told British representatives that “our public opinion” would not support Dulles meeting with Zhou, and the Canadians that the American public would not countenance communist China’s admission to the U.N.<sup>115</sup> He claimed to favor trading with China, but again blamed public opinion for his inability to act.<sup>116</sup> He told Nehru that “he would like to get our people over their currently very averse attitude toward Red China,” adding that he “does not understand” why the American people appeared to fear the Chinese more than the Russians.<sup>117</sup> Eisenhower did not believe he could change the minds of most Americans, and certainly would not risk trying on an issue such as China which was a low priority for him.

In addition, the strongest opposition to any change was centered in his own political party. Conservative Republicans scored political points after 1949 by arguing the Truman administration failed to adequately support Chiang’s government during the Chinese Civil War. McCarthy was hardly alone in this endeavor. Some of these voices came by 1952 to be termed the “China Lobby,” a phrase they rejected since it implied both dual loyalty and that they were a minority pressure group. In addition, there was at that time no formal organization advocating for supporting the Chinese nationalists and

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<sup>115</sup> Memcon Eisenhower, Selwyn Lloyd, Harold Caccia, Newport, Rhode Island, 21 September 1958, 2, Folder Staff Notes – Sept. 1958, Box 36, DDE Diary Series, AWF, DDE; “U.S. Won’t Recognize Red China, Canada Told,” *Los Angeles Times*, 31 March 1956, 6.

<sup>116</sup> Minutes, 6, Folder 271<sup>st</sup> Meeting of NSC, 22 December 1955, Box 7, NSC Series, AWF, DDE.

<sup>117</sup> Memcon, Eisenhower and Nehru, 19 December 1956, 10, Folder Dec. ’56 Diary, Box 20, DDE Diary Series, AWF, DDE.

isolating the Chinese communists. This changed in 1954 with the decision by certain early conservative activists to form the Committee of One Million Against the Admission of Communist China to the United Nations. These activists worried about the upcoming U.N. vote on admission, fearing abandonment by key U.S. allies. As Christopher Emmet explained to Minnesota Representative Walter Judd, in his recent visit to Britain Emmet had been struck by the widespread belief in that nation that opposition in the U.S. to including communist China in the community of nations existed only among an extreme faction, and was not a widely held belief among the general public. A mass organization supported by members of both political parties could dispel that notion.<sup>118</sup> Liberal Democratic Senator Paul Douglas was an early and prominent member of the new organization, and the sole Democrat to appear at the April 1955 press conference announcing the formation of the organization. He seconded Emmet's reasoning, explaining that "if our allies know this is not just the position of small minority on the ultra-conservative side, they may reckon with the view more fully."<sup>119</sup> The group could only succeed if it remained bipartisan in membership, giving the appearance of a public consensus on the issue.

Marvin Liebman, who in 1955 worked as Emmet's assistant, became Secretary of the Committee of One Million, handling its daily business, including fundraising and publicity. But Walter Judd remained the face of the organization. As a congressman, he

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<sup>118</sup> Emmet to Judd, Subject: Committee for One Million, 8 August 1954, 3, Folder Committee of One Million General/non-printed material, 1968-1971, Box 177, Walter Judd Papers, Hoover Institute Archives, Stanford, Ca.

<sup>119</sup> Douglas to Ernest S. Ballard, 27 April 1955, 2, Folder Committee of One Million 1955, Box 1199, Paul H. Douglas Papers, Chicago History Museum, Chicago, Illinois.

enjoyed access to the president, and was on very good terms with many of his foreign policy officials. The Committee grew out of an effort begun in 1953 to collect one million signatures opposing the admission of communist China to the United Nations. After the announcement of this goal, Judd met at the White House with Eisenhower, providing the effort with publicity and legitimacy.<sup>120</sup> He was also in communication with Dulles, and called “Mr. China Policy” by Walter Robertson.<sup>121</sup> Robertson was seen at the time as the China Lobby’s conduit to Eisenhower, and he told Judd in 1959 that “this administration has been trying to implement the policies which you long have advocated.”<sup>122</sup> The administration’s relationship with members and allies of the Committee varied based on Eisenhower’s level of personal respect for the individual. He appeared indifferent to Judd, but fond of New Jersey Republican Senator Alexander Smith, who was a member of the lobby’s Steering Committee. Dulles was a close friend of Smith’s, and after Smith retired from the Senate in 1958 he became one of Eisenhower’s foreign policy advisers.<sup>123</sup>

On the other hand, Eisenhower was downright contemptuous of Republican Senate Majority Leader William Knowland, calling the conservative standard-bearer

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<sup>120</sup> Judd to Eisenhower, 22 October 1954, 1, Folder Committee of One Million General/non-printed material, 1953-1954, Box 176, Judd Papers, Hoover.

<sup>121</sup> Dulles to Judd, 16 June 1954, Folder Judd, Walter H., Box 93 (1955), Series Selected Correspondence, Dulles, JF Papers, Mudd; Robertson to Judd, 16 May 1959, Folder Robertson, Walter, 1949-1970, Box 165, Judd Papers, Hoover.

<sup>122</sup> Robertson to Judd, 16 May 1959.

<sup>123</sup> Dulles to Smith, 30 August 1957, Folder Smith, Alexander, Box 122 (1957), Series Selected Correspondence, Dulles, JF Papers, Mudd; Warren Duffee, “Senator Smith May Be Made Foreign Policy Adviser,” *Washington Post*, 11 May 1958, Folder Smith, Alexander, Box 135 (1958), Series Selected Correspondence, Dulles, JF Papers, Mudd.

“the biggest disappointment I have found since I have been in politics.”<sup>124</sup> He appeared to not respect the senator’s intellect, and no doubt was annoyed after Knowland leaked the news that Radford supported blockading China, an action Eisenhower adamantly opposed.<sup>125</sup> Overall, Eisenhower’s relationship with the Committee of One Million was best summed up by his administration’s handling of communications with Liebman in 1957 concerning his worries about Eisenhower possibly relaxing the trade ban. While deciding a letter from the president himself was not necessary, Eisenhower’s aides concluded that “in view of the prominence of the Committee of One Million” it would be advisable for White House Chief of Staff Sherman Adams to write the response.<sup>126</sup> Eisenhower respected the lobby’s influence, particularly on Capitol Hill. But his fear of public opinion extended beyond the Committee’s supporters, or its limited ability to inflame mass sentiment.

While denying it was itself a “China Lobby,” the Committee believed there existed a “Red China Lobby” consisting of ideologically suspect professors, greedy businessmen, and naïve religious leaders, identified by Liebman as “professional do-gooders, misguided liberals, and fearful Americans who believe appeasement to be the

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<sup>124</sup> Interview with Attorney General, 15 June 1955, 1, Folder ACW Diary June 1954 (3), Box 2, ACW Diary Series, AWF, DDE.

<sup>125</sup> Drew Pearson, “GOP Is Divided on China Policy,” *Washington Post*, 6 December 1954, 35.

<sup>126</sup> Fisher Howe to A.J. Goodpaster, Subject: Letter from Mr. Marvin Liebman, The Committee of One Million, 30 July 1957, Folder Communist China (2), Box 713, Official Files, White House Central File, DDE.

best policy.”<sup>127</sup> Eventually, the academics would prove to be their most articulate and influential adversaries. But for most of the Eisenhower years, the academics kept a low profile, many of them no doubt still recovering from the attacks they sustained during the McCarthy Era. By 1957, a few began to speak out, particularly John King Fairbank of Harvard and Arthur Doak Barnett of the Council on Foreign Relations. Fairbank called for policy reform in the April 1957 issue of the *Atlantic*, while Barnett advocated open debate of the issue in a Foreign Policy Association pamphlet.<sup>128</sup> For the time being, these tentative forays had no effect on public opinion. But later events would prove Liebman was correct to view men like Fairbank and Barnett as potential threats.

Eisenhower claimed Congress posed an insuperable obstacle to any policy reforms during his time in office. Historians have taken him at his word. Yet at the time reporters noticed pronounced fissures on Capitol Hill regarding China policy which prefigured those of the late-1960s, when Democrats and liberal Republicans joined forces to call for policy change, isolating support for the status quo among a right-wing rump. As early as February 1955, veteran pundit Arthur Krock predicted support at the 1956 Democratic Convention for high-level negotiations with China, and a split on that issue at the Republican Convention. At the start of 1956, the *New York Times* claimed moderate “Eisenhower Republicans” now supported “a practical not a formal” recognition of Communist China, which the editors expected Eisenhower to pursue in

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<sup>127</sup> Confidential Memorandum, Liebman to Steering Committee, Re: Confidential Report on Status of Red China’s Bid for a UN Seat, November 1956, 3, Folder 5: Committee For One Million, 1955 (3), Box 541, Series 4: Senatorial Career, H. Alexander Smith Papers, Mudd.

<sup>128</sup> Steering Committee to Members and Friends, Re: Relations between the United States and Communist China, May 1957, 4, in *Ibid.*



his second term. After the election, a *Times* story claimed “a powerful Senate group” was seeking to lift the trade ban. This group, supposedly led by Walter George and Majority Leader Lyndon Johnson, was expected to attract “considerable liberal Republican support.”<sup>129</sup> Though George no doubt supported such moves, he was part of no group of this sort. Yet there were some who like him expressed at least an openness to policy change. Senator J. William Fulbright, who would soon succeed George as Foreign Relations chair, predicted in 1957 that in the future it would be necessary to recognize communist China. He would soon lead efforts to unite academics and what Republican Senator Hugh Scott termed the “non-braying jackasses” on his Foreign Relations Committee to call for policy change.<sup>130</sup>

While keeping quiet for the time being, Mike Mansfield had long supported a “flexible” foreign policy on China and other issues. After the 1960 elections, his aide Frank Valeo noted how “China policy in the past eight years has stood still while the situation has changed,” though he recognized bringing this situation into balance was “likely to be controversial.”<sup>131</sup> A rationale for undertaking such controversial policy reform was offered in 1958 during the Second Straits Crisis by the *Kansas City Star*.

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<sup>129</sup> Arthur Krock, “Far East Policy Looms as a Big Issue for ’56,” *New York Times*, 13 February 1955, 169; “China Question Fades as a Political Issue,” *New York Times*, 29 January 1956, 176; William S. White, “China Trade Move Rising in Senate,” *New York Times*, 4 June 1957, 1, 8.

<sup>130</sup> S.J. Owen to Fulbright, 18 June 1957, Folder Face the Nation, 6/1/57, Box 14, Subseries 72, J. William Fulbright Papers, University of Arkansas Libraries, Special Collections, Fayetteville, Arkansas; Charles Porter to Hugh Scott, 24 February 1960, Folder Asia, 1959-1964, Box 35, Series 48, Subseries 11: Asia, Fulbright Papers, Arkansas.

<sup>131</sup> Our China Policy, 12, Folder Our China Policy, circa 1950, Box 51, Series 21: Speeches, Reports, Mike Mansfield Papers, Archives and Special Collections, University of Montana, Missoula, Montana; Valeo to Mansfield, Subject: Report on U.S.-Chinese Relations, November 1960, 1, 2, Folder Report on China 1960-1961, Box 107, Series 22: Senate Leadership, 1961-1977, Mansfield Papers, Montana.

Noting “we cannot overthrow” the Chinese communists, the editors proposed that recognition and U.N. admission be “dispassionately and hard-headedly” examined to pave the way for their future implementation.<sup>132</sup> This would remain an isolated sentiment for the next half-decade, but in the mid-1960s swiftly became the media consensus on China policy, paving the way for acceptance of Nixon’s moves in the early 1970s.

### **Threat and Menace**

The main difference between these later eras and Eisenhower’s time was how the Chinese threat was perceived. In the 1950s, China was either seen as not dangerous or as dangerous but fragile. Expressing the former view, Eisenhower remarked in a 1955 meeting of the National Security Council that he “was not afraid of Communist China – not in this decade at least.”<sup>133</sup> Many, including his Secretary of State, doubted it would make it into the next decade. Only months into the regime’s existence, Dulles claimed the communists in China “will find it very difficult to establish its uncontested rule unless we help that by seeming, ourselves, to accept that result.” Provided that did not occur, “the Communist offensive in the East will be checked on the rocks of internal difficulties within China.”<sup>134</sup> In 1954, he wrote Clare Boothe Luce that “despotisms always look formidable and impregnable from the outside,” but “they are usually rotten

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<sup>132</sup> “Our Long-Term Policy Toward Red China, *Kansas City Star*, 15 September 1958, Folder WH – General Correspondence 1958 (2), Box 6, White House Memoranda Series, Dulles, John Foster Papers, 1951-1959, DDE.

<sup>133</sup> Minutes, 7, Folder 271<sup>st</sup> Meeting of NSC, 22 December 1955, Box 7, NSC Series, AWF, DDE.

<sup>134</sup> Notes, 8 January 1950, 1, 2, Folder China, People’s Rep. Of, Box 47 (1950), Series Selected Correspondence, Dulles, JF, Mudd.

on the inside.”<sup>135</sup> Such assumptions argued for the virtues of nonrecognition. Adding a certain moral element, and alluding to Dean Rusk’s characterization of the regime as a “Slavic Manchukuo,” leading U.S. historian of China Stanley Hornbeck reminded a 1955 audience that “the United States did not recognize Manchukuo. Also – Manchukuo did not stay.”<sup>136</sup> In a 1954 article in the *Saturday Evening Post*, the journalist Joseph Alsop situated the regime’s strengths and weaknesses within the context of distant Chinese history, comparing Mao’s rule to the short-lived Qin and Sui dynasties which collapsed after trying to change too much too quickly.<sup>137</sup>

Belief in the notion of China as a fragile threat did not preclude some from emphasizing the threat over the fragility. General James Van Fleet, the former Commander of United Nations Forces in Korea, travelled for over three months in 1954 across the Pacific Rim on behalf of Eisenhower. His report to the president labeled China “a greater menace to the Free World than the Soviet Union itself.”<sup>138</sup> In an article published in *U.S. News* upon returning, Van Fleet cautioned Americans that “I don’t think that time is on our side.”<sup>139</sup> Yet a few months later, that same magazine argued that

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<sup>135</sup> Dulles to Clare Boothe Luce, 1 September 1954, 1, Folder Dulles, John Foster Sept. 1954 (2), Box 4, Dulles-Herter Series, AWF, DDE.

<sup>136</sup> Stanley K. Hornbeck, “Learning the Hard Way in the Far East,” address before the Shanghai Tiffin Club of New York, at the National Arts Club, 13 December 1955, 1, Folder Communism – China – Printed Matter – Miscellaneous, Box 25, Christopher Emmet Papers, Hoover.

<sup>137</sup> *Saturday Evening Post* to Alsop, 17 September 1954, 16, Folder 1, Box 42, Joseph Alsop Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

<sup>138</sup> Report of the Van Fleet Mission to the Far East, 26 April to 7 August 1954, 7, Folder President’s Papers 1954 (8), Box 2, Special Assistant Series, Presidential Subseries, OSANSA, WHO, DDE.

<sup>139</sup> Gen. James A Van Fleet, “Catastrophe in Asia,” *U.S. News & World Report*, 17 September 1954, 28.

while “acting tough,” the Chinese “are leading from appalling weakness.”<sup>140</sup> A continued policy of isolation was the best way to keep them in that state of weakness. The *New York Times*, which a decade later – upon reconsidering the regime’s stability – would lead the calls for policy change, in 1954 labelled the proposed benefits of outreach to China a “dangerous delusion.” Zhou Enlai’s virtuoso performance at the recent Geneva Conference, establishing him as “a formidable adversary,” only confirmed this assessment.<sup>141</sup> Leading China scholar Richard Walker called China “a major power on the world scene” in 1958, but that only strengthened his support for a policy designed to “exploit the weaknesses of the country, to make him (Mao) fail.”<sup>142</sup>

Walter Robertson summed up all these views in a 1959 speech which began by noting the “growing fear of the growing power and threat of Red China” among the non-communist nations of Asia. Yet ending China’s isolation would only compound the problem. With this in mind, the administration would “take no action which would create international prestige for this regime.” He concluded by telling his audience that “the cure for muddy water” is “time,” a reference to a Chinese saying implying time was not on Mao’s side, and all the U.S. had to do was wait his regime out.<sup>143</sup> But in the interim,

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<sup>140</sup> “Taking a Look at China,” *U.S. News & World Report*, 4 February 1955, 24.

<sup>141</sup> “Chou and the Cold War,” *New York Times*, 28 June 1954, 18.

<sup>142</sup> Richard L. Walker, “Communist China: Power and Prospects?,” *New Leader*, 20 October 1958, 3, 32, Folder Communism – China – Printed Matter – Miscellaneous, Box 25, Emmet Papers, Hoover.

<sup>143</sup> Walter S. Robertson, “U.S. China Policy,” Address made before the Canadian Club, Ottawa, Canada, 13 March 1959, 1, 4, 6, Folder China – United Nations Membership – Memoranda, Box 18, Emmet Papers, Hoover.

the Chinese communists remained a great menace to their southern periphery, and had to be contained.

Dulles claimed in 1955 that the Chinese were both “more belligerent” than the Soviets and enjoyed “a cultural prestige in Asia not enjoyed by Russia in Europe.”<sup>144</sup> Dulles had recently returned from the region, where he noticed that “everywhere there were people who were frightened and worried” about “aggressive Chinese Communist intentions.” The Secretary of State did not anticipate conventional military action on the part of the Chinese, arguing instead that they would encourage aggression and subversion “by all means short of open invasion.”<sup>145</sup> Allen Dulles argued that China was setting its sights on Southeast Asia, where it faced the least resistance. Walt Rostow claimed the greatest point of weakness was South Vietnam, but also argued that so long as that nation held, China would not seek to expand its influence anywhere else.<sup>146</sup> Given the disparity between Chinese goals and capabilities, containment could be achieved at a low cost, while failure to contain China would exact an extremely high price.

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<sup>144</sup> Notes, Far East Presentation, 10 May 1955, 1, Folder China People’s Republic of, Box 90 (1955), Series Selected Correspondence, Dulles, JF Papers, Mudd.

<sup>145</sup> Dulles, Potential Dangers in Far East and Southern Asia, 15 March 1955, Folder 3/15/55: Statement: Re “Potential Dangers in FE & SE ASIA,” Box 334, Series Speeches, Statements, Press Conferences, etc., Dulles, JF Papers, Mudd; Dulles, “The Threat of a Red Asia,” speech before the Overseas Press Club of America, New York, N.Y., 29 March 1954, 4, Folder China, People’s Republic of, Box 79 (1954), Series Selected Correspondence, Dulles, JF Papers, Mudd.

<sup>146</sup> Governor’s Briefing, 27 April 1954, 7, Folder 9: China People’s Republic of, 1950 and 1954-1955, Box 100, Series 5: Subject Files, C.I.A., Allen W. Dulles Papers, Mudd; Rostow, Asia Policy, 3, Report of the Quantico Vulnerabilities Panel Tab 3(b), Folder Quantico Vulnerabilities Panel, Record Group 59.15, National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Maryland.

Though none disputed the containment aspect of the policy, some questioned isolation on the assumption that the regime was not going away. An early voice to this effect was Marquis Childs of the *Washington Post*, who in 1954 claimed the administration “has not yet come to grips with the most massive and formidable alteration in the world that we have witnessed this century,” the creation of a united, powerful, and hostile China.<sup>147</sup> As the decade advanced, this conviction slowly spread, with *Newsweek* in 1958 noting “an astonishing nine-year record of achievement” by the Chinese communists.<sup>148</sup> Even those who hewed to existing policy such as State Department official J. Graham Parsons realized by 1959 that “uprisings on a national scale or even large-scale regional uprisings are most unlikely to occur within the foreseeable future.”<sup>149</sup> But while some assumptions were being questioned or overturned, few if any followed the obvious policy implications. That would have to wait for officials in the next administration.

Underlying much of the fear of China during this period were considerations of race – the merging of the Red Menace with the Yellow Peril. The fact that communist China was powerful, antagonistic, and non-white made it threatening in a way the Soviet Union could never be, no matter how many armored divisions or intercontinental ballistic missiles it deployed. Racial considerations also might have, for lack of a better term, colored the administration’s reactions to attempts by the Chinese communists at

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<sup>147</sup> Marquis Childs, “U.S. Not Facing Up To Asian Problem, *Washington Post*, 12 June 1954, 14.

<sup>148</sup> “Moscow Feels the Dragon’s Breath,” *Newsweek*, 14 July 1954, 38.

<sup>149</sup> Parson to Gordon Gray, 19 August 1959, 1, Folder Communist China (1959), Box 5, NSC Series, Briefing Notes Subseries, OSANSA, WHO, DDE.

outreach or tentative rapprochement. Gordon Chang claimed “prejudice against Asians permeated the entire top levels of the administration.” While recognizing it was “difficult to judge” if this influenced policy, Chang hypothesized that it led Eisenhower and Dulles to view Chinese acts of kindness as “Asian trickery” and declarations of hostility as proof of “Asian fanaticism.”<sup>150</sup>

However, the extant record does not bear this contention out. The isolated examples of Dulles and Eisenhower making prejudiced remarks were far outweighed – in terms of policymaking implications – by their anticolonial sensitivity to Asians’ own views on race, particularly hostility throughout the region to continued white domination. Regarding decolonization, Walter Judd remarked to Eisenhower in 1954 that Asians “are afraid the United States will stay with the White people,” to which Eisenhower replied “maybe Judd had got something there.”<sup>151</sup> Eisenhower was reminded in a 1952 memo that while China’s neighbors opposed communism, “they are equally or even more interested in ridding themselves of ‘white man’s’ rule,” creating a delicate tightrope for the incoming president to walk in his Asian containment policies.<sup>152</sup> After a violent encounter in 1957 between a U.S. soldier and members of the local population led to small-scale riots in Taipei, Eisenhower wondered if the U.S. should have any

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<sup>150</sup> Gordon H. Chang, *Friends and Enemies: The United States, China, and the Soviet Union, 1948-1972* (Stanford University Press: Stanford, Ca., 1990), 170-173.

<sup>151</sup> Memcon, Eisenhower and Judd, 25 June 1954, Folder ACW Diary June 1954 (1), Box 2, ACW Diary Series, AWF, DDE.

<sup>152</sup> Memorandum for General Eisenhower, Re: United States Pacific Policy, 6, Folder Formosa (China) 1952-57 (1), Box 10, International Series, AWF, DDE.

military bases in the region “if they hate us so much.”<sup>153</sup> For his part, Dulles – whom Chang cast as even more prejudiced than the president – cautioned at the height of the First Straits Crisis that it was “of the utmost importance that the issue should not take on the appearance of a struggle between races.”<sup>154</sup> Even if these two leaders were prejudiced in personal beliefs, they were sensitive to the racial feelings of non-whites, and their policies reflected the latter over the former.

### **Passing and Perpetual Rhetoric**

The administration’s refusal in 1956 to have Dulles meet with Zhou did not dampen the expectations of significant and imminent policy alteration. That nothing had changed so far was chalked up to the upcoming election as well as bureaucratic inertia, Joseph Harsch of the *Christian Science Monitor* writing in a front-page story that “the process by which the machinery of a great and powerful government adjusts itself to changed circumstances is of necessity a slow and ponderous one – more like the movement of an ocean liner than of a bicycle or a motor car.”<sup>155</sup> Events abroad appeared to be working against existing policy. At the end of 1956, noted psychic Jeane Dixon predicted communist China’s admission to the U.N. in the upcoming year. With perhaps more credible sourcing, the *Washington Post* reported that “a highly-placed United

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<sup>153</sup> Telcon, Eisenhower and Dulles, 24 May 1957, Folder May ’57 Phone Calls, Box 23, DDE Diary Series, AWF, DDE.

<sup>154</sup> Memorandum, Formosa, 7 April 1955, 13, Folder Position Paper Offshore Islands – April-May 1955 (5), Box 2, WHMS, John Foster Papers, 1951-59, DDE.

<sup>155</sup> Joseph C. Harsch, “U.S. Policy Slowly Shifts,” *Christian Science Monitor*, 10 March 1956, 1.



States official” expected the same result.<sup>156</sup> In addition, it was still widely believed Eisenhower would welcome an end to the policy of isolating China. Journalist Robert Donovan, a reporter with the *New York Herald Tribune* who had enjoyed extensive access to President Eisenhower during his first term in office, wrote in the *Saturday Evening Post* in January 1957 that the president “has long been troubled by doubts about the wisdom of endless nonrecognition of Red China.” Donovan viewed Eisenhower’s purported desire to change China policy as part of an overall mission to marginalize the conservative wing of the Republican Party.<sup>157</sup> This report, combined with speculation about an end to the trade ban and a concerted push by major U.S. newsgathering organizations for a partial lifting of the travel ban, had conservatives fretting that Eisenhower was really going to set them adrift.

In part to quell this speculation, Secretary of State Dulles gave an address in late June at a Lions Club gathering in San Francisco. It would be the most comprehensive and publicized remarks on China policy by a high-ranking Eisenhower official to date, and come to define the administration’s approach for posterity. It is largely because of this speech that contemporaries and historians alike forgot about the near-constant expectations for policy change among the press while Eisenhower was in office. China Lobby ally Robertson helped his boss craft the speech. Robertson reminded Dulles “this is a very important speech” which should not be allowed to be subject to multiple interpretations. He noted the speculation of imminent policy change, as well as recent

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<sup>156</sup> Ruth Montgomery, “Red China in Crystal Ball,” *Washington Post*, 30 December 1956, D6; Hebert Gordon, “Red China Seen Entering U.N. in 1957,” *Washington Post*, 27 December 1956, A11.

<sup>157</sup> Robert J. Donovan, “What Ike Will Do,” *Saturday Evening Post*, 19 January 1957, 74, 73.

remarks by Democratic senators Green, Fulbright, Hubert Humphrey, and Warren Magnuson supporting such a course of action.<sup>158</sup> In his address on 28 June 1957, Dulles reiterated opposition to recognition and U.N. membership, as well as travel to and trade with China. He attacked those who claimed such steps were inevitable, calling this “the least cogent” argument for policy change. The speech’s enduring passage came near its conclusion, when Dulles declared that “we can confidently assume that international communism’s rule of strict conformity is, in China as elsewhere, a passing and not a perpetual phase. We owe it to ourselves, our allies, and the Chinese people to do all we can to contribute to that passing.”<sup>159</sup> Though he did not use these exact words, Dulles would be forever connected with the idea that communist rule in China was “a passing phase.” A sympathetic observer might claim in his defense that Dulles was not merely predicting the regime’s collapse, but perhaps its evolution. Technically it was “communism’s rule of strict conformity” which was the passing phase. The market-based reforms begun under Deng Xiaoping could be seen as having turned Maoism into “a passing phase.” But that interpretation does not conform to Dulles’s repeated prior expressions of his belief in regime collapse.

The press noted Dulles’s speech as an attempt to reassure supporters of the existing policy at home and abroad as well as to squelch any and all speculation of

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<sup>158</sup> Robertson to Dulles, Subject: Suggested changes in your draft speech on Communist China, 1, Folder Robertson, Walter, Box 121 (1957), Series Selected Correspondence, Dulles, JF Papers, Mudd.

<sup>159</sup> Dulles, “Our Policies Toward Communism in China,” Before the International Convention of Lions International, San Francisco, California, 26 June 1957, 7, 8, Folder Speech: “Our Policies Toward Communism in China,” Box 356, Series Speeches, Statements, Press Conferences, etc., Dulles, JF Papers, Mudd.

policy change.<sup>160</sup> While Dulles emphatically succeeded in that first mission, he failed in the second, such was the continuing strength of expectations that Eisenhower desired change on China policy. Taiwanese diplomat George Yeh congratulated Dulles on the address, noting how when Chiang read a translation of the text he “was particularly impressed by your reference to the rule of international Communism in China as a ‘passing and not a perpetual phase.’”<sup>161</sup> C.D Jackson termed the speech “interesting, exciting, virile, and anticipated the counterarguments so skillfully and straightforward that that dragon will have very few teeth left.”<sup>162</sup> Judd effusively praised the address on the floor of the House of Representatives, an action for which Dulles sent a warm thank you note.<sup>163</sup> Still, within two months, the *New York Times* termed the speech “a kind of fireman operation” which only delayed the inevitable alteration of existing policy.<sup>164</sup> The media simply refused to not believe a change was going to come.

The issue which aroused the most rampant speculation in the months leading up to Dulles’s address was a possible lifting of the trade ban, established by an executive order given by Truman during the Korean War applying the 1949 Export Control Act.<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> “Dulles Rules Out Any Deals With Red China,” *Los Angeles Times*, 29 June 1957, 6.

<sup>161</sup> Yeh to Dulles, 30 June 1957, Folder Chiang Kai-shek, Box 114 (1957), Series Selected Correspondence, Dulles, JF Papers, Mudd.

<sup>162</sup> Jackson to Dulles, 1 July 1957, Folder Dulles, John Foster (3), Box 49, Jackson Papers, DDE.

<sup>163</sup> Dulles to Judd, 8 July 1957, Folder Judd, Walter, Box 118 (1957), Series Selected Correspondence, Dulles JF Papers, Mudd.

<sup>164</sup> Dana Adams Schmidt, “U.S. China Policy is again under Scrutiny,” *New York Times*, 1 September 1957, 101.

<sup>165</sup> Telcon, Eisenhower and Dulles, 11 June 1957, Folder June ’57 Phone Calls, Box 25, DDE Diary Series, AWF, DDE.

Before the onset of that conflict, Dulles himself had privately wondered “is recognition of the Chinese communist government necessary for the conduct of trade between the United States and China?”<sup>166</sup> China hard-liners had always worried trade would become the thin edge of the rapprochement wedge due to its appeal among their natural political allies in the business world. Washington University Professor George Taylor wrote Stanley Hornbeck in 1954 about a meeting he had with a group of Seattle bankers, finding that “every last one of them was a Republican and in favor of trading with Communist China as quickly as possible, and if this meant recognition then why not recognize.” In 1956, Liebman noted with concern the support of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce’s president for lifting the trade ban.<sup>167</sup> Internally, the administration concluded such an action “would constitute a concession without an adequate quid pro quo,” hurt U.S. “prestige” in the region, and “might adversely affect U.S. public opinion.”<sup>168</sup> The State Department noted how between mid-1955 and mid-1956 support of trade with China in public opinion polls had dropped dramatically.<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> Dulles, Questions, 9 January 1950, Folder China, People’s Republic Of, Box 47 (1950), Series Selected Correspondence, Dulles, JF Papers, Mudd.

<sup>167</sup> Taylor to Hornbeck, 1 October 1954, Folder Taylor, George E., Box 408, Stanley Hornbeck Papers, Hoover; Liebman to Members and Friends, Re: Report on Activities, 26 December 1956, 1, Folder 5; Committee For One Million, 1955 (3), Box 541, Series 4: Senatorial Career, Smith Papers, Mudd.

<sup>168</sup> Draft Memorandum, Multilateral Trade Controls Against Communist China: U.S. Position, 7 January 1956, 3, Progress Report, Department of State, Subject: Multilateral Export Controls on Trade with Communist China, 17 August 1956, 6, both in Folder 5429/5 – Policy Toward the Far East (1), Box 12, WHO, OSANSA, NSC Series, Policy Papers Subseries, DDE.

<sup>169</sup> American Opinion, Department of State, 27 July 1956, 1-2, Folder 61-3, Record Group 59.33, NARA.

In the weeks leading up to Dulles's speech, Eisenhower considerably muddied the waters at a press conference by refusing to rule out a reevaluation of the trade ban.<sup>170</sup> The speech ended speculation for the next few months, though largely because of concrete evidence of a reconsideration of the travel ban. On 6 August 1956, the Chinese communists announced they would admit U.S. journalists. The next day, the State Department reaffirmed the travel ban, and Eisenhower followed suit two weeks later.<sup>171</sup> The print media now transitioned from observers to participants. In February 1957, the American Newspaper Publishers Association launched a formal protest.<sup>172</sup> The administration responded first with an argument that the Chinese unfairly tied ending the travel ban to the release of U.S. prisoners, turning them into hostages to be exchanged for concessions, which only succeeded in casting itself in a worse media light by implying Eisenhower's obstinacy not only kept out reporters who wanted to go to China, but Americans held in China against their will in. Second, it argued that lack of diplomatic representation prevented the U.S. government from protecting American journalists in China. When this was scoffed at, the administration finally raised the

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<sup>170</sup> William S. White, "President Opens Door to Renewal of Peiping Trade," *New York Times*, 6 June 1957, 1; "Ike Doubts Wisdom of China Trade Ban," *Washington Post*, 6 June 1956, A2; "The Change of Change," *Wall Street Journal*, 11 June 1957, 14.

<sup>171</sup> Chronology Memorandum as to Newsmen Getting into Red China, 6 January 1960, 1, Folder Asia, 1959-1964, Box 35, Series 48, Subseries 11: Asia, Fulbright Papers, Arkansas; Press Release, 7 August 1956, Folder China, People's Rep. of, Box 101 (1956), Series Selected Correspondence, Dulles, JF Papers, Mudd; Frank Robertson, "Peking Woos More Newsmen," *Christian Science Monitor*, 21 August 1956, 7; Dana Adams Schmidt, "Eisenhower Backs China Travel Ban," *New York Times*, 21 August 1956, 3.

<sup>172</sup> "Publishers Score U.S. Ban on China," *New York Times*, 7 February 1957, 13.

possibility that the reporters would be hoodwinked by their Chinese hosts and turned into instruments of propaganda.<sup>173</sup>

Rather than dig this hole any deeper and subject itself to further public ridicule, on 22 August 1957 the State Department decided to approve visas for a limited number of journalists to visit China. However, it refused to allow Chinese journalists to visit the United States, and this lack of reciprocity led to a Chinese refusal to allow the U.S. newsmen to visit.<sup>174</sup> The caveat, coupled with Dulles's address two months earlier, would indicate a certain lack of seriousness behind the administration's offer. Such a conclusion is further supported by a July memo worrying that any relaxation of the travel ban "would be interpreted as a weakening of our China policy in some Asian nations," as well as an August letter from Dulles to Jackson explaining why he disagreed with Jackson's support for allowing reporters to travel to China. Dulles wrote that "I believe the sense of ostracism – being treated as different, and not morally the equal of other countries – is the greatest pressure we can bring to bear" to lead to the release of all the U.S. prisoners.<sup>175</sup> This rejection of outreach, and its conflation with appeasement, typified the administration's approach to the Chinese communists.

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<sup>173</sup> "Blackmail & Principal," *Time*, 18 February 1957, 44; Edward W. Barrett, "Diplomacy, Press and China," *Saturday Review*, 9 March 1957, 22-23; Dulles, Press Conference Statement, Draft #2, 23 April 1957, 1, Folder China, Peoples Republic of, Box 114 (1957), Series Selected Correspondence, Dulles, JF Papers, Mudd.

<sup>174</sup> Press Release, 21 August 1957, 1-2, 4, Folder ACW Diary August 1957 (1), Box 9, ACW Diary Series, AWF, DDE;

<sup>175</sup> Memorandum, Travel of Americans to Communist China, July 1958, 2, Folder Staff Memos July 1958 (2), Box 35, DDE Diary Series, AWF, DDE; Telcon, Dulles and Jackson, 7 August 1956, Folder Log – 1956 (2), Box 69, Jackson Papers, DDE.

## **With Apathy and Hostility**

Thus, the contemporaneous assessment of Eisenhower's China policy was the reverse of that during Nixon's early years. While the latter president's July 1971 announcement of his upcoming visit to the Chinese mainland came as a complete and utter shock to nearly all informed observers, despite multiple signals he desired to take such a journey, Eisenhower's peacetime confirmation of President Harry Truman's wartime isolation of the People's Republic never ceased to be a surprise. As president, Eisenhower established what for 17 years would be the U.S. China policy status quo of no diplomatic recognition, opposition to U.N. admission, and bans on trade and travel. He set precedents which required immense efforts to overturn. Yet few believed he supported these actions, and many expected them to constitute a passing phase in U.S. foreign policy. Barely anyone realized Eisenhower was laying the cornerstone of U.S. Asia policy for a generation. What was more, provocative U.S. actions and utterances sparked an escalating hostility spiral with the Chinese which it would take nearly a decade after Eisenhower left office to undo. Henry Kissinger noted that in his first meetings with Zhou Enlai in July 1971 that "the only time" the Chinese Premier displayed anger "was when he was talking about Dulles" and his behavior at the 1954 Geneva Conference.<sup>176</sup> Zhou repeatedly claimed in the ensuing decades that Dulles ostentatiously refused to shake his hand at that meeting. While extensive historical investigations have nearly definitively debunked this claim, the legend proved more

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<sup>176</sup> Kissinger to Nixon, Subject: Your Encounter with the Chinese, 5 February 1972, 6, Folder China, Box 13, Rodman Subject and Chron., August 1969-Aug. 1974, HAK Admin & Staff Files, HAK Office Files, National Security Council Files, Richard M. Nixon Presidential Library, Yorba Linda, California.

important than mere facts. The alleged snub became the symbol of Eisenhower's – and America's – intransigent and at times insulting treatment of Chinese communists. When Richard Nixon finally set foot on Chinese soil, the first thing he made sure to do was shake Zhou Enlai's hand in full view of the cameras, to definitely indicate that a new era had dawned.

In April 1971, Max Frankel recalled how on the eve of leaving office Eisenhower warned incoming President Kennedy that any relaxation of China policy by the new president would “force him out of retirement to lead the opposition.”<sup>177</sup> Nancy Bernkopf Tucker debunked this claim, arguing instead that all evidence points to Eisenhower using this conversation to emphasize the need for Kennedy to take a tough stand on communist infiltration of Laos. This assessment accords with the archival evidence of their conversation.<sup>178</sup> Tucker concluded that Eisenhower and Dulles “misled contemporaries and historians” with their harsh rhetoric due to an unwillingness to confront domestic opposition to the policy changes they preferred.<sup>179</sup> Tucker was clearly incorrect about Eisenhower misleading contemporaries. If anything, the media believed he was more flexible on China than was actually the case. She also underrated the importance of his and Dulles's public rhetoric on long-term relations with the Chinese. Whether or not they believed fully in the policies they followed, these two statesmen initiated a peacetime hostility spiral with the Chinese which foreclosed the option of policy change

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<sup>177</sup> Max Frankel, “Changing U.S. Attitude on China,” *New York Times*, 14 April 1971, 15.

<sup>178</sup> Memorandum for the Record, Eisenhower and Kennedy, 19 January 1961, 1, Folder Meetings with the President 7/30/57 to 1/20/61 (1), Box 21, Herter Papers, DDE.

<sup>179</sup> Tucker 181-182.



for close to a decade after their departure. They allowed the U.S. to remain for Mao, in the phrase of Thomas Christenson, useful adversaries. Given the willingness of many prominent senators to support or at least acquiesce to most policy changes then under consideration, one must also conclude that Eisenhower's obstinacy was based less on a need to mollify public opinion than on a fear of appearing weak to internal political and external diplomatic allies. More than Mao, or even Chiang, it was Eisenhower who was obsessed with saving face.

Near the end of Eisenhower's second term, two events commenced which would dramatically alter perceptions of the Chinese communists in the next decade – the Great Leap Forward and the beginning of the Sino-Soviet conflict. The C.I.A. failed to see China's impending disaster, going so far as to worry in October 1959 about "the threat of millions of tons of exportable rice hanging over Southeast Asia" due to China's booming food production.<sup>180</sup> Even without access to the mainland, the U.S. press sensed impending disaster, warning China was "close to economic chaos" and soon would have to severely shift course to avoid further calamity.<sup>181</sup> As for China's deteriorating relationship with their Soviet allies and patrons, which exacerbated China's economic difficulties, historians have recognized for three decades that, while officially pushing the notion of a communist monolith, the Eisenhower administration worked to cause

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<sup>180</sup> Report, Central Intelligence Agency, The Tenth Anniversary Celebration of the People's Republic of China, 1 October 1959, 13, Folder Communist China's Anniversary Celebration, Report re (1959), Box 5, NSC Series, Briefing Notes Subseries, OSANSA, WHO, DDE.

<sup>181</sup> "To Catch a Flea," *Time*, 13 April 1959, 40; "Red China Trims Its Sails," *Businessweek*, 5 September 1959, 36.

fissures in the alliance.<sup>182</sup> Dulles's preferred approach was "to keep pressure on Communist China" in order to punish that regime for its Soviet alliance. This policy of tough hate was also backed by Walter Judd, who expressed the hope that one day the Chinese would realize that "Moscow cannot supply its needs."<sup>183</sup> The 1954 Quantico Vulnerabilities Panel convened to advise the administration on how to win the Cold War concluded "Sino-Soviet relations cannot be broken at this time, but they can be strained by continuing to isolate the Chinese communists."<sup>184</sup>

By the end of the decade, it was clear to all that the alliance was at the very least troubled. The NSC policy paper on the Far East written during Herter's brief tenure as Secretary of State predicted that "despite likely frictions the Sino-Soviet alliance will hold firm," and the State Department maintained as late as August 1960 that "frictions do exist, but that interest in continuing relationship overrides frictions."<sup>185</sup> This only added to the notion that the present policy still suited events. Soon, that would no longer prove to be the case.

In January 1960, William F. Buckley quipped that "Mr. Eisenhower has been pretty good where China is concerned (indeed, he tends to be pretty good on everything

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<sup>182</sup> David Allen Mayers, *Cracking the Monolith: U.S. Policy Against the Sino-Soviet Alliance, 1949-1955* (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press, 1986), 149.

<sup>183</sup> Dulles to Bowles, 25 March 1952, 2, Folder Chester Bowles, Box 58 (1952), Series Selected Correspondence, Dulles, JF Papers, Mudd; Speech, 18, Folder Asia and China, 1954 (Feb.-Aug.), Box 43, Judd Papers, Hoover.

<sup>184</sup> Report of the Quantico Vulnerabilities Panel Annex to Tab 4, 1, Paul Linebarger, "Straining the Sino-Soviet Alliance," 1, both in Folder Quantico Vulnerabilities Panel, RG 59.15, NARA.

<sup>185</sup> NSC 5913/1: Statement of U.S. Policy in the Far East, September 25, 1959, 1, Folder NSC 5913 – Far East, Box 27, WHO, OSANSA, NSC Series, Policy Papers Subseries, DDE; Notes on Pre-Press Briefing, 17 August 1960, Folder Staff Notes August 1960 (2), Box 51, DDE Diary Series, AWF, DDE.

to which he does not turn his attention.)”<sup>186</sup> This punchline summed up the situation quite well. Conservatives had much to complain about regarding Eisenhower’s presidency, but China policy was not one of their complaints. This was in part because the president had other priorities, and devoted his attention to communist China only when compelled to. That turned out to be quite frequently, but his involvement rarely extended beyond crisis management. While he was applauded for his approach during his first term, after the Second Straits Crisis Eisenhower began to attract critics. Even *Reader’s Digest* came by 1959 to support a lifting of the travel ban. Noting that “communist China is a nation organized to work and to hate,” it claimed person-to-person contacts was the only way to counteract this dangerous trend.<sup>187</sup> Senator Mansfield came to a similar conclusion in 1960, at least with regard to the need for an exchange of journalists.<sup>188</sup> The beginning of change appeared around the corner. Yet a 1957 article in the *Christian Science Monitor* regarding the debate that year over exchanging reporters offered a prescient warning. Noting how the domestic needs of each nation were rarely in sync, and how many of the proposals for outreach were mere gamesmanship, it observed that “one side unbolts its door only when it is sure the other side’s door is going to be locked.”<sup>189</sup> This would prove both a fitting epilogue for

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<sup>186</sup> Remarks at Testimonial Dinner for Alfred Kohlberg, Waldorf-Astoria Hotel, 26 January 1960, by Wm F. Buckley Jr., Editor, National Review, Folder WM F Buckley, Jr., Box 21, Alfred Kohlberg Papers, Hoover.

<sup>187</sup> John Strohm, “How They Hate us in Red China!,” *Reader’s Digest*, January 1959, 30, 39.

<sup>188</sup> Speech, Mansfield, “Outer Mongolia and Newsmen to China: Suggested New Approaches,” 20 April 1960, 1-2, Folder 1960 April 20 Speech Outer Mongolia and Newsmen to China, Box 40, Series 21: Speeches, Reports, Mansfield Papers, Montana.

<sup>189</sup> “Double Door to China,” *Christian Science Monitor*, 27 August 1957, 18.

Eisenhower's two terms, and well as an apt prologue for the two presidents who would succeed him for the next eight years.

### CHAPTER III

#### DON'T LET'S START: QUESTIONING CONSENSUS IN THE KENNEDY YEARS

“I cannot believe that a policy of immobility can serve us well in a world where change is the rule.” - Averell Harriman<sup>1</sup>

On 17 December 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. But 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

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<sup>1</sup> Harriman to Rusk, 13 April 1962, Subject: United States Policy on Shipments of Medicines and Food Grains to Communist China,” Folder 3, Box 443, Averell Harriman Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

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 other device.”<sup>2</sup>

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.”<sup>3</sup>

Buck's books, particularly *The Good Earth*, played a major role during the 1930s and 1940s in creating an American affection for and paternalistic identification with the Chinese people, sentiments which made the communist takeover in 1949 and the following year's attacks across the Yalu River particularly traumatic and inexplicable, fueling support for the China Lobby's preferred policies of isolating a regime so

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<sup>2</sup> Memorandum for the Record, Michael Forrestal, Conversation with Miss Pearl Buck, 17 December 1963, 1, Folder 6, Box 23, National Security Files, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library, Boston, Massachusetts.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. 1-2.

obviously anathema to the main currents of Chinese culture.<sup>4</sup> However, Buck herself blamed Chinese militancy on these 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 Relations, founded in the 1940s by Owen Lattimore and John Fairbank and accused by Senator Joseph McCarthy and his supporters at the heart of the China Lobby of being a communist-front organization.<sup>5</sup> She was thus self-consciously a woman of the Left when it came to China policy. Unlike “the Lattimores and the Fairbanks,” whom Representative Kennedy had memorably blamed by name in 1949 for the communist conquest of mainland China, her celebrity gave her entrée to the halls of power in the early 1960s.<sup>6</sup>

Like most prognosticators during this period of what the future held for China, no matter their ideological leanings, Buck was partially correct but mostly wrong. Taiwan was in no danger of collapse, and those in positions of power who agreed with Buck’s desire for change at this time actually leaned towards a “Two Chinas” policy,

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<sup>4</sup> 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* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), particularly 164-169.

<sup>5</sup> 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..

<sup>6</sup> January 30, 1949 speech in Salem, Massachusetts, Salem folder, Box 95, JFK Pre-Presidential Papers, JFK. By the time he was president, Kennedy had long quietly disassociated himself from these accusations, and exchanged letters with Harvard Professor Fairbank, who had returned to respectability, if not yet influence.

believing in the inevitability of Taiwanese independence, not reabsorption by the mainland. Yet her fundamental supposition – that the United States must reach out to the Chinese communists precisely because they were menacing and dangerous, proved prescient, and would soon become increasingly prevalent, both within the administration and in many prominent organs of the mainstream print media. Ultimately, U.S. leaders would feel compelled to take these actions before Chiang's passing, in large part to prevent the P.R.C. from settling into permanent pariah status. The notion that the inevitability of China's rise to great power status necessitated the end of U.S. attempts to isolate the Chinese communists remained a minority opinion, but for the first time it would be expressed by those with influence over opinion and access to power.

It was during Kennedy years that it dawned on most Americans – and many within the administration – that the Chinese communist regime was here to stay, and in the long term was only going to get stronger and become more threatening to U.S. interests. This sentiment manifested itself both in the popular culture, where Chinese villains began supplanting Russian ones, and in debates within the State Department and the National Security Council. The beginnings of the Sino-Soviet split both presented potential opportunities to exploit intra-bloc dissension and indicated that even China's closest allies were growing wary of its assertiveness. At the same time, the ease with which Mao's regime survived the disastrous famines caused by the Great Leap Forward, its accelerating nuclear weapons program, and its 1962 battlefield defeat of Indian forces in the Himalayas further confirmed its durability. All these factors led officials like Chester Bowles, Robert Komer, and Roger Hilsman to argue for outreach to the Chinese



precisely because of the threat they would present in the future. Their arguments fell on deaf ears among senior Kennedy officials, in part because of fears of right-wing political backlash. To confront this domestic opposition, Roger Hilsman went public in December 1963, attacking the major presumptions of those who supported the China policy status quo. The positive press reaction to his speech made debating China policy respectable, laying the groundwork for the eventual acceptance of rapprochement.

### **Yellow Peril Yes, Fifth Column No**

The fundamental grand strategic question Kennedy's East Asian advisers grappled with, which Eisenhower's had not, but all future administrations would, was how to deal with the long-term threat of a rising China. This specter had long haunted the American cultural imagination. Jack London parodied such fears in his short story "The Unparalleled Invasion" (written in 1907, published in *Collier's* in 1909), in which the U.S. in 1976 leads a coalition of the white nations in a campaign of airborne biological warfare to exterminate the Chinese people lest their productive, industrializing nation become the world's leading economic power.<sup>7</sup> A decade 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.

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<sup>7</sup> 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), 273-281. Many scholars have taken London's story at face-value as "a celebration of genocide," as no doubt most if not all of his readers at the time did. (see H. Bruce Franklin, *War Stars: The Superweapon and the American Imagination* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2008), 39.) However, his laudatory depiction of China's people in his unfortunately entitled 1905 newspaper essay "The Yellow Peril" made it deeply unlikely he would have wished for them to be exterminated. For this essay see Jack London, *The Asian Writings of Jack London: Essays, Letters, Newspaper Dispatches, and Short Fiction by Jack London* (Lewiston, Maine: Edwin Mellen Press, 2009), 301-302.

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.”<sup>8</sup> After all, at that time, the western powers were waxing, and the backward, corrupt, and seemingly incurious Qing Dynasty was in terminal decline.

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 irritating, confounding, and at times humiliating their American 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.

Robert Heinlein anticipated this changing mood with his bestselling science fiction novel *Starship Troopers*, published in 1959. That story depicted a future global

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<sup>8</sup> “The Competition of Japan,” *Harper’s Weekly*, 15 February 1896, 147.

society very different from that of his own time. The differences were as much political as technological, and the former were brought about in large part by the rise of communist China. In Heinlein's imagined 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.<sup>9</sup>

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 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*.”<sup>10</sup> Government by military veterans would

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<sup>9</sup> Robert A. Heinlein, *Starship Troopers* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1959), 139, 212, 214.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* 246.

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.

In his biography of Heinlein, Leon Stover claimed Heinlein modeled the communistic alien bugs after “Soviet expansionism.”<sup>11</sup> But the novel's text made clear the model was Red China, the Filipino hero Johnnie Rico observing – in a transparent allusion by Heinlein to Chinese human wave attacks during the Korean War – 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 gave the Russo-Anglo-American Alliance.”<sup>12</sup> The global alliance thus triumphed over Chinese stand-ins, a new society successfully re-fighting an old war.

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 Fifth Columns. Coming only six years after the end of the Korean War, when Chinese armies compelled U.S. soldiers and

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<sup>11</sup> Leon Stover, *Robert A. Heinlein* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1987), 48.

<sup>12</sup> Heinlein, *Starship Troopers*, 184.

marines to embark on the longest retreat in their nation's 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 had a certain surface plausibility, one that would be echoed four years later by the historian Arnold Toynbee.<sup>13</sup>

In contrast to Heinlein's faceless hordes, Chinese villainy assumed individual form in the movies "The Manchurian Candidate" and "Dr. No," released in 1962 and 1963 respectively. Both were based on bestselling books written in the late 1950s, Richard Condon's *The Manchurian Candidate* having been published in 1959 and Ian Fleming's *Dr. No* a year earlier. Both drew upon the original lone Chinese villain, the Englishman Sax Rohmer's 1913 creation Fu Manchu, described in that year's *The Insidious Fu Manchu* as "the yellow peril incarnate in one man," possessed of "all the cruel cunning of an entire Eastern race, accumulated in one giant intellect."<sup>14</sup> In the movie "The Manchurian Candidate," Frank Sinatra, playing the hero, Army Captain Bennett Marco, helpfully described the villain Yen Lo as "that Chinese cat standing there smiling like Fu Manchu."<sup>15</sup> Stanley Kauffmann of *The New Republic*, in his lukewarm review of the inaugural James Bond film, described the title character as "a kind of

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<sup>13</sup> Arnold J. Toynbee, "Is a 'Race War' Shaping Up?" *New York Times Magazine*, 29 September 1963, 23, 88-90.

<sup>14</sup> William Wu, *The Yellow Peril: Chinese Americans in American Fiction, 1850-1940* (Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1982), 164.

<sup>15</sup> *The Manchurian Candidate* [DVD], MGM Home Entertainment, 1998.

space-age Fu Manchu.”<sup>16</sup>

In the original 1958 Ian Fleming novel, No was very tall, thin, and bald, just as Rohmer described his classic Yellow Peril personification.<sup>17</sup> In both the book and the film, No defended his private island of Crab Key with an armored flame-throwing tractor costumed to look like a dragon. In the film, Chinese soldiers in vaguely Maoist uniforms captured Bond and defended their leader's lair, while Chinese technicians kept his nuclear reactor running.<sup>18</sup> Bond's nemesis sought to sabotage the U.S. space program, had his services refused by both that nation and the U.S.S.R., and said of the Cold War “east, west, just points of the compass, each as stupid as the other.”<sup>19</sup> 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. Critics viewed the film as mildly entertaining escapist fun having no 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.

The same could not be said for “The Manchurian Candidate.” Its geopolitical content was unmistakable. However, given that the plot featured American communists using a staunchly anticommunist Republican senator and Chinese operatives to facilitate a Soviet takeover of the United States, the exact nature of its political message was

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<sup>16</sup> Stanley Kauffmann, “The First Roses of Summer,” *The New Republic*, 15 June 1963, 36.

<sup>17</sup> Fleming, *Doctor No*, 127. As with Fu, No's nemesis is a British secret agent.

<sup>18</sup> In the book, No runs a far less glamorous guano mine.

<sup>19</sup> *Dr. No* [DVD], MGM Home Entertainment, 2000.

somewhat up for grabs. *Life* identified the villains as “Chinese Reds,” while Brendan Gill of the *New Yorker* claimed the “Russians” were the bad guys.<sup>20</sup> 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,” which made the film “a good deal more enjoyable” for Knight.<sup>21</sup> The creators themselves added to the debate, albeit retrospectively. In a 1988 conversation with director John Frankenheimer and star Frank Sinatra, which was included as part of the original VHS release of the film, screenwriter 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.” Axelrod remembered 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 Kennedy replied “great – who's going to play the mother?”<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> “Deck of Deadly Queens,” *Life*, 9 November 1962, 93; Brendan Gill, “Bad Men and Good,” *New Yorker*, 11 November 1962, 116.

<sup>21</sup> Arthur Knight, “The Fu Manchurian Candidate,” *Saturday Review*, 27 October 1962, 65.

<sup>22</sup> “Exclusive Interview with Frank Sinatra, John Frankenheimer, and George Axelrod,” included in *The Manchurian Candidate* [DVD] MGM Home Entertainment, 1998.

Yet a close reading of the film – as well as the book – reveals the Asiatic, and particularly Chinese, nature of the villainy. Like Fu Manchu, Yen had a special talent for brainwashing. This particular stereotype 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 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.”<sup>23</sup> Condon's novel referred to Marco's desire to “unlock all of the great jade doors” and liberate Raymond's mind from its Chinese captors.<sup>24</sup> The book and movie both featured an early scene in which Yen brainwashes his American prisoners of war, taken from the front in Korea. Presciently anticipating the Sino-Soviet split, as well as pinpointing one of its causes, Condon noted 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.”<sup>25</sup> In the film, Yen told the Russians, who were impatient to witness the brainwashed U.S. soldier 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.”<sup>26</sup> The film was symptomatic of a transitional period in Cold War cinematic enemy imagery. The Chinese still worked for their Russians

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<sup>23</sup> 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.

<sup>24</sup> Condon, *The Manchurian Candidate*, 298.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.* 35.

<sup>26</sup> *The Manchurian Candidate* [DVD], MGM Home Entertainment, 1998.



masters, but were increasingly coming to the fore, and the nature of the villainy in question took on characteristic elements of the Yellow Peril.

Yet as the cultural chasm between Chinese and Americans grew, that between Chinese-Americans and white Americans curiously narrowed. The 1961 film musical “Flower Drum Song,” based on the 1958 musical by Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein, itself based on a successful novel of the previous year written by the Yale-educated Chinese-American C.Y. Lee, was the first Hollywood film production with an predominantly Asian cast, and the only one until 1993’s “Joy Luck Club.”<sup>27</sup> The film presented 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 engaged in a sort of Reverse Yellowface, with Asian actors playing parts that would normally be reserved for white actors, and were in fact were “played” by white characters in Lee’s novel, which aimed for a semblance of realism. What in Lee’s hands had been a complex tale of the specific difficulties faced by young educated Chinese immigrants was transformed for the stage and screen into an update of early 20<sup>th</sup> 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.

Juanita Hall’s Madame Liang, before performing the song-and-dance number “Chop Suey” at a party celebrating her completion of citizenship classes, declared “I am

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<sup>27</sup> Christina Klein, *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination, 1945-1961* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 232.

happy to be both Chinese and American,” to which her brother – the family patriarch Wang Chi-Yang – replied “you are like the Chinese dish the Americans invented. Everything is in it – all mixed up.”<sup>28</sup> The notion that Liang can become fully American without sacrificing her Chinese heritage reflected the lyricist Hammerstein's left-leaning tolerant liberalism.<sup>29</sup> Yet critics found its depiction of Asian-American life patronizing and inauthentic. *Newsweek* joked the movie “makes plain that all Chinese are cute as little dolls and most of them are rich as Mme. Chiang.”<sup>30</sup> The *New Yorker* declared that “the settings are every bit as authentic as Fu Manchu.”<sup>31</sup> Even the unprecedented use of a nearly all-Asian cast came in for criticism because almost none of the actors were Chinese. “Honestly fellows, they don't all look alike,” scolded *Time* magazine, no paragon of ethnic sensitivity when it came to reporting news from China during this period.<sup>32</sup> Regardless, all agreed that America's Chinese had finally entered the mainstream. While the foreign image of Chinese was returning to the negative, menacing stereotypes of earlier periods, discrimination and antipathy towards the Chinese in America so characteristic of that group's experience during the past century was fast

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<sup>28</sup> *Flower Drum Song* [DVD], Universal Studios, 2006.

<sup>29</sup> 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. 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. The only other non-Asian to appear onscreen is a white man who mugs Wang Chi-Yang on his doorstep.

<sup>30</sup> “Musical Chop Suey,” *Newsweek*, 27 November 1961, 89.

<sup>31</sup> Brendan Gill, “Paper Problems,” *New Yorker*, 18 November 1961, 207.

<sup>32</sup> “No Tickee, No Worry,” *Time*, 24 November 1961, 66.

receding.

### **A Torch Passed**

Such cultural manifestations of a revived Yellow Peril appeared to bode ill for the popularity of even the most incremental China policy alterations during the early 1960s. Yet as the members of the Kennedy administration settled into their offices, the first glimmers of a new public openness for change appeared. The reasoning behind these glimmers appeared to reinforce, rather than counter, the heightened threat perception. A March 1961 Gallup poll for the first time showed significant increases in support for taking incremental steps to improve relations with communist China, including majority support for a partial lifting of the trade ban. 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.”<sup>33</sup> 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.”<sup>34</sup> While only 20 percent supported seating the P.R.C. in the United Nations, 59 percent claimed a willingness to “go along with a

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<sup>33</sup> Public Opinion Studies, Folder 1961-1963, 19 March 1961, Box 33, RG 59. NARA.

<sup>34</sup> George Gallup, “Public Approves U.S. Move to Improve Red China Relations,” *Hartford Courant*, 19 March 1961, 22.

decision to seat Red China” if the U.S. was outvoted. Both numbers were nearly double what they had been in 1955.<sup>35</sup>

Kennedy officials heard similar arguments from academic experts on mainland China. Anathematized and threatened by conservatives during the early 1950s, and ignored by those in power during the second half of the decade, they gained the ears of many in the new administration. University of Rochester Economics professor Alexander Eckstein, one of the leading American experts on China, wrote James Thomson shortly after the election to tell him the incoming administration's policy 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.”<sup>36</sup> Pressure also came 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.”<sup>37</sup>

Working against this gathering current for change was the undertow of domestic political considerations. The State Department had noted in March 1961 that support for “taking steps” to approve relations with Communist China enjoyed majority backing among Democrats and independents while Republicans were “much more evenly

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<sup>35</sup> George Gallup. “Public Yielding a Bit on Seating Red China,” *Boston Globe*, 25 March 1961, 16.

<sup>36</sup> Memorandum on China Policy, Alexander Eckstein, November 1960, 8, 9, Folder 5, Box 14, James C. Thomson Papers, JFK.

<sup>37</sup> “Briton Urges Red China in UN,” *Christian Science Monitor*, 9 February 1961, 5.

divided on the issue.”<sup>38</sup> Yet this by no means made changing China policy a political winner. Among those who cared passionately about the matter, sentiment seemed to run staunchly against any change whatsoever. The *Nation* might have labelled the Committee of One Million the “Lobby of a Million Ghosts” in 1961, but in 1960, their lone vocal enemy in Congress, Democratic Representative Charles Porter of Oregon lost his bid for reelection, and in 1962 more than two-thirds of Porter's former colleagues – 296 Representatives, along with 55 Senators, 180 of them Republicans and 171 Democrats - consented to have their names appear on Committee mailings.<sup>39</sup> Once out of office, Porter devoted himself as obsessively to, as he wrote Kennedy in August 1961, “showing up the Committee of One Million for the fraud it is,” as his arch-nemesis Marvin Liebman did to proving he group was no paper tiger.<sup>40</sup> For the time being, Liebman clearly had the better of it. Eisenhower administration State Department holdover J. Graham Parsons wrote the new Secretary of State Dean Rusk to remind him of “the force of public opinion in the United States and the effectiveness of groups like the Committee of One Million to stir it up.”<sup>41</sup> The Chinese communists seconded this assessment, Foreign Minister Chen Yi telling Britain’s Malcolm MacDonald in 1962

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<sup>38</sup> Gallup Poll Begins 3-part Series on Red China, 1961, Folder 61-3, RG 59, NARA.

<sup>39</sup> “Don't Give Up The Ship: Sink It,” *The Nation*, 4 March 1961, 178; Stanley D Bachrack, *The Committee Of One Million: “China Lobby” Politics, 1953-1971* (New York: Columbia University Press: New York, 1976), 206; Fundraising letter, Committee of One Million, 11 May 1962, Folder 170, Box 10, Group 775, Right-Wing Pamphlets Collection, Sterling.

<sup>40</sup> Charles Porter to Kennedy, 17 August 1961, Folder IT47.CO1-CO50-2, Box 387, White House Subject Files, JFK.

<sup>41</sup> Parsons to Rusk, 21 February 1961, Annex III, Subject: A New Approach to our China Policy Objectives, 9, Folder 3, Box 443 Harriman Papers, LOC.

that “there are extremely hostile interests and ‘lobbies’ in Congress and elsewhere the Administration cannot ignore” when it came to crafting policies concerning his regime.<sup>42</sup>

John F. Kennedy assumed 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*.<sup>43</sup> 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.”<sup>44</sup> That day was coming. In March 1963, when Gallup asked another sample the same question, 46 percent chose China, and 33 percent Russia, a reversal from two years earlier.<sup>45</sup> Perhaps in response, at a 1 August 1963 press conference, John F. Kennedy called China “menacing” and “Stalinist,” while defining

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<sup>42</sup> Harriman to Rice, Re the Chen Yi – MacDonald conversation, 3 August 1962, Folder 6, Box 442, Harriman Papers, LOC.

<sup>43</sup> John B. Tsu, “Behind the Bamboo Curtain,” *America*, 15 April 1961, 158.

<sup>44</sup> George Gallup, “Russia Still Feared More Than Red China.” *Hartford Courant*, 22 March 1961, 16.

<sup>45</sup> 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.

the Soviet Union as a status quo power.<sup>46</sup>

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, sent several divisions across the Himalayan Mountains, and grew increasingly estranged from its Soviet ally and one-time leading patron and protector. 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.

Amidst this maelstrom of dimly understood events occurring behind and just beyond the Bamboo Curtain, a small coterie of Kennedy officials within the State Department and the National Security Council – with the tacit support of some in the White House – men who had the ears of the those in power but did not control the levers – began promulgating the theories which Kennedy could not dare propose, but in a decade's time would become accepted – and even celebrated – policies under the man

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<sup>46</sup> Radhe Gopal Pradham, *America and China: A Study in Cooperation and Conflict, 1962-1983* (Delhi: UDH Publishers, 1983), 49.

Kennedy had defeated. By the end of 1963, when these new policy notions were finally made public, 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 unmentionable notions 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 majority of the American public 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 withstood the slings and arrows of Truman's troubled second term. But something had changed. For future administrations, that which had been a question of "what" became a question of "when." Those in positions of power who defended the status quo of isolation no longer argued that these policies were correct, as had been the case throughout the Eisenhower years. Instead they argued that the time had not yet arrived for the inevitable changes in policy.

Nearly all the steps first proposed by Kennedy officials were ultimately enacted by the man Kennedy defeated with a swiftness that astounded these same officials. Yet when Richard Nixon shook Zhou En-lai's hand in February 1972, he was standing on the shoulders of these men who worked for the man who defeated him for the presidency more than a decade before. These men 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. 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 among his very different foreign policy staff. Only Kennedy – or more accurately those who worked for Kennedy – could lay the ground work for Nixon to go to China.

### **A Policy Questioned, but Maintained**

The only way to fight back would be to embark upon measures to alter public opinion. In November 1961, Abram Chayes – who worked for Undersecretary of State Bowles – attempted to get just such a process started by writing a “Proposed Presidential Speech on a Two Chinas Policy.” Revealingly, the words “Two” and “Chinas” appeared in that order nowhere in the text. 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.”<sup>47</sup> This speech contained nothing in the way of concrete policy proposals. Yet the words President Kennedy never uttered bore an unmistakable similarity to those spoken by President Nixon eight to ten years in the future, as well as to what one of Kennedy’s own officials would publically utter slightly more than two years hence. As

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<sup>47</sup> Chester Bowles note, 30 November 1961, Folder 14, Box 14, Thomson Papers, JFK.

with that actual speech, this proposed speech baited the Committee of One Million, first subtly by referring to the Chinese capital as communist-preferred Peking instead of the nationalist-approved Peiping, and then blatantly by declaring the United States can no longer afford to “allow our national policies to be shaped by shrill charges and sterile slogans.”<sup>48</sup>

It was intended both as a signal to the Chinese that the U.S. was capable of change and as an attempt to convince the American people such change would be in their interest. Like virtually all attempts at starting the process of policy change during this period, it subscribed to the notion of an expansionist China endangering U.S. interests, both because of the traditional behavior of new Chinese dynasties and the established actions of young communist regimes. Yellow and red proved a potentially catastrophic combination, one compared to that posed by Nazi Germany or 1930s Japan.<sup>49</sup> However, unlike those two regimes, the Chinese could be altered rather than destroyed, since “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.” Therefore, the U.S. government and its people “must welcome every opportunity to encourage more moderate attitudes on the part of the Peking government,” and “the door remains open; we for our part will never close it.”<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Bowles to Hughes, 30 November 1961: Proposed Presidential Speech on a Two Chinas Policy, 19-21, Folder 14, Box 14, Thomson Papers, JFK.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid. 15-18.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid. 19-21.

Breaking taboos, but offering no concrete path forward, this speech was both too bold to be uttered and not bold enough to be worth uttering. Bowles recognized this, commenting that “this needs more work. It is right and awkward in several areas, and I don't want it to go unless it is good.”<sup>51</sup> 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 “I believe we may soon be prepared to move.” Bowles speculated such a speech would have the support of Averell Harriman, Adlai Stevenson, and Senator Mike Mansfield. Most hopefully of all, “the general line appears to me reasonable and in line with the President's instincts.”<sup>52</sup> No mention was made as to what Dean Rusk, who effectively exercised veto power over all change in China policy during his lengthy tenure under both Kennedy and Johnson, would think of the speech.

The two men who did the most to commence the process of policy evaluation could not have been more different. Chester Bowles was a politician, an incurable optimist, and a dove. Robert Komer a bureaucrat, an innate pessimist, and a hawk. Bowles objected to the Bay of Pigs, and was termed a “gutless wonder” by Attorney General Robert Kennedy, while Komer viewed the bargain which ended the Cuban Missile Crisis as an unacceptable loss for the U.S. and was nicknamed “Blowtorch Bob” by Ambassador to South Vietnam Henry Cabot Lodge.<sup>53</sup> The cautious, deferential

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<sup>51</sup> Chester Bowles note, 30 November 1961, Folder 14, Box 14, Thomson Papers, JFK.

<sup>52</sup> Bowles to Hughes, 1, 2, in Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Howard B Schaffer, *Chester Bowles: A New Dealer in the Cold War* (Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press, 1993), 220; Douglas Kinnard, *The War Managers* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1977), 104; Two days before the end of the crisis, he called the removal of Jupiter missiles from Turkey “non-negotiable”: Komer to Bundy, 27 October 1962, Folder 12, Box 322, NSF JFK.

Bowles floundered in Kennedy's State Department, while the headstrong, impudent Komer excelled in McGeorge Bundy's National Security Council. Yet both assumed the current policy existed on borrowed time, that the clock was ticking down to zero, and that change, while sure to be agonizing, must come sooner rather than later.

As befitted his nature, Komer moved first, telling Bundy barely a month after the new president's inauguration that "we should prod State to get started pronto on a broad-scale rethinking exercise" and "disengage, as skillfully as we can, from unproductive aspects of our China policy," specifically opposition to UN membership for the PRC and defending Taiwan's possession of the Offshore Islands. Komer recognized opposition from congress and elements of the American public would be "a real problem," but he also feared delay would lead to the U.S. "being dragged into such changes" by world opinion.<sup>54</sup>

One month later, Komer elaborated on this memo in his report "Strategic Framework for Rethinking China Policy." Stating that "time is not working in our favor in the Far East," Komer observed "the secular trend is toward increasing acceptance of a powerful Red China as a fact of political life."<sup>55</sup> To respond to this seemingly inevitable eventuality, Komer proposed a then-novel – but eventually commonplace – mixture of containment and outreach in the hopes of making the regime less threatening to American interests. Komer recognized this would face headwinds from both Taiwan and their supporters in the U.S., against which the administration "must fight a two-front

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<sup>54</sup> Komer to Bundy, Walt Rostow, 1 March 1961, Folder 4, Box 21a, NSF, JFK, NSF.

<sup>55</sup> Komer, Strategic Framework For Rethinking China Policy, Draft, 7 April 7, 1961, 3, Folder 1, Box 22, NSF, JFK.

war” because “any revision of China policy unfortunately requires, perhaps more than any other facet of US foreign affairs, consideration of the impact at home.” The primary arguments which should be made to domestic critics were that treatment of the P.R.C. was simply being made equivalent to that of the U.S.S.R., and that engagement was necessary “precisely because it is an enemy, not despite this fact.”<sup>56</sup> For their part, the Chinese communists were in no way expected to be receptive to any initial overtures. This intransigence, however, would work against them, since it would “shift the onus for continued tensions as much as possible to Peiping.”<sup>57</sup> Neutralist nations would recognize that the Chinese were solely to blame for poor relations.

This tactical gambit was previously utilized by Eisenhower on multiple occasions to curry favor overseas vis-à-vis the Soviets, but was only applied to China policy beginning with the Kennedy administration.<sup>58</sup> Even those who believed proposing concrete policy changes were substantially premature favored such steps. In an early memo to Rusk, Parsons argued “we might well put the onus for the fact that we do not have more contact squarely on the Chinese Communists.”<sup>59</sup> Chester Bowles, in a lengthy April 1962 memorandum, echoed Komer and Parsons almost verbatim, writing “it is to our clear advantage to place the onus for the present communication impasse squarely on

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid. 36-40.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid. 27.

<sup>58</sup> For numerous examples of Eisenhower’s actions in this regard, see Kenneth Osgood, *Total Cold War: Eisenhower’s Secret Propaganda Battle at Home and Abroad* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2006).

<sup>59</sup> Parsons to Rusk, 21 February 1961, Subject: A New Approach to our China Policy Objectives, Folder 3, Box 443, Harriman Papers, LOC.

the Peiping regime.”<sup>60</sup> Bowles blasted the previous administration’s “sterile, inept, and unrealistic” policies in Asia, which had burdened Kennedy with “a complex of contradictory policies many of which had their root in domestic partisan conflicts.”<sup>61</sup> The existing U.S. approach of “non-recognition and U.N. exclusion” was “a national posture rather than a national policy.”<sup>62</sup>

While Komer retrospectively defended Eisenhower’s approach to communist China as useful during the time it existed, Bowles had savaged the previous president’s entire foreign policy as it was being made. In a 1957 speech at the Naval war College, Bowles labelled the existing approach to containment “left-over American isolationism.”<sup>63</sup> Entirely lacking in his opinion was positive outreach to non-communist nations, specifically in the form of generous foreign aid. In their fervent support for foreign aid and profound antipathy to Eisenhower, Bowles and then-Senator Kennedy were in complete agreement. In addition, both saw democratic India as Asia’s great prize, a potentially potent example of the blessings of freedom. Bowles had been Truman’s ambassador to that nation, and would later serve in that position for Johnson. In a 1959 speech, Kennedy labelled “the struggle between India and China” as a contest between democracy and dictatorship “for leadership of the East, for the respect of all

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<sup>60</sup> U.S. Policies in the Far East – Review and Recommendation Memorandum, 4 April 1962, 36, Folder 0607, Box 311, Series 1, Group 628. Bowles Papers Sterling.

<sup>61</sup> U.S. Policies in the Far East, 2.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid. 29.

<sup>63</sup> “The Power of Public Opinion,” 24 September 1957, 12, Folder 0885, Box 172, Series 11, Group 628, Bowles Papers, Sterling.

Asia, for the opportunity to demonstrate whose way of life is the better.”<sup>64</sup> Only later would Kennedy’s innate hawkishness contrast irreconcilably with Bowles’s deeply dovish nature.

Despite, or perhaps because of, this dovishness, Bowles feared Chinese aggression as much as an ultra-hawk like Douglas MacArthur. In a series of 1961 speeches, the general warned audiences that China’s communist leaders had created “a mighty colossus which threatens all of continental Asia and bids fair to emerge as the balance of military power in the world.”<sup>65</sup> In an unpublished essay written for the *New York Times Magazine* in 1959, Bowles was more specific but hardly less alarmist, predicting that “the principle military threat in Asia during the next decade may take the form of a major Chinese push into Southeast Asia.”<sup>66</sup> To neutralize this looming threat, three years later Bowles called 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.” China’s “re-entry into the family of nations,” entailing U.S. diplomatic recognition and the P.R.C. occupying China’s seat in the U.N. Security Council, should be the “desirable long-term goal of U.S. foreign policy.”<sup>67</sup> This, of

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<sup>64</sup> India and China Folder, 1, Box 915, Pre-Presidential Papers, JFK.

<sup>65</sup> “M’Arthur Say U.S. Helped China Rise,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 12 June 1961, 2.

<sup>66</sup> 1959 Spring – Proposed Article for the New York Times on China Policy, 21, Folder 0643, Box 240, Series 11, Group 628, Bowles Papers, Sterling.

<sup>67</sup> U.S. Policies in the Far East 29.

course, was exactly what eventually occurred, beginning under the administration of Eisenhower's Vice-President.

Bowles believed the process of change must begin sooner rather than later. This was because "by 1964 China will almost certainly detonate a nuclear device," and any policy alterations after this event would be viewed overseas as "a defensive U.S. response to increased mainland power."<sup>68</sup> Like all others considering change within the administration, he recognized the powerful impediment of inflamed public opinion. Whereas Komer the bureaucrat believed in confronting such negative sentiments, Bowles the politician 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."<sup>69</sup> For whatever reason, the public was beginning to sense something might be afoot. 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."<sup>70</sup> Whether hopeful or fearful, such speculation had to be discouraged. This also anticipated Nixon's eventual approach.

Bowles loathed the Committee of One Million. As Chairman of the 1960 Democratic Platform Committee, after receiving multiple letters from the organization warning of the political repercussions of any softening of the China plank, he wrote "in

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid. 2

<sup>69</sup> Ibid. 33.

<sup>70</sup> Special Report on American Opinion, Department of State: 1962 Public Attitudes Toward U.S. Policy on China, Folder 4, Box 15, Thomson Papers, JFK.



all frankness, I must admit that this campaign irritates me a great deal.”<sup>71</sup> The Committee of One Million had valid reasons for its concern. In an April 1960 article on *Foreign Affairs*, Bowles extolled the strategic value of an independent Taiwan, and explicitly argued for the abandonment of Quemoy and Matsu to the mainland communists.<sup>72</sup> The *Foreign Affairs* piece was nearly identical to his unpublished *New York Times Magazine* piece written the previous year, with the revealing absence of the phrase “Two Chinas.” Yet this implication was clear. Bowles’s potential influence was revealed during the general election campaign, when Kennedy pointed out the strategic uselessness of the Offshore Islands during a televised debate with Richard Nixon. During Bowles’s Senate confirmation hearings for the position of Undersecretary of State, Republican Senator Norris Cotton of New Hampshire wondered whether Bowles believed opposition to American recognition of “Red China” or that regime’s admission to the United Nations “are bedrock foundations of our policy.”<sup>73</sup>

Bowles’s lone proposal for immediate policy change in 1962 was a partial lifting of the trade ban to allow the selling of wheat to mainland China as an inducement to better behavior. Bowles believed the ongoing severe scarcity of food in China was not a passing phase. He asserted it was “endemic” in a society with unproductive collective

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<sup>71</sup> Bowles to Cae Soule, June 30, 1960, Folder 947, Series 111, Group 258, Bowles Papers, Sterling. James Thomson, who worked for Bowles in 1960 on the foreign policy aspects of the platform, labeled the tone of the Committee of One Million mailings “outrageous” and predicted with reference to them that “the pressure at Los Angeles will be enormous.” Thomson to Bowles, Folder 947, Box 258, Series 111, Group 629, Bowles Papers, Sterling.

<sup>72</sup> Chester Bowles, “The ‘China Problem’ Reconsidered,” *Foreign Affairs*, April 1960, 481.

<sup>73</sup> “Bowles’ Attitude On Red China Question,” *Los Angeles Times*, 8 January 1961, 4. Bowles gained his opponents’ support while eliding the fundamental question by stridently proclaiming his support defending Formosa from a communist invasion.

agriculture and a rapidly expanding population.<sup>74</sup> His hope was that the promise of massive wheat sales could be employed to encourage Chinese cooperation in Northeast and Southeast Asia.<sup>75</sup> In this hope, Bowles was not alone. That very month, Averell Harriman – who the previous November replaced Bowles as Undersecretary of State – pleaded with his immediate superior “we should not have our historical record be one of having refused to sell food to a people in a period where food was greatly needed. That would be a record which might one day haunt us.” Harriman argued for no mere isolated humanitarian gesture. Echoing Komer and Bowles, he couched this proposal as part of a long-term process “moving our relationship away from one of implacable mutual hostility.” Like Bowles, Harriman worried such a friendly gesture in the aftermath of an inevitably imminent Chinese nuclear test “might be interpreted as motivated by apprehension.” He considered policy change to be both inevitable and beneficial, telling Rusk rather bluntly “I cannot believe that a policy of immobility can serve us well in a world where change is the rule.”<sup>76</sup> As the leading Democratic defender of China policy immobility, Rusk surely did not take kindly to such sentiments.

### **Crucible of Famine**

The obvious reason for all this discussion of selling food to China was the massive three-year famine in China occasioned by the spectacularly catastrophic man-made disaster of the Great Leap Forward. Next to the Sino-Soviet split, no aspect of

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<sup>74</sup> U.S. Policies in the Far East 2.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid. 38.

<sup>76</sup> Harriman to Rusk, 13 April 1962, 2.

China policy received more attention from the American media during the Kennedy years. Journalists and government officials differed on two questions. They argued over the severity of the famine, and over whether it threatened the future of the mainland regime. Those who correctly gauged the severity earliest also paradoxically proved most incorrect in predicting its effects, anticipating the regime might not survive or at the very least would become defanged. Officials in the Defense Department recognized the true extent of the famine relatively early.<sup>77</sup> An April 1961 memorandum from then-Deputy Assistant for Special Operations Edward Lansdale to Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara crowed “‘The Great Leap Forward’ in China has landed in the soup.” He reminded the Secretary of “the old Chinese political saying ‘Three bad harvests and the mandate from heaven changes,’” and noted mentions of “growing discontent” from CIA staffers and “Chinese friends.” While not making an outright prediction of communist China’s collapse, Lansdale observed that while “the threat of China has hung heavy over our heads in Asia,” he hoped that “it might well be that we can start changing this is 1961.”<sup>78</sup> In the media, Chiang Kai-shek’s old boosters at *Time* led the way, becoming the first major U.S. periodical to write “Communist China faces mass starvation,” noting “a crisis in public morale and labeling the regime’s predicament “damn serious.”<sup>79</sup> For those who believed Mao’s regime might be “a passing and not a perpetual phase,” surely

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<sup>77</sup> Americans inside and outside of government only became aware of what was afoot in China in 1961, three years after Mao launched the Great Leap Forward. Thus, by the time the U.S. became aware of the catastrophe, the worst was largely over.

<sup>78</sup> Memorandum From the Deputy Assistant for Special Operations to the Secretary of Defense (Lansdale) to Secretary of Defense McNamara, 3 April 1961. From *FRUS, 1961-1963, Vol. 22: Northeast Asia* (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1996), 38-39.

<sup>79</sup> “Reds Have Troubles Too,” *Time*, 26 May 1961, 25.

this was the moment for it to pass from the scene by collapsing under the weight of its own misguided delusions.

Yet those who believed the U.S. hard-liners were the ones deluding themselves with such speculations deluded themselves into underestimating China's domestic plight. As late as 1962, *Business Week* wrote "although China is hungry, it is not starving," and esteemed foreign policy journalist 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."<sup>80</sup> Even the arch-conservative *U.S. News & World Report*, shortly before *Time* used the phrase "mass starvation," both underrated China's difficulties and incorrectly placed most of the blame on natural and not human causes. Yet, unlike *Time*, that magazine correctly discounted the danger of domestic discontent.<sup>81</sup> Whatever one's view of the viability of the mainland government, no one seemed to believe that it could survive causing the death of 30-40 million of its countrymen.

Less than a decade before, Joseph Alsop predicted that, like the short-lived Qin and Sui Dynasties, Mao's dynasty would try to do too much too quickly and meet its inevitable demise within less than a generation.<sup>82</sup> Now, it appeared to him that vindication was imminent. He expressed his confidence in a series of articles in 1961

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<sup>80</sup> "Red China's troubles pile up," *Business Week*, 2 July 1962, 33; Richard Hughes, "The 'Great Leap' is Now The 'Great Retreat'," *New York Times Magazine*, 7 October 1962, 86.

<sup>81</sup> Robert P. Martin, "Communist China In Real Trouble?" *U.S. News & World Report*, 20 February 1961, 43.

<sup>82</sup> Joseph Alsop, "Will China Stay Red?" *Saturday Evening Post*, 30 October 1954.

and 1962 which went far beyond Lansdale's cautious predictions.<sup>83</sup> The liberal *Atlantic Monthly*, which was one of the first magazines in the mid-1950s to argue against Dulles's "Passing Phase" line, reversed course, announcing that "unrest and dissatisfaction have penetrated every corner of China."<sup>84</sup>

Even if the regime persevered, it would no longer be capable of disruptive radicalism at home or abroad. A May 1963 National Intelligence Estimate predicted Mao "will no longer be able to count on a high degree of revolutionary, almost frenetic enthusiasm."<sup>85</sup> *U.S. News* quoted an unnamed expert that "never again will the Communist be able to manipulate the Chinese people the way they once did."<sup>86</sup> The *New Republic* took note of a new "realism" among the Chinese leadership, and *Newsweek* speculated that this new cautiousness would extend to foreign affairs, included a possible if belated acquiescence to Soviet demands.<sup>87</sup> It appeared Chinese behavior for the rest of the decade would be boring and predictable for a change. After such a serious and self-inflicted wound, surely its leaders had no choice.

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<sup>83</sup> Joseph Alsop, "Can China Explode?" *Hartford Courant*, 17 May 1961, 14; Joseph Alsop, "China Is In Grave Trouble, and 'One Good Harvest' Won't Help." *Los Angeles Times*, 10 April 1962, B6; Joseph Alsop, "The Coming Explosion in Red China," *Saturday Evening Post*, 11 August 1962, 79-82.

<sup>84</sup> "The Atlantic Report: Red China," *Atlantic Monthly*, February 1962, 16.

<sup>85</sup> NIE 13-4-62: "Prospects for Communist China." 2 May 1962, 6, from *Tracking The Dragon: National Intelligence Estimates on China During the Era of Mao, 1948-1976* (Washington, D.C.: National Intelligence Council, 2004).

<sup>86</sup> "From An Expert: 'Communists Have Lost The Chinese'," *U.S. News & World Report*, 6 August 1962, 50.

<sup>87</sup> "'Realism' in Peking," *The New Republic*, 30 April 1962, 6; "Hungry Admission," *Newsweek*, 30 April 1962, 45.

Yet some doubted the seriousness of the wound. Traveling in mainland China in the aftermath of the famine, Sir Fitzroy Hew MacLean found conditions “harsh, but slowly improving” and warned that, despite recent setbacks, “China’s strength is growing.” Given this assumption, “it is unrealistic for the United States government to maintain no relations with it.”<sup>88</sup> Roger Hilsman predicted “sufficient agricultural recovery to renew significant development efforts,” though growth rates for the rest of the decade would be “well below” those of the previous decade, when China’s economy posted some of the world’s fastest growth rates.<sup>89</sup> Mao’s China would soon demonstrate its resilience, though not where expected. Chiang had made no secret of his desire to exploit the calamity of the Great Leap Forward by launching massive raids on the mainland in the hopes of inciting a general rebellion. In a meeting with Roger Hilsman in early March 1962, his son and heir apparent declared it would be “the year of action.”<sup>90</sup> Less than a week later, Harriman visit Chiang Kai-shek in Taipei to inform him that Kennedy “would not repeat the Cuban experience” and risk a Bay of Pigs with the world’s most populous nation.<sup>91</sup> Rusk was less diplomatic, telling Kennedy “the plan was nonsense,” and proposed the president reject it outright. Hilsman, as was becoming the case in his relationship with Rusk, begged to differ, claiming a frank rejection

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<sup>88</sup> Sir Fitzroy Hew MacLean, “Inside Red China,” *Saturday Evening Post*, 16 November 1963, 96, 103.

<sup>89</sup> Hilsman to Rusk, 3 October 1962, Subject: The Crisis in Communist China and Peiping’s Recovery Prospects, 1, Folder China General 9-12.62, Box 23, NSF, JFK.

<sup>90</sup> Memorandum for the Record: Meeting with General Chiang Ching-Kuo, 19 March 1962, 1-3, Folder 3, Box Roger Hilsman Papers, JFK.

<sup>91</sup> Memcon, Harriman and Chiang Kai-shek, 14 March 1962, Folder 6, Box 442, Harriman Papers, LOC.

“would immediate start a public campaign to arouse the China lobby.”<sup>92</sup> Then, and later, he argued the best course of action would be “temporizing,” lest Chiang suspect the administration was considering adopting a Two-China policy.<sup>93</sup> Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Maxwell Taylor agreed with Rusk that “not being more frank with Chiang” risked miscalculations down the road, and he was supported by others who had the same fears.<sup>94</sup>

However, the miscalculations in 1962 would be made by Nehru in the Himalayas, not Chiang in the Taiwan Straits. Lashing out at the weakest link in its an chain of encirclement, China demonstrated that even at its lowest, it was still by far the strongest military power on the continent, and capable of projecting that power across the most formidable of natural barriers. Paradoxically, the manner in which the Chinese executed this attack would lessen, rather than accentuate, U.S. fears of an irrationally belligerent Chinese leadership. American elites inside and outside of government were shocked not by China’s aggression, but by its restraint.

Virtually every aspect of the Sino-Indian War caught officials within the Kennedy administration flat-footed. As late as within one month of the start of major fighting, they did not expect the border dispute to escalate into outright war. Once

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<sup>92</sup> Memorandum For the Record, Subject: White House Meeting on GRC Plans, 1 March 1962, Folder 4, Box 1, Hilsman Papers JFK.

<sup>93</sup> Hilsman to Harriman, 30 March 1962, Subject: GRC Operations Against the Mainland, Folder 6, Box 442, Harriman Papers, LOC.

<sup>94</sup> Robert H. Johnson to Rostow, 27 September 1962, Subject: General Taylor’s Proposals in his Telegram from Camp Smith; Joseph A. Yager to Usher, Subject: General Taylor’s Recommendations Concerning the Far East, both in Folder US Policy toward Far East, 1962, Box 3, Top Secret Files Relating to the Republic of China, 1954-1965, Office of the Country Director for the Republic of China, Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs, RG 59, NARA.

fighting began, they underestimated Chinese tactical capabilities and goals. After these became clear, they overestimated Chinese strategic objectives to varying degrees. A Special National Intelligence Estimate less than a year before the war occurred stated “we do not believe that Peiping will launch a major military effort against India during the next two years or so.”<sup>95</sup> After China’s initial limited yet devastating attacks on India’s front line positions in the Northeast Frontier Area (NEFA), a C.I.A. official wrote “we believe Chinese objectives are limited.”<sup>96</sup> From his perch in Hong Kong, analyst John Holdridge agreed, telling Washington on November 5, that “we believe Peiping will content itself with securing a favorable military position and then hope that Afro-Asian (or Soviet or internal) pressures or blandishments will force Nehru to acquiesce to its demands.”<sup>97</sup>

By this point, C.I.A. analysts were having second thoughts, writing that “we are less confident that the Chinese objectives will remain similar limited” to their current front-line positions.<sup>98</sup> U.S. Ambassador to India John Kenneth Galbraith voiced similar doubts in a telegram to Rusk.<sup>99</sup> On November 18, Chinese forces annihilated their

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<sup>95</sup> SNIE 13-3-61: Communist Capabilities and Intentions in the Far East, 30 November 1961, 6. From *Tracking The Dragon*.

<sup>96</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, Memorandum for the Director, Subject: The Sino-Indian Conflict, 25 October 1962, 1, Folder General, 10.12.62-10.25.62, Box 107A, India Country File, NSF, JFK.

<sup>97</sup> Airgram, Hong Kong to State, John Holdridge, 5 November 1962, Subject: The Background and Timing of Recent Large-Scale Clashes Along the Sino-Indian Border and an Estimate as to Peiping’s Intentions, 1, Folder General, 11.9.62, Box 108, India CF, NSF, JFK.

<sup>98</sup> Memorandum. C.I.A. to Special Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs, Subject: Outlook and Implications of the Sino-Indian Conflict, 6 November 1962, 6, Folder General, 11.6.62, India CF, NSF, JFK.

<sup>99</sup> Telegram, Galbraith to Rusk, 4 November 1962, Folder General 11.4.62, Box 108, India CF, NSF, JFK.



poorly equipped Indian adversaries along India's far northeastern and northwestern frontiers. In the northeast, the Chinese passed to the edge of the mountain barrier and advanced to the precipice of the Assam province frontier, a rich land containing the bulk of India's petroleum wells and tea plantations. Nehru declared a state of "total war" and asked Kennedy for 12 U.S.-piloted fighter squadrons to halt the advance.<sup>100</sup> Before he could respond, China announced its unilateral withdrawal from NEFA on November 20, established occupation of Aksai China (Ladakh) in the far northwest, and declared a unilateral cease-fire. In the words of Galbraith, "like a thief in the night, peace arrived."<sup>101</sup>

China's restraint shocked both the U.S. press and the administrations. *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." In its cover story that week, *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."<sup>102</sup> Paul Nitze, the Pentagon's point man on the war, admitted in his memoirs that "the Chinese Communists surprised us all" while Galbraith relayed Indian laments that "at the moment CHICOMS look reasonable

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<sup>100</sup> A Chronology of the Sino-Indian Border Dispute, 11, Folder 19, Box 1, Hilsman Papers, JFK; Robert McMahon, *The Cold War on the Periphery: The United States, India, and Pakistan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 292.

<sup>101</sup> John Kenneth Galbraith, *Ambassador's Journal: A Personal Account of the Kennedy Years* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1969), 426.

<sup>102</sup> "Never Again the Same," *Time*, 30 November 1962, 23; Robert P. Martin, "Behind China's Strange Moves," *U.S. News & World Report*, 10 December 1962, 51.

and this advantage had to be taken away from them.”<sup>103</sup> U.S. officials quickly reached a consensus that the threat of a vigorous U.S response deterred the Chinese. Komer wrote Kennedy that “a case can be made that Peiping realized it might be overreaching itself and risking an expanded war in which US and UK would rapidly step up the scale of their supports.” Thomas Hughes at the State Department’s Bureau of Intelligence and Research concluded “concern over the growing prospect of direct U.S. intervention” played a primary role. Galbraith added that “a large and growing number of Indians” felt the same way.<sup>104</sup>

The implication was clear: China could be deterred by mere threats of U.S. conventional force. Hilsman made the connection to “future courses of Chinese Communist action, not only in India but in Burma, Laos, and elsewhere in Asia.”<sup>105</sup> “Elsewhere,” unmistakably, meant South Vietnam. U.S. officials readily recognized that “the type of pressure which we are most likely to face from Communist China in the foreseeable future consists of political subversion and subversive insurgency” as opposed to “all-out” conventional attacks on neighboring nations.<sup>106</sup> In late 1961, an SNIE argued that “domestic difficulties thus far do not see to have had a direct effect on

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<sup>103</sup> Paul Nitze, with Ann M. Smith and Steven L. Rearden, *From Hiroshima to Glasnost: At the Center of Decision, A Memoir* (New York: Grove Wiedefeld, 1989), 240; Telegram, Galbraith to Rusk, 30 November 1962, Folder General 11.30.62, India CF, NSF, JFK.

<sup>104</sup> Memorandum, Komer to Kennedy, 20 November 1962, Folder General 11.20.62 Part 2, Box 108, India CF, NSF, JFK; Thomas Hughes, Intelligence Note: Peiping’s Cease-Fire and Withdrawal Ploy, 20 November 1962, 2, in *Ibid.*; Telegram, Galbraith to Rusk, 29 November 1962, 2, Folder General 11.28.62-11.29.62, Box 108A, India CF, NSF, JFK,.

<sup>105</sup> Memorandum, Hilsman to Rusk, Subject: Intensified U.S. Support of India: Soviet, Chinese, and Pakistani Responses, 4, Folder General 11.20.62 Part 2, Box 108, India CF, NSF, JFK.

<sup>106</sup> Yager to Usher, 3.

Peiping's foreign policy."<sup>107</sup> At the same time, 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. Without ardent Chinese backing, "the DRV would probably see to avoid having its regular units enter into a direct military engagement with SEATO, and in particular US, forces."<sup>108</sup> At this early point, increased American involvement in Southeast Asia was based less on Chinese strength than on China's supposed lack of resolve when faced with American might.

### **The Atomic Divorcee**

Behind this strategy of containment through deterrence was the ultimate possibility of a U.S. nuclear attack on the communist Chinese, who lacked such weapons. Yet this situation was known to be a temporary condition. Underlying nearly all arguments for outreach to communist China was the ominous and imminent inevitability of its acquisition of atomic weaponry. State Department Director of Policy Planning George McGhee wrote to McGeorge Bundy in 1962 that "there can be little doubt but that over the long run a Chicom nuclear program could have a degrading effect on the U.S. political and military positions in Asia."<sup>109</sup> Curtis LeMay claimed "the attainment by the Chinese Communists of even a limited nuclear capability would present serious military and political problems to the United States and the Free

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<sup>107</sup> SNIE-13-3-61: Chinese Capabilities and Intentions in the Far East, 20 November 1961, 3, from *Tracking The Dragon*.

<sup>108</sup> SNIE 10-3-61: Probable Communist Reactions to Certain SEATO Undertakings in South Vietnam, 10 October 1961, 7, 2, from *Tracking The Dragon*.

<sup>109</sup> Memorandum, George McGhee to McGeorge Bundy, 25 September 1962, Subject: Program to Influence World Opinion with Respect to Communist Chinese Nuclear Detonation, 4, Folder China General 9-12.62., Box 23. China CF, NSF, JFK.

World.”<sup>110</sup> But in the near-term, a Chinese atom bomb was seen as largely a weapon of public opinion. McGeorge Bundy wrote Rusk that when the Chinese communist became the first Asian nation to acquire nuclear weapons, “the impact might even be like Sputnik I.”<sup>111</sup> The greatest fear was how the publics in China’s neighborhood would receive the news. LeMay worried it might induce them “to yield to the ‘wave of the future.’”<sup>112</sup> Komer’s subordinate Joseph Hanson, adopting some of his superior’s instinctive alarmism, pushed for swift “advance action” to prevent “unnecessarily large psychological gains for the Chinese.”<sup>113</sup> But it was assumed the leaders of these countries would be more sophisticated and understand China’s extremely limited arsenal and almost nonexistent delivery capability. With that in mind, Hilsman assured Rusk “the neutralist countries are unlikely to change their basic policies.”<sup>114</sup>

Preventing the communist Chinese from developing nuclear weapons through the use of force, while fleetingly considered by the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. at various times, was never a serious option. More peaceful means of suasion also appeared fruitless, Edward Rice informing Harriman in June 1963 that “it appears very unlikely that

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<sup>110</sup> Curtis LeMay to McNamara, 29 April 1963, Appendix 1, Subject: Study of Chinese Communist Vulnerability, Folder Nuclear Capability, Box 4, Top Secret Files Relating to the Republic of China, 1954-1965, Office of the Country Director for the Republic of China, Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs, RG 59, NARA.

<sup>111</sup> Bundy to Rusk, undated March 1961, 1-2, Folder 5. Box 410, Robert Komer, Papers, NSF, JFK.

<sup>112</sup> LeMay to McNamara, Appendix 3.

<sup>113</sup> Joseph O. Hanson, Jr. to Komer, 3 March 1961, Subject: Blunting Expected ChiCom A-Bomb Propaganda, 1-3, Folder 5, Box 410, Komer Papers, NSF, JFK.

<sup>114</sup> Hilsman to Rusk, 3 October 1962, Subject: Asian neutralist Reactions to a Chinese Communist Nuclear Detonations, Folder China General 9-12.62, Box 23, China CF, NSF, JFK.

Communist China will be deterred from exploding a nuclear device merely because of a US-USSR test-ban agreement.”<sup>115</sup> Moves towards this first superpower arms control agreement had many causes, but one catalytic factor was the accelerating Sino-Soviet split, which made the Soviets more amenable to U.S. outreach, since they no longer had to worry about alienating their more obstinate junior partner.

This most important relationship in the communist sphere rapidly unraveled during the Kennedy years, and was closely and often breathlessly covered by U.S. media. The *Boston Globe* speculated at the time of Harriman’s appointment as head of the State Department’s Far Eastern Affairs Division that “it may be possible to exploit tension between Moscow and Communist China.”<sup>116</sup> Yet the administration both doubted the severity of this tension more than the media and was at a loss as to how to exploit it. Walt Rostow in January 1962 called it a “historic and unprecedented development” about which “no one knows what to do.”<sup>117</sup> While McGhee told McGeorge Bundy in September 1962 that “the Sino-Soviet dispute will not be resolved in the near future,” in a December 1962 speech on the matter Harriman claimed he “did not foresee a complete break.”<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Rice to Harriman, 21 June 1963, 1, Subject: Inhibiting Communist China’s Making and Exploiting Nuclear Weapons, Folder Nuclear Capability, Box 4, Top Secret Files Relating to the Republic of China, 1954-1965, Office of the Country Director for the Republic of China, Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs, RG 59, NARA.

<sup>116</sup> Doris Fleeson. “Harriman, Far East Expert, May Exploit Rift Between Moscow and Communist China,” *Boston Globe*, 29 November 1962. 17.

<sup>117</sup> S/P Meeting, 1/2/62: Sino-Soviet Conflict, 1a, Folder 1, Box 15, Thomson Papers, JFK.

<sup>118</sup> George McGhee to McGeorge Bundy, 25 September 1962, 1; “Harriman Sees Widening of USSR-Red China Rift,” *Hartford Courant*, 27 December 1962, 17.

One can infer just how troubled a writer or speaker believed Sino-Soviet relations were at a given time based on the word or words 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, written by McGee:

“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.”<sup>119</sup>

After outlining the significance of the terms one employs, McGee, 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.”<sup>120</sup>

The fundamental debate among those who looked at the matter with open eyes was whether they took evidence of deteriorating Sino-Soviet relations at face value or

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<sup>119</sup> Prospects for the Sino-Soviet Conflict,” 2/20/62, 1-2. Folder 2, Box 15, Thomson Papers, JFK.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid. 2.

extrapolated based on how these close and necessary allies should behave. Journalists tended to fall into the first group, and academic experts into the second. The informed public would have also been cognizant of expert opinion and analysis which invariably poured cold water on the breathless reportage of the journalists. One of the first major print pieces on the issue talked of a “momentous power struggle” which had “suddenly flared into flames,” but concluded with the qualifier that experts believed “each needs the other too much to risk an outright rupture in relations.”<sup>121</sup> In October 1960, *U.S. News* asked five academic experts to prognosticate the future course of events. None predicted rupture, agreeing that, in the words of Hugh Seton-Watson, “the Chinese will gracefully surrender.”

Leading officials within the administration oscillated between the academics and the journalists, migrating over time from the skepticism of the former to the credulity of the latter. For instance, in June 1961 Robert Komer wrote Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. that “the Sino-Soviet dispute may well prove to be one of the key determinants of the shape of the 1960s.”<sup>122</sup> That same summer, in a National Security Estimate, analysts predicted while “it seems to us unlikely” the two sides “will soon find a way to resolve their differences,” each side is aware of the immense danger that would result from an open rupture.” Therefore, Sino-Soviet relations would in the future be “erratic, cooperative at some times and places, competitive at others.”<sup>123</sup> The marriage might be rocky and

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<sup>121</sup> *Newsweek*, 29 August 1960, 43.

<sup>122</sup> Memorandum for Mr. Schlesinger, 28 June 1961, Folder 3, Box 410, Komer Papers, NSF, JFK.

<sup>123</sup> NIE 10-61: “Authority and Control in the Communist Movement,” 8 August 1961, 14, 15, from *Tracking The Dragon*.

loveless, but there would be no divorce if the parties understood what was best for them.

On the other side entirely were those who denied the reality of the split. Outside the administration, this included the Committee of One Million, though their conservative media allies in venues like the *National Review* largely ignored the frictions within the communist world. In the administration, the leading expounder of this denial was Dean Rusk, who both feared and catered to the China Lobby, which reciprocated with a mixture of bullying and praise. At the first Policy Planning Staff meeting on the matter, Rusk expressed skepticism when staff member Mose Harvey boldly declared “the monolith no longer exists.” 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 to his boss “their objectives are no longer the same.”<sup>124</sup>

But even among those on Harvey’s side, there were reasons to eschew boldness both domestic and foreign. Two months after the first meeting concerning the Sino-Soviet dispute, the State Department issued public relations guidelines which stressed that “constant care” must be taken “to avoid exaggerating either the nature or implication of the dispute.” In addition, any suggestion that the US is taking sides in the dispute is to be avoided.”<sup>125</sup> Since neither communist power was particularly popular in the U.S., Kennedy should not be seen as cozying up to either. On the foreign side of the equation, a May 1962 State Department report concluded “too blatant a propaganda exploitation of the Sino-Soviet dispute, or conciliatory gestures to either party to woo them further

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<sup>124</sup> Thomson to Harriman, 12 January 1962, 3, Folder 1, Box 15, Thomson Papers, JFK.

<sup>125</sup> S/F Draft, 3/16/62: “Guidelines for Co-ordinated Information Policy in the Sino-Soviet Dispute,” 2, 3, Folder 4, Box 15, Thomson Papers, JFK.



apart, might well have the counterproductive effects of strengthening the forces tending to drive them together.”<sup>126</sup> This anticipated Nixon’s much more famous triangular diplomacy, since he was also acutely aware of the need not to publicly flaunt the fact he was playing one communist power against the other.

As with Nixon, Kennedy officials recognized the need to exploit these intra-bloc tensions, particularly when it came to advancing U.S. interests in Southeast Asia. Larger goals were tantalizing but not realistic. Hong Kong Consul John Lacey noted that “one is accordingly tempted to look for lines of action which the US might take to accelerate the collapse of Communist and the weakening of the Sino-Soviet Bloc.”<sup>127</sup> Around the same time, the State Department concluded that even 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. Still, “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.<sup>128</sup> In other words, the split reaffirmed the Kennedy administration’s belief the United States could safely fight and win limited “Brush-Fire Wars.” In a strikingly similar vein, Columbia University Professor Donald Zagoria argued in an October 1962 *Foreign Affairs* article that tensions within the communist camp enabled the United States to “take firmer positions in Southeast Asia

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<sup>126</sup> Sino-Soviet Relations: Current Status and Prospects, 22 May 1962, 16, Folder 7, Box 1, Hilsman Papers, JFK.

<sup>127</sup> Lacey to Thomson, July 25, 1962, 4, Folder 13, Box 14, Thomson Papers, JFK.

<sup>128</sup> Sino-Soviet Conflict and U.S. Policy, 35-37, in *Ibid.*

“without increasing the risks.”<sup>129</sup> Thus, the only safe way to exploit the rift was for the U.S. to increase its commitment to South Vietnam.

None of this meant the administration was taking Rusk’s side over McGhee and his fellow like-minded staffers. In fact, the same memo which cautioned about publicly seeking to exploit acrimony between the Chinese and the Soviets admonished against underplaying it either. One of the goals of future public relations activities was “to counter Communist efforts . . . to gloss over the seriousness of their differences and to maintain the fiction of a monolithic unity that no longer in fact exists.”<sup>130</sup> The notion of a communist monolith had by then officially devolved from gospel to heresy, 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. Hilsman walked this line in a November 1962 speech in Dallas, the first on the topic by an administration official. Though acknowledging that Sino-Soviet differences were “very serious,” he maintained that shared enmity towards the United States would lead the two sides to “patch over their differences.”<sup>131</sup> By this late stage in 1962, those around Hilsman no longer believed this, and no doubt neither did he. But it was important to keep up the façade.

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid. 18.

<sup>130</sup> Guidelines for Co-ordinated Information Policy in the Sino-Soviet Dispute, 4.

<sup>131</sup> Roger Hilsman, “How Real Is The Break Between Russia and Red China?” *U.S. News & World Report*, 26 November 1962, 74.

## Going Public

A little over one year later, Hilsman would give a far more consequential speech which was just as strategic, but more reflective of his true beliefs and intentions. The speech made no policy proposals, concealing internal discussions over the travel and trade bans, which were the two aspects of China policy a president could change with the stroke of a pen. Such steps were seen by both their opponents and supporters as the thin edge of the wedge to rapprochement and all that this entailed. Broaching the subject of slight changes in the travel ban, Joseph Yager wrote to Harriman in February 1962 that “there is a real need for first-hand scholarly reporting on mainland China.”<sup>132</sup> In November 1963, Chayes told Hilsman that Harriman “authorized him to go ahead with a less restrictive policy covering validation of passports to Communist China.”<sup>133</sup> While this did not take effect, it reflected a concurrent State Department proposal that the Kennedy administration soon “permit travel to China by American citizens in the larger context of general liberalization of present passport restrictions.”<sup>134</sup>

This document also proposed that “at the appropriate time” the administration should permit “sales to China insofar as it includes food grains.”<sup>135</sup> In May 1963, six months before the writing of this internal report, Marvin Liebman wrote to John Tower,

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<sup>132</sup> Yager to Harriman, 12 February 1962, Possible Travel of Scholars to Communist China, Scholar’s Travel, Folder Travel Controls, Box 3, Subject Files of the Office of Asian Communist Affairs, 1961-1973, RG 59, NARA.

<sup>133</sup> Hilsman to Harriman, December 18, 1963, Subject: Travel Regulations Governing American Citizens, 1, in *Ibid.*

<sup>134</sup> Guidelines of United States Policy Toward China, 15 November 1963, 17, Folder Affairs 62-3, Box 1, Subject Files of the Office of Asian Communist Affairs, Lot Files, RG 59, NARA.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.* 18.

the new Republican Senator from Texas, that he had been made aware of McGeorge Bundy “saying that United States policy on trade with Red China ‘Is now being reviewed at the Department of State.’” Believing such a change could only succeed in secret, Liebman instructed Tower that “if this is so, the public should know about it.”<sup>136</sup> Tower wrote the White House with an enquiry, and was soon assured that “the Administration does not contemplate the change of that trade policy in the existing circumstances.”<sup>137</sup>

Liebman’s letter to Tower was a response to a public comment made by Porter, who had been in touch with the administration in his capacity as leader of the newly-formed Committee For a Review of Our China Policy, which he created as a counterweight to the Committee of One Million. Porter advocated beginning the process of eliminating the trade embargo. He told Hilsman that the purpose of his group was “to ‘take over the Department’s worries by drawing critics’ fire.” The former congressman believed “American policy to be changing,” but recognized how controversial this would be. He proposed quite prophetically that the process of altering public opinion could best be furthered by Senator Fulbright’s Foreign Relations Committee holding “public hearings on our China policy.”<sup>138</sup> Like Bowles, Porter felt the executive branch trying to

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<sup>136</sup> Liebman to Tower 29 May 1963, Re: Trade with Red China, Folder Charles O. Porter – Committee For a Review of Our China Policy, Box 4, Subject Files of the Office of Asian Communist Affairs, 1961-1973, RG 59, NARA.

<sup>137</sup> Frederick G. Dutton to Tower, 7 June 1963, 1, in Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> Memcon, Hilsman, Porter, Grant, 30 July 1963, Subject: Interest of the Committee For a Review of Our China Policy in Studying Feasibility of United States/Chinese Communist Trade, Folder Committee For a Review of Our China Policy, Box 4, Subject Files of the Office of Asian Communist Affairs, 1961-1973, RG 59, NARA.

move public opinion was a fool's errand and would do more harm than good.

Unbeknownst to him, his interlocutor begged to differ.

Hilsman spoke in San Francisco on 13 December 1963, three weeks after Kennedy's assassination. He intended his remarks as an open rebuke to the late John Foster Dulles, who in San Francisco in 1957 had declared the communist Chinese regime to be "a passing and not a perpetual phase." That speech had been applauded by the Committee of One Million and their supporters. Now Hilsman, supported by subordinates like James Thomson, Allen Whiting, and Robert Barnett, who helped Hilsman write the speech, was going to confront these forces publicly for the first time.<sup>139</sup> By doing so, he began that faction's marginalization within the foreign policy elite and among leading opinion makers.

At its heart, Hilsman's speech was a less evocative and minimally provocative rewriting of Chayes's speech from two years before. As with that speech, Hilsman proposed only outreach. He declared that "we pursue today toward Communist China a policy of the open door," a phrase with an obvious pedigree concerning Sino-American relations.<sup>140</sup> Hilsman noted how, in recent years, the Chinese communists had proven to be "pragmatic when their existence is threatened," belying their reputation for belligerent irrationality. Like Chayes, Hilsman recognized that the past harsh rhetoric

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<sup>139</sup> Roger Hilsman, *To Move A Nation: The Politics of Foreign Policy in the Administration of John F. Kennedy* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1967), 351, 344.

<sup>140</sup> Roger Hilsman, "United States Policy Toward Communist China," *Department of State Bulletin*, 6 January 1964, 16. Thomson expressed his support for publicizing the phrase "an open back door" as the term for a revised China policy. See Thomson to Rice, 27 December 1963, Folder 4, Box 15, Thomson Papers, JFK.

used by Dulles (or, for that matter, Rusk), led to rhetorical hate spirals, and declared “we will not sow the dragon’s seed of hate.”<sup>141</sup> Hilsman went on to imply those who had done so on the American side were acting out of irrational emotion. It was now “time to take stock – dispassionately,” of U.S. policy towards East Asia. Unfortunately, “there has been perhaps more emotion about our China policy than about our policy toward any single country since World War II.”<sup>142</sup> Hilsman was openly proclaiming himself and like-minded reformers not to be soft and sentimental doves, but actually more dispassionate, reasonable, and hard-headed than the China hawks.

Hilsman’s opponents did not fail to recognize the threat. 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.”<sup>143</sup> To his supporters, Liebman castigated “the demoralizing softness of Mr. Hilsman’s major theme of conciliation and tolerance,” the first time the Committee had felt compelled to condemn the action of a member of any administration.<sup>144</sup> Publicly, he charged Hilsman with “promoting a ‘two Chinas solution,’” a notion backed to varying degrees by those who supported Hilsman’s statements within the administration.<sup>145</sup> Liebman was no doubt reacting less to Hilsman’s words than to the widespread favorable reception they received in the media.

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<sup>141</sup> Roger Hilsman, “United States Policy Toward Communist China,” *Department of State Bulletin*, 6 January 1964, 17, 22.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.* 12, 15.

<sup>143</sup> Letter, 24 September 1962, Folder 170, Box 10, Group 775, Right Wing Pamphlets Collection, Sterling.

<sup>144</sup> Marvin Liebman, Informational Memorandum, 31 December 1963, 5, in *Ibid.*

<sup>145</sup> “Anti-Peking Group Assails Hilsman Speech on China, *New York Times*, 31 December 1963, 22.

The *Christian Science Monitor* called the speech “the most articulate and complete statement of American policy on mainland China to have been made in years.”

Numerous stories in major newspapers alluded to the “open door” phrase in their headlines, proving that had in fact been a successful sound-bite.<sup>146</sup> The primary criticism was that Hilsman had not gone farther, and made any policy proposals, the *Washington Post* lamenting “after six years, has the United States nothing more to say than if China changes, the situation might improve?”<sup>147</sup>

Yet Max Frankel of the *New York Times* expressed the emerging consensus that “the most remarkable fact” concerning the speech was that it was made at all.” During 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.<sup>148</sup> Louis Fleming wrote in the *Los Angeles Times*, previously a China Lobby bastion, that “reluctantly, the United States is speaking about the unspeakable.” Fleming declared Chinese behavior “the most predatory” of all nations during the postwar period, but that the only way to contain China was to accept “the realities of China” and adopt a policy of outreach rather than isolation.<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> Robert Brunn, “U.S. Door Ajar for Peking,” *Christian Science Monitor*, 16 December 1963, 1; Murrey Marder, “Door Is Open to Red China, Hilsman Says,” *Washington Post*, 14 December 1963, A5. Max Frankel, “U.S. ‘Door Open’ To Talks If China Gives Up Hatred,” *New York Times*, 14 December 1963, 1; “Hot Air Through The Open Door,” *Hartford Courant*, 16 December 1963, 18; “Open?” *Washington Post*, 15 December 1963, E6.

<sup>147</sup> “Open?” *Washington Post*, December 15, 1963, E6.

<sup>148</sup> Max Frankel, “Looking Toward Peking,” *New York Times*, 16 December 1963, 3.

<sup>149</sup> Louis B. Fleming, “U.S. Reviewing Its China Policy,” *Los Angeles Times*, 5 January 1964, N1.

## **The Journey of a Thousand Miles**

All recognized this would be a long process. Some even knew it was already several years in the making. Frankel termed the speech an expression of “long held but rarely articulated views on Communist China.”<sup>150</sup> This was precisely Hilsman’s intention, as he made clear in a post-speech talking points memo to Adlai Stevenson which recognized his words as “significant primarily as the first attempt in some time to articulate the policies we have been pursuing toward Communist China for several years.”<sup>151</sup> The *Christian Science Monitor* summed up Stevenson’s ensuing remarks by claiming the new 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.” This summed up Hilsman’s intent to begin the process of policy change by moving the debate beyond the corridors of Foggy Bottom. As the *Guardian* in Britain had aptly predicted the morning after Hilsman’s speech, “time will be allowed to erode the old policy.”<sup>152</sup>

Stevenson’s remarks came in the immediate wake of Rusk’s assurance to China hard-liners at home and Taiwanese leaders abroad that the speech “simply referred to the longest possible range future.” The press saw this as “seeming to cancel the conditional policy toward Communist China that Hilsman had proffered in his speech.” For the first,

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<sup>150</sup> Max Frankel, “U.S. ‘Door Open’ To Talks If China Gives Up Hated,” *New York Times*, 14 December 1963, 1.

<sup>151</sup> Letter to Adlai Stevenson, 19 December 1963, 1, 2, Folder 9, Box 1, Hilsman Papers, JFK.

<sup>152</sup> Earl W. Foell, “U.S. Policy Firm: Line Restated By Stevenson,” *Christian Science Monitor*, 20 December 1963, 2; “Opening the door to China,” *The Guardian*, 14 December 1963, 6.



but by no means the last time, Rusk undercut a junior administration official who hinted at a softening of China policy. According to veteran pundit Arthur Krock, the Secretary of State had merely “thickened the fog” which already “suffuses American Far Eastern diplomacy.”<sup>153</sup> The *New York Times* quipped that Rusk had “made American policy seem even more of a Chinese puzzle than before.” If any side was inscrutable, it was the Americans, not the Chinese. In that same editorial, the *Times* became the first major newspaper to call for “normalization of contacts with the Chinese.”<sup>154</sup> Hilsman’s words were having an effect.

Assessing the impact of Hilsman's speech two days after it had been given, Frankel concluded that “it did not change policy, but it changed Washington's posture.”<sup>155</sup> 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.”<sup>156</sup> 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. From that time and place, Kennedy’s successors would let the word go forth that the torch had been passed to a new generation of officials, tempered by the flames of McCarthyism, but not afraid, and occasionally eager, to poke its dying embers. When Kennedy took office, change

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<sup>153</sup> Arthur Krock, “In The Nation,” *New York Times*, 19 December 1963, 32.

<sup>154</sup> “Policy Toward Peking,” *New York Times*, 12 January 1964, E12.

<sup>155</sup> Frankel, “Looking Toward Peking,” 3.

<sup>156</sup> U.S. Policies in the Far East – Review and Recommendations Memorandum, 4 April 1962, 29, Folder 0670, Box 311, Series 1, Group 628, Bowles Papers, Sterling.

was in the air. Shortly after he was struck down, it was on the lips. The question now became, when would words become actions?

## CHAPTER IV

### BEGIN THE BEGIN: POLICY MAINTENANCE AMIDST A TRANSFORMED DEBATE DURING THE JOHNSON ADMINISTRATION

In February 1964, two months after Roger Hilsman's San Francisco speech and a matter of weeks after France offered diplomatic recognition to the People's Republic of China, Doak Barnett wrote a memo for his seminar students seeking to explain the lack of change in U.S. China policy, particularly under Democratic administrations.

According to him, the Republicans controlled policy remotely by using "China policy issues as a political weapon" to intimidate Democrats, turning them into "captives of the opposition." They were able to do so because of the perception that the public was on their side when it came to isolating the Chinese communists as much as possible.

However, in Barnett's estimation, "public opinion" was conflated with "Congressional opinion," which was dominated by "certain small lobby groups" known colloquially as the "China lobby." Barnett hypothesized that the public favored a much more flexible approach to China policy than members of congress.<sup>1</sup>

Barnett went on to advance the argument that the executive branch had since 1949 "been unwilling to use, in the formulation and implementation of policy toward China, most of those officials who had accumulated experience and expertise (sic) on Chinese problems prior to 1949, because such persons were considered tainted by the

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<sup>1</sup> Some Intentionally Provocative Hypotheses Concerning U.S. Policy Toward China Since 1949, February 1964, 1-3 Folder Seminar on US-Far Eastern Relations, Box 83, Arthur Doak Barnett Papers, Rare Books and Manuscript Collections, Columbia University Libraries.

failures of past policy.” In addition, younger experts who did serve in government felt “inhibited” by the “persecution” of an earlier generation of scholars.<sup>2</sup> Barnett himself was part of the latter group, as was his brother Robert, who had served in the Kennedy and was currently serving in the Johnson administration. Doak Barnett himself had covered the communist victory in the Chinese Civil War as a journalist in the late 1940s, and a decade later participated, along with Dean Rusk, in a series of study sessions convened by the Council on Foreign Relations to better understand events behind the “Bamboo Curtain,” a term he had coined in 1948 while in northern China.

In other course material produced for his students that semester, Barnett predicted the situation of stasis and inertia might quickly change, claiming “the U.S. Government will probably have to start acting vigorously – and soon – to lay the groundwork for some acceptable alternative.” Standing in the way was fear of a public “outcry” and the consequent negative political repercussions. To neutralize this threat to policy change, Barnett declared “there is an urgent need, therefore, to inform the American people about the realities of the situation, and to clarify the practical alternatives from among which American policy makers must choose.”<sup>3</sup> The professor was talking about the Johnson administration. The executive branch would be the potential agent of change, overcoming a congress which on this matter was recalcitrant at best and outright hostile at worst.

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid. 3-4.

<sup>3</sup> Folder Foreign Policy Course, Lecture Ideas + Material, China & US & UN, Box 84, Barnett Papers, Columbia.

Unbeknownst to Barnett, the reverse would soon prove to be the case, and he would go from observer to leading actor. In late November of that year, Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chief of Staff Carl Marcy forwarded an article written by George Kennan from the most recent *New York Times Magazine* to his boss, Senator and committee Chairman Fulbright. “I think you will find this article quite worth reading,” Marcy wrote in an attached memo.<sup>4</sup> In this lengthy and often meandering essay, Kennan argued that China’s communist regime would not collapse, but could be moderated through diplomatic engagement.<sup>5</sup> Politicians are constantly forwarded articles by members of their staff, and usually it is nearly impossible to figure out if they even bothered to read the material, let alone if the arguments made any impact. In this instance, that is not the case. Within a year, Fulbright began giving speeches calling for significant changes in U.S. China policy privileging outreach over isolation. In every one of these speeches, he quoted – at length and with accreditation – Kennan’s words from that article. Those quotes concerned Kennan’s belief that, though currently menacing and dangerous, China’s communist regime was bound to evolve in a manner more congenial to U.S. interests, provided the U.S. ceased its policy of total isolation and official hostility.

Not wanting to be the only voice calling for change, in March 1966 Fulbright convened Senate hearings on communist China. The two star witnesses were Doak

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<sup>4</sup> Memo, Marcy to Fulbright, 24 November 1964, Folder 8: Misc. Speeches – Research Material (Foreign Policy), Box 5, Series 73, Fulbright Papers, Arkansas.

<sup>5</sup> George F. Kennan, “A Fresh Look At Our China Policy,” *New York Times Magazine*, 22 November 1964, 142, 144.

Barnett and John Fairbank. Their remarks were televised live, and received extensive and prominent print media coverage. If Barnett represented the later, untainted, generation of scholars, Fairbank was a leading member the earlier cohort. His appearance signified both a personal vindication and a sign that old fears and taboos were fast receding. Barnett's call for a new policy of "containment without isolation" became an oft-repeated sound bite and slogan for those proposing significant changes in China policy. While not leading to this result during the administration of Lyndon Baines Johnson, it did occasion new, and more conciliatory, rhetoric from the president.

That the executive branch is missing from this sketch of developments on China policy during the first half of the Johnson administration is no oversight. During this period, and continuing through the second half of Johnson's tenure, congress and public opinion provided the motive forces on this issue, while the administration largely stood still. Hilsman's speech changed nothing internally, but externally it began a chain reaction which led to greater media advocacy – as represented by Kennan's article – that influenced and emboldened a few members of congress, Fulbright most importantly during this period. The chain reaction reached critical mass in the spring of 1966, after academics came out of the shadows to grant decisive legitimacy to those calling for policy change. Throughout these years, the administration was, in terms of the public and elite debate, on the outside looking in. It would soon join, albeit more to co-opt and control the forces of reform rather than to harness them.

During the first half of his administration, Lyndon Johnson accepted the new premises put forth in Roger Hilsman's speech, but steadfastly followed the old policies

these premises logically undermined. French diplomatic recognition for the P.R.C., the gathering momentum for seating communist China in the United Nations, and its successful test of a nuclear weapon – all occurring in 1964 – seemed for brief moments to necessitate at least some policy alterations, but quickly proved inconsequential. Meanwhile, increasing U.S. military commitments in South Vietnam set the U.S and the P.R.C. on a dangerous collision course. While inside the administration some privately argued this was yet another reason for outreach, publicly these same officials backed away from Hilsman’s posture and returned to modified versions of the rhetoric of Dulles-era intransigence. They – and their superiors – ignored evidence that for the first time the general public, largely out of fear of the Chinese threat, was softening in its opposition to changes in China policy. Ultimately, it would take outside actors to capitalize on and catalyze this new mood. Fulbright’s hearings gave prominent China scholars a national forum in which to question existing policy, and the press and the public proved receptive. This in turn spurred the administration to change its rhetoric, if not yet its policies.

### **First Year Jitters**

Some Democrats at the time and many scholars since have faulted the Eisenhower administration for taking an approach to long-term China policy centered around instances of short-term crisis management. By comparison, one may call Johnson’s approach to the issue an attempt at crisis-free crisis management. There were potential crises early in his tenure, specifically French recognition and China’s first test of a nuclear weapon. One might argue that on China matters much of his presidency was

overtaken by a continuing regional crisis in the form of the Vietnam War. Yet fears of direct Chinese military intervention – fears which occasioned the timing of Fulbright’s hearings – quickly dissipated and the situation proved easily manageable, even with the extremely limited level of direct communication between the two nations. Furthermore, in between these events, the administration did little if nothing to formulate a long-term strategy which matched the new assumptions that took hold in the foreign policy bureaucracy during the Kennedy years. Internal documents reveal that, having jettisoned the theoretical bases for Eisenhower’s approach, practical actions – and much of the public rhetoric – was little different than under Dulles. Some of this changed after the Fulbright hearings. But in the first half of his time as president, Johnson’s approach to China was a dead policy walking, devoid of life and initiative. One cannot blame this on escalation in South Vietnam, for there was no visible flame of policy initiative for the Indochinese jungles to extinguish.

Before Vietnam became all-consuming, there were a series of events which had the potential to undermine existing U.S. China policy. The first was France’s informing the U.S. on 15 January 1964 of its decision to accord the People’s Republic of China diplomatic recognition.<sup>6</sup> France thus became the first U.S. ally to recognize the P.R.C. in 14 years.<sup>7</sup> While certainly a blow to U.S.-led Western solidarity on this matter, by itself

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<sup>6</sup> Benjamin Read to McGeorge Bundy, Subject: French Recognition of Communist China, 22 January 1964, Folder Political Affairs and Area Relationships, Communist China and France, 1964, Box 10, Bureau of East Asian Affairs, Central Files, 1947-1969, RG 59, NARA.

<sup>7</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, Office of National Estimates, Subject: Implications of an Assumed French Recognition of Communist China, 15 January 1964, 2, Folder 7, Box 176, Country File – France, National Security Files, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, Austin, Texas.



the initiative taken by an increasingly maverick Charles De Gaulle was little more than a briefly damaging news story. What worried U.S. officials was that this could be the first of many similar defections. Canada, for instance, was seen as “most inclined toward recognition.”<sup>8</sup> The Canadians had much to gain from increased agricultural trade with China, and the longstanding siren call of the Chinese market proved “a formidable attraction for many nations.” This no doubt had played a major role in France’s decision, along with its desire to reassert its influence in Indochina.<sup>9</sup>

On a less self-serving and more strategic level, De Gaulle argued that isolating China only made it more of a threat by increasing its potential for belligerence. Diplomatic contact could encourage moderation.<sup>10</sup> This combination of arguments would be used by U.S. allies – and the U.S. itself – to justify diplomatic outreach to China, but not until the very end of the decade. De Gaulle probably believed events in 1964 were working on a more accelerated timeline.<sup>11</sup> In this he would not have been alone among U.S. allies, and American policy makers were well aware of it at the time.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid. 5.

<sup>9</sup> Daniel F. Moore to Sorenson, Subject: French Recognition of Communist China, 23 January 1964, 3, 5, Political Affairs and Area Relationships, Communist China and France, 1964, Box 10, Bureau of East Asian Affairs, Central Files, 1947-1969, RG 59, NARA.

<sup>10</sup> Research Memorandum, George C. Denney, Jr. to Rusk, Subject: French Recognition of Communist China, 22 January 1964, 3, Folder 7, Box 176, Country File – France, NSF, LBJ; Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Intelligence Summary, French Recognition of Communist China: Some Speculation on its Motivation, *Current Foreign Relations*, Issue No. 5, 29 January 1964, 21, CPR 64 65 66, Robert Komer Papers, NSF, LBJ.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Lindsey Grant to Marshall Green, Various Statements on Recognition of Communist China, 1, Folder Relations with Free World (General), 1964, Box 1, Records of Relations to Communist China, 1964-1966, Office of Asian Communist Affairs, Bureau of East Asian Affairs, RG 59, NARA.

The Hilsman speech, and the favorable media coverage it occasioned, was one indication this might be the case. Some reacted the same way to France's actions. On 1 February, *The New Republic* opined "the action of France will no doubt hasten the entry of China in the UN, and why not?"<sup>13</sup> Ultimately, the hopes of those supporting change and the fears of those backing the status quo turned out to be unfounded. France achieved little economically or diplomatically from its bold move, discouraging others from taking a similar step into the unknown. By late summer the administration could breathe a sigh of relief, assured there would be no more "problems with free world countries."<sup>14</sup> This proved to be the first of multiple problems whose repercussions could be deferred until later.

By 1964, it was clear that a successful Chinese test of an atomic weapon was imminent. Even Marvel produced two Ironman comic books with plots revolving around Chinese scientists trying to procure atomic secrets in the service of Mao's efforts to acquire a nuclear bomb.<sup>15</sup> Prior consideration on both the U.S. and to a lesser extent the Soviet side to destroy or delay China's nuclear program with a military strike had been jettisoned as impractical or counterproductive.<sup>16</sup> The primary issue now became the

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<sup>13</sup> "Recognizing China," *The New Republic*, 1 February 1964, 5, Folder Communism – China – Printed Matter – Miscellaneous, Box 25, Emmet Papers, Hoover.

<sup>14</sup> David Dean to Lindsey Grant, 31 August 1964, Subject: U.S. Policy Towards Communist China, 1, Folder Sino 64, Box 1, ACA Subject Files, Lot Files, RG 59, NARA.

<sup>15</sup> Stan Lee and Robert Berns, "Trapped by the Red Barbarian," *Tales of Suspense* #42, June 1963, Stan Lee, "The Hands of the Mandarin!," *Tales of Suspense* #50, February 1964, both in *The Invincible Ironman, Volume I: Collecting Tales of Suspense, Nos. 39-50* (New York: Marvel, 2015).

<sup>16</sup> William Burr and Jeffrey T. Richelson, "Whether to 'Strangle the Baby in the Cradle'," *International Security*, Vol. 25, No. 3, (Winter 2000/01), 55, 97.

inevitable event's effects, specifically if China's neighbors would be intimidated and Chinese policy emboldened. In April Robert Johnson of the State Department's Policy Planning Council emphasized the test's impact would be more "political" than military, bolstering the regime's domestic prestige. Abroad, the test's effect would be neutral and "confirm" the present assumptions of U.S. allies, communist nations, and the non-aligned states. As for the U.S. posture in the region, "a Communist Chinese nuclear capability need impose no new military restriction on the U.S. response to aggression in Asia," and thus should not affect ongoing efforts in South Vietnam.<sup>17</sup> While Johnson at the State Department saw this event as changing nothing, the military strongly disagreed, the Pacific Command arguing in July that "the effect on Asia at large will be very great." In their view, the test alone would grant China far greater regional stature.<sup>18</sup>

What China would or could do with this stature was another matter. Rostow at the National Security Council tilted towards the State Department and disagreed with the military's viewpoint, claiming in September that "with nuclear weapons comes caution."<sup>19</sup> Rostow's report the next week to McGeorge Bundy reiterated past assumptions of Chinese rationality, arguing that China would only use these weapons

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<sup>17</sup> Robert Johnson of Policy Planning Council, The Implications of a Chinese Communist Nuclear Capability, 16 April 1964, 2-3, 7, Folder Memos, Vol. 1 (2 of 2), Box 237, China Country Files, NSF, LBJ.

<sup>18</sup> Cable, Cincpac to DIA, Chicom Nuclear Program, 13 July 1964, 1-2, Folder Cables Volume 1 (2 of 2), Box 237, China Country Files, NSF, LBJ.

<sup>19</sup> Letter, Komer to MacNamara, 18 September 1964, 3, Folder China, Box 1, Committee File – Committee on Nuclear Proliferation, NSF, LBJ.

defensively if under direct threat of invasion.<sup>20</sup> Thus, there was no need for “major policy changes” in light of changing circumstances.<sup>21</sup> Less than a week before the detonation, in an NSC meeting, Rusk flatly stated “now is no time for a new policy toward Communist China.”<sup>22</sup>

The one aspect open for dispute was how other nations would react. United States Information Agency head Carl Rowan predicted based on recent opinion surveys that the reception would be “unwelcome, particularly in Africa.”<sup>23</sup> On 22 October, six days after the test of the 20 kiloton warhead, Thomas Hughes offered a contrasting view.<sup>24</sup> In a memorandum entitled “Africa Stops Worrying and Loves the Bomb,” Hughes predicted the test “adds one more argument in favor of diplomatic recognition for those African fence-sitters.”<sup>25</sup> The director of INR at State ultimately concluded the

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<sup>20</sup> Rostow to McGeorge Bundy, Subject: Chinese Communist Nuclear Paper: “Major Conclusion,” 26 September 1964, Tab A, 1, 4, Folder China Vol. 1 (2 of 2), Box 31, Nuclear Testing, Subject File, NSF, LBJ; Draft, Program of Action, A Chinese Communist Nuclear Detonation and Capability, 25 September 1964, Folder China, Box 1, Committee File – Committee on Nuclear Proliferation, NSF, LBJ.

<sup>21</sup> Draft, Program of Action, 2.

<sup>22</sup> Summary Notes of 543<sup>rd</sup> NSC Meeting, 17 October 1964, Folder Communist China, Box 1, NSC Meetings, NSF, LBJ.

<sup>23</sup> Carl T. Rowan to Johnson, 19 October 1962, 2, Folder China Volume 1 (1 of 2), Box 31, Nuclear Testing, Subject Files, NSF, LBJ.

<sup>24</sup> John Wilson Lewis and Xue Litai, *China Builds the Bomb* (Stanford, Ca.: Stanford University Press, 1988), 244.

<sup>25</sup> Hughes to Rusk, Subject: African Reaction to Chinese Atomic Test, 22 October 1964, 2, Folder China, Volume 1 (1 of 2), Box 31, Subject Files, Nuclear Testing, NSF, LBJ.

Chinese “encountered no unpleasant surprises” in the international reception of their action.<sup>26</sup>

The primary concern at the time for those who opposed any change in U.S. China policy was that what *Look* referred to as “the nuclear thunder out of China” would lead some to conclude a more dangerous P.R.C. must now be dealt with.<sup>27</sup> The historian Stanley Hornbeck expressed this concern in a letter to Committee of One Million Chairman Walter Judd.<sup>28</sup> In fact, in early November, former China Lobby stalwart Henry Luce’s *Time* magazine came to just this conclusion, leading Robert Komer to feel vindicated in his belief that the “China issue no longer has to the same domestic impact that it used to.”<sup>30</sup> Along with a post-election article in the usually right-leaning *Saturday Evening Post* entitled “Needed: A China Policy that makes sense,” this seemed to confirm to Komer that the issue “isn’t domestic dynamite any longer.”<sup>31</sup> However, he worried that the situation in Vietnam made matters more complicated than before.<sup>32</sup> There was also fear inside the administration that any lessening of U.S. support to South

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<sup>26</sup> Hughes to Rusk, Subject: Initial World Reactions to the Chinese Communists’ Nuclear Detonation, 28 October 1964, 4, Folder China, Box 1, Committee File – Committee on Nuclear Proliferation, NSF, LBJ.

<sup>27</sup> T. George Harris, “The Chinese Bomb Menace,” *Look*, 1 December 1964, 28.

<sup>28</sup> Hornbeck to Judd, 20 October 1964, Folder Hornbeck, Stanley K., Box 20, Walter Judd Papers, Hoover.

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<sup>30</sup> Komer to McGeorge Bundy, 6 November 1964, Folder China Volume 1 (1 of 2), Box 31, Subject File, Nuclear Testing, NSF, LBJ.

<sup>31</sup> Komer to McGeorge Bundy, 16 November 1964, Folder CPR 64 65 66, Komer Papers, NSF, LBJ.

<sup>32</sup> Komer to McGeorge Bundy, 6 November 1964.

Vietnam in the near future would be seen as a negative reaction to the test.<sup>33</sup> All told, the test itself appeared to by and large confirm previously held beliefs on all sides in both the U.S. and abroad. Unlike French diplomatic recognition, this event had long been foreseen. Like that earlier event, its effects would not be felt for several years to come. For the time being, they could be filed under potential problems successfully avoided.

### **A Policy Running to Stand Still**

Avoiding China policy change was something in which this administration would soon become past masters. Hilsman's speech purposefully offered nothing in the way of concrete proposals, merely announcing a shift away from a hostile posture towards the Chinese communists. This left Johnson plenty of room to maneuver, which in reality made it very easy to remain stationary. In fact, it made it even easier than before. Paradoxically, by achieving a change in the official tone, proponents of substantive policy alterations during the Kennedy years lessened the pressure for and need of such changes. Those who remained under Johnson, foremost among them James Thomson, had failed by succeeding. Eisenhower-era hostility, typified by the remarks of John Foster Dulles, built up pressure for change, much like shaking a bottle of soda makes it likely for the liquid to burst out if the bottle is ever opened. But an unshaken bottle, with lesser pressure, can safely be opened and let out only gas. This was essentially what Hilsman had accomplished. While appearing to stir things up in the new administration, his remarks actually calmed the situation.

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<sup>33</sup> Effects of the Chinese Bomb on Nuclear Spread, 6, Folder China, Box 1, Committee File – Committee on Nuclear Proliferation, NSF, LBJ.

Militating against any change in 1964 was the fact that Johnson was running for election. Thus, throughout that year, the question was what the administration would seek to accomplish in 1965, giving the matter a pronounced lack of urgency. Nonetheless, the State Department went about the business of producing a pre-election policy paper and preparing public statements. White House official William Y. Smith identified the “dilemma” the administration faced at that time. Policy papers would inevitably be “leaked” to the press, producing “campaign fodder” for the opposition and damaging the president with voters. However, a perceived lack of activity would indicate a lack of concern and serious thinking about a vital matter.<sup>34</sup> To preempt the leaks, the State Department made a series of public statements as it conducted its preliminary review which reaffirmed the substance of existing policy while attempting not to appear stuck in the past.

From his perch in Hong Kong, C.I.A. Acting Principal Officer John Lacey helped set the tone and shape the rhetoric. He focused on China’s threats to U.S. allies along its borders, viewing China purely through the prism of containment. He became the first to use the term “firmness and flexibility” to describe the administration’s approach. Beginning in July 1966, when Johnson avidly and publicly adopted the phrase, it implied a continued containment policy heavily leavened with tentative attempts at outreach. But this was not what Lacey had in mind in 1964, defining it purely in terms of

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<sup>34</sup> William Y. Smith, Memorandum for the Record, Subject: Daily White House Staff Meeting, 20 April 1964, in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968, Volume XXX: China* (Washington: D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1998), 56.

a containment strategy which would be “flexible in tactics and firm in principle.”<sup>35</sup> The U.S. would be prepared to meet any attempts at Chinese aggression with a variety of measures. At no point did Lacey consider any lessening of the U.S.-led program of isolating China. In Lacey’s telling, this was entirely consistent with Hilsman’s remarks since, like the outgoing State Department official, he sought to put the “onus” for this isolation on the Chinese by highlighting their bad behavior. This would counteract the signal sent by France’s recognition that it was the U.S. which was becoming isolated on this matter.<sup>36</sup> The goal was to apply the Eisenhower methods in a manner clever enough to curry favor with world opinion. Hilsman thus had given the policies he opposed a new lease on life.

Lacey’s approach was seconded by Lindsey Grant, head of the Office of Asian Communist Affairs at the State Department. Hilsman created the ACA in 1963 to provide a greater bureaucratic focus on China.<sup>37</sup> In James Thomson’s words, this resulted in an “upgrading of the mainland China desk” to independent status.<sup>38</sup> As ACA head, Grant would assume the leading role in China policy formulation for the next two years at State, and set the tone for debate within the entire administration. This was because in early 1964 Hilsman was replaced by William Bundy, who initially opposed

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<sup>35</sup> Airgram, Hong Kong to State, Subject: Communist China 1964 and Recommendations for U.S. Policy, 21 February 1964, 2, 9, Folder Cables Volume 1 (1 of 2), Bo 237, China CF, NSF, LBJ.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid. 8, 2, 3.

<sup>37</sup> Kevin Quigley, “A Lost Opportunity: A Reappraisal of the Kennedy Administration’s China Policy in 1963,” *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, Vol. 13, No. 3 (September 2002), 181.

<sup>38</sup> James C. Thomson Jr., “On the Making of U.S. Chiaa Policy, 1961-9: A Study in Bureaucratic Politics,” *China Quarterly*, (June 1972), 229.



policy change, Harriman by George Ball, who was indifferent to the matter, and Thomson transferred to the NSC. Though personally more flexible on China policy than his predecessor, Johnson's purging of Kennedy loyalists removed voices more in line with his instincts than Kennedy's, contributing to stasis on the matter.

In March of that year, Grant produced his "Guidelines of United States Policy Toward China." Like Lacey the previous month, Grant stressed containment and mere tactical shifts to place "the onus for our continuing mutual hostility" onto the Chinese. Like Hilsman, he took for granted the stability and staying power of the P.R.C., and held out hope for future moderation. However, since "our leverage within Communist China is almost nil," there was nothing the U.S. could do to encourage this development.<sup>39</sup> Grant explained his assessment to his superior, the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Far Eastern Affairs Marshall Green. He categorized the Chinese communists as "a serious annoyance" rather than "a major threat." The way to prevent them from becoming one was to demonstrate that aggression was "dangerous and unprofitable." The greatest danger was if they sensed any "softening" of U.S. policy.<sup>40</sup> Grant emphasized the importance of "firmness" even more bluntly to John De Haan, declaring that "the fundamental point of this policy is precisely that we are not willing to go to Munich."<sup>41</sup> In both communications, Grant made clear he did not fear the Chinese threat, and

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<sup>39</sup> Lindsey Grant, "Guidelines of United States Policy Toward China," 2 March 1964, 14, 2, 8, Folder International Meetings, January-March, 1964, Box 1, Records of Relations to Communist China, 1964-1966, Office of Asian Communist Affairs, Bureau of East Asian Affairs, RG 59, NARA.

<sup>40</sup> Grant to Green, Subject: Talking Points on Communist China, 20 April 1964, 3, 4, Folder Sino 64, Box 1, ACA Subject Files, Lot Files, RG 59, NARA.

<sup>41</sup> Grant to De Haan, Folder Sino 64, Box 1, ACA Subject Files, Lot Files, RG 59, NARA.

believed it could be easily contained through a tough and uncompromising approach. In a telephone conversation with McGeorge Bundy, George Ball reiterated the line that “if the US ever does change its policy toward Red China, that will certainly never occur unless and until Red China changes its policy towards the civilized world.”<sup>42</sup> This “You First” approach was directly out of the Dulles playbook.

A more searching and long-term approach to policy appeared around election time, when it was clear Johnson was going to have at least four more years in office. Yet, while the proposals produced strayed somewhat from the first limited policy review, and appeared to promise change, they were always couched in a vague and purely theoretical style, envisioning a future situation on a distant horizon in which change would be both feasible and desirable. Those most forcefully pushing for change were a trio of advocates left over from Kennedy – Robert Komer, James Thomson, and Thomas Hughes. None of them had gained access to the levers of power on this issue since their earlier attempts at advocacy. Komer at NSC opened the campaign in late October, reiterating in a typically lengthy and urgent-sounding memorandum how changing circumstances had rendered the existing policy obsolete. Instead, he called for initiating “the slow, frustrating, and uneven process of grappling to find some areas of accommodation” with the ultimate goal of “integrating China into the world community as a law-abiding and constructive member.”<sup>43</sup> Komer and others had by this time been

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<sup>42</sup> Telcon, Ball and Bundy, 18 April 1964, Folder China (Peking) [1.21.64-7.22.66], Box 2, George Ball Papers, NSF, LBJ.

<sup>43</sup> Memorandum, Subject: United States Policy Towards Communist China, 22 October 1964, 2, 5, 3, Folder CPR 64 65 66, Robert Komer Papers, NSF, LBJ.

using such language for close to three years. However, two things had changed. First, allied support for U.S. policy was “eroding.” Second, and more pressing, was the situation in South Vietnam. Lack of communication with China seriously inhibited reaching an accommodation with the communists, which was vital because, according to Komer, “the prospects for United States military pacification of Southeast Asia are poor.”<sup>44</sup> Only a “political settlement” could preserve South Vietnam. The key to achieving this aim was to exploit the “natural antagonisms between China and Indochina.”<sup>45</sup> This was an inversion of Rostow’s formula under Kennedy, whereby China and North Vietnam moved in lockstep, and thus Chinese moderation could dictate the same in Hanoi, which also would become the basis for Nixon’s “linkage.” It was a more astute reading of the situation, but also ironic given Komer’s later position as head of pacification programs in South Vietnam.

Chinese intransigence could be broken, and negotiations over Vietnam begun, by unilateral lifting of the travel and trade bans in order to demonstrate good faith. These steps would presumably have a moderating influence on the Chinese, just as previous U.S. hostility had encouraged a matching response from Mao.<sup>46</sup> In a memo sent to McGeorge Bundy a month later, Komer explained his position in greater depth, and dealt with some of the countervailing arguments. Change was inevitable. The goal would be to bring it about as gracefully and swiftly as possible, though these two characteristics were

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid. 6, 7.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid. 8.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid. 9, 10.

in tension due to “domestic politics” and U.S. credibility overseas. As Komer pithily put it, “it is simply unrealistic to expect us to say boldly we were wrong about our China policy,” adding that “great nations don’t win kudos abroad by admitting mistakes.” But this was a purely tactical matter requiring diplomatic finesse. Domestic opinion was shifting in his favor, catching up with views overseas. The trick was to exploit the situation in Vietnam. A display of U.S. strength towards Hanoi would open doors to Beijing. As Komer put it, the U.S. was “escalating to negotiate.” At the same time, the bitter pill of restraining its North Vietnamese ally could be sweetened by intimating an end to overt U.S. opposition to a U.N. seat for the P.R.C., something Komer believed would happen sooner rather than later regardless.<sup>47</sup>

Whereas Komer saw the situation in South Vietnam as essential to China policy, Thomson – though reaching the same conclusions – claimed the recent focus on Hanoi and Saigon was “concentrating on the tail for the dog, rather than the dog itself.” Instead, Thomson attempted to redirect attention back to the eroding of China’s international isolation, particularly in the realm of trade.<sup>48</sup> The U.S. would thus face the worst of both worlds – a hostile China isolated only from the U.S. To prevent this, Thomson urged a series of policy shifts beginning early the next year as part of a new policy of “containment – plus subversion.” By subversion, Thomson meant outreach aimed at “the domestication of Communist China.” Like Komer, Thomson called for lifting the travel

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<sup>47</sup> Komer to McGeorge Bundy, 23 November 1964, 1, 2, Folder China – UN Representation (1964-1966), Box 15, Komer Files, NSF, LBJ.

<sup>48</sup> Thomson to Bundy, Subject: The U.S. and Communist China in the Months Ahead, 28 October 1964, 1, Folder 3, Box 16, Thomson Papers, JFK; also Folder CPR 64 65 66, Box 14, Komer Papers, NSF, LBJ.

and trade bans, as well as a shift to a two-Chinas position in the U.N. Mirroring some of Komer's language about the uncertain effects of this potential shift, Thomson ended by calling for "a groping toward coexistence on the basis of mutual self-interest."<sup>49</sup> He believed such policies would face little concerted domestic opposition, citing as evidence the positive press reception of Hilsman's speech and the lack of congressional opposition to his remarks. As with Komer, these were the same proposals he had put forth under Kennedy, only this time hopefully made more relevant by the passage of time.

From Hong Kong, embassy Consul General Edward Rice backed Komer's and Thomson's policy prescriptions. He focused on the recent nuclear explosion as a spur to greater acceptance abroad "of China as a permanent and major factor on the world scene." However, Hughes differed on both the effects of such a changed policy on preserving South Vietnam as well as the importance of that goal. He predicted the communist Chinese and North Vietnamese "would be tough and uncompromising in any negotiations." But a negative turn of events in Indochina need not have larger effects. Questioning the Domino Theory, he doubted if Thailand would go communist "because one of its neighbors goes."<sup>50</sup> But while these three disagreed over the importance of South Vietnam, they were in lockstep over how to approach the colossus to its north.

Whether such opinions were held by those with actual influence over China policy is somewhat debatable. What is not up for debate is that these officials, whatever

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid. 2, 3.

<sup>50</sup> Airgram, Hong Kong to State, Subject: Communist China and Recommendations for United States Policy, 6 November 1964, Folder Cables Volume 2, Box 238, China CF, NSF, LBJ.

their personal beliefs, did nothing to affect change. Grant wrote remarks to William Bundy in February 1965 which indicated an openness to change, at the rhetorical level in the short-term and potentially also in terms of long-term policy. Grant believed bellicose rhetoric could inflame both Americans and Chinese, making future accommodation problematic. Emphasizing where he differed from Dulles's example, he wrote that "if we proclaim ourselves too emphatically anti-Communist or anti-Chinese-Communist, public opinion at home will make it even harder than now to pursue policies subtle enough for the situation." He couched China's position in a racialized or at the very least Orientalized manner. Claiming Chinese people "are preternaturally sensitive to slights, real or imagined," Grant worried that showing "hostility for its own sake" could lead to a situation where the U.S. would "some day face a China both strong and deeply hostile."<sup>51</sup> To prevent this, "we must be prepared to accord her a degree of dignity," to be conveyed by a softening of U.S. opposition to U.N. admission.<sup>52</sup> This was a clue that Grant was at least unofficially out of step with Rusk, and open to Adlai Stevenson's hope that year for "an accommodation with Communist China" to bring about "peaceful coexistence" between the U.S. and the P.R.C.<sup>53</sup>

Stevenson based his own proposal on foreign opinion, particularly in non-aligned nations where the U.S. was seeking to curry favor. Domestic opinion was a different

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<sup>51</sup> Grant to William Bundy, Subject: Communist China: The Problem of Polarization, 9 February 1965, 4, 5, Folder Guidelines, Directives, Basic Studies 1-5.65, Box 1, ACA Subject Files, Lot Files, RG 59, NARA.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid. 6.

<sup>53</sup> Travel Letter IV, 11 June 1965, 3, Folder 12: Chinese Representation, 1961-1964, Box 340, Series 5: United Nations, 1945-1965, Adlai Stevenson Papers, Mudd Library, Princeton University, Princeton, N.J.

matter, over which there was disagreement. One of Grant's goals was to "bring domestic opinions and our demands upon it closer together," which was more a normative than a factual statement since he was himself making no such demands by seeking to push the policy envelope.<sup>54</sup> Grant's remarks implied the administration feared getting ahead of what the electorate would tolerate. In reality, throughout the Johnson administration, the public led in tolerating policy change, and the president lagged. Evidence contrary to the assumptions of Grant and others in power, while noted, appeared to change no minds.

### **Reading the Tea Leaves**

That evidence, while by no means overwhelming, was accumulating during this period. Robert Blum, then head of the Council on Foreign Relations, informed Marshall Green at the State Department in February 1964 that his organization was planning to commission an extensive and detailed survey on Americans' views of China policy, to be conducted by the Survey Research Center at the University of Michigan. A preliminary survey, essentially a series of focus groups convened by Samuel Lubell Associates, questioned 169 Americans the previous fall. This unscientific investigation seemed to confirm recent polling that a sizable majority of Americans viewed China "as a bigger threat to the United States than Soviet Russia." More tellingly, support for gestures of outreach towards China, such as allowing China to join the U.N., strongly correlated with greater fear of China. Those who feared the Soviet Union more were almost unanimous in their opposition to changes in China policy, while those who feared

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<sup>54</sup> Grant to Green, Subject; Proposed Restatement of U.S. Policy Concerning Communism, 22 October 1964, 3, Folder Guidelines, Directives, Basic Studies 64, Box 1, ACA Subject Files, Lot Files, RG 59 NARA.

China were evenly divided. This despite the fact that participants who feared China expressed that fear in racial terms and described its leaders as “irrational” and “Oriental.” Still, this group also expressed the belief that “China is here to stay and can’t be ignored.”<sup>55</sup> Fear, not hope, appeared to be driving support for policy change among the general public.

The increasing fear of the Chinese as expressed by Gallup polling in 1963 and 1964 was noted by the White House as well. By November 1964, three times as many Americans viewed China as a greater threat to world peace than Russia.<sup>56</sup> The CFR survey of 1,500 respondents conducted in May and June of 1964 also discovered “a widespread fear among Americans that Communist China may attack the United States or may try to rule the world.” Intended to be released only after the election, the results were eventually published as a book in 1966. Yet Blum informed the administration of the major results in August 1964. These included soft majority support for outreach to China, including a two-China policy at the U.N., albeit with a determined and sizeable minority in opposition. Notably, the survey revealed a willingness to support change provided the president proposed such measures. Much of the public appeared to want to be led on the issue.<sup>57</sup> At the very least, the issue was no longer politically radioactive.

That James Thomson would greet these results with enthusiasm was understandable. More curious was Lindsey Grant’s positive response. After receiving the

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<sup>55</sup> Robert Blum to Marshall Green, 7 February 1964, 1-6, Folder 1, Box 16, Thomson Papers, JFK.

<sup>56</sup> Folder Relations with Russia, Box 181, Office Files of Frederick Panzer, Lyndon Johnson Papers, LBJ.

<sup>57</sup> Thomson to Bundy and Komer, Subject: U.S. Opinion regarding Communist China, 21 August 1964, 1-2, Folder CPR 64 65 66, Robert Komer Papers, NSF, LBJ.



survey summary from Thomson, Grant replied that he had “cheered myself hoarse.” He termed the results “further ammunition in the common cause,” and evidence of “the ebbing of public sentiment on the subject.”<sup>58</sup> This reflected a private view on Grant’s part which his policy papers did not in the least represent. Assessing the public mood on the eve of the election, he told William Bundy “the dominant mood had been a confused one seeking for a new and more appealing policy.” Thus, there was an opening for change. However, standing in the way was “Congressional timidity.” Grant proposed leaking some of the results to key members of congress to inspire them to “go out and test the water for themselves.”<sup>59</sup> Nowhere did Grant mention any direct public actions by the administration. Based on the dissonance between these expressed beliefs and his policy statements, Grant appeared to be transferring his own timidity onto other actors.

Others viewed the latest data with more caution. At the end of 1964, a State Department report claimed that while “a substantial segment of articulate opinion” supported ending the travel and trade bans as a prelude to normalization, “a ‘hard core’ majority, however, remain opposed to changes at this time.” Noting both “increasing popular concern about Red China as a threat to world peace” as well as growing support for UN admission, the report highlighted continuing majority opposition to seating the P.R.C. In addition, and in opposition to the opinions of Thomson, Komer, and to some

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<sup>58</sup> Grant to Thomson, undated 1964, Folder 3, Box 16, Thomson Papers, JFK.

<sup>59</sup> Grant to William Bundy, Subject: The US Public’s View of China Policy, 30 October 1964, 2, Folder Guidelines 64, Box 1, ACA Subject Files, Lot Files, RG 59, NARA.

extent Grant, it concluded this remained “a highly controversial, emotional issue.”<sup>60</sup> This no doubt better reflected Rusk’s own view, as well as the administration’s actions during this period, or lack thereof.

Robert Barnett confided to James Thomson in April 1965 that “China policy will be made at the margins for some time ahead.”<sup>61</sup> This assessment concerned the travel and trade bans, as well as diplomatic recognition of Mongolia, which Thomson referred to with clear frustration that June as “tired old chestnuts that have been kicked around in the Government since at least the first months of the Kennedy Administration.” These measures had not been enacted because of repeated conclusions that the time was inappropriate, leading Thomson to exclaim with clear resignation that “I am convinced that ‘now’ is never going to be the right time.” To counter any further excuse-making, Thomson noted how recent U.S. escalation in Vietnam would inoculate the administration against any charges of softness towards Asian communism.<sup>62</sup> It was the rare occasion Thomson was not alone, and had the support of those in greater positions of power and influence. Undersecretary of State William Bundy wrote to Rusk later that month proposing a slight but significant modification of the travel ban in order to allow U.S. scholars to travel to China. He noted how this could both “put the Chinese Communists on the defensive” as well as “nullify domestic criticism on both the right

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<sup>60</sup> Special Report on American Opinion, Department of State, U.S. China Policy 1964, 1-2, Folder 4, Box 16, Thomson Papers, JFK.

<sup>61</sup> Barnett to Thomson, 5 April 1965, Folder 10, Box 16, Thomson Papers, JFK.

<sup>62</sup> Thomson to McGeorge Bundy, Subject: U.S. Initiatives on (1) Travel to China and (2) Mongolia Recognition, 2 June 1965, 1-2, Folder Cables Volume 3, Box 238, China CF, NSF, LBJ.

and the left.” Rusk disapproved the proposal later that month, indicating his lack of support for even the most tentative attempts at softening the policy of isolation.<sup>63</sup>

This steadfastness was best represented by a series of public addresses by State Department officials of escalating rank between early 1964 and early 1966. All reiterated in one form or another Dean Rusk’s February 1964 declaration that “when Mainland China has a Government which is prepared to renounce force, to make peace, and to honor international responsibilities, it will find us responsive.”<sup>64</sup> It was basically a shotgun marriage of Dulles to Hilsman, accepting the possibility of change but putting the onus for starting the process on the other side. Speaking at Harvard in April 1964, Robert Barnett began – as Dulles often had – by noting that “we do not ignore the Chinese Communist regime.”<sup>65</sup> This line was always intended as a rebuttal to those arguing for change who claimed formal isolation equaled de facto denial. Barnett accepted that conditions were changing, particularly in light of the ongoing Sino-Soviet split, and that “Chinese Communist totalitarianism has its Chinese precedents,” indicating the assumption that the P.R.C. took its marching orders from Moscow no longer held official credence.<sup>66</sup> Offering the most tentative hints of future outreach, Barnett claimed U.S. policies were carried out “more in sorrow than in anger,” while

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<sup>63</sup> Action Memorandum, William Bundy to Rusk, 16 June 1965, in *F.R.U.S. 1964-1968, Vol. XXX*, 175-176.

<sup>64</sup> Communist China and the Recognition Issue, Folder Records 1-3.64, Box 1, ACA Subject Files, Lot Files, RG 59, NARA.

<sup>65</sup> Department of State, Press Release, Address by Mr. Robert W. Barnett at ‘The China Conference of the Collegiate Council for the United Nations, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 17 April 1964, Folder 2, Box 16, Thomson Papers, JFK.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.* 2, 5.

warning “we must not mistake future expectations for present reality.”<sup>67</sup> It was Dulles-ism with a human face.

Marshall Green continued this emphasis on the wisdom of continuing containment coupled with isolation in the near-term in two speeches, one in late 1964 and the other early in 1965. He emphasized the regime’s “avowed hostility” and “expansionist” tendencies.<sup>68</sup> Green classified any lessening of this isolation as “premature actions which would weaken free countries.”<sup>69</sup> He noted the “more than 180 diplomatic level talks with Peiping representatives” as Dulles often had in order to dismiss the notion the U.S. had no contact with the Chinese communists.<sup>70</sup> In both speeches, Green predicted change was inevitable, though more likely to take the form of evolving moderation on the part of the ruling party than any overthrow of the Chinese regime.<sup>71</sup> However, the U.S. could do nothing but wait and maintain “strength with patience.”<sup>72</sup> Lindsey Grant referred the Green’s addresses as “educative diplomacy,” yet

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid. 9, 14.

<sup>68</sup> Communist China as a Problem in U.S. Policy Making, Address by Marshall Green, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs, Princeton, New Jersey, 26 February 1965, 1, 4, Folder International Meetings, January-March, 1964, Box 1, Records of Relations to Communist China, 1964-1966, Office of Asian Communist Affairs, Bureau of East Asian Affairs, RG 59, NARA.

<sup>69</sup> Outline of 60-Minute Opening Presentation by Marshall Green at the Ditchley Conference, “US Policy Toward Communist China, 28 November 1964, Folder Guidelines, Directives, Basic Studies 64, Box 1, ACA Subject Files, Lot Files, RG 59, NARA.

<sup>70</sup> Communist China as a Problem in U.S Policy Making, 4.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid. 8, Outline of 60-Minute Opening Presentation, 9.

<sup>72</sup> Communist China as a Problem in US Policy Making, 7.

the only lesson it conveyed was the wisdom of continuity.<sup>73</sup> Public remarks were consistent with Grant's internal policy papers rather than his private hopes. Furthermore, the lack of signaling any prospect for change only served to encourage expectations of maintaining the status quo, enabling those like Rusk who opposed any changes to argue that any new approaches would be jarring and unwelcome.

Even those who internally advocated change spoke out publicly against it. Newly-installed head of INR Thomas Hughes remarked in a speech in December 1965 that "China is recognized as important enough to be denied recognition," as pure and pithy a distillation of Dulles's doctrine as could be enunciated.<sup>74</sup> For his part, in February 1966 William Bundy cast doubt on the very sort of attempts at increased person-to-person contact he had proposed the previous June, noting how "the Chinese have kept the door tightly barred," essentially blaming the enemy for its isolation. He also ridiculed the notion that a U.N. seat would moderate the regime as "neurosis" theory, using language associated with those who opposed change rather than those who supported it.<sup>75</sup> In terms of what this rhetoric emphasized about the administration's thinking, these speeches were a great leap backwards from Hilsman, justifying current

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<sup>73</sup> Grant to William Bundy, Proposed Policy Initiatives in the AGA Area in 1965, 18 March 1965, 2, Folder Records 1-3.64, Box 1, ACA Subject Files, Lot Files, RG 59, NARA.

<sup>74</sup> Address by Thomas L. Hughes, Director of Intelligence and Research, Department of State, at the Annual Banquet of the Air Force Intelligence Reserve, Bolling Air Force Base, Washington, D.C., 15 December 1965, 6, Folder China – Background Material (1 of 2), Box 328, Office Files of Frederick Panzer, Papers of Lyndon Johnson, LBJ.

<sup>75</sup> Speech, William Bundy, "The United States and Communist China," Pomona College, Pomona, California, 12 February 1966, 9, 8, Folder Bundy, William and McGeorge, Box 42, Stanley Hornbeck Papers, Hoover. George Taylor used similar if more colorful language to oppose John Fairbank's March Senate testimony.

policies rather than hypothesizing about openings for possible alterations. The tone would soon change, but only under substantial outside pressure which revealed that the restraining nature of public – and particularly congressional – opinion was vastly overstated. The executive branch needed to be led into leading.

### **Watching, Waiting, and Not Hoping**

Two outside issues also encouraged continuity. The first – China’s failure to sufficiently increase its support for U.N. admission – had the negative effect of making sudden change unnecessary. The second – the deteriorating situation in South Vietnam – had the positive effect of making any changes appear counterproductive to regional stability. The possibility of a negative outcome in the U.N. had been an argument for policy change since the first days of the Kennedy administration. The question was a classic choice of “fight-or-flight.” Harlan Cleveland, in an October 1964 member entitled “The Taming of the Shrew,” argued for the former. He cast doubt on whether UN membership would “tame” the Chinese communists, and pointed out how that its neighbors feared admission. Even though they regarded it as inevitable, they did not welcome it, and thus it was in the United States’s interest to do all it could to delay the day of reckoning.<sup>76</sup> Grant presented the contrary argument to Bundy, pointing out its imminent impracticality by predicting “almost certain defeat” in the fall of 1965. Instead, Grant proposed a “two Chinas” compromise.<sup>77</sup> David Dean predicted the P.R.C.

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<sup>76</sup> Memo, Harlan Cleveland to William Bundy, Subject: Communist China and the United Nations, 4, Folder Chinese Representation 10/65, Box 290, Country File – United Nations, NSF, LBJ.

<sup>77</sup> Grant to William Bundy, Subject: U.S. Position on Chinese Representation, 15 November 1964, 7, 9, Folder UN and World Organizations 1964, Box 2, Subject Files, Office of Asian Communist Affairs, 1961-1973, RG 59, NARA.

would gain a majority, forcing the U.S. to invoke the “Important Question” motion in order to require a two-thirds vote and thus prevail with minority support.<sup>78</sup> That year witnessed the first tie vote on the matter, meaning the Important Question motion remained unused, sparing the U.S. that loss of dignity. In response, Thomson and Komer lobbied McGeorge Bundy and Lyndon Johnson respectively to focus instead on preserving Taiwan’s status in 1966, effectively conceding the matter of P.R.C. admission.<sup>79</sup> Komer swiped aside any worries about objections from the Republic of China by claiming “the Chinats are still our prisoners.”<sup>80</sup> Ultimately, this too could be deferred, largely because of the severe blow to China’s image occasioned that upcoming summer by the explosion of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution.

While the Chinese would be denied trade or a U.N. seat, they could not be denied influence along their borders. The need to contain Chinese-sponsored expansion in Southeast Asia had been reinforced by Kennedy’s officials, although at that time part of their motivation was the perceived ease with which this could be accomplished, given the combination of Chinese weakness during the Great Leap Forward and the perceived stability of Diem’s rule. After Diem’s assassination and China’s partial recovery, the argument stood, even if the goal now required a far greater effort. Rostow wrote to Rusk in January 1964 – when U.S. military personnel were still in an advisory role – to

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<sup>78</sup> Dean to Fearey, Chinese Representation, 18 August 1965, , Folder UN and World Organizations 1964, Box 2, Subject Files, Office of Asian Communist Affairs, 1961-1973, RG 59, NARA.

<sup>79</sup> Thomson to McGeorge Bundy, Subject: China Policy Discussion With Your Brother, 1, Folder Memos Vol. 5 (1 of 2), Box 239, China CF, NSF, LBJ; Komer to Johnson, Open door for Red China?, 2 March 1966, 1, Folder 6, Box 7 (2 of 2), CO 50: China, White House Central Files, Johnson Papers, LBJ.

<sup>80</sup> Komer to Johnson, Ibid.

emphasize the need to prove the Chinese hope for “Wars of National Liberation is not viable” lest they be encouraged to undertake future adventurism in the region.<sup>81</sup> The press presented similar arguments, *U.S. News* reminding its readers in 1964 that “Red China is the real enemy,” while Adlai Stevenson wrote in *Newsweek* in 1965 that the goal in Vietnam was to contain “Chinese expansionism.”<sup>82</sup>

This led to a balancing act whereby enough force would be applied to preserve South Vietnam but not enough to encourage direct Chinese military intervention, so that the unhappy Korean experience would not be repeated.<sup>83</sup> Some thus concluded that a successful end to the conflict could only come through a negotiated settlement with the North Vietnamese, since with any attempt at military victory “we will almost certainly find ourselves at war with Communist China.”<sup>84</sup> A September 1965 report noted “Peiping’s extensive program to prepare the country politically, militarily, and economically for war with the United States growing out of the Viet-Nam conflict.”<sup>85</sup> Opponents of the war such as Walter Lippmann argued the risk was not worth the reward. In early 1966 he compared taking a stand against Asian communism in Saigon

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<sup>81</sup> Rostow to Rusk, Subject: Southeast Asia and China, 10 January 1964, 2, Folder Memos Vol. 1 (1 of 2), Box 237, China CF, NSF, LBJ.

<sup>82</sup> “Who Is The Real Enemy in Vietnam?” *U.S. News & World Report*, 1 June 1964, 33; “Why Hold the Line in Vietnam? Adlai Stevenson’s Answer,” *Newsweek*, 27 December 1965, 20.

<sup>83</sup> James G. Hershberg and Chen Jian, “Reading and Warning the Likely Enemy: China’s Signals to the United States about Vietnam in 1965,” *International History Review*, Vol. 27, No. 1 (March 2005), 47.

<sup>84</sup> The Risks of the Present Course, 10 February 1965, 9, Folder Memos Vol. 2, Box 237, China CF, NSF, LBJ.

<sup>85</sup> Visit of Chinese Minister of Defense Chiang Ching-Kuo, Background Paper, Political-Military Situation of the Mainland, 21-28 September 1965, 1, Memos Vol. 4 (1 of 2), Box 238, China CF, NSF, LBJ.



to trying to defeat European communism by drawing the line at the defense of Bucharest.<sup>86</sup> But internally, the administration believed it was successfully erring on the side of caution.

A greater challenge than avoiding a shooting war with the Chinese was seeking to drive wedges between the Chinese and Soviets on the one hand and the Chinese and the North Vietnamese on the other. In April 1965, the C.I.A. believed it could detect the beginnings of a Sino-Vietnamese split similar to the recent Sino-Soviet split due to Chinese insistence on a more aggressive and conventional North Vietnamese military strategy.<sup>87</sup> This proved incorrect on both counts, since it was the Chinese who objected to North Vietnamese aggressiveness, although this disagreement did not lessen Chinese support at a level which could have aided the U.S. effort appreciably. The Rand Corporation had a better sense of the nature of Chinese strategy and how it affected relations with the North Vietnamese. While some in the press disagreed – *Newsweek* calling it “China’s blueprint for the conquest of the world” – they recognized that Lin Biao’s “Long Live the Victory of the People’s War!” manifesto was less a radical call to arms than a statement of the limits of Chinese power.<sup>88</sup> The acknowledgement of these limits created “sharp differences between Peking and Hanoi.”<sup>89</sup> Regarding the Soviets,

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<sup>86</sup> Walter Lippman, “Confrontation With China,” *Washington Post*, 15 February 1966, Folder China 66-68, Box 329, Panzer Files, Johnson Papers, LBJ.

<sup>87</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, Directorate of Intelligence, Research Staff, Intelligence Memorandum, Peiping-Hanoi Differences Over Doctrine And Strategy For the Viet Cong, 2 April 1965, 20, 1, Folder Memos Vol. 2, Box 238, China CF, NSF, LBJ.

<sup>88</sup> “Blueprint for Conquest,” *Newsweek*, 20 September 1965, 37.

<sup>89</sup> George C. Denney to Rusk, Subject: Rand Corporation Thesis that Lin Piao Article Calls on Viet Cong to Revamp Military and Political Strategy, 3, Folder General Foreign Policy, January 1966-April 1966,

Ambassador to the U.S.S.R. Llewelyn Thompson worried a U.S. loss in Vietnam might end the Sino-Soviet split.<sup>90</sup> This added yet another reason to take a stand. As for exacerbating their existing estrangement, Douglas Cater proposed to the president early in 1966 that the U.S. feign interest in outreach to China as a means of creating “anxiety” in Moscow.<sup>91</sup> At this point, serious outreach to Beijing in order to preserve South Vietnam was not seriously considered. The goal was containment while keeping the war limited.

The predominant assumption which buttressed the case for containment was that China’s military posture was fundamentally defensive. Thus, in the words of John Lacey in February 1964, China’s “reluctance” to directly fight the U.S. meant his government could “step up the pace of its military effort in the area without risking unacceptable levels of retaliation.”<sup>92</sup> A C.I.A. report claimed this to be the case so long as the Chinese did not have the capability to deliver a nuclear weapon.<sup>93</sup> Thomson reinforced past assumptions of Chinese strategic “caution.”<sup>94</sup> While cautious, the Chinese remained

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Box 1, Records of Relations to Communist China, 1964-1966, Office of Asian Communist Affairs, Bureau of East Asian Affairs, RG 59, NARA.

<sup>90</sup> Memcon, Department of State, Subject: Meeting on China Study, 27 August 1965, 4, Folder Special State-Defense Study Group Re: China, Box 61, Agency File, NSF, LBJ.

<sup>91</sup> Cater to Johnson, 17 January 1966, 1, Folder CHICOM – Sino-Soviet Relations, Box 1, Alfred Jenkins Files, NSF, LBJ.

<sup>92</sup> Airgram, Hong Kong to State, 21 February 1964, 4-5.

<sup>93</sup> Chinese Communist Military Doctrine, Special Report, Central Intelligence Agency, Office of Current Intelligence, 17 January 1964, 2, 8, Folder Memos Vol. 1 (1 of 2), Box 237, China CF, NSF, LBJ.

<sup>94</sup> Thomson to Bundy, Subject: Check List for the Far East, 24 August 1964, 1-2, Folder Thomson Memos, Box 8, Name File, NSF, LBJ.

opportunistic, hence the need to hold the line in South Vietnam.<sup>95</sup> As George Ball put it to journalist James Reston, China sought to expand its reach “on a limited liability basis.”<sup>96</sup> How far the Chinese would go if given the opportunity remained an open question. Lindsey Grant wrote to his superior Marshall Green to argue for China’s “larger and ambitious world view” driven more by ideology than national interest.<sup>97</sup> Green assented and forwarded his sentiments to Rusk, adding for effect that “the example of Hitler should forewarn us that it is always dangerous to assume that people do not mean what they say they mean.” While seeking to counter the longstanding argument that China’s bite did not match Mao’s bark, Green added the caveat that “direct and naked aggression against their neighbors does not fit their pattern,” clearly differentiating communist China from Nazi Germany.<sup>98</sup>

The crucial determinant of Chinese restraint was lack of capability. China was decades away from becoming an industrial power. In the short term, the C.I.A. claimed the Chinese economy “continued to flounder in 1963” despite the end of the Great Leap Forward.<sup>99</sup> Recognition of Chinese stagnation after economic near-collapse did lead to

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<sup>95</sup> Airgram, Hong Kong to State, China’s Major Problems Affecting U.S. Policy, 4, Folder Cables Volume 5, Box 239, China CF, NSF, LBJ.

<sup>96</sup> Telcon, Ball and Reston, 2, 1 March 1977, Folder China (Peking) [1.21.64-7.22.660, Box 2, Ball Papers, NSF, LBJ.

<sup>97</sup> Grant to Green, Subject: How Aggressive Are The Chinese Communists?, 30 June 1964, 2, 3, Folder 2, Box 16, Thomson Papers, JFK.

<sup>98</sup> Green to Rusk, Subject: How Aggressive Are the Chinese Communists?, 2, 30 June 1964, Folder 2, Box 16, Thomson Papers, JFK.

<sup>99</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, Office of Research and Reports, Economic Intelligence Report, Little Chance of Communist China Regaining Economic Momentum, April 1964, 1, Folder Vol. 1 (2 of 2), Box 237, China CF, NSF, LBJ.

certain assumptions which, while appearing logical at the time, proved to be quite incorrect. The foremost error was the belief that that the Chinese populace, particularly Chinese youth, were ideologically spent, increasingly apathetic, and impervious to Mao's motivations. British journalist Felix Greene reported "a considerable lessening in 1963 of the dynamism" he had observed in previous visits.<sup>100</sup> The C.I.A. claimed in late 1965 that the regime "is unable to arouse the population from its political apathy," and that even Mao admitted "the coming generation lacks the revolutionary zeal that brought the present leadership to power."<sup>101</sup> Not only did the C.I.A. fail to foresee the Cultural Revolution – which was understandable – it also incorrectly placed Mao's lieutenants on the ideological spectrum, claiming Deng Xiaoping and Lui Shaoqi belonged to "the radical grouping," while Chou Enlai and Chen Yi formed a "moderate" faction.<sup>102</sup> Still, that same memo did correctly foresee that "the succession may turn out to be disorderly."<sup>103</sup> The issue of succession proved crucial to U.S. policy makers, since few expected change in the relationship to occur while Mao remained in power.

Most did not expect change even then, at least while the generation which came to power with Mao remained. A State Department report in early 1964 predicted that the

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<sup>100</sup> Memcon, James Thomson, Felix Greene, Robert W. Barnett, Subject: Felix Greene's Travels on Mainland China, 23 April 1964, 3, Folder Memos Vol. 1 (1 of 2), Box 237, China CF, NSF, LBJ.

<sup>101</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, Office of Current Intelligence, Special Report: Popular Attitudes and Morale in Communist China, 17 December 1965, 1, 2, Folder Memos Vol. 5 (1 of 2), Box 239, China CF, NSF, LBJ.

<sup>102</sup> Intelligence Memorandum, Central Intelligence Agency, Subject: The Chinese Communist Leadership and the Succession Problem, 19 March 1964, 4, Folder Memos Vol. 1 (1 of 2), Box 237, China CF, NSF, LBJ.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.* 10.

regime's legitimacy was contingent upon "the necessity to wage unremitting struggle against the influence of the United States."<sup>104</sup> In Hong Kong in 1965, John Holdridge called Mao's potential successors "a tough-minded and intractable crew" who would prevent any easing of tensions so long as they remained alive.<sup>105</sup> Holdridge did note a western ambassador visiting from the mainland expressed his past hope "that a more positive approach could be implemented to follow up the beginning made in the Hilsman speech." But even this ambassador believed such actions would only lay the ground work for improving the U.S. image for future generations of Chinese leaders, and thus promised no short-term reward.<sup>106</sup> As best the U.S. could tell, any outreach would be more likely to compromise containment by indicating weakness than lessen Chinese aggressiveness by showing reasonableness. China remained a problem rather than an opportunity.

With regards to Chinese capabilities, many in the media begged to differ. *Newsweek* noted in early 1964 how the Chinese were emerging from their diplomatic isolation regarding non-communist nations, and a year later observed that for the time being they were besting the Soviets in their rivalry for influence in the Communist Bloc.<sup>107</sup> In addition, to some observers the nation appeared well on its way to internal

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<sup>104</sup> Chinese Capabilities and Intensions, 3, Folder International Meetings, January-March 1964, Box 1, Records of Relations to Communist China, 1964-1966, Office of Asian Communist Affairs, Bureau of East Asian Affairs, RG 59, NARA.

<sup>105</sup> Airgram, Hong Kong to State, Observations on Developments in Communist China by Western Ambassador to Peiping, 7 April 1965, 1, Folder Cables Volume 3, Box 238, China CF, NSF, LBJ.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.* 2.

<sup>107</sup> "China: The East Wind Gains Force," *Newsweek*, 17 February 1964, 43; "Red China: An Insistent Presence," *Newsweek*, 15 March 1965, 36.

economic recovery from the Great Leap Forward.<sup>108</sup> Typifying how this fear of rising Chinese power could lead some to call for rapprochement was a June 1964 commencement address at St. John's University by Claire Boothe Luce, the wife of *Time-Life* publisher Henry Luce and a former ambassador in her own right. In this address, Luce worried that a rising China, if isolated, "might turn desperately aggressive," telling the students that if this proved to be the case "your generation will know nothing but endless war in the Orient."<sup>109</sup> This showed calls for policy change could be bipartisan. When Committee of One Million Secretary Marvin Liebman worried the 1964 Democratic landslide would lead to adverse changes in China policy, the leading liberal China hard-liner Paul Douglas wrote Liebman that "I do not believe that it is fair to continuously imply that the Democrats are soft on communism and want to appease Red China. Clare Booth Luce is not a Democrat."<sup>110</sup> Yet such calls for change proved to be few and far between at this time, in large part because of a series of devastating diplomat setbacks for the Chinese in 1965, particularly the Indonesian coup and extermination of that nation's large – and pro-Chinese – communist party, as well as U.S. direct military intervention in Vietnam. The conservative weekly *U.S. News*, which staunchly opposed policy change at this time, trumpeted China's weakness in late 1965

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<sup>108</sup> Roland Berger, "Walking on Two Legs, *Nation*, 16 November 1964, 352; "Red China: An Insistent Presence, 36-38.

<sup>109</sup> "The Future of Half the World," *Time*, 26 June 1964, 34.

<sup>110</sup> Douglas to Liebman, 2 December 1964, Folder Committee of One Million – Correspondence, Box 22, Emmet Papers, Hoover.

and early 1966.<sup>111</sup> The pressure appeared to be off, and supporters of the existing policy thought they had achieved a respite.

Yet the calm proved deceiving, because a new set of actors were about to enter the scene. Before 1966, scholars had remained on the sidelines. The administration considered outreach, and some of them made tentative preparations for this, but little occurred. James Thomson informed McGeorge Bundy late in 1964 of the worrisome “communications gap between the working level of China specialists on the one hand and the highest levels of government on the other.”<sup>112</sup> Others in the administration also recognized this as a problem, but for reasons that did not directly involve China policy. In June 1965, as the U.S. military presence in South Vietnam rapidly increased in numbers and responsibility, Rostow proposed scholarly consultation for the “primary stated purpose” of getting advice and knowledge from these experts, but with “a secondary (and unstated) objective” of “influencing the views of those who are skeptical concerning our policy.”<sup>113</sup> Already at this early stage in the war, policy makers sensed a rift between the universities many of them came from and the policies they were enacting, and wanted to do what they could to heal it.

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<sup>111</sup> “Red China: ‘Paper Tiger’?,” *U.S. News & World Report*, 25 October 1965, 40; “Rays of hope for U.S. in Asia,” *U.S. News & World Report*, 6 November 1966, 25; “How Dangerous is Red China?,” *U.S. News & World Report*, 4 April 1966, 29.

<sup>112</sup> Thomson to McGeorge Bundy, Subject: Some New Years Reflections on U.S.-China Policy, Folder 13, Box 16, Thomson Papers, JFK.

<sup>113</sup> Rostow to William Bundy, Subject: Possible Consultation with Selected Far East Academics, 7 June 1965, 1, Folder US Public Opinion, Records of Relations to Communist China 1964-1966, Office of Asian Communist Affairs, Bureau of East Asian Affairs, RG 59, NARA.

For their part, the scholars appeared grateful for the official attention. After Averell Harriman visited Cornell University in May 1965, historian John Mellor wrote that “there is a sense through much of the academic community” that their knowledge was “not being exploited sufficiently.”<sup>114</sup> A week later, Cornell historian and noted China expert Knight Biggerstaff penned a letter, signed by numerous members of his department, thanking Harriman for his efforts to “reestablish communication between the American university community” and the makers of U.S. foreign policy.<sup>115</sup> The State Department desired to extend this outreach, Harold Jacobson suggesting William Bundy begin “undertaking a more intensive effort to maintain regular contact with the Academic community,” especially China experts.<sup>116</sup> But such efforts remained theoretical. Scholars also refrained from going public with their objections to existing Far East policies. However, in the final days of 1965 Jacobson noted the formation of the National Committee on U.S. China Policy. While recognizing this group, led by Berkeley professor Robert Scalapino, was officially “educational in nature” and did not explicitly advocate policy positions, he understood that the academics involved

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<sup>114</sup> John W. Mellor to Harriman, 11 May 1965, Folder 17: Correspondence 1960-1963, Box 19, Knight Biggerstaff Papers, Division of Rare Books and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library, Ithaca, N.Y.

<sup>115</sup> Biggerstaff to Harriman, 17 May 1965, Folder 7: Correspondence 1963-1965, Box 20, Biggerstaff Papers, Cornell.

<sup>116</sup> Harald W. Jacobson to Bundy, Continuing Contact with Academic Community on U.S. China Policy, 9 December 1965, 1, Folder Guidelines, Directives, Basic Studies 65, Box 1, ACA Subject Files, Lot Files, RG 59, NARA.



“obviously believe that certain changes in current US policy are necessary.”<sup>117</sup> One of the creators of the NCUSCR, and its future leader, was Doak Barnett.

The Committee of One Million had worried about the influence of professors pushing for policy change since Scalapino co-wrote the Conlon Report for Fulbright in 1959. Yet in 1964 and 1965, they were largely complacent on this front, and preoccupied with tacking against unfavorable ideological winds. The fundamental tension within the Committee was that its right-wing leadership believed it imperative for it to appear bipartisan, and maintain support across partisan and ideological lines at least within the halls of congress. Speaking before the Democratic National Convention Platform Committee in 1964, Connecticut Senator Thomas Dodd – one of two Democratic senators in the Committee of One Million’s inner circle – argued that admitting China to the UN was not a partisan issue, being “favored by only a tiny handful of liberals and a tiny handful of conservative businessmen.”<sup>118</sup> Yet the recent electoral defeats of so many Committee supporters in congress had to be made good. Christopher Emmet argued the changing political climate called for a more “moderate” Committee in both personnel and posture, with even William F. Buckley conceding that at that moment “a large

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<sup>117</sup> Jacobson to Bundy, Subject: National Committee on US China Policy, 23 December 1965, 1, Folder Guidelines, Directives, Basic Studies, Box 1, ACA Subject Files, Lot Files, RG 59, NARA.

<sup>118</sup> Statement to be delivered in (sic) behalf of the Committee of One Million by Senator Thomas J. Dodd before the Democratic National Convention Committee on Resolutions and Platform at 2 p.m. on Wednesday, August 19, 1964, Washington, D.C., 2, Folder Committee of One Million General/non-printed material, 1960-1967, Box 177, Judd Papers, Hoover.

majority of the Country is not Conservative.” Thus, the Committee’s current image as a right-wing organization “handicaps” its effectiveness.<sup>119</sup>

Emmet proposed to Douglas that he recruit a moderate Republican to help balance the Steering Committee. The senator he had in mind was Hugh Scott, since the Pennsylvanian had opposed Goldwater and “is a fighting moderate Republican.” Emmet considered Kentucky’s Sherman Cooper, who while being more liberal than Scott “over the whole spectrum of his voting record,” was viewed as insufficiently anti-Communist.<sup>120</sup> By the end of the month, Scott had come aboard.<sup>121</sup> None of the feared pressure for policy change came to pass during the height of liberal power in congress that year, and by late summer Liebman fretted about “the difficulty of maintaining public interest,” as reflected in even lower fundraising totals than usual.<sup>122</sup> But this complacency would soon be shattered.

### **Breaking the Silence**

Senator Fulbright seemed like a logical candidate to do the shattering. In previous years, he had attempted more than any member of congress to change China policy, which still was not much. He commissioned the Conlon report in 1959 and

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<sup>119</sup> Emmet, Memorandum on Marvin Liebman and The Committee Of One Million, 6 January 1965, Folder Committee of One Million 1965 (2), Box 1199, Paul H. Douglas Papers, Chicago History Museum, Chicago, Il.

<sup>120</sup> Emmet to Douglas, 5 January 1965, 1, 3, Folder Committee of One Million 1965 (2), Box 1199, Douglas Papers, CHM.

<sup>121</sup> Memorandum, Liebman to Steering Committee, 29, January 1965, 1, Folder Steering Committee, Box 24, Liebman Papers, Hoover.

<sup>122</sup> Memorandum, Liebman to Steering Committee, Re: Brief Report (January 1 – August 31, 1965) and Recommended Program for Balance of Year, 31 August 1965, Folder Steering Committee, Box 24, Liebman Papers, Hoover.

lobbied Rusk in 1961 to allow scholars to travel to China. However, he had never spoken publicly on the matter before reading Kennan's article. Two weeks later, in a speech at Southern Methodist University in Dallas entitled "Bridges East and West," Fulbright quoted extensively and with attribution from Kennan's text, particularly his assertion that no regime was incapable of change. Fulbright proposed nothing concrete in this speech, talking vaguely of "building bridges" in the hopes that "perhaps in ten or twenty years" the U.S. relationship with Communist China could be similar to current relations with the Soviet Union, involving communication, negotiation, and the exchange of ideas.<sup>123</sup> This was the most tentative of policy statements. In fact, it was not really one at all. Fulbright explicitly ruled out diplomatic recognition or UN membership "at present," and did not directly address the travel and trade bans.<sup>124</sup> Thus, Fulbright's remarks received little notice.

In a speech exactly one year later in New Zealand, Fulbright's language, while being no more specific, was nonetheless more insistent. Again, he quoted from the Kennan piece on the likelihood bordering on inevitability of change and moderation within the Chinese regime. With that in mind, it was time for the U.S. "to take a chance that China will change." This "gamble" was worth the risk because "China is too big to be isolated." It was already the leading power in the region, and "its strength is

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<sup>123</sup> "Bridges East and West," Southern Methodist University, 8 December 1964, 9, 4, 8, Folder Bridges East and West, Box 24, Series 72, Fulbright Papers, Arkansas.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.* 9

growing.”<sup>125</sup> Compared to his Dallas address, this speech placed far more emphasis on China’s potential menace. That nation was currently in the midst of “profound and uncompromising chauvinism.” Hopefully, the albeit-still-unspecified U.S. attempts at outreach would help lessen this condition.<sup>126</sup> The speech was also notable for the appearance of Fulbright’s “arrogance of power” slogan, here referenced as “the arrogance of wealth and power” felt not by the U.S. alone, but by “the West” as a whole. Still, at this stage Fulbright chose not to break significantly from the Cold War consensus, maintaining that as the U.S. attempted to reach out to the Chinese communists “it remains necessary to contain” Chinese power.<sup>127</sup>

Perhaps the situation in Vietnam played a role in this shift. However, Fulbright’s continued insistence on containment casts doubt upon this assumption, as did his failure to even allude to the expanding conflict which he would soon oppose. It was noteworthy that Fulbright’s “Bridges East and West” speech occurred months before Operation Rolling Thunder, indicating his growing support for outreach to the Chinese might not be have been entirely predicated on the Vietnam War. A potential additional outside influence to Kennan, and one which Fulbright encountered between his two speeches, was a lengthy report sent to him by Michigan State University Anthropologist R.A. Drews. This May 1965 essay was a curious mix of backward-looking Social Darwinism

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<sup>125</sup> “The Commonwealth and the United States in Eastern Asia, Parliament, Wellington, New Zealand, 8 December 1965, 4-5, Folder “The Commonwealth and the U.S. in Eastern Asia” (12/8/65), Box 25, Series 72, Fulbright Papers, Arkansas.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.* 3.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.* 7, 6.

and forward-thinking grand strategy. Drews began by asserting the violent upheavals and mass deaths experienced by the Chinese between the mid-19<sup>th</sup> and mid-20<sup>th</sup> centuries had improved the “genetic make-up” of the Chinese population like none other in the world, weeding out the weak and making it a superior race. Drews forecast a high probability of imminent war between China and the U.S., and predicted this war would take on “racial overtones.”<sup>128</sup> To prevent such a war between the white and non-white races, the latter of which would be led by a China “rapidly emerging as the champion of the non-white nations of the world,” the only sensible option was “to learn all that can be learned about our potential enemy” and try to deescalate the conflicts between the U.S. and the Chinese. The alternative was the “present course” which “leads with almost absolute certainty to an escalation of our difficulties with China.”<sup>129</sup> Détente with the Chinese therefore had an expiration date which was fast approaching.

The dangers of a confrontation with China over Vietnam were recognized even by those who supported the status quo with the Chinese communists. Senator Douglas, who compared abandoning Vietnam to pre-World War II appeasement and warned of “the fatal day when the entire nation must sacrifice all to keep the enemy from our gates” also worried that bombing Hanoi would risk driving the North Vietnamese “into

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<sup>128</sup> R.A. Drews, “The Position in Which the U.S.A. Finds Itself: The China Problem, May 1965, 5, 12, Folder 8, Misc. Speeches – Research Material (Foreign Policy), Box 5, Series 74, Fulbright Papers, Arkansas.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid*, 19, 20.

the dominance of Red China.”<sup>130</sup> Even he supported a negotiated solution, expressing his hope in February 1966 that the measured use of U.S. force would “bring this matter to the negotiating table.”<sup>131</sup> There was little if any policy difference on South Vietnam between those on opposite sides of the China policy issue. Both saw the need to contain but not provoke China.

“There is no other single question of American foreign policy which enjoys widespread public support as does our China policy,” Marvin Liebman boasted to Senator Russell Long on 5 March 1966.<sup>132</sup> Three days later, Fulbright’s Foreign Relations Committee would commence hearings which would begin to erode this consensus among the public and in the halls of congress, beginning the Committee of One Million’s downward spiral. Liebman recognized the danger of hearings, particularly those like Fulbright’s where the testimony of academics who supported significant policy change predominated. He warned such well-publicized, authoritative, and adversarial presentations “would have a morale-shattering effect.”<sup>133</sup> Liebman made this comment with reference to a House subcommittee hearing earlier that year which received little press attention and entertained only the most minor of policy alterations. Fulbright’s efforts promised to have a much higher profile. In a Sunday morning

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<sup>130</sup> Douglas to William W. Williamson, 13 September 1965, Folder Communist bloc (1965), Box 590, Douglas Papers, CHM; Douglas to Raymond A. Scott, 14 December 1965, Folder Asia – 1966, Box 589, Douglas Papers, CHM.

<sup>131</sup> Douglas to H.L. Rupp, 15 February 1966, Folder International – Asia, Jan and Feb 1966, Box 588, Douglas Papers, CHM.

<sup>132</sup> Liebman to Long, 5 March 1966, Folder Senator Jacob L. Javits, Box 21, Liebman Papers, Hoover.

<sup>133</sup> Urgent Memorandum, Liebman to Steering Committee, Re: Congressional Hearings on Red China, 25 January 1966, Folder Steering Committee, Box 24, Liebman Papers, Hoover.

television interview on the eve of the hearings, Fulbright expressed his hope that the expert testimony would “educate myself, the members of my Committee and the American public on China.” He made clear this goal was not entirely neutral in terms of policy, decrying the “taboo that has existed” around the issue since the McCarthy Era. According the Fulbright, “heretofore it has been considered unpatriotic to even discuss it.”<sup>134</sup> Like Hilsman before him, Fulbright recognized that silence could only favor the status quo, which like Hilsman he had come to oppose, if not quite yet knowing what should replace it.

Fulbright began the hearings by obliquely referencing Vietnam as an inspiration for their timing, discussing his fears of war between China and the U.S. He claimed that as a southerner he could sympathize with China’s past military defeats and “Century of Humiliation” in a way Americans from other parts of the country could not. But just as Dixie’s “hot-headed romanticism” led to the tragedy of the Civil War, China’s bellicosity could do the same. The senator hoped his efforts could begin a process by which this could be avoided.<sup>135</sup> Perhaps because such concerns were widespread at the time, the television networks provided live coverage of the testimony of Fulbright’s first two witnesses, Doak Barnett on 8 March and John Fairbank two days later. This provided unprecedented public exposure for their views, as Fulbright had intended. As also intended, it meant the agenda would be set by those who like Fulbright wanted to upend existing policy. Barnett made the most of this, calling for a shift from seventeen

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<sup>134</sup> ABC’s Issues and Answers, 6 March 1966, Folder “Issues and Answers,” 3/6/66, Series 72, Box 25, Fulbright Papers, Arkansas.

<sup>135</sup> Statement of William Fulbright, 7 March 1966, 1, 8, Folder 1, Box 17, Thomson Papers, JFK.

years of “containment and isolation” to a new policy of “containment without isolation.”<sup>136</sup> In the short term, this would entail lifting the travel and trade bans and acquiescing to U.N. admission. Following Barnett two days later, Fairbank focused more on history than policy, yet found time to reiterate Barnett’s prescriptions, arguing the goal would be “manipulating Peking into an acceptance of the international world.”<sup>137</sup> Isolation, on the other hand, could only foster continued fanaticism. The press proved largely supportive, the *Christian Science Monitor* calling the lack of “new or imaginative or more supple thinking” on China policy since the early 1950s “regrettable.”<sup>138</sup> Doris Fleeson of the *Washington Star* hoped the hearings would help avert the “collision course with China” she believed the Vietnam War had initiated, but worried Johnson would try to shut down debate yet again.<sup>139</sup>

Both Barnett and Fairbank offered their support for the Vietnam War, the former arguing it made rapprochement not look like weakness, and Fairbank – albeit with some reservations – viewing the war as a continuation of a necessary grand strategy of containment extending from South Korea through Taiwan to South Vietnam. James Thomson noticed this fact and trumpeted it within the administration. He told Jack

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<sup>136</sup> Statement of A. Doak Barnett, United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, 8 March 1966, 2, 12, Folder 38, United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations (1), Box 5, George Taylor Papers, Washington University, Seattle, Wa.

<sup>137</sup> Statement by Professor John K. Fairbank for the Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, 10 March 1966, Folder 38: United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations (1), Box 5, Taylor Papers, Washington.

<sup>138</sup> “Toward understanding China,” *The Christian Science Monitor*, 9 March 1966, Folder Asia 1966 (1), Series 48, Subseries 11: Asia, Box 35, Fulbright Papers, Arkansas.

<sup>139</sup> Doris Fleeson, “Debate on China Long Overdue,” *Washington Star*, 12 March 1966, Folder Asia 1966 (1), Series 48, Subseries 11: Asia, Box 35, Fulbright Papers, Arkansas.



Valenti at the White House that “we are in luck” with Fulbright’s selection of star witnesses, and hoped outreach to such sympathetic scholars could “bridge” the developing “chasm” between the administration and academia.<sup>140</sup> Richard Wilson of the *Washington Evening Star* agreed, declaring that “President Johnson is finally getting his intellectual rationale for the war in Viet Nam from highly qualified sources in the academic world.”<sup>141</sup>

After the first week of televised testimony had concluded, Valenti wrote the president to inform him “I am trying to stay in touch with historians, writers and others who communicate their views,” and hoped to meet soon with Barnett. The presidential aide even forwarded Johnson the suggestion he “take the offensive away from Fulbright” by endorsing his and any other attempts to educate the American people on China.<sup>142</sup> It appeared the administration was finally being roused from its slumber on this issue. Thomson wrote Bill Moyers that Barnett’s and Fairbank’s argument for “containment – yes, isolation no” provided “a useful and memorable shorthand for describing a rational policy.”<sup>143</sup> Since Thomson had long argued for such an approach, this was hardly surprising. Vice-President Hubert Humphrey’s public endorsement of this approach certainly was. On “Meet The Press” that Sunday, Humphrey announced that henceforth

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<sup>140</sup> Thomson to Komer and Valenti, Subject: The Fulbright China Hearings, 8 March 1966, 1-2, Folder 1, Box 17, Thomson Papers, JFK.

<sup>141</sup> Richard Wilson, “The China Experts vs. The Critics,” *Evening Star*, 15 March 1966, Folder 2, Box 17, Thomson Papers, JFK.

<sup>142</sup> Valenti to Johnson, 10 March 1966, Folder CO 50-2: People’s Republic of, 11/23/63-5/16/66, Box 22, White House Country Files, Johnson Papers, LBJ.

<sup>143</sup> Thomson to Moyers, 14 March 1966, Folder 3, Box 17, Thomson Papers, JFK.

the administration would support a policy of “containment without necessarily isolation,” clearly borrowing Barnett’s phrase.<sup>144</sup>

Editorial pages across the nation seized on these words as a sure sign of a shift in the administration’s China policy largely because, in the wake of the hearings, they hoped that would be the case. Reflecting on the phrase “containment without isolation,” the *Minneapolis Tribune* asked “can we hope that those three words sum up a new U.S. China policy?”<sup>145</sup> The *Denver Post* and *Detroit Free Press* claimed Humphrey had changed administration policy with his words alone, whether or not that was his intention.<sup>146</sup> Only staunchly conservative outlets such as the *Dallas Morning News* and *Fort Worth Star Telegram* voiced objections, worrying that change implied weakness and uncertainty.<sup>147</sup> If not the inauguration of a new policy, it was “at least a welcome beginning.”<sup>148</sup> As with the positive press reactions to Hilsman’s San Francisco speech, the press focused – as Fulbright hoped – on the breaking of a code of silence on China policy. Editorial writers claimed “the unmentionable has been mentioned,” “a long and stultifying taboo seems to have ended,” and China was no longer “like a porcupine”

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<sup>144</sup> *Wichita Eagle*, “HHH on Red China,” 16 March 1966, 4A, Folder 2, Box 17, Thomson Papers, JFK.

<sup>145</sup> *Minneapolis Tribune*, “A New Policy Toward Red China?,” 15 March 1966, 4, Folder 2, Box 17, Thomson Papers, JFK.

<sup>146</sup> *Denver Post*, “New China Policy Deals With Reality,” 15 March 1966, 16, *Detroit Free Press*, “Humphrey Has Mentioned The Unmentionable Idea,” 15 March 1966, 6A, both in Folder 2, Box 17, Thomson Papers, JFK.

<sup>147</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, “Thorny Question,” 15 March 1966, *Fort Worth Star Telegram*, “Red China Policy To be Headache,” 15 March 1966, 6, both in Folder 2, Box 17, Thomson Papers, JFK.

<sup>148</sup> *Providence Journal*, “The Administration Eases a Bit on China,” Folder 2, Box 17, Thomson Papers, JFK.

which had resisted “being picked up for examination.”<sup>149</sup> That these sentiments had to be repeated more than two years later showed how little had changed in the interim.

Richard Wilson noted that Dulles-era policies were nowhere close to being changed, but believed Humphrey’s endorsement of Barnett’s phrase “makes possible a rational discussion” of East Asian policy, helping to engender future change.<sup>150</sup>

Within the administration, long-time advocates for such changes were split between hope and worry. Thomson, as could be expected, represented hope. Noting the lack of negative press reaction, he argued to Komer that Johnson should exploit this opportunity to push for change.<sup>151</sup> But Komer called Humphrey’s remarks “rather premature,” and worried any policy shift at that time “would be risky.” Merely urging Johnson to be open to greater flexibility, Komer was concerned primarily with whether any shifts on China strengthened or weakened the U.S. position in Vietnam.<sup>152</sup> For the time being, as with the Hilsman speech, Rusk had the last, and contradictory, word. Testifying before Zablocki’s House Subcommittee two days after Humphrey’s remarks, he made clear nothing had changed. The paramount policy goal remained doing “nothing which encourages Peiping” to think that aggression would be rewarded. Rusk denied

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<sup>149</sup> *Detroit Free Press*, “Humphrey Has Mentioned The Unmentionable Idea,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, “The Debate About Mainland China,” 15 March 1966, Chalmers M. Roberts, *Washington Post*, “China Policy . . .,” A15, all in Folder 2, Box 17, Thomson Papers, JFK.

<sup>150</sup> Richard Wilson, “The China Experts vs. The Critics,” *Washington Evening Star*, 16 March 1966, Folder China 66-68, Box 329, Panzer Files, Johnson Papers, LBJ.

<sup>151</sup> Thomson to Komer, Subject: Press Reaction to the Vice President’s Comments on China, 21 March 1966, Folder CO 50-2: Peoples’ Republic of, 11/23/63-5/16/66, Box 22, White House Country Files, Johnson Papers, LBJ.

<sup>152</sup> Memorandum, Komer to Johnson, “Staying Loose on China Policy,” 14 March 1966, in *F.R.U.S. 1964-1968, Vol. XXX*, 273-274.

there was any growing scholarly consensus that policy needed to change, asserting that “experts do not always agree.”<sup>153</sup> Thomson wrote on a press clipping the next day that Rusk’s testimony represented the “End of Honeymoon.”<sup>154</sup> Senator Fulbright expressed his own hope afterwards that “possibly we may make some impression upon the Secretary of State before we are through,” and that “the hearings have at least opened up the subject for discussion.”<sup>155</sup>

The press suspected the professors’ testimony would bring about a sea change in administration policy in order “to meet China’s future power.”<sup>156</sup> As *U.S. News* put it, “clearly, Sinologists are having their day.”<sup>157</sup> Some worried these academics were in fact becoming too powerful. Focusing on Asia scholars in particular, Sociologist Lewis Feuer claimed “for the first time, the Government recognizes intellectuals as a special status and interest group,” adding that “the Intellectual Elite is trying to assert itself as a self-conscious force in the making of decisions by the government.”<sup>158</sup> Recent scholarship has noted a change in administration policy toward Barnett’s “containment without

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<sup>153</sup> Rusk Testimony before House Subcommittee, 16 March 1966, 19, 2, Folder 4, Box 17, Thomson Papers, JFK

<sup>154</sup> AP wire report, 17 March 1966, Folder 3, Box 17, Thomson Papers, JFK.

<sup>155</sup> Fulbright to Gene Farmer, 22 March 1966, Folder Asia 1966 (1), Box 35, Series 48, Subseries 11: Asia, Fulbright Papers, Arkansas.

<sup>156</sup> “U.S. starts rethinking policies on Red China,” *U.S. News & World Report*, 12 March 1966, 41.

<sup>157</sup> “China – ‘through a glass darkly,’” *U.S. News & World Report*, 23 April 1966, 60.

<sup>158</sup> Lewis S. Feuer, “The Elite of the Alienated,” *New York Times Magazine*, 26 March 1967, 202.

isolation” after the March 1966 hearings.<sup>159</sup> Victor S. Kaufman found “little willingness to change” policy before the hearings and their positive reception in the forum of public opinion.<sup>160</sup> Thus, the event proved to be a watershed, achieving a breakthrough where Hilsman’s speech had only established a beachhead.

While the media, the professors, the senators, and administration officials had their say, the question remained what if any impact the hearings had on the general public. Early evidence indicated that, unlike Hilsman’s speech, the professors’ words had begun to focus attention on China and change some minds on policy towards the regime. A Mutual Broadcasting System survey found 54 percent of Americans were aware of the Fulbright hearings.<sup>161</sup> A Harris survey at the end of the month discovered that, for the first time, “a majority of the American people favor wide-ranging rapprochement with Red China,” specifically diplomatic recognition and U.N. admission on a Two-China basis. In general, this majority wanted greater contact with communist China so long as it was not at the expense of maintaining the existence of an autonomous Taiwan.<sup>162</sup> How to thread such a needle would bedevil U.S. policy makers for more than a decade afterwards, and in some ways well beyond then, but this represented an

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<sup>159</sup> Matthew Jones, ““Groping Toward Coexistence’: US China Policy during the Johnson Years,” *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, Vol. 12, No. 3 (September 2001), 185.

<sup>160</sup> Victor S. Kaufman, “A Response to Chaos: The United States, the Great Leap Forward, and the Cultural Revolution, 1961-1968,” *Journal of American-East Asian Relations*, Vol. 7, Nos. 1-2 (Spring-Summer 1998), 82-83.

<sup>161</sup> The American Consensus Report, Folder 7, Box 17, Thomson Papers, JFK.

<sup>162</sup> The Harris Survey by Louis Harris, 27 March 1966 1, 3, Folder 7, Box 17, Thomson Papers, JFK.

important shift in public opinion, significantly less nebulous than the prior CFR survey results.

But the hearings themselves had the greatest effect on the Senate itself by emboldening liberals in both parties to speak out without fear of backlash. Self-described “progressive” Republican Jacob Javits had a long if intermittent affiliation with the Committee of One Million, though this had not prevented him from in 1965 expressing heretical support for seeking out “ways to open the door somewhat,” including a relaxation of the travel and trade bans.<sup>163</sup> Now, however, he became much bolder. In a speech twelve days after Barnett’s testimony, Javits called for “containment but not isolation of the Chinese people.” At this time, he couched the need for a new policy as necessary for both avoiding direct Chinese intervention in Vietnam and achieving a negotiated solution. Only by “trying to bring Communist China into the community of nations” could South Vietnam be preserved. To save Saigon, the U.S. must go to Beijing.<sup>164</sup>

### **Hurry Up, Then Wait**

Javits’s defection revealed the possibility that China policy could remain a bipartisan issue – except in exactly the opposite manner the Committee of One Million wanted it to be. The liberals might become ascendant in congress, and the conservatives

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<sup>163</sup> RKO Broadcasting, “In Search of a Solution: Communist China,” 6 January 1965, Folder 1/6/65: In Search of a Solution: Communist China, Box 3, Series 1, Subseries 1, Jacob Javits Papers, State University of New York – Stony Brook, Stony Brook, New York; Javits to Liebman, 31 March 1965, 2, Folder Senator Jacob L. Javits, Box 21, Liebman Papers, Hoover.

<sup>164</sup> Remarks, Javits, “China and the Peace of Asia, Annual Masonic Dedication Service, New York, N.Y., 20 March 1966, 1-3, Folder 3/20/66: China and the Peace of Asia, Box 36, Series 1, Subseries 1, Javits Papers, Stony Brook.

isolated. The legislative branch would no longer be a hindrance to policy change, as Barnett had previously assumed and the executive branch still believed. It might, in fact, lead the way. The China Lobby picked up upon this shift. Liebman focused on the increasing boldness of academics, noting their “current intensified and well-publicized efforts to change present American policy toward Red China.” While not commenting on the Javits speech, or directly addressing the hearings, Liebman did lament Senator William Proxmire’s recent resignation from the Steering Committee.<sup>165</sup> It was the first of what would prove to be multiple defections in the years to come.

In its coverage of the hearings, the *National Review* ruefully argued with respect to Fairbank that “one of the ironies of the situation lies in the fact that those very people who in large measure are personally responsible for the political disaster on the Chinese mainland are today hailed as experts by the communications media, the universities and important members of the Congress.” The magazine called Barnett’s slogan “the now fashionable euphemism for appeasement.”<sup>166</sup> The handful of scholars sympathetic to the China Lobby remained collegial with the new stars of the scholarly majority, however. George Taylor, who gave the most eloquent and convincing arguments against Barnett and Fairbank at the hearings, nonetheless complimented Barnett on his “pretty

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<sup>165</sup> Memorandum, Liebman to Steering Committee, Re: Press Release and other matters of immediate importance, 21 March 1966, 1, Folder Memorandum sent to all members of Steering Committee, Box 72, Liebman Papers, Hoover.

<sup>166</sup> “Introduction” by Theodore Lit, Folder 18: “Four Against the Red China Lobby,” Box 6, Taylor Papers, Washington.

impressive show.”<sup>167</sup> In his warm response, Barnett concluded that their policy disagreements centered around “judgments about the possibility of influencing the Chinese Communist leaders and their policies in the future.”<sup>168</sup> Stanley Hornbeck wrote Barnett that he believed ending isolation would “be erosive to the policy of containment.”<sup>169</sup> Barnett disagreed, arguing that an effective policy required both a “carrot” and a “stick.”<sup>170</sup>

In the end, of course, Barnett would win the policy argument. But that day remained more than five years distant. What had changed during the previous two-and-a-half years was that the forces for change, while nowhere near triumphant, had coalesced and made themselves heard. In the past, they had remained isolated and ineffective. But Hilsman’s speech begat Kennan’s article which directly convinced Fulbright first to speak out himself and then to offer a venue for others to do the same. This in turn would in the months ahead inspire Johnson to publicly address the issue, and to do so in a manner which gave aid to the forces for change. There remained two complicating outside factors. The first was the Vietnam War. While its successful resolution could – and would – be used to justify changing U.S. China policy, the fact that hundreds of thousands of U.S. troops were fighting China’s neighbor and ally and that U.S. bombs were dropping near China’s southern border could not help make the Chinese eager

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<sup>167</sup> Taylor to Barnett, 5 April 1966, Folder 39: United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations (2), Box 5, Taylor Papers, Washington.

<sup>168</sup> Barnett to Taylor, 28 April 1966, Folder 39: United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations (2), Box 5, Taylor Papers, Washington.

<sup>169</sup> Hornbeck to Barnett, 8 April 1966, 1, Folder Barnett, A. Doak, Box 25, Hornbeck Papers, Hoover.

<sup>170</sup> Barnett to Hornbeck, 28 April 1966, 1, Folder Barnett, A. Doak, Box 25, Hornbeck Papers, Hoover.



negotiating partners. Working against rapprochement even more strongly were events inside China. Just as the Fulbright hearings created opportunities for outreach inside the U.S., the Cultural Revolution was squelching them. Over time, those within the Johnson administration sympathetic to policy change would realize the chance had passed them by before they even seriously considered taking it. However, the debate within the U.S. had decisively changed. For the first time, those supporting existing policies were on the defensive. The events of these years thus helped ensure that when the Chinese saw the need for change, those in power in the U.S. would not only notice, but welcome this reality.

## CHAPTER V

### WAITING FOR THE GREAT LEAP FORWARD: THE CHANGING POLITICAL CLIMATE ON CHINA POLICY BETWEEN FULBRIGHT'S HEARINGS AND NIXON'S ELECTION

“We are willing to foster peaceful relations, if Communist China is.”<sup>1</sup>

“The Red Guards are getting into more trouble than Stokely Carmichael and SNICK.”<sup>2</sup>

Chiang Kai-shek's regime in Taiwan could never be described as a contented ally. Even during the supposedly halcyon days of the Eisenhower administration, when its most ardent supporters held senior positions, there was considerable friction and occasional mistrust. But by the spring of 1966, the worries among leaders in the Republic of China became more pronounced than ever. That April, U.S. officials noted “serious concern in GRC about eventual drift of US policy toward greater accommodation with Communist China.” While leadership on the island claimed to still trust the Johnson administration, they had their doubts about the American public. Noting the ongoing “domestic US policy debate,” they wondered how much longer the present American policy so favorable to their interests could be maintained. The Fulbright hearings had gotten Chiang's attention, with the slogan “containment without

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<sup>1</sup> William Bundy to Rusk, Subject: A New Approach to Our Trade and Transaction Controls Against Communist China, 3 October 1966, 2, Folder 4, Box 443, Harriman Papers, LOC.

<sup>2</sup> Rostow to Johnson, 16 September 1966, Folder Memos Volume 7 (3 of 3), Box 240, China CF, NSF, LBJ.

isolation” becoming the “center of much of this discussion.” To highlight their opposition to Doak Barnett’s proposed strategic shift, newspapers on the island used a Chinese translation of “containment” which was a synonym for “isolation,” allowing the officially-backed journalists to attack “faulty US logic.”<sup>3</sup>

The Taiwanese were correct to focus on words emanating from outside the White House and their effect on the general public. The March 1966 Fulbright hearings proved to be the beginning of a national conversation. According to a one-hour prime-time NBC special entitled “Dragon at the Crossroads,” “China-watching, once the esoteric pursuit of a few academicians and government officials, has become a national pastime. China policy is debated with a passion usually reserved for such topics as the length of women’s skirts.” Helping to foster this debate were events within China, particularly the beginnings of the most radical and public phase of the Cultural Revolution. Coupled with China’s indirect involvement in the Vietnam War, these mystifying and frightening events gave the acquisition of knowledge from behind the Bamboo Curtain an added urgency. To quote NBC correspondent Welles Hangen, “the most frightening thing about Communist China has always been our ignorance of it.”<sup>4</sup> Events within China would soon begin to repeatedly put that assertion to the test, as well as limit the options for fruitful policy change. Rostow’s point man on China at the National Security Council Alfred Jenkins may have written in August 1966 when arguing for policy change and

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<sup>3</sup> Telegram From the Embassy in the Republic of China to the Department of State, 6 April 1966, from *F.R.U.S. 1964-1968, Volume XXX, 279*.

<sup>4</sup> NBC News Special, “Dragon at the Crossroads: Communist China Today and Tomorrow, WNBC, 9-10pm, 12 July 1966, 2, Folder Asia 1966 (2), Box 35, Series 48, Subseries 11: Asia, Fulbright Papers, Arkansas.

refinement that “a semi-demented, Mao-led Communist China is perhaps the world’s toughest and most urgent problem.”<sup>5</sup> Yet how could one deal effectively on a diplomatic level with a “semi-demented” regime?

These forces combined to move China policy during the second half of Johnson’s presidency on two tracks. To be more accurate, as the policy debate among the general public accelerated, the policy itself remained unchanged. Events within China reinforced the caution of Johnson and his officials. Yet within the U.S. itself, actions by members of congress forced Johnson to take an unprecedented public stand in favor of eventual change, which in turn pushed the debate forward. By the 1968 campaign to replace Johnson as president, China policy change had ceased to be a political lightning rod and was now a potential issue to be exploited. This was a sea change from all previous elections since 1952. Johnson helped to facilitate this change, but remained content with that limited historical role on this matter. What Jenkins termed “our near non-policy” on China remained precisely that.<sup>6</sup> Those such as Jenkins who supported incremental change realized there had been a chance only well after they believed that chance had passed. Meanwhile, the argument that U.S. military involvement in Vietnam inoculated the administration against charges of softness if it reached out to China diplomatically became the predominant viewpoint. This encouraged a late push to remove travel and trade restrictions. Rusk, as always, stood in the way. But his methods during this period indicated that even he recognized the tide was turning. The Secretary of State’s remarks

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<sup>5</sup> Jenkins to Rostow, Subject: Mainland Developments Demand a Clearer U.S. Policy, 3 August 1966, 1, Folder Chicom General, Box 1, Alfred Jenkins Files, NSF, LBJ.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. 5.

became more measured, and even hinted at the inevitability of change. Internally, he shifted from open negativity to passive delay. Rusk sought to wait out the supporters of change in the short-term, seemingly knowing they were content to wait him and his ilk out in the long-term. All involved waited on Mao's China to signal a desire to reengage the world in a productive manner.

Events occurring during the second half of Johnson's administration confirmed a decisive shift in support for changing China policy, particularly among elites. This shift inspired the president to back rapprochement in his rhetoric, though not in his actions. He also sought the advice of increasingly influential and assertive China scholars, who inspired leading members of congress to call for policy change, isolating support for the status quo among the right-wing rump of the Republican Party. However, with China's embroilment in the Cultural Revolution temporarily stalling the growth of its power, there was a less urgent need for policy change than had been the case earlier in the decade. U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War finally convinced some members of the administration that the road to peace must go through Beijing. But Beijing had for the moment placed itself off limits. These same officials belatedly realized there had been an opportunity for change earlier in the administration. Still, the groundwork had been laid for future progress. When the Chinese would again prove receptive, a future president could count on support from congress and at the very least public acquiescence. The election of 1968 reflected this new situation, as the Democratic candidate pushed for policy change, while his Republican opponent declined to make an issue of this one-time heresy.

## **Confronting an Altered Landscape**

The period between April 1966 and January 1969 witnessed the erosion of the credibility of all past internal arguments against policy change. The media was on the side of change. Polling indicating the public increasingly if still tentatively felt the same way. Most important, congress had gone was an enemy of change to its friend. This left only one credible barrier to changing China policy – the Chinese. That barrier was only hardened. Curiously, the domestic supporters of the status quo were unable to exploit egregious Chinese behavior to reinforce their flagging cause. To a certain degree, this was because events in Vietnam and even in China itself played into their enemy's hands. Since 1961, supporters of policy change used China's growing menace and proven unpredictability as evidence its ruling regime needed to be engaged in an attempt to tame it. Now, the apparent effects of isolation were on vivid display. One could not accurately predict what sort of China would emerge from the cataclysm. But the ongoing course of events indicated it would not be congenial to U.S. regional interests. The risks of change now seemed to outweigh those of standing pat. Again, as in previous years, the administration followed rather than led. The difference was, in this period, the outside pressure finally proved impossible to ignore. Rather than fight senators and reporters and academics, Johnson and his officials sought to bring them aboard or meet them partway.

The internal policy debate occurred in two distinct stages. The first immediately followed the Fulbright hearings, and involved both long-term strategic considerations and short-term tactical policy proposals. The second occurred in the administration's final months, at which point the long-term goal of policy change had effectively been

accepted by all involved and the debate revolved around the timing of removing travel and trade restrictions. While coming close to taking these initial actions, Johnson ultimately chose to leave matters entirely to his successor rather than start a process he could not hope to come anywhere near finishing. This course of events seemed on the surface to confirm the *New York Times*'s June 1966 assertion that revising U.S. China policy "is almost as difficult as revision of the Scriptures."<sup>7</sup> The Mosaic figure most committed to defending that which had been written in stone was clearly Rusk. Yet even he appeared to flirt with apostasy in testimony before Zablocki's House Subcommittee weeks after the Fulbright hearings concluded.

At the end of lengthy prepared remarks reiterating the wisdom of present policies, Rusk argued for the need to "avoid assuming the existence of an unending and inevitable state of hostility between ourselves and the rulers of mainland China," and tellingly emphasized that "we should continue to enlarge the possibilities for unofficial contacts between Communist China and ourselves, contacts which may gradually assist in altering Peiping's picture of the United States."<sup>8</sup> What was more, Rusk prefaced this with an acknowledgement of China's destiny to be "a great world power," the peaceful attainment of which the U.S. would not impede.<sup>9</sup> To the untrained or eager ear, Rusk was now singing from the Hilsman Hymnal. The closed executive session testimony was

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<sup>7</sup> "A Policy for China," *New York Times*, 10 June 1966, Folder China 66-68, Box 329, Office Files of Frederick Panzer, Papers of Lyndon Johnson, LBJ.

<sup>8</sup> Statement by the Secretary of State Before the House Sub-Committee on Foreign Affairs, 41 Folder Dept. of State – Leak of Sec. China Testimony Before Zablocki Sub-Committee, Box 61, Agency File, NSF, LBJ.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* 35.

swiftly leaked to Marvin Kalb of CBS, who reported it as the beginning of a new China policy in response to “growing domestic pressure for change, prompted by the war in Viet-Nam, and recent Congressional hearings on China.”<sup>10</sup> Such apparent concessions on Rusk’s part to the shifting political winds left the Chinese Nationalists predictably “dejected.”<sup>11</sup> The Secretary chose not to walk back his leaked remarks, or to lash out at the subcommittee for the leak. However, this new public flexibility would not be matched in his decisive role adjudicating internal policy debates.

In these debates, the ongoing tumult within China appeared to put the wind at least temporarily at the backs of those favoring reform. Edward Rice reiterated the now-familiar call for “a live-and-let-live relationship with China,” warning that failure to move in that direction now would make it “much more likely to get into war with China” in the future,” adding somewhat more hopefully “if we do not now plant the seeds of doubt that this is so were are unlikely to gather their fruit.”<sup>12</sup> Waiting for Mao to die would be to delay too long. Instead, the U.S. must quickly begin removing the trade ban.<sup>13</sup> Jenkins began pressing these themes in late summer. As Thomson’s replacement under Rostow, he became the closest thing the administration would have to a China Hand, and through the new National Security Adviser his opinions frequently reached

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<sup>10</sup> Marvin Kalb, CBS News, 7 p.m., broadcast over radio, 13 April 1966, 1, Folder Dept. of State – Leak of Sec. China Testimony Before Zablocki Sub-Committee, Box 51, NSF, LBJ.

<sup>11</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, Directorate of Intelligence, Intelligence Memorandum: Growing Pessimism Among Nationalist Chinese Leaders, 17 May 1966, 1, Folder Memos Vol. 6 (1 of 3), Box 240, China CF, NSF, LBJ.

<sup>12</sup> Rice to Rostow, Subject: United States Policy Towards Communist China, 15 April 1966, 1, Folder Memos Volume 6 (2 of 3), Box 240, China CF, NSF, LBJ.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. 3.



the president. Alluding to recent events, Jenkins worried about a stronger China a decade in the future which was still “psychotic.” He proposed doing “what we can to get out of the devil’s role which China finds so useful, and do our part to help cure China’s rather alarming psychosis.” Among his proposals was official reference to the regime as “the People’s Republic of China” to indicate a modicum of respect.<sup>14</sup> The psychiatric metaphor was reminiscent of Fairbank’s rhetoric before Fulbright’s committee. He continued in this vein in October, telling Rostow “Asian stability requires a well and sane China, not a sick and violated one.” Looking at the region as a whole, Jenkins argued the improved stability of U.S. allies in China’s vicinity reduced the dangers inherent in reaching out to a powerful adversary.<sup>15</sup>

While there was nothing in Jenkins’s and Rice’s statements which had not been in past memoranda by Thomson, Komer, or for that matter Rice, they were no longer the words of lonely dissenters, as the immediate means for policy change were being endorsed by ever-more-senior officials. Undersecretary of State William Bundy proposed to Rusk in October 1966 that the U.S. lift the trade ban as an indication “to other countries that our position on China is not absolutely rigid.”<sup>16</sup> The proposal had been bandied about within Bundy’s Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs since April. Robert Barnett, who was one of two men immediately under Bundy, endorsed the proposal, but

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<sup>14</sup> Jenkins to Rostow, Subject: Chinese Affairs, 27 August 1966, 4, Folder Chicom General, Box 1, Alfred Jenkins Files, NSF, LBJ.

<sup>15</sup> Jenkins to Rostow, Subject: Attached China Thoughts, 14 October 1966, 3, 4, Folder Chicom General, Box 1, Jenkins Files, NSF, LBJ.

<sup>16</sup> William Bundy to Rusk, Subject: A New Approach to Our Trade and Transaction Controls Against Communist China, 3 October 1966, 6, 2, Folder 4, Box 443, Harriman Papers, LOC.

worried about its political impact, and requested additional polling to gauge public opinion.<sup>17</sup> In June, Barnett argued such a proposal would give meaning to his brother's popular slogan, and again requested the conducting of opinion polling.<sup>18</sup> While Barnett believed congress would be receptive, and a majority of Americans supportive, he still worried about "the vocal minority against any change in our China policy," whom he believed cared about the issue far more than the supportive majority.<sup>19</sup>

The White House was informed in July of a Harris poll showing more than two-thirds of respondents favored lifting the travel ban.<sup>20</sup> A State-NSC China Working Group recommended lifting the travel ban in November, while remaining silent on the trade ban. Only Samuel Berger, sharing the same rank as Barnett, objected due to "unsettled political conditions" in China and fears of "adverse domestic reaction." For his part, Jenkins argued doing nothing was the greater risk in terms of domestic politics. He particularly worried about how it would be received by the academic community.<sup>21</sup> Ultimately William Bundy did not choose at this time to press the matter too intently,

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<sup>17</sup> Memcon, Subject: U.S. Trade and Other Controls Directed at Communist China, 12 April 1966, 6, Folder 8, Box 442, Harriman Papers, LOC.

<sup>18</sup> Memcon, Subject: U.S. Trade and Other Controls Directed Against Communist China, 26 June 1966, 4, 5, Folder 8, Box 442, Harriman Papers, LOC.

<sup>19</sup> Memcon, Subject: U.S. Trade and Other Controls Directed Against Communist China, 21 July 1966, 2-3, Folder 8, Box 442, Harriman Papers, LOC.

<sup>20</sup> Hayed Redmon to Moyers, 11 July 1966, Folder CO 50-2: People's Republic of, 5/17/66 - , Box 22, WH Country Files, Johnson Papers, LBJ.

<sup>21</sup> Jenkins to Rostow, Subject: Lifting Remaining Travel Restrictions on China, 4 November 1966, Folder Chicom General, Box 1, Jenkins Files, NSF, LBJ.

and it was quietly deferred for later. But there was now a clear groundswell among mid-level officials at both the NSC and State for beginning some sort of policy shift.

Even without Rusk's opposition, these proposals suffered from the existence of the negative restraining influence of fast-moving events inside China and the lack of positive inducements to act quickly. As always, the issue was timing, most specifically the timing of the P.R.C.'s admittance to the United Nations. A U.S. loss in the General Assembly had been predicted by proponents of policy change since early 1961, and without it their proposals would have lacked urgency. The tie vote in November 1965 seemed to portend the fateful and long-predicted denouement had finally arrived. That this perhaps occasioned Rusk's changed tone before the Zablocki Subcommittee in April was bolstered by his suggestion to Johnson in May that the U.S. move that fall to a "two-china approach." Recent polling indicated majority support in the U.S. for such a step. Taiwan could be brought on board by reminding them that even if such a motion passed the General Assembly, the Chinese communists would never accept it. It was thus merely a new method to achieve a traditional aim. But a new method was now necessary to avoid allied defections, led by the Canadians.<sup>22</sup> Though Rusk in no way proposed the U.S. actually seek a two-China result, Rostow called the Secretary's proposal "something of a landmark." He even proposed reaching out to General Eisenhower for an endorsement of a larger policy evolution, indicating Rostow believed this portended

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<sup>22</sup> Memorandum From Secretary of State Rusk to President Johnson, Subject: Need for New Tactics on Chinese Representation, *F.R.U.S. 1964-1968, Volume XXX*, 302-303.

additional changes.<sup>23</sup> Ambassador to Japan Edward Reischauer couched the shift as a move to appease world opinion, as well as a way to give substance to “the current semi-official phrase ‘containment without isolation.’”<sup>24</sup>

That such a move was a feint in order to put the onus for hostility on the Chinese was further confirmed by Jenkins’s assessment that “there is no net US advantage to be gained from Chinese Communist participation in the UN’s political organization” at that moment, or for that matter so long as Mao remained in power.<sup>25</sup> This lack of a comprehensive policy framework hurt those like Jenkins who advocated for incrementalism. By itself, lifting the travel and trade bans were hollow gestures. As those who supported the status quo had long pointed out, on a practical level the presence of U.S. citizens on the Chinese mainland required some sort of U.S. diplomatic presence to protect and assist them. Yet the Chinese would surely refuse to give the U.S. these benefits without the promise of getting a U.N. seat in return in the near future. As with the Kennedy administration, no one in the Johnson administration was willing to think in such comprehensive terms. They were content to try making China policy only a little bit pregnant. Subsequent events demonstrated that once the process began, it had to be followed to its logical conclusion. If one was afraid to reap the consequences, they should not attempt to begin matters. So long as the U.N. vote could be relied upon, there

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<sup>23</sup> Memorandum From the President’s Special Assistant (Rostow) to President Johnson, 17 May 1966, *F.R.U.S. 1964-1968, Vol. XXX*, 303.

<sup>24</sup> Reischauer to Rusk, 11 August 1966, Part 3 of 3, 1, Folder 9, Box 442, Harriman Papers, LOC.

<sup>25</sup> Situation in Communist China and United States Policy Alternatives, 5,4, Folder 4, Box 244, China CF, NSF, LBJ.

was no reason to think on such a large and meaningful scale. Like before with the Sino-Soviet split in the early part of the decade, the initial stages of the Cultural Revolution served to reverse Chinese momentum, the Albanian Resolution to seat the P.R.C. in place of the R.O.C. failing in both November 1966 and November 1967 by 11 votes. Mao had granted existing U.S. policy yet another temporary reprieve.<sup>26</sup>

### **Powerhouse or Poorhouse?**

That Chinese power was rising slower than had been expected also played a role. To quote Roger Hilsman, China was that curious amalgam of “an emerging nation” and “a great power.”<sup>27</sup> For most of the 1960s, it displayed more attributes of the former than the latter, lessening the urgency of policy change. As *U.S. News* opined in late 1967, China was “more a poorhouse than a world power – and is likely to stay that way.”<sup>28</sup> Yet no matter how many missteps the Chinese communists took, the assumption among those who favored eventual policy change always was they would get it right eventually, and turn their nation into a fully-fledged great power. The crucial question was when. To help provide an answer, long-time State Department official Joseph Yager was in mid-1966 made head of the Long Range Communist China Study, which was a joint effort

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<sup>26</sup> Information Memorandum From the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for International Organization Affairs (Popper) to Secretary of State Rusk, Subject: The Vote on Chinese Representation, 29 November 1966, in *F.R.U.S. 1964-1968, Vol. XXX*, 469; Information Memorandum From the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for International Organization Affairs (Sisco) to Secretary of State Rusk, Subject: The Vote on Chinese Representation, 28 November 1967, in *F.R.U.S. 1964-1968, Vol. XXX*, 611.

<sup>27</sup> Hilsman to Fulbright, 14 October 1966, 1, Folder Asia 1966 (2), Box 35, Series 48, Subseries 11: Asia, Fulbright Papers, Arkansas.

<sup>28</sup> “Red Chijna: No ‘Yellow Peril’ – Views From Asia,” *U.S. News & World Report*, 4 December 1967, 66.

with the Department of Defense.<sup>29</sup> The group produced an analytical study in 1966, followed by a set of policy proposals based on their analysis the following year. The analysis did not differ from previous assessments by others in government, concluding that over the next decade Chinese leaders would lose their “revolutionary zeal” while making “significant” advances in nuclear weaponry. China’s detonation of a hydrogen bomb the next year, which given the country’s ongoing political anarchy came “as a sobering shock to the rest of the world” according to the *New York Times*, only confirmed this.<sup>30</sup> Looking ahead, this study concluded the paramount U.S. goal should be ensuring that this new, more powerful, more moderate China orient itself “toward the free world rather than toward the Soviet Union.” Only by achieving this end could the U.S. claim “the strategy of containment” to be a success.<sup>31</sup> To put it another way, containment could only work if isolation was abandoned. Continued pursuit of the latter would eventually undo the success of the former.

The proposals offered by the Study Group in 1967 attempted to construct a preliminary road map for encouraging Chinese moderation. They called for the immediate removal of travel restrictions, but the maintenance of trade restrictions until

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<sup>29</sup> Jenkins to Rostow, Subject: Interagency China Country Committee, 14 September 1966, Folder Jenkins Memos (2 of 2), Box 5, Name Files, NSF, LBJ.

<sup>30</sup> “China’s H-Bomb,” *New York Times*, 19 June 1967, Folder China 66-68, Box 329, Panzer Files, Johnson Papers, LBJ.

<sup>31</sup> Communist China – Long Range Study, Prepared by the Special State-Defense Study Group, June 1966, 5, 6, 23, 24, Folder Study Group Volume 1, Box 245, China CF, NSF, LBJ.

the Chinese began offering their own reciprocal concessions.<sup>32</sup> This focus on a long-term process of rapprochement was somewhat new. Previous proposals from erstwhile reformers often expressed an apparent urge to do something new for the sake of change, without expectations this would lead to larger and more substantive alterations. Their primary goal had been to remove internal inertia. As the belief in the value of change moved beyond the likes of Thomson, Rice, and Komer, that was a less pertinent goal. At the same time, how the Chinese would respond to such overtures became a more pressing concern. Here there was inherent tension between the reason outreach was urgent and its probability of success. In fact, in the short-term they were inversely proportional. As Rostow put it to Army Chief of Staff Harold Johnson in April 1967, “a ‘sick’ China constituting a quarter of the earth’s population would be a serious drawback in the attempt to bring about the sort of world which it is basic U.S. policy to fashion.”<sup>33</sup> Yet the “sicker” the Chinese became, and the more hostile their posture, the less favorably they would respond to any softening of the U.S. position towards them.

With this in mind, the consul in Hong Kong emphasized the importance of staying the course for the time being, even though “eventual normalization” was in the nation’s – and the region’s – best interests. This communication also recommended

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<sup>32</sup> EA/ACA, Catalog of Proposals in the Special State-Defense Study Group’s Long Range Study on Communist China, March 1967, 20, 19, Folder CHICOM, China Working Group – 1966-67, Box 1, Jenkins Files, NSF, LBJ.

<sup>33</sup> Rostow to General Harold K. Johnson, 1 April 1967, 2, Folder US Relations, Box 1, Jenkins Papers, NSF, LBJ.

maintaining the trade embargo “so long as the Vietnam war continues.”<sup>34</sup> That the war would end with a U.S. victory was not in doubt within the administration, at least before the Tet Offensive. Rostow predicted to Johnson 15 days before its surprise launch that “Vietnam will be over” by 1971.<sup>35</sup> The China Study Group predicted in 1967 that “well before 1976 major hostilities will have ended in Vietnam, but that guerrilla warfare will still not have been suppressed,” necessitating the continued presence of U.S. combat forces in South Vietnam.<sup>36</sup>

There was no worry such a presence would provoke the Chinese. As of the spring of 1966, U.S. leaders no longer feared Chinese entry into the war, and believed China’s leaders had come to the same conclusion.<sup>37</sup> So long as the existence of the North Vietnamese government remained unthreatened, China would not send combat troops.<sup>38</sup> China’s strategy remained opportunistic but fundamentally defensive in orientation.<sup>39</sup> Rather than inflame Chinese sensibilities, limited war in South Vietnam – successfully and prudently conducted – would have both a restraining and a domesticating influence. This could especially be the case if coupled with attempts at outreach. In August 1966

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<sup>34</sup> Hong Kong to State, Subject, Communist China – U.S. Policy Assessment, 15, 17, Folder Cables Volume 8 (2 of 3), Box 240, China CF, NSF, LBJ.

<sup>35</sup> Rostow to Johnson, Subject: Don’t Mourn, Organize, 16 January 1968, Folder Rostow Memos (1 of 2), Box 7, Name Files, NSF, LBJ.

<sup>36</sup> Catalog of Proposals, 6.

<sup>37</sup> Hughes to Rusk, Subject: Recent Chinese Views on Imminence or Inevitability of War With the US, 29 March 1966, Folder Memos Volume 6 (2 of 3), Box 240, China CF, NSF, LBJ.

<sup>38</sup> The Chinese Equation, 27 April 1967, 2, Folder Chicom General, Box 1, Jenkins Files, NSF, LBJ.

<sup>39</sup> Rostow to Johnson, Communist China’s Military Policy and its General Purpose and Air Defense Forces, 5 May 1967, Folder Cables Volume 8, Box 241, China CF, NSF, LBJ.



Komer proposed extending the Chinese an “olive branch” in order to affirm the U.S.’s “peaceful purposes in Vietnam.” The fact that the U.S. was taking a stand in South Vietnam in fact improved the U.S. bargaining position, allowing its leaders to act from a position of strength.<sup>40</sup> Jenkins had similar thoughts the next month, around the same time he began pushing for significant policy change. He celebrated the “acute embarrassment of Maoism in Vietnam,” and claimed it was solidifying regional political and economic cooperation. Jenkins referred to this regional integration as “a bouncing baby – which could not have been born without Vietnam.”<sup>41</sup>

The same “bouncing baby” imagery could be used for the process of U.S. policy change. The collapse of South Vietnam in 1965 would have meant any future American outreach would have been from a perceived position of weakness, and thus politically unacceptable. On a less hypothetical level, the Fulbright hearings and the accompanying interest in China were driven by the Vietnam War, and fears of Chinese involvement in that war. Without the war, there would have been no hearings, no sparking of debate, no “containment without isolation.” The trajectory of Asia policy, including debates over changing that policy, would have been very different. It is important to remember that all the professors who testified before Fulbright’s committee on behalf of China policy change also offered their support for the Vietnam War. The second was a precondition for the first. This calls into question the notion that McCarthy-era purges of China experts from the State Department opened the door to the Vietnam War. With the

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<sup>40</sup> Komer to Johnson, 16 August 1966, Folder Memos Vol. 6 (1 of 2), Box 239, China CF, NSF, LBJ.

<sup>41</sup> Jenkins to Rostow, Subject: Hardliners and Moderates, 30 September 1966, Folder Chicom General, Box 1, Jenkins Files, NSF, LBJ. Also in Folder Memos Volume 7 (1 of 3), Box 240, China CF, NSF, LBJ.

exception of Alexander Eckstein, all the leading China experts outside government supported going to war to protect South Vietnam from a communist takeover. Had relations between the U.S. and China begun to improve prior to 1965, it is possible the two nations could have worked out some settlement to avert war before the U.S. became directly involved. Since that was not the case, only proxy war could bring them together.

The Vietnam War also demonstrated the dangers of ignoring a powerful China, and the potential benefits of outreach. It thus reinforced the connection between threat and rapprochement. It is tempting to conclude a Democratic administration could not have seized the opportunity due to the lingering “Ghost of ’49.” But the war – fought in part because of fear of that ghost – had also exorcised its presence. Johnson proved his toughness against communism by going to war. The Fulbright hearings, moreover, had driven a stake through whatever lingering McCarthyist specter still hovered over Washington. What held Johnson back was his own diplomatic timidity, Rusk’s intransigence, and the chaotic situation inside China itself.

The two nations would eventually be brought together having been mutually humbled, and looking for relief, the U.S. from Vietnam and the Chinese from the external Soviet threat and self-inflicted internal traumas. Early U.S. reactions to the Cultural Revolution evinced a certain *schadenfreude* combined with allusions to contemporaneous youthful rebellions within the U.S. Rostow joked to the president in September 1966 that “the Red Guards are getting into more trouble than Stokely

Carmichael and SNICK.”<sup>42</sup> (sic) Jenkins in turn told Rostow a year later that “China is putting on one hell of a happening,” and expressed “a certain exhilaration at being a leading determinant” of events, implying U.S. efforts in South Vietnam were exacerbating tensions within the Chinese leadership.<sup>43</sup> Initial reactions were bewilderment and confusion, Rice writing in June 1966 that “at no time in recent years have there occurred on Mainland developments at once so important and so clouded in obscurity as those of the past few months.”<sup>44</sup> What was unmistakable was that these events were weakening the Chinese communists at home and abroad. If the Great Leap Forward had destroyed the image of the Chinese economic model, and failures in Indonesia and South Vietnam the viability of wars of national liberation, then the Cultural Revolution dealt an additional blow to the political allure of the regime to other developing nations. Robert Barnett wrote in May 1967 that, internationally, “the lustre, the model value of this image is over.”<sup>45</sup>

The question then became what, if anything, the U.S. could or should do about it. China’s temporary weakness might offer an opportunity. Jenkins initially believed this to be the case, writing in August 1966 that “mainland events may prove to be exploitable

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<sup>42</sup> Rostow to Johnson, 16 September 1966, Folder Memos Volume 7 (3 of 3), Box 240, China CF, NSF, LBJ.

<sup>43</sup> Jenkins to Rostow, Subject: Attached Memo “The Outlook in Communist China,” 20 August 1967, 3, Folder 6, Box 244, China CF, NSF.

<sup>44</sup> Memorandum From the Executive Secretary of the National Security Council (Smith) to President Johnson, 29 June 1966, from *F.R.U.S. 1964-1968, Vol XXX*, 326-327.

<sup>45</sup> Barnett to Berger, Subject: China Strategy, 11 May 1967, 1, Folder Chicom General, Box 1, Jenkins Files, NSF, LBJ.

sooner than expected,” perhaps “within months.”<sup>46</sup> Jenkins believed the time was “ripe” to move on loosening travel and trade restrictions in order to lessen the dangerous isolation of the Chinese people. Yet by the following April, Jenkins had changed his mind, advising Rostow that “I see little that can be done for the patient until this protracted crisis is over.”<sup>47</sup> Once again, the timing was not propitious. China’s growing self-imposed diplomatic isolation no doubt played a role in closing this potential window of opportunity, Rostow telling Johnson in September 1966 that “today China’s leaders are more inflexible and hostile to the rest of the than they were in 1957.”<sup>48</sup> That same month, Jenkins noted his equivalents at the State Department believed “this is a time for considerable caution on our part.”<sup>49</sup> A conversation with Chinese defector Miao Chen-pai confirmed his newfound caution. Reflecting the emerging consensus within the administration, Miao endorsed “bridge-building efforts” while insisting “China would not reciprocate until the post-Mao era.”<sup>50</sup> Events in China seemed to validate both Mao’s fanaticism and the notion there was no credible partner for the U.S. to parley with in any meaningful fashion.

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<sup>46</sup> Jenkins to Rostow, Subject: Mainland Developments Demand a Clearer U.S. Policy, 3 August 1966, 1, Folder Chicom General, Box 1, Jenkins Files, NSF, LBJ.

<sup>47</sup> Jenkins to Rostow, Subject: Mao’s Mangy Majority, 10 April 1967, Folder Volume 9 (1 of 2), Box 241, China CF, NSF, LBJ.

<sup>48</sup> Rostow to Johnson, The Cost of China’s Commitment in Vietnam, 12 September 1966, 2, Folder 11, Box 212, France CF, NSF, LBJ.

<sup>49</sup> Jenkins to Rostow, Subject: Time for Caution on our Part?, 16 September 1966, Folder Jenkins Memos (2 of 2), Box 5, Name Files, NSF, LBJ.

<sup>50</sup> Jenkins to Rostow, Subject: Conversation with Defector Miao Chen-pai, 8 November 1966, Folder Memos Volume 7 (1 of 3), Box 240, China CF, NSF, LBJ.

Unlike during the Great Leap Forward, speculation about the potential collapse of the regime was limited. As *U.S News* put it during the height of the Red Guards' prominence, it was "a struggle between Communist factions, not a fight to rid China of Communism."<sup>51</sup> The Republic of China told the U.S. Embassy in Taipei that the "GRC can afford to wait for an opportunity that will surely come," reflecting both their continued belief in a return to the mainland and their realization the moment had not yet arrived.<sup>52</sup> On the other hand, Joseph Alsop, who had led the talk of imminent collapse during the Great Leap Forward, predicted to Jenkins in July 1968 – even after the most chaotic parts of the Cultural Revolution had passed and the People's Liberation Army was well on its way to restoring order in the provinces – that "chances are the regime may not hold together through this winter."<sup>53</sup> Academic experts did not share this opinion about communist party rule in general, but some leading lights did incorrectly gauge the firmness of Mao's hold on power. In two October 1966 lectures, Doak Barnett declared "the end of the Maoist era in China is in sight," since China's leaders were "self-consciously defying Mao" at that time.<sup>54</sup> For their part, in 1967 *Time*, *U.S. News*,

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<sup>51</sup> "Mystery of Red China: A Real Blowup Coming?," *U.S. News & World Report*, 23 January 1967, 46.

<sup>52</sup> Telegram From the Embassy in the Republic of China to the Department of State, 5 July 1966, in *F.R.U.S. 1964-1968, Vol. XXX*, 351.

<sup>53</sup> Jenkins to Rostow, Subject: Press Contact, 1 July 1968, Folder Jenkins Memos (1 of 2), Box 5, Name Files, NSF, LBJ.

<sup>54</sup> Press Release, Barnett Lecture at Princeton University, 17 October 1966, 1, Press Release, Barnett Lecture at Princeton University, 20 October 1966, 1, both in Folder 10: China, People's Republic of, 1965-1966, Box 100, Series 5: Subject Files, C.I.A., Allen W. Dulles Papers, Mudd.

and *Newsweek* all questioned the army's loyalty to Mao.<sup>55</sup> These incorrect outside assessments could have been a result of incomplete information, since those inside the government more accurately saw events as a succession struggle under Mao's control. Furthermore, while the chaotic events temporarily impeded the workings of Chinese foreign policy, it was during this period that Mao and other leaders began shifting their own posture to one of support for eventual rapprochement with the U.S.<sup>56</sup>

For the time being, China's cultural status as the greatest geopolitical threat to the U.S. only solidified. The Avengers character Quicksilver no doubt spoke for many in the entertainment industry – particularly actors seeking Asian roles – when he asked in 1965 “why need we concern ourselves with international affairs?”<sup>57</sup> The *Wall Street Journal* reported in October 1966 that the Chinese had not only displaced the Russians as the leading villains in Hollywood, but that Russians were beginning to be “cast as good guys helping American heroes outwit the Orientals.” Mort Fine, a producer of the television show “I Spy” – which was largely filmed in Hong Kong – said Russians were no longer “acceptable as villains anymore” to the general public. In one of that show's episodes, in fact, after defeating an Asian villain, the American protagonists were decorated by Soviet officials for their efforts. Another popular spy show from that period, “The Man From U.N.C.L.E.,” featured a Russian as one of its heroes, while the

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<sup>55</sup> “A Long Way to Go,” *Time*, 24 January 1967, 25; “Out of Chaos: End of An Era for Red China,” *U.S. News & World Report*, 13 February 1967, 36; “Collision Course,” *Newsweek*, 14 August 1967, 44.

<sup>56</sup> Barbara Barnoin and Yu Chenggen, *Chinese Foreign Policy during the Cultural Revolution* (New York: Kegan Paul, 1998), 99.

<sup>57</sup> Stan Lee, “When the Commissar Commands!,” *The Avengers* #18, July 1965, in *Marvel Masterworks: Volume 2, Collecting The Avengers, Nos. 11-20* (New York: Marvel, 2009), 156.

film “The Russians Are Coming” sympathetically portrayed a Soviet submarine crew whose vessel ran aground off the coast of Maine. Khigh Dhiagh, the North African actor who had played the Fu Manchu-esque Wen Lo in “The Manchurian Candidate” and spent his career portraying Asian characters, complained “we’re getting back to the era of the ‘Yellow Menace’” and added “I don’t think this contributes anything to prospects for world peace.”<sup>58</sup> Of course, fear of Chinese power, as expressed in movies and television during the 1960s, did reflect a public sentiment which paradoxically – if belatedly – contributed to, at the very least, a lessening of tensions in Asia.

Compounding this fear, even in the midst of Chinese external weakness and internal chaos, was that nation’s 17 June 1967 detonation of a three megaton hydrogen bomb.<sup>59</sup> The press noted this significant leap in China’s nuclear capability.<sup>60</sup> So did Dean Rusk. At a press conference in October of that year, the Secretary of State talked of a future China with “a billion people on the mainland, armed with nuclear weapons,” possessing an uncertain attitude towards their neighbors and the U.S.<sup>61</sup> Such reasoning was being used at that time in the U.S and abroad not to stoke alarmism – as was Rusk’s intention – but to stress the need for rapprochement. It would soon form one of the pillars of Nixon’s China policy. But Rusk seemed unable to make the necessary counterintuitive leap to connect threat to outreach.

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<sup>58</sup> Norman Sklarewitz, “The New Bad Guys: Orientals Take Over As TV, Film Villains,” *Wall Street Journal*, 12 October 1966, 1.

<sup>59</sup> John Wilson Lewis and Xue Litai, *China Builds the Bomb* (Stanford, Ca.: Stanford University Press, 1988), 244.

<sup>60</sup> “Peking’s Big Blast,” *Time*, 23 June 1967, 27.

<sup>61</sup> “The ‘Yellow Peril’: Old Fear New Policy?,” *Los Angeles Times*, 22 October 1967, F4.

## **Eggheads in the Oval Office**

At this point, academics were only in the earliest stages of collaborating with government officials. Doak's brother Robert noted the State Department led the way in this endeavor, while the C.I.A. was either "indifferent" to or "scornful" of the value of outside expertise.<sup>62</sup> The primary example of this newfound collaboration during the later Johnson administration was the China Advisory Panel. The panel consisted of ten outside experts, eight of whom were professors, and included Doak Barnett, John Fairbank, Alexander Eckstein, and Robert Scalapino.<sup>63</sup> In a 1967 voter guide, the League of Women Voters called 1966 "A Year of Change" for China policy, noting the Fulbright hearings in March, a July speech on the subject by the president, and the formation the advisory panel in December.<sup>64</sup> As the title indicated, it was intended purely to provide advice and expertise, rather than guide policy.<sup>65</sup> The experts met in Washington five times over a two-year period, discussing topics such as the Cultural Revolution, the Vietnam War, Taiwan's future, regional security, and the United Nations. During these meetings, they analyzed classified documents and discussed issues amongst themselves and with officials from the State Department and the NSC.

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<sup>62</sup> Memorandum for the files, Robert W. Barnett, Subject: Meeting with CIA China Specialists, 11 August 1967, 1-2, Folder Chicom General, Box 1, Jenkins Files, NSF, LBJ.

<sup>63</sup> William Bundy to Eckstein, 3 December 1966, 2, Folder China Advisory Panel, State Dept., Corres., 1961-1967, Box 1, Alexander Eckstein Papers, Bentley Memorial Library, Ann Arbor, Mi.

<sup>64</sup> Facts & Issues, League of Women Voters of the United States, September 1967, 1-2, Folder U.S. China Policy, Statements, 1966-1976 (1), Box 6, Eckstein Papers, Bentley.

<sup>65</sup> Guidelines for Conduct of the Panel Meetings, 24 January 1967, 2, Folder China Advisory Panel, State Dept., Miscellanea, Box 1, Eckstein Papers, Bentley.



After their first meeting, Fairbank noted the group was “pretty well homogenized in our thinking.”<sup>66</sup> He described one session to a friend as “a sort of group therapy exercise, barely structured.”<sup>67</sup> Jenkins informed Rostow that at the first two meetings the academics agreed a firm stance needed to be taken in Vietnam, which he found to be a pleasant contrast with his prior contacts with numerous academics.<sup>68</sup> Rusk suggested to Scalapino after the first meeting the panel members offer their thoughts on policy, and by February 1968 Doak Barnett had drafted a memo which reflected the panel’s “general consensus.”<sup>69</sup> They proposed immediate efforts “to bring China fully into the community of nations” and “offer it acceptable alternatives to isolation and belligerency.” These would include immediate lifting of the travel and trade restrictions, and support for U.N. admission.<sup>70</sup>

Rostow proposed the president reject this advice for the time being. Since Mao wanted “us in the devil’s role,” any attempts at softening the present hard line would be

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<sup>66</sup> Fairbank to John Burke, 3 April 1967, 1, Folder China Advisory Panel, State Dept., Corres., 1961-1967, Box 1, Eckstein Papers, Bentley.

<sup>67</sup> Paul M. Evans, *John Fairbank and the American Understanding of Modern China* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1988), 260-261.

<sup>68</sup> Jenkins to Rostow, Subject: Highlights of China Panel Meetings, 3 February 1967, 4, Folder Volume 8, Box 240, China CF, NSF, LBJ; Jenkins to Rostow, Subject: China Panel, 23 June 1967, 2, Folder 9 (1 of 2), Box 241, China CF, NSF, LBJ.

<sup>69</sup> Scalapino to Rusk, 26 April 1967, 1, Folder China Advisory Panel, State Dept.: Corres., 1961-1967, Box 1, Eckstein Papers, Bentley; Reischauer to Johnson, 12 February 1968, Folder 4, Box 244, China CF, NSF, LBJ.

<sup>70</sup> Memorandum on China Policy, 1-2, Folder 31: Rostow and LBJ Paper, Box 5, Taylor Papers, Washington; also in Folder 4, Box 244, China CF, NSF, LBJ.

fruitless as “it takes two to play some games.”<sup>71</sup> Academics such as Barnett thus assumed the role of James Thomson, offering the most extreme acceptable position on the issue. The difference was that, even though unlike Thomson these experts were outside of government, their ideas were given greater consideration due to the changing climate of debate on the issue. Rostow did not argue with the wisdom of their policy recommendations, but only with the timing of their implementation.

There was one dissenter from the liberal academic monolith on the panel – George Taylor of the University of Washington. He wrote his own memo to Johnson detailing the reasons he still opposed any policy changes, quipping about the other panelists “there is nothing quite so funny as a ritualistic liberal trying to appear to be a practical realist.”<sup>72</sup> Though Johnson’s policies followed Taylor’s recommendations and not Barnett’s or Fairbanks’s, administration officials equated academic status with liberalism, and liberalism with competence. In May 1966, William Bundy compiled a list of the leading China scholars for Rusk, categorizing 21 individuals by, among other characteristics, ideology. Bundy grouped scholars into four categories: Liberal, Moderate, Conservative, and “Conservative, but respected.” Only Taylor made it into the fourth category.<sup>73</sup> Jenkins also revealed this assumption when he told Rostow that Franz

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<sup>71</sup> Rostow to Johnson, Subject: Appraisal of China Specialists Memorandum, 22 February 1968, 1, 3, Folder CO 50-2: People’s Republic of, 5/17/66 –, WH Country Files, Johnson Papers, LBJ; also in Folder Memos Volume 12 (1 of 2), Box 243, China CF, NSF, LBJ.

<sup>72</sup> Taylor to Rostow, 14 February 1968, Folder 31: Rostow and LBJ Paper, Box 5, Taylor Papers, Washington; also in Folder CO 50-2: People’s Republic of, 5/17/66 - , Box 22, WH Country Files, Johnson Papers, LBJ.

<sup>73</sup> William Bundy to Rusk, Subject: Possible Panel of Consultants on China, 5 May 1966, 3, Folder Sino 5-6.66, Box 1, ACA Subject Files, Lot Files, RG 59, NARA.

Michael – one of Taylor’s former colleagues at Washington – “is among the more conservative of the academicians with respect to China policy, but is a very competent sinologue.”<sup>74</sup> This orientation could not help but be reflected in the officially non-partisan non-lobby National Committee on U.S.-China Policy. In fact, Eckstein told Johnson in February 1968 that the N.C.U.S.C.R. “constituted an answer to the rigidities represented in the Committee of One Million.”<sup>75</sup> The Committee was quick to recognize the threat posed by this new organization. As early as April 1966, Liebman told Douglas “I feel almost overwhelmed,” adding his group “is simply not able to match this in terms of organization and funds.”<sup>76</sup> He correctly expected the rival group to raise a quarter of a million dollars in its first year of existence, quadruple his own budget.<sup>77</sup>

The N.C.U.S.C.R. had two advantages. First, it was tax-exempt, because unlike the Committee of One Million it did not take overt stands on political issues. Second, it represented what was now the prestigious and respectable side of the debate. McCarthy’s enemies – or at least those his movement had not discredited – could now have their revenge. The problem was, they were winning everywhere but in the actual making of policy. Johnson told the academics he welcomed the debate they were sparking, saying

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<sup>74</sup> Folder Jenkins Memos (1 of 2), Box 5, Name Files, NSF, LBJ.

<sup>75</sup> Jenkins, Memorandum for the Record, Subject: China Experts Meeting with the President, 2 February 1969, 3, Folder Memos Volume 12 (2 of 2), Box 243, China CF, NSF, LBJ.

<sup>76</sup> Liebman to Douglas, 4 April 1966, Folder Committee of One Million, 1966 (4), Box 1198, Douglas Papers, CHM.

<sup>77</sup> Press Release, Committee of One Million, “Challenge Issued to Newly Organized Committee on United States-China Relations, 13 June 1966, 2, Folder Committee of One Million 1966 (2), Box 1198, Douglas Papers, CHM.

to them “we have to keep hammering away at this.”<sup>78</sup> The implication of these remarks was that the president was himself a spectator in this debate, and would prefer to remain so. Even after the setbacks of 1966, Walter Judd boasted about “how much has been accomplished for so relatively little.”<sup>79</sup> Yet if the line was holding where they had feared most – in the Executive Branch – it was long-past breached in their once-strongest redoubt – the halls of congress. Jacob Javits drove this home in December 1966 when he sent the Committee a letter of resignation from the organization. In this letter, he argued “Peking’s threat to world peace is likely to grow in the immediate future, not diminish.” However, it was “precisely because Communist China is a world power” that U.S. policy must shift. Isolation only risked future war.<sup>80</sup> In the letter’s margin, Liebman wrote “no way can contain if don’t isolate,” echoing the Taipei media’s response to Barnett’s phrase.<sup>81</sup>

The senator had left the organization before, and had already committed himself to a series of contrary policy steps back in March, after Barnett’s testimony. But Javits made a point of releasing his letter to the press, and the headline “Javits Disavows Anti-Peking Lobby” appeared on the front page of the *New York Times*. The Committee pointed out Javits’s previous defections – usually shortly after he had secured reelection

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<sup>78</sup> Jenkins, China Experts Meeting, 2.

<sup>79</sup> Fundraising Letter, 17 January 1967, Folder Committee of One Million, Correspondence/Internal 1966-1967, Box 182, Judd Papers, Hoover.

<sup>80</sup> Javits to Committee of One Million, Attention, Mr. Marvin Liebman, Secretary, 14 December 1966, 1-2, Folder Senator Jacob L. Javits, Box 21, Liebman Papers, Hoover.

<sup>81</sup> Javits to Liebman, 14 December 1966, Folder Committee of One Million, Correspondence/Internal 1966-1967, Box 182, Judd Papers, Hoover.

– and speculated this latest instance was inspired by his vice-presidential ambitions.<sup>82</sup> But in trying to paint Javits as a craven opportunist, Liebman effectively conceded that calling for changes in U.S. China policy might now be a political plus, even in the Republican Party. An apostasy based on sincere principle would have been less damaging. Liebman still maintained his group was only up against a “pro-appeasement minority” led by a “Red China Lobby” of disloyal academics, avaricious businessmen, and naïve ministers.<sup>83</sup> To bolster its moderate credentials, and help maintain some ideological balance after Paul Douglas’s defeat in November 1966, Liebman asked John Sherman Cooper to join the Steering Committee two years after deciding he was not worth pursuing. Cooper graciously turned down the offer.<sup>84</sup>

In 1967, other senators began to follow Fulbright’s example, opening up new opportunities for academic experts to exert influence. Democratic Senator William Proxmire, who the previous year withdrew from the Committee of One Million’s Steering Committee during the Fulbright hearings, held hearings on the trade ban in April. The idea had been suggested to him by Javits.<sup>85</sup> In his remarks at the hearings, the

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<sup>82</sup> Confidential Memorandum, Liebman to Steering Committee Re: Senator Jacob Javits’ withdrawal as a Congressional endorser and attendant publicity, 1, Letter to the Editor, Liebman to Los Angeles Times, 29 December 1966, 2, both in Folder Sen. Jacob L. Javits, Box 21, Marvin Liebman Papers, Hoover.

<sup>83</sup> Memorandum, Liebman to Steering Committee, Members and Friends, Re: Report on work and accomplishments: January – December, 1966, 6, Folder 10/10/66: Agenda of Meeting of Steering Committee, Box 75, Liebman Papers, Hoover.

<sup>84</sup> Draft Letter, Committee of One Million Steering Committee to John Sherman Cooper, 6 February 1967, Cooper to Liebman, 15 February 1967, both in Folder Steering Committee, Box 24, Liebman Papers, Hoover.

<sup>85</sup> Senator Proxmire Announces Hearings on the Economy of Mainland China, 19 March 1967, Folder Congressional Testimony Correspondence, 1966-1967, Box 2, Eckstein Papers, Michigan.

New York Republican reiterated his arguments that China was “a first-rate world power,” that there was “precious little time” to change how it wielded that power, and that beginning to trade with the Chinese communists was a good start. Going back to Barnett’s slogan, he hoped ending the trade ban would put “life in phrases like ‘containment without isolation,’” which he feared were fast becoming “an excuse for nothing save their repetition.”<sup>86</sup> The star witness was Michigan economics professor Alexander Eckstein, long considered the foremost U.S. expert on the Chinese economy. He explained how China had shifted its trading patterns during the Sino-Soviet split so that currently 70 percent of its trade involved non-communist countries, meaning the U.S. was doing a poor job of keeping its allies in line. “Depriving American businessmen of any share” of this trade served no purpose save protecting “our self-delusion” about the success of the strategy of isolation.<sup>87</sup> This statistic would become a go-to talking point for members of congress from both parties.

That the trade ban was by that point at U.S. expense and no longer hurting the Chinese had been a mainstay in the press for a couple years. But to have it put so succinctly by a credentialed expert – in fact the credentialed expert – influenced lawmakers as anecdotal evidence from less authoritative sources could not. Perhaps not coincidentally, the hearings occurred as the State Department began a new review of the

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<sup>86</sup> Remarks, Javits, Joint Economic Committee Hearings on the economy of Communist China, 5 April 1967, Folder 4/5/67: Economy of Communist China, Box 38, Series 1, Subseries 1, Javits Papers, Stony Brook.

<sup>87</sup> Statement by Alexander Eckstein before the Joint Economic Committee of the Congress of the United States, 12 April 1967, 8-9, Folder Congressional Testimony Statements: Drafts (2), Box 2, Eckstein Papers, Michigan.

trade ban in light of the preliminary recommendations of the ongoing China Advisory Panel.<sup>88</sup> Doak Barnett wrote Eckstein around this time emphasizing the need for academics to speak out and try to influence policy, particularly on trade.<sup>89</sup> That same day, Barnett penned a letter to Rusk, calling on changes in trade policy as a means “to open the door to increased contacts and reduced tensions.”<sup>90</sup> This did not have any immediate effect, and neither did Proxmire’s hearings, in part because – as with Fulbright – the senator refused to go beyond publicity. The Democratic-controlled Senate saw no need to embarrass their president with symbolic votes calling for policy changes the administration was unlikely to make.

What Democratic senators did feel comfortable doing was speaking out on their own as never before. Edward Kennedy led the way in May 1966, shortly after the Fulbright hearings. At that point, he called for no policy changes, and merely highlighted China’s “imposing presence on the world stage” and U.S. ignorance of that nation. All he called for was “a long-term process of public education,” led by the formation by the president of a “blue-ribbon commission” to make policy recommendations.<sup>91</sup> This was, ultimately, what occurred, though the China Advisory Panel was in the works at least a

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<sup>88</sup> Action Memorandum From the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern and Pacific Affairs (Bundy) to Secretary of State Rusk, Subject: A New Approach to our Trade and Transaction Controls Against Communist China, 29 March 1967, *F.R.U.S. 1964-1968, Vol. XXX*, 541-542.

<sup>89</sup> Barnett to Eckstein, 1 May 1967, Folder China Advisory Panel, State Dept.: Corres., 1961-1967, Box 1, Eckstein Papers, Michigan.

<sup>90</sup> Barnett to Rusk, 1 May 1967, China Advisory Panel, State Dept. Corres., 1961-1967, Box 1, Eckstein Papers, Michigan.

<sup>91</sup> Speech, Edward Kennedy, United States Policy Toward China, 3 May 1966, 1-2, Folder Asia 1966 (2), Box 35, Series 48, Subseries 11: Asia, Fulbright Papers, Arkansas.

month before Kennedy's speech. The White House did see fit to prepare for questions on the subject at an upcoming press conference after additional remarks by Edward Kennedy on 19 July.<sup>92</sup> In March 1967, his brother and fellow senator Robert added to the gathering chorus, mentioning in a speech at the University of Chicago that the Chinese communists should be treated "with respect, dignity, and good will."<sup>93</sup>

If any Democratic senators would have wished to embarrass Lyndon Johnson, it would have been the Kennedy brothers. The same could not be said for Majority Leader Mike Mansfield. Though a one-time professor of Asian history, Mansfield had kept a respectful distance on this issue for many years, softly mouthing the Committee of One Million's party line while never affiliating himself with an organization that would have greatly appreciated his prestige. In June 1966, this began to change. At first, it was in the context of finding a way to preserve South Vietnam. He hoped the administration planned in the near future to "restore some 'bridges' to China," and perhaps invite China to "an Asian conference" on Vietnam similar to one held five years earlier concerning Laos.<sup>94</sup> This was a fairly moderate position at the time, even among senators, and given purely in the context of the Vietnam War. But that war would lead him to lead on the issue of China within two years. A sign of Mansfield's evolution was a letter he wrote to

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<sup>92</sup> Telcon, Ball and Bundy, 20 July 1966, Folder 3: Telcons: China (Peking) (LBJ) 1964-1966, Box 156, Series 5: Telcons, Ball Papers, Mudd.

<sup>93</sup> Ira A. Matthews to Robert Kennedy, 17 March 1967, 1, Folder RFK Memos, Box 5, Name File, NSF, LBJ.

<sup>94</sup> Mansfield, "Vietnam and China: The Shadow of War – The Substance of Peace," Commencement Address at Yeshiva University, New York, New York, 16 June 1966, 10, 12, Folder Speeches, Vietnam and China – Shadow of War – The Substance of Peace, 6-16-66, Box 76, Series 22: Senate Leadership, 1961-1977, Mansfield Papers, Montana.



Johnson in April 1967 stating “the road to settlement with Hanoi now, very likely runs by way of Peking rather than Moscow.” To explore that road, Mansfield proposed “a quiet and conciliatory approach to China.”<sup>95</sup> Rostow reported Rusk’s objection to this notion, and therefore the lack of a need for any conciliatory gestures.<sup>96</sup> Yet the Majority Leader would not be deterred, and within months was offering himself as the bridge, requesting permission to visit Beijing and speak to its leaders during a trip to Japan. Nicholas Katzenbach believed “it is quite mad for Mansfield to think of going” at that of all times, given the tumultuous events within China.<sup>97</sup> Perhaps he had a point. Yet in the years ahead Mansfield would continue to escalate his rhetoric, soon divorcing it from the issue of Vietnam entirely, and continue his attempts to visit the mainland.

### **Johnson Speaks, Then Hesitates**

Amidst all this activity, it is not surprising Johnson decided that he could no longer remain silent. In fact, his decision to speak out predated that of most senators. The press anticipated something was afoot by late May, when Drew Pearson reported that Johnson “has authorized his diplomats to take some radical steps for better understanding in the Far East” because “you can’t ignore a nation of 700 million people.” The steps supposedly under consideration included a minister-level conference, U.N admission, and possibly even diplomatic recognition.<sup>98</sup> Pearson had jumped the gun

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<sup>95</sup> Mansfield to Johnson, Subject: Vietnam, 29 April 1967, Folder Mansfield (1 of 2), Box 6, Name File, NSF, LBJ.

<sup>96</sup> Rostow to Johnson, 30 April 1967, Folder Mansfield (1 of 2), Box 6, Name File, NSF, LBJ.

<sup>97</sup> Rostow to Johnson, 31 July 1967, Folder Rostow Memos (1 of 2), Box 7, Name Files, NSF, LBJ.

<sup>98</sup> Drew Pearson, “LBJ Shows New Faith in Viet Victory,” *Washington Post*, 26 May 1966, F23.

a decade before with similar claims about Eisenhower's supposedly imminent moves on China. But while Johnson was not seriously considering such steps, he was going to – unlike Eisenhower – publically address the issue. This move was inspired by Columbia University Professor Donald Zagoria, who within days of his testimony before Fulbright's committee talked to Jack Valenti about the possibility of a presidential speech on China. It would be the first such presidential address devoted to the subject since the communist takeover.<sup>99</sup> In May, with Valenti's assent, Zagoria wrote a memo directly to the president explaining his reasoning. He argued presidential words of conciliation would appeal to world opinion and put the Chinese on the defensive. Domestically, it would placate liberal critics of the Vietnam War. Zagoria concluded Johnson "would have much to gain and little to lose by taking such an initiative."<sup>100</sup> Valenti was seconded in his efforts by Bill Moyers, who had a back channel to Thomson at the NSC, and played a part in crafting the address's conciliatory language.<sup>101</sup>

In that rare instance of a president taking an academic's advice, Johnson would make that speech in July. In a prime-time televised address entitled "The Essentials For Peace in Asia," Johnson argued "a misguided China must be encouraged toward understanding of the outside world and toward policies of peaceful cooperation." He trumpeted recent U.S. efforts to permit some scholars and doctors to travel to china,

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<sup>99</sup> Valenti to Moyers, 5 April 1966, Folder Memos Volume 6 (2 of 3), Box 240, China CF, NSF, LBJ.

<sup>100</sup> Zagoria to Johnson, Reasons for the President to Make a Speech to the Nation on U.S. China Policy, 1, 2, Folder Volume 6 (2 of 3) Box 240, China CF, NSF, LBJ; also in Folder CO 50-2: People's Republic of, 11/23/63 – 5/16/66, Box 22, WH Country Files, Johnson Papers, LBJ.

<sup>101</sup> James C. Thomson Jr., "On the Making of U.S. China Policy, 1961-9: A Study in Bureaucratic Politics," *China Quarterly*, (June 1972), 239-241.

overtures he noted the Chinese had rejected. His call for “reconciliation between nations that now call themselves enemies” was reminiscent of Abram Chayes’s proposed speech for Kennedy in 1961. As in that address not given five years before, Johnson made no actual policy proposals.<sup>102</sup> That the speech was given showed how much had changed. That its content was so similar showed how little had.

The White House believed Johnson’s speech was well received at home and abroad, putting the Chinese on the defensive while expanding his options but still allowing Johnson to maintain his flexibility.<sup>103</sup> Thomson liked what he saw as the rhetorical forward progress from Barnett’s – and Humphrey’s – “containment without isolation” to Johnson’s “reconciliation.” He noted that Johnson liked the phrase “firmness and flexibility” to describe his evolving China policy. The phrase had its origins in John Lacey’s policy memo written over two years before, in which it had a different, more traditional meaning applying only to containment and not referencing outreach. Now, it would take on a new significance. The soon-to-be-departed Thomson wondered at what pace the administration would “pour” substantive policy changes “into this new rhetorical container.”<sup>104</sup> The answer turned out to be not at all, no doubt disappointing Thomson from his perch at Harvard, though hardly for the first time.

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<sup>102</sup> “The Essentials For Peace In Asia,” Lyndon Johnson, addressed the American Alumni Council on nationwide radio-TV from the White House Theatre, 12 July 1966, 10, 11, Folder China Advisory Panel, State Dept.: Miscellanea, Box 1, Eckstein Papers, Michigan.

<sup>103</sup> Memorandum for Bill Moyers, Subject: Press Conference Queries on China, 20 July 1966, Folder CO 50-2: People’s Republic of, 5/17/66 - , Box 22, WH Country Files, Johnson Papers, LBJ.

<sup>104</sup> Thomson to Jenkins, Subject: China Strategy, 25 July 1966, Folder Memos Vol. 6 (1 of 2), Box 239, China CF, NSF, LBJ.

Johnson would continue with his conciliatory rhetoric that October. In a speech given during a visit to Honolulu, Johnson echoed Fulbright's assertion from nearly two years prior in New Zealand that China was destined to moderate and open up to the world. Stating "we do not believe in eternal enmity," itself an almost verbatim echo of Kennedy's most conciliatory words for China in November 1963, Johnson argued that only through exchanges of people and ideas "can isolation be ended and suspicion give way to trust."<sup>105</sup> Johnson made additional amicable gestures in his January 1967 State of the Union Address and in a press conference that July.<sup>106</sup> Yet these public hints of a removal of the travel and trade bans proved to be feints. At no point did Johnson display any desire to override Rusk and side with his staff. Regarding statements made by these lower-level officials, internal directives made clear they should change their tone, but not their tune. While suggesting the use of such phrases as "we look forward to the day when hostility can be replaced by cooperation," they were not to imply "any change in the policy enunciated by the Secretary and the President."<sup>107</sup> This was reflected in Ambassador U. Alexis Johnson's speech in Tokyo in February 1967, when he reiterated the old standby that "it has become increasingly clear over the years that Peking is not interested in any understanding with the United States, however limited, unless Taiwan

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<sup>105</sup> Remarks of the President at the East-West Center, Honolulu, Hawaii, 16 October 1966, 6, Folder China Advisory Panel, State Dept.: Miscellanea, Box 1, Eckstein Papers, Bentley.

<sup>106</sup> Max Frankel, "Johnson Reviving Bid for Contacts with Red Chinese," *New York Times*, 11 July 1967, Folder China 66-68, Box 329, Panzer Files, Johnson Papers, LBJ.

<sup>107</sup> U.S. Posture Toward Communist China Guidelines For Public Statements, 3, 1, Folder CHICOM, China Working Group – 1966-67, Box 1, Jenkins Files, NSF, LBJ.

is turned over to them.”<sup>108</sup> The goal merely seemed to be shifting the onus for bad relations onto Peking. That had been the most minimal goal of would-be policy reformers like Chester Bowles and Robert Komer as far back as early 1961. It was clear Johnson had decided he desired change, but was not willing to make serious efforts himself to seek it.

Part of his hesitation was due to the uncertainty concerning public reaction. Opinion polling on the issue remained both sparse and vague. A June 1967 Harris poll indicated a majority favored diplomatic recognition as well as U.N. admission. But the latter was only the case if Taiwan stayed in the organization, and an overwhelming majority opposed the Albanian resolution formula.<sup>109</sup> Also, simple polls such as this did not gauge the importance of the issue, and the administration worried about a committed minority opposed to any policy changes. For this reason, as well as fear of showing weakness, Rusk told Johnson in February 1968 that in the near-term “only very limited steps” were feasible. The limited step he had under consideration was a slight relaxation of travel restrictions.<sup>110</sup> The China Panel’s recommendations earlier that month were only the most ambitious of a series of proposals for policy reform to appear at that time.

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<sup>108</sup> U. Alexis Johnson, “Some Facts About America’s ‘China Policy,’” April 1967, USIA Byliner, 3, Folder China – Background Material (1 of 2), Box 328, Panzer Files, Johnson Papers, LBJ.

<sup>109</sup> Panzer to Johnson, Subject: Advance Harris Survey for Tuesday, June 27, 1967, 24 June 1967, 1, Folder CO 50: China (folder 6), WH Central Files, Johnson Papers, LBJ; also Louis Harris, “Many Favor Détente With Red China, *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 27 June 1967, Folder Red China, Box 181, Panzer Files, Johnson Papers, LBJ.

<sup>110</sup> Rusk to Johnson, Subject: Policy Toward Communist China, 22 February 1968, 1, Folder Memos Volume 12 (1 of 2), Box 243, China CF, NSF, LBJ; also in Folder 4, Box 244, China CF, NSF, LBJ.

With the exception of the academics' memo, all these papers concluded that while Mao would not reciprocate, moves at that time on travel and trade would lay the groundwork for better relations after his death. Travel restrictions on journalists, doctors and professors were eased in July 1966, medical supplies licensed for export in April 1967, and Chinese journalists invited to cover the elections in 1968, but these were such minor and symbolic pinprick attacks on the travel and trade bans that they neither set a precedent, nor established momentum for policy change, nor moved the Chinese to reciprocate.<sup>111</sup> While Secretary of State Rusk remained opposed to more substantive actions, National Security Advisor Rostow offered his support.<sup>112</sup> However, his assistant Jenkins backed away from his prior stand. Again, the issue was timing. For once, an official said the time was right. But that was in retrospect, and in Jenkins's estimation the moment had passed. That moment was before August 1966, when he began pushing for action. China's accelerating internal chaos after that point created a situation where the U.S. would be best served by playing a "waiting game" while "China is trying to sort itself out." In addition, that China was in a "weakened" state removed the "urgency" of policy reform. With the threat lessened, there was reduced need for outreach.<sup>113</sup> Now might not be the right time, even if yesterday had been.

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<sup>111</sup> Robert Garson, "Lyndon B. Johnson and the China Enigma," *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 32, No. 1 (Winter 1997), 72.

<sup>112</sup> Rostow to Johnson, Subject: Comparison of Four Memoranda on China, 24 February, 1968, 2, Folder 4, Box 244, China CF, NSF, LBJ.

<sup>113</sup> Jenkins, Thoughts on China, 22 February 1968, 8-9, Folder Memos Volume 12, Box 242, China CF, NSF, LBJ.

With the travel ban up for renewal on 15 March 1968, debate within the State Department continued. William Macomber noted to Rusk that lifting the ban “would please certain liberal elements in the Congress,” but did not believe the matter to be “pressing.” It would provide a larger political upside if announced the next year, at the start of Johnson’s next term.<sup>114</sup> For his part, William Bundy renewed his endorsement of removing the travel ban, discounting any current danger to potential U.S. travelers to mainland China. Rusk disapproved of the proposal.<sup>115</sup> With one item on what Jenkins referred to as the “dog-eared shopping list” no longer up for consideration, the focus turned to trade. Jenkins still supported some movement on this front, as did William Bundy, who saw it as “a tangible signal to China of our desire for a more normal relationship.”<sup>116</sup> At this juncture, Rusk chose delay, and put the matter aside until after the November election.

### **A Succession Crisis – In the United States**

That campaign season proved to be both a watershed in the China policy debate and further confirmation of the trend over the past two years. The press noted “a perceptible evolution in American attitudes – academic, official and public – toward

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<sup>114</sup> Macomber to Rusk, Subject: Proposal to Remove Travel Restrictions to Mainland China, Folder Travel Controls Jan.-Dec. 1968, Box 2, Subject Files of the Office of Asian Communist Affairs, 1961-1973, RG 59, NARA.

<sup>115</sup> Action Memorandum From the Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs (Bundy) to Secretary of State Rusk, Subject: Removal of travel restriction to Mainland China, 6 March 1968, *F.R.U.S. 1964-1968, Vol. XXX, 667*.

<sup>116</sup> Jenkins to Rostow, Subject: Administration Goals in the Coming Months: China Policies, 8 April 1968, 2, Folder Chicom General, Box 1, Jenkins Files, NSF, LBJ; William Bundy to Benjamin Read, Subject: New Foreign Policy Initiatives Between Now and January, 3 May 1968, 2, Folder Sino 1-6.68, Subject Files, Lot Files, RG 59, NARA.

China.”<sup>117</sup> In April, Vice-President Hubert Humphrey spoke of the need for “peaceful bridges to mainland China,” a noted change from “Communist China” or “Red China” which was seen as “an unmistakable olive branch” by the press.<sup>118</sup> The administration contributed to this shift in the form of a May speech at the National Press Club by Undersecretary of State Nicholas Katzenbach. The State Department’s second-in-command spoke favorably of ending the trade ban, though he also emphasized China’s lack of interest at that time in trade, and the limited results of such a move. In addition, he highlighted the regime’s recent mistreatment of diplomats as evidence that China was isolating itself.<sup>119</sup> Though most of the speech’s substance highlighted reasons for continued U.S. hostility, the press focused on what separated it from past remarks by Rusk and others, concluding that it represented “a definite shift in official thinking” and calling it an endorsement of ending the trade ban.<sup>120</sup> Change was not only non-controversial. It appeared to be welcome. The media wanted to believe.

However, congress continued to lead the way and set the terms of the debate. While the administration was adopting the positions of senators circa 1966 by proposing acts of tentative outreach, Mike Mansfield raced ahead by discussing U.N. representation and diplomatic recognition. For the first time, a leading politician moved

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<sup>117</sup> “China Policy in a Campaign Year, Folder 66-68, Box 329, Panzer Files, Johnson Papers, LBJ.

<sup>118</sup> Joseph C. Harsch, “U.S. seeks to mend relations with Peking,” *Christian Science Monitor*, 27 May 1968, Folder China 66-68, Panzer Files, Johnson Papers, LBJ.

<sup>119</sup> Nicholas Katzenbach, “The U.S. and China Today,” 21 May 1968, 6, Folder China 66-68, Box 329, Panzer Files, Johnson Papers, LBJ.

<sup>120</sup> “U.S. line on Peking relaxes,” *Christian Science Monitor*, 24 May 1968, “Door Ajar for Red China,” *Houston Post*, 30 May 1968, “Bringing China Into The World,” *New York Times*, 2 June 1968, all in Folder China 66-68, Box 329, Panzer Files, Johnson Papers, LBJ.



beyond the doomed “Two-Chinas” formula. Instead, he proposed the U.S. adopt the position that “there is only one China and Taiwan is a part of it,” though reunification could only occur in the future “by peaceful means.”<sup>121</sup> While the administration focused on Mansfield’s less original argument that “the Chinese Communist Government is here to stay and is a major power,” the press immediately recognized this as a new “One-China” approach.<sup>122</sup> It was a marked shift from Mansfield’s prior consistent opposition to recognition or U.N. admission.<sup>123</sup> It also, in retrospect, offered what proved to be a viable path forward for rapprochement by finessing the major difference between the two countries in a manner both might accept.

Humphrey further showed his cards by openly consulting on China policy with academics such as Alexander Eckstein.<sup>124</sup> On the Republican side, Nixon revealingly maintained his silence on the matter. Journalists spoke of “a quiet revolution” on the issue, and argued that the “policy of boycott had lost its popular base.”<sup>125</sup> Supporters of the status quo could only console themselves by the fact that they still had allies in

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<sup>121</sup> China, Retrospect and Prospect, Lecture by Senator Mike Mansfield, University of Montana, Missoula, Montana, 29 March 1968, 26, Folder Memos Volume 12, Box 242, China CF, NSF, LBJ.

<sup>122</sup> Rostow to Johnson, Subject: Mike Mansfield’s Speech on China, 29 March 1968, Folder Memos Volume 12, Box 242, China CF, NSF, LBJ; Murrey Marder, “Mansfield Urges ‘One China’ Policy,” *Washington Post*, 30 March 1968, Folder Far East – China, 1966-1974, Box 47, Series 22: Senate Leadership, 1961-1977, Mansfield Papers, Missoula.

<sup>123</sup> Mansfield to Helen Arthur, 25 August 1966, Folder Communist China re: recognition and admission to UN, Box 98, Series 13: Foreign Relations, Mansfield Papers, Missoula.

<sup>124</sup> Humphrey to Eckstein, 27 May 1968, Folder China Advisory Panel, State Dept.: Miscellanea, Box 1, Eckstein Papers, Bentley.

<sup>125</sup> William R. Frye, “The Search for a China Policy,” Folder China 66-68, Box 329, Panzer Files, Johnson Papers, LBJ.

mainland China, who for the time being evinced no interest in reciprocity.<sup>126</sup> By June, Liebman was forced to effectively abandon the Committee's longstanding commitment to bipartisanship when he told Walter Judd that "American-China policy will become a partisan issue – something which we have successfully avoided for the past 15 years." Even this was only a "hope" on his part. Humphrey had thrown in his lot with the enemy, as evidenced by his employment of Doak Barnett as a leading adviser. Now Nixon was the one, the only one, who could save them. Liebman confidently asserted "I know that Nixon is with us on China," yet was unsure of where his advisers stood.<sup>127</sup>

This was where Judd came in. He had long known Nixon, and presumably could reach him. Liebman requested Judd draft a speech for Nixon on the subject. In an echo of the bipartisan consensus of former times, David Martin, a former aide to the recently departed Senator Thomas Dodd, wrote the speech.<sup>128</sup> The text accused Democrats like Humphrey and Mansfield of catering to "the influential leftist minority" of their party. While "this is not the time for new initiatives," Martin proposed "offering increased contact" to China as a reward for future good behavior, the closest the Committee could come to a concession to the shifting terms of the debate.<sup>129</sup> Nixon campaign official Thomas Charles Huston, whom Liebman knew from when Huston had led the Young

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<sup>126</sup> John Hughes, "Peking ignores U.S. hints," *Christian Science Monitor*, 26 June 1968, Folder China 66-68, Box 329, Panzer Files, Johnson Papers, LBJ.

<sup>127</sup> Liebman to Judd, 14 June 1968, Folder Committee of One Million, Correspondence/Internal 1968-1971, Box 183, Judd Papers, Hoover.

<sup>128</sup> Liebman to Huston, 27 June 1968, Folder Statement on China for Nixon, Box 84, Liebman Papers, Hoover.

<sup>129</sup> Notes on United States China Policy for the consideration of Richard M. Nixon, 1-2, Folder Statement on China for Nixon, Box 84, Liebman Papers, Hoover.

Americans for Freedom, sent the Committee's Secretary the Nixon-penned *Foreign Affairs* article "Asia After Vietnam" as a guide to where the candidate stood. He also confided to Liebman that Nixon was "particularly concerned with Red China as a potential nuclear power" and that Nixon had told Huston "China will be the most serious problem with which the next President will have to deal."<sup>130</sup> Huston dutifully passed Martin's text to Patrick Buchanan, expressing his "hope this paper on China will not get lost in the files."<sup>131</sup> Huston reported to Liebman that Nixon had looked at the recommendations, wrote "Good" on the paper, but declined to speak on the issue at that time. Huston recommended Liebman forward the remarks to Texas Senator John Tower, one of the Committee's last reliable mouthpieces on Capitol Hill.<sup>132</sup>

While the Democratic Platform that summer called for concrete policy changes – in the areas of travel and trade – the Republican Platform avoided mentioning these incremental steps and merely reiterated opposition to U.N. membership "under existing conditions." This was a change from the 1964 Republican Platform, which explicitly opposed any weakening of the trade ban.<sup>133</sup> No major figure was vocally on the China Lobby's side anymore. Democratic leaders were in opposition. Nixon was for the time being neutral. And Republican liberals affiliated with Javits saw a political opening. For

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<sup>130</sup> Huston to Liebman, 18 June 1968, Folder Statement on China for Nixon, Box 84, Liebman Papers, Hoover.

<sup>131</sup> Huston to Buchanan, 11 July 1968, Folder Statement on China for Nixon, Box 84, Liebman Papers, Hoover.

<sup>132</sup> Huston to Liebman, 11 July 1968, Folder Statement on China For Nixon, Box 84, Liebman Papers, Hoover.

<sup>133</sup> Mailing, Committee of One Million, Folder Communist China: Misc. 72, Box 98, Series 13: Foreign Relations, Mansfield Papers, Missoula.

close to two years now, prominent Democrats, including several administration officials, had talked of change. But they had yet to deliver in any meaningful manner. In April 1966, a month after the Fulbright hearings, the liberal Republican Ripon Society argued in a policy paper that “Republicans must fill a leadership vacuum with has developed in the formulation of American policy toward China.” Its leaders should instead find a middle ground between “the rigid right and the sentimental left.”<sup>134</sup> Within the Republican Party, there was thus a debate between traditionalists and reformers over whether the political calculus indicated if the political gains on the China issue were in opposing the Democrats, or beating them at their own game.

### **Moving the Ball, then Punting**

In his history of Johnson’s China policy, Michael Lumbers credited Johnson with “tentative bridge-building” in line with changing domestic attitudes.<sup>135</sup> Johnson not only prevented the Vietnam War from exacerbating tensions with Chinese. He recognized the conflict as a reason to grope towards some sort of understanding, or at least towards the recognition that such groping was necessary. This matched the administration’s own assessments of their efforts and achievements. It credited itself with “major policy statements during 1966 and 1967” which affirmed hostility was neither permanent nor inevitable.<sup>136</sup> In early 1968, Eckstein credited Johnson for “preparing ground” for future

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<sup>134</sup> Folder Asia, 1966 (2), Box 35, Series 48, Subseries 11: Asia, Fulbright Papers, Arkansas.

<sup>135</sup> Michael Lumbers, *Piercing the bamboo curtain: Tentative bridge-building to China during the Johnson Years* (New York: Manchester University Press, 2008), 245.

<sup>136</sup> Major Accomplishments in East Asia and the Pacific Since 1961, 4, Folder Accomplishments (3 of 4), Box 19, Subject File, NSF, LBJ.

potential change in consonance with “the improving climate of domestic public opinion.”<sup>137</sup> But Eckstein remained skeptical of the prospects for change in the immediate future. Jenkins agreed, reaffirming that November that “it is not yet time energetically to woo China into the world.” Still, thanks to the administration’s efforts, when that time arrived, “the ground is well laid.”<sup>138</sup> Until that day arrived, all Johnson’s successor appeared capable of doing was what Johnson had already done – wait.

With his internal focus on Johnson and his officials, Lumbers reduced outside actors like academics, senators, and journalists to little more than footnotes. Yet those were the actors driving debate during this period, and forcing Johnson and his officials to react. None of these actors was isolated from the administration, nor from each other. They were inextricably intertwined. Professors went from congressional committees to meetings with the president and back, with the media covering all of it and influencing events with its encouraging words. Left to their own devices, Johnson and his officials would in all likelihood have refrained from speaking out. Paralysis would have set in. Reformers like Thomson would have remained internal dissidents without allies higher up the chain of command. In other words, it would in all likelihood have been a repeat of the Kennedy experience, with the crucial difference being the recognition of the inevitability of change. Lumbers’s story thus lacked the prime movers, who were outside

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<sup>137</sup> ADA Luncheon Address Outline, Washington, D.C., 10 February 1968, Folder Talks: The Cultural Revolution and its Political Implications for the United States, 1968, Box 7, Eckstein Papers, Bentley.

<sup>138</sup> Jenkins to Rostow, Further Thoughts on China, 9 October 1968, 5, 11, Folder China (A) 13 (2 of 2), Box 243, China CF, NSF, LBJ.

the White House or Foggy Bottom. His was, for the most part, a story of a journey where the motor was missing from the vehicle.

Actions considered in the administration's waning days indicated how little had really changed in terms of assumptions since 1965. A Policy Planning Council report prepared a month after Nixon's election expressed the now familiar long-term goal of having China "become a constructive member of the world community" coupled with the longstanding caveat that this "will take a long time." Nevertheless, lifting the travel and trade bans would encourage this evolution, or at least provide the future framework for a process of outreach.<sup>139</sup> This paper was meant as advice for the incoming Republican administration, which might or might not choose to pick up where they had left off eight years before. If that was his goal, there would be virtually no actions Nixon would have to reverse or undo. All it would take would be a change in rhetoric. The only thing standing between the enactment of such a policy – aside from Nixon's own deeply held and deeply concealed beliefs on the subject – was evolving public opinion as reflected by past statements from Johnson and his underlings. Posture had changed, not policy.

Before departing the scene, Rusk finally appeared to relent, recommending that Johnson relax the trade ban by allowing U.S. subsidiaries to engage in third-party trade with China. The fact that U.S. companies had to ensure that their components did not end up in products companies headquartered in other nations sold to China had long

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<sup>139</sup> Policy Planning Council, U.S. Policy Toward Communist China, December 1968, 4, I, 12, Folder Transition: Policy Planning Council Papers – US Policy Toward Communist China, Box 50, Subject File, NSF, LBJ.

been an irritant for these multinational enterprises. He believed congress would support such a preliminary move. Perhaps wisely, Johnson chose to deny Rusk's request by not acting.<sup>140</sup> Two weeks before leaving office was no opportune time for a president to set a precedent, particularly on an issue he had avoided acting upon for so long. Johnson had his chance. As he might have put it, and most of those working for him did in fact put it, he either actually had no chance or failed to exploit a narrow window to make minor changes at best. In his rhetoric, he broke new ground for a president on the issue, but still stayed behind what prominent senators advocated, or the leading media organs desired. Beset by other foreign policy problems, he believed the most he could achieve was to do no harm. In this he succeeded. It would be up to Nixon to decide if all a president could do on China policy was to always be waiting for something to happen.

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<sup>140</sup> Memorandum From the President's Special Assistant (Rostow) to President Johnson, Subject: Recommended Change in Treasury Regulations on the Trade of U.S. Subsidiaries Abroad with China, 6 January 1969, *F.R.U.S. 1964-1968, Vol. XXX*, 729-730.

## CHAPTER VI

### I WILL DARE: NIXON'S JOURNEY TO THE EAST, AND A REPUBLICAN'S ACHIEVEMENT OF DEMOCRATIC DREAMS

“I do hope that China remains of interest to you and your boss. Deftly dealt with, it could make heroes of you both.”<sup>1</sup> – James Thomson to Henry Kissinger, 5 October 1970

Richard Nixon loved to operate in secret. He also craved the public adulation garnered by big events. In this regard, his 15 July 1971 announcement that he would be travelling to mainland China in 1972 was his perfect coup. Yet while ostensibly concealing his specific intentions towards the Chinese from his 1968 presidential campaign onwards, Nixon could not help but drop hints both official and unofficial concerning this matter. Some of these signals were apparent only in retrospect to even expert observers, but many were noticed at the time they were given. That his general goal was to reach out to the Chinese communists in ways far more significant than his predecessors had even contemplated was noted nearly from the start of his administration. This he had to make clear, if only to get the attention of China's leaders, whose participation was essential to the entire endeavor. That his specific goal was an unprecedented presidential visit to China was – while never directly enunciated – repeatedly hinted at by the president himself. Thus, the president's surprise

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<sup>1</sup> Letter, Thomson to Kissinger, 5 October 1970, Folder General China 1967-1970, Box 17, Subject Files: CO (Countries), White House Central Files, Richard M. Nixon Presidential Library, Yorba Linda, Ca.



announcement was quite possibly the most successful worst kept secret ever. How Nixon achieved surprise, and why he should not have, will be the focus of this chapter.

That this was an unsurprising surprise, at least in hindsight, quickly became apparent. While admitting he had been caught “by complete surprise,” Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield added that “in retrospect, however, it is a development which follows logically from the course which the President has been pursuing, to my knowledge, since February, 1969.”<sup>2</sup> Mansfield was hardly a disinterested observer. Since early 1969, he had been in direct communication with Zhou Enlai about becoming the first American statesman to visit the People’s Republic, and in fact had received an invitation from the Chinese nearly three months before Nixon. In Washington, was one of several Senate Democrats pushing Nixon to do more to bring about rapprochement with the Chinese. They did so out of sincere belief this would improve the U.S. strategic position in the Pacific and accelerate an exit from South Vietnam, but also because they saw it as a potent political issue on which they could score points with voters at Nixon’s expense. By eventually acceding to – and in fact exceeding – their demands, he dramatically turned the tables on them, much to their pronounced chagrin and his palpable *shadenfreude*. Democratic leaders simply did not think him capable of such a maneuver.

From the opening days of his presidency, Nixon sent various signals as to his intentions regarding China. He had been both intentionally indiscreet about his desire in

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<sup>2</sup> Statement, Mansfield, 23 July 1971, Folder SCon Res. 76 – President’s Forthcoming Visit to China, Box 70, Series 8: Bills Introduced By, Mansfield Papers, Montana.

order to secure the invitation from the Chinese, and unintentionally so in settings where his words served no strategic purpose. The best example of the latter was his surreal midnight journey to the Lincoln Memorial to meet with antiwar protesters on 1 May 1970, following the Kent State shootings. In the middle of his rambling remarks, he discussed at length places these young Americans should visit. He cautioned them that Europe, while a popular destination, was simply “an older version of America.” Instead, they should travel to Asia – the continent of the future. He expressed “my great hopes that during their lifetime, that the great mainland of China would be opened up so that we could know the 700 million people who live in China who are one of the most remarkable people on earth.”<sup>3</sup> These off-the-record remarks received no attention at the time. However, that October *Time* magazine reported his on-the-record statement that “if there is anything I want to do before I die, it is to go to China.”<sup>4</sup> In April 1971, shortly after the beginning of Chinese diplomatic reciprocations had dramatically raised U.S. hopes of a breakthrough, he told the American Society of Newspaper Editors that he wished his daughter Julie and her new husband David Eisenhower could honeymoon in China and “see the great cities, and the people, and all of that, there,” adding “I hope they do. As a matter of fact, I hope I do.”<sup>5</sup> By the summer of 1971, it could not have been any clearer that Nixon really wanted to go to China.

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<sup>3</sup> Folder Memorandum of Events, May 1, 1970, 4, Box 11, Name/Subject File, President’s Personal File, 1969-1974, RMN.

<sup>4</sup> Folder 3: Material concerning preparations for HAK first China trip, Box 1031, China/Vietnam Negotiations, For the President’s Files, NSF, RMN.

<sup>5</sup> Nixon, Remarks, American Society of Newspaper Editors, 16 April 1971, Folder US China Policy 1969-1972 [1 of 4], Box 86, Country Files: Far East, Henry A. Kissinger Files, NSF, RMN.

Nixon achieved complete surprise when he announced his upcoming visit to mainland China largely due to the numerous previous failed expectations of progress. As long as there had been a policy of isolating communist China, many had anticipated that policy would soon begin to change. As sooner repeatedly became later, the hopes of those supporting change ebbed and the fears of those on the opposing side dulled. The announcement elicited widespread public elation, particularly but not exclusively among Nixon's natural political adversaries on the left and among young adults. The media saw this epochal event coming, but only in retrospect. What historians would later view as obvious signals of Nixon's intentions were entirely missed at the time. The breakthrough occurred both because Nixon was willing to reach out to the Chinese and because the Chinese were finally ready to respond affirmatively. While the Chinese were primarily motivated by increasing fear of the Soviets, Americans – and many U.S. allies – took advantage of China's temporary fears because of their own fears of the long-term rise of a powerful China. Triangular diplomacy determined Nixon's timing. It did not set his, or the nation's, agenda. This largely accounts for the maintenance of “containment without isolation” after the demise of the Soviet Union, which rendered triangular diplomacy obsolete.

### **Evolution of a Statesman**

So why were the signals missed? Why did no one expect either a general diplomatic breakthrough with the Chinese or the specific act of a presidential visit? Three main reasons can be presented to explain this failure of imagination: U.S. inertia, Chinese intransigence, and Nixon's reputation. First and foremost, the policy of

containment and isolation had been in place for so long, and survived so many false alarms about its imminent discarding, that even the most seasoned observers had grown complacent. After the end of the Korean War, after Eisenhower's reelection, after Kennedy's election, after Hilsman's speech, and finally after Fulbright's hearings, there had been reports in the press of imminent and significant policy alterations which cheered reformers and worried those who supported the status quo. None of these proved accurate. In fact, there is no written evidence that senior policy makers at any of these junctures even considered taking significant actions of any kind. By the beginning of the 1970s, change in U.S. China policy was becoming like Charles De Gaulle's famous comment on Brazil's status as a great power, or jokes about soccer becoming a major sport in the United States – it was the wave of the future, and always would be.

At least while Mao Zedong remained alive and in power. By the middle of Johnson's presidency, nearly all his foreign policy officials had come to the conclusion that ending China's isolation was essential to U.S. and Asian security, but that the major necessary actions could not be taken until Mao had left the scene. It had long been recognized that Mao needed the U.S. as a bogeyman to remain in power, and that he initiated periodic military crises with the U.S. in order to enable the domestic mass mobilization campaigns that were his primary methods of transforming Chinese society. He could not abandon this hostile posture without calling his legitimacy into question. U.S. actions like lifting the travel and trade bans would not be met with the necessary reciprocity. At most, they would shift the "onus" for bad relations onto the Chinese. But

relations could not be improved without Chinese participation, which was not seen as forthcoming from the Great Helmsman.

Finally, there was Nixon's own well-earned reputation as a staunch anti-communist. Almost no one realized that he could use this reputation to his advantage. Generally, this idea is codified as "Only Nixon could go to China." Yet it also worked in other, more subtle ways. Nixon made his reputation as, for lack of a better term, a red-baiter. He attacked the loyalty and anti-communist credentials of liberal Democrats. His focus was domestic subversion. By concentrating on the menace within, he did not need to harp on the threats from beyond America's borders, whether emanating from Europe or Asia. He saw no need to advocate the liberation of Europe's "captive nations." More relevantly, he did not need to partake in the "Who Lost China?" debate. Remarkable for a California politician holding national office in 1949, he kept his distance from Chiang Kai-shek and the Taiwanese cause. Furthermore, with Alger Hiss's scalp on his belt, Nixon did not need to condemn "the Lattimores and the Fairbanks," – as John Kennedy had – or call the Mao's regime "a Slavic Manchukuo," as Dean Rusk would. In short, he left a very slim paper trail for future actions to contradict. After 15 July 1971, he could have argued times had changed, and that the statements he made in the past were no longer applicable, but even these cursory actions were unnecessary. Existing historical investigations of Nixon's China policy have all failed to note the fact that while Nixon was particularly anti-communist, he was never especially anti-Chinese communist.

In a speech early in 1969, University of Michigan Professor Alexander Eckstein expressed skepticism about any near-term change in U.S. China policy, citing as his

three reasons “inertia,” the “situation in China,” and the “structure of our foreign policy process.”<sup>6</sup> Thus, he was at the time in agreement with two of my three retrospective reasons. His last reason – focusing on bureaucracy – was seen as less significant by others, in part because it had always been mid-level bureaucratic officials who led the fight for policy change. The leading individual who typified this – James Thomson – declined to subscribe to any of the three prevalent beliefs I identified, or to any of Eckstein’s three reasons. On the inside in Washington, James Thomson had been a gadfly. From his outside perch at Harvard, he became a prophet.

In October 1970, while leading Democrats on Capitol Hill continued to harangue Nixon for inactivity, other academics bemoaned the lack of significant progress, and the media was largely silent on the issue, Thomson published an article in *Pacific Community* which he sent to Henry Kissinger, with whom he occasionally conversed on the subject of China policy. Kissinger thanked Thomson for the article, and pledged to distribute it to his staff.<sup>7</sup> The article argued that Nixon alone possessed “the credentials – Republicanism, conservatism, and anti-communism” to act boldly on China policy without fear of domestic political repercussions. He commended the administration on the incremental steps it had already taken to relax the travel and trade bans. However, what was to date lacking was “the grand gesture, the gesture of magnanimity required of

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<sup>6</sup> “American Approaches to China,” 1969, 5, Folder Talks: Talks and Lecture Notes on China, Box 7, Eckstein Papers, Michigan.

<sup>7</sup> Kissinger to Thomson, 9 October 1970, Folder General China 1967-1970, Box 17, Subject Files: CO (Countries), White House Central Files, RMN.

the greater power.”<sup>8</sup> Yet Thomson, who had remained hopeful during his service in the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, had not flagged in his faith. In fact, it was stronger than ever now that Nixon had made changing China policy bipartisan. In his accompanying letter to Kissinger, he concluded with the words “I do hope that China remains of interest to you and your boss. Deftly dealt with, it could make heroes of you both.”<sup>9</sup> Not everyone was blind to the possibilities for Nixon to make major changes to U.S. China policy. Fittingly, the man who saw the open door had spent most of the past decade running into brick walls.

Nixon’s few early pre-presidential comments on China were mild boilerplate for the era, and focused on painting Democrats as Cold War losers. During the 1954 midterm campaign, he blamed the result of the Chinese Civil War on “the Acheson policy of weakness, inconsistency and compromise,” arguing Republicans were superior negotiators.<sup>10</sup> In the 1958 midterms, while advocating a more vigorous election-time debate over which party was superior in the field of foreign policy, he demanded congressional candidates state their opinions on U.N. admission, though at that time virtually no one on Capitol Hill was arguing in the affirmative.<sup>11</sup> In late 1961, again regarding U.N. admission, he criticized “defeatist talk” of a “two China policy”

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<sup>8</sup> James C. Thomson, Jr., “Will The Nixon Administration Recognize Communist China?,” *Pacific Community*, October 1970, 102, 103, in *Ibid*.

<sup>9</sup> Letter, Thomson to Kissinger, in *Ibid*.

<sup>10</sup> Excerpts from remarks by Vice President Nixon, Los Angeles, California, 28 October 1954, 2, Folder Speech File, 1954 Campaign, Los Angeles, Calif.: Red China, Box 23, Speech File, Pre-Presidential Papers, RMN.

<sup>11</sup> Statement of Vice President Nixon, Press, Conference, San Francisco, 15 October 1958, 2, Folder China, Box 3, Country Files, Vice-Presidential Collection, Pre-Presidential Papers, RMN.

supposedly emanating from within the Kennedy administration, once again framing the issue as a matter of victory or defeat against global communism.<sup>12</sup> As “Old Nixon” partisan rhetoric went, this was weak sauce indeed.

During his victorious 1968 campaign, Nixon kept his own counsel on China policy, much as he did on nearly all pressing matters of foreign policy. This left both the press and campaign aides in the dark. Howard Hunt urged Nixon to take a hard line and “not join the Democrats on this issue” because “Nixon came into the limelight through being an anti-communist.”<sup>13</sup> Such an approach was consonant with the advice Walter Judd had offered, and Tom Huston had endorsed. However, neither Huston nor Hunt was taken seriously by their boss as foreign policy experts. Nixon’s own spokespeople were at a loss as to what their candidate’s views were on the issue, and were unable to respond to repeated press inquiries.<sup>14</sup> When Nixon finally spoke on the matter, it was to a Milwaukee television affiliate – a minor provincial venue where his remarks would be unlikely to make waves. In this interview, he did hint at future change, remarking “the dialogue with Communist China must come, I think, during the next two terms of the next President. I can’t state the exact time.”<sup>15</sup> This implied a continuation of the

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<sup>12</sup> Article, 8 December 1961, 6, Folder For Times-Mirror Syndicate #5: Communist China, Box 100, Speech File, Pre-Presidential Papers, RMN.

<sup>13</sup> Hunt to Nixon, 20 August 1968, Folder 14, Box 22, White House Special Files Collection, RMN.

<sup>14</sup> Alicia Boyd to Richard Allen, 14 June 1968, Folder Communist China – Foreign Policy [2 of 2], Box 19, Campaign Research File, Pre-Presidential Papers, RMN.

<sup>15</sup> News Interview, WITI-TV (ABC) Studios, 24 September 1968, 12, Folder News Interview – WITI, Milwaukee, Wis., Box 98, Speech File, Pre-Presidential Papers, RMN.



Johnson-era approach of waiting for the opportune moment for outreach, and continued attempts at incremental change.

Nixon's frequent overseas travels in the years immediately preceding his presidency no doubt exerted a significant influence on his future foreign policy actions, on China in addition to many other issues. Evelyn Goh credited Nixon's desire for rapprochement with China to the influence of Charles De Gaulle, with whom Nixon held discussions in 1963 and 1967.<sup>16</sup> Superficially, this makes sense. Nixon's longtime admiration of the French President was well-known, as was De Gaulle's desire to bring China in from the diplomatic cold. Yet Nixon's own handwritten notes on his 1967 meeting with De Gaulle revealed that by then he was "disillusioned about China" due to France's lack of diplomatic influence in that nation.<sup>17</sup> Having been a trailblazer, De Gaulle had now soured somewhat on his own pioneering venture. More typical of that period were Nixon's interactions with West German Chancellor Willy Brandt. Nixon found China to be an "obsession" of the German leader, quoting Brandt as remarking that "12,000,000 Chinese born a year- each exists on bowl of rice," after which he cupped his hand in a display of *gelbe gefahr* which would have made Kaiser Wilhelm II proud, and possibly able to temporarily overlook the fact that his successor state was now run by a socialist. What Brandt feared most was China's threat in the "future –

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<sup>16</sup> Evelyn Goh, *Constructing the U.S. Rapprochement with China, 1961-1974* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 106.

<sup>17</sup> Notes, 1, Folder RN's Handwritten Notes, Box 7, Series II: Trip File, Wilderness Years Collection, RMN.

when they have atomic weapons,” by which he surely meant intercontinental ballistic missiles able to deliver the hydrogen bombs China had recently tested.<sup>18</sup>

The need for outreach in response to future Chinese power – the world’s most populous state with the world’s most dangerous weapons – ultimately played a significant role in the Nixon administration’s decision making on the matter. Yet the future president could not yet grasp the counterintuitive reasoning required to understand that threat necessitated outreach, that fear must inspire favor. In his recollection of meeting with Chiang Kai-shek, Nixon wrote his personal conclusion that it was “ironical to say China the great danger and soften our policy toward them.”<sup>19</sup> At the same time, as he made clear in March 1967 remarks to the Romanians, he recognized the “danger of isolating China,” a notion which would become a key selling point for his future policy alterations.<sup>20</sup> It was at this time that he began to hear this message from key U.S. allies along China’s periphery. Their input was perhaps more important than that of more significant allies such as the leaders of France and West Germany, who did not live in fear of Chinese expansion and subversion. Singapore’s Lee Kwon Yew told Nixon it was “a mistake for U.S. to isolate them” and that the United States “now must establish contact.”<sup>21</sup> One of the longstanding arguments against ending the policy of isolating

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<sup>18</sup> Notes, 2, 5, Folder Europe Trip (03/05/1967-03/15/1967) – Richard Nixon’s Handwritten Notes (2 of 2), Box 9, Series II: Trip File, Wilderness Years Collection, RMN.

<sup>19</sup> Notes, 4, Folder Richard Nixon’s Handwritten Notes, Box 4, Series II: Trip File, Wilderness Years Collection, RMN.

<sup>20</sup> Notes, 2, Folder Europe Trip (03/05/1967-03/15/1967) – Richard Nixon’s Handwritten Notes (1 of 2), Box 9, Series II: Trip File, Wilderness Years Collection, RMN.

<sup>21</sup> Notes, 3, Folder Far East and Middle East Trips 1967 – RN’s Handwritten Notes (2 of 2), Box 11, Series II: Trip File, Wilderness Years Collection, RMN.

China was that vulnerable regional allies would feel betrayed and possibly go neutralist. Nixon now knew these allies themselves desired a change in U.S. policy. Most intriguing of all were Nixon's conversations with Philippine diplomat and future Foreign Minister Carlos Romulo. While meeting with Nixon in Manila in 1967, Romulo suggested that if Nixon became president he should "go to China." He then reminded Nixon he had given him identical advice when they last met in 1966, "at a lunch in Manila" Nixon noted from memory in the marginalia.<sup>22</sup> This is the first recorded mention of someone telling Nixon he should go to China.

### **Expectations, but Not Great Ones**

Even without the knowledge of Nixon's pre-presidential overseas conversations, no one expected a return to Eisenhower-era hostility. Despite Nixon's reputation as a Cold War hardliner, many in the press expected the momentum for policy change built up during the second half of the Johnson administration to continue. The *Wall Street Journal* reported at the start of 1969 a rumor that Berkeley Professor Robert Scalapino had been offered – but declined – the position of Assistant Secretary for State for Far Eastern Affairs.<sup>23</sup> Whether or not this was accurate, the mere fact that a leading proponent of policy change was thought likely to assume the leading position in the State Department on China policy spoke volumes about the durability of the new bipartisan policy consensus. Additional stories in the weeks before Nixon's inauguration reflected a sense that the new administration wanted at least a thaw in relations, and that

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<sup>22</sup> Notes, 10, Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> "Washington Wire," *Wall Street Journal*, 3 January 1969, 1.

there was now a chance the Chinese felt the same way.<sup>24</sup> Still, veteran foreign policy observers failed to notice what in later years would be viewed as a major signal in Nixon's Inaugural Address which alluded to his willingness to reach out to the Chinese when he said desired "a world in which no people, great or small, will live in angry isolation." Neither Chalmers Roberts nor Joseph Kraft, who had written on the subject for decades, referenced his allusion to China in their lengthy stories on the speech the next morning.<sup>25</sup> For the time being, the sense was that the moment was ripe for change, but Nixon might not be eager to harvest the fruit.

The new president appeared to confirm this assumption at his first press conference, where one of his first questions was on China policy. In response, he gave no hint that change was afoot, instead reiterating U.S. opposition to P.R.C. membership in the United Nations and emphasizing U.S. policy would change when China's posture had changed.<sup>26</sup> Yet this did not squelch expectations of change. *Newsweek* noted how the Chinese "gave unusually thorough coverage" to the press conference, yet "ignored his strong statement of support for the Nationalist regime on Taiwan," indicating the

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<sup>24</sup> Charlotte Salkowski, "China-U.S. détente," *Christian Science Monitor*, 10 January 1969, 1, 10; Stanley Karnow, "Peking Seems Ready to Adopt More Flexible Foreign Policy," *Washington Post*, 6 January 1969, A19.

<sup>25</sup> Chalmers M. Roberts, "Muted Confidence Marks Nixon's Inaugural Address," *Washington Post*, 21 January 1969, A8; Joseph Kraft, "Nixon Speech Set Out Goals Acceptable to Largest Group," *Washington Post*, 21 January 1969, A15.

<sup>26</sup> John Pierson, "Nixon Often At Odds With the Press, Sails Through Initial Presidential News Session," *Wall Street Journal*, 28 January 1969, 8; Dan Oberforer, "President's Press Debut: Poised Performance," *Washington Post*, 28 January 1969, A1; "President Nixon on Foreign Policy . . .," *Washington Post*, 28 January 1969, A14.

Chinese were changing their posture.<sup>27</sup> Meanwhile, the *Chicago Tribune*, which was one of the few leading national news sources which still opposed changing China policy, contrasted Nixon's "public posture" with reports that administration officials were already sounding out the Chinese communists about improving relations.<sup>28</sup> *Time* magazine chose June 1969 as the time to call for significant policy changes, including an immediate end to the travel and trade bans as well as a soft-peddling of opposition to U.N. membership for the P.R.C. Still, the magazine expressed doubts Nixon would follow their advice.<sup>29</sup>

Nixon's nebulous early position on China contrasted with the combination of changes in domestic public opinion as well as a growing abandonment by key U.S. allies, something which had been feared since France's defection in 1964 but had so far not come to fruition. By the start of 1968, new and more leftist governments in Canada and Italy had let it be known they planned to normalize relations with the P.R.C.<sup>30</sup> Combined with increased domestic pressure from both sides of the congressional aisle, this created the appearance of an *aussenpolitik-innenpolitik* pincer movement on Nixon. The weekend after his inauguration, elected officials led by William Fulbright, Mark Hatfield, and Sherman Cooper met with experts in Santa Barbara, California at the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions to discuss the need for and possibility of

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<sup>27</sup> "This Diplomatic Thaw," *Newsweek*, 10 February 1969, 44.

<sup>28</sup> "Nixon Plans Study of U.S., Red China Ties," *Chicago Tribune*, 5 February 1969, 11.

<sup>29</sup> "Rethinking U.S. China Policy," *Time*, 6 June 1969, 49, 48.

<sup>30</sup> Joseph Kraft, "Relations With Peking: Several Factors Favor Conciliation With Communist Chinese Regime," *Washington Post*, 26 January 1969, 39.

rapprochement with the Chinese. The hostile *Chicago Tribune* termed the conference “the resumption of a drive by Senate foreign policy liberals in both parties to reform the United States position on mainland China.”<sup>31</sup>

Much of the discussion that weekend centered upon whether the public was ready to support significance policy changes. The consensus among those assembled was no. Cooper claimed existing public opposition “make change in American policy toward Communist China, or support by the Congress extremely difficult.”<sup>32</sup>

Representative Don Edwards largely agreed with Cooper. According to him, while the latest national polling indicated majority public support for lifting travel and trade restrictions, most individual congressmen would suffer with their constituents if they called for more significant policy changes.<sup>33</sup> In April, liberal Republican Paul Findley agreed, telling the *Washington Post* that congress “isn’t ready for China yet.”<sup>34</sup> Jacob Javits disagreed, telling the National Council on United States-China Relations that March “the people are well ahead of the government on this matter.”<sup>35</sup> Soon, Javits

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<sup>31</sup> “China Policy Move Is Asked of Nixon” *Chicago Tribune*, 25 January 1969, N6.

<sup>32</sup> John Sherman Cooper, “United States Policy in Asia,” paper for Japanese-American Conference by Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions, Santa Barbara, California, 24-25 January 1969, 7, Folder Asia, 1968-69, Box 36, Series 48, Subseries 11: Asia, Fulbright Papers, Arkansas.

<sup>33</sup> Don Edwards, “China Policy and Congress,” January 1969, paper for Japanese American Conference by Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions, Santa Barbara, California, 24-25 January 1969, 1, Folder Asia 1966 (2), Box 35, Series 48, Subseries 11: Asia, Fulbright Papers, Arkansas.

<sup>34</sup> Stephen S. Rosenfeld, “Policy on China And How It Grows,” *Washington Post*, 11 April 1969, A24.

<sup>35</sup> Speech, Javits, “A Hopeful New Path For U.S.-China Relations, First National Convocation of the NCUSCR, New York, New York, 20 March 1969, 1, Folder 3/20/69: Nat’l Committee on US-China Relations, Box 43, Series 1, Subseries 1, Javits Papers, Stony Brook.

would be proven correct over Cooper and Findley. But for the time being, the shadow of the past weighed heavily on the minds of many reformers.

Naturally, Nixon's early actions reflected this skittishness about mass public opinion. In a February 1969 memo to Kissinger, the president reflected upon a perceived divide between elite and mass opinion. While affirming his desire to "give every encouragement to the attitude that this Administration is exploring possibilities of rapprochement with the Chinese," he cautioned it "should be done privately and should under no circumstances get into the public prints." On the other hand, in terms of Kissinger's "contacts with your friends" in academia and abroad, "I would continue to plant" the notion that the administration was seeking rapprochement.<sup>36</sup> Meanwhile Nixon's Assistant Secretary for Congressional Relations William Macomber assured Majority Leader Mansfield that March the administration desired "greater contact and communication" with communist China.<sup>37</sup> This fear of public opinion interfering with foreign policy was characteristic of how Nixon and Kissinger operated. In March 1971, Kissinger noted how between 1966 and 1970 there had been "a sharp change" towards support for various elements of U.S.-China rapprochement "without any leadership from anybody." This of course ignored the Fulbright hearings, shifting editorial comments across the media spectrum, and congressional speeches, among other methods of influencing mass opinion. Kissinger also noted elite opinion had reached a consensus in

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<sup>36</sup> Nixon to Kissinger, 1 February 1969, Folder President/Kissinger Memos (1), Box 341, Subject Files, NSF, RMN.

<sup>37</sup> Macomber to Mansfield, 4 March 1969, 1, Folder Far East – China, 1966-1974, Box 47, Series 22: Senate Leadership, 1961-1977, Mansfield Papers, Montana.

favor of rapprochement in 1966, yet failed to see how this elite consensus could over the next four years have influenced mass opinion.<sup>38</sup> Nixon's February 1969 strategy could be seen as an attempt to indirectly influence mass opinion by signaling to elite opinion, though that would probably be giving even him too much credit.

On 5 February 1969, four days after signaling to Kissinger that he should let his friends know Nixon was considering changes in China policy, Nixon directed his National Security Adviser to conduct an official review of U.S. policy towards China which would consider both "the nature of the Chinese Communist threat" and "alternative U.S. approaches on China." This led a little over six months later to the creation of National Security Study Memorandum (NSSM) 14.<sup>39</sup> Its broad brush-strokes confirmed the assumptions which had guided the Johnson administration: China was presently not a military threat to the United States; in the long term, it would become one, provided the U.S. did not reach out to Mao's successors; and isolation was both counterproductive and ineffective.<sup>40</sup>

A meeting with the president and his advisers at his vacation home in San Clemente, California also concluded that failure to reach out to China soon would give the impression to the Chinese that the U.S. intended to "gang up" on China along with

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<sup>38</sup> Kissinger to Nixon, Subject: Chinese Representation at the United Nations, March 1971, 6, Folder Chirep, Box 86, Country Files: Far East, Henry A. Kissinger Files, NSF, RMN.

<sup>39</sup> Memorandum, Kissinger, Subject: U.S. China Policy, 5 February 1969, Folder NSSM-14 (2 of 2), Box H-134, Study Memorandums (1969-1974), NSC Institutional ("H") Files, RMN; National Security Study Memorandum 14, 5 February 1969, 1, Folder US China Policy 1969-1972 [1 of 4], Box 86, Country Files: Far East, HAK Files, NSF, RMN.

<sup>40</sup> NSSM 14: US China Policy, 8 August 1969: Outlines and Key Issues, 1, 3, Folder NSC Meeting (San Clemente) 8/14/69 Briefings: Korea, China (2 of 3), Box H-023, Study Memorandums 1969-1974), NSC Institutional ("H") Files, RMN.



the Soviets.<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, continued Chinese hostility necessitated the continued deployment of large U.S. military forces in Asia, violating the recently enunciated Nixon Doctrine.<sup>42</sup> These last two points shifted the timeline for action considerably forward from where it had been during the Johnson years. The memorandum itself offered little that was new in terms of assumptions, and nothing in the form of new policy prescriptions. Beginning by noting “the weight of China’s looming mass” on its neighbors and in the American and Soviet imaginations, it foresaw no breakthroughs while Mao remained alive, and limited ability to influence the succession struggle. In the long-term, the goal should be a combination of continued “deterrence” and new forms of outreach.<sup>43</sup> At its most then, this only confirmed that Doak Barnett’s policy had gone bipartisan. But the all-important issue of timing remained undecided.

A sign that change might come sooner than later appeared in a memo written by Marshall Green later that month. A diplomatic veteran who had served the U.S. in and about Asia since the Eisenhower administration, the Undersecretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs had privately favored change during the Johnson years but officially argued for extreme incrementalism. Now, he was beginning to change his tune. The reason for this was that “the American mood is changing,” in favor of changing China policy as well as against continuing military commitments in Asia. This weariness

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<sup>41</sup> Talking Points, China, NSC Meeting, 14 August 1969, 1, Folder NSC Meeting (San Clemente) 8/14/69 Briefings: Korea, China (2 of 3), Box H-023, Study Memorandums (1969-1974), H-Files, RMN.

<sup>42</sup> NSSM 14: US China Policy, 2, Folder NSC Meeting (San Clemente) 8/14/69 Briefings: Korea, China (2 of 3), Box H-023, Study Memorandums (1969-1974), H-Files, RMN.

<sup>43</sup> NSSM 14 (full), 1, 5, 9, Folder NSC Meeting (San Clemente) 8/14/69 Briefings: Korea, China (2 of 3), Box H-023, Meeting Files, H-Files, RMN.

created “the need for a new approach.” To fulfill this approach, the U.S. should continue gradually lessening travel and trade restrictions and tentatively reach out to the Chinese leadership.<sup>44</sup> Green had finally been moved to action. But it was to be a go-slow approach for the time being. Still, by the end of the year the media could sense something had changed. The *New York Times* noted Nixon possessed “more flexibility on the problem of China than the Democratic Administrations” which preceded his, and predicted “milestones” to come.<sup>45</sup>

The president’s strategy was based on a gradual escalation of signals, which allowed him freedom of maneuver. The first of these signals was a slight modification of travel and trade controls which made it easier for certain groups of qualified Americans (scholars, newsmen, students, doctors, scientists, and members of Congress) to travel to the mainland and allowed U.S. travelers there to purchase up to \$100 of Chinese-made goods while in country. Taking the form of National Security Decision Memorandum (NSDM) 17, it was approved by Nixon on 23 June 1969 and went into effect on 21 July.<sup>46</sup> The press noted the change, but deemed the actions “more symbolic than substantive,” which they certainly were given continued Chinese refusal to grant Americans visas.<sup>47</sup> This approach continued in 1970. In March, upon Secretary of State

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<sup>44</sup> Green, A New Approach in East Asia, 23 August 1969, 2, 5, Folder Sen. Mike Mansfield [2 of 2] (2 of 4), Box 149, US Domestic Agency Files, HAK Office Files, NSF, RMN.

<sup>45</sup> Tad Szulc, “U.S. and China: The Unthinkable Is Here,” *New York Times*, 28 December 1969, E3.

<sup>46</sup> Kissinger to Nixon, Subject: Actions to Indicate a Possible Opening Toward China, 23 June 1969, 2, Kissinger to Nixon NSDM 17 – Relaxation of Trade Controls Against Communist China, July 1969, both in Folder NSDM-17 [2 of 2], Box H-210, NSC H-Files, RMN.

<sup>47</sup> “Significant Gesture to China,” *Los Angeles Times*, 23 July 1969, A6.

William Rogers's suggestion the previous month, the travel ban was lifted for all who wished to travel to China for "legitimate" purposes.<sup>48</sup> In August, the U.S. slightly relaxed the trade ban by allowing foreign-made goods with U.S. parts to be sold to China.<sup>49</sup>

## **Reaching Out**

None of these actions indicated Nixon planned anything more than a continuation of Johnson's program of halting outreach. The travel ban was still in effect, if now only being enforced by the Chinese, and the trade ban effectively maintained. In terms of rhetoric, what changed from Johnson were not the sentiments expressed by officials, but their rank. In August 1969 in Australia, Secretary of State Rogers said what Secretary of State Rusk never would, expressing hope that soon the U.S. and China could "enter into a useful" dialogue leading "to a reduction of tensions." He also declared neutrality in the ongoing fighting between the P.R.C. and the U.S.S.R.<sup>50</sup> One month later, Secretary of the Treasury Elliot Richardson argued that "longrun improvement in our relations" with the Chinese communists "is in our own national interest" and that the administration intended to improve relations with the Chinese as well as the Soviets.<sup>51</sup> That December, Kissinger told the press the Chinese were "a great people" with which the administration

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<sup>48</sup> Rogers to Nixon, 7 February 1970, Folder Country Files Europe – Poland, Vol. II, Warsaw Talks (2/1/70 – 6/30/70) [1 of 2], Box 700, Country Files – Europe (Poland), NSF, RMN.

<sup>49</sup> "U.S. Eases Curb on China Trade," *Washington Post*, 29 August 1970, A4.

<sup>50</sup> Secretary Rogers speech to National Press Club, Canberra, Australia, 8 August 1969 (excerpts), in Department of State Bulletin, 1 September 1969, 180, 181, Folder US China Policy 1969-1972 [1 of 4], Box 86, Country Files: Far East, HAK Files, NSF, RMN.

<sup>51</sup> Elliot Richardson speech to American Political Science Association, 5 September 1969 (excerpt), in Department of State Bulletin, 260, in *Ibid*.

intended “to build a more permanent peace.”<sup>52</sup> None of these early remarks was at all epochal. But they did signal to the Chinese increased U.S. interest in altering relations from the most senior members of the administration.

Since the Korean Armistice, the sole regular venue of contact between representatives of the Chinese and U.S. governments was in Warsaw, where diplomats from the two nations had met over 100 times between the mid-1950s and late-1960s. The chaos and radicalism of the Cultural Revolution had temporarily halted these meetings, but in late 1968 the Chinese expressed interest in their resumption after Nixon took office. However, the Chinese abruptly cancelled the planned 135<sup>th</sup> meeting for 20 February 1969 at the last minute. The official reason was the defection of a Chinese diplomat to the U.S. embassy in the Netherlands, though larger factional struggles within China revolving around the upcoming Ninth Party Congress were seen by the American media as a more likely culprit.<sup>53</sup> However, the press viewed this as a temporary setback which need not derail U.S. efforts at outreach, particularly the lifting of the travel and trade bans.<sup>54</sup> The 135<sup>th</sup> Meeting eventually occurred exactly one year later. The primary agenda item at past meetings under previous administrations had been the release of a handful of U.S. civilian and military prisoners held by the Chinese. Their captivity had been a major stated reason for not lifting the travel and trade bans going back to Dulles’s tenure. But the Nixon administration aimed for something vaguer but larger. A month

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<sup>52</sup> HAK Backgrounder – 18 December 1969, 3, Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> “China Backs Out,” *New York Times*, 20 February 1969, 46.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.; “Waiting for Peking,” *Wall Street Journal*, 21 February 1969, 16.

before the meeting, Kissinger wrote Nixon that the goal was “to shape a climate” of cooperation between the two adversaries.<sup>55</sup>

This would prove a wise approach. Attempts to accomplish anything concrete, even on the limited issue of prisoner release, had long proven futile. Kissinger and others recognized the proper use of such meetings was to gauge Chinese receptivity to more substantive contacts. The Chinese themselves appeared to have the same idea. In his opening statement at the meeting, Lei Yang expressed Chinese interest in “higher level meetings” at the “ministerial” or “presidential envoy” level.<sup>56</sup> Kissinger’s reaction to this was that China was returning to a Bandung-era approach to foreign policy. He recalled to Nixon how the Chinese had previously offered higher-level meetings in 1955, which the U.S. rejected, alienation the P.R.C. leadership and causing the Warsaw talks to become “sterile.”<sup>57</sup> Unlike it 1955, the U.S. public, the congress, and the administration were now all receptive to such an offer.

The administration’s primary means of communicating with the Chinese was through unofficial and official backchannels using private citizens and the leaders of other nations. The two vectors were Nicolai Ceausescu’s Romania and Yahya Khan’s Pakistan, both of which had strong connections to the Chinese at that time. In November

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<sup>55</sup> Kissinger to Nixon, Subject: The Warsaw Talks, 21 January 1970, 3, Folder Country Files Europe – Poland, Vol. I (Warsaw Talks up to 1/31/70) [1 of 2], Box 700, Country Files – Europe (Poland), NSF, RMN.

<sup>56</sup> Telegram, Warsaw (Stoessel) to Washington, 20 February 1970, 1, 3, Folder 1: Exchange leading up to HAK trip to China, Box 1031, China/Vietnam Negotiations, For the President’s Files, NSF, RMN.

<sup>57</sup> Kissinger to Nixon, Subject: Chinese at Warsaw Talks Suggest US Send High-Level Representative to Peking, 20 February 1970, 1, Folder Country Files Europe – Poland, Vol. II, Warsaw Talks (2/1/70 – 6/30/70) [2 of 2], Box 700, Country Files – Europe (Poland), NSF, RMN.

1969, a note from Theodore White to Zhou Enlai was passed through the Romanians via the U.S. embassy in Bucharest. White was a journalist whose *Thunder Out Of China* in the 1940s had marked him as the second leading sympathetic U.S. journalist to the Chinese Communist guerrillas, after Edgar Snow.<sup>58</sup> In this letter, White referenced the chaos caused by the counterculture as a reason Nixon would be open to outreach, telling Zhou “there is a ferment in our country such as we have never experienced before.”<sup>59</sup> This upheaval had led to the questioning of old certitudes and the reevaluation of longstanding policies, including on the issue of China.

With Pakistan, the outreach was purely through official channels. Assistant Secretary of State Harold Saunders told Pakistan’s Ambassador to the United States Agha Hilaly in August 1969 that Nixon no longer wanted China to remain isolated.<sup>60</sup> In Islamabad, President Khan translated this message to the Chinese ambassador as “the U.S. is interested in normalizing relations with Communist China.” Hilaly reported this to Kissinger than December.<sup>61</sup> Nixon reiterated to Khan in a letter that month his desire to create “a more meaningful dialogue” with China’s leaders.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> China Lobby stalwart Freda Utley referred to the book in 1949 at “Blunder Out Of China.”

<sup>59</sup> White to Chou, 17 November 1969, Folder T.H. White, Box 86, Country Files: Far East, HAK Files, NSF, RMN.

<sup>60</sup> Memcon, Saunders and Hilaly, 28 August 1969, 2, Folder 2, Cookies II: Chronology of Exchange with PRC, Box 1032, For the President’s Files, NSF, RMN.

<sup>61</sup> Memcon, Kissinger and Hilaly, 19 December 1969, 1, Folder 1: Exchange leading up to HAK trip to China, Box 1031, China/Vietnam Negotiations, For the President’s Files, NSF, RMN.

<sup>62</sup> Nixon to Khan, 20 December 1969, in Ibid.

The revelations in late April 1970 of the U.S. invasion of Cambodia outraged the Chinese and led them to once again temporarily call off the Warsaw meetings.<sup>63</sup> Yet Vietnam proved only a temporary hindrance, as evidenced by the major breakthroughs of 1971 which occurred during the Lam Son 719 operation by the U.S. and the South Vietnamese in Laos. The more perennial hurdle was Taiwan. There was doubt as to how far the U.S. could or should go in alienating its treaty ally, as well as a continued desire to protect that regime's existence. The issue most directly relevant to the R.O.C. was its U.N. seat, which the U.S. remained committed to defending. The notion that a loss in the annual vote would necessitate wholesale policy change on the P.R.C.'s terms went back at least to Robert Komer in 1961. This had been the original argument for what could then have been termed preemptive rapprochement. China's own actions – first with Mao's precipitation of the Sino-Soviet split in 1960 and then his launching of the Cultural Revolution in 1966, had undone years of positive momentum and bought the U.S. a decade of profitable inaction. But in November 1970, the vote to seat the P.R.C. and expel the R.O.C. was 51 for and 49 against, exceeding the tie vote of 1965 and giving the Chinese communists their first ever majority. This fell short of the two-thirds supermajority required to override U.S. labelling of the matter an Important Question, but it was clear this de facto veto could be overridden in 1971.<sup>64</sup> That led to an extensive

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<sup>63</sup> Chalmers M Roberts, "China Calls Off Parley With U.S. in Warsaw," *Washington Post*, 19 May 1970, A1.

<sup>64</sup> "'New Situation' on China," *New York Times*, 21 November 1970, 29; Robert Keatley, "Peking & the UN," *Wall Street Journal*, 3 November 1970, 1.

internal reevaluation of the U.S. approach on the matter.<sup>65</sup> This study would take into consideration both international and domestic public opinion on the issue, and seek to formulate a strategy which could satisfy both.<sup>66</sup>

The conclusion reached in March 1971 was that while the American public would accept the P.R.C.'s admission, perceived U.S. abandonment of Taiwan might "arouse a considerable last gasp effort of the right-wing remnants of the China Lobby."<sup>67</sup> The new approach would be a variation on the "Two Chinas" policy proposed by Komer in 1961, although it would now be called "One China – Two States."<sup>68</sup> In his report on his matter to Nixon, Kissinger claimed this could be pulled off and prevent "Taipei's expulsion, not just for a year or so, but for the foreseeable future."<sup>69</sup> The ultimate barrier was getting enough U.N. delegations to go along with this new approach. The immediate challenge was achieving Chiang's acquiescence. U.S. Ambassador Robert Murphy met with Chiang in May, and believed he had reached an agreement. Chiang's only proviso

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<sup>65</sup> Murrey Marder, "U.S. Plans to Restudy Its Policy," *Washington Post*, 21 November 1970, A1.

<sup>66</sup> Memorandum, John Holdridge, Col. Richard T. Kennedy, Marshall Wright and Helmut Sonnenfeldt to Kissinger, Subject: Establishment of China Policy Group, Study of UN Membership Question, Public Relations Handling of China Policy Question, NSC Staff Study, 18 November 1970, 1-2, Folder NSSM-106 (2 of 3), Box H-176, Study Memorandums (1969-1974), NSC H-Files, RMN.

<sup>67</sup> Marshall Wright to Kissinger, Subject NSSM 107 – The UN Membership Question, 3 March 1971, 2, 5, Folder China – United Nations Sensitive (1 of 2), Box 86, Country Files: Far East, HAK Files, NSF, RMN.

<sup>68</sup> Wright to Kissinger, 9 March 1971, Subject: Alternative Forms of Dual Representation, 9 March 1971, 6, in *Ibid*.

<sup>69</sup> Kissinger to Nixon, Subject: Chinese Representation at the United Nations, March 1971, Folder Chirep, Box 86, Country Files: Far East, HAK Files, NSF, RMN.



was maintaining the Security Council seat.<sup>70</sup> This somewhat complicated the U.S. approach, but Chiang insisted he would “rather be a jade broken than an earthen tile intact.”<sup>71</sup>

### **Red Schism and Yellow Peril**

The most common and parsimonious explanation of why Nixon went to China involves triangular balance-of-power diplomacy, specifically the role the increasing threat the Soviet Union posed to the Chinese and the United States as the chief causal variable. In the most recent and authoritative book on the subject, Chris Tudda endorsed this line of reasoning for both U.S. and Chinese actions.<sup>72</sup> It seemed to be endorsed at the time by officials in the State Department, at least from China’s vantage point. A 1972 memo claimed recent Chinese actions “should probably be viewed first of all in the context of its fear of the Soviet Union.”<sup>73</sup> This was predicted in September 1969 by former general and longtime communist China observer William Griffith, who claimed growing Chinese fear of the U.S.S.R. “might also make it possible for us to work out a *détente*” with the Chinese.<sup>74</sup> After his secret July 1971 visit to Beijing, Kissinger told

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<sup>70</sup> Kissinger to Nixon, Subject: Chinese Representation in the UN, 19 May 1971, 1, Folder Murphy, Ambassador [1], Box 86, Country Files: Far East, HAK Files, NSF, RMN.

<sup>71</sup> Summary Record of a Conversation Between Chiang Kai-shek and Mr. Robert D. Murphy, 9, in *Ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> Chris Tudda, *A Cold War Turning Point: Nixon and China, 1969-1972* (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press, 2012), 206.

<sup>73</sup> PRC Foreign Relations, 2, Folder China’s Foreign Policy – General 1972, Box 6, Subject Files, Office of Asian Communist Affairs, 1961-1973, RG 59, NARA.

<sup>74</sup> William E. Griffith, “The American Stake in the Russian-China Confrontation,” *Reader’s Digest*, September 1969, 92.

New York Governor Nelson Rockefeller “they are scared to death of the Russians or they wouldn’t be doing this.”<sup>75</sup>

On the Chinese side, this motivation was undoubtedly true. But on the U.S. side, it can only explain the timing of the policy shift. Whether the U.S. was primarily interested in “our position as ‘balancer’ in the evolving triangular relationship among the superpowers,” to quote Kissinger aide Richard Solomon, is open to dispute.<sup>76</sup> The final breakdown of relations between the Chinese and Soviet communists as represented by the border clashes which began in March 1969 certainly influenced the timing of U.S. actions. But the decision to take those actions at the earliest possible moment had already been made. Nixon discussed his intentions with aides in January, and ordered Kissinger to get the bureaucratic wheels turning at the start of February, over a month before the first Red Army soldier opened fire on his People’s Liberation Army counterpart along the Ussuri River. Also, discussion of the Sino-Soviet split tended to be coupled with talk of the long-term Chinese threat. It was this looming Chinese threat, and not the Soviet menace, which guided U.S. decision making.

Complicating the triangular diplomacy narrative was Nixon’s ardent desire “to avoid creating the impression that we seek a better relationship with China merely in order to heighten Soviet concern,” as enunciated in NSSM-63 from September 1969, the

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<sup>75</sup> Telcon, Kissinger and Rockefeller, 17 July 1971, 3, Folder 1971 1-20 July 10 of 11 (2 of 2), Box 12, HAK Telephone Conversation Transcripts, NSF, RMN.

<sup>76</sup> Solomon to Kissinger, Subject: Mao Tse-tung and the Sino-Soviet Dispute, 7 December 1971, 9, Folder PRC Briefing Papers Sent to the President February 1972, Box 91, Country Files: Far East, HAK Files, NSF, RMN.

administration's policy paper on the Sino-Soviet split.<sup>77</sup> The goal instead was to improve relations with both rivals. At the same time, the document emphasized the need to pursue "the possibility of better relations in the longer-run with an increasingly powerful, nuclear-armed China."<sup>78</sup> Balancing mutual outreach to two enemy powers would prove tricky. On the eve of his first relaxation of travel and trade restrictions, Kissinger warned Nixon that he should make the change before his upcoming visit to Romania, lest it "give your decision overly anti-Soviet significance."<sup>79</sup> Nonetheless, it was still seen that way, one reporter calling the move "more of a threat to Moscow than the United States's achievements on the moon."<sup>80</sup> Conversely, some in the press assumed his in retrospect anomalous and clumsy hard-line comments about China at this first press conference might have been a signal of reassurance to the Soviets.<sup>81</sup>

Nixon was not the only actor sending signals. Some seasoned observers wondered if the Chinese decision to escalate their border dispute with the Soviets was not a wink to the Americans.<sup>82</sup> Kissinger's lead China watcher John Holdridge in December 1969 similarly assumed the recent Chinese release of two U.S. yachtsmen "is

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<sup>77</sup> NSSM-63: U.S. Policy on Current Sino-Soviet Differences, 3 September 1969, 17, Folder Review Group Meeting – NSSM 63, Sino-Soviet differences, 9/25/69, Box H-040, Meeting Files (1969-1974), NSC H-Files, RMN.

<sup>78</sup> NSSM-63: US Policy on Current Sino-Soviet Differences, Summary Statement, 11 September 1969, 1, 5, in Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Kissinger to Nixon, Subject: Relaxation of Economic Controls Against China, 11 July 1969, 1, Folder China [1969], Box 839, Name Files, NSF, RMN.

<sup>80</sup> "Right Move on China," *Christian Science Monitor*, 24 July 1969, 16.

<sup>81</sup> Chalmers M. Roberts, "Soviet Worry: Nixon Visit to Rumania Reopens Question of China Policy," *Washington Post*, 6 July 1969, 39.

<sup>82</sup> C.P. Fitzgerald, "The River Is Not The Issue," *Nation*, 14 April 1969, 465.

probably aimed mostly at the Russians.”<sup>83</sup> Thus, arrows at the Soviets were olive branches to the Americans, and vice-versa. Behind all these machinations was a worry that if the U.S. did not act soon, the Soviets and the Chinese might patch up their differences and resume their mutual hostility towards the U.S., effectively wrecking détente.<sup>84</sup> This was a fleeting opportunity which must be seized swiftly. Thus, the greatest role of the Sino-Soviet rift was in changing the crucial time variable in the equation of changing China policy. Officials in the Johnson and Nixon administrations subscribed to the same basic assumptions on changing China policy. In the Johnson administration, it was never the right time for change. In the Nixon administration, it almost always was.

The role played by perception of the Chinese threat was also complex. The long-term threat, which had been present in policy circles since the beginning of the 1960s, retained its hold on the imagination. Yet due to economic stagnation, diplomatic setbacks, and the chaos of the Cultural Revolution, the short-term threat had receded. This created a window of opportunity in which a president could conduct a policy of rapprochement without seeming to most observers to be conducting a policy of appeasement. Pundits failed to notice both sides of this China threat coin, and rather focused only on one. Hong Kong Consul General Edward W. Martin wrote in May 1969 that the time was finally propitious for policy change due to current Chinese weakness.

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<sup>83</sup> Holdridge to Kissinger, Subject: Your Breakfast with the President and Senator Mansfield, 16 December 1969, 2, Folder Sen. Mike Mansfield [2 of 2] (1 of 4), Box 149, US Domestic Agency Files, HAK Office Files, NSF, RMN.

<sup>84</sup> Rogers to Nixon, Subject: Next Moves on China Policy, 2 December 1969, Folder NSSM-14 (2 of 2), Box H-134, Study Memorandums (1969-1974), NSC H-Files, RMN.

The *Wall Street Journal* credited the declining fear of “Chinese expansionism” with ongoing policy shifts. *Newsweek* claimed “a major assumption” of Nixon’s new approach was the realization China was “less of an immediate threat,” while the *Christian Science Monitor* credited the Warsaw thaw to China’s reduced capabilities.<sup>85</sup>

Still, for others, the long-term threat remained paramount. The *Wall Street Journal*, which by then was a moderate but consistent supporter of policy change, reminded its readers in 1969 that “brooding over all is the enigma of Red China, adding in 1970 that “for Red China the logical course of empire is – south.”<sup>86</sup> Reflecting these fears, de Gaulle suggested to Nixon in 1969 that “it would be better for the U.S. to recognize China before they were obliged to do it by the growth of China.”<sup>87</sup> A few experts did manage to square this circle and see the full situation. Stewart Alsop wondered at the start of 1970 if “we perhaps take Communist China too seriously?” For the time being, the answer to him was yes. Still, “the time will no doubt come when we will have to take Chinese power very seriously indeed.” In assessing China after two decades of communist rule, *U.S. News* followed the lead of other periodicals writing on the same subject by contrasting the apparently growing and prosperous China of 1959 with the basket case of a nation it had temporarily become a decade later, observing that

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<sup>85</sup> Martin to Green, 19 May 1969, 4, Folder Def 12 Armaments – US ABM Program 1969, Box 2, Subject Files, Office of Asian Communist Affairs, 1961-1973, RG 59, NARA; “Good Sense in Asia,” *Wall Street Journal*, 5 August 1969, 14; “Asia and ‘The Nixon Doctrine’,” *Newsweek*, 18 August 1969, 34; Joseph C. Harsch, “Why U.S. and Peking began to chat,” *Christian Science Monitor*, 12 January 1970, 1.

<sup>86</sup> “The Chains of Asia,” *Wall Street Journal*, 29 August 1969, 8; “The Premises of Policy,” *Wall Street Journal*, 14 July 1970, 16.

<sup>87</sup> Memcon, Nixon and de Gaulle, 1 March 1969, 9, Folder Memcons – Europe Feb 23, ’69, Box 447, Subject Files, NSF, RMN.

“China is not an immediate military threat to either of the superpowers.” Nonetheless, both superpowers “worry about the day when the Chinese will have a respectable arsenal of nuclear weapons and of missiles to carry them.” The combination of atomic weapons and limitless manpower reserves was one “not lightly dismissed by experts.”<sup>88</sup> The giant was no longer sleeping. It might be sick. But sickness was temporary. Changes had to be made before that time passed.

### **Intellectuals, Red-Baiters, and Political Hacks**

The few remaining opponents of change could not understand the reasoning behind such moves. In its story on the announcement of the Nixon Doctrine, the *Chicago Tribune* reminded readers that in his Guam speech the president “identified Red China as the greatest threat to the peace of the world.” In the view of the editorial writer, such a statement “can hardly be reconciled with gratuitous concessions to Peking.”<sup>89</sup> This reflected Marvin Liebman’s retort to Jacob Javits’s embrace of Doak Barnett’s slogan – “can’t contain if don’t isolate.” Early on, Nixon paid at least cursory attention to the old China Lobby stalwarts, if only to keep them quiet. In September 1969 he instructed Kissinger to meet with Walter Judd.<sup>90</sup> Before the meeting, Kissinger’s aide John Holdridge explained to his boss with condescension – if not also accuracy – that “Dr. Judd is about the last major proponent of the unreconstructed why-we-lost China

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<sup>88</sup> Steward Alsop, “Does China Matter Much?,” *Newsweek*, 26 January 1970, 84; “Red China After 20 Years of Mao: Threat to World Peace?,” *U.S. News & World Report*, 12 October 1969, 66.

<sup>89</sup> “Strange Illusions About Red China,” *Chicago Tribune*, 2 August 1960, N10.

<sup>90</sup> Nixon to Kissinger, 22 September 1969, Folder CO 34 China [1969-70], Box 6, Subject Files, Confidential Files, 1969-1974, White House Special Files, White House Central Files, RMN.

school,” and that Kissinger should “let him have his way” and blow off steam about his worries about Nixon betraying his old allies.<sup>91</sup> As Nixon’s goal of policy change became apparent to the media, newspapers wrote stories on the China Lobby’s death at the hands of “a gradual shift in public opinion.”<sup>92</sup>

By 1971, their in-house ally Tom Charles Huston reported to Haig that his old friends in the movement “express alarm about a possible major shift in American policy.” Huston primarily worried about how to prevent right-wing anticommunists from attacking the administration.<sup>93</sup> Haig’s response was that Huston could assure his friends that “there is absolutely no cause for alarm about a major shift in American policy.”<sup>94</sup> This was accurate at the time, since only after unexpected intervening events in April did the administration accelerate its long-planned program of rapprochement. After the whirlwind events of that month, Judd wrote to Nixon demanding “to know what we are doing – and why.” Following repeated and unreturned calls to the White House over the ensuing weeks requesting an answer from the president, Nixon aide Jon Howe concluded it would be best “to provide a brief non-substantive reply” to a man who less than two years before could demand an audience with the National Security Adviser. That reply

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<sup>91</sup> Holdridge to Kissinger, Subject: Your Meeting with Dr. Walter Judd, 17 October 1969, 1, 2, in *Ibid.*

<sup>92</sup> “‘China Lobby,’ Once Powerful Factor in U.S. Politics, Appears Victim of Lack of Interest,” *New York Times*, 26 April 1970, 14.

<sup>93</sup> Huston to Haig, Subject: U.S. Policy Toward Communist China, 19 February 1971, Folder [EX] CO 34-2 People’s Republic of China (Red China) [1/1/71 – 5/31/71], Box 19, Subject Files: CO (Countries), White House Central Files, RMN.

<sup>94</sup> Haig to Huston, Subject: U.S. Policy Toward Communist China, 25 February 1971, in *Ibid.*

emphasized Nixon's belief that peace in Asia depended upon "communication" between the American and the Chinese.<sup>95</sup>

Part of the reason Nixon could now ignore the likes of Judd was that some of his leading compatriots had switched sides. Most notable among these turcoats was Anna Chennault, the Chinese widow of one of the Lobby's godfathers. Nixon invited her to the White House in April 1971, and she proved supportive of his efforts to change policy, publicly endorsing a complete removal of the travel and trade bans.<sup>96</sup> The movement of mainstream opinion away from the old certitudes of the Lobby was also reflected by the League of Women Voters' endorsement of normalizing diplomatic relations in April 1969. The group reached this conclusion following a three-year study, presumably begun after the Fulbright hearings, held three years and one month earlier.<sup>97</sup> Democratic leaders attempted to capitalize on the changing national mood. Senator Ted Kennedy made normalization of relations with communist China a centerpiece of his then-frontrunning presidential campaign. He launched this effort in a March 1969 address before the National Committee on United States-China Relations.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Judd to Nixon, 21 May 1971, Howe to Ray Price, Subject: Reply to Dr. Judd, 16 June 1971, Nixon to Judd, 29 June 1971, all in Folder [EX] CO 34-2 People's Republic of China (Red China) [6/1/71 – 7/31/71], Box 19, Subject Files: CO (Countries), White House Central Files, RMN.

<sup>96</sup> Chennault to Nixon, 20 April 1971, George Lardner, Jr., "Anna Chennault Praises President," *Washington Post*, 16 April 1971, both in Folder [EX] CO 34-2 People's R71epublic of China (Red China) [1/1/71 – 5/31/71], Box 19, Subject Files: CO (Countries), White House Central Files, RMN.

<sup>97</sup> "Admit China to U.N., Women Voters Urge," *Chicago Tribune*, 27 April 1969, 7.

<sup>98</sup> China Policy for the '70's by Edward M. Kennedy, Address before the National Committee for United States-China Relations, New York City, 20 March 1969, Folder Congressional Testimony Statements: Miscellanea, Box 2, Eckstein Papers, Michigan.



Despite such signs of changing times, Nixon remained cautious of congressional backing. He made sure to inform members of the House and Senate leadership from both parties prior to his first minor relaxation of the travel and trade bans in July 1969.<sup>99</sup> In his October 1970 testimony before the House Subcommittee on Asian and Pacific Affairs, Marshall Green emphasized the gradual and incremental nature of Nixon's approach to China while highlighting the "utility" to the Chinese communists of being able to cast the Americans in the "devil's role."<sup>100</sup> As these moves accelerated in early 1971, the media credited a new "China Lobby" led by the NCUSCR and its "scholars and specialists," who "quietly laid the groundwork and acceptance for a reexamination of China policy."<sup>101</sup> By 1969, while Judd and his allies were being ignored in Washington, professors enjoyed access to both ends of Pennsylvania Avenue. In addition to that, they established connections to big business, which the China Lobby had always feared would betray them. The *Washington Post* noted how the NCUSCR's first national conference was funded by \$50,000 in easily-obtained donations from "big corporations."<sup>102</sup> For a brief period, one might even speak of a Professor-Industrial-Political Complex, with businesses funding the efforts of academics to advise the nation's elected leaders and convince them of the wisdom of their policy prescriptions.

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<sup>99</sup> Undersecretary of State to Nixon, Subject: NSDM: China Trade, 8 July 1969, 2, Folder NSDM-17 [1 of 2], Box H-210, Study Memorandums (1969-1974, NSC H-Files, RMN).

<sup>100</sup> Statement of Assistant Secretary Green Before the Subcommittee on Asian and Pacific Affairs, Committee on Foreign Affairs, House of Representatives, 6 October 1970, 3, 14, Folder Master of Opening Statement by Marshall Green before House, 10/6/70, Box 5, Subject Files, Office of Asian Communist Affairs, RG 59, NARA.

<sup>101</sup> John W. Finney, "Congress Is Calm on China Moves," *New York Times*, 2 May 1971, 8.

<sup>102</sup> Stephen S. Rosenheld, "The China Talkers and the Absentees," *Washington Post*, 23 March 1969, 50.

As an academic, Henry Kissinger believed in the importance of backing from intellectuals to a politicians' success on the national stage. At his first meeting with representatives of the Nixon campaign in June 1968, the then-adviser to Nelson Rockefeller argued that support from the "intellectual community" would "increase public support for Nixon's programs," while their opposition would lower his margin for political error. He blamed Johnson's failures in part on that president's failure to cultivate intellectuals as Kennedy had.<sup>103</sup> Perhaps this plug from a professor on behalf of his own kind was in part self-serving. Still, using Kissinger as an intermediary, Nixon did proceed – at least on China policy – to patronize an influential coterie of largely liberal academics. The academics had already volunteered their services before Nixon took office. In December 1968, Doak Barnett, along with Harvard Law Professor Jerome Cohen and John Fairbank, sent Nixon an unsolicited 11-page memorandum on changing China policy. It laid out a combination of incremental policy changes and secret contacts to gain the enemy's trust and possibly lead to a breakthrough, while cautioning against taking sides in the Sino-Soviet dispute.<sup>104</sup> With the exception of an admonition to include Japanese leaders in any major moves and keep them informed, it reads like a remarkably accurate game plan for what was to follow. Two months before Nixon's visit to China, the *Los Angeles Times* credited this "secret" study with laying the basis for

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<sup>103</sup> Michael Saperstein to Leonard Garment, Re: Meeting with Henry Kissinger on 12 June 1968, 13 June 1968, 1, 2, Folder Leonard Garment: 1968 Campaign name files: Henry Kissinger, Box 70, Referred Materials White House Central Files, RMN.

<sup>104</sup> Memorandum for President-elect Nixon on United States Relations with China, Folder Statements on China (Not Used), Box 84, Liebman Papers, Hoover.

Nixon's China policy.<sup>105</sup> While this was something of an exaggeration, Kissinger's closeness to the China Studies community and reliance upon their advice – particularly those in the community who taught at Harvard – was public knowledge.<sup>106</sup>

Though these assessments of the influence of academics on Nixon were retrospective, shortly after Nixon's first step in altering the travel and trade bans, the *New York Times* claimed Nixon had adopted Barnett's policy of "containment without isolation."<sup>107</sup> By that point, Barnett and other academics had already met with both Nixon and Kissinger at the White House to offer advice.<sup>108</sup> At Barnett's urging, a second White House meeting occurred in December 1970.<sup>109</sup> During the deliberations of how to keep Taiwan in the United Nations, a third meeting took place in March 1971 on that particular subject.<sup>110</sup> This was triple the number of meetings these China scholars had with Johnson during his presidency.

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<sup>105</sup> David Kraslow, "Nixon's China Policy – How It Came About," *Los Angeles Times*, 10 December 1971, A1.

<sup>106</sup> Stanley Karnow, "China Lobby Finally Undone by One of Its Own," *Los Angeles Times*, 24 October 1971, F3.

<sup>107</sup> Peter Grose, "U.S. and China: Policy Shift Based on 'Containment Without Isolation'," *New York Times*, 27 July 1969, E3.

<sup>108</sup> Kissinger to Taylor, 27 May 1969, Folder 33: Gen Corr: Kissinger, Henry A, Box 1, Taylor Papers, Washington; Barnett to Nixon, 1 May 1969, [EX] CO 34 China [1969-70], Box 17, CO (Countries), Subject Files, White House Central Files, RMN.

<sup>109</sup> Barnett to Kissinger, 19 October 1970, Holdridge to Kissinger, 28 October 1970, Holdridge to Kissinger 24 November 1970, Memorandum for the White House Police, 2 December 1970, all in *Ibid.*

<sup>110</sup> Eckstein to Kissinger, 1 March 1971, Agenda for Tuesday, March 16 Meeting with American China Scholars, both in Folder Personal Correspondence File, 1960-1976: Kissinger, Henry, Box 6, Eckstein Papers, Michigan.

By late 1970, scholars like Barnett were becoming frustrated with what they saw as the slow pace of change under Nixon to that point. However, by the end of that year, his signaling and attempts at outreach began to bear fruit. A letter he sent through the Pakistani president to Zhou Enlai impressed the Chinese Premier, who noted it was the first communication to “come from a Head, through a Head, to a Head.”<sup>111</sup> Nixon reinforced the changing U.S. attitude in his February 1971 Foreign Policy Report, which referred to the “People’s Republic of China.”<sup>112</sup> The wording was immediately recognized as a milestone – the closest the U.S. had come to recognizing the regime thus far.<sup>113</sup> Nixon had used the phrase the previous October in a toast to Nicolai Ceausescu at a state dinner, but this was the first time it appeared in an official document. At a press conference in early March, the president stated his goal was to “normalize” relations with China, the first time he had used that specific word to define the goal of his attempts at rapprochement.<sup>114</sup> It soon became widely known that Zhou had observed these signals with approval.<sup>115</sup>

It was now finally China’s turn to reciprocate. Since the dust had recently settled from the Chairman’s latest purges and marginalization of officials like Lin Biao who had

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<sup>111</sup> Kissinger to Nixon, Subject: Chinese Communist Initiative, 9 December 1970, 2, Folder 1: Exchange leading up to HAK trip to China, Box 1031, China/Vietnam Negotiations, For the President’s Files, NSF, RMN.

<sup>112</sup> Foreign Policy Report, 25 February 1971, 85, Folder US China Policy 1969-1972 [1 of 4], Box 86, Country Files: Far East, HAK Files, NSF, RMN.

<sup>113</sup> “Nixon’s new Stance on China,” *Christian Science Monitor*, 26 February 1971, 16.

<sup>114</sup> President’s Press Conference, 4 March 1971 (excerpts), in *Ibid.*

<sup>115</sup> “Chou notes Nixon’s Red China reference,” *Christian Science Monitor*, 8 March 1971, 2.

supported the continuation of the policy of hostility towards the United States, moderates like Zhou who now held Mao's favor were free to let Nixon know his signals had been received loud and clear nearly two years after he began sending them. The opportunity came during the international table tennis championships in Nagoya, Japan, where Chinese players in early April welcomed the friendly entreaties of a 19 year-old American player named Glen Cowan. This led to an official invitation by the Chinese for the U.S. team to visit their country, the first time that regime had taken advantage of Nixon's relaxation of the travel ban.<sup>116</sup> The press termed the invitation "one of the most hopeful bits of news to come out of the Far East in some time," and wondered if Nixon would respond by inviting a Chinese sporting delegation to the U.S.<sup>117</sup> The administration immediately looked for ways to capitalize upon what they termed "'peoples diplomacy' with a vengeance."<sup>118</sup> State Department Press Secretary and former ABC News journalist John Scali proposed Nixon meet with the returning players the day of a scheduled major antiwar protest later that month to undercut coverage of that event, reflecting how much outreach to China was viewed as a public relations counterpoint to the continuing Vietnam War.<sup>119</sup>

This was in all likelihood the moment Nixon and others realized significant change could occur during Mao's lifetime. Symbolically, Nixon responded by inviting

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<sup>116</sup> "Ping-Pong Hippie Asserts He Could Mend U.S.-China Rift," *Chicago Tribune*, 19 April 1971, 1, 2.

<sup>117</sup> "How Will the Ball Bounce?," *Wall Street Journal*, 12 April 1971, 12.

<sup>118</sup> Memorandum, Ping-Pong Diplomacy, 14 April 1971, 4.

<sup>119</sup> Scali to Dwight Chapin, 12 April 1971, 1, Folder [EX] Co 34-2 People's Republic of China (Red China) [1/1/71 - 5/31/71], Box 19, Subject Files: CO (Countries), White House Central Files, RMN.

the Chinese table tennis team to tour the United States and visit the White House later that year.<sup>120</sup> Shortly thereafter, Nixon's public remarks acquired greater if still measured boldness. By the end of April, he referred at a news conference to "our new China policy" and mused that he expected "to visit Mainland China sometime in some capacity."<sup>121</sup> He began to use the awkwardly mixed metaphor that he had "broken the ice" but now needed "to test the water to see how deep it is," unwittingly implying his China policy would lead to his political demise.<sup>122</sup>

In a rare diplomatic pun, on a visit to Paris that April Marshall Green identified "the humble ping pong ball as a new 'sphere' of influence."<sup>123</sup> Longtime Asia policy observer Harrison Salisbury noted how U.S. policy makers recognized the connection between April's "Ping Pong Diplomacy" and Nixon's full lifting of the travel ban in March.<sup>124</sup> Presumably with that in mind, within a week of China's invitation Nixon

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<sup>120</sup> Don Irwin, "China Table Tennis Players to Visit U.S., Nixon Approves," *Los Angeles Times*, 21 April 1971, 1.

<sup>121</sup> Nixon, News Conference, 29 April 1971, Folder US China Policy 1969-1972 [1 of 4], Box 86, Country Files: Far East, HAK Files, NSF, RMN.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*; Nixon, Speech, Southern Media Representative Attending a Background Briefing on Domestic Policy Initiatives, Birmingham, Alabama, 25 May 1971, in Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents, 31 May 1971, 811, Folder US China Policy 1969-1972 [2 of 4] Box 86, Country Files: Far East, HAK Files, NSF, RMN.

<sup>123</sup> Memcon, Green and Charles Lucet, Subject: Chou En-lai Invitation to Senator Mansfield; Recent Developments in US-PRC Relations, 23 April 1971, 1, Folder Contacts with Communist Representatives, Professor Paul Lin – China, 1971, Box 6, Subject Files, Office of Asian Communist Affairs, 1961-1973, RG 59, NARA.

<sup>124</sup> Harrison F. Salisbury, "U.S. and China: Ping . . . Pong . . . A New Approach to Diplomacy," *New York Times*, 11 April 1971, E3.

issued NSDM 105 further relaxing trade restrictions, though not yet eliminating them or putting Chinese trade on the same level as that with other communist nations.<sup>125</sup>

This was exactly what Nixon was proposing to Kissinger by the end of April, arguing that recent events had unexpectedly accelerated the timeline for his projected actions.<sup>126</sup> That step would be taken in early June, after additional Chinese actions which would lead to the ultimate breakthrough.<sup>127</sup> The press noticed the “absence of national uproar” to this action, though Joseph Alsop did report internal opposition from the Defense Department, which worried about Chinese access to technology with military applications.<sup>128</sup> Eckstein’s fear of bureaucratic opposition proved largely unfounded. This was in large part because mid-level officials had been the first to openly support policy change in the previous administrations, and those such as Marshall Green who did not privately favored those who did. Only the Soviet desk opposed these initiatives due to their fears of Chinese rapprochement wrecking superpower détente. Yet Nixon leaning to one side would be counterproductive, and thus he was unwilling to heed their warnings.

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<sup>125</sup> Kissinger, National Security Decision Memorandum 105, 13 April 1971, 1, Folder US China Policy 1969-1972 [1 of 4], Box 86, Country Files: Far East, HAK Files, RMN; Don Irwin, “Nixon Moves to Heal Relations With Red China,” *Los Angeles Times* 15 April 1971, 1; “U.S. and China: A ‘New Page’ – and a Chance For Great Changes,” *New York Times*, 18 April 1971, E1.

<sup>126</sup> Nixon to Kissinger, 27 April 1971, Folder HAK/President Memos, Box 341, Subject Files, NSF, RMN.

<sup>127</sup> Murray Seeger, “Nixon Lifts Embargo on Exports to China,” *Los Angeles Times*, 11 June 1971, 1; “Another Move Toward China,” *Los Angeles Times*, 14 June 1971, B8.

<sup>128</sup> Murrey Marder, “Lack of Uproar on China Significant,” *Washington Post*, 14 June 1971, A2; Joseph Alsop, “The China Long Shot,” *Washington Post*, 14 June 1971, A21.

Just as the ending of the travel ban in March led to Ping Pong Diplomacy in April, the ending of the trade ban in June was intended to pave the way for Henry Kissinger's secret visit to Beijing in July. That visit was intended to secure an invitation for Nixon's visit, which the Chinese readily offered, and Nixon announced to a shocked television audience at 10:30 p.m. Eastern Time on the night of 15 July.<sup>129</sup> The invitation had been immediately offered to Kissinger by Zhou when they first sat down for talks on July 9.<sup>130</sup> In the coming months, this itself led to the controversy of "Who Invited Whom?," particularly after Zhou Enlai framed the invitation as Mao's response to a prior request from Nixon. An NSC investigation of the chronology of events concluded that while technically the invitation was initiated by the Chinese, Nixon had repeatedly signaled he wanted such an invite, essentially arguing that the president had made himself available without appearing too desperate.<sup>131</sup>

Kissinger recognized this danger while meeting with Zhou, noting "the Chinese desire to make it appear that the President had asked for an invitation to visit China," and he insisted the invitation refer to "a mutually expressed desire for a summit."<sup>132</sup> The first draft of the invitation, which was cleared with Kissinger, kept to this framework.

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<sup>129</sup> Speech, Nixon, 15 July 1971, Folder US China Policy 1969-1972 [2 of 4], Box 86, Country Files: Far East, HAK Files, NSF, RMN.

<sup>130</sup> Memcon, Kissinger and Chou En-lai, 9 July 1971, Peking, 3, Folder China Visit – Record of Previous Visits (3 of 5), Box 90, Country Files: Far East, HAK Files, NSF, RMN.

<sup>131</sup> Peter Rodman to Kissinger, Subject: Who Invited Whom?, 13 October 1971, Folder China, Box 13, Rodman Subject and Chron. August 1969-Aug. 1974, HAK Admin & Staff Files, HAK Office Files, NSF, RMN.

<sup>132</sup> Memcon, Kissinger and Chou En-lai, 11 July 1971, Peking, 12, Folder China Visit – Record of Previous Visits (3 of 5), Box 90, Country Files: Far East, HAK Files, NSF, RMN.



However, in the official announcement the Chinese added a preamble clause reading “knowing of President Nixon’s expressed desire to visit the People’s Republic of China,” putting the onus for the invite on the Americans and affording the Chinese a minor public relations advantage which no doubt irked the protocol-conscious Kissinger and cravenly insecure Nixon.<sup>133</sup>

Such prideful considerations had already become paramount. Throughout the process, Kissinger maintained in press interviews that Nixon had initiated the efforts at outreach towards the Chinese communists.<sup>134</sup> Still, the public apportionment of laurels – even before Kissinger’s secret journey from Islamabad to Beijing – benefitted the gregarious Kissinger over the more reserved Rogers. The National Security Adviser was made aware in early June that the Secretary of State “had been terribly hurt” but his lack of mention in the press release announcing the lifting of the trade ban.<sup>135</sup> In April 1971 Rogers’ press aide John Scali noted how as events progressed “the question of who authored this policy will become increasingly important,” and that “Rogers is prouder of his role in China policy than anything else with which he has been associated.”<sup>136</sup> Later that year, Scali would remark upon “the battle between Rogers and Kissinger” for credit,

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<sup>133</sup> Announcement (First Chinese Draft), Announcement, both in Folder China Visit – Record of Previous Visits (1 of 5), Box 90, Country Files: Far East, HAK Files, NSF, RMN.

<sup>134</sup> Telcon, Kissinger and Saville Davis (Christian Science Monitor), 19 December 1970, 2, Folder Telephone Conversations – Chron File, 16-21 Dec 1970 (2 of 2), Box 8, Telephone Conversation Transcripts, (Telcons), Kissinger Papers, RMN.

<sup>135</sup> Haig to Kissinger, 7 June 1971, Folder NSSM-106 (3 of 3), Box H-177, Study Memorandums (1969-1974), NSC H-Files, RMN.

<sup>136</sup> Scali to Haldeman, 21 April 1971, 2, 1, Folder Alpha Name Files (1969-1973) John Scali, Box 85, Staff Member Office Files: H.R. Haldeman, White House Special Files, RMN.

and he noted Rogers' disappointment in him for failing to push the policy making primacy of Rogers' State Department to the press.<sup>137</sup> Yet even when his department was given public credit, Rogers' name was omitted. Instead, the media focused on the role of Marshall Green, whom Javits aide Peter Lakeland referred to as the "principal architect of Nixon's China policy."<sup>138</sup> Rogers could not catch a break.

But Kissinger's true rival – at least in his own mind – was not even a member of the administration. It was Senator Mansfield. Kissinger had long warned Nixon about Mansfield's freelance diplomacy with the Chinese, arguing Mansfield was a partisan who did not have the president's best interests at heart. He could not have been pleased when it was Mansfield rather than himself whom Zhou first invited to China in April 1971.<sup>139</sup> Kissinger suggested Nixon attempt to "hold him off" and delay a visit Mansfield had been seeking for over two years.<sup>140</sup> Zhou offered Kissinger his own invite ten days later, on 21 April.<sup>141</sup> Nixon appeared to have no problem sharing the limelight, suggesting to Kissinger that Mansfield and Senate Minority Leader Hugh Scott could

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<sup>137</sup> Scali to Colson, Subject: CBS Reporting on China, 30 November 1971, 2, 1, Folder Alpha Name Files (1969-1973), John Scali October 1971, Box 96, Staff member Office Files: H.R. Haldeman, White House Special Files, RMN.

<sup>138</sup> William C. Selover, "Critical voice on China: loud and somewhat lone," *Christian Science Monitor*, 21 April 1971, 3; Lakeland to Javits, Suggested Guest List for "China Policy" Dinner, 27 April 1971, Folder China 1970-72, Box 14, Series 4, Subseries 2, Javits Papers, Stony Brook.

<sup>139</sup> Contacts with PRC Officials Concerning US-PRC Relations that have Taken place Since January 1969, 4, Folder 2, Cookies II: Chronology of Exchange with PRC, Box 1032, For the President's Files, NSF, Nixon.

<sup>140</sup> Mansfield to Nixon, 16 April 1971, Kissinger to Nixon, Subject: Your Meeting with Senator Mansfield 16 April 1971, 1, both in Folder Sen. Mike Mansfield [1 of 2] (3 of 3), Box 149, US Domestic Agency Files, HAK Office Files, NSF, RMN.

<sup>141</sup> Message from Premier Chou En lai, 21 April 1971, Folder 1: Exchange leading up to HAK trip to China, Box 1031, China/Vietnam Negotiations, For the President's Files, NSF, RMN.

accompany the president on his own eventual journey to China. Kissinger disagreed, worrying about sharing the moment “with the Democrats.” Nixon did not appear worried about that, reasoning that the Chinese would “know where the power is.”<sup>142</sup> In his meetings with Zhou, Kissinger made sure to insist that the Chinese refrain from welcoming any members of congress until after Nixon’s visit, repeatedly saying he did not want the matter to “become a policy football.”

### **Dancing in the End Zone**

In addition, Kissinger said he worried a large delegation might antagonize opponents of rapprochement and “the China Lobby might start up again.”<sup>143</sup> The transcript indicated Zhou nodded upon the mention of “China Lobby.” He had previously used the term himself in interviews with U.S. journalists, indicating the Chinese were well aware of the U.S. domestic political implications of the issue. In their second set of meetings in October 1971, Kissinger remarked to Zhou that “the radical right equals the radical left in their expression of violence, if not in the excellence of their grammar.”<sup>144</sup> The afternoon after his 15 July announcement, Nixon expressed his worries to Kissinger that only liberals would applaud his moves, as well as his desire to receive more vocal support from conservatives on the matter.<sup>145</sup> Even before the

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<sup>142</sup> Telcon, Kissinger and Nixon, 27 April 1971, 6, Folder 1: Exchange leading up to HAK trip to China, Box 1031, China/Vietnam Negotiations, For the President’s Files, NSF, RMN.

<sup>143</sup> Memcon, Kissinger and Chou En-lai, 11 July 1971, Peking, 7, 21, Folder China Visit – Record of Previous Visits (1 of 5), (3 of 5), Box 90, Country Files: Far East, HAK Files, NSF, RMN.

<sup>144</sup> Meeting, Kissinger and Chou En-lai, Peking, 20 October 1971, 5, Folder China Visit – Record of Previous Visits (1 of 5), Box 90, Country Files: Far East, HAK Files, NSF, RMN.

<sup>145</sup> Telcon, Kissinger and Nixon, 16 July 1971, 1, Folder 1971 1-20 July 10 of 11 (2 of 2), Box 12, Henry A. Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts, NSF, RMN.

announcement, conservatives in Houston had launched a “Reagan in ’72” committee due to dissatisfaction with the acceleration of détente with the Soviets and the Chinese.<sup>146</sup>

Nixon made sure Reagan was one of the few politicians given prior warning of his announcement, though like all others he was not told in advance of the speech’s contents.<sup>147</sup>

Whether out of genuine support, gratitude for the attention, or pure careerist pragmatism, Reagan played the good soldier, warning the Young Americans for Freedom in September against opposing Nixon’s China trip.<sup>148</sup> Other elected conservatives, even longtime China Lobby backer John Tower, muted their public criticism, though the senator did complain to Kissinger about his lack of White House access.<sup>149</sup> The lone conservative voice Nixon worried about was William F. Buckley, which he made clear to Kissinger, requesting multiple times that he call Buckley. Kissinger procrastinated, instead placing an early call to the magazine publisher’s brother James, telling the senator “we don’t want to wind up being supported by the wrong people for the wrong reasons and lose our friends.”<sup>150</sup> He only placed a call to

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<sup>146</sup> Alan L. Otten, “Conservative Grumbling About Nixon,” *Wall Street Journal*, 12 July 1971, 8.

<sup>147</sup> Telcon, Kissinger and Reagan, 15 July 1971, Folder 1971 1-20 July 10 of 11 (1 of 2), Box 12, Henry A. Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts, NSF, RMN.

<sup>148</sup> “Y.A.F. Is Cautioned on Its China Stand,” *Chicago Tribune*, 6 September 1971, C8.

<sup>149</sup> Telcon, Kissinger and Tower, 17 July 1971, Folder 1971 1-20 July 10 of 11 (2 of 2), Box 12, Henry A. Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts, NSF, RMN.

<sup>150</sup> Telcon, Kissinger and Nixon, 13 July 1971, 2, Folder 1971 1-20 July 10 of 11 (1 of 2), Box 12, Henry A. Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts, NSF, RMN; Telcon, Kissinger and Nixon, 16 July 1971, Folder 1971 1-20 July 10 of 11 (2 of 2), Box 12, Henry A. Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts, NSF, RMN; Telcon, Kissinger and James Buckley, 17 July 1971, in *Ibid*.

William Buckley after the publisher and ten other prominent conservatives announced they were “suspending” their support for the president over his perceived foreign policy weakness on a variety of issues, though as Buckley admitted during their conversation, the “catalyst” was China. Kissinger told Buckley that right-wing opposition helped the administration in its negotiations with the Soviets and the North Vietnamese, though not with the Chinese, cautioning Buckley not to “hit us too hard on China.”<sup>151</sup>

Nixon was in a strong position on this issue with American conservatives because, on this matter, they were, in addition to being isolated, internally divided. Right-wing academic and longtime movement member Henry Jaffa backed Nixon’s move, and worried that if conservatives lessened support for the president, he might lean more heavily on liberals. Businessman Henry Salvatori, one-time backer of the Committee of One Million and Reagan’s leading financial patron in California, also supported the move, but worried the administration was not doing enough to explain “the long range thinking” which lay behind its actions.<sup>152</sup> Furthermore, Goldwater’s old allies were not the only important conservative faction by 1971. Nixon recognized this, and had Kissinger meet in August with Billy Graham and other religious leaders to sell them on the policy. The visit proved an unqualified success. Graham’s aides told Nixon they supported his policy “one hundred per cent.” One of them complimented Kissinger

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<sup>151</sup> Gordon Strachan to Haldeman, Subject: Conservatives “Suspending” Support for the President,” 28 July 1971, Folder Alpha Name Files (1969-1973) Gordon Strachan July 1971, Box 92, Staff Member Office Files: H.R. Haldeman, White House Special Files, RMN. Telcon, Kissinger and Buckley, 28 July 1971, 2, 1, Folder 1971 21-30 July, 11 of 11, (2 of 2), Box 12, Henry A. Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts, NSF, RMN.

<sup>152</sup> Jaffa to Salvatori, 19 July 1971, 1, Salvatori to Haldeman, 21 July 1971, 1, both in Folder Alpha Name Files General (A1) Haig August 1971, Box 92, SMOF: Haldeman, WHSF, RMN.

on his “becoming modesty” and “great humility,” at least in comparison to that man’s past encounters with McGeorge Bundy and John Kenneth Galbraith.<sup>153</sup>

Unlike Buckley, Graham’s followers were swept up in the widespread euphoria inspired by the surprise announcement. The first polling survey conducted afterwards showed it was the second-most followed event in 1971 in terms of public awareness, trailing only the conviction of Lieutenant William Calley.<sup>154</sup> The connection to Calley was by no means coincidental. Nixon’s failure to end U.S involvement in the Vietnam War had been a drag on his popularity, particularly among the young. The invasion of Cambodia not only temporarily alienated the Chinese, but led to the most widespread antiwar demonstrations in U.S. history. Events at Kent State and in the days afterward in May 1970 gave the impression of a nation on the verge of civil war. Nixon going to China was the first unalloyed feel-good story since the moon landing two summers before. In the days afterwards, the administration took notice, and eagerly sought to highlight this phenomenon. Kissinger explained to Mary McGrory how the upcoming visit “proves we are still an optimistic people.” He told Nixon “the whole country is looking up.” Others in the administration noticed a national mood of “relief” and

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<sup>153</sup> George M. Rideout to Nixon, 14 August 1971, David M. McConnell to Kissinger, 12 August 1971, 1, McConnell to Kissinger, 13 August 1971, 1, all in Folder [EX] CO 34 China [1/1/71 - ], Box 17, Subject Files: CO (Countries), White House Central File, RMN.

<sup>154</sup> Some Comments on the July 20-21, 1971 Telephone Survey – Tom Benham, Opinion Research Corporation, 1, Folder Distribution of China Trip Announcement Poll ORC 20-21 July 1971, Box 354, Haldeman Files, SMOF, WHSF, RMN.

“happiness.” White House aides proposed Nixon capitalize on this national mood to take a literal victory lap and hold a series of “non-political” events across the country.<sup>155</sup>

The first post-announcement poll recorded 67 percent of Americans calling the upcoming visit a “good thing,” including 78 percent of young people ages 18 to 20.<sup>156</sup> That poll also recorded a 57 percent job approval rating for Nixon among 18 to 29 year-olds, up from 46 percent in June.<sup>157</sup> Nixon demanded the administration trumpet this China bounce among America’s youth, the very group with which Nixon’s political support was supposed to be weakest. Haldeman was informed that the Opinion Research Council, which conducted the poll, claimed the sample size of this demographic was too small to be statistically valid without confirmation from additional surveys, though Haldeman insisted to Colson the White House get “maximum mileage out of it.”<sup>158</sup> Colson proved happy to oblige, sending out a press release before the month was over.

Since this was Nixon, the president took the greatest satisfaction in how much his diplomatic coup discomfited his Democratic adversaries. Even back in May, Charles Colson noted Nixon’s desire to publicize that their presidential candidates “have been

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<sup>155</sup> Telcon, Kissinger and McGrory, 19 July 1971, Telcon, Kissinger and Nixon, 19 July 1971, 1, both in Folder 1971 1-20 July 10 of 11 (2 of 2), Box 12, HAK Telcons, NSF. RMN; Bill Rhatigan to Colson, Subject: Public Acclaim Regarding China, 19 July 1971, Folder [EX] CO 34-2 People’s Republic of China (Red China) [6/1/71 – 7/31/71], Box 19, Subject Files: CO (Countries), White House Central Files, RMN.

<sup>156</sup> ORC Press Release, President Nixon’s Plan to Visit Communist China Widely Approved, 24 July 1971, Folder Distribution of China Trip Announcement Poll ORC 20-21 July 1971, Box 354, Haldeman Files, SMOF, WHSF, RMN.

<sup>157</sup> ORC Press Release, Approval of President Nixon By Young People Up Sharply, 31 July 1971, Folder Distribution of China Trip Announcement Poll ORC 20-21 July 1971, Box 354, Haldeman Files, SMOF, WHSF, RMN.

<sup>158</sup> Jon Huntsman to Herb Klein, Subject: ORC Polls and Youth, 27 July 1971, Strachan to Haldeman, 29 July 1971, Haldeman to Colson, Subject; ORC Press Release, 30 July 1971, in Ibid.

strangely silent on the China issue.”<sup>159</sup> After the announcement of the upcoming visit Rockefeller observed to Kissinger the administration had left the democrats “absolutely quiet.” The silent voice Nixon most wanted to hear was that of Ted Kennedy. The youngest brother of the man who had defeated him for the presidency had been the loudest voice calling for policy change, and the man most critical of Nixon on the matter. Nixon noted Kennedy’s silence two days after the announcement, and joked that the Democrats “are going through the agonies of hell.” On Nixon’s orders, Colson informed multiple newspaper columnists of Kennedy’s silence, forcing him to utter a statement in support of Nixon’s breakthrough. “It must have pained him to do it,” Colson duly reported to the president.<sup>160</sup> For once, Nixon could take an action which equally satisfied the greater and lesser angels of his nature.

Most intriguing of all were the reactions of Democrats who served in the previous two administrations. “I am jealous,” McGeorge Bundy told Kissinger in support of his trip and its results.<sup>161</sup> The support was anomalous, though not the jealousy, among Bundy’s former colleagues. Predictably, Dean Rusk expressed doubts about what the trip would achieve, and about Nixon’s ability to bargain successfully when Zhou Enlai. More surprising was the opposition from Averell Harriman and Adlai Stevenson,

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<sup>159</sup> Colson to Haldeman, Subject: Democratic Aspirants on China, 6 May 1971, Folder Alpha Name Files (1969-1973) Chuck Colson May 1971 [1] (5 of 6), Box 86, SMOF: Haldeman, WHSF, RMN.

<sup>160</sup> Telcon, Kissinger and Rockefeller, 17 July 1971, 2, Telcon, Kissinger and Nixon, 17 July 1971, both in Folder 1971 1-20 July 10 of 11 (2 of 2), Box 12, HAK Telcons, NSF, RMN; Colson to Nixon, Subject: Senator Kennedy/China, 20 July 1971, Folder [CF], TR-24 China (1971-74), Box 65, Subject Files: Confidential Files, 1969-1974, WHCF, WHSF, RMN.

<sup>161</sup> Telcon, Kissinger and McGeorge Bundy, 19, July 1971, Folder 1971 1-20 July 10 of 11 (2 of 2), Box 12, HAK Telcons, NSF, RMN.



who had both opposed Rusk by leading an unsuccessful fight to change the policy and a successful one to change the posture of the Kennedy and Johnson administrations.

Harriman worried about alienating the Soviets, while Stevenson fretted about upsetting allies in Asia. For these two men to fall back on the arguments of their longtime opponents at the time their preferred policy was being enacted most likely reflected frustration that they were not involved in the victory.<sup>162</sup>

### **On Second Thought**

It soon became clear that Nixon's achievement had been predictable, but only in retrospect. Signals of his intentions which seemed obvious afterwards went unnoticed at the time. Hours before his announcement, Nixon told Kissinger that his 1967 *Foreign Affairs* article was "really a damn good prophetic thing." Yet it went unremarked upon during the presidential campaign, and for long after. Huston forwarded a copy to Liebman in 1968, thinking at the time it reflected Nixon's support for the status quo. *U.S. News* noted it as a signal of Nixon's future intentions – in August 1971.<sup>163</sup> This is not to say no one – save James Thomson – saw change coming. Some could even conceive of the form it would take. Harry Schwartz speculated in the *New York Times* in the wake of Ping-Pong Diplomacy that Nixon "could score a major political coup" by visiting China in the summer of 1972 during the Democratic Party Convention, but

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<sup>162</sup> "Nixon Trip to China Too Hasty, Rusk Says," *Washington Post*, 4 September 1971, A6; "Harriman Skeptical About Nixon China Visit," *Los Angeles Times*, 23 July 1971, A1; Thomas Seslar, "Adlai Calls China Visit 'Theatrics'," *Chicago Tribune*, 5 September 1971, A10.

<sup>163</sup> Telcon, Kissinger and Nixon, 15 July 1971, 2, Folder 1971 1-20 July 10 of 11 (1 of 2), Box 12, HAK Telcons, NSF, RMN; "How Nixon Signaled His China Policy Four Years Ago," *U.S. News & World Report*, 16 August 1971, 23.

termed this prediction “sheer fantasy.”<sup>164</sup> The week Edgar Snow’s interview with Mao appeared in *Life*, in which the Chinese leader welcomed visits from Nixon and other Americans, Secretary Rogers termed a presidential visit “possible,” though not in the near term. In June, Joseph Alsop suggested “a promising longshot bet” of the establishment of “state relations” between the U.S. and the P.R.C. before the 1972 election.<sup>165</sup> What all these predictions had in common was the low probability placed on them coming true. The notion of Nixon going to China was out there. It was spoken of. But it was not seen as very likely.

In the weeks after the announcement, multiple stories appeared in the press detailing how Nixon had decided at the start of his administration to pursue a wide-ranging rapprochement with the Chinese communists. They referenced a 1 February 1969 meeting with Kissinger which presumably began the bureaucratic process of reviewing and altering existing policy.<sup>166</sup> Yet this meeting had already been publicly noted by multiple outlets in the spring of 1971.<sup>167</sup> Presumably the meeting and its contents were leaked with Nixon’s approval in the post-Ping Pong period of optimism,

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<sup>164</sup> Harry Schwartz, “Triangular Politics and China,” *New York Times*, 19 April 1971, Folder [EX] CO 34-2 People’s Republic of China (Red China) [6/1/71 – 7/31/71], Box 1, Subject Files: CO (Countries), WHCF, RMN.

<sup>165</sup> Edgar Snow, “A Conversation With Mao Tse-Tung,” *Life*, 30 April 1971, 47; Terence Smith, “Rogers Says U.S. Favors Exchanges of Newsmen and Students With China,” *New York Times*, 29 April 1971, 3; Joseph Alsop, “China Needs U.S. Friendship,” *Los Angeles Times*, 15 June 1971, A6.

<sup>166</sup> Fred Farrar, “How Nixon’s Red China Policy Evolved Toward Talks Stage,” *Chicago Tribune*, 17 July 1971, 2; “Blazing The Trail To Peking,” *U.S. News & World Report*, 2 August 1971, 17; C.L. Sulzberger, “New China Policies,” *New York Times*, 4 August 1971, 33.

<sup>167</sup> Dan Oberdorfer, “Nixon’s Swing on China,” *Washington Post*, 23 April 1971, A23; John Osborne, “Signals to Mao,” *New Republic*, 1 May 1971, 15.

when secrecy appeared less important. The most extreme example of ignored signs was the reaction – or lack thereof – to the president’s 6 July 1971 address to a convention of media executives in Kansas City. This was Nixon’s first speech devoted to China policy, and an obvious effort to prepare the country for the news of Kissinger’s imminent visit to Beijing. It was his last best chance to sell his policy to the American people.

Therefore, the arguments he used in this setting are historically important. They may not reflect Nixon’s true motivations, but they reveal what he believed the public wanted to believe his motivations were, which is nearly as important. The focus of this speech was the rise of an economically powerful China. “Inevitably,” a communist-led China would become “an enormous economic power,” and “that is the reason I felt it was essential that this administration take the first steps toward ending the isolation of Mainland China from the world community.” In the future, an isolated and powerful China “would be a danger to the whole world.” Integrated into the global economy, the Chinese colossus would still present “an immense escalation of their economic challenge” in terms of industrial competition, but that was by far the lesser of two evils. Echoing Hilsman’s speech, he claimed all he was doing was “opening the door.”<sup>168</sup> The remarks failed to make news, presumably because they did not hint at the highly newsworthy events it was preemptively justifying. One man who noticed the speech was Zhou Enlai. At their first meeting three days later, the National Security Adviser found himself being “questioned at length” by the Chinese Premier about the text of a

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<sup>168</sup> Speech, Nixon, News Media Executives, 6 July 1971, in Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents, 12 July 1971, 1036, Folder US China Policy 1969-1972 [2 of 4], Box 86, Country Files: Far East, HAK Files, NSF, RMN.

presidential address he did not yet even know existed. Realizing his interlocutor's ignorance, Zhou provided Kissinger with an English-language copy of the text.<sup>169</sup> The only man who appeared to hear Nixon's remarks was half a world away, and he was a leader of the state which was the speech's subject. Not for nothing in Kansas City did Nixon refer to the Chinese as a "clever" people. One might also add observant.

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<sup>169</sup> "The Speech Zhou En-Lai Read Before Kissinger Did," *U.S News & World Report*, 2 August 1971, 46.

## CHAPTER VII

### CONCLUSION: RISE ABOVE:

#### NIXON'S "JOURNEY FOR PEACE," THEN AND NOW

“Since 1950 Washington has officially sent more men to the moon than it has to China.”<sup>1</sup>

Though he was the first sitting president to travel to China, Richard Nixon was not the first American president to visit that country. This honor fell to William Howard Taft, who traveled there in 1905 while serving as Secretary of War.<sup>2</sup> The China Taft visited could not have been more different than the one Nixon saw. In 1905, the Qing Empire was in its death throes, facing widespread internal discontent amidst halting attempts at reform, all while struggling with a recent military defeat by the Japanese and the crushing indemnity imposed by the European powers after the Boxer Rebellion. Meanwhile, hundreds of thousands of Russian and Japanese soldiers were waging a war on what was still technically Chinese soil, and there was nothing the Qing could even consider doing to stop them. In 1971, the Chinese people might have been psychologically traumatized by the Cultural Revolution, saddled with a stagnant and dysfunctional economy, and subject to the whims of a capricious leader. But the regime

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<sup>1</sup> John K. Fairbank, “The Time Is Ripe for China to Shift Outward Again,” *New York Times*, 18 April 1971, E1.

<sup>2</sup> *West Virginia Hillbilly*, 16 October 1971, in Scali to Haldeman, Subject: Taft in China, 21 October 1971, Folder Alpha Name Files (1969-1973) John Scali October 1971, Box 96, SMOF: H.R. Haldeman, WHSF, RMN.

which ruled over them was a projector of power abroad, rather than an absorber of the aggressions of others. As Sun Yat-sen predicted in 1912, China had woken up. As Mao vowed in 1949, China had stood up. But it still had yet to live up to its potential. That was of course a large part of why Nixon went there, and why the American people supported his journey so wholeheartedly.

There was also the novelty of such high-level summitry, particularly when its ceremonials were conducted on television for all to witness. Adding to this show business aspect were the events of 1971 which brought this trip about, particularly Glenn Cowan's seemingly random encounter with the Chinese ping-pong team and Henry Kissinger's secret trip from Islamabad to Beijing. Cowan sought to make the most of his brief time in the spotlight, getting profiled in *Seventeen* magazine and attempting to launch a television talk show, which his agent billed as "an underground newspaper of the air."<sup>3</sup> For his part, Kissinger boasted to Nelson Rockefeller that "it was real James Bond" when he slipped his press detail in Islamabad to make history.<sup>4</sup> Recognizing that event's dramatic qualities, President of Universal Television Sid Sheinberg – who within a few years would get credit for discovering a young director named Steven Spielberg – proposed a treatment for a live action dramatization entitled "Journey to Peking." Kissinger would provide narration for the reenactments, which would seek to follow events as closely as possible, since "the facts would be more intriguing than our

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<sup>3</sup> "A Ping-Pong star's get-rich plans," *Businessweek*, 8 May 1971, 26.

<sup>4</sup> Telcon, Kissinger and Rockefeller, 17 July 1971, 1, Folder 1971 1-20 July 10 of 11 (2 of 2), Box 12, HAK Telcon Transcripts, NSF, RMN.

fiction.”<sup>5</sup> In his pitch to Kissinger, Taft Schreiber wrote of wanting to tell the American people about “the events, the mystery, the suspense, the excitement of the arrangements that were made for the trip,” and asked for government footage from his arrival in Peking, provided such footage existed. The program – hopefully airing shortly before Christmas – would end before the point where Kissinger sat down with Zhou. For once, Kissinger chose to duck the limelight.<sup>6</sup>

On the eve of Nixon’s trip, Kissinger sent the president a lengthy memo detailing the potential pitfalls of his upcoming meetings with Zhou, Mao, and other Chinese leaders. Recognizing the largely symbolic nature of the endeavor, he wrote that “the intangibles of your China visit will prove more important than the tangible results.” However, Kissinger cautioned on the need for “the careful scaling down of expectations.”<sup>7</sup> Both men recognized that the euphoria in the U.S. which allowed them to bask in such adulation the previous July created its own pitfalls, and that the Chinese leadership could shift away from the U.S. as quickly as it had shifted towards. Helping reassure the communists was their admission in October 1971 to the United Nations, definitively signally the end of a generation of international isolation. In the months between the announcement of Nixon’s visit and the U.N. vote, the administration retreated to an embrace of the Two Chinas approach which some had advocated since

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<sup>5</sup> Sheinberg to Taft Schreiber, Subject, “Journey to Peking,” 29 July 1971, 1, 2, Folder Alpha Name Files General (Al) Haig August 1971, Box 92, SMOF: Haldeman, WHSF, RMN.

<sup>6</sup> Schreiber to Kissinger, 30 July 1971, in Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Kissinger to Nixon, Subject: Mao, Chou and the Chinese Litmus Test, 19 February 1972, 1, Folder China, Box 13, Rodman Subject and Chron. August 1969-Aug. 1974, HAK, Admin & Staff Files, HAK Office Files, NSF, RMN.

1961. Renamed “One China – Two States” by Secretary of State Rogers, the goal was the seating of both the People’s Republic of China and the Republic of China in the General Assembly, with the permanent seat in the Security Council passing to the communists.<sup>8</sup> In his speech at the General Assembly in October, Rogers pointed to the de facto existence of two sovereign governments in Chinese territory, as well as the fact that Chiang’s regime ruled a larger population than that of two-thirds of the current U.N. member states.<sup>9</sup>

The question behind the administration’s push to maintain Taiwan’s presence at the U.N. was whether or not it really wanted to win. The Chinese communists were adamant in their desire to see the Nationalists removed from the U.N. and further delegitimized on the international stage. Were the U.S. to prevail in the vote, the Chinese communists would be quite displeased. The *Wall Street Journal* predicted that “the U.S. won’t fight very hard on Taiwan’s behalf. And Washington could even hope to lose.”<sup>10</sup> Ronald Reagan worried about this in a telephone conversation with Kissinger the day Rogers announced the new approach. The governor wondered if the administration had gone “soft on China.” Kissinger assured Reagan that he believed the nationalists would not be expelled.<sup>11</sup> In a conversation between Kissinger and Ambassador to the U.N.

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<sup>8</sup> Statement, William Rogers, 2 August 1971, Folder China – United Nations Sensitive (1 of 2), Box 86, Country Files: Far East, HAK Files, NSF, RMN.

<sup>9</sup> Speech, Rogers, United Nations General Assembly, 4 October 1971, 6, in Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Robert Keatley, “Washington to Fight to Keep Taiwan in UN – But Not Very Hard,” *Wall Street Journal*, 3 August 1971, 1.

<sup>11</sup> Telcon, Kissinger and Reagan, 2 August 1971, Folder 1971 2-10 Aug 1 of 11 (1 of 2), Box 11, HAK Telcon Transcripts, NSF, RMN.



George Bush, when Bush informed Kissinger of his extensive efforts to preserve the Nationalists' membership in the General Assembly, the National Security Adviser asked "do we want to win it that badly?" Bush responded in the affirmative, arguing that "to win this would be very helpful."<sup>12</sup> He did not intend to play the sacrificial pawn in a game of diplomatic chess.

But Kissinger had other ideas. He chose to make a second visit to Beijing in mid-October on the eve of the vote, sending an unmistakable signal to U.S. allies on where the administration's priorities were. For the Committee of One Million, this was the ultimate betrayal. Judd complained that "just at the time when Secretary of State Rogers and Ambassador Bush were announcing an all-out effort to prevent the expulsion of the Republic of China, the White House ostentatiously sent Kissinger to Peking. Other nations got the signal, and voted accordingly."<sup>13</sup> Marshall Wright predicted the Chinese communists would not prove to be much trouble, emphasizing "the lucid realism that remains constant under the rhetorical flourishes." The regime "accepts reality, and attempts to manipulate it." On issues concerning Africa, "China will play Robin Hood to our Sheriff of Nottingham."<sup>14</sup> Still, while this might prove a minor irritant, it was one the U.S. could easily manage.

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<sup>12</sup> Telcon, Kissinger and Bush, 7 September 1971, Folder 1971 1-10 Sept 4 of 11 (1 of 2), Box 11, HAK Telcon Transcripts, NSF, RMN.

<sup>13</sup> Press Release, Committee of One Million, 27 October 1971, Folder Committee of One Million General/non-printed material, 1968-1971, Box 177, Judd Papers, Hoover.

<sup>14</sup> Wright to Kissinger, Subject: The US and the PRC in the United Nations, 21 November 1971, 1, 2, Folder China – United Nations Sensitive (2 of 2), Box 86, Country Files: Far East, HAK Files, NSF, RMN.

While 68 percent of Americans polled in October 1971 expressed approval of Nixon's upcoming trip, 52 percent also worried he could "get fooled and trapped" by his hosts. The same poll showed a drop in those who feared the Chinese over the Russians from the last time the question was asked in 1967, though the drop was only from 71 to 56 percent, and Americans still claimed by a more than two-to-one margin that the Chinese would in the near future pose a greater threat to world peace.<sup>15</sup> Nixon continued to sell his trip as the best way to deal with a rising China. At an August news conference, he noted China was "the most populous nation in the world" and "potentially in the future could become the most powerful nation in the world." In a speech that September, he told the Economic Club of Detroit that "ten, fifteen years from now, there will be between 900 million and a billion people in Mainland China. Ten or fifteen years from now, they will be a very significant nuclear power." Considering this long-term threat, it was desirable to him "that we will talk about them [our differences] and not fight about them, now or fifteen years from now." To continue to isolate such a potential colossus would only endanger the U.S. and the world.<sup>16</sup>

Long gone was the era when the Chinese communists could be termed "a passing and not a perpetual phase." One leading voice who had stuck with his predictions of regime collapse longer than just about anyone was Joseph Alsop. In late 1972 and early

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<sup>15</sup> John Richardson to Rogers, 4 October 1971, China and the President's Trip, Folder 68-74, RG 59.52, NARA; George Gallup, "Impending Talks Lessen Fear of China as a Threat to Peace," *Washington Post*, 10 October 1971, F5.

<sup>16</sup> Nixon, News Conference, 4 August 1971, Nixon, Speech, Economic Club of Detroit, Michigan, 23 September 1971, 1, both in Folder China – United Nations Sensitive (1 of 2), Box 86, Country Files: Far East, HAK Files, NSF, RMN.

1973, he conducted a lengthy tour of parts of southeastern and southwestern China he had visited more than three decades previous. He marveled at the people's improved standards of living, the advanced infrastructure, and what he evaluated as a sophisticated and flexible approach to agricultural and industrial development. As he ended his journey, Alsop argued that "a truly successful China cannot help but be a superpower, even a supergiant power." He predicted that someday that nation would economically become "a China-sized Japan," exporting massive quantities of industrial and consumer goods across the globe and competing with existing advanced economies in North America and Western Europe. This would result by the end of the century in "a sudden tilt in the overall balance of this changing world such as no one has seen since the 18<sup>th</sup> century when the Industrial Revolution began in England."<sup>17</sup> The American Century might be replaced by the Chinese Century, with the East overtaking the West.

Part of this admiration mixed with anxiety was influenced by a contemporary sense of decline occasioned by the domestic tumult of the late-1960s and early-1970s. In *Power and Protest*, Jeremi Suri saw this unrest – not only in the U.S. but also in the U.S.S.R and the P.R.C. – as a reason for the flowering of the era of détente. Each power needed breathing space to regroup and reassert the primacy of domestic elites before rejoining the superpower struggle in earnest. There is evidence some contemporary observers came to a similar conclusion. When meeting with Zhou Enlai in 1971, former U.S. diplomat John Service told the Chinese Premier "American youth is unhappy and

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<sup>17</sup> Joseph Alsop, "Summing Up," 10 January 1973, 4, "The East Is Red," 17 January 1973, 1, 4, both in Folder 7, Box 182, Alsop Papers, LOC.

alienated.” This domestic unrest, coupled with a loss of “US prestige,” was in his opinion a major spur for Nixon’s zeal for rapprochement with the Chinese.<sup>18</sup> Also, in an article published shortly before Nixon’s 1972 visit, John Fairbank claimed it was destined to succeed “because both parties are in trouble.” Mao’s recent purges of the Party’s senior leadership, combined with “Nixon’s troubles at home,” would bring the two former adversaries together, leading to “a Sino-American détente, perhaps an entente.”<sup>19</sup> Domestic discord could and would lead to international concords.

At the same time, some leading U.S. officials who observed the Chinese saw less of this current unrest and more of the country’s latent power, particularly in comparison to what at the time seemed an exhausted and possibly decadent America. After visiting China in the summer of 1972, future president and current House Minority Leader Gerald Ford could not help but be ominously impressed by what he had seen. His compliments verged deeply into envy. Describing “China’s colossal potential,” he recalled feeling “this sense of a giant stirring, a dragon waking,” which gave him “much to ponder.” He approved of the “State-directed conformity” he had witnessed. Ford contrasted this Chinese “unity of effort and purpose” with the current situation in his own nation, writing that “where people are free to live and work and choose and read and think and disagree as they please, there has been widespread division, discord and disillusionment and a pervasive permissiveness straining the fibers of our national

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<sup>18</sup> John Service Interview with Chou En-lai, 4, 1, Folder Contacts with Communist Representatives, Official 1971 China, Box 6, Subject Files of the Office of Asian Communist Affairs, 1961-1973, RG 59, NARA.

<sup>19</sup> John K. Fairbank, “Getting to Know You,” *New York Review of Books*, 24 February 1972.

character.” He concluded by wondering “if our self-indulgent free society will be able to compete effectively fifty years hence with this totalitarian State,” given China’s population, natural resources, and “total commitment to national goals.”<sup>20</sup> One can readily imagine, and in fact find surely find examples of, expressions of similar sentiments among leading American visitors to China twenty or thirty years later, or even in our own time. Americans were unsure if their nation could compete with the Chinese long before that competition had begun, generally for the same reasons, and based on the same evidence, both real and imagined.

Nixon’s own assessment of the effects of his visit on moderating Chinese antipathy towards the U.S. was modest. In March 1972, he wrote Kissinger that “they still see the United States President as a devil but the horns might not be as prominent as they were previously.”<sup>21</sup> The taming of the dragon had begun. Whether it could have begun earlier remained an open question. There were two sets of impediments, one foreign and the other domestic. The U.S. could do little to control China’s grand strategy. So long as fomenting hatred of the U.S. was in Mao’s domestic political interest, American overtures would prove of little value. Domestically, more could be accomplished. Yet the administrations preceding Nixon’s had at best an intermittent interest in shifting the public away from the bitter hostility of the Korean War period. Despite expectations to the contrary, Eisenhower reinforced this hostility and

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<sup>20</sup> Joint Report to the United States House of Representatives by Majority Leader Hale Boggs and Minority Leader Gerald R. Ford on Their Mission to the People’s Republic of China, 23 June to 7 July 1972, Folder Mansfield Reports, Impressions of the New China, June 23 – July 7, 1972, Box 65, Series 21: Speeches, Reports, Mansfield Papers, Montana.

<sup>21</sup> Nixon to Kissinger 9 March 1972, Folder HAK/President Memos, Box 341, Subject Files, NSF, RMN.

antagonized the Chinese, often gratuitously. He had his own domestic constituencies to worry about. Kennedy and Johnson, both having endured the McCarthy Era, showed little interest in changing China policy. Their Secretary of State Dean Rusk was actively hostile to any policy alterations, though many below and around him fought a persistent low-level guerrilla campaign which achieved occasional local successes.

What ultimately proved decisive in moving both elite and mass opinion were the actions of outside actors. An informal alliance of academics, journalists, and congressmen provided assistance to resistance fighters in the State Department and National Security Council, and vice-versa. Over time, they overwhelmed and overcame their enemies in the realm of public opinion, taking stronghold after stronghold until their once-dominant adversaries were left isolated and powerless. Into this changed policy landscape stepped Richard Nixon, who recognized the existence of an opportunity to improve America's standing in the world as well as his own domestic political reputation. As David Horowitz wrote in *Ramparts* in late 1971, in a survey of China policy over the previous two decades, "when the time came for an accommodation to the reality of Chinese power in Asia, the outlines of a new policy would already have been agreed upon."<sup>22</sup> Nixon received the triumph without having to fight hardly any of the battles.

By this point, some of the losers wondered if the fight was ever worth having in the first place. Managing Editor of the *National Review* James Burnham was the leading conservative foreign policy theorist of the early Cold War. He had long been a hard-liner

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<sup>22</sup> David Horowitz, "The Making of America's China Policy," *Ramparts*, October 1971, 44.

on dealing with the Chinese communists. Yet defeat brought him both resignation and recrimination. Near the end of 1971, with the Chinese communists in the U.N. and Nixon about to pay them a visit, he argued that “I think we should have ‘taken our loss’ in 1954 or possibly in 1957.” Fighting so successfully for so long had only made defeat worse. Burnham explained that “by failing to take our loss at the most advantageous time instead of stubbornly postponing it until this year, we have deepened the loss, as we can already see – and there is a lot more extra damage to come.”<sup>23</sup> Burnham in 1971 was belatedly agreeing with Robert Komer and Chester Bowles in 1961 that defeat had always been inevitable, and the sooner it had occurred the better.

The years Burnham cited for an advantageous surrender will be familiar to the reader. This story began in 1954 with the first U.N. vote on admission of the Chinese communists and the formation of the Committee of One Million to publicize the opposition of the U.S public to that potentiality. Speculation of Eisenhower recognizing the P.R.C. peaked in early 1957 at the start of his second term, and Dulles’s speech that year in San Francisco was in large part motivated by this phenomenon. The problem with the notion of making changes in this earlier period was that it offered little if any political dividends for Eisenhower. The public was overwhelmingly opposed at that time to rapprochement. This opposition appeared soft on certain incremental steps like lifting the travel and trade bans. These actions could have occurred with little if any political fallout, but also with little if any political gain for the administration. A revolution in public sentiment would need to occur before a revolution in diplomacy would prove

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<sup>23</sup> James Burnham, “The Question of Timing,” *National Review*, 17 December 1971, 1401.

beneficial to any president. Eisenhower deliberately delayed and deferred the moment this would occur with his administration's acts of hostility and disrespect towards the Chinese. His two successors would not act in a similar manner, but neither did they do much to further the process of change. Nixon, had he assumed office in 1961, would in all likelihood have continued the Eisenhower-era approach, in which case the breakthrough might not have occurred until even later.

Such a delay would no doubt have hindered the U.S. in its Cold War competition with the Soviet Union. As Chen Jian noted in the conclusion to his *Mao's China and the Cold War*, Nixon's visit essentially removed China from the Cold War. It would still compete for influence in the developing world with the Soviet Union – particularly in Africa – and independently support the operations of anti-Soviet guerrillas in Afghanistan, but the messianic quality of its foreign policy between the mid-1950s and mid-1960s was long gone. China became a regional power with regional ambitions and regional concerns. Its foreign policy became non-ideological in an era still defined by ideology. In other words, its grand strategy assumed an almost post-Cold War posture nearly two decades before the Cold War had ended.

This is fitting, and connected to the reasons for Nixon's outreach, because China could never rise so long as the Soviet Union stood in its way. While the two superpowers stood at nuclear-tipped daggers drawn, there was no room for China to rise beyond the status of a mere great power-designate. Only in a post-Soviet world, in which China could gain full entry to U.S.-led economic institutions which were now truly global in scope, could it achieve its economic potential. Only with the Soviet military threat gone



could the Chinese reorient to a maritime strategic policy which directly threatened U.S. hegemony in East Asia in a way American policymakers had always feared. By trying to manage the Cold War, Nixon was laying the foundations for the global order of the next era. As long as the Soviet Union existed, its very presence would manage and contain a rising China. Only when it was gone would the U.S. have to worry about what Nixon and so many others feared.

In his textbook on the history of U.S.-China relations, Warren Cohen referred to the period from 1949 until 1971 as “The Great Aberration,” since it was the one period when these two polities were officially isolated from one another. This formulation focused on contact to the exclusion of power, which is unfortunate because contact was reestablished, bringing this “great aberration” to an end, due precisely to considerations of power. Scholars such as Cohen have defined eras in Sino-American relations based on prevailing U.S. sentiment towards China and the Chinese. They identified periods of admiration, contempt, fear, sympathy, and so forth. By this standard, relations have followed a pendulum-like motion. In place of the metaphor of the pendulum, I would offer that of the light switch, in which the light is Chinese power. Before 1949, the light was off. At various times, Americans might have cursed the darkness, or mocked the darkness, or wanted to care for those living in the darkness. But regardless, they still feared the potential of the light. In 1949, that light switched on. While it flickered, and slowly brightened, and flickered some more, many wondered if it would short-circuit or burn-out. They sought to isolate the light, to block the windows, to keep anyone from entering, and to wait for the darkness to return. Eventually, Americans concluded this

was a light that would never go out, and began to come to terms with its potentially glaring brightness. They decided to let the light dissipate outwards, lest it eventually burn with sun-like intensity, and also bask in the light themselves.

The history of Sino-American relations can thus properly be divided into the eras: the Era of Chinese Powerlessness, and the Era of Chinese Power. The latter era contains two periods: The Period of Containment and Isolation, lasting from 1949 until 1971, and the Period of Containment without Isolation, lasting from 1971 until and presumably beyond the present day. This dissertation has sought to account for why the second period replaced the first. It sees most of the first period as a time of transition. The policy of isolation was inherently unstable, but it held a certain stubborn appeal. Much had to occur for the inertial forces to be surmounted. Driving the transition was the very fact of Chinese power itself, and the potential scope of that power. It was an adversary which could not be conquered like Germany or Japan, or driven to disintegration like the Soviet Union. It would have to be engaged, altered, and hopefully coopted. As Nixon explained in his Kansas City speech, such an approach would ironically augment the very power the U.S. sought to contain. But this was thought to be the lesser of two evils. The hope was engagement would prevent Yellow Power from becoming a Yellow Peril.

Jack London's 1909 short story "The Unparalleled Invasion" prophesized that the united and still-imperially dominant white nations would in 1976 exterminate an increasingly powerful Chinese nation to prevent it from gaining a global hegemony it did not yet seek. By the actual 1970s, not only were the white nations neither united nor

truly imperial, but China had yet to become the economic powerhouse London saw as its inevitable destiny. His story, while still seen today by some as a celebration of racial genocide, was actually a parody of that impulse and desire. London greatly admired the Chinese people, much as Richard Nixon did. Both saw them as industrious, creative, and destined for greatness. It is tempting to imagine Jack London covering Nixon's trip as a journalist, and filing reports on that momentous historical event. China had changed markedly since he travelled there in 1905, as had the entire world. Would he have seen it as a modern-day tribute mission, as William Buckley did? Or would he, like Nixon, have viewed it as a way to manage change, to guide shifts in the balance of power, to prevent war and to preserve peace? In other words, to keep his prophecy in the realm of science fiction. Just as Jack London's world is long gone, so is Richard Nixon's. But their fears, their hopes, and their attempts to harness one to bring the other to fruition, remain.

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