1950

Our China Policy

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In any discussion of China policy two premises ought to be agreed upon at the outset. Unless they are, we will end by obscuring the very issues which we are supposed to clarify.

First of all, China is not merely a group of political and military chieftains on the island of Formosa. Nor is it a few Chinese Marxist theorists in Peking, or—as they are at present—in Moscow. We mean or should mean when we speak of China the 475 million Chinese people who possess a very ancient and distinct culture and who, during the past half century have come to develop an increasing awareness of their national unity. They constitute the China towards which the friendly hand of the United States traditionally has been extended. They are the China we have long sought to encourage in the direction of democracy and freedom from foreign control.

In the second place, we ought to agree that China policy is not solely the question of "to aid or not to aid" Chiang Kai-shek, but rather the whole course of action and inaction in our relations with that country. The question we must ask ourselves is whether the course we have set is the best that can be pursued under existing circumstances. Does it serve all the interests of the United States? Not merely our commercial interests in China, although they are of some importance; not merely our strategic interests in the Far East, although obviously
those too are important—but the entire range of American concern with China, the Far East and the rest of the world.

If we keep these two fundamental facts in mind, we shall find, I believe, that the policy followed in turn by General Marshall and Secretary Acheson during the administration of President Truman has been on the same bipartisan track pursued by administration after administration—Republican and Democratic—during the past half century. It should be kept on that track despite the efforts of those, who for reasons of sentimentality or politics, would derail it.

So much heat and so little light has been shed on this policy by the debate of the past few years that I should like to review briefly just what we have done and what we have not done with respect to China.

During the war and immediate postwar period, the United States extended both economic and military assistance to the Chinese. The amount of that assistance was not large enough to satisfy the more voracious of the Kuomintang leaders and their American friends. It was much smaller than that which went to Russia or Great Britain. At the time, however, most of us were concerned not with dividing the American inheritance equally among our Allies, but with using available resources in a manner best calculated to defeat our enemies. The fact that we are meeting here tonight seems to indicate that the decisions of our wartime leaders in this respect were at least reasonably correct.
Assistance given to China during the war, limited though it may have been, was the critical factor in saving a valued ally from collapse and I think it is about time we stopped being ashamed of it. American interests were served by this aid in that we were able to share the terrible human sacrifices demanded by the war. China's interests also were served since that country emerged from the conflict in a stronger and more independent position than it had ever before occupied in the modern world.

Partly to complete our wartime commitments and partly to equip China for its greatly enhanced and important international role, the United States continued aid to China during the months following the end of the war. The Chinese people wanted the removal of the 3 million Japanese remaining in China. They wanted internal stability and rapid economic and political reconstruction. And above all they wanted an end to civil war.

The intention of our post-war aid was to assist them in realizing these objectives. We were not concerned with furthering the interests of any particular group of Chinese officials. If we extended our assistance through the National Government, it was because the available evidence indicated that, at the time, most of the Chinese people still looked to the Generalissimo, who had led them in war, to continue to supply them with leadership in peace.

General Marshall's mission similarly was in accord with the wishes of the Chinese people. The General did not go to China to "force" Chiang
Kai-shek to accept Communists into his Government as has been so recklessly charged by some in this country. He went to help achieve what the Chinese people clearly and desperately desired—what the Generalissimo and the National Government had repeatedly proclaimed as their official policy—a settlement of the internal problem of unity by peaceful means.

When it proved impossible to achieve such a settlement, President Truman reiterated the traditional policy of the United States—that we would not become directly involved in a Chinese civil war. That decision was applauded by the people of China, who were overwhelmingly opposed to the suicidal conflict being precipitated among them. As the civil war spread, we sought ways to alleviate the suffering it caused and to prevent China from collapsing into utter anarchy.

The cost of these American efforts to help the Chinese people has been great. An official calculation placed the total amount at 2 billion dollars in loans and grants since V-J Day. It is possible to argue about the exact amount and millions of words have been wasted in proving that it was closer to one billion or to three billion.

The significant facts, however, are these: During the first few weeks after the defeat of Japan, the United States transported by sea and air 400,000 to 500,000 National Government troops over and around the Communist forces to key sectors of East and North China. The purpose of this undertaking was to insure an orderly surrender.
disarmament and repatriation of the Japanese. Fifty thousand American marines held such vital cities as Peiping, Tientsin and Tsingtao for months, thus preventing their seizure by the Chinese Communists. By the end of 1945 we had delivered sufficient tonnage to equip 39 divisions of National Government ground forces and an 8 and 1/3 group air force. Whatever Japanese equipment the Chinese Communists obtained with the facilitation of the Russians in Manchuria was offset by the Japanese equipment surrendered to the Nationalist forces in North, Central and South China.

In December, 1945, Chiang Kai-shek held a numerical superiority in combat forces over the Communists of 5 to 1. He had a monopoly of heavy equipment and mechanical transportation and an unopposed air arm. Yet, by December, 1948, exactly three years later, this preponderance of strength had been so dissipated that General Barr, head of our advisory mission in China, was forced to conclude that without direct American involvement with its combat forces, the complete defeat of the Nationalist armies was inevitable.

What lies behind this colossal failure? We have the answer from General Marshall, General Wedemeyer, General Barr and practically every other competent observer who has had the opportunity to view the situation in China first hand. The failure was due not to any lack of arms and ammunition. The failure was due to the incredible ineptitude of the Nationalist Army command. It was due to the inability or unwillingness of the Chinese Government to take the necessary and repeatedly-advised measures of social, economic, political and military
reform which alone could have retained for it, the support of the soldiers and the common people of China. It was due to the downright corruption in official circles. (That corruption, according to the magazine U.S. News and World Report, resulted in the diversion of millions of dollars of U.S. aid, intended for the use of the Chinese people, into the personal fortunes of those who held power. Some of that money is back here in the United States in private bank accounts at this very moment.)

In the face of the mass of evidence, there are still people who cling to the theory that the Yalta Agreement is at the root of all of China's difficulties. It follows, then, that since we participated in this dark and wicked conspiracy, we are guilty of some sort of gross betrayal.

Let us see what this much-maligned agreement actually provided. Under its most pertinent clause, the United States committed itself to intercede with the Chinese Government in order to obtain the return to the Soviet Union of certain limited port and naval concessions in Manchuria. They were substantially the same as had been lost by In return the Russians agreed to enter the war against Japan. Russia to Japan in 1904. They also reaffirmed their recognition of China's sovereignty over all Manchuria; and consented to give assistance and support to China exclusively through the National Government.

Military considerations were largely responsible for the American decisions at Yalta. It is all very well, with the wisdom of hindsight, to ridicule these considerations. But at the time, the war
with Japan was still of uncertain duration. Without the unforeseeable impact of the atomic bomb on the outcome, hundreds of thousands of additional casualties might have been the price of the defeat of Japan. The administration wanted to share that toll as far as possible with other countries. No one, it seems to me, is justified in talking glibly of such a consideration.

The fact is that we could not have prevented, by any method short of war, the penetration of Manchuria by Russian imperialism, so we tried to limit it. The American people have never indicated a willingness to go to war for the ejection of non-Chinese control from Manchuria. Our traditional China policy has never countenanced such a step. We did not go to war when the Russians originally penetrated the area towards the close of the 19th Century. We did not go to war when the Japanese replaced them in 1904-- It was, as a matter of fact, President Theodore Roosevelt, who arranged that first "Yalta" agreement. And in 1931, another Republican administration refused to lead us into war over this issue when the Japanese expanded economic concessions into political domination of all Manchuria.

We have placed on record in the past our conviction that Manchuria is Chinese territory. At Yalta we did so again. And we still believe Manchuria remains Chinese territory, regardless of the advantages taken by predatory neighbors in this time of China's weakness. But the task of restoring Manchuria to China in fact as well as in name is primarily the task of Chinese Nationalism. It is not now and it has never been the responsibility of the United States armed forces.
Rather than speak of Yalta as a gross and iniquitous "betrayal", I think it is time to recognize it for what it was—the best possible chance, at the time, of preserving the long-term interests of both the United States and China.

Another bogey has now made its appearance in connection with the island of Formosa. This time the Administration is accused, not of betraying the Chinese, but of betraying the Formosans who, incidentally, are about 98 per cent Chinese.

At the Cairo Conference in 1943, the United States pledged the restoration of Formosa to China. There was practically unanimous approval of that decision both in this country and in the Allied world. When the war ended, the Formosan Chinese welcomed the return of the National Government as a liberator. Chen Yi, an old friend of Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek was appointed the first Governor. Chen Yi found living standards on the island better than on the mainland. He found a populace both industrious and law-abiding. And he found no communists. After a little more than one year of Chen Yi's carpet-bagging maladministration, the island was rocked by a fierce uprising against the mainlanders. Chen Yi crushed the revolt with a ruthlessness that claimed several thousand lives. It is not surprising that many Formosans believe their lot—bad as it might have been under the Japanese—was preferable to what they have suffered under the National Government. Successive and more enlightened governors, Wei Tao-ming, Chen Cheng and K. C. Wu have not been able to wipe out the
bitterness and hatred which the Formosan Chinese feel for their oppressors.

It is into this ugly situation that we are now invited to project ourselves. Since a peace treaty with Japan has not yet been signed, a legal loophole exists whereby we might assume some sort of protectorate over Formosa. In this manner we might conveniently avoid or postpone in Chiang Kai-shek's interest the pledge given to the Chinese people at Cairo. This ignores the fact, however, that for three years we have not questioned Chinese control over the island and to do so now would be unabashed interference in internal Chinese affairs.

The "gun boat" policy for Formosa currently being advocated in some quarters is not a new one. It was first proposed a hundred years ago by Admiral Perry and decisively rejected by the American people then. If we were to follow it now, we might be able with superior force to discourage the present Communist masters of China from seeking to take the island. But in doing so, we would give credence to the anti-American propaganda in the Orient that charges us with using our power for imperialist purposes. We would confound our true friends in China—not the leaders on Formosa but the Chinese people—who at this very moment are being told that we are in league with Chiang Kai-shek to keep the island from them. We would build, in the final analysis, a lasting heritage of hatred just as the Russians are now busily doing in Manchuria, Sinkiang and Mongolia.
The situation in Formosa points up the key difficulty involved in keeping our China policy on the right track. We must discriminate between what we can do and what we cannot do both in a material and an ethical sense. There is no virtue in doing in foreign affairs just to be doing, and there are times when inaction is more effective from the point of view of American interests than action.

The cardinal principle of United States China policy must remain what it always has been—recognition of the fact that the internal problems of the Chinese people, whether on the mainland or on Formosa, must be solved primarily by the Chinese people themselves. They do not want and they will not acquiesce indefinitely in solutions forced upon them by foreign intervention.

We cannot make ourselves responsible—militarily or otherwise—for a regime which has been abandoned by the Chinese people. To do so would be the certain way of diverting attention from the real threat to their nation arising in the North.

We cannot continue to supply armaments to a Government which, the Communist leader Mao Tze-tung has callously, but unfortunately, with much accuracy, labelled his supply service for the delivery of American equipment.

We cannot, by conducting naval exercises in the path of an impending engagement in the Chinese civil war find a cheap and involvement-free solution to the complex problem of China policy. It is irresponsible and dangerous to threaten force unless you are prepared to use it. And I doubt that even those who advocate such a policy are ready to go to war over Formosa.
We cannot on the other hand, give recognition to a government which shows little regard for the rights of our citizens and little respect for even the most elementary international usages. There would appear to be little point, moreover, in our association with a regime which claims to speak with the authentic voice of China but which has the accent of the Soviet Union. At the conclusion of the present and unexpectedly long talks in Moscow we may know better whether that regime has abandoned the accent or China's fundamental interests.

What we can do in the present circumstances is to maintain our faith in China--not in a handful of exalted figures but in the Chinese people themselves. We can continue to help those people with the limited means at our disposal--through public and private channels--in whatever regions remain open to us. The Chinese people will not forget acts of genuine friendship in their hour of trial.

We can, moreover, through the Voice of America, the United Nations and other feasible ways, keep the attention of the Chinese and the world focused on the Soviet exploitation that is now going on in China's remote provinces. Through the United Nations we can also seek to prevent the present Communist masters from pushing the peaceful Chinese people into aggressive campaigns beyond China's borders.

By lending encouragement to legitimate nationalist aspirations and by extending practical economic assistance under Point Four to the countries surrounding China, we can demonstrate our genuine interest in the progress of all Asia.
Finally, we can keep our thinking on general foreign policy flexible. Only in this way will we be able to act appropriately in any given circumstances. Above all we must avoid the fallacy of believing that consistency in foreign policy lies in acting precisely in the same manner in every part of the globe. It is, for example, fantastic to suggest that what we have done in Greece we must also do in China, which has 60 times as many people, 60 times as great an area and a vastly different set of political and strategic problems.

The only consistency we need be concerned with is the consistency with which we devote ourselves to the protection of the security and all the legitimate interests of the United States. That is the basic ingredient of a non-partisan, non-political approach. Beyond it let us exercise a little imagination and a lot of discretion.