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THE CHINA WHITE PAPER

August 1949

VOLUME I

Originally Issued as
UNITED STATES RELATIONS WITH CHINA
With Special Reference to the Period 1944-1949
Department of State Publication 3573
Far Eastern Series 30

Reissued with the Original Letter of Transmittal
to President Truman from Secretary of State Dean Acheson

WITH A NEW INTRODUCTION BY LYMAN P. VAN SLYKE

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LYMAN P. VAN SLYKE

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Introduction

by Lyman P. Van Slyke

UNTIL the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, American attitudes toward China were shaped by the missionary and the trader, who operated under the system of the unequal treaties forced on China by the Western powers. The United States benefited fully from such treaties—and even contributed to their final form by adding the concept of extra-territoriality—but because Americans had not taken the initiative in setting up and enforcing the treaty system, the American people felt little responsibility for its inequities. In time, Americans came to feel that their behavior in China contrasted favorably with the selfishness of the European powers and Japan, and this feeling was greatly heightened by the idealism and moral fervor of the American missionary effort. The trader and the businessman—advocating free trade and opposing exclusive spheres of influence—represented America's economic stake in China. But this was never more than a very small part of American overseas investment.

In the end, therefore, there grew up a split between our attitudes and our actions. Having no great political or economic stake in China, we were inclined to frame our China policy in moral terms; but for the same reason, we were unwilling to back our policies, however just, against the conflicting policies of nations with higher stakes in the game. There was no conscious duplicity on our part. Our China policy reflected our feelings as a nation; if we were reluctant to back these feelings, it was because our vital interests were not really involved in China.

All this was symbolized by the Open Door policy. Originally an affirmation that every nation should have equality of economic opportunity in China, the Open Door policy was soon redefined as a call for the territorial and administrative integrity of China; but it never led to effective action on our part to ensure China's independence. Nevertheless, thanks to our philanthropic and educational work in China, our willingness to forgo our share of the Boxer indemnity, and our government's repeated expressions of goodwill, we came to think of the United States as China's close friend and benefactor.

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Thus, on the eve of Pearl Harbor, although all our sympathies lay with China, we characteristically continued normal relations with Japan. The Japanese attack forced a change in our policies, but it was still impossible to give China much military help. In the first months of the war, there was no matériel to spare; and later it was all but impossible to get supplies to China's isolated armies. Most important, Europe took clear priority over Asia in the Allies' master plan for the war; and in Asia, by 1943 the island-hopping strategy obviously had replaced the strategy of attacking Japan through China. In military terms, China was a sideshow.

To compensate Chiang Kai-shek politically and to keep China actively in the war, Roosevelt pushed China's recognition as one of the Big Four over British objections, and dramatically terminated the unequal treaties in 1943. In these moves, Roosevelt had the enthusiastic support of the American public, which felt that America had done too little for China in the past and which saw the Generalissimo and Madame Chiang as heroic allies against the Japanese aggressor. But once again, United States policy, in its generosity and optimism, did not necessarily reflect the realities of the situation.

While we were committing ourselves to Chinese greatness under Chiang, the Nationalists were becoming increasingly ineffective. Shocking stories of corruption and dictatorial high-handedness came out of Chungking. Friction between the Nationalists and the Communists threatened to erupt into civil war. Chiang also hinted that unless American aid were forthcoming on Chinese terms, China might be forced to make a separate peace, thereby releasing large Japanese forces. The almost unopposed Japanese offensive into the interior of south China in 1944 seemed to confirm all these fears.

By October 1944, when General Joseph W. Stilwell, who favored a tough quid pro quo policy toward Chiang, was recalled at the Generalissimo's insistence, General Patrick J. Hurley had already arrived in China. He expressed clearly the goals of American policy: to keep China in the war, to support Chiang and the National Government, to persuade Chiang to undertake certain reforms, and to promote the unity and democracy to which all Chinese parties proclaimed their dedication. It is clear now that these goals were irreconcilable, for if there was no possibility of withdrawing our support from Chiang, there was no way of getting him to make changes he did not choose to make. America's role as mediator was compromised for the same reason. But this was far from clear at the time, except to those who knew the situation in China most intimately. Americans in 1944-45 were in substantial agreement that China policy, broadly speaking, was being ade-

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quately handled. This consensus lasted until well after the war; even Hurley's parting broadside (pp. 581-84) failed to shake it.

Partisanship on the China issue did not really begin until after the Congressional elections of November 1946, which put Republican majorities into both the Senate and the House and marked the low point of the Truman Administration's influence. In January 1947, General George C. Marshall, who had succeeded General Hurley as the President's Special Representative in China, reported the failure of his efforts to arrange a peaceful settlement, and returned home to become Secretary of State. The Republicans—anticipating the Presidency in 1948—used their majorities in Congress to exert an increasingly powerful influence on foreign policy. A group of Congressmen (led by William Knowland and Styles Bridges in the Senate, and by Walter Judd in the House) called for increased aid to the Nationalists in their conflict against the Chinese Communists. Nothing could alter their belief in the greatness of Chiang Kai-shek, or their conviction that the Chinese Communists were Russian puppets.

During 1947 and 1948, the Republicans used the threat of torpedoing the Marshall Plan for the recovery of Europe as a way of getting support for China. Among other things, they argued that if a strategy of massive foreign aid was appropriate to Europe (i.e., Greece), it should also be applied in Asia (i.e., China). So long as this balance of power existed on Capitol Hill, the Administration felt it necessary to make cautious concessions on the China front in order to move ahead with the rest of its foreign program.

Marshall, who was convinced that only all-out military intervention could save Chiang, favored a policy of quiet disengagement from China. Not only were America's resources insufficient for military intervention in his opinion, but the American people would not sanction such a course. And yet disengagement had almost as high a price, thanks not only to the embattled political situation in Washington, but to the accumulated weight of past American relations with China. How could we simply abandon a traditional friend, an ally who had suffered so long, a member of the Big Four by virtue of our own insistence? Marshall wavered, then moved from quiet disengagement back to limited commitment. The principal concessions of the Administration were the resumption of arms shipments to the Chinese Nationalists in early 1947, the dispatch of the Wedemeyer mission later that year, and the China Aid Act of April 1948.

This unstable situation lasted until the unexpected Democratic victory in the 1948 election. With both houses of Congress once more in Democratic hands, the Administration no longer had to buy Repub-

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lican support for its legislative program at the cost of concessions on China. Instead of reducing partisanship on the China issue, however, the Democratic victory only heightened it. Earlier the Republicans had been overconfident and a little complacent; now, in the bitterness of defeat, they sought to draw blood wherever they could.

As the plight of the Nationalists worsened, Republican attacks on Administration policy became more frequent and more heated. By now, too, a new note had been added—the question of Communist influence on China policy in the State Department. In 1947, the Truman Administration had begun a program of security investigations that it hoped to keep confidential, but a number of sensational cases were receiving publicity all during 1948. Eleven Communist leaders were trading blows with Judge Harold R. Medina in a Smith Act trial in New York City; Judith Coplon of the Justice Department, allegedly a Communist, was under indictment for conspiracy; Klaus Fuchs had confessed to atomic espionage on behalf of the Soviet Union; and the ex-Communist Whittaker Chambers was describing his conspiratorial relations with Alger Hiss, a high official of the State Department. There had been sporadic charges made earlier against certain career China specialists, beginning with Hurley's letter of resignation in 1945, but by 1949 the atmosphere had grown feverish. This was the immediate background for Senator Joseph McCarthy's notorious effort, beginning in early 1950, to discredit the State Department as a whole.

The White Paper was thus published in the midst of acrimonious controversy over United States China policy, the containment of Communism abroad, and the fear of subversion at home.

The idea of a White Paper may have first been suggested by middle-level officers in the State Department's Office of Far Eastern Affairs. Secretary of Defense James V. Forrestal recorded in his diary that at a conference held on November 26, 1948, "Marshall read a paper from some office people in the State Department, who advocated going to the American public now to explain the inadequacies of the Chiang Kai-shek government." Marshall went on to say that he had decided, with the President's approval, to reject this suggestion because he felt it would administer the *coup de grâce* to Chiang.¹ The idea persisted, however, and the following spring, after Dean Acheson's appointment as Secretary of State, Acheson obtained Truman's approval to go ahead with the preparation of a White Paper on China.

When Acheson said later that the White Paper had been published in the belief that "the disasters had already overtaken the Nationalist

¹ Walter Millis, ed., *The Forrestal Diaries* (New York: Viking, 1951), p. 534.

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government,"² he meant that the White Paper could not have hastened a collapse that was already complete. By implication, the decision to publish the White Paper reflected the feeling that since we could no longer effectively influence events in China, we should not be entangled in them. This was the agonizing decision Marshall had shrunk from making a year earlier, when there may still have been grounds for hoping that a Nationalist collapse could be averted. By the spring of 1949, such grounds existed no longer. The Nationalist cause was in ruins: in January, Chiang Kai-shek quit the Presidency and Peiping fell; in April, Communist troops crossed the Yangtze without opposition, and peacefully occupied Shanghai a few days later.

The directive from President Truman and Secretary Acheson to the compilers of the White Paper called for a completely objective record. Yet the Administration plainly hoped this record would show that we had done as much as we could, that our course had been basically correct, and that the impending fall of China to the Communists was in no way attributable to American policy. The White Paper was issued to counter largely Republican criticism. In Truman's words, "The role of this government in its relations with China has been subject to considerable misrepresentation, distortion, and misunderstanding. Some of these attitudes arose because this government was reluctant to reveal certain facts . . ."³ Truman believed his two goals—objectivity and justification—were compatible. His critics, as it turned out, found the White Paper neither objective nor convincing.

In overall charge of the project was W. Walton Butterworth, who was concurrently Director of the Office of Far Eastern Affairs and Acting Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs. Because of the weight of his duties, Butterworth delegated the actual preparation of the White Paper to his division officers, several of whom he detailed to full-time work on the project. Beginning about March 1949, the White Paper became a round-the-clock effort for those involved. Most of the work of writing and editing was done by five or six officers with recent and extensive experience in China.⁴ Only materials in the files of the Department of State were used. To have searched for and sought the release of documents in other agencies—especially the former War Department—would have greatly delayed publication of the White Paper, and Acheson was anxious that it be issued as soon as possible.

² U.S. Senate, Committee on Armed Services and Committee on Foreign Relations, *Hearings on the Military Situation in the Far East*, 82d Cong., 1st Sess. (1951), p. 1770.

³ Department of State, *Bulletin*, Aug. 15, 1949, p. 237.

⁴ Many others helped in the preparation of the document, particularly in the Division of Historical Policy Research under G. Bernard Noble, but unless one counts archivists, secretaries, and clerks, the total number was far less than the eighty persons alleged by the journalist Arthur Krock.

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This complete reliance on State Department files later led to charges that the White Paper was inadequate in its coverage.

In late June 1949, when the White Paper was nearly finished, Acheson asked Ambassador-at-Large Philip C. Jessup to read the document and suggest changes in it. Jessup, a professor of international law with a distinguished career at Columbia, was at that time the United States representative to the United Nations General Assembly and had been working on negotiations concerning the Berlin blockade. Later, during McCarthy's attacks on Jessup, the erroneous impression was given that the White Paper was largely his creation. Actually, the changes he suggested were few. Jessup did have an active hand, however, in preparing Acheson's Letter of Transmittal, the most controversial document in the volume. The letter subsequently went through many hands and many drafts before Acheson finally reworked it to suit himself.

As one might expect, the White Paper is composed primarily of documents and excerpts from documents, nearly all of which were highly classified before the White Paper was published. This preponderance is greater than appears at first sight, because even the narrative section contains long quotations from documents. Although the period of special reference is from 1944 to 1949, nearly one-fifth of the volume deals with the century from 1844 to 1943. There is very heavy emphasis—about 40 per cent of the total—on 1947 and 1948 (there are only a very few documents dating from early 1949). The volume's coverage is least extensive for 1944 and 1945.⁵ Originally scheduled for release at the end of July, the White Paper was held up for about a week by printing difficulties. Because of the rush to publish, no index was prepared. The White Paper was released to the public on August 5, 1949, at a price of three dollars.

In issuing the White Paper, the Administration was proceeding in the belief—or the hope—that the record would speak for itself. Though its principal significance lay in domestic politics, one could expect the White Paper to have a very pronounced impact on both parties in China. Let us consider this impact briefly before turning to its reception in the United States.

The Chinese Communists made the White Paper the center of their first mass anti-American campaign. There had been much Communist-inspired criticism of the United States in the past, but there remained in

⁵ Extensive and fascinating new documentation covering 1944 is now available in Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1944, Vol. VI: China* (Washington, D.C., 1967), 1,206 pp. Similar volumes covering 1941, 1942, and 1943 were published earlier.