

United States China Policy

New York, N. Y.

Sir: In recent editorials *Worldview* has written of the need for basic revaluations in United States foreign policy. Surely there could be no more terrifying a demonstration of the need for such revaluations than the current events involving Quemoy and Matsu. Once again, America is distrusted by her allies, considered by many as risking a nuclear holocaust out of a commitment to Chiang Kai-shek, and worse, is being blackmailed by the very general whom she supports. Possibly this will all turn out to have been a gigantic power play on both sides, and the situation will calm down to an uneasy truce. Possibly it could become tragic. But either way, there is a crucial need for a reevaluation of American policy, not simply toward China, but toward all of Asia.

The question is usually posed, "Who lost China?" But that suggests that there was a possibility of "saving" China during the post-war period, and this is precisely what was out of the question. For when we take a long look at America's China policy, the most striking thing is that it was incapable of developing any real alternative to Mao's conquest for over a decade before it took place. And now that Communism is a reality in China, we not only fail to hold out any hope or encouragement for a democratic resurgence in China itself, but continue to create conditions favorable to Communism in other Asian countries.

The problem is not simply John Foster Dulles. Rather, it is American policy in much more fundamental terms. We must, as a nation, come to an understanding of the failure of our policy in China as symbolic of our failure to come to terms with the colonial revolution throughout Asia and Africa.

For some time now, American policy has been based upon support for Chiang Kai-shek. Sometimes, as in 1947 and 1948, this support was given reluctantly; sometimes it was defended primarily in terms of a lesser evil; and on other occasions it was granted enthusiastically. But whatever the motive, this line of conduct was always doomed to failure. And involved in our understanding this point is a much more important fact about the character of the colonial revolution.

In the late twenties, Chiang broke with the Chinese Communists, drowning his enemies in blood and relying upon the worst elements of the Chinese underworld for aid. By the early thirties, he had sufficiently consolidated his own position within the Kuomintang so that he was the acknowledged leader of all China. For some historians, Chiang had, during the brief period between his rise and the Japanese invasion, the possibility of accomplishing the minimal

tasks which confronted him: the unification of the nation, the creation of a stable regime, modernization and a program of social welfare.

But by 1937, Chiang lost all hope of bringing forth a new China. In the early thirties, his dictatorship had a certain momentum. There was a certain expansion of capital, construction of railroads, and so on. In 1937, with the Japanese attack, Chiang was expelled from the cities. This was a momentous fact, for it meant that the political balance within the Kuomintang changed. The business elements of the cities were pushed aside, and Chiang was forced to rely more and more upon the more reactionary Kuomintang supporters in the rural areas. But more, the financial base of the regime became a tax upon the peasants. Thus it was that the Chinese Communists in this period did not have to advocate land reform, but only a policy of holding the rents down to their traditional levels. Chiang was so compromised that such a moderate policy appeared to be radical within the immediate context.

How did America respond to these events?

During World War II, American policy was permeated by the glow of the alliance with Russia. It was in this period that some of the more disastrous illusions about Chinese Communism appeared, not as the result of a Communist espionage plot within the State Department, but as a consequence of the general political basis of the war itself. In the fascinating Government study, *U. S. Relations with China*, we find General Hurley writing to Washington in 1944, "At the time I came here Chiang Kai-shek believed that the Communist Party in China was an instrument of the Soviet Government in Russia. He is now convinced that the Russian Government does not recognize the Chinese Communist Party as Communist at all and that (1) Russia is not supporting the Communist Party in China, (2) Russia does not want dissensions or civil war in China, and (3) Russia desires more harmonious relations with China."

This attitude was not completely naive, for there is evidence (put forth mainly by the Titoists during their break with Stalin) that the Kremlin did not believe that Mao could seize power in the post-war period. But Hurley's (and Chiang's, if we are to accept Hurley's word) theory of the relation between Chinese Communism and Russia was, of course, incredible. There were some in the State Department who saw through it (George Kennan did himself honor in this regard) but these illusions were a part of American policy.

In the post-war period, as Mao unleashed his drive to power, the United States lost some of its naive

attitudes. But then it was forced to a policy which was not much better—that of seeking a coalition government of the Kuomintang and the Chinese Communists. Thus, in December 1945, President Truman instructed his Special Representative, General Marshall: "Specifically, I desire that you endeavor to persuade the Chinese Government to call a national conference of representatives of the major political elements to bring about the unification of China and, concurrently, to effect a cessation of hostilities, particularly in north China."

The coalition policy was, of course, doomed. For it was precisely through the call for coalition that Mao had determined to come to power. He understood that the Kuomintang would never accede to his terms, and he also realized that this strategy would give him a positive political appeal among all classes of the Chinese people who were becoming disgruntled with Chiang. Marshall's mission, and almost all of American diplomacy in China in the post-war period, could not possibly attain its end. In a sense, the scales had already been tipped in favor of Mao, and all that the Communist leader had to do was to build up his forces patiently and to wait until Chiang came crashing down under the weight of inflation, factional strife, and sheer inability to act.

Finally, there was another major aspect of American policy in this period—the tactic of putting pressure upon Chiang to liberalize his regime. It was expressed by General Marshall in one of his reports. "The salvation of the situation," he wrote, "would be the assumption of leadership by the liberals in the Government and in the minority parties and successful action on their part under the leadership of the Generalissimo would lead to unity through good government." The problem with this policy, at least as we know it from historical hindsight, is that the Kuomintang was strong enough to keep the minority parties out of government, and that the right wing inside the Kuomintang was able to defeat the liberal wing, sometimes through a tactic of assassination.

Thus, the three major phases of American policy—war-time illusions about the Communists, coalition government, liberalization of Chiang's regime—were totally incapable of preventing the Communist seizure of power. In this context, the present American policy of supporting a *defeated* Chiang is utterly without sense. If the Kuomintang showed itself incapable of leadership and action in a period when it controlled the central government of mainland China and a large army, how can it be the focus of our policy now that it has been expelled from its own country, is in exile, and without political appeal to a single progressive force in all of Asia?

And yet, the State Department continues to follow a line of action whose inevitable failure has already been documented. Our August 1958 policy statement in this regard is a work of political wish-dreaming: "The generally recognized legitimate government of

China continues to exist and in Taiwan is steadily developing its political, economic and military strength. The government of the Republic of China controls the strategic island of Taiwan and through its possession of a stable military force—one of the largest on the side of the free world in Asia—presents a significant deterrent to renewed Communist aggression."

The truth could hardly be more antithetical to the policy. Politically, Chiang is discredited through all of Asia—he is a failure. America's continued support of him, which may be rationalized in terms of a division here or a division there, thus costs much more than it could conceivably pay, for it establishes a powerful symbolic identification of the United States with reaction and the old order.

Given this analysis, the various phases of American policy, from the illusions about Communism to the current support of Chiang, all have a common element which has been fatal: they place the Generalissimo and his party in the center of policy. Whatever Chiang may be as an individual, he is not, of course, the diabolic force that some writers make him. But he has proved himself incapable of the historic task which was set before him.

Throughout the ex-colonial world, a revolution is taking place. Its impetus is toward political independence, usually of metropolitan imperialism, but this nationalist demand is inextricably bound up with the "revolution of rising expectations." Thus, it is not enough for the regime simply to achieve the break from European domination, for it is also confronted with a terrible and enormous social problem as well. Two centuries ago, even a century ago, such a revolution would have been carried out by entrepreneurs who would create the economic conditions for a new society. Today, the businessmen are too weak to accomplish such a prodigious undertaking. And as a result, throughout Asia and Africa, the state plays an important, if not a decisive, economic role in the newly independent countries.

The social question which is at the bottom of the Cold War in these nations is not, as some have phrased it, "free enterprise versus Communism." Rather, it is what kind of state will carry out the revolutionizing of underdeveloped economies. A totalitarian state on the Red Chinese model, or a democratic state? By supporting men like Chiang (and Syngman Rhee, Ngo Diem, etc.), the United States guarantees that it will lose this battle, that it will be unable to influence these societies in a democratic direction. For Chiang (and the forces he symbolizes) is incapable of any dynamic action. Mao, the totalitarian, *acts*. This, though a tragic fact, is of enormous importance in Asia and Africa.

In fifty years, the question "Who lost China?" will no longer be the crucial one for America. In fifty years, if the present policy continues, the question will be, who lost Asia and Africa?

MICHAEL HARRINGTON