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NON-RECOGNITION OF RED CHINA: REASONS AND RATIONALIZATIONS

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In 1949 the Nationalist government of China, under the leadership of Chiang Kai-shek, was driven off the China mainland to an uncertain island refuge on Formosa by its long-time civil war enemy, the Chinese Communists. These Chinese Reds subsequently proclaimed at Peiping September 29, 1949 that they were the new Communist government of China, the so-called Peoples' Republic. Party Chairman Mao Tse-tung became Chairman of the Central Peoples' Government. His regime, three days later, made a formal request for recognition by the foreign governments that had consulates at Peiping--including the United States.

Some nations extended recognition immediately. The United States, among others, did not. There were no reasons, in particular, for the refusal to act at this early date--except time, to wait to see what would happen.

But what sort of thing was to be looked for in that waiting period? The basis of the impending recognition decision apparently was a matter of some difference of opinion. Twenty-five consultants, including scholars, businessmen, and politicians, met October 6-8, 1949, at Washington to advise the State Department on its Red China recognition problem.¹ Thirteen of these consultants favored recognition in time, three were opposed to recognition, and nine were noncommittal. A clear majority thus recommended that the United States recognize Red China, but only at a later and more appropriate time.

The representatives of the State Department agreed that recognition of Red China by the United States would have to wait. But there was less agreement on what the United States was waiting for. The advisors were waiting to see if the Mao Tse-tung regime was actually in control of China; the Department was waiting to see how the Mao Tse-tung regime behaved.

It behaved badly. It repudiated the Nationalist United Nations delegation and announced that it would re-examine all Nationalist treaties, deciding in due course which it would keep and which it would scrap. A new revolutionary government might be expected to do this to its predecessor, but the predecessor in this instance was still recognized by the United States. Consequently, such precipitous action was not calculated to win American favor.

More directly and dramatically, the Peiping regime brought pressure to bear on individual American officials and citizens in China. It caused the arrest of United States Consul-General Angus Ward at Mukden October 24. Ward and others on his staff were arrested for alleged assault on a Chinese employee. A month later Mukden Vice Consul William Stokes was taken into court and questioned about his alleged espionage activity.

Red China was trying to force the American hand. It would not be forced. When Peiping finally repudiated the Nationalist delegation in the United Nations, as it did November 16, the United States immediately announced its support of the Nationalist delegation. That same day, in a press conference, Secretary of State Dean Acheson gave his reasons. The arrest of Angus Ward, Acheson said, had killed any chance of early recognition of Red China.² In short, bad behavior was the reason.

Then for a while, tensions seemed to relax. Angus Ward and the others, sentenced to various terms, were released and deported November 24. India became the first non-Communist country to recognize the Peiping government December 30, 1949. Britain followed suit seven days later. The West seemed to be moving toward recognition. The following week, on January 12, Secretary Acheson spoke on Asiatic policy to the National Press Club in Washington. He complained bitterly against the Soviet Union, to be sure, for "detaching" Manchuria and other areas from

¹ Full text of these conversations in U. S. Department of State, *Transcript of Round Table Discussion on American Policy Toward China Held in the Department of State, October 6, 7, and 8, 1949.* (Confidential classification cancelled).

² *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 17 November, 1949.

actual Chinese control, but his speech was in general conciliatory of the Peiping regime.³ The State Department still was waiting and watching.

It did not have to wait long. Two days later, January 14, the Chinese Communists forcibly took over the consulates of the United States, France, and the Netherlands, in Peiping. If Red China seriously were seeking American recognition--this is open to possible doubt--this was not the way to do it. The United States reacted quickly and angrily. It closed all its China consulates and ordered all American officials out. Administration Spokesman Senator Tom Connally of Texas endorsed this action. "The Chinese Communist government," he explained in a statement released to the press that night, "is seeking recognition. But no nation is entitled to recognition when it does not respect international law and does not respect the representatives of other governments and the rights of their citizens."⁴ It was less a lawyer's theoretical complaint than a demand for a minimum of common decency and the ordinary mutual conveniences of diplomacy.

The Netherlands, apparently pressured in part by this consulate seizure, extended recognition to the offending Peoples' Republic March 27, 1950. The United States did not, and Red China's early opportunity for recognition was lost. The basic standard for continuing non-recognition was still, in the main, bad behavior.

It was in this atmosphere of angry suspension, on June 25, 1950, that Communism launched its lightning invasion of South Korea. For the moment, all other problems were pushed aside. Through the summer of 1950 hard-pressed and undermanned South Korean, American, and other United Nations forces were pushed back to the "Pusan perimeter." The tide turned with the Inchon landings of mid-September and by early October the 38th parallel had been recrossed. The general feeling in the West was that the war was over. In General Douglas MacArthur's phrase, the boys would be "home for Christmas."⁵

Chinese Communists, however, had other ideas. Peiping's premier, Chou En-lai, had warned October 1 that Red China would "not supinely tolerate seeing their neighbors being savagely invaded by imperialists."⁶ In late October, Chinese "volunteers" began to take the field. On November 26, in overwhelming numbers, the Chinese "volunteers" launched a crushing counteroffensive. Two days later MacArthur was forced to report to the United Nations: "We face an entirely new war."⁷ And the United Nations lost it. Or at least, it did not win it. The explanation and the symbol of this frustration was Communist China. This was not mere misbehavior. This was war. And in war, one must hate the enemy.⁸ Consequently, the recognition issue became clouded with ideology.

Assistant Undersecretary of State Dean Rusk addressed the 25th anniversary dinner meeting of the China Institute of America May 18, 1951. It was both a tirade and a turning point. Said Rusk:

We do not recognize the authorities in Peiping for what they pretend to be. The Peiping regime may be a colonial Russian government--a Slavic Manchukuo on a larger scale. It is not the government of China. It does not pass the first test. It is not Chinese.

It is not entitled to speak for China in the community of nations. It is entitled only to the fruits of aggression upon which it is now willfully, openly and senselessly embarked.

³ Full text in U. S. Department of State, *Bulletin* xxii:551 (23 January, 1950), 111-118.

⁴ *New York Times*, 15 January, 1950.

⁵ *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 26 November, 1950.

⁶ *Arkansas Gazette*, 2 October, 1950.

⁷ *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 29 November, 1950.

⁸ See, for example, the melancholy prophecy of the idealist, Woodrow Wilson, immediately prior to America's entrance into World War I: "A nation couldn't put its strength into a war and keep its head level; it had never been done." Quoted in Morison and Commager, *The Growth of the American Republic* (3rd edition, New York, 1942) II, 468-9.

We recognize the National Government of the Republic of China, even though the territory under its control is severely restricted. We believe it more authentically represents the views of the great body of the people of China, particularly their historic demand for independence from foreign control.⁹

It was the difference between the free and the un-free. Furthermore, Rusk added, in spite of their Russian Communist masters "the Chinese people decide for freedom, they shall find friends among all the peoples of the earth who have known and love freedom." This was a thinly veiled threat to wage eternal war against the Communist government of China until it was overthrown.

Future Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, from the same platform, was less subtle. The Mao Tse-tung regime was without doubt, in his estimation, a "puppet regime" and any opposition to it should receive encouragement and, by inference, assistance from the United States.¹⁰ This would appear to be the kernel of the famous "liberation" idea that Dulles expounded so actively during the 1952 presidential campaign and since.

The thinking expressed here by Rusk and Dulles continues in United States policy. Satelliteism, or subservience to Moscow in particular, was united with bad behavior in a new double standard of non-recognition. These were the main themes. But other propositions, sometimes incidentally revealed, are also worthy of attention. For example, November 25, 1949, nearly two months after the proclamation of the Peoples' Republic of China, a new government was installed by *coup d'état* in Panama--a bloodless revolution engineered by the national chief of police, his third such action in six days. Three weeks later the United States recognized this government. Why? Because the transition had been realized without any "foreign intervention."¹¹ Thus the means were apparently less important than the pedigree. By extension, this standard also applied to Red China, which was, of course, not recognized.

Also, in October 1951, when his qualifications as United States delegate to the United Nations were being investigated by a subcommittee of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Ambassador-at-large Phillip Jessup was asked his opinion on the question of recognizing the Mao Tse-tung regime. He recalled an Acheson Formula of recognition "more than two years ago": That a government control the country it claims to control, that it recognize its international obligations, and that it rule with the acquiescence of the people who are ruled.¹² "Under the present circumstances," Jessup concluded without further elaboration, "we cannot recognize Communist China."¹³ It was not clear here which counts were being held against Peiping. Certainly there was little doubt about its control of China; if anything, this test should have worked hardship only on the Nationalists who were in effective control of approximately one-third of one per cent of the territory usually included in the Chinese political unit. The fact that the Communists did not recognize their international obligations was mostly a repetition--none the less valid--of the bad behavior charge. The prerequisite of ruling with the acquiescence of the people was an added item in the general ideological complaint which has received new emphasis since 1950.

Altogether, then, the continuing indictment which is the basis for non-recognition of the Peoples' Republic of China seems to include: That it has misbehaved, that it was established through "foreign intervention," that it is not "entitled" to speak for China (because of its apparent status as a "colonial Russian government"), and that it does not rule "with the acquiescence of the people who are ruled."

An argument that the final standard--acquiescence--is entirely unreal can be demonstrated easily by reference to the American policy toward other new and questionably democratic regimes during the period covered by these events. From

⁹ Complete text in State Department *Bulletin* xxiv:621 (28 May, 1951), 843 ff.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 15 December, 1949.

¹² *New York Times*, 13 October, 1949.

¹³ *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 6 October, 1951.

September 1949 to the present, the United States has extended recognition, almost immediately, to governments by *coup d'état* in Panama, as already noted, in Syria December 17, 1951, in Cuba March 27, 1952, and in Bolivia June 2, 1952.

This contrary practice seems to cast additional doubt on the validity of the "colonial Russian government," or satellite charge--if what is meant here is that this further proves that the government in question is without popular support. The same might be said concerning "foreign intervention" in the initiative stages of any regime. If the complaint is, however, against Russian domination and Russian intervention in particular, then there is also obvious conflict with the original and continued recognition of all firmly established Russian satellite states and, indeed, of Russia herself. And yet, in October 1952, when Republican Senator William Knowland of California called, logically, for the breaking of diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union in retaliation for their having demanded the recall of United States Ambassador to Moscow George F. Kennan, Secretary Acheson refused to undertake such action. Acheson based his decision on the grounds that it "would be a step of the utmost seriousness with worldwide consequences."¹⁴ If there is any point in not recognizing the existence of things Russian, then there is much un-recognizing to be done.

Misbehavior, and American displeasure with it, seems to be the one sincerely valid count against Communist China. But it is important to realize that non-recognition based on this reasoning, places the United States in a serious dilemma. It cannot easily trade recognition for China's good behavior if good behavior is the precondition of the United States and recognition is the precondition for the Chinese Reds. As Correspondent Thomas J. Hamilton points out in a recent newspaper dispatch from United Nations, New York, the United Nations probably cannot get a general truce in Korea without recognizing Communist China, nor can the United Nations readily extend that recognition without first getting a general truce.¹⁵

The additional problem of dealing with realities, regardless of preference, was revealed strikingly last spring by a diplomatic dilemma of a different sort. The United States, Great Britain, and France submitted to the United Nations Disarmament Commission May 28, 1952, a proposal for limiting the size of armies among the great powers. A ceiling of 700,000 or 800,000 men was to be fixed for Britain and France and of 1,500,000 for the United States, the Soviet Union, and--"China." The last designated party was nowhere otherwise defined in the plan. Since the Nationalist government on Formosa has, by the most optimistic estimates, no more than 500,000 men under arms, its adherence to such agreement would have been meaningless. When questioned later about which one of the two Chinas was meant, Western representatives differed in opinion somewhat, at least in degree. French Delegate Jules Moch was quoted as saying that "nobody had thought of Formosa" in this connection.¹⁶ Great Britain's Sir Gladwyn Jebb "made it obvious that he had Communist China in mind."¹⁷ American delegates, however, according to reputable report, "displayed a great reluctance to state flatly that 'China' was Communist China. They were afraid that direct mention of Communist China might involve them in the problem of recognition. In their corridor explanations they preferred to say that they were talking about whatever China was in command of the troops on the Chinese mainland."¹⁸

This was sheer fantasy. If the United States is currently unwilling or unable to call a fact a fact, even when, as in this instance, it was in its own obvious best interests to do so, it will find the real world, at least in Asia, increasingly difficult to deal with. We must keep in mind that misbehavior is the only defensible standard on which our non-recognition of the Peoples' Republic of China is based. If we can bargain it away, which apparently was our intention in withholding recognition in the first place, for better behavior, as

¹⁴ *New York Times*, 8 October, 1952.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 13 January, 1953.

¹⁶ *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 31 May, 1952.

¹⁷ A. M. Rosenthal dispatch to the *New York Times*, 29 May, 1952.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

possibly in Korea, or for achievement of our best interests, as in disarmament, we must be prepared to do so, regardless of extraneous ideological overtones. We must remember when and if the time for hard bargaining comes, particularly in Korea--and the writer is not predicting that it necessarily will come--that words are not meanings and symbols are not realities.

United States non-recognition of the Peoples' Republic of China has been imposed since 1949, and thus far ineffectually, as a sanction. The sanction has been employed legitimately only against misbehavior. If it works at all, which it may not, the United States must be willing to abandon it in return for the results it was designed to achieve.