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Author(s): Barbara W. Tuchman

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IF MAO HAD COME TO WASHINGTON: AN ESSAY IN ALTERNATIVES

By Barbara W. Tuchman

ONE of the great "ifs" and harsh ironies of history hangs on the fact that in January 1945, four and a half years before they achieved national power in China, Mao Tse-tung and Chou En-lai, in an effort to establish a working relationship with the United States, offered to come to Washington to talk in person with President Roosevelt. What became of the offer has been a mystery until, with the declassification of new material, we now know for the first time that the United States made no response to the overture. Twenty-seven years, two wars and \times million lives later, after immeasurable harm wrought by the mutual suspicion and phobia of two great powers not on speaking terms, an American president, reversing the unmade journey of 1945, has traveled to Peking to treat with the same two Chinese leaders. Might the interim have been otherwise?

The original proposal, transmitted on January 9 by Major Ray Cromley, Acting Chief of the American Military Observers Mission then in Yen-an, to the Headquarters of General Wedemeyer in Chungking, stated that Mao and Chou wanted their request to be sent to the "highest United States officials." The text (published here for the first time)¹ was as follows:

"Yenan Government wants [to] dispatch to America an unofficial rpt unofficial group to interpret and explain to American civilians and officials interested the present situation and problems of China. Next is strictly off record suggestion by same: Mao and Chou will be immediately available either singly or together for exploratory conference at Washington should President Roosevelt express desire to receive them at White House as leaders of a primary Chinese party."

¹ The author wishes to acknowledge with thanks the assistance of Mr. Ray Cromley and Mr. John S. Service who supplied information and elucidation, and of Mr. William Cunliffe of the Military Records Division, National Archives, who found and secured declassification of the relevant documents, *viz.* Nos. 322 and 324 from Dixie Mission to Chungking; Nos. 21084 and 25246 from Marshall to Wedemeyer; Wedemeyer's replies to Marshall of 22 and 27 January 1945; and the undated typewritten draft of the first of these. I am also indebted to Mr. J. C. James of the Roosevelt Library at Hyde Park for several searches, both negative and positive.

Chou requested air travel to the United States if the invitation from Roosevelt were forthcoming. In case it was not, Mao and Chou wanted their request to remain secret in order to protect their relationship with Chiang Kai-shek, which was then in the throes of negotiation.

The message, received in Chungking on January 10, was not forwarded, except as secondary reference in another context, either to the President, the State Department or the War Department. It was held up in Chungking by Ambassador Patrick J. Hurley with the arm-twisted concurrence of General Wedemeyer.

Before examining the circumstances and reasons for this procedure, let us imagine instead that, following a more normal process, the message had been duly forwarded to the "highest officials," and had received an affirmative response which is 99-44/100 percent unlikely but not absolutely impossible. If Mao and Chou had then gone to Washington, if they had succeeded in persuading Roosevelt of the real and growing strength of their sub-government relative to that of the decadent Central Government, and if they had gained what they came for—some supply of arms, a cessation of America's unqualified commitment to Chiang Kai-shek and firm American pressure on Chiang to admit the Communists on acceptable terms to a coalition government (a base from which they expected to expand)—what then would have been the consequences?

With prestige and power enhanced by an American connection, the Communists' rise and the Kuomintang's demise, both by then inevitable, would have been accelerated. Three years of civil war in a country desperately weary of war and misgovernment might have been, if not entirely averted, certainly curtailed. The United States, guiltless of prolonging the civil war by consistently aiding the certain loser, would not then have aroused the profound antagonism of the ultimate winner. This antagonism would not then have been expressed in the arrest, beating and in some cases imprisonment and deportation of American consular officials, the seizure of our consulate in Mukden, and other harassments, and these acts in turn might not then have decided us in anger against recognition of the Communist government. If, in the absence of ill-feeling, we had established relations on some level with the People's Republic, permitting communication in a crisis, and if the Chinese had not been moved by hate and sus-

picion of us to make common cause with the Soviet Union, it is conceivable that there might have been no Korean War with all its evil consequences. From that war rose the twin specters of an expansionist Chinese communism and an indivisible Sino-Soviet partnership. Without those two concepts to addle statesmen and nourish demagogues, our history, our present and our future, would have been different. We might not have come to Vietnam.

II

Although every link in this chain is an "if," together they tell us something about the conduct and the quirks of American foreign policy. What we have to ask is whether the quirks were accidents only, or was the bent built in? Was there a real alternative or was the outcome ineluctable? Looking back to find the answer, one perceives the ghost of the present, and from the perspective of a quarter-century's distance, its outline is more clearly visible than among the too-near trees of the Pentagon Papers.

In the circumstances of 1945 there are three main points to remember: first, the Japanese were as yet undefeated; second, American policy was concentrated urgently and almost obsessively on the need to bring Nationalists and Communists into some form of coalition; third, the American Military Observers Mission of nine, later enlarged to 18 members (known as the Dixie Mission), was already in contact with the Communists, having been functioning in Yen-an since July 1944. Its purpose was to organize an intelligence network using Communist men and facilities in a strategic area vital to future operations, and generally to assess Communist capabilities and aims. These had become acutely important with the approach of an American landing in China (at that time still contemplated as part of the final assault), and with the approach, too, of Russian entry against Japan.

Coalition was the central factor in American plans because only in this way would it be possible, while still supporting the legal government, to utilize Communist forces and territory against the Japanese entrenched in the north. A patched-up unity was the more imperative from our point of view because of the need to avert civil war between the Chinese parties. This above all else was the thing we most feared because it could defeat our major objective, a stable, united China after the war—and because civil chaos would tempt outsiders. If the conflict erupted

before the Japanese had been defeated and repatriated, they might take advantage of it to dig themselves into the mainland. And then there was the looming shadow of the Soviet Union. In the absence of coalition, we feared the Russians might use their influence, when they entered the war, to stir up the Communists and increase the possibility of a disunited China afterwards. As early as May 1941, it may be worth noting, an unpublished policy study of the Council on Foreign Relations on the interrelation of the Chinese Communists, Japan and the Soviet Union, stated: "It is vital that there be no civil war in China."

During November and December 1944, negotiations for coalition were pursued by Ambassador Hurley as go-between, with optimism, enthusiasm and a minimum of acquaintance with the causes, nature and history of the problem. On November 10 he had succeeded in hammering out with the Communists a Five-Point Plan for their participation in a coalition government. Its terms would have allowed them relative freedom of political action while acknowledging Chiang's leadership and joint authority over their armed forces. Because Mao and his colleagues saw coalition as an avenue to American aid and, in the long run, to national power, they were prepared to pay this temporary price. To Hurley, who thought the Communists were a kind of Chinese populist Farmer-Labor party whose aim was a democratic share in national government, the terms seemed so workable and such a triumph of his own diplomacy that he signed the document along with Mao.

On November 16, to his dismay, Chiang Kai-shek rejected the plan in toto on the ground, as he told Hurley, that to admit the Communists to government on the terms Hurley had signed would eventually result in their taking control of it. Hurley, who identified the Generalissimo's tenure with American interest—and with his own—was ready at once to adapt coalition to the Generalissimo's terms. That these did not reflect the realities in China was not apparent to the Ambassador, although it was to his staff, who had been observing conditions under the Kuomintang for years and now had the opportunity to visit and investigate the Communist zone. Their assessment pointed to a different American interest, and this became the critical issue: was the American objective preservation of the Generalissimo, or was it a wider option that would not involve us in the fate of a "steadily decaying regime?"

Hurley and Wedemeyer were convinced converts of the first thesis. It was not easy at that time to envisage China without Chiang Kai-shek. His towering reputation as national leader made it an article of faith to most outsiders that no one else could hold China together and that his fall would carry chaos in its wake. It was easy for Hurley and Wedemeyer to believe in him: the trappings of power are very persuasive. Both the new ambassador and the new commander were ambitious to show how they could succeed where General Stilwell had failed and both saw the obvious path to success as keeping in step with the Generalissimo.

Pressed by Hurley into making a counteroffer to the Communists, Chiang proposed a plan of coalition which would bring the Communist armed forces under Nationalist control and in return legalize the Communists as a party. Hurley promptly espoused the Generalissimo's plan although it nullified the terms he had negotiated with Mao, and exerted his most strenuous efforts, assisted by Wedemeyer, to persuade the Communists to accept it. They naturally refused an arrangement which would have meant submission, not coalition. Concluding that negotiations through a mediator who had committed himself to the other side were useless, they broke off the talks, and from that time on ceased to trust Hurley. When Wedemeyer argued that if they came to terms with the Generalissimo the United States could send them arms and supplies, they were not persuaded because they knew Chiang would control the distribution. When Hurley offered to revisit Yenan to resume the talks, he was turned down, and when Colonel David D. Barrett, Chief of the Dixie Mission, was asked to add his persuasion, he was told by Mao and Chou that they still hoped for and needed American arms but not on Chiang's terms. They said the United States was propping up a "rotten shell" in Chiang Kai-shek, who, in spite of all the United States might do, was "doomed to failure." Barrett left the interview feeling he had talked to two leaders who were "absolutely sure of the strength of their position."

Negotiations were thus deadlocked, leaving the Communists, who had made a serious effort from which they had hoped to gain much, in need of a new approach. Haphazardly at this point certain exploratory and apparently unconcerted overtures from American military sources were made to them which left them encouraged but confused. The proposals were brought on De-

ember 15 by Colonel Barrett, and simultaneously but separately by Colonel Willis H. Bird, Deputy Chief of OSS in China. Both projects concerned possible airborne landings of American technical units to operate jointly with Communist forces. Colonel Bird's plan, which was the more grandiose, involved the "complete coöperation" of all Communist armed forces "when strategic use required" by the American command. Whether this plan was intended to bypass the Generalissimo or whether Colonel Bird had ever considered this aspect of the problem is not mentioned in his rather jaunty report, which does, however, make the claim that "Theater Command already agreed on principle of support to fullest extent of Communists. . . ."

Colonel Barrett brought two proposals authorized by Wedemeyer's Chief of Staff, General Robert B. McClure. McClure had cleared the first one, limited to 4,000 to 5,000 American technical troops, with General Chen Cheng, the Generalissimo's Chief of Staff, and secured the kind of ambiguous reply which a Chinese uses to disguise "No" and an American takes to mean "Maybe." The second more startling proposal on December 27 carried McClure's verbal assurance to Barrett that it had been cleared with Ambassador Hurley. It projected, after victory in Europe, a beachhead on Shantung and the landing of an entire U.S. paratroop division of some 28,000 men for whom the Communists were asked if they could take care of supplies, other than arms and ammunition, until U.S. Army supply procedures could begin to function. They said they could, although Barrett could not help wondering whether, behind Chinese composure, they might not have been slightly dazed by the responsibility and its implications.

Faced by such prospects, uncertain how far they were authorized at the summit, the Communists understandably felt a need for clarification by direct contact in Washington, bypassing Hurley. More than clarification, what they wanted was recognition. The offer to make the distant journey—which would have been Mao's first outside China—was a measure of their seriousness. Today, after 25 years of Mao's vicious denunciations of the United States as the fixed—and doomed—enemy of the Socialist camp (matched by vintage Dulles, early Nixon, and others from our side), the obvious question is: Were the Chinese Communists ideologically still sufficiently flexible in 1945 really to desire an association with the United States?

III

Before everything else the Chinese Communists were pragmatic. Ideological purity having proved nearly fatal in the 1920s, they had learned to adapt political action to present fact, and were ready to deal, for survival or advantage, with whatever ideological opponent the situation required. If they could deal with Chiang Kai-shek, as they had in 1936 and were prepared to again, why not the United States? What they hoped to gain can be reconstructed from the frank conversations held by Mao and Chou with John S. Service, political officer of the Dixie Mission, who reported them at length.

Primarily they wanted to convince President Roosevelt that they, not the Kuomintang, represented the future of China. They knew that time was working in their favor, that the mandate of heaven was slowly and irresistibly shifting. If they could somehow make this plain at the policy-making level in Washington, then the United States might be persuaded to mitigate its support of Chiang and thus hasten the shift. Second, they wanted access, as a partner in a coalition government, to American arms and other munitions on the model of Tito, their Communist counterpart in Europe. On the basis of usefulness against the enemy, they considered they had no less a claim. Armament was their most serious deficiency; they had gained control of North China beyond and behind Japanese lines by an astonishing organization but without enough weapons to risk a real battle. In Washington they hoped to persuade the President of the validity of their claim. They felt the United States was blind to the real state of the Kuomintang's decline and their own rise, and that if they could reach Roosevelt they could make this clear.

Roosevelt's aura as a man with sympathy for the oppressed had penetrated the remotest corners of the world. In "Christ Stopped at Eboli," Carlo Levi tells how, on entering a hovel in a miserable village in God-forsaken Calabria, he was confronted on the wall by a crucifix, a picture of the family's absent son and a picture of Roosevelt. While it is doubtful if, apart from propaganda posters of the four Allied leaders, the American President appeared on any private walls of Yen-an, he was present in the minds of the leaders. On Roosevelt's reelection in 1944, Mao sent him a message of congratulations and received a reply in which Roosevelt said he looked forward to "vigorous coöperation with all the

Chinese forces" against the common enemy, Japan. If not definitive, this was at least an opening.

The American observers in Yen-an found their hosts intensely curious about the United States, anxious to learn what they could of means and techniques, especially military, developed by the Americans. Mao, according to Major Cromley, "would grab intellectually anything about the United States that anyone could tell him." He and his colleagues had been impressed by the steady advance of American forces in the extraordinarily difficult campaign across the Pacific, and they realized it was this that would be the main force in the defeat of the Japanese homeland. In the real world in which they now had to make their way, the United States with its money, its resources and its current presence in Asia was the country they had to deal with—for the interim.

"We can risk no conflict," Mao told Service, "with the United States." They were not concerned about adulteration by a rival ideology because they were confident of the ultimate victory of their own. They wanted American recognition of what they had accomplished and were capable of accomplishing and thus recognition as a major party, not an outlaw. They wanted to acquire belligerent status as a party to the coming Allied victory so that they could not be ignored in the arrangements for postwar China, nor in the organization of the United Nations. And certainly they had in mind that an American connection would help them to meet that none-too-welcome day when the heavy tramp of the Soviet Union should enter Manchuria. In short, they wanted to find out at the source whether, if Chiang continued to refuse coalition, there was "any chance," as Mao asked Service, "of American support of the Chinese Communist Party?" They wanted to know where they stood.

The governing factor was that in their own minds they fully expected to succeed to the sovereignty of China. Here lay the problem which in the Communists' relation to the United States eventually became the shipwreck rock. The Communist view of it was made explicit by Mao as early as August 1944: "For America to give arms only to the Kuomintang will in its effect be interference because it will enable the Kuomintang to oppose the will of the people of China." While this may have been a subjective judgment of the will of the people, it was more realistic than otherwise, and recognized as such by American observers whose duty was to assess the evidence. As "the only group in

China possessing a program with positive appeal to the people," reported John P. Davies, second secretary of the Embassy who was attached as political officer to the Theater Command, the Communists were the first group in modern Chinese history to have "positive and widespread popular support. . . . China's destiny is not Chiang's but theirs." He thought this was a consideration that the United States in seeking to determine policy should keep in mind.

The tenor of advice by our career officers both in China and the State Department at this time was that unqualified support of Chiang Kai-shek was not the best means of achieving unity in China. By encouraging in Chiang a false sense of his own strength, it made him intransigent to compromise and therefore more likely to precipitate civil war than prevent it. The staff in China felt that we should retain our freedom to establish contact with the Communists, who were certain to retain North China and very likely inherit Manchuria after the war, because only through U.S. contact and economic aid could we keep them out of the coming Soviet embrace. The plea of officers in the field for greater flexibility of approach" grew almost impassioned. Sustaining Chiang should not become, as one said, "an end in itself." The China Affairs and Far East Divisions of the Department tried to convey the voice of the field upward to the policy-making level, even to the point of suggesting that if Chiang himself did not take remedial action, a reëxamination of U.S. policy would not only be justified but "very likely imperative."

The difficulty was the not unusual one in the conduct of American foreign policy, that the voice of the field was not reaching, or certainly not influencing, the ear at the policy-making level—in this case the President. Out of an old prejudice against career diplomats, justifiable almost anywhere but in China, Roosevelt always felt he would be better informed by a personal envoy—in this case Ambassador Hurley.

IV

The personality of Hurley is a major quirk in this history. One would like to think that historical factors were more rooted in natural law, more Toynbeeian in scope, than the chance character of a minor individual who was neither heroic nor demonic. But history is not law-abiding or orderly and will often respond to a breeze as carelessly as a leaf upon a lake.

It happened that Hurley was a man whose conceit, ambition and very vulnerable ego were wrapped up in his mission to the point of frenzy. From birth in a miner's cabin in Oklahoma, he had risen through a Horatio Alger boyhood to the practice of law and a lucrative representation of the oil interests of the Choctaw Indians. A later client was Sinclair Oil. He made a fortune of \$15,000,000, served overseas in World War I, became Hoover's Secretary of War, and coated the rough ebullience of a frontier background with the glossy Republicanism of Andrew Mellon. Tall, handsome and impressive, he dressed with the care of a Beau Brummel and when ordered to wear civilian clothes as Ambassador could only be induced to shed a general's uniform and medals on the direct intervention of the President. Vanity was Hurley's security.

His initial assignment to China as special envoy to facilitate the appointment of General Stilwell as Commander in Chief of China's armed forces had ended in a notable reverse. Instead of Hurley's cajoling Chiang, Chiang had cajoled Hurley into supporting his demand for Stilwell's recall. Hurley therefore felt a double need to make a success of coalition. He had wrecked his chances as mediator, however, by allying himself with the Generalissimo for the sake of the ambassadorship. Hurley was just what Chiang had always wanted in an envoy—a man with direct access to the President and no experience of China, who was easy to manipulate through his vanity. When Ambassador Gauss resigned at the time of Stilwell's departure, Chiang was only too pleased to ask for Hurley as successor. In a personal message to Roosevelt (sent via T. V. Soong to Hopkins, avoiding the State Department), he solicited a "more permanent" mission for Hurley who "has my complete confidence" in dealing with the Communists, and would thus be able to make a contribution to the war effort by solving the problem of coalition. Roosevelt was lured; he believed in the efficacy of harmony. If nothing else had worked in China, maybe a person pleasing to Chiang Kai-shek might. Hurley received the appointment and owed it to Chiang.

As a result, he at once convinced himself that his mission and the policy of the United States ("my policy" as he sometimes called it) were to "prevent the collapse of the National Government" and "to sustain Chiang Kai-shek as President of the Republic and Generalissimo of the Armies." No such instructions appear in the documents, and despite Hurley's later claims, they

could hardly have been oral since he was in China when he was appointed. It should be added, however, that when he stated this understanding of his mission in a rare communication to the State Department, no one disabused him. This was partly because the Department had no rein on Hurley, who generally bypassed it, and partly because it was unable to decide, except in noble generalizations, exactly what our China policy was. And no one knew for sure what it was in the President's mind.

Before he ever reached China, Hurley's estimate of the situation was shaped by the premise, which he accepted without question because it was told to him personally by Molotov, that the Soviet Union was not interested in the Chinese Communists, who were not really Communists at all. He thereafter underestimated them, said their strength and popular support were greatly exaggerated, and insisted that as soon as they were convinced that the Soviet Union would not support them, they would settle with the National Government and be content with minority status. Coalition would be easy. "There is very little difference, if any," he reported, between the "avowed principles" of the Kuomintang and the Communists; both "are striving for democratic principles." This may well be the least sophisticated statement ever made by an American ambassador. It reflects the characteristic American refusal to recognize the existence of fundamental divergence; hence the American assumption that there is nothing that cannot be negotiated.

Hurley accepted no guidance from his staff. Because he was over his head in the ancient and entangled circumstances which he proposed to settle, he fiercely resented and rejected the counsel of anyone more knowledgeable about China than himself. When the coalition blew up in his face and he found Chinese affairs resisting his finesse, depriving him of the diplomatic success he had counted on, he could find an explanation only in a paranoid belief that he was the victim of a plot by disloyal subordinates. He did not consider there might be a Chinese reason.

On the premise that his mission was to sustain Chiang Kai-shek, Hurley of course blocked the bid of Mao and Chou to go to Washington, the more so as it was intended to bypass himself. Although their message had been addressed to Wedemeyer for just that reason, it reached Hurley because Wedemeyer was absent in Burma at the time, and he and Hurley had an agreement to share all incoming information. A second message from

Yenan the next day, addressed to Wedemeyer on an "eyes alone" basis, quoted Chou En-lai as specifically stating that "General Hurley must not get this information as I don't trust his discretion." This, too, reached Hurley with effect that can be imagined. At the same time he learned through information passed by Nationalist agents in Yen-an of Bird's and Barrett's military proposals to the Communists. A terrible bell rang in his mind: here was the reason why the Communists had walked out on coalition. They had received a direct offer and were already secretly proposing to go to Washington over his head!

Barrett's proposals had, of course, emanated from Theater Command but Hurley ignored that out of his need to find some conspiratorial reason for the breakdown of coalition. Wrathfully claiming that Bird and Barrett had acted without authority, he informed the President on January 14 that their action had become known to him only when it "was made apparent by the Communists applying to Wedemeyer to secure secret passage for Mao Tse-tung and Chou En-lai to Washington for a conference with you."

Only in this context (repeated in a second telegram of February 7) was Roosevelt informed of the Communist request. It appeared as no more than a by-product of unwarranted action by American officers undermining Hurley's efforts for coalition.² The plan for military coöperation with Yen-an, Hurley said, would constitute "recognition of the Communist Party as an armed belligerent," and lead to "destruction of the National Government . . . chaos and civil war, and a defeat of America's policy in China." In the meantime, he assured Roosevelt, by discovering and frustrating the Communists' maneuver, he had now prevailed upon Chou En-lai to return to Chungking to resume negotiations.

V

What of the receiving end? The Communist request reached Roosevelt in terms already condemned by his ambassador. It

² Hurley's accusations, passed on by the White House to General Marshall and by him in a peremptory query to Wedemeyer, caused a furious quarrel between Wedemeyer and Hurley, followed by an enforced agreement between them on an explanation for Marshall that would leave Wedemeyer's command blameless while not disputing Hurley. This was accomplished in a convoluted masterpiece covering everybody except Colonel Barrett, who had neglected the soldier's elementary precaution of obtaining his orders in writing. At Hurley's insistence, unopposed by Wedemeyer, Barrett's nomination for promotion to Brigadier General, which had already gone forward, was withdrawn. His was the first in a line of honorable careers damaged to fill the need for scapegoats in China.

reached him, moreover, when he was plunged into preparations for the Yalta conference and overwhelmed by the dismaying problems of approaching victory. (Hurley's second, fuller telegram arrived after the President had already left Washington for Yalta.) War crimes, the postwar treatment of Germany, the Soviet claim to 16 seats in the United Nations, the Polish border, the arrest of Badoglio, trouble in Yugoslavia and Greece, the fall of the Iranian government, not to mention the necessity, according to Secretary Stettinius, of a "private talk with Mr. Churchill on British meat purchases in Argentina"—all these in the thirteenth year of a crisis-filled presidency did not leave Roosevelt eager to precipitate a new crisis with the unmanageable Chiang Kai-shek.

Bewildered by the intractability of China, disenchanted with the Generalissimo but fearful of the troubles that would rush in if the United States relaxed support, Roosevelt was inclined to look for a solution in the coming conference with Russia. His hope was to secure Stalin's agreement to support the Nationalist government, thus giving the Chinese Communists no choice but unity. He succeeded in obtaining the desired agreement at Yalta, and returned to be confronted by a choice in our China policy. Tired, ill and in the last month of life, he made a decision that closed this episode.

Coalition having reached another deadlock, Hurley and Wedemeyer arrived in Washington in March 1945 for consultation. Choosing their presence there as the opportunity to bring to a head the issue in American policy, all the political officers of the Embassy in Chungking, led by the *Chargé d'Affaires*, George Atcheson, joined in an unprecedented action. With the concurrence and "strong approval" of Wedemeyer's Chief of Staff, they addressed a long telegram to the Department, in effect condemning the Ambassador's policy. It pointed out that the Communists represented a force in China that was on the rise, that it was "dangerous to American interests from the long-range point of view" to be precluded from dealing with them, that with the approach of a landing in China the time was short before we would have to decide whether to cooperate with them or not. They recommended therefore "that the President inform the Generalissimo in definite terms that military necessity requires that we supply and cooperate with the Communists," and that such decision "will not be delayed or contingent upon" coalition.

After precipitating the explosive reaction of Hurley, who could see only an "act of disloyalty" to himself, the telegram was submitted to the President with the Department's recommendation that it provided an opportunity to reëxamine the whole situation and "in particular" the possibility of "giving war supplies to the Chinese Communists as well as to Chiang Kai-shek." The President discussed it in two conversations with Hurley on March 8 and 24, with no officer of the State Department recorded as present on either occasion. Hurley evidently argued convincingly that the Russian agreement secured by the President at Yalta would sufficiently weaken the Communists so that he could promise unity in China by "the end of April," as he had already told the Department. Roosevelt, clinging to the goal he had started with and ever the optimist, decided in favor of Hurley's policy of dealing exclusively with the Generalissimo and of making no connection with the Communists without his consent. In effect this rejected the recommendation of the Embassy staff and left the conduct of American policy to the tyro Ambassador. Thus confirmed, Hurley was able to insist on his requirement that Acheson and his colleagues involved in the Embassy telegram, five out of six of them Chinese-speaking and representing nine decades of Chinese experience, should be transferred out of China. This was duly accomplished on Hurley's return.⁸

In making his choice the President undoubtedly believed or was persuaded by Hurley that it would compel the Communists to accept Chiang's terms for coalition. But it was only possible to believe this by rejecting the Embassy's appraisal of the seriousness and the dynamism of the Communist challenge. The choice

⁸ Morale at the Embassy having sunk low under the effect of Hurley's rages and vendettas, the officers on duty in Chungking, whose careers were vulnerable to unfavorable action by the Chief of Mission, were anxious to be transferred, or in the case of two who were on leave in the United States, not to return. Acheson, as Hurley's ranking subordinate, though too senior to be adversely affected, could not remain under the Ambassador's violent objection, and was transferred to General MacArthur's command as Political Adviser. Hurley personally obtained the removal of Service whom he correctly guessed to be the principal drafter of the telegram, by direct request to Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson (Service being attached to the Military Command). In the case of Raymond Ludden, a political officer who had also served with the Dixie Mission and after a four-month tour of Communist territory had reported the likelihood of their coming to power, Hurley obtained a statement from Wedemeyer that he "no longer required Ludden's services." Fulton Freeman, third secretary of the Embassy, Japan Language Officer Yuni, and Arthur Ringwalt, former Consul in Kweilin recently transferred to Chungking, who suffered the longest under Hurley's vindictiveness, were all variously reassigned. With the exception of Acheson, who died shortly thereafter, the careers of all these men were slowed or otherwise damaged to greater or less degree by this episode. (Information supplied to the author by John S. Service.)

was the last important decision of Roosevelt's life. A few days later he left for Warm Springs where he died.

In March when the President made this decision, Mao and Chou in conversations with Service were still emphasizing and amplifying their desire for coöperation and friendship with the United States. The rebuff suffered by the lack of any reply to their offer to go to Washington was never mentioned (doubtless because they wished to keep it secret) and in fact none of the political officers attached to the Dixie Mission knew anything about it. Supported by Chu Teh, Liu Shao-chi and other leaders of the Party, Mao and Chou returned repeatedly to the theme that China and the United States complemented each other economically—in China's need for postwar economic development and America's ability to assist and participate in it. Trying to assess how far this represented genuine conviction, Service concluded that Mao was certainly sincere in hoping to avoid an exclusive dependence on the Soviet Union.

The banishment shortly afterward of Service and the others concerned in the Atcheson telegram was a signal to the Communists of the American choice. In reaction their first overt signs of hostility appeared in the form of articles by Mao in the Communist press. Confined so far to attacks on the "Hurley policy," these seemed still to retain hope of a change by Roosevelt's successor. In his speech to the Seventh Party Congress in June, Mao seemed to be half warning, half pleading. If the pro-Chiang choice by "a group of people in the U.S. government" were to prevail, he said, it would drag the American government "into the deep stinking cesspool of Chinese reaction" and "place a crushing burden on the government and people of the United States and plunge them into endless woes and troubles."

After V-J Day American forces enabled the Nationalists, who had neither the means nor the plans ready for the occasion, to take the Japanese surrender on the mainland and regain the occupied cities. The United States moved its marine forces into the important northern cities and ports (Tient-sin, Tsingtao, Peking, Chingwangtao) to deny these centers and the railroads in the area to the Communists until Chiang's troops, ferried by American ship and planes, could get there. This constituted clear intervention to the Communists since their own forces would otherwise have reoccupied the north. Though justified by us under the pressing necessity of disarming the Japanese, our action

was a logical development of the decision to sustain Chiang, and was taken as such by the Communists. Confirmed, as they saw it, by the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration's discrimination against Communist areas and by American toleration of Japanese troops serving with the Nationalists, they took the turn toward antagonism which in the course of the next four years was to become definitive.

Through 1945 efforts for coalition, mediated by Hurley, continued—largely because neither side wished to appear to have chosen the course of civil war—but they were empty of intent. Failing to move either side any closer to the unity he had so often and so confidently promised, Hurley grew increasingly erratic and disturbed and suddenly resigned in November 1945 with a famous blast, the first salvo of McCarthyism. His mission had been thwarted, he claimed, by a section of the State Department which was “endeavoring to support Communism generally as well as specifically in China.” He could not admit, and perhaps never understood, that his own estimate of the situation had been inadequate and the current of Chinese affairs simply too strong for him.

VI

Beyond Hurley, responsibility lay with the President. Hind-sight makes his rejection of the Embassy's advice appear short-sighted, but every historical act is entitled to be examined in the light of the circumstances that surrounded it. Without doubt the primary factor influencing him was the Russian agreement obtained at Yalta. Both Roosevelt and Hurley believed that the Soviet Union held the key and that its still secret pledge to enter a treaty of alliance with Chiang Kai-shek (subsequently fulfilled in August) would in its effect on both sides in China serve to block the danger of civil war.

This belief was made possible only by underestimating the Communists as a *Chinese* phenomenon with roots reaching down into a hundred years of unmet needs and strength drawn from the native necessity of revolution. Back in 1930 Ambassador Nelson Johnson, a man of no unusual powers but able to observe the obvious, reported that communism was not the cause of chaos in China but rather the effect of “certain fundamental conditions.” One such small voice, however, was overwhelmed as time went on by the conventional wisdom which held, first, that the

Chinese would never accept communism because it was incompatible with the structure of Chinese society, and second, according to the Molotov dictum which much impressed Roosevelt, that the Chinese Communists were not Communists at all. On these premises it was easy to persuade oneself that the Communists were not the coming rulers of China but a party of rebellious "outs" who could eventually be reabsorbed. When Hurley and Wedemeyer during this visit, along with Commodore M. E. Miles (Chief of Naval Intelligence in China), conferred with the Joint Chiefs, "they were all of the opinion," as reported by Admiral Leahy, "that the rebellion in China could be put down by comparatively small assistance to Chiang's central government."

A second factor was that no proponent of another view, no one within the government who could effectively counter Hurley's version, had regular access to Roosevelt. This left a terrible gap. The President, again according to Leahy who lived in the White House, "had much confidence in Hurley's reliability in accurately carrying out the duties assigned to him in the foreign field." Moreover, if Leahy can be used as a mirror, the White House bought the thesis that Hurley was undermined in his efforts by a group of jealous career diplomats who had "ganged up on the new Ambassador appointed from outside the regular foreign service."

Here is a beam of light on the most puzzling aspect of our China policy: why the information and opinions provided by experienced observers maintained in the field for the express purpose of keeping our government informed were so consistently and regularly ignored.

The answer lies in the deep-seated American distrust that still prevailed of diplomacy and diplomats, the sentiment that disallowed knee-breeches for Americans. Diplomacy means all the wicked devices of the Old World, spheres of influence, balances of power, secret treaties, triple alliances and, during the interwar period, appeasement of fascism. Roosevelt reflected the sentiment in his attitude toward the career Foreign Service which he considered a group of striped-pants snobs drawn from the ranks of entrenched wealth (as many of them were), unrepresentative of America and probably functioning as tools of the British.

There was enough truth in this picture to make it persist despite passage of the Rogers Act in 1924 formalizing the Foreign

Service as a career based on entry by examination and promotion by merit. The Act itself had been the result of wide criticism of cliques in the State Department, leading to a congressional investigation. The tragedy was that Roosevelt's prejudice derived from his liberal instinct yet produced a quite astonishing rigidity. When the voice from the field reported evidence that interfered with his desire to believe, he assumed it was the voice of reaction. When officers of the Embassy in Moscow and of the Russian Division of the State Department (technically the Division of East European Affairs) reported critically and relentlessly the brutal truth of Stalin's purges of 1937, they spoiled an image and were accordingly judged to be a nest of reactionaries married to White Russian princesses. On orders from above, the Russian Division was abolished, its unique files destroyed, its library given over to the Library of Congress and its chief, Robert F. Kelly, who had assembled over the years a collection of material that Litvinov envied, transferred to another post.

Ironically, the snob reputation had not on the whole been valid for China which, not being considered a particularly desirable post by socialites who preferred the Quai d'Orsay and the Court of St. James's, had been filled by academics, missionaries' sons and hard-working men promoted from the consular service, like Johnson and Gauss, the two ambassadors preceding Hurley. By a double irony, just such men would not have found themselves on easy terms with the White House.

Hurley started his mission with his mind equally set against the Foreign Service. When he came to blame it for his troubles he accused it alternately of conspiring to support communism and of sucking the United States into a power bloc "on the side of colonial imperialism." In this odd coupling he was not unique. Robert Sherwood, when conferring with General MacArthur's staff in Manila, found a persecution complex at work which seemed to conceive of the War Department, the Joint Chiefs and even the White House as under the domination of "Communists and British Imperialists."

Finally, the weight of domestic opinion on Roosevelt must be taken into account. If the hold of Chiang Kai-shek as the archetype anti-Communist on American public opinion was such that his cause perverted American politics for a decade after the war, and if it has taken us 27 years to untie the silver cord, and even yet have not cut it loose, it can hardly have been easy for Roose-

vult to untie it in 1945. Fear of communism lay very close beneath the skin, so close that in his final speech of the campaign of 1944, Governor Dewey, the Republican candidate, charged that Communists as a small disciplined minority, acting through Sidney Hillman, had seized control of the American Labor movement, and "now . . . are seizing control of the New Deal through which they aim to control the Government of the United States." Roosevelt, said this disciplined and respectable lawyer, had auctioned control of the Democratic Party to the "highest bidder," *i.e.* Hillman and Earl Browder, in order to perpetuate himself in office. Through him communism would destroy liberties, religion and private property.

If a man like Dewey could resort to the tactics of the enormous lie and to a charge as reckless as any in the history of political campaigning, Roosevelt was politician enough to know how little would be needed to revive it. The autocrat of the *Time-Life* empire, Henry R. Luce, was rabid on this subject, especially with reference to China; his publications were the trumpet of Chiang's cause. Summoned to battle by Chiang's partisans, some of them sincere and passionate advocates like the former medical missionary, Congressman Walter Judd, any of the myriad enemies of the Administration could create serious trouble. Roosevelt was concentrating now on the coming conference in San Francisco to organize the United Nations and on his hopes of a four-power alliance after the war to keep world peace. It was a time at all costs to avoid friction. Since China was in any case secondary to Europe—a disability it suffered from all through the war—it did not seem worth the risk that the Atcheson telegram asked him to take.

Thus passed the opportunity Mao and Chou had asked for. The factors operating against it suggest there never was an "if." And yet, there remains one strange contradictory sliver of evidence. Edgar Snow, the kind of outsider from whom Roosevelt liked to get his facts, reported a conversation with the President in March 1945 at the very time of the Hurley-Wedemeyer visit. Roosevelt was "baffled yet acutely fascinated," Snow said, by the complexity of what was happening in China and complained that nobody explained it satisfactorily, Snow included. "He understood that our wartime aid was actually a form of intervention in China;" he "recognized the growing strength of the Chinese Communists as the effective government of the guerrilla

area;” he asked “whether they were real Communists and whether the Russians were bossing them,” and asked further, “what, concretely, the Eighth Route Army could do with our aid in North China. He then said that we were going to land supplies and liaison officers on the North China coast as we drew closer to Japan.” Snow questioned whether, so long as we recognized Chiang Kai-shek as the sole government, all supplies would have to go through him. “‘We can’t support two governments in China, can we?’” he asked.

“‘Well, I’ve been working with two governments there.’ The President threw back his head decisively. ‘I intend to go on doing so until I can get them together.’”

This is a puzzle. It seems irreconcilable with the decision to uphold Hurley, unless Roosevelt was so convinced that Hurley would indeed achieve coalition “by the end of April” that what he had in mind was sending the Communists arms and aid *after* they had become part of the National Government.

Of the major quirk in the case one has to ask whether there might have been a different result if the ambassador had been a different man. A different man could still not have achieved coalition because no one on earth could have arranged terms that both parties could accept. A different man might have facilitated rather than blocked the visit of Mao and Chou to Washington, but if he had been a different man in whom they had confidence they would not have asked to go. There remains only the remote chance that an ambassador who both listened to his staff *and* had the ear of the President might have turned the President toward a wider option than the blank check to the Generalissimo.

Otherwise it would seem from the record that our course was destined, not by our stars but by ourselves and our inclinations; that the President, the public and the conduct of foreign policy combined to work toward an inescapable and, from our point of view, a negative end.

VII

Is any principle contained in this dusty answer? Perhaps only that every revolutionary change exacts a price in loss as well as gain, and that history will continue to present us with problems for which there is no good and achievable solution. To insist that there is one and commit ourselves to it invites the fate set apart for hubris. We reached in China exactly the opposite of what

had been our object. Civil war, the one absolute we tried to prevent, duly came about. Though we defeated Japan, the goal that would have made sense of the victory, a strong united China on our side after the war, escaped us. The entire effort predicated on the validity of the Nationalist government was wasted.

What should have been our aim in China was not to mediate or settle China's internal problem, which was utterly beyond our scope, but to preserve viable and as far as possible amicable relations with the government of China whatever it turned out to be. We were not compelled to make an either/or decision; we could have adopted the British attitude, described by Sir John Keswick as one of "slightly perplexed resignation." Or, as a Brookings Institution study concluded in 1956, the United States "could have considered its China policy at a dead stop and ended all further effort to direct the outcome of events."

Yet we repeat the pattern. An architect of our involvement in Vietnam, Mr. Walt Rostow, insists that a fundamental premise of American policy is the establishment of a stable balance of power in Asia. This is not a condition the West can establish. Stability in Asia is no more achievable by us than was unity in China in 1945.

Basic to the conduct of foreign policy is the problem basic to all policy: how to apply wisdom to government. If wisdom in government eludes us, perhaps courage could substitute—the moral courage to terminate mistakes.