Record of a meeting between Secretary of State D. Acheson and Foreign Secretary E. Bevin on the topic of China at the State Department, Washington, 18 September 1949[[1]](#footnote-1)

TOP SECRET

CHINA

*Mr. Acheson* recalled that a special Advisory Committee under Dr. Jessup had been looking into the question of United States policy in China and he had now seen their recommendations, with which he was in general agreement. He was anxious to get the question of China removed from the field of internal party politics.

The general conclusions reached by the Advisory Committee were as follows:

The United States Government should avoid giving any appearance of running after the Communists, and should on the contrary leave it to the Communists to come to them.

They should keep on the look-out for the emergence of any genuine resistance groups in China, but should not be in too much of a hurry to give such groups their support. At the moment there was no national leader of sufficient stature in sight. They should, however, be constantly on the lookout for the development of a Chinese version of Titoism. This was not the moment for conciliatory gestures to the Communists, which would only be represented as a sign of weakness, and in any case would be unacceptable to the American public. The aim should be to let the Chinese Communists learn by bitter experience that the position of a satellite of Russia had little to recommend it. Every effort should be made to show up any Soviet actions which were contrary to China’s interests. At the moment the United States Government had few weapons with which they could do any harm to the Communists, though the position in this respect would gradually change. They should, however, certainly avoid doing anything to help them.

The policy recommended for the United States Government might be summarised as follows:

(a) No premature recognition and no recognition until the Communist regime had obtained firm control over the greater part of China;

(b) Insistence on recognition by new regime of China’s international obligations;

(c) The policy to be followed should, as far as possible, be concerted between the Atlantic Powers;

(d) There should be no economic warfare against the new regime, but it should be made to pay its way. For example, there should be no haste to offer loans. The United States Government should try to secure agreement on the general prohibition of the import into China of the items specified on the 1.A. list. As regards items on the 1.B. list, the necessary machinery of control, export licences, &c., should be instituted, but no attempt should be made at present to prevent these goods from reaching China.

*Mr. Acheson* also referred to the complication presented by the present state of affairs in Formosa[[2]](#footnote-2), but said that there seemed no possibility of any useful initiative there at present.

*Mr. Bevin* said that His Majesty’s Government were in no hurry to recognise the Communist regime. On the other hand, the British were in a rather different position from the Americans in China, since their commercial interests were very much greater. The British community had been advised to stay where they were, and the British consular officers were remaining their posts. It would scarcely be possible at this stage to advise the British community to clear out. To do so would have a very demoralising effect in Hong Kong and in the rest of the area. The grant of recognition would have to depend on how the Communist Government behaved. It would certainly not be given if they tried to use threats, and it would be necessary to ensure that they accepted their international obligations. At the same time he thought there was a risk, if the Western Powers remained too obdurate, that the Chinese would be driven further into the arms of Moscow. It was important to avoid doing anything which would discourage them from being Chinese first and foremost.

*Mr. Acheson* said he agreed that the objective must be to encourage a split with Moscow. He thought, however, that there was a danger that premature recognition would serve to discourage the anti-Communist forces in China.

It was agreed that the maximum publicity, by means of pamphlets or otherwise, should be given to the action of the Russians in removing all the available machinery and equipment from Manchuria.

*Mr. Acheson* said that the United States Government quite understood that because of the much more extensive British interests in China the behaviour of His Majesty’s Government was bound to be somewhat different from that of the United States Government. It was a difference in situation rather than a difference in policy, and as long as the objective of the two Governments remained the same he did not think it mattered greatly if there was some divergence on tactics.

After some further discussion of the question of exports to Communist China, *Mr. Bevin* confirmed that he agreed that every effort should be made to prevent the entry into Communist China of any goods on the 1.A. list. He undertook to look again into the possibility of setting up machinery for the control of goods on the 1.B. list.

[TNA, FO 371/75814][[3]](#footnote-3)

Keywords: China

1. It appears that the record of this meeting was not published in *Foreign Relations of the United States*. However, see the record of the conversation about the discussions taking place earlier in the day in Foreign Relations of the United States, 1949. The Far East: China Volume IX (1949), 88-91. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. 38 In September 1949, the island of Formosa (Taiwan) and the province of Guangdong remained the last territories under Kuomintang control. In December 1949, the Government of Chang Kai-shek relocated to Taipei, the principal city of Taiwan. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See also the telegram from the British Ambassador in Nanking dated 1 September 1949 which proposed recognition of the Communist regime. The telegram argued that the policy of the United Kingdom was essentially focussed on trade and that, if that policy were to be adhered to then, not only could countless difficulties be avoided, but real advantages could be reaped for Britain and the wider world. Moreover, it could be a to preserve a foothold in the country, that would, in the final reckoning, help those elements resist Communism more than Acheson’s loud declaiming in the manner of the penultimate paragraph of the letter devoted to the White Paper. FO 371/75814 13102. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)