Telegram from Foreign Secretary, E. Bevin, to British Embassy in Washington D.C., 16 December 1949

SECRET

FROM FOREIGN OFFICE TO WASHINGTON

Recognition of Chinese Communist Government[[1]](#footnote-1)

Please seek an interview with Mr. Acheson and convey to him the following personal message from me. Begins[[2]](#footnote-2).

I want you to know that the Cabinet have now taken a decision in principle to accord *de jure* recognition to the Chinese Communist Government. The actual date of recognition has not yet been fixed, but I am thinking in terms of the 2nd January 1950, though I do not wish to be held to that date. I am anxious that no publicity should be given to our decision until we are ready to notify the Chinese Government.

I also wish you to know that we have deferred a decision on this matter as long as we felt able, but having taken into account all the circumstances and all the views expressed by other Governments, we nevertheless feel we must now proceed to recognition. There are some factors which affect us specifically not only our interests in China but the position in Hong Kong and also in Malaya and Singapore, where there are cast Chinese communities. We are advised that continued non-recognition is liable to cause trouble there which we cannot afford to risk, and we have had to bear this in mind.

As you know, we also take the view that to withhold recognition indefinitely is to play straight into the hands of the Soviet Union. We feel that the only counter to Russian influence is that Communist China should have contacts with the West, and that the sooner these contacts are established the better.

Our recognition will merely acknowledge the inescapable fact that the Chinese Communist Government is in effective control in China. This does not in the least lessen our determination to resist communism in South East Asia and elsewhere. What happens in the territories for which we are responsible is very much our business, and we intend to stimulate resistance to communism with all the means at our disposal, and hope like-minded countries will do the same.

While for obvious reasons, we cannot accompany the act of recognition with a statement in public that it does not denote approval of the Chinese Communist Government, this is as you know the fact. All of us after all recognise the Soviet Union and satellites. We acknowledge the existence of these governments, though we certainly do not approve of them, and by recognising the Chinese Communist Government we shall be doing no more than acknowledging a fact, as we have done with the Soviet Union and the satellites.

Such then is the position which I want to put to you frankly. I had hoped that we might be able to take action together in this matter, but if the United States feel unable to accord recognition I shall quite understand the positions. As you know, we want to keep in close association with you, but we have to be careful not to lose our grip of the situation in Asia and to take into account the views of our Asian friends.

I am grateful for the views which you expressed to Sir Oliver Franks about this question of recognition on 8th December (Washington telegram No. 5726 of 8th December) which I have taken into account in discussion with my colleagues. I am consulting with Commonwealth and other Governments with whom we have been in touch on this question, but it is of course for them to make up their own minds. Ends.

You will no doubt ask Mr. Acheson if he has any comments on this communication and indicate that I shall be grateful to receive a reply.

[TNA, FO 371/75828]

Keywords: Post-war Asia, China

1. The Cabinet agreed to recognise China on 15 December; see: CM (49) 72 in CAB 128/16. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. For the preceding correspondence with the USA in respect of the recognition of China, see British Embassy – State Department, 19 March 1949, US State Department / Foreign relations of the United States, 1949. The Far East: China, т. IX (1949), pp. 11-12; see also Bevin’s note to Acheson, where he observes: ‘As you know, we also take the view that to withhold recognition [of China] indefinitely is to play straight into the hands of the Soviet Union. We feel that the only counter to Russian influence is that Communist China should have contacts with the West, and that the sooner these contacts are established the better ‘, ibid, p. 225. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)