Foreign Office memorandum on the recognition of the Chinese Communist government, 18 November 1949

RECOGNITION OF CHINESE COMMUNIST GOVERNMENT

Approach to Commonwealth Governments

 1. On the 29th October, Commonwealth High Commissioners in London were sent an aide-memoire setting out the views of the United Kingdom Government on the question of recognition of the Chinese Communist Government. It was suggested that when Commonwealth High Commissioners had consulted their Governments this question should be discussed with them at a meeting in London at which the Foreign Secretary would be present. At the same time, the text of the aide-memoire was sent to United Kingdom High Commissioners who were asked to report any preliminary reactions they might receive from Commonwealth Governments.

2. The aide-memoire stated that the United Kingdom Government would not act before replies had been received from Commonwealth and other friendly Government (to whom a parallel approach was made) and before the implications of recognition had been examined at the Singapore Conference. The main arguments for recognition put forward in the aide-memoire were: -

(a) The authority of the Nationalist Government had almost completely collapsed;

(b) the Communists controlled 70% of the area of China and more than 75% of the population. They offered the only alternative to the Nationalist-Government.

(c) Russia and her satellites had already recognised the Communist Government and unless the United Kingdom did so we could not combat Soviet influence in China;

(d) the United Kingdom had very considerable trade interests in China which could only be preserved by recognition of the new Government;

(e) de jure recognition of the Communists would be in accordance with the principles and practice of international law, having regard to the relative authority of the Communist and Nationalist Governments in China.

 3. The aide-memoire also dealt with the question of the Chinese Nationalist motion in the United Nations Assembly complaining of a Russian breach of the Sino-Soviet Treaty. We felt there was no longer any point in supporting this complaint and that if we did so we should only be drawn into criticisms of Chinese Communists which would prejudice our future relations with them. The United Kingdom Government view was, therefore, that we would take no part in the debate and it there was a vote, we would abstain.

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