



Chatham House, the Council on Foreign Relations, and China policy during the Korean war, 1950–1953

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Abstract

In late 1950, with pervasive disharmony over the recognition of China, the Korean War, broader Asian policy, and British rearmament seriously threatening relations between Great Britain and the United States (USA), the New York-based Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) and the British Royal Institute of International Affairs established a collaborative study group project. These two organizations, each the leading foreign policy think tank in its respective state, undertook a comprehensive examination of conflicts within their relationship, that ultimately, in early 1953, produced a book-length joint report. The issue of future policy towards China featured significantly in their collaborative discussions. These deliberations, which proceeded at the ambiguous interface where officialdom and private thinking overlapped, were undertaken by individuals brought together by two non-governmental organizations, at the prompting of the Rockefeller Foundation, which provided its funding. Neither side succeeded immediately in altering the official policies of the other, but the enterprise facilitated communication on politically sensitive issues at an ostensibly private level among British and American elites with close connections to government, thereby mitigating potentially corrosive tensions between the two states. In the longer run, on the American side, this enterprise may well have cleared the way intellectually for a series of influential CFR publications on China that appeared during the 1950s and 1960s and helped to prepare the ground for the reopening of relations with China during the 1970s.

Keywords Foreign policy think tanks · Council on foreign relations · Chatham house · Anglo-American relations · Sino-US relations · Sino-British relations · Korean war

The role of foreign policy think tanks as mechanisms for discreetly moderating and stabilizing international disputes and tensions at an ostensibly non-governmental or

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semi-official level has drawn occasional scholarly attention [21, 22]. Almost since their inception in the early twentieth century, these organizations have served as forums of informal diplomacy, providing transnational channels of communication that crossed state boundaries, facilitating dialogues and interchanges on contentious issues among influential policymakers, businesspeople, and academics and media figures who helped to shape public opinion and set the intellectual agenda. On some occasions, notably the reintegration of West Germany into the US-led post-World War II European liberal order, think tanks from different countries worked together in efforts to resolve vexed issues [11]. Earlier, in the late 1920s and 1930s, the New York-based Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), the premier United States (US) foreign policy think tank, and its British counterpart, the Royal Institute of International Affairs (RIIA), often known as Chatham House, launched a collaborative study group initiative to resolve thorny problems that threatened to disrupt Anglo-American relations [24]. Some years later, in the early 1950s, with pervasive disharmony once again seriously jeopardizing ties between the two countries, the same institutions established a similar, second project, that eventually produced a book-length joint report.

One major difference between the two enterprises was that, whereas the initial interwar venture focused primarily upon naval policy and economic issues, especially war debts and trade policy, divergent thinking and policies towards Asia, particularly China, featured prominently in the successor undertaking. On 1 October 1949, Mao Zedong, Chairman of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), which had won control of mainland China, formally proclaimed the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC). Most of the ousted Nationalist Guomindang government fled to the island of Taiwan, where the Republic of China (ROC) headed by President Chiang Kai-shek continued in existence, claiming to be the only legitimate government of all China. Some evidence suggests that until late 1950, when China intervened in the Korean War, top US officials had contemplated recognizing the mainland government relatively expeditiously [30], the classic work arguing this case; see also [14]. For various reasons, including the rise of fiercely anti-communist McCarthyite sentiment and political pressures from the China Lobby in the US Congress, this never occurred. For 30 years, until 31 December 1978, the US government maintained diplomatic relations with the ROC. US officials claimed in justification that, by forcing China to embrace the Soviet Union as a patron, they hoped to provoke dissensions between the two communist great powers, discord that would eventually persuade China to look towards the West [4, 8, 15, 31, 34]. Britain, by contrast, contended that maintaining communication with whatever government held power was a prerequisite of any long-term efforts to influence China, and accorded the PRC *de jure* recognition on 6 January 1950, following its pragmatic tradition of granting this to any regime that controlled a specific nation or territory. From a more self-interested perspective, the British sought to safeguard not just their remaining economic interests in China, but also the unofficial bargains they had concluded with the Chinese communists to leave British administration of Hong Kong undisturbed [5, 15], Chapter 1; [17–19, 29].

Some indications suggested that the CFR itself leaned towards recognizing the new regime. In London, Foreign Office diplomats found 'interesting and rather



cheering' the results of a Council survey conducted in February 1950, covering the views of '720 leading citizens in 23 American cities'. Forwarding this document, Sir Oliver Franks, Britain's ambassador in Washington, noted that at least half these opinion makers opposed further US military or economic funding for the Nationalists, with 90% believing that 'effective military opposition to the Chinese communist regime on the mainland of China' had ended. Almost two-thirds, 64%, thought that 'American access to China, even on a limited basis, is so important to the American interest in Asia as to warrant American initiative in seeking some degree of mutual toleration between the United States and China'. Franks noted, however, that since that time public antagonism towards the new Chinese regime had intensified, so this figure should now be considered an overestimate.¹

Once the Korean War began in June 1950, the Truman administration moved quickly to persuade the United Nations (UN) to authorize the dispatch of a predominantly American military force to aid the beleaguered Southern government, and in late July also declared its intention of protecting Taiwan from any future mainland attack. Following Chinese intervention in the conflict, the USA took the lead in persuading the UN to impose stringent economic sanctions on China, measures that proved immensely detrimental economically to Britain's crown colony of Hong Kong, which depended heavily on exporting Chinese goods. The USA also blocked the new PRC from UN membership. American policies towards China sat uneasily with many of its Western allies, and also with assorted Asian powers, especially India, which like Britain recognized China in short order. Other Commonwealth countries lagged behind, as did many American NATO allies, largely due to their reluctance to offend their powerful patron, but such grudging acquiescence in US policies did not necessarily imply approval. Britain's recognition of communist China and continuation of at least limited economic relations with the mainland soon attracted fierce attacks from the American right, especially members of the China lobby. Heated charges by left-wing British members of parliament and other prominent public figures that US policies in both Asia and Europe were unnecessarily aggressive and confrontational and unjustifiably military in nature further inflamed anti-British sentiment in hostile American quarters (See, e.g. [2, 3], Chapter 4; [6, 8], esp. Chapters 1–5; [12, 13, 17, 18, 20, 26, 27, 32], Chapter 2; [33, 34]).

With McCarthyism well entrenched in the United States, open criticism by non-nationals of American positions could prove counterproductive, further inflaming divisive antagonisms. Indeed, mainland Chinese leaders from Mao Zedong downward hoped that discord over China policy would drive a wedge between the United States and Britain [34], Chapter 1). Thanks in part to its strict non-attribution rule banning any published reports of proceedings within its portals, the CFR was one forum where foreigners from elsewhere could frankly address influential Americans within and outside government on sensitive and politically controversial subjects.

¹ Oliver Franks to Ernest Bevin, 14 April 1950, enclosing Joseph Barber, ed., *American Policy Toward China: As Viewed by 720 Leading Citizens in Twenty-three Cities* (Council on Foreign Relations, April 1950), File FO371/83320, British Foreign Office Files on China, UK National Archives [hereafter UKNA], London.



The Council offered opportunities for dissenting albeit loyal Cold War allies to speak their minds and defend their countries' positions towards China and Asia, latitude of which external speakers, including diplomats, other government officials, and private individuals, all took full advantage. When—as with China policy—difficult relationships or issues seemed particularly contentious, more orchestrated joint ventures involving collaborative and sometimes transnational study groups and conferences supplemented isolated speeches, talks, and discussions.

In autumn 1950, Council members enjoyed repeated opportunities to hear from British Commonwealth powers on China. A degree of solidarity obtained. When Kenneth Younger, British Minister of State at the Foreign Office, addressed the Council in October 1950 on 'British Policy in Asia', he defended India's decision to recognize China. Younger warned that 'India, considering itself and China as the two great historical forces in the Far East, can hardly look with other than jaundiced eye on a policy, of American inspiration, which keeps the people of China from being represented in world councils.' Younger also deprecated the US decision to defend Taiwan against potential Chinese attack. He feared that, should the United States seek to resist a Chinese assault on Taiwan, this would trigger a similar and almost inevitably successful Chinese move against British-ruled Hong Kong. Asked about Japan, Younger wished neither to rearm Japan, nor to discourage economic links with China, one of Japan's 'greatest potential markets' in Asia. When Allen W. Dulles, the Council's president and a future Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) director, inquired whether British recognition of China had prompted any change of attitude from the Chinese Communists, Younger admitted that there had been little impact, possibly because various British votes in the UN could have been interpreted as unfriendly to China. In due course, the British would try to improve relations with China, which was currently 'treating British representatives correctly but distantly'.² A few days earlier, a New York banker had sent Dulles a memorandum by H. E. Metcalf, a British engineer with over 40 years of experience working in East Asia with both Japan and China, that strongly advocated PRC membership in the UN and suggested that mainland officials should be invited to present their case on Korea to the Security Council. Dulles responded that the United States had, 'by a policy of vacillation in China over the last 5 years, so "messed up" the situation that I must admit as to some doubt as to what we should do now.'³

By then Dulles had also listened to Percy Spender, foreign minister of Australia, which had contributed troops to the UN Korean War contingent and sought a defence pact with the United States. Speaking a few days after Younger, Spender told the Council that while Britain had recognized China in part to maintain solidarity with India, Australia had chosen to defer any decision until after the forthcoming Colombo conference of British Commonwealth nations had discussed the

² Digest of Meeting, Kenneth Gilmour Younger, 'Britain's Position in the Far East', 19 October 1950, Folder 3, Box 443, Council on Foreign Relations Papers, Mudd Manuscripts Library, Princeton University, Princeton, NJ [hereafter CFR Papers].

³ Dulles to Grosvenor Farwell, 8 November 1950, enclosed in H. E. Metcalf to Clement Attlee's Private Secretary, forwarded to Foreign Office, 20 November 1950, File FO371/83295, British Foreign Office Files on China, UKNA.



issue. Australia and other white Commonwealth states had not yet taken any action on recognizing China, in part because they preferred not to fall out of step with the USA, but at some point they must reach a decision. Characterizing as ‘fantastic’ the belief that Chiang Kai-shek had any chance of regaining power on the mainland, he nonetheless asserted that the prospect of surrendering Taiwan to communist rule left Australians unenthusiastic; they broadly supported the US policy of ‘neutralizing’ the island and hoped its own people would decide its ultimate fate. He hoped that the lure of UN recognition might possibly induce Communist China ‘to “pull a Tito”’ and move away from the Soviet Union. ‘[O]therwise we must admit that China is irretrievably lost to our side.’⁴

One month later, Sir Benegal Narsing Rau, India’s UN ambassador, addressed a Council dinner on ‘India’s Policy on China and Korea’. Noting that India had broken with Chinese positions on Korea, Taiwan, and Tibet, viewing these as matters open to UN discussion, whereas China considered them internal conflicts and therefore exempt from UN scrutiny, Rau stated that India sought to remain neutral in the growing international polarization between communist and non-communist powers. It had recognized the new Chinese government because that regime enjoyed *de facto* control of mainland China. He suggested that the United States would find recognizing China advantageous, since this would break the Soviet monopoly of friendship and communication with the new PRC.⁵

Efforts by eminent individuals to expound alternative views on China apparently failed to douse rising American resentment of the refusal of other leading powers to endorse US positions. More comprehensive remedies seemed advisable. The most elaborate Council effort to defuse tensions over China, an Anglo-American collaborative venture, lasted over 2 years. Early in 1951, the CFR and Chatham House established a joint study group to consider systematically points of contention and disagreement in Anglo-American relations, discover the roots of these, ‘dispel misunderstandings’, and if appropriate reach a compromise on them. Several Asia-related items featured prominently on the agenda, including the terms of any Korean peace settlement, the future of Taiwan, long-term policy towards Communist China, and Japanese peace treaty provisions.⁶ One British project member bluntly stated that ‘the difficulties over China... were the occasion of the two study groups being set up’.⁷ The initiative originated with Joseph H. Willits of the Rockefeller Foundation, who found the recent deterioration in Anglo-American relations disturbing, and in late 1950 therefore suggested the idea to Walter H. Mallory, the CFR’s executive director. After approving the proposal, the Council contacted Ivison Macadam,

⁴ Digest of Meeting, P. C. Spender, ‘Australia, the Commonwealth, and the United States’, 25 October 1950, Folder 3, Box 443, CFR Papers.

⁵ Digest of Meeting, Sir Benegal Narsing Rau, ‘India’s Policy on China and Korea’, 28 November 1950, Folder 2, Box 443, CFR Papers.

⁶ Percy W. Bidwell, ‘Memorandum on Plans for Combined Council-Chatham House Study’, revised 4 April 1951, enclosed in Walter H. Mallory to Lewis W. Douglas, 4 April 1951, Folder 1, Box 147, CFR Papers.

⁷ Minutes of meeting of Anglo-American Relations Study Group, 6 May 1952, File 9/48a, RIIA Archives, Chatham House, London.



Chatham House's executive director, who promptly agreed and set about organizing a high-powered British study group, chaired by Conservative member of parliament John G. Foster, a former First Secretary in Britain's Washington embassy. (In October 1951, when Foster became a junior minister in the new Conservative government, Admiral Sir Henry Moore, former head of the British naval mission in Washington, replaced him.) The group also included the Marquess of Salisbury, leader of the House of Lords; two bankers, Lord Brand of Lazard Frères London and Henry F. Tiarks of J. Henry Schroeder; the Conservative member of parliament Sir Arthur Salter, a potential Chancellor of the Exchequer; the prominent academics H. G. Nicholas, Isaiah Berlin, and Arnold Toynbee; and Robert I. Hall, principal economic adviser to the British cabinet.⁸ At the British group's first meeting, Salter sought to define common ground between Britain and the United States on several vexed issues, including policy on China and Taiwan. He suggested that, at least while Chinese troops were fighting UN forces in Korea, Britain could not realistically advocate seating mainland China on the UN Security Council. Equally, while the war continued, 'it was surely not right for Formosa to remain anything but neutral. It could not be handed over to the Chinese at the pistol point, nor, indeed, could it be thought of as a base for a counter-invasion by Chiang Kai-shek.' Yet those assembled also felt the United States needed to do better in 'explain[ing]' its 'case on China'.⁹

Overall responsibility for this latter task would devolve upon the corresponding American group, chaired by Henry M. Wriston, president of both Brown University and—since January 1951—the CFR. When setting up this enterprise, Wriston consulted with Sir Oliver Franks; Secretary of State Dean Acheson; several other State Department officials; and Walter S. Gifford, the US ambassador in London.¹⁰ After attending the first British meeting, the financier Tiarks promptly visited the USA, where he privately discussed the undertaking with assorted 'enthusiastic' American friends, including Whitney H. Shepardson, a Council founder and long-time member, and Henry R. Luce, publisher of *Time* magazine.¹¹ Tiarks had 'no doubt that China presents the greatest stumbling block at present' to smooth Anglo-American relations.¹²

The Council continued to host general meetings where elite British figures could expound their country's viewpoint. In early March 1951, Sir Gladwyn Jebb, Britain's forceful UN ambassador, robustly defended British policies while speaking on 'The

⁸ Mallory to Ivison Macadam, 19 December 1950, Macadam to Mallory, 17 January, 15 February, 1951, Wriston to Mallory, 17 February 1951, Mallory to Joseph H. Willits, 17 February 1951, Folder 3, Box 147, CFR Papers; copies of related correspondence are also included in File 9/48e, RIIA Archives. On Rockefeller Foundation support, see materials in Rockefeller Foundation Papers, Record Group 1.2 Projects, Series 100S, Box 57, Folder 441, Rockefeller Archive Center, Pocantico, NY [hereafter RAC].

⁹ Minutes of meeting of British group on Anglo-American Relations, 12 February 1951, File 9/48a, RIIA Archives.

¹⁰ Acheson to Mallory, 6 February 1951, Wriston to Mallory, 13 February 1951, 'Council-Chatham House Study: British-American Tensions', n.d., Bidwell, 'Memorandum on Plans for Combined Council-Chatham House Study', 25 February 1951, Folder 3, Box 147, CFR Papers.

¹¹ Henry S. Tiarks to Macadam, 26 February, 1 March 1951, File 9/48f, RIIA Archives.

¹² Tiarks to Macadam, 1 March 1951, File 9/48f, RIIA Archives.



UN and Far Eastern Problems' (On Jebb, see [10]). He backed the British decision to recognize communist China, arguing not just that this government, however unappetizing, physically controlled the mainland, but also that, should Britain withdraw recognition, it 'would lose a source of intelligence reports' and most neutral nations would probably not follow suit. Being communist did not disqualify any nation from UN membership, Jebb pointed out, and the British believed 'the present Asian situation would not be worse and might actually be better if communist China had been admitted to the UN before the outbreak of the Korean war.' Britain saw little to be gained by branding China as an aggressor in the UN, as the USA wished. Bombing Chinese factories in Manchuria would be ineffective, since these produced little war matériel. Allowing Chiang Kai-shek's forces to invade south China would likewise be futile, since 'his troops would probably desert'. Any British military sanctions on China were likely to prove unavailing. Imposing further economic restrictions on China might cause Britain to lose Hong Kong, inflicting 'a blow to Anglo-American prestige'. Jebb discerned 'no likelihood in the immediate future of a Chinese break with Russia', but thought that China might eventually follow its own line in international affairs. In conclusion, he affirmed that any differences between the two allies were relatively minor, and like the Americans, the British intended to fight and hold the line in Korea.¹³ Jebb's presentation was enthusiastically endorsed by the Council's director of meetings, George Franklin, who believed 'the tensions between our two countries in the last few months have been far greater than could be justified by the differences in our positions.'¹⁴ Even so, Franklin wished uneasily that Jebb had been 'a little less angry in his answers to questions' and felt he had perhaps downplayed just how widely the two countries diverged on China policy.¹⁵ More forthrightly, the usually Anglophile Council chairman and banker Russell C. Leffingwell, head of J. P. Morgan & Company, who had presided over the meeting, found Jebb 'lacking in persuasiveness' and 'eloquence' and accused him of 'magnifying rather than minimizing the differences between us and the British'.¹⁶

The occasion underlined just how sensitive and divisive a topic China had become. As Council leaders bristled at Jebb, Wriston went to London for an exploratory meeting with the group Chatham House had already established. China policy, Taiwan, and the Korean situation all came up. The Oxford don H. G. Nicholas had produced a paper warning that American actions in Korea, including the American drive to the Yalu River border with China, policies towards Taiwan, and the extreme anti-communist rhetoric of American 'Asialationists', had alarmed the British, provoking 'widespread worry that the U.S.A. was running berserk in the Far East and that matters were out of control of responsible elements in Washington'.¹⁷ Wriston responded that the United States sought to 'isolate China, hoping that the close

¹³ Digest of Meeting, Sir Gladwyn Jebb, 'The UN and Far Eastern Policy', 8 March 1951, Folder 2, Box 443, CFR Papers.

¹⁴ Franklin to Jebb, 9 March 1951, Folder 2, Box 443, CFR Papers.

¹⁵ Franklin to Russell C. Leffingwell, 9 March 1951, Folder 2, Box 443, CFR Papers.

¹⁶ Leffingwell to Franklin, 12 March 1951, Folder 2, Box 443, CFR Papers.

¹⁷ H. G. Nicholas, 'Anglo-American Differences', 7 March 1951, File 9/48a, RIIA Archives.



contact with the Soviet Union and Soviet exploitation would produce Titoism in China, as it had in Yugoslavia. The British, on the other hand, felt it was better to try to woo Communist China. Neither policy had worked.’ On Taiwan, Wriston ‘argued that the island must be in friendly hands for strategic reasons, particularly because of its proximity to the Philippines’. Perhaps to his surprise, he reported back, ‘[t]he British agreed’. On Korea, Wriston contended that the American decision to cross the Thirty-Eighth Parallel had not impelled China’s intervention in the war. Wriston concluded that the ‘rifts between the two countries were irritating rather than profound’.¹⁸

The Council, on its side, convened a relatively small American group, including—besides Wriston—five of its own leading officers, Franklin, Mallory, Hamilton Fish Armstrong, William Diebold, and Percy W. Bidwell; four prominent academics, Everett N. Case, president of Colgate University, Edward Mead Earle and Jacob Viner of Princeton, and William T. R. Fox of Yale; John W. Davis and Lewis W. Douglas, former US ambassadors to Britain; William J. Donovan, head of the wartime Office of Strategic Services; Charles Dollard and Joseph E. Johnson of the Carnegie Corporation and Endowment; the geologist and oil executive James Terry Duce; Spruille Braden, a former diplomat; and the retired Admiral Thomas W. Kinkaid. Henry L. Roberts, a Columbia University Soviet expert, served as American rapporteur. The groups agreed to adopt a common agenda, with each side attempting to appreciate issues from the other’s perspective, and producing memoranda and papers stating their understanding of their counterparts’ position. These would then be dispatched to their opposite numbers, to discover how recognizable they found these depictions of themselves and to serve as starting points for further discussions. Three members of each group should also cross the Atlantic, to provide their side’s perspective.¹⁹ Predictably, the initiating Rockefeller Foundation provided funding.²⁰

In late April 1951, as the groups began work, Sir Oliver Franks addressed a Council audience of almost 200—including several study group members—on British policies in Asia, with the expressed intention of ensuring that Americans understood these. He defended British recognition of China as essential in terms of conciliating Asian nationalist feeling, arguing that the new regime, while undoubtedly communist, had also harnessed nationalist urges within China and could not possibly be dislodged, given its ‘effective control of the Chinese mainland’. Although China was currently extremely close to the Soviet Union, that might change. Meanwhile, India found China’s anticolonialism—though not its communism—appealing and wished

¹⁸ Meeting of Group on British-American Tensions, 13 April 1951, Folder 1, Box 147, CFR Papers; Wriston to Mallory, 11 March 1951, Mallory to Macadam, 17 April 1951, Folder 3, Box 147, CFR Papers; also Minutes of Meeting of the Anglo-American Relations Study Group, 12 March 1951, File 9/48a, RIIA Archives.

¹⁹ Meeting of Group on British-American Tensions, 13 April 1951, Folder 1, Box 147, CFR Papers; Draft ‘American Preface’, File 9/48c, RIIA Archives.

²⁰ Mallory to Macadam, 17 April 1951, Folder 3, Box 147, CFR Papers; Flora M. Rhino to Mallory, 31 May 1951, Willits to Macadam, 31 December 1951, Ian Grey to Macadam, 18 January 1952, File 9/48e, RIIA Archives.



‘to see the Chinese experiment go through’. The British had initially proposed China for UN membership in the belief that ‘one great function of the United Nations is to provide a world force [sic] where all the countries can meet and discuss and talk shop if they want to, whether they are good, technically, or bad’. In Korea, one overriding British concern had been to avoid escalating hostilities in ways that would leave the Soviet Union no option but intervention. Nor did they wish to pressure China too hard beyond Korea’s boundaries, fearing that this might prove counterproductive and conceivably broaden the conflict.

The British, Franks stated, considered Asia largely a diversion from Europe, the primary Cold War arena. Since, realistically, ‘the viability of Japan is absolutely bound up with her relations to the mainland opposite’, and ‘implacable hostility to China’ would merely create difficulties for the new Japanese state, the British had hoped to involve China in ongoing peace treaty negotiations with Japan. The British also believed this treaty should contain language indicating that, as stated in the World War II Cairo Declaration, Taiwan was no longer under Japanese rule but part of China. Even if in practice Taiwan experienced an interval of separate administration, ‘ultimately’, the British believed, it belonged to China, and recognizing two governments in one country was problematic. Franks, originally an Oxford philosopher, argued that in international affairs abundant ambivalence had valuable utility. Eventually, time might resolve all these problems. Questioned, Franks replied that bombing Chinese air bases in Manchuria or blockading China risked enlarging the war beyond Korea. Asked why Britain was prepared to champion strongly a non-communist government in divided Germany but not in China, Franks replied that ‘the two situations were essentially different. The Bonn government, unlike the Chinese National government, had not “lost the confidence” of the people; and “the remnant which is Formosa” was not comparable to “the large body of Western Germany”.’²¹ Franklin hoped that Franks’s facility in handling ‘embarrassing questions’ might ‘prove useful in lessening some of the distrust of Britain’s policy now prevalent around [New York].’²²

Meanwhile, study group deliberations continued. Some early American meetings concentrated on East Asia, with Roberts, the group’s rapporteur, producing a memorandum on ‘British Policy in the Far East’. In East Asia, Roberts argued, Britain’s ‘relations with Communist China’ drove its policies. The British were determined to prevent a ‘Third World War’; they were equally resolute that ‘the Chinese question’ should not ‘weaken Britain’s security’. These preoccupations were intimately related to British policies on Korea, Taiwan, the Japanese peace treaty and Communist China’s role therein, and ‘Britain’s position in Hong Kong, and by extension its commercial interests in China’. Hong Kong was heavily dependent on trade with China, which accounted for about one-third of the territory’s commerce and had grown significantly in 1949 and 1950. While recognizing Communist China and backing its UN membership, Britain had contributed substantial military forces to the Korean

²¹ Digest of Meeting, Sir Oliver Franks, 23 April 1951, and transcript of Franks’ address, 21 April 1951, Folder 1, Box 443, CFR Papers.

²² Franklin to Douglas, 24 April 1951, Folder 1, Box 443, CFR Papers.



intervention and—albeit reluctantly—joined other UN members in declaring China an ‘aggressor’ in Korea. Britain now seemed ready to welcome overtures for a ceasefire. With a Japanese peace treaty under negotiation, the British had even suggested that a draft be submitted to Beijing for Chinese input.²³

The second and third American meetings focused specifically on British Far Eastern policy, which Johnson observed had—unlike that of the USA, which at least until World War II had treated Asia and Europe as ‘separate’—always been subordinate to British interests in Europe. The British currently focused primarily upon Hong Kong and Singapore. The American group discussed the relative weight in British policy towards China of political considerations, including hopes that recognition would draw China away from the Soviet Union, a view strongly advocated by Chatham House figures, as opposed to intentions to maintain British control over Hong Kong, where, although it carried some ‘sentimental’ implications, their interest was primarily economic. Johnson suggested that Britain’s readiness to endorse mainland China’s admission to the UN revealed that it held that organization in less respect than did the Americans. Despite supporting US intervention in Korea, Britain regretted the US decision to protect Taiwan and feared that UN resolutions branding China an ‘aggressor’ might inflame the situation while facilitating the imposition on China of economic sanctions. The Americans again noted British concerns that any Japanese peace treaty excluding China and the Soviet Union would be unsatisfactory.²⁴

A few weeks later, in June 1951, the Americans considered a revised paper by Roberts on British Far Eastern policy, which highlighted growing inconsistencies in British policies towards China, stemming from Britain’s somewhat irreconcilable efforts to offend neither China nor the USA. While the executive branch of the American government was relatively tolerant of discrepancies in British and US policies towards China, Congress and the press were ‘highly critical of British policy and actions’. Roberts suggested that Britain had been ‘overly hasty’ in recognizing China, a move he thought unlikely to safeguard British economic interests, yet argued that at this juncture, reversing recognition would make little sense. With debate ongoing in both Britain and the United States over the wisdom of each country’s policies towards China and ‘whether a reasonable peaceable future in the Far East is possible so long as the Chinese Communist government is in power’, the only realistic joint Anglo-American policy Roberts could discern was ‘one of cautious yet determined perseverance to maintain the position of the free world without an eruption into war’.²⁵

By now, the Americans were demonstrating considerable sympathy for the British position on recognition. William Diebold, a long-time Council research fellow,

²³ Henry L. Roberts, ‘Memorandum on British Policy in the Far East’, 14 May 1951, Folder 4, Box 147, CFR Papers.

²⁴ Digest of Second Meeting, Study Group on Anglo-American Relations, 15 May 1951, Folder 1, Box 147, CFR Papers.

²⁵ Roberts, ‘Critical Memorandum on British Policy in the Far East’, 14 June 1951, Folder 4, Box 147, CFR Papers.



noted that when the British recognized communist China, their position had been less remote from the American stance than it later became. Wriston suggested that ‘we had let them run a kind of “pilot operation” and when we found it did not work, we denounced them’. Franklin even contended ‘it might be useful for Britain and the U.S. to have two policies on this matter’. Wriston agreed that this dichotomy, however unintentional, might be advantageous, since ‘it could be useful to “work both sides of the street” without either country being inconsistent’. The group discussed at length British assertions that their own policy was more likely than US isolation to detach China from the Soviet Union. Case recalled that in 1949 genuine differences of opinion had existed among American policymakers over which course might prove most effective in encouraging China to split from the Soviets. Duse mentioned Yugoslav expectations that ultimately, China would inevitably follow their example and break with the Soviets. Diebold noted that the United States was fighting ‘a limited war’ in Korea, which Wriston characterized as a reversion to the nineteenth-century pattern of US warfare. Discussing somewhat defensively General Douglas MacArthur’s requests to bomb troop mustering areas within China, Admiral Kinkaid asserted that MacArthur had not sought ‘to start World War III’. Unlike most present, Kinkaid still believed Nationalist forces might regain a foothold on the mainland and dislodge the communists. The group noted British claims that a fullscale economic embargo on China would be ‘ruinous to England’ and especially Hong Kong. Wriston considered questionable the British assertion that the new regime ‘had the support of 400 million Chinese’. Viner agreed, but suggested improving the memorandum with a paragraph indicating ‘that some of our differences with the British were simply differences of judgment’ as opposed to ‘matters of logic or analysis’. The group nonetheless feared that, in terms of American public opinion, continued British recognition of China could prove ‘a source of misunderstanding’.²⁶ Writing subsequently to Lewis W. Douglas, former American ambassador to London, who had raised this point, Walter Mallory, the Council’s executive director, confirmed that before recognizing China, Britain had indeed consulted with the American government, which ‘did not oppose the British recognition’. Yet, given current US ‘domestic tensions’, Mallory warned that it would be ‘impolitic’ to state that the British might have had good ‘reason to believe that United States contemplated recognition at a later date’.²⁷

At the following meeting in July 1951, the Americans discussed a paper on British policy in South and Southeast Asia, plus a Chatham House memorandum on American China policy. Wriston noted that Britain and the USA were by now less at odds over either China or Taiwan than over India, which had not only recognized China but infuriated the Americans by seeking to mediate the Korean War. William Donovan, attending his first meeting, sceptically believed the British had not followed India’s lead in recognizing China, but simply found the Indian position useful

²⁶ Digest of Third Meeting, Study Group on Anglo-American Relations, 14 June 1951, Folder 1, Box 147, CFR Papers.

²⁷ Mallory to Douglas, 3 August 1951, also Mallory to Macadam, 17 April 1951, Folder 3, Box 147, CFR Papers.



cover for their chosen course, since ‘Britain feared China and Russia more than she feared us’. Turning to the British memorandum, Wriston characterized as inaccurate its statement that Britain’s position on recognition of China had ‘no appeal’ in the United States, remarking: ‘Actually it appealed to large sections of U.S. opinion.’ He contended, however, that before recognizing China, the British should have insisted the new state agree ‘to discharge international obligations’.²⁸

Summer provided time for Chatham House to respond. In June, the British group heard from the diplomat Sir Esler Dening, British representative during the recent Japanese peace negotiations. Dening robustly defended British policy in recognizing the PRC, holding ‘it... essential that at least one member of the English-speaking nations should maintain contact with Communist China.... British policy was to keep a foot in the Chinese door, and to work as far as possible against the complete isolation of China from the West, as well as to combat the strong body of Asiatic opinion which regarded the Western powers as imperialistic.’ Ultimately, Dening hoped, China would split with the Soviet Union. Dening believed that, by denying China UN membership, the USA was leading other Asian nations, many of whom had no particular liking for China, to think it unfairly victimized. Were China admitted, he suspected its behaviour in the organization would be so intransigent as to alienate many other members, such as India. He thought continued US support for Chiang Kai-shek made ‘little political sense’, while Chiang’s efforts to overturn the new mainland regime had no chance of succeeding. Suggesting that China had only intervened in Korea because it feared a direct American attack, Dening suspected hostilities there might drag on indefinitely, perhaps ending in an ‘armed neutrality’. Discussing future Western policy towards China, Dening warned that outside powers possessed very little influence over Chinese internal developments or Sino-Soviet relations, and ‘any interference on the part of the West in China’s affairs was to be deprecated. His own advice was to do nothing.’²⁹

Dening’s views featured substantially in the trenchant British response to the Council’s memorandum on Britain’s China policy. Drafted largely by Stanley Olver, Chatham House’s Asian expert, and Robert Scott, Assistant Under Secretary at the Foreign Office, it argued that Britain had ‘never subscribed to the American view that China was a first-rate power though the British realize that China may in time become one’. Whereas Britain approached China in the context ‘of policy towards India and the rest of South and Southeast Asia’, the United States had for decades considered China its top priority in Asia. The authors believed the Chinese Communists had won power because ‘however regrettably they had the support or acquiescence of a majority of their countrymen and so despite initial disadvantages were able crushingly to defeat a much more strongly armed but corrupt and inept regime.’ Chatham House pragmatically defended British recognition on the grounds ‘that you must take the peoples and governments of the world more or less as you find them’,

²⁸ Digest of Fourth Meeting, Study Group on Anglo-American Relations, 12 July 1951, Folder 1, Box 147, CFR Papers.

²⁹ Minutes of meeting of Anglo-American Study Group, 14 June 1951, also meeting of 28 June 1951, File 9/48a, RIIA Archives.



thinking it ‘in the long run nonsense to ignore the existence of a country or of a government merely because the policy of that government is not the same as your own policy.’ The British favoured mainland China’s UN membership, considering that organization ‘a sort of Noah’s Ark where the lamb and serpent lie down together whereas many Americans seem to look on it as a defensive alliance’. This would at least allow Chinese participation in ‘an open forum in which all can meet and discuss their differences’.

Americans, the authors contended, exaggerated the economic significance of British trade and investments in China. Discussing Hong Kong’s future, they stated the territory could never be ‘an independent sovereign state on its own’, but its free port status was valuable to much of Asia. While not venturing to predict its long-term prospects, the authors noted that Hong Kong had ‘not been the target of any very determined abuse even from Peking’. Turning to Taiwan, the British paper ‘doubt[ed] if Formosa has the slightest defensive importance to the United States and, with the blockade and bombing of the China coast last year from Formosa in mind, it is easy to argue that the Chinese have some justification for thinking its possession essential to their own defence.’ Whereas Americans tended ‘to see Chiang Kai-shek as a Napoleon who might land from Elba’, the British suspected that, should he attempt to retake China, he would experience ignominious defeat. For economic reasons, Britain believed that trade with mainland China was essential to Japan, which should be allowed to decide for itself on recognizing China. In terms of China policy, the memorandum warned, most other powers were far closer to the British than the American position. Presciently, the authors ended by warning that many in Britain believed the Soviet Union was ‘trying to embroil the West in big commitments in the Far East’ and that in Asia the USA was ‘playing into Soviet hands’, prompting real ‘anxiety’ within Britain, which shared the same fundamental objectives as its ally.³⁰

In September 1951, the American group discussed this response, in conjunction with both its own rewritten paper on British Far Eastern policy, and the British counterpart on US policies in Asia, initially drafted by the Oxford academic H. G. Nicholas for Wriston’s March 1951 visit to London, and subsequently significantly revised. The latter’s newest incarnation highlighted as major irritants in Anglo-American relations British recognition of the PRC, as the government in de facto control of the mainland, and the continuation well into the Korean War of British exports to China through Hong Kong. It also mentioned and sought to rebut American criticisms that the British war effort in Korea had been relatively smallscale.³¹

Most of the Americans clearly found justifying non-recognition of China an uncomfortable exercise in defending the indefensible. Discussing the Chatham

³⁰ Anglo-American Relations Study Group, ‘Comments on ‘Memorandum on British Policy in the Far East’, 13 August 1951, File 9/48a, RIIA Archives; for an earlier draft of this paper, see A. S. B. Olver and R. H. Scott, ‘Comments on “Memorandum on British in the Far East (first Draft)”’, 24 July 1951, File 9/48 h, RIIA Archives.

³¹ Nicholas, ‘Revised Memorandum on Anglo-American Differences’, 21 May 1951, File 9/48a, RIIA Archives; on the revision of this memorandum, see also Minutes of Meeting of Anglo-American Relations Study Group, 9 May 1951, 29 May 1951, File 9/48a, RIIA Archives.



House response, Dollard of the Carnegie Corporation regretted that the Council memorandum failed to mention that in late 1949 and early 1950, ‘the United States government was looking for the right opportunity to recognize the government of Communist China’. Henry Roberts, its author, replied that given the subject’s ‘explosive’ implications, this omission was deliberate. During congressional hearings on General MacArthur’s dismissal Secretary of State Acheson had refused to confirm this, and ‘no documentary proof of the intention of the United States to recognize Communist China’ existed. Indeed, ‘Only Senator McCarthy has insisted that it is true, and this has precluded the possibility of the admission of it by the State Department.’ Wriston again characterized British dealings with Communist China as ‘very weak’ for ignoring whether China was willing to accept its ‘international obligations’. By contrast, Percy Bidwell, the Council’s Director of Studies, ‘queried whether we could really defend the American position’ on the Chinese communists, since ‘we cannot very well accuse the British of being over-hasty in extending recognition... if, in fact, we were contemplating the same step and were prevented from taking it only by external causes’. Another thought the Chatham House view that British recognition of China was ‘a wise step in the light of Asiatic opinion, was a good one’. He also endorsed British contentions that the unresponsiveness of the Chinese Communists to ‘British overtures’ should not be ‘construed as a defeat for British policy, for the onus of refusing to establish normal relations has now been put squarely on the Chinese.’ Perhaps enviously, Wriston added that ‘the British have contrived to have the best of both possible worlds’. Yet when Viner asked just how crucial the recognition issue was to Anglo-American relations, Dollard replied that, to ‘the American Congress, it is of very great importance indeed’. Earle thought it might be advisable for the Americans to concede that their standards for recognition were ‘at variance with the general doctrine’ most states in the world followed, and that even within the USA there existed ‘considerable difference of opinion on recognition’. When Kinkaid stated he saw no reason why his country should deal with ‘a government that seeks to destroy us’, the trade unionist Michael Ross retorted that, logically, this would seem to require the withdrawal of US recognition from Soviet Russia.

Earle, who had attended one British group meeting at Chatham House, claimed—probably erroneously—that the British now felt they had been mistaken in recognizing the PRC, but that this decision could not be reversed.³² Johnson suggested that the Americans inform Chatham House that the British should have waited to coordinate their actions with those of the USA, meaning there was ‘really no excuse for the hasty recognition of the British’. Clutching at straws, Johnson recalled that ‘one American official’ had told him that ‘Communist control of the Chinese mainland is not yet perfect’, which might, he thought, ‘afford reasonable grounds for withdrawing recognition’. Long-time Council officer Hamilton Fish Armstrong, however, retorted that Percy Spender, now the Australian ambassador, had warned that ‘no one expects Chiang Kai-shek to regain control of the Chinese mainland. How, then,

³² This meeting’s records do not support Earle’s recollection. Minutes of meeting of Anglo-American Relations Study Group, 7 June 1951, File 9/48a, RIIA Archives.



can anyone continue to recognize his regime as the legal government of China?’ Had the British recognized the Chinese communists, he continued, ‘so as to strengthen their position vis-à-vis the USSR, then American policy to withhold recognition offset the British step. If Great Britain recognizes them, we should have done as well.’ Wriston suggested simply withdrawing recognition from Chiang, without switching to the Communists. Given that British recognition had failed to separate the Chinese from the Russians, however, Viner considered this ‘a bad wager’. China’s entry into the Korean War proved equally contentious. Wriston found persuasive Chatham House complaints that American policy had misguidedly treated China as ‘a first-rate power’ and allowed the Chinese situation to ‘dominate all other Far Eastern questions’. The Americans differed over whether, as Wriston and Armstrong suspected, fears of impending direct US attacks had prompted Chinese intervention in Korea. Kinkaid suggested that the Chinese had opted for hostilities well before UN forces crossed the Thirty-Eighth Parallel, citing heavy deployments of Chinese troops on the Korean border much in advance of this event, whereas Diebold thought these were probably precautionary moves. Johnson remained non-committal.³³

Across the Atlantic, in October 1951, the British group again discussed a shorter memorandum on ‘American Policy in the Far East’. Noting the dramatic expansion of US involvement in Asia since World War II, as Britain’s previously impressive presence declined commensurately, Chatham House highlighted an intensifying ‘feeling that the Far East was now America’s business and that if things went wrong there, it was not for Britain to accept any responsibility for situations arising from American policy, or to be drawn into troubles that were not her concern.’ The British had few real interests in Korea, and no commitment to Chiang Kai-shek’s government. While the USA had initially intended to recognize the new Chinese regime, high-profile espionage cases and the far deeper American emotional investment in Nationalist China had precluded this. Since June 1950 the Americans had conducted what was ‘primarily an American campaign’ in Korea, led by a US commander, with the great bulk of UN troops and casualties American, meaning their country ‘had the sense of being at a war whereas the British have not’. Consequently, Americans viewed ‘China as an enemy to be defeated, while the British have continued to think of dealing with China in terms of compromising peace-time diplomacy’. The British were not just resisting entanglement in ‘large-scale war’ with China, but prepared to sanction Chinese Communist UN representation and let the mainland ‘conquer Formosa if they can’. They expected that China would ‘sooner or later quarrel with Russia’. Britain also believed that ‘Europe, and not the Far East, should have strategic priority for the nations associated in the Atlantic Pact, and that Russia, not China, is the menace’, making Britain ‘desperately anxious to get the Korean conflict quickly settled lest it should involve a deeper commitment of Western forces in the Far East’. The USA, in defining Taiwan as a vital US strategic interest, to be defended against communist attack, had precluded any united Anglo-American policy on Asia. ‘[T]he best that can be hoped for at the present is for each nation to try

³³ Digest of Sixth Meeting, Study Group on Anglo-American Relations, 6 September 1951, Folder 1, Box 147, CFR Papers.



to have a sympathetic understanding for the contrasting points of view which have led to different courses of action'.³⁴

Shortly afterwards, the Council dispatched Wriston, Roberts, and Johnson to London, for direct discussions at Chatham House. Addressing the draft British memorandum, Wriston offered minor qualifications, rather casuistically querying whether, as the British Foreign Office believed, the government had initially definitely planned to recognize mainland China. He accepted that Britain had wished to 'encourage[e] Mao to emulate Tito' by recognizing China, whereas the Americans saw 'more hope of Mao becoming a Tito if China and Russia were thrown together', adding wryly: 'Neither policy seemed to have been very successful to date.' Disputing that Americans viewed China as 'an enemy to be defeated', Wriston contended that his country sought to defeat China only in Korea; elsewhere in Asia, American policy aimed to oppose and contain 'Chinese expansion' in Malaya and Indochina, territories where Britain and France were still involved, demonstrating that Asia remained strategically significant to European nations. He agreed, however, that 'U.S. interest in China was primary, whereas British interest was secondary'.³⁵

In practice, Anglo-American differences over China gradually declined in intensity. As early as August 1951, when Anthony Eden, Britain's shadow Foreign Secretary, who had unavailingly opposed recognition, addressed a large Council audience, he mentioned China only briefly, dismissing the topic of diplomatic relations as 'not important today' except in causing Britain and the United States to be 'out of step for so long'.³⁶ Eden believed that 'self-interest' had led Britain to move 'precipitately' on the issue, confident that the USA would soon 'follow suit. But Korea intervened. Under the present deplorable circumstances, we both can only work together to repair the breach, by urgent negotiations and concessions where possible'.³⁷ Two months later, following a Conservative general election victory, Eden again became Foreign Secretary, a development that perhaps influenced the two think tanks' December 1951 decision to continue their study group, hold a joint conference in 1952, and finally produce a collaborative report delineating the differences separating the United States and Britain in international affairs. On China policy, this offered scope for political embarrassment since, in Ambassador Douglas's words, should the report frankly explain why Britain had recognized China and the USA had not, 'we may get into trouble with Washington'. And, discussing the 'Formosan impasse', Dollard wondered if a tentative solution of the 'neutralization'

³⁴ 'Memorandum on American Policy in the Far East (First draft for discussion)', 4 October 1951, File 9/48a, RIIA Archives.

³⁵ Minutes of meeting of the Anglo-American Relations Study Group, 8 November 1951, File 9/48a, RIIA Archives.

³⁶ Digest of Meeting, Anthony Eden, 28 August 1951, Folder 4, Box 443, CFR Papers.

³⁷ Roger F. Evans, Memorandum, 'Hon. Anthony Eden at the Council on Foreign Relations—Colony Club—28 August 1951', Rockefeller Foundation Papers, Record Group 1, Series 100S Grants, Sub-Series Council on Foreign Relations, Box 97, Folder 879, RAC.



of Taiwan was feasible, rhetorically enquiring, ‘What is to be done about Chiang Kai-shek?’³⁸

The Americans therefore tried to finalize a ‘Joint Statement’ covering both British and American policies in Asia that, while detailing existing differences and their origins, suggested that in practice the objectives of both countries were not too far apart. The document perceived several grounds for cautious optimism: Britain, though recognizing communist China, had afforded it neither ideological nor political backing; recent decreases in Sino-British trade had moderated American criticism of this commerce; the opening of truce negotiations in Korea, plus the excellent fighting performance of British troops, had defused complaints that Britain was not pulling its weight there; and, despite reiterated British fears that American policies were dangerously erratic and bellicose, the USA had not allowed the Korean War to escalate into a broader conflagration. The statement concluded that neither Britain nor the USA would readily abandon its existing position on Chinese recognition. Effectively, it trusted that the American and British governments would manage to live with existing discrepancies.³⁹

As the book neared completion, differences over strategy continued to divide the British and Americans. Commenting on the US policy of containment of the Soviet Union, Peter Calvocoressi of Chatham House described how this had originally focused on drawing a line and preventing additional Soviet advances. Following the Communist victory in China, Washington had gone further and, with minimal consultation with its allies, expanded the geographical scope of its strategic commitments and ‘converted containment of the U.S.S.R. into containment of the U.S.S.R. plus China’. This equation of China with the Soviet Union was ‘not agreeable to Washington’s allies’.⁴⁰ A Council paper on policies towards the Soviet Union submitted to Chatham House in August 1952 took these caveats on board.⁴¹ Yet further strategic expansion was implicit in a second Council paper discussed in London that same month that recommended establishing in the Pacific a US-led security organization resembling NATO, with the objective of precluding the eruption of future military crises or wars in East and Southeast Asia.⁴²

In August 1952, the Council also submitted a revised Joint Statement, rewritten to articulate the differing British and American perspectives and preoccupations, without necessarily endorsing either party’s position. Suggestions that the USA might have initially planned to recognize China were toned down, while the influence of

³⁸ Digest of Eighth Meeting, Study Group on Anglo-American Relations, 18 December 1951, Folder 3, Box 147, CFR Papers.

³⁹ ‘Sample “Joint Statement” on British and American Policies in the Far East’, 2 January 1952, revised 10 January 1952, Folder 4, Box 147, CFR Papers; ‘Sample “Joint Statement” on British and American Policies in the Far East’, 18 January 1952, File 9/48a, RIIA Archives.

⁴⁰ ‘Note by Mr. Calvocoressi on American Policy towards the U.S.S.R.’, 22 July 1952, File 9/48b, RIIA Archives.

⁴¹ Council on Foreign Relations, ‘Policy and Attitudes Toward the Soviet Union’, 25 August 1952, File 9/48b, RIIA Archives.

⁴² Council on Foreign Relations, ‘Global Military Problems’, 25 August 1952, File 9/48b, RIIA Archives.



India, which had recognized the PRC almost immediately, was emphasized when justifying Britain's recognition policy. The divergent British and US expectations of how best to encourage China and the Soviet Union to split were likewise highlighted. So too were their conflicting interpretations of the implications of diplomatic recognition. In terms of UN membership, Britain thought this organization should be open to nations of all political complexion, a forum where differing views could meet, whereas the USA believed membership 'must imply compliance with certain basic concepts of international legality', meaning that the presence of such a state as China would 'weaken' the UN as 'an instrument for the maintenance of peace'. The British would also have preferred that mainland China, not Taiwan, sign the 1951 Japanese Peace Treaty, whereas the Americans believed 'the present government in Peking is not one that can legitimately or safely be regarded as a victorious power over a defeated Japan'.

Where Taiwan was concerned, Britain believed the island had little strategic or military value and should revert to mainland rule. The British also condemned Chiang Kai-shek's government as 'hopelessly corrupt and undemocratic', and believed he could not 'contribute anything to the future well-being of Asia'. While the Korean War continued, however, they did not intend to press the issue. The USA, by contrast, thought Taiwan 'of great importance to the security of the U.S. defense perimeter in the Pacific', and held Chiang's 'merits or faults... wholly secondary to the over-riding threat of Communist expansion'. Britain considered Chinese intervention in the Korean War primarily defensive in nature, whereas the USA thought it an act of aggression. The USA, treating China as an enemy, sought to embargo all trade with Beijing, whereas Britain was prepared to continue commercial dealings, both 'as an indication of its hopes for amicable relations' and in Hong Kong's interests. Yet Britain had, however reluctantly, acquiesced in the imposition of economic sanctions on China. Unlike the USA, Britain was sceptical over the advantages of rebuilding Japan economically and militarily, to counterbalance potential Chinese power, and reluctant to join any Pacific Pact. British positions had attracted significant American media and political criticism, while leftist opinion in Britain had condemned many US measures. Overall, the British and US governments had largely succeeded in managing these differences, though some might well re-emerge following a Korean peace settlement.⁴³

In September 1952, the two groups held a joint five-day conference at Arden House in New York, to discuss the draft book manuscript, co-authored by Henry Roberts and Paul Wilson, their enterprise had generated. Eight British group members, led by Ivison Macadam, and thirteen Americans discussed Anglo-American tensions around the globe, encompassing policies towards not just Asia but also the Soviet Union, Western Europe, the Mediterranean, the Middle East, and economic, defence, and strategic matters. The draft chapter on Southeast Asia highlighted how far the desire not to alienate India, where Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru largely sympathized with China, drove Britain's recognition of China. The British, moreover, felt that the USA underestimated the significance of India, 'one of the largest

⁴³ Council on Foreign Relations, 'The Far East', 25 August 1952, File 9/48b, RIIA Archives.



manufacturing countries in Asia, [with] a huge resource of military power, much of it well trained, and occup[ying] a most important and central strategic position'. They also considered American policies misguided in trying to enlist Southeast Asian peoples 'in an ideological fight against Communism' regardless of their 'welfare'. The British preferred to accept 'neutralist policies' among these nations, believing it wiser to 'build up their strength as far as possible to enable them to defend themselves in an emergency, than to put pressure on them to take a definite anti-Communist line'. Encouraging broad regional economic prosperity would also safeguard these states against 'internal subversion'. The Americans, by contrast, believed that, even if some Asians viewed the current Far Eastern conflict as simply a great power competition, largely irrelevant to them, and failed to 'regard the Communist movement as mortal peril to themselves', this outlook was 'simply fallacious and the United States and Great Britain should work mightily to disabuse them of this dangerous error'. The Americans were also readier to channel economic aid towards states affirming a strongly anti-Communist line.⁴⁴ Dollard reported that Macadam was 'most pleased' following this conference and 'spoke warmly' of the CFR's Franklin.⁴⁵ Early in 1953, as President Dwight D. Eisenhower took office, the book representing this joint venture's ultimate tangible outcome finally appeared [23]. At a May 1953 Chatham House press conference, ex-ambassador Sir Oliver Franks launched the British version, which received a substantial Rockefeller Foundation subsidy.⁴⁶

By this time, the end of the Korean War was in sight, and Anglo-American relations had rebounded from their early 1951 nadir. Throughout the 1950s, however, China policy would remain controversial, dividing the United States from allies and neutrals alike. Yet the resulting tensions did not—as Mao and other Chinese communist leaders hoped—represent insurmountable barriers to more fundamental Anglo-American cooperation. The significance of this particular bilateral study group probably lay less in its concluding discreetly sanitized findings and their publication, than in its function in facilitating sustained if somewhat repetitive Anglo-American communication on often contentious issues. It served as a model for similar collaborative ventures the CFR undertook in the mid-1950s with its Canadian and Indian equivalents, the Canadian Institute of International Affairs and the Indian Council of World Affairs. Each culminated in a major transnational conference: Chatham House representatives joined the North Americans in September 1955 at a tripartite gathering in Montebello, Canada; the Indians and Americans came together in Dedham, Massachusetts, in June 1956. The second project resulted in a substantial

⁴⁴ Draft chapter, 'South and Southeast Asia', File 9/48c, RIIA Archives.

⁴⁵ Charles Dollard, record of interview with Macadam, 11 September 1952, Folder 9 Royal Institute of International Affairs 1933-1955, Box 314, Carnegie Corporation Papers, Columbia University, New York.

⁴⁶ Macadam to Willits, 12 May 1953, Rockefeller Foundation Papers, Record Group 1.2 Projects, Series 100S, Box 57, Folder 441, RAC.



co-authored volume [28]. In both enterprises, divisions over China loomed large on the project agenda.⁴⁷

At Chatham House, China-related activities and meetings declined dramatically by the early 1960s, victims to dwindling interest among members. For the CFR, by contrast, the Anglo-American group inaugurated a lengthy succession of Council endeavours to tackle the controversial topic of post-1949 China policy. During its deliberations, Hamilton Fish Armstrong of the Council remarked that American policy on China was ‘hamstrung’ due to ‘splits’ in opinion, divisions that Wriston likewise felt made it somewhat ‘incoherent’.⁴⁸ Where China was concerned, the British demonstrated far greater confidence in their own country’s policies than their opposite numbers could muster when justifying US positions. It seems likely that several American participants privately sympathized with British thinking on China, so were arguing against their own convictions. One can only speculate what longer-term impact these 2 years of sometimes heated discussions had on the American members. Undoubtedly, promoting studies of modern China in the USA and beyond quickly became a significant priority of the ‘big three’ foundations, Ford, Carnegie, and Rockefeller, whose executives prompted, financed, and participated in the Anglo-American project [16], esp. 39–85; [7].

Within the Council’s precincts, debates over China quietly continued, albeit often somewhat muted. Cautiously but definitely, Asian specialists who had congregated around the rival Institute of Pacific Relations before it succumbed to McCarthyite attacks migrated to the once Eurocentric CFR, which unobtrusively offered them an alternative base to regroup. For the rest of the 1950s and 1960s, internal Council study groups that included prominent China experts from within and outside the official policy apparatus produced—with generous foundation funding—a succession of widely read and influential volumes dealing with developments in China and Sino-Soviet relations that increasingly unequivocally suggested the desirability of initiating major changes in the US government’s position on China. The China scholar Doak Barnett recalled that in the late 1950s, Franklin and other Council officials ‘decided, before any other organization was prepared to do so, that it ought to sponsor a major study of China and U.S. policy towards China.’ They asked Barnett to undertake this. The volume he produced in 1960 apparently became the bestselling book the Council ever published [1]. ‘In retrospect’, Barnett wrote, ‘it is hard to remember that for an organization such as the Council to undertake a major study on China at that particular time was rather audacious, but it was.’⁴⁹ In the early 1960s, retired CIA director Allen W. Dulles chaired the steering group directing a multi-year project that produced eight volumes covering almost every aspect of China’s

⁴⁷ For further details, see Folders 2 and 5-8, Box 156, Folders 1–4, Box 157, and Folders 2–8, Box 562, CFR Papers; and Files 10/7, American-British-Canadian Conference, Records of Conferences, RIIA Archives.

⁴⁸ Digest of Ninth Meeting, Study Group on Anglo-American Relations, 10 January 1952, Folder 3, Box 147, CFR Papers.

⁴⁹ A. Doak Barnett to John King Fairbank, 31 January 1984, Folder 3, Box 53, CFR Papers.



international position, economic, political, strategic, and military, as well as US and foreign views of China [4, 9, 25, 31].

While their influence is hard to quantify, the appearance and dissemination of these works affected public opinion and contributed significantly to creating an intellectual climate that laid the groundwork for the reopening and ultimate normalization in the 1970s of relations between China and the USA. In 1969 former National Security Adviser McGeorge Bundy even told George Franklin ‘that he felt the fact that it was now possible to consider changes in China policy within our government was due more to the meetings of the Council than to any other single factor.’⁵⁰ Bundy perhaps exaggerated somewhat. Domestic developments within the USA and major changes on the international scene also played their part. So did tacit sanction from at least portions of the official bureaucracy. In these years, discretion and deliberate circumspection where sensitive government policy was concerned were habitual Council watchwords. Such limitations notwithstanding, the 1950–1953 Anglo-American study group was not simply a bilateral exercise in transnational damage control, but also marked the beginning of a long-term Council effort to mould and eventually change US policy towards mainland China.

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