

In the Shadow of the Mushroom Cloud :

**US -Taiwan Strategic Friction over Chinese Nuclear Explosion,
1963-1964**

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Ever since the Chinese Nationalists (KMT) retreated to Taiwan after being defeated by Chinese Communists (CCP) in 1949, the KMT leadership headed by Chiang Kai-shek had made “returning to the mainland” the basic principle of their “temporary” regime in Taiwan, and persistently sought America’s support for the realization of this long-cherished wish. Nationalists’ efforts intensified in the early 1960s, when, for many times, they judged that the conditions in mainland China were vulnerable to military attacks across the strait. However, counseling caution in East Asia, both the Kennedy and Johnson administrations discouraged the Nationalists from launching any large-scale military operations against the mainland. Because of this, the interaction between Nationalist’s intent of retaking the mainland and American government’s opposition – the

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quarrel and friction between two allies – has been dominant themes on the subject of postwar US-Taiwan relations. The existing literatures, by and large, cover extensively on the alternating strategic cooperation and conflict between the US government and the Nationalist regime, contextualizing analyzation mainly in the US-China relations of the 1960s.¹ However, researches on US-Taiwan interaction over the questions of Chinese nuclear development – an important episode in this longer drama – remain relatively few, and some pertinent literatures touching on this issue emphasize mainly on the US policy fluctuation before the nuclear test, while KMT's reaction to the explosion and its policy initiatives after the explosion have been largely ignored.² So, this

¹ An extended bibliography is needed to make a complete list of literatures concerning Sino-US relations in the 1960s since it has been drawing researchers' attention since the open relevant American official files in late 1990s. Among them, quite a number of works are degree (PhD and MA) thesis, for example: Kang, Jean S. "Evolution towards Change in U.S. China Policy, 1961-1963" (Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1999); Kochavi, Noam. "A Conflict Perpetuated: American China Policy during the Kennedy Years." (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Toronto, 1999); 牛大勇著, 〈甘迺迪政府對華政策研究(1961-1963年)〉(北京:北京大學博士論文, 2000年); 簡鴻全, 〈從拖延到拒絕:一九六二至一九六三年美國對國府反攻政策之演變〉(嘉義:中正大學碩士論文, 2001年); 唐小松, 〈有限的遏制:壓力與困境下的美國對華政策(1961-1968)〉(上海:復旦大學博士論文, 2001年); Pellegrin, Charles John, "United States diplomatic and military relations with the Republic of China in the era of the Vietnam War, 1961-1969," (Ph.D. dissertation, Mississippi State University, 2005). etc.

² The American policy toward the Chinese nuclear development in the 1960s has long been a subject of interests and controversy among scholars.



study, on the basis of recently declassified governmental archives, will seek to examine the different attitudes shown by the US government and Taiwan authorities in response to the Chinese nuclear test, particularly presenting the inside stories of how the Johnson government thwarted KMT's efforts in persuading US government for agreeing a military raid against the mainland, in the aftermath of the first Chinese nuclear detonation.

I. Early 1960s: the Changed and Unchanged

During John F. Kennedy's three-year presidency, American government's China policy still along the old track of containment and hostility in China affairs set by his predecessors. Although in early 1960s the young president

McGeorge Bundy, president's national security assistant in Kennedy and Johnson administration, claimed that the White House never discussed preventive action against China, but simply engaged in "talk, not serious planning or real intent." Bundy's comments were intended to refute the views presented by historian Gordon Chang's in the same year. While William Burr and Jeffrey T. Richelson, two senior analysts at the National Security Archives of George Washington University, corroborate and further clarify the latter's point of view on the basis of recently declassified government documents. See, Gordon Chang, "JFK, China, and the Bomb," *Journal of American History*, 74.4 (Mar. 1988): 1289-1310; McGeorge Bundy, *Danger and Survival: Choices about the Bomb in the First Fifty Years*, (New York: Vintage, 1990), 532; William Burr and Jeffrey T. Richelson, "Whether to Strangle the Baby in the Cradle: The United States and the Chinese Nuclear Program, 1960-1964", *International Security*, 25.3(Winter 2000.1) :54-99.



were highly expected to expand his “New Horizon” into Chinese affairs, the domestic politics and international geopolitical realities were still not ripe for any drastic policy shifts. Additionally, due to his winning only a marginal victory over Richard Nixon in 1960’s presidential campaign, Kennedy concerned that his “soft” stance on China would become a political liability. Nevertheless, beneath rigid containment and cold isolation, imaginary initiatives were silently sought – the declassified governmental files reveal that the Kennedy Administration had envisaged certain concrete measures in order to test the waters for the improvement of US-China relations.³ Furthermore, according to the memoir of one of his closest aides, the President also explicitly expressed his intention of improving relations with Communist China during the second term of his presidency.⁴

However, it would never be known whether Kennedy’s alleged desire for seeking rapport with China would have materialized were he escape the assassination. But it is safer to conclude that by the time Lyndon Johnson assumed the presidency, this former majority leader faced a quite different picture from that had confronted his predecessor in 1961. The political

³ Foreign Relations of the United States (hereafter cited as FRUS), 1961-1963, Volume XXII, Northeast Asia, (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1996).

⁴ Roger Hilsman, Jr., *To Move a Nation: the politics of foreign policy in the administration of John F. Kennedy*, Garden City, (N.Y.: Doubleday, 1967), 351-357.



environment within which America's China policies operate had changed remarkably during the previous years. With Chinese Communist steadily expanding its international influence, the wishful thinking that Beijing government was only a doomed, fleeting historical phenomenon became an anachronism in Washington; on the contrary, it was widely regarded that the Chinese Communist regimes was going to stay, to stabilize and to grow in power. And the receding of McCarthyism in US political life, along with the changing of perspectives in non-government research institutions with regard to Chinese Communist, and the shifting of American public's opinion on Mainland China,⁵ emboldened some officials to express the changes of views on China.⁶ It became evident to some decision-makers that continuously ignoring the existence of PRC would bring no practical benefits to the United States, instead,

⁵ A. T. Steele: *The American People and China* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book, 1966); Leonard A. Kusnitz: *Public Opinion and Foreign Policy: American China Policy: 1994 -1979* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1984), 95- 130; 資中筠：〈緩慢的解凍：中美關係打開之前十幾年間美國對華輿論的轉變過程〉，《美國研究》2(1987)：7-13。

⁶ In late 1963 and early 1964, some officials such as Rogers Hilsman, Assistant Secretary of State of East Asian Affairs, and Fulbright, Chairman of foreign policy committee of US Senate, expressed the changes of their attitude towards Beijing in some public speeches. See, Address by the Honorable Roger Hilsman, Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs, at the Commonwealth Club, San Francisco, California, At 12:00 noon, P. S. T., Friday, December 13, 1963, National Security File (hereafter, NSF), Country File, China, Box 237, LBJL; and Congressional Quarterly, inc., *China: U.S. Policy since 1945*(Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly, 1980), 142.



only taking tactics leading to the ultimate improvement of bilateral relations between US and China could serve American government's interests.

Against this background, some officials in charge of Chinese affairs in Johnson government, such as James C. Thomson, Special Assistant to the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs, and Edward Rice, Consul General in Hong Kong and Macau, strongly recommended new China policy initiatives to the government. They argued, since the established Communist regime was not a “fleeting phenomena,” adopting the “ostrich” policy of ignoring this reality benefited no one. Since the tactic of containment combined with moral persuasion had achieved little success, why not try replaced these outdated strategies with something new? That is, employ “the careful use of free world goods, people, and ideas” to open the door of totalitarian societies. Accordingly, it would be in America's interests if normal relations – even a sort of “cold working relationship” – were temporarily established between the two powers through contact and dialogue.⁷

President Johnson also deemed it necessary for a more flexible China policy,

⁷ James C. Thomson, Jr.: “On the Making of U. S. China Policy, 1961-9: A Study in Bureaucratic Politics” ,*The China Quarterly*, No. 50. (Apr. - Jun., 1972), 220-243; Document 63. Memorandum from James C. Thomson to McGeorge Bundy, Washington, October 28, 1964, FRUS, 1964-1968 Vol. XXX, 117-120.; Airgram from AmConsul Hong Kong to Department of State: Communist China and Recommendations for United States Policy, November 6, 1964, NSF, Country File, China, Box 238, LBJL.



but he nevertheless remained cautious and hesitant. On January 13, 1964, about ten weeks after he came to power, Johnson said to Senator Richard Russell that “there isn’t any question” that sooner or later the United States would have to recognize the PRC, however, such action – as Russell observed – was “politically right” but “poison” at that moment.⁸ Johnson’s calculations were influenced, firstly, by the perceived threat brought by China’s active “export of revolution” in East Asia, which he conveniently used as the most persuasive justification for US Vietnam efforts; while, on the other hand, Johnson, like his predecessor, was afraid of a needless domestic furor over China – the champions of the Nationalist China lobby still cast a long shadow over any new policy initiatives.⁹

It was amidst this milieu that Johnson administration began a major reassessment of its policy toward KMT regime in Taiwan. The result of such an effort is the National Policy Paper (NPP) on the Republic of China completed in September 1964, when various agencies in Washington reached the consensus as to what strategies and course of actions should be taken towards Taiwan over the next five years. Although a "two Chinas" policy was not clearly stated, the NPP established that the emergence of an independent national entity in Taiwan

⁸ Editorial note, FRUS, 1964-1968 Vol. XXX, 3

⁹ Walter LaFeber, *The American Age: United States Foreign Policy at Home and Abroad since 1750*, (New York: W.W. Norton, 1989), 579; and Lloyd Gardner, *Pay Any Price: Lyndon Johnson and the Wars for Vietnam*, (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1995), 115-117.



remained to be America's ultimate goal. The KMT's immunity from communist military pressure and the restraint in their ambition of "retaking the mainland" were prerequisites for the realization of this goal. The US government would continue to discourage the KMT from taking any military or para-military operations against the Chinese mainland, but would continue to "encourage the GRC (Government of the Republic of China) to rely more on political and psychological efforts in seeking to undermine Communist control of the mainland."¹⁰

Partly because of the US government's cautiousness and the difficulty in making an accurate prediction, this long-range National Policy Paper came to no conclusions on such specific issues as the potential effects that a Chinese nuclear weapon would have on the Nationalist governments. However, the policy it had set for Chiang Kai-shek's "Returning to the Mainland" effort was consistent with the US's past tactics and would provide guidelines for further action.

II. Chinese Nuclear Ambition: What should be done?

Paralleling to KMT's relentless searching for a possible large scale military attack against the mainland, the Chinese Communists were stepping up the

¹⁰ Document 48, National Policy Paper, Washington, September 11, 1964, FRUS, 1964-1968 Vol. XXX, 86-94.



preparation for any invasion from KMT armies supported by their “imperialist masters.” Actually, the CCP’s decision to develop a nuclear capability was a direct outcome of the confrontation between Beijing and Washington over the offshore islands of Quemoy and Matsu during 1954-1955, when Mao Zedong found the “nuclear blackmail” from the “American Imperialists” disagreeable. Besides, the Chinese Communists knew that Chiang Kai-shek, sympathized by American government, was still intent on a return to the mainland. The nuclear umbrella would, no doubt, consist the best defense line.¹¹ Their nuclear effort progressed rapidly in the 1950s. By the early 1960s, China’s pursuit of a nuclear capability had become one of Washington’s most concerned problems. During the Kennedy Administration, several options were scrutinized to disrupt the Chinese nuclear effort including preemptive bombing. But it was finally forsaken because of the great political disadvantages involved.¹²

¹¹ 中共中央文獻研究室編，《毛澤東外交文選》（北京：中央文獻出版社、世界知識出版社，1994），297。See also John Wilson Lewis and Xue Litai, *China Builds the Bomb*, Stanford, (Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1988), 11-46; McGeorge Bundy, *Danger and Survival: Choices about the Bomb in the First Fifty Years*, (New York: Vintage, 1990), 526-527; Rosemary Foot, *The Practice of Power: U.S. Relations with China since 1949* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 168-174; and Tian-Yu Cao, “Two Critical Moments in China’s Strategic Weapons Program,” presentation at the National Air and Space Museum, August 23, 2000.

¹² William Burr and Jeffrey T. Richelson, “Whether to Strangle the Baby in the Cradle: The United States and the Chinese Nuclear Program, 1960-1964”, *International Security*, 25.3: 54-99.



Although the US government worked closely with the Nationalists in gathering intelligence on Chinese nuclear activities, they disagreed considerably on the appropriateness of certain strategic options: the KMT authority persistently prodded the US government to militarily strike Chinese nuclear facilities or support their own effort. Chiang Ching-kuo, son of Chiang Kai-shek and Defense Minister of the Nationalist government, broached the possibility of “steps” against Beijing’s nuclear program during his visit to Washington in September 1963. Undoubtedly concerned that a nuclear-armed China would end any hopes for a return to the mainland, Chiang Ching-kuo raised the issue of attacking China’s nuclear facilities on several occasions.

On September 10, Chiang Ching-kuo, in the company of Ray Cline, CIA’s deputy director of intelligence and former chief of station in Taiwan, and William Nelson, Cline’s successor, met National Security Assistant McGeorge Bundy for discussions, which centered on long-standing differences between Washington and Taipei over military operations against the PRC. Although Bundy favored taking measures to “weaken” the PRC, he doubted that plans to seize territory would work and counseled against action that could realign Beijing with Moscow or “trigger a major conflict.” Chiang brought up possible action against Beijing’s nuclear installations, suggesting that the United States provide “transportation and technical assistance” for a commando operation. Bundy responded that the “United States is very interested in whether something could be planned” that could have a “delaying and preventive effect



on the nuclear growth of China.” He believed, however, that those measures needed “most careful study.”¹³

The next day, Chiang Ching-kuo had an extended discussion with President Kennedy. He proposed to Kennedy the plan of sending commandos to attack Chinese nuclear installations. He asked “whether it would be possible to send 300 to 500 men by air to such distant……atomic installations as that at Baotou, and whether it was not likely that the planes involved would be shot down.” Chiang said that the feasibility of this plan was supported by both the intelligence gathered by the KMT and by his discussions with other US officials. Kennedy doubted that it was the right time for a military attack on mainland China. He compared Chiang’s plans of weakening “the Chinese Communist regime” to the “Bay of Pigs operation,” which was “based more on hope than on realistic appraisals.” Washington and Taipei needed better intelligence about conditions on the mainland to avoid this scenario. Only then, Kennedy argued, whatever action is undertaken “would be fit the actual situation.”¹⁴

A few days later, Chiang met with McCone to formalize the understandings the general had reached with Kennedy and his advisers. With respect to action

¹³ Document 185, Draft Minutes, Washington, September 10, 1963, FRUS, 1961-1963 Vol. XXII, 383-385.

¹⁴ Document 186, Memorandum of Conversation, Washington, September 11, 1963, FRUS, 1961-1963 Vol. XXII, 386-392.



against PRC nuclear installations, McCone and Chiang only agreed to establish a planning group to study the feasibility of the military plans proposed by Nationalists, but reached no consensus as to the concrete tactics. McCone deliberately emphasized that any operations would require joint approval by top authorities from both sides.¹⁵

By May 1964, it became much clearer to Washington that the Chinese Communists was going to detonate a nuclear bomb in the near future. In response, the decision-makers in Johnson government reaffirmed that any preemptive military action against Chinese Nuclear facilities was undesirable and it would be better to let the Chinese nuclear test take place rather than to initiate any unprovoked unilateral military action. The reasons are twofold: for one thing, the possible nuclear danger brought by China was not big enough to merit a preemptive aid -- A year-long "major planning exercise" conducted by the Policy Planning Council came to the conclusion that, the Chinese nuclear explosion itself would be more significant as a tool of propaganda than as a weapon of high mortality;¹⁶ For another, through this period of crucial decision-making on Vietnam, President Johnson and his senior advisers all avoided any course of actions which might cause China to repeat in Vietnam

¹⁵ William Burr and Jeffrey T. Richelson, "Whether to Strangle the Baby in the Cradle: The United States and the Chinese Nuclear Program, 1960-1964", *International Security*, 25.3: 54-99.

¹⁶ Document 30, Paper Prepared in the Policy Planning Council, Washington, undated, FRUS, 1964-1968 Vol. XXX, 57-58.



their intervention in Korea.¹⁷ A better alternative to military action, as some decision-makers suggested, would be taking diplomatic action with the Soviet Government to warn the PRC against tests, since the Sino-Soviet split had already become a well-known event.¹⁸

III. Detonation and Reaction

The Chinese Communist nuclear explosion took place earlier than expected by US officials. On October 16, 1964, with a huge fireball and mushroom cloud rising over the western part of Xinjiang Province, China became the fifth member of the nuclear club. Several hours after the test, the PRC government launched a propaganda campaign, stressing three points: China's purpose in developing nuclear weapons was "to break the superpower monopoly," China would never be the first to use nuclear weapons, and, somewhat paradoxically, all nuclear weapons should be eliminated.¹⁹ While the timing of the test was indeed shocking to Washington, the announcement from Beijing confirmed the

¹⁷ McGeorge Bundy, *Danger and Survival: Choices about the Bomb in the First Fifty Years*, 532; William Burr and Jeffrey T. Richelson, "Whether to Strangle the Baby in the Cradle: The United States and the Chinese Nuclear Program, 1960-1964", *International Security*, 25.3: 54-99.

¹⁸ Document 49, Memorandum for the Record, Washington, September 15, 1964, FRUS, 1964-1968 Vol. XXX, 94-95.

¹⁹ 中共中央文獻研究室 編，《周恩來年譜》（北京：中央文獻出版社、世界知識出版社，1997），676。



US State Department's analysis that China would be a cautious nuclear power.

When the reports about the explosion of a nuclear device in Communist China arrived at the White House, a special meeting of the National Security Council was convened to discuss its significance and what kind of statement should be released to respond to the explosion.²⁰ Hours later, in an attempt to neutralize any political fallout, President Johnson issued a reassuring statement, downplaying the threats posed by the Chinese Communist nuclear explosion, dismissing it as “a tragedy for the Chinese people” because their limited resources “have been used to produce a crude nuclear device which can only increase the sense of insecurity of the Chinese people.” Johnson reaffirmed US “defense commitments to Asia,” emphasizing that “Free World nuclear strength” was enough to counter the possible danger brought by Communist China.²¹

In spite of this, the detonation of China's first nuclear device sent a shock wave around the world. The possible effects of China's nuclear ambition, and its rising influence as a world power, were widely reported and debated in media circle and public forums. It was thought that China's entry into the nuclear club was certain to cast a long shadow across Asia, and it was bound to have an

²⁰ Document 57. Memorandum for the Record, Washington, October 16, 1964., FRUS, 1964-1968 Vol. XXX China, 108-109.

²¹ *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Lyndon B. Johnson, 1963-64*, Book II(Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1966), 1357.



inhibitive and restrictive effect upon United States policy in Asia.²²

However, nowhere was that “sense of insecurity” aroused by the explosion more acutely felt than in Taiwan, which was reduced into the state of crisis by the detonation. As Beijing was announcing its atomic triumph, Admiral Jerauld Wright, US ambassador to Taiwan, called on Shen Chang-huan, Foreign Minister of the Republic of China, to pass him all available information and guidance on the Chinese Communist atomic event. The test shocked Chiang Kai-shek; his reaction was described as “convulsive.” Three days later, Chiang Kai-shek told Ambassador Wright that the Chinese Communist nuclear explosion had enormous and far-reaching psychological effects, especially on the attitude of those people who had thus far been riding on the fence regarding whether military actions against mainland China should be taken. He requested that both the US and Taiwanese governments should reevaluate their policy toward mainland China and work jointly for a “New Solution.”²³

Because of the absence of specific evidence, Wright did not know exactly what President Chiang referred to as the “New Solution:” he estimated that Chiang probably had in mind some dramatic actions, such as crippling or destroying Chinese Communist nuclear production facilities, which involved a radical

²² Hanson W. Baldwin, “China’s Bomb: Grave Problems Posed for West,” *New York Times*, Oct 18, 1964, E3.

²³ US Embassy Taipei to Department of State, October 19, 1964, NSF, Country File, China, Box 238, Lyndon B. Johnson Museum and Library, Austin, Texas, U.S.A. (Hereafter, LBJL.)



stiffening of US policy toward Communist China and aimed at countering the psychological effects of the Chinese Communist nuclear explosion. On the same day, Chiang Ching-kuo informally proposed that the US consider sending a high-level team to discuss with the GRC leaders the political and military implications of the Chinese Communist nuclear explosion, but he did not indicate what line of action the GRC had yet decided to propose.²⁴ Thus, the US Department of State decided to send Ray S. Cline, Deputy Director for Intelligence of CIA, to Taipei, in the hope that Cline could use his “background and relationship with those people” to appraise the attitude of KMT officials.²⁵ October 23, Cline arrived in Taipei. He could tangibly feel the panic among Taiwanese leaders almost immediately after arrival. Chiang Kai-shek, characteristically, was in the midst of a fairly emotional response. He told Cline that US assurances for the defense of Taiwan were inadequate to calm fears aroused by the explosion: the Chinese Communists, Chiang fulminated, now felt immune to the American policy of isolation and containment, and would have ample opportunities to perfect their nuclear capability. He was extremely angry about the US policy of holding back Taiwan from taking military actions against the mainland, for “the Chinese Communists’ primary aim was to destroy

²⁴ Department of State to US Embassy Taipei, October 19, 1964, NSF, Country File, China, Box 238, LBJL ; Department of State to US Embassy Taipei, October 20, 1964, NSF, Country File, China, Box 238, LBJL.

²⁵ Document 62, Report of Meeting, Taipei, October 23-24, 1964. FRUS, 1964-68, Volume XXX, 115-116.



himself and his government, and when they had nuclear weapons all of Asia would be threatened.” He asserted that it was high time for the US government to review its China policy and choose either Mao or he (Chiang himself) as a friend.²⁶

The Chinese Communist nuclear explosion came as a definite shock to Chiang because he had previously maintained a skeptical attitude towards his nemesis’s ability in developing nuclear facilities, although, since 1964, the US government had repeatedly reminded him that the Chinese Communists would successfully test a nuclear bomb soon. April 16, when asked by Secretary Rusk what he thought the possible effect would be if the Chinese Communists explode a nuclear device by the end of this year or next, Chiang said, according to the information at the his disposal, he did not believe that Communist China would be able to explode a nuclear device “in the next three to five years.”

²⁷However, August 26, CIA’s Special National Intelligence Estimate came to the conclusion that it was not impossible that the Chinese nuclear detonation may occur before the end of 1964. ²⁸ Because of this, Secretary Rusk made a public speech on September 29, for the purpose of preparing the world against an

²⁶ Document 62, Report of Meeting, Taipei, October 23-24, 1964. FRUS, 1964-68, Volume XXX, 115-116.

²⁷ Document 27. Memorandum of Conversation, Taipei, April 16, 1964, 9:30-10:30 p.m. FRUS, 1964-1968, Volume XXX, 50.

²⁸ Document 43. Special National Intelligence Estimate, Washington, August 26, 1964. FRUS, 1964-1968, Volume XXX, 79.



unduly alarm raised by Chinese nuclear test, once it became true. He clearly declared that US intelligence had discovered a nuclear test site in Western China and predicted that it could be ready for use in about two months.²⁹

However, those warnings were greeted with wide skepticism in Taiwan. Sampson Shen, Minister at the ROC embassy at Washington, thought Rusk's aim in delivering this speech was to fend off the possible blow from the opposing Republicans, who might charge the Democratic government as being insular once the scenario became true. However, he thought, Rusk's statement had the undesirable effect of enhancing Communist China's international reputation, because the Communist China nuclear ability still remained in the experimental stage, far from ready for detonation.³⁰ As such, the spokesman of the Taiwanese Foreign Ministry immediately refuted Rusk's statement as unfounded rumor. Even Chiang Kai-shek himself gave little credence to America's predictions. As late as October 5, he still stuck to his estimate that the Chinese nuclear explosion would not happen in the next "three to five years." During a talk with Henry Luce, the founder of *Time* magazine, Chiang show his

²⁹ Document 43. Special National Intelligence Estimate, Washington, August 26, 1964. FRUS, 1964-68, Volume XXX, pp.78-81.; United States Department of State Office of Media Services, The Department of State bulletin(Washington, D.C.: Office of Public Communication, Bureau of Public Affairs, October 19, 1964), 542-543.

³⁰ 沈錡，《我的一生：沈錡回憶錄》，第四卷(台北：聯經出版公司，2000)，59-60。



displeasure with Rusk's statement, saying "Rusk had gone out on a limb in his September 29 statement."³¹

Chiang Kai-shek's dismissal of the US warning as unbelievable was first of all based on his estimation of the situation in mainland China. In his opinion, it was impossible for the Communist regime, which was suffering under a devastated economy, to produce nuclear weapon in such a short time. On the other hand, the US government's credibility was undermined by its repeated miscalculation in predicting the exact time of Chinese nuclear detonation. October 4, Chiang complained in the KMT Central Committee meeting that "The US government first predicted that the Chinese Communist would explode the nuclear bomb on PRC's national anniversary day (October 1), but nothing happened; later, they claimed again that the nuclear explosion would occurred on our national anniversary day (October 10), also nothing happened; now they predict that it is going to take place at the end of this month – it is also unlikely to happen." So, Chiang concluded it was unwise to get alarmed by these unfounded warnings, for "even in the case that the Communist Bandits explode the nuclear weapons, we should not be afraid. On the contrary, their developing nuclear provides good chance for our retaking the mainland."³²

³¹ US Embassy Taipei to Department of State, October 29, 1964, NSF, Country File, China, Box 238, LBJL.

³² 汪士淳,《漂移歲月：將軍大使胡炳的戰爭紀事》(台北：聯合文學出版，2006)，230。



Probably, these words reflected Chiang's attitudes towards the ongoing Chinese nuclear programs, but more likely they served as a shot in the arm to boost the KMT moral. But Chiang became not so sure after Chinese Communist's successful nuclear explosion on October 16.

IV. The Failure of Persuasive Efforts

Ambassador Wright, who had been ordered to persuade Chiang Kai-shek before, to no avail, sent a long telegram to the Department of State on October 29, explaining in detail the significance of the Chinese Communist nuclear explosion. Obviously, the Chinese nuclear explosion was a severe blow to Chiang Kai-shek's mainland recovery hopes, as the threat of retaliation by the Chinese Communists in the form of a nuclear attack on Taiwan would certainly throw a wet blanket on local support for any large-scale military attack on mainland China. In the face of the Chinese nuclear threat, Chiang Kai-shek's constant pronouncements of "early return," "counterattack," and the "release of our countrymen" would be more and more received as empty talks.

Wright anticipated that, in the near future, Chiang would continue to press the US for support of GRC's action against the mainland, and that Chiang might also intensify the mainland recovery preparations, possibly more for purposes of bolstering domestic morale and increasing pressure on the US than for any actual intent to act. In order to deal with the new situation, he suggested that the Department of State continue by various means to reassure Nationalist high



level officials of American government's support, use all possible means to emphasize the credibility of the US retaliatory capability and explore other means to give a psychological boost to anti-communist peoples in this area.³³

Chiang seized a chance to act, when on November 3, 1964, President Johnson won a landslide victory in the US presidential election. The Nationalist authority wanted to take this as a chance to get closer with the US government. Two days later, Chang Chun, the Secretary General of KMT, hinted to Wright that "lots of people, including press and a legislator, had suggested that President Chiang might go to the United States for a talk with President Johnson." Although he said that he did not know what President Chiang would think of this idea, Wright took Chang's remark as a feeler concerning a possible trip by President Chiang to Johnson government, evidently sanctioned by Chiang Kai-shek. In consideration of Chiang's willingness to abandon the long-held position that he would not leave Taiwan until the "lost land" was recovered, Wright suspected that Chiang must have felt that his personal fortunes and those of his government had reached a very critical stage. Since Chang said he would recommend a trip to President Chiang only if "crucial decisions" needed to be made, Wright took this to mean Chiang Kai-shek would go if there were good prospect of radical change in American policy involving

³³ US Embassy Taipei to Department of State, October 29, 1964, NSF, Country File, China, Box 238, LBJL.



greater support for his Mainland Recovery aspirations.³⁴

The Department of State was convinced that what Chiang's intentions of proposing the visit was anything but a state visit or mere exchange of views; rather, the purpose of his visit was to seek support for the mainland recovery plan, which would definitely not be allowed by the US government. Chiang would certainly feel despondent were he to visit US. Thus, the Department of State decided to refuse Chang's request on the grounds that Chiang's visit before an impending vote on Chinese Representation in UN "would be misconstrued as sign of weakness and hurt the GRC position," and that the appropriate time for a visit would be clearer only after the 19th UN General Assembly.³⁵

After Chiang's request to visit was rejected, he tried to take another opportunity to further his plan of retaking the mainland. On December 23, he wrote a letter to President Lyndon Johnson in the name of extending congratulations for his successful re-election. In his letter, Chiang Kai-shek reaffirmed that, with the explosion of their first atomic device, the Chinese Communists would not only further tighten their control of various Asian

³⁴ US Embassy Taipei to Department of State, November 7, 1964, NSF, Country File, China, Box 238, LBJL.

³⁵ Department of State to US Embassy Taipei, November 20, 1964, NSF, Country File, China, Box 238, LBJL, Document 67, Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in the Republic of China · Washington, November 20, 1964 · FRUS, 1964-1968, Volume XXX, 129



Communist parties, but would also pose a greater threat to the morale of the peoples concerned. He proposed that the Johnson government assume a leadership role in ending the war of attrition in South Vietnam and in overthrowing the Chinese Communist regime before it developed the full ability to produce nuclear weapons. Chiang tentatively stated that “if this course of action should be deemed impracticable at the moment, the next best thing would be for the US to make available to the Republic of China such materials and technical aid as are necessary for destroying the Chinese Communist nuclear installation.” In a word, Chiang urged the US government to seize the chance and take preemptive military actions.³⁶

The urgent tone in Chiang’s letter reminded Wright of his earlier letter to President Kennedy on March 15, 1963, in which Chiang had urged the US government to take advantage of the “God-given opportunity” to help him attack the mainland, because the conditions there, along with the Sino-Soviet split, made the situation ripe for KMT’s military action. The new letter pleaded for a change in US policy primarily based on what Chiang called a fundamental transformation of the situation in Asia, resulting from the Chinese Communist nuclear explosion. Chiang pressed the US to act, not because conditions were favorable, but rather to prevent an otherwise inevitable disaster.³⁷ As before,

³⁶ Letter from Chiang Kai-shek to President Johnson, November 23, 1964, NSF, Country File, China, Box 244, LBJL.

³⁷ US Embassy Taipei to Department of State, December 4, 1964, NSF, Country



Wright suggested the Department of State refuse Chiang's request.

One month later, the mushroom cloud over Lop Nor had already disappeared, but the fears Chiang harbored toward the nuclear threat had not decreased a bit, any sign of disturbance would arouse further anxiety, and he was more desperate to make the last effort of counterattacking the mainland. In August 1964, Chiang Kai-shek pronounced to senior KMT army officials: "Our only way of life is to fight. We would rather fight to death than wait to be killed by Communists' nuclear bomb; we would rather die in the battlefield than being betrayed by Americans."³⁸ On November 28, Chiang said at the Second Plenum of the 9th KMT Central Meeting: The detonation of Chinese Communist's nuclear device has greatly imperiled the security of Taiwan and offshore islands, we are facing an unprecedented dangerous situation, the only way out was to launch military attack against the mainland and neutralize "Mao bandits" before the Chinese nuclear facilities were fully developed – in the year next or two.³⁹ Although he was then a 78-year-old man, he promised to lead his armies to fight back to mainland China before he died.⁴⁰ But, the long-awaited

File, China, Box 238, LBJL.

³⁸ 段玉衡將軍訪問記錄，參見國防部史政編譯室編，《塵封的作戰計畫：國光計畫—口述歷史》(台北：國防部史政編譯室，2005)，200。

³⁹ 《非常時期革命幹部的決心和責任》，民國五十三年十一月二十八日在國民黨九屆二中全會上的閉幕詞。載張其昀編，《先總統蔣公全集》，第三冊(台北：中國文化大學中國學術院，1984)，2863。

⁴⁰ 秦孝儀主編，《總統蔣公思想言論總集》，二十八卷(台北：國民黨中央黨史委員會會，1984年)，383。



green light from the other side of pacific never came – the Johnson government delayed in replying all KMT's request.

In the meantime, the KMT's intelligence reported on December 10 that Chinese Communists had recently installed IL-10 planes at Foochow, the capital city of Fujian Province across the strait from Taiwan. Chiang immediately called the Johnson Administration's attention to this fact, and recommended expedited delivery of pending military assistance and equipment not yet delivered as a means to counter this threat, to which the US government also gave no reply for a long time.⁴¹

Finally, on December 21, the letter from President Johnson reached Chiang Kai-shek. The US government rejected almost all KMT's requests, only reaffirming that the Mutual Defense Treaty between United States and the Republic of China was still their basic international commitment, which would in no way be weakened by the Chinese Communist development of nuclear weapons. However, the objective of liberating mainland China would continue to be guided by the principles set forth by the late Secretary of State Dulles in the communiqué of October 23, 1958: that victory over the Communist China was to be won principally by political means, rather than by force. Moreover, the US Government had no evidence of the increased popular restiveness on

⁴¹ Document 73, Telegram From the Embassy in the Republic of China to the Department of State , Taipei, December 10, 1964, 4 p.m. FRUS, 1964-68, Volume XXX, 141



mainland China or the weakness in the Communists' internal controls; thus, it was doubtful that political conditions favored the taking of military action.⁴² Two weeks later, Washington plainly denied KMT's request for expedited delivery of missiles on the grounds that there were not enough evidences to show that the IL-10 aircraft represented a significant increase in the threat to Taiwan.⁴³

As it was clearly to the Johnson government, the Nationalists' failure to elicit United States support for larger raids on the mainland, together with the prestige won by Beijing as a result of its nuclear explosion and France's diplomatic recognition shifting from Taipei to Beijing in early 1964, caused a sharp decline in morale among the Nationalist regime.⁴⁴ Although with the sharpening of GRC's sense of isolation and decreasing of their hopes for a successful return to mainland China, the frictions between the US government and Taiwan authority were expected to grow. In the eyes of American policy makers, Taiwan's mainland recovery scheme had increasingly degenerated to an unrealizable "myth" – the Chinese Communist's nuclear explosion confirmed the doubt on

⁴² Letter from Lyndon Johnson to Chiang Kai-shek, December 21, 1964, NSF, Country File, China, Box 244, LBJL.

⁴³ Document 73, Telegram From the Embassy in the Republic of China to the Department of State, Taipei, December 10, 1964, 4 p.m. FRUS, 1964-68, Volume XXX, 141

⁴⁴ Taiwan's Morale Problem. Office of Current Intelligence, Special Report, SC No. 00654/65B. Jan. 22, 1965. Johnson Library, NSF, Countries, China, Volume 2. Report. Reproduced in DDRS.



the feasibility of military counterattack plans. James C. Thomson, staff of National Security Council, suggested that the US government should clearly present this attitude to KMT, because “ambiguity is a breeding ground for continuing suspicion of the U.S. and for latent anti-Americanism,” and both governments would pay high costs to maintain this “non-credible but unquestioned myth.”⁴⁵

Conclusion

The US-Taiwan friction over the reaction towards the first Chinese nuclear explosion was one episode among the bigger drama of the strategic conflicts between US and Taiwan during the Cold War. Although both sides shared the same goal of trying to inhibit the Chinese nuclear ambition, they disagreed on what measures should be taken to prevent the growth of Chinese nuclear power. The KMT government, worrying the Chinese nuclear success would end their long-held dream of “retaking the mainland,” wanted to take every chance to get American consent and support for their adventure. While the Johnson government, although equally concerned with the danger posed by Chinese nuclear development, preferred a diplomatic solution to China’s nuclear

⁴⁵ Document 83. Memorandum From James C. Thomson, Jr., of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy) › Washington, April 15, 1965. FRUS, 1964-1968, Volume XXX, 163.



problem, and still maintained an opposing attitude toward taking large-scale military action against mainland. Against this background, the US government approached the Chinese nuclear effort and the KMT's military proposals with extremely caution, as American policy-makers realized that it was necessary to minimize the restrictions imposed by Taiwan on its latitude of policy-adjusting. Thus, after the detonation of the first Chinese nuclear bomb, the Johnson government tried to disabuse Chiang Kai-shek's fear of Chinese Communist's nuclear power with the assurance that Beijing would "pursue a cautious policy" and that the commitments of the US government were enough to protect the safety of Taiwan, in order to discard any initiatives that had the possibility of further worsening Sino-US relations. Within this framework, some basic characteristics of the US-Taiwan relations behind the curtain of Cold War – the intertwined role as collaborators and quarrelers – were clearly revealed.



蘑菇雲的陰影：

中國第一顆原子彈爆炸前後的美台交涉，1963-1964

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本文擬根據近年來新解密的外交檔案，梳理1960年代初期美國民主黨政府與臺灣蔣介石政權在對中共原子彈試驗問題上的分歧與合作，以此折射出冷戰時期美台同盟的若干特性。出於對中共崛起中的核力量的恐慌，以及為了實現“反攻大陸”的計畫，蔣介石政府曾在不同的場合，多次要求美國支持其向中國大陸發動軍事進攻，以摧毀中共的核設施。但由於美台雙方在亞洲的戰略目標不同，甘迺迪和詹森政府對這些計畫先是採取拖延、擱置的態度，最終加以明確的拒絕，蔣介石聯美反攻的圖謀再次遭到挫敗。

關鍵字：蔣介石、詹森、原子彈、反攻大陸

