

# SAVING FACE: CHINA AND TAIWAN'S BID FOR THE UNITED NATIONS SEAT IN THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY AND SECURITY COUNCIL, 1950-1971

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## Introduction

In the cascade of the Chinese Civil War, Mao Zedong, the leader of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), was poised to quell the remnants of the lingering Capitalists led by Chiang Kai-shek, whose tongue was ripe with bitterness and failure in maintaining his unified China.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, Chiang rebuffed any notion that hinted at Taiwan as a permanent space for his Nationalists' government (KMT).<sup>2</sup> As tensions flared, Mao and Chiang became sidetracked when the Korean War, initiated by Kim Il-sung, brought Americans knocking on China's front door. Mao was called to aid his comrade, which exacerbated the international status of the CCP controlled Mainland, as it was pitched in direct warfare against the United States between 1950 and 1953. US President Harry Truman, in an effort to draw the People's Republic of China (PRC) forces from the northeast to hinder more troops from moving to reinforce the ones in the north, and to maintain the Republic of China (ROC), ordered the US Seventh Fleet to the Taiwan Strait.<sup>3</sup> The CCP intervention on the Korean Peninsula coupled with US efforts to secure the perilous Strait spared Chiang Kai-shek and his regime on Taiwan.

It would not, however, nix the disagreement between the KMT and CCP respective interpretations of a singular China. In fact, the disputed interpreta-

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1 To maintain consistency with United Nation and United States' documents, this discussion will utilize Taiwanese Romanization, while all other forms shall maintain the Pinyin System.

2 Nancy Tucker, *Strait Talk: United States-Taiwan Relations and the Crisis with China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 9.

3 *Ibid.*, 13.

tion of which government would legitimately represent China would pose as an obstruction to cross-Strait relations for the next two decades—that is, until the PRC ousted the ROC in the United Nations in 1971.

Due to new membership in the UN, a shift in policy preferences on the part of the United States, the ROC could not maintain its UN seat in the Security Council and General Assembly. In what follows, this discussion will trace the points leading up to the expulsion of the Republic of China while also focusing on Washington's efforts and its shift in policy preference from Taipei to Beijing.

### **Zhou Enlai's Diplomatic Campaign Begins**

Before the CCP was halted dead in their tracks in their attempt to muffle the little noise of resistance trumpeting from the island in 1950, Mao pursued a soft-line approach that would seriously bludgeon the KMT government on Taiwan. His strategy: international diplomacy. China's new Premier and Foreign Minister—Zhou Enlai—wrote to the Secretary-General of the UN to consider the PRC as the one and only legitimate governing party of China.<sup>4</sup> He repudiated the legal status of China by the Nationalists. Because, in the view of Foreign Minister Zhou, an acknowledged CCP-administered Mainland would restore the true inheritors to the throne of China, which was robbed after the forthwith fall of the Qing dynasty.

Since Zhou was limited in his freedom to advocate for PRC inclusion, Yakov Malik, Representative to the UN of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), came to his aid. USSR Representative Malik, a proponent of PRC admission, advocated for communist China with the support of Ukraine Soviet Socialist Republic (Ukraine SSR) and Yugoslavia:

At the fourth session of the General Assembly, the delegation of the Soviet Union informed the United Nations that it supported the communication of the Government of the People's Republic of China.<sup>5</sup>

Representative T.S. Tsiang of the ROC, deplored the USSR motion, “the statements just made by the representatives of the USSR and of the Ukrainian SSR strike a blow at the very legal and moral foundations of the Security Council

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4 United Nations Security Council, 4th year, “Statements Regarding Representation in the Security Council,” No. 54, Official Record 29 December, 1949, <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/NL4/906/43/PDF/NL490643.pdf?OpenElement>.

5 Ibid.

and of the United Nations.”<sup>6</sup> However, chiding from the ROC did not curtail their opponents from insisting a vote after the General Assembly president ruling over the matter for further consideration. Malik insists:

I must therefore insist upon a vote being taken on my proposal.... I wish to state, furthermore, that the delegation of the USSR does not consider it possible that further meetings should be called under the presidency of a representative who does not represent China and the Chinese people and whose presence in the Security Council is illegal.<sup>7</sup>

The conclusion of the first episode of the beginning of a long series ended with ROC represented-China, Cuba, Ecuador, Egypt, France, Norway, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the US in favor of the ruling; USSR, Yugoslavia against; and India abstaining.<sup>8</sup> The UN, at this juncture of the international relations of power, was four years in the making and the US had just emerged from the ashes of World War II nearly unscathed. Influence within the inchoate multilateral institution was by-and-large wielded by the US, as most other countries were occupied with nation building. In short, Moscow, Beijing and other Washington opponents would still have to begrudgingly allow China to be represented in the UN by Taipei.

Foreign Minister Zhou Enlai remained steadfast; he continued his diplomatic efforts by rebranding the PRC image—most notably, at the Asian-African Conference in 1955.<sup>9</sup> There, he advocated for regional cooperation. He also emphasized US aggression in the Third World. This was especially important as many early members in the UN viewed the PRC as an illegitimate government. Yet, Zhou’s diplomatic campaign invariably failed to penetrate the US bulwark preventing PRC membership. As soon as representatives of the USSR pushed to include Chinese representation into the agenda, US efforts to undermine their attempts championed again. However, that would soon change.

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6 Ibid.

7 United Nations Security Council, 5th Year, “Statements Regarding Representation in the Security Council (continued),” No. 1, Official Record, January 10, 1950, <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UN-DOC/GEN/N50/033/54/PDF/N5003354.pdf?OpenElement>.

8 Ibid. For more information see: United Nations Affairs Document, June 3, 1952, Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954, Volume III, Document 403.

9 “Bandung Conference (Asian-African Conference), 1955,” United States Department of State, Office of the Historian, <http://history.state.gov/milestones/1953-1960/BandungConf>.

## Tectonic Plates of the United Nations Shift

As memories of the Korean War began to fade, and as membership into the UN began to increase, tectonic forces within the multilateral institution began to shift. More countries, who were historically victims of western colonialism, matriculated into the UN. They began strategically aligning themselves with the CCP-administered Mainland. As such, securing the KMT-seat as the legitimate governing authority of China became increasingly difficult. By 1960, UN membership nearly doubled, from the original 51 members to 99.<sup>10</sup> US influence in the maturing institution waned. The extent to which the US could urge other countries to vote favorably towards Taipei abated. Since the US represented a symbol of Western colonialism, among other factors, it was met with opposition from many of the Third World countries. When the US propounded a vote to block PRC representation, it passed by merely eight votes (which would have passed much easier in the past).<sup>11</sup> Emerging from under the brutal legacies of Western domination and into the UN (a palpable sense of power and influence), Third World countries could stand united. In 1961, the UN officially included representation of China as a part of its agenda, “[in] accordance with Article 18 of the Charter of the United Nations, that any proposal to change the representation of China is an important question”—a major breakthrough since Zhou Enlai embarked on this journey of restoring the PRC (in what he deemed to be true) as the rightful heir to the throne since the outbreak of the Korean War and conclusion to the Chinese Civil War on the Mainland.<sup>12</sup> Zhou Enlai still had one obstacle to overcome. An “important question” still required two-thirds vote from all General Assembly members. In other words, an increasingly timorous US earned some borrowed time.<sup>13</sup>

Every year, in what evolved into a stale tradition, the UN considered the issue of Chinese representation between 1961 and 1969; and every year the PRC could not obtain the aforementioned two-thirds vote—thus failing to expel the ROC government.<sup>14</sup> However, this all changed when Henry Kissinger, National

10 “Growth in United Nations membership, 1945-present,” United Nations, <http://www.un.org/en/members/growth.shtml>.

11 United Nations General Assembly, Fifteenth Session, General Committee, Resolution 1493 Representation of China in the United Nations, October 8, 1960 (A/4474).

12 United Nations General Assembly, Sixteenth Session, General Committee, Representation of China in the United Nations, December 15, 1961 (A/5033).

13 United Nations, Charter of the United Nations, October 24, 1945, 1 UNTS XVI, <http://www.un.org/en/documents/charter/chapter4.shtml>.

14 “Struggle to restore China’s lawful seat in the United Nations,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/ziliao/3602/3604/t18013.htm>. In 1962, USSR drafted a resolution to replace the Republic of China in the General Assembly and the Security Council

Security Advisor to President Richard Nixon, conducted a National Security Study regarding US policy towards “China,” including costs and risks.<sup>15</sup> China was the key to unlocking a redefined approach to foreign policy, considering the debacle in Vietnam. Nixon and Kissinger wanted to demonstrate that, even while in war-time, US potency could simultaneously influence the long-term peace processes on the international stage. Nixon is noted as telling Kissinger, “Well, Henry, the thing is the story change is going to take place, it has to take place, it better take place...”<sup>16</sup> Indeed, no better position to be at than to be the authors of this “story” when the “story change” takes place. Therefore, the yielded conclusion was to develop a bifurcated policy directed towards both Taiwan and Mainland China, respectively, as ROC expulsion in the UN appeared imminent.

### Bifurcated Foreign Policy in the Making

In December 1969, the US Ambassador to Poland—Walter Stroessel—made one of the first trips to the PRC. Through the furtive and critical passage of Pakistan, Ambassador Stroessel would pave an expedient path towards rapprochement with the CCP-administered Mainland for the US.<sup>17</sup> Henry Kissinger in his memoirs writes, “the People’s Republic seemed to be saying two things [vis-a-vis Stroessel]: it was ready for contact... [and that] both our general interest [is] in improving relations.”<sup>18</sup> All the while, US Secretary of State William P. Rogers was occupied discussing the burgeoning Latin-American bloc in the UN and its implications on the future of Chinese (ROC) representation with Taipei.<sup>19</sup> His conclusion (eight months later) was that the prospects of China as represented by the ROC were bleak; and, the PRC was slated to very soon supplant their communist counterpart.

Roger... strongly implies that we continue our present policy even though eventually it will fail, and China will be represented

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by the People’s Republic of China, yet failed to pass on October 30, 1962. Albania, in a similar resolution, was also rejected in October 1963. See: Foreign Relations, 1961–1963, volume XXV, Documents 230 and 274.

15 National Security Memorandum 14 to Secretary of State, Secretary of Defense, Director of Central Intelligence Agency, February 5, 1969, Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1972, Volume V, Document 273.

16 Henry Kissinger, *The White House Years: the First Steps Towards China* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company), 255.

17 *Ibid.*, 188.

18 *Ibid.*, 191.

19 Telegram from Secretary of State Rogers to the Department of State, October 11, 1969, FRUS, 1969-1972, Vol. V, Doc. 279.

by the People's Republic of China (PRC), or by nobody... [and] we could move to one of the "two-China" variants....<sup>20</sup>

In the above memorandum from Kissinger to Nixon, Rogers proposed the US maintain their UN policy regarding Chinese representation, in spite of the reality that their abysmal efforts to maintain a ROC-seated China would fail. The US should go down fighting.<sup>21</sup> The US plan: to propound a two-China and dual representation formula as a means by which Taipei can maintain its presence in the UN.

But, Nixon and Kissinger were not particularly keen to Roger's recommendation. The notion of "two-Chinas" explicitly contradicts how "China" on both sides of the Taiwan Strait perceive their historical narrative. The two-China representation formula conflicts with how the PRC and ROC, respectively, perceive China as a singular entity with one governing authority. Additionally, Nixon and Kissinger had just opened the Pakistani channel to the CCP-administered Mainland; pursuing a two-China representation plan would obviate the normalization process between the US and PRC. However, a two-China representation formula would indicate, at least to Taiwan sympathizers in the US, that Washington was still fervidly committed to Taipei. The US would not be a "sellout."<sup>22</sup>

Perhaps the recommendation propounded by Roger was intended to be a political gesture to placate ROC-sympathizers. For, one might opine that it is quite inconvenient for a country, which espoused the democratic virtues of human rights and labeled the communist bloc as aggressors, to engage with a communist personality cult that was pitched in forthright warfare with its own citizens. Indeed, a bifurcated policy preference would be most appropriate, considering the above.

From late 1970 onward, the US concluded to not only surreptitiously normalize relations with Beijing, but also garner support from Taipei for dual-representation.<sup>23</sup> In a message delivered to Zhou Enlai (through the Pakistani backchannel), Richard Nixon organized a clandestine trip for Henry Kissinger to China to discuss the prospects of rapprochement in the summer of 1971.<sup>24</sup>

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20 Memorandum from the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon, July 11, 1970, FRUS, 1969-1972, Vol. V, Doc. 290.

21 Letter From the Representative to the United Nations (Bush) to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger), April 17, 1971, FRUS, 1969-1972, Vol. V, Doc. 346.

22 Ibid.

23 Report Prepared in the Department of State, September 1973, FRUS, 1969-1972, Vol. V, Doc. 455.

24 Letter from Henry Kissinger to Pakistan Ambassador Hilaly, May 10, 1971, National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No. 70, Box 1031, <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB66/ch-23.pdf>.

Simultaneously, Robert D. Murphy, an interlocutor on behalf of the Nixon administration, in a conversation with Chiang Kai-shek, discussed the possible defeat of the "Important Question" initiative, which required three-fourth votes and meant the expulsion of the ROC in the UN. Specifically in the aforementioned conversation, Ambassador Murphy advocated for dual-representation.<sup>25</sup>

### A Botched Attempt to Save Face

In July 1971, Kissinger embarked on his trip to the PRC via Pakistan.<sup>26</sup> Following his sojourn in East Asia, Nixon announced his ambition to travel to Beijing. From that point forward, the issue of Chinese representation in the UN degenerated to a countdown. As mentioned heretofore, the Nixon administration had long concluded that the ROC would eventually lose its seat. As such, US Secretary of State Rogers advocated on behalf of the ROC up until the final moment, only to fail. On October 25, 1971, the Important Question was defeated and the Albanian Resolution was adopted which replaced the PRC in the seat of the ROC as China.<sup>27</sup> The United Nations General Assembly decided:

... to restore all its rights to the People's Republic of China and to recognize the representatives of its Government as the only legitimate representatives of China to the United Nations, and to expel forthwith the representatives of Chiang Kai-shek from the place which they unlawfully occupy at the United Nations and in all the organizations related to it.<sup>28</sup>

The conclusion to the 20-year competition to unseat Taipei ended with the ROC delegation walking out. Chow Shu-kai, en route to Taipei from the botched attempt to secure the ROC seat in New York, contacted Washington. He shared his gratitude to the US for their "support" on the issue of ROC-representation and hoped for ROC participation in other specialized international organizations in the future.<sup>29</sup> While Washington expressed their "contriteness" for the

25 Record of Conversation between President Chiang Kai-shek and Ambassador Robert D. Murphy, April 23, 1971, FRUS, 1969-1972, Vol. V, Doc. 349.

26 Memorandum from the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon, July 14, 1971, FRUS, 1969-1972, Vol. E-13, Documents on China, Doc. 9.

27 Tucker, *Strait Talk*, 50. Tucker makes the observation that one potential reason why Taiwan lost its seat is because the UN, as a collective whole, wanted to kick Uncle Sam. This is to say that Taiwan symbolized US influence and, as the UN membership began to diversify, the interests of those new members were to weaken that influence by eliminating Taiwan.

28 United Nations General Assembly, Twenty Sixth Session, Restoration of the Lawful Rights of the People's Republic of China in the United Nations, October 25, 1971 (A/L.630).

29 Memorandum of Conversation, October 29, 1971, FRUS, 1969-1971, Vol. V, Doc. 433.

UN debacle, it was evident well before 1971 that Taipei representation in the Security Council and General Assembly was bleak. In other words, the foregoing exchanges of condolences were mere formalities as to gear up for the next conflict between Beijing and Taipei—the debate over eventual reunification.

Beijing and Taipei's competition for the UN seat in the Security Council and General Assembly included an array of back-alley talks, strategic planning and a shift in policy on the part of the US. Initially, the prospects of a PRC-administered China seemed unlikely; however, as the rest of the world began to trickle into the United Nations, the tectonic forces within the multilateral institution began to shift as well. US influence within the UN waned, and the PRC bid for the UN generated more patronage from third-world actors whom could relate with the struggles of the PRC. While the Important Question borrowed some time for the declining trajectory on which the ROC found themselves, it failed to curtail the aforementioned Albanian Resolution—the adopted framework that ousted the ROC from the UN. Washington, for undisclosed reasons, reassessed their China policy and essentially jettisoned its liabilities. Now, in a seemingly final bout, Taipei must face the issue of reunification with the now legitimate governing authority of China—Beijing, their arch enemy of the past. **Y**