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GENERAL GEORGE C. MARSHALL'S MISSION TO CHINA, 1945-1947



The mission of General George C. Marshall to prevent the renewal of the Chinese civil war and, as a consequence, prevent the growth of Soviet influence in both Manchuria and China proper must be viewed in the context of the emerging Cold War as well as the context of American perceptions of China that go back, at least, to the days of John Hay and the Open Door. This collection comprises the full set of records held by the National Archives in the State Department's Lot File 54 D 270 and is subdivided into six parts: War Department records; Records of the Marshall Mission relating to Political Affairs; Records of the Marshall Mission relating to Military Affairs; Records of the Division of Chinese Affairs; Records of John Carter Vincent; and, Marshall's Report.

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Detailed Description:

The mission of General George C. Marshall to prevent the renewal of the Chinese civil war and, as a consequence, prevent the growth of Soviet influence in both Manchuria and China proper must be viewed in the context of the emerging Cold War as well as the context of American perceptions of China that go back, at least, to the days of John Hay and the Open Door. Washington's view of communism as monolithic and inherently expansionist, combined with an unstated and probably unrealized belief in Chinese inferiority, led American policymakers to the conclusion that the Chinese Communist Party was merely a pawn of the Soviet Union and that containment of Soviet expansion in Asia necessitated continued rule by Chiang Kai-shek and the Nationalists. The American experience in China during World War II had led to disillusionment with Chiang and the Kuomintang on the part of many, but not all, military and diplomatic officers. One additional factor complicated the situation further—Soviet troops occupied Manchuria in the wake of the Japanese surrender and were delaying evacuation, ostensibly because Chinese government troops were not prepared to replace Red Army formations. The Chinese, unaware of the development of the atom bomb, had not anticipated the defeat of Japan before 1946.

General Marshall, who had just retired as army chief of staff, had the task of negotiating a settlement that would lead to a coalition government incorporating Nationalist, Communist, and "Third Force" parties but one that would remain friendly to the U.S., hostile to Soviet expansion, and would continue to be accessible to U.S. economic penetration, which had been the object of American policy in Asia since the first Open Door note in 1899. Despite the difficulty of the problem and the limited means at his disposal - particularly, the notion that the U.S. would not abandon Chiang Kai-shek - Marshall achieved notable initial success. On January 10, 1946, a ceasefire that Marshall was instrumental in arranging went into effect, and this was quickly followed by the resolutions of the Political Consultative Conference that looked forward to the formation of a democratic coalition government. On February 25, the two sides reached an agreement on military reorganization that would abolish "party armies" and integrate both Communist and Nationalist forces into a nonpartisan force commanded by a professional bureaucracy. Opposition by more hard-line factions in both the Communist Party and Kuomintang, together with the inability to reach a satisfactory solution to the problem of who would take over from the Soviets in Manchuria, however produced a stalemate. On June 30, the ceasefire, which had not been renewed, expired and with it any chance for successful mediation. Negotiations continued for the next six months but proved inconclusive. General Marshall became increasingly disillusioned with both the Communists and the Nationalists and hoped to see realignment in Chinese politics that would combine moderates in both parties along with other democratic elements into a single liberal party. This hope was not consistent with the power realities of Chinese politics but does reveal some of the "cultural baggage" that Marshall brought to China.

When General Marshall left China on January 7, 1947, he had apparently failed in his mission. In 1949, Chiang was driven from the mainland and Mao Tse-tung proclaimed the People's Republic of China. However, Chinese nationalism, which neither Marshall, nor his superiors, nor his immediate successors understood, contained Soviet influence in Asia to a significant degree as the People's Republic emerged as an independent force both in world communism and in international diplomacy.

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Source Note: Record Group 59: Records relating to the U.S. Department of State, Lot Files, 54 D 270: Marshall's Mission to China.

N.B.: This digital collection comprises the full content of the Scholarly Resources microfilm product entitled The Complete Records of the Mission of General George C. Marshall to China, December 1945 -January 1947.