

December 30, 1970

Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Department of Political Affairs, Asia-Oceania, Note, 'State of the Chinese Question after Canada and Italy's Recognition of Beijing and After the UN Discussion'

Citation:

"Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Department of Political Affairs, Asia-Oceania, Note, 'State of the Chinese Question after Canada and Italy's Recognition of Beijing and After the UN Discussion'", December 30, 1970, Wilson Center Digital Archive, Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, France. Obtained by Enrico Fardella and translated by Garret Martin. <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/116461>

Summary:

Following the normalization of relations between Canada and Italy and China, the French Foreign Ministry speculates how China's status at the United Nations may change in the near future.

Credits:

This document was made possible with support from MacArthur Foundation

Original Language:

French

Contents:

Translation - English

Paris, 30th December 1970

Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Department of Political Affairs
Asia-Oceania

Note

State of the Chinese question after Canada and Italy's recognition of Beijing and after the UN discussion

Canada and Italy's recognition of Beijing, as well as the vote at the UN, are evidence of a re-orientation of the foreign policy of Communist China and an evolution of the international attitude towards the latter.

Chinese diplomacy, whose resurgence was already obvious in 1969, has become particularly active in the last year. In particular, it relies on a style, and uses methods, that contrast with those of previous periods.

True, in regard to America and the USSR, while remaining prudent with the first and agreeing to 'normalize' its inter-state relations with the second, Communist China still acts in a way to weaken, as much as possible, the two 'superpowers' and to prevent their collusion which is viewed as dangerous for Chinese interests. However, China has adopted a more open attitude towards the rest of the world. Indeed, it seems keen to build friendships with Third World countries, to end the diplomatic isolation it had trapped itself in during the Cultural Revolution, and even to encourage the independence of nations or group of nations that are likely to counter-balance the power of the 'big' two.

Thus, in Asia, Beijing seems to have moderated its attitude towards Burma and India, and used the opportunity of a change of government in Sri Lanka to strengthen its ties with the country. In Africa, where its preference naturally goes to certain 'revolutionary' or strategically well placed countries, it endeavors to renew relations with old acquaintances such as Mali, Kenya or Tunisia, or even to build new friendships such as with Ethiopia or Equatorial Guinea. In Europe, Communist China is showing a desire to intensify relations with Britain and France, but there again it also wants to build new ties. Negotiations with Italy, which had been dragging on for twenty months or more, were eventually concluded because Beijing finally gave up on imposing a formal recognition of its authority over Taiwan. In the Americas, aside from the establishment of relations with Canada in similar conditions, we have to note the completion of talks with Chile as well as the improvement of relations with Cuba.

In general, Communist China claims to be ready to build ties with all countries on the basis of 'peaceful coexistence'. So it is likely that it would welcome the openings of other countries, such as Austria and Belgium, to establish relations, as long as they agreed to give up official ties with Taiwan. Finally, in regard to the United Nations, China's tone has considerably changed, and while it has until now publicly refused to confirm whether or not it would send its representatives to New York in case of a favorable vote in the General Assembly, we have reasons to believe, as declared by the Minister during one of his speeches to the Organization, that China would do so.

Nonetheless, this policy that could lead to China's return to the concert of nations is undermined by political and ideological considerations, and it still does not imply that Beijing has given up on its fundamental aims. On the one hand, the Chinese leaders continue to condemn countries, like West Germany or Japan, which they regard either as 'aides' of 'American imperialism' or of the USSR, or both of them as in the case of

Germany; not that this condemnation stands in the way of Communist China developing profitable commercial exchanges with these countries. On the other hand, they continue to provide a firm support for the revolutionary movements, especially in Asia where they indirectly serve Chinese interests, but also in Africa and elsewhere in the world where Beijing still maintains relations with Marxist-Leninist groups. There is thus an ambiguity in China's foreign policy, even a contradiction which is very clear in the case of Burma for example, where Beijing seems to be betting both on stabilizing, or even eventually improving, its relations with the Rangoon government, and the development of an internal revolutionary movement.

Beijing's more moderate attitude in the last few months has generally met with positive reactions across the world. Obviously, Communist China only needed to abandon the excessive attitude it had adopted during the Cultural Revolution for some nations - either keen to escape from the pressure of the 'big' two or simply conscious of the future role of Communist China, and of the political and economic advantages that they could draw from establishing relations with Beijing - to follow the example given by France a few years before. That was the case for a number of already mentioned countries. What is the situation for other candidates to establish relations with Beijing? While we have noted several signs of intent, be it from Austria, where the parliament is in charge of the problem, from Belgium, Malaysia or even New Zealand and Iran, it does not seem, though, that we can expect a cascade of recognitions. Many countries - and it is the case for those just mentioned - want to maintain official relations with Taiwan and want to delay as long as possible the moment of decision. We thus have to expect a certain time to pass before the experience of their contacts with Beijing makes them realize that China cannot accept their claims. That said, Beijing could score some rapid successes in Latin America, with the more or less progressive governments of Bolivia and Peru, in Africa by renewing with countries with which previously existing relations had been broken, and in Europe with Austria in particular.

This situation comes across in the United Nations, where the evolution of things could be faster. Indeed, for the first time this year, the vote on the so-called 'Albanian' resolution, which advocates restoring China's rights, scored 51 votes for and 49 against (with 25 abstentions), while the 'American' resolution, which requires a two-third majority to solve the debate, obtained 66 votes for and 52 against (7 abstentions). If there is no change to the current procedure, only an eight vote shift would be required to allow the Beijing representatives to be admitted to New York. Such an event will happen for sure in the coming years, maybe even next year. Indeed, on the one hand, a number of countries that have relations with Beijing, like Great-Britain, Italy and Canada, and which this year either voted along with the Americans or abstained, could change their attitude; on the other hand, nations like Austria which, without having yet established relations with China, are already voting in favor of the Albanian resolution, and might provide even firmer support to Communist China.

It remains that a number of countries, with the US at the forefront, will do their utmost to keep Taiwan in the Organization one way or another, even if they cannot prevent the Beijing delegates from gaining access to the United Nations. It is hard to imagine what maneuver could succeed in that regard. True, the admission of Taiwan to the UN as a new member state or the representation of the Chinese state by several governments could theoretically be possible solutions, because they would probably be approved by a majority of the General Assembly, but the claim of Jiang Jieshi's regime to represent all of China, and Beijing's radical hostility to these solutions, means they have no chance of succeeding. In the same way, a 'package deal' that would aim to include at the same time in the UN all the divided countries (2 Koreas, 2 Germanies, 2 Vietnams and 2 Chinas) would inevitably face Beijing's opposition. In these conditions, it is possible that the United States would finally stick to their current position so to preserve their bilateral relations with Taiwan after the delegates of that country have been expelled from the United Nations.

As for Taipei's attitude, it does not look that it can change as long as Jiang Jieshi remains in power. Whether or not the 'Republic of China' withdraws of its own volition before the United Nations' final decision or whether or not its representatives are banned by the UN will not change much to the situation.

However, we must not confuse the expulsion of Taiwan's delegates from the Organization with the devolution of this territory to China. The economic prosperity of the island has made it a stable entity whose security will in fact be maintained for a long time by America and maybe later by Japan.

Will the supporters of Beijing wait for a General Assembly vote to ensure that the Chinese delegates are sitting next to them? That is not clear. Some countries favorable to Communist China could bring this issue up in front of the Security Council when it will convene in January, and when this authority will confront the question of the powers of the representatives. Yet, the composition of the Council means it is not likely that a decision will be obtained this time.