

**CONTAINMENT AND ENGAGEMENT: U.S. CHINA POLICY IN
THE KENNEDY AND JOHNSON ADMINISTRATIONS**

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Thesis submitted for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
Discipline of History
School of History and Politics
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February 2008

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ABSTRACT

This study argues that despite the basic inertia in U.S. China policy during the Kennedy and Johnson years, the period nonetheless witnessed a fundamental evolution in the strategic presumptions underlying Washington's approach to the China "problem." By increments, U.S. policymakers began to seriously question the wisdom of a policy predicated on the idea that the containment of the People's Republic of China necessitated its political and economic isolation. Inversely, a basic consensus emerged in interested corners of the U.S. foreign policy bureaucracy that considered attempts to engage the Chinese—on levels bilateral and multilateral, official and unofficial—could serve to socialise China's revolutionaries, thereby facilitating a reduction in Sino-American tensions and paving the way to a bilateral rapprochement. Critically, in this analysis "engagement" was seen as a means of enhancing, rather than simply supplanting, the larger effort to contain China.

The dynamics involved in the emergence of this consensus are manifold and complex, and cannot be properly understood without close reference to changes in both the international strategic environment and the domestic political context through the 1960s. At the heart of this process, however, were advocates of policy moderation within the U.S. bureaucracy, mediating external pressures for policy movement, and championing the case for a more conciliatory approach to Sino-American relations.

The growing acceptance of what was sometimes articulated as "containment without isolation"—shorthand for a policy framework that implicitly rejects the either/or choice between containment and engagement—found expression in, and was in turn fostered by, basic adjustments in Washington's posture toward Mao's China. By the end of 1968 senior U.S. officials had repeatedly signalled that Washington was reconciled to the reality of a

Communist-controlled mainland China, and would in fact welcome expanded efforts toward bilateral accommodation and even cooperation.

These postural shifts may not have been matched by concrete policy changes, yet they remain significant. In the most immediate sense, the less provocative posture toward China enhanced Washington's capacity to communicate U.S. intent to China's leadership, thereby helping avert a direct Sino-American conflict in the 1960s, even as the two sides pursued antithetical objectives in the Asian region. In a longer-term frame of reference, the more flexible posture adopted in the 1960s played an important role in challenging the domestic politicisation of China policy, while establishing a rhetorical framework and conceptual foundation for more substantive policy movement.

In the course of tracing these developments, this study also provides new interpretative insights on a number of specific issues pertaining to U.S. China policy in the Kennedy and Johnson years, including the policy preferences, relationships, and roles of key U.S. officials in shaping the policy process; the impact of domestic politics, alliance politics, and various Cold War strategic concerns on policy outcomes; the question of how to deal with China's nuclear development; and the manner in which major China-related events and developments in the 1960s—such as the failure of Mao's Great Leap Forward, the 1962 Taiwan Strait crisis, the Sino-Indian border war, China's involvement in Vietnam, and the Cultural Revolution—were interpreted by U.S. officials, and, in turn, shaped understandings of and responses to the China problem.

Thesis Declaration

This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being made available for loan and photocopying, subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968.

Sean Turner
February 28, 2008

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The costs involved in undertaking research for this thesis were offset by generous grants awarded by the Lyndon B. Johnson Foundation and the John F. Kennedy Library Foundation. I am deeply grateful for this support. The University of Adelaide also provided assistance with scholarships and travel grants, easing the financial burden of nine months spent living and travelling in the United States.

Time and again throughout the research process I was struck by the willingness of American research librarians and archivists to go out of their way in helping me locate and access archival material. I am indebted to a number of individuals in particular for their assistance on this score, provided before, during, and after my visit to the United States. Many thanks to Stephen Plotkin and Sharon Kelly of the John F. Kennedy Library, both of whom have been helpful in tracking down materials overlooked during my stay in Boston; the same again to Charlene McCauley, who helped me access a substantial amount of classified documentary material released as a result of mandatory review requests submitted while conducting research at the Lyndon B. Johnson Library.

The academic staff at the University of Adelaide's School of History and Politics have been supportive from the first. Special thanks to Dr. Roger Knight, for his kind words of encouragement and providing me with the opportunity to teach and lecture in his Cold War course, and to Dr. David Mosler, who co-supervised this thesis, and offered invaluable advice throughout. I owe a particular gratitude to my supervisor, Dr. Fredric Zuckerman, for his support, guidance, and patience throughout the entire process. He has always brought a

discerning eye to my work, and challenged me to think about my material and the writing process in new ways.

Finally, I could not have finished this thesis were it not for the love and support of my parents, Chris and Jenny. Mum, Dad: Thank you.

ABBREVIATIONS

ACA	Subject Files for the Office of Asian Communist Affairs, Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs, 1961-1973 (NA)
ACDA	Arms Control and Disarmament Agency
ADST	Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, Oral History Collection, Lauinger Library, Georgetown University
AID	Agency for International Development
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CF	Central File (NA)
CFR	Council of Foreign Relations
CFRA	Public Policy Papers, Council of Foreign Relations Archive, Seeley G. Mudd Manuscript Library, Princeton University (Princeton, New Jersey)
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CO	Country Files (LBJL and JFKL)
Congentel	Consulate General telegram
CPE	<i>The CAESAR, POLO, and ESAU Papers</i> (CIA online collection)
CREST	CIA Records Search Tool (NA)
CWIHP	Cold War International History Project
DDI	Deputy Director for Intelligence (CIA)
Depcirtel	Department of State circular telegram
Deptel	Department of State telegram
DROH	Dean Rusk Oral History Transcripts (RBRL)
DRPP	Dean Rusk Personal Papers (RBRL)
DSB	<i>Department of State Bulletin</i>
EA	Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, Department of State *
EAF	Subject Files of the Office of the Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs (NA)
Embtel	Embassy telegram
FE	Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs, Department of State *
FRUS	<i>Foreign Relations of the United States</i>
FSD	Foreign Service Dispatch
GRC	Government of the Republic of China
HP:KJA	Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Papers of W. Averell Harriman, Special Files: Public Service, 1918-1986, n.d., Kennedy-Johnson Administrations, 1958-1971, n.d.
INR	Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Department of State
IO	Bureau of International Organization Affairs, Department of State
JCS	Joint Chiefs of Staff
JFKL	John F. Kennedy Library (Boston, Massachusetts)

* In November 1966 the Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs was renamed the Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs.

JTP	Papers of James C. Thomson (JFKL)
JTP:FE	Papers of James C. Thomson, Series 5: Far East, 1961-1966 (JFKL)
JTP:SP	Papers of James C. Thomson, Series 2: Speeches, 1961-1966 (JFKL)
LBJL	Lyndon B. Johnson Library (Austin, Texas)
Memcon	Memorandum of Conversation
MF	Microfilm
MPR	Mongolian People's Republic
NA	National Archives II (College Park, Maryland)
NIE	National Intelligence Estimate
NSAM	National Security Action Memorandum
NSC	National Security Council
NSF	National Security File
NSF:CO	National Security File, Country File
NSF:CO/VN	National Security File, Country File, Vietnam (LBJL)
NSF:KP	National Security File, Papers of Robert W. Komer (JFKL)
NYT	<i>New York Times</i>
OCI	Office of Current Intelligence (CIA)
OHI	Oral History Interview
ONE	Office of National Estimates (CIA)
ORR	Office of Research and Reports (CIA)
PKI	Indonesian Communist Party (<i>Partai Komunis Indonesia</i>)
POF:CO	President's Office Files, Countries (JFKL)
PPP	<i>Public Papers of the Presidents</i>
PRC	People's Republic of China
RBRL	Richard B. Russell Library, University of Georgia (Athens, Georgia)
RG59	General Records of the Department of State, Record Group 59
RH:CO	Papers of Roger Hilsman, Series 1. Countries Files, 1961-1964 (JFKL)
ROC	Republic of China
ROCF	Subject Files of the Office of Republic of China Affairs, 1951-1975
S/P	Policy Planning Council, Department of State
Secto	Telegram from the Secretary of State (or his delegation) to the Department of State
SFRC	Senate Foreign Relations Committee
SNIE	Special National Intelligence Estimate
Telcon	Telephone conversation
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
USIA	United States Information Agency
USIS	United States Information Service
USUN	United States Mission to the United Nations
WHCF	White House Central File (LBJL)