HE LOSS OF CHINA TO COMMUNISM IS ONE OF THE GREAT TRAGEDIES OF OUR century, and the key question that rapidly emerges from any study of the Chinese Civil War is “Who lost China?” There are many who think they have the answer. Brian Crozier blithely entitles his biography of Chiang Kai-shek The Man Who Lost China. During the early days of the Cold War, the answer immediately given by conservatives was the U.S., or more specifically the U.S. State Department China Hands with an assist from General George Marshall. Liberals just as immediately replied, “China was not ours to lose.” The more thoughtful authors have recognized a complex of causes, though the majority of them ultimately blame Chiang and the Kuomintang (KMT) and either ignore the U.S. role or exonerate the U.S.

But no one concerned about the U.S.’s relationship with anti-Communist Freedom Fighters around the world today can afford to ignore America’s part in the loss of the world’s largest country to Communism. To fully understand the U.S. role, however, the whole complex of factors surrounding Mao Tse-tung’s victory in China must be understood. Let us first examine factors contributing to the fall of China that are mostly independent of Chiang and U.S. officials.

THE JAPANESE

Most historians agree that Chiang’s best chance to build a just government in China and to defeat the Communists was from 1931-1937. Arthur N. Young, financial adviser to China from 1929-1947, explains how close Chiang was to establishing a stable Chinese government:

Whatever the government’s weaknesses, by 1937 it survived a series of acute crises, consolidated its position in most of the country after putting down regional separatists, developed the nucleus of a strong army under central control, was able to speak internationally for China, built up the revenues almost from scratch to about C$1 billion (about US$300 million), organized a budgetary and administrative system, developed a market for international borrowing, settled most debts in arrears, reformed the currency system and coinage on a nationwide basis, organized and developed a central...
bank, rehabilitated and improved transportation and communication, began agricultural reforms, and had under way a growing and promising program of development in which both domestic and foreign capital and technical aid participated.2

Militarily, according to Lyman P. Van Slyke, “the Kuomintang had almost defeated the Chinese Red Army.”3 But... and at the same time to tighten the ideological discipline of the whole Communist movement in China.15

Though all sides agreed Nationalists were, War after 1937 than the agreement willingly, because of the Japanese, which forced him to join the United Democratic Front against Japan, and the renewed Japanese aggression in 1937 made the achievement of both goals impossible.

From 1937 on, the deleterious effect of Japanese aggression was not simply a matter of tying up troops which could have been used to defeat the Communists, but the loss of civilian life and property, the bombing of every sizable city and town, the large numbers of refugees, the prevalence of malnutrition, the loss of property and labor to the enemy, and the prevention of any economic recovery because 95 per cent of Chinese industry was in Japanese hands.5 The length of the war drained Nationalist China economically and eventually made it more dependent on U.S. aid.

Since Chiang agreed to the United Democratic Front only because of the Sian Incident, whereas the Communists appeared to enter the agreement willingly, the Communists were able to gain far more propaganda advantage from the Sino-Japanese War after 1937 than the Nationalists were,6 even though all sides agreed that Chiang was the only man with enough stature to lead the struggle against Japan.7 Chiang, believing that the Communists were a far greater enemy than the Japanese because the West would eventually help him defeat Japan, husbanded his resources for the eventual final struggle with the Communists.8 Most of the Japanese attacks were launched against Nationalist-held territory, not Communist.9 Thus Chiang’s policy of giving up territory and not launching counter-attacks was interpreted as lack of will to fight Japan.

Mao, on the other hand, was successful in portraying the Communists as determinedly anti-Japanese,10 though the People’s Liberation Army actually did very little against the enemy.11 In fact, in August 1937 Mao told the Eighth Route Army, “We should use seventy per cent of our energy on our own expansion, twenty per cent on compromising with the Nationalists and ten per cent on fighting the Japanese,”12 and in reality the Communist army “was powerless in the face of the Japanese army.”13 Even Ernest Hemingway, no friend to conservatives, reported to Harry Dexter White in 1941 that the part played by the Nationalists in the war against Japan had been “a hundred times greater” than that of the Communists.14 According to Robert C. North:

While co-operating nominally with Chiang Kai-shek and his government, the Chinese Communists expanded, trained, and battle-tested their armed forces; developed border region governments as proving grounds for administrative techniques and structures; proclaimed the so-called New Democracy as a theoretical framework; and carried out the Cheng Feng or “ideological remolding movement,” which enabled them to adapt Russian theory to Chinese practice and at the same time to tighten the ideological discipline of the whole Communist movement in China.15

In addition, because Mao was under much less pressure from the Japanese, he was able to institute selected land reform programs to get
and keep the peasants on his side. He usually ordered rent and tax reduction rather than outright confiscation because he also hoped to keep the landlords’ support until such time as he was in full control of the country.” Though the land reform did not always go nearly so smoothly or produce such spectacular results as Communist propaganda would have the world believe,\(^\text{17}\) the opinion of the general public was that the peasants were happy in Communist-held areas and supported the People’s Liberation Army.\(^\text{18}\)

Therefore the Sino-Japanese War had these important results: preventing Chiang’s defeat of the Communists at the time that he was strongest and they were weakest; allowing the Communists to create the image of determined resisters to Japanese aggression; preventing Nationalist reforms while allowing the Communists to make those reforms which would be to their immediate advantage; and draining Nationalist resources so that they would be unavailable to defeat the Communists when the Sino-Japanese War ended.

**THE SOVIET UNION**

During World War II, the Soviet Union gave no appreciable assistance to the Chinese Communists. Locked in a deadly struggle with Nazi Germany, Stalin could spare little thought for Mao and the People’s Liberation Army (PLA). After World War II ended, Stalin concluded the Sino-Soviet Treaty with Chiang (August 14, 1945). These facts tend to obscure the significant role the Soviet Union played in Mao’s ultimate victory over Chiang.

The Soviet Union declared war on Japan on August 8, 1945, and Japan accepted surrender terms on August 10. The Soviet army made no contribution to the Allied victory over Japan, but its entry into the war made a major contribution to the Communist victory over Chiang. The Soviet army occupied Manchuria and confiscated large quantities of Japanese arms. Though the Sino-Soviet Treaty obligated the Soviets to turn Manchuria over to the Nationalists, the Soviet troops timed their withdrawals from Manchurian cities in such a way as to facilitate PLA occupation.\(^\text{19}\) The Soviet army would not allow the Nationalists to land at the main Manchurian ports for five weeks, thereby preventing the Nationalists from occupying key Manchurian positions.\(^\text{20}\) Though the Nationalists finally drove the PLA out of the cities in 1946, the Communists retained their hold on the countryside, which turned out to be crucial.\(^\text{21}\) In addition, the Soviets turned over the captured Japanese arms to the PLA.\(^\text{22}\) These arms “must supply the reason why the Communist forces, so poorly armed before the autumn of 1945, appeared to be so well-provided in the subsequent campaigns.”\(^\text{23}\) Communist control of Manchuria guaranteed their continued control of north China and gave them a significant strategic advantage in the civil war.

Besides the immediate benefits gained by the Chinese Communists because of the Soviet occupation of Manchuria, Stalin’s government provided additional assistance to Mao. The Soviets rebuilt Lin Piao’s Fourth Field Army and transferred into it 100,000 North Korean troops with supplies.\(^\text{24}\) Soviet military advisers assisted the Chinese Communist army, and the Soviets supplied 1,276 artillery pieces and 369 tanks, reversing the early Nationalist superiority in these areas.\(^\text{25}\)

In its own propaganda literature, the Soviet Union is more than willing to take full credit for the Chinese Communist victory:

When the USSR entered the war against Japan the People’s Liberation Army of China was in an extremely difficult position…. After North-east China was liberated, the Soviet Commander handed over to the People’s Liberation Army the weapons and equipment of the former Kwantung Army, and later, Soviet weapons too. The materiel captured by two Soviet fronts alone included more than 3,700 guns and mortars, 600 tanks, 861 aircraft, and nearly 680 military depots. The USSR helped to form, equip and train an 800,000 strong army which played the decisive role in routing the Kuomintang counter-revolutionary forces.\(^\text{26}\)

Though allowances must be made for the exaggerations of propaganda, the basic facts of Soviet aid are confirmed by other sources.\(^\text{27}\)

Soviet intervention was not the only reason for the Chinese Communist victory, but Russian aid made it
much easier for the Chinese Communists to win the civil war.

THE KUOMINTANG

Most historians agree that Chiang Kai-shek himself was not personally corrupt, but no one denies that Kuomintang officials in the government and the military were inefficient, greedy, dishonest and selfish. Among the evils of the KNIT commonly cited are the following: The KNIT was dominated by factionalism; the rich and privileged were able to avoid conscription; taxes were not honestly collected; treatment of draftees was deplorable, soldiers’ pay mostly went into the pockets of their officers, and the soldiers almost never had enough to eat; there was profiteering on U.S. aid to China; military officers received positions and were promoted on the basis of loyalty to Chiang alone, without regard to ability; the KNIT was overbureaucratized; provincial and local governments defied orders coming from the central government, especially regarding land reform. Chiang himself said of the KNIT in January 1948, “To tell the truth, never, in China or abroad, has there been a revolutionary party as decrepit and degenerate as we are today; nor has there been one as lacking in spirit, in discipline, and even more in standards of right and wrong as we are today.”

The officials responsible for this corruption made it virtually impossible for such reforms as Chiang attempted to be carried out. They would simply not obey his orders. Chiang did not force them to institute these reforms because he had to give top priority to his two-front war and because he believed that if he lost his support his government would fall. The KNIT officials weakened the military and the government, created discontent among the people and gave the Communists a propaganda weapon.

Though current sources agree that none of the evils of KNIT government, except those relating to the military, have been eliminated by the Chinese Communists, and are in fact in some cases far worse, it is still true that KMT corruption made it much easier for the Chinese Communists to triumph.

CHIANG KAI-SHEK

Now we can consider the role of “the man who lost China,” if the U.S. State Department’s White Paper on the fall of China is to be believed. Whatever else may be said about the Nationalist leader, Chiang Kai-shek understood the Communist menace as did few men of his time and therefore never stopped fighting it. In the early years of the KMT, Chiang cooperated with the Communists. But his 1923 visit to the Soviet Union caused him to see the true nature of Communism. Though he still used the Soviet Union to his advantage—mainly in their establishment of the Whampoa Military Academy, which he directed—he was just biding his time until he could move against them. From then until the day he died, Chiang Kai-shek fought the Communists. Though criticisms might be leveled against the effectiveness of his strategy and tactics against them, there is no question that he knew the evil of Communism and was determined to prevent its conquest of his country. Furthermore, the very fact that 72 per cent (14,000) of the Chinese prisoners of war chose to live in Taiwan rather than be returned to the mainland after the Korean War shows that, when given a choice, men preferred living under Chiang to living under Mao.

The main criticism that can be leveled against Chiang is that he did not make the reforms which would have strengthened the Nationalist government and armed forces so that he could defeat the Communists. This failure is not wholly his fault. As we have already seen, he had to contend with Japanese aggression, Soviet intervention and Chinese corruption. It would have been enormously difficult for him to have made all the political and economic reforms which his critics urged on him (and which he did in fact make on Taiwan) in view of the obstacles he faced.

Nevertheless, the Communist-Nationalist struggle was at the end a military struggle. There were reforms he could have undertaken in the military, with U.S. help, which would have made it more likely that the Nationalists would have won the war. He could have cut down the size of his army and therefore been able to feed it better, provided rations directly to the men instead of to their officers so that the men would actually get their full rations, required sanitation procedures such as delousing, taken care of his draftees so that they wouldn’t die before they even entered combat. Ability as well as loyalty could have been taken into account in officer appointments and promotion. Chiang should not have tried to direct the war in detail, issuing orders from headquarters which were obsolete by the time they reached the front. Though General Joseph Stilwell (Chiang Kai-shek’s American-
appointed Chief of Staff from January 1942 until October 1944) antagonized Chiang unnecessarily, the reforms he (and later General Albert Wedemeyer, who replaced Stilwell) recommended for the Chinese army were worthwhile and should have been pursued vigorously.

Chiang did not pursue them, and the Nationalists lost.

**THE UNITED STATES**

Marxists believe that history is determined by the inevitable revolutionary dialectic, but Christians know that history is made by the free will choices of individuals. Therefore to determine if the United States “lost China,” we must examine the role of key individuals in the U.S. to see the role they played in the fall of China.

General George C. Marshall is the single person most frequently charged by conservatives with the responsibility for the loss of China. Marshall was sent by President Truman as his personal representative to China, arriving on December 20, 1945. His specific instructions from Secretary of State Byrnes were to insist on a coalition government as a condition for continued aid to the Nationalists. Because the Truman Administration had made a firm decision not to provide U.S. combat troops to Chiang, and since Marshall was convinced that Chiang could not win without U.S. troops, he therefore agreed with the decision to insist on a coalition government as the only alternative, though Marshall later stated in his testimony in the 1951 Senate hearings on the fall of China that he never had any doubts that Mao’s forces were Marxist Communists. Marshall held frequent meetings with Chiang or his delegates and with Mao’s representative, Chou En-lai, and arranged two separate cease-fires in the civil war, in January and June of 1946. When Chiang would not cooperate with Marshall’s efforts to set up a coalition government, Marshall ordered an arms embargo, in effect from July 29, 1946 through May 26, 1947 (though no new arms arrived until November 1947).

Though the cease-fires were somewhat to the Communist advantage, enabling them to move troops into better positions and regain strength, since both sides violated the cease-fires almost at will, their ultimate effect was not crucial. Of far greater controversy is the arms embargo. There is no question that Chiang was winning the majority of battles fought before the arms embargo, that he continued to win in the fall of 1946 before the full effects of the arms cut-off would have been felt, and that he won almost no battles after that. Was the embargo the deciding factor in this military reversal?

Some historians offer other explanations than the embargo itself. Among them are the following: Chiang was winning in 1946 because the Communist Chinese army was not yet fully operational. The troops winning the early battles were the American-trained and equipped troops; later reinforcements were much less effective. PLA general Lin Piao allowed the Nationalists to occupy cities in Manchuria with little opposition because he knew that it would spread the Nationalist army too thin. In spite of the arms embargo, Chiang’s armies had enough weapons and ammunition, but lost because of other causes, among them poor generalship, a defensive rather than an offensive strategy, low morale, and desertions.

A Nationalist Chinese source, “Recollections and Evaluations of Important Communist-Suppression Campaigns” prepared in 1950 by seventeen high-ranking Nationalist officers, concludes: “We have never heard it said that our military defeat in recent years resulted from a lack of ammunition or an insufficiency of other supplies. Rather, we inadequately understood bandit-suppression and anti-Communism; we had insufficient morale; and our government, economy and programs completely failed to provide close support for the bandit-suppression military effort.” The report also blamed poor troop training and discipline, the overextension of forces, the lack of an offensive strategy, factionalism among commanders, and poor intelligence. Nationalist General Chao Chai-hsiang, writing in 1952, agrees that the PLA was superior in leadership, troop management, intelligence and treatment of POW’s.

Other authors and witnesses believe otherwise. Richard C. Thornton makes a strong case that Chiang’s defensive strategy began only because of the arms embargo. General Wedemeyer persuasively testified that the loss of morale was indeed a cause of the defeat, but that the arms embargo and other
U.S. Failures to support the Nationalists, as well as the constant anti-Nationalist propaganda, were a cause of poor morale. Admiral Oscar Badger, General Claire Chennault, and Brigadier General Francis Brink also regarded the arms embargo as a significant factor in the loss of China.

Marshall's arms embargo, therefore, certainly played a major role in the Nationalist defeat, but, especially in view of the Nationalist sources quoted above, it seems unlikely that the arms embargo was the sole deciding factor in that defeat. It was, however, indicative of a broader U.S. policy, and that broader policy must now be examined.

American policy in China was largely shaped by the so-called "China Hands" in the State Department: John Stewart Service, John Paton Davies, John Carter Vincent, and others. Their defenders say that they were loyal patriots who understood the problems of China better than anyone else, proposed the right solutions, and unjustly suffered at the hands of the McCarthyites. Their critics say they were pro-Communist at best and disloyal at worst.

Neither extreme is borne out by the facts. The China Hands were not disloyal. But neither did they suffer unjustly. They deserved to lose their positions—not for disloyalty, but for incompetence, because they didn't do their job.

First of all, it was their job to understand the true nature of Communism. Though this article is not the place to explore it, there was more than enough evidence at the time to know what Communism in the Soviet Union was really like. Even lacking that, a careful reading of Marx and Lenin would have shown that the characteristics of Communism—the dialectic, denial of human worth, atheism, materialism, espousal of revolution—were sufficient reason for resolutely opposing Communism.

It was their job to know that Mao was a Communist and was not just "red outside and white inside" as some believed. Mao was present at the founding of the Chinese Communist Party and had always followed the Soviet propaganda line. The 1934 Constitution of the Chinese Soviet Republic stated that the "Chinese Soviet Government has the goal of eliminating the feudal system... It has the further goal of eventual nationalization of all land." At the Senate hearings on the fall of China, General Omar Bradley testified that he had no doubts that "Mao himself is a Communist and was a Communist many years ago," and Dean Acheson added that the State Department had "very little doubt that these [Mao and his followers] were Moscow-trained Communists." A report prepared for the U.S. War Department in July by The Chinese Communist Movement, declared, among other things, "The Chinese Communists are Communists." The report added that the Communists were more rigidly controlled than the KNIT, allowed no opposition groups to exist in their areas (in contrast to the KNIT), and were part of the international Communist movement. General Chu Teh, commander in chief of the Chinese Communist Army, said, "Chinese Communists are Marx-Leninists... The Chinese Communists will certainly continue to apply and develop Marxism-Leninism dialectically in accordance with our own conditions." Both Protestant and Catholic missionaries could have provided information on the persecution of religion in the Communist-held areas.

It was their job not to be misled by Communist propaganda into thinking that a coalition government would solve all China's ills. That they were in fact misled can be seen in a few representative quotes. John Paton Davies, June 24, 1943: "The Kuomintang and Chiang Kai-shek recognize that the Communists, with the popular support which they enjoy and their reputation for administrative reform and honesty, represent a challenge to the Central Government and its spoils system." John Stewart Service, July 30, 1944: "...the Communists base their policy toward the Kuomintang on a real desire for democracy in China under which there can be orderly
economic growth through a stage of private enterprise to eventual socialism without the need of violent social upheaval and revolution.”  Service, August 3, 1944: “…the Communist Party becomes a party seeking orderly democratic growth toward socialism—as it is being attained, for instance, in a country like England—rather than a party fomenting an immediate and violent revolution.”  John Carter Vincent in a memo to Secretary of State Byrnes, December 9, 1945, called for broadening the base of the Chinese government to include “so-called Communists.”

The “Dixie Mission” to PLA headquarters in Yenan in the summer of 1944, including John Stewart Service and Raymond Ludden of the State Department and General David Barrett of the U.S. military mission, was a coup for the Chinese Communists, giving them respectability.  The Potemkin Village show put on by Mao fooled the American observers into thinking that the Communists were in fact the democratic hope for China’s future.  Gunther Stein’s The Challenge of Red China reported that the Dixie Mission was delighted by the “active, natural Yenan atmosphere and those cheerful, warm-hearted, practical Eighth Route Army men” and their wives “without lipstick and society manners.”  In his report on the Dixie Mission, Service stated on July 28, 1944, “There is everywhere an emphasis on democracy or unlimited relations with the common people.”

The China Hands were not traitors—there is no evidence, for example, of the kind of treasonable activities engaged in by the British spies of this time—but because of the liberal bias endemic in the State Department, they did not face the reality of Communism. Because they knew the Chinese language and had been in China for years, their recommendations carried much weight, and they played a major part in the fall of China.

Also playing a part in the formation of U.S. policy on China were members of the Institute for Pacific Relations, authors and reviewers of books on China, and others in the media, who contributed to the favorable image of the Chinese Communists. During the Senate hearings on the IPR, 46 persons connected with the IPR were identified as Communist Party members.  Their publications were clearly pro-Communist. Yet the IPR and its publications were the main source of information on the Far East. At the IPR hearings, Owen Lattimore testified, in response to a question on IPR influence in the 1930’s, “I believe that in those years, to the best of my recollection, the publications of the Institute for Pacific Relations were the only ones that not only specialized on the Far East but were confined to the Far East.”  An IPR resource packet was adopted by 1300 public school systems, and the War Department purchased over three quarters of a million IPR pamphlets for instructing military personnel.

Popular books gave a distorted view of Chinese Communism. Edgar Snow’s Red Star over China created the myth of Mao as a simple agrarian reformer.”  Owen Lattimore’s The Solution in Asia and The Situation in Asia spoke of the Chinese Communists as supporting self-government and elected representatives, expanding because of reforms not because of force, and representing a broad base.  Thunder out of China was a Book of the Month Club selection which presented Chiang as a dictator and Yenan as a far more pleasant place to live than Nationalist China.  The book’s authors, Theodore White and Annalee Jacoby, knew that the Maoists were Communists, but said that there was such “great affection for the Communists” that there “is little likelihood of their returning to a policy of ruthless land confiscation or terror in the village except under the sharpest provocation.”  Infected with the liberal bias which characterized the China Hands, the IPR, and the widely-read authors, American policymakers helped to create a difficult if not impossible situation for Chiang and the Nationalists.

Harry Dexter White in the Treasury Department played a key role in sabotaging U.S. economic aid to the Nationalists, as even his friendly biographer admits. In a December 9, 1944 memo to Treasury Secretary Morgenthau, White wrote, “We have stalled as much as we have dared and have succeeded in limiting gold shipments to $26 million during the past year. We think it would be a serious mistake to permit further large shipments at this time.”  The U.S. government had made a commitment to Chiang in writing to supply $200 million in gold to curb inflation in Nationalist China.  White’s policy prevented the shipment until it was too late to be effective in stemming the inflation, a contributing factor to loss of American confidence in Chiang and thus to Chiang’s
defeat. White also supported the propaganda line favorable to the Communists. Reporting to Morgenthau on the Dixie Mission on October 16, 1944, White wrote that the interests of the Chinese Communist Party “do not run counter to those of the United States in the foreseeable future and merit a sympathetic and friendly attitude on our part.”

With White, unlike the China Hands, there is evidence that he was involved in Communist groups. Both Elizabeth Bentley and Whittaker Chambers named White as a member of Communist cells, the Silvermaster and Ware groups respectively, though both testified that they did not know if White was actually a Communist. Investigations were never completed because White died of a heart attack in August 1948.

On the question of economic aid in general, the U.S. did not adequately support Chiang. His critics say that he wasted vast sums, but the fact is that U.S. aid to China was relatively small during World War II. Though “China, for the war period as a whole, contained on the average something like half of Japan’s troops overseas,” the total Lend Lease aid to China from 1941-1946 was only $1.5 billion, three per cent of the total Lend Lease aid we supplied to all countries. Thus we did comparatively little to help the Nationalists bear the ravages of the war with Japan, so that they were less able to defeat the Communists.

General Joseph Stilwell, in his key position as Chiang’s Chief of Staff, poisoned the well. While he had many good ideas which could have helped the Nationalist army, they were never fully implemented, largely through his own fault. Unlike Chennault and Wedemeyer, Stilwell had no understanding of the Oriental mentality, believing that he could deal with Chiang as he would another American. He made no secret of his contempt for Chiang, a contempt which he communicated to Marshall. Furthermore, Stilwell had an obsession with his own plans for reopening the Burma Road which caused him to show a lack of understanding, not just of the Chinese, but of other forces under his command as well. Thus Chiang became more determined to keep total control of his army and less likely to trust any American.

President Harry Truman’s instructions to Marshall to support a coalition government meant that America was precluding a Nationalist victory because we would not support a government that did not include Communists, even though Mao had publicly said in 1945 that a coalition would result in the defeat of “reactionary American imperialism.” Yet President Truman did not show such blindness in Europe. Without committing U.S. combat troops and without supporting a coalition government, the Truman Doctrine saved Greece from Communism. Greece received weapons and financial support and, most importantly, operational advisers at the battalion level, who ensured that American aid was used effectively. Marshall himself testified that such aid might have worked in China, but General David Barr’s military mission to China was specifically instructed not to supply this kind of assistance. General Wedemeyer recommended this approach in his report on his 1947 fact-finding mission, but Marshall personally suppressed the report. Chiang believed that the Truman Doctrine would be extended to China, and ordered an offensive as soon as word of the new policy reached him. But there is no evidence that Truman at any time intended to make an all-out effort to save China from Communism. Chiang warned Truman of the consequences of his decision. In the summer of 1946, Truman told Chiang to be more willing to compromise. Chiang replied that first the Communists must abandon “their policy to seize political power through the use of armed force, to overthrow the government and to install a totalitarian regime such as those with which Eastern Europe is now being engulfed.” Exactly such totalitarianism, of course, did engulf China.

The United States’ role in the fall of China, then, was not any one particular mistake, but a broader failure of U.S. policy. During World War II almost everyone in United States policy-making positions blinded himself to the reality of Communism because the Soviet Union was our ally in the war against the Nazis. It would have taken men of great vision and courage to have been able to say, in the atmosphere of necessary and justified determination to destroy Nazi Germany, that the Communists were the greater enemy and that we must never lose sight of the moral imperative of helping countries avoid a Communist takeover. But it is in such vision and courage that historical greatness consists. Precisely the opposite happened, however. At the Teheran and Yalta conferences the U.S. and Great Britain gave Stalin all he asked as a means of keeping him in the war against Germany (it was never a realistic possibility that he would make a separate peace) and bringing him into the war against Japan (in which, as we have seen, the Soviets made no contribution to victory). After the war, it was not until the Truman Doctrine that the U.S. faced up to the reality
of Communist imperialism, but only in Europe, not in Asia, though there was a chance that China could even then have been saved. Therefore the responsibility for the U.S. role in the loss of China cannot be placed on the shoulders of any one individual person or policy. The responsibility lies with all those in our country who have refused to face the reality of Communism. For the choice was not, as some wanted to believe, between democracy and anti-democracy, or even between Communist authoritarianism and Nationalist authoritarianism, but between Chiang's anti-Communism, corrupt and inefficient as it might be, and the revolutionary destruction which is Communism. The contrasting histories of mainland China and Taiwan since 1949 clearly show the true nature of the choice.

ALL OF THE ABOVE

Is the answer to the question “Who lost China?” then “All of the above”? To say that would be to take the easy way out. Even admitting all the other factors and Chiang's considerable responsibility, the fact remains that the U.S. could have done far more to save China than it did. Even an excellent Chinese leader (a Chinese Jonas Savimbi, for example) wouldn’t have been able to defeat the Communists without any U.S. aid, given all the obstacles he faced. With full-scale aid, based on the premise that the Communists must be defeated, Chiang could have won. Therefore U.S. aid was crucial. America was the one country that could have prevented the Communist conquest of China, but we didn’t know why we should and so we didn't.

What could we realistically have done? During World War II, we could have made it clear to Chiang that we supported him in his anti-Communism. We could have built up his army on a large scale as Stilwell and Wedemeyer did on a small scale. We could have given economic aid on a quid pro quo basis in exchange for practical reforms. As soon as the Sino-Japanese War was over and the Chinese Civil War resumed, we could have given all-out aid to Chiang as we did to the Greek anti-Communists. There is no question that dealing with Chiang would have been difficult and often frustrating, but a clear anti-Communist determination could have carried us through.

What lessons do we learn from this experience?

1. The U.S. needed and still needs a consistent anti-Communist policy. We have opposed the Communists on an ad hoc basis here and there, but that is not enough. We need to understand the nature of the Communist system—the dialectic, the denial of individual worth, the espousal of revolution. If we know what it is, we will know that it must be fought.

2. We need to help those who are fighting Communism when they ask for our help, even if their government or leader isn’t all that we want. Right now, we need to help the Mujaheddin in Afghanistan, UNITA in Angola, RENAMO in Mozambique, the Contras in Nicaragua. Whatever weaknesses these resistance groups have, they would in every way be preferable to Communism and deserve our support.

3. We must realize the power of the media to shape our perceptions and not allow it to bemuse us into ignoring the reality of Communism.

The day that the barbed wire barriers come down and free emigration from Communist countries is permitted, the day that land ownership is returned to the people, the day that full religious freedom is granted, the day that all the gulags are forever closed, the day that free elections and a multi-party system are allowed: when that day comes we can stop worrying about the Communists, because they will no longer be Communists. Until that day, America must always stand on the side of those who fight for freedom for themselves and for their children.
Notes

1Crozier’s biography is one of the few books that is not unremittingly hostile to Chiang, but even he blames Chiang for the loss of China.
4The Long March to Power (New York, 1972), p. 239. References cited in this article are for the most part those which are not identifiable “conservative.”
6Sec, for example, Brian Crozier, The Man Who Lost China (New York, 1976), p. 395.
9Van Slyke, p. 115.
13Guillermaz, p. 332.
16Guillermaz, p. 340.
18Sec, for example, Levine, p. 88. Of course, all land was collectivized in the 1950’s, so even such land as the Communists had redistributed became the property of the state.
19Levine, p. 82.
21Harrison, p. 380.
25Ibid., p. 207.
26Dmitri Yefimov, Our Common Victory (Moscow, 1988), pp. 82-83.
27Sec, especially, Richard C. Thornton, cited above.
29Chan, pp. 32-33.
31Ibid., p. 169.
36Ibid., p. 172.
37Chan, p. 81.
39Hsi-Sheng Ch’i, p. 225; Eastman, p. 223.
41Tang Tsou, p. 507.
42Crozier, p. 62.
43Ibid., pp. 86-88.
44Ibid., p. 360.
46Pogue, pp. 65-66.
47Tang Tsou, p. 356.
48Ibid., p. 364.
49Military Situation in the Far East, Hearings before the Committee on Armed Services and the Committee on Foreign Relations, U.S. Senate, 82nd Congress (Washington, 1951), p. 377.
50Guillermaz, p. 445; Thornton, p. 192.
51Levine, pp. 103-104; Thornton, p. 206, who stresses that it was the Soviet Union that made the PLA battle-ready.
54Military Situation, p. 612 (General Marshall), p. 1013 (General Bradley), p. 2960 (General Barr).
55Eastman, p. 159.
56Ibid., pp. 160-166.
57Levine, p. 137.
58Thornton, pp. 201, 203.
59Military Situation, pp. 2317-2318, 2329.
60Ibid., pp.2745, 2749; 2025; 2025.
63Stilwell, for example, see Tuchman, p. 159; and Henry Wallace, see Crozier, p. 254.
65Tang Tsou, p. 213.
67Military Situation, p. 1110.
68Ibid., p. 1874.
69Van Slyke, p. 1. Italics in the original.
70Ibid., p. 13.
72Kahn, p. 97.
73Ibid, p. 118.
74Ibid.
76Guillermaz, pp. 354-355.
77In his post-war book, Barrett admitted he was naive to believe “agrarian reformer guff” about Mao, since

78Kubek, pp. 228-229.
79Ibid., p. 230.
80Report on the IPR, p. 11.
81Ibid., p. 76.
82Kubek, pp. 350-351.
83Tang Tsou, p. 232.
84*Situation in Asia* (Boston, 1949), p. 60.
85*Solution in Asia* (Boston, 1945), pp. 120-121.
86Ibid., pp. 105-108.
88Ibid., pp. 234, 236.
89Rees, p. 326.
90Ibid., p. 333.
91Kubek, p. 199. Italics in the original.
94Rees, p. 164.
95Crozier, p. 263.
96Pogue, p. 52.
97See, for example, Charlton Cogburn, *The Marauders* (New York, 1956).
100Tang Tsou, p. 457.
101Thornton, p. 208.
102Tang Tsou, p. 429.