

The Changing of the Guard

Introduction

Studies that explore the period from late 1944 to the end of the war tend to focus on the transition of the presidency from Roosevelt to Truman and on Soviet-US relations.¹ This period saw significant changes within the Roosevelt Administration which caused upheaval in Allied relations; Secretary of State Hull resigned, Moscow began to occupy Eastern Europe, and the strategy for victory against Japan changed. There were also several key changes to US personnel in China. In the last few months of 1944 Joseph Stilwell was recalled and Ambassador Gauss resigned. More crucially, at the time of all of this change, the President was in failing health. The replacement of significant personnel caused disruptions in US China policy. Any study of wartime Sino-US relations would be incomplete without an examination of the impact those changes had on the US's relationship with China. This examination is particularly significant, as it reveals some of the flaws in FDR's diplomatic methods.

The State Department after Hull

In November 1944, after nearly twelve years in office, Cordell Hull resigned as Secretary of State because of his advancing years and poor health.² Hull felt he could no longer fulfill the duties of his office despite having a great deal more to do to complete his and FDR's vision of the post-war world. Hull had been Secretary of State from the beginning of Roosevelt's presidency and his resignation was bound to be disruptive. The President took the opportunity of Hull's departure to restructure the State Department. In order to face the challenges of the post-war world, and to accommodate the new global institution,

1 See, for example, Paul Varg, *The Closing of the Door: Sino-American Relations 1936–1946* (Michigan: Michigan State University Press, 1973) pp. 189–98, Dallek, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy*, pp. 524–38; Miscamble, *From Roosevelt to Truman*, pp. 34–123, 171–249 and 308–31; and McGregor Burns, *Roosevelt*, pp. 560–91.

2 Letter of resignation from Cordell Hull to the President, November 21, 1944, "President Franklin D. Roosevelt's Office Files (Microfilm)," Part 3 Reel 24: 396.

Roosevelt greatly expanded the Foreign Service and State Department.³ He created two new Assistant Secretary positions and moved other important figures around to fill the vacancy that Hull's resignation had created.

The new Secretary of State, Edward Stettinius, had a similar vision to Roosevelt and Hull. For him the future mission of the State Department was to maintain Allied unity, create the UNO, increase international trade and spread the freedoms for which the Allies had fought. Having worked as Lend-Lease Administrator before becoming Under Secretary of State in 1943, Stettinius was quite new to the State Department when he was asked to lead it. His appointment as Under Secretary had been on the basis of his administrative experience rather than his diplomatic expertise.⁴ In the few months that Stettinius had as Secretary of State before Roosevelt's death in April 1945, the shadow cast by Cordell Hull's legacy obscured his work. Stettinius was unable to make his mark as head of the State Department and was also unable to obtain the same deference from other foreign diplomats that Hull had earned over his lengthy tenure.

As Secretary of State, Stettinius focused on the final stages of the creation of the UNO while Roosevelt attended to the conclusion of the war. After FDR's death President Truman allowed Stettinius to continue to focus on the UNO. Truman did not rush to replace the cabinet that he inherited from FDR, and this provided some stability to Truman's new administration. Stettinius did not, however, see the Japanese surrender as Secretary of State. In July 1945 he was replaced by James Byrnes and, for his contribution towards the creation of the organization, was made the first US Ambassador to the UNO.

China after Stilwell and Gauss

General Stilwell was recalled from China in October 1944 at the Generalissimo's request. The long conflict between Vinegar Joe and Chiang Kai-shek came to an end, and so did the American public's infatuation with China. Stilwell's recall caused a stir in the US. Despite Roosevelt's efforts to reduce interest in

3 To minimize the impact of the upheaval on the creation of the UNO Roosevelt asked Hull to attend the final negotiations at the San Francisco Conference as part of the US delegation. President's reply to Hull's resignation letter, November 21, 1944, *ibid.*, Part 3 Reel 24: 396; Memorandum to the President from Edward Stettinius, December 12, 1944, *ibid.*, Part 3 Reel 21: 93.

4 Norman Graebner, ed. *An Uncertain Tradition: American Secretaries of State in the Twentieth Century* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company Inc., 1961), pp. 210–11.