

# U.S. Mediation Efforts in the Kuomintang-Communist Conflict: Challenges and Limitations in August 1946

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**Abstract.** The U.S. government sent a team to China after World War II to arbitrate the conflicts between the Kuomintang (KMT) and the Chinese Communist Party (CPC) to carry out the established policy of building a coalition government in China, including the CPC. For around a year, negotiations started. The period around August 1946 was a critical time node in the tripartite negotiations, and this paper mainly explores why the mediation of the United States in August 1946 did not achieve the desired results from the perspectives of the CCP and the United States. It can be seen that the failure of the US to achieve positive results in mediation during this period was the result of macro factors such as the difference between the established policies of the CPC and the US, as well as the "ideological misunderstanding" caused by the surplus materials of the Pacific War. In addition to the distractions caused by the war launched by the Nationalist Government, a direct analysis of Sino-US relations from the perspective of the CPC and the US shows that the differences in the policies of the two sides in August 1946 and the series of events affected by them prevented the US from achieving positive results in its mediation activities.

**Keywords:** August 1946, the United States, mediation, Kuomintang-Communist conflict causes.

## 1. Introduction

One of the main concerns in Asia following World War II was the conflict between the KMT and the CPC in China. In December 1945, the US government sent a delegation to China to mediate the conflict between the KMT and the CPC. The Nationalist Government and the CPC also sent delegations to negotiate to carry out the established policy of establishing a coalition government in China. The tripartite negotiations between the KMT, the CPC, and the US ultimately broke down in early 1947. Through the review of the negotiation process, around August 1946 was an important time for the situation of the tripartite negotiations to change. During this period, in addition to the ongoing wars and conflicts in various places, the mediation work carried out by the US also failed to satisfy the CPC. It is worth noting that during this important period in August 1946, The US imposed a military embargo on the Nationalist Government to limit its civil war-like actions, but this move did not achieve the desired effect. In addition, under the influence of a series of incidents, such as the anti-US policy further determined by the CPC in July, the insuitability of the US China policy to China's national conditions, and the sale of surplus materials from the US Pacific War to the Nationalist Government at this time, the US delegation not only failed to complete the mediation task, but also lost its image of objective and fair mediation, and ultimately failed to mediate. From the perspective of the CPC and the US, analyzing the factors that did not achieve the expected results in the mediation work of the US around August 1946 is conducive to looking at the inevitable causes of the civil war between the KMT and the CPC from a more comprehensive historical perspective.

## 2. The Three Stages of the KMT-CPC Negotiations

After the end of World War II, China's class contradictions, instead of national contradictions, re-emerged as the main contradictions in China. In December 1946, the person in charge of the diplomatic work of the CPC recalled the negotiation process between the KMT and the CPC and believed that the negotiations from 1945 to 1946 could be divided into three stages. From August 25, 1945, when the Central Committee of the CPC issued a declaration and opened the Chongqing

negotiations, to the end of 1945, which was the first stage. From the convening of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) in January 1946 to the armistice in Northeast China in June, it belonged to the second stage, From July to the end of 1946, it belonged to the third stage, and considered that "the first stage was direct negotiations, which were fruitless and fought a civil war for three months; In the second stage, the parties consulted and obtained results, but due to the reactionary nature of the KMT they were actually overthrown; In the third stage, the negotiations became a smokescreen, which actually hit hard, proving that the negotiations had failed [1]. "According to this stage division, it can be roughly sorted out the time context of the activities of the three parts: the KMT, the CPC, and the US.

In October 1945, the KMT and the CPC signed the *Minutes of Talks between the Government and the Representatives of the CPC*, that is, the *Double Tenth Agreement*, but the contradictions were not completely eased, and local conflicts were still going on in various places. The contradictions between the KMT and the CPC had a major impact on the political landscape of the Far East. On December 15, the U.S. government stated its China policy, "That a cessation of hostilities be arranged between the armies of the National Government and the CPC and other dissident Chinese armed forces for the purpose of completing the return of all China to effective Chinese control [2]." He also formed a delegation of special presidential envoys to China to mediate the conflict between the KMT and the CPC. The next day, the CPC delegation also arrived in Chongqing to start negotiations with the Nationalist Government and the US. On December 19, the Central Committee of the CPC issued instructions to all local districts, deciding that they could make appropriate use of the opportunity of mediation to "launch a peaceful political offensive against the KMT at the CPPCC in order to match the self-defense struggle in the liberated areas", which initially outlined the rudiments of the CPC's policy toward the United States [3]. On December 27, the negotiation resumed.

On 5 January of the following year, the KMT and the CPC negotiated and reached an "Agreement on Methods for Cessation of Internal Military Conflicts." On January 10, the agreement was announced, and according to the content of the agreement, a three-member military group composed of representatives of the KMT, the CPC, and the US was formally formed. After the agreement between the representatives of the CPC and the KMT government on the cessation of internal conflicts, the three-member military group reached several agreements, including the "Peaceful National Construction Program" on January 31 and the "Agreement on Mediating the Armistice in Northeast China" on March 27. During this period, until the end of June 1946, the mediation of the KMT and the CPC was relatively smooth; however, the conflict between the KMT and the CPC in the northeast was difficult to reconcile. In the meantime, in May 1946, the CPC representatives reminded the American representatives that they could stop aiding the Nationalist Government to put pressure on them; On June 6, the Nationalist Government issued a temporary armistice statement in Northeast China, announcing an armistice for 15 days from the next day.

On June 26, 1946, the KMT army attacked the Central Plains Military Region of the CPC, and a full-scale civil war broke out in China. In July 1946, the conflict in the northeast region further expanded, and the US proposed to impose a military embargo on the Nationalist Government; In August, the US formally imposed a military embargo on the Nationalist Government; however, on August 30, the U.S. government sold surplus materials from the Pacific War to the Nationalist Government. Since then, the situation of war in China has become inevitable. On January 7, 1947, the United States announced that it had failed to "mediate" between the KMT and the CPC, and left China and returned to the US. On the 29th, the U.S. government officially announced the termination of its relationship with the military trio. In late February, the KMT government forced the evacuation of CPC negotiators and staff, and the three-member military mediation team terminated its work.

Reviewing the historical context, the U.S. mediation of KMT-CPC relations is a process.

### 3. Causes

#### 3.1. Misalignment Between U.S. Policy and China's Political and Social Conditions

The former US Secretary of State once said: " There is no more pragmatic country than the US in its day-to-day diplomacy, but no more idealistic than the US in pursuing the moral convictions of its historical traditions [4, 5]." Therefore, on the issue of mediating the relations between the KMT and the CPC, the established policy of the US in the hope of establishing a coalition government in China determines that it is difficult for the US to conform to China's national conditions.

As early as October 1945, the US put forward a policy toward China, "Our policy is to support Chiang Kai-shek, but we cannot get involved in the Chinese civil war to fight for Chiang Kai-shek", which doomed the US to a certain degree of bias in mediating the relationship between the KMT and the CPC [6, 7]. On December 15, the U.S. government stated its China policy that it would further state that it would not be involved in China's civil war, but that the premise of mediation was to support the Nationalist government as the legitimate government of China." The U. S. and the other United Nations have recognized the present National Government of the Republic of China as the only legal government in China. It is the proper instrument to achieve the objective of a unified China [2]. Due to the ideological conflict between idealism and realism, the United States, on the one hand, supported the establishment of a Kuomintang-Communist (KMT-CPC) coalition government in China, and on the other hand, had great hopes for the existing KMT regime. Based on this established policy toward China, the U.S. side "is to rule out the use of armed intervention, and consequently to curb all actions that can be elevated to armed intervention in China." Despite the complete failure of the KMT-CPC negotiations in November 1946, and despite the rapid deterioration of the KMT's political-military position in the summer of 1947, even though the fact that in February 1948... Recognizing that the Kuomintang government was likely to be defeated soon, but this policy has been strictly followed", under the influence of this idea, the behavior decisions made by the US seem contradictory, but in fact reasonable [8].

In August 1946, after a month of full-scale civil war in China, the US decided to impose a strict military embargo on the Nationalist Government to limit the military operations of the Nationalist Government. On August 10, in view of the increasingly turbulent domestic situation in China, the head of the US government issued a warning to the Chinese embassy in the US, and his attitude was obviously tougher "Unless convincing proof is shortly forthcoming that genuine progress is being made toward a peaceful settlement of China's internal problems, it must be expected that American opinion will not continue in its generous attitude towards your nation. It will, furthermore, be necessary for me to redefine and explain the position of the United States to the American people [9]." During this period, the US was gradually imposing a military embargo on the Nationalist Government.

The U.S. government issued a military embargo order to the Nationalist Government at the end of August. On August 30, the Nationalist Government was notified of the start of U.S. restrictions on aid to China. When Marshall learned of this, he spoke to KMT General Yu Dawei about the matter, "The handling of this matter has nothing to do with me, but I am glad that this incident has happened in this way, because it just confirms what I have been saying to him and Chairman Chiang for some time. I conclude by saying that I had expected some kind of such action and had warned them that it was only a matter of time before this action was taken [10,11]."

The goal of established U.S. policy is to establish a coalition government in China that includes both the KMT and the CPC; the specific means is to achieve reconciliation between the KMT and the CPC through mediation; the main means include tripartite negotiations and a unilateral military embargo on the Nationalist Government. However, the US ignored China's specific national conditions, and the military embargo was carried out in secret to reduce the pressure of political public opinion, and was rarely mentioned in official documents, and the role of the CPC was ignored. Ultimately, the August 1946 mediation made it difficult to achieve the desired results.

### 3.2. The CPC's Established Anti-American Policy

Another important factor in the failure of the U.S. mediation in September 1946 was the anti-American policy that the Chinese Communists had already established. Since its founding, the CPC has always regarded the opposition to Western imperialism as its main revolutionary task, and this general policy has never changed. As for the specific strategy of negotiations, the CPC has changed according to the situation.

As early as March 1945, in the report "On Coalition Government", the CPC put forward three possibilities for the establishment of a "coalition government": "The first is the possibility that we do not want, that is, we want to hand over the army to become officials in the dictatorial government; The second is led by Chiang Kai-shek, advocating for democracy while acknowledging the liberated areas. However, in essence, it remains a dictatorial regime under Chiang Kai-shek's control; the third is to be us-centered [12]." On November 12, the head of the foreign affairs department of the CPC proposed: "In line with the basic principles of opposing civil war, striving for democracy, and seeking peace, and implementing the principles of political offensive and military self-defense, we should determine the minutes of the Double Tenth Talks and our proposal as the basic price, and conduct negotiations of 'fighting while talking' [13]."

In August, based on the anti-US policy that had been decided, the CPC openly criticized the US Day by day. The head of the CPC's diplomacy believed that after July 1946, because the KMT troops had attacked the liberated areas, "we regarded negotiation as the work of educating the people [1]." On 6 August 1946, in an interview with US reporters, the head of the CPC made a famous statement: "Chinese people will suffer for a long time under the joint attack of US imperialism and Chinese reactionaries, if these reactionaries fail one day, we will win one day [12]." On September 29, the head of the CPC criticized the American side even more sharply, "According to the fact that the US provided Chiang Kai-shek with a large amount of assistance, which enabled him to hold a civil war of unprecedented proportion, the U.S. government's policy appears to utilize the concept of mediation as a means to bolster Chiang Kai-shek in various ways, and through Chiang Kai-shek's policy of massacre, to oppress the Chinese democratic forces, so that China will actually become a colony of the US." If this policy continues, it will inevitably provoke all patriotic people in China to rise up and resolutely resist [12]. "

By combing through the diplomatic strategy of the CPC, the CPC's overall strategy of seizing national power and opposing imperialism through armed struggle has not wavered for a long time, but its specific struggle strategy has changed with the specific situation. However, in the summer of 1946, the CPC's attitude toward the US gradually hardened, and the established policy of the US did not change with the specific situation of the CPC and China, so mediation was the desired effect.

### 3.3. Misunderstandings Caused by the Surplus Materials of the Pacific War

There are big differences of opinion between the CPC and the US on the issue of American aid. Although the CPC did not reject US economic aid to China, in 1946, when the KMT and the CPC were partially engaged in the civil war, the US, assisted the Nationalist Government and was always resented by the CPC. On August 30, 1946, the surplus materials of the Pacific War sold by the US to the Nationalist Government constituted one of the important "fuses" of the contradictions and conflicts between the two sides.

As early as June 1946, the head of the CPC openly opposed the US policy of aiding the Nationalist Government, "The CPC has no choice but to resolutely oppose the U.S. Government's continued transfer of arms to the Kuomintang dictatorship in China by means of sale, exchange, lend, gift or transfer, resolutely oppose the US sending military missions to China, and resolutely demand that the US immediately stop and withdraw all so-called military aid to China and immediately withdraw the U.S. troops in China [14]."

When talking about the surplus materials of the Pacific War, the person in charge of the diplomatic work of the CPC held that the surplus materials of the Pacific War were one of the important evidence of the United States' subjective assistance to the Nationalist Government in the civil war, "The

agreement on the disposal of surplus materials, worth 855 million US dollars, was signed during the war in China, and this transaction precisely includes airplanes, military automobiles, transportation equipment, and all the daily necessities of the army, because it itself is the surplus materials of the army... And this aid, which was directly or indirectly used in the Chinese civil war, must not revive China's economy, but rather exacerbate the destruction of China's economy [15]." On August 23, the head of the CPC's diplomatic work stressed in a telegram to the US representative that it had yet to be verified whether the surplus wartime materials sold by the US in August had yet to be verified, but that "these materials were still wartime materials and were sufficient to greatly enhance the government's potential combat effectiveness [16]."

On the other hand, the US believes that most of the surplus materials from the Pacific War are civilian materials and have little military significance, and "the surplus materials from the Pacific islands are of great variety, including food, clothing, medicine and medical equipment, as well as construction machinery, mining equipment, telecommunications equipment, general machinery and building materials." In addition, with the exception of a small amount of inventory, a large amount of surplus materials are second-hand equipment [17]." On the issue of the sale of surplus materials from the Pacific War, the representative of the US explained to the representative of the Chinese Communists about the surplus materials of the Pacific War, "He pointed out that the resale of this resale began to be discussed in early 1946 and was ... in March It's almost decided. During his stay in the United States, he resolved most of the difficult issues involved, which were still negotiated in February, and were resolved only by the efforts of the Chinese government to improve the terms [18]."

In terms of the subjective motive for the sale of the goods, "the US had no choice but to enter into an agreement with China to sell the surplus to China at once or throw it into the sea by the governments of other countries in the Far East, and such an action would deprive China of the goods of considerable importance for the economic revival of the country [18]."

Judging from the composition of the surplus materials of the Pacific War and their subsequent roles, most of them are indeed civilian materials. From a qualitative point of view, as a surplus material of the war, its quality is relatively inferior, "the tonnage received minus the tonnage of allocation, there are still 6272 long tons that cannot be distributed. These 6,272 long tons of undistributed construction equipment are obviously the most damaged, most mutilated, or least suitable for economic use in the surplus materials of the US military in the Pacific, and if you add hundreds of tons of spoiled canned food, the total weight of all scrap products is about 6,600 long tons. It is estimated that the waste products account for about 4.4% of the 150,000 long tons of surplus US military materials handed over to China by the General Assembly [17]."

However, because the US only sold the surplus materials of the Pacific War to China at the end of August 1946, due to time and other reasons, it inadvertently further deepened the contradictions between the CPC and the US. Although the purpose of the US move to sell supplies was to promote China's post-war economic reconstruction and the disposal of US war materials, it objectively promoted the intensification of contradictions within China.

#### **4. Conclusion**

During August 1946, due to the superimposed factors of conflict events that directly exacerbated the contradictions, such as the established policy of the US, the specific negotiation situation of the CPC, and the surplus materials of the Pacific War, it was difficult for the US to effectively advance the mediation in August 1946, and the situation in China further deteriorated. The US had difficulty reconciling the relationship of two parties, and there were both accidental factors such as the transfer and sale of surplus materials from the Pacific War in August, as well as inevitable factors such as China's national conditions. In August 1946, the anxiety of the mediation situation not only made subsequent negotiations more difficult, but also exacerbated the distrust of the CPC and the Chinese people towards the US government to a certain extent. In the later negotiations, the CPC's positioning

of the negotiations was more about "educating the people" through negotiations, and the offensive adopted by the Nationalist government in the negotiations and at the local level exacerbated the CPC's distrust of the US. The U.S. government's insistence on its established policy and its failure to consider China's specific situation considering the situation made the negotiations more difficult in the future, and ultimately failed to mediate. At the level of international relations, the role of time difference cannot be ignored, while the KMT, the CPC, and the US are negotiating, the war is going on in various parts of China and the situation is changing rapidly, and the progress of the local war will greatly affect the judgment of the representatives of the three parties on the negotiation situation, and the time difference in the sale of surplus materials from the Pacific War has caused the further deterioration of the negotiation situation to a certain extent. When exploring historical events, historians must consider the role of the same policy in different times, places, and positions. However, it may be difficult for historical figures who are experiencing historical events to consider many factors, so to a certain extent, they will affect the formulation of the next policy. To sum up, the failure in August 1946 was caused by many reasons, and it must be viewed dialectically from multiple angles.

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