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“Synergy in Paradox”: Nixon’s Policies toward China and the Soviet Union

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When President Richard Nixon announced on July 15, 1971 that he would visit the People’s Republic of China (PRC), he staked both his political career and the international reputation of the United States on a belief that a friendship with China was not only desirable but necessary. Given Nixon’s desire for détente with the Soviet Union and the depth of hostility between the Soviet and Chinese Communist parties, the very act of opening relations with China engendered a high-stakes diplomatic balancing act on the part of the Nixon administration. Publicly, the President contextualized the policy of rapprochement within the framework of a global peace-building effort. In launching the China initiative, he relied on the shrewdness of his National Security Advisor, Henry Kissinger. Ultimately, prolonged and frank conversations among Kissinger, Nixon, and Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai laid bare the US’s strategic rationale for rapprochement. Several predominant Asian security concerns—in particular, the Vietnam War and the issue of Taiwan—dominated talks during Kissinger’s October 1971 visit to China and Nixon’s February 1972 visit. Nixon indeed desired to move the world toward global peace and the resolution of Cold War tension. Nonetheless, a sense of urgency stemming from security concerns in Asia, which Nixon hoped to resolve as quickly as possible, drove him to embrace China. This will be one of my main contentions and the way in which I shall clarify the existing historiography’s somewhat vague conception of the administration’s strategic

rationale.

Naturally, the broader conflict of the Cold War emerged many times during the talks, as did the two countries’ mutual fear of Soviet expansionism. Each side viewed the other as a welcome counterbalance to the Soviet Union, and Nixon undoubtedly considered a Sino-American partnership conducive to an eventual resolution of Cold War tension. Indeed, the Americans actively encouraged China to view the Soviets as a threat. Scholars of rapprochement have thus focused extensively on the role of the USSR in driving the initiative. For them, Nixon and Kissinger wanted to gain leverage over the USSR. I shall not try to refute this claim, but try to argue instead that Nixon and Kissinger intended for the Sino-American partnership to function indirectly as a check on Soviet expansion. The partnership was not an outright balance of power gambit. My archival work suggests that both sides downplayed the Soviet problem in favor of working immediately toward a resolution of tension in Asia, which they believed would counteract Soviet expansionism in the long term.

Therefore, the Sino-American dialogue on the Asian security issues defined the course of rapprochement. Both sides shared the goal of relaxing tension, but they differed drastically on several questions. The American side sought to proceed cautiously, so as not to alienate their traditional allies in East Asia, while the Chinese side wanted more rapid change. In spite of disagreement between the two sides, the

Americans showed great flexibility, particularly with regard to the problem of Taiwan. Nixon and Kissinger, hungry for whatever leverage they could gain in East Asia via a PRC partnership, made bold promises on Taiwan, which they would be unable to deliver on. Amid the negotiations, there emerged a noticeable contrast between American flexibility and Chinese intransigence. The extent of American flexibility was symptomatic of the urgency underlying the initiative, which the current historiography does not emphasize sufficiently. While the moves of rapprochement may have been meticulously calculated, they occurred in an atmosphere of political exigency, given America's declining international status as well as the reelection bid that Nixon faced in 1972. Nixon and Kissinger had gambled far too much political capital on their China policy—and they placed too much hope in its benefits—to allow it to fail. Hence, they offered bold concessions on Taiwan and endured scathing Chinese rebukes of their policy in Indochina.

No analysis of rapprochement is complete if it does not take into account Nixon's other foreign policy initiative: détente. The administration undertook a formidable juggling act by trying to improve relations with China and the Soviet Union simultaneously. Nixon and Kissinger sought repeatedly to ameliorate Soviet suspicion vis-à-vis rapprochement by denying that the policy had military implications and by stressing its bilateral orientation. Nonetheless, while seeking to reassure their Soviet colleagues of their malice-free intentions, they plainly drew on the fledgling relationship with China to encourage diplomatic concessions from Moscow. In their minds, the incentive-based tactics of rapprochement and détente complemented rather than impeded one another. By cultivating better relations with each side than the two sides had with each other—in Kissinger's formulation—the US sought to strengthen its position with respect to both, hence his term “triangular diplomacy.” They also weakened the Soviets' position in the US-PRC-USSR triangle by updating China on détente while withholding from the USSR information on rapprochement. Nixon tried, paradoxically, to advance détente by partnering with an enemy of the USSR. This objective factored into his overall rationale for rapprochement.

Ultimately, rapprochement and détente formed a unified whole, which produced unprecedented presidential visits to Beijing and Moscow. Further, these visits occurred within only three months of each other, and they produced concrete diplomatic results in addition to conciliatory rhetoric. The success of détente was, I shall argue, a product and benefit of the success of rapprochement; this important point is absent from the existing literature. Nixon's victory abroad translated into a formidable domestic victory in the 1972 presidential election. In evaluating rapprochement and détente, I shall argue that Nixon and Kissinger adapted their brand of realism—rooted in Kissinger's study of nineteenth-century Europe—to the Cold War with considerable, albeit short-lived, success.

In the years 1971 and 1972, Nixon, Kissinger, and their Chinese counterparts created something without historical precedent: a major diplomatic partnership between America and a Communist country situated in opposition to the Soviet bloc. The partnership entailed neither a formal alliance nor true normalized relations. Nonetheless, each of these things had become a genuine possibility when Nixon returned from his February 1972 negotiations in Beijing. During the course of rapprochement's rapid construction from July 1971 to February 1972, Sino-American discussions revolved around a simple yet profoundly vexing theme: tension in Asia stemming from the Cold War. The highly elastic term “tension,” which both sides employed throughout the talks, could mean anything from the cold war between the Soviet Union and China to the very hot war between the US and North Vietnam. The Vietnam War was anathema to both the US's international status and Nixon's chances for reelection. Therefore, it—as I shall argue in the next section—served as the most important immediate stimulus to the administration's pivot toward China, while domestic political turmoil and Nixon's realist political philosophy provided the backdrop to the decision.

When the US and the PRC came together for talks, they faced formidable obstacles to rapprochement, such as Chinese condemnation of the Vietnam War and the US's refusal to end its alliance with Taiwan. However, the two sides shared a strong mutual interest in counteracting the overall state of affairs, no matter how much they differed on the issues. Fortunately, there was one issue on which their interests neatly aligned: the India-Pakistan conflict. Their ability to work together on South Asia allowed them to compromise on the polarizing security problems of Vietnam and Taiwan. Further, their commitment to compromising for the sake of reducing tension in Asia propelled them both toward a mutual long-term goal: the reversal of Soviet influence in Asia-Pacific. Thus, the partnership constituted what I call an indirect entente against Soviet expansion, deriving its strength from the US and China's mutual suspicion of the USSR.

This diplomatic gambit, bold as it was, grew out of political turmoil within the US and a gradual decline in the country's strategic position abroad. During the year leading up to President Nixon's inauguration, America found itself roiled by the stalemate in Indochina, the gold crisis, domestic racial and student unrest, and the assassinations of Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert F. Kennedy.¹ In 1968, more American soldiers died in Vietnam than in any other year of the war.² As a result, the polarization between America's “hawks” and “doves” intensified, while Mao Zedong, Chair-

1 Dominic Sandbrook, “Salesmanship and Substance: The Influence of Domestic Policy and Watergate,” in *Nixon in the World: American Foreign Relations, 1969-1977*, ed. Fredrik Logevall and Andrew Preston (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 85.

2 Schaller, *The United States and China*, 164.

man of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) urged his comrade H Chí Minh, Chairman of the Vietnamese party, to reject President Johnson's request for peace talks. At the same time, the Chinese rebuffed Johnson's request to engage in Sino-American talks.³ US-PRC rapprochement under Nixon cannot be considered apart from this background of domestic and international crises. Given the easily foreseeable backlash to the policy from the pro-Taiwan Republicans—as well as various Democrats who wanted to be the first to open relations with China—Nixon trod carefully.⁴ Specifically, US-PRC relations during the first two years of his presidency consisted in subtle diplomatic overtures—largely through Pakistan—culminating eventually in Kissinger's secret trip to China in July 1971 and an invitation for Nixon to visit Beijing in order to engage in high-level talks with Mao and Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai.⁵ Nixon brought the same level of caution to the breakthrough's public revelation.

When Nixon informed the nation of his China initiative, he somewhat obscured his underlying motives. He depicted the policy as a step toward world peace rather than as a strategic gambit designed to contain armed conflict as well as Soviet influence in Asia-Pacific. At 7:31 p.m. on July 15, 1971, he appeared live on television and radio to announce his upcoming visit to the PRC. He called the visit “a major development in our efforts to build a lasting peace in the world.”⁶ From the outset, then, he depicted rapprochement as a farsighted policy designed to help minimize or eliminate Cold War tension and thereby move the world toward equilibrium. In an appeal to common sense, he claimed that, given the sheer size and population of China, the world could simply not hope to achieve a “stable and enduring peace” without China's participation.⁷ Above all, he claimed, he and the CCP leaders planned “to seek the normalization of relations between the two countries and also to exchange views on questions of concern to the two sides.”⁸ Therefore, he promised a genuine partnership with China without committing the US to a formal alliance or binding negotiations.

Nixon concluded his speech by delimiting the implications of rapprochement. He claimed that the US would

not pursue a relationship with China “at the expense of our old friends” and that the relationship “is not directed against any other nation.”⁹ In this pair of statements, he anticipated both uproar from the conservative wing of the Republican Party and an intensification of Soviet suspicion and hostility. He concluded by sharing his conviction that “all nations will gain from a reduction of tensions and a better relationship between [the US and China]”; he ended on his hope that future generations would inherit peace as a legacy of rapprochement.¹⁰ Overall, he combined pragmatism and idealism in his effort to sell rapprochement to ordinary Americans. The foreign policy initiative would, according to Nixon, constitute a major step toward the resolution of the Cold War.

If Nixon offered the American citizenry an idealistic, globally minded, and farsighted rationale for rapprochement, his rhetoric morphed from idealism to *Realpolitik* when he spoke privately with foreign leaders, White House bureaucrats, and congressmen. He narrowed the focus of the policy from long-term “peace in the world” to more immediate peace in Asia-Pacific, which he viewed as a necessary step to the eventual goal of world peace. In a January 1972 conversation with Dutch Prime Minister Barend Biesheuvel, US Ambassador to the Netherlands J. William Middendorf, and US Deputy National Security Advisor Alexander Haig, Nixon emphasized China's nuclear capacity and the danger of its becoming a superpower. In his words, “when they become...a nuclear superpower,” the US will need “to be in a position that...we can discuss differences and not inevitably have a clash.”¹¹ It is telling that Nixon used the conjunction “when” rather than “if” regarding China's becoming a superpower; for him, China's rise was not likely but inevitable. As he later argued to congressional leaders after his return from China, normalized relations “will reduce the possibility of miscalculation.”¹² In his mind, the only alternative to normalized relations consisted in an “an inevitable road of suspicion and miscalculation, which could lead to war.”¹³

In these private White House talks, Nixon spoke of his preoccupation with the current state of tension in Asia rather than tension on a global scale. He claimed that no policy of peace “in the Pacific” would succeed “without having the Chinese a part of it.”¹⁴ Significantly, this statement closely mirrored a similar one in the July 15 announcement, except he substituted “[peace] in the Pacific” for “peace in

3 Ibid.

4 Michael Schaller, “Détente and the Strategic Triangle Or, ‘Drinking Your Mao Tai and Having Your Vodka, Too’” in *Re-examining the Cold War: U.S.-China Diplomacy, 1954-1973*, ed. Robert S. Ross and Jiang Changbin (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2001), 372.

5 S. M. Ali, *US-China Cold War Collaboration, 1971-1989*, Routledge Studies in the Modern History of Asia (New York: Routledge, 2005), 17-41.

6 Richard M. Nixon, “Remarks to the Nation Announcing Acceptance of an Invitation To Visit the People's Republic of China,” (address, NBC Studios, Burbank, July 15, 1971), accessed February 21, 2014, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=3079>.

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.

11 Richard M. Nixon, *Nixon White House Tapes 656-10 (excerpt 1)*, MP3, Yorba Linda: Nixon Presidential Library & Museum, August 20, 2013.

12 Richard M. Nixon, *Nixon White House Tapes 92-1 (excerpt 1)*, MP3, Yorba Linda: Nixon Presidential Library & Museum, August 20, 2013.

13 Ibid.

14 Nixon, *Nixon White House Tapes 656-10 (excerpt 1)*.

the world” and thereby revealed the East Asian rather than global focus of rapprochement. He envisioned not a swift and decisive blow against the international power of the USSR but rather a solid barrier to Soviet influence in Asia-Pacific. Containing Soviet influence there, by way of an entente with China, would, in turn, indirectly contain Soviet expansion elsewhere. This was a subtle form of *Realpolitik* and not—as historian William Bundy claimed—“balance of power diplomacy at its most naked and extreme.”¹⁵

On a more basic level of international security, the entente was designed to prevent the US and the PRC from fighting each other again, as they had in the Korean War. Nixon’s realist approach to international relations thoroughly informed this objective. He bluntly stated that, following a direct US encounter with China in Korea and an indirect one in Vietnam, he wanted no further confrontation between American and Chinese soldiers.¹⁶ He even claimed, in his discussion with congressional leaders, that had normal Sino-American relations existed in 1950, the US could have avoided a military encounter with China on the Korean Peninsula.¹⁷ Going into the visit to China, he hoped to discuss with his Chinese counterparts “their role in the Pacific and our role in the Pacific.”¹⁸ As he told the leaders of Congress, both the US and the PRC hoped “to build a structure of peace in the Pacific and, going beyond that, in the world.”¹⁹ In these White House discussions, Nixon echoed his article “Asia After Viet Nam,” which was included in the October 1967 issue of *Foreign Affairs* and which articulated his brand of realism. As he argued at the time, the US “cannot afford to leave China forever outside the family of nations... There is no place on this small planet for a billion of its potentially most able people to live in angry isolation.”²⁰ Reportedly, Mao read the article in translation and told Zhou that if Nixon were to become president, he might reverse the US’s belligerent policy toward China.²¹

If this hierarchy of objectives—that is, peace in Asia-Pacific before global peace—was explicit in Nixon’s White House conversations, it was even more explicit in his talks with Zhou Enlai during his February 1972 visit to China. As he told the Chinese Premier, “peace in the Pacific is going to be the key to peace in the world, there being a relative

balance in Europe.”²² Zhou understood and agreed with this sentiment. As he replied to Nixon, since both the US and China “want to make some contribution to the relaxation of tensions in the world, then we should see to it first of all where there is a possibility for relaxation of tensions in the Far East.”²³ As he explained, China “is not in the position to look into the possibility of other parts of the world; they are too far away from us.”²⁴ In short, both sides engaged in talks with a view to mitigating Cold War tension in Asia-Pacific rather than in the whole world. As we will see, both sides were eager to gain a partner in their mutual struggle against the Soviet Union, but neither sought direct confrontation. Instead, they hoped to contain Soviet influence by working out among themselves a structure of equilibrium in Asia. Insofar as rapprochement constituted an anti-Soviet entente, it functioned as an indirect rather than direct weapon against Soviet expansion. This structure was a corollary to Nixon’s Guam Doctrine, which called for a reduction of US troops in Asia and greater self-reliance on the part of America’s allies. If the US were to retrench its military presence in Asia, China could serve as a guarantor against Soviet efforts to fill the void.²⁵

Sino-American exchanges, both during Nixon’s visit and during the preceding year, suggest that both sides viewed their fledgling partnership as an indirect entente. Early deliberations between the two sides centered on the India-Pakistan conflict, which produced the war of December 1971. As we will see, the Indian subcontinent became a prime example of the indirect entente in action. The conflict served as an important stimulus to the opening of diplomatic talks between the US and China. As mutual friends of Pakistan, the two countries communicated indirectly through Pakistani channels from 1969 to 1971.²⁶ The success of the Pakistani channel, and Pakistani President Yahya Khan’s willingness to vouch for the US, enabled Kissinger to make his short, secret

15 Bundy, *A Tangled Web*, 290.

16 Ibid.

17 Richard M. Nixon, *Nixon White House Tapes 92-1 (excerpt 1)*.

18 Richard M. Nixon, *Nixon White House Tapes 656-10 (excerpt 2)*, MP3, Yorba Linda: Nixon Presidential Library & Museum, August 20, 2013.

19 Richard M. Nixon, *Nixon White House Tapes 92-1 (excerpt 2)*, MP3, Yorba Linda: Nixon Presidential Library & Museum, August 20, 2013.

20 Richard M. Nixon, “Asia After Viet Nam,” *Foreign Affairs* 46, no. 1 (October 1967): 121, accessed January 11, 2015, <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/23927/richard-m-nixon/asia-after-viet-nam>.

21 Schaller, *The United States and China*, 165.

22 United States of America, The White House, Executive Office of the President, *Memorandum of Conversation, 22 February 1972, 2:10-6:10 PM*, ed. William Burr, Nixon’s Trip to China (Washington, D.C.: National Security Archive, 2003), 30, accessed February 21, 2014, <http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB106/NZ-1.pdf>.

23 Ibid., 20.

24 Ibid.

25 Vitaly Kozyrev, “Soviet Policy Toward the United States and China, 1969-1979,” in *Normalization of U.S.-China Relations: An International History*, ed. William C. Kirby, Robert S. Ross, and Gong Li (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2005), 257-58. See also Robert S. Ross, “U.S. Policy Toward China: The Strategic Context and the Policy-making Process,” in *China, the United States, and the Soviet Union: Tripolarity and Policy Making in the Cold War*, ed. Robert S. Ross, Studies on Contemporary China (Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, 1993), 151.

26 Gary J. Bass, *The Blood Telegram: Nixon, Kissinger, and a Forgotten Genocide* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2013), 103.

visit to China in July 1971.²⁷ That visit served primarily as a means for Kissinger and Zhou to become acquainted. They quickly learned how difficult it would be to agree on security issues. For instance, in their first meeting, they spent a considerable amount of time discussing the status of Taiwan without reaching any agreement, beyond Kissinger's willingness to declare that the US "is not advocating a 'two Chinas solution' or a 'one China, one Taiwan' solution."²⁸ While this visit produced little in the way of consensus, it was nonetheless crucial in the consolidation of formal contact between the two countries. In August 1971, Kissinger secured a permanent and direct channel of communication with China, by way of Chinese ambassador Huang Zhen in Paris.²⁹

Given that Pakistan had proved crucial in bringing the two countries together in the first place, Kissinger and Huang preoccupied themselves with the India-Pakistan conflict when they sat down in Paris. Kissinger assured Huang that, although the US would probably be unable to continue supplying military aid to Pakistan—due to the pro-Indian Democratic Party's control of the United States Congress—the US would nonetheless be able and willing to cut off economic aid to India in the event that it pursued military action against Pakistan.³⁰ He affirmed that the US would not be drawn by India into the political future of East Pakistan. On the contrary, it would allow the Pakistanis to resolve the issue for themselves. Moreover, the US would coordinate the supply of food and emergency aid to East Pakistan "so as to deprive India of any pretext for intervention."³¹ Kissinger's brief exposé of US policy on the India-Pakistan conflict confirmed the US's commitment to Pakistan's sovereignty and territorial integrity. The importance of a firm American commitment on Pakistan stemmed from China's overall isolation; in August 1971, Pakistan was the PRC's only friendly neighbor.³² As Nixon wrote in his memoir, "If we failed to help Pakistan, then Iran or any other country within the reach of Soviet influence might begin to question the de-

pendability of American support."³³ Nixon quotes Kissinger as having said, "We don't really have any choice. We can't allow a friend of ours and China's to get screwed in a conflict with a friend of Russia's."³⁴

Kissinger intimated to Huang that the US would not only tolerate but also support an active Chinese role in the resolution of the conflict. Specifically, he told Huang that, although the US could not supply Pakistan with military aid, "we understand if other friends of Pakistan will give them the equipment they need."³⁵ He also called for China to exert greater influence over Pakistani policy, because the Pakistani government was, by US reckoning, "honorable but...not very imaginative in psychology and in its political strategy."³⁶ He urged China to do anything in its power "to encourage [the Pakistani government] to be imaginative so as to make it possible for the return of the refugees to a maximum extent."³⁷ Implicitly, the US viewed the PRC as reasonably competent in regard to political strategy at the regional international level. In offering official US approval of a more active Chinese role on the Indian subcontinent, Kissinger shrewdly conveyed to the Chinese that the Americans would regard them as equal partners in the arena of international politics. One week after the Indo-Pakistani War broke out in December 1971, he bluntly called for Chinese military assistance to Pakistan.³⁸ In the process, he betrayed the US's desire for China to do what the US plainly could not. Overall, in advocating a greater Chinese role in the India-Pakistan conflict, Kissinger designated the Indian subcontinent as the first theater of the US and China's new indirect entente. Protecting Pakistan from the USSR's friend India was tantamount, in Nixon and Kissinger's mind, to averting a stronger Soviet foothold in Asia. The logic of the indirect entente had come forcefully into play.

The idea of an indirect coalition against Soviet expansionism was not merely implicit in the Sino-American exchanges. The two sides would discuss explicitly and at length the threat of the Soviet Union. Shortly before arriving in China, Nixon wrote himself a note asking, "How can we work together?" Under that heading, the first item he penned was: "Your opponents are ours."³⁹ In another note,

27 Ibid.

28 United States of America, The White House, Executive Office of the President, *Memcon, Kissinger and Zhou, 9 July 1971, 4:35-11:20 PM, Top Secret / Sensitive / Exclusively Eyes Only, with Cover Memo by Lord, 29 July 1971*, ed. William Burr (Washington, D.C.: National Security Archive, 2002), 15, accessed February 22, 2014, <http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB66/ch-34.pdf>.

29 United States of America, The White House, Executive Office of the President, *Memo from Lord to Kissinger, 19 August 1971, Enclosing Memcon of Kissinger-Huang Zhen Meeting, 16 August 1971, PRC Embassy Paris, 9:05-10:45 AM*, ed. William Burr (Washington, D.C.: National Security Archive, 2002), 7-8, accessed February 22, 2014, <http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB70/doc4.pdf>.

30 Ibid., 8.

31 Ibid.

32 MacMillan, *Nixon and Mao*, xx.

33 Richard M. Nixon, *RN: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1978), 527.

34 Ibid.

35 *Memcon of Kissinger-Huang Zhen Meeting, 16 August 1971*, 7-8.

36 Ibid.

37 Ibid., 8.

38 United States of America, The White House, Executive Office of the President, *Lord to Kissinger, 15 December 1971, Enclosing Memcon of Kissinger-Huang Hua Meeting, 10 December 1971, Top Secret/Sensitive/Exclusively Eyes Only*, ed. William Burr (Washington, D.C.: National Security Archive, 2002), 15, accessed February 24, 2014, <http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB70/doc23.pdf>.

39 Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Special Files,

he declared that the US and China needed to work together to “Maintain [a] balance of power” and “Restrain [Soviet] expansion.”⁴⁰ Kissinger, to strengthen the Chinese leaders’ impression of American confidence in them, informed Huang of the US’s willingness to cooperate on the problem of Soviet expansion. He promised in Paris to keep Huang thoroughly informed of any and all developments in Soviet-American relations.⁴¹ To prove his sincerity, he listed in detail the provisions of a recent Soviet-American agreement on protocols for the avoidance of accidental war and promised that the US would sign an identical agreement with the PRC if it so desired.⁴² While he was committing himself to providing China with information on the Soviets, he had recently denied—or so he told Huang—a Soviet request for information on China.⁴³ When writing to President Nixon about the meeting with Huang, Kissinger explicitly stated his motivation in giving the Chinese information about the USSR. By “keeping the Chinese informed on all significant subjects of concern to them,” the US was giving the PRC “an additional stake in nurturing our new relationship.”⁴⁴ In other words, he sought to foster Chinese cooperation by rewarding China with intelligence on the Soviet Union. His willingness to do so gives some indication of the sense of urgency driving rapprochement. Kissinger presumably knew that sharing Soviet secrets with the Chinese could have sour repercussions for Soviet-American relations. However, those repercussions were outweighed in his mind by potential gains from the US’s partnership with China, which he sought to consolidate as quickly as possible without upsetting traditional alliances held by the US in Asia.

Kissinger would persist in the tactic of sharing Soviet information throughout the course of rapprochement. By the time of Nixon’s visit, he would in fact be delivering to high-ranking PRC military officials a detailed report of Soviet forces arrayed along the Sino-Soviet border.⁴⁵ His conversation with Huang embodied a more general strategy

of fostering Chinese suspicion of the Soviet Union. As he declared to Huang, the Soviets wanted to convey to the world “that they can outmaneuver the People’s Republic of China by seeming to come much closer to us because they can offer us much more”; he assured Huang that the US would not be fooled by the Soviets’ advances.⁴⁶ Nonetheless, in depicting Soviet strategy in that manner, Kissinger plainly exploited the PRC’s already great suspicion of the Soviet Union. As he told Zhou Enlai in October 1971, he believed that the USSR had come fairly easily to an agreement with the US, Britain, and France on Berlin in the preceding month because it “has a great desire to free itself in Europe so that it can concentrate on other areas.”⁴⁷ The implication was clear: The Soviets were shifting their gaze eastward. When Nixon arrived in China, he assured Zhou that “the US would oppose any attempt by the Soviet Union to engage in an aggressive action against China.”⁴⁸ Zhou, for his part, did not feign indifference to the threat of Soviet expansion in East Asia. For instance, he argued to Kissinger that China could not convey to the world a desire to lessen its role in Vietnam, for doing so would only invite the Soviets to “stick their hands into [Indochina].”⁴⁹

Because Nixon and Kissinger sought to foster Chinese suspicion of the Soviet Union, one could infer that Nixon’s rationale for rapprochement consisted primarily in constructing a Sino-American alliance directed against the USSR. However, subsequent talks between Kissinger and Zhou epitomized the true goal of the initiative: to work toward the resolution of security issues in Asia and thereby counteract Soviet expansionism indirectly. Implicit in Nixon’s focus on peace in the Pacific was a notion that continued tension in Asia would allow the USSR to gain more and more influence in the Pacific and thus the world as a whole. The Chinese, for their part, also envisioned rapprochement

President’s Personal Files, Box 7, Folder “China Notes,” February 21, 1972, quoted in Goh, *Constructing the U.S. Rapprochement with China*, 172.

40 “China Notes,” February 22, 1972, quoted in Xia, *Negotiating with the Enemy*, 203.

41 *Memcon of Kissinger-Huang Zhen Meeting*, 16 August 1971, 4.

42 *Ibid.*

43 *Ibid.*

44 United States of America, The White House, Executive Office of the President, *Kissinger to Nixon, “My August 16 Meeting with the Chinese Ambassador in Paris,”* 16 August 1971, ed. William Burr (Washington, D.C.: National Security Archive, 2002), 4, accessed February 23, 2014, <http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB70/doc2.pdf>.

45 United States of America, The White House, Executive Office of the President, *Memorandum of Conversation*, 23 February 1972, 9:35-12:34 PM (Washington, D.C.: National Security Archive, 2003), 5, accessed February 23, 2014, <http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB106/NZ-4.pdf>.

46 *Memcon of Kissinger-Huang Zhen Meeting*, 16 August 1971, 6.

47 United States of America, The White House, Executive Office of the President, *Memcon, Kissinger and Zhou, “Korea, Japan, South Asia, Soviet Union, Arms Control,”* 22 October 1971, 4:15-8:28 PM *Top Secret/Sensitive/Exclusively Eyes Only*, ed. William Burr (Washington, D.C.: National Security Archive, 2002), 33, accessed February 23, 2014, <http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB70/doc13.pdf>.

48 United States of America, The White House, Executive Office of the President, *Memorandum of Conversation*, 23 February 1972, 2:00-6:00 PM, ed. William Burr (Washington, D.C.: National Security Archive, 2003), 21, accessed February 23, 2014, <http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB106/NZ-2.pdf>.

49 United States of America, The White House, Executive Office of the President, *Memcon, Kissinger and Zhou, “Communique, Prisoners, Announcements of Trips, Technical Matters,”* 26 October 1971, 5:30-8:10 PM *Top Secret/Sensitive/Exclusively Eyes Only*, ed. William Burr (Washington, D.C.: National Security Archive, 2002), 18, accessed February 24, 2014, <http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB70/doc19.pdf>.

as a means of reducing tension in Asia-Pacific to counteract Soviet influence. As we saw earlier, Zhou bluntly told Nixon that the PRC was “not in the position to look into... other parts of the world.”⁵⁰ Hence, the PRC did not seek to become the US’s partner in resolving conflicts and tension throughout the whole world. Both sides wanted to focus on Asia and avert Soviet influence there via their partnership.

The Sino-American talks on East Asian security issues underscored the way in which Nixon and Kissinger envisioned the indirect entente operating as a guarantor of stability in Asia. Two issues came to the fore: Vietnam and Taiwan. Because the Vietnam War was undermining both America’s international status and Nixon’s political survival, the President came to China determined to receive Chinese help in negotiating an end to the war. The Chinese, on the other hand, wanted the war to cease because they viewed it as an opportunity for the Soviets to gain more influence in Asia. In return for Chinese help in Vietnam, Nixon was willing to offer significant concessions on Taiwan, which the PRC sought to incorporate into a political union with the Chinese mainland. Given the delicate situation stemming from the Taiwan lobby in US politics, Nixon knew that he could not go too far in his formal—that is, publically proclaimed—promises on this issue. He could not raise doubts over American commitment to the island’s independence. Nonetheless, he strongly insinuated to Mao that he would reorient, in a covert manner, US policy toward reunification between Taiwan and the mainland.

Overall, Vietnam and Taiwan constituted the two most important issues at stake because they were, in the eyes of both parties, major sources of tension and major obstacles to their purpose of banding together to impose a check on Soviet expansion. The US’s ongoing alliances with anticommunist countries in Asia-Pacific served to complicate the talks. In particular, China’s fear of Japanese military expansion and its dissatisfaction with the status quo in Korea factored significantly into the negotiations. The Chinese, in occasionally rebuking their American interlocutors for past and present US policies in Taiwan, Vietnam, and elsewhere, revealed the more intransigent, dogmatic perspective that they brought to the negotiations. The Americans’ toleration of these rebukes revealed their dogged determination to see the talks through to a successful end, even at the cost of indulging the CCP leaders’ prides.

In October 1971, Kissinger visited China for the second time. In contrast to his previous visit, he and Zhou

worked diligently to produce a list of security resolutions that the Chinese and Americans could agree upon; they drafted a preliminary version of what later became known as the Shanghai Communiqué. Scholars have depicted the drafting of the communiqué as the major crucible of rapprochement.⁵¹ Both sides knew that they would never reach full agreement on the issues at hand, but each side needed to state its own position in words acceptable to the other side. If they failed in this task, they would fail to create a lasting partnership. The Kissinger-Zhou talks and the communiqué centered on six major security issues, which Zhou listed as the most important obstacles to stability in Asia: Taiwan’s status, the ongoing war in Indochina, the potential for a renewed conflict on the Korean Peninsula, the revitalization of Japan, the India-Pakistan conflict, and the growth of the Soviet military threat.⁵² Zhou described Taiwan’s status as “the crucial issue with regard to the seeking of normalization [of relations] between...China and the US”; on the other hand, he called the war in Indochina “the most urgent issue to be resolved to relax tension in the Far East.”⁵³ Here, Zhou laid out the trajectory for the exchanges.

This conversation of October 20, 1971—the first of Kissinger’s second visit to China—did more than enumerate the issues. It also hinted at what the US feared regarding the international repercussions of rapprochement. As Kissinger stated, “it would be shortsighted if either side tried to use this normalization to end alliances on the other side”; he explained to Zhou that, if either side pursued such a policy, “everyone will...withdraw back into the rigidity that we are attempting to escape.”⁵⁴ In short, he promised that the US would not disrupt China’s relationships with its traditional allies, and he implicitly urged China not to disrupt the US’s relationships with its allies. Zhou immediately discerned the underlying implication of Kissinger’s statement. Although the American claimed that he was not speaking of Taiwan, Zhou bluntly replied, “I thought you were trying to bring in subtly the question of Taiwan.”⁵⁵ This conversation embodied a general theme in the Sino-American dialogue: American cautiousness versus the Chinese desire for radical change. The US, as Nixon had suggested in his televised announcement from July 15, 1971, did not want to abandon its long held alliances with various anticommunist clients in Asia, among them Taiwan and South Vietnam. The Chinese,

50 United States of America, The White House, Executive Office of the President, *Memorandum of Conversation, 22 February 1972, 2:10-6:10 PM*, ed. William Burr, Nixon’s Trip to China (Washington, D.C.: National Security Archive, 2003), 20, accessed February 21, 2014, <http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB106/NZ-1.pdf>.

51 See, for example, MacMillan, *Nixon and Mao*, 303.

52 United States of America, The White House, Executive Office of the President, *Memcon, Kissinger and Zhou, “Opening Statements, Agenda, and President’s Visit,” 20 October 1971, 4:40-7:10 PM Top Secret/Sensitive/Exclusively Eyes Only*, ed. William Burr (Washington, D.C.: National Security Archive, 2002), 15-6, accessed February 23, 2014, <http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB70/doc10.pdf>.

53 Ibid., 15.

54 Ibid., 25.

55 Ibid., 26.

however, feared that the US, in maintaining those alliances, was avoiding a firm commitment to the new partnership. As Zhou insisted, in order for rapprochement to succeed, the Americans needed to accept changes in international politics. He asked Kissinger rhetorically, “If all of the old relations remained unchanged, how can we say we are welcoming in a new era?”⁵⁶ Implicitly, if the US wanted Chinese help in negotiating a settlement with North Vietnam, then the US had better be willing to help China reclaim Taiwan and avert the potential threat of Japan.

Zhou only grew more and more firm on this point as his conversations with Kissinger progressed. Tension stemming from old alliances reached its apogee on October 24, the day on which the two men began debating in greater detail the content of their communiqué. Zhou chastised Kissinger for clinging to anticommunist regimes in East Asia. As he said, “there will be no hope of easing tension” so long as the US supports such regimes because they “want to oppress the people where they are and expand to other regions.”⁵⁷ Zhou then posed a question: “shall this generation of peace be based on hopes for the future or on [America’s] old friends? This is a fundamental difference between us.”⁵⁸ Kissinger, in responding to Zhou’s criticism, spoke with greater firmness than was his custom. The tone of his response signaled that the urgency of the American initiative in China was tempered by the Americans’ caution vis-à-vis the delicacy of traditional alliances. As Kissinger stated, “it is not acceptable for us to be told that we must give up immediately all old friends.”⁵⁹ He clarified that the US “does not give [its clients] a veto over our policies, and we will not maintain them against the forces of history.”⁶⁰ Here, Kissinger ironically drew on Marxist rhetoric in formulating a retort to Zhou. While the US would not “maintain [its clients] against the forces of history”—that is, it would not keep them in power if democratic forces overthrew them—it would also not abandon them at China’s behest.

When the subject of old friends had arisen, Kissinger slipped in a request for help in dealing with North Vietnam and North Korea. In the process, he betrayed the exigency underlying the American initiative in China. He implored Zhou to provide the PRC’s friends with “some personal advice...at least with respect to your judgment of our sincerity.”⁶¹ For Nixon, who faced an imminent bid for

reelection as President, Chinese assistance in Vietnam dominated his diplomatic wish list. In a personal note to himself that echoed a conversation between Kissinger and Zhou, he listed the two issues upon which rapprochement would hinge: “1. Taiwan—most crucial 2. V. Nam—most urgent.”⁶² In another handwritten note, he clarified the implication of labeling Taiwan “most crucial” and Vietnam “most urgent”:

Taiwan = Vietnam = trade off

1. Your people expect action on Taiwan.
 2. Our people expect action on Vietnam.
- Neither can act immediately—But both are inevitable—Let us not embarrass each other.⁶³

On the occasion of Kissinger’s first visit to China in July 1971, he had introduced the idea of this bargain. As Kissinger told Zhou, “two-thirds of [American] forces in Taiwan [are] linked to the war [in Vietnam] and their removal would depend on an end of the conflict.”⁶⁴ He also stated, “an end to the war would accelerate the improvement in our relationship.”⁶⁵ Implicitly, the sooner China delivered assistance in Vietnam, the sooner the US would commit itself to averting Soviet aggression against China and to pursuing action on Taiwan. Nixon himself expressed to Zhou his wish for such assistance on the second day of his visit to China. Although he did not expect help from the PRC, he said, “we of course would welcome any moves, any influence to get negotiations [with North Vietnam].”⁶⁶ Prior to the meeting, Nixon had scrawled onto a memorandum from Kissinger four of his own reasons that he could supply to the Chinese as to why they should cooperate:

1. Helps on Taiwan troop removal
2. Reduces Soviet hand there
3. Reduces irritant to our relations
4. Gets us out—gives them [the Vietnamese Communists] a fair chance.⁶⁷

The Americans’ requests with respect to Vietnam betrayed

56 Ibid.

57 United States of America, The White House, Executive Office of the President, *Memcon, Kissinger and Zhou, “General Philosophy and Principles, Communiqué,” 24 October 1971, 10:28-1:55 PM Top Secret/Sensitive/Exclusively Eyes Only*, ed. William Burr (Washington, D.C.: National Security Archive, 2002), 8, accessed February 23, 2014, <http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB70/doc15.pdf>.

58 Ibid., 10.

59 Ibid., 15.

60 Ibid.

61 Ibid., 16.

62 “China Notes,” February 15, 1972, quoted in MacMillan, *Nixon and Mao*, 262.

63 “China Notes,” February 23, 1972, quoted in Xia, *Negotiating with the Enemy*, 198.

64 United States of America, White House, Executive Office of the President, *My Talks with Chou En-lai*, by Henry A. Kissinger (Washington, D.C.: National Security Archive, 2002), 14, accessed January 11, 2015, <http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB66/ch-40.pdf>.

65 Ibid.

66 *Memorandum of Conversation, 22 February 1972, 2:10-6:10 PM*, 27.

67 *Memorandum from Henry A. Kissinger to the President*, February 8, 1972, Indochina, p. 4: Briefing Papers for the China Trip, Briefing Book V, NPM, National Security Council Files, For the President’s Files (Winston Lord) China/Vietnam Negotiations, Box 847, quoted in MacMillan, *Nixon and Mao*, 264.

the uncomfortable position in which they found themselves. They sought to maintain alliances with anticommunist clients, while persuading communist states in the region to accept a negotiated peace. Hence, they longed for the leverage over North Vietnam that a friendship with the PRC could provide, but they faced the obstacle of Chinese resentment of their traditional allies, above all Taiwan.

Firm though Kissinger may have been when Zhou brought up the problem of the US's "old friends," Kissinger and Nixon knew that they would not succeed without providing major concessions to the Chinese. Fully aware of China's fear of Japan, Kissinger promised that the US would oppose Japan's nuclear rearmament, limit its traditional rearmament, and "oppose the extension of Japanese military power to Taiwan, Korea, and elsewhere."⁶⁸ Nixon, en route to China, pondered the issue of Japan and how to explain to Zhou Japan's inclusion under the United States' nuclear umbrella. In his notes, he wrote:

Best to provide nuclear shield—

1. To keep Japan from building its own.
2. To have influence for U.S.

We oppose Japan "stretching out its hands" to Korea, Taiwan, Indochina.⁶⁹

Nixon closely reproduced this line of argument in his actual conversation with Zhou.⁷⁰

On the problem of Korea, Kissinger expressed a desire that the US and China work together to maintain stability on the peninsula. He stated that American recognition of North Korea could be adopted as "an objective but not as an immediate policy" and that the US government was "studying" the problem of the United Nations Commission for the Unification and Rehabilitation of Korea (UNCURK).⁷¹ Zhou bluntly told Nixon on February 23 that China wished to see UNCURK abolished.⁷² Regarding the upcoming election of the United Nations Secretary General, Kissinger stated that, if China objected to any particular candidate and informed the US of its objection, "we will take it very seriously into account."⁷³ Though Nixon and Kissinger sought Chinese help in the failing Vietnam peace negotiations, they refused to step down in Indochina so long as North Vietnam remained obstinate. As Kissinger informed Zhou, "we have

made our last offer [to Hanoi]. We cannot go further than we have gone...it is they who owe us an answer."⁷⁴ Nonetheless, the fact of an American request for Chinese assistance marked a mild form of concession. In asking for whatever help the PRC was willing to provide, the Americans had acknowledged China's strong influence over Southeast Asia.

During both the Kissinger visit of October 1971 and the Nixon-Kissinger visit of February 1972, the issue of Taiwan pervaded discussions. Therefore, much of the remainder of this section will focus on how and why the US and China struggled to formulate mutually agreeable positions on Taiwan's status and America's military presence on the island. Failure to reach any concrete agreement would have resulted in rapprochement's collapse. All that the two sides had hoped to gain from the initiative would have rapidly disappeared, and the Soviets would thus have gained greater freedom—according to Nixon and Kissinger's reasoning—to intensify their presence in Asia. Therefore, the Americans did their utmost to satisfy the Chinese on Taiwan. Zhou regarded the island's status as the issue with the most serious implications for the normalization of Sino-American relations. Though he claimed that the PRC could wait a few years for a solution, he bluntly told Kissinger, "If it is not solved, there is no possibility of the normalization of relations [between the US and China]."⁷⁵ Recognizing the importance of satisfying the PRC on this issue, Nixon promised through Kissinger to withdraw a large contingent of American forces from Taiwan after the peaceful resolution of the Vietnam War. He also promised to reduce the remaining forces progressively over a longer period of time; withdrawal would accelerate, he claimed, if the improvement of Sino-American relations proceeded apace.⁷⁶ Thus, Nixon shrewdly encouraged Chinese help in negotiating a settlement with North Vietnam. Regarding the actual status of Taiwan, Kissinger told Zhou that the US would attempt "to encourage a solution within a framework of one China and by peaceful means."⁷⁷ Finally, because Zhou greatly feared a Taiwanese-Japanese military alliance directed against China, Kissinger assured him that the US would oppose Japanese military forces on Taiwan and Japanese support for Taiwanese independence.⁷⁸

The trouble for Nixon and Kissinger lay in proving the sincerity of their promises. As both men told Zhou, they could not afford to alienate the staunchly pro-Taiwan conservative wing of the Republican Party, particularly when Nixon faced the challenge of a new presidential election

68 *Memcon, Kissinger and Zhou, "Korea, Japan, South Asia, Soviet Union, Arms Control,"* 22 October 1971, 4:15-8:28 PM, 25.

69 "China Notes," February 16, 1972, quoted in Xia, *Negotiating with the Enemy*, 205.

70 *Memorandum of Conversation, 23 February 1972, 2:00-6:00, 18.*

71 *Memcon, Kissinger and Zhou, "Korea, Japan, South Asia, Soviet Union, Arms Control,"* 12-3.

72 *Memorandum of Conversation, 23 February 1972, 2:00-6:00, 17.*

73 *Memcon, Kissinger and Zhou, "Korea, Japan, South Asia, Soviet Union, Arms Control,"* 18.

74 *Ibid.*, 14.

75 *Memcon, Kissinger and Zhou, "General Philosophy and Principles, Communique,"* 24 October 1971, 10:28-1:55 PM, 16.

76 *Memcon, Kissinger and Zhou, "UN and Indochina,"* 4:42-7:17 PM, 13, accessed February 23, 2014, <http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB70/doc12.pdf>.

77 *Ibid.*, 28.

78 *Ibid.*, 20.

the following autumn.⁷⁹ As Nixon told Zhou, “The problem here, Mr. Prime Minister, is not in what we are going to do...[but] what we are going to say about it...my record shows I always do more than I can say.”⁸⁰ He expressed the same sentiment to Mao during their sit-down: “You will find I never say something I cannot do. And I will always do more than I can say.”⁸¹ Regarding the formulation of the Taiwan issue in the communiqué, Nixon warned Zhou, “what we say here may make it impossible for me to deliver on what I can do.”⁸² In short, Nixon staked the entire negotiation process on Zhou’s willingness to believe in his sincerity.

The formulation that appeared in the final communiqué reflected Nixon’s caution. The Americans went no further than acknowledging, “all Chinese on either side of the Taiwan Strait maintain that there is but one China and that Taiwan is a part of China”; the US, the authors continued, “does not challenge that position” and it “reaffirms its interest in a peaceful settlement of the Taiwan question by the Chinese themselves.”⁸³ The authors did in fact commit the US to the withdrawal plan outlined by Kissinger to Zhou.⁸⁴ Overall, without major concessions on Taiwan, Nixon could not have hoped to bring rapprochement to fruition. Unfortunately for the Chinese and in spite of Nixon’s reassurances, the President had promised more than he could deliver on. He would be unable to achieve withdrawal, much less provide a plan for the reunification of China and Taiwan, before resigning from the presidency on August 9, 1974.⁸⁵ Given how much effort he invested in China during his first term, he likely would have done everything in his power to consolidate rapprochement had his second term been fulfilled.

Also, given how much political capital Nixon had invested in China, a deep sense of urgency and a genuine hope for the success of rapprochement impelled his promises. That same combination of urgency and hope led the Americans to endure the other side’s insults and ambivalent attitude toward the negotiations. Throughout the course of the discussions, the Americans struggled against the ide-

ology and skepticism of the CCP leaders, who remained embroiled in the tension, uncertainty, and factional rivalries unleashed by Mao’s Cultural Revolution.⁸⁶ In fact, two prominent cliques surrounding Vice Chairman Lin Biao and Mao’s wife, Jiang Qing, actively sought to undermine Zhou’s standing in the Party and oppose rapprochement; thanks to Mao’s support for Zhou, these cliques failed to alter the course of rapprochement in any significant way.⁸⁷ Mao’s strategic commitment to a “horizontal line” of defense against the Soviet Union—stretching from the Far East through Europe and to the United States—ultimately prevailed over opposition within the Party.⁸⁸ Nonetheless, the Americans still needed to overcome a fair amount of suspicion from Mao and Zhou themselves. As we have seen, Nixon and Kissinger both stressed that they would be able to do more about Taiwan than they could say in the Shanghai Communiqué, and Kissinger had promised that the US would not “maintain [its anticommunist allies] against the forces of history.”⁸⁹

While the Americans offered these subtle gestures of concession and withheld explicit criticism of Chinese policy in East Asia, the Chinese rebuked the Americans over Vietnam. Zhou refused to respond directly either way when Nixon and Kissinger asked for whatever aid China could provide in negotiating a peace with North Vietnam.⁹⁰ Additionally, Zhou severely berated the American Deputy National Security Advisor Alexander Haig—who had personally commanded an American battalion in Vietnam—when Haig visited China a month before Nixon’s arrival. The recent intensification of US bombing in Vietnam had, Zhou said, “increased the Soviet influence and tension in this area.”⁹¹ Zhou grew even more confrontational on his second day of conversations with Haig: “The self-justification by the United States is utterly untenable...your excuses will not carry

79 *Memorandum of Conversation, 22 February 1972, 2:10-6:10 PM, 6.*

80 *Ibid.*, 6.

81 United States of America, The White House, Executive Office of the President, *Richard Nixon and Mao Zedong “Memorandum of Conversation,” February 21, 1972, 2:50-3:55 PM*, ed. Ada Tseng and Melody Yuan (Los Angeles: USC US-China Institute, 2012), 9, accessed February 27, 2014, US-China Relations.

82 *Ibid.*

83 United States of America, Department of State, Office of the Historian, *Joint Statement Following Discussions With Leaders of the People’s Republic of China* (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 2010), accessed February 23, 2014, <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v17/d203>.

84 *Ibid.*

85 MacMillan, *Nixon and Mao*, 337.

86 Jie Li, “China’s Domestic Politics and the Normalization of Sino-U.S. Relations, 1969-1979,” in *Normalization of U.S.-China Relations: An International History*, ed. William C. Kirby, Robert S. Ross, and Gong Li (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2005), 56.

87 *Ibid.*, 61-63.

88 Zhongchun Wang, “The Soviet Factor in Sino-America Normalization, 1969-1979,” in *Normalization of U.S.-China Relations: An International History*, ed. William C. Kirby, Robert S. Ross, and Gong Li (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2005), 156.

89 *Memcon, Kissinger and Zhou, “General Philosophy and Principles, Communiqué,” 15.*

90 *Memorandum of Conversation, 22 February 1972, 2:10-6:10 PM, 27.*

91 United States of America, The White House, Executive Office of the President, *Memcon, Haig and Zhou, 3 January 1972, Midnight, Great Hall of the People, Top Secret/Sensitive/ Exclusively Eyes Only*, ed. William Burr (Washington, D.C.: National Security Archive, 2002), 14, accessed February 27, 2014, <http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB70/doc24.pdf>.

over with the people of the world”; moreover, he explained to Haig that the PRC would be satisfied only by a complete American withdrawal from Indochina.⁹² He had intimated this demand to Kissinger in a biting tone back in October: If the US failed to negotiate a final withdrawal date, he said, “It will be detrimental to the President’s visit to China.”⁹³ Zhou’s sense of indignant self-righteousness would be compounded by his later threat regarding the Taiwan issue: “If it is not solved, there is no possibility of the normalization of relations.”⁹⁴ Zhou openly expressed his ambivalence toward the negotiations when he stated to American reporters that everything would be fine whether or not rapprochement succeeded.⁹⁵ After hearing this statement, Kissinger told Zhou, “We do not agree fully because we think it is in the interest of humanity for [rapprochement] to succeed. But our interest must be mutual.”⁹⁶ Zhou replied, “I did not say it would be good or fine if it failed... You have to be prepared for [failure].”⁹⁷ Overall, this brief exchange captured the conflict between the American leaders’ ardent desire to realize the partnership and the Chinese leaders’ skepticism of it. This skepticism likely intensified the Americans’ effort to prove their sincerity, in part by tolerating harsh criticism.

No one exemplified Chinese ambivalence toward rapprochement more than Mao. His attitude indicated that rapprochement was hardly a foregone conclusion; rather, its success depended fully upon the lengths to which Nixon was willing to go in making promises on Taiwan. This was especially true given that Zhou, the major Chinese architect of rapprochement, was unwavering in his loyalty to Mao.⁹⁸ The Chairman expressed disdain for Nixon in his private discussions with Zhou. For him, the Americans needed the Sino-American partnership more badly than did the Chinese—presumably because of the declining American position amid the turmoil of Vietnam—and he thus exercised less diplomatic restraint than his Premier; Zhou was always the far more tactful diplomat. When Zhou relayed Nixon’s concern about pro-Taiwan forces in the US Congress, Mao scoffed, “Nixon can’t even be the leader of the US. How can

he talk about being a world leader?”⁹⁹ Further, Mao fully endorsed Zhou’s verbal attack on Alexander Haig. After Zhou presented Mao with a draft of his response to Haig, Mao said, “Good. I think we can tell him this...the worst thing that could happen would be that the visit is cancelled... In my opinion, in a few years [Nixon] will come after all.”¹⁰⁰

In short, Mao simply did not care if the Americans, alienated by insults and remonstrations, terminated negotiations with the PRC. He viewed them as too vulnerable to abandon the negotiations. His attitude contradicted Kissinger’s assessment, in a letter to Nixon, that the Chinese side “needs the visit as much as we do.”¹⁰¹ In general, Mao refused to yield on the PRC’s commitment to world revolution. His influence on the Chinese statement in the final Shanghai Communiqué reflected this ideological rigidity. Zhou, in a meeting with Kissinger, had offered to temper the Marxist language of the Chinese section by changing the phrase “the people want revolution” to “the people want progress”; Kissinger instantly acceded to this revision, seemingly with relief.¹⁰² Nonetheless, Mao later commanded Zhou to undo the revision: “Revolution is exactly what [the Americans] fear. The more they fear it, the more we need to mention it.”¹⁰³ In the end, Mao’s wish prevailed. The Chinese section of the final communiqué, which the US and the PRC jointly proclaimed to the world, declared, “Wherever there is oppression, there is resistance...the people want revolution.”¹⁰⁴ The Americans, having gambled such an extraordinary amount of political capital on China, endured the Marxist dogma. They did their best to satisfy the Chinese on Taiwan and the language of the communiqué; in the process, they betrayed the urgency of their need for a diplomatic victory in China.

92 United States of America, The White House, Executive Office of the President, *Memcon, Haig and Zhou, 7 January 1972, 11:45 PM, Great Hall of the People, Top Secret/Sensitive/ Exclusively Eyes Only*, ed. William Burr (Washington, D.C.: National Security Archive, 2002), 3-10, accessed February 27, 2014, <http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB70/doc25.pdf>.

93 *Memcon, Kissinger and Zhou, “UN and Indochina,” 4:42-7:17 PM, 11.*

94 *Memcon, Kissinger and Zhou, “General Philosophy and Principles, Communique,” 24 October 1971, 10:28-1:55 PM, 22.*

95 *Ibid.*, 20.

96 *Ibid.*

97 *Ibid.*

98 Li, “China’s Domestic Politics and the Normalization of Sino-US Relations, 1969-1979,” 61.

99 People’s Republic of China, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Diplomatic History Institute, *Haig’s Preparatory Mission for Nixon’s Visit to China in January 1972*, trans. Zhao Han, ed. William Burr (Washington, D.C.: National Security Archive, 2002), 8, accessed February 27, 2014, <http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB70/doc26.pdf>.

100 *Ibid.*

101 United States of America, The White House, Executive Office of the President, *Kissinger to Nixon, “My October China Visit: Discussions of the Issues,” 11 November [1971] Top Secret/ Sensitive/ Exclusively Eyes Only*, by Henry A. Kissinger, ed. William Burr (Washington, D.C.: National Security Archive, 2002), 13, accessed February 27, 2014, <http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB70/doc20.pdf>.

102 United States of America, The White House, Executive Office of the President, *Memcon, Kissinger and Zhou, “Communique,” 25 October 1971, 9:50-11:40 PM, Top Secret/Sensitive/ Exclusively Eyes Only*, ed. William Burr (Washington, D.C.: National Security Archive, 2002), 8-9, accessed February 27, 2014, <http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB70/doc18.pdf>.

103 *Haig’s Preparatory Mission for Nixon’s Visit to China in January 1972*, 8.

104 *Joint Statement Following Discussions With Leaders of the People’s Republic of China*, 2.

Overall, rapprochement emanated from hardheaded realism. The policy rested on Nixon's conviction that peace in the Pacific would be the necessary first step toward peace in the world. The PRC, as the world's most populous nation and a future nuclear power, played an indispensable role in this vision. The Sino-Soviet split and China's subsequent international isolation, as well as the mutual friendship with Pakistan, had laid the basis for contact. Nixon and Kissinger believed that they could convince the Chinese of rapprochement's potential benefit for the PRC, specifically a chance to gain concessions on Taiwan. For both the Americans and the Chinese, rapprochement provided a new partner in the global struggle against the Soviet Union, though neither side viewed the policy as an offensive gambit against the USSR. Instead of tackling the Soviet problem directly, the US and the PRC hoped to work immediately to resolve tension in Asia-Pacific. This resolution of tension would, they believed, contain Soviet expansionism in the long term. Further, the US sought with great urgency to establish Sino-American relations in order to gain an advantage in extricating itself from Vietnam. Hence, Nixon flew 7,000 miles to broker a deal with the CCP leadership.

Given the significance of the USSR in Sino-American discussions—as we have seen—and the significance of China in Soviet-American discussions—as we will see soon—neither rapprochement nor détente can be viewed in isolation from the other. On the contrary, détente factored indispensably into the strategic rationale for rapprochement; one could also say the reverse. Though Nixon and Kissinger intentionally aroused Soviet fear via their pivot toward China, they counted on that fear to accelerate the progress of Soviet-American talks on nuclear arms control and various other issues. Both rapprochement and détente were chock-full of paradoxes, as was the fact of their simultaneity. The former entailed the US's moving toward China while staying close to “old friends” whom China regarded as deadly enemies. Détente involved bilateral negotiations with a rival superpower that Nixon wished to contain. The US needed to convey to China that, although it was pursuing negotiations with the USSR, it was serious about the Sino-American partnership. It likewise needed to convey to the Soviet Union that, although it was pursuing a Sino-American partnership, it was serious about pursuing SALT and other bilateral negotiations. The remainder of this essay will explain how and why the Nixon administration walked this diplomatic tightrope as well as assess the efficacy of its performance.

Although the progress of rapprochement in 1971 and 1972—from Kissinger's visit in July to Nixon's visit the following February—represented a great diplomatic achievement for the administration, it also threatened the viability of détente. I shall argue that Nixon not only made rapprochement compatible with détente but also drew on the former to energize the latter. To this end, I shall discuss the American effort to assuage Soviet suspicion over rap-

prochement, which did not stop Nixon and Kissinger from occasionally playing the “China card” in their discussions with Soviet leaders.¹⁰⁵ They further undermined the USSR's bargaining position within the US-PRC-USSR triangle by creating an asymmetry of information between the PRC and the USSR. In short, they told the Chinese more about détente than they told the Soviets about rapprochement. Even so, they needed to continuously declare to the Chinese that they valued rapprochement over détente. When Nixon became president in 1969, he had already visited the USSR and spoken with Soviet leaders on three separate occasions, once as Vice President and twice as a private citizen. On the basis of this experience, he believed that—while the Soviet Union had largely closed the gap between the two superpowers' military arsenals—the US remained in a strong bargaining position vis-à-vis the Soviets, if only the two could be brought to negotiate with one another on major issues.¹⁰⁶

After July 15, 1971—the date on which he announced his China trip—the difficulty for him consisted in reconciling Sino-American negotiations with Soviet-American ones. The announcement could have been fraught with fatal implications for détente. After all, hostility between the two Communist powers, rooted in their ideological dispute and diplomatic rupture in the early 1960s, ran deep. It started as a series of rhetorical attacks during the time of Nikita Khrushchev's leadership in Moscow. Each country considered the other to be “revisionist” or not truly Marxist-Leninist. What had begun as merely a rhetorical battle eventually became a physical one. Chinese and Soviet military units patrolling the border between the two countries sporadically attacked one another from March to September 1969 before the two sides negotiated a truce.¹⁰⁷ Lingering hostility nonetheless posed an obstacle to Nixon's effort to improve relations with both countries simultaneously.

Moreover, just as there was disagreement within the Chinese Politburo over the merits of rapprochement, there was also disagreement within the Soviet Politburo over détente. Leonid Brezhnev, General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), found himself defending the policy before his colleagues at the 24th Soviet Party Congress on March 30, 1971 and a CPSU Central Committee meeting on May 19, 1972. During the latter, he argued that détente was the best means for the USSR to circumvent the threat of Sino-American rapprochement.¹⁰⁸ This assertion by Brezhnev encapsulates the overall argument of this section: Nixon and Kissinger, in pursuing the China initiative,

105 Kissinger used the term “China card” as shorthand for the leverage that China conferred on the US in its dealings with the Soviet Union, and historians have adopted the term. Kissinger, *White House Years*, 763; MacMillan, *Nixon and Mao*, 338.

106 Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation*, 29.

107 Ibid., 228.

108 Vitaly Kozyrev, “Soviet Policy Toward the United States and China, 1969-1979,” 264.

provided an enormous incentive for the Soviets to quicken the pace of détente. As we will see, the prospect of greater Soviet-American trade and of a European security conference, which would guarantee the USSR's hold on Eastern Europe, served as positive incentives or carrots that balanced out the prospective stick of a Sino-American alliance. The Soviets' response to this maneuvering proved to be one of the greatest political dividends of rapprochement. They did indeed quicken the pace of détente after Nixon announced his China trip, thereby playing directly into Nixon and Kissinger's game of *Realpolitik*. Though the Soviets were more or less following a path laid out for them by the Americans, the logic was sound on their end. After all, if mutual fear and suspicion between the US and USSR could be drastically reduced, the US would have much less of an incentive to develop its partnership with China. The Americans skillfully manipulated the Soviets into trying to manipulate US policy according to this logic. In short, the success of the Moscow summit in May 1972 constituted one of the major political victories of the Nixon administration and one of the most tangible payoffs of rapprochement, though not the only one. While the Soviets accelerated détente, the Chinese exerted some influence on North Vietnam to pursue peace negotiations with the US. This phenomenon will be included in my discussion of triangular diplomacy's successful results.

In order for this whole ploy to work, the Nixon administration had to prevent Moscow from reading the China announcement as a call to arms. Given the depth of Soviet animus toward the PRC and its friends, Nixon defended rapprochement to the Soviet leadership almost two years before rapprochement had even begun in earnest. He informed the Soviet Ambassador to the US, Anatoly Dobrynin, in October 1969 that he was interested in reestablishing Sino-American relations. He insisted that this interest did not imply an anti-Soviet stratagem: "I can reaffirm that the U.S. Government is not trying to take advantage of Sino-Soviet differences and it will not do anything in this area that might be perceived in the Soviet Union as an attempt to cause it harm."¹⁰⁹ The rationale he offered Dobrynin reiterated the *Realpolitik* pragmatism of his 1967 *Foreign Affairs* article on China. As he told the ambassador, the Chinese would have nuclear weapons in 10 years and would thus "pose a serious threat to both of our countries."¹¹⁰ Calling China "[t]he main beneficiary of Soviet-U.S. disagreements," Nixon urged the Soviets to work with America to create "the conditions for international peace, for peace on the Asian continent, after the Vietnam War—a peace in which China would also find a worthy place for itself."¹¹¹ If the Vietnam War ended, he

claimed, he would "be able to take dramatic steps to improve and develop Soviet-U.S. relations."¹¹² By linking China to the Vietnam issue and requesting Soviet help in Vietnam in such frank terms, Nixon had already begun to employ the "China card," even though rapprochement had not yet become a diplomatic reality. By introducing the possibility of a warming of relations between the US and China, he sought to offset a drastic Soviet response to the realization of that possibility in the future. In all likelihood, he also wanted to test the efficacy of triangular diplomacy before committing to it.

By tipping off Brezhnev and the Soviet Politburo about the China initiative, Nixon laid the foundation upon which Kissinger could effectively employ the "China card" in negotiations leading up to the Soviet-American summit in Moscow. Thanks to Nixon's move, Brezhnev and Dobrynin could not pretend to have been oblivious to the possibility of a Sino-American rapprochement. Further, given their record as fickle, querulous diplomats, they were also less likely to be able to fault the US for using China as leverage at the negotiation table.¹¹³ At any rate, they still reacted to Nixon's announcement of his China trip with deep resentment and suspicion. Kissinger noted that, during his first meeting with Dobrynin afterward, he found the ambassador "at his oily best, and for the first time in my experience with him, totally insecure."¹¹⁴ Kissinger, reminding Dobrynin that Nixon had desired a summit in Moscow long before he ever envisioned one in Beijing, criticized the Soviets' "grudging and petty" responses to American diplomatic overtures.¹¹⁵ Had the USSR taken the summit request seriously, the Americans "would have stalled a Chinese summit until much later."¹¹⁶ Dobrynin retorted that the Soviet leaders genuinely wanted a summit, but it may not be possible now that the President was going to Beijing. He asked if it might still be possible for Nixon to come to Moscow before Beijing, and Kissinger refused.¹¹⁷ Later, I shall revisit the hard bargaining tactics that preceded the Moscow summit. Here, it is important to note that Kissinger had begun combining a conciliatory tone with his passive-aggressive employment of the China card.

Soviet government documents help to corroborate the success of Nixon and Kissinger's strategic game. In short, Dobrynin, Brezhnev, and the Politburo agonized over rapprochement every bit as much as the Americans wanted them

109 United States of America, Department of State, Office of the Historian, *Memorandum of Conversation (USSR) - October 20, 1969*, by Anatoly Dobrynin (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 2007), 93.

110 Ibid.

111 Ibid.

112 Ibid., 96.

113 Kissinger provides many concrete examples of discrepancies between Soviet diplomatic assurances and Soviet actions. See, for example, *White House Years*, 874.

114 United States of America, Department of State, Office of the Historian, *Memorandum of Conversation (U.S.) - July 19, 1971*, by Henry A. Kissinger (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 2007), 404.

115 Ibid.

116 Ibid., 405.

117 Ibid., 404.

to. A few days after the China announcement, Dobrynin sent a telegram to the Soviet Foreign Ministry, analyzing the US's diplomatic gambit and how the USSR should respond. He wrote that Nixon "is evidently hoping that the Chinese will help him escape from this quagmire [the Vietnam War] 'with his dignity intact,' which can secure him a victory in the elections."¹¹⁸ Dobrynin recommended passive resistance rather than an outright condemnation of rapprochement. The USSR, he argued, "should draw the attention of world public opinion to issues and facts that cast the motives and the actions of the two governments in a far from positive light."¹¹⁹ Continuing with this theme of vague subversion, he also suggested that the Soviets "gradually highlight everything that continues to stand between the U.S. and the PRC and hinders their rapprochement, particularly those issues that are antagonistic to us."¹²⁰ The flaccidness of these prescriptions reveals the weakened position that the USSR found itself in. On the question of what could be done to counteract rapprochement by way of confrontation, the answer was clear in Dobrynin's telegram: nothing at all, short of a nuclear confrontation. Evidently, the Politburo leaders recognized their own state of impotence. It would lead them to embrace the only legitimate option: increase the pace of détente, and hope that more détente would translate for the US into a less urgent need of rapprochement.

The American side, while plainly drawing on the USSR's fear of the PRC, was careful to temper this tactic of intimidation. Nixon and Kissinger recognized the delicate nature of their game. The China card could incite the Soviets to accelerate détente, but it could also alienate the USSR if overplayed. As Kissinger later argued in one of his memoirs:

Triangular diplomacy, to be effective, must rely on the natural incentives and propensities of the players. It must avoid the impression that one is "using" either of the contenders against the other; otherwise one becomes vulnerable to retaliation or blackmail. The hostility between China and the Soviet Union only served our purposes best if we maintained closer relations with each side than they did with each other.¹²¹

He and Nixon more or less followed this prescription of dealing minimal offense to both the Soviets and the Chinese. Kissinger, while criticizing Soviet behavior during his July 19 meeting with Dobrynin, also reassured Dobrynin that "he had no conversations, and was having none, with

the Chinese that affected the Soviet Union's interests in any way."¹²² Nixon made his own effort to assuage Soviet suspicion. He wrote a letter to General Secretary Brezhnev, declaring that his maneuvers in China "[had] no hidden motives" and "[were] not aimed at any third country, including, specifically, the Soviet Union."¹²³ Rather, they were aimed at "end[ing] the hostility that has unfortunately existed between the United States and the mainland of China for over twenty years and to lay the basis for relations which will be mutually beneficial and contribute to peace and stability in Asia and the world as a whole..."¹²⁴

This declaration paralleled Kissinger's reassurances to Dobrynin. Both emphasized the pragmatic design of rapprochement and denied the possibility of its being motivated by a desire to hurt the Soviet Union. Similar reassurances would be made following Kissinger's second trip to China in October 1971 and Nixon and Kissinger's famous trip in February 1972.¹²⁵ Nixon suggested to Brezhnev—as he had to Dobrynin—the capability of the USSR to offset the effects of rapprochement by helping the US in Vietnam: "I would hope that the Soviet Union would exercise its influence to achieve peace in that area of the world. Such an action would give great impetus to the policies of reconciliation that we intend to pursue."¹²⁶ An "impetus to the policies of reconciliation" likely included a check on Sino-American relations. In other words, the Americans would not move too close to China if the Soviets would be willing to use their influence over North Vietnam for the US's benefit. Helping the US with respect to Vietnam could serve—according to the subtext of Nixon's statement—as a way for the USSR to prove its sincere commitment to détente as a whole. In short, the administration's rhetorical use of the PRC inhered even in its reassurances to the Soviets.

Kissinger would in fact make far more direct use of the China card in his discussions with Dobrynin. The transcripts of their talks indicate that Kissinger knew how to do so without playing China too hard and too often. For exam-

118 United States of America, Department of State, Office of the Historian, *Telegram From Ambassador Dobrynin to the Soviet Foreign Ministry - July 22, 1971*, by Anatoly Dobrynin (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 2007), 413.

119 Ibid., 414.

120 Ibid.

121 Kissinger, *White House Years*, 712.

122 United States of America, Department of State, Office of the Historian, *Memorandum of Conversation (USSR) - July 19, 1971*, by Anatoly Dobrynin (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 2007), 409.

123 United States of America, Department of State, Office of the Historian, *Letter from President Nixon to General Secretary Brezhnev - August 5, 1971*, by Richard M. Nixon (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 2007), 424.

124 Ibid.

125 United States of America, Department of State, Office of the Historian, *Memorandum of Conversation (USSR) - October 31, 1971*, by Anatoly Dobrynin (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 2007), 508; United States of America, Department of State, Office of the Historian, *Memorandum of Conversation (U.S.) - March 9, 1972*, by Henry A. Kissinger (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 2007), 607.

126 *Nixon to Brezhnev*, 425.

ple, shortly after returning from his October trip to Beijing, he reassured Dobrynin that, if the Moscow summit proved to be a success, the US would limit its diplomatic and military agreements with China to matters impacting only the US and China.¹²⁷ This is perhaps the most overt example of the China card in play. After Nixon's PRC trip, Kissinger was careful to remind Dobrynin of the diplomatic concessions that might accrue to the Soviets if they simply stayed the course of détente. In particular, he mentioned two items that the Soviets wanted badly: increased trade with the US and the convening of a European security conference, which would reaffirm Soviet domination of Eastern Europe.¹²⁸ As Kissinger had told Dobrynin before Nixon's trip to China, "The danger now was the more intransigent the Soviet Union was, the more we would respond by compensating moves toward Communist China; it was therefore important that we get our relationships on a sensible basis."¹²⁹ This statement embodies the strategic interplay of rapprochement and détente. The Americans, by introducing the possibility—however remote—of a US-PRC alliance, amplified the importance of stable Soviet-American relations. A falling-out between the two superpowers would now entail a much greater risk of escalation. If Kissinger used trade and a European security conference as potential carrots, then he also sought to make the Soviets perceive the Sino-American relationship as a potential stick. He of course knew that the Sino-American partnership was far from a genuine alliance.

The success of triangular diplomacy derived in part from an asymmetry of information between the USSR and PRC, which resulted from the US's tendency to privilege the latter when it came to sharing information on the other Communist power. Kissinger initiated the US's double standard: its tendency to provide the Chinese with privileged intelligence on the Soviets while refusing to provide the Soviets with comparable intelligence on the Chinese.¹³⁰ As we have seen, he promised in a discussion with Huang Zhen to keep the Chinese thoroughly informed of any and all developments in Soviet-American relations.¹³¹ The Soviets suspected this ploy to ingratiate the Chinese by offering intelligence on the USSR. Kissinger—in response to an accusation to this ef-

fect from Dobrynin—told the Soviet ambassador, "Anatoly, do you think I would be this amateurish, and do you think that the military dispositions along the Sino-Soviet border could be of any precise concern to us?"¹³² As we have seen, during Nixon's China trip, Kissinger provided the Chinese military with an extensive report on the Soviet military presence along the border.¹³³ After the trip, Dobrynin reported to Kissinger that the Chinese had alerted the Soviet government to similar information sharing that had occurred in October 1971. Kissinger fervently denied that he had given PRC leaders a report on Soviet forces on the border, calling the accusation a "pure provocation" by the CCP.¹³⁴ If the Soviets did learn of the Americans' information-sharing proclivity from the Chinese, the latter were evidently putting the American commitment to rapprochement to the test.

To understand why the Chinese would take such an action, one must consider the shift of the Nixon administration's focus from the PRC to the USSR after the China trip. Rapprochement alarmed the Soviets, but the continued progress of détente alarmed the Chinese; suspicion ran in both directions along the triangle. To address China's fear of Soviet-American maneuvers, Kissinger cleverly introduced the notion of "formal symmetry" to his Chinese interlocutors. He did so presumably in order to avert Chinese suspicion regarding the increasing success of détente. As he told Huang Hua, Chinese Ambassador to the United Nations, in August 1972, "In order to have a plausible basis and in order to avoid giving the Soviet Union the pretense of claiming that they are being encircled, we want to do enough with the Soviet Union to maintain a formal symmetry."¹³⁵ In other words, the US needed to pursue détente with the USSR in order to avoid a direct confrontation between the Soviet bloc and the US-PRC partnership. Here, Kissinger employed his rhetorical skill so that he could in the future proceed with

127 *Memorandum of Conversation (USSR) - October 31, 1971*, 508. United States of America, Department of State, Office of the Historian, *Memorandum of Conversation (U.S.) - March 9, 1972*, by Henry A. Kissinger (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 2007), 607.

128 United States of America, Department of State, Office of the Historian, *Memorandum of Conversation (USSR) - March 1, 1972*, by Anatoly Dobrynin (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 2007), 598. This conference would in fact take place in Helsinki, Finland during Gerald Ford's presidency.

129 *Memorandum of Conversation (U.S.) - January 21, 1972*, 561.

130 Bundy uses the term "double standard" in this connection. See *A Tangled Web*, 411.

131 *Memcon of Kissinger-Huang Zhen Meeting, 16 August 1971*, 4.

132 United States of America, The White House, Executive Office of the President, *Memcon by Kissinger of Meeting with Dobrynin, 17 August 1971, Top Secret/Sensitive/Exclusively Eyes Only*, ed. William Burr, by Henry A. Kissinger (Washington, D.C.: National Security Archive, 2002), 2, accessed June 11, 2014, <http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB70/doc23.pdf>.

133 United States of America, The White House, Executive Office of the President, *Memorandum of Conversation, 23 February 1972, 9:35-12:34 PM* (Washington, D.C.: National Security Archive, 2003), 5, accessed February 23, 2014, <http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB106/NZ-4.pdf>.

134 United States of America, Department of State, Office of the Historian, *Memorandum of Conversation (USSR) - March 9, 1972*, by Anatoly Dobrynin (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 2007), 611.

135 United States of America, Department of State, Office of the Historian, *Foreign Relations, 1969-1976, Volume E-13, Documents on China, 1969-1972*, by Winston Lord, accessed November 25, 2014, <http://2001-2009.state.gov/r/pa/ho/frus/nixon/e13/72605.htm>.

constructive Soviet-American negotiations, without damaging the US-PRC entente.¹³⁶

While triangular diplomacy may have been more fallible in reality than it was in the minds of Nixon and Kissinger, the policy did produce diplomatic advantages, which translated for the administration into domestic political gain. Kissinger visited China in February 1973 to ensure the continuing progression of Sino-American relations.¹³⁷ Given that Nixon had visited both Beijing and Moscow within the span of three months in 1972, triangular diplomacy could be said to have reached its zenith. On March 2, 1973, Kissinger wrote to the president:

To date the Soviet factor has been the main leverage in our dealings with the PRC. At the same time... our opening to Peking has paid us substantial dividends with Moscow... Peking, after all, assuming continued hostility with the USSR, has no real alternative to us as a counterweight (despite its recent reaching out to Japan and Western Europe as insurance). And Moscow needs us in such areas as Europe and economics.¹³⁸

Both relationships produced dividends. Significantly, the Chinese did exert some pressure on North Vietnam to pursue negotiations with Washington. Zhou Enlai traveled to Hanoi in March 1972 to discuss Sino-American relations with Lê Duân, who served as General Secretary of the Communist Party of Vietnam. Zhou, noting that Mao had changed his position on the US-North Vietnam peace talks—that is, the Chairman now approved of such talks—told his Vietnamese comrade, “if the problem of Indochina is not solved, it will be impossible to realize the normalization of China-U.S. relations.”¹³⁹ Given that the PRC had just hosted President Nixon and released a joint communiqué with the US, China had already committed itself to the path to normalized relations. Thus, Zhou’s statement could be read as a tacit demand that his Vietnamese comrades engage

in genuine talks with the Americans, in order to prevent the Vietnam War from impeding the US-PRC partnership. Lê Duân recognized the implications of China’s new relationship with the US. As he told Zhou, “Now that Nixon has talked with you, they will soon hit us even harder.”¹⁴⁰ Overall, Zhou’s decision to exert indirect pressure on the North Vietnamese indicated the efficacy of triangular diplomacy, especially given that Vietnam so greatly preoccupied Nixon when he visited Beijing.

On the Soviet-American side, the most tangible payoff of triangular diplomacy consisted in the Moscow summit of May 1972. Prior to the announcement of Nixon’s China trip, the Soviets had met the president’s request for a summit meeting with evasion and vacillation. For example, after Kissinger had urged Ambassador Dobrynin to respond to a summit invitation by no later than July 1, 1971, Dobrynin failed to deliver an official response before July 5. When Dobrynin did reply, he proposed a summit in November or December 1971. To Kissinger, this was “in effect a rejection” because he had already said that those months would be highly inconvenient for President Nixon’s schedule.¹⁴¹ However, the Soviets became drastically more accommodating after the China trip announcement, which is a crucial point in my overall argument that détente’s successes derived heavily from rapprochement. As we have seen, Dobrynin asked—a few days after the announcement—that Nixon come to Moscow before going to Beijing, a request that Kissinger refused.¹⁴² In spite of this rejection, Dobrynin quickly offered the more practical alternative of a summit that would take place in April or May 1972.¹⁴³ The actual summit would in fact occur on May 22–30, 1972. Nixon’s China trip had happened only three months earlier: February 21–28. The productivity of the Sino-American trip undoubtedly motivated Brezhnev and the Politburo to do real business with the US when their opportunity arrived.¹⁴⁴ As we will see, they did work hard to ensure the productivity of their summit with Nixon. The President had successfully lured them to the bargaining table, and China helped ensure that they had actually come there to bargain and not to bicker.

136 Here, I relied on Goh for context and the precise interpretation of the term “formal symmetry.” See Goh, *Constructing the U.S. Rapprochement with China*, 233.

137 United States of America, Department of State, Office of the Historian, *Memorandum From the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon*, by Henry A. Kissinger (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 2010), accessed January 17, 2015, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v18/d18>.

138 Ibid.

139 Yun Shui, *Chushi Qigou Jishi: Jiangjun Dashi Wang Youping (Diplomatic Missions to Seven Countries: The General-ambassador Wang Youping)* (Beijing: Shijie Zhishi Chubanshe, 1996), 139, quoted in Li Danhui, “Vietnam and Chinese Policy Toward the United States,” in *Normalization of U.S.-China Relations: An International History*, ed. William C. Kirby, Robert S. Ross, and Gong Li (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2005), 198.

140 Ibid., 138.

141 *Memorandum of Conversation (U.S.) - July 19, 1971*, 404.

142 Ibid.

143 United States of America, Department of State, Office of the Historian, *Memorandum of Conversation (USSR) - July 19, 1971*, by Anatoly Dobrynin (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 2007), 406.

144 Here, I am echoing Kissinger, who had written to the President on September 29, 1971: “There is no doubt that our China policy has provided an additional incentive for Brezhnev to demonstrate that he, too, can do business with the US, and that your visit to Peking is not, in fact, a setback to his policies.” United States of America, Department of State, Office of the Historian, *Memorandum From Presidential Assistant Kissinger to President Nixon*, by Henry A. Kissinger (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 2007), 455.

Indeed, even before the Beijing summit, substantive negotiations between the US and USSR became more fruitful. Within two months of the China trip announcement, the US and the USSR, along with France and the United Kingdom, signed the Quadripartite Agreement on Berlin.¹⁴⁵ Originally signed on September 3, 1971 and entering into effect on June 3, 1972, the agreement reaffirmed the post-war division of Berlin and contained a Soviet promise that the German Democratic Republic (GDR) would not disrupt traffic between the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) and Berlin's Western Sectors.¹⁴⁶ Some scholars have linked this event to the advent of triangular diplomacy, although US officials including Ambassador Kenneth Rush considered FRG Chancellor Willy Brandt's policy of *Ostpolitik* to be the primary impetus to the agreement.¹⁴⁷ While *Ostpolitik* underlay the atmosphere of conciliation that made the agreement possible, the settlement must also be seen within the context of accelerating Soviet-American negotiations after Nixon's China announcement. In other words, *Ostpolitik* and Sino-American rapprochement were likely both important factors behind the settlement.

Though this was an extraordinary breakthrough, the Moscow summit produced the most important legacy of Soviet-American negotiations under Nixon. In March 1972, Dobrynin sent an urgent telegram to the Soviet Foreign Ministry, arguing that the summit "takes on special significance" in light of the US-PRC talks that had just occurred in Beijing.¹⁴⁸ In other words, the Soviet leadership needed to engage in productive negotiations with the Americans if they wanted to prevent the new Sino-American partnership from becoming a genuine threat to the USSR. As I noted at the outset of this section, Brezhnev made the same point to skeptics of détente within the Soviet Communist Party.¹⁴⁹ The actual results of the summit would demonstrate the earnestness of both sides to reach a concrete agreement on major bilateral issues. In particular, Nixon and Brezhnev signed

two separate agreements on the limitation of anti-ballistic missiles and other armaments, thereby concluding the process known as SALT I.¹⁵⁰

Like Nixon's China trip, the Soviet-American summit also produced a joint statement of principles paralleling the Shanghai Communiqué. The "Basic Principles of Mutual Relations between the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics" formalized both countries' commitment to avoiding war, limiting armaments, and maintaining commercial as well as cultural ties.¹⁵¹ The document included a declaration that "The development of U.S.-Soviet relations is not directed against third countries and their interests."¹⁵² This statement suggested that, while Nixon had striven to ameliorate Soviet suspicion before, during, and after his China trip, he was equally mindful of Chinese suspicion stemming from his USSR trip. Beyond the SALT agreements and the "Basic Principles" communiqué, the summit produced subordinate agreements on the avoidance of sea and airspace encounters and broader cooperation on science, technology, education, health, and the environment.¹⁵³ Unsurprisingly, scholars view the summit as the high point of détente under Nixon.¹⁵⁴

These international successes had important domestic repercussions, which must be included in the dividends of triangular policy for the Nixon administration. Specifically, the Beijing and Moscow summits strengthened Nixon's position heading into the 1972 election. His Gallup poll ratings hardly rose above 50 percent at any time from May through December 1971. However, between January and March 1972—the months surrounding his China trip—the figure increased from 49 to 55 percent. In May, the month of the Moscow summit, it reached 62 percent and stood at

145 United Nations, Treaty Series, *German History in Documents and Images*, accessed January 19, 2015, http://ghdi.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=77.

146 Ibid.

147 Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation*, 277; Jussi M. Hanhimäki, *The Rise and Fall of Détente: American Foreign Policy and the Transformation of the Cold War*, Issues in the History of American Foreign Relations (Dulles: Potomac Books, 2013), 53; Bundy, *A Tangled Web*, 251.

148 United States of America, Department of State, Office of the Historian, *Telegram From Ambassador Dobrynin to the Soviet Foreign Ministry - March 8, 1972*, by Anatoly Dobrynin (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 2007), 604.

149 L. I. Brezhnev, "Report on the International Situation to the Plenary Meeting of the Central Committee of the CPSU, Apr. 26-27, 1973," Russian State Archive of Contemporary History, Fond, 2, Inventory 3, File no. 292, 33, quoted in Kozyrev, "Soviet Policy Toward the United States and China," 264.

150 United States of America, Department of State, Bureau of International Security and Nonproliferation, *Treaty between the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics on the Limitation of Anti-Ballistic Missile Systems*, section goes here, accessed January 19, 2015, <http://www.state.gov/www/global/arms/treaties/abm/abm2.html>; United States of America, Department of State, Bureau of International Security and Nonproliferation, *Interim Agreement Between The United States of America and The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics on Certain Measures With Respect to the Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms*, accessed January 19, 2015, <http://www.state.gov/t/isn/4795.htm>.

151 United States of America, Department of State, Office of the Historian, *Text of the "Basic Principles of Relations Between the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics"*, accessed January 19, 2015, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=3438>.

152 Ibid.

153 Bundy, *A Tangled Web*, 323.

154 Ibid., 327; Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger*, 408; Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation*, 359; Hanhimäki, *The Rise and Fall of Détente*, 58.

58 percent immediately preceding the election.¹⁵⁵ In the election, Nixon scored a victory over his Democratic opponent George McGovern by a comfortable margin of 61 to 38 percent.¹⁵⁶ On the whole, the numbers indicate that Nixon's foreign policy initiatives helped him overcome domestic political troubles.

Ultimately, Nixon and Kissinger took two foreign policies initiatives that should have invalidated one another, and they managed to harmonize them. They were able to do so by declaring to Dobrynin, Brezhnev, and the Soviet Politburo that rapprochement was not in any way directed against the Soviet Union. As I argued in the first part of this essay, the US-PRC partnership was designed to contain the Soviet Union by resolving tension in Asia-Pacific and thereby indirectly checking Soviet expansion into that region. The Soviets, however, were ignorant of the precise form and substance of the Sino-American partnership. For all they knew, a formal alliance could emerge in the future. Nixon and Kissinger skillfully exploited this fear in order to create a synergy between rapprochement and détente. The Soviets played into their hand by accelerating détente after Nixon's China trip announcement. Overall, the success of the Moscow summit in 1972 was a product of Nixon's success in Beijing, and it helped him prevail over George McGovern in a landslide electoral victory.

One can easily draw a connection between Nixon's successes abroad and his domestic resurgence. In the long run, however, the effects of rapprochement and détente extended far beyond Nixon's reelection. They left a profound mark on the Cold War order and brought the age of bipolarity to a close. The US's move toward China constituted a de facto recognition of China as a third pole of world politics. The unprecedented catastrophe that was the Vietnam War motivated Nixon to fly to Beijing and offer dramatic concessions on Taiwan. Although the 1973 peace in Vietnam would soon collapse and Nixon would not deliver on his Taiwan promises, the US and China seemed in 1972 to have secured great diplomatic advantages by way of their partnership.¹⁵⁷ Rapprochement served as an attempt to both resolve violent conflict in Asia-Pacific and to check Soviet expansion into that region. The policy brought an end to over twenty years of open hostility between the US and the PRC and drastically reduced the chances that American and Chinese soldiers would ever meet again on the field of battle. At the

same time, rapprochement helped to galvanize the progress of détente, which had produced little in the way of concrete results prior to the China trip announcement. Advancing détente, then, was yet another objective in the strategic rationale for rapprochement. The former encouraged the Chinese to move closer to the US, while the latter encouraged the Soviets to do the same.

Ultimately, whether Nixon and Kissinger were in conversation with Mao and Zhou on the one hand or Brezhnev and Dobrynin on the other, triangular diplomacy always involved reconciling seemingly incompatible incentives. Despite the ebbs and flows that would punctuate rapprochement and détente in subsequent years, particularly in the aftermath of Nixon's ignominious resignation, the Nixon administration had managed to harmonize the two policies in 1972. Today, China may be on a trajectory to become the world's largest economy in the 2030s, but—as Odd Arne Westad notes—the US will remain the world's leading military superpower. The role of a rising China in international affairs will thus depend, in large part, on how the US and others choose to interact with the new economic giant.¹⁵⁸ In the recent monograph *On China*, an 88-year-old Kissinger declared that Sino-American relations “need not—and should not—become a zero-sum game.”¹⁵⁹ Over four decades ago, he and Nixon adapted *Realpolitik* to the twentieth century by paying scrupulous attention to the strategic desires as well as the fears of the People's Republic of China and the Soviet Union; they adjusted their triangular maneuvers accordingly. In other words, they combined Bismarckian intimidation with numerous positive incentives for both the PRC and the USSR. Future US leaders, in seeking to encourage cooperation from China and Vladimir Putin's intransigent regime in Russia, would do well to learn from the successes and limitations of triangular diplomacy. After all, no foreign policy game can succeed without taking into account the natural incentives and propensities of the players.

155 Frank Newport and Joseph Carroll, “Reflections on Presidential Job Approval and Re-election Odds,” Gallup, June 10, 2003, Richard M. Nixon, accessed January 19, 2015, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/8608/reflections-presidential-job-approval-reelection-odds.aspx>.

156 Ibid.

157 Bundy provides a concise overview of the fall of South Vietnam. See *A Tangled Web*, 484-90, 494-97.

158 Odd A. Westad, *Restless Empire: China and the World Since 1750* (New York: Basic Books, 2012), 462.

159 Henry A. Kissinger, *On China* (New York: Penguin Press, 2011), 523.