

Diplomacy and Policy:
How Rhetoric Shaped U.S.-China Relations 1972-1974

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Abstract

Normalization of relations between the People's Republic of China and the United States began after U.S. President Richard Nixon's 1972 visit to China. This paper examines how the foundational document issued at the end of Nixon's visit, known as the Shanghai Communiqué, shaped the diplomatic rhetoric of U.S.-China relations from 1972 to 1974. Memoranda of conversations and internal communications from the U.S. Department of State reveal how diplomatic rhetoric surrounding the topics of Taiwan and Vietnam was shaped by the principles of the Shanghai Communiqué. The findings of this research were that the Shanghai Communiqué served as an active framework for U.S.-China diplomacy that was effective in negotiating issues surrounding Taiwan but limited what could be done about both countries' interests in Vietnam.

Introduction

In July of 1971, the United States President Richard Nixon shocked the world with the televised announcement of his planned visit to Beijing in the People's Republic of China (PRC). It marked the end of a decade's long schism between the U.S. and China. Nixon touched down in Beijing in February of 1972, greeted by Premier Zhou Enlai of the PRC, who shook the hand of Richard Nixon.¹ The highly publicized visit showed the international community the historic moment when Nixon shook the hand of PRC Chairman Mao Zedong and Nixon's tour of historical sites around Beijing (revealing live footage of Chinese contemporary culture for the American public).² The end result of Nixon's visit was the foundational Shanghai Communiqué, which established the geo-political positions of both nations on Taiwan: that the Taiwan question was the crux of Chinese acceptance of normalization, that the PRC is the sole legitimate government of China, that Taiwan is part of China and its affairs a domestic matter, and that the U.S. acknowledged the one-China position while expressing interest in a peaceful resolution and the eventual withdrawal of U.S. military forces from Taiwan.³ Although normalization didn't officially occur until 1979 under the administration of U.S. President Jimmy Carter and China under Paramount Leader Deng Xiaoping.⁴ Nixon's successful visit carried the momentum of negotiations through to 1973, when the U.S. and China agreed to create liaison

¹ Jonathan D. Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, 3rd ed. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2013), 568.

² Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, 568.

³ U.S. Department of State, "Joint Statement Following Discussions with Leaders of the People's Republic of China," in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume XVII, China, 1969-1972*, ed. Steven E. Phillips, (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2006), document 203, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v17/d203>.

⁴ The Paramount Leader of the PRC is an informal title for who has the most influence in China. Mao Zedong was the Chairman of the CPC (the highest office in China) from its inception until his death in 1976 and was succeeded by Hua Guofeng. Deng Xiaoping, however, was deemed more influential than Hua Guofeng and was therefore given the title of Paramount Leader.

offices to establish a more reliable and constant line of communication between Washington and Beijing.⁵

The key figures in the early stages U.S.-China normalization, between 1972 and 1974, were Richard Nixon's National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger and Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai. They participated in the diplomacy sessions that led to the issuance of the Shanghai Communiqué and the process of normalization. This essay explores the rhetoric of U.S.-China diplomacy in the wake of the Shanghai Communiqué and the document's effects on it. Through analysis of diplomatic rhetoric in proceedings between Henry Kissinger, Zhou Enlai, and Vice Premier Deng Xiaoping that took place between the years of 1972 and 1974, this essay reveals that the rhetoric that moved these negotiations was intrinsically tied to the tenets of the Shanghai Communiqué. While U.S. domestic constraints, such as the unraveling of Richard Nixon's Watergate Scandal in Spring 1973, potentially stalled processes towards normalization, the evidence reveals steady progress in diplomacy on the issues of Taiwan and stalling of progress related to U.S. involvement in Vietnam. The Shanghai Communiqué outlined directives and principles for the U.S. and China in their current relations and their future roles in the politics of Asia at large. This paper argues that the Shanghai Communiqué directives facilitated an active framework for U.S.-China diplomacy that was effective in negotiating issues surrounding Taiwan but ultimately limited what could be done about both countries interests in Vietnam.

⁵ Pete Millwood, "New Liaisons," in *Improbable Diplomats: How Ping-Pong Players, Musicians, and Scientists Remade US-China Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 166, <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108935982.005>.

Historiography

Previous scholarship on Nixon's 1972 visit to China and the subsequent effort towards normalization has moved through several analytical frameworks. Works from the 1980s to the early 2000s focused on analyses of triangular relations such as U.S.-China-Taiwan and U.S.-China-Russia frameworks. More recently, scholarship in the 2020s builds upon the foundations of previous scholarship, focusing on normalization through a social-historical lens. These shifts follow an evolution from triangular geo-political analyses examining how normalization affected third-party relationships to social-historical approaches that foreground people-to-people contacts, yet no study has closely examined the evolution of diplomatic rhetoric itself as a driver of normalization.

In the decades following normalization, the 1980s to the early 2000s, scholars followed a framework of triangular relations to analyze normalization. Historian Ross Terrill's 1980 article "US-China Relations," for example, argues that normalization—including, he argues, the period between 1972 and 1979—benefitted both countries by cooling tensions on multiple fronts in Asia.⁶ Terrill explains that the mutual agreement between China and the U.S. to at least temporarily set aside their disagreements on Taiwan "is a solid, if implicit guarantee of Taiwan's security."⁷ The importance of this analysis is that, as Terrill argues, the entente established a means for the U.S. and China to move on from the issue while preventing military conflict with Taiwan.⁸ This analysis of the implications of normalization for the allies of the U.S. is a characteristic that is frequently featured in this type of scholarship. Political scientist Michel

⁶ Ross Terrill, "US-China Relations," *The Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs*, no. 3 (1980): 110, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2159014>.

⁷ Terrill, "US-China Relations," 109.

⁸ Terrill, "US-China Relations," 109.

Oksenberg builds upon a similar analytical trend in his 1982 article titled “A Decade of Sino-American Relations,” which examines how the perceived threat of Soviet expansion of influence in Asia affected U.S.-China normalization.⁹ He argues that this was the main force driving normalization until 1980, with China seeing closer ties to the U.S. as a counterbalance to Soviet influence in Asia.¹⁰

This framework of triangular relationships persisted in the scholarship of later decades, with many scholars building on earlier works, with the benefit of a greater scope of hindsight and declassified sources. One such work is Damodar Panda’s 1997 article “The United States and China: Towards A Rapprochement.” Panda’s argument, that the U.S.-China mutual interest in containing Soviet influence in Asia was the key motivator in normalization, echoes Oksenberg’s.¹¹ However, Panda further elaborates America’s position during normalization, arguing that Nixon and Kissinger were also hopeful that normalization would give the U.S. more room to maneuver a way out of the Vietnam War.¹² In contrast to Terrill, Nancy Bernkopf Tucker’s 2005 article “Taiwan Expendable? Nixon and Kissinger Go to China”, making use of declassified documents surrounding normalization and the Nixon administration, allows for a more critical approach to U.S.-China normalization and the implications for Taiwan.¹³ She argues that, in regards to achieving normalization with China, “the means to that laudable end

⁹ Michel Oksenberg, “A Decade of Sino-American Relations,” *Foreign Affairs* 61, no. 1 (1982): 175, <https://doi.org/10.2307/20041357>

¹⁰ Oksenberg, “A Decade of Sino-American Relations,” 194-195.

¹¹ Damodar Panda, “The United States and China: Towards A Rapprochement,” *Indian Journal of Asian Affairs* 10, no. 1 (1997): 49, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41950411>.

¹² Panda, “The United States and China,” 51.

¹³ Tucker, “Taiwan Expendable,” 110n4.

were deeply flawed, that they fundamentally undermined U.S. credibility and sowed the seeds of continuing distrust in United States-Taiwan and United States-China relations.”¹⁴

As new sources were made available, such as those used by Tucker, scholarship on normalization became more developed, allowing more recent studies to adopt a new analytical approach: a shift to social history. This framework brings a focus on the people-to-people communication between the U.S. and China during the process of normalization. Kazushi Minami’s 2024 book titled *People’s Diplomacy: How Americans and Chinese Transformed US-China Relations During the Cold War*, for example, argues that the role of ordinary people and cultural exchange played a significant role in diplomacy as discourse among people with more distance from official state involvement improved favorability within the Chinese and U.S. public towards normalization.¹⁵ Minami’s argument expands the scope of the historiography of normalization from the broad strokes of geo-politics to the specific social contacts conducted between the two countries. Pete Millwood, in “New Liaisons” in his 2022 book *Improbable Diplomats: How Ping-Pong Players, Musicians, and Scientists Remade US-China Relations*, uses the social history shift to make a unique argument: Millwood highlights the complexity of the role the Liaison Office played in facilitating cultural exchange between the U.S. and China, arguing that there was a much wider range of people involved in cultural exchanges organized by the office and were incredibly important to the normalization of relations.¹⁶

¹⁴ Nancy Bernkopf Tucker, “Taiwan Expendable? Nixon and Kissinger Go to China,” *The Journal of American History* 92, no. 1 (2005): 110, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3660527>.

¹⁵ Kazushi Minami, *People’s Diplomacy: How Americans and Chinese Transformed US-China Relations During the Cold War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2024), 11, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7591/jj.23338323.3>.

¹⁶ Pete Millwood, “New Liaisons,” in *Improbable Diplomats: How Ping-Pong Players, Musicians, and Scientists Remade US-China Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 200, <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108935982.005>

Despite these shifts, a missing link in the scholarship is a close analysis of the evolution of diplomatic rhetoric that occurred during the 1970s effort towards normalization. The extensive conversations that took place between U.S. and Chinese diplomats and leaders are mentioned briefly by scholars like Terrill, Oksenberg, Panda, and Tucker, but their works, focused on the triangular relations framework, and the social-historical analysis, do not provide a close analysis of evolving rhetoric. This essay will contribute to filling this gap by tracing rhetorical shifts that facilitated diplomacy, how that rhetoric contributed to the process of normalization, and where it failed in talks related to Vietnam.

Methodology

The sources I am analyzing include a myriad of memoranda from the U.S. federal government, including U.S. diplomatic talks with Chinese leaders, internal communications between government officials from the White House and the Department of State. Memoranda of official conversations are transcripts typed on-site by American note-takers during diplomatic meetings between government officials. It is important to note that these documents include what was deemed important by the American note-takers and the statements made by Chinese officials are translated by an interpreter who is present in the meetings. These memoranda provide the key insights into the language of diplomacy. Memoranda of internal communications are documents written by American government officials for other American government officials. These documents include analysis that gives insight into the positions and opinions of the U.S. Government. They are useful in comparing what is stated in memoranda of official conversation to what was being written by National Security Council analysts behind closed doors. These sources come from declassified documents released by the U.S. government National Archives between 2001 and 2005 and were published by the Digital National Security Archive at George

Washington University between 2002 and 2007 and by the Office of the Historian's Foreign Relations of the United States Series between 2006 and 2007.

The methodology for this project necessitates finding common talking points across these diplomatic conversations and memoranda. To accomplish this, I systematically coded the memoranda by topic and tracked how speakers discussed each topic across different meetings and time periods. I noted when new language was introduced or rhetorical shifts occurred, when parties deferred discussions, and when they reached consensus. The comparison of internal State Department communications with memoranda of conversation allowed identification of gaps between American diplomatic strategy and its execution. Comparing public communiqués with private conversations helped reveal what was negotiable behind closed doors versus what required public consensus.

The sources I am analyzing rely on interpreters translating conversations between officials. Thus, my analysis reflects American diplomatic perspectives and interpretations. While I can examine how American diplomats understood Chinese positions through memoranda, I cannot access Chinese officials' internal communications or unfiltered perspectives. This means my project analyzes American diplomatic strategy and perceptions of Chinese positions rather than claiming to represent both sides equally. Given that my analysis will rely on American sources, I will utilize translated statements from Chinese leaders and commentary from American officials on Chinese politics to analyze China's diplomatic positions and priorities.

Relations Before 1970

The process of normalization between the United States and the People's Republic of China was a surprise to the international community. After the conclusion of World War II, the world saw the United States and China as firmly on opposite sides of the Cold War's political

and economic divides. Only twenty-two years before Richard Nixon became the first U.S. President to visit China, American and Chinese soldiers were fighting on opposite sides of the Korean War in the 1950s. Shortly after the halt of the Korean War in 1953, The United States began official involvement in the Vietnam War in 1955 under President Dwight Eisenhower's administration, following the geo-political strategy of containment to stop the spread of communism. This came after Eisenhower's Secretary of State John Foster Dulles's disastrous appearance at the 1954 Geneva Conference, which was convened to plan the future of Vietnam after the First Indochina War.¹⁷ At the conference, Dulles made the hardline anti-communist policy of containment clear as he refused to acknowledge the leadership of North Vietnam or China, going as far as to refuse to shake Zhou Enlai's outstretched hand, an action which stuck in Zhou Enlai's mind for years.¹⁸ In China, these acts made the United States the focus of Chairman Mao Zedong's anti-imperialist doctrine. Although the order of the Cold War seemed firmly separated along the Iron Curtain, things would soon begin to change.

In 1956, First Secretary Nikita Khrushchev of the Soviet Union denounced the late Joseph Stalin to the dismay of Chinese Chairman Mao Zedong, planting the seeds for a continuous strain on relations between China and the Soviet Union. In 1960, the Soviet Union withdrew its advisors and economic aid from China.¹⁹ In the late 1960s, tensions between China and Russia nearly boiled over as a military buildup occurred on their shared border and resulted

¹⁷ Zhai Qiang, "China and the Geneva Conference of 1954," *The China Quarterly*, no. 129 (1992): 117, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/654599>.

¹⁸ Qiang, "China and the Geneva Conference," 119.

¹⁹ U.S. Department of State, "Paper Prepared by the National Security Council Staff," in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume XIV, Soviet Union, October 1971-May 1972*, eds. David C. Geyer, Nina D. Howland and Kent Sieg, (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2006), document 236.

in small confrontations in 1969. These Sino-Soviet strains encouraged Chinese leaders to explore normalization with the United States.

Henry Kissinger's Secret Visits to Beijing

In 1969, as Soviet-Chinese tensions boiled over, U.S. President Richard Nixon took office. At the time, the Vietnam War had been raging since 1955. U.S. Morale was low and public opinion was turning out of favor of the war effort. Looking for ways to undermine the influence of the Soviet Union and possibly find a way to facilitate an exit from Vietnam, Nixon began to consider establishing contact with Beijing in 1970.²⁰ In September 1970, Nixon would assign his National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger to initiate talks with China.²¹ To maintain secrecy, Nixon and Kissinger sent and received messages with Chinese leaders through Pakistan's president Yahya Khan, who had agreed to facilitate normalized relations with both the U.S. and China.²² Through this channel, Mao would communicate his desire to have Nixon on an official visit to China soon.

Premiere Zhou Enlai was delegated the task of negotiating by Mao. Zhou would be the one to facilitate Henry Kissinger's secret visit in July of 1971. The 1971 visit was a resounding success and agreements between Zhou Enlai and Henry Kissinger set the stage for perhaps the most important moment in modern U.S.-China Relations: Nixon's 1972 visit to China.

²⁰ William Burr, *The Beijing-Washington Back-Channel and Henry Kissinger's Secret Trip to China September 1970-July 1971*, (Washington, D.C.: The National Security Archive, 2002), <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB66/>.

²¹ Burr, *The Beijing-Washington Back-Channel*.

²² Burr, *The Beijing-Washington Back-Channel*.

The Nixon Visit

While Kissinger's secret visit set a foundation for normalization, Nixon's unprecedented visit to the PRC marked the end of twenty-three years of official estrangement. Nixon announced the visit in July of 1971 and landed in China just six months later, on the twenty-first of February 1972. While the president made his rounds with televised tours, dinners and speeches, diplomatic proceedings took place in between these events. On the last day of the visit, the landmark document, the Shanghai Communiqué, and the foundation on which the United States and China would normalize their relations was issued on the twenty-eighth of February 1972.²³ It was the culmination of all the secretive diplomacy conducted by Henry Kissinger and Zhou Enlai and the most important outcome of Nixon's official visit.

The Shanghai Communiqué outlined the goals of normalization and how the United States and China would interact going forward. The first point of the communiqué is a commitment to reducing tensions between the two countries, following "principles of respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all states, nonaggression against other states, noninterference in the internal affairs of other states, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence."²⁴ Furthermore, the communiqué states that normalization between the United States and China is in the best interest of the common good, that both sides seek to reduce the risk of conflict, and that neither country "should seek hegemony in the Asia-Pacific Region."²⁵ It also set the precedent for how the two countries would handle the Taiwan question during the process of normalization, with the communiqué detailing the U.S. and China's positions on the

²³ U.S. Department of State, "Joint Statement."

²⁴ U.S. Department of State, "Joint Statement."

²⁵ U.S. Department of State, "Joint Statement."

matter. China maintained the position that the PRC is the only government of China and that Taiwan is one of its provinces, making it a domestic rather than an international matter. The U.S. acknowledged this view and made a commitment to resolving the issue peacefully and beginning a withdrawal of its troops from Taiwan.²⁶ In 1973, the United States and China set up the liaison offices that would help facilitate the goals set in the Shanghai Communiqué.²⁷

The principles and language used in the Shanghai Communiqué are key to understanding the diplomatic rhetoric in talks between 1972 and 1974 that would occur after its issuance. It provided a baseline for the diplomatic proceedings after Nixon's visit and is a testament to the dramatic shift in Cold War geo-politics.

Conversations on Taiwan and Adherence to the Communiqué

The issue of Taiwan was one of the most present topics in diplomatic exchanges between the U.S. and China. The Shanghai Communiqué set the precedent for how diplomats handled debate over Taiwan, with the commitment to reducing the U.S. military presence on the island being central to the conversation. Such is the case in the February 1973 memorandum of conversation between Zhou Enlai and Henry Kissinger.²⁸ This conversation took place in Beijing with the purpose of advancing progress towards normalization and was one of the earliest mentions of establishing liaison offices to create a more reliable mode of communication between Washington and Beijing.²⁹ The language of the “memorandum of conversation”

²⁶ U.S. Department of State, “Joint Statement.”

²⁷ Millwood, “New Liaisons,” 166.

²⁸ U.S. Department of State, “Memorandum of Conversation,” in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume XVIII, China, 1973-1976*, ed. David P. Nickles, (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2007), document 9, 49, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v18/d9>.

²⁹ U.S. Department of State, “Memorandum of Conversation,” 52.

establishes clear goals and spells out exactly what the U.S. reduction of military presence in Taiwan entailed and the main concerns China had with the process. Zhou opens the discussion of the Taiwan issue, asking Kissinger the following:

Shall we say a few more words on the Taiwan issue? Do you envisage that there will be a definite time limit for your aid to Taiwan, military aid? Is there going to be another contract after this contract? I don't mean that if you do this for their armed forces that it will mean a great deal. I just want to know something about it so we can coordinate our action during our work. I can assure you that we don't mean that we are going to liberate it by the armed forces. We have no such plan at the moment.³⁰

Zhou's language here expresses that the focus in these early stages of normalization regarding the Taiwan issue is largely focused on the timeline of U.S. military withdrawal. Zhou's reassurance that there are no plans for an invasion of Taiwan also hints that he is paying close attention to any language that might insinuate armed conflict to guarantee the tenets of cooperation and peace outlined in the Shanghai Communiqué are adhered to. It is also important to note that Zhou's use of the word "liberate" in the context of invading Taiwan is emblematic of the position taken in the Shanghai Communiqué, that Taiwan is a part of China. Kissinger, in turn, responds positively to Zhou's questions and his reassurance. Kissinger begins with a clarifying statement on what military aid to Taiwan entails, stating "that we are not giving military equipment. We are selling it or giving it on some credit."³¹ This reveals that Kissinger stressed the importance of transparency about the conditions in which military aid was provided to Taiwan. This is further demonstrated in Kissinger's outline of progress on the reduction of military presence in Taiwan. Kissinger states the following: "We think that over the next two years we will have a very substantial reduction of our military forces. We are even now going

³⁰ U.S. Department of State, "Memorandum of Conversation," 50-51.

³¹ U.S. Department of State, "Memorandum of Conversation," 51.

very slow about giving new military equipment. We do this through administrative means, not as policy measures. For example, as I told the Prime Minister yesterday we have refused the sale of two squadrons of F-4s.”³² Given that withdrawing from Taiwan is one of the most important conditions of normalization, Kissinger’s verbal commitment to a timeline and his provided example of tangible reduction in sent military aid signals that the U.S. is genuine in its adherence to the Shanghai Communiqué. The specificity of Kissinger’s assurances is attempting to communicate to Zhou that not only is the commitment genuine, but also that there is a short and long-term commitment to normalization.

Further language in this memorandum also suggests that both sides were willing to have flexibility regarding how the U.S.-Taiwan relationship would work after full normalization.

Kissinger makes the following statement:

Now we would like to keep some form of representation on Taiwan, but we haven’t figured out a formula that will be mutually acceptable. And we would like to discuss with you, in the spirit of what you have always discussed with us, some understanding that the final solution will be a peaceful one.³³

Kissinger’s request for room to maintain an informal relationship with Taiwan and the noncommittal details—or lack thereof—are met with no further scrutiny or comment from Zhou. This signals that, at the very least, China’s (and Zhou’s personal) expectations are amenable to a degree of adaptability in future U.S.-Taiwan relations. This observation is confirmed in a collection of internal memoranda from National Security Council member Richard Solomon and compiled for his fellow council member Winston Lord in January of 1974.³⁴ Solmon and Lord

³² U.S. Department of State, “Memorandum of Conversation,” 51.

³³ U.S. Department of State, “Memorandum of Conversation,” 51.

³⁴ Richard Solomon to Winston Lord, “‘Confirming the Principle of One China’ and Analytical Memorandum Suggesting Steps to Improve U.S.-China Relations,” memorandum, 9 January 1974, in *China and the United States: From Hostility to Engagement, 1960-1998*, (Washington, D.C.: The National Security Archive, 2016), Digital

both worked closely with Henry Kissinger throughout the process of normalization and the memoranda included in the compilation are suggestions and analyses of the status of relations and recommended steps for Kissinger. In the memoranda, Solomon writes the following on how the expectations in Beijing for the U.S. withdrawal of aid from Taiwan relaxed and how it was reflected in formal communications:

During your November 1973 trip to Peking, the manner in which the Taiwan issue was discussed by Chinese leaders implied that the PRC has come to simplify the actions it expects on our part regarding reduction of U.S. ties with Taiwan as a basis for fully normalizing U.S.-PRC relations. This was formally expressed in the phrase which the Chinese added to our draft Communique that ‘the normalization of relations between China and the United States can be realized only on the basis of confirming the principle of one China.’ This formulation seems to give us considerably more institutional elbow room than was implicit in the Shanghai Communique as we seek at once to fulfill our commitment to move toward full diplomatic relations with Peking while not precipitously abandoning our existing commitments to the Republic of China on Taiwan.³⁵

Solomon elaborates that the reasoning behind this development is concern that further excluding Taiwan from the international community leaves too much of an opportunity for Soviet intervention in Taiwan.³⁶ This position is supported by the change in language used in China’s media surrounding coverage of issue related to Taiwan, as Solomon writes, “This moderated position on Taiwan’s ‘liberation’ has been reflected in PRC media in the past two years as talk of ‘peaceful liberator’ has been modified to appeals for ‘peaceful unification’ and more recently ‘peaceful settlement’ of the Taiwan issue.”³⁷ This shift in China’s rhetoric in the domestic sphere signifies serious preparation taking place for full normalization with the U.S.

National Security Archive accession number CH00286, X, <https://www.proquest.com/government-official-publications/confirming-principle-one-china-analytical/docview/1679040339/se-2?accountid=14784>.

³⁵ Solomon to Lord, “Confirming the Principle,” 7.

³⁶ Solomon to Lord, “Confirming the Principle,” 9.

³⁷ Solomon to Lord, “Confirming the Principle,” 8.

While diplomatic progress on Taiwan was, according to the memoranda, going remarkably well, it was still not without its moments of friction. One such moment is highlighted in a memorandum of conversation between Zhou and Kissinger during a diplomatic visit to Beijing in November of 1973.³⁸ The main point of contention in this conversation is in regard to debts accrued by the previous governments of China, namely the Qing Dynasty (1644-1912) and the Republic of China (1912-1949). Zhou asks Kissinger the following, “what are we going to do with those bond indebtedness issued in the days when we still have not established diplomatic relations. Even if we had established diplomatic relations with you... How do you intend to settle the question of the bond indebtedness?”³⁹ Kissinger responded by affirming that “the U.S. Government will not legally support any claims connected with those bonds.”⁴⁰ However, the issue was more complicated, as Zhou raises concerns that private citizens in the U.S. can attempt to make claims to the bonds. Zhou then asks, “To make such dealings, whom would they approach: since the bonds were issued by former governments, Chiang Kai-shek or the Ching Government which was non-existent?”⁴¹ Kissinger’s answer to this is inconclusive, as he states the following:

I will make a proposal which in my judgement will be the honest maximum of what we can do. The significance of this agreement is not the amount of money, which is ridiculous. We should prove that we can settle this so we can go on to more substantial things. Therefore, it should be done in a generous spirit so a year from now we won’t

³⁸ U.S. Department of State, “Conversation Between Zhou Enlai and Henry Kissinger,” memorandum of conversation, 13 November 1973, in *Chile and the United States: U.S. policy toward democracy, dictatorship, and human rights, 1970-1990*, (Washington D.C.: The National Security Archive, 2011), Digital National Security Archive accession number CL00939, 1, <https://www.proquest.com/government-official-publications/conversation-between-zhou-enlai-henry-kissinger/docview/1679062802/se-2?accountid=14784>

³⁹ U.S. Department of State, “Conversation Between Zhou Enlai and Henry Kissinger,” 17.

⁴⁰ U.S. Department of State, “Conversation Between Zhou Enlai and Henry Kissinger,” 17.

⁴¹ U.S. Department of State, “Conversation Between Zhou Enlai and Henry Kissinger,” 17.

even remember what it was. Within two weeks of my return, we will tell you in our best judgement if and to what extent we can modify our position⁴²

It is evident that Zhou believed issues like this were significant enough to bring up in high-level talks and that they could hinder progress if delegated elsewhere. Kissinger, however frustrated he may have been by Zhou's eagerness to solve this matter between the two of them rather than delegating it to National Security Council staff, had to agree to settle the matter so that they can, as he aptly put, move on to more substantial things. Zhou's insistence on raising this issue also implies that China placed emphasis on resolving small issues with high-level officials, likely to ensure that the directives of the Shanghai Communiqué and party leadership were being followed. From these conversations we can see that in discussions surrounding Taiwan, the Shanghai Communiqué was nearly explicitly followed as a framework by the U.S. and China in their diplomacy. The framework seemed to allow for flexibility in future negotiations and was well-suited to the political situation faced by American and Chinese diplomats at the time. In contrast, discussion surrounding the Vietnam War were far more difficult and at times more contentious than those focused on Taiwan.

Difficulties With Vietnam

China's interest in U.S. withdrawal from Vietnam was due to their desire to reduce tensions in Asia at large. Chinese officials advised the U.S. to pull out of Vietnam as soon as possible in accordance with the principles of nonaggression, noninterference and respect for sovereignty as outlined in the Shanghai Communiqué's first point.⁴³ In China's view, U.S.

⁴² U.S. Department of State, "Conversation Between Zhou Enlai and Henry Kissinger," 18.

⁴³ U.S. Department of State, "Joint Statement." As mentioned earlier, the first point stated that the U.S. and China would follow the principles of respect for sovereignty, territorial integrity, nonaggression, noninterference, equality and mutual benefit and peaceful coexistence.

involvement in Vietnam was in direct opposition to the principles of the Communiqué. The Chinese would make clear that these same principles gave them reason to refuse to assist the U.S. in meddling with the territorial sovereignty of Vietnam.

Much of the diplomatic tension surrounding Vietnam arose during talks about the U.S.-Vietnam Paris Peace talks of 1972. Memoranda reveal that Henry Kissinger and Zhou Enlai thoroughly discussed U.S.-Vietnam negotiations on June 19, 1972.⁴⁴ In this exchange, Zhou asks Kissinger if there has been any progress in talks with Vietnam to which Kissinger replies with the following statement:

No, at this moment the Paris talks are suspended and there is no fixed date for the resumption. We have proposed... to the North Vietnamese that there be a private meeting between Le Duc Tho and me on June 28 and have stated that if there is such a meeting its purpose would be to prepare for the resumption of plenary sessions. We have not yet received a reply. But the real problem... is not whether the talks resume but what we are going to talk about when they do resume. The tragedy is—as I have told you before and I know we don't agree, but I have to be honest—the North Vietnamese are very heroic but they are not wise. They are acting as if Dulles were still alive and as if they had to protect themselves against Dulles. There is no solution to this problem if they insist that everything must be settled at once. If they could do what you have done—to separate those issues which must be taken care of immediately from those which should be settled by history, the war would be over in a month. Because we have no permanent objectives in Indochina [including Vietnam].⁴⁵

The language of Kissinger's response is particularly noteworthy in its references to John Foster Dulles and in the direct compliments Kissinger is giving Zhou Enlai. Furthermore, the callback to Dulles—who refused to shake Zhou's hand at the 1954 Geneva Conference and made no contact with Chinese officials—is appealing to Zhou's personal disdain for Dulles and his

⁴⁴ U.S. White House, (A) "Meeting Between Henry Kissinger and Zhou Enlai," memorandum of conversation, 19 June 1972, in *U.S. Policy in the Vietnam War, Part II, 1969-1975*, (Washington, D.C.: 2016), Digital National Security Archive accession number VW00977, 1, <https://www.proquest.com/government-official-publications/meeting-between-henry-kissinger-zhou-enlai/docview/1679101709/sc-2?accountid=14784>

⁴⁵ U.S. White House, (A) "Meeting Between Henry Kissinger," 5.

hardline containment policies.⁴⁶ Zhou and Kissinger continued this thread of conversation in greater detail the following day, on June 20, 1972.⁴⁷ Kissinger elaborates the U.S. position on the current situation of the Paris talks stating that the Nixon administration is not interested in having a permanent presence in Vietnam and that they have moved on from the policies of Dulles and the false justification of China being behind the turmoil in Vietnam used by U.S. President Lyndon B. Johnson to increase U.S. involvement.⁴⁸ Furthermore, Kissinger states the following, “the mere fact that we are sitting in this room changes the objective basis of the original intervention in Indochina. For us who inherited the war our problem has been how to liquidate it in a way that does not affect our entire international position.”⁴⁹ Kissinger once again calls back to Dulles, though this time he makes an important statement about how much progress has been made since 1954: that having opened relations with China proved that the U.S. could make allies of communist countries. Kissinger’s repeated comments on how the U.S. has moved on from Dulles and his stressing of the importance of the newly re-opened relations with China infers that the administration believes that China can provide an angle through which to frame a treaty with North Vietnam. Unlike the Taiwan issue, however, Zhou does not articulate a Chinese incentive to give credence to Kissinger’s desire for a “clean” exit from Vietnam. Kissinger, on the other hand, further demonstrates his belief that China can help the U.S. gain a favorable withdrawal in

⁴⁶ Zhai Qiang, “China and the Geneva Conference of 1954,” *The China Quarterly*, no. 129 (1992): X, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/654599>.

⁴⁷ U.S. White House, (B) “Meeting Between Henry Kissinger and Zhou Enlai,” memorandum of conversation, 20 June 1972, in *U.S. Policy in the Vietnam War, Part II, 1969-1975*, (Washington, D.C.: 2016), Digital National Security Archive accession number VW00978, X, <https://www.proquest.com/government-official-publications/meeting-between-henry-kissinger-zhou-enlai/docview/1679091831/se-2?accountid=14784>.

⁴⁸ U.S. White House, (B) Meeting Between Henry Kissinger,” 28.

⁴⁹ U.S. White House, (B) “Meeting Between Henry Kissinger,” 28.

the following statement, “the Democratic Republic of Vietnam is a permanent factor on the Indochinese peninsula and probably the strongest entity. And we have had no interest in destroying it or even in defeating it.”⁵⁰ He continues:

There’s only one demand they have made we have not met and cannot meet and will not meet, no matter what the price to our other relationships, and that is that we overthrow ourselves the people with whom we have been dealing and who, in reliance on us, have taken certain actions. This isn’t because of any particular liking for any of the individuals concerned. It isn’t because we want a pro-American government in Saigon. Why in the name of God would we want a pro-American government in Saigon when we can live with governments that are not pro-American in much bigger countries of Asia? It is because a country cannot be asked to engage in major acts of betrayal as a basis of its foreign policy.⁵¹

Kissinger’s language suggests that he is trying to convince Zhou that North Vietnam could have a similar relationship to the U.S. as the one being developed through the very conversations he and Zhou are partaking in, that the relationship between the U.S. and China could be a model for relations with Vietnam. Kissinger spells out his hopes for a Vietnam treaty in the model of the progress made with China, comparing North Vietnam’s demands with a hypothetical scenario in which China demanded that the U.S. overthrow Chiang Kai-shek as a condition to begin talks of normalization.⁵² Kissinger then lays out to Zhou why the U.S.-China relationship works so well, stating, “The secret to our relationship is we were prepared to start an evolution in which the Prime Minister has expressed great confidence, such an act would totally dishonor us and make us a useless friend of yours, because if we would do this to once associate we would do it to anybody.”⁵³ Kissinger’s argument that the U.S.-China relationship should be used as the

⁵⁰ U.S. White House, (B) “Meeting Between Henry Kissinger,” 29.

⁵¹ U.S. White House, (B) “Meeting Between Henry Kissinger,” 29.

⁵² U.S. White House, (B) “Meeting Between Henry Kissinger,” 30.

⁵³ U.S. White House, (B) “Meeting Between Henry Kissinger,” 30.

framework for building bilateral relations with Vietnam is the significant talking point in discussions around the issue. However, Zhou raises questions for this line of reasoning, asking, “If after you withdraw... civil war again breaks out in Vietnam, what will you do? It will probably be difficult for you to answer that.”⁵⁴ Zhou’s raising of this question signals his lack of confidence in the U.S.’s desire to withdraw from Vietnam and that, perhaps, the U.S. hasn’t yet completely moved on from containment.

Kissinger, in response to Zhou’s question, states that, “If the North Vietnamese... engage in a serious negotiation with the South Vietnamese, and if after longer period it starts again after we were all disengaged, my personal judgement is that it is much less likely that we will go back again, much less likely.”⁵⁵ Kissinger’s noncommittal language and hesitancy to give a definite answer suggests he isn’t confident the outcome of the Paris talks will result in long term peace. Zhou immediately recognizes this, responding to Kissinger, “You said last year after you have withdrawn and the prisoners of war have been returned then as to what happens then, that is their affair. In principle you mentioned that.”⁵⁶ Zhou further expresses his frustration with the situation after Kissinger continually reiterates his previous position that North Vietnam is unreasonable in their conditions for a ceasefire, stating, “The Saigon problem is really too much of a headache. And this is one of the bitter fruits left over by Dulles which is not yet solved. It was a tragedy created by Dulles and you are even now tasting the bitter fruits of that... you could shake yourselves free from it.”⁵⁷ Zhou’s statement here is insinuating that there isn’t much he can do to

⁵⁴ U.S. White House, (B) “Meeting Between Henry Kissinger, 31.

⁵⁵ U.S. White House, (B) “Meeting Between Henry Kissinger,” 31.

⁵⁶ U.S. White House, (B) “Meeting Between Henry Kissinger,” 31.

⁵⁷ U.S. White House, (B) “Meeting Between Henry Kissinger,” 33.

help Kissinger free himself from this “headache” and that the situation in Vietnam was started by the U.S. and needs to be ended by the U.S. Zhou turns Kissinger’s constant referencing of Dulles on its head to make it clear that China was not obligated to help clean up the mess created by the U.S., foreshadowing Chinese officials’ later clear refusals to engage not only in a U.S. issue, but one he would claim broke the first principle of the Shanghai Communiqué.

By 1974, The Paris Peace Accords were finally signed off on and Gerald Ford replaced Richard Nixon after he stepped down during the unraveling of the Watergate Scandal. The outcome of the Paris Peace Accords and the unstable situation left behind in Vietnam is discussed by Vice Premier Deng Xiaoping in a memorandum of conversation from November of 1974 between him and Henry Kissinger in Beijing.⁵⁸ In this conversation, Kissinger makes the following suggestion to Deng: “Finally, in connection with the missing in action—this is not your direct responsibility or under your responsibility at all, but we have found great difficulty in getting any answers from North Vietnam, as is called for by the Paris Agreement and any influence or advice you could give to Hanoi we would greatly appreciate.”⁵⁹ Kissinger’s statement here is suggesting to Deng that China may be able to tip the scale in the favor of the U.S. in negotiations. However, Kissinger then makes a claim that North Vietnam is in violation of the Paris Agreement, to which Deng responds, “From what we have heard, it is the United States and Nguyen Van Thieu who are not abiding by the Agreement.”⁶⁰ Kissinger denies this

⁵⁸ U.S. National Security Council, “Meeting Between Henry A. Kissinger and Deng Xiaoping, Great Hall of the People, Peking,” memorandum of conversation, 28 November 1974, in *China and the United States: From Hostility to Engagement, 1960-1998*, (Washington, D.C.: The National Security Archive, 2016), Digital National Security Archive accession number CH00329, X, <https://www.proquest.com/government-official-publications/meeting-between-henry-kissinger-deng-xiaoping/docview/1679040944/se-2?accountid=14784>.

⁵⁹ U.S. National Security Council, “Meeting Between Henry A. Kissinger,” 6.

⁶⁰ U.S. National Security Council, “Meeting Between Henry A. Kissinger,” 7.

allegation, then Deng responds by reiterating the principle of non-interference that was outlined in the Shanghai Communiqué:

We feel that this issue is one to be discussed only between you and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and the People's Revolutionary Government of South Vietnam... We think the fundamental question is this. It is good that you have withdrawn your armed forces, but you have not really disengaged. Your feet are still bogged down there and probably all these specific issues all stem from the fact that the fundamental issue has not been completely resolved. I should think that is true about the entire Indo-Chinese issues too.⁶¹

Deng's language here echoes the views Zhou expressed in 1972. That Kissinger was still discussing this topic with Chinese officials almost two years later validates the frustrations expressed by Zhou and Deng. It reveals that since the beginning of normalization and the issuance of the Shanghai Communiqué, China, following the principles of non-interference, had zero responsibility—or desire—to intervene on behalf of the U.S. in Vietnam, and that the U.S. was acting in opposition to Communiqué principles.

These discussions of Vietnam were evidently a source irritation in both camps. Kissinger was hoping to use the spirit of the new U.S.-China relationship as a lever to get China to help advance their interests in Vietnam. Zhou and Deng responded by using the Shanghai Communiqué's principles of non-interference as a shield, using the terms and conditions that both parties agreed to as a rhetorical tool to resist U.S. pleas for assistance in their geo-political ambitions. In this case, the Shanghai Communiqué was working in opposite ways, negatively for the U.S. and positively for China.

⁶¹ U.S. National Security Council, "Meeting Between Henry A. Kissinger," 7-8.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the rhetoric of U.S.-China diplomacy after the Nixon Visit largely reflected the tenets outlined by the Shanghai Communiqué. Diplomatic rhetoric surrounding Taiwan revealed a firm commitment from the U.S. to honor the agreements in the Shanghai Communiqué and an attitude of patience and flexibility from China. However, when discussion veered to Vietnam, diplomatic progress ground to a halt. The rhetoric revealed that U.S. pleas for assistance in negotiating with North Vietnam were met with a cold shoulder from China, who, following the principles of the Shanghai Communiqué, refused to intervene on behalf of the U.S. This revealed that the Shanghai Communiqué worked in discussions on Taiwan because of the explicit obligations set in its text for both countries, though in discussions on Vietnam, China could point to the same principles of non-interference and respect for territorial sovereignty to refuse U.S. requests for Chinese intervention on their behalf. These findings help close the gaps left in scholarship centered around the triangular relations framework and the social-history framework by revealing the centrality of the the Shanghai Communiqué as a point of reference and rhetorical tool for diplomacy between the U.S. and China.

Ultimately, while U.S. and Chinese relations improved, the Communiqué proved to be both an opening for normalization and a means to limit Chinese support for U.S. interests in Asia. The Communiqué created explicit mutual obligations on Taiwan, giving the U.S. and China ample incentive to follow its directives. However, the same principles that smoothed over Taiwan tensions had an opposite effect on Vietnam, giving the U.S. a potential obligation to withdraw from the war and China no reason to assist the U.S. with a clean exit. This demonstrates how Communiqué's structure produced different outcomes depending on whose interests were being served. While the U.S. failed to prevent the collapse of the pro-U.S. South Vietnam, it did not

prevent the U.S. from eventually reaching its goals with China. After a period of instability with Nixon's resignation and Ford's bid for reelection, normalization was officially announced on December 15, 1978, when President Jimmy Carter read aloud to the nation a joint communiqué stating that on January 1, 1979, the U.S. would abandon its official recognition of Taiwan and recognize the PRC as the legal government of China.⁶² It was elaborated in this communiqué that the U.S. would maintain unofficial (economic and cultural) relations with Taiwan and that, adhering to the principles of the Shanghai Communiqué, would "continue to have an interest in the peaceful resolution of the Taiwan issue."⁶³ This is what created the limbo in U.S.-China-Taiwan relations that remains to this day, with the U.S. maintaining the same unofficial relations as were outlined by President Carter in 1978.

⁶² U.S. Department of State, "Address by President Carter to the Nation," in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1977-1980, Volume I, Foundations of Foreign Policy*, ed. Kristin L. Ahlberg, (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2014), document 104, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1977-80v01/d104>.

⁶³ U.S. Department of State, "Address by President Carter."

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