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A Delicate Balance: US-China-Taiwan Relations under the Nixon and Carter administrations in the 1970s

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A Delicate Balance: US-China-Taiwan Relations under the Nixon and Carter administrations in
the 1970s

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of Social Studies
of Bard College

by
Evan H. Matthews

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Introduction: Why Nixon and Carter?

In November 2021, President Biden met virtually with President Xi Jinping to address the “complex nature” of the relationship between the United States (US) and the People’s Republic of China (PRC).¹ In the era of the Covid-19 pandemic and in the post-Trump world, where misinformation and false leaks headline many news articles, it seems only fitting that President Biden “misspoke” about Taiwan.² Specifically, when asked whether or not the US or the PRC had made any progress on Taiwan, President Biden responded, “It’s [Taiwan’s] independent. It makes its own decisions.”³ This is not the first time an American official has “misspoken” or misconstrued American policy about Taiwan. In 2001, when President Bush was asked whether or not the United States would defend Taiwan, he responded by saying the United States would do “whatever it took to help Taiwan defend herself” and that “the Chinese must understand that.”⁴ Even Trump, as the President-elect in 2016, risked starting off on bad terms with Beijing by taking a call from Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen. Embedded in this controversy is the question of whether or not the United States would outwardly defend Taiwan in the event of a Chinese invasion. Over the years, the United States has adopted, what is commonly referred to as, a position of “strategic ambiguity” to this very question. The United States *may* defend Taiwan if it is attacked by the PRC, but there is no treaty that requires the US to do so. Famously, in the 1990s, President Clinton sent the USS Nimitz aircraft carrier and several supporting ships through the Taiwan Strait in response to PRC aggression towards Taiwan in the Third Taiwan Crisis. US presidents since the 1970s have developed slightly different interpretations of

¹ “Readout of President Biden’s Virtual Meeting with President Xi Jinping of the People’s Republic of China.”

² Mackinnon, “Biden Struggles to Stick to the Script on Taiwan.”

³ Mackinnon.

⁴ News, “Bush Vows Taiwan Support.”

“strategic ambiguity,” but the core of American foreign policy remains the same: that the United States *may* defend Taiwan.

While the answer to the Taiwan question is an ambiguous one – and one that often causes much debate – perhaps a deeper exploration into the origins of the Taiwan question may illuminate the consistencies, nuances, and shared goals of past and present US administrations. This project places a spotlight on both the Nixon and Carter administrations as they contended with the questions that came with normalizing relations with the PRC in the 1970s. For both administrations, there was an understanding that the US and the PRC should have normalized relations. The cost of the normalization of relations set by the PRC, among other things which will be explained later, was that the US had to sever its diplomatic ties with the Republic of China (ROC). It should not be understated that the decision to switch official relations from the ROC to the PRC was a monumental event in American foreign policy. The relationship between the US and the PRC has never been easy. Many contentions today can be traced to how this relationship began and the concessions both sides made to normalize relations. Still, the future of Taiwan and its relationship with the United States were integral parts of the normalization process.

Succinctly, the “normalization of relations” typically refers to when two countries reconcile their relationship after war or a strained or prolonged disagreement. Moreover, “diplomatic relations” refers to when countries send official representatives, or diplomats, to each other’s country to perform duties and tasks required for building their country’s relationship. Additionally, and for clarity’s sake, this thesis will use “the People’s Republic of China,” “the People’s Republic,” “PRC,” “Beijing,” and “China” to identify the government located on the mainland. Likewise, “the Republic of China,” “ROC,” “Kuomintang” or “KMT,”

and “Taiwan” will be used interchangeably to identify the government located in Taiwan. One may also wonder about the absence of President Ford’s contributions to this process. While there is brief mention of the Ford administration’s attempts at rapprochement, this thesis focuses primarily on the key turning points that were institutionalized by pivotal documents during the 1970s. The Ford administration, to be terse, did not prioritize the normalization of relations with the PRC as much as the Nixon and Carter administrations. These key transition points were encapsulated in the Shanghai Communique, the Normalization Communique, and the Taiwan Relations Act.

This project is guided by its research question of why and how the United States decided to maintain unofficial relations with Taiwan, despite pursuing the normalization of relations with the People’s Republic of China. The answer to this question has, unsurprisingly, proven to be a difficult one. President Nixon and National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger struggled to answer this question and left it up to “historical evolutions.” In other words, they believed that the Taiwan question was unimportant to the goals they were trying to accomplish – namely, the normalization of relations with the PRC. Unfortunately, for President Carter and his foreign policy advisers, they were the ones who had to answer the questions left by the previous administrations. President Carter also had to contend with the expectation that Taiwan was part of China and that its reunification was an internal matter, as set by the Shanghai Communique. The Carter administration believed in three fundamental principles, each spearheaded by different agents in the administration: (1) that the United States had a moral obligation not to jeopardize the future of the Taiwanese people, (2) that the United States must pursue normalization with the PRC while, at the same time, placing an expectation that the reunification of Taiwan to mainland China must be peaceful, and (3) that the way the United States handled

the Taiwan question would define their image and integrity not only to the people of Taiwan, but also to other allies and the American people themselves. Therefore, both administrations believed that Sino-American normalization was in American interests. Implicitly, they also recognized that, given the internal debate about legitimacy between the PRC and the ROC, the timeline for reunification could be indefinite. The Taiwan Relations Act (TRA) was passed after a swift back-and-forth between the 96th Congress and the Carter administration. The TRA has become the dominant set of guidelines for Taiwanese-American relations in the decades after its creation. Fundamental to this act, the United States asserts that the relationship between the American people and the Taiwanese people will not be affected by the end of diplomatic relations. In enforcing this act, the United States gives itself the right to sell Taiwan defensive weaponry. The act also establishes that the United States and Taiwan will maintain cultural, commercial, and other relations that will bolster the interests of both parties. The Carter administration approached building an unofficial relationship with Taiwan in multiple ways and for multiple reasons which will be explained in this project.

Chapter I: Nixon and Kissinger Go to China

Introduction

The world watched in anticipation as President Nixon made his way down the stairs of Air Force One, extending his hand to Premier Zhou En-lai. At the time, it had been nearly twenty years since former Secretary of State John Foster Dulles snubbed Zhou En-lai by refusing to shake his hand. Nixon hoped to end China's "angry isolation" and begin a new era. What this new era would look like was unknown and full of hopeful possibilities. The political theatrics and historical importance of President Nixon's trip to China have well been documented; books, articles, documentaries, and even an opera are just some of the ways this trip has been recounted. Perhaps most inspiring and influential to this very chapter is Margaret MacMillan's book *Nixon and Mao: The Week that Changed the World*. In it, MacMillan articulates the characters, sets, drama, and themes of Nixon's trip to China. While MacMillan does not overtly compare this trip to a political soap opera, the similarities are stunning. The People's Republic of China and the United States are two unlikely "frenemies" who seek to rebuild their relationship after years of distance and distrust. However, this new relationship faces complications from its "irritating," pesky, soon-to-be-ex, Taiwan. Despite the US's pursuit of a new tomorrow, it has a past with Taiwan that cannot so easily be ignored. Making matters even more complicated – and as much as they would deny it – both Taiwan and China desired the same thing: recognition as the legitimate government of China. In the final act, the United States and the People's Republic share one final moment to consummate their new relationship by announcing to the world the spectacle of this new tomorrow, through the Shanghai Communique. As the curtain closes on Nixon's (first) historic show, reality settles back in.

The hallmark of success during Nixon's trip for both governments was the issuing of the Shanghai Communique. In it, both governments sought to cooperate on a number of affairs that would greatly decrease the risk of conflict in Asia and establish the normalization of relations between the two countries. After the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the United States did not recognize the PRC as China and instead opted to recognize the Republic of China, which had fled to and resided in Taiwan where it was acknowledged by many in the world as the legitimate government of China. After several years, the absurdity of this claim became mainstream and many, including President Nixon, advocated for the normalization of relations with the PRC. Despite the shared goals of the Shanghai Communique, it raised many more questions than providing answers. Would the United States attempt to secure a peaceful arrangement over the reunification of Taiwan to the mainland? Would the United States abandon Taiwan? What did Sino-American normalization mean for Taiwan? Could the United States have relations with two governments that claimed to be China? In any case, the Shanghai Communique became the basis for not only Sino-American normalization, but also set in motion a new Taiwanese-American relationship dependent on the terms and limits of Sino-American normalization.

Section I: The Week that Changed the World

When Mao Zedong, Richard Nixon, Zhou En-lai, and Henry Kissinger first met on February 21, 1972, they praised each other's work, cracked jokes about Kissinger's misadventures as a bachelor, and attempted to tackle Sino-American normalization head on. As charming as all four men were, the next days would test their resolve and principles. There was some grand responsibility each man assumed as they felt the eyes of the world watching them,

waiting for the outcome of the trip. Peace and stability in Asia, a path to normalization of relations, and the self-determination of states were what both sides eventually agreed upon in the Shanghai Communique. One of the fundamental obstructions to normalization was the “issue” or “question” of Taiwan. Could the United States have relations with two governments that claimed to be “China?” Perhaps unbeknownst to them at the time, the Shanghai Communique would assume an authority over the framework of all Sino-American normalization negotiations.

First, a brief, yet relevant, recent history of Taiwan should be told. After 1949, Chiang Kai-shek, the leader of the Kuomintang (KMT) and the Republic of China (ROC), fled to Taiwan after the nationalists’ defeat in the Chinese Civil War. Taiwan had recently been occupied by Japan, from 1895 until its return to Chinese control in 1945, following Japan’s defeat in World War II. Chiang Kai-shek swore that he would return to the mainland in triumph and glory. His government also claimed to be the legitimate government of all of China. This claim was accepted by most countries after the Chinese Civil War. On the mainland, however, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) were clearly in charge and the legitimate government of the Chinese people there. The CCP also claimed ownership of Taiwan, citing that it was a province of China. Both parties claimed to be the legitimate governments of China. The United States made its choice to support Chiang Kai-shek presumably because of geostrategic reasons and Cold War anticommunist agendas. In 1954, President Eisenhower signed a Mutual Defense Treaty which pledged American land, air, and sea forces to the defense of the Republic of China should it be invaded. During President Nixon’s trip to China, Taiwan’s future was discussed as both it and the event of normalization were deeply intertwined.

No final agreement was reached on Taiwan in the Shanghai Communique. Instead, both sides expressed their hopes and expectations on the matter. The PRC stated that it would not

support “‘one China, one Taiwan’, one China, two governments’, ‘two Chinas’, an ‘independent Taiwan’ or advocate that ‘the status of Taiwan remains to be determined’” as an appropriate compromise.⁵ The Americans, using precise language, acknowledged that only one China existed and that Taiwan belonged to *that* China. They also stated that Taiwan must be peacefully reunified with the mainland.⁶ Intentional or not, the American position was ambiguous and left room for future developments.

It was no surprise that both sides were able to agree to the goals of the Shanghai Communique in a week. Nixon’s trip to China in 1972 was not the first contact this administration had with Chinese Communist Party leaders. Over the summer and in October of 1971, Henry Kissinger took two secret trips to China to meet with Premier Zhou En-lai to discuss the details of the Shanghai Communique. Both Kissinger and Zhou were the primary architects of the Shanghai Communique, so their personal philosophy sometimes leaked into the negotiations. Their drafts of the Shanghai Communique still included shared goals of peace, stability, and the disavowal of hegemony. Unsurprisingly, how normalization would affect Taiwan was up for debate. Zhou maintained that the reunification of Taiwan was an internal matter. Kissinger assured Zhou that the United States would withdraw its forces on Taiwan related to the Vietnam War.⁷ Margaret MacMillan, author of *Nixon and Mao*, states that Kissinger had been criticized for “too readily abandoning an old American ally and for exceeding his instructions by promising more than he should have.”⁸ In these secret meetings, Kissinger indicated that the United States was “going to end its support for Chiang Kai-shek” and “[the

⁵ “Wilson Center Digital Archive.”

⁶ “Wilson Center Digital Archive.”

⁷ U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Public Affairs, Office of the Historian, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, vol. XVII of China, ed. Steven E. Phillips and Edward C. Keefer, Document 162, 1971. All citations pulled from the *Foreign Relations of the United States* under the Nixon administration will hence be cited as “FRUS, document number, year of publication” for simplicity’s sake and to avoid redundancy.

⁸ MacMillan, *Nixon and Mao*, 256

United States] would not support any attempt by the Taiwanese to become independent.”⁹ He stated to Zhou that “maybe history can take care of events,” in reference to how both sides would deal with Taiwan.¹⁰ Resorting to this attitude of dealing with Taiwan on a later date, both sides had to return to the main issues at stake, namely the Soviet threat and the war in Vietnam. Still, as Margaret MacMillan writes, it was “a precondition for any improvement of relations between the United States and China” that China recovered Taiwan.¹¹

This answer did not necessarily satisfy either party because the main obstruction to normalization still lingered in the background. Kissinger assured Zhou that the United States was adamant on the peaceful reunification of Taiwan. He also emphasized the need to let the situation solve itself:

But I want to assure the Prime Minister that we are not looking for a clever way out of what I told him in July. With respect to Taiwan, I think we understand that it’s possible to do more than we can say. And that some things can be left to an historical evolution as long as we both understand the way it’s going. And that, of course, everything is easier for us if the resolution is peaceful.¹²

The roots of what is commonly referred to today as “strategic ambiguity” can be seen getting planted in this section. Perhaps, Kissinger was intentionally vague about what he thought historical evolution meant for Taiwan and China. Or, perhaps, Kissinger was sincerely focused on playing, what is commonly referred to as, the “China card,” or the geostrategic move of using the PRC as a counterweight against the Soviet Union, for the benefit of American interests. Kissinger may have thought that Taiwan was expendable for these pursuits. but was not authorized to make that call. Whatever the reason, Sino-American relations were already

⁹ MacMillan, 257

¹⁰ MacMillan, 257

¹¹ MacMillan, 256.

¹² FRUS, Document 162 1971.

delicate; any movement one way or the other had the risk of seriously inhibiting future relations with the PRC.

The Shanghai Communique states the differences in philosophy, or political ideology, between the People's Republic and the United States. Zhou En-lai and Mao, in particular, advocated that their part of the document focus partially on revolutionary thinking and resisting [imperialist] oppression.¹³ This statement was a nod to countries like Vietnam, North Korea, Cambodia, and Laos, as the PRC called for the equality of all nations and for strong nations not to bully the weak. In Kissinger's memos to the President, he made a special note of Zhou En-lai's insistence to emphasize the differences in political ideology between both countries in the Shanghai Communique.¹⁴ Kissinger wrote that "both in our discussions and in the communique drafting, the Chinese showed their disdain for pretending that peace was either near or desirable as an end in itself; for submerging differences in ambiguous formulas of agreements, or for discussing such subsidiary issues as arms control, trade, or exchanges which only serve to make relations look more 'normal' than they really are."¹⁵ The Chinese were skeptical of the process in general and Mao even disliked the very idea of writing a communique perhaps due to his revolutionary ideology and distrust of the United States.¹⁶ Despite the ideological differences, the US and PRC still agreed that peace in Asia was a top priority, no matter its feasibility.

The American portion of the document raised concerns mainly over the need for peace and argued that a stable relationship with China was a pathway towards peace. The particular peace that the US called for was a "just and secure" one: "just, because it fulfills the aspirations of peoples and nations for freedom and progress; secure, because it removes the danger of

¹³ "Wilson Center Digital Archive."

¹⁴ FRUS, Document 164, 1971.

¹⁵ FRUS, Document 164, 1971.

¹⁶ MacMillan, 212.

foreign aggression.”¹⁷ In addition to some of the reasons why the United States sought normalization, the US side expressed their hope that their armed forces on Taiwan related to the Vietnam War would swiftly be brought back home. Perhaps the most salient claim of the Shanghai Communique was that the US stated that there was only one China and that Taiwan belonged to that China. In a way, this was how Nixon and Kissinger could get around stating a position on the Taiwan question. With this claim, they could remain an objective third-party while also remaining immersed in the process.

Playing the “China card” not only tipped the balance of world power, but also gave the Nixon administration a new avenue for getting out of Vietnam. The Nixon administration prioritized the war in Vietnam over the Taiwan issue. The war had expanded into Cambodia and Laos, which was not in the direction Nixon wanted the conflict to move. Margaraet MacMillan writes that “the conflict was overshadowing Nixon’s presidency much as it had Johnson’s; it was hurting American society and harming Nixon’s ability to deal with the big issues facing the United States abroad, such as relations with the Soviet Union.”¹⁸ The Americans and the Chinese could collaborate with the North Vietnamese to find a peaceful resolution and form a bloc against the Soviet Union.¹⁹ Nixon hoped that normalized relations between the US and PRC would decrease the chances for conflict between the US and the PRC and could get the United States out of Vietnam.

Likewise, the Chinese sought an American “quasi-alliance” to deter the Soviet Union from threatening their northern border.²⁰ Since the 1960s, Sino-Soviet relations were under constant strain as Nikita Khrushchev spearheaded “de-Stalinization” and sought better relations

¹⁷ FRUS, Document 164, 1971.

¹⁸ MacMillan, 262.

¹⁹ Kissinger and Le Duc Tho, the famous Vietnamese diplomat, jointly won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1973 for their part in ending the war

²⁰ Kissinger, *On China*, 276

with capitalist countries. The Great Leap Forward, launched in 1958, was at odds with Khrushchev's reformist policies.²¹ Additionally, the Soviet Union refused to aid China's nuclear weapons program, as Khrushchev believed that Mao was "rash and potentially destabilizing" on the stage of international politics.²² Khrushchev was a harsh critic of the Cultural Revolution, calling it "reactionary," to which Mao responded that the Soviet method of peaceful coexistence with capitalist countries was "imperfect revolution."²³ Mao also made note to Kissinger that the Soviet Union was a global threat that "needed to be resisted globally."²⁴

Nonetheless, the relationship between PRC and the United States was even more combative and tense. Shifting from enemy to ally was not as seamless as the Chinese government would have the Nixon administration believe. The old guard rhetoric of battering the Americans over their imperialistic history was toned down for this trip, but the sentiment and belief of American imperialism was still prevalent in Chinese thought. This came through in the dialogue between Zhou En-lai and Kissinger when the Chinese side was forthcoming about establishing the differences between the two countries. Chinese propaganda often called the Chinese people to "overthrow the American imperialists and their running dogs."²⁵ Zhou En-lai took many stabs at Truman and John Foster Dulles for signing an "illegal" treaty with Chiang Kai-shek.²⁶ However, playing the "American card" against the Soviet Union reordered the tri-polar relationship and greatly reduced the chances of another Sino-Soviet clash or even a Soviet-American clash. And as MacMillan argues throughout the book, the Soviet threat and peace in Vietnam were more important issues than dealing with Taiwan in the present moment.

²¹ Szczepanski, "What Was the Sino-Soviet Split?"

²² Szczepanski, "What Was the Sino-Soviet Split?"

²³ Kissinger, 131.

²⁴ Kissinger, 281.

²⁵ FRUS, Document 163, 1971.

²⁶ MacMillan, 250.

The Soviet Union and Vietnam presented their own problems for the PRC and the United States, but were problems that the normalization of relations could help alleviate. Taiwan, if given too much attention by Kissinger and Zhou, was not only an obstacle to normalization, but had the potential of driving both parties further apart. While the United States had to commit to a position of noncompliance when it came to supporting any independence movement in Taiwan, the reality of the situation was that Nixon and Kissinger felt slightly differently. In private conversations after Nixon's trip to China, they debated that their actual position on Taiwan was to wait for the PRC to become "less dogmatic" and accept the *fait accompli* that Taiwan was its own separate entity.²⁷ Perhaps Beijing already took this into account and warned the United States that it could wait another 20 years over Taiwan.²⁸ Ultimately, Nixon and Kissinger did not have any plan other than to let history unfold and take care of the problem.

More pressing to the Nixon administration was getting out of Vietnam and establishing relations with the most populous country in the world. Where they succeeded in setting in motion a process for normalization also created more pressing questions for Taiwan. While the Shanghai Communique made the goal of Sino-American normalization more attainable, it raised unanswerable questions about the status of Taiwan. What would Taiwanese-American relations look like if the United States and People's Republic normalized relations? Would the United States abandon its old ally? Could the Taiwanese advocate for their own path? How long would the Chinese realistically wait on the Taiwan issue? And perhaps most importantly, what happens next? These are the questions that emerged from Nixon's trip to China. The Nixon administration could not *have their cake, and eat it too*; they could not have official relations with the PRC and the ROC. Indeed, it is unconvincing that the Americans were willing to embark on a

²⁷ FRUS, Document 208, 1972

²⁸ MacMillan, 260.

reunification process because it continued to treat Taiwan as a separate entity. Truly, if Taiwan was accepted as just a “province” of China the amount of complications and contradictions embedded into the nature of Sino-American relations would be significantly reduced. The Shanghai Communique set the US on a path towards normalization, but at the cost of breaking their official relationship with Taiwan. How these pieces would be picked up, not only by this administration, but by the Taiwanese themselves, would determine which parts of the Taiwanese-American relationship were vital.

Section II: Responses to the Shanghai Communique

When Henry Kissinger broke the news to the Taiwanese that the United States wanted to pursue relations with the PRC, reactions were understandably mixed. Nixon assured the US Ambassador to the ROC Walter McConaughy that they would pursue normalization “not because we love them, but because they’re there.”²⁹ Before Nixon’s trip to China, Kissinger told Ambassador James Shen of the ROC that the United States had no intention of “going much beyond where it is now” with its relations with the PRC.³⁰ However, what the Taiwanese did not know at the time was that Kissinger had already taken several secret trips to China. It would be a hard sell for Taiwanese officials to accept that Sino-American normalization meant anything less than cutting some ties with the ROC. Ambassador Shen was particularly worried about the Shanghai Communique and its implications for Taiwan. Among its relationship with the United States and reunification with the mainland, ROC officials were concerned whether or not the Mutual Defense Treaty would remain intact if the United States and the PRC normalized relations. Under Article X of the Mutual Defense Treaty, either party could terminate the treaty

²⁹ FRUS, Document 136, 1971.

³⁰ FRUS, Document 225, 1972.

but would have to give a year's notice before it became null and void. Nonetheless, the Nixon administration sought to avoid this situation by hoping that the Chinese would become less dogmatic about its claims over Taiwan and that the ROC government would become more representative and democratic. Ultimately, the Shanghai Communiqué sparked questions about American commitments to Taiwan and provoked enough doubt in the KMT's legitimacy to foster political liberalization.

The KMT was desperate for allies after its international isolation began in 1971. That year was pivotal because the United Nations voted to recognize the PRC as holding the China seat in both the General Assembly and in the Security Council, thus making it one of the P5. Chiang Kai-shek's argument that the KMT represented all of China fell on deaf ears as the years turned into decades without any momentum indicating that the KMT was the legitimate government of China. The Albanian Resolution, the motion in the UN to recognize the PRC as the China seat, eventually passed with a majority vote in the General Assembly. The ROC delegation, in an attempt to save-face, stormed out of the building before the vote was cast. As a result of its expulsion, the ROC lost many of its diplomatic ties, only retaining diplomatic relations with several smaller countries.³¹ Larger countries such as the United Kingdom, who recognized the PRC in the 1950s and France, who recognized the PRC in the 1960s. Presumably, due to a mixture of elements such as the Mutual Defense Treaty, tense pre-existing relations with the PRC, and the ongoing Cold War, support of Taiwan was still a vital US interest.

The Nixon administration recognized that the United States had a major impact on Taiwan's economic development. In the 1960s, American aid to Taiwan amounted to around \$1 billion which, at the time, equaled 43% of gross investment.³² By the mid-1960s, Taiwan hit an

³¹ Shattuck, "A New Type of Diplomacy."

³² Chang, David W., "U.S. Aid and Economic Progress in Taiwan."

economic “surge” as “industrial production was three times what it had been in 1953; per capita income was up six-fold over 1940.”³³ American aid ceased in 1964 due to what the State Department cited as “healthy economic growth.”³⁴ American military aid, however, would not cease. The two economies were deeply linked, which created a close-knit relationship between the two powers.

In addition to its economic aid, US media were quite fond of Chiang Kai-shek and his wife, Soong Mei-ling. Henry Luce, an influential editor for *Time* magazine and the son of a missionary who spent a lot of time in Taiwan, used *Time* magazine to “tout the Chiangs as a bulwark for a modernized, Westernized, and Christian China.”³⁵ Flash forward to 1971, the United States and Taiwan were at a crossroads due to developments in Sino-American relations and an international leaning towards the PRC.

In April of 1971, the United States hosted the departing Ambassador of the ROC, Chow Shu-kai, to discuss moves in the United Nations and how the US was planning on moving forward with the PRC.³⁶ Initially, Nixon and Kissinger made it clear to Ambassador Chow that the Shanghai Communique did not mean the termination of the Mutual Defense Treaty for now.³⁷ Nixon and Kissinger also expressed that the growing threat the PRC posed was too considerable to rely solely on the hope that war or open-armed conflict would not disrupt the stability of East Asia. Therefore, the United States had to consider the normalization of relations with the PRC as a means of securing peace. A peaceful solution for reunification would greatly reduce any threat of war or conflict. Chow understood the motivation behind the US interest to move forward with the PRC. Chow also recognized that this new relationship would also put the United States

³³ Copper, *Taiwan: Nation-State or Province?*, 39

³⁴ New York Times, “U.S. ECONOMIC HELP FOR TAIWAN TO END.”

³⁵ Bergsten, et. al, *China's Rise*, 172.

³⁶ FRUS, Document 114, 1971.

³⁷ FRUS, Document 113, 1971.

between Beijing and Moscow as a buffer, which was ultimately in Taiwan's interests as well because it drew attention away from reunification.³⁸ However, Chow speculated how "sophisticated" this move was. He claimed that it would be difficult to explain these American moves to the people of Taiwan, yet Chow was made aware that the US pursuit of normalization with the PRC had nothing to do with Taipei-Washington relations.³⁹ This meeting was very friendly, as Kissinger assured Ambassador Chow that "Taiwan should feel he had two friends [Nixon and Kissinger] in the White House."⁴⁰ Perhaps, this is yet another example of Kissinger playing a dangerous game by promising more than he could give. It is difficult to determine if Kissinger was being purposefully deceitful in order to gain more time while he and others in the Nixon administration adopted a plan for how the United States could maintain relations with both the ROC and the PRC. But, what is not difficult to imagine is that Ambassador Chow reported this to Chiang Kai-shek and ROC officials understood exactly what part of their relationship was at stake.

While the United States had its hand full clarifying their intentions behind the Shanghai Communique with Taiwanese officials, Chiang Kai-shek was not so easily convinced that Sino-American relations had nothing to do with Taiwanese-American relations. The KMT was pragmatic and knew the risks of expressing their distaste of the situation. Potentially losing favor among those sympathetic to Taiwan in Congress and further embarrassing themselves on an international level, Chiang Kai-shek sent his son Chiang Ching-kuo (CCK), who was at the time the Vice Premier of the KMT, to meet with Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian Affairs Marshal Green and Kissinger's assistant John Holdridge. This meeting, held after the announcement of the Shanghai Communique, was a "long and cordial meeting" which stressed

³⁸ FRUS, Document 113, 1971.

³⁹ FRUS, Document 113, 1971.

⁴⁰ FRUS, Document 113, 1971.

the importance of the Mutual Defense Treaty.⁴¹ The ROC had to emphasize the importance of the Mutual Defense Treaty as the fear was that without it, there was nothing stopping the PRC from launching an invasion. Green and Holdridge assured the younger Chiang that the United States had not changed its status with Taiwan, but merely sought the normalization of relations with the PRC.⁴² Green remarked, surprisingly, that the United States would “continue to have diplomatic relations” with the Republic of China.⁴³ In addition to the need for American military support, CCK was also interested in the future of American economic support. Holdridge, in private, quipped that “our relationship with them will continue, because they have nowhere else to go.”⁴⁴

How the Nixon administration interpreted the PRC-ROC Relationship

The United States did not challenge that Taiwan was part of China in the Shanghai Communique. This stance was a reflection of what both the PRC and the ROC claimed. However, it cornered the Nixon administration into hoping either the PRC or ROC would adjust their stance. The Nixon administration miscalculated that the PRC would eventually lose interest in Taiwan, which would not only ease Sino-American tensions, but also relieve some tensions in PRC-ROC relations. Despite their hopes, the Nixon administration underestimated how long the Chinese were willing to hold out on the Taiwan issue.

In March of 1972, Secretary of State William Rogers issued ten intermediate steps to Kissinger on how to deal with the PRC and the ROC. They are summarized below:

1. Act as if both the PRC and the ROC were the *de jure* governments of the area under their control.

⁴¹ Taylor, *The Generalissimo*, 578

⁴² Taylor, 578.

⁴³ Taylor, 578.

⁴⁴ Taylor, 578.

2. Avoid legalistic formations about the status of Taiwan and speak increasingly of the PRC as China and the ROC as Taiwan.
3. Make it clear to the PRC that we [the Nixon administration] will not put any special military or other pressures on it from Taiwan.
4. Do everything to rid our relationship with the PRC of the past aura of confrontation.
5. Encourage PRC-Taiwan dialogue (trade, travel, reunification of families).
6. Maintain the ROC's bargaining position in any talks that any settlement should be acceptable to people on both sides of the Taiwan Strait.
7. Emphasize the economic aspect of Taiwan's status over the political and the military. This would include support of Taiwan in international financial institutions.
8. Quietly endorse trends with the ROC to make its government more representative, but also informing them that the U.S. will not support any Taiwanese independence movement.
9. Reduce the possibility that Taiwan could become a major problem area for U.S.-Japanese relations.
10. Do nothing to encourage or discourage the PRC to become less dogmatic about gaining control over Taiwan.⁴⁵

Of these ten steps, the final one, which fully states that “On the assumption that Peking may become less dogmatic about gaining control over Taiwan in the long-term future, in effect not doing anything which would conflict with Peking’s acceptance as a *fait accompli* of Taiwan’s existence as a separate entity.”⁴⁶ Playing both sides weakened the US position because it not only angered the PRC because of the slow process of troop removal, selling of arms, and harboring of pro-independence movement leaders, but also gave Taiwan no pathway to independence if the people so desired. Even by 1972, most Taiwanese were happy with the “economic miracle” and there was, as historian John Copper writes, “no desire on the part of the population to be ruled under communism by the People’s Republic of China.”⁴⁷

⁴⁵ FRUS, Document 208, 1972.

⁴⁶ FRUS, Document 208, 1972.

⁴⁷ Copper, 41.

A few years later, in October of 1975, Henry Kissinger spoke with Mao for the last time before Mao's death. In their conversation, Mao was cognizant of his ailing health and the decline of his influence in the Chinese Communist Party. He thought of himself as "a showcase exhibit for visitors."⁴⁸ Aware of his age and of China's long-term historic goals, the Chairman was less concerned about Taiwan and more concerned with China's place in the pecking order of the world. In his view, the United States and the Soviet Union remained supreme at the top while countries in Europe and Japan rested in the middle and China reigned as the leading country in the "third world." In reference to Taiwan, the Chairman had this to say:

It's better for it to be in your hands. And if you were to send it back to me now, I would not want it, because it's not wantable. There are a huge bunch of counter-revolutionaries there. A hundred years hence we will want it [gesturing with his hand], and we are going to fight for it.⁴⁹

Perhaps the scale of Mao's claims were underestimated by Kissinger and his aides, or they perceived his comments to be the ramblings of an old man; the United States still believed that China and Taiwan would reunite peacefully based on the Shanghai Communique. Contrary to the language of the Shanghai Communique, it seems that Mao was less concerned about a peaceful reunification than the Americans were. The Shanghai Communique sought to avoid conflict when necessary, but the PRC still claimed that the reunification of Taiwan was an internal matter. The Nixon administration attempted to avoid any notion that Taiwan was a separate entity. The Chinese attempted to avoid revolutionary rhetoric about Taiwan with the hope that it would not provoke outrage by the United States and their shared mission for peace. Thus, both sides compromised their own agendas for the benefits of peace and stability.

⁴⁸ Kissinger, 310.

⁴⁹ Kissinger, 307.

Despite their best efforts, each side hinted at their true intentions for Taiwan. This attitude was the highlight of talks between Kissinger and Vice Premier Deng in 1974 when Kissinger was questioned on the validity of the Taiwanese-American Mutual Defense Treaty. Along the lines of the Mutual Defense Treaty, Deng pointed out the contradiction of the American stance of “one China” and the existence of American interests in creating liaison offices in Taipei. Deng stated that “since you can formulate a law [Mutual Defense Treaty], naturally you can also do away with it,” essentially calling Kissinger’s bluff that the United States was fully committed to reunification. Perhaps, if the United States was fully committed to peaceful reunification, it would have severed its Mutual Defense Treaty following its acknowledgement that Taiwan was a part of China. However, as discussed before, the American position on Taiwan was intentionally left vague and ambiguous. After Nixon’s trip, he, Kissinger, and Chief of Staff H. R. Haldeman confirmed in private that the United States would neither encourage nor discourage Taiwanese independence.⁵⁰ And for the Chinese, Mao’s words about eventually taking Taiwan by force speak for themselves; the Chinese were far more invested in Taiwan than the Americans had estimated or planned for.

Conclusion

While President Nixon’s trip to China and the Shanghai Communique were breakthroughs in Sino-American rapprochement, this relationship was now partially dependent on the question of Taiwan. The Shanghai Communique asserted to the world that a new player was emerging into the world order and its presence would be here to stay. Even with better relations on the horizon, the PRC and the United States still had a wedge between them. Since its

⁵⁰ FRUS, Document 212, 1972.

status remained undetermined, there were naturally many questions about Taiwan. These questions would not be answered by the Nixon administration and had to be picked up by President Carter. How could the United States maintain relations with both countries? Which parts of the Taiwanese-American relationship were important to keep? If the full normalization of relations did occur, what would happen to Taiwan and its people? Was it in American interests to maintain unofficial relations with the ROC? If so, why? How could this be accomplished?

Timeline

1971: United Nations unrecognizes the Republic of China as holding the “China ” seat in both the Security Council and the General Assembly; Tensions grow between Soviet Union and People’s Republic of China; James C.H. Shen is appointed Republic of China’s ambassador to the United States.

February, 1972: Nixon and Kissinger Trip to China; Shanghai Communique is released.

August, 1974: Nixon resigns from office after Watergate scandal; President Ford is sworn into office.

April, 1975: Chiang Kai-shek dies. His son, Chiang Ching-kuo, serves as de facto ruler of Taiwan.

January-September, 1976: Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai die. Hua Guofeng becomes Premier.

January, 1977: Jimmy Carter is inaugurated President.

July, 1977: Deng Xiaoping becomes Vice Premier.

August, 1977: Cyrus Vance’s “exploratory” trip to China ends in an unsatisfactory result.

May, 1978: Zbigniew Brzezinski’s trip to China restarts Sino-American normalization talks.

September, 1978: Carter gives Chai Tse-min the American conditions for normalization.

November-December 1978: Leonard Woodcock meets with Chinese leaders several times to discuss normalization.

December 15, 1978: President Carter announces publicly that Sino-American normalization will begin on January 1, 1979.

January 1, 1979: Normalization Communique is released.

April 10, 1979: Taiwan Relations Act (TRA) signed into law.

Chapter II: The Carter Years

Introduction

When President Jimmy Carter took office in 1977, the world looked a little different than how it did in 1972. The United States was no longer at war in Vietnam. President Nixon had resigned because of the Watergate scandal. Mao Zedong and Zhou En-lai had both passed away. New leadership was underway, as Deng Xiaoping reemerged from his latest purge as Vice Premier and the *de facto* leader of the Chinese Communist Party. Chiang Ching-kuo had cemented his place as leader of Taiwan. Despite President Ford's efforts at normalization, President Carter would be the one tasked with not only normalizing relations with the People's Republic, but also answering some of the questions asked during the Nixon administration. The Carter administration pondered specifically the question of how, despite pursuing the normalization of relations with the PRC, the United States could maintain unofficial relations with the ROC government and the Taiwanese people.

The administration went through several rounds of talks with the PRC in order to gauge the details about normalization on which the PRC was willing to compromise. In 1977, the Carter administration, among other things, proposed demoting their embassy in Taipei to the status of a liaison office and likewise, promoting both liaison offices in Beijing and Washington to the status of embassies. This would ensure that relations with both the ROC and the PRC could exist simultaneously. As will be expanded upon, the PRC did not accept this proposal. In the intermediate stages of the normalization process, the Carter administration sought to reignite the normalization process by coming to a compromise of agreeing to disagree about the future of Taiwan. During this intermediate phase, however, the Carter administration emphasized their

excitement concerning normalization by not stressing the Taiwan question. Reminiscent of Nixon-era negotiations, this successfully reset the course for normalization. In the final phase of negotiations, the United States had a more unified approach to the Taiwan question and sought to establish a private organization in place of an embassy, but also stressed the importance of selling defensive weapons to Taiwan.

Throughout the entire process, the Carter administration kept in mind fundamental guiding principles which defended the decision to maintain unofficial relations in the first place. The United States risked several things by switching recognition. Namely, the United States had a moral obligation not to jeopardize Taiwan's future. Members of Carter's cabinet also stressed that the image of the United States was at stake if they were perceived by their allies as abandoning Taiwan for a communist country.

What is evident, as well, is that the Carter administration did not consult any ROC officials on the normalization process. Nor did the Carter administration actively consult members of Congress about both the normalization process and the question of how to maintain unofficial relations with Taiwan. This, in effect, led to criticism of the Carter administration and forced both Democrats and Republicans in Congress to act swiftly to create legislation that backed the commitments of the United States to not only maintain commercial and cultural relations with the people of Taiwan, but also – should the need arise – defend Taiwan from invasion, perceived or realized.

As a result of all of these moving pieces, Congress passed the Taiwan Relations Act (TRA) on April 10, 1979. The Taiwan Relations Act gave the United States special privileges in its relationship with Taiwan. The United States would continue “commercial, cultural, and other relations” with the people of Taiwan. Most importantly, the United States would “provide Taiwan

with arms of a defensive character.”⁵¹ Still, in order to normalize relations with the PRC, the United States had to sever diplomatic relations with the ROC. From 1977 to 1979, US-China-Taiwan relations experienced a drastic shift; the People’s Republic and United States normalized relations and the Republic of China was alone in the world with no major official allies. Nonetheless, the core components of the Taiwanese-American relationship remained intact.

Section I: The Appropriate Conditions for Sino-American Normalization

On January 8, 1977, Secretary-designate Cyrus Vance was introduced to Chief PRC Liaison Officer Huang Chen by then-Secretary of State Kissinger. This transfer of power marked a turning point in Sino-American relations. Other than the fact that President Carter was a Democrat with a strong focus on human rights in foreign policy, the Kissinger-dominated era of diplomacy was coming to an end. Kissinger greeted Ambassador Huang like an old friend as they joked about that historic trip in 1972. Kissinger joked to Vance that he would lose his “trim figure” after enough servings of Peking Duck and Mao tai.⁵² Much like during Nixon’s trip to China, the conversations were pleasant, lighthearted, and convivial. However, the underlying significance of this conversation was that Kissinger entrusted to Vance the responsibility to normalize relations with the People’s Republic. It was already well-established that normalization would be guided through the framework of the Shanghai Communiqué.⁵³ The

⁵¹ Zablocki, “Text - H.R.2479 - 96th Congress (1979-1980).”

⁵² U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Public Affairs, Office of the Historian, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, vol. XIII of China, eds. David P. Nickles and Adam M. Howard, Document 2, 1977. All citations pulled from the *Foreign Relations of the United States* under the Carter administration will hence be cited as “FRUS, document number, year of publication” for simplicity’s sake and to avoid redundancy.

⁵³ Quote from Document 2: “Secretary Kissinger: Perhaps I could sum up what I told Mr. Vance about our relationship and then the Ambassador could see if I have correctly stated it. First, I told Mr. Vance that I’ve always believed that our relationship with the PRC was one of the most important initiatives that was undertaken and one of

Carter administration had no plans to stray from this path. In addition to the spirit of the Shanghai Communique, the PRC became increasingly vocal about three preconditions for normalization: (1) sever the diplomatic relationship with Taiwan, (2) withdraw US troops from Taiwan, and (3) abrogate the Defense Treaty of 1954. As was the case in 1972, Taiwan was going to be a wedge obstructing a clean path to normalization between the People's Republic and the United States.

Before any decision was made about normalization, Carter and his aides had to find an appropriate solution to the Taiwan issue that satisfied not only these three conditions for normalization, but also assured supporters of the ROC that Taiwan was not going to be abandoned. The Carter administration went through several phases of negotiations with the PRC, which ultimately strengthened the Carter administration's resolve to support Taiwan through nonofficial methods. Secretary of State Cyrus Vance and National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski both made individual trips to China, with varied results. The Carter administration was still attempting to get their footing when Vance made his trip to China in August of 1977. Vance and the entire Carter administration were criticized by the PRC as having delayed normalization due to various reasons. Namely, Deng Xiaoping claimed that the United States was going back on what the Ford administration had promised. Deng understood that Ford, if re-elected, would normalize relations between the US and the PRC. At this point in 1977, the United States only had a liaison office in China which dealt with mutual affairs.⁵⁴ Vance, in his trip, suggested that the United States sever diplomatic ties with Taiwan and set up a liaison office

the most important elements of international equilibrium. We expressed this in the Shanghai Communique and in other communiques—our mutual concern with respect to hegemony, with respect to the dangers of hegemony in the world. And we therefore developed the practice of informing the PRC quite fully, or fully, about our planned discussions with other key countries. Chairman Mao, in several very extensive conversations with me and in two conversations with American Presidents, elaborated the Chinese point of view on the international situation which on many key points was parallel to our own.”

⁵⁴ Boccardi, “Teng Says Vance Trip Set Back Normal Ties.”

there like the US had in mainland China.⁵⁵ This switch of liaison offices was unacceptable because “it would mean that continued diplomatic links between the United States and Taiwan” would still exist.⁵⁶ To Deng and the rest of the Chinese Communist Party, this delayed normalization.

In between Vance’s and Brzezinski’s trip, the Carter administration took a break from the normalization process to reassess the best way to approach the PRC. In this interim period, the Department of Defense and the Joint Chiefs of Staff were utilized to not only reaffirm the reason why the Carter administration had moral obligations to Taiwan, but also that there were real benefits to the normalization of relations with the PRC.

A year after Vance’s trip, Zbigniew Brzeziński met with Deng Xiaoping to discuss normalization. Famously, Brzezinski told Deng that “the U.S. has made up its mind.”⁵⁷ Echoing how Zhou En-lai viewed the Taiwan situation in that China could play the waiting game, Deng Xiaoping also stated that “if the U.S. was still in need of Taiwan, China could wait.”⁵⁸ After Brzezinski’s trip to China, Carter commissioned Leonard Woodcock, Chief Liaison Officer to China, to draft the Normalization Communique.

The proceeding section will discuss the fundamental document titled PRM-24 which outlined the Carter administration’s China and Taiwan policies; then it will outline how that policy was presented to the Chinese leaders during Secretary of State Cyrus Vance’s trip to China; then, in the interim period between the Vance and Brzezinski trip, the Carter administration took reevaluated its commitments to Taiwan; finally, this section will detail Zbigniew Brzezinski’s trip to China the following year and his emphasis on pushing for

⁵⁵ Boccardi.

⁵⁶ Boccardi.

⁵⁷ “Zbigniew Brzezinski Meeting with Deng Xiaoping, May 21, 1978 | US-China Institute.”

⁵⁸ “Zbigniew Brzezinski Meeting with Deng Xiaoping, May 21, 1978 | US-China Institute.”

normalization within the framework of Sino-Soviet tensions, which ultimately deemphasized Taiwan's role in normalization.

The Carter Administration's Early China Policy

Even during President Nixon's trip to China, the PRC was firm on their conditions for normalization. Brzezinski reiterated to President Carter that the United States was willing to accept the Chinese preconditions as long as the United States could continue selling arms to Taiwan and maintain some degree of cultural, commercial, and other relations with Taiwan.⁵⁹ Just as the Japanese had unofficial relations with Taiwan, the United States sought to keep a presence on the island.

To best understand the Carter administration's approach to China and the Taiwan issue, it is helpful to distinguish the foreign policy goals of Carter and Nixon. Similar to how Nixon relied on Henry Kissinger to strategize and suggest how to move forward with China, Carter entrusted Cyrus Vance, Zbigniew Brzeziński, and later Leonard Woodcock to negotiate with Chinese officials. Brzezinski is often seen as the main protagonist of Sino-American relations for reigniting the process. His approach of using the "China card" against the Soviet Union, which paralleled – even completed – Kissinger's original intent, was the argument that convinced Carter to fully commit to normalization.⁶⁰ Historian Jean Garrison argues that "according to Brzezinski, since the Soviets were so indifferent to the US interests, even to the detriment of SALT, he felt the United States should increase the pace of normalization with China against Soviet wishes."⁶¹ However, other than this approach to normalization, the similarities between Carter and Nixon begin to fade. Carter is remembered for his emphasis on human rights and

⁵⁹ FRUS, Document 99, 1978.

⁶⁰ Garrison, "Explaining Change in the Carter Administration's China Policy," 90

⁶¹ Garrison, 90.

infusing a “new morality in American diplomacy, one grounded in the pursuit of human rights.”⁶² In his inaugural address, Carter stated that, “Because we are free, we can never be indifferent to the fate of freedom elsewhere. Our moral sense dictates a clear-cut preference for those societies which share with us an abiding respect for individual human rights.”⁶³ Despite the criticism that he was a mediocre foreign policy president, he made significant progress in many areas. Most notably, the Camp David Accords, the peace treaty between Israel and Egypt, was a source of pride for the Carter administration. Not only did Carter bridge the gap between these two historic enemies, he also ratified the Panama Canal Treaty, which would relinquish US control of the Panama Canal by the year 2000 and guarantee the canal’s neutrality. In addition to this, Carter was instrumental in de-escalating tensions between the Soviet Union and the United States through the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (SALT) II, which limited the amount of nuclear weapons either side was allowed to manufacture. Although Nixon’s legacy has been tarnished by the Watergate scandal and other domestic affairs, he nonetheless paved his own path in foreign policy. Lauded by the maxim that he was the only president who could have gone to China, Nixon also made an effort to get the United States out of Vietnam and attempted to ease tensions between the Soviet Union and the United States. To any Carter or Nixon historian, the differences I have highlighted might seem glaringly insufficient in describing the two administrations. However, the point is that while these two men had different agendas as president, both still believed in the virtue of normalization with the People’s Republic. That “virtue,” which is highlighted in the Shanghai Communique, is that these two powers were committed to peace in Asia and the benefits of cooperation with the PRC. Thus, Carter, as written succinctly and accurately by diplomatic historian Brian Hilton, “pursued normalization

⁶² FRUS, “Carter and Human Rights,” 1977-1981.

⁶³ FRUS, “President Carter and Human Rights.”

because of his moralistic belief that the Sino-American rapprochement that began in 1972 had produced genuine and tangible progress toward the goal of helping China to develop into a productive and cooperative member of the international community.”⁶⁴

The Carter administration’s China and Taiwan policies were influenced by a number of reasons. Before Secretary Vance’s trip to China, the United States was working with many theoretical and untested approaches to China. Along with Carter’s own belief that China and the United States needed a formal relationship and that playing the “China card” could reasonably counter the Soviet Union – or at least make them more agreeable to compromise on SALT II, Taiwan still could not be separated from the overall approach to China. Presidential Review Memorandum 24, or PRM-24, was written in April of 1977 by Zbigniew Brzezinski to outline American options regarding China and Taiwan. Somewhat confusingly, the summaries of the conclusions related to PRM-24 are broken into two parts in another document.⁶⁵ The foreign policy options in part one are as follows:

- Option 1: Make a major effort to establish full diplomatic relations in the near future by recognizing Peking, allowing diplomatic relations and the Treaty with Taiwan to lapse, and remaining satisfied that alternative means will exist to sustain the substance of our current relationship with Taiwan.
- Option 2: Seek to achieve qualitative movement toward – but short of – full normalization by recognizing Peking while retaining some official representation and possibly military forces on Taiwan.
- Option 3: Seek to advance the relationship not through normalization but through unilateral steps on Taiwan (troop withdrawal, lowering the level of our representation on Taiwan).
- Option 4: Maintain official relations at current levels, with focus on collateral enhancements (such as increased security contracts, intelligence sharing, sale of dual-use technology, and/or acquiescence of third country sale of military technology).⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Hilton, “Maximum Flexibility for Peaceful Change,” 605

⁶⁵ FRUS, Document 34, 1977.

⁶⁶ FRUS, Document 34, 1977.

In essence, each option treats normalization on a scale ranging from full diplomatic relations with the PRC to keeping diplomatic relations with Taiwan, but improvement of some US-PRC relations. In each option, the United States had the intention of maintaining some relations with Taiwan, albeit anything short of diplomatic relations. This could entail a liaison office, like they had set up in China while normalization was still in negotiations.

Most of the administration believed that adopting Option 1 was ideal for a number of reasons. The first being that Sino-American relations had “eroded since 1973-4. Trade [was] down; cultural exchanges [languished]; intelligence sharing [had] ceased; the rhetoric on each side no longer adequately [took] into account the domestic concerns of the other.”⁶⁷ Defense Secretary Harold Brown went as far to note that the relationship was “not a stable [one].”⁶⁸ Undersecretary Philip Habib stated that the Chinese felt “let down” and that the United States owed them a “debt” – in reference to the Shanghai Communiqué.⁶⁹ The window to normalize relations with the Chinese, in the eyes of the Carter administration, was getting smaller as time went on. Another reason for adopting Option 1 was that full normalization takes advantage of the already strained Sino-Soviet-US triangular relationship. Richard Holbrooke, Assistant Secretary of State, made it clear that “the Sino-Soviet-US triangle is inherently unstable and that a change in one leg could easily impact in unpredictable ways upon the other legs – hence the desirability of consolidating the Sino-American leg.”⁷⁰

To this end, Brzezinski summarized that there were two inter-related problems and three strategic goals. The inter-related problems were “(a) how to achieve normalization – a bilateral issue; and (b) how to deepen the relationship and expand the areas of tacit cooperation – in many

⁶⁷ FRUS, Document 34, 1977.

⁶⁸ FRUS, Document 34, 1977.

⁶⁹ FRUS, Document 34, 1977.

⁷⁰ FRUS, Document 34, 1977.

ways, a strategic problem.” In regard to the strategic goals, they were “(1) to prevent a deterioration in the bilateral relationship that would harm our strategic interests; (2) to keep the Sino-US relationship qualitatively better than Sino-Soviet relations; and (3) to engage the PRC in wider global relations.”⁷¹ There was an emphasis from Brzezinski that the PRC-US relationship was more inherently more important than the ROC-US one.

Part two of the summary of PRM-24 presented three options with regards to American troop withdrawal: 1) complete withdrawal by December 31, 1977, 2) 50% reduction by December 31, 1977, and 3) 50% reduction by December 31, 1978. In terms of the troop withdrawal, the administration believed that this decision would be best decided after Secretary of State Cyrus Vance’s trip to China planned for August of 1977. This part of the decision to normalize relations, although significant on the logistical side, was not as concerning to the Carter administration as was the decision to normalize relations in the first place.

The Carter administration had repeatedly flagged the three Chinese preconditions for normalization. To Carter’s aides, it was important to frame their own conditions around these because the PRC was inflexible. If normalization was to proceed, the United States had to accommodate these conditions and proceed from there. One strategy that could help retain an American presence on Taiwan would be to continue selling defensive weapons to Taiwan. There were few questions raised about whether or not the PRC would be willing to accept this proposition. In light of this, Brzezinski raised the question of what evidence there was to support that the United States could pursue this strategy. In response, Richard Holbrooke stated:

Well, the Chinese thus far have explicitly mentioned three conditions for normalization: abrogation of the Defense Treaty, severance of diplomatic relations with Taiwan, and withdrawal of all military forces and military installations. If the Chinese were to add no arms sales, then they have added a fourth condition.

⁷¹ FRUS, Document 34, 1977.

We are proceeding in the hope that the Chinese care a great deal about symbols, and that they are willing to tolerate a continued U.S. security relationship with Taiwan in substance in order to obtain a relationship that affirms their legitimacy as the government of China.⁷²

Carter was willing to pursue this strategy as long as the United States was open about it with the Chinese. In his mind, it was better to lay out the idea than to secretly sell arms to Taiwan and the process of normalization would be set back further, or worse, fall apart completely.

Another reason the Carter administration wanted to grant Taiwan some autonomy is that if normalization created enough pressure on Taiwanese officials for them to declare independence, the PRC would invade to reunify Taiwan with the mainland. This scenario presented more problems than solutions to the Carter administration and a risk too big to take. Also, it would take Sino-American relations to extreme hostilities and the prospect of war increased dramatically. Richard Holbrooke believed that Taiwan would not go independent because “its leaders are pragmatic.”⁷³ Agreeing with him, Michael Oskenberg, a staff member of the NSA, stated that “as long as Taiwan is not pushed into a desperate position, they are unlikely to declare their independence.”⁷⁴ Brzezinski suggested that they also add another clause to a policy paper titled “Alternative Negotiation Strategies for Normalizing U.S.-PRC Relations” stating that the US had no intention of recognizing an independent Taiwan.⁷⁵ The paper already mentions that the United States “would neither encourage nor stimulate the creation of an independent Taiwan,” so the United States would be adding a clause declaring their *intent* to reject an independent Taiwan.⁷⁶ This strategy is drastically different from the Nixon-Kissinger approach of ambiguity. What is clear from these policy discussions is that there is no situation

⁷² FRUS, Document 41, 1977.

⁷³ FRUS, Document 41, 1977.

⁷⁴ FRUS, Document 41, 1977.

⁷⁵ FRUS, Document 41, 1977.

⁷⁶ FRUS, Document 34, 1977.

where an independent Taiwan has the support – whether openly or not – of the United States. Therefore, ensuring that Taiwan would not be completely isolated from the rest of the world, the United States had to make the pitch to the PRC to maintain some relations with Taiwan.

Along with the two American conditions for normalization – which were continued unofficial relations with Taiwan and a commitment from the PRC to tone down their rhetoric on reunification, the President also raised the question of what the worldwide reaction would be to normalization. Vance thought it would generally be positive, predicting even that the Soviets would be forced to come to some agreements with the United States. By playing the “China card,” this would invoke to the Soviets that the United States and China were coming closer together – a situation that could leave the Soviets exposed and vulnerable in the grand scheme of things. Michael Oksenburg, staff member of the NSC, voiced the opinion that normalization would “increase the chances that Taiwan will evolve as an independent entity, developing its relations with Peking in a peaceful manner.”⁷⁷

The Carter administration floated many ideas about how to approach normalization, all of which included a solution to the Taiwan issue. Looking for guidance, the Carter administration sought to use “the Japanese model,” which allowed for both normalization with mainland China and unofficial relations with Taiwan. Throughout the Carter administration, the approach to China vis-a-vis Taiwan was relatively uniform: ensure the security of the people on Taiwan. The shades of gray in this process included how to navigate around dogmatic Chinese rhetoric of liberating Taiwan by force and how to continue selling defensive arms to Taiwan.

⁷⁷ FRUS, Document 41, 1977.

Vance's Trip to China: Moral and Security Obligations to Taiwan

Cyrus Vance recalled, in his memoir *Hard Choices*, that prior to his trip to China in August of 1977, President Carter gave him the green light to inform the Chinese government of the American intent to normalize relations, but also that the United States would have to be able to maintain some unofficial relations with Taiwan. President Carter even went as far as to give Vance a draft of a normalization communique to present to the Chinese if they were also ready to start the formal normalization process.⁷⁸ Vance goes on to write in his memoir that “the president said he wanted to complete normalization and was prepared to face the political criticism of those who would claim we were abandoning Taiwan.”⁷⁹ Secretary Vance went to China with the intention of suggesting the United States normalize relations with the PRC and set up a liaison office in Taiwan. Restricting the United States from establishing a liaison office, which was more formal than a private organization, was that a liaison office still required some official diplomatic presence. The US already affirmed to the PRC that there was only one China and that Taiwan belonged to that China in the Shanghai Communique. This statement would not be brushed aside by the Chinese leaders such as Deng Xiaoping who believed that anything short of switching recognition vis-a-vis diplomatic relations was not fulfilling the commitments of the Shanghai Communique. Vance, during his trip, presented the American strategy of establishing a liaison office in Taiwan as a compromise to breaking diplomatic relations.⁸⁰ Deng Xiaoping and Foreign Minister Huang Hua were not willing to accept this request and went as far as making public statements about their dissatisfaction with the Vance trip. The public defamation of the trip has led historians and analysts to assume the position that Vance’s trip was disastrous. Not helping

⁷⁸ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 79.

⁷⁹ Vance, 79.

⁸⁰ For more context, the United States established a liaison office in China with Leonard Woodcock serving as Chief Liaison Officer. He would later go on to serve as the first ambassador to China and play an instrumental role in the process of normalization.

matters, it was believed back in the United States that the trip was quite successful because, as Vance claims, “an article was written by John Wallach... [which] reported that members of the National Security Council staff, reading my reports to the president on my trip, had seen signs of ‘progress,’”⁸¹ The main goal of the Vance trip, which was conveyed to Taiwanese Ambassador Shen some weeks later, was for “exploratory” reasons. The Carter administration used this trip as an opportunity to gauge how far the Chinese were willing to go with regards to the Taiwanese-American relationship.

Understanding the Vance trip would be incomplete without understanding how Vance viewed normalization with the PRC and US relations with Taiwan. To him, better relations with the Chinese meant a more stable Asia in the post-Vietnam war era. Vance also believed that normalization did not have to come at the cost of jeopardizing the security and well-being of the people of Taiwan.⁸² He understood, as well, that Congress felt very strongly about supporting Taiwan; the Carter administration, due to the Watergate scandal and its fallout, was aware to get Congressional support and oversight on many foreign policy proposals. Taiwanese security was a *sine qua non* for Congress. In addition to these underlying beliefs about Taiwan, Vance understood that the way the United States approached Taiwan was going to be evaluated closely by American allies in Asia and around the world.⁸³ Most importantly, and much like some of the pro-Taiwanese members of Congress such as Senator Goldwater, Vance believed that the United States had a “moral obligation” not to abandon Taiwan.⁸⁴ Perhaps, weighing on his conscience, the future of Taiwan and its people was an influence Vance could not shake. Perhaps Vance knew that Congress’s input was too powerful to ignore. Carter, in fact, agreed with Vance’s sentiment

⁸¹ Vance, 82-83.

⁸² Vance, 76.

⁸³ Vance, 77. Another highlight of the Carter administration is the Camp David Accords in which Egypt and Israel signed a peace treaty. The Israelis were watching the Taiwan situation unfold very carefully to determine the determination and will of the United States.

⁸⁴ Vance, 77.

that the United States had a moral obligation to Taiwan. In meetings with Carter and Brzezinski, Vance advocated for three American conditions for normalization: (1) allow the Mutual Defense Treaty to be terminated upon its provisions – which would be the end of 1979, (2) American interest in a peaceful resolution of the Taiwan issue, and (3) the Chinese had to tone down their rhetoric about liberating Taiwan by force.⁸⁵

These views, combined with the green light from Carter to express the American interest of normalizing relations, made the nature of Vance's trip clear. The United States sought to explore how normalization would unfold. However, from the very start of Vance's trip, the American and Chinese diplomats had a difficult time finding common ground. Upon arrival, Vance and his wife Grace Sloane were greeted by Foreign Minister Huang Hua, his wife, Madam Ho Lilang, Ambassador Woodcock, and several other American officials. Vance described the welcome as "correct and friendly."⁸⁶ In his memoir Vance summarized that his strategy during the proceeding talks would be to represent the American position to the Chinese:

For political reasons, I intended to represent a maximum position to the Chinese on the Taiwan issue. U.S. Government personnel would have to remain on Taiwan after normalization, under an informal arrangement, for the purpose of rendering practical assistance to U.S. citizens in Taiwan. Peking's position, which it regarded as a concession to the Ford administration, was that it would tolerate a continued U.S. relationship with Taiwan along the lines of the Japanese model – a nonofficial presence through an ostensibly private organization.⁸⁷

Vance did not believe that the Chinese would accept this position and that the United States would eventually have to abandon the idea of retaining unofficial relations with Taiwan.

In the first formal meeting with Foreign Minister Huang Hua, Vance reiterated the American position that Carter was willing to advance with normalization according to the

⁸⁵ Vance, 77.

⁸⁶ Vance, 79.

⁸⁷ Vance, 79.

Shanghai Communique and that the United States would recognize only one China and that Taiwan belonged to that China. Additionally, Vance stated that it was necessary that the United States have a presence on Taiwan not diplomatic in nature and that the Chinese tone down its rhetoric of liberating Taiwan by force. Huang Hua, the next day, gave a not “unexpected” response. Vance writes that “my presentation had been too much for him to accept. He reiterated the three Chinese conditions and said our position simply gave him ‘lip service’ to them. After tough words about liberating Taiwan, the foreign minister concluded that normalization would be further delayed.”⁸⁸ Deng Xiaoping also shared this sentiment and went public stating that the Vance trip set normalization back.⁸⁹

It is important to note that Vance never mentioned the selling of defensive arms to Taiwan after the normalization process commenced. For the Chinese, they were willing to accept an unofficial relationship that followed the Japanese model, but the part of Vance’s pitch they were not willing to accept was liberating Taiwan by force. Despite their outward displeasure with the Vance trip, they were still open to discussing normalization according to Vance but in private.⁹⁰ At the same time, Vance “still believed that with the Panama debate beginning, the time [for normalization] was not right.”⁹¹

Vance’s trip was categorized as “exploratory” in nature by President Carter in interviews after its completion. It is difficult to accept this because Vance was given a draft of a normalization communique which indicates that Carter was ready to start the normalization process as soon as possible or that he seriously underestimated the Chinese commitment to both the Shanghai Communique and the reunification of Taiwan to the mainland. The Carter

⁸⁸ Vance, 82.

⁸⁹ Boccardi.

⁹⁰ Vance, 83.

⁹¹ Vance, 82.

administration decided rather early on that Taiwan would not be abandoned for many reasons as stated before. For both the Carter administration and the PRC, adopting a Japanese model of unofficial cultural and economic relations was acceptable. Vance did not stick to this script and instead suggested a move towards the establishment of a liaison office in Taipei. It is important to remember that since the PRC and ROC had claims to be China, there was a legitimacy problem for all Chinese. For the CCP to claim legitimacy as the ruling party of China, they would need to resolve the Taiwan issue. The United States had influence and power in this decision. While normalization was in some murky territory at this point in the timeline, it is not necessarily correct to assume that normalization was completely off the table. Rather, the normalization process experienced some minor bumps – those bumps being the American demand for the Chinese to tone down their rhetoric of liberating Taiwan by force – that required some readjustment.

Thus, it is important to highlight two aspects of trilateral relations coming from Vance's trip to China: Cyrus Vance personally felt that the United States had a moral obligation to Taiwan and that the Carter administration's demands for peaceful reunification were considered to be too much interference by the People's Republic of China. Additionally, Deng Xiaoping did not like the idea of promoting their own liaison office to an embassy and downgrading the US embassy in Taipei to a liaison office. Endowed by a moral obligation, Vance believed that the United States had a responsibility to ensure the safety of the Taiwanese people and to not jeopardize their future. This layer of morality challenges the idea that the United States was going to abandon Taiwan. For the PRC, the condition that Taiwan be liberated peacefully was too big of an ask. Solely for this demand, the Chinese were quick to publicly denounce the United States and make the claim that normalization had taken a step backwards. By the end of 1977, efforts to

normalize relations with the PRC were put on the backburner by the Carter administration in favor of both the Panama Canal Treaty and the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) II.

Department of Defense Perspective

President Carter also took into account the perspective of his Secretary of Defense, Harold Brown. Brown was influential in convincing Carter and Brzezinski of the larger Soviet threat that loomed over the United States as it sought to normalize relations with the PRC. Brown stated to both of them in 1977 that “the most important factor for the next decade is that the US-PRC relationship will be a major influence on US-Soviet relations... This Administration must foster a relationship with Peking which gives greater global balance to our national security position.”⁹² Brown also stressed that “the objective was to find some way to normalize relations without abandoning Taiwan.”⁹³ Brown, like Brzezinski, wanted to play the “China card” to offset the Soviet threat, but also understood that the United States should and could go about this without leaving Taiwan to fend for itself. Unlike Brzezinski, Brown underscored the need for the United States to continue selling arms to Taiwan on the basis that the Joint Chiefs of Staff and others in the military would be hesitant to support any resolution that terminated the Mutual Defense Treaty without a guarantee for a peaceful reunification of Taiwan to the mainland.⁹⁴ Ideally, the Carter administration needed to be unified in their approach to normalization in order to uphold a sense of legitimacy and political prowess. Department of Defense historian Edward Keefer recalls that “[Brown’s] new deputy assistant secretary of defense (ISA), former NSC staffer Michael Armacost, alerted him to signs that some senior military commanders were questioning and even undermining the policy of gradual reduction of U.S. contacts with Taiwan,

⁹² Keefer, *Harold Brown*, 396.

⁹³ Keefer, 396.

⁹⁴ Keefer, 398-399

a policy designed to condition Taipei to life after normalization. Armacost recommended getting the Joint Chiefs on board.”⁹⁵

The Joint Chiefs of Staff had a more complete view of the situation. The Chairman of the JCS, USAF General David C. Jones, recognized the importance of upholding the reputation that the United States supported its long-time allies. For him, “how the United States handles the Taiwan issue during the normalization process will be carefully studied by US allies, the non aligned states, potential adversaries, and, perhaps more importantly, the people of the United States.”⁹⁶ Jones found that if the PRC granted the US some assurances over Taiwan, the United States could accept the three Chinese preconditions with more confidence. Still, he argued that the way that the United States handled Taiwan would “demonstrate US resolve to maintain a substantial and constructive influence in the Pacific.”⁹⁷ To that end, Jones suggested that simultaneous relations can be accomplished if the administration achieves “what is understood to be the current administration’s position on normalization: establishment of a US trade mission on Taiwan, continued US arms sales to Taiwan, and a PRC commitment not to use force against Taiwan.”⁹⁸

Another example of how those in the military viewed the Taiwan question comes from Admiral Noel Gayler, the former Commander-in-Chief of the Pacific Command (CINCPAC). Although his testament came after Carter’s public announcement that the United States would normalize relations with the PRC, it is still forthcoming of the perspective shared by those in the military. In Subcommittee Hearings after the proposal of the Taiwan Relations Act, Gayler proceeds to state that “our major dilemma is our moral commitment to Taiwan, a faithful Ally

⁹⁵ Keefer, 398-399.

⁹⁶ FRUS, Document 154, 1978.

⁹⁷ FRUS, Document 154, 1978.

⁹⁸ FRUS, Document 154, 1978.

[sic] for 32 years. It is essential both to our moral position and to our perceived strength and will that we not renege on that commitment. How can we reconcile these imperatives in the light of the insistent position of the PRC that the fate of Taiwan is an internal Chinese question?”⁹⁹

The Department of Defense and the Joint Chiefs of Staff, while not as much of an influence in the Carter administration’s China policy as the State Department or the National Security Council, had the important distinction of bridging the gap between moral and strategic reasoning behind maintaining unofficial relations with Taiwan. In particular, what was called into question was the integrity of the United States to stand behind its allies. Certainly, these influences shaped the framework with which Carter, Vance, and Brzezinski viewed the decision to normalize relations with the PRC. In respect to why the United States needed to maintain unofficial relations with Taiwan, there is the underlying and implicit reason that the United States was seeking to be a Pacific power. While it is clearly stated in the Shanghai Communique that the United States does not seek hegemony in Asia, it does not explicitly state that the United States would leave Asia and abandon its interests in that region. If we are to believe that the Carter administration sought not only the normalization of relations with the PRC and a formula to maintain unofficial relations with the ROC, the United States was seeking to firmly supplant and solidify itself as a Pacific power. Therefore, it can be presumed that the Department of Defense and other generals and admirals believed that the main interest at stake in regards to abandoning Taiwan is that American power projection would be afflicted by surrendering Taiwan to the PRC by an American absence, military or otherwise.

⁹⁹ U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Subcommittee on Asian and Pacific Affairs, *Implementation of Taiwan Relations Act: Issues and Concerns*, 114.

Brzezinski's Trip to China: Restarting Sino-American Normalization Talks

After the apparent failure of the Vance trip, Sino-American normalization talks were put on the back-burner by the Carter administration. Instead, Carter focused on several other foreign policy issues (name them – SALT II, Panama, Camp David). Carter utilized Vance in a much more strategic way in those talks. Whether Carter was looking for a new pointman for Sino-American normalization talks or the Chinese deliberately chose a member of Carter's cabinet whose realpolitik views matched up more with the PRC's is contested.

Unlike Cyrus Vance, who believed that there was more to normalization than just using China as a counterweight to the Soviet Union, Brzezinski believed that the opposite was true. Rather, the United States should press forward with normalization so that the Soviet Union would be more agreeable to the SALT II talks. Michael Oksenberg, in his essay *A Decade of Sino-American Relations*, outlines five actions the PRC took after Cyrus Vance's trip to indicate a forward interest in normalization: the rhetoric of liberating Taiwan by force was toned down; the purchase of American wheat after a lapse of two years; members of The Ministry of Petroleum accepted an invitation to come to the United States; Senators Jackson, Kennedy, and Cranston all received "extraordinarily warm welcomes" on their visits to China.¹⁰⁰ Taken separately, these events do not demonstrate much, but they indicate a shift in Chinese attitudes toward Taiwan, normalization, and cooperation. However, what Oksenberg highlights as the most significant shift in PRC behavior is the selection of Zbigniew Brzezinski as the new point of contact for the normalization process. Oksenberg argues that Brzezinski was more aligned with the Chinese because he wanted the normalization process to progress more rapidly than it had in the previous year.¹⁰¹ Juxtaposed to the idea that it was the Chinese who personally selected

¹⁰⁰ Oksenberg, "A Decade of Sino-American Relations," 183.

¹⁰¹ Oksenberg, 183.

Brzezinski. Jean A. Garrison argues that Brzezinski, himself, “convinced the president that he should be the one to deal directly with the Chinese.”¹⁰² Whichever presumption is correct, the Carter administration shifted its point-man from Vance to Brzezinski in order to speed up the normalization process. Now that Brzezinski had the reins and responsibility of Sino-American normalization, the Carter administration was now approaching the situation via the Soviet threat. Taiwan, while still an American priority to ensure its safety, received less advocacy by Brzezinski. Rather, during Brzezinski’s historic trip to China in May of 1978, the United States affirmed their previous stance that the Taiwan issue was an internal affair. This renewed position was more in line with the ideology of the Shanghai Communique and made the Chinese more agreeable to the Japanese model of unofficial relations with Taiwan. However, without securing a commitment from the Chinese that Taiwan would not be liberated by force, continuing to sell Taiwan defensive arms became more essential to the overall trilateral relationship.

In May 1978, Zbigniew Brzezinski made a three-day trip to China in order to reignite the normalization process. According to his memoir, Brzezinski was authorized to accept not only the three Chinese conditions for normalization, but also reaffirm the five points from the Nixon and Ford administrations. Those five points were that (1) the United States accepted the principle of one China and that Taiwan was part of China, (2) the United States would not support any Taiwanese independence movement, (3) the United States will use its influence to discourage Japan and other countries from moving into Taiwan once the American presence diminished, (4) the United States would support any peaceful resolution on reunification between Taiwan and China, and (5) the Administration would actively work toward the full normalization of Sino-American normalization.¹⁰³ Underneath these conditions and expectations, however, was

¹⁰² Garrison, 91.

¹⁰³ FRUS, Document 98, Undated.

the central reservation of the Carter administration that they could provide Taiwan with defensive arms. Brzezinski, from both his memoir and transcripts of debate in the White House, was never a strong advocate for Taiwan. While he was not necessarily against supporting the future of the Taiwanese people, Brzezinski's vision of this trilateral relationship was more aligned with Kissinger's in that the priority was the full normalization of relations with the PRC.

To claim that Brzezinski was indifferent about the future of Taiwan would be inaccurate. Rather, Brzezinski was an agent for strategic partnerships and, when dispatched to China, a messenger for the Carter administration. He did not engage in lengthy philosophical discussions as had Kissinger. Instead, he presented a more sound and complete overview of American interests to the Chinese about Taiwan. In his meeting with Deng Xiaoping, Brzezinski said that “we will remain guided by the Shanghai communique, by the principle that there is only one China, and that the resolution of the issue of Taiwan is your problem” and that “we will have to find some formula that allows us to express our hope and our expectation regarding the peaceful resolution of the Taiwan issue” and that “though we are now continuing and accelerating our military withdrawal from Taiwan, [we will] continue in such a manner as not to create destabilizing conditions likely to be exploited by our mutual adversary [the Soviet Union].”¹⁰⁴ Brzezinski emphasized that the United States could not suddenly leave Taiwan because in the wake of the United States leaving Taiwan, it could create destabilizing conditions. Therefore, Brzezinski found that it was crucial for the United States to have some relations with Taiwan during this transition period: “this consideration must be borne in mind when resolving the issue of normalization and when defining the full range of relations during the historically transitional period of our relationship with the people on Taiwan.”¹⁰⁵ Similar to Vance's conversation with

¹⁰⁴ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 214.

¹⁰⁵ Brzeziński, 214.

Deng Xiaoping, Brzezinski emphasized that the United States was committed to not abandoning the Taiwanese people, especially during the transition period: “during the historically transitional period the maintenance of full range of commercial relations with Taiwan would provide the necessary flexibility during the phase of accommodation to a new reality in the course of which eventually one China will become a reality.”¹⁰⁶ If we are to believe Brzezinski, the Carter administration was fully committed to a one-China policy. Implicit in this stance is the rejection of both an independent Taiwan and a Taiwan with some government-to-government relations with the United States. One of the core reasons Brzezinski argued for an extended American presence on Taiwan after normalization was to keep stability on Taiwan. He convinced Deng to accept this proposal mostly because of his appeal to their mutual threat, the Soviet Union. He also attempted to convince Deng Xiaoping of committing to a peaceful reunification process because “domestic difficulties in the U.S. would be far minimized if our hope and expectation that the internal and purely domestic resolution of Chinese problems would be such that it would be peaceful and that our own hopes in this respect would not be specifically contradicted.”¹⁰⁷

Upon Brzezinski’s return to the United States, he was given a brief analysis of his trip from Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs William Gleysteen. Gleysteen outlined five sections about the Brzezinski trip: General Assessment, Tone, Presentation, Impact on Chinese Perceptions, and Normalization Issues. Before I break down these five impressions, it is important to note that in regards to arms sales, the United States had not explicitly mentioned to the Chinese that they intended to continue selling arms to Taiwan. Rather, they left this matter untouched, fearing that any mention of it in talks would draw

¹⁰⁶ “Zbigniew Brzezinski Meeting with Deng Xiaoping, May 21, 1978 | US-China Institute.”

¹⁰⁷ “Zbigniew Brzezinski Meeting with Deng Xiaoping, May 21, 1978 | US-China Institute.”

unwanted attention and focus to the idea. Both Vance and Brzezinski did not mention the American interest and intention of selling arms to Taiwan.

In a very matter-of-fact approach, Gleysteen writes “your [Brzezinski’s] visit was successful in that you were able to remind the Chinese that our relationship with them is important and capable of mutually-beneficial evolution.”¹⁰⁸ This was vital for the Brzezinski trip considering the state of normalization talks were not progressing as the Carter administration had hoped. As a counterpoint to Brzezinski’s successful trip, Gleysteen was of the opinion that Brzezinski also made commitments that were too not yet backed up by action, in reference to what Brzezinski said to Deng Xiaoping: “the U.S. has made up its mind.”¹⁰⁹ Overall, Gleysteen approved of Brzezinski’s trip and the future prospects of normalization.

In regards to the tone of the meetings with both Deng Xiaoping and Huang Hua, Gleysteen found them to be warm. Gleysteen and many others in Carter’s administration were well aware of how the Chinese were welcoming of Vance, but then after the trip offered criticism and dissatisfaction of the results of that trip.

With what Brzezinski had to say to the Chinese, Gleysteen found that Brzezinski offered a comprehensive and thorough dive into American foreign policy. Brzezinski essentially offered three important shifts:

1. Implied clearly to the Chinese that there has been a shift in our global strategy since the Vance visit so that the competitive elements of our policy vis-a-vis the USSR now heavily overshadow the cooperative elements, and you identified yourself clearly with those who favor a concentrated, worldwide effort to counter the Soviets;
2. Stated that our common ground with the PRC is now far more important than our difference, in contrast to previous US and PRC formulations which have been considerably more qualified;

¹⁰⁸ FRUS, Document 118, 1978.

¹⁰⁹ FRUS, Document 118, 1978.

3. Suggested, rather pointedly, that the goal of our China policy is a far more intimate US/PRC collaboration embracing a security dimension.¹¹⁰

These three points are not drastically different from Vance's approach to normalization, but they emphasize that the Soviet Union and bilateral cooperation would play larger roles than the stabilization of Asia and normalization would be conducted with less emphasis on Taiwan. Deng Xiaoping stressed that the Japanese model of unofficial relations were the "maximum" the PRC was willing to go on Taiwan so emphasizing a common threat [the Soviet Union] as opposed to a common divider [Taiwan] strengthened the need for normalization on both sides.

As for how the Chinese leaders received Brzezinski's presentation, Gleysteen writes "I suspect the Chinese reaction was a mixture of receptivity and skepticism."¹¹¹ As demonstrated in the past, the Chinese were likely to be hesitant to jump to terms not set by themselves. Nonetheless, Gleysteen found that "the Chinese posture toward you was not very different from that taken toward Vance," which indicates again their hesitancy.¹¹²

Most important to Gleysteen's analysis, and the one that is important for this paper, is the way Taiwan was handled in these talks. At this point in 1978, the Chinese response to the American terms was better understood. For Gleysteen and others within the State Department and NSA, "the Chinese position on normalization now seems reasonably explicit in two respects while remaining ambiguous in the third."¹¹³ The three terms were 1) representation, 2) peaceful settlement, and 3) arms sales.

The Chinese were clear that representation of the United States on Taiwan must be both "*non-official* and *non-governmental*." This was vital for the PRC because if there were official

¹¹⁰ FRUS, Document 118, 1978.

¹¹¹ FRUS, Document 118, 1978.

¹¹² FRUS, Document 118, 1978.

¹¹³ FRUS, Document 118, 1978.

representatives of the United States on Taiwan, it would seriously put into question the legitimacy of *who* represented China.

In regards to the peaceful settlement of Taiwan, the Chinese “have gone out of their way to draw the parameters of what they are prepared to do, i.e. they seem willing to tolerate a fairly objective statement of US expectations and to state their own position in minimal terms.”¹¹⁴ This understanding of the situation expands upon what went wrong with the Vance trip [i.e. that the PRC waived the right to liberate Taiwan by force]. The most that the United States could do was express their *expectation* of a peaceful settlement. Ultimately, though, they had to realize that the most progress they would get on reunification was that it was a purely internal matter. Anything resembling foreign intervention was off the table for the PRC.

Finally, in regards to arms sales, the Carter administration had taken the approach of not calling attention to their intention of continued arms sales. In both the Vance and Brzezinski trips, neither representative discussed arms sales directly. Instead, both opted to treat arms sales as part of a continued effort to stabilize Taiwan post-normalization. In June 1978, in a telegram from Leonard Woodcock to Richard Holbrooke, Woodcock wrote “While we should not use the term ‘arms sales’ we should make it very clear that when we speak of our intention to continue the sale of equipment of all types that Taiwan needs for all legitimate purposes we mean all types of equipment.”¹¹⁵

Arms sales and the rhetoric of liberating Taiwan by force were intrinsically linked in the eyes of Gleysteen and several other members of the administration. Interestingly, Gleysteen assumed that Deng Xiaoping was not referring to the continuance of arms sales when he accepted the US maintaining commercial and economic relations with Taiwan.¹¹⁶ The Brzezinski

¹¹⁴ FRUS, Document 118, 1978.

¹¹⁵ FRUS, Document 121, 1978.

¹¹⁶ FRUS, Document 118, 1978.

trip did indeed reignite the normalization process by addressing a recommitment to the Shanghai Communique and reidentifying the Soviet threat, but at the cost of the United States accepting no commitment from the PRC about peaceful reunification. Thus, Brzezinski brought to the Carter administration's China policy a recommitted and reinvigorated interest in Sino-American normalization. According to the PRC, the reunification of Taiwan was purely an internal affair, which neither required nor asked for American interference. However, since the Carter administration had a moral obligation to Taiwan's security, it could not be justified to leave Taiwan defenseless against a PRC invasion. Still, considering Brzezinski pressed for normalization in the hopes of making the Soviet Union more agreeable to SALT II, Sino-American relations were back on track.

Zbigniew Brzezinski believed that it was necessary to do whatever needed to be done on the Taiwan issue in order for Sino-American normalization. Brzezinski was fine letting the Taiwan question remain an internal matter, so long as Sino-American rapprochement was not impaired. As has been evident, however, Sino-American rapprochement could not justly be realized without accounting for Taiwan. Both sides had their own views about the reunification of Taiwan. While neither government could convince the other that their solution was best, they could agree that they had different views. In other words, they could agree to disagree. Deng Xiaoping accepted the notion that the United States would express their expectations, but that they were not allowed to set preconditions limiting the PRC.¹¹⁷ Brzezinski stated that during this transitional period, the United States would need to be able to maintain commercial relations in order to keep the stability in Taiwan. There was this fear that the Soviet Union would sneak in to disrupt Taiwan during the transition period. For Brzezinski, maintaining relations with Taiwan was less of a moral obligation, but a practical one. This is what the surface level of his stance

¹¹⁷ "Zbigniew Brzezinski Meeting with Deng Xiaoping, May 21, 1978 | US-China Institute."

was. Beneath all of the formalities, the Carter administration could have been manipulating their language so that they could lose the least amount of their previous relationship with Taiwan and pursue as much as possible with Sino-American normalization. Therefore, supporting Taiwan was a strategic decision to achieve maximum gains (full normalization) with China and minimal losses (unofficial relations) with Taiwan.

Section II: The Taiwanese Reaction to Normalization

Introduction

Throughout the 1970s, the Taiwanese were under the impression that the normalization of relations between the PRC and the US was going to be finalized by the end of the decade. While this was a blow to Taiwanese pride and source of contention, Taiwanese officials were determined primarily with the conditions and timing of normalization. For this section, I am going to focus primarily on the memoir of Ambassador James Shen as he recounts his interactions with members of the Carter administration. Shen, a career diplomat, had been involved in the transition period dating back to the Nixon administration. Part of what this chapter is arguing overall is that the Americans were concerned with getting the assurance from China that they would not liberate Taiwan by force. The plan to get this commitment from the PRC did not succeed so, as a result, the United States found it necessary to sell Taiwan defensive arms. A key aspect of the Taiwan Relations Act is the mention of selling Taiwan defensive arms. Part of what this section will argue is that Shen and many Taiwanese officials were not informed of Carter's China policy until details and settlements were already finalized. To emphasize this behavior of the administration, the American ambassador in Taipei infamously informed Chiang

Ching-kuo, in the middle of the night and without much warning, that news of official Sino-American normalization would be announced the next day. While the Carter administration took great efforts to advocate for Taiwan's security post normalization, the effort to involve Taiwanese officials in their own fate during and after the normalization process was minimal.

Ambassador Shen

Ambassador Shen, simply put, had minimal access to the Carter administration. In the earliest days of Carter's term, it was difficult for Shen to get an audience with top members of the administration. He only met with President Carter once, just two days after his inauguration.¹¹⁸ Likewise, he could not get a hold of either Vice President Mondale or Secretary of State Vance. When asked why he insisted on seeing them, Shen said that "I was merely carrying out my instructions." Besides, he continues, "I knew for a fact that Ambassador Unger in Taipei had easy access to our high government officials, including both the Foreign Minister and the Premier" and that "I thought it was well within my right as a fully accredited Ambassador from an allied nation to ask to see the Secretary himself on important matters."¹¹⁹ Regardless of the subject matter, the Carter administration was treating Shen – in his perspective – as a second-class Ambassador. Ambassador Shen was directed to Undersecretary of State Philip Habib and remarked that "in diplomacy, symbolism and substance should be given equal weight and that people in the Orient are particularly sensitive to diplomatic snubs and slights, be they intentional or otherwise."¹²⁰ In addition to the snubs and slights, Shen believed that the Shanghai Communique held no legitimacy because it was written by "disgraced and deceased"

¹¹⁸ Shen and Myers, *The U.S. & Free China*, 204.

¹¹⁹ Shen and Myers, 206.

¹²⁰ Shen and Myers, 206-207

heads of state.¹²¹ Meetings between Shen and Habib mainly consisted of Habib reassuring Shen that Taiwan was a large focus in Sino-American talks. Substantial policies were never planned in these meetings.

Ambassador Shen had the unique experience of holding the ambassadorial rank for three administrations. He was able to see American foreign policy transpire over the course of the decade and therefore had a more encompassing understanding of the changes and rifts in each administration. For the Carter administration, he kept a particularly close eye on Vance being that he was the Secretary of State. Before Vance's trip, Shen noted that "it had been widely believed in Washington that he was going to Peking to negotiate with the Chinese Communists the terms for establishing diplomatic relations."¹²² Shen also noted that this brought on a "storm of protest" from both Taiwanese-Americans and from the people in Taiwan. The White House was flooded with angry letters of protests, phone calls, and telegrams opposing the way the Carter administration planned on moving forward with normalization.¹²³ Shen assumed that it was an "eleventh hour change" that Carter shifted the purpose of the Vance trip from one focused on negotiations to one amused with exploratory talks. Shen's perspective on Vance was that he was rather "concise" in public about Taiwan and China. Vance often reiterated the policy that the United States would be interested in developing relations, in accordance with the Shanghai Communique, with the PRC and that the United States sought to be an Asian power. However, what was rather shocking to Shen, is that Vance often omitted the use of the Republic of China and rarely even acknowledged Taiwan's existence to the press or in speeches.

When news broke out that Deng Xiaoping was dissatisfied with the Vance trip – mainly because of the disagreement over the swapping of liaison offices – Ambassador Shen finally met

¹²¹ Shen and Myers, 206.

¹²² Shen and Myers, 214.

¹²³ Shen and Myers, 214.

one-on-one with Vance after a previously unsuccessful attempt back in early 1977. Their discussion during the meeting was vapid as the only significant point of interest Vance emphasized was that “in order to normalize relations both sides must make some concessions.”¹²⁴ After meeting with Vance, Shen sought out Henry Kissinger to get his point of view on the situation:

I visited Georgetown University’s Center for International and Strategic Affairs to see Kissinger, Vance’s immediate predecessor, just to check on what he had heard about the Secretary of State’s visit to Peking. He had no wish to criticize the Carter administration for the way it had been handling the normalization issue, but Kissinger did point out that in his numerous trips to Peking the Taiwan question invariably appeared on the agenda, yet each time it was quickly passed over for something else. In other words, there had been no serious discussion on this question because both sides agreed there were other and more important or urgent matters to talk about. My conclusion after listening to Kissinger was that Vance had gone beyond what Kissinger felt was necessary, actually discussing with Teng such specific proposals as the swapping of embassies and liaison offices. Would Kissinger have done it differently if Ford had won in 1976 and he himself had stayed on as Secretary of State? It is hard to say.¹²⁵

It is difficult to imagine everything that might have been going on in Shen’s mind, but it is reasonable to assume that Shen had a difficult time both navigating through the Carter administration’s China policy and inserting himself as an effective advocate for Taiwanese interests. Fittingly, in February 1977, Shen had made a request to Undersecretary Habib that he be “consulted, not just informed” about matters regarding US foreign policy involving the ROC.¹²⁶ To Shen, both Kissinger and Vance demonstrated that although Taiwan’s security and well-being were important, they were not top priorities in American foreign policy.

Zbigniew Brzezinski’s trip to China almost a year later indicated to Shen a clear “tip-off” about the Carter administration’s plans to recognize the PRC “at the expense of U.S. relations

¹²⁴ Shen and Myers, 215.

¹²⁵ Shen and Myers, 215-216.

¹²⁶ FRUS, Document 7, 1977.

with the Republic of China.”¹²⁷ To make matters more offensive, Brzezinski’s trip to China coincided with the inauguration of Chiang Ching-kuo. Shen expressed his discontent with the arrival date to Michael Oksenberg to which he replied “we are boxed in.” Shen notes that Oksenberg “didn’t even say ‘Sorry.’”¹²⁸ Debate then circulated amongst the Taiwanese whether or not this was an intentional snub. Unlike those who speculated this, Shen believed it was a case of “ignorance and false pride.”¹²⁹ Resentment was growing amongst the Taiwanese over the American’s lack of consultation and the insult to Taiwanese pride. After Brzezinski’s trip, Shen met with both Holbrooke and David Newsom, the new Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs to raise two concerns: (1) whether or not Brzezinski’s mission was to draft details of normalization; and (2) to remind them that Kissinger had always given Shen details about his trips to China in the hopes that Brzezinski would do the same.¹³⁰ Despite his requests, Brzezinski and the NSA never received Shen.

Ambassador Shen, despite not being informed directly by the administration, was aware of their plans surrounding Taiwan. On June 13, 1978, Carter spoke to the influential private foreign policy think tank the Trilateral Commission indicating that he would pursue full diplomatic relations with the PRC under three conditions:

1. That the U.S. trade and aid to the Republic of China – including military assistance – continue after the establishment of full diplomatic relations with Peking.
2. That a U.S. trade office be established in Taiwan once the U.S. embassy there had been closed.
3. That Communist China make clear, through a formula yet to be agreed upon, that it would not use force in seeking to reunite Taiwan with the Chinese mainland.

¹²⁷ Shen and Myers 216.

¹²⁸ Shen and Myers, 217.

¹²⁹ Shen and Myers, 217.

¹³⁰ Shen and Myers, 218.

These three points were not necessarily a counter to the original Chinese preconditions, but rather additional assurances that the United States would demand for Taiwan. As well-intentioned as these conditions were, Shen still felt disrespected by Carter and his administration because they kept on saying that “neither the ‘timing’ nor the ‘modalities’ for normalization” were decided when he would ask them.¹³¹ In reality, the entire process was kept under tight wraps as the American public was not aware of this strategy either until it was ready to be announced.

While Ambassador Shen had no opportunity to influence the Carter administration directly, there were some in Congress who found it necessary to not only advocate for the Republic of China, but also to balance the president’s power. The Dole-Stone amendment, which became part of the International Security Assistance Act of 1978, called for the prior consultation before any policy changes were enacted on the Mutual Defense Treaty. The full amendment states:

- (1) Whereas the continued security and stability of East Asia is a matter of major strategic interest to the United States;
- (2) Whereas the United States and the Republic of China have for a period of twenty-four years been linked together by the Mutual Defense Treaty of 1954;
- (3) Whereas the Republic of China has during that twenty-four year period faithfully and continually carried out its duties and obligations under the treaty; and
- (4) Whereas it is the responsibility of the Senate to give its advice and consent to treaties entered into by the United States;
- (5) It is the sense of the Senate that there should be prior consultation between the Senate and the Executive Branch on any proposed policy changes affecting the continuation in force of the Mutual Defense Treaty cited above.¹³²

Both Senators Bob Dole (R-KS) and Richard Stone (D-FL) were both supporters of the Republic of China and thought the United States ought to reevaluate its decision to normalize relations

¹³¹ Shen and Myers, 218.

¹³² Shen and Myers, 227.

with the PRC. This amendment, at least, indicated that even if the White House had designs to pursue normalization, Congress would at least advocate more vocally for the people on Taiwan. It also created an avenue for Congress to more directly shape American policy with the ROC.

As we have seen, the United States and the PRC agreed to disagree about the reunification of Taiwan to the mainland; both sides had their own idea of what was in their best interest. The United States and the People's Republic would essentially agree to disagree and instead use the language of "expect" and "hope" to convey their policy stances. Meanwhile, Ambassador Shen was doubtful this language resonated with the Chinese and was left wondering about the implications of *how* these new relationships and dynamics would unfold. To Shen, Sino-American normalization felt rushed and left open the speculation of ulterior motives. He writes:

One thing which remains a mystery to many of us who were in Washington at the time is why Carter did it in such a great hurry? Had Teng Hsiao-ping [Deng Xiaoping] set any time limit to normalization of relations? Was Teng [Deng] caught in a serious political struggle and, therefore, in need of U.S. support to sustain his power and influence in Peking's hierarchy?... Was it possible, on the other hand, that Carter, when Israel and Egypt were unable to reach an accord in November, felt he needed something dramatic to shift the American people's attention from the Middle East? Or was it because he had run into strong Soviet opposition in SALT II negotiations and wanted to prod the Russians by establishing diplomatic relations with Peking at that particular juncture?¹³³

While some of these questions remained unanswered, some of them can be answered by reexamining the Vance and Brzezinski trips. For instance, *timing* was a large factor in the Vance-Brzezinski split and for this reason, it resulted in a disfigured approach to Sino-American relations. Early on in the Carter administration, Vance emphasized the need to approach normalization from a predominantly moral and calculated perspective (i.e. the Panama Canal

¹³³ Shen and Myers, 233.

Treaties and SALT II were more important). Brzezinski, following the Kissinger approach, wanted to play the “China card” against the Soviet Union to not only make them more agreeable to SALT II, but also to tip the balance of power in the United States’ favor. While their ultimate goals and even their way of going about it were not so dissimilar, it created the appearance that the Carter administration was disorganized. This had the added side effect of leaving Shen out of the picture. To Shen, the Carter administration symbolically disrespected him by avoiding consultation meetings and *ex post facto* briefings.

Despite these slights, the Carter administration found it necessary to maintain cultural, economic, and security relations with the ROC. From a purely diplomatic and strategic point of view, what Ambassador Shen’s accounts shed light on is that the needs of the people on Taiwan were not treated as a top priority by the Carter administration. Instead, diplomatic norms and the offensive nature of unrecognizing the ROC were larger focuses for Shen than the way that the US and the ROC could stitch together a new relationship grounded in the reality of the new era. To be fair to Shen, this was not only a transition period, but a very sensitive one. Anything short of full disclosure, especially when it was centered around working out the loose ends of this new era, could be seen as offensive. Shen viewed himself as an “accredited Ambassador,” yet was kept in the dark by this new administration. Ambassador Shen was unable to directly influence the Carter administration. This was not because he did not try, but because he was neither received by the members of the administration who were constructing the new policies nor was he informed with adequate information to construct policies that reflected ROC interests. How could he advocate for the needs of the Taiwanese people without an audience? Other than the reasons already predetermined by the Carter administration such as morality, stability, and integrity, what could Ambassador Shen advocate for other than unofficial relations?

Despite not being able to directly influence the Carter administration, Ambassador Shen did search for alternative methods. He assembled a team of Chinese-Americans (those who were from nationalist backgrounds) to approach the normalization issue and present those ideas to pro-ROC members in Congress and other pro-ROC allies in the United States.¹³⁴ Shen reached out to Hungdah Chiu (University of Maryland Law School), Winberg Chai (City College of New York), Michael Kao (Brown University), and James C. Hsiung (New York University) to discuss Taiwan's future.¹³⁵ This group of academics came up with four suggestions for Congress to advocate for to the Carter administration:

1. An ROC/Taiwan liaison office in Washington, in exchange for a U.S. liaison office in Taipei, after the severance of diplomatic relations.
2. continuation in force of the 53 existing treaties between the ROC and the U.S. (not counting the Mutual Security Treaty, which would not survive U.S. normalization with Beijing);
3. OPIC insurance (i.e., insurance of U.S. business investments in Taiwan by the Overseas Private Investment Corporation, a quasi-official U.S. agency);
4. security, and future arms sales to Taiwan, etc.¹³⁶

The core remnants of the Taiwanese-American relationship were what this group of academics believed could remain intact after the severance of diplomatic relations. The finer modalities of what this new relationship between the ROC and the US would look like came down to essentially one thing: stability. Shen was well aware that the United States and the PRC would eventually normalize relations. He had presumably begun to assess the parts of the ROC-US relationship that really mattered to Taiwan's survival. Stability in its security, stability in its financial opportunities, and stability in the ability to communicate with the US were all intrinsically linked to Taiwan's survival as an autonomous state.

¹³⁴ Hsiung, "Reminisces about the Making of the Taiwan Relations Act (TRA)," 271.

¹³⁵ Hsiung, 272.

¹³⁶ Hsiung, 272.

These academics were also able to rally support for the ROC with the American public and Congress. At Professor Winberg Chai's school, City College of New York (CCNY), a rally was held by the Asian-American Assembly, "under the auspices of the Asian-American Studies Department."¹³⁷ Additionally, Professor Winberg Chai and Professor James C. Hsiung collaborated with each other to publish a position paper, which summarized the views of this small team, titled "U.S. Relations with China in the Post-Kissingerian Era."¹³⁸ The position paper advocated for four models the United States could take to usher in this new era of relations:

1. The Philippines model - involving a complete break with Taiwan after normalization with China, which should be rejected;
2. The Japanese model - maintaining a private U.S. relationship with Taiwan;
3. A hypothetical model - maintaining consular relations with Taiwan; and
4. The "American Model" - switching the then U.S. Liaison Office in Beijing with its current embassy in Taipei.¹³⁹

This position paper was sent to every single member of Congress and to "other opinion leaders and concerned citizens from the name lists kept by the Asian-American Assembly."¹⁴⁰ While the "American Model" was swiftly rejected by Deng Xiaoping, the Japanese model, as has been previously mentioned, had been the plan of the Carter administration fairly early on. This model was also easy for the PRC to accept because they had already accepted it with Japan, hence the name. Whether or not the position paper had much influence on members of Congress needs additional research. Its influence could also be nuanced in that it could have swayed some members in Congress in different ways. For example, the more vocal supporters of the ROC could have taken it as more evidence to maintain some relations with the people of Taiwan. Again, this topic needs additional research. Nevertheless, Ambassador Shen and several other

¹³⁷ Hsiung, 272.

¹³⁸ Hsiung, 272.

¹³⁹ Hsiung, 272.

¹⁴⁰ Hsiung, 272.

academics proved to be a small, but vocal group that advocated for continued ROC-US relations. For them, it was imperative that the shape that this relationship took was one that mutually benefited both the ROC and the US and guaranteed that the United States would not abandon Taiwan completely. While there was a feeling of betrayal coming from Ambassador Shen and the relationship between the ROC and the US was navigating through uncharted waters, the Taiwanese-American relationship was too important for ROC officials to look the other way and give up the hope that there could be some compromise between the two countries. It was then the job of Shen and others to market that a continued relationship with the ROC was also in the interest of the United States to members of Congress and the American public.

Section III: The Taiwan Lobby

Introduction

Throughout both the Nixon and Carter administrations, a group of Congressmen openly advocated for continued support of the Republic of China. More research is required to tell the full story of these Congressmen, but the role they played in shaping the future of Taiwanese-American relations throughout the normalization process cannot go unnoticed. Naturally, support of the Republic of China varied given the time period and the individual. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, the so-called Taiwan Lobby, or China Lobby, had “great political clout,” but had fallen “into disarray” after President Nixon’s trip in 1972, according to Brzezinski.¹⁴¹ Nonetheless, the more vocal support of the Republic of China reemerged by the end of the 1970s. Despite that support of the ROC was traditionally championed by conservative politicians, the way that Carter announced his intention to normalize relations with the PRC

¹⁴¹ FRUS, Document 40, 1977.

created a bipartisan effort to extend a stronger type of unofficial relations with the ROC than President Carter originally planned for. Generally, the support of Taiwan in Congress can be measured on a spectrum with hawkish Republicans, who had anticommunist agendas, on one end and more moderate Democrats, who had similar concerns to the Carter administration, on the other. The main concern shared by Democrats and the Carter administration was how the United States could normalize relations with the PRC while maintaining some unofficial relations with the ROC for moral and strategic reasons.

The Carter administration took a page from the Nixon administration and kept their negotiations with the PRC secretive. In a letter to Carter from Nixon, Nixon stressed that when dealing with the Chinese, “secrecy is indispensable if there is to be any chance of success.”¹⁴² While the Carter administration clearly did not seek the advice of Ambassador Shen, they neither sought the advice or consulted members of Congress about their plans to normalize relations with the PRC. Carter did propose an omnibus bill that proclaimed the United States and the people of Taiwan would maintain some form of unofficial relations through a private model that supported people-to-people relations. As Congressmen, on both sides of the political spectrum, reviewed this bill, they were able to craft a new version that satisfies their own concerns regarding how the United States would maintain relations with the people of Taiwan.

Reactions to the Announcement of the Normalization of Relations

On December 15, 1978, President Carter announced to the world that the United States was going to sever its diplomatic ties with the Republic of China and instead recognize the People’s Republic of China as of January 1, 1979. A *New York Times* article published after the

¹⁴² FRUS, Document 178, 1978.

event said that reactions ranged from “applause to anger.”¹⁴³ As one could probably assume, the “applause” came mostly from Democrats and the “anger” came mostly from Republicans. However, the subsequent aftermath of Carter’s announcement might tell a different story. While vocal supporters of the ROC, such as Goldwater, did express their anger over this decision, a bipartisan force in Congress was able to act swiftly to add much needed validity and force to Carter’s originally proposed bill to conduct relations with Taiwan.

President Carter’s originally proposed bill, entitled the “Taiwan Enabling Act,” authorized the United States to continue relations with the people of Taiwan despite the lack of official diplomatic relations. Its opening clause states:

“[This bill] authorizes continued relations with the people of Taiwan and the Pescadores, which shall not be affected by the lack of diplomatic recognition of the government of Taiwan. Defines the term "people on Taiwan", as used in this Act, to include the governing authority on Taiwan, recognized by the United States prior to January 1, 1979, as the Republic of China; its agencies, instrumentalities, and political subdivisions, the people governed by it; or the organizations and other entities formed under the law applied by the people on Taiwan. Continues all treaties and other international agreements entered into between the United States and the Government recognized as the Republic of China prior to January 1, 1979, unless terminated by law.”¹⁴⁴

Years later Representative Lester Wolff (D-NY), the chairman of one of the subcommittees directly involved with reviewing and reconstructing the original bill, wrote that he and Senator Edward W. Kennedy (D-MA) thought the Taiwan Enabling Act was “too weak of a statement to fulfill the need[s] of the people of Taiwan who did not want to come under Communist domination.”¹⁴⁵ The Taiwan Enabling Act also lacked any “security provisions for Taiwan” which Wolff felt was inconsistent with American foreign policy since the ROC and the US had an

¹⁴³ Halloran, “Carter’s Recognition Step Draws Applause and Anger.”

¹⁴⁴ Church, “S.245 - 96th Congress (1979-1980).”

¹⁴⁵ Wolff, “Crafting the Taiwan Relations Act | Commentary.”

existing Mutual Defense Treaty, which was soon to be terminated.¹⁴⁶ In the spirit of keeping promises to longtime allies, Wolff and others presumably believed that the United States ought to honor the legacy of the Mutual Defense Treaty and offer some security arrangements with Taiwan so that the PRC could not easily occupy the country. Similar to the thought-process of some in Carter's administration such as Secretary Brown and JCS Chairman David C. Jones, the United States had a responsibility to its allies.

The hearings that Representative Wolff conducted surrounding the eventual Taiwan Relations Act will be expanded upon in further detail in later sections. That being said, it is important to be cognizant of the bipartisan support of Taiwan coming from Congress. Ultimately, the answer that the Carter administration concocted for the Taiwan question fell short in its first attempt. This opened the possibility that other voices could have a say in how the United States and the ROC could maintain unofficial relations. In a way, these diverse voices strengthened the resolve of the United States to support a unique piece of legislation. While Ambassador Shen and other Taiwanese/Chinese-American academics were unable to convince the Carter administration of inputting their stamp on the future of US-ROC relations, there is room to believe that it was a popular belief amongst those in Congress that the United States could maintain relations with the people of Taiwan.

Senator Barry Goldwater

It is impossible to talk about pro-ROC members of Congress without mentioning Senator Barry Goldwater. Perhaps the most vocal supporter of Taiwan in Congress, Senator Goldwater was President Carter's harshest critic about the move to normalize relations with the PRC. The Republican Senator from Arizona was elected into the Senate in 1952 and ran against Lyndon B.

¹⁴⁶ Wolff.

Johnson in the 1964 presidential election. Remembered posthumously as an icon for American conservatism, Goldwater openly challenged the Carter administration's approach to normalization through his staunch support of Taiwan and harsh disavowal of the PRC. Goldwater's ties to Taiwan, or as he termed it, "Free China," dated back to World War II when he helped train ROC pilots.¹⁴⁷ Goldwater was a member of the "Taiwan Lobby," or members of Congress who favored the Republic of China over the People's Republic of China. Other members included Senator Bob Dole (R-KS), Senator John Tower (R-TX), Congressman Clement J. Zablocki (D-WI), and Senator Richard Stone (D-FL). In 1977, Brzezinski brushed off the Taiwan Lobby writing that they do not "constitute a major obstacle to normalization" and that rather the main obstacle to normalization was "our willingness to grasp this thorny issue at a *time that is strategically and politically advantageous to us.*"¹⁴⁸ While the Carter administration may not have perceived the Taiwan Lobby to have much significance to the overall process of normalization, Goldwater and others still played a crucial role in building up enough support for Taiwan at home to hold the Carter administration accountable for Taiwan's future.

In December 1978, President Carter announced that the United States would establish the full normalization of relations with the PRC starting on January 1, 1979. Senator Goldwater attacked this position by stating that it "downgraded, humiliated and victimized the Republic of China on Taiwan, one of this nation's most faithful and valuable allies."¹⁴⁹ Goldwater also declared that "it is a confirmation of expediency over honor – a confirmation of the doctrine of might and size make right" and that the United States was "rewarding a lawless system of government which has suppressed the most basic rights to its population."¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁷ Shen, "Goldwater: Unwavering Friend of 'Free China.'"

¹⁴⁸ FRUS, Document 40, 1977.

¹⁴⁹ Burks, "Goldwater Attacks Tie to China As Illegal Yielding to Expediency."

¹⁵⁰ Burks.

Four days later, Goldwater and a cohort of fifteen others in the Senate and House of Representatives filed suit in the United States District Court of the District of Columbia challenging the constitutionality of the president's decision to normalize relations. The United States would have to terminate its 1954 Mutual Defense Treaty, which Goldwater claimed could not be done without Senate approval. The motion eventually made its way to the Supreme Court on December 13, 1979, but did not end up making legal progress.¹⁵¹ For further explanation on his decision to sue the Carter administration, Goldwater published an important study through the Heritage Foundation. In this study, Goldwater stated that

“(1) No President can terminate a treaty unless he first obtains the consent of Congress; (2) that there is a Constitutionally required prior role for the Senate in the termination of treaties; and (3) that presidential action in violation of these principles would be an impeachable offense.”¹⁵²

The Supreme Court dismissed these claims as “political” and that it needed to be decided between Congress and the president.¹⁵³

The pro-Taiwan Lobby, also referred to as the “Friends of Free China,” had influence in both the Republican and Democratic parties. Considering that Ambassador Shen was not able to access the executive branch, the next plausible outlet to advocate for American support of Taiwan was through Congress. Author Zhiqun Zhu argues that the difference between Taiwanese and PRC lobbying efforts is that the former targets the Congress and the latter targets the executive branch.¹⁵⁴ One of the ways that Taiwan has garnered favor with Congress has been through expense-free trips to Taiwan. The notable pro-Taiwan members of Congress such as Goldwater and Dole have received notable “gifts” from Taiwan. Before and after the passing of

¹⁵¹ Schultz, “Goldwater v. Carter.”

¹⁵² U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Subcommittee on Asian and Pacific Affairs, *Implementation of Taiwan Relations Act: Issues and Concerns*, 37

¹⁵³ Volle, *The Political Legacies of Barry Goldwater and George McGovern*.

¹⁵⁴ Zhu, “BATTLE WITHOUT GUNFIRE,” 53.

the Taiwan Relations Act, Goldwater frequently visited Taiwan and was a longtime friend of Chiang Ching-kuo. Many years later, in January 1998, Dole became a “registered agent of Taiwan” and allegedly “received \$360,000 a year from Taiwan.”¹⁵⁵ Other reports indicate that Dole’s law firm would receive around \$30,000 a year in a deal struck between his law firm and the Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office.¹⁵⁶

Barry Goldwater and other members of the Taiwan Lobby were not just persuaded to support Taiwan through the power of the purse, but also the power of ideology. To Goldwater, there was a fight against communism and a “moral crusade of good versus evil.”¹⁵⁷ Not unlike Vance or even Carter, Goldwater believed that the United States had a moral commitment to Taiwan’s future and its people. While Goldwater’s lawsuit did not have enough momentum to overturn the decision of normalization, it indicated that there were members in Congress who felt strongly about the US commitment to Taiwan. Therefore, it was not just the internal debate amongst Carter’s top advisers that made its way into the decision-making process, but also the input of senators like Goldwater. Even still, while Goldwater was conservative, support of Taiwan was not necessarily a partisan issue. Senator Richard Stone, coauthor of the Dole-Stone amendment which required the prior consultation of the Senate before any changes to the Mutual Defense Treaty were made, was a Democrat from Florida. His inclusion in the Taiwan Lobby indicates further that Carter had to navigate through Congress to pursue normalization.

Conclusion

These examples help unpack that because of the secrecy surrounding the normalization process, there were several red flags waved when Carter announced that the United States and

¹⁵⁵ Zhu, 53.

¹⁵⁶ “Dole Now a Foreign Agent for Taiwan.”

¹⁵⁷ Volle, 79.

People's Republic of China would normalize relations. The criticism came from both sides of the political spectrum, which indicates a rare exercise of bipartisan support for a particular subject. Congress felt strongly that the United States and the Republic of China should maintain some relations despite accepting the reality that the PRC was the legitimate government of mainland China. Echoing again the idea that the Carter administration's negotiations with the PRC were often kept secret from those outside of room where it happens, it is important to note that while most members of Congress believed that normalizing relations with the PRC was indeed the right step for the United States, *how* the United States went about doing so was contested and the reasons *why* the United States should maintain relations with the ROC varied as well.

Section IV: Compromises and Agreements

Introduction

Converging back to the story of the Carter administration's negotiations with the PRC, President Carter met with Beijing's Chief Liaison Officer Chai Tse-min in order to discuss the final details of the normalization process. President Carter also dispatched Leonard Woodcock, the Chief Liaison Officer for the United States, to guide the negotiations in Beijing. As has been mentioned in the previous section, Congress quickly reconstructed Carter's original bill into the Taiwan Relations Act, which provided much needed backing of unofficial relations with the people of Taiwan from the United States. As has been the story of Sino-American rapprochement, President Carter and Ambassador Chai Tse-min could not agree on all terms, but could agree that normalization was long overdue. Compromises and agreements were central

themes of not only the final stage of negotiations between the Carter administration and the PRC, but also between the Carter administration and Congress.

President Carter and Chai Tse-min

The final phase of the Sino-American normalization process took place from September-December 1978. President Carter, feeling confident in his relationship with Congress after the approval of the Panama Canal Treaty, decided that the time was now right to pursue Sino-American normalization.¹⁵⁸ In September 1978, President Carter received Ambassador Chai Tse-min, who was the director of the People's Republic of China Liaison Office to give his most updated approach to normalization. Having received the input and advice from all of his advisers, Carter emphasized the need for the United States to maintain unofficial relations with Taiwan to demonstrate American "dependability, credibility, integrity, and resolve" in the interim period as they changed their relations with both Taiwan and the People's Republic of China.¹⁵⁹

In this meeting between Carter and Chai Tse-min, Carter reiterated the American position on two sensitive issues to the Chinese: selling defensive weapons to Taiwan and the peaceful reunification of Taiwan. On the first point, Carter supported this position to continue selling Taiwan arms as part of their continued trade with the island. Additionally, he acknowledged that Taiwan had the scientific capability to develop nuclear weapons. In order to avoid a situation where Taiwan would use nuclear weapons, Carter stated that it was necessary for the United States to have a continued relationship with Taiwan to avoid instability and danger in the area.¹⁶⁰ If these conditions could be agreed upon, President Carter was ready to move forward with normalization as soon as possible.

¹⁵⁸ Chang, *United States China Normalization*, 39.

¹⁵⁹ FRUS, Document 135, 1978.

¹⁶⁰ FRUS, Document 135, 1978.

The PRC made it very clear to the Carter administration that there would be no foreign intervention in the reunification of Taiwan. This was outlined in not only the Shanghai Communique, but also in almost every meeting between Carter administration officials and PRC officials. To avoid any contradiction, Carter clearly stated that the United States would “state our expectations of a settlement of the Taiwan issue through peaceful means.”¹⁶¹ A general agreement between Carter and Chai Tse-min was settled that the PRC would not contradict the US stance in public.¹⁶² This murky area in relations is still in question today. The PRC claims that the United States, or any foreign power, has no right to interfere with Taiwan’s reunification while the United States expresses its expectation that while it is an internal affair, Taiwan should be reunified with its own consent.

Chai Tse-min responded to Carter’s two points with three points of his own. The first point Chai makes is that the PRC holds the right to liberate Taiwan by whatever means necessary; it is an internal affair that requires no foreign intervention.¹⁶³ The second point is an acknowledgment that the only way to solve the “problem” of Sino-American relations is through the Japanese model. This model, as stated previously, allows people-to-people relations between Taiwan and the United States. The third point raises concerns about selling Taiwan weapons. This issue is detailed further in Woodcock’s negotiations with Deng Xiaoping and Han Nien-lung.

While this meeting did not venture too deep into the details of normalization – high level, Track I Diplomacy, meetings like this rarely do – it did present a couple things. The first is that the Carter administration was unified in their approach to the PRC, outlining the conditions they required to pursue normalization. Part of Carter’s appeal to Chai Tse-min was that if the United

¹⁶¹ FRUS, Document 135, 1978.

¹⁶² FRUS, Document 135, 1978.

¹⁶³ FRUS, Document 135, 1978.

States can maintain some of its relations with Taiwan, that it would ultimately look good for all parties involved. American “dependability, credibility, integrity, and resolve” were issues that Vance, Brzezinski, Brown, and other members of the administration believed were at stake for the United States if Taiwan’s people and future were put in serious jeopardy.

Leonard Woodcock Negotiations

President Carter dispatched Leonard Woodcock to continue negotiations around June of 1978. Woodcock, the former president of the United Auto Workers, was appointed as the Chief Liaison Officer in Beijing in 1977. In this new role as chief negotiator, Woodcock received most of his orders from Vance, Brzezinski, Holbrooke, and Oksenberg. While he negotiated with Chinese officials many times, the most important negotiations happened in December 1978, just weeks before Carter made his announcement that the United States and the People’s Republic of China would normalize relations. This crucial time period was an eleventh hour stretch for negotiators on both sides to agree upon what exactly would and could be stated about the normalization of relations. While both sides focused on the main issues of normalization, namely how to approach Taiwan, Woodcock focused primarily on the timing of normalization and substantive issues regarding Taiwan. The PRC focused primarily on the language used regarding normalization and Taiwan. This is not to say that both sides were not on the same page about many aspects of this new relationship. Indeed, as demonstrated by Kissinger in the earliest days of the normalization process, the executive branch and the PRC saw eye-to-eye on many issues such as the Soviet threat and the need for Sino-American relations in order to ensure peace and stability in the region. Judging from these discussions, however, Taiwan was still a sensitive topic and while the inability of the United States to completely withdraw *all* support of Taiwan

did not prove to be a strain on Sino-American relations, it certainly prompted certain confusions and fundamental disagreements between both sides that would not be settled by normalization.

In a memorandum to the President in June 1978, Secretary Vance outlined what Woodcock's approach to China would be. First, *timing* was a key consideration for the issuance of the Normalization Communique. The administration aimed for a mid-December date to announce normalization to the public. One reason behind this was that this announcement would take place just after the 1978 midterm elections, giving the administration some flexibility to make political leaps without immediate electoral impacts. A second reason is that this designated time frame would allow the administration to work with Beijing officials at a "reasonable pace."¹⁶⁴ Additionally, advance notice was to be given to top officials in Taipei, Tokyo, and Congress to ensure the smoothest and most stable transition period. Thus, Woodcock's orders were to meet with the Chinese over the summer and persuade them of the importance of the mid-December target date. If normalization was not announced or established by this date, the PRC could become especially frustrated with the lack of progress for normalization. Soviet relations with both the United States and PRC were at a critically vulnerable status and the window of opportunity to pull the PRC away from the Soviets was dwindling with further delays. Therefore, the timing of normalization was just as important as the substantive issues surrounding normalization.

What were these substantive issues that Woodcock was tasked with addressing in his negotiations? In that same memorandum, Secretary Vance notes that "we must address the three remaining substantive issues: relations with Taiwan after normalization; public statements on 'peaceful settlement'; and arms sales to Taiwan after normalization."¹⁶⁵ Vance and presumably

¹⁶⁴ FRUS, Document 119, 1978.

¹⁶⁵ FRUS, Document 119, 1978.

Brzezinski, Holbrooke, and Oksenberg found that the United States had two options when it came to the model for a “private” organization to handle the cultural, commercial, and other relations with Taiwan: a federally-chartered private cooperation, similar to the Red Cross, and a corporation privately chartered in the District of Columbia.¹⁶⁶ What would become known as the American Institute in Taiwan took the model of this second option, essentially using the District of Columbia’s laws as a cover for a *de facto* embassy. Both models, nevertheless, would “meet the PRC’s conditions” and “be able to handle the relationship with Taiwan adequately.”¹⁶⁷

Perhaps learning from his own trip to China, Vance emphasized the importance for Woodcock to “inform the Chinese after establishment of diplomatic relations we would have no official relations with Taiwan and no governmental representation.” Without overt clarification of this point, Woodcock could risk compromising the “seriousness of our [the Carter administration’s] entire approach.”¹⁶⁸ Further development of this approach would require Congressional approval and support mainly because of funding, but also because of monitoring the sale of arms.¹⁶⁹ In a way, this approach has all of the characteristics of a compromise. Not only would a private model, or the Japanese model, allow the United States to maintain some relations with the people of Taiwan, but it was acceptable to both the PRC and could be an acceptable settlement for the Taiwan lobby.

The second substantive issue that Vance addresses is public statements about Taiwan. Since the 1950s, the PRC has claimed that it would not make a non-use of force statement about the reunification of Taiwan to the mainland. Along with this statement, the PRC has claimed that the reunification of Taiwan is an internal matter requiring no foreign interference. However,

¹⁶⁶ FRUS, Document 119, 1978.

¹⁶⁷ FRUS, Document 119, 1978.

¹⁶⁸ FRUS, Document 119, 1978.

¹⁶⁹ FRUS, Document 119, 1978.

Vance claims that from the August 1977 and May 1978 talks, the Chinese indicated that they may be “willing to take a stand which, while not endorsing our view, does not contradict it either.”¹⁷⁰ Vance quotes Deng Xiaoping as stating as follows:

You have said on the question of the resolution of the issue of Taiwan the U.S. side has to take into account the reaction of your people at home and people in Taiwan. We understand your viewpoint. In solving the question of normalization of relations between our two countries under the three conditions, the U.S. side can express your hopes [for a peaceful settlement]. It is quite alright. You can state your views but you should not make it a precondition. And the Chinese side will state our views saying that the solution of Taiwan and how and when we will solve the problem of Taiwan is the business of the Chinese people themselves.¹⁷¹

In a “win-win” situation, the Chinese and the Americans essentially agreed to disagree on this matter and still proceed with normalization. Setting aside this debate, Vance indicated to Woodcock that he should continue this way of negotiating with the Chinese to avoid any unnecessary contradictions. While this “agree to disagree” approach would work in the short-term, it was still a delicate and sensitive matter to the Chinese. Woodcock would have to emphasize to the Chinese that what they say could “undercut our efforts for normalization.”¹⁷²

The third and final substantive issue that Woodcock would have to address is arms sales to Taiwan. Vance indicated that this was the trickiest matter because it is the most sensitive and strategic one. Chairman Hua noted to Brzezinski that China would not commit itself to using peaceful means to settle the Taiwan question while also stating that if the United States did not demand peaceful reunification from China, it might even tolerate US arms sales to Taiwan.¹⁷³

Ultimately, Woodcock was instructed to refer to Hua’s statement and make note that the Carter administration had “carefully considered it.”¹⁷⁴

¹⁷⁰ FRUS, Document 119, 1978.

¹⁷¹ FRUS, Document 119, 1978.

¹⁷² FRUS, Document 119, 1978.

¹⁷³ FRUS, Document 119, 1978.

¹⁷⁴ FRUS, Document 119, 1978.

For the final phase of Sino-American normalization negotiations, it is important to consider the first phase of the Carter administration's "China Policy." Early on, the Carter administration debated the best way to maintain unofficial relations with Taiwan and how to get a commitment from the PRC for a peaceful reunification settlement. The administration ultimately came to the decision that what was important while pursuing normalization with the PRC was that the Taiwanese people would not be abandoned. While this core principle still guided the thinking of the Carter administration, their approach was now tested and accommodated accordingly by the PRC's response. The PRC accepted that unofficial relations with Taiwan was the cost of normalization of relations. In addition to their three preconditions, the PRC was clear that reunification was an internal matter, held the right to liberate Taiwan by force, and disapproved of arms sales to Taiwan. Vance and Brzezinski, at this point, were well aware of these positions and rather than delaying the normalization process further by attempting to negotiate a firm commitment for peaceful reunification, they concluded that normalization of relations was more important than risking relations to turn adversarial due to delays and disagreements about Taiwan. Woodcock, thus, was tasked with the special objective of finalizing these disagreements into agreements. There were many imperfections already brewing in the relationship between the PRC and the US, most stemming from how to deal with Taiwan.

In December 1978, Woodcock met with Vice Foreign Minister Han Nien-lung to further the normalization talks. Woodcock had already presented a draft of the Normalization Communique. It was in these days leading up to the announcement date that both sides hashed out the details of the communique itself and again reiterate their differences about Taiwan. After presenting the Chinese side with the American stances on timing and substantive issues, Han Nien-lung gave Woodcock seven major points which summarized the Chinese position. While

most of these seven points remain fairly consistent with the PRC's stance over the course of negotiations, it is worth mentioning them again. In summary they are as follows: 1) the US owes China a debt on Taiwan and must itself untie the knot it has tied, 2) President Carter's expression of willingness to meet the three Chinese conditions is important and should be given explicit expression in the Normalization Communique, 3) the Chinese agree to issuing a joint communique on January 1, 1979; they also understand the US desire for time to solve related problems but cannot agree to an indefinite interim period; Ambassadors can only be exchanged once the three conditions are met, 4) non-governmental agencies can be maintained on Taiwan but all official and semi-official links must be severed and all official agreements declared null and void; normalization will improve American credibility, 5) the Chinese have stated their emphatic objection to arms sales to Taiwan after normalization; the United States should not let Taiwan acquire atomic weapons, but if it does, this is not a matter for the US to worry about, 6) a Chinese commitment on peaceful liberation is not only impossible but would not serve the US interest in a peaceful solution; the Chinese can refrain from objecting to a US expression of hope for a peaceful solution but will issue their own statement calling this an internal Chinese affair; the formulation of this statement already represents a Chinese concession to US needs, and 7) Sino-American relations are not a diplomatic but a political and strategic question.¹⁷⁵

New to the conversation and worthy of mentioning is the PRC's recognition that normalization is not necessarily a diplomatic question, but thoroughly a political and strategic decision by both sides. Woodcock's direct response to these seven points was not reported back to Brzezinski or Vance, but judging from his later meetings with Deng Xiaoping that centered around the language of the joint communique, Woodcock reported the substance of these meetings back to Washington for Carter and his administration to be the judges for how to

¹⁷⁵ FRUS, Document 159, 1978..

proceed. Also considering that Woodcock's main objective of these negotiations was to finalize details for the joint communique, it would be reasonable to assume that anything that was not related to the timing or substantive issues were not concerns of his at the moment. That is not to undermine the importance of how the PRC viewed the situation. It is illuminating to note that part of the PRC's positions is that the Chinese were under the assumption that this transition period would not last indefinitely as it has proven to show.

Days later, and as mentioned above, Woodcock met with Deng Xiaoping to discuss the joint communique. For Deng, he had three clarifications that would make the communique acceptable. Deng brought attention to Article X of the Mutual Defense Treaty which states "This Treaty shall remain in force indefinitely. Either Party may terminate it one year after notice has been given to the other Party."¹⁷⁶ Considering the terms of the treaty, once either party [Taiwan or the US] wishes to terminate the treaty, it would be one year before the treaty is officially terminated. In that transition year, Deng asked Woodcock that the US make no sale of defensive weapons as it would cause confusion and indicate that the US is "continuing to carry out the Treaty provisions" [of supplying Taiwan with defensive weapons].¹⁷⁷ Deng also thought that Article X of the Mutual Defense Treaty should not be mentioned or should be avoided because it could raise concerns along the same lines as the previous point. The third clarification that Deng raised was that the joint communique should have an "anti-hegemony" clause. Deng stated to Woodcock that "if our two sides can restate the anti-hegemony clause [similar to the one stated in the Shanghai Communique] in our joint communique, I think it would add weight to the impact of the communique, which would have greater significance to the world."¹⁷⁸ This clause

¹⁷⁶ "Avalon Project - Mutual Defense Treaty Between the United States and the Republic of China; December 2, 1954."

¹⁷⁷ FRUS, Document 166, 1978.

¹⁷⁸ FRUS, Document 166, 1978.

could have been important to Deng because it gave the PRC an additional assurance that the United States would not interfere – with what the PRC could claim – in “internal affairs.”

On a side note, it was Deng Xiaoping also who suggested that the United States mesh the claim that the United States would maintain commercial and cultural relations *and* that the United States would maintain other relations with the people of Taiwan. The opening clause of the Taiwan Relations Act that the United States would maintain “commercial, cultural, and other relations” between the people of the United States and the people of Taiwan was actually suggested by none other than Deng Xiaoping.

In Woodcock’s conclusions to Brzezinski, he emphasized the PRC’s objections to the sale of defensive arms to Taiwan. It was so severe that Woodcock thought it was worth mentioning to Brzezinski that “we have serious differences over this issue.”¹⁷⁹ Yet, he also wrote that “Teng [Deng] is prepared nevertheless to proceed with our normalization schedule as planned. He urged, however, that the President find some means of avoiding direct answers to questions on arms sales” and that if a public controversy over this issue were to take place before the normalization date, it would “reduce the significance of normalization.”¹⁸⁰ Without oversimplifying it too much, a theme reemerges in Sino-U.S. talks that had first been mentioned by Kissinger way back in 1972 that “the trouble is that we disagree, not that we don’t understand each other.”¹⁸¹ *Agreeing to disagree* became the mantra of the Carter administration’s approach to normalization. The Carter administration could not accept any more delays and setbacks on the issue and proceeded to progress with normalization despite the costs of ambiguity about Taiwan.

¹⁷⁹ FRUS, Document 170, 1978.

¹⁸⁰ FRUS, Document 170, 1978.

¹⁸¹ MacMillan, 259.

The Taiwan Relations Act

It is fitting for this chapter to finish where modern Taiwanese-American relations begin: with the Taiwan Relations Act (TRA). As the basis for Taiwanese-American relations today, the TRA's ambiguous language surrounding an American defense of Taiwan has been interpreted by American presidents as they see fit. Throughout the normalization negotiations, President Carter was primarily concerned with maintaining some unofficial relations with Taiwan. He gave little attention to the modalities of this new relationship, assuming that Congress would pick up the scraps to create a functional and legal *de facto* embassy of sorts. Oxymorons aside, several Congressmen swiftly picked up Carter's originally proposed bill, the Taiwan Enabling Act, and presented their own version called the Taiwan Relations Act in the House in February 1979. The TRA passed by overwhelming majorities in both the House and the Senate eventually getting approval from the president himself, signing it into law on April 10, 1979.

In February, after its introduction, several hearings were held by the Committee on Foreign Affairs in the House of Representatives in order to gauge the issues and concerns of the Taiwan Relations Act. A subcommittee was formed to interview professors, experts, senators, and State department officials all linked to the development of the Taiwan Relations Act. There were two central debates that Chairman of the Subcommittee Lester Wolff identified. The first was the "concern over the security question in the wake of notification of the ending of the Mutual Defense Treaty between Washington and Taipei" and the second was "how the future economic and social well-being of the people on Taiwan would be promoted under the new, unofficial relationship."¹⁸² Despite the concerns, most members of Congress, like members of the

¹⁸² U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Subcommittee on Asian and Pacific Affairs, *Implementation of Taiwan Relations Act: Issues and Concerns*, III

Carter administration, acknowledged that normalization with the People's Republic of China was not only appropriate, but a positive step for US foreign policy.

The first concern of this subcommittee, and of Congress as a whole, was the security and well-being of the *people* of Taiwan. While the government, the Kuomintang Party, which represented the Taiwanese people no longer had official diplomatic relations with the government of the United States, there was a loophole of sorts in that the people of both Taiwan and the people of the United States were able to maintain relations. An interesting distinction is made by Senator Javits in his 1981 article in *Foreign Affairs*. He addresses this concern by writing that “although Beijing was now the de jure or legally recognized government of China as far as the United States was concerned, the authorities in Taipei were clearly the real or de facto government on Taiwan.”¹⁸³ Instead of a security agreement between the governments of Taiwan and the United States, Congress sought a solution where the United States government could protect the security of the *people* of Taiwan. Identifying this problem as well, Wolff acknowledged that the security concerns for the people of Taiwan were lacking any structure.¹⁸⁴ By extension, the interests of the people of Taiwan were linked to the interests of the American people. Therefore, Wolff rightly indicates that the President “retains the power [to defend the Taiwanese people] under the War Powers Resolution to take steps, with the consent of Congress, deemed necessary to protect U.S. interests on Taiwan.”¹⁸⁵ The War Powers Resolution of 1973 was designed to “limit the U.S. president’s ability to initiate or escalate military actions abroad,” but in this context, since the Mutual Defense Treaty was terminated, the president with the advice and consent of Congress could dispatch American troops as they deemed fit to protect

¹⁸³ Javits, “Congress and Foreign Relations,” 57

¹⁸⁴ U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Subcommittee on Asian and Pacific Affairs, *Implementation of Taiwan Relations Act: Issues and Concerns*, III.

¹⁸⁵ U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Subcommittee on Asian and Pacific Affairs, *Implementation of Taiwan Relations Act: Issues and Concerns*, V.

American interests.¹⁸⁶ As a supplement to the Mutual Defense Treaty, Wolff and this subcommittee found that it was still within the right of the American president and Congress to protect American interests in Taiwan despite no formal defense treaty.

The second concern of the subcommittee centered on the economic and social well-being of the people of Taiwan. In other words, how could Congress maintain cultural and commercial relations with Taiwan with no diplomatic relations in place anymore? The Carter administration and the PRC both agreed that the United States could follow the Japanese model, or “formula,” to maintain these cultural and commercial relations. To support the seriousness of this concern, Wolff writes that a “major interest to the Congress, and particularly to the business community, was the lack in the proposed administration bill [draft of Taiwan Relations Act] of specific safeguards for continued economic and social relations between the Taiwanese people and the American people.”¹⁸⁷ To solve this issue, a non-profit organization was suggested as a means to conduct the day-to-day commercial relations in this new relationship. The American Institute in Taiwan (AIT) was to be established as a nonprofit corporation that acted under the laws of the District of Columbia to conduct transactions and other services in the name of the American government. The Taiwan Relations Act authorized the AIT to administer several functions which all centered around the people-to-people relations.

Special legal counsel to the Carter administration Herb Hansell, in an interview years after the authorization of the TRA, stated his integral role in the formation of the AIT.

As you know, there were issues of arms sales to Taiwan and how to conduct unofficial relations with it. At my suggestion, we created--this was a carryover from my experience as a corporate lawyer in private practice--a corporation under the laws of the District of Columbia, called the American Institute on Taiwan [AIT]. That is the entity which has unofficially represented the U.S. in Taiwan ever since. It still functions in Taiwan,

¹⁸⁶ “War Powers Resolution of 1973 | Richard Nixon Museum and Library.”

¹⁸⁷ U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Subcommittee on Asian and Pacific Affairs, *Implementation of Taiwan Relations Act: Issues and Concerns*, V.

representing the U.S. Government in conducting its non-official relations. You probably know this, but what happens is that Foreign Service Officers are ‘detailed’ to that organization and during their periods of service there are considered to have temporarily been severed from U.S. Government employment. They are not employed by the U. S. Government as such during the time that they [serve in Taiwan]. When that tour of duty is over, they come back and resume [their U. S. Government careers].¹⁸⁸

Hansell sheds light on some of the inner workings of the AIT and that in reality, its grasp over Taiwanese-American relations is much more similar to an embassy. Indeed the AIT’s function might actually extend beyond that of an embassy considering its importance in maintaining the commercial and cultural relations between Taiwan and the United States. “Unofficial” only in name, the AIT acts as a substitute for an American embassy and a valid strategy to overcome the problem of *how* the United States and Taiwan would maintain their cultural and commercial ties.

Also, some 53 treaties and agreements between Taiwan and the United States would also remain intact. Secretary Holbrooke expanded on this point by stating that “we would maintain the broad range of substantive ties with Taiwan in commerce and investment, in travel and tourism, and in cultural interchange.”¹⁸⁹ Holbrooke also stated that “these without them [the treaties and agreements] we could not continue, for example, cooperation in the peaceful uses of atomic energy; and the ending of the Treaty of Friendship, Commerce and Navigation and the orderly marketing agreement would have a deleterious effect on our and Taiwan’s essential business interests.”¹⁹⁰

Another idea that permeated through these interviews is that the Taiwan Relations Act offered a justifiable equilibrium powerful enough to balance the Chinese-Taiwanese-American relationship. When interviewed, Professor Victor H. Li, professor of International Legal Studies

¹⁸⁸ Hansell, The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project.

¹⁸⁹ Subcommittee Hearings, VI

¹⁹⁰ U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Subcommittee on Asian and Pacific Affairs, *Implementation of Taiwan Relations Act: Issues and Concerns*, VI.

at Stanford Law School, stated that “normalization of Sino-U.S. relations, reinforced by the Taiwan Relations Act, established a stable equilibrium among the United States, China, and Taiwan. All three parties have a strong interest in preserving this equilibrium.”¹⁹¹ Worth mentioning too is the summary of Professor Li’s discussion of *de facto* recognition:

Victor Li’s explanation of the theory of ‘de facto recognition’ turns on an acknowledgement of two separate societies. Under the theory, the United States could either ignore the rival claims to ‘China’ made by the PRC and the ROC and treat them as different nations, or accept the PRC’s claim in principle but continue to deal with the ROC. Japan has followed just such a course in recognizing the PRC while simultaneously continuing to trade with the ROC. Japan does not officially deny the sovereignty of the PRC.¹⁹²

This explanation highlights the minor, yet key, distinction between recognition and acceptance. This theme plays out in both the Shanghai Communique and the Normalization Communique through the US acknowledgement that there is only one China and that Taiwan belongs to China. Without overtly stating *who* or *which* China is the legitimate government, the United States can avoid contradicting itself, the PRC, and the ROC while simultaneously avoiding complicating and obfuscating cultural, commercial, and other relations.

Conclusion

The Taiwan Relations Act is a seminal document not only because it offered concrete solutions to the two primary concerns of security and maintaining cultural, commercial, and other unofficial relations, but also because it was able to blend a decade of normalization talks into something acceptable to all parties involved. As a testament to its acceptability, it was

¹⁹¹ U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Subcommittee on Asian and Pacific Affairs, *Implementation of Taiwan Relations Act: Issues and Concerns*, 48.

¹⁹² U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Subcommittee on Asian and Pacific Affairs, *Implementation of Taiwan Relations Act: Issues and Concerns*, 43.

passed in the House by a vote of 345-55 and passed in the Senate by a vote of 90-6.¹⁹³ A *compromise* of sorts, the TRA was really an accomplishment of the 96th Congress than of the Carter administration. It is imperative to note that since Congress now oversaw the functionality of the American Institute in Taiwan, they also funded its operation. The Department of State, too, “through a contract with the Institute [of Taiwan], provides a large part of the AIT’s funding and guidance in its operations.”¹⁹⁴ While more research is required on what the AIT’s budget was in 1979, modern reports indicate that Congress has provided the AIT with a \$44 million budget for the 2022 fiscal year.¹⁹⁵ In retrospect, this number has varied throughout the decades, but it should not go unstated that Congress and the State Department determine the budget of the American Institute in Taiwan.

While Carter and his top advisers were focused, fixated even, on the benefits of this new Sino-U.S. relationship, their ambition ultimately created many uncertainties and ambiguities for the future of trilateral relations. Members of Congress such as Senators Goldwater and Javits took the opportunity to criticize Carter for the seemingly rushed normalization process, as demonstrated in *Goldwater v. Carter* and in Javit’s article. However, this was a decision that was decades in the making. Since Nixon and Kissinger mentioned their intent to normalize relations to the PRC in 1972, there was increasing pressure with each administration to finalize this deal. Perhaps no administration had considered gathering support in Congress to come to a compromise about Taiwan. Perhaps Carter realized that the opportunity to capitalize on Nixon’s historic trip was dwindling. Of course, it cannot go unstated that Carter and every member of Congress is a politician who, to some degree, is working to get reelected. Thus, there was – and there will always be – a risk in moving too fast with such a controversial decision as the

¹⁹³ Zablocki, “Text - H.R.2479 - 96th Congress (1979-1980).”

¹⁹⁴ “Policy & History” | American Institute in Taiwan

¹⁹⁵ “Payment to the American Institute in Taiwan, State | Spending Profile | USA Spending.”

normalization of relations with a communist country during the Cold War. Nonetheless, not all of the credit can go to Congress for “saving” the Taiwanese-American relationship. Without the contributions of all parties, I believe that there would have been no forward progress at all. The Taiwan Relations Act is a rare example of an almost unanimous agreement designed to tackle one of the most complicated foreign policy issues of the 20th century.

Conclusion: Clarity, Ambiguity, and the Lessons of the Past

Before President Nixon departed for China, he told reporters that “if we can make progress [towards peace]... the world will be a much safer place.”¹⁹⁶ Similarly, President Carter stated that “we expect that normalization will help to move us together toward a world of diversity and of peace. For too long, our two peoples were cut off from one another. Now we share the prospect of a fresh flow of commerce, ideas, and people, which will benefit both our countries” on the front lawn of the White House during Deng Xiaoping’s visit to the United States in January 1979.¹⁹⁷ Both Nixon’s and Carter’s legacies have partially been constructed by this monumental process of normalization. Both administrations ushered in a new era of relations between the United States and the People’s Republic of China. At the price of severing diplomatic relations with the Republic of China, the US could pursue the normalization of relations with the PRC. Toward this better path to peace in Asia, the US and the PRC were able to put aside their differences and pursue new opportunities borne of friendship and peace. In a way, the normalization of relations cemented the United States as an Asian power because of this “fresh flow of commerce, ideas, and people.”¹⁹⁸

Much has been said about President Nixon’s historic trip to China in 1972. He and Henry Kissinger shocked the world as they met with Mao Zedong and Zhou En-lai to carve out a new destiny for their countries. Both governments issued the Shanghai Communique, which stated their mutual intentions of normalizing relations in the future and their shared goals of peace and the rejection of hegemony in Asia. This shocking turn of events created friction between the

¹⁹⁶ Szulc, “President Leaves on Trip to China; Stops in Hawaii.”

¹⁹⁷ “Jimmy Carter and Deng Xiaoping, Exchange of Comments and Toasts at the White House, Jan. 29, 1979 | US-China Institute.”

¹⁹⁸ “Jimmy Carter and Deng Xiaoping, Exchange of Comments and Toasts at the White House, Jan. 29, 1979 | US-China Institute.”

ROC and the US, which sparked questions of whether or not the United States was going to abandon its longtime ally and friend.

Behind the romanticization of normalization, however, both administrations had to grapple with the question of how to maintain some relations with Taiwan despite the pursuit of normalization. The Nixon administration's time was cut short due to domestic scandals, which inevitably left the normalization process up for future administrations. Embedded into this question of *how*, was the question of *why*. For Carter, in particular, this question of *why* was mostly treated as a prerequisite for normalization; the United States and the People's Republic could not normalize relations without some assurances for the people of Taiwan. Yet, there were still concrete reasons why the administration advocated to their PRC counterparts that the United States must have some unofficial relations with Taiwan.

The first reason, which connects to who President Carter was as a person, is that there was a morality question entangled with the Taiwan question. Would the United States abandon its longtime ally and friend, a government that had been faithful and loyal to the United States throughout the "heat" of the Cold War? Would the United States jeopardize the future of the Taiwanese people by terminating the Mutual Defense Treaty between their two governments? The answer to these questions is simply, no. Carter attracted like-minded individuals, such as Cyrus Vance, who believed in not only the virtue of normalization, but also in maintaining some commitments to Taiwan. For this administration, both options could be pursued.

This question of morality was, like many other attributes of the normalization process, nuanced. Which parts of the relationship were important to maintain and which parts could be discarded? For the Carter administration, there was a solicitation throughout the entire process that the PRC had to tone down their rhetoric about liberating Taiwan by force. The PRC claimed

that this was an internal matter, which required no foreign interference. While some concessions were made sporadically, nothing could be agreed upon that resembled peaceful intentions. Since the fate of Taiwan's reunification was left unanswered, the United States resorted to continuing selling Taiwan defensive weapons. Therefore, the Carter administration believed that it ought to protect Taiwan since it could not get a firm commitment from the PRC regarding Taiwan's peaceful reunification. What also made the morality question nuanced was the likelihood that Taiwan would become a "destabilizing" force in Asia. Since the United States did not support an independent Taiwan, nor was it in the interest of either the US or the PRC for any third party to make an attempt to establish relations with Taiwan, it was argued that the United States needed to maintain some relations with Taiwan during this transition period. The Carter administration believed that the United States had an obligation to support Taiwan throughout the transition period.

The normalization of relations also called into question the perceived strength of the United States to skillfully pursue official relations with the PRC and unofficial relations with the ROC. How the United States pursued both would indicate to their allies and adversaries alike their resolve and dependability. Carter echoed this exact sentiment to Chai Tse-min when he argued for an American presence on Taiwan to demonstrate "dependability, credibility, integrity, and resolve."¹⁹⁹ Also rooted in the question of how the United States could maintain relations with both the PRC and ROC was the notion that both sides had to come to an agreement about what was acceptable. They settled on adopting the "Japanese Model" of unofficial relations. This model allowed for a private organization to conduct people-to-people relations. The function of the private organization would also conduct in commercial relations between the two groups of people. For the Carter administration, they originally sought to incorporate liaison offices with

¹⁹⁹ FRUS, Document 135, 1978.

minimal government-to-government cooperation, but that idea was dismissed by Deng Xiaoping because it clearly contradicted the notion of one China; Deng argued that the United States could not have anything that resembled government relations with Taiwan since the normalization talks were guided by the principles of the Shanghai Communique.

Despite the constant back-and-forth between the US and the PRC about normalization, they agreed to normalize relations on January 1, 1979 incorporating both the “Japanese Model” of unofficial relations and accepting all other conditions. The PRC held that in order for normalization to proceed, the United States needed to accept three preconditions: 1) terminate the Mutual Defense Treaty of 1954, 2) sever diplomatic relations with the ROC, and 3) remove all US troops from Taiwan. In turn, the United States offered their own conditions. Namely, the United States sought to 1) maintain unofficial relations, such as commercial and cultural relations, with the people of Taiwan and 2) continue selling Taiwan defensive weapons.

While the Carter administration and the PRC were at an agreement on normalization, members of the 96th Congress had mixed reactions to the announcement of normalization. President Carter introduced a bill that would provide the legal basis for the private organization in Taipei that would conduct unofficial relations, but this bill was rejected swiftly by Congress. Immediately after its introduction, this new bill was absorbed by Congress and reconstructed as the Taiwan Relations Act. Through several committee and subcommittee hearings, Congress was able to reinforce this new unofficial relationship with funding and an additional layer of attentive care.

The relationship between the United States and the People’s Republic was necessitated out of a fear that their mutual adversary, the Soviet Union, could be pacified by normalization. In seeking this rapprochement, many questions were raised not only about the fate of the US-PRC

relationship, but also about both the PRC-ROC relationship and the US-ROC relationship. It has been upwards of forty years since the Taiwan Relations Act was passed and some of the same questions are still being asked today. Is Taiwan's autonomy (still) an American interest? Are the People's Republic of China and the United States doomed for rivalry or catastrophe, specifically over Taiwan? Is there a future where the ROC or Taiwan can exist beyond the shade of the PRC's shadow? Given Taiwan's transition from autocracy to democracy throughout the 1980s and 1990s, these questions may be even more important. One thematic truth that has emerged throughout this research is that the "problems" of the last generation never truly dissipate with the coming of the next. Kissinger and Nixon believed the Taiwan question would resolve itself. Carter, Vance, and Brzezinski believed that eventually Taiwan would be reunified with mainland China. These inherited problems, indeed, become even more complicated with time. Thus, the ephemeral interests of states never truly materialize into eternal proclamations, and diplomats must continue to compromise with these evolving interests in order to push us towards new prospects of peace and stability.

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