

**CONTAINMENT AND ENGAGEMENT: U.S. CHINA POLICY IN
THE KENNEDY AND JOHNSON ADMINISTRATIONS**

Sean Matthew Turner

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University of Adelaide

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ABSTRACT

This study argues that despite the basic inertia in U.S. China policy during the Kennedy and Johnson years, the period nonetheless witnessed a fundamental evolution in the strategic presumptions underlying Washington's approach to the China "problem." By increments, U.S. policymakers began to seriously question the wisdom of a policy predicated on the idea that the containment of the People's Republic of China necessitated its political and economic isolation. Inversely, a basic consensus emerged in interested corners of the U.S. foreign policy bureaucracy that considered attempts to engage the Chinese—on levels bilateral and multilateral, official and unofficial—could serve to socialise China's revolutionaries, thereby facilitating a reduction in Sino-American tensions and paving the way to a bilateral rapprochement. Critically, in this analysis "engagement" was seen as a means of enhancing, rather than simply supplanting, the larger effort to contain China.

The dynamics involved in the emergence of this consensus are manifold and complex, and cannot be properly understood without close reference to changes in both the international strategic environment and the domestic political context through the 1960s. At the heart of this process, however, were advocates of policy moderation within the U.S. bureaucracy, mediating external pressures for policy movement, and championing the case for a more conciliatory approach to Sino-American relations.

The growing acceptance of what was sometimes articulated as "containment without isolation"—shorthand for a policy framework that implicitly rejects the either/or choice between containment and engagement—found expression in, and was in turn fostered by, basic adjustments in Washington's posture toward Mao's China. By the end of 1968 senior U.S. officials had repeatedly signalled that Washington was reconciled to the reality of a

Communist-controlled mainland China, and would in fact welcome expanded efforts toward bilateral accommodation and even cooperation.

These postural shifts may not have been matched by concrete policy changes, yet they remain significant. In the most immediate sense, the less provocative posture toward China enhanced Washington's capacity to communicate U.S. intent to China's leadership, thereby helping avert a direct Sino-American conflict in the 1960s, even as the two sides pursued antithetical objectives in the Asian region. In a longer-term frame of reference, the more flexible posture adopted in the 1960s played an important role in challenging the domestic politicisation of China policy, while establishing a rhetorical framework and conceptual foundation for more substantive policy movement.

In the course of tracing these developments, this study also provides new interpretative insights on a number of specific issues pertaining to U.S. China policy in the Kennedy and Johnson years, including the policy preferences, relationships, and roles of key U.S. officials in shaping the policy process; the impact of domestic politics, alliance politics, and various Cold War strategic concerns on policy outcomes; the question of how to deal with China's nuclear development; and the manner in which major China-related events and developments in the 1960s—such as the failure of Mao's Great Leap Forward, the 1962 Taiwan Strait crisis, the Sino-Indian border war, China's involvement in Vietnam, and the Cultural Revolution—were interpreted by U.S. officials, and, in turn, shaped understandings of and responses to the China problem.

Thesis Declaration

This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being made available for loan and photocopying, subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968.

Sean Turner
February 28, 2008

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discerning eye to my work, and challenged me to think about my material and the writing process in new ways.

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ABBREVIATIONS

ACA	Subject Files for the Office of Asian Communist Affairs, Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs, 1961-1973 (NA)
ACDA	Arms Control and Disarmament Agency
ADST	Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, Oral History Collection, Lauinger Library, Georgetown University
AID	Agency for International Development
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CF	Central File (NA)
CFR	Council of Foreign Relations
CFRA	Public Policy Papers, Council of Foreign Relations Archive, Seeley G. Mudd Manuscript Library, Princeton University (Princeton, New Jersey)
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CO	Country Files (LBJL and JFKL)
Congentel	Consulate General telegram
CPE	<i>The CAESAR, POLO, and ESAU Papers</i> (CIA online collection)
CREST	CIA Records Search Tool (NA)
CWIHP	Cold War International History Project
DDI	Deputy Director for Intelligence (CIA)
Depcirtel	Department of State circular telegram
Deptel	Department of State telegram
DROH	Dean Rusk Oral History Transcripts (RBRL)
DRPP	Dean Rusk Personal Papers (RBRL)
DSB	<i>Department of State Bulletin</i>
EA	Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, Department of State *
EAF	Subject Files of the Office of the Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs (NA)
Embtel	Embassy telegram
FE	Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs, Department of State *
FRUS	<i>Foreign Relations of the United States</i>
FSD	Foreign Service Dispatch
GRC	Government of the Republic of China
HP:KJA	Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Papers of W. Averell Harriman, Special Files: Public Service, 1918-1986, n.d., Kennedy-Johnson Administrations, 1958-1971, n.d.
INR	Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Department of State
IO	Bureau of International Organization Affairs, Department of State
JCS	Joint Chiefs of Staff
JFKL	John F. Kennedy Library (Boston, Massachusetts)

* In November 1966 the Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs was renamed the Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs.

JTP	Papers of James C. Thomson (JFKL)
JTP:FE	Papers of James C. Thomson, Series 5: Far East, 1961-1966 (JFKL)
JTP:SP	Papers of James C. Thomson, Series 2: Speeches, 1961-1966 (JFKL)
LBJL	Lyndon B. Johnson Library (Austin, Texas)
Memcon	Memorandum of Conversation
MF	Microfilm
MPR	Mongolian People's Republic
NA	National Archives II (College Park, Maryland)
NIE	National Intelligence Estimate
NSAM	National Security Action Memorandum
NSC	National Security Council
NSF	National Security File
NSF:CO	National Security File, Country File
NSF:CO/VN	National Security File, Country File, Vietnam (LBJL)
NSF:KP	National Security File, Papers of Robert W. Komer (JFKL)
NYT	<i>New York Times</i>
OCI	Office of Current Intelligence (CIA)
OHI	Oral History Interview
ONE	Office of National Estimates (CIA)
ORR	Office of Research and Reports (CIA)
PKI	Indonesian Communist Party (<i>Partai Komunis Indonesia</i>)
POF:CO	President's Office Files, Countries (JFKL)
PPP	<i>Public Papers of the Presidents</i>
PRC	People's Republic of China
RBRL	Richard B. Russell Library, University of Georgia (Athens, Georgia)
RG59	General Records of the Department of State, Record Group 59
RH:CO	Papers of Roger Hilsman, Series 1. Countries Files, 1961-1964 (JFKL)
ROC	Republic of China
ROCF	Subject Files of the Office of Republic of China Affairs, 1951-1975
S/P	Policy Planning Council, Department of State
Secto	Telegram from the Secretary of State (or his delegation) to the Department of State
SFRC	Senate Foreign Relations Committee
SNIE	Special National Intelligence Estimate
Telcon	Telephone conversation
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
USIA	United States Information Agency
USIS	United States Information Service
USUN	United States Mission to the United Nations
WHCF	White House Central File (LBJL)

INTRODUCTION

In October 1967 a group of prominent American scholars convened in Washington to compare notes on China with officials from the Johnson administration. Among the participants at the meeting—one of a series held over the course of 1967 and 1968—was Harvard professor, doyen of American sinology, and one-time target of the anti-Communist demagoguery to which Joseph McCarthy lent his name, John King Fairbank. Midway through the morning session, with discussion centred on the administration's recently announced plan to deploy a "Chinese-oriented" anti-ballistic missile system, Fairbank interjected to complain that U.S. China policy since 1949 had "been remarkable for its 'miniscule' quality." Elaborating, Fairbank contended that successive administrations had afforded the Sino-American relationship little to no importance. And, by implication, Fairbank charged that Washington had yet to properly tackle what he regarded as the fundamentally important task of "formulating a new approach to China, one based on long-run considerations."¹

It was an analysis later echoed by U.S. officials who had agitated for policy change during the Kennedy and Johnson years. As the Sino-American rapprochement was still unfolding in 1971 James Thomson, a China-born sinologist (and former student of Fairbank's) who had worked at the State Department and on the National Security Council staff between 1961 and 1966, recalled that during the Democratic 1960s China specialists in Washington had been "considered exotica at best, sheer tedium at worst." For senior policymakers China was never a priority, and but for the "intermittent question of Peking's possible intervention in Vietnam,

¹ Minutes, China Panel meeting, October 24, 1967, Record Group 59: General Records of the Department of State (hereafter RG59), Subject Files of the Office of the Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs (hereafter EAF), lot 73D8, box 20, "China Advisory Panel Meeting, October 23-24, 1967," National Archives II, College Park, Maryland (hereafter NA). For the ABM system announcement, see Robert S. McNamara, September 18, 1967, *Department of State Bulletin* (hereafter *DSB*) 57:449-50.

China was a room-emptier; its existence was uninteresting, if true.” Granted, there was a highly-trained, energetic group of sinologists and Asianists labouring away in the bureaucracy, challenging the rigidity of a policy predicated upon the idea that the containment of Mao Zedong’s pariah state necessitated its political and economic isolation. But their successes had been few and far between, and of little import at that. Indeed, Thomson settled on the same adjective as Fairbank to describe these rare victories: “minuscule.”²

These characterisations of U.S. China policy in the 1960s accurately underline the lack of substantive policy movement in the decade prior to the Sino-American rapprochement. From Kennedy’s inauguration through Johnson’s return to his ranch on the Pedernales eight years later, the key markers of U.S. China policy remained constant: non-recognition of the People’s Republic of China, opposition to its membership in the United Nations, a draconian trade embargo, and continued diplomatic recognition of Chiang Kai-shek’s vestigial regime on Taiwan as the “sole legitimate government of China.”

However, this policy inertia obscures a subtle but nonetheless fundamental evolution of the strategic presumptions underlying the U.S. approach to the China “problem”—that is, the problem of a revolutionary China set against American power in Asia and, more broadly, the international status quo—over the course of the Kennedy and Johnson years. By increments, U.S. policymakers began to seriously question the wisdom of a policy that presumed the containment the People’s Republic of China demanded its international isolation. Inversely, a basic consensus emerged in interested corners of the U.S. foreign policy bureaucracy that considered attempts to engage the Chinese—on levels bilateral and multilateral, official and unofficial—could serve to socialise China’s revolutionaries, thereby facilitating an amelioration of the prevailing enmity between Washington and Beijing and paving the way for a Sino-American rapprochement. Critically, in this policy vision “engagement” would modify, rather than simply supplant, the larger effort to contain China—the United States

² James C. Thomson, Jr., “Watching the China-Watchers,” *Foreign Policy*, no. 4 (1971): 138-40.

would maintain a military posture designed to deter (and if necessary check) Beijing's aggressive drive for regional hegemony, yet at the same time encourage new points of Sino-American contact in the hope of gradually moving the relationship from confrontation to conciliation.³

The dynamics involved in the emergence of this consensus are manifold and complex, and cannot be properly understood without close reference to the shifting eddies of the international strategic environment during the Democratic 1960s, together with changes in the domestic political context (often extraneous to the issue of China) through the same period. In tracking the construction of this consensus, however, it becomes apparent that at the heart of this process were advocates of policy moderation within the U.S. politico-bureaucratic apparatus, mediating external pressures for policy movement, and championing the case for a more flexible, conciliatory approach to a deeply-troubled Sino-American relationship.

Unfolding along a non-linear, even fitful trajectory, this proved a partial and, in the final analysis, inconclusive strategic evolution. Over the course of the decade key U.S. officials perceived compelling reasons to maintain existing policy positions, if only "for the time being." Beyond Washington's marked ideological (and, indeed, moral) aversion to Maoist China, in the 1960s Sino-American tensions were exacerbated by a highly charged contest for the strategic loyalties and, in a broader sense, the political soul of post-colonial Asia. As this contest played itself out, most violently in Vietnam, existing obstacles to improved Sino-American relations were reinforced, and new ones still created. Even to the extent that U.S. officials became progressively alert to an underlying need to disengage from the established "closed door" policy, the willingness and ability of policymakers to implement the necessary changes was circumscribed by an ever-shifting and oftentimes overlapping miscellany of

³ As Evan Resnick points out, the term "engagement" is used to denote so many different things in international relations that it has been stripped of any precise meaning. The term, as it is used here, is broadly comparable to Resnick's description of "engagement" (one of several offered) as "the attempt to influence the political behaviour of a target state through a comprehensive establishment and enhancement of contacts with that state across multiple issue-areas (i.e. diplomatic, military, economic, cultural)." Resnick, "Defining Engagement," *Journal of International Affairs* 54 (Spring 2001): 551-52, 559.

geopolitical concerns, bureaucratic constraints, and political pathologies inherited from the McCarthy-era fracas over the “loss of China.” The most important restraint on improved relations with China was, not surprisingly, China’s own disposition toward the United States, which never augured well for a Sino-American rapprochement during the Kennedy and Johnson years. In sum, when proposals for substantive policy change were considered during the 1960s U.S. policymakers ultimately decided it was too soon, too difficult, or, quite often, both, to attempt a proper shift from existing policy positions.

Still, the growing acceptance of what was sometimes articulated as “containment without isolation”—shorthand for a policy framework implicitly rejecting the either/or choice between containment and engagement—did find expression in, and was in turn fostered by, basic adjustments in Washington’s posture toward Mao’s China. Whereas officials in the Eisenhower administration approached China matters with a greater measure of intellectual flexibility than was apparent to contemporary observers, the U.S. posture toward China during the 1950s was defined in both word and deed by a consistent refusal to countenance engagement with a regime that, ostensibly at least, was illegitimate and immutably malevolent. By contrast, by the end of 1968 senior U.S. officials had repeatedly signalled that Washington was reconciled to the reality of a Communist-controlled mainland China, and would welcome any sign that Beijing was interested in improved bilateral relations.

These postural shifts were not matched by concrete policy changes, yet they remain significant. In the most immediate sense, the less provocative posture toward China enhanced Washington’s capacity to communicate U.S. intent to China’s leadership, thereby helping avert a direct Sino-American conflict in the 1960s, even as the two sides pursued antithetical objectives in the Asian region. In a longer-term frame of reference, the more flexible posture adopted in the 1960s played an important role in challenging the domestic politicisation of China policy, while establishing a rhetorical framework and conceptual foundation for more substantive policy movement.

Scholarship on U.S. China Policy in the 1960s

This depiction of a robust and, indeed, meaningful U.S. China policy discourse in the 1960s stands in opposition to the received orthodoxy. Introducing his own account of U.S. China policy during the Democratic 1960s, James Thomson predicted that when the history of Sino-American relations came to be written:

...it will very likely lump together much of the two decades from the Korean War to the Kissinger-Chou meeting as a period of drearily sustained deadlock. Korean hostilities will be blended rather easily into Indochina hostilities, John Foster Dulles into Dean Rusk. The words and deeds of American East Asian intervention, of the containment and isolation of China, will seem an unbroken continuity.⁴

Although a number of scholars have (as discussed below) since identified areas of considerable nuance, and even innovation, in official approaches to China policy during the 1960s (and, for that matter, in the preceding decade)⁵ in large measure Thomson's prediction has been borne out. On China matters, policymakers in the Kennedy and Johnson administrations have often been cast as prisoners of political and ideological *idées fixes* forged in the fires of the early Cold War, but long since branded anachronistic by more thoughtful corners of the foreign policy elite. In their approach to China policy these policymakers, like their predecessors in the 1950s, appear intransigent and unimaginative, except for when they were busy being reflexive and confrontational. And little to no consideration was given, or so it seems, to the rather obvious option of seeking a reduction in Sino-American tensions.⁶ In Kissinger's words: "For twenty years US policymakers considered China as a brooding, chaotic, fanatical, and alien realm difficult to comprehend

⁴ James C. Thomson, Jr., "On the Making of U.S. China Policy, 1961-9: A Study in Bureaucratic Politics," *China Quarterly*, no. 50 (1972): 220.

⁵ Scholarship on U.S. China policy during the Eisenhower years is discussed, inter alia, in chapter one, 19-23.

⁶ For instance, see James Mann, *About Face: A History of America's Curious Relationship with China, from Nixon to Clinton* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999), 15-24 passim; and Robert D. Schulzinger, *Henry Kissinger: Doctor of Diplomacy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 75-80. Of the early studies giving expression to this view, the standard work is Foster Rhea Dulles, *American Foreign Policy toward Communist China, 1949-1969* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1972). Other major studies, although still emphasising this basic policy continuity, give greater attention to calls for policy change within the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, and modest shifts in the U.S. approach to China. Michael Schaller, *The United States and China: Into the Twenty-First Century*, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 152-62; Warren I. Cohen, *America's Response to China: A History of Sino-American Relations*, 3rd ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 187-94; Harry Harding, *A Fragile Relationship: The United States and China Since 1972* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 1992), 29-35.

and impossible to sway.”⁷

The rapprochement, by contrast, appears in most narratives of Sino-American relations as an inspired, bolt from the blue initiative, indeed the fullest expression of Kissinger’s Realpolitik genius, Nixon’s political daring, and the diplomatic acumen of both. To the extent Nixon’s claim to foresight and political backbone in breaking the two-decade impasse in Sino-American relations has forced a few raised eyebrows, it is less because of doubts about his personal agency in driving developments or the political context in which he was operating, and more because Nixon, with his better-dead-than-Red credentials beyond reproach, was effectively immune to the politically-inspired canard that a less contentious approach to China was a mark of softness on Communism. “Only Richard Nixon could go to China,” goes the well-worn witticism, “without being Red-baited by Richard Nixon.” This is, however, only the most cynical expression of the widely held view that it required Nixon, with his political muscle and willingness to think outside the strategic box, to engineer a Sino-American rapprochement.⁸ The subtext of this analysis is clear: absent Richard Nixon (and, at least in Kissinger’s retelling, Henry Kissinger) the Gordian knot in which Sino-American relations had been bound since 1949 might well have remained uncut.

This “Nixinger”-centric narrative of the Sino-American rapprochement has rarely been challenged.⁹ Certainly, senior officials from the Kennedy and Johnson administrations have made no attempt to deny Nixon and Kissinger credit for what Nixon biographer Jonathon Aitken calls “America’s most outstanding foreign policy initiative in the postwar period.”¹⁰ For instance, Dean Rusk, secretary of state for the entirety of the Kennedy and Johnson years, wrote to Kissinger in 1987 and referred, with perhaps a whisper of bitterness, to the honour the Nobel Committee had bestowed upon Kissinger in 1973 for his part in negotiating

⁷ Henry Kissinger, *White House Years* (Boston: Little, Brown, & Co., 1979), 685.

⁸ On Nixon’s role in promoting this perception, see Nancy Bernkopf Tucker, “Taiwan Expendable? Nixon and Kissinger Go to China,” *Journal of American History* 92 (June 2005): 112n7.

⁹ “Nixinger” is borrowed from Jeffrey Kimball, *Nixon’s Vietnam War* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 1998).

¹⁰ Jonathan Aitken, *Nixon: A Life* (Washington, DC: Regnery, 1993), 425.

America's "peace with honour" in Vietnam: "I was pleased that you received the Nobel Peace Prize," wrote Rusk, "but I thought you had received it for the wrong reason. You should have gotten it because of your role in the opening to China."¹¹

However, without denying the initiative of Nixon and Kissinger in guiding the rapprochement (at least on the American side), several mid-level officials from the Kennedy and Johnson administrations have indirectly challenged the accompanying tendency to reduce the internal China policy discourse in the 1960s to a politically informed and ideologically bound torpor. Before the decade was out, Roger Hilsman, Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs from May 1963 through March 1964, publicly recounted how, together with a number of State Department colleagues, he had pushed for a more flexible, forward thinking approach to China policy. Other insider accounts followed, including valuable contributions from Chester Bowles, James Thomson, and, more recently, Hilsman's deputy at the Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs, Marshall Green. Like Hilsman, these individuals underlined—and bemoaned—the lack of substantive policy movement during the 1960s. And, also like Hilsman, they suggested that despite broad support in the bureaucracy for policy movement, the habitual caution on China matters evinced by senior policymakers (Rusk in particular) served to frustrate their collective efforts to implement a new China policy. Nonetheless, these accounts all point to spirited China policy debates within the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, albeit debates wherein the voices for change were rarely decisive in determining policy outcomes.¹²

Gradually, a small (but still growing) body of secondary literature has emerged to substantiate

¹¹ Rusk to Kissinger, January 21, 1987, Dean Rusk Personal Papers (hereafter DRPP), IV. General Office Files: A. Alpha Files (hereafter IV:A), box 2, "America-China Society," Richard B. Russell Library, University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia (hereafter RBRL).

¹² Roger Hilsman, *To Move a Nation: The Politics of Foreign Policy in the Administration of John F. Kennedy* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1967), 302-57; Chester Bowles, *Promises to Keep: My Years in Public Life, 1941-1969* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), esp. 391-403; Thomson, "U.S. China Policy"; and Marshall Green, "Averting Wider War," in *War and Peace with China: First Hand Experiences in the Foreign Service of the United States*, ed. Green, John H. Holdridge, and William N. Stokes (Bethesda, MD: Dacor Press, 1994), 54-65.

this picture of a lively China policy discourse within the Kennedy and Johnson administrations. Several of these studies narrow the focus to developments in the Kennedy era. Kevin Quigley, in an account that concentrates on the final year of Kennedy's presidency, writes that the endeavours of predominantly mid-level U.S. officials favouring policy change—including the abovementioned individuals—culminated in 1963 in moves to implement a new twin-track policy, allowing for both “hard” and “soft” policy lines in a changing international environment.¹³ In a more detailed, book-length account of U.S. China policy in the Kennedy years, Noam Kochavi points to three distinct revisionist critiques of U.S. China policy within the administration: *visionary revisionism*, which held that the United States could use its dominant power position to compel an inherently weak PRC to surrender its ambitions of regional hegemony; *temperate revisionism*, emphasising the advantages of a policy of “containment without isolation”; and *pedagogic revisionism*, essentially a synthesis of the other two revisionist variants, wherein arguments for “containment without isolation” were qualified with the condition that movement in this direction would be contingent on China “learning to behave.”¹⁴

Nancy Bernkopf Tucker, a leading historian of modern Sino-American relations, argues that whatever enthusiasm may have existed in Washington for real China policy innovation during the first half of the 1960s was negated in the Johnson years by a tendency among U.S. policymakers to view China as the champion of Communist aggression in Vietnam.¹⁵ Other studies addressing the Johnson years, however, dispute the idea that the Vietnam War

¹³ Kevin Quigley, “A Lost Opportunity: A Reappraisal of the Kennedy Administration's China Policy in 1963,” *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 13 (September 2002): 175-98.

¹⁴ Noam Kochavi, *A Conflict Perpetuated: China Policy during the Kennedy Years* (Westport: Praeger, 2002). Also see Kochavi, “Kennedy, China, and the Tragedy of No Chance,” *Journal of American-East Asian Relations* 7 (Spring-Summer 1998): 107-16; and Kochavi, “Opportunities Lost? Kennedy, China, and Vietnam,” in *Behind the Bamboo Curtain: China, Vietnam, and the World beyond Asia*, ed. Priscilla Roberts (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2006), 127-51. James Fetzer, by contrast, suggests that although there were “tactical” differences on China policy within the Kennedy administration, these differences were subordinate to broadly shared concerns about the perceived Chinese menace. James Fetzer, “Clinging to Containment: China Policy,” in *Kennedy's Quest for Victory: American Foreign Policy, 1961-1963*, ed. Thomas G. Paterson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 178-97.

¹⁵ Nancy Bernkopf Tucker, “Threats, Opportunities, and Frustrations in East Asia,” in *Lyndon Johnson Confronts the World: American Foreign Policy, 1963-1968*, ed. Tucker and Warren I. Cohen (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 99-134.

precluded the possibility of (or official interest in) policy change. In particular, Michael Lumbers suggests that the challenges presented by the war in Vietnam prompted the administration to pursue a tentative exercise in “bridge-building” in 1965-1966. In Lumbers’s analysis, this conciliatory turn in the administration’s approach to China represented, on the one hand, an attempt to disabuse China’s leadership of the notion that Washington was angling for a wider war, and, on the other, a tailored effort to mobilise domestic support for an escalation of the American military presence in Vietnam by highlighting the constructive face of U.S. policy in the region.¹⁶

Yet the promise of more substantive policy change was dashed by the onset of the Cultural Revolution in mid-1966, and with it a reduction in the pressures that, according to Lumbers, had driven the attempts at “bridge building” to begin with. Nonetheless, Lumbers is still able to point to a “maturation of high-level attitudes toward Beijing” in 1967-1968, underpinned by the hope that a more moderate Chinese leadership might emerge from the chaos that had engulfed China, and thereby provide new opportunities for forward movement in Sino-American relations.¹⁷ According to Lumbers, that this maturation did not translate into bolder policy departures during Johnson’s presidency can be attributed, in the first instance, to concerns that a U.S. “intervention” in China’s highly fluid internal situation would undermine the emergence of a relatively moderate post-Maoist Chinese leadership. And although hints emerged in late 1967, early 1968 that pragmatic forces were in the ascendant within the Chinese polity, post-Tet Johnson was forced to surrender any idea of moving on China policy out of concern that major policy changes would complicate his efforts to develop, in the modern parlance, an “exit strategy” from the Vietnamese quagmire.¹⁸

Whereas the abovementioned sources narrow the period of inquiry to either the Kennedy or

¹⁶ Michael Lumbers, “The Irony of Vietnam: The Johnson Administration’s Tentative Bridge Building to China, 1965-1966,” *Journal of Cold War Studies* 6 (Summer 2004): 68-114. Also see Robert Garson, “Lyndon B. Johnson and the China Enigma,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 32 (January 1997): 63-80.

¹⁷ Garson makes a similar point. Garson, “China Enigma,” 68-73.

¹⁸ Lumbers, “‘Staying Out of This Chinese Muddle’: The Johnson Administration’s Response to the Cultural Revolution,” *Diplomatic History* 31 (April 2007): 259-94.

Johnson years, Evelyn Goh examines discursive trends across both administrations, in an innovative analysis of the relationship between developments in the China policy discourse from the early 1960s through 1974, and the evolution of Nixon's thinking on China during the same period. Building on Rosemary Foot's scholarship, Goh explores how changing American perceptions of China informed the development and interaction of competing—if, at times, intersecting—“subdiscourses” on China. In addition to several hostile subdiscourses favouring policy continuity, Goh details the development of two distinct conciliatory subdiscourses, one based on perceptions of China as a “Troubled Moderniser,” the other on China as a “Resurgent Power.” Although these subdiscourses characterised the China problem in contrasting ways—the first underlining China's structural weaknesses, the second its potential strength—both allowed for the potentially constructive effect of considered attempts to engage China's leadership. And both of these revisionist subdiscourses advocated, in differing degrees, “reducing China's isolation.”¹⁹

Taken as a totality, the rich and varied scholarship surveyed in the foregoing paragraphs strongly suggest that China policy was very much a contested policy area in the 1960s: options were discussed, alternatives were weighed, and thought was given to the impact different policy choices would have on Sino-American relations over the long-term. But did any of this, in the final analysis, actually matter? Warren Cohen, a prominent scholar of the Sino-American relationship, cautions that policy dissent within the Kennedy and Johnson administrations needs to be understood within its proper bureaucratic context. While allowing that there is no longer any doubt that in both the United States and China during the 1960s “some analysts, some men in the policy process, perceived the possibility of fruitful change in the relationship,” Cohen qualifies this by noting that it is “equally clear that they were given little or no latitude by the men at the top.” In short, the most enthusiastic advocates of policy

¹⁹ Evelyn Goh, *Constructing the U.S. Rapprochement with China, 1961-1974: From “Red Menace” to “Tacit Ally”* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Rosemary Foot, *The Practice of Power: US Relations with China Since 1949* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), esp. 207-18.

change lacked the necessary influence to have a meaningful impact on policy outcomes.²⁰

Some historians, even as they concede this basic policy immobility, nonetheless afford developments in the 1960s at least some measure of significance in the broader scheme of Sino-American relations, not least because of important attitudinal shifts on China matters over the course of the decade. Quigley, for instance, points to a conceptual shift during the Kennedy years “away from the Truman/Eisenhower policy of total isolation,” marking “the beginning of an evolving consensus, which by 1969 would give Nixon the freedom to manoeuvre.”²¹ Kochavi, somewhat more cautiously, suggests that by the time of Kennedy’s assassination the idea of policy change had “gained official legitimacy.”²² In a chapter-length survey of the domestic context of U.S. China policy in the 1960s, Foot takes this same point a step further, suggesting that over the Kennedy and Johnson years the majority view that emerged in official circles was that the United States should move to a policy of “containment without isolation,” albeit with “an important middle stage that emphasised the conditional aspects of this policy: China would have to learn to behave before it could be rewarded and thereby become less isolated, lessons the Soviet Union had learned after the Cuban missile crisis.”²³

However, for her part Foot is less interested in the growing receptivity to the idea of “containment without isolation,” and more in the fact that, in the push for policy innovation, the “bureaucracy labored so long and hard to bring forth what amounted to a mouse or two.”²⁴

It is, to be sure, impossible to overlook the picayune nature of substantive policy change

²⁰ Warren I. Cohen, “Kennedy’s China,” review of *A Conflict Perpetuated*, by Noam Kochavi, *Diplomatic History* 28 (January 2004): 157.

²¹ Quigley, “Lost Opportunity,” 193-94.

²² Kochavi, *Conflict Perpetuated*, 249.

²³ Rosemary Foot, “Redefinitions: The Domestic Context of America’s China Policy in the 1960s,” in *Re-examining the Cold War: U.S.-China Diplomacy, 1954-1973*, ed. Robert S. Ross and Jiang Changbin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 262-87 (quote from 266). Taking a different tack, Arthur Waldron argues that Washington, in contrast to Beijing, had always been open to improved Sino-American relations during the 1960s, implicitly rejecting the idea of an incremental development, or indeed a sudden shift, in U.S. thinking on China. Arthur Waldron, “From Nonexistent to Almost Normal: U.S.-China Relations in the 1960s,” in *The Diplomacy of the Crucial Decade: American Foreign Relations During the 1960s*, ed. Diane B. Kunz (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 219-50.

²⁴ Foot, “Redefinitions,” 275.

through the decade—limited to minor, essentially symbolic adjustments in travel restrictions and the trade embargo. Yet several historians contend that these symbolic shifts, together with a moderation in official rhetoric on China, went at least some distance toward enhancing Washington’s future flexibility on China matters, while creating a foundation for more substantive policy movement down the track. Lumbers, in his account of the Johnson administration’s “bridge-building” to China in 1965-1966, concludes that these steps “set in motion a thaw that would reach its culmination during the Nixon presidency” (although he does not elaborate on this point).²⁵ A similar note is struck by Robert Schulzinger, who suggests (also in passing) that the Johnson administration’s overtures for expanded bilateral contacts “laid the groundwork for the later détente.”²⁶ In a different connection, both Lumbers and Victor S. Kaufman have argued that by way of the judicious decision not to explicitly take sides in the struggle within the Chinese polity during the Cultural Revolution, Johnson averted (in Lumbers’s words) “the folly of adding fuel to the fire of Sino-American hostility and nourishing Mao’s siege mentality.” In this sense, by choosing a course of patient detachment and considered inaction, Johnson maximised the policy options open to his successor.²⁷

Perhaps the most systematic attempt to relate developments in the 1960s to subsequent policy shifts is Goh’s analysis of the discursive origins of the Sino-American rapprochement. Offered as a corrective to the somewhat reductive emphasis on power politics in realist explanations of the rapprochement—and realism remains, to this day, the dominant paradigm for both Chinese and American narratives of the rapprochement²⁸—Goh’s study suggests that the increasingly sophisticated China policy discourse of the Kennedy and Johnson years is key to a proper appreciation of the genesis and meaning of the opening to China. Borrowing

²⁵ Lumbers, “Irony of Vietnam,” 114.

²⁶ Robert D. Schulzinger, “The Johnson Administration, China, and the Vietnam War,” in Ross and Jiang, *Re-examining the Cold War*, 258.

²⁷ Victor S. Kaufman, *Confronting Communism: U.S. and British Policies toward China* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2001), 209-10; Lumbers, ““Chinese Muddle,”” 293.

²⁸ On this point, see Chen Jian, *Mao’s China and the Cold War* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 239n6.

heavily from the constructivist approach to international relations, Goh goes beyond the conventions of Realpolitik to posit the existence of a discursive nexus between revisionist policy perspectives in the 1960s (and attendant calls for policy moderation) and Nixon's subsequent pursuit of a Sino-American rapprochement.²⁹

This study expands upon—and, in some measure, departs from—the abovementioned scholarship on U.S. China policy in the 1960s in several important ways. On the most basic level, this is the first full-length study that focuses entirely on the development, and the import, of the bureaucratic discourse on U.S. China policy across both the Kennedy and Johnson years.³⁰ There were, to be sure, major contextual dissimilarities between the Kennedy and Johnson years that, directly or indirectly, had a bearing upon the question of U.S. China policy: the political mood on China matters in Johnson's America was quite unlike what it had been when Kennedy was in the White House; differences in the international situation, and China's place therein, were perhaps more pronounced still. And although, as David Kaiser notes, the “continuity of senior policy advisers from 1961 through 1969 is unique in the history of the twentieth century,” it is equally the case that there were “profound differences in the foreign policies of the two presidents, their relationships with their senior advisers, and the ways in which they used the instruments at their disposal.”³¹ Yet there were also strong continuities in the bureaucratic discourse on China policy across the Kennedy and Johnson years—continuities that recommend treating the two administrations as a single,

²⁹ Goh, *Rapprochement with China*.

³⁰ Several chapter-length studies of U.S. China policy looking at the 1960s as a whole have been published. See Waldron, “From Nonexistent”; Foot, “Redefinitions”; and Thomson, “U.S. China Policy.” Other studies address policy developments across both administrations in the course of more sweeping analyses of modern Sino-American relations or related topics—of particular note, Goh devotes the first of three sections in her aforementioned study of the origins of the rapprochement to a detailed analysis of the U.S. China policy discourse during the Kennedy and Johnson years. Goh, *U.S. Rapprochement*, 17-98. Also see Schaller, *United States and China*, 152-62; Cohen, *America's Response*, 187-94; Foot, *Practice of Power*, esp. 96-103; Gordon Chang, *Friends and Enemies: The United States, China, and the Soviet Union, 1948-1972* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 217-84; and Kaufman, *Confronting Communism*, 147-210 passim; and Robert Garson, *The United States and China Since 1949: A Troubled Affair* (London: Pinter Publishers, 1994), 80-120.

³¹ David E. Kaiser, “Men and Policies: 1961-1969,” in Kunz, *Crucial Decade*, 11-13. For an account that directly addresses the differences between how the two administrations approached China policy, see Victor S. Kaufman, “A Response to Chaos: The United States, the Great Leap Forward, and the Cultural Revolution, 1961-1968,” *Journal of American-East Asian Relations* 7 (Spring-Summer 1998): 73-92.

relatively discrete period, at least with respect to China policy. Often, the full import of developments in the Kennedy years only became apparent during Johnson's presidency. Similarly, shifts in the U.S. approach to China during the Johnson administration can only be fully understood in reference to attitudinal and discursive shifts that took place during the Kennedy years. And the abovementioned development of a consensus on the need for an approach to China policy that coupled containment and engagement was very much a process that unfolded over the course of both administrations.

By affording the U.S. foreign policy bureaucracy a central role in developing this consensus, this study adds to the existing scholarship in a second important way. This is not to suggest that U.S. officials alone should be credited with developing the concept of "containment without isolation" in the United States, or to deny the impact upon the policy process of pressures for policy change from sources outside the administration. Yet individuals within the bureaucracy who were convinced of the need for policy change played a key role in mediating these pressures, popularising within both administrations the notion that U.S. interests would be served by enhanced Sino-American engagement.

Progressing chronologically, rather than thematically, this argument is developed over ten chapters. In the process, new interpretative insights are also provided on a number of specific issues pertaining to U.S. China policy in the 1960s, including the policy preferences, relationships, and roles of key U.S. officials in shaping the policy process; the impact of domestic politics, alliance politics, and various Cold War strategic concerns on policy outcomes; the question of how to deal with China's nuclear development; and the manner in which key China-related events and developments in the 1960s—such as the failure of Mao's Great Leap Forward, the 1962 Taiwan Strait crisis, the Sino-Indian border war, China's involvement in Vietnam, and the Cultural Revolution—were interpreted by U.S. officials, and, in turn, shaped understandings of and responses to the China problem.

Archival and other Primary Sources

Although building on a substantial body of secondary literature—including the abovementioned crop of scholarship on U.S. China policy in the 1960s—the foundation of this study is documentary material from several archival collections: the State Department Record Group at the National Archives II (College Park, Maryland); various collections in the Lyndon B. Johnson Library (Austin, Texas), and the John F. Kennedy Library (Boston, Massachusetts); Dean Rusk’s personal papers, filed in the Richard B. Russell Library (Athens, Georgia); and W. Averell Harriman’s papers, which are held in the Manuscripts Division of the Library of Congress (Washington, DC).³² Some of the declassified material from these collections has been utilised in earlier studies of U.S. China policy; much of it is used here for the first time. More importantly, the broad multiarchival net cast yields a rich, textured history of a complex and multi-faceted China policy discourse during the Kennedy and Johnson years, and allows for a precise analysis of the departures and continuities in U.S. readings of and approaches to China matters across both administrations.

This analysis is further enriched by non-archival primary material, including memoirs penned by administration insiders; the speeches and statements of both presidents, as published in the *Public Papers of the Presidents* series, and of other U.S. policymakers, primarily sourced from the *Department of State Bulletin*; newspaper editorials and articles, chiefly from the *New York Times*; public opinion surveys and studies; the *Congressional Record* and other congressional publications, including the declassified proceedings of the closed “executive sessions” of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee; and published collections of declassified documents, such as the relevant volumes of the State Department’s *Foreign Relations of the United States* series, together with intelligence materials collated and made easily accessible by the Central Intelligence Agency and the National Security Archive, a

³² In addition to oral history transcripts from these archives, I have accessed transcripts from the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training’s Foreign Affairs Oral History Collection, filed at the Lauinger Library, Georgetown University. I have also used small amounts of documentary material from the Council of Foreign Relations Archives, in the Seeley G. Mudd Manuscript Library, Princeton University; and the Chester Bowles Papers, in Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

non-governmental research institute and library based at the George Washington University
(Washington, DC).

1

DEAN RUSK AND THE LIBERAL CRITIQUE OF U.S. CHINA POLICY IN THE 1950S

Throughout the Eisenhower years both Dean Rusk and his future deputy in the State Department, Chester Bowles, found occasion to express dissatisfaction with an inflexible China policy that seemed, at times, informed more by domestic political considerations than calculations of the national interest. In particular, Rusk and Bowles shared a common aversion to the administration's unbending adherence to a policy and posture that neatly accorded with (and, indeed, indulged) Taipei's pretence to being the sole legitimate government of China. The fundamental disconnect between this claim and the central geopolitical reality of post-colonial East Asia—namely a centralised and, but for Taiwan, unified Chinese state under the well-established and stable governance of the Chinese Communist Party—not only undermined the legitimacy of U.S. policies in the region, but also weighed against U.S. attempts to facilitate an amelioration of cross-Strait tensions and, by extension, reduce the risk of a direct Sino-American confrontation.

Yet the commonalities in Rusk's and Bowles's respective approaches to China matters disguised a basic division over the ends to which each believed policy change should be directed. For his part, Rusk argued the case for policy modifications on narrow tactical grounds, concerned primarily with maintaining the normative legitimacy—and thus the efficacy—of U.S. efforts to contain the Chinese threat, in both its military and political dimensions. The idea of trying to engage China's revolutionary leaders and, in a broader sense, construct a policy framework that would allow for an eventual Sino-American normalisation, was very much secondary in Rusk's approach to the China "problem." Indeed,

on questions touching directly on Sino-American relations or expressly designed to facilitate China's integration into the international system Rusk was, at best, indifferent. Although it would not become fully apparent until Rusk's return to the State Department in 1961, Rusk was predisposed to temporise on such questions, wary of challenging the basic continuity of the existing policy framework lest this raise doubts about American constancy, particularly in the face of Maoist militancy.

Although Bowles shared Rusk's concern about deteriorating international support for U.S. policy positions, the liberal policy critique that he articulated was more expansive, looking toward a fundamental revision of U.S. China policy and, in turn, Sino-American relations. In Bowles's vision—of interest here less because of Bowles's own place in the U.S. China policy process of the 1960s, and more because during the 1950s and early 1960s Bowles gave voice to a policy perspective that was broadly representative of thinking among liberal foreign policy elites¹—China's leaders would be exposed to non-Soviet influence on a multilateral level, while Washington sought out new areas of Sino-American interaction and cooperation bilaterally. In the process, a basic foundation would be established that allowed for an eventual reconciliation between the estranged nations.

Admittedly, in the 1950s the points of convergence in Rusk's and Bowles's views on China outweighed those of divergence. Yet an analysis of the differences between Rusk's and Bowles's respective approaches to China matters prior to 1961 throws light on the underlying dynamics of the liberal push for policy revision in the Kennedy and Johnson years and, in what was one of the defining characteristics of the politico-bureaucratic discourse on China policy across the decade, the idiosyncrasies of Rusk's cautious response to this push.

¹ During his second tour as U.S. ambassador to India, which began in mid-1963, Bowles's views on China policy appear to have shifted, with hostilities between New Delhi and Beijing reducing his enthusiasm for a more conciliatory approach to relations with China. See James C. Thomson, "Whose Side Were They On?" review of *Friends and Enemies*, by Gordon Chang, in *New York Times Book Review*, July 29, 1990.

The “Closed Door”: A Précis of U.S. China Policy in the Eisenhower Years

To contemporary critics, U.S. China policy during the Eisenhower years, given expression in the administration’s harsh public rhetoric, appeared inflexible, irrational, and highly antagonistic. This rhetoric, which cast the Sino-American contest in terms that appeared, at times, nothing short of Manichean, implied that the administration held itself morally duty-bound to actively assist in liberating the Chinese people from godless, Soviet-directed International Communism.² As Dulles told one audience in 1957, U.S. policy toward China was predicated upon the assumption:

...that International Communism’s rule of strict conformity is, in China as elsewhere, a passing and not a perpetual phase. We owe it to ourselves, our allies and the Chinese people to do all that we can to contribute to that passing.³

Privately, however, senior policymakers gave at least some thought to a more conciliatory approach toward the PRC. For his part, Eisenhower wondered if Free World trade might be used as a draw to inveigle the Chinese “out from under [the Soviet] umbrella”; even Dulles, belying his image as a dogmatic Cold Warrior, hinted that he might be prepared, in certain circumstances, to consider PRC membership in the United Nations on a “two Chinas” basis.⁴

This willingness to weigh the advantages of policy alternatives is indicative of a broader awareness on the part of senior U.S. policymakers that, contrary to the administration’s rhetoric, the existence of “two Chinas” would likely prove an enduring reality in the international system. Once again, the public posture of the administration closely accorded with Taipei’s stated objectives, implying that the administration was operating in sympathy

² See Schaller, *United States and China*, 141-42. Studies emphasising the Eisenhower administration’s intransigence toward China include: Dulles, *American Policy*, 130-87; Townsend Hoopes, *The Devil and John Foster Dulles* (Boston: Little, Brown, & Co., 1973), esp. 457-59; and Norman A. Graebner, “Eisenhower and Communism: The Public Record of the 1950s,” in *Reevaluating Eisenhower: American Foreign Policy in the 1950s*, ed. Richard A. Melanson and David Mayers (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 67-87.

³ Dulles, June 28, 1957, *DSB* 37:91-95.

⁴ On the trade question see Qing Simei, “The Eisenhower Administration and Changes in Western Embargo Policy against China,” in *The Great Powers in East Asia*, ed. Warren I. Cohen and Akira Iriye (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 121-42; Burton I. Kaufman, “Eisenhower’s Foreign Economic Policy with Respect to East Asia,” in *ibid.*, 106-12; and Schaller, *United States and China*, 143-44. On Dulles, see Nancy Bernkopf Tucker, “John Foster Dulles and the Taiwan Roots of the ‘Two Chinas’ Policy,” in *John Foster Dulles and the Diplomacy of the Cold War*, ed. Richard H. Immerman (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 241-44; and Frederick W. Marks III, *Power and Peace: The Diplomacy of John Foster Dulles* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1993), 79-81.

with—or at least pandering to—Chiang’s dream of a “return to the mainland.” One of Eisenhower’s first steps as president was the “unleashing” of Chiang, which basically meant retracting Truman’s June 1950 order to the Seventh Fleet to prevent Nationalist attacks against the mainland (while, of course, maintaining that part of the same order mandating Taiwan’s defence from Communist assault). However, upon “unleashing” Chiang the administration moved immediately to impress upon Taipei that this did not constitute a *carte blanche* for military action against the mainland.⁵ Even the U.S.-ROC Mutual Defence Treaty of 1954 (ratified in 1955), the most salient expression of the administration’s staunch support for the GRC, served to tighten the “leash” on Chiang, at least inasmuch as the adjunct exchange of notes between Dulles and the GRC foreign minister made Nationalist military action against the mainland subject to joint consultation and agreement.⁶

Indeed, despite the prominence of pro-Nationalist hardliners in the State Department, the key decision-makers in the administration never seriously believed a Nationalist “return to the mainland” was likely, and quietly worked to circumscribe the sometimes hot-headed Generalissimo’s capacity to act against the mainland.⁷ Some scholars have even detected signs of restraint in the administration’s response to the two offshore islands crises of the 1950s, episodes conventionally seen as epitomising the administration’s reflexive hostility toward the PRC and responsiveness to Nationalist pressures.⁸

According to historian Nancy Bernkopf Tucker, the administration’s unwavering public

⁵ Nancy Bernkopf Tucker, *Taiwan, Hong Kong, and the United States, 1945-1992: Uncertain Friendships* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1994), 36.

⁶ Tucker, “Taiwan Roots,” 241-44.

⁷ Nancy Bernkopf Tucker, “A House Divided: The United States, The Department of State, and China,” in Cohen and Iriye, *Great Powers*, 35-62.

⁸ See Marc S. Gallicchio, “The Best Defense if a Good Offense: Evolution of American Strategy in East Asia,” in Cohen and Iriye, *Great Powers*, 74-75; Leonard H.D. Gordon, “United States Opposition to the Use of Force in the Taiwan Strait, 1954-1962,” *Journal of American History* 72 (December 1985): 637-60; and Robert A. Divine, *Eisenhower and the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 65-66. For a contrary view, see Chang, “To the Nuclear Brink: Eisenhower, Dulles, and the Quemoy-Matsu Crisis,” *International Security* 12 (Spring 1988): 96-112. Recent studies suggest that although the administration acted with restraint during both crises, it nonetheless overcommitted to positions that risked escalation. Ronald W. Pruessen, “Over the Volcano: The United States and the Taiwan Strait Crisis, 1954-55,” in Ross and Jiang, *Re-examining the Cold War*, 77-105; Robert Accinelli, “‘A Thorn in the Side of Peace’: The Eisenhower Administration and the 1958 Offshore Islands Crisis,” in *ibid.*, 106-40.

support for the GRC, like the belligerence of its rhetoric toward Beijing, was more a function of political expedience than an expression of actual thinking on China. The administration, in this analysis, sought to inoculate itself against charges of “softness” on China from the same loosely bound and politically eclectic amalgam of pro-Nationalist Americans, collectively known as the China Lobby, who, together with McCarthy and his sympathisers, had driven the furore over the “loss of China” when Truman was president.⁹ Other historians, although less inclined to afford primacy to domestic political considerations in explaining the administration’s rhetorical hostility toward the PRC, contend that rather being an expression of any belief that Communism was intrinsically monolithic, the “closed door” policy toward China was, at least in part, based on the assumption that the Kremlin’s inability to sate Beijing’s economic, political, and military demands would force latent Sino-Soviet animosities to the fore, thereby undermining the integrity of a relationship that most senior officials considered inherently unstable.¹⁰ Meanwhile, Rosemary Foot, without discounting other explanations for the perpetuation of the policy hardline, highlights concerns within the administration that a more conciliatory approach would “empower” the militant Chinese, with a “corresponding loss of U.S. prestige and of its ability to control foreign policy outcomes.”¹¹

In short, although various explanations have been offered for the Eisenhower administration’s “closed door” policy toward the PRC—and, as Foot notes, any satisfactory explanation is likely to be multicausal—it is now apparent that the administration’s harsh China rhetoric disguised a keen understanding of the underlying dynamics of the Sino-Soviet relationship, along with a healthy appreciation of the stability of the Chinese Communist Party’s control of

⁹ Tucker, “Continuing Controversies in the Literature of U.S.-China Relations Since 1945,” in *Pacific Passage: The Study of American-East Asian Relations on the Eve of the Twenty-first Century*, ed. Warren I. Cohen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 227. For detailed analyses of the China Lobby, see Stanley D. Bachrack, *The Committee of One Million: ‘China Lobby’ Politics, 1953-1971* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976); and Ross Y. Koen, *The China Lobby in American Politics* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974).

¹⁰ Chang, *Friends and Enemies*, esp. 81-115; John Lewis Gaddis, *The Long Peace: Inquiries into the History of the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 148, 174-87; Mayers, *Cracking the Monolith: U.S. Policy Against the Sino-Soviet Alliance, 1949-1955* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1986).

¹¹ Rosemary Foot, “The Eisenhower Administration’s Fear of Empowering the Chinese,” *Political Science Quarterly* 111 (Fall 1996): 505-21.

mainland China and, following from this, the likely longevity of a “two Chinas” situation.¹²

However, the administration’s hardline rhetoric was also an integral part of a broader policy of maximum pressure against China that, for the aforementioned reasons of both political expedience and strategic utility, was ultimately maintained throughout Eisenhower’s presidency. Whatever the subtleties of actual thinking on China within the Eisenhower administration, this rhetoric, like the coercive posture of the United States toward China generally, reflected, and indeed defined, a strategy that dictated China’s continued international isolation. By extension, this strategy also circumscribed the possibilities for meaningful improvements in Sino-American relations. As such, the administration evinced a marked indifference when Beijing hinted at a desire for improved relations with the United States at various moments during its period of (relatively) conciliatory “Bandung diplomacy” between 1955 and 1958.¹³ Moreover, even though the administration participated in regular ambassadorial-level talks with PRC representatives from the 1954-55 offshore islands crisis onwards in order to defuse tensions in the Taiwan Strait and demonstrate U.S. equanimity to the international community, interest in the talks evidently did not extend to actually improving Washington’s relations with Beijing.¹⁴

And although consideration was occasionally given to policy alternatives at the upper reaches of executive power, the decidedly pro-Nationalist bent of a bureaucracy that had been purged of senior China careerists following the “loss of China” controversy, militated against any concerted push from within the administration for a different approach to China policy.¹⁵ Admittedly, as Tucker has argued, while Dulles staffed the most visible China positions in the

¹² Ibid., 506.

¹³ Beijing’s “Bandung Diplomacy,” named for the Afro-Asian conference held in Bandung, Indonesia in 1955, was apparently both an attempt to upset U.S. relations with its allies, and a genuine effort to ease Sino-American tensions. Zhang Baijia, “The Changing International Scene and Chinese Policy toward the United States, 1954-1970,” in Ross and Jiang, *Re-examining the Cold War*, 47-56.

¹⁴ Steven M. Goldstein, “Dialogue of the Deaf? The Sino-American Ambassadorial Level Talks, 1955-1970,” in Ross and Jiang, *Re-examining the Cold War*, 205-18.

¹⁵ See E.J. Kahn, *The China Hands: America’s Foreign Service Officers and What Befell Them* (New York: New York, 1975).

department with hardliners in an attempt to safeguard the State Department's anti-Communist credentials, he actually relied on an inner-circle of relatively moderate advisers for guidance on China matters; flexibility, as such, "was not foreclosed."¹⁶ Still, as Foot points out, the heavy presence of staunch pro-Nationalists in key bureaucratic posts not only demonstrated the administration's responsiveness to right-wing sensitivities on China, but also "helped define the parameters of China policy," while reinforcing the politicisation of the China issue.¹⁷

Chester Bowles and the Liberal Critique of U.S. China Policy

Since returning from his sixteen-month tour as Ambassador to India in March 1953 Chester Bowles, the Democratic Party's "standard bearer of idealism and liberal interventionism" and *soi-disant* Asianist, had been agitating for a revision of these policy parameters.¹⁸ He chastised the Eisenhower administration for the "near total failure" of a China policy marked by repeated displays of bluster and brinkmanship, while calling on his own party to "discard the complexes" accumulated during the McCarthy period, and push for the implementation of fresh, imaginative policies.¹⁹ Bowles envisioned a policy that not only checked Chinese military aggression, but also accounted for the stability and likely endurance of Communist rule in China, along with the potential for discord within the Sino-Soviet alliance. Perhaps most significantly, he called for an approach that did not foreclose the possibility of improved Sino-American relations.

Indeed, Bowles believed the administration should seize every opportunity to communicate to Beijing a willingness to negotiate on outstanding regional issues, and be "reasonable and flexible" in doing so. The increased Sino-American contacts that might result, at both the

¹⁶ Tucker, "House Divided," 36.

¹⁷ Foot, *Practice of Power*, 89. Also see Goh, *U.S. Rapprochement*, 21n14.

¹⁸ Howard B. Schaffer, *Chester Bowles: New Dealer in the Cold War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 159 (quote); Bowles to Kennedy, January 11, 1961, President's Office Files, Series 9: Countries (hereafter POF:CO), box 113a, "Communist China, General," John F. Kennedy Library, Boston, Massachusetts (hereafter JFKL).

¹⁹ Chester Bowles, *The Coming Political Breakthrough* (New York: Harper, 1959), 149-53.

governmental and societal levels, would expose the Chinese people and their leaders to foreign ideas, while offering Beijing an alternative to continued dependence on Moscow. At the very least, if Beijing refused to reduce barriers on its own side to increased contacts after the United States had taken the initiative, then the onus for the continued Sino-American impasse would fall to the Chinese. He characterised this approach as one of “restraint, firmness, patience, and flexibility.”²⁰

Bowles also publicly urged that the “myth” of the GRC as the legitimate government of all China, and the attendant perpetuation of the spurious “return to the mainland” concept—a concept that provided Beijing with a ready excuse for initiating hostilities in the Strait—be abandoned in favour of “imaginative policies based on the reality of two Chinas.” Taking this argument to its logical conclusion, Bowles argued that the United States needed to demonstrate in both word and deed that it did not seek in Taiwan a “military base for the invasion of the mainland,” but rather the “orderly growth of a new, independent nation.” This postural shift would, in Bowles’s estimate, enhance international support for Taiwan’s defence and, more broadly, for the containment of the PRC.²¹

As might be inferred from the above, Bowles, like the overwhelming majority of his coevals, took as his point of departure the “threat” posed by Communist China. Indeed, Bowles criticised the lack of flexibility in U.S. policy not because he was sanguine about the dangers of Maoist militancy but, on the contrary, because he viewed such flexibility—alongside continued firmness—as necessary to minimising these dangers. “We have not only the problem of trying to contain China,” Bowles told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee during his confirmation hearing in January 1961, “we have the problem of how do you let the

²⁰ Chester Bowles, *Ambassador’s Report* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1955), 393; Schaffer, *Bowles*, 4, 62, 81, 130; Bowles, “The ‘China Problem’ Reconsidered,” *Foreign Affairs* 38 (April 1960): 476-86.

²¹ Chester Bowles, *New Dimensions of Peace* (London: Bodley Head, 1956), 367; Bowles, “‘China Problem’” 481; Schaffer, *Bowles*, 159.

steam out of this boiler without an explosion.”²²

Bowles’s take on the exact form of the China threat, and the geostrategic mechanism he envisioned for meeting it, was, admittedly, quite singular. Through the 1950s and beyond Bowles feared that a resource poor and overpopulated China, flush with revolutionary fervour, would undertake armed aggression to absorb the resources and agricultural lands of neighbouring Southeast Asia.²³ Sceptical about the defensive value of the Dullesian system of alliances with Asia’s rightist autocracies—later derided as “pactomania”—Bowles argued that in order to contain the PRC Washington need to co-opt the prevailing currents of neutralism and post-colonial nationalism in the region. Specifically, he envisioned an Asian Monroe Doctrine, indigenous to Asia, anchored by Japan and India, and (discreetly) assisted by the United States.²⁴

In fact, a direct southward push by China to correct food-and-resource deficits was never likely to deliver anything more than a Pyrrhic victory for the Chinese, given the narrowing food-to-population ratio in post-war Southeast Asia.²⁵ Recognising this, few observers of China in the early Cold War America shared Bowles’s anxiety about Beijing making an overt military play for the land and resources of the region. Although reference to the threat of Chinese aggression was entirely pedestrian for American commentators throughout this period, it was generally presumed this aggression would be of the indirect, opportunistic variety. Similarly, most interested observers tended to view Beijing’s expansionist tendencies as, in the first instance, a function of Beijing’s ideological zeal and raw national chauvinism, rather than an expression of Beijing’s desire for land, food and treasure per se.²⁶

²² Schaffer, *Bowles*, 212.

²³ Bowles, “A Close Look at Mainland China,” *Saturday Evening Post*, April 4, 1959, 111-12; On China’s revolutionary fanaticism, see Bowles, *Ambassador’s Report*, 228.

²⁴ Bowles, “A Fresh Look at Free Asia,” *Foreign Affairs* 33 (October 1954): 54-71; Jones, “A ‘Segregated’ Asia,” 851.

²⁵ Alexander Woodside, “The Rise and Fall of the Southeast Asia Obsession in Sino-American Relations,” in *Dragon and Eagle, United States-China Relations: Past and Future*, ed. Michel Oksenberg and Robert B. Oxnham (New York: Basic Books, 1978), 308-12.

²⁶ Evidently, over the course of the 1960s Bowles arrived at a more sophisticated understanding of the nature of

Meanwhile, Bowles found little support for his concept of an Asian Monroe Doctrine. To be sure, Bowles's vision of India operating as an alternative politico-economic developmental model to the PRC was very much within the bounds of the mainstream Cold War discourse of the 1950s.²⁷ And many Democrats were inclined to look askance at the Dullesian take on collective security as it was manifest in Asia. But if SEATO and CENTO appeared crude, ineffective imitations of the North Atlantic alliance, Bowles's concept of an informal, broad-ranging collective security system, anchored by pacifist Japan and neutral India—the latter aided by rival Pakistan no less—made for an unwieldy alternative.²⁸ Bowles may have had a particular genius for articulating the international idealism that captured the imagination of so many of his contemporaries, but he lacked a comparable gift for balance-of-power geopolitics.

Although in several important respects Bowles perceived the China threat in a manner distinct from most of his contemporaries and advocated a multilateral geostrategic approach that failed to gain traction, his call for attempts to pursue improved bilateral relations with Beijing within what amounted to a “two Chinas” framework was, in varying degrees, echoed by a number of the luminaries of American liberalism during the Eisenhower years. Among those who voicing views in a “two Chinas” (or “one China, one Taiwan”) vein were Adlai Stevenson and Eleanor Roosevelt, along with less prominent—although, in terms of elite opinion, still important—future officials in the Kennedy administration, such as RAND analyst Allen S. Whiting and Harvard Professor Edwin O. Reischauer.²⁹ Similarly, calls for a more “reasoned policy with respect to China” (as Stevenson put it) were issued in the

the Chinese threat. In a 1963 a cable sent from the U.S. Embassy in New Delhi under Bowles's name (he was appointed ambassador in July 1963) argued that China's motive in attempting to subvert Asian states “is primarily [the] expansion of [the] Communist domain rather than [the] search for lebensraum.” Embtel-1536, New Delhi, November 1, 1963, RG59, Central File:1963 (hereafter CF:[year/s]), box 3861, POL CHICOM-INDIA, NA.

²⁷ Robert J. McMahon, *The Cold War on the Periphery: The United States, India, and Pakistan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 260-62; Kochavi, *Conflict Perpetuated*, 27-31, 40-42.

²⁸ Schaffer, *Bowles*, 86-88.

²⁹ Adlai Stevenson, “Putting First Things First: A Democratic View,” *Foreign Affairs* 38 (January 1960): 203; Kochavi, *Conflict Perpetuated*, 30-31; Chang, *Friends and Enemies*, 163; Reischauer, *Wanted: An Asian Policy* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1972; first published 1955 by Knopf), 242-49; Li Thian-hok, “The China Impasse: A Formosan View,” *Foreign Affairs* 36 (April 1958): 446n6.

speeches, statements, and writings of like-minded Democrats—particularly in the wake of the 1958 offshore islands crisis—and in the organisations of the liberal wing of the party, including the flagship organisation for Democratic liberalism during the Cold War, Americans for Democratic Action.³⁰

Moreover, Bowles expressed a view common among liberals when he criticised the Eisenhower administration for its apparent failure to either appreciate the potential for tensions in the Sino-Soviet relationship or, by extension, to attempt to draw the Chinese from Moscow’s sphere of influence. These criticisms, it might be noted, were based on an erroneous assumption about the Eisenhower administration’s approach to the Sino-Soviet relationship: contrary to what liberal critics charged, the administration not only recognised but, in fact, sought to exacerbate Sino-Soviet tensions—even if, unlike the “soft wedge” approach advocated by Bowles, Dulles’s “pressure wedge” did not necessarily anticipate any improvement in Sino-American relations.³¹ The “Sino-Soviet bloc” may have remained a useful rhetorical device for the administration through the decade, but U.S. officials, at both the working and decision-making levels, recognised that it was gradually eroding as a cohesive geopolitical entity. This misperception notwithstanding, Bowles’s criticism of the “do-nothingness” of the Eisenhower administration’s handling of the Sino-Soviet alliance, and the kind of wedge strategy he envisioned, was broadly representative of liberal thinking in the 1950s.

Dean Rusk and the Two Chinas

Unlike Bowles, Dean Rusk, who had left the Truman administration at the end of 1951 to become president of the Rockefeller Foundation, neither sought to cultivate a public profile nor trumpet his foreign policy views in the public domain. As such, when Kennedy

³⁰ Adlai Stevenson, *Call to Greatness* (London: Hart-Davis, 1954), 85-86; Kochavi, *Conflict Perpetuated*, 25.

³¹ See Chang, *Friends and Enemies*, 169. Dulles had, in fact, explained this logic to Bowles in private correspondence between the two. Gaddis, *The Long Peace*, 174-75; Chang, *Friends and Enemies*, 84-87.

announced Rusk's nomination as secretary of state in December 1960, the general public had no way of knowing the true sweep of his views on China. On the one hand, Rusk had, as the *New York Times* noted, given some hint of his thinking on China in a study produced by a panel on foreign policy that Rusk had chaired as a part of the Rockefeller Brothers Fund Special Studies Project. The panel report, published in 1959, had called for a "candid recognition of what Communist China is and where it is going," and warned against allowing "emotion or differences of ideology" to preclude improved U.S.-PRC relations. Yet the *Times* conceded that the report—not written by Rusk personally, but rather bearing his imprimatur as chair of a twenty-person committee—could only offer "clues" as to Rusk's foreign policy outlook.³²

More than any hints the aforementioned report may have provided about Rusk's views on China, it was the ostensibly hardline position Rusk had taken toward the PRC as Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs in the Truman administration that most interested observers remembered.³³ Appointed assistant secretary at the height of the "loss of China" controversy, Rusk mounted a divertive defence of the administration's policies against congressional "primitives" (Dean Acheson's pejorative designation for McCarthy *et al.*), highlighting examples of ongoing U.S. aid to anti-Communist forces in Asia (if not to anti-Communist *Chinese* forces) in order to blunt charges that the administration had betrayed the defeated Kuomintang. Rusk's deft congressional diplomacy, added to the political support he received from prominent Republicans like his friend and colleague John Foster Dulles, helped the new assistant secretary earn the confidence of domestic critics of U.S. East Asian policy, including key China Lobby figures.³⁴

³² Editorial, *New York Times* (hereafter *NYT*), December 13, 1960. The final report was published as: "The Mid-Century Challenge to U.S. Foreign Policy," (Report I), in *Prospect for America: The Rockefeller Panel Reports* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1961).

³³ Milton Viorst, "Incidentally, Who is Dean Rusk?" *Esquire*, April 1968, 101-3.

³⁴ Cohen, *Dean Rusk*, 45-47; Schoenbaum, *Waging Peace*, 201-3. Freda Utley, the ex-Communist whose books were staple for the anti-Communist Right, was not so kind to Rusk, accusing him of being a "dupe" for depicting the Chinese Communists (in Utley's words) as "good liberals who follow the American ideal." Freda Utley, *The China Story* (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1951), 121-22.

Had Rusk been a more divisive figure he may well have attracted unwelcome attention to his long—albeit peripheral and episodic—involvement in matters touching on China policy in the years prior to his appointment to the Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs.³⁵ For instance, Rusk’s wartime posting to New Delhi, the operational centre of the China-Burma-India theatre, had brought him into close and regular contact with Chiang’s old *bête noire*, Joseph Stilwell. During the war Rusk also became acquainted with many of the “Old China Hands,” whose loyalty he would later obstinately defend in the face of potent congressional attacks. Rusk had even personally approved, as an act of American good faith, the delivery of a limited amount of supplies to Mao’s post-Long March, pre-1949 base in Yen’an (Yan’an).³⁶ Moreover, back in Washington as part of the Operations Division of the War Department General Staff in 1945, Rusk helped draft a policy paper which advocated the application of pressure on Chiang to negotiate with Mao’s Communists—the same logic that underpinned the controversial U.S. effort between December 1945 and January 1947 to mediate a political settlement between the Communists and the Nationalists, commonly known as the Marshall Mission. And, according to his biographer, Rusk even had a hand in the preparation of the Letter of Transmittal for the 1949 China White Paper, the State Department report on the Kuomintang’s defeat that quickly became a lightning rod in the political storm over the “loss of China.”³⁷

That Rusk managed to escape the political fracas over Mao’s victory in China personally unscathed—so much so that he was sometimes viewed as a sympathetic witness to the “loss of China” inanity—is in large part a testament to his firm bipartisan appeal. Perhaps more importantly, Rusk’s standing with the China Lobby crowd was appreciably enhanced by his unbending rhetoric against Mao’s regime. Most notably in this respect, in May 1951 Rusk derided the regime as “a colonial Russian government—a Slavic Manchukuo on a larger

³⁵ David Halberstam, *The Best and the Brightest* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1992), 323-25.

³⁶ Cohen, *Dean Rusk*, 48; Schoenbaum, *Waging Peace*, 108; Thomas Zeiler, *Dean Rusk: Defending the American Mission Abroad* (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources, 2000), 25.

³⁷ Cohen, *Dean Rusk*, 40. Rusk could not recall any such involvement. Rusk, *As I Saw It*, 158. On the White Paper, see Robert P. Newman, “The Self-Inflicted Wound: The China White Paper of 1949,” *Prologue* 14 (Fall 1982): 141-56.

scale.” With Rusk promising continued aid and assistance to the GRC, the speech was greeted with applause from the China Lobby, while raising the ire of liberals within the administration, who felt Rusk had co-opted the Republican line and in effect opened the door for congressional antagonists to suggest that the administration was now admitting its error on China and issuing a hangdog *mea culpa*.³⁸

Looking back, Rusk maintained that he had simply restated in “shorter sentences” the existing position of the Truman administration; if he had indulged in a little rhetorical excess in the course of doing so, this was simply because he felt entitled to respond in kind to the anti-American philippics regularly broadcast from the Chinese capital. However, as Rusk himself reflected, in such circumstances what the speaker actually says or, indeed, intends to say, can become secondary in importance to “the interpretations that are put into it by others.”³⁹ And the prevailing interpretation in this instance was that Rusk had taken it upon himself to advance a hardline policy consistent with the views of the ideologues driving the controversy over the “loss of China.” Headlines in national dailies declared “Dean Rusk’s Coup on China Policy... State Department Has A New Stalwart... And America Has Firmer Goals” (the *U.S. News & World Report*), and even “Rusk Hints Aid to Revolt in China” (the *New York Times*).⁴⁰ It is not surprising then that in 1961, in an attempt to focus public attention on Rusk’s “past sentiments,” and thereby counter public speculation about a “major change in our China policy,” (resulting in part from the appointment of prominent liberals like Bowles and Adlai Stevenson) the Committee of One Million reprinted Rusk’s “Slavic Manchukuo” speech in pamphlet form.⁴¹

³⁸ Rusk, May 18, 1951, *DSB* 24:846-48; Rusk, OHI, January 1986, “WWWWW,” Dean Rusk Oral History Transcripts (hereafter DROH), RBRL; *New York Herald Tribune*, May 25, 1951, filed in DRPP, V. Speeches and Publications, C. Richard Rusk Files (hereafter V:C), “Rusk/Schoenbaum Files, Princeton University Archives,” RBRL.

³⁹ Rusk, OHI, September 13, 1991, “KK,” and OHI, January 1986, “WWWWW,” DROH, RBRL; BBC interview with Rusk, DRPP, V. Speeches and Publications, B. Articles, Interviews, Speeches of Dean Rusk (hereafter V:B), box 8, RBRL; transcript, interview six with Rusk by Edwin Newman, May 1985, *ibid.*, box 10.

⁴⁰ *U.S. News & World Report* as cited in Viorst, “Who is Dean Rusk?” 101; and *New York Times* as cited in Cohen, *Dean Rusk*, 63.

⁴¹ Bachrack, *Committee of One Million*, 181; Cohen, *Dean Rusk*, 163. This speculation is discussed in the next

Even though Rusk's speech accurately reflected his innate sense of abhorrence at the ideological constitution of Mao's regime—appreciably intensified by Chinese intervention in Korea⁴²—his suggestion that the PRC was a mere Soviet client was not a true representation of his understanding of the Sino-Soviet relationship. Admittedly, Rusk was always somewhat sceptical about the prospects for a break between Moscow and Beijing, and did not subscribe to the kind of wedge strategy advocated by Bowles.⁴³ Even when Sino-Soviet animosity boiled over into open military engagement in the late 1960s, Rusk maintained that Beijing and Moscow could always reconcile. Yet this was more an expression of the lesson Rusk took from WWII that totalitarian regimes can shift course quickly (witness Hitler and Stalin), rather than a reflection of any belief on Rusk's part that state Communism was inherently monolithic.⁴⁴ Contrary to his "Slavic Manchukuo" taunt, Rusk perceived indications of Beijing's independence from the Kremlin even during the Truman years, and by the late 1950s he was cognisant to frictions developing within the relationship, even if he remained doubtful about Washington's ability to either foster or exploit this discord.⁴⁵ Indeed, in some ways his speech aimed to play on these (still potential) frictions; although his comments were primarily designed to counter politically directed attacks at home on U.S. China policy, Rusk had also hoped a possible by-product would be the arousal of Chinese nationalism against the Kremlin's predominant position in the relationship.⁴⁶

The severity of Rusk's rhetoric against Beijing as assistant secretary also disguised his underlying aversion toward Chiang's regime and its autocratic, anachronistic mode of governance. Rusk may have welcomed the movement of the Seventh Fleet into the Taiwan

chapter.

⁴² Kochavi, "Limited Accommodation," 98; Cohen, *Dean Rusk*, 163.

⁴³ Chang, *Friends and Enemies*, 57-58, 175-78.

⁴⁴ Rusk, testimony to the House Committee on International Relations, July 22, 1975, DRPP, IV:A, box 20, RBRL.

⁴⁵ Rusk, OHI, "KK," supra note 39; Council of Foreign Relations (hereafter CFR), Discussion Meeting Report, "The United Nations And United States Foreign Policy," Third Meeting, March 11, 1958, Public Policy Papers, Council of Foreign Relations Archive, Seeley G. Mudd Manuscript Library, Princeton University (hereafter CFRA).

⁴⁶ Rusk, OHI, "KK," and OHI, "WWWWW," both supra note 39; Rusk to Robert Accinelli, July 8, 1993, DRPP, IV:A, box 1, "'A' General Correspondence," RBRL.

Strait and the subsequent U.S. commitment to Taiwan's defence, but he only supported Chiang's Mandarin-style rule *faute de mieux*.⁴⁷ Moreover, Rusk's thinking sharply diverged from Taipei's on the fundamental question of Taiwan's relationship to mainland China. Although a Taiwanese state with de jure independence from the mainland was no less invidious to authorities in Taipei than in Beijing, Rusk had personally spearheaded the abortive effort within the State Department in early 1950 to have Taiwan placed under UN trusteeship, an obvious precursor to Taiwanese independence.⁴⁸ Despite his failure on this occasion, through the 1950s Rusk remained in favour of an incremental shift toward a stabilised, internationally recognised, "two Chinas" situation, that both allowed for the Taiwan's continued independence from the mainland and was consistent with the likelihood that Communist control of the mainland would endure well into the foreseeable future.⁴⁹

Similarly, Rusk was impatient with Nationalist talk of a "return to the mainland," and troubled by the cross-Strait tensions fostered by the perpetuation of this concept, particularly as these tensions were manifest around the offshore islands. Addressing the Council of Foreign Relations in 1959, Rusk argued that the offshore islands remained a potent "symbol of return to the mainland," and "the last opportunity that Chiang had to give effect to his policy of return which was contrary to the United States position."⁵⁰ Only by moving the GRC away from its objective of a "return to the mainland" and neutralising tensions in the Strait could the United States avoid the danger of becoming enmeshed in Chinese hostilities, while securing international and domestic support for the U.S. commitment to Taiwan's defence.⁵¹ Significantly, Rusk felt Washington should pressure Chiang to withdraw his forces from the offshore islands, even though this would likely heighten tensions with Taipei: "We

⁴⁷ Rusk, *As I Saw It*, 288.

⁴⁸ Waren I. Cohen, "Acheson, His Advisors, and China, 1949-1950," in *Uncertain Years: Chinese-American Relations, 1947-1950*, ed. Dorothy Borg and Waldo Heinrichs (New York: Columbia University Press), 28-32.

⁴⁹ CFR, "United Nations," supra note 45; Rusk, OHI, April 1985, "TTT," DROH, RBRL; Chang, *Friends and Enemies*, 180-81.

⁵⁰ CFR, Study Group Report, "Communist China and United States Policy in Asia," sixth meeting, February 17, 1959, CFRA.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*; Rusk to Dulles, March 11, 1952, DRPP, I. Rockefeller Foundation (hereafter DRPP, I), box 1, "Dulles, John Foster (1)," RBRL.

are not talking of Chiang's interest but of the United States interest," Rusk insisted, adding "we are capable of saying [the Nationalist forces] must withdraw [from the offshore islands] and we could make it stick."⁵²

Rusk also held that the United States needed to re-evaluate its position on Chinese representation in the United Nations, and it was this aspect of the China issue more than any other that occupied his attention during the Eisenhower years. In June 1953, with a Korean armistice in sight, Rusk wrote to Dulles that the United States should indicate to its allies a willingness to acquiesce in PRC entry into the United Nations on a *quid pro quo* basis. The conditions set out by Rusk would undoubtedly have been viewed by Beijing as tantamount to a repudiation of both its nationalistic ambitions and revolutionary honour, including PRC acceptance of Taiwan's independence and the continued representation of the ROC (or, presumably, a post-ROC Taiwanese state) in the United Nations; Beijing's agreement to a political settlement for the unification of Korea; termination of PRC assistance to Ho Chi Minh; and the substitution of India for the Chinese seat in the UN Security Council. However, Rusk's principal concern was not facilitating Beijing's entry into the United Nations, but rather assuaging allied frustration with U.S. intransigence on the issue. If China agreed to this "heavy price" then the United States would, in return, have obtained "substantial benefits"; if China rebuffed the offer, this would still deliver a basic victory for the United States, since the administration would then be in a position to argue to a "number of our allies...that Peiping has itself rejected UN membership offered to it on a reasonable basis."⁵³

By the end of the decade Rusk had abandoned the idea of effecting a comprehensive *quid pro quo* arrangement on China's UN representation, sensing that it was "absolutely necessary to break out of the present frozen position" post-haste in order to ensure continued GRC representation, relieve a point of friction in U.S. relations with its allies, and avert any further

⁵² CFR, "Communist China," supra note 50.

⁵³ Rusk's letter printed in William P. Snyder, "Dean Rusk to John Foster Dulles, May-June 1953: The Office, the First 100 Days, and Red China," *Diplomatic History* 7 (Winter 1983): 84-86.

political losses on the matter for the United States. The only means to achieve these ends, Rusk suggested, was to develop a Free World consensus that there were two Chinese governments that possessed the attributes of sovereignty and, as such, were entitled to representation in the United Nations.⁵⁴

Rusk recognised that the course he was advocating was problematic, both in terms of domestic politics and relations between Taipei and Washington; this did not, however, make change any less necessary. Well aware that domestic political sensitivities on China policy might undermine attempts to develop a new approach in the United Nations, Rusk noted that a concerted effort was required to build a sense of bipartisan cohesion on the matter. Given this particular aspect of U.S. China policy touched upon allied unity, he told fellow members of the Council of Foreign Relations, “It is absolutely necessary not to make the mere discussion of the problem a question of disloyalty.”⁵⁵ Similarly, Rusk maintained that U.S. policy had first and foremost to reflect U.S. interests, as opposed to Taipei’s quite distinct strategic and political priorities. And when asked if a shift in the U.S. approach to the Chinese representation issue would be interpreted in Asia as a weakening of the value of U.S. commitments, Rusk questioned whether the United States in fact had any such commitment to the GRC to maintain the parliamentary status quo in the United Nations.⁵⁶

Even though Beijing’s admission to the United Nations was evidently not a consideration for Rusk, it remains significant that he was in no sense committed to Beijing’s exclusion from the world body. The seating of Beijing, Rusk argued, “is a political act which does not, in itself, change the situation on the ground very much one way of the other.”⁵⁷ If Rusk did not point to any benefits that might accrue from PRC membership, nor did he find the argument that denying Beijing membership was crucial to Free World security particularly compelling.

⁵⁴ CFR, “United Nations,” supra note 45; Rusk, “Outline Notes on China Policy,” dated 1957, sent by Rusk to Acheson, January 27, 1958. Rusk’s “outline notes” and related correspondence are filed in DRPP, I, box 1, “China Policy,” RBRL.

⁵⁵ CFR, “United Nations,” supra note 45.

⁵⁶ Rusk to Altschul, March 20, 1958, DRPP, I, box 1, “China Policy,” RBRL.

⁵⁷ Quote from Rusk to Dulles, June 16, 1953, in Snyder, “Rusk to John Foster Dulles,” 84-86.

Speaking in 1959, Rusk offered a succinct summary of his views on how U.S. diplomacy should account for the political reality of “two Chinas.” On the one hand, he rejected the idea that the United States should place any immediate importance on establishing formal relations with Beijing; the administration might move to publicly indicate that it recognised “certain unrealities in the present situation,” but it should not surrender the pretence of the GRC as the government of China for the equally false position that Beijing was the *only* Chinese government. Yet at the same time he argued that the United States should “relax [its] attitude” on Beijing’s representation in the United Nations. Even if a “two Chinas” solution was not implemented, it would at least be preferable to the present situation, where the U.S. delegation was “out with a club in its hands, beating everybody into an unwilling acceptance of the present situation when the responsibility ought to be on others to try to find a solution.”⁵⁸

A Comparative Analysis of Rusk’s and Bowles’s Views on U.S. China Policy

In view of the foregoing, it might be assumed that Rusk and Bowles were basically united in their views on U.S. China policy during the 1950s. Both felt the United States needed to come to terms with the existence of “two Chinas,” and perceived U.S. flexibility in this regard as essential to forestalling Washington’s international isolation on the issue. Similarly, while both underscored the importance of maintaining Taiwan’s independence from Communist control, neither believed Washington should be bound by the policy priorities of Taipei and the China Lobby; the United States had vital interests distinct from those of Taipei invested in the China situation, and U.S. policy should, first and foremost, be consistent with those interests. In particular, Rusk and Bowles shared a common aversion to the perpetuation of the “return to the mainland” concept, and believed that U.S. policy should be designed to effect a reduction of cross-Strait hostilities. And, in making the case for greater flexibility, both Rusk and Bowles pointed to the importance of moving beyond the politics of the past and

⁵⁸ Rusk, address at Industrial College of the Armed Forces, April 27, 1959, DRPP, V. Speeches/Publications: A. Dean Rusk Articles and Speeches (hereafter V:A.), box 6, RBRL.

developing a measure of bipartisan cohesion on the issue of China. Suggestive of the commonalities in their respective approaches to China policy, in 1958 Bowles wrote to Rusk that he thought his “Outline Notes” on China were “excellent”; the following year Rusk congratulated Bowles for the “fresh thinking” shown in a draft of his 1960 *Foreign Affairs* article on China.⁵⁹

Yet upon closer inspection important differences are evident in each man’s frame of reference with respect to China policy. Rusk’s principal grievance with the Eisenhower administration on China was that it had failed to address the apparent decline of the normative legitimacy of U.S. policy toward China. In Rusk’s analysis, existing U.S. policies were increasingly seen, both at home and abroad, as emotionally-driven in an age demanding cool heads, thus undermining the efficacy of U.S. efforts to contain the PRC, maintain the integrity of Taiwan’s *de facto* independence from the mainland, and, in a broader sense, successfully prosecute the Cold War. As Rusk once suggested (in a line of reasoning that recalls aspects of Joseph Nye’s “soft power”): “Opinion is also power, and what people think about conduct has a lot to do with what kind of conduct they will support or oppose.”⁶⁰

Rusk’s proposed approach to the question of Chinese representation in the United Nations is illustrative of his sense of priority on China policy matters. In his notes on the issue, Rusk argued:

...the target [of allied negotiations to determine a new approach on Chinese representation] need not be to find a position which we would know in advance would be acceptable to Moscow and Peiping. There is no point in our doing their negotiation for them in advance. *Free world unity should be the primary objective*; if Moscow and Peiping find the resulting position unacceptable, then they take on the responsibility for Peiping’s absence in the United Nations.⁶¹

Beyond assuaging disquiet over U.S. China policy among Free World nations, the only other

⁵⁹ Bowles to Rusk, January 1, 1958, DRPP, I, box 1, “China Policy,” RBRL; Rusk to Bowles, December 4, 1959, Chester Bowles Papers, Part V, Series I. Correspondence, box 215, folder 276, Yale University Library, Manuscripts and Archives. I would not have been aware of the second letter were it not also cited in Cohen, *Dean Rusk*, 85-86.

⁶⁰ Rusk, “Parliamentary Diplomacy—Debate vs. Negotiation,” *World Affairs Interpreter* 26 (July 1955): 121; Joseph Nye, *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power* (New York: Basic Books, 1990).

⁶¹ Rusk, “Outline Notes,” *supra* note 54 (italics mine). Also see Rusk to Dulles, *supra* note 57.

significant consideration in play for Rusk was the need to protect domestic support for the international body, given this support might be damaged should the PRC be seated over U.S. objections. Alluding to Rusk's focus on both domestic and international opinion, one colleague at the Council of Foreign Relations noted that the "avowed purpose" of the Rusk's plan for a "two Chinas" approach to the UN problem appeared to be to "salvage something from the wreckage" of a U.S. policy "doomed to failure."⁶²

Indeed, in the various presentations of his UN proposal Rusk made no mention of the advantages that might accrue from Beijing's integration into the community of nations, such as subjecting China's leaders to moderating influences, or, by extension, laying the foundation for an eventual Sino-American accommodation. On the contrary, Rusk consistently argued that it was not the responsibility of the United States to "carry Peiping piggyback into the United Nations."⁶³ Rather than facilitating China's international integration, Rusk was interested in transforming what had become a vexing political problem for Washington into a problem for Moscow and Beijing, by forcing the Communist powers to confront the existence of "two Chinas." "When one is impaled upon a dilemma," Rusk reasoned, "there is merit in seeking to impale one's adversaries on the dilemma instead."⁶⁴

Admittedly, several times during 1958 and 1959 Rusk expressed an interest in moving Sino-American trade onto a parallel footing with U.S.-Soviet trade.⁶⁵ In a 1959 letter to Bowles, Rusk even suggested that Bowles might point out in a *Foreign Affairs* article that he was writing:

...the advantage of China's acquiring a stake in "normal" relations with countries outside the Communist block and the corresponding advantage to the rest of us in having mainland China interested in its general relationships with the non-Communist world.⁶⁶

Although suggesting that Rusk was not entirely indifferent to the logic of effecting a

⁶² Altschul to Rusk, March 3, 1958, DRPP, I, box 1, "China Policy," RBRL.

⁶³ Rusk, address, supra note 58. Also see Cohen, *Dean Rusk*, 86.

⁶⁴ Rusk, "Outline Notes," supra note 54.

⁶⁵ CFR, "United Nations," supra note 45; Kochavi, *Conflict Perpetuated*, 37.

⁶⁶ Rusk to Bowles, supra note 59.

moderation of Chinese militancy through processes of engagement, even here he did not argue that trade might provide a mechanism for improving Sino-American relations per se.

Other indicators of Rusk's flexibility on China policy during the Eisenhower years could be easily be misconstrued as expressions of an underlying interest in greater Sino-American engagement. For instance, in 1958 Rusk suggested that communications between Beijing and Washington might be placed on a more regularised footing, perhaps using the ambassadorial level Sino-American talks in Warsaw as a model.⁶⁷ Two years later he urged that the PRC be invited to participate in multilateral discussions addressing questions pertaining to biological warfare and disease.⁶⁸ However, in neither instance was Rusk particularly interested in improving Sino-American relations. In the first case, Rusk was primarily concerned with doing away with the awkward process of conducting sensitive diplomatic communications through third parties; in the second, he based his recommendations on the pragmatic (and undeniably humanitarian) grounds that biological agents carried in high-velocity winds respect neither national nor ideological boundaries.

On the one hand, Bowles shared Rusk's view of opinion as power, and, by extension, his concern with securing international support for U.S. policy positions; to this end, Bowles consistently cast his arguments for policy change in reference to the likelihood that if Beijing rejected U.S. overtures for improved relations this would at least "make it clear to the world which side was the intransigent one."⁶⁹ But for Bowles, as for many other American liberals, this represented a minimum objective. Beyond considerations of international or domestic opinion, Bowles sincerely believed that by lowering barriers to bilateral exchange and dialogue this would, over time, impress upon China's leadership Washington's willingness to

⁶⁷ CFR, "United Nations," supra note 45.

⁶⁸ Rusk, "Thoughts While Shaving," June 8, 1960, Records of the Secretary of State Dean Rusk (hereafter Rusk Records), Miscellaneous Subject File, box 65, "Memoranda/Correspondence," NA.

⁶⁹ Bowles, *Ambassadors Report*, 392-93. On opinion as power, see Bowles, address at National War College, June 7, 1956, in Bowles, *The Conscience of a Liberal: Selected Writings and Speeches*, ed. Henry S. Commager (New York: Harper & Row, 1959), 25-28.

be flexible and “meet genuine Chinese contributions to peace in Asia half-way.”⁷⁰ In this sense, Bowles’s policy critique was grounded in the hope that the United States could and should attempt, as he later wrote, to “bring China into the world community and develop a working relationship with this great country.”⁷¹

Here Bowles gave voice to liberal optimism about the transformative agency of U.S.-led international engagement. In this analysis, engagement, rather than simply a reward for “good behaviour” (that is, adherence to normative, status quo measures of acceptable state conduct) could itself abet positive shifts in a state’s disposition. Indeed, this form of non-coercive state-to-state interaction could provide the primary mechanism for reducing tensions and improving relations between states.

On a broad philosophical level, Rusk was sympathetic to the brand of Cold War liberal internationalism espoused by Bowles. Consistently a champion of international law (enforced through robust collective security arrangements), throughout the Cold War Rusk remained, as Warren Cohen has written, the “consummate Wilsonian, still responding to Lenin with the precepts of American liberalism.”⁷² More specific to the issue at hand, the logic of what might be called “moderation through engagement” sat quite comfortably with Rusk’s weltanschauung. In addition to his aforementioned references to the potential instrumentality of trade in China’s international integration, Rusk believed that the energies produced by universal human wants—peace, spiritual freedom, and material wellbeing—could provide a basis for transcending disagreements between nations and creating a sustainable peace. In Rusk’s words, the “ties which bind us together as a human race” constituted a “mandate to governments to find and obey the rules by which we live in peace.”⁷³ In an applied sense, these innate common interests could provide the impetus for small, even peripheral acts of

⁷⁰ Bowles, *Ambassadors Report*, 392-93.

⁷¹ Bowles to Moss, February 22, 1973, filed with Bowles, OHI, July 1, 1970, JFKL.

⁷² Cohen, *Dean Rusk*, 109. For a good analysis of Rusk’s “neo-Wilsonianism,” see Zeiler, *Dean Rusk*, 3-40.

⁷³ Rusk, remarks at Fifth Ave. Association, September 29, 1953, DRPP, V:A, box 6, RBRL. Also see Rusk, address at West Point, December 2, 1960, Rusk Records, Speeches, “Fall 1960 West Point Speech,” NA.

cooperation between peoples, thereby incrementally building international understanding and reducing distrust.⁷⁴

Yet, the tangible impact of this concept on Rusk's approach to foreign policy problems—including the China problem—was marginal; the process of cooperation Rusk described was less a prescription for state-to-state diplomatic engagement, and more a description of an almost teleological process, wherein universal human need predisposed people to comity and peace over mistrust and war, and by which transnational (and, perhaps of equal importance given the nature of the Cold War, transideological) interdependencies were created. On a working level, what governed Rusk's approach to China policy—both before and during his service as secretary—was not the abstract idealism implied by his observations on the “ties which bind us together”; rather, it was his preference for policy continuity, the flip-side of this coin being a cautious aversion to major, and (to Rusk's mind) precipitate shifts in U.S. policy and posture toward China.

Whereas Bowles tended to locate his case for change in a long-term frame of reference, Rusk showed a distinct lack of enthusiasm for long-term policy planning, which, he maintained, circumscribed the policymakers ability to respond to the ever-shifting eddies of the international environment, and thereby engineer and implement policies appropriate to the situation at hand.⁷⁵ Similarly, Rusk evinced a pronounced scepticism toward grand designs for policy change, holding that the expansive power and influence of the United States mandated that its policies possess a fundamental measure of predictability for friend and foe alike. Sudden policy departures risked undermining that predictability, and thereby injecting, as he later explained, “disarray into an already troubled planet.”⁷⁶

Upon taking office as secretary of state, Rusk had in fact offered a rather different vision,

⁷⁴ Also see Cohen, *Dean Rusk*, 84.

⁷⁵ Rusk, OHI, *supra* note 39; Zeiler, *Dean Rusk*, 35; Cohen, *Dean Rusk*, 99.

⁷⁶ Rusk, “A New Secretary of State,” *Washington Post*, July 18, 1982 (for quote); Rusk, “The President,” *Foreign Affairs* 38 (April 1960): 366.

almost Bowlesian at first glance, of how, and to what end, U.S. foreign policy should be made. Speaking to officers in the State Department in January 1961, Rusk suggested that the advent of a new administration offered a rare opportunity to take a “fresh look” at America’s foreign policy; the administration, he added, could “take a certain leadership in change itself.” Arguing the need to maintain a fix on the future, Rusk claimed “Every policy officer cannot help but be a planning officer. Unless we keep our eyes on the horizon itself, we shall fail to bring ourselves on target with the present.” However, Rusk qualified this lofty conception of the policymakers role by outlining the many and varied concerns any policy officer must account for in considering a particular problem. By way of analogy the new secretary then provided his audience with what would be, in hindsight, an indicator of the degree to which his caution would vitiate any long-range “fresh look” at China policy. “The pilot of a jet aircraft has a check list of many dozen questions which he must answer satisfactorily before he takes off on a flight. Would it not be interesting and revealing if we had a check list of questions which we should answer systematically before we take off on a policy?”⁷⁷ The problem for some officials at State was that Rusk’s check lists would prove so exhaustive that proposals for policy departures, including those on China, seemed forever confined to the hanger.

There were two circumstances where Rusk did perceive a need for change in existing policies—and where he was prepared to set aside his inveterate caution: first, where the current approach to China matters threatened to seriously damage the United States’ international standing; and second, on points where Washington’s freedom of manoeuvre on matters affecting vital U.S. interests in the region (specifically, matters of war and peace, such as those involved in the offshore islands question) had, through inaction more than design, been subordinated to Chiang’s conflicting imperatives.

⁷⁷ Rusk, remarks to policy-making officers of the Department, February 20, 1961, RG59, Rusk Records, Speeches and Statements by the Secretary of State, 1961-1969 (hereafter Speeches), box 1, NA.

Outside of circumstances where the political and strategic costs of inaction posed intolerable and imminent costs, and in considering the broader question of Sino-American relations and China's place within the international system, Rusk was generally inclined toward temporisation: the United States could not indefinitely refuse to deal with the government of the world's most populous nation on a normalised basis, yet this did not in turn impart upon the U.S. government any obligation to inveigle Beijing from its self-imposed isolation. And although Rusk was not entirely unsympathetic to the liberal internationalist view that engagement might serve as a means for effecting a amelioration in Beijing's anti-American animus, he was guided, in the first instance, by a pronounced inclination toward policy continuity, coupled with a readiness to respond positively should China's leaders moderate their militancy.

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The perceptual differences on China policy between Rusk and Bowles in the 1950s would become more pronounced after both men had settled into their respective roles in the State Department. Bowles enthusiasm for policy change only seemed to increase after his appointment as undersecretary of state, and although his time in the role was short, he would do much to contribute to and encourage the initial drive by liberals working within the administration for a revision of China policy—efforts which would continue well after Bowles's was removed from the undersecretary's office in the November 1961. Meanwhile, in making the transition from the "luxurious world of opinion" to the "rigorous world of decision," Rusk's caution on policy change was given full expression, the new secretary of state now "haunted by the ghost of the missing factor."⁷⁸ And Rusk's nonchalance toward the GRC's sensitivities during the 1950s was replaced by a newfound appreciation of the need to tread carefully so as to effectively manage relations with the irascible, and oftentimes

⁷⁸ Rusk to President Carter, January 20, 1981, DRPP, IV:A, box 8, RBRL.

intractable, Chiang Kai-shek. Perhaps more significant still, Rusk would display a particular sensitivity, hitherto largely absent in his thinking on China policy, that any moderation in policy would be viewed as a sign of American weakness and indecision.

Still, although Rusk played a central role in establishing (or rather limiting) the bounds of the 1960s bureaucratic discourse on China policy, at the outset of the new administration it was primarily President Kennedy, rather than his secretary of state, who moved to shut down speculation of a broad review of China policy. Wary of inviting political attack on a still controversial foreign policy issue in the wake of his narrow electoral victory, particularly since Beijing seemed so unwilling to entertain the possibility of improvements in Sino-American relations, Kennedy proved unreceptive to calls for policy revision. Thus, despite widespread expectations that a moderation in China policy was on the cards, with the new president reluctant to address the question of U.S. China policy, and his secretary of state disinclined to push the case for a policy review, these expectations were soon tempered.

2

A NEW PRESIDENT, OLD FIXATIONS: KENNEDY AND U.S. CHINA POLICY

John F. Kennedy's ascent to the presidency was accompanied by the broad assumption that he would imbue U.S. foreign policy with a new dynamism. From the televised debates with Richard Nixon, to the assemblage of an illustrious team of "New Frontiersman," to the rousing oratory of his inaugural address, Kennedy projected an image of progressive, innovative thinking. Expectations of change extended to the realm of U.S. China policy, with a number of foreign governments, some observers in the press, and indeed many members of the new administration anticipating that Kennedy would subject existing policies to a searching review.

Despite these expectations, Kennedy decided against an early review of U.S. China policy. Pronounced though Kennedy's aversion to Maoism was, it was the new president's fear of domestic political attack that stood at the heart of his decision to work within the existing policy framework. Although in some ways sympathetic to the liberal critique of existing U.S. China policy, Kennedy remained wary of the China Lobby's latent ability to mobilise powerful forces within the body politic against policy change should the need arise. Reinforcing this decision, Kennedy saw no interest on Beijing's part in improving relations. And even as some in the new administration pointed to the medium to long-term benefits of unilateral policy adjustments, Kennedy was loath to institute changes which would not deliver any immediate tangible benefits to offset the political risks.

Kennedy's Pre-Presidential Career and U.S. China Policy

As a young Representative in 1949 Kennedy had cast his lot with the “loss of China” school, publicly lamenting that what “our young men have saved, our diplomats and President have frittered away.”¹ Kennedy’s participation in the debate was brief, and except in retrospect, not particularly noteworthy; by the time McCarthy had “uncovered” the Communist conspiracy in the corridors of governmental power, Kennedy was already through using the issue to enhance his own credentials as a Cold Warrior.² Indeed, in a 1957 *Foreign Affairs* critique of U.S. foreign policy penned by the then junior senator from Massachusetts, Kennedy backed away from his earlier comments, noting (albeit in passing) the “unreality” of the idea that the “the actions of a few diplomats” rather than “underlying revolutionary forces” were responsible for Mao’s victory in 1949.³ And privately Kennedy told both Theodore H. White and Arthur Schlesinger of his deep regret at ever having attacked the “China Hands.”⁴

Recognising that his comments had alienated him from the liberal intellectuals who were, as Allen Matusow writes, “the soul of the [Democratic Party], the guardians of its ideals,” Kennedy’s *volte face* on the “loss of China” may have simply been one small part of a broader campaign to win over, or at least appease, this important constituency.⁵ But by 1960 Bowles had good cause for believing that Kennedy genuinely shared his frustration on “our inflexible position in regard to China, Taiwan, and Southeast Asia.”⁶ Admittedly, during the 1950s Kennedy had, like so many of his contemporaries, made a point of condemning

¹ Cited in Dulles, *American Policy Toward Communist China*, 189. Also see Fetzer, “Clinging to Containment,” 179; and Kochavi, *Conflict Perpetuated*, 38-39.

² Kochavi argues that Kennedy’s criticism of the administration extended from genuine conviction, rather than mere political opportunism. Kochavi, *Conflict Perpetuated*, 39.

³ Kennedy, “A Democrat Looks at Foreign Policy,” *Foreign Affairs* 36 (October 1957): 59.

⁴ Theodore White, *In Search of History: A Personal Adventure* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978), 470; Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *A Thousand Days: John F. Kennedy in the White House* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965), 21n2. Also see Kennedy, November 29, 1961, *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: John F. Kennedy* (hereafter *PPP:JFK*), 1961, 764.

⁵ Allen J. Matusow, *The Unravelling of America: A History of Liberalism in the 1960s* (New York: Harper & Row, 1984), 15-16. On reservations among liberals over Kennedy’s candidacy, see George McGregor Burns, *John Kennedy: A Political Profile* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1960), 150; Thomas J. Whalen, *Kennedy versus Lodge: The 1952 Massachusetts Senate Race* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2000), 201; and Arthur Krock, *Memoirs: Intimate Recollections of Twelve American Presidents from Theodore Roosevelt to Richard Nixon* (London: Casell & Company, 1968), 342-43.

⁶ Bowles, *Promises to Keep*, 288-89.

Beijing's aggressive disregard of international norms, and (like Bowles) voiced concerns about the possibility of a Chinese push for hegemony in Southeast Asia.⁷ Yet Kennedy had also publicly offered the tentative view that existing U.S. China policy was “probably too rigid” and U.S. objectives “distorted.” Non-recognition was, in Kennedy's estimate, a rational policy for the present, but he also held that “we must be very careful not to straight-jacket our policy as a result of ignorance and fail to detect a change in the objective situation when it comes.” Significantly, Kennedy noted the need for a less inhibited political conversation on issues such as China, warning “if a low ceiling is placed on criticism, policy tends to rigidity and vested interests harden to the point where established viewpoints cannot be modified.”⁸

As the Eisenhower years drew to a close, Kennedy hinted at a qualified sympathy with the liberal critique of existing China policies, suggesting it might prove advantageous to clearly indicate a “willingness to talk with [China's leaders] when they desire to do so, and to set forth conditions of recognition which seem responsible to the watching world.”⁹ In a major foreign policy address in June 1960 Kennedy went slightly further, suggesting that although any change in policy on the fundamental questions of recognition and UN representation should be postponed until Beijing modified its aggressive attitude, enhanced Sino-American communications—perhaps beginning with Beijing's inclusion in nuclear test ban negotiations and graduating to economic and cultural contacts—might provide a mechanism for improved relations.¹⁰

Of the many foreign policy issues surveyed by Kennedy in his speech, it was his call for greater contact with Beijing that was singled out for front-page treatment by the *New York Times*.¹¹ Meanwhile, the *Wall Street Journal* ran an editorial which placed Kennedy, on the basis of his address, in sympathy with Bowles's call for the moderation of U.S. policy.

⁷ Kochavi, *Conflict Perpetuated*, 39-40; Fetzer, “Clinging to Containment,” 179-80.

⁸ Kennedy, “Foreign Policy,” 50.

⁹ Dulles, *American Policy*, 189-90.

¹⁰ Senator Kennedy, June 14, 1960, 86th Cong., 2nd sess., *Congressional Record* 106, pt. 10: 12523-26.

¹¹ Russell Baker, “Kennedy Favors Peking Contacts,” *NYT*, June 15, 1960.

Tellingly, the Committee of One Million distributed this editorial to its members and supporters, and although the covering letter judiciously stopped short of referring to the Democratic candidate personally—Committee organisers placed a premium on the bipartisan character of the organisation—it warned that a minority within the body politic, in their willingness to offer concessions to the Chinese Communists “for the sake of temporary expediency,” had failed to heed the lesson of Munich.¹²

As a candidate Kennedy also drew a moderate amount of political heat on China simply for his association with Bowles and Stevenson, both foreign policy advisers to his campaign, and both of whom had, in varying degrees, publicly advocated a more flexible policy toward China.¹³ The delightfully named “Republican Truth Squad,” a political unit dedicated to tracking and attacking Kennedy’s campaign, suggested that “statements by responsible Democratic spokesmen indicate a preliminary ‘softening-up’ process under way” to condition public opinion for the diplomatic recognition of the PRC should Kennedy take the White House.¹⁴ And, directing public attention to Stevenson’s suggestion that Beijing would be “more accountable to world opinion” as a member of the United Nations than as an outcast, Nixon himself challenged Kennedy to disavow Stevenson’s position, arguing on behalf of an apparently baffled public: “The American people cannot make sense of a campaign in which the candidate says one thing on foreign affairs and one of his principal advisers says the opposite while campaigning for the candidate.”¹⁵

These cynical attacks obscure the fact that the involvement of Stevenson and Bowles as foreign policy advisors in Kennedy’s campaign probably had less to do with the candidate’s

¹² Memo, Committee of One Million, “Democratic and Republican Red China Planks,” August 5, 1960 (with attached article by William H. Chamberlain, “China Question: Kennedy, Bowles, Seem to Favour Softening of U.S. Stand,” *Wall Street Journal*, August 1, 1960), Papers of James C. Thomson, Series 5: Far East, 1961-66 (hereafter JTP:FE), box 14, “Communist China, Background Material,” JFKL.

¹³ Bowles and Stevenson were also touted as the leading candidates for the secretary of state’s office following Kennedy’s election. *The New Republic* 143 (November 14, 1960): 3.

¹⁴ *NYT*, “Shift on China Feared,” October 12, 1960. Also see Senator Cotton, August 25, 1960, 86th Cong., 2nd sess., *Congressional Record* 106, pt. 13: 17645-49.

¹⁵ Stevenson, “Democratic View,” 203; Leo Egan, “Nixon Prods Rival on China U.N. Seat,” *NYT*, October 16, 1960.

predisposition on foreign policy issues (including China), and more to do with his desire to allay liberal concerns about his candidacy.¹⁶ Still, there is some evidence to suggest that Kennedy shared his advisors' thinking on "two Chinas." Asked by Bowles to clear an article he had written for *Foreign Affairs* arguing for the implementation of a more flexible policy based on the reality of "two Chinas," Kennedy privately endorsed Bowles's arguments, and suggested his article "might open at least a few minds to the possibilities."¹⁷ Bowles may have been, as his biographer has written, "desperate to believe that the senator/president viewed the world through Bowles-coloured glasses," particularly given his political dependence on Kennedy as of 1960.¹⁸ Yet in light of Kennedy's tentative expressions of interest in policy change on other occasions, it is likely he also felt the article offered a relatively safe trial balloon with which to test the domestic mood on a "two Chinas" policy.

A minor controversy during the presidential campaign over the Nationalist position on the offshore islands increased speculation that Kennedy was disposed toward a revision of U.S. China policy. Probably inadvertently Kennedy introduced the issue into the campaign when, in an October 1 television interview, he questioned the wisdom of a U.S. defence of Quemoy and Matsu. During the second televised debate six days later, Kennedy contended that the United States risked "being dragged into war" over the islands; Nixon countered that as a matter of principle the United States should not surrender part of the "area of freedom" to Communism. By the third debate, with both candidates now claiming they supported current U.S. policy toward the islands—as expressed by the purposely open terms of the Formosa Resolution—there appeared little to differentiate Kennedy's views on the matter from Nixon's.¹⁹ Yet to advocates of policy change Kennedy's position on the issue appeared, in the

¹⁶ Schaffer, *Bowles*, 176-77.

¹⁷ Bowles, *Promises to Keep*, 391; Bowles, OHI, February 2, 1965, 7, JFKL.

¹⁸ Schaffer, *Bowles*, 170.

¹⁹ W.H. Lawrence, "Nixon Scores Foe on Quemoy Issue," *NYT*, October 12, 1960; Peter Kihss, "Kennedy Charges Nixon Risks War," *NYT*, October 13, 1960; *News of the Week in Review*, *NYT*, sec. IV, October 16, 1960. This blurring of the differences between the candidates on the issue was discreetly facilitated by Secretary of State Christian Herter, who had privately intervened out of concern the controversy might adversely affect U.S.-GRC relations. Kochavi, *Conflict Perpetuated*, 41.

words of a *New York Times* endorsement, “more reasoned, less emotional, more flexible, less doctrinaire, more imaginative, less negative” than the position taken by Nixon.²⁰

China was never more than a peripheral concern during the 1960 election. Yet on the few occasions Kennedy had touched on China policy in the lead-up to the November poll he seemed to hint at a dissatisfaction with the status quo not all that far removed from the liberal policy critique articulated by Bowles (and, in a somewhat more tentative fashion, Stevenson). To his critics Kennedy had displayed, as Republican Senator Hugh Scott suggested, “fuzzy thinking” on China;²¹ to his supporters, it was “flexibility.” Either way, by November Kennedy had emerged as the candidate most likely to bring new thinking to bear on U.S. China policy.

U.S. China Policy and the Art of the Possible

By the time of Kennedy’s inauguration many interested observers, at home and abroad, suspected that the new president would adopt a more conciliatory posture toward China, and likely implement substantive changes in U.S. policy.²² In part this was a corollary of the “aura of reform,” as Bowles put it, which settled over Washington following Kennedy’s electoral victory.²³ Yet there was also a sense that Kennedy and the administration that he assembled during the interregnum were open to the possibility of moderation of China policy. Capturing this anticipation John K. Fairbank, who had been personally targeted by Kennedy in 1949 for his part in China’s “loss,” posited that Kennedy’s election “presumably marks the burial of the unreal and divisive issue of ‘Who lost China?’”²⁴

²⁰ Editorial, “The Choice of a Candidate,” *NYT*, October 27, 1960.

²¹ *NYT*, “Scott Says Kennedy is Fuzzy on Taiwan,” July 17, 1960.

²² David Dean, OHI, July 21, 1998, 36-37, Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, Oral History Collection, Lauinger Library, Georgetown University (hereafter ADST); Lindsay Grant, OHI, January 31, 1990, 15, ADST; Leonard A. Kusnitz, *Public Opinion and Foreign Policy: America’s China Policy, 1949-1979* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press), 96.

²³ Bowles, OHI, July 1, 1970, JFKL. Also see Charles E. Bohlen, *Witness to History, 1929-1969* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1973), 476; and Alfred Lesesne Jenkins, *Country, Conscience, and Caviar: A Diplomat’s Journey in the Company of History* (Seattle, WA: BookPartners, 1993), 188-89.

²⁴ Cited in Foot, “Redefinitions,” 263. Also see Wallace Carroll, “New Mood at State,” *NYT*, January 13, 1961.

Taipei moved quickly to register with the new administration its growing anxiety about “widespread public speculation” in the region and beyond “on possible changes in U.S. policy for China under [the] new administration.”²⁵ And in fact over the first two months of the Kennedy administration the State Department received word that a number of key governments supporting U.S. positions on China, including (though not limited to) Japan, Brazil, and Canada, suspected a change in U.S. China policy was in the offing, and were accordingly considering adjustments in their own policies.²⁶ Meanwhile, U.S. officials in London suggested that British Foreign Secretary Lord Home’s comments in early February that “the facts of international life require that Communist China be seated in the UN,” together with other statements which departed from the usual British practice of avoiding any public airing of Anglo-American differences on China policy, may have been made in anticipation of possible changes in U.S. policy.²⁷

In June 1961 the State Department sent out a circular airgram to all U.S. diplomatic missions, providing guidance for dispelling conjecture about an imminent change in U.S. China policy.²⁸ The airgram reflected the fact that by the summer of 1961 Kennedy had privately ruled out any major change in U.S. China policy for the foreseeable future. Likely playing into this decision was Kennedy’s dual-concern over Beijing’s promotion of “wars of national liberation” in Southeast Asia and its pursuit of an independent nuclear capability.²⁹ And as time progressed Kennedy’s perception of China as the more militant party in the increasingly

²⁵ Embtel-418, Taipei, January 24, 1961, CF:1960-63, 303/1-2461, NA (for quote); Embtel-639, Taipei, April 21, 1961, CF:1960-63, 611.93/4-2161, NA; Bundy to Kennedy, July 7, 1961, U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States* (hereafter *FRUS*), 1961-1963 22:89-91.

²⁶ Memcon, Rusk and Ambassador Asakai (Japan), January 31, 1961, RG59, Executive Secretariat, The Secretary’s and the Undersecretary’s Memoranda of Conversation, 1953-1964 (hereafter Secretary’s Memcons), lot 65D330, box 20, NA; Parsons to Rusk, February 9, 1961, RG59, CF:1960-63, microfilm, 611.93/2-961, NA; Embtel-640, Ottawa, March 3, 1961, *ibid.*, box 473, 303/3-361; memcon, Rusk and Ambassador Romulo (Philippines), January 27, 1961, *ibid.*, box 2145, 793.00/1-2761.

²⁷ Embtel-3510, London, March 2, 1961, RG59, CF:1960-63, box 473, 303/3-261, NA; Embtel-485, Taipei, February 14, 1961, *ibid.*, 303/2-1461; Congressional Quarterly, *China and U.S. Far East Policy*, 102. Also see Kaufman, *Confronting Communism*, 147-49. On Anglo-American differences on UN Chinese Representation, see Victor S. Kaufman, “‘Chirep’: The Anglo-American Dispute over Chinese Representation in the United Nations, 1950-1971,” *The English Historical Review* 115 (April 2000): 354-77.

²⁸ The instruction, dated June 16, 1961, was sent as circular airgram-10880. *FRUS*, 1961-1963 22:92n1.

²⁹ Kennedy’s response to China’s nuclear development is addressed in chapter seven.

acrimonious Sino-Soviet dispute—a perception evident in at least some corners of the administration in 1961—would assume a strong measure of importance in his decision to maintain a policy of maximum pressure against Beijing.³⁰

Although all these factors were, in varying degrees, pertinent in 1961, they fall short in explaining Kennedy's decision not to move on China policy. Prior to taking office Kennedy had pointed to the threat posed by Chinese militancy, yet still seen fit to float the idea of a less rigid approach in dealing with China. Rusk was likely correct in later suggesting that Kennedy was “not passionately opposed to any kind of movement towards the [PRC] on ideological or other terms”; rather, the new president simply felt the political costs of policy change too high. It was an impression taken by Rusk from a tête-à-tête with Kennedy on the subject in May 1961, where Rusk ran through a series of policy alternatives. Even though both agreed that existing China policy “did not reflect Asian realities,” Kennedy claimed he lacked a mandate to assume the political burden of reviewing China policy; changes in China policy would have to remain a task for the future. Driving home his political sensitivity on this score, as Rusk was leaving the meeting Kennedy called across the Oval Office: “What’s more, Mr. Secretary, I don’t want to read in the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times* that the State Department is thinking about a change in China policy!”³¹

When the subject of China policy arose in meetings with his colleagues or foreign representatives, Kennedy would claim that Eisenhower had warned him during the transition that while he would support the administration on foreign policy generally, any steps taken to recognise Beijing or facilitate its entrance into the United Nations would bring him out of

³⁰ Studies emphasising (in varying degrees) Kennedy's concerns about Chinese militancy and expansionism in determining his decision to maintain the policy status quo, include: Cohen, *Dean Rusk*, 164-73; Fetzer, “Clinging to Containment,” 178-97; Timothy P. Maga, “‘Pay Any Price, Bear Any Burden’: John F. Kennedy and Sino-American Relations, 1961-1963,” in *Sino-American Relations since 1900*, ed. Priscilla Roberts (Hong Kong: University of Hong Kong, 1991), 468-81; and Foot, *Practice of Power*, 208. Gordon Chang, in particular, has portrayed a president given to an almost visceral hostility toward the PRC. Chang, *Friends and Enemies*, 228-52.

³¹ Rusk, OHI, January 1986, “WWWWW,” DROH, RBRL; Rusk, *As I Saw It*, 282-84. Rusk is the sole source on the meeting. Although no record of the meeting has been found, according to Kennedy's and Rusk's appointment books the afternoon of May 5 was the only time that Kennedy and Rusk meet in private that month. Editorial note, *FRUS, 1961-1963* 22:54-55.

retirement.³² Existing records of the second transition meeting (when Eisenhower had apparently made these comments) contain no mention of China, and McGeorge Bundy, although not disputing Kennedy's recollection, would later suggest that Kennedy might have simply been using Eisenhower's remarks "as an umbrella for his own policy."³³ Still, regardless of what transpired in this exchange there is little reason to doubt that Kennedy was, as Rusk recalled, "very much impressed with the idea that any change in China policy would lead to a bitter controversy here in the United States."³⁴

Admittedly, although China policy remained politically charged when Kennedy took office, there were, as Rosemary Foot argues, "areas of flexibility in mass opinion [toward China] that could have been built upon" had the new president determined to do so.³⁵ Public sympathy for the GRC remained strong when Kennedy took office, yet across the previous decade American opposition to the Nationalist ambition of a "return to the mainland" had grown amid mounting suspicion that Taipei was trying to involve the United States in a war against the PRC. Inversely, even as a plurality of Americans continued to oppose either diplomatic recognition or UN representation for Beijing, opinion polls suggest that by 1961 the American public was amenable to efforts to improve Sino-American relations. Asked in September 1954 if the United States should endeavour to improve relations with the PRC only 26% of respondents said yes, against 59% opposed; asked effectively the same question soon after Kennedy's inauguration the result was basically reversed, 53% favouring such steps, with only 32% responding in the negative.³⁶

These hints of flexibility in mass opinion were matched by cautious expressions of

³² Memcon, Kennedy and PM Macmillan (UK), April 5, 1961, *FRUS, 1961-1963* 22:42-43; Rusk, *As I Saw It*, 283; Thomson, "U.S. China Policy," 221.

³³ *FRUS, 1961-1963* 22:43n2; memo for the record, November 18, 1964, *FRUS, 1964-1968* 30:127.

³⁴ Rusk, OHI, supra note 31.

³⁵ Foot, "Redefinitions," 277.

³⁶ For a more detailed look at the nexus between public opinion and U.S. China policy in the 1950s and 1960s, see Kusnitz, *Public Opinion*; and Steele, *The American People and China* (New York: Published for the Council on Foreign Relations by McGraw Hill, 1966), esp. Part II. The analysis here is based on both these works, along with a reading of relevant public opinion polls available from iPOLL (see bibliography, under "Published Documentary Sources").

dissatisfaction with existing China policy by national political figures. Although criticism of existing China policy remained politically verboten for most Democrats, amid a general post-Sputnik willingness to question the Eisenhower administration's approach to foreign policy, some party figures were prepared to tentatively broach the subject.³⁷ More specific to the issue of China, the 1958 offshore islands crisis also helped effect a (subtle) ebbing in the political inhibitions surrounding China policy, at least inasmuch as Democrats ranging from Adlai Stevenson to Dean Acheson were willing to take the administration to task for its "brinkmanship" over what were deemed irrelevant parcels of land.³⁸

Yet it soon became clear to those with access to Kennedy that the China Lobby's continued influence in key places appreciably affected the thinking of a president elected by a margin so narrow that it "seemed to strengthen his enemies more than his friends."³⁹ In 1961 Kennedy had only to look to Capitol Hill to see that the China Lobby, as formally manifest in the Committee of One Million, remained a political force to be reckoned with. A joint congressional resolution opposing U.S. recognition of Beijing or UN representation for Mao's regime was passed unanimously in the summer of 1961 (minus a small number of abstentions), a clear demonstration of the Committee's continuing ability to marshal political support against moderations in existing policy.⁴⁰ Outside of Congress, Kennedy also felt he had to contend with elements in the press which might turn against him on foreign policy.⁴¹ Referring to the president's anxiety about elite opinion on China, in October 1961 NSC staffer Robert Komer wrote to White House aide and "court-historian" Arthur Schlesinger that although "the reaction to [a] shift in China policy properly explained would not be as

³⁷ Bachrack, *Committee of One Million*, 152-58; Reichard, "Divisions and Dissent," 62-63, 68-71.

³⁸ Congressional Quarterly, *China and U.S. Far East Policy, 1945-1966* (Washington: U.S. GPO, 1967), 87. Stevenson had, in fact, criticised the administration's handling of the issue during the first crisis. Stevenson, radio address, April 11, 1955, printed in Stevenson, *What I Think* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1956), 202-12.

³⁹ Quote from Halberstam, *Best and Brightest*, 64.

⁴⁰ In a July 28, 1961 roll-call vote, *S Con Res 34*, passed the Senate on 76-0, with 24 not voting. The resolution passed the House on August 31, in a roll-call vote of 395-0, with only two members of the House speaking against it (both voted "present").

⁴¹ On the centrality of the press in Kennedy's calculations of his freedom of manoeuvre in the foreign policy field, see Ralph B. Levering and Montague Kern, "The News Management Issue and John F. Kennedy's Foreign Policy," in *John F. Kennedy: The Promise Revisited*, ed. Paul Harper and Joanne P. Krieg (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988), 143-52.

adverse as many think,” the president remained “worried, not just about the general temper, but about that significant and highly vocal minority which has such an emotional block on China.”⁴²

As Komer wrote to Walt Rostow in July 1961, although it was “clear the President well recognises the need for an adjustment in our China policy toward one with which we can live during the Sixties... it is equally apparent that he doesn’t want to spring this ‘during the first six months of a Democratic administration,’ as [McGeorge Bundy] said this morning.”⁴³ Kennedy himself, in considering the matter of UN Chinese representation, stressed the importance of avoiding change in the first year of the administration, given the “political dynamite locked up” in the issue.⁴⁴ Wary of political opponents looking to confront the new administration on foreign policy, in 1961 Kennedy determined that any substantial changes in policy—if in fact such changes appeared beneficial—would have to await the emergence of a more propitious domestic political environment.

Kennedy also concluded that short of a U.S. abrogation of its commitments to the GRC and a withdrawal “of all [U.S.] armed forces from China’s territory Taiwan and the Taiwan Strait area” (pursuant to Beijing’s September 1960 demands), the Chinese leadership had no genuine interest in resolving the impasse in relations.⁴⁵ He was almost certainly correct on this score. Despite an occasional softening of Beijing’s posture over the first half of 1961, there was never any change in the basic anti-American animus of Mao’s regime, or indeed any departure from its refusal to make substantive concessions in pursuit of a more cooperative relationship with the United States.⁴⁶

⁴² Komer to Schlesinger, October 13, 1961, National Security File, Papers of Robert W. Komer (hereafter NSF:KP), box 411, “China (Taiwan and Offshore Islands), 1961-1963 (3),” JFKL.

⁴³ Komer to Rostow and McGeorge Bundy, July 31, 1961, *ibid.*

⁴⁴ Memcon, May 24, 1961, *FRUS, 1961-1963* 22:63-65; memcon, August 5, 1961, *ibid.*, 113; Schlesinger, *Thousand Days*, 443, 446.

⁴⁵ The demands are noted in *FRUS, 1961-1963* 22:10.

⁴⁶ FSD-878, Hong Kong, June 1, 1961, RG59, CF:1960-63, box 2146, 793.00/6-161, NA; *NYT*, “Peiping Softens Hostility to U.S.,” February 2, 1961; Kunitz, *Public Opinion*, 97.

Indeed, Kennedy was quite justified in declaring in June that Beijing's rhetorical attacks on the U.S. government both before and after his assumption office had been "constant, immediate, and in many cases malevolent."⁴⁷ He referred in this connection to the belligerent line that Beijing had taken at the meeting of Communist parties at the Moscow Conference in 1960, no doubt aware that the more militant anti-American aspects of the official conference statement, which the Kremlin was judiciously toning down in its own reporting, had featured prominently in a resolution issued at the Ninth Plenum of the Chinese Communist Party Central Committee. The timing was ominous: the plenum, held January 14 to 18, 1961, was able to broadcast its call for the people of the world to "unite and wage an unremitting struggle against the policies of aggression and war of imperialism headed by the United States," just in time for Kennedy's inauguration. Meanwhile, the propaganda line from Beijing was that the United States remained very much "enemy number one," whichever particular imperialist happened to be in residence at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue. Indeed, by April 1961 Mao was telling visiting foreign delegations that not only was U.S. imperialism the root of all the world's ills, but that "the Kennedy administration can only be even worse and not better than the Eisenhower administration."⁴⁸

Therefore, as Rusk recalled, fearing "the issue might divide Congress and the American people, [Kennedy] decided the potential benefits of a more realistic China policy didn't warrant risking severe political confrontation."⁴⁹ Rusk believed that Kennedy may have considered taking on the political risks of the issue, but that the president was guided by the logic that "if you're going to have a fight, have a fight about something, don't have a fight about nothing."⁵⁰ It was a sentiment that Kennedy expressed at length in a March discussion about China with New Zealand Prime Minister Keith Holyoake, telling his visitor that he had come to office with an:

⁴⁷ Kennedy, June 2, 1961, *PPP:JFK, 1961*, 436.

⁴⁸ Roderick MacFarquhar, *The Origins of the Cultural Revolution*, vol. III, *The Coming of the Cataclysm, 1961-1966* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 13-22; FSD-878, Hong Kong, supra note 46.

⁴⁹ Rusk, *As I Saw It*, 283.

⁵⁰ Rusk, OHI, March 30, 1970, 227, JFKL.

...open mind and had been prepared to take such steps as might be possible to bring about a less tense atmosphere and to make it possible to seek some sort of developing relationship. If he had found that there were, in fact, possibilities, he would have been prepared to tackle the very deepseated and emotional opposition throughout this country from such groups as the Committee of One Million, because he felt if he could show that new steps were in the national interest they would be accepted in the end and that they would be the right thing.⁵¹

However, Kennedy continued, every indication had been that China's leadership preferred to maintain the impasse in relations; as such, the possibilities for introducing new approaches "seemed very limited indeed."⁵²

Kennedy, Rusk, and Early Contacts between Beijing and the Administration

The first formal contact between representatives of the Kennedy administration and Chinese officials at Warsaw demonstrated not only that the Chinese had little interest in pursuing a more productive relationship, but also that the administration was itself more interested in highlighting this intransigence than in attempting to improve Sino-American relations. The meeting, the 103rd overall in the ambassadorial-level U.S.-PRC talks, had been postponed to provide Rusk, as Assistant Secretary for Far Eastern Affairs Graham Parsons had recommended in January, with the opportunity to study the course of previous talks, determine what use to make of the channel, and, if desired, "contemplate some fresh approach or initiative toward Peiping through this channel, in which case there might be maximum advantage in making the move at the first meeting after the assumption of office."⁵³ In a follow-up communication with Rusk in February, Parsons suggested reintroducing the idea of a journalist exchange into the talks, in part to probe what Parson's deemed the slim possibility that the arrival of a new administration "may provide the Chinese Communists with a justification for responding more positively to our overtures." Rusk approved.⁵⁴

More than a simple conciliatory overture, however, the newsmen initiative was calculated to

⁵¹ Memcon, Kennedy and PM Holyoke (NZ), March 3, 1961, *FRUS, 1961-1963* 22:21-22.

⁵² Ibid. Both U.A. Johnson and Ball have noted Kennedy's reluctance to tackle difficult policy issues which did not hold the promise of immediate results. Kochavi, *Conflict Perpetuated*, 73. Also see Lawrence Freedman, *Kennedy's Wars: Berlin, Cuba, Laos, and Vietnam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 6-7.

⁵³ Parsons to Rusk, January 24, 1961, RG59, CF:1960-63, microfilm, 611.93/1-2461, NA.

⁵⁴ Parsons to Rusk, February 19, 1961, *FRUS, 1961-1963* 22:11; Deptel to Warsaw, March 4, 1961, *ibid.*, 22-25.

cast Washington's posture toward China in a favourable light, since regardless of the Chinese response the administration would win kudos from its allies for this show of flexibility.⁵⁵ Reflecting the State Department's (and Rusk's) sense of priority on the matter, the initiative was leaked to the press well in advance of the talks. While the leak provided, as foreign service officer Ralph Clough wrote, "a valuable means of focusing public attention on the talks and thus gaining maximum propaganda advantage from the Chinese Communist rejection of our proposal," the "advance announcement [of the initiative] is likely to convince Peiping that our only motive in introducing the subject is the propaganda motive, thus reducing the chances of our being able to work out an arrangement with them."⁵⁶

Surprising nobody, the Chinese representative at the talks, Ambassador Wang Bingnan, responded to the proposal by simply reiterating that until the issue of Taiwan was resolved there was little hope of progress on other matters.⁵⁷ At a press conference the next day Kennedy noted in connection with the Chinese rejection of the proposal that the prospects for progress in relations now appeared "dimmed," adding that the Chinese Communists had been "extremely belligerent towards us, and they have been unflinching in their attacks upon the United States." And alluding to Beijing's demand of a U.S. withdrawal from the Taiwan area, Kennedy insisted that although the United States desired a lessening of tensions, it "was not prepared to surrender" to threat and intimidation in pursuit of that end.⁵⁸

The new administration's first attempt to engage Mao's regime was thus derailed by Chinese intransigence. Yet the apparently deliberate advance leaking of the proposal, viewed alongside Kennedy's emphatic response to Beijing's negative response, suggests that the administration was, at this point, more interested in highlighting this intransigence (the

⁵⁵ FE paper, "China Policy," attached to memo, Parsons to Rusk, December 28, 1960, Papers of W. Averell Harriman, Special Files: Public Service, 1918-1986, n.d., Kennedy-Johnson Administrations, 1958-1971, n.d. (hereafter HP:KJA), Subject File, box 443, "China, Folder 7," Library of Congress, Manuscript Division (hereafter LCMD).

⁵⁶ Clough to Edwin Martin, March 1, 1961, RG59, CF:1960-63, microfilm, 611.93/3-161, NA.

⁵⁷ Embtel, Warsaw, March 7, 1961, *FRUS, 1961-1963* 22:26.

⁵⁸ Kennedy, March 8, 1961, *PPP:JFK, 1961*, 159.

“propaganda motive,” as Clough put it) than in genuinely reaching an agreement on the exchange of newsmen.

At the same time, Kennedy seemed content to work within the existing rhetorical framework on China. For instance, a joint statement released after Kennedy’s meeting with Holyoake in March 1961 described Beijing’s “hostile and aggressive attitude” as a “menace” to peace, not only in the region, but in the developing world generally. Kennedy had referred to the “menace” of PRC aggression before, most notably in his State of Union. Yet the Holyoake-Kennedy joint statement, as one historian has written, “astonished observers,” given no mention was made of Moscow, despite the fact most observers assigned the Soviets the lion’s share of responsibility for Communist activities in Laos, Cuba, and the Congo.⁵⁹

Kennedy was, however, willing to consider minor conciliatory overtures to Beijing when it was politically advantageous to do so. For instance, Kennedy indicated that the administration would be willing to consider making American foodstuffs available to the Chinese should it receive a request to this end from Beijing.⁶⁰ These indications of qualified flexibility were well received by the foreign policy cognoscenti and general public alike, opinion polls indicating that a majority of Americans supported the provision of food aid to China. And the China Lobby would have been hard pressed to oppose the provision of foodstuffs to a hungry population whose interests it claimed to represent.⁶¹ Similarly, there was reasonably broad public support for an exchange of newsmen, and the press was always going to be well disposed toward an initiative that would enhance their own access to the mainland.⁶² These tentative overtures thus allowed Kennedy to placate his liberal base over the lack of substantive movement in China policy, without exposing himself to political attack from the

⁵⁹ Cohen, *Dean Rusk*, 167.

⁶⁰ Kennedy, January 25, 1961, *PPP:JFK, 1961*, 15. The question of food aid is discussed at length in chapter four.

⁶¹ Gallup Poll (AIPO), February 1961, in *iPOLL*, USGALLUP.61-641.R026; McGovern to Rostow, May 24, 1961, National Security File, Countries (hereafter NSF:CO), box 22, “China, General,” JFKL; Friends Committee on National Legislation, “Should U.S. Surplus Food Be Offered to Mainland China?” January 1962, NSF:CO, box 26, “China, Subjects, Food Situation,” JFKL.

⁶² Gallup Poll (AIPO), June 1957, in *iPOLL*, USGALLUP.57-584.Q006.

Right.

But given Beijing's persistent anti-Americanism, Kennedy evidently saw little reason to accept the political risks inherent in pursuing more substantive steps toward improved relations. Thus, when Chen Yi suggested in October that Beijing would be open to elevating the Sino-American dialogue to the ministerial-level (provided the United States took the initiative), Kennedy responded that there were already adequate channels of communication available for the exchange of views. Moreover, Kennedy added, the administration "had not seen any evidence as yet that the Chinese Communists wish to live in comity with us."⁶³

Despite Kennedy's reluctance to pursue substantive policy change, some administration insiders held that the secretary of state, who seemed conceptually tethered to the policies of the past, was alone obstructing a policy review.⁶⁴ In part this perception arose because Rusk, wary of leaks, never disclosed to his colleagues what Kennedy had told him at their seminal May meeting on China policy. When approached about the possibility of implementing a "two Chinas" policy by officials such as Stevenson (appointed U.S. Representative to the United Nations), Bowles, and the Assistant Secretary of State of International Organisation Affairs, Harlan Cleveland, Rusk stonewalled, playing (in his own words) the "village idiot."⁶⁵ In a letter to Cleveland in 1975 Rusk recalled his silence on his May meeting with Kennedy, musing "Where does solidarity with the president intersect with a duty to be candid with one's own colleagues? I don't have a completely clear answer yet."⁶⁶ For better or worse the balance that Rusk struck on this question, and his attendant moves to discourage any review of China policy (to the chagrin of a number of his more liberal colleagues), created an impression in parts of the administration that Rusk was blocking progress on the issue against Kennedy's wishes.

⁶³ *FRUS, 1961-1963* 22:169n2; Kennedy, October 11, 1961, *PPP:JFK, 1961*, 658.

⁶⁴ For instance, see Thomson, "U.S. China Policy," 221-22. On this perception, also see Cohen, *Dean Rusk*, 172; and Kochavi, *Conflict Perpetuated*, 70n107.

⁶⁵ Rusk, *As I Saw It*, 284.

⁶⁶ Rusk to Cleveland, February 10, 1975, DRPP, IV:A, box 9, "Cleveland, Harlan (1)," RBRL.

Yet at times Rusk demonstrated more flexibility (if only marginally so) than Kennedy on China matters.⁶⁷ There is evidence of this in the handling of a minor issue relating to the U.S. embargo on trade with China, trivial but for the light it sheds on the dynamic between Rusk and Kennedy on China policy matters. At a February 1 meeting of the National Security Council discussion touched on the agricultural crisis then coming into view in China, and a possible change in U.S. embargo policy to allow U.S. oil companies to provide bunkering to Free World ships carrying foodstuffs to China under PRC charter, thus helping relieve tensions with U.S. allies on the China trade question. Charged with looking into the matter by Kennedy, Rusk spoke to Secretary of the Treasury C. Douglas Dillon—a conservative Republican who had worked in the Eisenhower administration—and both concurred that this move, properly handled, was unlikely to occasion any political controversy.⁶⁸ However, Kennedy decided against even this minor step, the president likely guided by the counsel of Special Assistant Frederick Dutton on the matter, who argued that not only would this be a poor “first step” toward a new China policy, but that the change would raise “unnecessary possibilities of domestic political attack for the new Administration.”⁶⁹ The bunkering question and the substantive consequences of Kennedy’s decision were of marginal importance, yet the episode suggests that upon entering office Kennedy’s political caution on China related matters was so pronounced that, regardless of Rusk’s own views, immediate movement on China policy was simply not on the cards.

Although Rusk never demonstrated any sustained interest in improving Sino-American relations, he was evidently prepared to quietly explore possible points of expanded contact with Beijing. For instance, Rusk claimed that during the Geneva conference on Laos in May 1961 he acted on his own initiative in making some “discreet inquiries as to whether [PRC foreign minister Chen Yi] would wish to sit down in a private meeting with me just to talk

⁶⁷ Cohen makes a similar point. Cohen, *Dean Rusk*, 172.

⁶⁸ Telcon, Rusk and Dillon, February 1, 1961, RG59, Rusk, Phone Calls, box 44, NA.

⁶⁹ Editorial note, *FRUS, 1961-1963* 22:2-4.

about various things, but he showed no willingness to do so, so that didn't come to anything." It was the first and only time, Rusk recalled, that he ever attempted to seek out contact with the Chinese without first obtaining clearance from the White House.⁷⁰

Yet this episode (for which Rusk is the only source) stands out as something of an aberration. For the most part, Rusk's willingness to consider increased Sino-American contacts, or broader shifts from the existing strategy of isolating Beijing, was outweighed by his concern that such steps would "empower" the militant Chinese.⁷¹ This concern evidently determined his decision to refuse a request from W. Averell Harriman, the head of the U.S. delegation in Geneva, for clearance to arrange a discreet meeting with Chen to discuss the Laotian issue with him. It was "unlikely that such a meeting could be kept secret," Rusk wrote to Harriman, "since the Chinese Communists might consider it advantageous as a means of increasing their prestige and making us appear weak and anxious, to leak the fact the you had taken the initiative to approach them."⁷² Similarly, when Harriman suggested that the Chinese be brought into more intimate discussions with the "Big Four" at the conference—the United States, Britain, the Soviet Union, and France—the State Department dismissed the idea on the grounds it would confer upon the Chinese equal status with the other powers.⁷³

Rusk was, however, willing to explore improved Sino-American contacts on a low-key basis, or when Beijing took the initiative, thus minimising any possibility that U.S. flexibility would be misinterpreted by the Chinese as a sign of weakness or uncertainty. Developments in the Warsaw talks during the summer bear out this assessment of Rusk's views on expanded

⁷⁰ Rusk, OHI, May 1985, "UUU," DROH, RBRL; Rusk, *As I Saw It*, 287.

⁷¹ The term is borrowed from Foot, "Empowering the Chinese."

⁷² Deptel to Consulate General in Geneva, June 23, 1961, *FRUS, 1961-1963* 22:80-81. Rusk indicated he would, however, have no objection to Deputy Assistant Secretary of State John Steeves making a "casual and informal approach" to Ambassador Wang Bingnan, the Chinese representative in the Warsaw talks who was also part of the Chinese delegation in Geneva. Steeves subsequently spoke to Wang at a reception, and introduced Harriman to Wang and Chen. Telegram, Harriman (Geneva), 26 June, 1961, cited in *ibid.*, 81n3. Harriman subsequently received clearance from Kennedy to meet with whomever he saw fit, but by this stage Chen had already left the conference. Chester Cooper, OHI, May 6, 1966, 18, JFKL; Schlesinger, *Thousand Days*, 475.

⁷³ Rudy Abramson, *Spanning the Century: The Life of W. Averell Harriman, 1891-1986* (New York: William Morrow & Company, 1992), 585.

bilateral contacts. Ambassador Wang, through his contacts with Harriman at Geneva⁷⁴ and Ambassador Jacob D. Beam in Warsaw, began making friendly overtures toward the Americans, alluding to the possibility of a normalisation of relations.⁷⁵ Most U.S. analysts doubted Wang's "gambit" constituted anything more than a tactical play aimed at either improving Beijing's international image, exacerbating U.S.-GRC tensions, or making its harsh terms on Laos more palatable. Yet the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research was unwilling to rule out the possibility that Beijing was testing the waters on actually improving Sino-American relations, either in deference to Soviet admonishments that its belligerency toward the United States was counterproductive, or in an attempt to alleviate its economic and diplomatic difficulties.⁷⁶ In order to cut through the confusion, Rusk instructed Ambassador Beam to press the Chinese representative on steps that might be taken to improve bilateral relations.⁷⁷

On August 15 Beam and Wang meet for an informal discussion—following the formal portion of their discussion—and the Chinese representative, although not conceding anything on points of substance, apparently "felt himself obliged to pay tribute to [the] idea of efforts toward [improved relations]."⁷⁸ However, at an impromptu meeting on September 2 Wang "read from prepared governmental statement which completely reversed [the] more conciliatory attitude" he had previously displayed. A "slightly embarrassed" Wang proceeded with a lengthy by-numbers condemnation of U.S. imperialism.⁷⁹ Wang's boorish tirade, clearly made at Beijing's direction, brought to a dispiriting end the brief vacation from the

⁷⁴ See supra note 72.

⁷⁵ Embtel-1518, Warsaw, April 19, 1961, RG59, CF:1960-63, microfilm, 611.93/4-1961, NA; Harriman (Geneva), supra note 72; Deptel-1519 to Warsaw, June 23, 1961, NSF:CO, box 153a, "Poland, Subjects, Ambassadorial Talks with Ambassador Wang," JFKL; Embtel, Warsaw, June 30, 1961, *FRUS, 1961-1963* 22:87-89.

⁷⁶ Clough to McConaughy, August 8, 1961, RG59, CF:1960-63, microfilm, 611.93/8-8661, NA; Congentel-32, Hong Kong, July 19, 1961, *ibid.*, 611.93/7-1961; CIA (OCI), "The Signs of Chinese Communist Friendliness," June 17, 1961, NSF:CO, box 22, "China, General," JFKL; INR, "Wang Ping-nan's Approach to Ambassador Beam," July 7, 1961, *ibid.*

⁷⁷ Martin to McConaughy, July 7, 1961, RG59, CF:1960-63, microfilm, 611.93/7-761, NA; Deptel to Warsaw, August 13, 1961, *FRUS, 1961-1963* 22:118-20.

⁷⁸ Embtel, Warsaw, August 16, 1961, *FRUS, 1961-1963* 22:125-26.

⁷⁹ Embtel, Warsaw, September 2, 1961, *ibid.*, 130-33. Also see Jacob D. Beam, *Multiple Exposure: An American Ambassador's Unique Perspective on East-West Issues* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1978), 140-43.

stilted exchanges typical of the talks at Warsaw, and with it the State Department's abortive investigation of the possibilities for an improved the Sino-American dialogue.

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Despite having hinted at a basic sympathy with the liberal critique of U.S. China policy, any ideas Kennedy may have had of laying the groundwork for improved Sino-American relations were put on indefinite hold in the wake of his narrow electoral victory. And with his pronounced political concerns and preoccupation with an increasingly unstable international environment, Kennedy was unperturbed by Beijing's evident disinterest in any improvement in relations. Beyond his constitutionalist deferral to the president, Rusk was essentially at ease with Kennedy's deferral of any re-examination of U.S. China policy, wary of a shift in U.S. policy or posture toward China in the face of Beijing's militancy.

Yet if Kennedy and Rusk alike were unwilling to take up the mantle of policy change in 1961, other quarters in the administration were equally unwilling to abandon hopes of a fundamental redefinition of U.S. policy, starting with the U.S.-GRC relationship. In fact, the vast majority of China policy questions which preoccupied U.S. policy makers in 1961 and which produced disagreements within the administration were not considered purely as bilateral issues between the United States and the PRC, but rather either touched upon, or indeed turned entirely on, how the U.S.-GRC relationship was defined, and, in turn, how it functioned.

3

“AN EXTRAORDINARY BURDEN”: THE U.S.-GRC RELATIONSHIP AND U.S. CHINA POLICY, 1961

Reflecting the centrality of the U.S.-GRC relationship to U.S. China policy in its broader conception, the China policy discourse over the first year of the Kennedy administration turned in large part on the nature and purpose of U.S. relations with Chiang Kai-shek’s “island China.” Professed adherence to the fiction that the GRC was the sole legitimate government of China circumscribed the extent to which Washington could pursue improved relations with the People’s Republic, at least inasmuch as such actions might contradict Taipei’s claim to sovereignty over mainland China, or suggest that the United States viewed Communist rule in China as something more than a transient phenomenon. Not surprisingly then, U.S. officials recognised that any transformation of U.S. China policy would be largely contingent on a redefinition of the U.S.-GRC relationship.

In 1961 even those officials averse to major policy changes conceded the need to adjust U.S. policy toward the GRC, if only to head off the diplomatic and political losses that would accrue if action was not taken to check the incremental deterioration of the GRC’s international position, and with it the normative legitimacy of U.S. policy toward China generally. Yet Taipei proved unwilling to compromise its claim to the mainland, and, fearful of a move by the Kennedy administration toward a “two Chinas” policy, worked to frustrate Washington’s attempts to introduce a new level of tactical flexibility into U.S. policy. Taipei’s ability to do so derived in large measure from concern within the U.S. foreign policy bureaucracy—particularly pronounced in the State Department’s Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs (FE) and the U.S. Embassy in Taipei—that moves toward a “two Chinas” policy would damage relations with the GRC, destabilise Chiang’s regime, or even impel a

despondent Chiang to undertake unilateral military action against the mainland. At the same time, Kennedy proved unwilling to assume the political costs of reviewing the fundamentals of U.S.-GRC relations. To the disappointment of officials in the new administration hoping for a redefinition of U.S. strategy toward China, in 1961 the administration leadership declined to confront the contradictions in the U.S.-GRC relationship, opting instead to temporise and thereby avoid rousing the wrath of Chiang and his supporters in the United States.

The “Gap between Theory and Reality” in the U.S.-GRC Relationship

The ambiguity of U.S. “support” for the GRC reflected inherent contradictions between Washington’s rhetoric on China and the actual thinking underlying U.S. policy, or what one official called the differences between “declaratory and actual policies.”¹ Principally, the public position that the GRC remained the sole legitimate representative of the Chinese people, and the accompanying pretense that Communist rule in China was, in Dulles’s famous turn of phrase, a “passing and not perpetual phase,” was by 1961 broadly regarded as false. Rather, the United States had become, as Rusk put it, “unavoidably locked” into this rhetorical framework by a confluence of historical circumstance and policy considerations.²

Foremost among these considerations was a determination not to allow what John W. Garver calls the “fundamental divergence of objectives” between Washington and Taipei to consume the integrity and utility of the alliance. At the crux of this divergence was Chiang’s messianic vision of a Nationalist-led “liberation” of China, which stood at the very heart of the GRC’s post-1949 *raison d’être*. Thus, for Taipei the “two Chinas” concept was anathema. Indeed, Chiang’s principle consideration in the alliance with the United States was preserving and developing his “base” on Taiwan while Nationalist forces readied for mainland recovery.

¹ Thomas Hughes, off-the-record address to the Air Force Intelligence Reserve, December 15, 1965, JTP:FE, box 16, “Communist China, General,” JFKL.

² Rusk, *As I Saw It*, 284.

Even allowing that many officials in Taipei recognised that the “return to the mainland” concept was based on specious reasoning, with Chiang’s dominance within the GRC unchallenged no leeway was given for the expression of such misgivings.³

In contrast the United States sought not to reinstall Chiang on the mainland, but rather to deny the PRC control of Taiwan. In conventional strategic terms, Taiwan was regarded as an integral link in the U.S. defensive perimeter in the Pacific, and Chiang’s forces as an important military reserve in Asia.⁴ Politically, Taiwan’s effective independence from Communist control offered evidence writ-large of the U.S. will and ability to resist Communist expansion in the region, and, as time progressed, the economic development of the island provided, by example, a means to counter the appeal of the Maoist socio-economic model in the developing world.⁵ Clearly, the best way to both maximise the positive qualities of the Taiwan asset, while protecting the island from Beijing’s designs and the GRC from international isolation, was for the Nationalist authorities to redirect their energies from mainland recovery toward a focus on the island’s economic and political development. In short, the GRC needed to back away from its pretence of being the government of China, and start behaving more like the government of Taiwan.

Admittedly, both the Truman and Eisenhower administration had, at various points, perceived a certain utility in limited offensive operations against the mainland as part of the broader policy of containing Beijing through the application of pressure. Yet such thinking had been tempered by the two crises in the 1950s over the offshore islands. And whereas a minority of officials in the Eisenhower administration supported the idea of a Nationalist “liberation” of the mainland, the key decision-makers in the administration consistently sought to forestall the outbreak of major hostilities that might jeopardize Taiwan’s *de facto* independence from

³ John W. Garver, *The Sino-American Alliance: Nationalist China and American Strategy in Asia* (New York: M.E Sharpe, 1999), 74; S/P Study, June 15, 1961, cited in *FRUS, 1961-1963* 22:72n1; Parsons to Bowles, March 31, 1961, RG59, CF:1960-63, microfilm, 611.93/3-3161, NA.

⁴ Airgram-759, Taipei, March 26, 1963, NSF:CO, box 26, “China, Cables,” JFKL.

⁵ Tucker, *Uncertain Friendships*, 6.

the PRC, and embroil the United States in no-win hostilities.⁶

U.S. officials had recognised since the inception of the alliance that the divergence of interest over mainland recovery, of which both parties were more than aware, contained the potential for serious discord between Washington and Taipei.⁷ The U.S.-GRC communiqué issued following the 1958 offshore islands crisis went some distance in addressing this divergence, inasmuch as it secured GRC agreement that the principal means of any “return to the mainland” would be political, not military. Yet the United States had proven reluctant to directly confront what Rusk would later term the “gap between theory and reality” in the GRC’s status and orientation.⁸ Beyond the domestic political difficulties that would accompany any shift toward a “two Chinas” policy, concerns that such moves might damage U.S.-GRC relations, along with the GRC’s morale, stability, and, ultimately, its ability to resist Communist subversion, acted as a brake on steps in this direction.⁹

In view of GRC sensitivities, U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of China Everett Drumright warned that if the United States moved toward a “two Chinas” policy then the GRC could be expected to “go it alone.”¹⁰ Fears extended to the GRC acting unilaterally against the mainland, or perhaps deliberately instigating hostilities with the PRC in the desperate hope that this would elicit U.S. support for the cause once the battle was already joined. Overwhelmingly, U.S. officials believed that a unilateral attack by the GRC would end in disaster. Taipei’s independent offensive capability was not great enough to allow it to successfully undertake major unilateral military action against the mainland, and it appeared unlikely the mainland population would rally to the cause of the discredited Nationalists. A defeated and demoralised GRC would be exposed to a counteroffensive from the mainland or,

⁶ EA paper, “US Policy toward the Republic of China: A New Perspective,” March 27, 1968, NSF:CO, box 242, “China Memos, Vol. XII,” Lyndon B. Johnson Library, Austin, Texas (hereafter LBJL).

⁷ Garver, *Sino-American Alliance*, 53, 77.

⁸ Rusk address to the CFR, March 19, 1979, DRPP, V:A., box 5, RBRL.

⁹ NIE 43-61, June 20, 1961, *FRUS, 1961-1963* 22:75-76; Steeves to Rusk, April 17, 1961, RG59, CF:1960-63, box 473, 303/4-1761, NA.

¹⁰ Embtel-639, Taipei, April 21, 1961, RG59, CF:1960-63, microfilm, 611.93/4-2161, NA.

at the very least, left vulnerable to Communist subversion. In short, a unilateral attack by the GRC would confront Washington with an unwelcome Hobson's choice: either abandon the GRC, Taiwan, and the island's population to the mercies of the People's Liberation Army; or, alternatively, be drawn into Chinese fighting, wherein if any progress was made the Sino-Soviet treaty might be activated and Beijing pushed back into Moscow's hitherto weakening embrace, all the while raising the spectre of a nuclear confrontation between the two superpowers.¹¹

The credibility of GRC threats to "go it alone" rather than abandon the "return to the mainland" concept was a point of contention in the administration.¹² However, more cautious members of the administration could point to several indications in 1961 that unilateral action was a genuine possibility. With Chiang's appetite for a counterattack aroused by deteriorating conditions on the mainland, the CIA station chief in Taipei, Ray Cline, reported that the GRC's deep mistrust of the direction of U.S. policy under the new administration had inspired planning for "dangerous adventures of its own, up to and including a suicidal landing on the mainland."¹³ Although concerns about what Kennedy called "Chiang's Götterdämmerung mood" would not become as pressing as in 1962, Chiang had already started building the crescendo on the risk-it-all counterattack theme in 1961.¹⁴ One CIA memo in July noted that in contrast to Chiang's ritualistic, supposedly morale-boosting promises of a "return to the mainland" since 1949, planning and preparations in 1961 (much of which took place outside the aegis of the U.S. Military Assistance Program in order to obscure it from U.S. scrutiny) had "taken on a new degree of urgency and credibility." In part the GRC seemed to be aiming to head off a U.S. shift toward a "two Chinas" policy. Yet Taipei also seemed to be infected with a "creeping desperation," deriving from a sense that if the GRC did not, as Chiang's son

¹¹ Telegram, Commander in Chief, Pacific (Felt) to JCS, July 10, 1961, *FRUS, 1961-1963* 22:92-93; State Guidelines Paper for Policy and Operations in the Far East, May 1962, JTP:FE, box 13, "General, Guidelines Paper: 'The Far East,'" JFKL.

¹² *FRUS, 1961-1963* 22:33n1.

¹³ Noted in Bundy to Kennedy, July 7, 1961, *FRUS, 1961-1963* 22:89-91.

¹⁴ Kennedy cited in Schlesinger, *Thousand Days*, 444; Embtel-594, Taipei, March 30, 1961, RG59, CF:1960-63, box 2146, 793.00/3-3061, NA. The "counterattack" issue in 1962 is explored further in chapter five.

Chiang Ching-kuo put it, seize the initiative or “in a year of two” it would be finished.¹⁵

U.S.-GRC Relations and American Diplomacy

Against the risks of change U.S. officials needed to weigh the costs of continued adherence to existing “declaratory policies,” not least the incremental deterioration of international support for Chiang’s regime. Rusk touched on this in a candid conversation with ROC Ambassador George Yeh in April 1961, noting that the GRC was “wholly isolated” in the international community on two points: one, that the GRC was in any sense the de facto government of all China, and two, that support for the GRC entailed support for the continuation of the Chinese civil war or a Nationalist “return to the mainland.”¹⁶ Indeed, most governments which officially recognised Chiang’s government chafed at the patent artificiality of the GRC’s claims to the mainland. Compounding matters, most of the non-aligned states emerging from the decolonisation process were reluctant to recognise an exiled regime clinging stubbornly to a myth, particularly if this precluded the possibility of diplomatic relations with Beijing. As NSC staffer Robert Komer argued in July 1961, rigid adherence to past positions would be costly in light of world trends, undermining the GRC’s international position, and in turn the measure of legitimacy given to Taiwan’s political detachment from the mainland.¹⁷ And for the United States, as the sole guarantor of the Nationalist’s survival on Taiwan, any loss in the GRC’s international position would in turn translate into a loss in the United States’ own prestige and position.

Moreover, operating within a rhetorical framework so far removed from situational realities imposed upon U.S. diplomacy what Rusk would later call an “extraordinary burden.”¹⁸ Touching on an important aspect of this burden, in September Bowles wrote to Rusk

¹⁵ CIA (ONE), “Prospects for Early Chinese Nationalist Military Action Against the Mainland,” July 27, 1961, NSF:CO, box 22, “China, General,” JFKL.

¹⁶ Deptel to Taipei, April 5, 1961, *FRUS, 1961-1963* 22:47.

¹⁷ Komer to Rostow and Bundy, July 20, 1961, NSF:CO, box 22, “China, General,” JFKL; Komer to Bundy, October 19, 1961, *ibid.*

¹⁸ Rusk, remarks to Georgia Association of Historians, March 3, 1979, DRPP, V:A, box 2, RBRL.

expressing his concern about the diplomatic costs of a strict adherence in official U.S. rhetoric on China to the “narrow terms acceptable to the Chinese Nationalists.” He suggested that the United States might maximise support for its policy by stressing Beijing’s intention of “swallowing up the eleven million people of Taiwan against their will,” thereby placing the problem within a rhetorical framework of national (viz. Taiwanese) self-determination, even if doing so “by-passes and implicitly challenges” the GRC’s claim to being the sole legitimate government of all China.¹⁹

Despite his in-principle agreement with Bowles, Rusk was apparently more taken with the point made by the third-ranking officer in the department, U. Alexis Johnson, that in making the adjustments Bowles had proposed the administration might “have some difficulty in finding a context which does not implicitly advance a two-China formula.”²⁰ While a State Department circular telegram (approved by U.A. Johnson) was sent out instructing missions to emphasise, as appropriate, the PRC’s openly announced intention of extending its control over Taiwan by force, Rusk and the advisers he placed his faith in tended to err on the side of caution in confronting the contradictions in the U.S.-GRC relationship, wary of directly challenging the GRC’s claims to the mainland.²¹

Washington’s Overtures to Ulan Bator, Taipei’s Protests to Washington

Despite his reluctance to challenge the GRC’s claim to the mainland, Rusk had been receptive to movement on another initiative bearing on the U.S.-GRC relationship, namely the push—championed by Bowles, and backed by the Bureau of European Affairs—to establish diplomatic relations with the Mongolian People’s Republic (MPR).²² Supporters pointed to numerous benefits of a U.S. mission in Ulan Bator: it would provide a listening post on Sino-Soviet differences; create a new intelligence capability in contiguous Chinese and Soviet

¹⁹ Bowles to Rusk, September 7, 1961, RG59, CF:1960-63, box 476, 303/9-761, NA.

²⁰ Rusk to Bowles, September 16, 1961, RG59, Rusk Records, Chronological File, 1961, NA.

²¹ Circular Deptel-480 to various missions, September 14, 1961, NSF:CO, box 25, “China, Cables,” JFKL.

²² Thomson, “U.S. China Policy,” 224; *FRUS, 1961-1963* 22:417n2.

areas; augment opportunities for the infiltration of Western influence in the area; and, since it would be the first time the United States had established relations with an Asian Communist nation, demonstrate to European allies and Asian neutrals alike that U.S. policy in the region was based on reason, and that the administration was therefore willing to pursue normal relations with “well-behaved” Asian Communist states. Moreover, it was estimated that the initiative might signal to Moscow U.S. support for its less militant stance in the deepening Sino-Soviet rift, since Beijing, it was supposed, resented the Kremlin’s influence in Ulan Bator, not least because it still harboured some thoughts of annexing Outer Mongolia.²³

Yet the proposal was certain to infuriate the GRC, which maintained a tenuous (though not formally declared) claim to Outer Mongolia. When it was in control of the mainland the GRC had, under Soviet pressure, in fact recognised the independence of the MPR, pursuant to a 1945 exchange of notes with the Kremlin accompanying the Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship and Alliance, wherein the GRC promised to recognise the MPR as a sovereign state if a plebiscite indicated a Mongolian desire for independence. (Mongolians voted in favour of independence the following year). However, Taipei subsequently argued that their denunciation of the treaty and “other related documents” in 1953 invalidated this agreement.²⁴

More than an expression of Nationalist irredentism, Taipei’s opposition to Washington’s initiative extended from a fear that it portended a broader shift in U.S. policy, up to and including a diplomatic recognition of the PRC. Moreover, since the move would challenge the GRC’s prerogative to adjudge Outer Mongolia’s status, Taipei worried that it would play into the hands of advocates of a “two Chinas” policy. As such, Taipei protested vociferously upon learning of this “very unfriendly act,” prompting the U.S. Embassy in Taipei and the Bureau

²³ Thomson, “U.S. China Policy,” 224; Kohler to Bowles, March 19, 1961, RG59, Subject Files for the Office of Asian Communist Affairs, Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs, 1961-1973 (hereafter ACA), lot 74D427, box 7, “Mongolia 1961,” NA. On Sino-Soviet tensions over Outer Mongolia, see Odd Arne Westad, “Introduction,” in *Brothers in Arms: The Rise and Fall of the Sino-Soviet Alliance, 1945-1963*, ed. Westad (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1998), 11; and Sergey Radchenko, “The Soviet’s Best Friend in Asia: The Mongolian Dimension of the Sino-Soviet Split,” Paper no. 42, Cold War International History Project (hereafter CWIHP), *Working Paper Series* (November 2003).

²⁴ John Czyzac to Martin, April 28, 1961, RG59, ACA, lot 74D427, box 7, “Mongolia 1961,” NA.

of Far Eastern Affairs in Washington to warn that the mistrust generated by the recognition of the MPR could undermine the integrity of “our entire relationship with the GRC.”²⁵

Although noting FE’s misgivings, Rusk (pushed by Bowles) recommended to Kennedy on May 23 that the U.S. Embassy in Moscow sound out Outer Mongolian representatives on the possibility of an exchange of missions. Kennedy agreed, and the Mongolians responded favourably to preliminary U.S. approaches.²⁶

Yet politics and pure bad luck conspired to sink the initiative. Following consultations with key congressional individuals and committees, Rusk advised the president that the administration could “proceed without fear of significant congressional difficulties.”²⁷ Rusk was overconfident. The China Lobby mobilised, and congressional antagonists began attacking the move, threatening the passage of the administration’s foreign aid legislation and earning front page coverage for their efforts. They were aided in this endeavour by the incidental presence in Ulan Bator at the time of a prominent target of the “loss of China” attacks of the early 1950s, Professor Owen Lattimore, giving the U.S. initiative a somewhat conspiratorial flavour.²⁸ Although it is doubtful Kennedy was ever nonchalant about the China Lobby, diplomat Ralph Clough was not entirely without cause in recalling that the “experience of Mongolia had a chastening effect on the Kennedy administration, because [until then] they hadn’t realised the strength of the Nationalist views and how it would affect the China Lobby.”²⁹

Another major factor figuring in the failure of the MPR initiative, no less important than

²⁵ Parsons to Bowles, March 27, 1961, *ibid.*; Embtel-633, Taipei, April 19, 1961, RG59, CF:1960-63, box 473, 303/4-1961, NA; Chiang to Johnson, June 9, 1961, NSF:CO, box 26, “China, Subjects, Chiang Kai-shek Correspondence,” JFKL; *FRUS, 1961-1963* 22:77n3.

²⁶ Steeves to Martin, March 22, 1961, RG59, ACA, lot 74D427, box 7, “Mongolia 1961,” NA; Rusk to Kennedy, May 23, 1961, *FRUS, 1961-1963* 22:417-19; Deptel to Moscow, May 29, 1961, *ibid.*, 419-20. Also see Kochavi, *Conflict Perpetuated*, 58-60.

²⁷ Yager to Harriman, January 30, 1963, RG59, ACA, lot 74D427, box 7, “Mongolian People’s Republic, 1963,” NA; Rusk to Kennedy (in previous note).

²⁸ Thomson, “U.S. China Policy,” 224; Kochavi, *Conflict Perpetuated*, 61; editorial note, *FRUS, 1961-1963* 22:421; Robert P. Newman, *Owen Lattimore and the “Loss” of China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 504-8.

²⁹ Ralph Clough, OHI, August 9, 1990, 93, ADST.

domestic political concerns, was the need to secure GRC cooperation in a change of tactics on the question of Chinese UN representation. As both Drumright and the Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs warned on numerous occasions, GRC cooperation on the matter might be seriously compromised, and even “rendered impossible,” by U.S. moves to recognise the MPR.³⁰ As such, in mid-July, Kennedy informed Chiang that the United States was prepared to set the initiative aside in the interest of cooperation on the UN issue, and at the end of the month Kennedy decided to indefinitely defer the recognition of the MPR.³¹ The issue was revisited on numerous occasions through the Kennedy and Johnson years, only to be wrecked each time on the shoals of Nationalist objections (and, later in the decade, Mongolian opposition to an exchange of missions). Remarkably, the United States would not establish diplomatic relations with the MPR until January 1987, only five years prior to collapse of the Communist system in Mongolia.³²

Chinese Representation in the United Nations, 1961

Nowhere was the need for policy adjustment more pressing in 1961 than in the United Nations, where one of the central pillars of U.S. China policy in the 1950s and 1960s, namely non-membership for the PRC, appeared at risk of collapse. From the first it was clear to all in the administration, including “Taiwan-firsters” at FE, that the parliamentary mechanism employed since 1951 to postpone consideration of the issue in the General Assembly, known as the “moratorium” formula, had become untenable.³³ In part this was a consequence of the marked shift in the parliamentary composition of the General Assembly as new states, the majority having recently graduated from colonial status, joined the world body. Washington had limited political capital with these nations and most were unmoved by legalistic or moral

³⁰ Embtel-5, Taipei, July 2, 1961, NSF:CO, box 25, “China, Cables,” JFKL; Parsons to Bowles, supra note 25.

³¹ Kennedy to Chiang, July 14, 1961, *FRUS, 1961-1963* 22:96; memcon, July 28, 1961, *ibid.*, 99-101. Shortly thereafter, the State Department announced the indefinite suspension of the initiative. Editorial note, supra note 28.

³² The U.S. had, however, been willing to recognise the MPR since at least 1973. Kenneth Jarrett, “Mongolia in 1987: Out from the Cold?” *Asian Survey* 28 (January 1988): 79.

³³ Parsons to Rusk (with attached papers), December 28, 1960, HP:KJA, Subject File, box 443, “China Folder 7,” LCMD; Rusk to Kennedy, July 9, 1961, NSF:CO, box 22, “China, General,” JFKL.

arguments against PRC admission, and “inclined to look askance at issues having to do with the West’s confrontation with the Communists.”³⁴ Moreover, largely because this transparent blocking device was originally only meant to be provisional, some nations which had once backed the moratorium had since withdrawn their support, and others still informed Washington that they would now follow suit. If the moratorium failed and the issue was decided on the simple basis of credentials—that is, which government was entitled to represent China—then the United States would likely find itself in a losing position.³⁵

From the new administration’s perspective, an adverse result in the United Nations would prove costly at home and abroad. As INR’s public polling and survey of congressmen suggested, a loss on Chinese representation would produce “a wave of revulsion against both the UN and the Administration” within the United States, points highlighted by Kennedy in conversations with administration insiders and foreign leaders.³⁶ Moreover, U.S. officials believed that the heavy engagement of U.S. prestige in the issue meant an adverse outcome would damage Washington’s standing relative to Beijing, and impair the U.S. ability to marshal international support in the United Nations on a wide range of Cold War issues.³⁷ Of more immediate concern, if the Republic of China were expelled from the UN this would likely exacerbate Taipei’s anxiety about the erosion of international support for its claim to the mainland, compounding already considerable internal pressures for “some sort of counterattack on the mainland.”³⁸

Rusk was quick to establish that while a new tactical approach was required, the administration did not seek PRC admission to the United Nations as a policy objective. The

³⁴ INR, “The China Question,” July 28, 1961, RG59, CF:1960-63, box 475, 303/7-2861, NA.

³⁵ State background paper, “The Chinese Representation Question in the United Nations,” March 30, 1961, JTP:FE, box 14, “Communist China, General,” JFKL. Also see Foot, *Practice of Power*, 32-37.

³⁶ Hilsman to Rusk, July 28, 1961, NSF:CO, box 22, “China, General,” JFKL; memcon, Kennedy and PM Menzies (Australia), February 24, 1961, *FRUS, 1961-1963* 22:14-15; memcon, Kennedy and PM Macmillan (UK), April 5, 1961, *ibid.*, 42-43.

³⁷ Telegram-588, USUN, August 31, 1961, NSF:CO, box 25, “China, Cables,” JFKL; memcon, Kennedy and VP Ch’en Ch’eng (ROC), July 31, 1961, *FRUS, 1961-1963* 22:102-3.

³⁸ FSD-54, Taipei, August 7, 1961, RG59, CF:1960-63, box 2147, 793.00/8-761, NA.

United Nations was not, to Rusk's mind, a "reform school" for wayward states. On the contrary, Beijing's continued absence from the United Nations was made an explicit objective in the policy guidance for the creation of new tactics. Some individuals in the administration—including James Thomson, Ambassador to India John K. Galbraith, NSC staffer Robert Komer, and by some reports, Adlai Stevenson and Ambassador-at-Large Averell Harriman—placed greater emphasis on the United States leaving open the door to eventual membership for both "Chinas."³⁹ Yet given the difficulties of effecting such a policy *volte face*, particularly in the face of opposition to any "two Chinas" arrangement from both Taipei and Beijing, there was no concerted push by advocates of policy change to realise membership for both "Chinas" in 1961. As such, differences within the administration centred on the extent to which the United States should tailor its approach in 1961 to favour a *future* emergence of a "two Chinas" situation in the United Nations.⁴⁰

For his part, Rusk's focus in 1961 was not on preserving the administration's future flexibility, but rather designing "a position that is acceptable to most of the members of the United Nations, but unacceptable to the Chinese Communists, thereby creating an impasse which would not only result in their continued exclusion from the United Nations, but shift to them the onus for their continued exclusion."⁴¹ Since it appeared there were majorities in the General Assembly both for maintaining ROC membership *and* admitting the PRC, the construction of any majority would likely require an approach that catered to this "two Chinas" sentiment, putting the onus on Beijing to accept or, as was far more likely, reject membership on a "two Chinas" basis.⁴²

Yet any hint of "two Chinas," even if just introduced on the basis of tactical expediency,

³⁹ Memcon, Rusk and Yeh, March 22, 1961, JTP:FE, box 14, "Communist China, General," JFKL; Kochavi, *Conflict Perpetuated*, 62-69 passim. On Stevenson, also see editorial note, *FRUS, 1961-1963* 22:151.

⁴⁰ Rostow to Kennedy, July 31, 1961, NSF:CO, box 22, "China, General," JFKL.

⁴¹ Rusk outlined these objectives in a February meeting with Parsons. Draft memo, Parsons to Rusk, February 16, 1961, HP:KJA, Subject File, box 443, "China Folder 7," LCMD.

⁴² McConaughy to Rusk, May 22, 1961, RG59, CF:1960-63, box 474, 303/5-2261, NA; Rusk to Kennedy, May 26, 1961, *FRUS, 1961-1963* 22:66-69.

would undermine the value of UN membership to the GRC as, in Chiang's words to Kennedy, an expression of "its rightful status and its moral position as the true representative of the Chinese people in the community of nations."⁴³ Faced with membership on a lesser level, the GRC might simply withdraw from the world body, as GRC officials had on occasion threatened to do, damaging U.S. prestige and leaving the field in the United Nations open to Beijing.⁴⁴

The administration pinned its hopes on the possibility that Taipei might be persuaded to remain in the United Nations if "the General Assembly were to adopt some resolution with 'two Chinas' implications which, of the face of it, would be unacceptable to the Chinese Communists and would not require the GRC to make any public declaration in support of the resolution or its implications."⁴⁵ Early attempts to sound the GRC out on a shift in tactics were far from encouraging, yet by May there were some tentative indications that the GRC might passively acquiesce in a "successor states" approach—wherein the General Assembly would adopt a resolution declaring that China at the time of its entry had become two states, and subject to Beijing informing the United Nations of its acceptance of membership on these grounds, both states were entitled to representation. Given Beijing would almost certainly refuse membership on these grounds, the parliamentary status quo would remain unchanged.⁴⁶ Impressed by the advantages of this approach, on May 26 Rusk wrote to Kennedy recommending that the administration throw its support behind a "successor states" resolution.⁴⁷

In trying to secure Taipei's cooperation in a tactical shift the administration ran up against mounting suspicion that it was attempting to entrap the GRC into accepting a "two Chinas"

⁴³ Memcon, Rusk and Yeh (containing portions of letter, Chiang to Kennedy), April 3, 1961, RG59, CF:1960-63, box 474, 303/4-361, NA.

⁴⁴ Embtel-579, Taipei, March 22, 1961, *ibid.*, box 473, 303/3-2261, NA.

⁴⁵ McConaughy to Rusk, *supra* note 42.

⁴⁶ Deptel-620 to Taipei, May 20, 1961, NSF:CO, box 25, "China, Cables," JFKL; Komer to Bundy, May 19, 1961, NSF:KP, box 411, "China (Taiwan), Chinese Representation in the UN," JFKL. Other records relating to attempts to sound Taipei out on tactical shifts filed in: RG59, CF:1960-63, 303, boxes 473 to 475, NA.

⁴⁷ Rusk to Kennedy, *supra* note 42.

policy. Added to tensions over the Outer Mongolian recognition issue and a decision to grant a visa to Japan-based Taiwanese independence activist, Thomas Liao, the GRC leadership became increasingly concerned, as Ambassador Yeh reported, “that extreme liberals in the new Administration were gradually taking over the shaping of policy.”⁴⁸

Further pressure on Chiang to be more flexible was to no avail, the Generalissimo refusing to consider either supporting or acquiescing in a “successor states” tactic, and leaving Ambassador Drumright with the impression that the GRC would withdraw from the United Nations should such a resolution be adopted.⁴⁹ In frustration, Rusk was forced to concede that the United States simply lacked the ability to persuade the GRC to adopt a more flexible position, given the issue touched on the GRC’s claim to China. “The GRC is not a satellite of the US,” as exasperated Rusk told the Japanese foreign minister; “in fact at times we wonder if we are not a satellite of the GRC on this question.”⁵⁰

Some officials, including Ambassador Stevenson and his staff at the U.S. Mission to the United Nations, maintained that the administration needed to hold its ground against Taipei. If the GRC, against U.S. advice, reacted to a General Assembly adoption of a “two Chinas” resolution by withdrawing from the international body, so be it; at least, as Stevenson’s deputy Charles Yost put it, the United States would then “be in a position of having defended its own interests to the best of its ability, having got through another formula which got the monkey off its back temporarily at least and probably having delayed for some period” the PRC’s entrance, since Beijing would likely refuse to accept UN membership while such a resolution stood unmodified.⁵¹

However, Kennedy believed that Taipei’s cooperation was vital in order to successfully

⁴⁸ Memcon, Yeh and McConaughy, June 29, 1961, RG59, CF:1960-63, box 475, 303/6-2961, NA; Steeves to Rusk, supra note 9; Bundy to Kennedy, supra note 13. On the Liao controversy, see documentation in *FRUS, 1961-1963* 22:76-79, 83-84, 96, 109, and 197-98.

⁴⁹ Deptel-715 to Taipei, June 30, 1961, NSF:CO, box 25, “China, Cables,” JFKL; Embtel-5, Taipei, supra note 30.

⁵⁰ Memcon, Rusk and Zenotra Kosaka (Japan), June 21, 1961, RG59, CF:1960-63, box 475, 303/6-2161, NA.

⁵¹ Yost to Woodruff Wallner, June 13, 1961, *ibid.*, 303/6-1361.

surmount the domestic political challenges that would likely arise in implementing a new approach to the UN issue. The administration's purpose in pursuing a "successor states" resolution might have been to maintain the parliamentary status quo in the United Nations (the ROC in, the PRC out), but, as Kennedy realised, any open statement of this purpose would undermine support in the General Assembly for a resolution that the administration needed to sell as a bona fide "two Chinas" solution. Without GRC support, therefore, the administration would likely find itself exposed to politically motivated accusations from domestic opponents that it was working to facilitate the entry of Red China into the UN at the expense of loyal anti-Communist ally.⁵² In short, GRC obstinacy undercut the administration's capacity to coordinate its public message on "successor states," and therefore Kennedy elected not to proceed.⁵³

Faced with this impasse over "successor states," in late July Rusk recommended instead introducing a UN General Assembly resolution declaring Chinese representation an "important question," meaning any substantive change in the status quo on Chinese representation would require a two-thirds majority in the General Assembly. Since the administration believed Taipei could be brought to support this parliamentary device (given the lack of "two Chinas" overtones), Kennedy endorsed the idea.⁵⁴

While the administration presumed that an "important question" resolution would command greater support than the moratorium (inasmuch as it would not block substantive discussion or a vote on the matter), it was by no means certain a simple majority could be secured in 1961 to ensure its passage.⁵⁵ As Kennedy himself noted, the "important question" gambit would be viewed by many as simply another device to block the PRC's entry into the United Nations—which, of course, was precisely what it was. It was hoped this scepticism might be tempered

⁵² Memcon, May 24, 1961, *FRUS, 1961-1963* 22:63-65; editorial note, *ibid.*, 81-82.

⁵³ INR, "China Question," *supra* note 34.

⁵⁴ Memcon, *supra* note 31.

⁵⁵ Rusk to Kennedy, September 5, 1961, NSF, Komer, box 411, "China (Taiwan), Chinese Representation in the UN [1961]," JFKL.

by an adjunct resolution creating a study committee on the matter, which would report its findings at the following General Assembly.⁵⁶ Incidentally, the study committee idea was also key in allaying the dissatisfaction of some U.S. officials (Stevenson in particular) with the decision to push for an “important question” resolution, since a study committee would in all likelihood report back with some variation of a more sustainable “two Chinas” solution.⁵⁷

Yet by August both Kennedy and Rusk were simply concerned with getting through the 1961 session intact. Uninterested in preparing congressional opinion for possible changes in policy beyond 1961, Rusk decided against briefing congressmen on the likely need to move toward a “two Chinas” solution in the near future.⁵⁸ At the same time, Rusk asked the Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, William Fulbright, to kill a congressional resolution calling for Kennedy to push the General Assembly to establish a Commission on Membership charged with exploring “with the Chinese Communist regime and the Republic of China means by which the people of China can be represented in the United Nations.” Rusk told Fulbright that neither Beijing nor Taipei would be prepared to cooperate with such a commission.⁵⁹ No doubt Rusk was also concerned that a congressional debate on the resolution would complicate the administration’s effort to secure Taipei’s cooperation in successfully implementing the “important question” approach.

In fact, although GRC support for the “important question” was never in doubt, Rusk still had cause to be concerned about securing Taipei’s cooperation in the UN. In a highly circuitous manner, majority support for the “important question” approach in the General Assembly now hinged on whether the GRC used its Security Council veto to defeat a UN membership application for the Mongolian People’s Republic (MPR). Taipei had used its veto against MPR admission since 1955, but this time the Soviets had tied the membership application of

⁵⁶ Memcon, supra note 31.

⁵⁷ Telcon, Stevenson and Ball, August 7, 1961, *FRUS, 1961-1963* 22:112n2; Komer to Bundy, supra note 17.

⁵⁸ Noted in Komer to Bundy, September 5, 1961, NSF:CO, box 22, “China, General,” JFKL.

⁵⁹ Brooks Hays to Rusk, August 16, 1961 (with attached correspondence between Fulbright and Rusk), RG59, CF:1960-63, box 476, 303/8-361, NA.

Mauritania to that of the MPR, and the “Brazzaville group” of French African nations, eager to avoid a Soviet veto of Mauritania’s admission, acquiesced in the Soviet linkage of both membership applications. By summer it was clear the French Africans would be infuriated if Mauritania’s application was undermined by a GRC veto of the MPR, and in retaliation could mobilise anywhere between eleven and twenty votes against the United States on Chinese representation. In Rusk’s words, “our goose would be cooked.”⁶⁰

The GRC’s willingness to risk its position in the United Nations over the Outer Mongolian question seemed to Washington irrational, emotionally driven, and above all reckless. It may have been all these things but, as Drumright wrote, it was also an issue in “which [the] GRC feels it can play [the] role of protector of [the] national interests of China in contrast to [the] puppet Communist regime, which is willing to sacrifice this part of China’s territory.” More important still, Chiang was fearful of compromising here lest it facilitate future steps toward a “two Chinas” policy in the United States.⁶¹

In what Komer described as a “test of wills,” numerous U.S. officials, up to and including the president himself, sought to impress upon Chiang the damage his obstinacy would inflict upon the international position of the GRC and, for that matter, on the U.S. standing in the Cold War.⁶² However, Chiang refused to budge, maintaining that abandonment of the GRC position on MPR membership would be such a “fatal blow” to the GRC’s moral position that continued UN membership would not compensate for it.⁶³

Having already seriously compromised on tactics in the United Nations, MPR recognition, and having now promised to hold up Thomas Liao’s visa application, by mid-September the

⁶⁰ Memcon, supra note 31; Battle to Bundy, August 15, 1961, RG59, CF:1960-63, box 476, 303/8-1561, NA.

⁶¹ Embtel-633, Taipei, supra note 25; Telegram-3275, USUN, June 7, 1961, RG59, CF:1960-63, box 474, 303/6-761, NA; Embtel-326, Taipei, October 13, 1961, NSF:CO, box 25, “China, Cables,” JFKL.

⁶² Komer to Kennedy (draft), July 27, 1961, NSF:KP, box 411, “China (Taiwan and Offshore Islands), 1961-1963 (3),” JFKL; Kennedy to Chiang, September 6, 1961, *FRUS, 1961-1963* 22:134-35.

⁶³ Chiang to Kennedy, September 10, 1961, POF:CO, box 113a, “China, General,” JFKL.

administration's patience with Chiang had reached breaking point.⁶⁴ Tensions spilt over after Drumright cabled Washington, reporting Taipei's mounting dissatisfaction with the United States and "determination to go down with the ship rather than compromise over Outer Mongolia and Chirep issues." In response, the usually unflappable Rusk fired off an uncharacteristically angry telegram (aimed at both the GRC and Drumright himself) declaring that if the GRC "elected to commit political suicide" the administration would be forced to publicly distance itself from this decision. He added:

...If GRC officials are tempted to give signal for expressions [of] frustration and anger at [the] US, they would make [a] fundamental error in supposing [that] what [the] GRC thinks of [the] US is [the] sole preoccupation [of] both sides. Someone in Taipei would be well advised to begin to worry about what [the] US thinks about [the] GRC. We have seen very little investment by [the] GRC in US-Chinese relations.

If the GRC could not, Rusk concluded, "break through its own mythology" in order to preserve its international position, "our ability to help them is severely limited."⁶⁵ Rusk used similarly blunt terms a fortnight later in conversations with Ambassador Tsiang Tingfu and Foreign Minister Shen Chang-huan, warning that if the GRC disregarded U.S. interests in the matter then future U.S.-GRC relations might be adversely affected.⁶⁶ When Rusk talked to Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs Walter McConaughy about getting this message across to Taipei, he was told that Chiang would take it as a threat; it was, Rusk replied, meant as just that.⁶⁷

Apparently moved by these "threats," in October Chiang delivered his terms for agreeing not to veto MPR membership. Chiang's key condition was that Kennedy publicly declare his willingness to use all means possible, including a Security Council veto, to block PRC entry into the United Nations. Rusk advised Kennedy that such a statement would appear defeatist, and undermine support for the "important question" resolution. As a compromise, Kennedy decided to make a strictly private assurance to Chiang that if a U.S. veto was what would

⁶⁴ U.A. Johnson to Chayes and McConaughy, July 14, 1961, RG59, CF:1960-63, box 2147, 793.00/7-1461, NA.

⁶⁵ Deptel to Taipei, September 17, 1961, *FRUS, 1961-1963* 22:137-39.

⁶⁶ Secto (Rusk) to State, September 29, 1961, *ibid.*, 140-41.

⁶⁷ Telcon, Rusk and McConaughy, September 28, 1961, cited in *ibid.*, 140n3.

appear effective in preventing PRC entry into the United Nations, then the United States would use it. Chiang agreed, and by October 16 the United States had finally secured a GRC promise not to veto MPR admission.⁶⁸

Several scholars have noted the significance of Kennedy's closely-held veto promise to Chiang, underlined by the fact Chiang had never managed to secure this promise from the Eisenhower administration.⁶⁹ Admittedly, the promise was in some ways empty: there were various situations, such as a straight credentials vote, where the veto would not apply, and even if the United States could properly use its veto in the Security Council then it was likely the GRC could use its own veto power (although there was some confusion as to whether the GRC, as a party to the dispute, could do so).⁷⁰ The promise was also qualified by the condition that the veto would only be used if it would be effective; use of the veto in a situation where it would simply lead to an "angry credentials vote" expelling the GRC in place of the PRC, would not, in Kennedy's estimate, constitute an "effective" use of the veto.⁷¹ Still, in his determination to secure GRC cooperation in 1961 Kennedy had clearly sacrificed U.S. flexibility in any future moves toward a "two Chinas" solution. Stevenson certainly felt the deal—which, to his consternation, he was locked out of—was both "grossly dishonest" and would diminish the chances of any future implementation of a "two Chinas" solution.⁷²

Stevenson's irritation was compounded by the decision in late November, over objections from the U.S. delegation to the United Nations, to drop the study committee element of the "important question" package. Stevenson had already made representations to other delegations to the effect that the United States was serious about a study committee as a

⁶⁸ This paragraph is based on documentation in *FRUS, 1961-1963* 22:142-46, 148-49, 151-60.

⁶⁹ Cohen, *Dean Rusk*, 166-67; Kochavi, *Conflict Perpetuated*, 67.

⁷⁰ Komer to Bundy, October 6, 1961, NSF:CO, box 22a, "China, General," JFKL; memcon, Yeh and McConaughy, October 12, 1961, *ibid.*; Rusk, testimony to SFRC, October 13, 1965, *Executive Sessions of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee* 17 (Washington, DC: GPO, 1976-1983): 1249.

⁷¹ Message, Bundy to Cline, October 18, 1961, NSF:CO, box 22a, "China, General, CIA Cables," JFKL.

⁷² Editorial note, *FRUS, 1961-1963* 22:161

“genuine instrument for finding [a] permanent solution” to the issue, and as such did not rule out the possibility that such a committee would return a “two Chinas” recommendation.⁷³ Yet the idea was jettisoned when it became clear that support for the “important question” resolution would not depend on the creation of a “study committee.” More importantly, the administration folded in the face of protests against the idea from Taipei, which evidently stemmed from Chiang’s belief that “there still lurk somewhere in the US bureaucracy officials who are conniving to bring about a “two Chinas” arrangement.”⁷⁴

On December 15 a resolution declaring any proposal to change the representation of China an “important question” easily passed the General Assembly, with a vote of 64 to 37 (7 abstentions). No study committee was established. The Kennedy administration had staved off defeat in 1961, but in doing so had sacrificed its future freedom of action, and failed to implement a substantive solution to a problem that would continue to vex U.S. officials throughout the 1960s. Instead, the administration had simply introduced a parliamentary device that British Foreign Secretary Lord Home quite fairly labelled “the moratorium in another guise.”⁷⁵ For advocates of a more flexible China policy, it was an unmitigated failure.

The Ongoing Chinese Civil War and the Offshore Islands

The administration’s preoccupation with the UN issue would also weigh against any concerted U.S. effort to address the proxy—and occasionally real—war between the two “Chinas.” The continuing tensions, manifest around the offshore islands, not only isolated the GRC internationally, but also posed a high risk of the United States being pulled into Chinese hostilities, perhaps deliberately by a GRC conniving to secure U.S. involvement in a “return to the mainland” campaign. Moreover, failure to bring the war to a decisive end precluded attempts to formalise—and thereby stabilise—Taiwan’s independence from the mainland.

⁷³ Telegram-588, USUN, supra note 37; Rusk to Stevenson, September 9, 1961, *FRUS, 1961-1963* 22:135-36.

⁷⁴ Cleveland to Rusk, December 9, 1961, RG59, CF:1960-63, box 477, 303/12-961, NA.

⁷⁵ Cited in Kaufman, “Anglo-American Dispute,” 370.

Noting Beijing's *praise* for Taipei's suppression of separatist elements in Taiwan, a report sent to McGeorge Bundy argued that "The GRC's insistence upon its myth provides an important asset to Peiping, and the Communists have come to view the GRC as a sort of caretaker regime to keep Taiwan in mainlander hands until Peiping is able to take over." The same report alluded to the difficulties any change in U.S. policy would engender: "The increasingly anomalous GRC regime on Taiwan, clinging stubbornly to its myth, has become an old man of the sea clinging to Uncle Sam's back. The problem is how to shake off that old man without upsetting the boat in the process."⁷⁶

Wary of damaging GRC morale or impelling it to act unilaterally, the Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs (FE) tended toward a wary course of temporisation, or what Komer derided as "McConaughy-style defeatism."⁷⁷ Responding to a Policy Planning paper recommending some modest preliminary steps toward bringing the Chinese civil war to a close, the bureau balked; not only would Chiang's government refuse to cooperate in such moves, but Beijing would not drop its claim to Taiwan—as such, the bureau argued, there was no compelling reason to ease the pressure on Mao's regime. The bureau, backed by Rusk's trusted adviser U.A. Johnson, concluded that rather than trying to effect a formal end to the civil war, the administration should simply work to ensure that neither side resorted to large scale force.⁷⁸

Outside of the bureau other officials believed the risks of temporisation were too high. Chester Cooper, the CIA liaison to the NSC, wrote to Komer that although the United States would face a "barrage of telegrams from Taipei on what will happen there if we modify our China policy, I think we should recognise the cold, hard, cruel fact that it is the [Nationalists], not ourselves, who lack alternatives." Cooper conceded there were risks involved in policy change, but whereas there might be reasons "we can't do anything...if we become

⁷⁶ Report by unidentified author, forwarded by Komer to Bundy and Rostow, July 25, 1961, NSF:CO, box 22, "China, General," JFKL.

⁷⁷ Covering note on Komer to Kennedy (draft), *supra* note 62.

⁷⁸ U.A. Johnson to Bowles, May 10, 1961, *FRUS, 1961-1963* 22:56-57.

mesmerised on this score, we will do nothing.”⁷⁹ Echoing this thinking, a draft policy memo prepared in the first half of 1961 by the State Department’s Policy Planning Council argued that the administration should be prepared “to review with the GRC the basic questions and purposes for which we will and will not support it.”⁸⁰ The subtext of Policy Planning’s paper was that U.S. relations with the GRC should be governed by an overarching objective of ending cross-Strait hostilities, any by extension moving toward an unequivocal “two Chinas” policy.

In 1961 what discussion there was in the administration about ending China’s civil war and implementing a “two Chinas” policy, centred (predictably enough) on the issue of the offshore islands. As analysts in the administration recognised, the Nationalist presence on the islands provided both Taipei and Beijing with an effective way of inhibiting movement toward a “two Chinas” settlement of cross-Strait hostilities. For its part, Beijing viewed the islands less as targets for conquest, and more as a means of reminding the world that until Taiwan was reunified with the mainland China’s civil war would continue. Indeed, Mao once told Edgar Snow that the every-other-day shelling of the islands was intended to allow Chiang to keep his forces supplied, adding wryly that he would be glad to slow the bombardment to every third day if this would help his old enemy.⁸¹ Meanwhile, for the GRC the islands remained, as one State Department paper explained, an indispensable “symbol of their determination to recover the mainland,” and recognised that a withdrawal would likely encourage a “two Chinas” situation.⁸²

⁷⁹ Cooper to Komer, April 25, 1961, NSF:KP, box 410, “China (CPR), 1961-1963 (3),” JFKL.

⁸⁰ S/P draft, “United States Policy towards China,” undated, JTP:FE, box 14, “Communist China, General, 1/61-6/61,” JFKL.

⁸¹ Komer to Bundy and Rostow, July 24, 1961, NSF:CO, box 22, “China, General,” JFKL; memo, McGhee, “US Policy Towards China,” April 3, 1961, JTP:FE, box 14, “Communist China, General,” JFKL; Rusk’s planning meeting, July 13, 1961, *FRUS, 1961-1963* 22:93-94; memcon, Harriman and Snow, July 16, 1961, HP:KJA, Subject File, box 504, “Snow, Edgar,” LCMD. Also see He Di, “The Evolution of the People’s Republic of China’s Policy toward the Offshore Islands,” in Cohen and Iriye, *Great Powers*, 222-45; and Schaller, *United States and China*, 151.

⁸² Briefing paper for VP Johnson, May 9, 1961, NSF:KP, box 411, “China (Taiwan and Offshore Islands), 1961-1963 (3),” JFKL; paper prepared by Taylor, September 20, 1962, *FRUS, 1961-1963* 22:316; Barnett to Thayer, August 7, 1968, *FRUS, 1964-1968* 30:701.

Seen from Washington, however, the islands were a dangerous flash point in an already unstable corner of the world. U.S. observers feared that a confrontation over the islands could be set off by Chinese on both sides of the Strait at will, provoking hostilities that could, in a worst case scenario, lead to a direct Sino-American conflict.⁸³ Moreover, the GRC could use the islands as a launch pad for a “return to the mainland” campaign, manipulating the situation to pull the United States into the fighting. As Bowles admitted to the Canadian foreign minister, the ambiguity of the United States’ obligations to the GRC, together with the continued Nationalist presence on the offshore islands, gave Chiang the “power to bring the house down.”⁸⁴

The offshore islands problem was, from Washington’s perspective, directly related to the larger problem of how to define U.S. support for the GRC. Thomson pointed to this intersection between the specific and the general in a memo he wrote to Bowles in May 1961: If the administration wanted to support the GRC “as a gadfly to the mainland: a source of continuing harassment, etc.,” it should continue to acquiesce in the heavy Nationalist presence on the islands. However, if (as Thomson hoped) the administration sought to reduce tensions in the Taiwan Strait and improve U.S. relations with the mainland, it should work to effect a Nationalist evacuation.⁸⁵

In a similar connection, the head of Policy Planning George McGhee and his staff emphasised that an evacuation of the offshore islands was the most important step that could be taken toward reducing cross-Strait tensions, and thereby creating “conditions under which Taiwan’s long-term viability might be promoted more effectively.”⁸⁶ In a draft memo to Rusk summarising a Policy Planning paper, titled “A New Basic Approach to the GRC,” McGhee drew out this connection, suggesting:

⁸³ McGhee to Rusk, undated, NSF:KP, box 411, “China (Taiwan and Offshore Islands), 1961-1963 (1),” JFKL; Williams to Komer, April 18, 1961, *ibid.*

⁸⁴ Memcon, Bowles and Ambassador Henney (Canada), March 15, 1961, RG59, Secretary’s Memcons, lot 65D330, box 20, NA.

⁸⁵ Thomson to Bowles, May 4, 1961, JTP:FE, box 14, “Communist China, General,” JFKL.

⁸⁶ S/P study, *supra* note 3.

We see the liquidation of the dangerous confrontation around the offshores as a means whereby the civil war might be turned into a period of a de facto peace, with 100 miles of blue water between the contestants, in which the needed free-world consensus about Taiwan's right to a separate future might grow; and would seek to use evacuation of the offshores as an inducement which might be offered our allies for sharing our commitment to defend Taiwan.⁸⁷

Inversely, the Nationalist presence on the islands provided a "cloak" for PRC aggression, while at once adversely affecting the GRC's international appeal.⁸⁸ McGhee also pointed to the beneficial impact an evacuation might have on the GRC's mindset, suggesting that once the "hope of involving the US in hostilities over the islands had been largely removed, most Nationalist leaders would be more apt to realise that the die was cast for 'two Chinas.'"⁸⁹

The Policy Planning Council recommended a carrot and stick approach to effect a GRC evacuation, offering "inducements of greater US assistance," while at once being "prepared to press on the sensitive nerve which is GRC dependence on us for its continued existence."⁹⁰ However, the Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs doubted Taipei, with its history of intransigence on the matter, could be moved through inducement. Moreover, there was a marked reluctance at the bureau to exercise U.S. leverage over the GRC at a moment when discussions on the UN representation question were so delicately poised. As one bureau official told colleagues in March, the GRC would "probably have to swallow a number of bitter pills in the near future," and the United States should therefore avoid compounding these problems through the application of excessive pressure.⁹¹

In February the then Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs, Graham Parsons, informed Rusk that, in light of the political and military importance Taipei attached to the offshore islands, the bureau did not believe it would be productive for the United States to try to effect a Nationalist evacuation of the islands.⁹² In Parson's view, while there might well be

⁸⁷ It is unclear whether this memo was actually sent. McGhee to Rusk (draft memo), March 10, 1961, *FRUS, 1961-1963* 22:27-28.

⁸⁸ Memo, McGhee, *supra* note 81.

⁸⁹ McGhee to Rusk, *supra* note 83.

⁹⁰ McGhee to Rusk, *supra* note 87.

⁹¹ Louis Mark, memo for the files, March 22, 1961, RG59, CF:1960-63, box 2879, 893.00/3-2261, NA.

⁹² Parsons to Rusk, February 9, 1961, RG59, CF:1960-63, microfilm, 611.93/2-361, NA.

some virtue to adjustments in U.S.-GRC relations, the idea of “whole new basic approach to GRC, beginning with the exertion of strong pressure against it for evacuation of the offshore islands,” was fraught with danger. With the U.S.-GRC relationship already under great strain such pressure risked precipitating “the very GRC decisions we hope to avoid,” such as “an inflexible policy in the United Nations or an abortive attempt to intervene in the mainland.”⁹³

In fact, as Komer noted in April, although a general consensus had developed within the U.S. bureaucracy on the need for an eventual Nationalist evacuation from the islands, debate continued on the question of timing: “[Policy Planning] seems to be plugging for early action, while FE prefers delay.”⁹⁴ For his part Komer felt that even though the United States “must start laying groundwork now” for an evacuation, with the UN issue “already upon us” he was inclined to agree with FE on the priority of securing GRC agreement on UN tactics.⁹⁵ Even Policy Planning conceded that while getting Chiang “to give in on one [issue] might facilitate getting him to go along on the other,” expecting him “simultaneously to make all the readjustments required by both [the UN representation and offshore islands situations] probably would compound our difficulties.”⁹⁶

By summer Policy Planning was reconciled to the fact that no major steps on bringing about a GRC withdrawal would be forthcoming so long as the UN question dominated the U.S.-GRC dialogue. Nonetheless, in June McGhee forwarded to Rusk a Policy Planning memo recommending 1) that the United States work toward “damping down” the civil war; 2) that a GRC evacuation of the offshores be made a “policy objective”; 3) that FE prepare plans to implement the first two objectives, and secure GRC acquiescence in an evacuation; and 4) that Rusk determine at what point following the United Nations General Assembly session this approach should be made. However, because of the “delicacy of the current situation”

⁹³ Parsons to Bowles, *supra* note 3.

⁹⁴ Komer to McGeorge Bundy and Rostow, April 17, 1961, NSF:KP, box 411, “China (Taiwan and the Offshore Islands), 1961-1963 (3),” JFKL.

⁹⁵ Komer to Bundy and Rostow, May 17, 1961, *ibid.*, “China (Taiwan), Chinese Representation in the UN [1961]”; Komer to Kennedy, April 3, 1961, NSF:CO, box 21a, “China, General,” JFKL.

⁹⁶ S/P draft, *supra* note 80.

Rusk only approved the first recommendation, which essentially entailed no shift from the current approach of temporisation.⁹⁷ Another Policy Planning study in August recommending the patient pursuit of a GRC evacuation from the islands “over an extended period of time” was enough to elicit praise from Bowles and his soon-to-be replacement, George W. Ball; it failed, however, to prompt Rusk into action. At any rate, by this stage McGhee had himself decided that any further action would have to await “settlement of the [Chinese representation] issue in the UN.”⁹⁸ Indeed, six months into the administration the State Department, guided by recommendations from the Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs, had ruled out even laying the groundwork for future action on the issue through discussions with GRC representatives, wary of jeopardising GRC cooperation on the UN question.⁹⁹

Nationalist Irregulars in Southeast Asia

In terms of “damping down” cross-Strait hostilities the administration only realised progress in one respect in 1961: forcing Chiang to honour an earlier commitment he had made to Washington to repatriate Nationalist irregular troops—remnants of the civil war proper—operating in the Laos-Burma border region (in the opium producing “Golden Triangle”) adjacent to PRC territory. Although Taipei had, at Washington’s insistence, evacuated the majority of those forces directly under its control in 1953-54, by 1958 it was apparent that several thousand troops were still operating in the region with Taipei’s support and direction. Washington’s concern about the remaining troops turned to alarm when in late 1960 and early 1961 the People’s Republic of China and non-Communist Burma joined forces to clear the area of the irregulars.¹⁰⁰

Not unlike the Nationalist occupation of the offshore islands, the irregulars operating in the

⁹⁷ McGhee to Rusk, June 15, 1961, *FRUS, 1961-1963* 22:72-73.

⁹⁸ On the S/P paper and responses to it, see editorial note, *FRUS, 1961-1963* 22:129.

⁹⁹ Briefing book, July 27, 1961, NSF:CO, box 26, “China, Subjects, Ch’eng Ch’eng Visit,” JFKL.

¹⁰⁰ For a history of U.S.-GRC diplomacy about the irregulars, see Victor S. Kaufman, “Trouble in the Golden Triangle: The United States, Taiwan and the 93rd Nationalist Division,” *China Quarterly*, no. 166 (June 2001): 440-56.

“Golden Triangle” were representative of the broader divergence of objectives in the U.S.-GRC relationship: To Chiang they constituted, as one State Department study explained, “the spearhead of the forces that will achieve his goal of recovering the mainland.” Yet from Washington’s perspective the irregulars were not only ineffective, but also provided the PRC with a pretext for intervention in the region, adversely affected U.S.-Burmese relations, impaired U.S. efforts to foster regional cooperation in meeting the Chinese threat, and all at a time when the situation in Laos was extremely delicate.¹⁰¹

In mid-February, after the Burmese air force downed a Nationalist plane that was attempting to drop supplies to the irregulars, the U.S. Embassy in Taipei, at Kennedy’s direction, demanded that Chiang honour his earlier pledge to repatriate the irregulars. Shaken by the unusually “severe” terms of the message, Chiang quickly assumed an obliging tone, and, in an uncharacteristically humble deference to U.S. interests, committed to the termination of supply drops and the evacuation of all troops “responsive to our influence.”¹⁰² Through March and April the GRC evacuated approximately 4300 irregulars from the region, representing almost all of those directly responsive to Taipei’s control. U.S. analysts estimated that 4000 irregulars, who had developed familial connections in the region or simply wanted to continue their lucrative trade in opium, refused evacuation.¹⁰³

Thus, in 1961 the administration had confronted Taipei on a significant point bearing on the U.S.-GRC divergence of interests, and addressed at least one, albeit small, point of possible tension in the region. Yet even this success would, in time, prove marginal, with Taipei unwilling to completely sever its communications with those forces refusing evacuation. Even though assistance to the irregulars was apparently frozen after 1961, in 1967-1968 it became

¹⁰¹ FE paper, February 20, 1961, NSF:CO, box 21a, “China, General,” JFKL; memcon, February 2, 1961, *FRUS, 1961-1963* 22:6-7; FSD-643, Hong Kong, March 22, 1961, RG59, CF:1960-63, box 2146, 793.00/3-2261, NA.

¹⁰² Kennedy to Rusk, February 17, 1961, NSF:CO, box 21a, “China, General,” JFKL; Deptel to Taipei, February 23, 1961, *FRUS, 1961-1963* 22:12-13; Embtel, Taipei, February 25, 1961, *ibid.*, 16-19.

¹⁰³ INR, “Chinese Nationalist Irregulars in the Thai-Burma-Laos Border Area—A Continuing Problem,” December 22, 1961, NSF:KP, box 411, “China (Taiwan and Offshore Islands), 1961-1963 (3),” JFKL On the remaining forces see Kaufman, “Golden Triangle,” 454.

apparent that Taipei had yet to abandon the idea of using the remaining irregulars to advance its anti-Communist objectives on the Asian mainland, U.S. intelligence reports pointing toward low-level planning apparently underway within the GRC for a resumption of such assistance.¹⁰⁴

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Inasmuch as the repatriation of Nationalist irregulars from the “Golden Triangle” can be marked up as a small victory in Washington’s efforts to move Taipei toward a more realistic appreciation of its prospects for mainland recovery, this stands out as an aberration in 1961. On other points of divergence in the alliance the Kennedy administration either failed to bring Taipei around to its point of view, or decided against trying to do so: Reviewing U.S. tactics on Chinese representation in the UN, the administration had taken the proverbial step forward, shifting from the “moratorium” formula to the relatively more sustainable parliamentary mechanism of an “important question” resolution, but two rather larger steps back, abandoning the “successor states” idea and sacrificing future flexibility on the issue by secretly promising to veto the PRC’s admission to the international body should the need arise. Plans to establish diplomatic relations with Ulan Bator were jettisoned following protests from both Taipei and the China Lobby, despite the manifold advantages the administration believed an exchange of missions would deliver for the United States. Meanwhile, no concerted effort was made to force the GRC to reconsider its strategic priorities; Taipei’s emphasis on a “return to the mainland,” and with it tensions in the Taiwan Strait, only continued to build through 1961.

In short, through 1961 U.S. China policy remained very much tethered to Taipei’s insistence on its claim to the mainland. However, at year’s end several developments seemed to favour

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.; Deptel-1375 to Bangkok, February 19, 1964, NSF:CO, box 237, “China, Cables, Vol. I,” LBJL; Embtel, Taipei, February 17, 1967, *FRUS, 1964-1968* 30:520-21; Embtel, Taipei, May 14, 1968, *ibid.*, 675; INR, “GRC Irregulars in the Thai-Laos-Burma Border Area,” February 10, 1967, HP:KJA, Subject File, box 443, “China (Taiwan),” LCMD.

forward policy movement, or at least the emergence of a more balanced bureaucratic discourse on U.S. China policy. First, personnel changes in the State Department, together with small but nonetheless important innovations in the department's organisational chart, would work to reduce the predominance of "Taiwan-firsters" in interested corners of the foreign policy bureaucracy. Second, a growing number of U.S. officials came to believe that Beijing, chastened by the spectacular failure of the Great Leap Forward, might prove amenable to the possibility of improved Sino-American relations.

4

U.S. RESPONSES TO THE FAILURE OF THE GREAT LEAP FORWARD, 1962

For those U.S. officials endeavouring to redefine U.S. China policy, 1961 had proven a dispiriting year. Preoccupied with more pressing matters, and loath to assume the political burden of reopening the question of China, Kennedy decided against a policy review. He encountered no argument from his secretary of state, who was basically comfortable working within the existing policy framework, except in those instances when U.S.-GRC positions appeared at risk of imminent collapse. And although there were voices of dissent within the administration in 1961, individuals arguing for a more rational, flexible policy and posture toward China were outnumbered, outgunned, and, with relative ease, outmanoeuvred by an entrenched bureaucracy that proved unwilling to challenge the existing parameters of the U.S.-GRC relationship or, indeed, of U.S. China policy in its broader conception.

However, in the closing months of 1961 a series of personnel and structural changes in the State Department promised to restore a measure of balance to the equation, and possibly redress the inertia which had hitherto characterised the bureaucratic discourse on U.S. China policy. At the same time, a growing number of officials within the administration began to question the image of an irrational China recklessly indifferent to the consequences of military confrontation. Still, those officials intent on pursuing policy change had been chastened by their experiences in 1961. As Bowles put it in April 1962, whenever anyone in the administration had so much as hinted at the possibility of policy change the China Lobby had stirred to action, forcing a retreat to “the same old dugouts built by the Eisenhower regime several years back.” In order to move forward it would thus be necessary to refrain

from any use of the phrase, “new China policy,” and instead focus on reaching agreement within the administration “on individual moves which take one thing at a time and which will leave us in a year or two perhaps in a much more advantageous position.”¹

The kind of beneath-the-radar incrementalism envisioned by Bowles entailed, first and foremost, a lowering of barriers to Sino-American interaction—even if Beijing’s unremitting hostility meant Washington would, in the first instance at least, have to do most of the lowering on a unilateral basis.² With the PRC struggling to feed its population in the wake of the abortive Great Leap Forward, from late 1961 through mid-1962 U.S. policymakers debated the merits of lowering one barrier in particular, namely the U.S. embargo on trade with the PRC, specifically as it related to foodstuffs. If Beijing proved amenable to receiving U.S. grain on a trade or aid basis, advocates of policy change argued, the United States would be afforded some leverage over PRC behaviour. Even should Beijing reject U.S. overtures—the more likely outcome—then simply by virtue of having taken the initiative the United States would have cast itself in a more reasonable light in international opinion, while highlighting the fallacy of Beijing’s anti-American dictates. Perhaps most importantly, regardless of Beijing’s response, such indications of U.S. equanimity would play into the hands of moderate forces within the Chinese polity, creating, over the medium to long-term, a situation more conducive to an eventual Sino-American rapprochement. Modest as U.S. proposals on food aid or trade may have been in the broader scheme of U.S. China policy, in a policy environment where the choice for the United States seemed to be one between, as Harriman put it, “immobility and steps which are few and small,” the issue was afforded what would otherwise seem an inordinate degree of importance by advocates of policy change.³

¹ Bowles to Stevenson, April 20, 1962, RG59, CF:1960-63, microfilm, 611.93/4-2062, NA.

² William Cunningham, OHI, March 17, 1997, 164-65; ADST; Paul Kreisberg, OHI, April 8, 1989, 43, ADST.

³ Harriman to Rusk, April 13, 1962, *FRUS, 1961-1963* 22:217.

Rice's "New Look" Policy and the Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs

In late October 1961 a lengthy draft paper on U.S. China policy, prepared in the State Department's Policy Planning Council, was circulated within the administration. The paper was the work of Ed Rice, a veteran Foreign Service officer who had served in China during WWII. Despite his wartime service Rice had survived the subsequent purge of "China Hands," in part because working the "Kuomintang side of the street" in Chungking (Chongqing) he was inadvertently spared the conspiratorial taint of contact with Mao's Communists. Perhaps more importantly, in Chungking he evidently impressed McCarthy's future collaborator, Ambassador Patrick Hurley, enough to earn a letter of commendation which, placed in his file, served to inoculate him from McCarthy's subsequent witch-hunts.⁴ And so it came to pass that the only "Old China Hand" working in Washington in a China related capacity in 1961 produced a document that would become an indispensable reference point for efforts to redefine U.S. China policy in the 1960s, and, more immediately, a flag for disheartened supporters of a policy transformation to rally around after the disappointments of 1961.⁵

Rice's paper reiterated Policy Planning's earlier appeals for a more realistic approach to U.S.-GRC relations (as discussed in the previous chapter), including the suggestion that the United States employ its leverage over the GRC to bring about a reduction of cross-Strait hostilities and an eventual evacuation of GRC forces from the offshore islands. Rice also laid out what Thomson called a "'laundry list' of possible unilateral initiatives towards Peking."⁶ The list included relaxing the trade embargo against China; making U.S. food aid available to the mainland Chinese on a grant basis if food shortages there worsened; scientific and medical exchanges; and continued attempts to gain access for U.S. correspondents to China, along with permitting U.S. "observers, scientists, scholars, and, if trade is resumed, businessmen" to

⁴ Kahn, *The China Hands*, 41; Thomson, "U.S. China Policy," 223-24.

⁵ Thomson, "U.S. China Policy," 223-24; Kochavi, *Conflict Perpetuated*, 105-7; Foot, "Redefinitions," 267.

⁶ Thomson, "U.S. China Policy," 223.

travel to China. While conceding the wisdom of non-recognition and opposition to PRC membership in the United Nations, Rice called for continuing study to be given to these questions, determining under which conditions the United States would be prepared to normalise diplomatic relations. The central theme of the paper was that while the United States needed to remain firm against Communist expansion in Asia, it should at the same time maintain tactical flexibility, avoid rhetorical excess, attempt to engage China's present and future leadership, and generally "hold ajar the door to a more satisfactory [U.S.-PRC] relationship."⁷ Rice called it a "New Look" policy.⁸

Robert Komer, who in the spring of 1961 had lamented the administration's lack of "long-range thinking on China"—and tried his own hand at writing a think-piece placing China policy in its "broadest strategic framework"⁹—welcomed Rice's contribution, which he had apparently helped instigate. Yet Komer was pessimistic about the "New Look's" prospects. "[Policy Planning] has finally written the overall China paper we requested," he wrote to Bundy and Rostow on November 11, "yet doesn't want to discuss it until it has been haggled out in State. Since it will probably make FE's hair stand on end, this process may be prolonged."¹⁰

Komer had cause to be pessimistic. Throughout 1961 the Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs had exhibited a pronounced caution on the possibility of expanded U.S.-PRC contacts, wary that a relaxation of U.S. policy would raise the ire of Taipei and compromise the image of American resolve.¹¹ This conservatism, as Komer had predicted, governed the bureau's initial response to Rice's "New Look." The bureau's Office of Chinese Affairs suggested that Rice was overly optimistic about the prospects for improved relations between Washington and

⁷ Draft S/P paper, "U.S. Policy Toward China," October 26, 1961, JTP:FE, box 14, "Communist China, S/P-61159: U.S. Policy Toward Communist China," JFKL.

⁸ Ibid. Also see Kochavi, *Conflict Perpetuated*, 106.

⁹ Komer, draft paper (and forwarding memo to Rostow and Bundy), April 7, 1961, NSF:CO, box 22, "China, General, 'Strategic Framework for Rethinking China Policy,'" JFKL.

¹⁰ Komer to Bundy and Rostow, November 11, 1961, cited in Schaffer, *Bowles*, 360n30.

¹¹ FE paper, "China Policy," attached to Parsons to Rusk, December 28, 1960, HP:KJA, Subject File, box 443, "China, Folder 7," LCMD; Parsons to Harriman, February 21, 1961, *ibid.*; Thomson, "U.S. China Policy," 223.

Beijing; given the administration's limited capacity to reduce Sino-American tensions, the office argued, the overarching strategic objective of U.S. China policy should remain the reduction of the PRC's military and economic capabilities. On those matters pertaining to U.S.-GRC relations, Chinese Affairs made no departures from the temporisation line, and, more provocatively, suggested that Rice had been too quick to discount the GRC's chances of weakening—or even one day overturning—Communist control of the mainland.¹²

Though long a bastion for conservative “Taiwan-firsters,” the bureaucratic character of the Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs was transformed in November following a major shake up of personnel in the State Department. Dramatically dubbed the “Thanksgiving Day Massacre,” this revamp of the State bureaucracy was driven first and foremost by Kennedy's mounting frustration with perceived inefficiencies throughout the department.¹³ Yet there was also a direct connection here to U.S. policy in East Asia: Kennedy, concerned about a corner of the bureaucracy that had proven particularly hawkish about the commitment of U.S. forces to Laos and South Vietnam, wanted his “own man” heading the bureau. Thus, as part of the November reorganisation the president removed Walter McConaughy—to Bowles's mind, a “Dulles holdover”—from the bureau, and appointed Averell Harriman Assistant Secretary for Far Eastern Affairs.¹⁴

Harriman's high-profile and strong rapport with the president did much to raise the standing of the bureau within the administration. Meanwhile, NSC staffer Michael V. Forrestal, appointed in January 1962, used his close relationship with both Harriman and Kennedy to ease communications between the bureau and the White House.¹⁵ Setting the tone for his assistant secretaryship, in January 1962 Harriman recruited the author of the “New Look” himself, Edward Rice, to be his deputy at the bureau. With an energy and idealism belying his

¹² Robert Rinden to McConaughy, November 27, 1961, RG59, CF:1960-63, microfilm, 611.93/11-2761, NA.

¹³ Schlesinger, *Thousand Days*, 376-414; James N. Giglio, *The Presidency of John F. Kennedy* (Lawrence, Kansas: University of Kansas Press, 1991), 33.

¹⁴ Kaiser, “Men and Policies,” 17-18; Schaffer, *Bowles*, 195.

¹⁵ Thomson, “U.S. China Policy,” 228.

age, Harriman, in Schlesinger's words, "gave Far Eastern policy a coherence and force it had not had for years."¹⁶

Harriman's appointment was complemented by important innovations in FE's organisational chart. On December 27, 1961, the Office of Chinese Affairs and Office of Northeast Asian Affairs were consolidated into an Office of East Asian Affairs, and separate "desks" were established therein for "Mainland China" and the "Republic of China (Taiwan)." Previously, institutional responsibility for PRC matters at State had been under the umbrella of a "China" office encompassing both mainland China and the ROC, where, as career diplomat Marshall Green recalled, "almost all the attention of the desk was focused on Taiwan." With the creation of the "Mainland China" desk there was, for the first time, an area in the bureaucracy devoted solely to matters pertaining to the People's Republic. Admittedly, the new "representation" for the PRC in the Department was at the low-ranking desk level, and was only staffed by a handful of early- to mid-career officials. Still, it created what the first director of the "Mainland China" desk, Lindsay Grant, called "a place for focus."¹⁷

Ironically for Bowles, the "Thanksgiving Day Massacre" also saw him removed from the undersecretary's office, to be replaced by Undersecretary of State for Economic Affairs, George Ball. The White House had in fact targeted Bowles for removal in July, in part for having leaked his opposition to the Bay of Pigs operation after its failure, in part for his lacklustre performance as an administrator.¹⁸ Bowles was newly-minted as the president's Special Representative and Adviser on African, Asian, and Latin American Affairs, an improvised post that Bowles immediately recognised as little more than a "gadfly operation."¹⁹

¹⁶ Schlesinger, *Thousand Days*, 413; Freedman, *Kennedy's Wars*, 251.

¹⁷ Marshall Green (as interviewer), in Ralph Clough, OHI, August 8, 1990, 99-100, ADST; Lindsay Grant, OHI, January 31, 1990, 15, ADST. On the reorganisation see *FRUS, 1961-1963* 22:167n1.

¹⁸ Abramson, *Spanning the Century*, 588; Schaffer, *Bowles*, 227-28.

¹⁹ Schaffer, *Bowles*, 226-34; Bowles, *Promises to Keep*, 369.

Between being informed of his fate on November 26 and the formal implementation of the departmental reorganisation on December 4, Bowles saw fit to prepare an ambitious presidential speech on China policy. The draft speech (which was never delivered) reflected Bowles's ideological sympathy with Rice's "New Look," essaying a more flexible U.S. posture towards China, wherein continued opposition to PRC expansionism would be coupled with a "firm determination never to slam the door shut" on improved Sino-American relations.²⁰ Forwarding a copy of the draft to his long-time colleague and then deputy director at State's Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Thomas Hughes, Bowles conceded that it might not be a particularly propitious moment to ask the president to deliver such a potentially divisive speech. Yet, in Bowles's estimate, movement on China policy remained imperative, and with Harriman and his new team coming into FE, "we may soon be prepared to move."²¹

Bowles's qualified optimism notwithstanding, Harriman did not take up his new position committed down the line to a transformation of existing policy. Prior to his appointment as assistant secretary, Harriman had, on occasion, shown a predilection for an enhanced Sino-American dialogue, particularly in leading the effort to engineer a political solution to the Laos crisis.²² Harriman had even applied (unsuccessfully) for a visa to visit the People's Republic in 1959.²³ Nonetheless, there is little to suggest that Harriman had any firm grip on the China policy debates preceding his arrival at the bureau. Nor had Harriman personally campaigned for the post, considering himself more Kremlinologist than sinologist.²⁴ Harriman embraced his new role with characteristic verve, but unlike Bowles, Harriman was not equipped with his own clearly defined agenda for changes in U.S. China policy.

²⁰ Outline of proposed speech, November 27, 1961, JTP:FE, box 14, "Communist China, Proposed Presidential Speech on Two Chinas Policy," JFKL; Bowles to "Pat" for Thomson and Hughes, November 30, 1961, *ibid.*; Thomson, "U.S. China Policy," 223; Schaffer, *Bowles*, 117-18.

²¹ Bowles to Hughes, November 30, 1961, JTP:FE, box 14, "Communist China, Proposed Presidential Speech on Two Chinas Policy," JFKL.

²² Thomson, "U.S. China Policy," 225; Abramson, *Spanning the Century*, 608; chapter two, 61.

²³ Quigley, "Lost Opportunity," 177.

²⁴ Abramson, *Spanning the Century*, 588.

Indeed, the formal FE response to Rice's "New Look" that Harriman signed off on—prior to the December creation of the Office of East Asian Affairs and, it is important to note, Rice's own move to the bureau—was, like the aforementioned Office of Chinese Affairs paper upon which it was based, lukewarm toward Rice's call for policy innovation. Gone was Chinese Affairs' rather incongruous hedging on a Nationalist "return to the mainland," yet on questions touching on U.S.-GRC relations generally there were no departure from the temporisation line. Likewise, it was argued that for the foreseeable future the construction of more effective barriers to PRC expansion would have to take precedent over the balancing objective of holding the "door ajar" to improved U.S.-PRC relations.²⁵ Harriman may have been, as Schlesinger suggested, an "inveterate foe of platitude, rigidity and the conventional wisdom,"²⁶ but, upon his arrival at the bureau, he was initially prepared to defer to the "conventional wisdom" of the bureaucracy he had inherited.

Furthermore, despite speculation that Harriman's appointment would be poorly received in Taipei,²⁷ Harriman was not predisposed toward a fundamental redefinition of U.S.-GRC relations. Indeed, during the 1950s, on the touchstone issue of the offshore islands, Harriman had actually argued that the Democrats needed to take a firmer position in support of the islands' defence.²⁸ Likely Harriman was drawing on his own convictions as much as the advice of his staff when he wrote to George McGhee in April 1962 that whereas a GRC withdrawal from the islands would be desirable, the extreme pressure or inducements needed to move the GRC would, for the moment, prove prohibitively costly.²⁹

No Longer a "Fearsome Dragon": Revised Appraisals of Chinese Power and Purpose

Still, by the time Harriman was appointed assistant secretary, he had begun to question the

²⁵ Harriman to Rostow, December 11, 1961, RG59, CF:1960-63, microfilm, 611.93/12-1161, NA.

²⁶ Schlesinger, *Thousand Days*, 413.

²⁷ Kusnitz, *Public Opinion*, 103.

²⁸ Abramson, *Spanning the Century*, 535.

²⁹ Harriman to McGhee, May 29, 1962, *FRUS, 1961-1963* 22:237-38.

prevailing image of a reckless China, bent on using force to realise its national and ideological ambitions. And although troubled by the threat Maoist ideology posed to regional stability, Harriman doubted the Chinese would engage in direct military aggression. For instance, handling the Laos negotiations Harriman became “utterly convinced” that the Chinese neither had the military capability or, significantly, any intent of intervening “in a major way” in Laos, except to the extent necessary to protect the integrity of China’s borders.³⁰

INR’s resident Sinologist, Allen S. Whiting, with whom Harriman established a close working relationship,³¹ was one of the most influential voices within the administration arguing that Beijing’s *modus operandi* in foreign affairs was, for all intents and purposes, both rational and defensive. Upon joining the State Department in September 1961, Whiting was warned by INR chief, Roger Hilsman—who had been brought into the administration at Bowles’s urging—to avoid appearing “soft” on China, lest it undermine their joint efforts to gradually foster a “political atmosphere” in Washington more conducive to policy change.³² His caution on this score notwithstanding, through the force of his analysis Whiting was instrumental in developing within the administration, as Foot writes, “a vision of China at odds with that which had prevailed up to this point, emphasising its cautious rather than its reckless attitude to the use of force.”³³

Concerns about Chinese belligerence in Washington also seem to have diminished as U.S. analysts revised earlier estimates of China’s military and industrial capabilities in light of the failure of Mao’s Great Leap Forward. Washington had, admittedly, been slow to appreciate the true folly of the Great Leap. One July 1959 National Intelligence Estimate, for instance, erroneously reported “remarkable increases” in China’s industrial productivity and

³⁰ Harriman, OHI, January 17, 1965, JFKL.

³¹ Kochavi, *Conflict Perpetuated*, 107-8.

³² Whiting, “Reflections on ‘Misunderstanding’ China,” paper based on 2001 Annual Gaston Sigur Memorial Lecture, March 15, 2001, George Washington University (Published by The Sigur Center for Asian Studies, June 2001), 4.

³³ Foot, *Practice of Power*, 97. Also see Thomson, “U.S. China Policy,” 228.

agricultural output.³⁴ Yet by 1961, with China's foreign exchange holdings seriously depleted and its industrial and agrarian sectors alike in disarray, Washington was beginning to comprehend the level of economic dislocation in China. And the situation appeared all the more desperate in view of the Sino-Soviet dispute, particularly with the withdrawal of Soviet technicians from China in 1960.³⁵ By early 1963 the CIA was reporting what by then had been known for several years, namely that "China's prospects for achieving status as a major world power in this decade have vanished."³⁶

U.S. observers also came to recognise, albeit incompletely, that China was suffering from severe food shortages.³⁷ It was not until years after the event that American observers—and foreign observers generally—properly grasped the extraordinary magnitude of the Chinese famine, to which in excess of 30 million fell victim between 1958 and 1962.³⁸ Symptomatic of Washington's failure to fully comprehend the enormity of what was happening in China is the fact that through 1961, when the privation in China was at its worse, both the CIA and the Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs took issue with the idea that there was, technically speaking, a "famine" in China.³⁹ Nonetheless, by 1961 it was clear to U.S. observers that the PRC food crisis—whether classified as a "famine" or as "widespread hunger"—was, as an American Universities Field Staff report in January put it, becoming a pivotal issue in Beijing "around

³⁴ NIE 13-12-59, July 28, 1959, in CIA, FOIA Reading Room, *The China Collection*, available at http://www.foia.cia.gov/nic_china_collection.asp.

³⁵ CIA (ONE), "The Situation in Mainland China," July 27, 1961, NSF:CO, box 22, "CIA, 'The Situation...,'" JFKL.

³⁶ CIA (ORR), "Communist China: Recent Economic Performance and Prospects," *ibid*, box 24, "China, General."

³⁷ Ball to McGovern, December 6, 1961, *FRUS, 1961-1963* 22:174-75; Basil Ashton, et al., "Famine in China, 1958-61," *Population and Development Review* 10 (December 1984): 630-31. For background and analysis of the famine's causes, also see Joseph Bernstein, "Stalinism, Famine, and Chinese Peasants: Grain Procurements during the Great Leap Forward," *Theory and Society* 13 (May 1984): 339-77; Jasper Becker, *Hungry Ghosts: China's Secret Famine* (London: John Murray, 1996); and, for a variety of perspectives, articles in *China Economic Review* 9 (Autumn 1998).

³⁸ Mortality figures range from 15 million to 43 million. For differences on the number that died, and an analysis of the failure of the outside world to appreciate the scale of the famine until the early 1980s, see Carl Riskin, "Seven Questions about the Chinese Famine of 1959-61," *China Economic Review* 9 (Autumn 1998): 111-24.

³⁹ CIA, *supra* note 35; McConaughy to Ball, November 21, 1961, RG59, CF:1960-63, box 2881, 893.03/11-2161, NA.

which vital domestic and international political decisions revolve.”⁴⁰

From the earliest days of the Kennedy administration, reports from the U.S. consulate in Hong Kong suggested that Mao’s regime was being forced to modify its policies for the first time since coming to power, reversing the radical developmental programs of the Great Leap Forward in favour of more measured and, by Beijing’s standards, conservative policies.⁴¹ In fact, some aspects of the Great Leap Forward had been curbed as far back as late 1958. This process of policy retrenchment was stepped up after Liu Shaoqi replaced Mao as head of state in April 1959 and thereafter assumed the lead role in the day-to-day management of domestic policy.⁴² Policies were still implemented under the rubric of the ubiquitous “Mao Zedong Thought,” yet Liu’s economic development program was a significant departure from the Maoist policies of the Great Leap, and more closely accorded with Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy. As part of this process the technocrats and apparatchiks of the Chinese party-state apparatus, under Liu’s patronage, reasserted the authority, in a development historian Maurice Meisner aptly terms “The Thermidorian Reaction.”⁴³

Although the degree to which these developments reflected a decline in Mao’s personal power has been a matter of debate among scholars since the early 1970s,⁴⁴ the possibility that the locus of power in China may have shifted barely registered in Washington prior to the outbreak of the Cultural Revolution 1966 (by which point it was shifting again, only this time

⁴⁰ American Universities Field Staff Reports Service, “Re China’s Food Crisis: Communist Agriculture Crippled by Massive Revolutionary Changes,” January 1961, NSF:CO, box 21a, “China, General,” JFKL.

⁴¹ FSD-496, Hong Kong, January 26, 1961, RG59, CF:1960-63, box 2879, 893.00/1-2661, NA; FSD-745, Hong Kong, April 19, 1961, *ibid.*, 893.00/4-1961.

⁴² Mao remained Chairman of the Central Committee of the CCP, and, by extension, chairman of the politburo, the zenith of power in the PRC.

⁴³ Maurice Meisner, *Mao’s China and After: A History of the People’s Republic*, 3rd Ed. (New York: The Free Press, 1999), 245-88.

⁴⁴ Compare, for instance, Ellis Joffe, *Between Two Plenums: China’s Intraleadership Conflict, 1959-1962* (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, 1975); with Lowell Dittmer, “‘Line Struggle’ in Theory and Practice: The Origins of the Cultural Revolution Reconsidered,” *China Quarterly*, no. 72 (1977): 685, 689-96; and Frederick C. Teiwes, *Politics and Purges in China: Rectification of the Decline of Party Norms, 1950-1965* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1979), 349-50, 364-65. On this issue, also see Kenneth Lieberthal, “The Great Leap Forward and the Split in the Yanan Leadership,” in *The Cambridge History of China* vol. 14, *The People’s Republic, Part I: The Emergence of Revolutionary China, 1949-1965*, ed. Roderick MacFarquhar and John K. Fairbank (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 293-359.

far more dramatically). Rather, U.S. analysts tended to point to continuity, if not cohesion, in the Chinese leadership, wherein China's professional economists and technocrats had been welcomed back into the fold without in the process usurping power from China's political ideologues.⁴⁵ Admittedly, the U.S. Consulate in Hong Kong reported in March 1961 that there had been a "definite rightist trend" over the preceding year in Beijing's policies, presumably impacting upon "the relative standing and influence of possible groups or individual leaders in the top strata" of the Chinese polity. However, the consulate qualified this point by suggesting that the practical policy turn might simply "signify a general acquiescence among the leadership in the modification of these programs rather than the victory of a conservative clique over a more radical element." At any rate, whatever changes may have occurred in China's leadership, viewed from Hong Kong Mao's own power and prestige appeared very much intact.⁴⁶

The CIA's Office of Current Intelligence (OCI) was, however, prepared to suggest that Mao's standing within the Chinese Communist Party had declined significantly since 1958, as had party cohesion generally. A November 1961 OCI study even allowed for the possibility that this might, in time, translate into a challenge to Mao's leadership from less radical "administrator-economist" figures such as Zhou Enlai and the Chinese foreign minister, Chen Yi. However, it was argued that short of assassination, Mao and his closest supporters could easily face down any play for power from more moderate elements. Moreover, the CIA rejected the idea that Mao's December 1959 retirement as head of state was a "forced blow," or that the retreat from Great Leap policies was undertaken against his authority.⁴⁷ And whereas some intelligence analysts thought there was a reasonable chance a physically ailing

⁴⁵ FSD-745, Hong Kong, *supra* note 41.

⁴⁶ FSD-613, Hong Kong, March 13, 1961, RG59, CF:1960-63, box 2146, 793.00/3-1361, NA; FSD-878, Hong Kong, June 1, 1961, *ibid.*, 793.00/6-161.

⁴⁷ CIA (OCI), "The Chinese Communist Leadership, 1958-1961," November 28, 1961, CIA Records Research Tool (hereafter CREST), NA. Certainly, there was no suggestion at the time that Mao was engaged in a struggle for control over policy with the "party-machine" group associated with Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping. On the contrary, these officials were seen, at least prior to 1966, as the beneficiaries of Mao's favour. *Ibid.*; and CIA (OCI), "The Chinese Communist Leadership and the Succession Problem," March 19, 1964, NSF:CO, box 237, "China Memos, Vol. I," LBJL.

Mao might soon voluntarily retire to a position of honorary chairman of the party, the chances of his being *forced* from his dominant position appeared slim.⁴⁸

Mao might have seemed very much in command of the Chinese ship of state, but some U.S. analysts nonetheless thought China's economic difficulties would force its leaders (the Great Helmsman himself included) to reconsider the wisdom of aggressively promoting "wars of national liberation" in the region and beyond. For instance, a National Intelligence Estimate in November 1961 suggested that while Chinese efforts to supplant U.S. influence in the region through means short of open military action would almost certainly continue, Beijing's preoccupation with the situation in China might compel it to curb the "scope and range" of its foreign policy activities.⁴⁹ Under Whiting's guidance, the Bureau of Intelligence and Research carried this logic a step further, suggesting Beijing's economic difficulties "may well encourage it to focus on domestic affairs and contribute to the adoption of a more moderate line in foreign policy during the 1960s."⁵⁰

This assessment was borne out by information contained in a collection of secret Chinese military papers, captured by CIA-sponsored Tibetan guerrillas during an attack on a PLA regimental post in the summer of 1961. This proved an extraordinary intelligence coup for Washington, offering invaluable insights into the thinking of China's political and military

⁴⁸ CIA (OCI), "The Decline of Mao Tse-tung" (POLO XV-62), April 9, 1962, *The CAESAR, POLO, and ESAU Papers*, CIA, FOIA Electronic Reading Room, online at <http://www.foia.cia.gov/cpe.asp> (hereafter *CPE*).

⁴⁹ SNIE 13-3-61, November 30, 1961, NSF, NIEs, box 4, "13-61 to 13-65, Communist China (1)," LBJL. Also see CIA (ONE), "The Chances of a Chinese Communist Military Move into Southeast Asia," May 11, 1961, POF:CO, box 113a, "Communist China, Security," JFKL.

⁵⁰ INR, "The Impact of the Food Crisis on Peiping's Policies," July 9, 1962, NSF:KP, box 410, "China (CPR), 1961-1963 (2)," JFKL. Whiting had made the same argument while working at the RAND Corporation. Whiting, RAND report, "Chinese Food Problems," JFKL, NSF:CO, box 22. In fact, at least some senior officials in Beijing in the first half of 1962, including Liu Shaoqi and the head of the CCP Central Committee's International Liaison Department, Wang Jiaying, apparently believed that the domestic crisis recommended a less confrontational foreign policy. On Liu, see Yafeng Xia, "Negotiating at Cross-Purposes: Sino-American Ambassadorial Talks, 1961-68," *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 16 (June 2005): 302. On Wang, see Qiang Zhai, "Beijing and the Vietnam Conflict, 1964-1965: New Chinese Evidence," *CWIHP, Bulletin*, no. 6/7 (1995/1996): 233-34. On Mao's subsequent attacks against Wang's policy line, see Yang Kuisong, "Mao Zedong and the Indochina Wars," in Roberts, *Bamboo Curtain*, 71-73; and Quangsheng Zhao, *Interpreting Chinese Foreign Policy: The Micro-Macro Linkage Approach* (New York: Oxford University Press: 1996), 48-49. For an analysis of Beijing's focus on domestic imperatives in this period, see Nui Jun, "1962: The Eve of the Left Turn in China's Foreign Policy," *CWIHP, Working Papers Series*, Working Paper no. 48 (October 2005): 9-22.

leadership.⁵¹ The “Tibetan Documents,” as they became known within the U.S. intelligence community, laid bare a military establishment struggling to modernise, and gave no hint that China’s leaders, beset as they were by domestic problems, were so much as considering new foreign adventures.⁵² On the contrary, the Bureau of Intelligence and Research noted that one of the papers within the captured collection “made a strong argument for Peiping’s having to give first priority to solving domestic difficulties and the necessity of deferring and avoiding any complications along its borders.”⁵³

Similarly, reports from the U.S. Consulate in Hong Kong—given greater prominence in Washington following the establishment of the “Mainland China” desk at FE⁵⁴—suggested China’s domestic setbacks would likely reinforce Beijing’s existing aversion to military adventurism. The consul general from November 1961, Marshall Green, had himself arrived at the consulate (Washington’s “keyhole” into the mainland, as one Foreign Service officer called it) perceiving China as “a powerful threat to its neighbours, purposeful and single minded in its expansionist design.” Yet with China floundering under the weight of its failed Great Leap policies, and with the Sino-Soviet alliance coming apart at the seams, Green was quick to appreciate that China was no longer “the fearsome dragon conjured up in the minds of many Americans.”⁵⁵

U.S. analysts were by no means given to the assumption that a moderation in Beijing’s foreign policy line would necessarily pass into an amelioration of its virulent anti-Americanism. Still, for some in Washington it seemed entirely plausible that with China forced to contend with the increasingly conspicuous shortcomings of Mao Zedong Thought,

⁵¹ John Kenneth Knaus, *Orphans of the Cold War: Americans and the Tibetan Struggle for Survival* (New York: PublicAffairs, 1999), 249.

⁵² INR, “The Tibetan Documents: A Survey of Chinese Communist Military Policies and Resources as Seen Through Capture Army Materials,” August 27, 1962, NSF:CO, box 24, “China, General,” JFKL; CIA (OCI), “Chinese Communist Military Doctrine,” January 17, 1964, NSF:CO, box 237, “China Memos, Vol. I,” LBJL.

⁵³ INR, “Evidence of Peiping’s Concern Over Possible GRC-U.S. Intentions,” June 22, 1962, NSF:CO, box 23, “China, General,” JFKL.

⁵⁴ Foot, *Practice of Power*, 97.

⁵⁵ Green, “Averting Wider War,” 55-56. On the role performed by the consulate, see Thomson, “U.S. China Policy,” 226; William Gleysteen, OHI, June 10, 1997, 61-64, ADST; Robert Drexler, OHI, March 1, 1996, 41, ADST.

elements within the Chinese polity might begin considering the potential advantages of improved Sino-American relations. China's "Internal and external difficulties," Harriman wrote to Rusk in April 1962, "must surely be breeding differences within [the Chinese] leadership." Writing in reference to debates within the administration about a possible offer of U.S. food aid to China (as discussed below), Harriman alluded to the possibility that one such difference might relate to the question of Sino-American relations, and whether it might prove in China's interest to seek a reduction in bilateral tensions.⁵⁶

Food for China

For some U.S. officials it seemed a promising moment to take the first steps towards realising a new Sino-American relationship. Although Bowles continued to fear a Chinese push into Southeast Asia for *lebensraum* (extending from what he viewed, in Malthusian terms, as an long-term agricultural crisis facing China), in the early months of 1962 he sensed, as he later wrote to Marshall Green, that "the mainland might be relaxing a little, and that the time was ripe for some kind of modest indication that we were willing to meet them half way."⁵⁷ Other officials, most notably McGeorge Bundy's deputy at the NSC, Walt Rostow (subsequently appointed chairman of the Policy Planning Council as part of the November 1961 reshuffle), were more interested in capitalising on China's weakness than in sending conciliatory signals to Beijing. Rostow contended that Beijing, chastened by its domestic and international troubles, might be seeking a "limited accommodation with the West"; this being so, the United States could secure concessions from Beijing, including a termination of its support for the insurgencies in Laos and South Vietnam, in return for such an accommodation.⁵⁸

While Rostow and Bowles approached the situation from different perspectives, they both identified an opportunity in China's internal situation for movements in U.S. policy and

⁵⁶ Harriman to Rusk, supra note 3, 216-17.

⁵⁷ Bowles to Green, March 18, 1963, RG59, CF:1963, box 3863, POL CHICOM-USSR, NA. On Bowles's concerns about Chinese expansionism, see chapter one, 25.

⁵⁸ Rostow to Kennedy, November 22, 1961, NSF:CO, box 22a, "China, General," JFKL.

posture toward China. And both honed in on the possibility of providing the Chinese with access to U.S. grain, on either a trade or aid basis, so that the United States might, as Rostow argued, extract concessions from Beijing, or, as Bowles suggested, send a signal of conciliation and thereby strengthen the position of moderate elements in Beijing.⁵⁹ Likewise, in the wider administration it was the food issue, more than any other, on which questions about the direction of U.S. China policy turned at this juncture.⁶⁰

Although the possibility of making U.S. foodstuffs available to the Chinese had been broached several times during 1961, these proposals had invariably come a cropper in the Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs. Not only would Beijing loudly reject any offer of American grain, the bureau argued, but such offers would be interpreted as a weakening of U.S. resolve. As such, only in the instance a “more serious famine” developed, and a firm request from Beijing for aid was received, should the administration reconsider the matter.⁶¹ It was a position which Harriman did not initially challenge upon his appointment to the bureau.⁶²

Evidently, these same concerns guided Rusk’s decision to reject a confidential offer made in November 1961 by Burmese Prime Minister U Nu, for Rangoon to act as an intermediary between Washington and Beijing on food aid.⁶³ Still, Rusk indicated to his subordinates that evidence of a new attitude on Beijing’s part might occasion a policy review, and he was willing to keep the possibility of food aid and/or trade consideration. With reserved authorisation from the departmental leadership, and with a new interest in the possibilities of policy movement in Harriman’s Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs, by the turn of 1962 the matter

⁵⁹ Barnett to Bowles, June 5, 1962, RG59, ACA, lot 72D175, box 3, “Grain Sale Legislation, 1962-1963,” NA. Bowles allowed that U.S. agricultural resources constituted potentially “vital instruments of leverage” which could be exploited to circumscribe PRC foreign activities, even if he regarded such “Machiavellian justifications” for a food deal as secondary. Bowles, “Notes on the China Food Situation,” January 15, 1962, POF:CO, box 113a, “China, Security,” JFKL; Bowles to NSC Standing Group, May 25, 1962, JTP:FE, box 15, “Communist China, Food for China,” JFKL.

⁶⁰ On this subject, also see Jean S. Kang, “Food for Communist China: A U.S. Policy Dilemma, 1961-1963,” *Journal of American-East Asian Relations* 7 (Spring-Summer 1998): 39-72.

⁶¹ McConaughy to Ball, *supra* note 39. Also see INR, “Possible Solutions for Mainland China’s Food Deficits,” November 13, 1961, JTP:FE, box 15, “Communist China, Food for China,” JFKL.

⁶² Ball to McGovern, *supra* note 37

⁶³ Rostow to Kennedy, November 8, 1961, NSF:CO, box 22a, “China, General,” JFKL; Deptel-296 to Rangoon, November 27, 1961, cited in *FRUS, 1961-1963* 22:175n5.

had become, as Undersecretary George Ball wrote, the subject of “considerable discussion and study within the Department.”⁶⁴

Whiting captured the thinking in favour of a Sino-American trade in foodstuffs on a normal commercial basis when he argued that if in fact Beijing was seeking U.S. grain, a forthcoming attitude on Washington’s part would likely strengthen the hand of moderate elements within the Chinese leadership; more immediately, the resources Beijing could devote to its military-industrial expansion would be reduced. Whiting conceded that grain sales would anger the GRC, but noted most foreign governments would applaud the show U.S. flexibility. In short, the diplomatic difficulties caused by such trade would be outweighed by the advantages, “particularly those which occur in the larger, longer-term frame of U.S.-Chicom relations.”⁶⁵

From the other side of the debate, the Bureau of European Affairs argued that by making American grain available to China the administration would inadvertently ease the pressure on the Soviets to draw on their own limited resources to aid China, thus “removing an important source of friction between Moscow and Peiping,” without necessarily reducing Beijing’s hostility toward the West in the process.⁶⁶ Robert Komer, who in 1961 had suggested modifying the embargo if only to shift to Beijing the onus for the poor state of Sino-American relations,⁶⁷ raised other concerns, including the problems any move on the matter would create in U.S.-GRC relations at a moment when Chiang was conspicuously raising the volume on “return to the mainland.”⁶⁸

Unfazed by these concerns, Bowles weighed in on the debate with an initiative of his own design, suggesting that Burmese Prime Minister U Nu act as an intermediary for the provision of U.S. food to China—an idea he had toyed with in 1961, even prior to U Nu’s

⁶⁴ Ball to Harriman, December 31, 1961, RG59, CF:1960-63, box 2881, 893.03/12-3161, NA; Ball to McGovern, January 4, 1962, NSF:CO, box 26, “China, Subjects, Food Situation,” JFKL.

⁶⁵ Whiting to Rice, March 12, 1962, RG59, ACA, lot 72D175, box 3, “Grain Sale Legislation, 1961-63,” NA.

⁶⁶ Memo, Anderson (EUR), February 28, 1962, JTP:FE, box 15, “Communist China, Food for China,” JFKL.

⁶⁷ Draft paper, Komer, *supra* note 9.

⁶⁸ Komer to Kaysen, January 24, 1961, NSF:KP, box 410, “China (CPR), 1961-1963 (3),” JFKL; Komer to Bundy, January 29, 1962, *FRUS, 1961-1963* 22:184-84.

abovementioned November offer along these lines.⁶⁹ In February 1962 he asked Kennedy for clearance to raise the issue with U Nu, suggesting it would be a serious mistake “not to make some attempt to probe the impasse with Communist China at this critical moment when China’s needs are so great, when our own advantage is so clear, and particularly when we have so much at stake in Southeast Asia.”⁷⁰ Kennedy agreed, on the condition that Bowles made it clear he was acting on his own initiative, rather than the president’s direction, when he discussed the idea with U Nu.⁷¹

Despite Bowles’s belief that he had the president’s full support, it is unclear how far Kennedy would have allowed this particular gambit to proceed, particularly in view of his acute political caution on China matters. Most likely Kennedy was simply attempting to placate his restive “Special Representative,” without necessarily committing to any set course of action. Ultimately, however, Kennedy’s own position was irrelevant to the fate of the initiative: unfortunately for Bowles—and indeed for U Nu—the Burmese leader was deposed in a coup one day before Bowles was due to arrive in Rangoon.

In another setback to the prospects for movement on the food issue, on March 23 the administration rejected an application from a Seattle-based trading firm to export approximately 6 million tons of grain to the PRC—in part because there was no evidence that the order was based on an actual request from Beijing, but more importantly to forestall a congressional resolution opposing such sales.⁷² Still, the administration had been careful to reject the application in a manner that did not foreclose future movement on the broader policy issue.⁷³ As such, a fortnight later Harriman, with the backing of Bowles and McGhee, recommended that the administration raise the possibility of U.S. grain sales to China in the

⁶⁹ Bowles to Rusk (draft memo), March 6, 1962, JTP:FE, box 15, “Communist China, Food for China,” JFKL.

⁷⁰ Bowles to Kennedy, February 6, 1962, RG59, CF:1960-63, box 2881, 893.03/2-662, NA.

⁷¹ Bowles, *Promises to Keep*, 400-3.

⁷² *FRUS, 1961-1963* 22:209n1; telcon, Chayes and Ball, March 22, 1962, Papers of George W. Ball, box 2, “China, Peking,” JFKL. On the application, see Luther Hodges to Kennedy, March 2, 1962, NSF:CO, box 26, “China, Subjects, Food Situation,” JFKL; and INR, “Peiping’s ‘Interest’ in Purchasing U.S. Grain,” February 28, 1962, NSF:KP, box 410, “China (CPR), 1961-1963 (2),” JFKL.

⁷³ Telcon, Chayes and Ball (in previous note).

Sino-American ambassadorial talks in Warsaw. Responding to reservations expressed by U. Alexis Johnson and George Ball that this step might make the administration appear weak and anxious, Harriman argued that “Evidence that the US would be willing to play a part in moving our relationship away from one of implacable mutual hostility might strengthen the hand of elements [within the Chinese leadership] which might favour doing so, now or later.”⁷⁴

Rusk deferred any decision pending a discussion with Rostow on a Policy Planning study addressing the implications of the Sino-Soviet split—which included a recommendation for the possible extension of grain sales to the PRC “in exchange for modifications in its behaviour.” True to form, following the April 17 meeting on the Rostow paper Rusk neither approved nor rejected any initiative on the food question, but simply let the matter sit.⁷⁵ When Harriman was asked soon thereafter by Executive Secretary Lucius Battle if he wanted to talk to Rusk again about the matter, Harriman responded in the affirmative, adding: “I certainly don’t want to see the rigid policies of the past foisted on the President. I think he is strongly for the less rigid attitude as far as the grain issue is concerned.”⁷⁶

Harriman’s estimate of Kennedy’s policy preferences aside, by the end of April 1962 the administration seemed no closer to a decision on how to approach the “food for China” matter. However, a major jump in the numbers of refugees fleeing the mainland for Hong Kong in May imbued the issue with a new urgency. Some analysts in Washington interpreted the mass exodus, which PRC border guards appeared to be not only tolerating but abetting, as an attempt by Beijing to place economic and political pressure on the British (a reading rejected by the U.S. Consulate in Hong Kong) rather than a natural interplay of hungry

⁷⁴ Rusk to Kennedy (draft memo), April 4, 1962, *FRUS, 1961-1963* 22:209-11; Harriman to Rusk, *supra* note 3, 117. Also see Bowles to Rusk, April 16, 1962, JTP:FE, box 15, “Communist China, Food for China,” JFKL.

⁷⁵ Battle to Harriman, April 14, 1962, RG59, ACA, lot 72D175, box 3, “Grain Sale Legislation, 1961-63,” NA; editorial note, *FRUS, 1961-1963* 22:207-8.

⁷⁶ Cited in *FRUS, 1961-1963* 22:217n4.

peasants and demoralised local officials in neighbouring Guangdong province.⁷⁷ Yet with the more than 140,000 refugees who made the crossing in May imposing a great burden on the colony, panicked British officials petitioned Washington for an exchange of views on food assistance to Beijing.⁷⁸ Thus, the highly visible refugee crisis became intertwined with the food issue in the administration, and as the crisis grew so did pressure within the administration to respond to the food shortages in China.

On May 23, in the midst of the refugee crisis and with Kennedy due to give a press conference that day, Bowles appealed to the president to publicly declare a U.S. readiness to sell grains to Beijing on a commercial basis, and willingness to discuss with Beijing “some mutually acceptable program” of food aid.⁷⁹ Curiously, Harriman was more equivocal, now telling the president that the United States needed to receive something in return for such largesse.⁸⁰ Although Harriman had earlier argued that food *sales* would help communicate to the Chinese a message of reasonableness to moderate elements within the Chinese polity while absorbing funds available to Beijing that might otherwise be put to more insidious purposes, evidently unconditional food *aid* was, to Harriman’s mind, a bridge too far.

Political considerations likely governed Kennedy’s response to the crisis. As noted in chapter two, opinion polls suggested a majority of Americans may have welcomed the extension of food aid to China, and Taipei would have been loath to publicly oppose such assistance to the starving people of China.⁸¹ Yet Kennedy still had to contend with opposition to any supply of U.S. grain to China from the likes of prominent columnist (and close acquaintance) Joseph

⁷⁷ INR, “The Flow of Chinese Communist Refugees into Hong Kong,” May 23, 1962, Papers of Roger Hilsman, Series 1: Countries Files, 1961-1964 (hereafter RH:CO), box 1, “Communist China, Refugees,” JFKL; Congentel-1294, Hong Kong, May 21, 1962, RG59, CF:1960-63, box 2150, 793.00/5-2162, NA.

⁷⁸ Message, Home (UK) to Rusk, May 20, 1962, NSF:CO, box 26, “China, Subjects, Food Situation,” JFKL. The 140,000 figure is from Allen S. Whiting, *Chinese Calculus of Deterrence: India and Indochina* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1975), 43.

⁷⁹ Bowles to Kennedy, May 23, 1962, JTP:FE, box 15, “Communist China, Food for China,” JFKL.

⁸⁰ Telcon, Hilsman and Evans, May 23, 1962, RH:CO, box 1, “Communist China, Refugees,” JFKL; marginalia by Harriman, on note from Rice to Harriman forwarding British Aide-Memoire, May 29, 1962, RG59, ACA, lot 72D175, box 3, “Grain Sale Legislation, 1961-63,” NA; Kochavi, *Conflict Perpetuated*, 113.

⁸¹ Chapter two, 58.

Alsop,⁸² who attacked the notion of the United States bailing Beijing out of its difficulties when the regime seemed on the verge of collapse. And although no prominent newspaper editorialists had voiced support for Alsop's "collapse thesis," they had nonetheless proven somewhat lukewarm on proposals for food aid.⁸³

As such, Kennedy equivocated. At his press conference he essentially reiterated his January 1961 position that there had not yet been any expression of interest on the Chinese side in receiving U.S. food aid, and "we would certainly have to have some idea as to whether the food was needed and under what conditions it might be distributed."⁸⁴ Whiting would later write that this represented a subtle (and rather weak) attempt to reduce Sino-American tensions.⁸⁵ Both Kochavi and Kusnitz have rejected this reasoning, instead arguing that Kennedy's comments, framed so that any change would have required China's proud revolutionaries to "beg" for U.S. assistance, were calculated to invite a rejection from Beijing, while assuaging calls for allies and liberals at home for a response to the crisis.⁸⁶ Neither explanation seems wholly satisfactory. Kennedy's comments in 1962 were, both in tone in substance, essentially a reiteration of his comments on the "food for China" question in January 1961. Rather than seeking to improve relations or force a rejection, Kennedy's comments in 1962, as in 1961, simply reflected his decision that inaction, coupled with the appearance of an open mind and continued deliberation on the matter, offered the safest political course.

Beijing, apparently embarrassed by the attention the flood of hungry refugees into Hong Kong was attracting, moved several days later to strengthen its border controls, thus bringing the

⁸² Robert Merry, *Taking on the World: Joseph and Stewart Alsop—Guardians of the American Century* (New York: Viking, 1996), esp. xviii.

⁸³ Kochavi, *Conflict Perpetuated*, 112; Public Opinion Studies Staff (Bureau of Public Affairs), "1962 Public Attitudes Toward U.S. Policy on China," undated, JTP:FE, box 15, "Communist China, General," JFKL; Kaysen to Bundy (forwarding Schlesinger memo), May 24, 1962, NSF:CO, box 26, "China, Subjects, Food Situation, 1962," JFKL; INR, "Proposed U.S. Food Offer to Communist China," May 26, 1962, *ibid.*

⁸⁴ Kennedy, May 23, 1962, *PPP:JFK, 1962*, 210.

⁸⁵ Whiting, *Chinese Calculus*, 70-71.

⁸⁶ Kochavi, *Conflict Perpetuated*, 113; Kusnitz, *Public Opinion*, 104-5.

crisis to an abrupt end.⁸⁷ Shortly thereafter Chen Yi bluntly stated that “even if we receive aid from somewhere, we will refuse American aid.”⁸⁸ Moreover, with London now given to “calmer contemplation” of the matter, international pressure on the White House for action subsided.⁸⁹ But, as INR noted, although the immediate crisis had passed, with the PRC still suffering food shortages and close to having exhausted all supplies of non-U.S. Free World grain, in some form or another “the crisis will undoubtedly return.”⁹⁰

Thus, prompted by Edward Rice, a modified proposal to broach the food issue with the Chinese at Warsaw was approved by the NSC Standing Group on May 25, wherein Ambassador Wang would be informed that if Beijing “wished to procure US food grains, we would be prepared to reconsider present US policies and discuss the matter.” It was appearing increasingly unlikely that Beijing would accept U.S. grain under any conditions, yet it was agreed such an approach might at least strengthen the hand of individuals in Beijing “at the less hostile end of the spectrum—however narrow the spectrum.”⁹¹ Perhaps because of the low-key nature of this modest proposal, Rusk pushed aside the concerns earlier expressed by U. Alexis Johnson and Ball, and signed his approval on May 28. After Rusk discussed the matter with Kennedy the U.S. representative at the talks, Ambassador John M. Cabot was informed that he would likely be instructed to raise a new (unidentified) item at the next ambassadorial meeting.⁹²

⁸⁷ Congentel-1308, Hong Kong, May 25, 1962, NSF:CO, box 25, “China, Cables,” JFKL.

⁸⁸ Whiting, *Chinese Calculus*, 71.

⁸⁹ Embtel-4500, London, June 5, 1962, NSF:CO, box 26, “China, Subjects, Food Situation, 1962,” JFKL; *FRUS, 1961-1963 22:278n2*.

⁹⁰ INR, *supra* note 83.

⁹¹ Draft paper by Rice, “Food for China,” May 24, 1962, JTP:FE, box 15, “Communist China, Food for China,” JFKL; draft paper (State), May 28, 1962, *FRUS, 1961-1963 22:231-33*. Chinese sources suggest that at least some in Beijing were, at this juncture, “considering signing an agreement to import foodstuffs from the United States.” Niu Jun, “1962: The Eve of the Left Turn in China’s Foreign Policy,” Working Paper No. 48, CWIHP, *Working Paper Series* (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 2005), 19. However, as John W. Garver argues, the idea of receiving American foodstuffs was anathema to Mao’s revolutionary objectives. “Food for Thought: Reflections on Food Aid and the Idea of Another Lost Chance in Sino-American Relations,” *Journal of American-East Asian Relations* 7 (Spring-Summer 1998): 101-6.

⁹² Rice to Harriman, May 28, 1962, RG59, ACA, lot 72D175, box 3, “Grain Sale Legislation, 1962-1963,” NA; Deptel-1655 to Warsaw, NSF:CO, box 153a, “Poland, Subjects, Ambassadorial Talks with Ambassador Wang,” JFKL. No record of Rusk’s meeting with Kennedy has been found. *FRUS, 1961-1963 22:231n*.

Still, Kennedy withheld a final decision on the matter, and, with the refugee crisis now contained, decided against bringing the date of the meeting forward from July 12.⁹³ And in mid-June Kennedy downplayed the likelihood of any provision of U.S. food aid to China, publicly reiterating that it would not be “fruitful” for the United States to proceed with an offer of food until the Chinese had indicated that it desired such aid, and provided some reasonable guarantee that the food would be properly distributed to the Chinese people.⁹⁴ Meanwhile, over the first three weeks of June new indications emerged that Beijing would categorically refuse any offer of U.S. grain, thereby further damaging the prospects of a U.S. overture on food aid.⁹⁵

However, what finally killed the initiative—and high-level considerations of the food issue—was a boilover of tensions in the Taiwan Strait in the second half of June. Apparently in response to a steady escalation of Nationalist preparations for an attack against the mainland, the PRC began moving troops into Fujian province, directly opposite the offshore islands. By June 20 a Special National Intelligence Estimate reported that seven PLA divisions had moved into the area, with five more possibly on the way.⁹⁶ With Washington preoccupied with the rapidly developing situation in the Taiwan Strait, the food issue, and the broader question of possible U.S. responses to the failure of the Great Leap Forward, fell by the wayside.

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The failure to move on the food aid question notwithstanding, the first half of 1962 witnessed important shifts in the way the China “problem” was perceived in Washington. In particular, during this period a growing proportion of a reinvigorated U.S. foreign policy bureaucracy

⁹³ Bundy to Forrestal (forwarded to McGhee), June 5, 1962, NSF:CO, box 153a, “Poland, Subjects, Ambassadorial Talks with Ambassador Wang,” JFKL; and attached note, Bromley Smith to Bundy, June 5, 1962, *ibid.*

⁹⁴ Kennedy, June 14, 1962, *PPP:JFK, 1962*, 487-88.

⁹⁵ Deptel-6823 to London, June 20, 1962, NSF:CO, box 25a, “China, Cables,” JFKL.

⁹⁶ SNIE 13-5-62, June 20, 1962, cited in *FRUS, 1961-1963* 22:251n1.

was inclined to question the prevailing image of an aggressive China either intent upon, or capable of, spreading Mao's revolution by way of the sword. And if China was not, as Green put it, "the fearsome dragon conjured up in the minds of many Americans," then there would likely be greater scope for moderations in existing U.S. China policy.

Still, seen within a more immediate frame of reference, developments in the first half of 1962 underscored the caution that characterised considerations of China matters at the highest strata of the administration. Rusk had again proven his preference for temporisation, rather than innovation; Kennedy, offered a concrete opportunity for forward movement on China policy, equivocated, no doubt concerned that any "softening" of U.S. policy would invite political controversy.

Finally, the abrupt end of discussions on the "food for China" question following the build-up of PRC forces opposite Taiwan, underlined the difficulties of moving on U.S.-PRC relations so long as the situation in the Taiwan Strait remained as volatile as it was. However, the diplomatic manoeuvring prompted by the escalation of cross-Strait tensions in the summer of 1962 would produce a modest, but nonetheless important, shift in Washington's posture towards both "Chinas," with the administration making important strides in distancing itself from Chiang's ambition of a "return to the mainland."

5

YEAR OF THE TIGER: THE THIRD TAIWAN STRAIT CRISIS, 1962

Just as some U.S. officials saw in mainland China's economic and agricultural malaise an opportunity to bridge the Sino-American divide, Taipei perceived a rare opening to put in motion a militarily-led attempt to "return to the mainland." Washington, on the whole, viewed with a healthy degree of scepticism Chiang's contention that he could capitalise on mainland conditions to topple Mao's regime. And, as in 1961, there was broad agreement within the administration that any major military action by Nationalist forces would undermine Taiwan's international standing and threaten a dangerous escalation of hostilities. Yet senior U.S. policymakers, and even many advocates of a redefinition of U.S.-GRC relations, feared that an outright disavowal of Chiang's ambitions would alienate the irascible Generalissimo, damaging U.S.-GRC relations, and possibly triggering a desperate unilateral assault by Nationalist forces against the mainland. Only when Beijing responded to Taipei's rhetorical provocations and military preparations with a rapid build-up of PLA forces opposite Taiwan in June, was the United States forced to show its hand and modify its policy of temporisation. In analysing the administration's response to this crisis, this chapter goes beyond existing accounts of developments in the Taiwan Strait in the summer of 1962, suggesting that the effort to defuse the crisis at hand constituted an important step forward in a larger process of stabilising the status quo in the Taiwan Strait and, by extension, redefining Washington's position in relation to both Chinas.¹

¹ Studies touching on the crisis include Kochavi, *Conflict Perpetuated*, 116-18; Tucker, *Uncertain Friendships*, 43-45; Hilsman, *Move a Nation*, 310-20; and Gordon, "United States Opposition," 654-58. For an account focusing on Beijing's perceptions of the crisis, see Whiting, *Chinese Calculus*, 63-72.

“Return to the Mainland” in 1962

Through the first half of 1962 all signs in Taipei pointed toward a Nationalist military attempt to recapture control of the mainland. The GRC had, of course, long-talked of “return to the mainland,” but rarely with the same degree of intensity. Key GRC officials issued increasingly provocative statements on “counterattack,” complemented by an officially encouraged campaign in Taiwan’s press calling for military action. By March Chiang was promising action against the mainland regime in the “nearest future,” declaring that the GRC could no longer “vacillate or hesitate to perform our duty to deliver our people, our nation and the whole world” from the tyranny of Chinese Communism. Meanwhile, the GRC expanded civilian and military preparedness programs, while dramatically increasing military expenditures.²

By January the U.S. Embassy in Taipei had arrived at the troubling conclusion that Chiang, looking across the Taiwan Strait to the massive economic dislocation confronting the PRC, felt compelled to make his move. Adding a sense of urgency to Chiang’s calculations was his persistent belief that a U.S. shift towards a “two Chinas” policy was on the cards, his conviction that the Free World was losing ground in Asia, and his own advancing age. With circumstances in 1962 pointing, as the U.S. Embassy in Taipei put it, “more clearly too some form of GRC action than it ever has in the past,” the administration steeled for renewed appeals from Taipei for either U.S. support or acquiescence in major military action against the mainland.³

U.S. representatives meeting with Chiang in early 1962 were coyly reminded that the coming year was, in the Chinese calendar, the Year of the Tiger, a favourable omen for action against the mainland.⁴ By February Taipei had presented the administration with a concrete proposal

² Embtel-737, Taipei, April 26, 1962, NSF:CO, box 25, “China, Cables,” JFKL; airgram-230, Taipei, December 12, 1962, *ibid.*, box 25a, “China, Cables”; Hilsman, *Move a Nation*, 310.

³ Airgram-100, Taipei, January 21, 1962, RG59, CF:1960-63, microfilm, 611.93/1-2162, NA; FSD-318, Taipei, February 19, 1962, *ibid.*, box 2149, 793.00/2-1962; Embtel, Taipei, March 6, 1962, *FRUS, 1961-1963* 22:190.

⁴ Hilsman, *Move a Nation*, 310.

for launching a “counterattack.” Expanding on an idea he had first broached in mid-1961, Chiang envisioned airdropping five teams of 200 Nationalist troops, in various areas south of the Yangtze River. These teams would overcome the self-defence corps of the local villages, in turn capitalising on popular discontent and inciting an uprising against the regime, prompting defections from both the general population and regular army units of the PLA to the Nationalist cause.⁵

GRC officials assured their American counterparts that the fighting would be contained to Chinese on both sides, and except for the provision of five C-130 Hercules aircraft (the main tactical airlift of the U.S. Air Force) and a limited amount logistical support, the United States would only be asked for its “tacit agreement” in the operations.⁶ Chiang also contended that in view of Sino-Soviet tensions—which, in Taipei’s analysis, was merely a temporary manifestation of a personal feud between Mao and Khrushchev—the Soviets would not intervene to assist Beijing, nor would the Chinese allow a Soviet intervention. Lest the case for U.S.-PRC estrangement be weakened, Chiang maintained that the Chinese Communist Party remained a tool of Soviet imperialism; in the same breath, however, he argued that a window of opportunity existed wherein the Sino-Soviet monolith would not act in concert. Thus, dealing the Communists a “mortal blow” would require “minimum effort,” with neither the need for overt U.S. involvement nor the risk of Soviet intervention—this would be, after all, not a “new” war, but simply a new phase in China’s ongoing civil war.⁷

Most members of the Kennedy administration thought Chiang’s painfully contorted estimate of the Sino-Soviet relationship entirely disingenuous, concluding that in the unlikely instance Nationalist forces, with their limited independent capability for offensive action, actually threatened the CCP’s control of the mainland then, rift or not, the Soviets would intervene to

⁵ William Bundy to McGeorge Bundy and McNamara, February 24, 1962, NSF:CO, box 22a, “China, General,” JFKL. On the 1961 plans see *FRUS, 1961-1963* 22:193n1.

⁶ Hilsman, memo for the record, March 19, 1962, RH:CO, box 1, “China, Planning on Mainland Operations,” JFKL; *FRUS, 1961-1963* 22:196n3, 200n2.

⁷ Chiang to Kennedy, March 15, 1962, POF:CO, China, box 113a, “China, Security, 1962-1963,” JFKL; airgram-717, Taipei, March 15, 1963, RG59, CF:1963, box 3863, POL CHICOM-USSR, NA.

the extent necessary to keep China in Communist hands. The Kremlin could then exploit the opportunity to heal relations with the Chinese on their terms, undermine Taipei's international position, and embarrass the United States politically.⁸

Likewise, Chiang's assurance that Nationalist troops alone would shoulder the burden in the fighting was less than convincing. Beyond the fact that it would be impossible to conceal U.S. involvement in large-scale airdrops, it seemed clear that Chiang was manoeuvring to get the United States explicitly involved in the operations already canvassed, and in turn implicitly committed to the broader "return to the mainland" effort. Even if the proposed teams of Nationalist troops by some miracle avoided annihilation, Taipei would then insist on greater U.S. involvement in the required follow-up action. The U.S. would then face the spectre of a direct conflict with both the PLA and Soviet forces, with extreme dangers of escalation and no guarantee of success.⁹

Moreover, no senior figure in the administration subscribed to Chiang's theory that the Chinese masses would rally to the Nationalist flag following an invasion, or, for that matter, welcome a reimposition of Nationalist rule in China.¹⁰ Nor did the Communist hold on power appear anywhere near as precarious as Taipei insisted. Admittedly, by 1965 the CIA was able to point to examples of popular dissidence in China, along with weaknesses in the regime's control apparatus following the failure of the Great Leap. However, these indications of disobedience, which was never regarded as serious enough to threaten the integrity of the Communist regime, went largely unnoticed in 1962.¹¹ Despite the evident difficulties engendered by the abject failure of Mao's radical experiment in developmental economics,

⁸ SNIE 13-3-62, March 28, 1962, *FRUS, 1961-1963* 22:200-201; Hilsman to Harriman, March 30, 1962, NSF:CO, box 23, "China, General, Return to the Mainland," JFKL.

⁹ Hilsman to Harriman (in previous note); Komer to Bundy, January 29, 1962, *FRUS, 1961-1963* 22:181-84.

¹⁰ Hilsman to Rusk, May 29, 1962, *FRUS, 1961-1963* 22:234; Congentel-1247, Hong Kong, May 10, 1962, RG59, CF:1960-63, box 2150, 793.00/5-1062, NA; Rice, draft paper, "The Chinese Nationalist Strategy for Return to the Mainland and U.S. Policy Alternatives," June 16, 1962, RG59, CF:1960-63, microfilm, 611.93/6-1662, NA.

¹¹ CIA, "Dissidence and the Potential for Resistance in Communist China," LBJL, NSF:CO, box 239, "China Memos (2), Vol. V"; CIA, "The Kwantung Exodus of 1962: One of a Series of Studies on Dissidence and Control in Communist China," March 23, 1965, *ibid.*, box 238, "China Memos, Vol. II." In fact, in 1960-61 the PLA had to put down armed rebellions in at least five provinces. See Teiwes, *Politics and Purges*, 347.

there was no reliable evidence in 1962 (or further down the track for that matter) to suggest that popular disaffection with the regime was likely to translate into widespread organised resistance, particularly with the regime maintaining its monopoly on arms, organisation, and communications.¹² Only the U.S. Pacific Command's Intelligence Division was optimistic enough to suggest that a "well planned operation just might strike the spark that would lead to widespread uprisings, with undeterminable consequences." Although Hilsman would later write that there "plenty of people" in the administration who agreed with Chiang that conditions might be ripe to attempt an overthrow of Chinese Communism, at the time Hilsman simply noted that Pacific Command's assessment stood in sharp contrast to the broadly shared scepticism in Washington about the validity of Chiang's plans.¹³

As such, the administration was careful to keep Chiang well and truly "leashed." Early in the piece Taipei was put on notice that the administration was displeased by the bellicosity with which GRC officials were talking up a "return to the mainland," and with some success demanded it curtail the "rising crescendo of press attention" being given to the issue.¹⁴ Similarly, the United States responded to the aforementioned increases in GRC military spending—which Washington feared might undermine Taiwan's developmental program, and with it the economic contrast Taiwan presented to mainland China—by reminding GRC officials in both Taipei and Washington of the GRC's obligation, as stipulated by the mutually agreed program for Taiwan's accelerated economic growth, to maintain a ceiling on such expenditures.¹⁵ To drive the point home, the United States delayed approval of elements of its aid program, along with the licensing of particular military items the GRC had purchased from the United States. These targeted delays appear to have impelled Taipei to be more forthcoming with the details of its military and civilian preparedness programs, and to

¹² CIA, "Morale of Party Cadres and Armed Forces in Communist China," May 18, 1961, NSF:CO, box 22, "CIA, 'Morale of...,'" JFKL; NIE 13-4-62, May 2, 1962, *FRUS, 1961-1963* 22:222.

¹³ Hilsman, *Move a Nation*, 311; Hilsman to Harriman, April 17, 1962, HP:KJA, Subject File, box 442, "China Folder 1," LCMD. The CINCPAC assessment is cited therein.

¹⁴ Cable traffic between State Department and U.S. Embassy in Taipei, in NSF:CO, box 23, "China, General, Return to the Mainland," JFKL.

¹⁵ Deptel to Taipei, April 29, 1962, *FRUS, 1961-1963* 22:219-21; Deptel to Taipei, May 4, 1962, *ibid.*, 223-25.

secure non-inflationary financing to cover the additional military expenditure.¹⁶

In order to impress upon Chiang the administration's concern about the intensified "return to the mainland" activity, a series of high-level officials (most notably Averell Harriman) were dispatched to Taipei, taking the opportunity to remind the president of the GRC's commitment not only to *consult* with the United States on the use of force against the mainland, but also, as he appeared to be conveniently forgetting, to obtain U.S. *agreement* prior to undertaking any military action.¹⁷ Meanwhile, Ambassador Drumright, viewed in Washington as overly partial to Chiang and ineffective in communicating the administration's views to Taipei, was removed from his post.¹⁸ Looking for an ambassador who could stand up to Chiang as a military peer, Kennedy recruited Admiral Alan Kirk, who had overseen the D-Day Normandy landings as commander of the allied flotilla.¹⁹

While refusing to concede anything to Chiang's arguments for an attack, the administration was unwilling to reject the GRC's proposals outright. Instead, the interim response to Chiang's airdrop plan was to stress the need for joint consultation and further study of the relevant intelligence.²⁰ In short, the administration continued to temporise.²¹

Political considerations played an important role in determining U.S. policy here, with Kennedy wary of giving Taipei licence to claim that "just as they were prepared to go to the mainland, the United States flunked out."²² It is likely that Kennedy overestimated Taipei's (and, more directly, the China Lobby's) ability to cause political trouble on this score. A State

¹⁶ Embtel-885, Taipei, May 25, 1962, NSF:KP, box 411, "China (Taiwan), Return to Mainland," JFKL; Embtel, Taipei, June 15, 1962, *FRUS, 1961-1963* 22:244-46.

¹⁷ Embtel, Taipei, March 15, 1962, *FRUS, 1961-1963* 22:195-96; message, Bundy to Cline, March 6, 1962, *ibid.*, 191-92; Whiting, *Chinese Calculus*, 64-65. This commitment was spelled out in a 1954 exchange of notes between Dulles and Yeh, adjunct to the U.S.-GRC treaty. U.S. Department of State (Historical Office), *American Foreign Policy, 1950-1955: Basic Documents*, vol. 1 (Washington: U.S. GPO, 1957), 954-49.

¹⁸ On dissatisfaction with Drumright, see Bundy to Kennedy, June 26, 1961, *FRUS, 1961-1963* 22:83-84.

¹⁹ William Cunningham, OHI, March 17, 1997, 144-45, ADST.

²⁰ Bundy to Cline, *supra* note 17; draft, Kennedy to Harriman, September 9, 1962, *FRUS, 1961-1963* 22:192-93; memo for the record, March 12, 1962, *ibid.*, 194.

²¹ Hilsman to Harriman, *supra* note 8.

²² Memo for the record, May 29, 1962, *FRUS, 1961-1963* 22:240; Embtel, Baguio, March 12, 1962, NSF:CO, box 23, "China, General, Return to the Mainland," JFKL.

Department review of the print media in 1962 revealed that only one major daily in the country, the *New York Daily News*, endorsed Chiang's idea that the time was ripe for a "return to the mainland."²³ Admittedly, the prominent columnist Joseph Alsop had at least implicitly supported Chiang's "Year of the Tiger" thesis in 1962, by suggesting that Mao's regime was on the brink of collapse.²⁴ Yet, Alsop was unable to marshal significant support for his "collapse thesis," and as Bowles pointed out to the president, there were more than a few columnists arguing that the United States should, if anything, tighten the "leash" on the GRC.²⁵ Nonetheless, the memory of the McCarthy-era "loss of China" controversy patently continued to haunt Kennedy, who had personally played a bit part in that ignominious episode of U.S. political history.

Curiously, in conversations with CIA Taipei Station Chief Ray Cline and CIA Director John McCone Kennedy privately claimed that he was unwilling to dismiss altogether the possibility that conditions within the People's Republic might deteriorate to the point where the administration might seriously consider supporting Nationalist military action against the mainland.²⁶ Kennedy's position appears, at first glance, inexplicable; any enthusiasm Kennedy may have once had for high-risk, excursionist policies had been tempered by the Bay of Pigs debacle, and the president had himself concluded that Soviet power could easily be brought into play to ensure the defeat of any Nationalist invasion.²⁷ Possibly Kennedy was simply indicating that he was prepared to keep every option in reserve (as presidents are wont to do), no matter how remote the possibility of exercising this particular option may have been. More likely Kennedy's comments were tailored to his audience: Cline and McCone (the latter a formerly active Republican) were both friendly with the Chiangs and, by all estimates, simpatico with the China Lobby; later in the decade they would, in fact, emerge as the only

²³ Public Opinion Studies Staff (Bureau of Public Affairs), "1962 Public Attitudes Toward U.S. Policy on China," undated, JTP:FE, box 15, "Communist China, General," JFKL.

²⁴ Kochavi, *Conflict Perpetuated*, 112.

²⁵ Bowles to Kennedy, June 15, 1962, POF:CO, China, box 113a, "China, Security, 1962-1963," JFKL.

²⁶ Memo for the record, May 17, 1962, *FRUS, 1961-1963* 22:227; editorial note, *ibid.*, 284.

²⁷ Memo for the record, June 18, 1962, *ibid.*, 247; Freedman, *Kennedy's Wars*, 251-52, 255.

two voices in the Johnson administration supporting a GRC plan for a major assault against the mainland.²⁸ Either way, Kennedy's comments in his conversations with Cline and McCone stand out as rare deviations from his otherwise marked aversion to Nationalist proposals for an attack against the mainland.

Reinforcing the administration's decision to temporise was the fear, already evidenced in 1961, that the GRC might move unilaterally against the mainland if the United States rejected its plans outright. Senior officials in the administration, up to and including the president, believed the United States needed to appear willing to study GRC plans in order to keep Taipei engaged, thereby allowing the administration to effectively register U.S. opposition to these plans, while encouraging greater realism in GRC thinking.²⁹

Of course, temporisation was not without its own costs. In making piecemeal concessions to the GRC position in order to buy more time, the United States risked a "step by step commitment" to Chiang's program.³⁰ Indeed, Washington's calculated ambiguity on the "return to the mainland" concept not only undermined international support for the GRC (and, by extension, adversely affected the international standing of the United States), but also left Chiang in a stronger position to manipulate the situation and pull the United States into a conflict with the mainland. As such, critics of temporisation, including Bowles, Stevenson, and Robert Barnett, argued for a public and explicit disavowal of any GRC effort to recover the mainland militarily.³¹

Yet the critics of temporisation were in a distinct minority in 1962. Even Edward Rice, who in

²⁸ Steven M. Goldstein, "The United States and the Republic of China, 1949-1978: Suspicious Allies," Working Paper, published as part of the *America's Alliances with Japan and Korea in a Changing Northeast Asia* Research Project (February 2000): 33. On Cline also see books cited in infra note 37; and Kochavi, "Opportunities Lost?" 135. On McCone also see Beschloss, *Crisis Years*, 416-18, 633.

²⁹ Embtel, Taipei, February 28, 1962, *FRUS, 1961-1963* 22:186-87; Rice to Harriman, March 29, 1962, *ibid.*, 199.

³⁰ Embtel, Baguio, *supra* note 22.

³¹ Bowles to Kennedy, June 8, 1962, RG59, CF:1960-63, box 2150, 793.00/6-862, NA; Bowles to Bundy, June 18, 1962, NSF:CO, box 23, "China, General," JFKL; Barnett to Bowles, May 10, 1962, JTP:FE, box 15, "Communist China, General," JFKL; NSC meeting, June 26, 1962, *FRUS, 1961-1963* 22:281.

1961 had voiced serious reservations about the temporisation approach, equivocated in 1962. On the one hand Rice agreed that temporisation would give Chiang licence to put pressure on the administration for “increasingly tangible increments of support,” adding “polite silence to avoid or postpone open disagreement” might be taken by Chiang as “tacit agreement” with his objectives. Thus, temporisation was a policy “pregnant with the danger of deepening entanglement.”³² However, Rice conceded that with the situation so delicate in 1962, the United States needed to at least “consult with the GRC about its mainland recovery plans if we are not to afford it the excuse for unilateral action which failure to respond to their initiatives would provide.”³³

The decision to temporise was formalised at a White House meeting on March 31. With uncharacteristic fervour, Rusk denounced Chiang’s aforementioned airdrop plan as utter “nonsense.” No one disagreed. Still, as Hilsman pointed out, the issue was not whether such operations would succeed, but “whether we reject the plan outright or whether we temporise.” In the end, no-one advocated outright rejection. (Harriman, interestingly enough, had been concerned that Rusk might do so.) Instead it was decided that the United States would inform Taipei that several C-123 aircraft—which had a much smaller lift capacity than the requested C-130s—would be made mission ready and a Chinese crew trained in the use of the aircraft. This would provide transport for a single team of 200 Nationalist soldiers, rather than the five teams Chiang had envisioned. However, the preparation of the planes and crew training, which would take six months, would take place on U.S. soil, and the aircraft would be transferred to Taiwan only “when and if there is agreement that an operation is feasible and timely.” In the interim, the GRC would be instructed to consult more closely with the United States on its plans and gather more evidence on mainland conditions, possibly through 20-man probes of the mainland.³⁴ In part, the United States believed these small-scale probes

³² Rice, draft paper, *supra* note 10.

³³ Rice to Harriman, March 7, 1962, RG59, CF:1960-63, box 2149, 793.00/3-762, NA.

³⁴ Memo for the record, March 31, 1962, *FRUS, 1961-1963* 22:204-5; memo to Cline, March 31, 1962, *ibid.*, 206-7. Similar operations had previously been approved in July 1961, in order to ease pressure for larger

would help redress serious gaps in U.S. intelligence about mainland conditions; more importantly, they offered, as Harriman wrote, a means of “anticipating, containing and diverting GRC pressures for larger-scale operations.”³⁵

Presented with the U.S. game plan in April 1962, Chiang immediately tried to bend the rules more to his liking, telling Washington he would move his attack-readiness deadline until October, but could not delay action beyond that point.³⁶ The administration stood by its guns: this was not, it reiterated, simply a question of timing; rather, the planes would only be made available if such action was deemed viable by both parties. With no U.S. ambassador in Taipei (Kirk did not arrive until July), CIA Station Chief Ray Cline—who had become closely acquainted with Chiang over the years—was given the unenviable task of reiterating the message to Chiang. Doing so “made me sweat blood,” Cline wrote to Bundy; although the situation had been brought under control, it had been a “close thing.”³⁷ And the issue was far from dead, with Chiang indicating that another showdown in the relationship could be expected in October if the United States continued to push for delay.³⁸

Crisis Averted

The administration did not have to wait until October for the situation in the Taiwan Strait to come to a head. In June 1962 American analysts detected the movement of large numbers of PLA troops into Fujian province, directly opposite Taiwan and adjacent to the offshore islands. From mid-June some seven additional divisions moved into the already heavily garrisoned region, with five more divisions apparently on the way. This was, as a June 20

airdrops. The GRC had, at that time, declined to undertake the operations, claiming they would be too small to be useful. *FRUS, 1961-1963* 22:193n1.

³⁵ Harriman to Kirk, August 8, 1962, *FRUS, 1961-1963* 22:301-2; Thomas Parrott to General Clifton, November 9, 1962, NSF:CO, box 23, “China, General,” JFKL.

³⁶ *FRUS, 1961-1963* 22:218n1.

³⁷ Cline to Bundy, April 19, 1962, NSF:CO, box 22a, “China, General, CIA Cables,” JFKL. On Cline’s years in Taipei, see Cline, *Secrets, Spies, and Scholars: Blueprint for the Essential CIA* (Washington, DC: Acropolis Books, 1976), 172-81; and Cline, *Chiang Ching-kuo Remembered: The Man and His Political Legacy* (Washington, DC: United States Global Strategy Council, 1989), 15-99 (both cited in *FRUS, 1961-1963* 22:89n1).

³⁸ Cline to Bundy, April 20, 1962, NSF:CO, box 22a, “China, General, CIA Cables,” JFKL.

Special National Intelligence Estimate reported, the “largest such movement [of Chinese troops] since the Korean War.”³⁹

The scale and pace of the build-up prompted the CIA to warn Kennedy that Beijing might be preparing for new assaults on the offshore islands.⁴⁰ Meanwhile, Kennedy’s Military Representative, General Maxwell Taylor, floated the possibility that an irrational Chinese leadership might be angling to eliminate some of Chiang’s crack troops, while delivering a blow to U.S. and GRC prestige in the international arena, and boosting morale on the home front.⁴¹

After McCone outlined the CIA’s analysis in a meeting with Kennedy and senior national security officials, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, with “contempt in his voice for the intelligence community,” dismissed CIA’s estimates as unduly alarmist.⁴² Similarly, officials in the State Department believed that the build-up was, in all probability, a defensive reaction to Beijing’s “genuine but exaggerated concern” that a Nationalist attack against the mainland was imminent. While the administration had dispatched a series of high-profile officials to Taipei in the preceding months in an attempt to put the brakes on Chiang’s push for action, U.S. officials understood that these visits, accompanied as they were by enthusiastic proclamations of U.S.-GRC solidarity, might well have been read by Beijing as a sign of U.S. approval of Chiang’s plans. Similarly, although Kirk was appointed ambassador in large part because his background in amphibious operations would allow him to challenge Chiang’s invasion plans on military as well as political grounds, Beijing might have reasoned that Chiang was using Kirk’s expertise to flesh out his aggressive designs. U.S. observers also noted that unrelated shifts in the U.S. military disposition in the region—not least the

³⁹ SNIE 13-5-62, June 20, 1962, referred to in *FRUS, 1961-1963* 22:251n1. Whiting estimates that the redeployment involved 100,000 troops. Whiting, *Chinese Calculus*, 68. Hilsman, however, estimated that troop numbers opposite Taiwan increased by 500,000 within the space of a week. Hilsman, *Move a Nation*, 318.

⁴⁰ President’s Intelligence Checklist, June 19, 1962, POF:CO, China, box 113a, “China, Security, 1962-63,” JFKL.

⁴¹ Taylor to Kennedy, June 26, 1962, *FRUS, 1961-1963* 22:282-83.

⁴² Meeting, June 20, 1962, *ibid.*, 251-55.

movement of a substantial contingent of U.S. troops to Thailand, with the implicit threat of committing them to Laos if need be—could easily have been interpreted by Beijing as indicative of a more aggressive U.S. posture. These factors, *in toto*, meant it was relatively easy for American analysts to understand how by “a selective process of alarmist reasoning,” as INR put it, Beijing had concluded that the United States was seriously contemplating supporting a Nationalist military assault against the mainland.⁴³

Despite the prevailing interpretation that the PRC troop movements were essentially defensive, the build-up still gave the administration cause for concern. Even if Beijing’s principle rationale was defensive, events in the strait could easily acquire an escalatory momentum of their own. More purposely, Beijing might try to exploit the situation to its diplomatic advantage, raising the spectre of a third clash over the offshore islands in order to throw Chiang off-balance and again put the United States in the taxing position of having to confront the contradictions of U.S.-GRC relations in a crisis environment.⁴⁴ Recognising the dangers inherent in the situation, Kennedy moved quickly to defuse the mounting tensions at hand. On the home front, the president instructed his press secretary, Pierre Salinger, to use McNamara’s aforementioned estimate of Chinese intentions as guidance in his briefings, in the hope this would put a lid on the rising speculation that another crisis over the offshore islands was brewing.⁴⁵ Meanwhile, at the diplomatic level, Kennedy directed that Beijing be both warned against any aggressive action, and assured that the United States had no current intention of supporting a Nationalist attack against the mainland.⁴⁶

Fortunately, the Chinese side was just as eager for an exchange on the matter, and when Wang invited Ambassador Cabot to a special session of the Warsaw discussions for June 23,

⁴³ INR, “Chinese Communist Motivations in a Possible Offshore Islands Probe,” June 22, 1962, NSF:CO, box 23, “China, General,” JFKL; INR, “Evidence of Peiping’s Concern over Possible GRC-U.S. Intentions,” June 22, 1962, *ibid.*; Embtel-1016, Taipei, June 26, 1962, NSF:CO, box 25a, “China, Cables,” JFKL; and *FRUS, 1961-1963* 22:247-49, 272-73, 276, 278.

⁴⁴ Hilsman to Rusk, June 18, 1962, *FRUS, 1961-1963* 22:248-49; Congentel, Hong Kong, June 22, 1962, *ibid.*, 272-73.

⁴⁵ Freedman, *Kennedy’s Wars*, 254.

⁴⁶ Ball to Kennedy, June 21, 1962, *FRUS, 1961-1963* 22:258-59.

the United States seized the opportunity to communicate a message which it had previously been trying to pass on through third parties.⁴⁷ Wang was assured that the “US Government had no intention of supporting any GRC attack on [the] Mainland under existing circumstances.” And the GRC, Wang was told, was obliged not to launch an attack without U.S. consent.⁴⁸ Four days later, Kennedy opened his press conference by reiterating U.S. opposition to the use of force in the Strait and emphasising the defensive nature of the U.S. treaty commitment to the ROC.⁴⁹

The June crisis, and the administration’s response to it, represented something of a watershed in the U.S.-GRC discussions on “return to the mainland.” With Taipei evidently cowed by Beijing’s pre-emption of any Nationalist military action, U.S. analysts detected a distinct shift by the GRC toward a defensive political posture in the wake of the PLA build-up. The “counterattack” theme was momentarily shelved, replaced by half-hearted declarations that the GRC was committed to peace in the region and would never take action against the mainland without U.S. consent. With Taipei caught off-guard, INR speculated that Chiang’s regime would now be wondering to “what extent the ground has been cut out from under its efforts to gain U.S. backing” for its objectives.⁵⁰

Meanwhile, leaked reports of the assurances given to Beijing at Warsaw began appearing in the press, compounding pessimism in Taiwan over the GRC’s ability to sell Washington on the virtues of a “return to the mainland.” The U.S. Embassy in Taipei reported that these press reports, along with Kennedy’s public reiteration of the defensive nature of the U.S.-GRC alliance, had served as a “sobering reminder that United States commitments to the GRC are

⁴⁷ Zhang Baijia and Jia Qingguo, “Steering Wheel, Shock Absorber, and Diplomatic Probe in Confrontation: Sino-American Ambassadorial Talks seen from the Chinese Perspective,” in *Re-examining the Cold War*, 190-91; Deptel-1828 to Warsaw, NSF:CO, box 153a, “Poland, Subjects, Ambassadorial Talks with Ambassador Wang,” JFKL.

⁴⁸ Embtel, Warsaw, June 23, 1962, *FRUS*, 1961-1963 22:273-75.

⁴⁹ Kennedy, June 27, 1962, *PPP:JFK*, 1962, 510.

⁵⁰ INR, “Taiwan Strait Crisis: GRC on the Defensive,” June 28, 1962, NSF:CO, box 25a, “China, Cables,” JFKL.

purely defensive in character.”⁵¹ Chiang, not privy to what had actually transpired in Warsaw, wasted no time in seeking assurances from Washington that such reports were false. Meeting with the newly arrived ambassador, Admiral Kirk, Chiang was fobbed off with the line that the United States had simply repeated its call for a mutual renunciation of force in the region. Subsequent appeals from Chiang for a public clarification of the content of the June 23 Warsaw discussion were ignored, Kirk simply reminding his host that, as Kennedy had stated, the United States commitment to the ROC was purely defensive. With nowhere to turn, Chiang was left to fume at the administration “shaking hands” with the Communist regime.⁵²

Through late 1962 and early 1963 the GRC pressed forward with its military preparedness program and Chiang continued his efforts to convince the administration that the time was ripe for a “counterattack.”⁵³ Yet by the middle of 1963 it was apparent that the leak of U.S. assurances to Beijing the previous summer had knocked the wind from Chiang’s sails, forcing a reassessment the prospects for a “return to the mainland.” Whereas Nationalist planners had earlier envisioned large-scale attacks they now shifted their energies to small-scale paramilitary operations and political warfare.⁵⁴ When the raids of the mainland by small, 20-man teams of Nationalist agents, launched from October 1962 onwards, were successively and without exception wiped out by the PLA, the Kennedy administration found another occasion to remind the GRC that conditions did not favour larger operations.⁵⁵ By 1963 Harriman could report to Kennedy that the United States was “making progress in Taiwan in

⁵¹ Airgram-230, Taipei, *supra* note 2; Clough, OHI, August 8, 1990, 94-95, ADST.

⁵² Embtel, Taipei, July 4, 1962, *FRUS, 1961-1963* 22:285-87; Embtel, Taipei, July 5, 1962, *ibid.*, 287-89; Embtel-237, Taipei, August 27, 1962, RG59, CF:1960-63, box 2152, 793.00/8-2762, NA.

⁵³ See Chang, *Friends and Enemies*, 226-27.

⁵⁴ Embtel-62, Taipei, July 17, 1962, RG59, CF:1960-63, box 2151, 793.00/7-1762, NA; airgram-276, Taipei, October 26, 1962, *ibid.*, box 2152, 793.00/10-2662; Embtel-803, Taipei, May 14, 1963, NSF:CO, box 26, “China, Cables,” JFKL; cable, COMUSTDC to State, June 29, 1963, *ibid.*; airgram-792, Taipei, April 5, 1963, *ibid.*

⁵⁵ Embtel, Taipei, January 10, 1963, *FRUS, 1961-1963* 22:337-38; memcon, Kennedy and Chiang Ching-kuo, September 11, 1963, *ibid.*, 386-92; Embtel-1095, Hong Kong, December 31, 1962, RG59, CF:1960-63, box 2153, 793.00/12-3162, NA; INR, “A Setback in Republic of China Efforts to Penetrate the Mainland,” JFKL, NSF:CO, box 24, “China, General.” One official in the Chinese Foreign Ministry reportedly suggested that, its public protests notwithstanding, Beijing was unconcerned about these attacks, given the “understanding” established between Beijing and Washington at Warsaw. CIA, “Comments of Chinese Communist Ministry of Foreign Affairs Official on China’s International and Domestic Problems,” April 29, 1963, NSF:CO, box 26, “China, Cables,” JFKL.

regaining our ‘independence.’”⁵⁶

For his part, Chiang continued to cling to the idea of a “return to the mainland”—hardly surprising given his rule was inextricably tied to his soi-dissant role as future liberator of the Chinese masses. Beyond political necessity, Chiang seemed psychologically incapable of overcoming his chimerical vision of a triumphant return to power on the Chinese mainland. GRC officials, acting upon instruction from their ageing leader, would periodically approach the United States about a “return to the mainland” through the 1960s, and Washington and Taipei would in turn clash on the viability and level of attention being given to the objective (some of the more fiery exchanges taking place during Kirk’s brief tenure as ambassador, which ended in March 1963).⁵⁷ The Vietnam War, in particular, witnessed a spike in the intensity of the “return to the mainland” theme, as the GRC made a series of high-level (and unsuccessful) attempts to tie their own fight against the CCP to the U.S. fight against the Vietcong, both rhetorically and on-the-ground.⁵⁸ Moreover, through the Kennedy and Johnson years Taipei would occasionally increase the volume on a “return to the mainland” in the public sphere. But for the most part this rhetoric had a hollow ring, and by and large the “return to the mainland” theme remained in low gear, at least relative to the noise generated in 1961 and (even more so) through the first half of 1962.⁵⁹ As ROC Foreign Minister Shen told the deputy chief of mission of the U.S. Embassy in Taipei Ralph Clough in 1963, Washington should not take Chiang’s comments on “counterattack” too seriously; such comments were in large part simply intended to enhance morale within the armed forces and maintain faith among the larger population in Chiang’s leadership.⁶⁰ In short, even if the lower intensity of the “return to the mainland” theme did not obviate U.S.-GRC tensions on the matter entirely, it at least made them more manageable.

⁵⁶ Harriman to Kennedy, January 23, 1963, cited in editorial note, *FRUS, 1961-1963* 22:341.

⁵⁷ See, for instance, *FRUS, 1961-1963* 22:335-36, 342-44, 352-60, 386-92.

⁵⁸ See chapter nine, 234.

⁵⁹ Embtel-465, Taipei, October 9, 1962, NSF:CO, box 25a, “China, Cables”; Wright to Hilsman, December 19, 1963, *FRUS, 1961-1963* 22:413.

⁶⁰ Airgram-693, Taipei, March 1, 1963, NSF:CO, box 26, “China, Cables,” JFKL.

Reading Beijing's "Campaign of Smiles"

The distance placed between the administration and Chiang's ambition of a "return to the mainland" also enhanced the possibility of forward movement in U.S.-PRC relations. Temporarily, U.S.-PRC tensions ebbed in the wake of the crisis, replaced by something approaching an air of civility between the two antagonists.⁶¹ Meanwhile, new indications emerged that the administration's defensive interpretation of the troop build-up was on the mark, including evidence (however inconclusive) that Beijing had got wind of Chiang's airdrop plan and believed the United States had agreed to assist in such operations.⁶² Moreover, through discussions with British representatives, PRC foreign minister Chen conveyed Beijing's appreciation for U.S. "assurances [provided at Warsaw] that neither support nor encouragement" would be given to Chiang to attack the mainland. To Washington it appeared that these assurances, together with Kennedy public reiteration of the defensive nature of the U.S.-GRC relationship, had placated a nervous Chinese leadership, and clearly signalled that the administration had no intention of capitalising on China's internal difficulties by sponsoring or tacitly supporting a Nationalist attack against the mainland.⁶³

In addition to reports of Beijing's appreciation for the assurances given at Warsaw, U.S. officials at the Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs also believed it was possible that Beijing had detected subtle indications in May 1962 that Washington was prepared to engage in discussions on food aid, even though the issue (as noted in the previous chapter) was not raised at Warsaw. "Twice then, in short order," Lindsay Grant of the Mainland China desk reported, "[Beijing] found possible indications of a change in the United States position on the China issue."⁶⁴

⁶¹ Embtel-365, Warsaw, NSF:CO, box 153a, "Poland, Subjects, Ambassadorial Talks with Ambassador Wang," JFKL.

⁶² Airgram-59, Hong Kong, July 18, 1962, RG59, CF:1960-63, box 2151, 793.00/7-1862, NA; airgram-510, Hong Kong, November 16, 1962, *ibid.*, box 2152, 793.00/11-1662; Hilsman to Yager, July 17, 1962, *ibid.*, microfilm, 611.93/7-1762; Forrestal to Bundy, August 3, 1962, *FRUS, 1961-1963* 22:299. Also see Whiting, *Chinese Calculus*, 65-66.

⁶³ SNIE 13-5/1-62, July 6, 1962, *FRUS, 1961-1963* 22:289-91; Deptel to Taipei, July 28, 1962, *ibid.*, 296-98.

⁶⁴ Grant to Bacon, August 18, 1962, RG59, CF:1960-63, microfilm, 611.93/8-1862, NA.

And when multilateral negotiations in Geneva on the neutralisation of Laos—to which both the United States and the PRC were a party—were successfully concluded in mid-July, the Chinese privately hinted at an interest in building on this success to improve Sino-American relations.⁶⁵ On July 18 Ambassador Wang, the PRC representative in Warsaw, approached Harriman in the delegates lounge in Geneva, and expressed to Harriman his belief that further understandings might now be reached between Beijing and Washington. Harriman did not press Wang on the matter given the informality of the occasion, but he was left with the impression that Wang was referring to “our basic relations,” rather than a peripheral subject such as Vietnam.⁶⁶ According to the third-ranked member of the U.S. delegation to the conference, William Sullivan, the conclusion of the Accords also prompted the PRC foreign minister, Chen Yi, to invite the American delegation to a party the Chinese were hosting to mark the end of the negotiations. Rusk felt “it would be too sensational” for Harriman or himself to attend, but instead allowed Sullivan, as the third ranking member of the U.S. delegation, to attend as token of the administration’s “appreciation of the cooperation Peking had shown in signing the Laos agreement.” Chen Yi, apparently surprised that any member of the American delegation had accepted the invitation, rose to the occasion, repeatedly toasting Sino-American friendship with “countless gulps of biting Mao Tai liquor.”⁶⁷

Even without the drinks, Chen still found opportunities at Geneva to tentatively express an interest in improved Sino-American relations. Knowing his comments would be relayed to U.S. officials, Chen told members of the British delegation that the Kennedy administration had shown greater flexibility than previous U.S. administrations, and that the signing of the Laos agreement constituted a “step forward” in Sino-American relations. Furthermore, in an

⁶⁵ Niu Jun portrays the Chinese pursuit of a peaceful settlement to the Laos crisis between 1960 and mid-1962 as both an attempt to avoid a direct confrontation with American forces, and part of a broader (tentative) effort to “break the stalemate in Sino-American relations.” Niu, “Left Turn,” 14-16.

⁶⁶ Telegram (Confe)-1271, Geneva (from Harriman), July 19, 1962, NSF:CO, box 25a, “China, Cables,” JFKL.

⁶⁷ William H. Sullivan, *Obbligato, 1939-1979: Notes on a Foreign Service Career* (New York: Norton, 1984), 170. Harriman’s assistant at the conference, Chester Cooper, also attended. Chester L. Cooper, *The Lost Crusade: The Full Story of US Involvement in Vietnam from Roosevelt to Nixon* (London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1970), 183-85.

uncommon recognition of the political constraints operating on the Kennedy administration, Chen stated that the Chinese understood the domestic difficulties the administration would confront in modifying its China policy, and were prepared to be patient in this respect.⁶⁸ This newfound esteem was not one-sided; Rusk told the Swiss ambassador that at Geneva the PRC had demonstrated a “degree of moderation that had not been there before.”⁶⁹

Outside the diplomatic sphere, there was little change in Beijing’s posture. Talking informally to members of the press, Chen was more circumspect: even allowing that Sino-American relations might improve, he stressed, it is “not up to us to improve the situation.” Here Chen fell back to the old saw that the U.S. “occupation” of Taiwan remained the principle obstacle to improved relations. Asked about a possible extension of U.S. food aid to China, Chen simply reiterated Beijing’s standing position: China would never “beg from anyone.” Still, when asked if the PRC would accept a no-strings attached offer of U.S. food he hedged, suggesting Beijing’s attitude “would depend on the form of the offer and circumstances.”⁷⁰

Applying Occam’s Razor, Lindsay Grant of the Mainland China desk initially wrote that the most likely explanation for Beijing’s “campaign of smiles” was that the Chinese were “badly enough shaken up” by their domestic and international difficulties “to wish a détente in which they will not have to gird up to defend their interests, real or imagined, against external pressures.” Moreover, Grant could not rule out the possibility that Beijing was seeking a real amelioration of Sino-American tensions in order to reduce their existing isolation, and perhaps expand access to Western markets.⁷¹ However, after taking a “more leisurely look” at the situation, Grant concluded that the Chinese were most likely playing a tactical game aimed at probing U.S. intentions. And whatever Beijing’s broader objectives, it seemed almost certain Beijing was exploiting the assurances given at Warsaw (through leaks) in a

⁶⁸ Deptel to Taipei, supra note 63.

⁶⁹ Memcon, Rusk and Ambassador Lindt (Switzerland), July 30, 1962, RG59, CF:1960-63, box 1367, 661.93/7-3062, NA. Also see Kochavi, *Conflict Perpetuated*, 118-20.

⁷⁰ CIA, “Additional Information on Ch’en I Geneva Interview at Laotian Delegation Reception on 23 July 1962,” July 25, 1962, NSF:CO, box 25a, “China, Cables,” JFKL.

⁷¹ Grant to Yager, August 1, 1962, RG59, CF:1960-63, microfilm, 611.93/8-162, NA.

concerted campaign to aggravate U.S.-GRC tensions.⁷² Grant's hypothesis was supported by an INR review of recent public statements by Beijing, including Chen Yi's public expressions of "qualified appreciation" for the ostensibly confidential U.S. assurances given at Warsaw, expressions that the bureau argued were principally intended to exacerbate U.S.-GRC tensions.⁷³

Still, even after concluding that Beijing's basic attitude toward the United States remained unchanged, Grant noted that the "very violence with which Ch'en Yi in May lashed out at our food grain policy" suggested the issue may have been the subject of considerable debate in China. "If so, our interest in establishing the idea that a less hostile stance is a meaningful policy alternative has not borne fruit this round, but the idea may be planted."⁷⁴ Beijing, it seemed, was not quite ready to discuss improved relations with the United States; all the same, hope remained that Beijing, chastened by China's domestic difficulties and international isolation, might still come around to the idea of reduced Sino-American tensions.

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The Third Taiwan Strait Crisis (which turned out to be something of a non-crisis after all) forced the Kennedy administration to directly confront the divergence of objectives in the U.S.-GRC alliance, and clearly—if not explicitly—dissociate the United States from Chiang's guiding ambition of a "return to the mainland." In the most immediate sense, the administration's success in "signalling" to Beijing U.S. opposition to Chiang's plans helped defuse the crisis at hand. In a longer-term frame of reference, the administration's deft public and private diplomacy during the crisis helped stabilise the status quo in the Taiwan Strait.

⁷² Memcon, Grant and Oren Ruzic (Counselor, Yugoslav Embassy), August 21, 1962, *ibid.*, 611.93/8-2161; Grant to Bacon, *supra* note 64.

⁷³ INR, "Recent Chicom Statements Designed to Split U.S. and Taipei," August 2 1962, NSF:CO, box 25a, "China, General," JFKL.

⁷⁴ Grant to Bacon, *supra* note 64.

Chiang continued to lobby Washington for clearance to launch a military assault on the PRC, but Nationalist preparations for a “return to the mainland” would never again assume the same degree of urgency or intensity witnessed during the Year of the Tiger. And while Beijing still fumed about the U.S. warships that stood between its armies and a “liberation” of Taiwan, it could at least proceed with some confidence that those warships would not be used to ferry the “Chiang Kai-shek clique” back to the mainland.

In part because of this new measure of understanding between Beijing and Washington, as the crisis subsided Sino-American relations entered a period of uncommon calm. The civility of the bilateral dialogue in July and August even gave some U.S. officials cause to hope that modest improvements in relations might be on the cards. The easing of Sino-American tensions would, however, prove altogether ephemeral. As summer gave way to fall the fog suffusing Beijing’s intentions lifted, revealing a regime given to an uncompromising and venomous brand of militancy in its dealings with ideological and national adversaries. The faint glimmer of hope provided by Beijing’s “campaign of smiles” soon vanished, and by the end of the year China had emerged in the American analysis as not only the more militant of the two Communist giants, but in some ways the more dangerous.

6

THE SINO-SOVIET DISPUTE AND U.S. THREAT PERCEPTION

The fall of 1962 was a watershed period in Washington's understanding of the Sino-Soviet dispute and its geopolitical import for the United States. To be sure, by the start of 1962 U.S. officials were already alert to serious, perhaps even irreconcilable, tensions threatening to tear the Moscow-Beijing axis apart. And yet upon reflection the attention given to the dispute and its policy implications in the upper reaches of the administration during the first eighteen months of Kennedy's presidency appears conspicuously slight, at least relative to the magnitude of this fundamental shift from the hitherto defining bipolarity of the Cold War. In part, this can be attributed to the difficulties inherent in understanding the vagaries of a multidimensional relationship between two secretive states with closed societies. More importantly, even as U.S. officials groped towards a proper appreciation of the extent and meaning of the rips appearing in the fabric of the Sino-Soviet partnership, a fundamental problem remained: even allowing for the reality of the Sino-Soviet dispute, no-one, as Walt Rostow put it in January 1962, seemed sure "what to do about it."¹

However, by the end of 1962, with the Sino-Soviet relationship descending into a no-holds-barred public brawl, a clearer picture of the dynamics, and by extension the policy implications, of the dispute had emerged. Two events occurring on different sides of the world in October, or more precisely the political reverberations of these events, had the effect of crystallising pre-existent American perceptions of the increasingly divergent foreign policy lines of Moscow and Beijing. China's attack on India, beyond reinvigorating a pre-Great Leap imagery of an assertive and militarily effective Chinese state, also suggested that Beijing was

¹ Thomson to Harriman, January 12, 1962, *FRUS, 1961-1963* 22:176.

now putting the combative dictums of “Mao Zedong Thought” to the test. Although both administration and insiders have written valuable accounts of Washington’s readings of the Sino-Indian border war,² this chapter points to a heretofore unexplored paradox in the administration’s interpretation of the conflict: On an intellectual level, U.S. policymakers recognised the local origins of the border dispute, and, belying the administration’s public rhetoric, China’s attack on India was never viewed as an unequivocal exercise in Communist aggression. But when interpreted through the prism of the expanding Sino-Soviet divergence on foreign policy, China’s offensive assumed a portent transcending the conflict’s local dimensions, becoming, in the American analysis, an attempt by Beijing to test the validity of its militant foreign policy line.

Meanwhile, the Cuban Missile Crisis, which was still playing out when China attacked India, would, oddly enough, reinforce this perception of Chinese militancy. Although serving in the first instance to highlight the threat of a U.S.-Soviet thermonuclear war, the conciliatory post-crisis atmospherics between Moscow and Washington threw into sharp relief China’s antagonism toward both U.S. imperialism and Soviet revisionism—and, more specifically, the Kremlin’s pursuit of “peaceful coexistence” with the West. By the beginning of 1963 U.S. officials not only found good cause to believe that China was the more militant party in the dispute—a widespread, long-founded and, it could be added, entirely well-founded assumption—but also that Mao’s China posed a greater threat to U.S. interests. Thus, even as U.S. policymakers remained unsure what to do about the Sino-Soviet dispute in early 1963, developments in fall of 1962 clearly defined the contours of an international context that favoured the exploration of a tacit (and, it should be stressed, limited) U.S. alignment with Moscow, directed toward curtailing Chinese militancy.

² See, in particular, Hilsman, *Move a Nation*, 320-39; and Kochavi, *Conflict Perpetuated*, 148-54.

Washington's Developing Awareness of the Sino-Soviet Dispute

As the fog suffusing Chinese intentions during its 1962 “campaign of smiles” started to lift in late August the picture that emerged was not, as some U.S. officials had tentatively hoped, that of a chastened and newly judicious Chinese leadership ready to curb its pronounced hostility toward the United States. On the contrary, the Chinese leadership had apparently regained some of their pre-Great Leap confidence following the stabilisation (if not recovery) of China’s economy, along with the successful mobilisation of military forces into Fujian in June (as discussed in the previous chapter). The fall of 1962 thus saw a re-emergence of Beijing’s “explosive blend of arrant chauvinism and ideological dogmatism.”³

In particular, U.S. observers interpreted the communiqué released following the 10th Plenum of the 8th CCP Congress, convened in the last week of September, as a formal reaffirmation of China’s hardline international policies. As the U.S. Consulate in Hong Kong concluded, the hardline veterans of the Long March, and indeed Mao himself, appeared firmly in control of China’s foreign policy, regardless of any changes that may have occurred in “the locus of power among the Old Guard.” Clearly, those voices within the Chinese polity appealing for moderation in foreign policy (to the extent they had existed in the first place) had, at least for the moment, been silenced. Indeed, the communiqué, cast in heavy-handed Maoist vernacular, indicated that the Chinese leadership had “spurned” a “more moderate course” in the international arena, instead opting for a “hard-line, bellicose foreign policy stance...with particular venom being directed toward the nations and leaders which the regime has branded as ‘enemies’”—including, of course, the United States.⁴

However, even from Washington’s perspective the most notable aspect of the communiqué was not the reiteration of Beijing’s shrill anti-Americanism, but rather its provocative anti-

³ Airgram-752, Hong Kong, January 29, 1963, RG59, CF:1960-63, box 2153, 793.00/1-2963, NA (for quote); INR, “Problems and Prospects in Communist China,” February 26, 1963, NSF:CO, box 24, “China, General,” JFKL.

⁴ Congentel-689, Hong Kong, September 29, 1962, RG59, CF:1960-63, box 2152, 793.00/9-2962, NA; airgram-498, Hong Kong, November 13, 1962, *ibid.*, 793.00/11-1362. On U.S. readings of Mao’s power position in the post-Great Leap, pre-Cultural Revolution period, see chapter four, 103-105.

Soviet philippics. Although not directly named, there was no confusion that Moscow was the target of Beijing's attacks on "great power chauvinism," and charge that "modern revisionism" (as nominally represented by Tito's Yugoslavia) was the main threat to world Communism. Alongside reminders issued by Beijing in the period leading up to the plenum on the obligation of one socialist state not to interfere in the internal affairs of another, the communiqué's assertion that the stand against "imperialists, reactionaries of all countries, and modern revisionists" was "entirely correct" served notice on the Soviets that Beijing would neither be bound by the Kremlin's policy diktats, nor retreat from its own ideologically framed positions.⁵

Of course, U.S. officials had long been aware of the existence of, or at least the potential for, serious tension in the Sino-Soviet alliance. Even after Mao declared that China would "lean to one side" in the Cold War and carried himself off to Moscow to negotiate a treaty with the Soviet Union, officials in the Truman administration remained hopeful that historical Sino-Soviet tensions would ultimately undermine the integrity of the alliance.⁶ By the end of the 1950s indications emerged that the relationship was indeed beginning to strain, with the Chinese and Soviets apparently at loggerheads on a number of issues, not least of which was their divergent foreign policy lines. In April 1960 Beijing publicly spelt out its grievances in an article titled "Long Live Leninism," published in the CCP's theoretical organ, *Red Flag*. The article took issue with the three ideological premises that Khrushchev had personally advanced as the foundation for Soviet foreign policy in the post-Stalin era: peaceful co-existence, non-inevitability of war, and peaceful transitions to socialism. An open quarrel

⁵ INR, "Peiping Plenum Defiant on Bloc Relations," September 28, 1962, NSF:CO, box 23, "China, General," JFKL. Until 1963 the Chinese and Soviets did not publicly refer to each other in name in their polemics, instead denouncing states which had become aligned with the other side in the dispute. The Chinese attacked the Yugoslavs, while the Soviets attacked the Albanians.

⁶ Mayers, *Cracking the Monolith*, 46-72. On tensions in treaty negotiation process, see Sergei N. Goncharov, John W. Lewis and Xue Litai, *Uncertain Partners: Stalin, Mao, and the Korean War* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 84-129; and Dieter Heinzig, *The Soviet Union and Communist China, 1945-1950: The Arduous Road to Alliance* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2004). Michael Sheng, however, uses Chinese evidence to support the "traditional" hypothesis of healthy Sino-Soviet ideological and strategic bonds in this period. Michael M. Sheng, *Battling Western Imperialism: Mao, Stalin, and the United States* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).

ensued at the June 1960 Congress of the Romanian Worker's Party in Bucharest, where Khrushchev had personally led the Soviet delegation in condemning Chinese behaviour. The sudden withdrawal of all Soviet technicians from the PRC in July 1960, at a moment when Chinese industry was still haemorrhaging courtesy of the Great Leap Forward, took the dispute to new heights and underlined for U.S. observers the extent of Sino-Soviet discord. By the end of 1960 one National Intelligence Estimate (NIE)—the closest representation of consensus within the U.S. intelligence community⁷—had concluded that the differences between Moscow and Beijing had grown so fundamental that “any genuine resolution of the fundamental differences is unlikely.”⁸

Some U.S. analysts have since suggested that as late as 1963 senior policymakers in Washington were reluctant to accept the reality of the Sino-Soviet dispute.⁹ Yet in the early 1960s these policymakers were not so much in doubt as to the reality of the Sino-Soviet dispute, but rather uncertain about its depth and, by extension, the implications for U.S. policy. Reflecting the tendency of U.S. analysts to hedge in their appraisals of the relationship at this juncture, several NIEs in 1961 predicted an uneasy ebb-and-flow in the relationship, wherein tensions would remain unresolved, yet sufficient unity would be preserved to “enable Moscow and Peiping to act in concert against the West, especially in times of major challenge.”¹⁰ For his part, in early 1961 Kennedy suspected the policy implications of any tensions between Moscow and Beijing would be largely negated by their shared hatred of the West. The two Communist powers reminded him, he told French president Charles de Gaulle in May 1961, of the rivalry between Caesar and Pompey, which only “came out into the open

⁷ Chester L. Cooper, “The CIA and Decision Making,” *Foreign Affairs* 50 (January 1972): 224-25; Cline, *Secrets, Spies*, 120, 135-40.

⁸ NIE 13-60, December 6, 1960, in CIA, *China Collection*; State paper (forwarded by Bohlen to Bundy for Kennedy), “Summary of the Sino-Soviet Dispute,” undated (forwarded February 16, 1961), President's Office Files, Series 8: Subjects, box 106, “Sino-Soviet Relations,” JFKL.

⁹ Paul Kreisberg, OHI, April 8, 1989, 30, ADST; Harold P. Ford, “The CIA and Double Demonology: Calling the Sino-Soviet Split,” *Studies in Intelligence* (Winter 1998-1999), online at https://www.cia.gov/csi/studies/winter98_99/art05.html.

¹⁰ NIE 10-61, August 8, 1961, *FRUS, 1961-1963* 22:114-18; SNIE 13-2-61, September 28, 1961, *ibid.*, 138-40.

after the two generals had conquered their common enemies.”¹¹

Washington’s uncertainty about the gravity of the dispute was compounded by the fluctuating character of the Sino-Soviet relationship in 1961 and 1962. Contrary indications emerged during this period as to the direction of the relationship, particularly as both sides made concerted efforts to play down tensions—a tack that some attributed to Beijing’s need to avoid a showdown in relations at a time when it was preoccupied with stabilising the economy and forestalling a U.S. sponsored attack by the GRC.¹² Also, both Moscow and Beijing evidently wanted to maintain a pretence of proletarian solidarity, if only to avoid the “deleterious consequences,” as INR put it, that an open break in party and/or state relations would have on the international Communist movement.¹³

This lull in the dispute, particularly pronounced in spring and summer of 1962, led several prominent U.S. diplomats to suggest that the Sino-Soviet relationship would likely survive any differences between Moscow and Beijing. In May 1962 veteran diplomat George Kennan cast doubt on the analytical accuracy of a February 21 NIE that claimed “Sino-Soviet relations are in a critical phase just short of an acknowledged and definitive split,” with the chances of such a split being avoided in 1962 “no better than even.”¹⁴ Kennan argued that the “greater modesty of aspiration” forced upon Beijing by failures on the home front, and on the Soviets by the frustrations of pursuing “peaceful coexistence” with the West, might encourage both sides to put their differences aside. Charles Bohlen, Soviet expert and Rusk’s Special

¹¹ Memcon, Kennedy and de Gaulle, May 31, 1961, *FRUS, 1961-1963* 24:220.

¹² Grant to Yager, August 1, 1962, RG59, CF:1960-63, microfilm, 611.93/8-162, NA. Niu Jun stresses Beijing’s preoccupation with China’s internal situation in informing the relatively moderate approach to the relationship with Moscow in this period. Niu, “Left Turn,” 10, 16-24. Dong Wang, meanwhile, suggests Beijing’s efforts to maintain the integrity of the alliance (at least prior to October 1961) were based on the fear that a deterioration of relations would undermine the PRC’s strategic position vis-à-vis the United States. Dong Wang, “The Quarrelling Brothers: New Chinese Archives and a Reappraisal of the Sino-Soviet Split, 1959-1962,” Working Paper No. 49, CWIHP, *Working Paper Series* (Washington, DC: 2006).

¹³ INR, “Sino-Soviet Relations: Current State and Prospects,” May 14, 1962, RH:CO, box 1, “Communist China, Sino-Soviet Dispute, U.S. Overt Attitude,” JFKL.

¹⁴ NIE 11-5-62, February 21, 1962, *FRUS, 1961-1963* 5:375.

Assistant, agreed with Kennan.¹⁵

The U.S. ambassador to the Soviet Union, Llewellyn Thompson, also agreed with Kennan, but was careful to note that any reconciliation between the two parties would likely prove transient.¹⁶ The State Department's own analysts made much the same point, suggesting that efforts by the Chinese and Soviets to paper over their tensions could not obscure the fact that the "differences that divide them are rooted in fundamentalist factors and are thus not subject to permanent reconciliation."¹⁷ Indeed, the scepticism expressed by some senior officials in the summer of 1962 about the depth of the dispute, although illustrative of the confusion surrounding the likely course of Sino-Soviet relations, ran counter to the broader trend in the administration's developing understanding of the dispute between the two Communist powers. At one of Rusk's regular Policy Planning meetings in January 1962, for instance, there was general agreement among the participants—including Rusk and Bohlen—as to both the reality and likely longevity of the Sino-Soviet dispute.¹⁸

In this sense the communiqué issued at the conclusion of the Beijing Plenum represented, at least in the American analysis, not so much a marker of a qualitative shift in the nature of Sino-Soviet relations, but rather a calculated escalation of anti-Soviet polemics by the Chinese after a period of relative quiescence. Nonetheless, with the communiqué stating in the most unequivocal terms yet the "essence of all Peiping's outstanding positions in its dispute with the USSR," Beijing had left very little room for a subsequent retreat, and indeed signalled its intention to hold to its own positions regardless of the impact on Sino-Soviet relations.¹⁹ In the process, Beijing had underlined the depth of the Sino-Soviet estrangement for U.S. observers, providing the clearest indication yet that the dispute would only worsen with time.

¹⁵ Editorial note, *FRUS, 1961-1963* 22:230-31.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ INR, *supra* note 13.

¹⁸ Thomson to Harriman, *supra* note 1, 176-79. Also see Thomson, "U.S. China Policy," 226-27.

¹⁹ INR, *supra* note 5.

Interpreting the Sino-Soviet Dispute

In the 1960s U.S. analysts of Sino-Soviet relations, both in government and academia, tended to place the dispute within a “realist” explanatory framework of rival nationalisms and conflicting security interests. Although Sino-Soviet differences were often stated in reference to competing interpretations of Marxist-Leninist doctrine, ideological differences were generally viewed as the text, rather than the source, of the dispute.²⁰ In this analysis, traditional Sino-Russian border tensions and the troubled history of CPSU-CCP relations dating back to 1920s, formed the principle pillars of the interpretative framework for U.S. understandings of the historical origins of Sino-Soviet tensions.²¹ More immediately, Beijing had apparently concluded that Moscow was deliberately thwarting its attempts to assume a more prominent role in both the Communist world and in the broader international system, while sacrificing China’s national interests—particularly, but not exclusively, as they related to nuclear weaponry and Taiwan—by exploring détente with the West. Beijing, operating within a political bloc that only allowed for a single source of authority, yet unwilling to dilute its national ambitions, had thus decided to challenge Soviet leadership of the Communist camp on ideological grounds, casting itself as the guardian of the Marxist-Leninist faith against the Kremlin’s revisionist apostasy.²²

This casual emphasis on “national interests” (in the narrow realist sense) in shaping Sino-Soviet relations dated back to the Truman and Eisenhower years, when U.S. analysts had suggested that competing national interests and the CCP’s relative independence from the Kremlin might, in time, undermine the integrity of the alliance.²³ Indeed, the Dullesian “closed door” (or “pressure wedge”) aimed to exacerbate these potential differences, by

²⁰ Quote from Mose Harvey to Rostow, June 21, 1963, NSF:CO, box 24, “China, General,” JFKL. For an overview of Western scholarship on the dispute, see Lowell Dittmer, *Sino-Soviet Normalisation and Its International Implications, 1945-1990* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1992), 5-9.

²¹ Ford, “Double Demonology.”

²² CIA Sino-Soviet Task Force, “The Sino-Soviet Dispute and its Significance,” April 1, 1961, NSF:CO, box 21a, “China, General, ‘The Sino-Soviet Dispute...,’” JFKL; draft S/P paper, December 19, 1961, JTP:FE, box 14, “Communist China, ‘Sino-Soviet Conflict and U.S. Policy,’” JFKL; State Department background paper, May 25, 1961, *FRUS, 1961-1963* 5:156.

²³ Ford, “Double Demonology.”

arousing Beijing's resentment against Moscow's dominant position within the alliance, and disappointment at the Soviet inability to sate China's economic and political needs.²⁴

However, it would be misleading to suggest that U.S. policymakers viewed the dispute simply in terms of nationalism trumping ideological commonalities. Ideological and nationalistic differences were by no means considered mutually exclusive, and U.S. analyses generally accounted for both faces of the dispute—even if national differences were, for the most part, afforded greater prominence.²⁵ Indeed, one NIE in 1960 noted that the Marxist-Leninist ideology “which pervades [Sino-Soviet] relations both modifies the urgent nationalism of the two countries and is in turn modified by national considerations.” Thus differences, such as those in the foreign policy field, “derive both from differing national interests *and* from doctrinal differences between the two Communist states.”²⁶

With American analysts taking this understanding of the interface between nationalism and ideology in the deterioration of the Sino-Soviet relationship as their frame of reference, three main conclusions ran through U.S. estimates of the likely course and implications of the dispute. First, whereas the personality clash between Mao and Khrushchev was an important variable in the dispute, it was not decisive. Rather, the core differences, particularly those of a more distinctly nationalistic origin, transcended personality. Thus, even allowing that the fall of either Mao or Khrushchev might have an impact on the tempo of the dispute, it would do little to mitigate underlying Sino-Soviet animosities.²⁷ As such, the dispute would likely prove bitter and protracted, largely (although by no means entirely) independent of internal political

²⁴ See chapter one, 21.

²⁵ For instance, see NIE 13-63, May 1, 1963, *FRUS, 1961-1963* 22:165-67; airgram-752, Hong Kong, *supra* note 3; Thompson, testimony to SFRC, January 14, 1965, *Executive Sessions* 17:186-87.

²⁶ NIE 100-3-60, August 9, 1960, in CIA, *China Collection* (italics mine).

²⁷ CIA, “Sino-Soviet Dispute,” *supra* note 22; CIA (OCI), “CIA Draft Paper on ‘Prospects for the Sino-Soviet Conflict,’” February 2, 1962, JTP:FE, box 15, “Communist China, ‘Prospects for...,’” JFKL. For a study placing Mao and his ideologically-determined domestic political priorities at the centre of the dispute, see Chen Jian and Yang Kuisong, “Chinese Politics and the Collapse of the Sino-Soviet Alliance,” in Westad, *Brothers in Arms*, 246-94. William Taubman, meanwhile, notes the importance of Khrushchev’s “hyper-sensitivity” to Mao’s criticism of Soviet policies and insults to his own person in shaping the deterioration of relations. William Taubman, “Khrushchev vs. Mao: A Preliminary Sketch of the Role of Personality in the Sino-Soviet Split,” *CWIHP, Bulletin*, no. 8/9 (Winter 1996/1997): 243-48.

developments in either state.

Second, although conflicting national interests were regarded as the principal source of Sino-Soviet antagonism, the fundamental *issue* in the dispute was how power positions within the Communist world were defined, manifesting itself in an ideologically framed battle for control over the direction and policies of the Communist movement. Believing that international Communism was inherently incapable of accommodating multiple sources of authority, U.S. observers anticipated that short of an outright capitulation by either the Chinese or Soviets (both unlikely scenarios) the struggle would continue, and tensions would therefore worsen. The perpetuation of the dispute, meanwhile, would engender greater factionalism within the world Communist movement, with a corresponding dissolution of the Communists' capacity for united action.²⁸

The third and final conclusion, and perhaps the most significant in shaping the U.S. China policy discourse, was that Beijing had become, and for the foreseeable future would likely remain, the more militant party in the dispute. As the Bureau of European Affairs noted, no issue in the dispute concerned the United States quite so directly as Beijing's opposition to the Kremlin's pursuit of "peaceful coexistence" with the West, and the related likelihood—as seen from Washington—that Beijing was more "willing to risk nuclear war in pursuit of its aims."²⁹

U.S. observers attributed Beijing's radicalism in large part to its apparent dissatisfaction with the status quo in the Communist world and the broader international sphere. The Chinese chafed at their junior status in the "partnership" with Moscow, along with their failure to secure recognition as a great power on the world stage. Perhaps more importantly, whereas the territorial integrity of the Soviet Union was not in question, Beijing remained frustrated by

²⁸ NIE 10-61, supra note 10; draft S/P Paper, supra note 22.

²⁹ EUR memo (forwarded by Kohler to McGhee), January 30, 1962, RG59, CF:1960-63, box 1367, 661.93/1-3062, NA.

the division of Taiwan from the mainland. And although Moscow was patently dissatisfied with the Western presence in Berlin, the desire to remedy this anomalous situation was mitigated by a fear of exposing their hard won industrial and societal gains to the destruction that would result from a general (viz. nuclear) war with the West.³⁰ Moreover, as the U.S. Embassy in Moscow suggested, the militancy of Beijing's ideological line could be attributed, in part, to the fact that they were in an earlier, more radical, stage of revolution, whereas the Soviet revolution had mellowed somewhat with the passage of time.³¹ As Bohlen put it, the essence of the quarrel was that the "Russians have become the Mensheviks, while the Chinese are Bolsheviks."³²

Just as the Sino-Soviet dispute had been evident well before 1962, so too had the idea that China constituted the more militant half of the axis. Indeed, this perception dated to the early post-Stalin era. For instance, an NIE in May 1955, pointing to Moscow's apparently genuine desire for a "substantial and prolonged reduction in international tensions," argued that Moscow took a "more cautious view than the Chinese of the risks appropriate to the pursuit of Communist objectives in Asia."³³ Gordon Chang argues that this view of Chinese militancy against Soviet caution—not just in Asia, but globally—became the majority view during Eisenhower's second term, so much so that by 1957 the administration considered the PRC "more dangerous than the Soviet Union." With China apparently driving the insurgencies in Southeast Asia, China became, according to Chang, "America's number one immediate enemy."³⁴

Yet by the time Kennedy had taken the presidential oath, it was clear that the rise of Chinese power had been severely undermined by the failure of the Great Leap. It was the Soviet enemy, not China, which occupied the nightmares of the senior U.S. officials, including the

³⁰ Chang, *Friends and Enemies*, 222; memcon, Harriman and Ambassador Knuth-Winterfeldt (Denmark), July 1, 1963, RG59, CF:1963, box 3863, POL CHICOM-USSR, NA.

³¹ Embtel, Moscow, supra note 27; Ball, statement to SFRC, January 12, 1966, *Executive Sessions* 18:77.

³² Thomson to Harriman, supra note 1, 177.

³³ NIE 11-3-55, May 17, 1955 (as cited in Chang, *Friends and Enemies*, 150).

³⁴ Chang, *Friends and Enemies*, 141-74 (quotes from 144, 169).

president himself, over the first eighteen months or so of the Kennedy administration. In 1961 Kennedy and Khrushchev faced off over Berlin, and in October 1962 the two leaders went toe-to-toe over the deployment of nuclear-capable Soviet missiles to Cuba. The China threat remained, but in the context of repeated Soviet-American confrontations it was only occasionally front-and-centre on the landscape of Washington's Cold War concerns.

It was not, however, inconsistent for U.S. officials to regard China as the more militant half of the Sino-Soviet partnership, if not necessarily the more dangerous. U.S. concerns focused on two manifestations of Chinese militancy in particular: First, unlike the post-Stalin Soviet leadership, Beijing's foreign policy placed a primary emphasis on the value of subversion and military insurgency in the former colonial world. Second, although the Chinese were, as a Special NIE in 1961 explained, "almost certainly more sensitive to the consequences of general war than some of their radical statements indicate, their concern over this possibility appears to be less acute than that of their Soviet partner."³⁵

Concerns about Chinese recklessness were compounded by the fear that the Soviets might feel compelled to adopt a more militant foreign policy line in order to counter Chinese charges that they had abandoned the Marxist-Leninist creed.³⁶ In fact, in early 1961 Rusk wondered if this was not already an active dynamic in Soviet foreign policy, telling Stevenson that Soviet intransigence on a number of Cold War issues suggested Beijing might be "giving the Soviets so much trouble they had to be more Bolshevik than the Chinese."³⁷ At the least, Beijing's militancy was thought to have reduced the Kremlin's freedom of manoeuvre, circumscribing its ability to opt for a "softer" foreign policy line.³⁸

³⁵ SNIE 13-3-61, November 30, 1961, NSF, NIEs, box 4, "13-61 to 13-65, Communist China (1)," LBJL.. Concerns in the Kennedy administration over China's apparently reckless view on nuclear war are explored in the next chapter.

³⁶ William Tyler to Rusk, November 10, 1961, RG59, CF:1960-63, box 1367, 661.93/11-1061, NA; State Department background paper, *supra* note 22.

³⁷ Telcon, Rusk and Stevenson, March 23, 1961, RG59, Rusk Records, Telephone Calls, box 44, NA. On similar reasoning late in the Eisenhower administration, see Vladislav M. Zubok and Konstantin Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War: From Stalin to Khrushchev* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 203.

³⁸ CIA, "Sino-Soviet Dispute," *supra* note 22; NIE 10-61, *supra* note 10; Embtel-A-98, Moscow, August 25,

The possible radicalisation of the Kremlin's policy was not the only complication extending from the Sino-Soviet dispute which concerned U.S. officials. On the one hand, Beijing, lacking the certainty of Soviet military support, might find greater reason to avoid major hostilities; on the other, the Chinese would likely intensify their support for insurgency movements in Southeast Asia to prove the validity of their thesis that "wars of national liberation" could be aggressively prosecuted without provoking a general war.³⁹ It was also likely that the heightened global competition between Moscow and Beijing would have a destabilising effect on the international situation, particularly in the emerging post-colonial world, where Soviet and Chinese competition for local loyalties might enflame tensions that existed independent of the Cold War. Meanwhile, Asian Communist parties susceptible to Chinese influence would likely become increasingly militant, with a corresponding growth in the threat to the integrity of non-Communist governments in the region.⁴⁰ Rusk, for one, warned that the dispute "may even have the effect of deepening, rather than moderating the Cold War."⁴¹

Certainly, the administration did not assume that the Sino-Soviet dispute would automatically redound to its advantage. Nonetheless, despite the new challenges posed by the dispute it was generally felt that, on balance, it would likely prove a positive development from Washington's perspective. First and foremost, the "split" would weaken the aggregate power available to the Communist world, and materially damage its prestige. Meanwhile, the West's room for manoeuvre would increase, with an inverse impact on the ability of the Communist world to coordinate against the West.⁴²

1961, RG59, CF:1960-63, box 2147, 793.00/8-2561, NA.

³⁹ Yager to Paterson, December 19, 1961, RG59, CF:1960-63, microfilm, 611.93/12-1961, NA; Congentel-1349, Hong Kong, February 12, 1963, *ibid.*, CF:1963, box 3863, POL CHICOM-USSR.

⁴⁰ SNIE 13-3-61, *supra* note 35; Thomson to Harriman, *supra* note 1, 177.

⁴¹ *NYT*, "Rusk Sees Threat in Red Differences," May 31, 1963.

⁴² NIE 10-61, *supra* note 10.

U.S. Policy toward the Sino-Soviet Dispute

Even as the depth and meaning of the Sino-Soviet dispute became apparent, the administration remained reluctant to attempt to exacerbate or exploit the split. Rusk proved particularly averse to the idea of trying to play Beijing and Moscow off against one another, convinced such moves would simply provide the two protagonists with “an excuse for trying to hurry to heal this breach.”⁴³ Similarly concerned that attempts to manipulate the dispute might produce unforeseen consequences, the interested regional bureaux at State recommended a wait-and-see approach. While the administration should not, as the Bureau of European Affairs argued, be so intransigent as to force the Soviets to move toward the Chinese line out of frustration, nor should it “gamble on a policy of inducement” in the hope of moving one party closer to the United States. Rather, the situation demanded close monitoring, with the administration remaining alert to any new policy opportunities.⁴⁴

However, a number of prominent officials in the intelligence community, such the CIA liaison to the NSC, Chester Cooper, urged a bolder approach. In April 1961 Cooper, who for many years had been encouraging the intelligence community to devote more attention to the dispute, suggested the administration might at least attempt to exploit high-level bilateral conversations with the Soviets to arouse Chinese suspicions about U.S.-Soviet connivance against the PRC; this would, in turn, “have important spill-over effects which we should be clever enough to turn to our advantage.”⁴⁵

Cooper’s confidence in the administration’s capacity to turn the dispute to its advantage was echoed in a major interdepartmental study overseen by Walt Rostow, then chairman of the Policy Planning Council. Rostow’s study, sent to Rusk in April 1962, took as its point of

⁴³ Rusk, OHI, April 1962, “TTT,” DROH, RBRL; Rusk, background press briefing, January 4, 1962, RG59, Rusk Records, Miscellaneous Subject File, box 64, “Backgrounders (Vol. 1),” NA.

⁴⁴ EUR memo, supra note 29. On FE’s views, see Harriman to Rostow, December 11, 1961, RG59, CF:1960-63, microfilm, 611.93/12-1161, NA.

⁴⁵ Cooper to Komer, April 25, 1961, NSF:KP, box 410, “China (CPR), 1961-1963 (1),” JFKL; Ford, “Double Demonology,” n21. Also see Cooper, *In the Shadows of History: Fifty Years Behind the Scenes of Cold War Diplomacy* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2005), 183.

departure the idea that Sino-Soviet differences had become so fundamental that the administration could exploit the dispute to its strategic benefit without “fear of driving Moscow and Peiping together.” Specifically, it was argued that while the administration should refrain from openly declaring its support for Soviet positions against China, it should nonetheless endeavour to demonstrate “that the international line now espoused by Moscow is more in keeping with our policies than that espoused by Beijing.” The flip-side of this coin was persuading Beijing that its belligerence was indeed, as Moscow charged, counterproductive and dangerous. Beyond “declaratory pronouncements” to this effect, this effort would entail possible preparatory military measures, particularly in relation to South Vietnam, where Beijing seemed intent on demonstrating the validity of Mao’s revolutionary dogma. Significantly, this would be coupled with signals to Beijing that the United States was not “an implacable foe determined to do it to the death,” leaving the door open to improved Sino-American relations. Even presuming China’s current leaders refused to pass through that door, this might at least help “moderate the attitudes of the post-Mao generation of Chinese Communists.”⁴⁶

However, Rusk was wary of basing policy decisions affecting U.S. relations with both Communist powers on the vagaries of the Sino-Soviet relationship, and as such withheld approval of Rostow’s recommendations for adjusting U.S. policy toward the PRC and the Soviet Union.⁴⁷ Rusk did, however, concede that the administration should make a concerted effort to highlight Sino-Soviet tensions, thereby countering Communist efforts to maintain the pretence of solidarity. Yet the resulting May 1962 guidelines only allowed for a basic factual treatment of the dispute, with U.S. officials instructed to avoid any suggestion that the United States was backing one side over the other.⁴⁸ Rather than representing a new boldness in the administration’s approach to the dispute, these guidelines, as Hilsman has noted, constituted a

⁴⁶ S/P paper, “U.S. Policy Re the Sino-Soviet Conflict,” forwarded by Rostow to Rusk, April 2, 1962, JTP:FE, box 14, “Communist China, ‘Sino-Soviet Conflict and U.S. Policy,’” JFKL.

⁴⁷ Rusk to Rostow, April 30, 1962, *ibid.*

⁴⁸ Rusk to McGhee, May 28, 1962, RG59, CF:1960-63, box 1367, 661.93/5-2862, NA. Also see Gerald Segal, *The Great Power Triangle* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1982), 32-33.

pedestrian compromise between those U.S. officials who wanted to articulate a U.S. policy towards the dispute, and more cautious officials (Rusk in particular) wary of any public discussion of the matter.⁴⁹

U.S. Perceptions of the China Threat and the Sino-Indian Border War

However, events in the fall of 1962, following on the heels of Beijing's reaffirmation of its militant foreign policy line at the aforementioned Party Plenum in September, brought into sharp relief a situation that, in general terms, seemed to recommend expanded efforts to at least tacitly support the Soviet position in the dispute. Specifically, the month-long Sino-Indian war that began with China's surprise attack at both the eastern and western ends of the 2400 mile border on October 22, 1962, underscored the Chinese challenge for U.S. observers. In the first instance the war barely registered in Washington, China launching its attack at a moment when senior U.S. officials were very much preoccupied with the Cuban Missile Crisis.⁵⁰ Yet the devastating effectiveness of China's attack, viewed alongside its violent condemnation of Khrushchev's decision to remove Soviet missile installations from Cuba in late October, exacerbated U.S. concerns about the threat of a militant China that, unlike the Soviet Union, seemed indifferent to the dangers posed by its high-risk policies.

Although Kennedy was quick to condemn China for its "flagrant violation of the territorial integrity of its neighbors,"⁵¹ officials in the administration were not entirely oblivious to the shades of grey in the situation. Indeed, when Sino-Indian border tensions had first become apparent in 1959 Washington had decided against endorsing India's claims, partly in deference to Nationalist sensitivities—with Taipei claiming much the same territory as their mainland rivals—but perhaps even more so because of the vague, and oftentimes inconsistent,

⁴⁹ Hilsman, *Move a Nation*, 344-45; Chang, *Friends and Enemies*, 223.

⁵⁰ On this point, see Galbraith, *Ambassador's Journal: A Personal Account of the Kennedy Years* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1969), 435.

⁵¹ Kennedy, November 1, 1962, *DSB* 47:783-84.

territorial claims of both New Delhi and Beijing.⁵² Thus, when asked about the border dispute in 1959, Secretary of State Christian Herter simply responded that the United States had no position on the validity of each side's claims. Perhaps to warn the Chinese off military action, in December 1961 Rusk seemed to shift from this neutral position, stating that the United States supported the Indian "view with respect to their northern borders."⁵³ This shift notwithstanding, prior to the 1962 war Washington remained reluctant to explicitly champion India's position in the border dispute.⁵⁴

For some U.S. observers, it seemed China's "aggression" had, in part, been provoked by New Delhi's obstinacy on the issue. Since tensions had first flared in the wake of the PLA's suppression of the Tibetan rebellion in 1959,⁵⁵ New Delhi had, as Rice told officials from the Australian Embassy, often seemed the more intransigent party to the dispute.⁵⁶ Specifically, New Delhi had rejected out of hand a tentative Chinese offer to consider Indian claims in the eastern sector of the border (then the North East Frontier Agency, or NEFA; see Figure 2) in exchange for an Indian accommodation of China's claims to the Aksai Chin basin in Ladakh to the west (see Figure 1), which provided a strategically vital passage from Xinjiang to Tibet.⁵⁷ Instead of entering into negotiations, Nehru had publicly declared that the Indian army would dislodge the Chinese from Indian-claimed territory in the summer of 1962; in the months thereafter Indian forces had, as General Maxwell Taylor told the House

⁵² CIA (Geographic Intelligence memo), "The Disputed Frontiers of Kashmir," November 1962, CREST, NA; CIA, "The Sino-Indian Frontier," December 17, 1959, CREST, NA; Chayes to Rusk, February 27, 1963, RG59, CF:1963, box 3861, POL CHICOM-INDIA, NA; Neville Maxwell, "China's 'Aggression in 1962' and the 'Hindu bomb,'" *World Policy Journal* 16 (Summer 1999): 114.

⁵³ Herter, November 12, 1959, *DSB* 41:782-83, 786; Rusk, December 8, 1961, *DSB* 45:1058.

⁵⁴ FE memo, November 3, 1962, RH:CO, box 1, "India, Sino-Indian Border Clash, 1962" JFKL.

⁵⁵ On the significance of the PLA's actions in Tibet in 1959 for Sino-Indian relations, see Chen Jian, "The Tibetan Rebellion of 1959 and China's Changing Relations with India and the Soviet Union," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 8 (Summer 2006): 80-89; and, in the same volume, Steven A. Hoffman, "Rethinking the Linkage between Tibet and the China-India Border Conflict," 182-83.

⁵⁶ Memcon, Rice and Munro (Australia), April 16, 1962, RG59, CF:1960-63, box 2149, 793.00/4-1662, NA.

⁵⁷ A CIA study suggested that Nehru had been personally willing to consider such a deal, but lacked the freedom to do so because of opposition from hardliners in the military and his own Congress Party. CIA (DDI Research Staff), "The Sino-Indian Border Dispute" (POLO XVI), in three sections, "Section 1: 1950-59," March 2, 1963, "Section 2: 1959-61," August 19, 1963, and "Section 3: 1961-62," May 4, 1964, *CPE*. On the idea of an east-west trade-off, also see John W. Garver, *Protracted Contest: Sino-Indian Rivalry in the Twentieth Century* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001), 100-3.

NOTE: This figure is included in the print copy of the thesis held in the University of Adelaide Library.

Figure 1. Sino-Indian border, western sector (Aksai Chin)
Source: U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, map 800911 (A06000), 9/88

NOTE: This figure is included in the print copy of the thesis held in the University of Adelaide Library.

Figure 2. Sino-Indian border, eastern sector (NEFA)
Source: U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, map 800912 (A06001), 9/88

NOTE: This figure is included in the print copy of the thesis held in the University of Adelaide Library.

Source: U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, map 800910 (A05999), 9/88

Appropriations Committee in a closed session, been “edging forward in the dispute area.”⁵⁸ Although no one in the administration sympathised with the Chinese resort to force, the “official conclusion,” as one foreign-service officer later recalled, “was that [the Chinese] had been recklessly provoked by the Indians.”⁵⁹

At the same time, the administration was quick to recognise the limited nature of Beijing’s objectives in the war. Admittedly, State’s Bureau of Intelligence and Research noted that the PLA’s presence in Ladakh and the NEFA would serve Beijing’s long-term ambition of expanding China’s sphere of influence to include the Himalayan kingdoms of Nepal, Sikkim, and Bhutan. Yet there was a corresponding awareness that the Chinese were constrained by the massive logistical problems they would face in broadening the offensive, and deterred by the threat of inviting Free World retaliatory action. Certainly, U.S. officials could see no logic in a Chinese attempt to conquer the “squalid human morass” of India, particularly when it had its hands full feeding, clothing, and placating 700 million Chinese.⁶⁰ Politically, further advancements by Chinese forces might push non-aligned India into the West’s welcoming embrace, and earn China, which had been posing as the aggrieved party in the dispute, international disapprobation for its actions.⁶¹ Observers in the State Department thus reasoned that China’s objectives were likely limited to embarrassing the Soviets, who, much to Beijing’s chagrin, had been busily fostering friendly relations with India; projecting an image of decisiveness and vigour in the region; boosting PLA morale; and securing the Aksai Chin, while at once providing New Delhi with a punitive demonstration of the PLA’s ability to capitalise on India’s vulnerabilities in the east if the Indians were unwilling to accommodate

⁵⁸ Deptel-3747 to New Delhi, April 18, 1963, RG59, CF:1963, box 3861, POL CHICOM-INDIA, NA. For Taylor’s comments, and a discussion about their meaning, see SFRC hearing, March 3, 1966, *Executive Sessions* 18:541-42, 544-45.

⁵⁹ Sullivan, *Obbligato*, 172. This view perhaps understates divisions within the bureaucracy on this point, particularly between the Office of Mainland Chinese Affairs and the Office of Indian Affairs. See Lindsay Grant, OHI, January 31, 1990, 24-25, ADST; and Kreisberg, OHI, April 8, 1989, 38, ADST.

⁶⁰ Sullivan, *Obbligato*, 172 (for quote); Rusk, OHI, January 1986, “WWWWW,” DROH, RBRL; INR, “The Five-Fold Dilemma: The Implications of the Sino-Indian Conflict,” November 17, 1962, RH:CO, box 1, “India, Sino-Indian Border Clash, 1962, Implications Analysis,” JFKL.

⁶¹ SNIE 13/31-2-62, December 14, 1962, NSF, NIEs, box 4, “13-61 to 13-65, Communist China (1),” LBJL; Congentel-1673, Hong Kong, April 3, 1963, RG59, CF:1963, box 3861, POL CHICOM-INDIA, NA.

China's strategic interests in the west.⁶²

With the PLA having already secured the Aksai Chin and in the process humiliated Nehru, the professional China watchers in the State Department were not particularly surprised when the PRC announced a unilateral ceasefire on November 21, 1962, and thereafter proceeded to withdraw its troops behind the so-called McMahon Line in the east (which India claimed represented the legal boundary), and to the "November 7, 1959 line of control" in the west (thereby ensuring Chinese control of the Aksai Chin basin). Following the withdrawal Beijing assumed a posture of "patient waiting" pending a diplomatic resolution of the dispute.⁶³

From Washington's perspective the Sino-Indian conflict, inasmuch as both the fighting and the damage to democratic India's prestige could be contained, contained opportunities as well as dangers. Specifically, U.S. policymakers immediately sensed an opening to effect a historic realignment of India's position in the Cold War, and to this end Washington extended some \$75 million in emergency military aid to New Delhi. Ultimately, plans to draw India into the western orbit through a large-scale and regularised program of military assistance—championed by Bowles and Ambassador Galbraith—failed to gain traction in Washington, not least because key policymakers, including Rusk and McNamara, were concerned that a comprehensive U.S.-India security relationship would alienate U.S. ally Pakistan, and exacerbate tensions on the subcontinent.⁶⁴ Still, the Chinese attack had clearly impelled the Indians to move toward a more pro-Western stance, and U.S. policymakers hoped that New Delhi, along with other neutral powers, would now be more cognisant of Communist perfidy and, by extension, sympathetic to U.S. efforts to counter the Communist threat in Asia and

⁶² Airgram-752, Hong Kong, supra note 3; Sullivan, *Obbligato*, 173; Hilsman, *Move a Nation*, 322-24.

⁶³ Congentel-1604, Hong Kong, March 25, 1963, RG59, CF:1963, box 3861, POL CHICOM-INDIA, NA; Grant, OHI, January 31, 1990, 22-23, ADST

⁶⁴ See Bowles, *Promises to Keep*, 439-40, 474-84; Norman D. Palmer, *The United States and India: The Dimensions of Influence* (New York: Praeger, 1984), 28; and Robert J. McMahon, "U.S. Policy toward South Asia and Tibet during the Early Cold War," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 8 (Summer 2006): 142-43.

beyond.⁶⁵

The attack also set in motion a rapid cooling of Soviet-Indian relations, as Moscow attempted to navigate a awkward course between “friendly India,” with which it had diligently cultivated good relations as the keystone of post-Stalin Soviet policy towards the developing world, and “fraternal China,” which despite growing tensions, remained, in name if nothing else, a military and ideological ally. In attempting “to steer a middle course between the contestants” Moscow had steadily “lost ground with both as they proceeded,” alienating India and dragging Sino-Soviet relations to a new nadir.⁶⁶ Without any effort on their own part, U.S. officials could sit back and enjoy the spectacle of Moscow “impaled on the horns of this dilemma.”⁶⁷

INR analyst Thomas Hughes went so far as to suggest that a perpetuation of Sino-Indian hostilities, as opposed to an Indian acceptance of the Chinese cease-fire proposal, would maximise the chances of effecting a realignment of India toward the West, while exacerbating the Soviet dilemma and placing China’s “aggression in its least favourable context.”⁶⁸ As Hughes’s comments suggest, the administration’s denunciation of China’s attack on India was directed toward casting China as—in the modern parlance—a “rogue state,” thereby reducing the appeal of Maoism in the non-aligned developing world. To this end the Chinese “aggression” against India became an effective and oft-invoked motif in Washington’s anti-PRC rhetoric during the 1960s.⁶⁹

In short, the strength of the administration’s condemnation of the Chinese attack against India

⁶⁵ SNIE 13-4-63, July 31, 1963, NSF, NIEs, box 4, “13-61 to 13-65, Communist China (2),” LBJL; FE memo, supra note 54; Ball, testimony to SFRC, April 7, 1965, *Executive Sessions* 17:434.

⁶⁶ INR, “Soviet Reaction to U.S. Military Aid to India,” November 21, 1962, RH:CO, box 1, “India, Sino-Indian Border Clash, 1962,” JFKL.

⁶⁷ INR, supra note 60. On the impact of the Sino-Indian border dispute on Sino-Soviet relations, also see M.Y. Prozumenschikov, “The Sino-Indian Conflict, the Cuban Missile Crisis, and the Sino-Soviet Split, October 1962: New Evidence from the Russian Archives,” *CWIHP, Bulletin*, no. 8/9 (Winter 1996/1997): 251-57.

⁶⁸ Hughes to Kennedy (with attachments), November 21, 1962, RH:CO, box 1, “India, Sino-Indian Border Clash 1962, Chinese Cease-Fire Proposal,” JFKL.

⁶⁹ On Rusk’s use of the Sino-Indian conflict “as his text in sharp attacks” against China, see Cohen, *Dean Rusk*, 171.

belied a private awareness that Beijing was acting in pursuit of limited objectives in a localised dispute, and one wherein neither party had proven a paragon of virtue. Yet despite all of this, the success of China's attack heightened U.S. concerns about the Chinese threat to the region and beyond. In part, this was simply because the effectiveness of China's action gave the administration pause to wonder if the failure of the Great Leap had affected Chinese power to the extent previously imagined. In particular, the mastery with which Beijing had synchronised the political and military dimensions of the campaign—particularly their “talk-fight, talk-fight tactics,” and subsequent unilateral withdrawal from large swathes of captured territory—suggested a politically sophisticated adversary with an impressive capacity to project its military power in a highly calculated fashion, and force neighbouring states to accommodate its interests.⁷⁰

More importantly, because the attack was also interpreted in reference to the increasingly divergent foreign policy lines of Moscow and Beijing, the Chinese attack assumed a portent it would not otherwise have possessed. In this sense, even though China's attack was not considered part of its broader program of regional aggression—which, it was presumed, would generally be pursued through less direct means—China's display of “remarkable military prowess” against India, as the U.S. Consulate in Hong Kong explained, had likely reinforced Beijing's confidence in the “correctness” of its militant foreign policy line.⁷¹ Even the Bureau of Intelligence and Research, which had led the way in emphasising the caution and rationality underlying Chinese foreign policy, was prompted by the success of the PLA's offensive to warn that the United States should brace against further challenges from a newly assertive China. Locating the attack within the broader context of the Sino-Soviet dispute, the bureau argued that “Peiping is now testing its strategy of risk-taking against that of Moscow. How we react in this situation may well affect future courses of Chinese Communist action,

⁷⁰ Hilsman, *Move a Nation*, 339; Goh, *U.S. Rapprochement*, 25; memcon, Harriman and Alsop, October 31, 1962, HP:KJA, Subject File, box 443, “China Folder,” LCMD.

⁷¹ Airgram-755, Hong Kong, February 1, 1963, NSF:KP, box 410, “China (CPR), 1961-1963 (1),” JFKL.

not only in India but in Burma, Laos, and elsewhere in Asia.”⁷²

The lines of this interpretative paradigm became clearer still after Beijing lambasted the withdrawal of Soviet missile installations from Cuba as a revisionist capitulation in the face of “nuclear blackmail.”⁷³ Soon thereafter evidence emerged that Beijing had “actively intervened to obstruct critical Soviet-U.S. negotiations” during the crisis, by submitting counter-proposals within the Communist camp designed to complicate efforts to engineer a peaceful solution to the crisis.⁷⁴ Ironically then, while the Soviet decision to install missile facilities in Cuba had taken the world to the nuclear brink and the Sino-Indian conflict was seen as a localised conflict with little threat of escalation, the roughly simultaneous crises in the Himalayas and the Caribbean actually served to confirm the (heretofore tentative) notion that the immediate danger posed by Chinese militancy was greater than that posed by the Soviet Union.

In the aftermath of the crisis, Rusk would later recall, U.S.-Soviet relations were set on an improved trajectory, both sides having “looked down the cannon’s mouth” only to realise “that we’d better make a real effort to prevent such crises from occurring in the future because they are just too utterly dangerous.”⁷⁵ Unfortunately, as Rusk explained, whereas the experience of being confronted with nuclear war had been a profound one for the Soviet and U.S. leadership alike, Beijing “did not share in that experience.”⁷⁶ As a result, to the minds of senior U.S. policymakers the Chinese threat rose relative to the Soviet threat: the “two curves crossed,” as then Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs William Bundy put it, and the threat of Chinese expansion into peripheral areas, however

⁷² INR, “Intensified U.S. Support of India: Soviet, Chinese, and Pakistani Responses,” November 11, 1962, RH:CO, box 1, “India, Sino-Indian Border Clash, 1962,” JFKL. On INR’s depiction of a cautious Chinese leadership, see chapter four, 101-105 *passim*.

⁷³ INR, “Chinese Communist Attacks on Soviet Handling of Cuban Crisis,” August 26, 1963, HP:KJA, Subject File, box 504, “Sino-Soviet Dispute,” LCMD.

⁷⁴ Congentel-938, Hong Kong, November 24, 1962, RG59, CF:1960-63, box 1367, 661.93/11-2462, NA.

⁷⁵ Transcript, BBC Interview with Dean Rusk, June 1981, DRPP, V:B, box 8, RBRL. On the impact of the missile crisis on Kennedy’s approach to U.S.-Soviet relations, see Giglio, *Presidency of John F. Kennedy*, 229-31; and Jennifer W. See, “An Uneasy Truce: John F. Kennedy and the Soviet-American Détente, 1963,” *Cold War History* 2 (January 2002): 163-66.

⁷⁶ Memcon (Part I), Rusk and Ohira, January 26, 1964, NSF:CO, box 250, “Japan Memos, Vol. I,” LBJL.

exaggerated, loomed as more immediate than that posed by Soviet power.⁷⁷

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As the “two curves crossed” the reluctance of senior U.S. officials to highlight the administration’s preference for Moscow’s position in the Sino-Soviet dispute ebbed. Rusk, for instance, was increasingly open to the suggestion, made in Rostow’s abovementioned April 1962 study of the implications of the Sino-Soviet dispute for the United States, that the administration should endeavour to demonstrate “that the international line now espoused by Moscow is more in keeping with our policies than that espoused by Beijing.” Appearing before a closed session of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in June 1963 Rusk pointed to the danger Beijing’s foreign policy line posed relative to the Soviet line, and referred to the related risk of a Soviet shift towards Beijing’s position should the Kremlin grow frustrated with the lack of dividends paid by its pursuit of “peaceful coexistence.” If, Rusk added, “there were some clear points on which it would be in our own interest to reach agreement [with the Soviets], we would think that this might be a timely moment in which to establish that fact.”⁷⁸ Rusk, to be sure, remained wary of affording the China factor excessive importance in the U.S. policymaking process vis-à-vis the Soviet Union, and he was under no illusion that the shared aversion to Maoist militancy would wash away the deeply felt animosities and suspicions that continued to confound U.S.-Soviet relations. Yet in 1963 the secretary of state, like other senior policymakers, believed that the need to demonstrate that Khrushchev’s “peaceful coexistence” promised better returns than Mao’s alternative of aggression and subversion, gave added force to the logic of pursuing a U.S.-Soviet détente.

Other senior players in the administration believed that it might even be possible to effect a

⁷⁷ Cited in transcript, BBC Radio 3 Series, *Many Reasons Why: The American Involvement in Vietnam* (Part 4), recorded June 23, 1977 (transmitted October 9, 1977), DRPP, V:B, box 8, RBRL. Increasingly, the general public also viewed China as a greater threat to world peace than the Soviet Union. Whiting, *Chinese Calculus*, 168; Foot, “Redefinitions,” 277.

⁷⁸ Rusk, testimony to SFRC, June 5, 1963, *Executive Sessions* 15:349-50.

narrowly defined alignment with Moscow aimed at limiting Chinese power, specifically in the nuclear field. Kennedy, in particular, wondered if the test ban treaty negotiations conducted during 1963 could also serve as a vehicle for exploring possible U.S.-Soviet cooperation in frustrating China's nuclear development. Yet in the second half of the year a second policy track, also informed by the Sino-Soviet split and the need for a more differentiated policy toward China, was debated within interested corners of the U.S. bureaucracy. This second policy track aimed to enhance the administration's capacity to deal with China as an actor independent of the Soviet Union, and make clear that while the United States would stand firm against Chinese militancy, it was prepared to leave the door open to improved relations with a less belligerent China.

“BOXING THE COMPASS”: NEW DIRECTIONS IN U.S. CHINA POLICY, 1963

In early 1963, amid the relief (and, in some quarters, elation) over the peaceful resolution of the Cuban Missile Crisis, U.S. policymakers cautiously anticipated that after years of successive U.S.-Soviet confrontations, a new era might be dawning for great-power relations in the Cold War. At the same time, Washington’s anxiety about the threat an increasingly militant China posed to global peace and stability, particularly in Asia, developed in almost inverse proportion to the optimism about the general trajectory of the international environment. In this context of a changing Cold War, the question of how to deal with the China “problem” was afforded an unprecedented level of attention in the Kennedy administration.

Over the first half of 1963 much of this attention centred on the more specific issue of China’s anticipated acquisition of a nuclear capability. Several historians have argued that President Kennedy and his senior advisers seriously contemplated undertaking preventive military strikes against China’s nuclear program, including actions executed with Soviet cooperation or acquiescence.¹ Rusk, in contrast, recalled that preventive action was “almost summarily rejected as an idea,” not least because the Chinese would likely rebuild any destroyed

¹ See, in particular, Gordon Chang, “JFK, China, and the Bomb,” *Journal of American History* 74 (March 1988): 1289-1310 (an updated version was published in Chang, *Friends and Enemies*, 228-52); and William Burr and Jeffrey T. Richelson, “Whether to ‘Strangle the Baby in the Cradle’: The United States and the Chinese Nuclear Program, 1960-1964,” *International Security* 25 (Winter 2000/01): 54-99. An important (if sometimes imprecise) distinction exists between “preemptive attack” and “preventive attack”: preemptive attacks are executed in the belief that an enemy attack is imminent, preventive attacks in response to less immediate threats, generally in anticipation of a future loss of security or strategic advantage. Admittedly, U.S. officials in the 1960s did not trouble themselves with this distinction, and, like their modern counterparts, used the term “pre-emption” in a less restrictive sense. Nonetheless, the military actions contemplated against China’s nuclear program in the 1960s clearly fall under the banner of “preventive attack,” and for the sake of clarity that term is used here. On this distinction, see Karl P. Mueller, et al. *Striking First: Preemptive and Preventive Attack in U.S. National Security Policy* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Project AIR FORCE, 2006), 6-10.

facilities—with reinforced defences—and possibly undertake retaliatory conventional attacks in the region.² This chapter suggests that while the preventive option was by no means “summarily rejected,” nor was it ever subjected to sustained, serious consideration at the decision-making end of the Kennedy administration. Rather, what talk there was of preventive attacks by senior policymakers possessed an exploratory, musing quality. And even though various forms of military action were certainly studied by both military and civilian planners in the Kennedy administration, the weight of opinion (at least where it mattered) held that such extreme action was neither necessary nor advisable. Nor does the fact that such studies were prepared reflect any serious intent on the administration’s part to pursue the preventive option; it would, indeed, be remarkable if such studies had not been conducted as part of the broader process of, as Rusk put it, “boxing the compass” on how the United States should respond to China’s nuclear development.³

Admittedly, in the context of the nascent triangulation of the Cold War, on several occasions Kennedy and his inner-circle discussed the possibility of U.S.-Soviet cooperation aimed at frustrating China’s nuclear development. And, at one point in the 1963 nuclear test ban negotiations, the administration even attempted (unsuccessfully) to sound the Kremlin out on the matter. But even allowing that Kennedy believed that preventive military action might be one form that U.S.-Soviet cooperation might take here—and the weight of evidence, although it remains indirect, suggests it was—most talk within the administration in 1963 of U.S.-Soviet cooperation centred on the far less dramatic notion that if Washington somehow managed to deliver the French to a test ban treaty Moscow might, in turn, exert whatever leverage they still possessed with Beijing to somehow bring the Chinese within the treaty framework. That such a quid pro quo was so improbable at this juncture only underlines the

² Rusk, OHI, January 1986, “XXXXXX,” DROH, RBRL; transcript, interview six with Rusk by Edwin Newman, May 15-17, 1985, DRPP, V:B., box 10, RBRL.

³ Rusk, OHI, supra note 2. Several scholars and administration insiders have also expressed doubts about the level of attention given to the option of preventive attacks. Tucker, “No Common Ground: American-Chinese-Soviet Relations, 1948-1972,” review of *Friends and Enemies*, by Gordon Chang, in *Diplomatic History* 16 (Spring 1992): 321; Freedman, *Kennedy’s Wars*, 272-74; and Thomson, “Whose Side Were They On?”

inchoate condition of the administration's thinking on how to curb China's nuclear development.

By the end of the summer of 1963 it was apparent that any Sino-American cooperation to limit Chinese power would be, at best, tacit. At the same time, liberal elements in the foreign policy bureaucracy, building upon earlier efforts toward policy moderation, pushed for changes in U.S. policy that would afford the president greater room for manoeuvre on China matters, particularly in the context of the Sino-Soviet split and the divergence of the respective foreign policy lines of Moscow and Beijing. To this end the Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs pushed a program of policy initiatives to encourage increased bilateral contact, while attempting to change what James Thomson called the "rhetorical foundations of China policy."⁴ In the first respect this endeavour failed, with the bureau's concrete policy proposals meeting resistance from upper echelon policymakers wary of any relaxation of U.S. China policy. However, modest but nonetheless important progress was made in redefining U.S. posture toward China within a rational, flexible rhetorical framework.

The Ominous Spectre of a Chinese Bomb

Even before 1963, the spectre of a nuclear-capable PRC was one that Kennedy and his team viewed with deep trepidation. This was not simply because of Beijing's avowed hostility toward the United States, but also because of what Kennedy privately referred to as the "irresponsible and callous attitude of the Chinese towards nuclear war."⁵ Readings of Beijing's views on nuclear war were primarily informed by statements attributed to China's leaders that in the event of a thermonuclear war China would not only survive—albeit at the cost of perhaps half or more of its population—but a new, unspoilt Communist society would

⁴ Thomson, "U.S. China Policy," 229.

⁵ Quote from memcon, Kennedy and Chief Minister Benedicto Kilauea (Uganda), Part II of V, October 17, 1961, RG59, CF:1960-63, box 477, 303/10-1761, NA. Also see background paper for Johnson, "The Chinese Communist Threat," May 9, 1961, NSF:KP, box 411, "China (Taiwan and Offshore Islands), 1961-1963 (3)," JFKL.

rise, Phoenix-like, from the ashes of the former imperialist order. “In place of the totally destroyed capitalism,” Mao reportedly told party colleagues in 1958, “we will obtain perpetual peace. This will not be a bad thing.”⁶

Some U.S. analysts stressed that such comments should not be taken at face value. The U.S. Consulate in Hong Kong, for instance, explained Beijing’s apparent nonchalance towards the threat of thermonuclear war as, in essence, an abstract attempt to reconcile Yanan-era Maoist theory on protracted warfare with the realities of the nuclear age, belying Beijing’s “healthy respect” for destructive capacity of nuclear weapons.⁷ There is little to suggest, however, that such nuanced analyses had much impact on the thinking of senior policymakers.⁸ And even allowing that Beijing was, as a Special National Intelligence Estimate in 1961 suggested, “almost certainly more sensitive to the consequences of general war than some of their radical statements indicate,” both Kennedy and his subordinates feared that the radicals who dominated the Chinese polity would be emboldened by their success in the nuclear field, and become, as Cooper predicted, “even more manic and hard to deal with than they are now.”⁹ The Joint Chiefs of Staff went further still, suggesting that even a limited Chinese nuclear arsenal would pose “serious military and political problems” for the United States, inasmuch as the Chinese might try to use their newly-acquired nuclear capability as an umbrella for overt conventional aggression and intensified support for Communist directed insurgencies in the region. Should they find themselves with their backs to the wall, the Chinese, with their devil-may-care attitude to the potential horror of nuclear warfare, might even employ nuclear

⁶ Allen S. Whiting, “The Sino-Soviet Split,” in Roderick MacFarquhar and John K. Fairbanks (eds), *The Cambridge History of China*, vol. 14, *The People’s Republic, Part I, The Emergence of Revolutionary China 1949-1965* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 488-89; McGeorge Bundy, *Danger and Survival: Choices about the Bomb in the First Fifty Years* (New York: Vintage, 1990), 530.

⁷ Congentel-1513, Hong Kong, March 7, 1963, NSF:CO, box 26, “China, Cables,” JFKL. Also see INR, “Is Peiping Trying to Trigger World War III?” July 24, 1963, *ibid.*, box 24, “China, General”; CIA (OCI), “Chinese Communist Military Doctrine,” January 17, 1964, NSF:CO, box 237, “China Memos, Vol. I,” LBJL; and H.W. Brands, “Vietnam and the Origins of Détente,” in *The Search for Peace in Vietnam, 1964-1968*, ed. Lloyd C. Gardner and Ted Gittinger (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2004), 376-77.

⁸ On this point, see Kochavi, *Conflict Perpetuated*, 225.

⁹ Cooper to Komer, April 25, 1961, NSF:KP, box 410, “China (CPR), 1961-1963 (1),” JFKL. For the SNIE quoted here, see 148n35.

warheads against U.S. bases or allies in the region.¹⁰

The Chiefs' alarmist reasoning aside, most U.S. officials recognised that the Chinese were decades away from developing a militarily significant nuclear capability. Still, it was widely held that a successful test of even a primitive nuclear device would likely heighten calls at home and abroad for (a still untamed) China's integration into the world community—particularly through its membership in the United Nations—while compelling governments in Asia to accommodate Beijing's ambitions of regional hegemony.¹¹ Alluding to this gain in Chinese standing in Southeast Asia and the inverse impact on Washington's position in the region, in October 1961 Kennedy privately told one journalist that domino theory was essentially redundant: the Chinese would soon develop the bomb, and “from that moment on they will dominate Southeast Asia.”¹²

Alert to the political challenge posed by China's nuclear development, from early in the Kennedy administration interested U.S. officials sought to devise means of minimising the anticipated politico-psychological impact of a Chinese nuclear detonation.¹³ The result of these labours was the State Department's “Program to Influence World Opinion with Respect to a Communist Chinese Nuclear Detonation,” circulated within the administration in September 1962. In broad strokes, this program involved reiterating the U.S. ability and determination to defend threatened nations against the Communist threat, while emphasising China's structural and military shortcomings (conventional and otherwise), particularly relative to U.S. capabilities. Thus, Washington would indicate that U.S. planning had already

¹⁰ LeMay to McNamara, “Study of Chinese Communist Vulnerability,” (with attached study), April 29, 1963, in National Security Archive, *The United States and the Chinese Nuclear Program, 1960-1964*, edited by Burr and Richelson (hereafter NSA, *Chinese Nuclear Program*), January 12, 2001, document 6. Collection online at <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB38>.

¹¹ Early estimates of possible foreign reactions to a Chinese nuclear test filed in JFKL, NSF:KP, box 410, “China (CPR), Nuclear Explosion (2).”

¹² Krock, *Memoirs*, 358. Also see Chang, *Friends and Enemies*, 229.

¹³ Komer to Bundy (with attached draft, “Anticipating the First ChiCom Nuclear Test”), March 7, 1961, NSF:KP, box 410, “China (CPR), Nuclear Explosion (2),” JFKL.

fully, and calmly, accounted for the anticipated entry of China into the nuclear club.¹⁴

Even as planning continued within the administration on how to limit the impact of a Chinese nuclear test, over the first two years of his presidency Kennedy appeared content to keep the issue of the Chinese bomb, like the issue of China generally, on the policy backburner. Preoccupied with more pressing matters, Kennedy would only occasionally turn to the question of China's nuclear program, including a passing reference at an NSC meeting in early 1962 to the impact China's acquisition of a nuclear capability might have on the situation in Southeast Asia as one example of the "special unsolved problems" of the world.¹⁵ But lacking any sense of urgency on the issue, before 1963 the president never formally instructed his subordinates to begin looking for a solution to this particular problem. It is also worth noting that prior to the peaceful conclusion of the Cuban Missile Crisis Kennedy's concern over China's cold indifference toward the spectre of a nuclear war was not all that far removed from his anxiety about Soviet attitudes on the same subject. Following his 1961 meeting with Khrushchev in Vienna, a shaken Kennedy told journalist Hugh Sidey how he had spoken with Khrushchev "about how a nuclear exchange would kill seventy million people in ten minutes and he just looked at me as if to say, 'So what?' My impression was that he just didn't give a damn if it came to that."¹⁶

"The Most Serious Problem Facing the World Today"

It was only in early 1963, after the developments described in the previous chapter had

¹⁴ Paper (State), "Program to Influence World Opinion with Respect to a Communist Chinese Nuclear Detonation," August 31, 1962 (forwarded to Bundy by McGhee, September 25, 1962, and enclosing memo, Rusk to McGhee, approving guidelines), NSF:CO, box 23, "China, General," JFKL. Also see Burr and Richelson, "Strangle the Baby," 63.

¹⁵ President's remarks to NSC, January 18, 1962, *FRUS, 1961-1963* 8:240. Some scholars attribute greater importance to these remarks. See Chang, *Friends and Enemies*, 232; and Lyle J. Goldstein, "When China was a 'Rogue State': The Impact of China's Nuclear Weapons Program on U.S.-China Relations during the 1960s," *Journal of Contemporary China* 12 (November 2003): 741.

¹⁶ Robert Dallek, *John F. Kennedy: An Unfinished Life, 1917-1963* (London: Allen Lane, 2003), 347. On the meetings see Michael R. Beschloss, *The Crisis Years: Kennedy and Khrushchev, 1960-1963* (New York: Edward Burlingame Books, 1991), 192-224. Chang argues that Kennedy had hoped to use the summit, *inter alia*, "to elicit the Soviet leader's thoughts on what actually could be done about Beijing's nuclear development." However, the evidence here is inferential. Chang, *Friends and Enemies*, 230-32.

thrown the Chinese challenge into sharp relief, that Kennedy finally moved the foreign policy bureaucracy into gear in a search for means to retard China's nuclear development. According to a memorandum for the record, in January McGeorge Bundy told CIA Director John McCone that Kennedy:

...felt that this was probably the most serious problem facing the world today and intimated that we might consider a policy of indicating now that further effort by the Chinese Communists in the nuclear field would be unacceptable to us and that we should prepare to take some form of action unless they agreed to desist from further efforts in this field. Bundy said that he felt the President was of a mind that nuclear weapons in the hands of the Chinese Communists would so upset the world political scene it would be intolerable to the United States and to the West.¹⁷

Bundy and McCone did not discuss what form such "action" might take. However, McCone, pointing to gaps in the intelligence community's knowledge of China's nuclear program, indicated that Langley had already developed a program for an expanded "intelligence effort in this field." The following week, Bundy and Harriman agreed to establish an interdepartmental working group to study China's long-range military potential, particularly its nuclear potential, with attention given therein to possible U.S. responses.¹⁸

Kennedy's renewed enthusiasm in the first half of 1963 for securing a test ban treaty with the Soviets can be attributed, in part, to this new sense of urgency about China's nuclear effort. Addressing the National Security Council on January 22, Kennedy expressed "great concern" about China going nuclear, suggesting "a test ban agreement might produce pressure against the development of such a capability." This was particularly important, Kennedy continued, since the Chinese Communists "loom as our major antagonists of the late 60's and beyond."¹⁹

It should be stressed that, like Eisenhower before him, Kennedy's interest in negotiating a test ban (and he had made serious efforts to this end in 1961, at least before September when the Soviets broke the moratorium on testing that had held since 1958) derived from a number of sources, including his desire to reverse the momentum of the wasteful, and profoundly

¹⁷ Editorial note, *FRUS, 1961-1963* 22:339-40.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*; Bundy, *Danger and Survival*, 532. On U.S. surveillance of China's nuclear program, see Burr and Richelson, "'Strangle the Baby,'" 63-66, 83-86.

¹⁹ NSC meeting, January 22, 1963, *FRUS, 1961-1963* 8:462, 462n6. Also see Krock, *Memoirs*, 370.

dangerous, nuclear arms race. More importantly, a test ban treaty would demonstrate the possibility of progress in U.S.-Soviet relations, and become a “first step” in a process of détente that, beyond any propaganda gains, Kennedy had long had a genuine interest in furthering.²⁰ In the aftermath of the Cuban missile crisis this interest was piqued by indications Khrushchev was interested in forward movement on arms control issues, and by a sense that Kennedy’s show of strength during the crisis provided him with the political capital to explore areas of agreement with Moscow without exposing himself to charges of appeasement at home. Kennedy likely discerned a need to seize the opportunity to make some progress towards détente afforded by this promising, but almost certainly ephemeral, domestic and international atmosphere.²¹

By 1963, however, the anti-proliferation connection, particularly as it related to China, had assumed a new measure of importance in Kennedy’s interest in a test ban. In the sense that a treaty might somehow affect Beijing’s pursuit of nuclear weapons a test ban treaty was, Kennedy told the aforementioned January 1963 NSC meeting, “more important to the world situation than it had been a year or two ago.”²² Indeed, Kennedy now claimed that the “primary purpose” for seeking a test ban treaty was to halt or delay the PRC’s development of a nuclear capability, which, he maintained, “the Russians are believed to be as concerned about as we are.”²³ Kennedy went so far as to suggest that even presuming the Soviets cheated on a comprehensive test ban, the gains in Soviet nuclear technology would be offset by the “advantages the treaty might bring in preventing the spread of nuclear weapons, particularly to China.”²⁴

As the administration’s Chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission, Glenn T. Seaborg, later

²⁰ Glenn T. Seaborg, *Kennedy, Khrushchev, and the Test Ban* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 32, 48-68 passim; See, “Uneasy Truce,” 171.

²¹ See, “Uneasy Truce,” 164-66; Seaborg, *Kennedy, Khrushchev*, 176, 180.

²² Seaborg, *Kennedy, Khrushchev*, 182.

²³ NSC meeting, supra note 19. Also see *FRUS, 1961-1963* 7:654n3; memcon, Kennedy and Macmillan, June 29, 1963, *ibid.* 754; Sherman Kent to Harriman, July 8, 1963, *ibid.*, 771-772.

²⁴ Seaborg, *Kennedy, Khrushchev*, 188, 193.

pointed out, Kennedy never clearly articulated how “he expected a test ban negotiated between ourselves and the Soviets to affect the Chinese unless it were through the force of world opinion, since the Chinese were quite certain to reject such a treaty.”²⁵ Beijing had repeatedly made clear their opposition to the idea of a test ban treaty, which they charged (not entirely without cause) was directed toward frustrating China’s nuclear development.²⁶ Beyond the “force of world opinion,” however, several of Kennedy’s senior advisers hoped that Moscow still possessed sufficient leverage over Beijing to compel the Chinese to abandon their nuclear ambitions, and that a test ban would help establish a “tacit understanding” between Washington and Moscow on this score.²⁷

CIA Deputy Director of Intelligence, Ray Cline, quite rightly pointed out that the Chinese were determined to push ahead with their nuclear development and the Soviets “do not have (and are not likely to acquire) the leverage to produce a change in this position.”²⁸ Hope, however, springs eternal, and the president and his principals felt that if the United States could bring the French to the table on a test ban, then in return the Soviets might secure Chinese adherence.²⁹ It was, to be sure, a highly suspect idea. Not only did the Soviets lack any real leverage with the Chinese, it is well-nigh impossible to imagine how the United States could have either coerced or induced de Gaulle, who had repeatedly made clear his determination to tread a path independent of U.S. power, to limit the development of his *force de frappe* at this juncture.³⁰ It is equally unlikely that references to the threat posed by a nuclear-armed China could have moved de Gaulle to join a test ban treaty; on the contrary, the French president was likely already thinking about China as a potential partner in his challenge to the superpowers global predominance—a point some U.S. analysts later

²⁵ Ibid., 180.

²⁶ Ibid., 23; memcon, Rusk and Gromyko, September 25, 1962, *FRUS, 1961-1963* 7:573; INR, “Peiping Opposes Non-Diffusion of Nuclear Weapons,” January 16, 1963, NSF:KP, box 410, “China (CPR), Nuclear Explosion, 1961-1963 (2),” JFKL.

²⁷ Paper by Adrian S. Fisher (ACDA), June 20, 1963, *FRUS, 1961-1963* 7:732.

²⁸ Cline to Foster, October 1, 1962, *ibid.*, 583.

²⁹ Deptel to Bonn, July 3, 1963, *ibid.*, 765-67.

³⁰ On Franco-American tensions in the early 1960s, see Frank Costigliola, “The Failed Design: Kennedy, de Gaulle, and the Struggle for Europe,” *Diplomatic History* 8 (Summer 1984): 234-51.

recognised.³¹ And whereas the Soviets were profoundly troubled by the spectre of a nuclear-armed West Germany, they were, as U.S. policymakers conceded, far less concerned about France's nuclear development. In short, even had Washington been able to bring Paris to a test ban, it is unlikely this would have provided Moscow with the necessary incentive to move on the Chinese.³² No one in the administration, it seems, outlined how this dubious quid pro quo might have worked, except to suggest that Harriman, as the U.S. representative to the test ban talks, "would have to develop this" during the negotiation process.³³

There is some inferential evidence which could be interpreted to suggest that the administration also hoped a test ban treaty would provide the normative grounds to credibly threaten joint U.S.-Soviet military action against Chinese nuclear facilities, should more peaceable moves fail to deter Beijing's nuclear efforts. Harriman pointed to the nexus between preventive attack and the test ban when he wrote to Kennedy in January 1963 that the Kremlin possibly hoped that "with such an agreement, together we could compel China to stop nuclear development, threatening to take out their facilities if necessary."³⁴ Moreover, columnist Stewart Alsop, who, like his brother Joseph, enjoyed high levels of access to the Oval Office, suggested the administration's rationale for pursuing a test ban treaty was to establish a Soviet-American understanding, and indeed a "quasi-legal" basis, for military strikes against China's nuclear installations.³⁵ However, just as Harriman's estimate of Soviet intentions does not in itself indicate support for comparable reasoning in Washington, Alsop's story is less than convincing as a guide to the administration's thinking. Indeed, McGeorge Bundy, outing himself as one of the sources for the article, later wrote that Alsop's reasoning

³¹ See Fredrik Logevall, "The French Recognition of China and Its Implications for the Vietnam War," in Roberts, *Bamboo Curtain*, 155; and Kochavi, *Conflict Perpetuated*, 223.

³² Following the negotiations Harriman told the SFRC that the Soviets had not appeared particularly concerned by France's nuclear development (in contrast to their fear of a nuclear-armed West Germany), although they did seem "very anxious to stop the French from testing so as to point the finger of scorn on Red China if and when she tests." Harriman, testimony to SFRC, July 29, 1963, *Executive Sessions* 15:470. Also see memcon, January 7, 1965, *FRUS, 1964-1968* 11:155.

³³ Editorial note, *FRUS, 1961-1963* 7:735.

³⁴ Editorial note, *FRUS, 1961-1963* 22:341.

³⁵ Stewart Alsop, "Affairs of State: The Real Meaning of the Test Ban," *Saturday Evening Post*, September 28, 1963. Also see Burr and Richelson, "Strangle the Baby," 74.

was fundamentally flawed, the columnist conflating talk with “serious planning or real intent.”³⁶

There is, in fact, no record of Kennedy himself directly making this connection between a test ban and preventive attack. Admittedly, William Foster, the Director of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, later suggested that in connection with the test ban Kennedy had considered abandoning the NATO Multilateral Force (MLF)—a proposed fleet of nuclear-armed surface vessels, that would be manned with a mixed crew from the NATO nations—in order to secure Soviet cooperation “in taking action, if necessary physically, against China.”³⁷ Records of meetings between Harriman and Kennedy in the lead-up to the test ban talks indicate that the president did, in fact, briefly consider abandoning the MLF if the Soviets could attain Chinese adherence to a test ban. However, these same records suggest Kennedy was simply thinking of providing the Soviets with an additional incentive to press the Chinese on joining a test ban.³⁸

And although the Joint Chiefs of Staff studied the option of preventive attack as part of a study on steps that might be taken to “compel or persuade” the Chinese to accept a test ban or some other arms control agreement, their conclusions weighed heavily against such action. Going against type the Chiefs warned that military strikes would be condemned by the greater part of the international community, severely damaging international support for U.S. policies in the region. Moreover, the Chinese might in retaliation undertake conventional military attacks on U.S. allies in the region, likely forcing the United States to employ nuclear weapons on a tactical basis in order to repel China’s armies. Even that personification of Cold War militarism and champion of air power, General Curtis LeMay, warned that it would be “unrealistic to use overt military force” against the China’s nuclear facilities; even if Beijing

³⁶ Bundy, *Danger and Survival*, 532.

³⁷ Cited in Burr and Richelson, ““Strangle the Baby,”” 54. On the MLF, see Frank Costigliola, “Kennedy, the European Allies, and the Failure to Consult,” *Political Science Quarterly* 111 (Spring 1995): 111-12.

³⁸ Editorial note, *FRUS, 1961-1963* 7:734-35; memcon, Harriman and Kennedy, July 15, 1963, *FRUS, 1961-1963* 7:790.

subsequently signed a test ban treaty it did not necessarily follow that they would adhere to a treaty they had been forced to sign against their will.³⁹ Even allowing that LeMay's argument might have been tailored to underline the case against a test ban treaty (which he firmly opposed), his comments still constitute a remarkable recognition of the limits of American military power by a man whose nonchalant discussion of nuclear conflict on other occasions deeply unnerved the president.⁴⁰

Admittedly, the Joint Chiefs' study suggested that the international backlash against the United States following any preventive strikes might be neutralised by securing Soviet cooperation in such action. Moreover, confronted with the daunting prospect of a united Soviet-American front, China's leaders would think twice about recommencing their nuclear program or undertaking retaliatory action. However, it appeared "highly unlikely" that Moscow would consider cooperating with the head of the imperialist camp to attack what remained, in name if nothing else, a fraternal socialist state. Indeed, despite the parlous state of Sino-Soviet relations in early 1963, the Chiefs thought that in the instance the United States took the preventive path it might give the Soviets cause to intervene *on behalf* of the PRC.⁴¹ This scepticism was even more pronounced in the State Department, where it was argued that Moscow could not consider such extreme measures against China, because to do so would, in effect, mean surrendering their leadership of the Communist movement while risking involvement in a protracted war in Asia.⁴²

As it happened, U.S. representatives could barely get the Soviets to discuss China, a step obviously prerequisite to any quid pro quo arrangements relating to China's inclusion in a test ban. In what was apparently an early attempt to establish a U.S.-Soviet understanding on the need to limit China's nuclear development, in May 1963 McGeorge Bundy suggested to

³⁹ LeMay to McNamara, *supra* note 10.

⁴⁰ On Kennedy-LeMay relationship, see Dallek, *John F. Kennedy*, 344-45.

⁴¹ LeMay to McNamara, *supra* note 10.

⁴² Rostow to Harriman, July 2, 1963, HP:KJA, Trips and Missions, box 540, "Test Ban Treaty, Background (3)," LCMD. Also see Rice to Harriman, June 21, 1963, *ibid.*, box 539, "Test Ban Treaty, Background (1)."

Ambassador Dobrynin that the two governments have a “private and serious exchange of views” on China’s nuclear development. Dobrynin, however, refused to be drawn on the matter.⁴³ During the test ban negotiations two months later Harriman raised China with Khrushchev after the conversation turned to France’s nuclear development, evidently attempting to sound his host out on the possibility of a France-for-China arrangement; Khrushchev, clearly unwilling to entertain any discussion bearing on Sino-Soviet differences, waved off China’s nuclear development as inconsequential.⁴⁴

Despite Khrushchev’s reticence, Kennedy instructed Harriman to continue pressing the issue with the Soviet leader, reiterating his belief that even small nuclear forces “in the hands of people like the Chicoms could be very dangerous to us all,” and adding that “even a limited test ban can and should be [a] means to limit diffusion.” Kennedy directed Harriman to make it clear to the Soviets, as the occasion allowed, that the United States was prepared to keep pressuring the French to join any test ban agreement if the “Soviets will work on [the] Chinese.”

However, Kennedy seemed to go further, cryptically adding that Harriman should attempt to “elicit Khrushchev’s view of means of limiting or preventing Chinese nuclear development and his willingness either to take Soviet action or to accept U.S. action aimed in this direction.”⁴⁵ Seaborg suggests the president “might have been thinking in terms of a pre-emptive strike against Chinese nuclear facilities.”⁴⁶ And William Foster would later recall how Kennedy would think aloud, suggesting that “it wouldn’t be too hard if we somehow get kind of an anonymous airplane to go over there, take out the Chinese facilities—they’ve only got a couple—and maybe we could do it, or maybe the Soviet Union could do it, rather than

⁴³ Memcon, McGeorge Bundy and Ambassador Dobrynin, May 17, 1963, NSA, *Chinese Nuclear Program*, document 7. Harriman made similar overtures prior to the test ban talks, with the same result. See editorial note, *FRUS, 1961-1963* 7:688.

⁴⁴ Embtel, Moscow, July 15, 1963, *FRUS, 1961-1963* 7:800; Embtel, Moscow, July 27, 1963, *ibid.*, 858-61. Also see Seaborg, *Kennedy, Khrushchev*, 238-39. Harriman had expected Khrushchev to be unresponsive. NSC Meeting, July 9, 1963, *FRUS, 1961-1963* 7:783.

⁴⁵ Deptel to Moscow (Kennedy to Harriman), July 15, 1963, *FRUS, 1961-1963* 7:801.

⁴⁶ Seaborg, *Kennedy, Khrushchev*, 239.

face the threat of a China with nuclear weapons.”⁴⁷ Yet, however conspiratorial Kennedy’s ambiguity in his communication to Harriman may seem, it likely reflected Kennedy’s own lack of clarity as to what “action” might be taken.⁴⁸ Even allowing that a preventive military assault was one “action” Kennedy had in mind when he wrote to Khrushchev—and, in light of Seaborg’s and Foster’s recollections, it likely was—the references to France’s nuclear program suggest that Kennedy had yet to surrender the idea that if he delivered de Gaulle to the test ban the Soviets might somehow pull off a similar feat with the Chinese. And presuming Foster’s recollection was accurate, the comments he attributes to Kennedy (perhaps the most direct evidence of Kennedy’s interest in preventive action) have the quality of ill-defined musings, consistent with what Rusk called Kennedy’s tendency to “bat the breeze and toss ideas around.”⁴⁹

At any rate, renewed efforts by Harriman to get Khrushchev to discuss China’s nuclear program failed, and there is no record of the American representative broaching the possibility of joint coercive action to hold back China’s nuclear development with his Soviet hosts.⁵⁰ Similarly, when Kennedy tried to discuss China’s nuclear development in relation to the test ban in August with Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin (again after the discussion turned to France’s nuclear program), he found the Soviet ambassador reluctant to discuss the matter.⁵¹ The administration ultimately concluded that, on the one hand, the Soviets wanted to use the treaty to, *inter alia*, contrast Chinese recklessness with the more productive Soviet policy of “peaceful co-existence,” thereby isolating Beijing in the international Communist movement and perhaps even forcing China’s leaders to reconsider the value of an independent nuclear capability. Yet it was equally apparent that the Soviets were unwilling to directly

⁴⁷ Cited in Burr and Richelson, ““Strangle the Baby,”” 54.

⁴⁸ Freedman, *Kennedy’s Wars*, 273.

⁴⁹ Rusk, *As I Saw It*, 441-42.

⁵⁰ Editorial note, *FRUS, 1961-1963* 22:370-71. Chang cites an anonymous “high-level official” in the administration who claimed that the possibility of a joint U.S.-Soviet preventive strike was, in fact, discussed with the Soviets. Chang, *Friends and Enemies*, 245.

⁵¹ Memcon, Kennedy and Dobrynin, August 26, 1963, *FRUS, 1961-1963* 5:753-54.

pressure Beijing to abandon its nuclear ambitions.⁵² Clearly, Khrushchev was wary of substantiating Chinese charges that he was working in concert with the imperialist camp to the detriment of a fraternal socialist state, or providing his domestic critics, who complained about the deterioration of Sino-Soviet relations under his watch, with additional ammunition.⁵³ And beyond any transitory leadership issues in the politburo, throughout the 1960s the Soviets consistently treated their dispute with the Chinese as an internal matter for the Communist movement, refusing to be drawn on China matters by U.S. representatives.⁵⁴

Just as Moscow was apparently reconciled to a nuclear-armed China, following the conclusion of the test ban negotiations the Kennedy administration focused less on frustrating China's nuclear development, and more on minimising the politico-psychological impact that a Chinese nuclear test might have. This trend was guided by analyses depicting the impending Chinese acquisition of nuclear weapons as an unwelcome yet entirely manageable development. Robert H. Johnson, a staffer working in Rostow's Policy Planning Council, was particularly influential in promoting this view in the administration. Drawing on studies prepared by the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Johnson rejected the idea that a Chinese nuclear capability would materially affect the military balance in the region; even with the bomb the Chinese would remain respectful of U.S. power and cautious in their international conduct, perhaps even more so lest they invite U.S. strikes against their hard won nuclear capability.⁵⁵

In mid-October a major interdepartmental draft study on China's nuclear development, also penned by Robert Johnson, suggested that even allowing that Beijing would use the bomb to

⁵² Seaborg, *Kennedy, Khrushchev*, 246; editorial note, *supra* note 50; airgram-141, Moscow, August 2, 1963, NSF:CO, box 26, "China, Cables," JFKL; editorial note, *FRUS, 1961-1963* 7:866; Rusk, testimony to SFRC, August 28, 1963, *Executive Sessions* 15:543.

⁵³ Vladislav M. Zubok, "'Look What Chaos in the Beautiful Socialist Camp!' Deng Xiaoping and the Sino-Soviet Split, 1956-1963," in CWIHP, *Bulletin*, no. 10 (1998): 159; Viktor M. Gobarev, "Soviet Policy Toward China: Developing Nuclear Weapons 1949-1969," *Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 12 (December 1999): 32.

⁵⁴ Rusk, OHI, April 1985, "TTT," DROH, RBRL.

⁵⁵ Robert Johnson to Rostow, "The Implications of a Chinese Communist Nuclear Capability," July 19, 1963, NSF:CO, box 24, "China, General," JFKL; Rostow to Harriman, *supra* note 42. Also see Burr and Richelson, "Strangle the Baby," 56, 77.

increase their international standing, they would avoid acts of overt aggression. Meanwhile, while the Soviets might be concerned about China's nuclear development, any "Soviet cooperation with the U.S. in containing Communist China is more likely to be tacit than explicit."⁵⁶ When the paper was discussed at a Policy Planning meeting held by Rusk, it was agreed that the Chinese acquisition of the bomb "will pose immediate problems that are diplomatic or political, rather than military, in nature." As such the response should be political, entailing an expansion of existing efforts to support and reassure Asian allies. Implicitly, preventive strikes against China's nuclear facilities were ruled out.⁵⁷

At Rostow's request Komer put the paper forward for Kennedy's weekend reading. However the paper never reached the Oval Office, the executive secretary of the NSC, Bromley Smith, writing to Bundy: "This event is so far down the road I doubt JFK should be given this this year."⁵⁸ Bundy apparently agreed, given he did not challenge Smith's reading of the president's priorities. Evidently, the sense of urgency over China's nuclear development earlier in the year had dissipated, not simply, as Smith's note suggests, because U.S. officials felt China was a long way from a successful detonation of a nuclear device, but also because calmer estimates of the implications of a Chinese nuclear capability now prevailed.

Noting that the president never saw Robert Johnson's analysis, Goldstein suggests that to his death Kennedy remained "very much a hawk with regard to China's development of nuclear weapons."⁵⁹ However, Kennedy was privy to a National Intelligence Estimate on the consequences of China's nuclear development released in late July 1963 (approximately coinciding with the conclusion of the test ban negotiations). On the one hand, this estimate predicted that a nuclear-capable China would prove more assertive in pursuing its existing

⁵⁶ Robert Johnson, summary of draft Policy Planning statement, "A Chinese Communist Detonation and Nuclear Capability: Major Conclusions and Key Issues," October 15, 1963, NSA, *Chinese Nuclear Program*, document 10.

⁵⁷ Quigley, "Lost Opportunity," 180; Rusk's Policy Planning meeting, October 15, 1963, *FRUS, 1961-1963* 22:399-402; Komer to McGeorge Bundy, November 5, 1963, *ibid.*, 404-5.

⁵⁸ *FRUS, 1961-1963* 22:405n4.

⁵⁹ Goldstein, "'Rogue State,'" 744.

objectives of expanding its world influence and promoting Communist subversion in Southeast Asia. Yet it was also suggested, somewhat contrarily, that the Chinese leadership would be fully alert to the limitations of their rudimentary nuclear capability, and were thus unlikely to run “significantly greater military risks” in pursuit of its objectives after going nuclear.⁶⁰ Kennedy and his inner-circle would have viewed any increase in Beijing’s activities in Southeast Asia with deep concern, and in this sense the conclusions presented in this particular NIE may well have reinforced the already firmly entrenched logic of an American presence in Southeast Asia. It did not, however, demand anything as radical as preventive military action against China’s nuclear program. Put simply, this analysis implicitly argued for maintaining the existing direction of U.S. policy, not new policy departures.

Moreover, there is nothing in the documentary record to suggest Kennedy was himself so much as toying with the idea of a preventive attack following the failure of Harriman’s overtures to the Soviets during the test ban talks. In a press conference on August 1 Kennedy, looking ahead to the 1970s, referred to the “menacing” prospect of a militant China with enormous human resources, surrounded by weaker, smaller nations, and armed with nuclear weapons; “we would like to take some steps now,” Kennedy suggested, “which would lessen that prospect that a future President might have to deal with.”⁶¹ Burr and Richelson interpret these comments as an expression of Kennedy’s continued interest in military action against China’s nuclear facilities.⁶² In contrast, Roger Hilsman has suggested the comments were indicative of Kennedy’s desire to improve relations with the PRC.⁶³ Tellingly, the only “step” which Kennedy referred to in this connection was the Limited Test Ban Treaty, although he did not identify how the treaty was relevant to checking the Chinese menace. He did, however, suggest that steps like the test ban treaty would help create a less dangerous world.

⁶⁰ SNIE 13-2-63, July 24, 1963, NSF, NIEs, box 4, “13-61 to 13-65, Communist China (2),” LBJL. Burr and Richelson, “Strangle the Baby,” 66. Also see NIE 4-63, June 28, 1963, *FRUS, 1961-1963* 7:748.

⁶¹ Kennedy, August 1, 1963, *PPP:JFK, 1963*, 320.

⁶² Burr and Richelson point to some interesting, but altogether circumstantial evidence that Kennedy’s remarks were related to renewed study of preventive attacks within the national security bureaucracy. See Burr and Richelson, “Strangle the Baby,” 71-72.

⁶³ Hilsman, *Move a Nation*, 339.

Rather than a cryptic signifier of an ongoing interest in preventive attack, or an expression of a desire to engage the Chinese, Kennedy was likely indicating that the administration was cognisant of the long-term danger posed by the rise of Chinese power, and by inference was placing the administration's approach to this problem within the rhetorical context of broader efforts to engineer a peaceful world environment.

In this sense, Kennedy's remarks should be seen as part of the campaign to shape public opinion and secure ratification of the Limited Test Ban Treaty in the Senate by a wide margin, a campaign that the president himself was deeply engaged in.⁶⁴ Notably, one of the most influential figures in the Senate on the issue, Senator John O. Pastore (D-RI), then Chairman of the Joint Committee on Atomic Energy, had suggested to McCone that one of the reasons he supported the treaty was that it might create a "moral inhibition" in China against the testing of a nuclear device.⁶⁵ Although Pastore's support for the treaty was never in doubt, his comments suggest that in the Senate, as in the White House, some individuals remained hopeful that a test ban treaty might ultimately frustrate China's nuclear progress. It was this hope (which Kennedy quite genuinely shared) to which the president was appealing in his August press conference.

Through the second half of 1963 (and, as discussed in the next chapter, into 1964) contingency planning on military action against China's nuclear program continued in various quarters of the administration. The fact that such planning took place is, in itself, unexceptional; officials charged with contingency planning should, by definition, plan for any number of conceivable contingencies. At any rate, this planning generally only served to highlight the dangers inherent in preventive attacks. For instance, a December 1963 Joint Chiefs study addressing the possibility of preventive action against China's nuclear program (prepared in response to a request from William Bundy) concluded that although conventional

⁶⁴ Seaborg, *Kennedy, Khrushchev*, 264-65; Beschloss, *Crisis Years*, 631-36.

⁶⁵ *FRUS, 1961-1963* 7:822n2. On Pastore's influence in the Senate on this issue, see Seaborg, *Kennedy, Khrushchev*, 259.

attacks on Chinese nuclear facilities might be feasible, nuclear weapons should be considered for use in such attacks. This proposal would, of course, have been anathema to the vast majority of civilian officials in the administration.⁶⁶

The Hilsman Project: Opening a Second Track in U.S. China Policy

If, however, the administration was coming to accept the inevitability of a Chinese nuclear capability, it remained profoundly concerned about the threat posed by Beijing's angry defiance of international norms. Underlining this defiance, on July 20 Sino-Soviet ideological talks in Moscow, convened as a last-ditch attempt by the Kremlin to rescue the alliance, broke down amid intense acrimony.⁶⁷ As if to dramatise the tectonic geopolitical shift taking place, just five days later the tripartite test ban negotiations taking place in the same city were brought to a successful conclusion. The Limited Test Ban Treaty, widely praised on both sides of the Iron Curtain as an important step towards a more peaceful world, was condemned by the Chinese as a "dirty fraud" engineered by reactionaries, revisionists, and imperialists.

U.S. analysts speculated that Beijing's angry refusal to be bound by international opinion disguised a mounting sense of anxiety within the Chinese leadership over the PRC's now pronounced international isolation; the risk, it seemed, was that Beijing might react by attempting to demonstrate the "correctness" of the Maoist line, perhaps by way of a renewed action along the Sino-Indian border or an intensification of Communist activities in Laos.⁶⁸ Even the U.S. Consulate in Hong Kong hedged, suggesting it was possible that Beijing might "be considering taking some form of military action at [a] time and place of their choosing to

⁶⁶ *FRUS, 1964-1968* 30:24n7; Maxwell Taylor (Chairman, JCS) to Gen. LeMay, Gen. Wheeler, Admiral McDonald, and Gen. Shoup, November 18, 1963, in NSA, *Chinese Nuclear Program*, document 11; Burr and Richelson, "Strangle the Baby," 74.

⁶⁷ Zubok, "Look What Chaos," 152, 158.

⁶⁸ SNIE 13-4-63, July 31, 1963, NSF, NIEs, box 4, "13-61 to 13-65, Communist China (2)," LBJL; airgram-106, Hong Kong, August 2, 1963, RG59, CF:1963, box 3858, POL 2-1 CHICOM, NA. Reports from Indian officials in fact suggested a build-up of PRC military forces along the north-eastern sector of the Sino-Indian border. Embtel-382, New Delhi, July 23, 1963, RG59, CF:1963, box 3861, POL CHICOM-INDIA, NA. On Beijing's perceived responsibility for the deterioration of conditions in Laos at this point, see: summary record of meeting, June 10, 1963, Files of McGeorge Bundy, box 18, "Meetings on Southeast Asia, Vol. I," LBJL; Embtel-1483, Vientiane, April 19, 1963, RG59, CF:1963, box 3863, POL CHICOM-USSR, NA.

assert, in dramatic fashion, [the] validity of concepts such as ‘U.S. the arch-enemy and incorrigible aggressor,’ [the] ‘paper tiger’ thesis, and [the] efficacy of ‘armed revolutionary struggle’ in gaining victory over the imperialists.”⁶⁹ While Beijing remained wary of U.S. power, “if they think they can get away with twisting [the] tail of the ‘paper tiger,’ they will be tempted to do so until [the] risk level becomes unacceptably high.”⁷⁰ Directing the Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs to examine possible responses to any PRC military initiative along their border, Rusk warned “we may be in for trouble.”⁷¹

At this juncture there were, as Noam Kochavi notes, very few dissenters within the administration “from the prevailing orthodoxy” of an increasingly assertive, threatening China.⁷² One corner of the administration given to such dissent, however, was State’s Bureau of Intelligence and Research (INR), which maintained the validity of Allen Whiting’s earlier portrayal of a China that, despite the rhetorical excess, had consistently acted in a cautious, restrained fashion. Beijing, the bureau stressed, “is trying to sell an ideological line based on national revolution, not external aggression. We believe it is likely to be extremely wary, particularly at this time, of pursuing a policy which supports the charges of both the USSR and the U.S. that the Chinese are aggressive.”⁷³

As of mid-1963 INR’s analysis represented a minority view of the China threat. Yet it found an important champion in former INR director, Roger Hilsman, who had been promoted Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs in April 1963. From the outset, Hilsman believed his principle task at the bureau was to expand upon Harriman’s efforts to create a policy framework that provided the flexibility for the president to pursue both “soft” and

⁶⁹ Congentel-186, Hong Kong, July 26, 1963, RG59, CF:1963, box 3861, POL CHICOM-INDIA, NA.

⁷⁰ Congentel-249, Hong Kong, August 7, 1963, *ibid.*, box 3863, POL CHICOM-USSR.

⁷¹ Rusk mentioned this in a telephone conversation with McCone. Telcon, Rusk and McCone, July 25, 1963, RG59, Rusk Records, Telephone Calls, box 48, NA. On resulting study see Hilsman to Rusk, July 31, 1963, NSF:CO, box 24, “China, General,” JFKL. Also see NSC meeting, July 31, 1963, *FRUS, 1961-1963* 22:371-74.

⁷² Kochavi, “Kennedy, China,” 126.

⁷³ INR, “Possible ChiCom Moves Around Their Periphery and Clues to These,” July 25, 1963, NSF:CO, box 24, “China, General,” JFKL. Also see INR, “Problems and Prospects in Communist China,” February 26, 1963, *ibid.*; and INR, “Possibility of Greater Chinese Communist Militancy,” JFKL, NSF:KP, box 410, “China (CPR), 1961-1963 (1).”

“hard” policies as the situation required. As Hilsman explained to a colleague, the administration needed to pursue a policy “of contact as well as containment: contact to break down the Chinese isolation and containment to prevent any further Communist aggression.”⁷⁴ Although never formally directed to undertake a policy review, Hilsman maintains that on several occasions Kennedy told him there was a need for some rethinking on China. As such, Hilsman was confident he was acting in concert with the president’s wishes in seeking to create a “less emotional, more rational” China policy.⁷⁵

Upon his appointment, Hilsman took over where Harriman had left off in engineering a bureaucratic environment conducive to policy innovation. James Thomson, perennial agitator for policy change, joined the bureau as Hilsman’s Special Assistant, and the U.S. Consul General in Hong Kong, Marshall Green, was invited by Hilsman to become his deputy. As Consul General, Green had called on the administration to pursue an expanded dialogue with Beijing while tempering its public rhetoric on China, arguing that such steps would help to “counteract Peiping’s hate campaign, to establish a better long-range basis for rapprochement, and to abet already discernible tendencies toward moderation and realism within certain elements of the Chinese Communist bureaucracy and among technicians.”⁷⁶ Not surprisingly then, Green responded to Hilsman’s invitation with enthusiasm: “I have long been interested in a relook at our China policy,” he wrote Hilsman, “and I consider it a stimulating challenge and opportunity to be in on the ground floor of the project you describe.”⁷⁷

In turn, Hilsman and his staff created an Office of Asian Communist Affairs in November 1963. This proved an important step in increasing the amount of attention being given to the PRC in the bureau, in effect consolidating the gains made in 1961 when a “Mainland China”

⁷⁴ Hilsman to John M. Cabot, October 25, 1963, as cited in Lumbers, “Irony of Vietnam,” 72.

⁷⁵ Hilsman, *Move a Nation*, 346-48, 354; Quigley, “Lost Opportunity,” 181; FE paper, undated, *FRUS*, 1961-1963 22:397-99.

⁷⁶ Green to Bowles, February 13, 1962, RG59, CF:1963, box 3862, POL CHICOM-US, NA; airgram-755, Hong Kong, February 1, 1963, NSF:KP, box 410, “China (CPR), 1961-1963 (1),” JFKL.

⁷⁷ Quigley, “Lost Opportunity,” 182.

desk was created as part of the bureau's new Office of East Asian Affairs.⁷⁸

In his push for a policy review Hilsman recognised that Beijing's manifest hostility toward the United States, together with domestic political sensitivities about China, placed considerable limits on the pace and scale of any prospective policy changes; the administration would "have to proceed slowly, tentatively, and incrementally—a step at a time."⁷⁹ For officials with even a casual interest in China policy, the incremental steps canvassed by the bureau had a familiar ring: renewed efforts to extend diplomatic recognition to Outer Mongolia; adjustments to the trade embargo; and, the initiative that received the most attention in 1963, a relaxation of restrictions on American travel mainland China.⁸⁰

With Harriman's blessing, the bureau had in fact developed plans for a targeted relaxation of travel restrictions in late 1961 and early 1962, focused on scholarly travel. If American scholars were refused entry by the Chinese, the bureau reasoned, this would help shift to Beijing the onus for the continued impasse in Sino-American relations; should the Chinese actually permit such travel, then the expanded contacts might contribute to a mellowing of Beijing's hostility towards the West, and "make at least a small breach in the wall of Chinese Communist isolation."⁸¹

However, with the Chinese flexing their military muscle in 1962, first in the troop build-up opposite Taiwan and then with the attack against India in October, U.S. officials were forced to put initiative on ice. The proposed changes also encountered clearance difficulties in the conservative Bureau of Security and Consular Affairs (seen as a State Department refuge for

⁷⁸ Ibid., 182-83; Green, "Averting Wider War," 60; FE paper, supra note 75. On the 1961 changes, see chapter four, 98. Goh, by contrast, suggests the creation of the office was a corollary of Washington's mounting concern over China's militancy. Goh, *U.S. Rapprochement*, 36.

⁷⁹ Hilsman, *Move a Nation*, 339-40.

⁸⁰ Ibid.; Thomson to Hilsman, August 14, 1963, RG59, ACA, lot 74D427, box 7, "Mongolian People's Republic, 1963," NA.

⁸¹ Materials used for this and next paragraph filed in RG59, ACA, lot 72D175, box 3, "Travel Controls, 1962-1963," NA; *ibid.*, "Scholars Travel, 1962-1963"; and *ibid.*, "Travel Controls, June-July 1965." Quote here is from Harriman to Rusk (draft memo), April 27, 1962, *ibid.*, "Scholars Travel, 1962-1963."

McCarthy-era hardliners),⁸² which had held up delivery of the proposal to Rusk's office without indicating any substantive disapproval.

The appointment of liberal Washington lawyer Abba P. Schwartz as head of the bureau in October 1962, however, brought about a marked shift in the bureau's character and, indeed, its stance on the liberalisation of travel restrictions. According to Schwartz, Kennedy had explicitly expressed his opposition to restrictions on travel to mainland China, and felt that the increase in American knowledge about the People's Republic and the benefits of improved Sino-American communication would "far outweigh" any risk that such steps would be viewed at home or abroad as a "softening" of U.S. policy towards the PRC.⁸³

Pressed by Schwartz and Harriman—who had evidently secured presidential support for a policy review—in late 1962 Rusk directed that an interagency group should review the travel controls. As a result, in June 1963 Harriman and Schwartz, together with State's Legal Adviser Abram Chayes and other interested officials, presented Rusk with a formal recommendation that all U.S. travel restrictions (excluding those pertaining to Cuba) be removed forthwith.⁸⁴ With specific reference to China, it was suggested that such travel could help re-establish "valuable contact between decent elements in China and the outside world."⁸⁵

The June 1963 recommendations stalled, however, upon reaching Rusk's desk. Although Rusk had green-lighted the original review, it was a low priority matter for the secretary, and he likely feared any move on the issue would complicate the delicate test ban negotiations underway in Moscow.⁸⁶ And Rusk evidently had the president's ear on the matter. After

⁸² Abba P. Schwartz, *The Open Society* (New York: William Morrow & Company, 1968), 4, 180-81.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 24-27, 85.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 87; Telcon, Rusk and Ball, July 3, 1963, RG59, Rusk Records, Telephone Calls, box 48, NA; Green to Hilsman (draft memo), November 22, 1963, RG59, ACA, lot 72D175, box 3, "Travel Controls, 1962-1963," NA. Along with the PRC, the countries in question were Albania, North Korea, and North Vietnam.

⁸⁵ Chayes and Schwartz to Rusk, June 28, 1963, NSF, Subject File, box 50, "Travel Restrictions, Vol. I," LBJL.

⁸⁶ Rusk to Fulbright, July 22, 1963, RG59, CF:1963, box 3863, POL CHICOM-US, NA; Hilsman to Rusk, October 22, 1963, RG59, ACA, lot 72D175, box 3, "Travel Controls, Jan-May 1965," NA.

meeting with Kennedy, Rusk called Schwartz, telling him the “travel business is dead until further notice.”⁸⁷

It was Hilsman’s team at FE that picked up the issue in the fall of 1963, and began a quiet campaign to push through the travel package.⁸⁸ On October 22 Hilsman sent a memo to Rusk through Harriman’s office, suggesting that with the ratification of the Limited Test Ban Treaty, it might now be possible to move on the issue. Hilsman argued that Kennedy’s speech to the United Nations on September 20—where he advocated “a freer flow of information and people” between East and West—had created a “particularly appropriate climate” to implement the changes suggested in June.⁸⁹ Oddly enough, despite his close involvement in the initiative, Harriman replied that a formal policy change “would attract too much attention to permit it to be done at this time,” suggesting instead that the Department simply institute a more permissive approach when determining exceptions to the travel restrictions.⁹⁰ This was likely a reference to the volatile situation in South Vietnam—the coup d’état against President Ngo Dinh Diem, and his subsequent murder, occurred at approximately the same time as Harriman communicated his concerns about the timing of the initiative (and, it might be noted, North Vietnam, as well as China, was one of the areas affected by the proposed changes).⁹¹

Although maintaining that the June recommendations for a comprehensive removal of the ban on travel to the PRC remained valid, Hilsman and his team recognised that in order to offset speculation that the initiative was connected to East Asian policy and thereby enhance its

⁸⁷ Telcons, Schwarz to Rusk, July 3, 1963, 12:40 pm, 3:50 pm, and 5:23 pm, and Rusk to Ball, July 3, 1963, 1:15 pm, RG59, Rusk Records, Telephone Calls, box 48, NA.

⁸⁸ Green, “Averting Wider War,” 62-63.

⁸⁹ Hilsman to Rusk, “Revision of Travel Regulations Governing American Citizens,” October 22, 1963, RG59, ACA, lot 72D175, box 3, “Travel Controls, Jan-May 1965,” NA. The editors of *FRUS* suggest this memo, sent through Harriman’s office as an attachment to another memo from Hilsman to Rusk of the same date, was not initialled by Harriman, and as such evidently was not sent to Rusk. However, the copy cited here was initialled by both Harriman and the Executive Secretariat, suggesting it did reach Rusk’s desk. See source note in *FRUS, 1961-1963* 22:403. For Kennedy’s speech, see *PPP:JFK, 1963*, 693-98.

⁹⁰ Harriman’s comments, passed through Chayes, were noted in Green to Hilsman, November 14, 1963, RG59, ACA, lot 72D175, box 3, “Travel Controls, Jan-May 1965,” NA.

⁹¹ Kochavi takes a different view, suggesting Harriman opposed the initiative. Kochavi, *Conflict Perpetuated*, 228.

acceptability, it was better for the bureau to take a backseat on the matter. It thus fell to others, in particular Abram Chayes, to carry the ball forward.⁹² As it happened, the troubled travel package fared no better once it was taken outside the purview of the “Hilsman Project.” Rusk remained reluctant to move on the proposed changes, and circumstances, not least the French recognition of Beijing in early 1964, conspired to prevent clearance. Following Kennedy’s death the package was bounced back and forth in the bureaucracy, neither rejected nor approved, but suspended in a policy no-man’s land of indefinite postponement. Indeed, it was not until the end of 1965 that the first modest changes were made to the travel restrictions, with further adjustments implemented over the following six months.⁹³ And with the onset of the Cultural Revolution in mid-1966 changes of the scale envisioned in 1963 would not be implemented until after Nixon had taken office.

Toward a New Rhetorical Framework: Hilsman’s Commonwealth Club Speech

The fate of the travel package was mirrored by a lack of movement on other China policy initiatives, including proposals for modest adjustments in the trade embargo. Reflecting some years later on the bureau’s effort to liberalise U.S. China policy in 1963, Marshall Green conceded there was little question they failed in the endeavour. Still, qualifying this failure, in “one important respect we succeeded. That was in recommending that our public treatment of Communist China be more moderate, civil, and factual.”⁹⁴ This campaign to adjust Washington’s posture towards China included guidance sent to U.S. diplomatic missions on the importance of avoiding polemics in public statements about China, along with attempts to improve the atmospherics of the ambassadorial-level talks in Warsaw.⁹⁵ However, the single most important success in adjusting U.S. posture towards China was provided by a speech drafted by the bureau and delivered by Hilsman to the San Francisco Commonwealth Club on

⁹² Green to Hilsman, *supra* note 90; and documents in RG59, ACA, lot 72D175, box 3, “Travel Controls, Jan-May 1965,” NA.

⁹³ These changes are discussed in chapter nine, 244-246.

⁹⁴ Green, “Averting Wider War,” 63.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*; David Dean, OHI, 41-44, July 21, 1998, ADST; Embtel-516, Warsaw, September 12, 1963, NSF:CO, box 153a “Poland, Subjects, Ambassadorial Talks with Ambassador Wang,” JFKL.

December 13, 1963—the first full official statement on China policy since Dulles had spoken in the same city in 1957.⁹⁶

Indirectly negating Dulles's 1957 claim that Communism in China was a "passing and not a perpetual phase," Hilsman declared that U.S. policy was predicated on the assumption that the Chinese Communist regime was firmly ensconced in power, and likely to remain so. Essaying the possibility of a more cooperative Sino-American relationship, and perhaps hoping to appeal to pragmatic elements within the Chinese polity, Hilsman pointed to possible tensions between the different levels of China's leadership, expressing the hope that the current "Old Guard" would, in time, be replaced by a more moderate group of leaders. Invoking that "classic canon" of U.S. China policy, the "Open Door," Hilsman finished his address on a positive note, suggesting the administration was "determined to keep the door open to the possibility of change, and not to slam it shut against any development which might advance our national good, serve the free world, and benefit the people of China." Hilsman described this as a policy of "strength and firmness, accompanied by a constant readiness to negotiate."⁹⁷

It should be stressed that Hilsman coupled these ideas with an emphasis on the constancy of U.S. support for its allies in the region (including the GRC), references to Beijing's "venomous hatreds" and militancy, and a reiteration of America's determination to resist Beijing's attempts to export revolution in the region. As Thomson admits, in retrospect the speech "seems curiously dated—laden still with Cold War concepts and obtrusive Pekingology."⁹⁸ Moreover, the central thesis of the speech, that the Chinese Communists "are going to be around and we're going to be dealing them," was hardly a profound revelation.⁹⁹

The ambassadorial talks in Geneva and Warsaw, diplomatic contact in multilateral

⁹⁶ Hilsman, *Move a Nation*, 350-51; Thomson memo for the files, May 6, 1964, JTP, Series 2: Speeches, 1961-1966 (hereafter JTP:SP), box 9, "Roger Hilsman, 12/13/63, San Francisco, Commonwealth Club, Thomson Notes on Genesis and Reaction" (hereafter simply "Genesis and Reaction"), JFKL.

⁹⁷ Hilsman, "United States Policy Toward Communist China," December 13, 1963, *DSB* 50:11-17.

⁹⁸ Thomson, "U.S. China Policy," 230.

⁹⁹ Quote from Grant, OHI, January 31, 1990, 16, ADST.

negotiations on Indochina (both in 1954 and 1962), and the increasingly apparent opposition in Washington to Chiang's "return to the mainland" objective, already implied U.S. recognition of the endurance of the People's Republic and, to a degree, a willingness to interact peaceably with Mao's regime.

In this sense the speech, as Grant later noted, simply moved "public policy into line with our recognition of the diplomatic realities."¹⁰⁰ However, as Thomson wrote to Ambassador Reischauer, although the speech represented a change in posture, as opposed to policy, this "in itself is significant."¹⁰¹ For even though the speech did not in and of itself constitute a change in policy, it was an important step forward in preparing the American public for possible future policy shifts, and in broadening the boundaries of the rhetorical framework in which more concrete policy initiatives could eventually be implemented.¹⁰²

And it appeared an altogether successful first step toward this end. Quite predictably, the GRC and the China Lobby alike were outraged by the "two Chinas" connotations of Hilsman's speech. However, the China Lobby "couldn't raise a whimper" in Congress, where reaction to the speech had been light, but generally positive.¹⁰³ The "attentive public," meanwhile, reacted favourably to the postural shift: The academic community welcomed the departure from Dulles-era polemics on China (although some prominent sinologists thought Hilsman might have gone further still in this respect). And in the nation's papers, where the speech was given prominent coverage, Hilsman received widespread (if not universal) approval for having had "the courage to discuss China policy dispassionately."¹⁰⁴ In all, the

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.; circular Deptel-1087 to all posts, December 14, 1963, JTP:SP, box 10, "Roger Hilsman, 12/13/63, San Francisco, Commonwealth Club, Correspondence and Press" (hereafter simply "Correspondence and Press"), JFKL; Hilsman to Stevenson, December 19, 1963, *FRUS, 1961-1963* 22:411-12.

¹⁰¹ Thomson to Reischauer, December 31, 1963, JTP:SP, box 10, "Correspondence and Press," JFKL.

¹⁰² Memcon, Hilsman and Ambassador Masood (Pakistan), December 17, 1963, RG59, CF:1963, box 3863, POL CHICOM-US, NA.

¹⁰³ Grant, OHI, January 31, 1990, 17-18, ADST; Thomson to Barnett, January 24, 1964, JTP:SP, box 9, "Genesis and Reaction," JFKL; Joseph W. Neuber to various FE officials, December 23, 1963, JTP:FE, box 13, "General, 1963-1964," JFKL.

¹⁰⁴ Neuber to FE officials (in previous note); A. Doak Barnett to Thomson, December 19, 1963, JTP:SP, box 10, "Correspondence and Press," JFKL; Public Opinion Studies Staff (Bureau of Public Affairs), "U.S. Policy on China," December 27, 1963, *ibid.*; Thomson to McGeorge Bundy, November 16, 1964, *ibid.*, box 16,

domestic reaction to Hilsman's speech seemed to suggest, as Thomson wrote, "a dramatic ebbing of passions on the China issue over the past decade."¹⁰⁵

Inasmuch as Hilsman also hoped, as Thomson later wrote, "to speak, across years of hostility," to pragmatic elements within the Chinese polity, the value of the speech was (and, indeed, remains) more difficult to quantify.¹⁰⁶ As had been anticipated, Beijing's reaction was uniformly negative, either dismissing the speech as a "peace fraud," or focusing, as one INR report suggested, "on those portions that could be labelled examples of unabated American antagonism toward Peiping."¹⁰⁷ However, the U.S. consulate in Hong Kong suspected that the decidedly defensive tone of Beijing's reaction to the speech reflected uncertainty in Beijing over to how to respond to a U.S. line that not only undercut Beijing's depiction of inveterate American hostility towards the PRC, but also might have resonated with moderate elements in China itself.¹⁰⁸

"If Oswald had Missed": The Kennedy Counterfactual and U.S. China Policy

Despite the generally favourable reaction to speech, Rusk seemed to be on a different page to Hilsman. Although claims that the speech was slipped past Rusk are exaggerated, Hilsman did little more than outline the main themes of the speech for the secretary who, pressed for time, did not actually read the text before granting clearance.¹⁰⁹ And Rusk's language in the days following Hilsman's address suggests that he was more inclined to emphasise continued U.S. "firmness" toward China, rather than the "flexibility" that Hilsman had also alluded to.

"Communist China, General,"; Hilsman, *Move a Nation*, 355-56; Quigley, "Lost Opportunity," 188-89.

¹⁰⁵ Thomson to McGeorge Bundy, October 28, 1964, *FRUS*, 1964-1968 30:119; Tucker, "Threats, Opportunities," 102.

¹⁰⁶ Beijing may, in fact, have interpreted the speech, with its "two Chinas" connotations, as further evidence of U.S. intransigence. See Foot, *Practice of Power*, 98n42.

¹⁰⁷ INR, "Chinese Communist Reaction to Hilsman Speech," February 6, 1964, JTP:SP, box 10, "Roger Hilsman, 12/13/63, San Francisco, Classified Documents," JFKL.

¹⁰⁸ Congentel-1504, Hong Kong, February 20, 1964, *ibid.*, "Correspondence and Press," JFKL; Congentel-1275, Hong Kong, January 15, 1964, *ibid.*; Congentel-1112, Hong Kong, December 18, 1963, RG59, CF:1963, box 3863, POL CHICOM-US, NA.

¹⁰⁹ Thomson memo, *supra* note 96; Thomson, OHI, July 22, 1971, 37-39, LBJL; Cohen, *Dean Rusk*, 172; Hilsman, *Move a Nation*, 355; Thomson to Hilsman, December 11, 1963, JTP:SP, box 10, "Correspondence and Press," JFKL.

Addressing the NATO conference on December 16, Rusk went out of his way to contrast Chinese militancy with Soviet reasonableness, prompting journalist Arthur Krock to suggest that the “fog which suffuses Far Eastern diplomacy has thickened,” Rusk’s address “seemingly cancelling the conditional U.S. policy” for improved Sino-American relations that Hilsman had surveyed only three days earlier.¹¹⁰ And when questioned about Hilsman’s “open door,” Rusk suggested that the assistant secretary was only referring to “longest range future”; for the moment, at least, Rusk did not “anticipate any traffic through that door.”¹¹¹

Whether Kennedy, assassinated on November 22, would have approved of the speech is difficult to determine. Hilsman, for his part, viewed his China speech as building on comments made by Kennedy on November 14, 1963, at his last press conference.¹¹² Asked about the conditions for a resumption of trade with mainland China, Kennedy had replied that in light of the PRC’s current policies the administration had no plans to review the existing trade embargo. Yet he insisted that the administration maintained an open mind on the matter:

If the Red Chinese indicate a desire to live at peace with the United States, with other countries surrounding it, then quite obviously the United States would reappraise its policies. We are not wedded to a policy of hostility to Red China.¹¹³

Kennedy’s ambiguity here appears to have been, at least in part, politically calculated. As Cohen points out, the president’s comments “provided a hint of flexibility for the liberals and an assurance of inaction for the conservatives.”¹¹⁴ Hilsman, however, was convinced that Kennedy would have revisited the China question in a second term. Similarly, Admiral Wright claims that when he was appointed Ambassador to the ROC Kennedy called him in and told him that once he had settled down in Taipei he should convey to Kennedy his views on what might be done to resolve the impasse between Taipei and Beijing. However, with

¹¹⁰ Drew Middleton, “Rusk Urges NATO to Seek Accords with Soviet Union,” *NYT*, December 16, 1963. Reston cited in Public Opinion Studies Staff, “U.S. Policy on China,” supra note 104.

¹¹¹ Rusk, December 24, 1963, *DSB* 50:42.

¹¹² Thomson, “U.S. China Policy,” 230.

¹¹³ Kennedy, November 14, 1963, *PPP:JFK, 1963*, 845-46.

¹¹⁴ Cohen, *Dean Rusk*, 171-72.

Kennedy's death, Wright recalled, "I never got a chance to get my oar in."¹¹⁵ Other advisers, particularly those of a liberal bent, have likewise claimed that at the time of his death Kennedy was considering a second-term review of China policy.¹¹⁶

Given Beijing's hostile indifference to improved relations with the United States prior to 1969, it would have been remarkably inconsistent for Kennedy to attempt any departures in policy during a second term on anything approaching the scale of the subsequent rapprochement. But as concerned as Kennedy was by the perceived Chinese threat to U.S. interests, his aversion to policy change was based more on his perception that the domestic political climate restricted his room for manoeuvre; in the sense that he had no in-principle opposition to normalised relations between the United States and Mao's China he could quite truthfully maintain that he was not "wedded to a policy of hostility" towards the PRC. Thus, although Kennedy would have recognised that opportunities for substantive policy change were limited by Chinese intransigence, he would likely have welcomed the measure of qualified flexibility that Hilsman and his staff thought they were creating.¹¹⁷ And while Kennedy's approach to China post-1963 would have turned largely on his success or failure in avoiding an Americanisation of the war in Vietnam (a counterfactual not within the purview of this study) at least at the time of his death he had given little indication that he opposed such flexibility on the grounds it would be read in Beijing as U.S. weakness or uncertainty in the face of Chinese militancy in Southeast Asia,¹¹⁸ considerations which (as the next chapter argues) fundamentally weighed against Johnson's willingness to depart from a policy of maximum pressure over the first two years of his presidency.

Finally, Kennedy had in all likelihood come to accept, however grudgingly, the idea of a

¹¹⁵ Admiral Jerauld Wright, OHI, June 18, 1987, 25-26, ADST.

¹¹⁶ Hilsman, *Move a Nation*, 347-48; Theodore C. Sorensen, *Kennedy* (New York: Hodder and Stoughton, 1965), 665-66; Thomson, "U.S. China Policy," 221. Also see Kochavi, *Conflict Perpetuated*, 231; and Cohen, *Dean Rusk*, 172.

¹¹⁷ A similar conclusion is reached in Quigley, "Lost Opportunity," 191.

¹¹⁸ Kochavi, by contrast, suggests that a "preoccupation with credibility permeated [Kennedy's] China policy." "Opportunities Lost?" 140.

nuclear-armed China, as had the key players in his administration.¹¹⁹ At the time of Kennedy's death it was apparent that the United States would have to learn to live with China's nuclear development and, in time, with China itself. Hilsman's speech, in effect, was a first step in creating a rhetorical framework that, although by no means demanding immediate policy change, allowed for the possibility that a strategy of containment *and* engagement might abet a process of moderation within the Chinese polity, ultimately creating a foundation for normalised Sino-American relations.

There is no reason, in short, to believe that Kennedy would have pursued a radically different course on China policy had he lived to win a second term. But equally, there is good reason to believe that in recognising the need for an eventual Sino-American *modus vivendi* Kennedy would have welcomed politically judicious efforts to maximise the potential for cooperative, peaceable relations between Washington and Beijing and, indeed, his own room for manoeuvre in managing that relationship.

*

Whatever course Kennedy may have taken had he lived, at the close of 1963 Sino-American relations remained fraught with tension. Nonetheless, within a month of Johnson assuming the presidency, the rhetorical dimensions of China policy had been broadened somewhat—at least relative to the time when Kennedy had himself taken the oath of office—and in a manner which reflected key elements of the liberal critique of U.S. China policy. And, despite the profound animosities that continued to plague Sino-American relations, the prospects for reshaping U.S. policy on a unilateral basis, at least once Johnson had won office in his own right, appeared reasonable. As Thomson wrote following Hilsman's San Francisco speech: “Now that we have talked dispassionately about China without having the roof fall in, we will

¹¹⁹ Senior officials in the Johnson administration also briefly considered to the possibility of preventive military action against China's nuclear program. This is discussed in the next chapter.

have the courage to talk a good deal more about China, I think.”¹²⁰ Thomson had not, however, reckoned with Johnson’s growing obsession with Vietnam, an issue that would quickly overwhelm all other aspects of the new president’s foreign policy.

¹²⁰ Thomson to Reischauer, *supra* note 101.

8

LYNDON JOHNSON, CHINA, AND THE AMERICAN COMMITMENT TO VIETNAM, 1963-1965

Johnson's first public statement on U.S. China policy as president, made in April 1964, was a reaffirmation of existing orthodoxies, the new president declaring that:

...so long as the Communist Chinese pursue aggression...[and] preach violence, there can be and will be no easing of relationships. There are some who prophesy that these policies will change. But America must base her acts on present realities and not on future hopes. It is not we who must re-examine our view of China. It is the Chinese Communists who must re-examine their view of the world.¹

If Johnson's words were not a direct repudiation of Hilsman's assertion four months earlier that the United States would "keep the door open to the possibility of change," he had, nonetheless, indicated that the administration viewed this possibility as so remote that for the moment it played no significant role in its policy calculus.

Not surprisingly, Johnson was unwilling to tackle the question of China policy in an election year, particularly given his drive for political consolidation on the basis of "continuity" and "firmness" following Kennedy's assassination. More important than political considerations, however, Johnson and the Cold Warriors advising him genuinely believed (both before and after the election) that any shift from a policy of maximum pressure in the face of China's nuclear development and promotion of "people's war" in Southeast Asia would suggest American uncertainty and be read in Beijing as a mark of underlying weakness, thereby reinforcing Beijing's belligerent approach to foreign policy. As Marshall Green of the Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs later wrote, with the Chinese detonation of a nuclear device in October 1964 and the growing preoccupation on both sides of the Pacific with Vietnam, the

¹ Johnson, April 20, 1964, *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Lyndon B. Johnson* (hereafter *PPP:LBJ*), 1963-1964, Book I, 499.

“opportunities we saw in 1962 and 1963 for improving long-term U.S.-Chinese relations were now fast disappearing.”² Indeed, 1964-1965 marked something of a nadir in the liberal push for a redefinition of U.S. China policy during the 1960s, a confluence of domestic circumstance and Cold War geopolitical concerns sucking the oxygen out of arguments for policy change, and forcing a retreat (if only a temporary one) to the logic of “containment and isolation.”

Enter LBJ

For the loss of its young president the American nation received heartfelt consolations, official and unofficial, from both sides of the Iron Curtain. Beijing, however, maintained a studied indifference. One Chinese newspaper, the *Worker's Daily*, even ran a callous cartoon of a mortally wounded Kennedy lying face down in a pool of blood. The caption, a play on the Chinese alliteration of the fallen president's name, read: “Kennedy bites the dust.”³ Analysts at Foggy Bottom and Langley alike recognised that, apocryphal reports in the American press notwithstanding, the Chinese government had not been cheered by Kennedy's violent demise. Indeed, reliable sources indicated that Chen Yi and Chou Enlai had condemned the assassination, and the editorial board of the *Worker's Daily* had been quietly reprimanded for its exercise in poor taste.⁴ Nonetheless, Beijing's cold public response to the events of November 22, 1963 would have provided Johnson with a potent reminder of Beijing's rabid anti-Americanism.

At any rate, it is unlikely Johnson would have been watching for any hints of Chinese moderation. Johnson may have approached China matters with an open-mind during his

² Green, “Averting Wider War,” 64.

³ Reported in airgram-438, Hong Kong, December 29, 1963, RG59, CF:1963, box 3858, POL 2-1 CHICOM, NA.

⁴ CIA, “Chinese Communist Reaction to President Kennedy's Death and Expectations of President Johnson,” December 24, 1963, NSF:CO, box 237, “China Cables, Vol. I,” LBJL; Deptel-1154 to Warsaw, January 22, 1964, RG59, CF:1964-66, box 2019, POL CHICOM-US, NA; memcon, Felix Greene (author) and Grant, February 7, 1964, *ibid.*, box 2005, POL CHICOM; Philip Snow, *The Star Raft: China's Encounter with Africa* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1988), 109.

presidency (as a number of administration insiders maintain he did), but in his pre-presidential career he had never shown any particular interest in China policy.⁵ Johnson's lack of enthusiasm for innovation was not, it should be noted, limited to China policy, but rather characterised his approach to foreign policy generally. Although not nearly as ignorant of international affairs as some critics have charged, Johnson's interest had always gravitated towards the domestic issues upon which he had built his long and successful political career. Lyndon Johnson could, H.W. Brands writes, "foment a revolution in American domestic affairs, but on international issues he stuck to the traditional verities of the Cold War."⁶

Moreover, Johnson's overriding preoccupation in the months after assuming office was consolidation. In the first instance the new president, operating in the shadow of Camelot, needed to demonstrate that prior to winning office in his own right he would conduct a foreign policy consistent with public understandings of the late president's agenda.⁷ Clearly, a review of China policy would have been regarded as a significant policy departure. And in an election year, with the ultraconservatives pushing Barry Goldwater's candidacy ready to pounce on any hint of Democratic "softness" toward Communism, this particular departure was out of the question. Admittedly, Goldwater's appeal for the United States to take the offensive in Asia and encourage non-Communist forces (including the Nationalist Chinese) to liberate Communist-controlled areas had fallen flat with American voters; Johnson had proven more closely attuned to the electoral zeitgeist when he assured the nation that he would avoid taking the fight directly to North Vietnam, given the risk of involving "American boys in a war in Asia with 700 million Chinese."⁸ Public opinion surveys from 1963 and 1964, meanwhile, suggested most Americans would have welcomed expanded Sino-

⁵ Goh, "U.S. Rapprochement," 95n16; Lumbers, "'Chinese Muddle,'" 261.

⁶ H.W. Brands, *The Wages of Globalism: Lyndon Johnson and the Limits of American Power* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 28-29. For a defence of Johnson's handle on foreign policy issues, see Robert Dallek, "The President We Love to Blame," *Wilson Quarterly* 15 (Winter 1991): 101-8.

⁷ Lyndon B. Johnson, *The Vantage Point: Perspectives of the Presidency, 1963-1969* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971), 19; Kaiser, "Men and Policies," 24.

⁸ John Morton Blum, *Years of Discord: American Politics and Society, 1961-1974* (London: W.W. Norton, 1991), 158-61. Johnson, September 28, 1964, *PPP:LBJ, 1963-1964, Book II*, 1164.

American contacts. Yet these same polls also pointed to a deep sense of foreboding among the general public that Red China, which a plurality of Americans now believed posed a bigger threat to the United States than the Soviet Union, was “moving inexorably towards a nuclear, racial war.”⁹ In short, although the general public mood might have allowed for well-timed and carefully explained moderations in policy, it is inconceivable that Johnson, after capturing the ideological middle-ground in the campaign, would have risked undermining his position as the (proven) centrist candidate by moving on China policy before November.

Advocates of policy change within the administration were well aware that prior to the election opportunities to meaningfully discuss China policy, even privately, would be limited.¹⁰ The Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs, however, made a concerted effort to keep China policy under active consideration. Less than a week out from the election Marshall Green assured William Bundy (who, as noted below, became assistant secretary at the bureau in March 1964) that the bureau’s staff had been weighing “several possible lines of approach to the basic problem of Red China” that might be pursued following the election. But in recognition of the political sensitivity of the subject, the bureau was not circulating policy papers; “the less paperwork,” Green wrote, “the better.”¹¹

Hilsman, it might be noted, still saw fit to deliver his groundbreaking speech on China less than one month into Johnson’s presidency. Viewing the speech as a product of the Kennedy administration, Hilsman’s decision to proceed did not, it should be stressed, reflect any reading of Johnson’s thinking—even though Hilsman did believe it would provide Johnson with greater room for manoeuvre—nor was the clearance of the speech (which Johnson had

⁹ Quote from report, “Changes in Public Attitudes toward Communist China,” by Samuel Lubell Associates, February 18, 1964, NSF:CO, box 237, “China Memos, Vol. I,” LBJL. Also see Thomson to McGeorge Bundy and Komer (with attached report, “U.S. Opinion Regarding Communist China”), August 21, 1964, *ibid.*; and H. Schuyler Foster to Dean (with attached comments on study by Survey Research Center, University of Michigan, “The United States and Communist China”), October 16, 1964, RG59, ACA, lot 71D423, box 1, “Guidelines, Directives, Basic Studies 1964,” NA.

¹⁰ Memo for the record, April 20, 1964, *FRUS, 1964-1968* 30:55-57; Cooper to McCone, January 16, 1964, HP:KJA, Subject File, box 461, “France, Recognition of Communist China,” LCMD.

¹¹ Green to Bundy, October 28, 1964, RG59, ACA, lot 71D423, box 1, “Sino-United States Relations, 1964,” NA.

no prior knowledge of) indicative of any desire on the new president's part to, as one scholar has argued, "break fresh ground" on China policy.¹² Moreover, Hilsman recognised that the program of concrete policy initiatives that he and his staff had originally intended to pursue following the speech would have to be postponed until after the election.¹³

Hilsman, as it happened, fared no better personally than his policy agenda, the brash West Pointer becoming an early casualty of the Kennedy-Johnson transition. Hilsman had ruffled the feathers of more than a few hawks in the Pentagon by impertinently questioning the military judgement of McNamara and the generals on Vietnam, and earned Johnson's ire in particular for his apparent role in the coup against Ngo Dinh Diem—the man Johnson once called, in a fit of hyperbole, the "Churchill of Asia."¹⁴ Hilsman still enjoyed Harriman's support, but Harriman's relationship with Rusk had always been an uneasy one, and now Harriman (also seen as a conspirator against Diem, and, perhaps worse still from LBJ's perspective, a friend of Robert Kennedy's) struggled to earn the new president's trust. Isolated and out of favour, in March 1964 Hilsman left government service to take up a new life in academia.¹⁵

Hilsman was replaced as assistant secretary by William P. Bundy, McGeorge's older brother, Dean Acheson's son-in-law, and, prior to his move to State, the Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs. The elder Bundy, a favourite of McNamara's, was more bureaucratically minded than his predecessor (a "bureaucrat's bureaucrat," as Thomson put it), tending to advocate policies he believed were in harmony with the views of his

¹² Garson, "China Enigma," 66.

¹³ Hilsman, *Move a Nation*, 353.

¹⁴ Although Johnson's admiration of Diem was quite genuine, the Diem-Churchill comparison was likely made at the suggestion of a State Department official who had briefed Johnson during his May 1961 visit to South Vietnam. William Conrad Gibbons, *The U.S. Government and the Vietnam War: Executive and Legislative Roles and Relationships*, Part II: 1961-1964 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986), 42n110.

¹⁵ David E. Kaiser, *American Tragedy: Kennedy, Johnson, and the Origins of the Vietnam War* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2000), 286-88; Halberstam, *Best and the Brightest*, 254-58, 374-75; Walter Isaacson and Evan Thomas, *The Wise Men: Six Friends and the World They Made* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1986), 641.

superiors, and often demanding that his subordinates do the same.¹⁶ And although the new assistant secretary would, in time, prove more receptive to arguments for a more flexible China policy than many senior officials in the administration, upon taking up his new position William Bundy possessed neither the enthusiasm for a robust competition of ideas on China policy that Harriman had brought to the job when it was his, nor the reformist zeal with which Hilsman had attacked the China question during his time heading the bureau.

At the same time, the orderly bureaucratic processes that Johnson favoured—in contrast to Kennedy’s aversion to formal bureaucratic procedure—to some extent circumscribed the opportunities for mid-level officials advocating policy change to have their voices heard by senior policymakers. Johnson eschewed the large, freewheeling policy forums that Kennedy had favoured, preferring smaller, more discreet meetings. The only officials assured of an invitation to these meetings, known inside the Beltway as “Tuesday lunches,” were Rusk, McNamara, and McGeorge Bundy, Johnson’s three most trusted foreign policy advisers. Much to the satisfaction of Rusk—who quickly established an easy rapport with the president—Johnson also proved more respectful of the bureaucratic chain-of-command than his predecessor. Thus, whereas both Harriman and Hilsman had channels to the White House that essentially bypassed the secretary of state, contact between the State Department and the White House in the Johnson years was almost always neatly mediated by way of Rusk’s office.¹⁷

Although domestic political concerns, personnel changes, and the idiosyncrasies of bureaucratic operations under Johnson all played important roles in guiding (or, more precisely, stifling) discussions about China policy in 1964-1965, approaches to China matters

¹⁶ Halberstam, *Best and the Brightest*, 395-98; Thomson, OHI, July 22, 1971, 11-12, LBJL.

¹⁷ Rusk, OHI, July 28, 1969, 5-6, 16-19, LBJL; Schoenbaum, *Waging Peace*, 410-18; Brands, *Wages of Globalism*, 6-23 passim. Cohen, *Dean Rusk*, 219. On the contrast between the “openness” of Kennedy’s administration and Johnson’s “closed” inner-circle, see Fredrik Logevall, *Choosing War: The Lost Chance for Peace and the Escalation of the War in Vietnam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 399. For a contrary view, see David M. Barrett, “Doing ‘Tuesday Lunch’ at Lyndon Johnson’s White House: New Archival Evidence on Vietnam Decisionmaking,” *PS: Political Science and Politics* 24 (December, 1991): 677-78.

during this period turned first and foremost on issues of national security. The prevailing wisdom, expressed most forcefully by Rusk but also shared by the Bundy brothers, McNamara, and Johnson himself, was that any shift in policy would be read in Beijing as a sign of weakness, proof positive that its combative defiance of international norms was “paying dividends.”

China’s “Deepening Shadow” over Southeast Asia

The perceived need to communicate U.S. resolve to China became all the more pronounced as the administration inched towards a decision for war in Vietnam over the first eighteen months of Johnson’s presidency. Underpinning Johnson’s decision to stand in Vietnam was his belief, shared by his most senior advisers, that the sanctity of the American “commitment” was at stake; should the United States appear to waver in meeting its commitment to the defence of a non-Communist South Vietnam, the credibility of the United States, and indeed of his administration, would be severely undermined.¹⁸ And this determination to protect U.S. credibility was by no means an empty matter of face. In one of Rusk’s favourite turns of phrase, the “the integrity of the U.S. commitment is the principal pillar of peace throughout the world”; should nations disposed toward aggression—with China very much included in this category—find cause to doubt the credibility of U.S. commitments to the defence of non-Communist nations, this would simply invite further aggression.¹⁹ Across the first half of the 1960s this “doctrine of credibility” emerged as a neat complement to the more orthodox (geo-strategic) “domino theory” in shaping U.S. decision-making on Vietnam. Indeed, the logic of original commitment to Vietnam became almost secondary: Johnson took American to war as

¹⁸ Of course, the reasons for Johnson’s decision to fight in Vietnam (and, indeed, the extent to which this “decision” was already determined by the time he took office) continue to be disputed. On the historiography of the Americanisation of the war, see David L. Anderson, “The Vietnam War,” in *A Companion to American Foreign Relations*, ed. Robert D. Schulzinger (Maldern, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), esp. 316-18; and Gary R. Hess, “The Unending Debate: Historians and the Vietnam War,” *Diplomatic History* 18 (Spring 1994): 249-52.

¹⁹ Paper by Rusk, July 1, 1965, *FRUS, 1964-1968* 3:105; “US Integrity is ‘Pillar of Peace’—Rusk,” September 21, 1965, *Knoxville News-Sentinel*, filed in RBRL, DRPP, V:B, box 8; Tom Wicker, “A Theological War,” *Diplomatic History* 20 (Summer 1996): 447.

much to defend the credibility of the American “commitment” as to defend South Vietnam itself.²⁰

Over the first two years of Johnson’s presidency the China policy discourse in the administration turned, in large measure, on this perceived need to defend U.S. credibility in Vietnam. In approaching China related matters senior officials in the administration took as their point of departure the notion that Beijing’s material and political support of North Vietnam and, by extension, the insurgency south of the 17th parallel, represented the vanguard of a broader attempt by Beijing to undermine the credibility of U.S. commitments in the region. Should the United States fail to meet this challenge, it was reasoned, the Chinese, confident in the validity of their militant foreign policy line, would redouble their efforts to dominate the region by means of indirect aggression, subversion, and revolutionary-grassroots political organisation that, conceived as a totality, constituted “wars of national liberation.” “Over this war—and all Asia,” Johnson explained in his April 1965 speech at John Hopkins, “is...the deepening shadow of Communist China.”²¹

The stakes, in Washington’s analysis, could hardly have been higher. In a clear intersection of “credibility doctrine” and “domino theory,” senior policymakers agreed that a Communist victory in South Vietnam would lend authority to Chinese charges that the United States was a “paper tiger”; in turn, “Country after country on the [Chinese] periphery would give way and look toward Communist China as the rising power in the area.”²² Beyond becoming the dominant power in Southeast Asia, Beijing would move closer to realising its leadership ambitions in the international Communist movement, a victory in Vietnam providing vindication, as the Hong Kong consulate explained, “of Mao’s armed struggle tactics and of Chinese claims to superior revolution zeal” in their contest with the more cautious Soviets.²³

²⁰ Logevall, *Choosing War*, 31-37; Geoffrey Warner, “The United States and Vietnam: from Kennedy to Johnson,” *International Affairs* 73, no. 2 (1997): 334; Rusk, OHI, December 9, 1969, 85, JFKL.

²¹ Johnson, April 7, 1965, *PPP:LBJ, 1965, Book I*, 395.

²² Quote from record of meeting, September 9, 1964, cited in Schulzinger, “Johnson Administration,” 244.

²³ Airgram-124, Hong Kong, September 13, 1963, RG59, CF:1963, box 3863, POL CHICOM-USSR, NA;

Meanwhile, the Soviet Union, perceiving profit in the Maoist line, would, in Rusk's words, "be sorely tempted to move in that direction rather than try to stay on a basis of peaceful coexistence."²⁴

The Vietcong were, to be sure, Vietnamese, as were there their masters in Hanoi, and neither Johnson or his advisers believed Beijing was itself directing the war effort. But just behind the North Vietnamese stood the Chinese Communist behemoth, providing political, ideological, and material support to Hanoi that was important enough for Rusk to suggest that Beijing possessed the ability to effectively order an end to the infiltration of South Vietnam.²⁵ Washington's perception of China as the engine of Communist aggression in Vietnam was particularly pronounced from late 1963 through 1965 when U.S. analysts sensed—quite presciently as it happened—that Hanoi, impatient with Moscow's pursuit of "peaceful coexistence," was leaning toward Beijing's position in the Sino-Soviet dispute, thereby affording the militant Chinese a generous degree of influence in Hanoi.²⁶

Certainly, Washington assigned the Chinese a greater share of responsibility for the war than the Soviets. Reflecting the contradiction between America's Cold War *idées fixes* and developing understandings of the Sino-Soviet split, readings in the administration's "Inner War Cabinet" (as Rusk dubbed the "Tuesday Lunch" group) of Soviet intentions in Vietnam possessed a counterintuitive logic reminiscent of an M.C. Escher drawing. Viewed within the bigger picture of the Cold War, Vietnam appeared part of the struggle against Soviet (and Chinese) aggression (if not, strictly speaking, a unified Sino-Soviet aggression). Yet seen in more precise, immediate terms, the Johnson administration generally held that the Soviets, wary of China's hegemonic designs in the region and the risks posed by the escalation of

airgram-299, Saigon, October 31, 1963, October 31, 1963, RG59, CF:1963, box 3863, POL CHICOM-USSR, NA; Board of National Estimates to McCone, June 9, 1964, *FRUS, 1964-1968* 1:486-87.

²⁴ Rusk, testimony to SFRC, January 8, 1965, *Executive Sessions* 17:99-100, 116.

²⁵ Rusk, testimony to SFRC, January 5, 1965, *Executive Sessions* 17:28.

²⁶ CIA, "Recent Soviet Tactics in the Sino-Soviet Dispute," November 18, 1963, CREST, NA. On Hanoi's "tilt" toward Beijing during this period see Qiang Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars, 1950-1975* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 122-29; and Xiaoming Zhang, "The Vietnam War, 1964-1969: A Chinese Perspective," *The Journal of Military History* 60 (October 1996): 736.

hostilities, genuinely hoped for a negotiated settlement in Vietnam. In this reading (which was likely accurate, at least in the lead-up to and early stages of the war),²⁷ the Kremlin was endeavouring to restrain their North Vietnamese allies and gently push them towards the negotiating table.²⁸ Inasmuch as Moscow's efforts to temper North Vietnamese militancy occasionally appeared somewhat desultory this was attributed to apparent Soviet concerns that if they pressed Hanoi too hard to settle this would force the North Vietnamese further into Beijing's embrace, while undermining Moscow's claims to revolutionary leadership.²⁹

Some U.S. officials worried that the administration's focus on China's role in Vietnam had lost a proper sense of proportion. George Ball, for one, expressed discomfit with the idea, fashionable in some quarters of the administration, that the war in Vietnam was directed against China; Beijing might see some benefit in the war, but this did not in turn suggest that the war was of Beijing's making, or that the Chinese had stolen command of military strategy from the Vietcong and Hanoi.³⁰ Similarly, Edward Rice, Consul General to Hong Kong since early 1964, wrote to William Bundy in the second half of 1965 emphasising that Hanoi had enough reasons of its own to support the Vietcong, irrespective of China's stance. It "would be both wrong and dangerous," Rice added, "to regard Peking as the main culprit in Vietnam."³¹

Rice's reading of the assumptions of Johnson's "Inner War Cabinet" was no doubt informed by the tendency among senior officials to muddy the distinction between Beijing and Hanoi

²⁷ Ilya Gaiduk suggests that although the Kremlin was eager to avoid a wider war, it also hoped that U.S. entanglement in Vietnam would afford them more freedom of manoeuvre in their foreign policy. Ilya A. Gaiduk, "Soviet Policy towards U.S. Participation in the Vietnam War," *History* 81 (January 1996): 40-54.

²⁸ CIA, "The Situation in Vietnam," LBJL, NSF:CO, Vietnam (hereafter NSF:CO/VN), box 49, "Southeast Asia, Special Intelligence Material, Vol. IV"; Cogentel-1420, Hong Kong, March 18, 1965, NSF:CO, box 238, "China Cables, Vol. III," LBJL. The negotiations question is touched on in chapter nine, 229, and chapter ten, 276.

²⁹ William Bundy to Rusk, July 1, 1965, RG59, ACA, lot 70D215, box 2, "Sino-Soviet Relations, June-September 1965," NA; memcon, Harriman, PM Pearson and Foreign Minister Martin (Canada), August 18, 1965, RG59, CF:1964-66, box 2005, POL CHICOM, NA; CIA, "The Situation in Vietnam," February 23, 1965, NSF:CO/VN, box 49, "Southeast Asia, Special Intelligence Material, Vol. IV," LBJL.

³⁰ Telcon, Ball and Reston, March 1, 1966, Papers of George W. Ball, box 2, "China, Peking," LBJL.

³¹ Rice to William Bundy, November 2, 1965 (forwarded to Rusk by Bundy, November 9, 1965), RG59, CF:1964-66, box 2006, POL CHICOM, NA.

when defining the “externally directed and supported conspiracy” against South Vietnam.³² Rusk, in particular, regularly implied the two regimes were basically synonymous; peace in Vietnam, the secretary argued both publicly and privately, would come when “Hanoi and Peiping leave their neighbours alone.”³³ Still, while Rusk and Johnson’s other senior advisers believed Beijing was providing vital support for North Vietnam’s “aggression,” they did not in turn view Hanoi as Beijing’s mere proxy. Rather, a review of the vast documentary record indicates that in the lead-up to the Americanisation of the war the administration took as its point of departure the idea that it was Hanoi, not Beijing, directing and controlling the insurgency in the South.³⁴ As Robert McNamara explained in March 1964:

First and foremost, without doubt, the prime aggressor is North Viet-Nam... To be sure, Hanoi is encouraged on its aggressive course by Communist China. But Peiping’s interest is hardly the same as that of Hanoi.³⁵

And as the U.S. Embassy in Saigon pointed out, there was no evidence to suggest that Beijing had “usurped Hanoi’s direction of the insurgency” or, for that matter, intended to do so.³⁶

Certainly, by 1965 both career analysts and senior policymakers alike recognised that the North Vietnamese were shrewdly playing the Sino-Soviet split to their advantage, exploiting each parties fear of losing favour in Hanoi to the other, and, by extension, association with a struggle that had become the fulcrum of Communist revolution in the post-colonial world. Although Beijing appeared to be cheering Hanoi on to victory on the battlefield and Moscow gently counselling caution, the central actor in this drama, as one CIA study explained, was Hanoi, and “neither Peiping nor Moscow seems presently able to give orders to Hanoi.” Indeed, rather than Hanoi having to toe the line advocated by either Beijing or Moscow, both

³² Quote from NSAM 273, November 26, 1963, *FRUS, 1961-1963* 4:638.

³³ Rusk to Johnson, January 8, 1964, *FRUS, 1964-1968* 1:9-10; memcon, Rusk and Gromyko, December 9, 1964, *ibid.*, 990-91; circular airgram-1308 to various posts, August 3, 1964, RG59, CF:1964-66, box 2019, POL 1 CHICOM-US, NA.

³⁴ Andrew Preston, “The Soft Hawks’ Dilemma in Vietnam: Michael V. Forrestal at the National Security Council, 1962-1964,” *International History Review* 1, no. 3 (2003): 72; Logevall, *Choosing War*, 291.

³⁵ McNamara, March 26, 1964, *DSB* 50:565-66.

³⁶ Airgram-299, Saigon, *supra* note 23.

of the Communist giants were “compelled by the situation to stay in step with Hanoi.”³⁷

There is, however, scant evidence to suggest that senior officials in the Johnson administration—as distinct from working-level analysts in Hong Kong and Washington—ever fully appreciated how historically-based anti-Chinese sentiment in Vietnam, along with more immediate Sino-Vietnamese differences on military tactics and Hanoi’s ambivalent position on the Sino-Soviet dispute, was placing pressure on relations between Beijing and Hanoi.³⁸ Rather, senior policymakers in the administration viewed the Vietnamese revolution, both north and south of the 17th parallel, as guided by the dictates of international Communism in the first instance, with the role of nationalism (and certainly anti-Chinese sentiment) afforded an importance that was very much secondary.³⁹ As such, the administration had no patience with the case made by de Gaulle, and echoed stateside by Senator Fulbright, that a neutralised, unified Vietnam, even one under Communist rule, could exist free from Chinese domination, and perhaps even operate as a bulwark against Chinese expansion.⁴⁰ To Rusk’s mind this was “wishful thinking”; to Johnson’s, “sheer Fulbright nonsense.”⁴¹

Indeed, in contrast to arguments put forth by Fulbright *et al.*, the administration believed that a Communist victory in Vietnam, even one achieved through the independent agencies of Hanoi, would be a decisive step in Beijing realising its ambition of regional hegemony. In November 1965 Robert McNamara wrote to the president, suggesting that the American

³⁷ CIA, “Asian Communist and Soviet Views on the War in Vietnam,” May 25, 1965, NSF:CO/VN, box 50, “Southeast Asia, Special Intelligence Material, Vol. VI (B),” LBJL. Also see INR, “North Vietnam: Peking’s Independent Partner of Pawn?” August 9, 1966, HP:KJA, Subject File, box 442, “China Folder 4,” LCMD.

³⁸ For examples of contemporary analyses pointing to such tensions, see Green to William Bundy, undated, RG59, ACA, lot 71D423, box 1, “Guidelines, Directives, Basic Studies, Jan-May 1965,” NA; INR, “Indications of Friction Between Hanoi and Peiping,” May 12, 1965, NSF:CO, box 238, “China Memos, Vol. III,” LBJL. On the failure of the U.S. leadership to fully appreciate these tensions, see Green, “Averting Wider War,” 65; Ford, “Unpopular Pessimism: Why CIA Analysts Were So Doubtful About Vietnam,” *Studies in Intelligence* 1, no. 1 (1997), <http://www.cia.gov/csi/studies/97unclass/vietnam.html>; and Gilbert, “Introduction,” in *Why the North Won the Vietnam War*, ed. Jason Marc Gilbert (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 11.

³⁹ McNamara, *In Retrospect*, 33.

⁴⁰ Schulzinger, “Johnson Administration,” 240; Logevall, *Choosing War*, 13-14, 56-57.

⁴¹ Rusk, OHI, I, July 28, 1969, 32, LBJL; Doris Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1976), 330.

effort in Vietnam made sense only inasmuch as it was “in support of a long-run United States policy to contain Communist China.” Communist China, McNamara continued, like Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan in the 1930s, and the Soviet Union circa 1947, “looms as a major power threatening to undercut our importance and effectiveness in the world and, more remotely but more menacingly, to organise all of Asia against us.”⁴²

And through 1964 and the better part of 1965 Washington found further reason to be concerned about China’s prospects of achieving a broad regional hegemony, given Beijing’s warming relationship with Sukarno’s Indonesia. Sukarno’s radical nationalism, combined with a brand of neutralism that was punctuated by strident anti-Western diatribes, had long rankled Washington, all the more so after he began making friendly overtures to the Soviets and Chinese in the 1950s, while cultivating the Beijing-orientated Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) as a personal political base.⁴³ Despite Kennedy’s best efforts to improve U.S. ties with Indonesia, the two nations were put on a collision course when, in January 1963, Sukarno declared psychological war on Malaysia. The military and political posturing that ensued over the next three years threatened the integrity of the newly formed Malaysian Federation (which formally came into being in September 1963), while raising the spectre of a wider conflict pitting Malaysia’s allies, Australia and Britain, and in turn the United States itself, against an Indonesia backed by China.⁴⁴ And after the Johnson administration moved closer to Malaysia’s position in the dispute—in part because the administration wanted to secure British support for American policy in Vietnam—Sukarno upped his rhetorical assaults on U.S. policies in the region, all the while edging toward closer relations with Beijing.⁴⁵

⁴² McNamara, *In Retrospect*, 218-19.

⁴³ In the late 1950s the Eisenhower administration secretly fostered an ill-fated rebellion against Sukarno’s rule by disaffected Indonesians. See Audrey R. Kahin and George McT. Kahin, *Subversion as Foreign Policy: The Secret Eisenhower and Dulles Debacle in Indonesia* (New York: The New Press, 1995).

⁴⁴ Paul F. Gardner, *Shared Hopes, Separate Fears: Fifty Years of U.S.-Indonesian Relations* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press 1997), 172-83; Ang Cheng Guan, “The Johnson Administration and ‘Confrontation,’” *Cold War History* 2 (April 2002): 111-28.

⁴⁵ Mathew Jones, “U.S. Relations with Indonesia, the Kennedy-Johnson Transition, and the Vietnam Connection, 1963-1965,” *Diplomatic History* 26 (Spring 2002): 249-81. Also see CIA memo, August 20, 1964, *FRUS, 1964-1968* 26:134-36; and Brands, *Wages of Globalism*, 155-82.

The U.S. Ambassador to Indonesia, Howard P. Jones, had tried, at least in 1963, to reassure his anxious colleagues in Washington that Sukarno was simply trying to maintain peaceable relations with his “powerful nation to the north,” rather than attempting to move Indonesia into the Chinese orbit.⁴⁶ Senior policymakers in Washington were less than convinced, looking across the Pacific to see what appeared to be a nascent Beijing-Jakarta-Hanoi-Pyongyang axis—a strategic entity that Sukarno had himself alluded to in 1965 when he talked of a “Beijing-Jakarta Axis.”⁴⁷ It was an ominous spectre. Indonesia, with its large population, rich resources, and tremendous geo-strategic potential, was quite reasonably regarded in the 1960s as being of equal or greater significance to the future of the region as all of Indochina.⁴⁸ An Indonesia aligned with Beijing, either formally or tacitly, could irrevocably shift the balance in the region in favour of the Chinese, creating, as Marshall Green (Jones’s successor as ambassador) later wrote, “a great Communist pincer in Southeast Asia, with the largest and fifth largest countries in the world enclosing not only Vietnam but also the vulnerable countries of mainland Southeast Asia.”⁴⁹

Preventive Attack Reconsidered?

In 1964 these concerns about Beijing’s perceived push for regional hegemony were made more acute still by China’s anticipated acquisition of a nuclear capability. Although most U.S. observers recognised that a Chinese bomb was unlikely to have a material impact on the military balance in the region (at least in the short-to-medium term), a nuclear capability would, nonetheless, appreciably enhance the image of an ascendant China; non-Communist governments, at least in China’s immediate region, would, in turn, be more likely to reorient

⁴⁶ Deptel-958 to Jakarta, April 24, 1963, RG59, CF:1963, box 3862, POL CHICOM-INDON, NA; Embtel-1653, Jakarta, April 24, 1963, *ibid.*

⁴⁷ Johnson, *Vantage Point*, 136; Rizal Sukma, *Indonesia and China: The Politics of a Troubled Relationship* (London: Routledge, 1999), 32; David Easter, “‘Keep the Indonesian Pot Boiling’: Western Covert Intervention in Indonesia, October 1965-March 1966,” *Cold War History* 5 (February 2005): 57.

⁴⁸ Jones, “U.S. Relations,” 264; Komer to Johnson, August 19, 1964, *FRUS, 1964-1968* 26:133.

⁴⁹ Cited in Guan, “Johnson Administration,” 111. For an overview of developments in Indonesia through this period, as seen from Washington, Moscow, and Beijing, see Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 185-89.

their policies in an attempt to accommodate China's rising power.⁵⁰

Over the first few months of Johnson's presidency the question of how the United States should respond to China's nuclear development remained essentially where Kennedy had left it: unresolved and relegated to the backburner. The closest the Kennedy administration had come to a policy position was an October 1963 interdepartmental draft paper on the subject, as drafted by Policy Planning staffer Robert Johnson, which had implicitly ruled out the option of a preventive attack. Just as the study had not been forwarded to Kennedy because it was not deemed urgent enough to warrant his immediate attention,⁵¹ nor did President Johnson's national security staff believe there was any pressing need to brief the new president on the subject. NSC staffer Robert Komer informed McGeorge Bundy in February 1964 that he had been sitting on the interdepartmental draft on the "assumption you'd hardly find it urgent business." Komer assumed correctly, Bundy declining to establish an ad hoc group on the issue when his staff were "over-employed on more urgent stuff."⁵²

Still, Bundy gave Walt Rostow the go-ahead to maintain a certain level of planning momentum, including continued study on the possibility of preventive action.⁵³ Consequently, an interdepartmental study on "possible bases for action" against China's nuclear facilities, again authored by Robert Johnson, arrived at Bundy's desk in April. The study highlighted the logistical difficulties, political problems, and military risks inherent in preventive action, although allowing that the manageability of these problems would turn on a large number of variables, including the manner of execution (for instance, whether the attacks were covert or overt; conducted by U.S. forces, or by proxy) and the circumstances surrounding such action (whether attacks preceded or followed a Chinese nuclear test; were in response to an act of Chinese aggression or unprovoked; and so forth). Regardless, the strongest argument against a

⁵⁰ See chapter seven, 165.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 176.

⁵² Komer to McGeorge Bundy, February 26, 1964, *FRUS, 1964-1968* 30:23-24, 24n6. (Bundy's response from marginalia on this memo.)

⁵³ *Ibid.*; Komer to McGeorge Bundy, March 21, 1964, NSF:CO, box 237, "China Memos, Vol. I," LBJL.

preventive attack remained that it was simply unnecessary given the obvious asymmetry of power, both conventional and nuclear, that would still exist between the United States and China following the latter's entry into the nuclear club. Inasmuch as the Chinese might, over the long-term, build a sufficient industrial base to allow China's development into a "Class A nuclear power," its first strike capability would still remain patently inferior to that possessed by the United States. Moreover, having achieved "major industrial status, [China's] interest in avoiding attack upon itself, which is already great, should increase further." In sum, the significance of China's nuclear development was "not such as to justify the undertaking of actions which would involve great political costs or high military risks."⁵⁴

In early May Rusk sent a summary of this analysis to President Johnson. This summary concluded that China's nuclear development did not demand any "major changes" in policy, and although study of covert action against China's nuclear program would continue, military action against Chinese facilities would "be undesirable except possibly as part of general action against the mainland in response to major ChiCom aggression."⁵⁵ As Burr and Richelson have pointed out, by sending this analysis to the president Rusk was giving "tacit and high-level endorsement" to the conclusion that preventive military action was neither wise nor necessary.⁵⁶

Although Robert Johnson's study purported to represent a "broad interdepartmental consensus," some senior officials, including McGeorge Bundy, believed Robert Johnson's analysis had understated the political consequences of a PRC nuclear detonation. As such, it was agreed to keep the question of how to respond to China's nuclear development under

⁵⁴ S/P, "An Exploration of the Possible Bases for Action Against the Chinese Communist Nuclear Facilities," April 14, 1964, forwarded to McGeorge Bundy by Rostow, April 22, 1964, NSF:CO, box 237, "China Memos, Vol. I," LBJL. Also see Robert Johnson to all members of S/P, June 1, 1964, NSA, *Chinese Nuclear Program*, document 13; Robert Johnson to Henry Owen, September 2, 1964, *ibid.*, document 15.

⁵⁵ S/P, "The Implications of a Chinese Communist Nuclear Capability," *FRUS, 1964-1968* 30:57-58.

⁵⁶ Burr and Richelson, "Strangle the Baby," 83.

review.⁵⁷

Independent of this decision, some of the more hawkish individuals within the U.S. defence establishment, pointing to perceived long-term strategic dangers presented by a Chinese nuclear capability, continued to make the case for preventive attack. In July Admiral Ulysses S. Grant Sharp (Commander in Chief, Pacific), argued that the threat posed by a China emboldened by its nuclear success warranted doing “everything possible,” including undertaking covert action against Chinese facilities, “to defer the day when the Chinese detonation takes place.”⁵⁸ Similarly, Henry Rowen, an official in the Defense Department’s International Security Affairs Office, pointing to what he regarded as the “horrendous” long-term military and political consequences of a Chinese nuclear capability, argued a non-nuclear strike against China’s facilities, preferably undertaken with Soviet acquiescence or cooperation, would buy the administration valuable time and perhaps even deter Beijing from further endeavours in the nuclear field.⁵⁹

Senior officials, however, were unmoved by such reasoning. At a September 15 “Tuesday Luncheon” a preliminary decision was made that the United States would not undertake unprovoked unilateral military action against China’s nuclear installations “at this time,” although this would (unsurprisingly) be reviewed in the event the United States found itself engaged in military hostilities with the PRC. At the same time, however, there was some discussion of the various possibilities for “joint action” with the Soviets, including “a warning to the Chinese against tests, a possible undertaking to give up underground testing and to hold the Chinese accountable if they test in any way, and even a possible agreement to cooperate in preventive military action.” To this end, it was decided that Rusk should meet with Soviet

⁵⁷ Memo for the record, *supra* note 10.

⁵⁸ Message, CINCPAC to JCS, July 14, 1964 (with attached message, CINCPAC to Defence Intelligence Agency, July 14, 1964), NSF:CO, box 237, “China Cables, Vol. I,” LBJL.

⁵⁹ Komer to McGeorge Bundy, September 18, 1964, *FRUS, 1964-1968* 30:96-99. Also see report originating from DOD directive, “China as a Nuclear Power (Some Thoughts Prior to the Chinese Test),” October 7, 1964, NSF, Committee File on Nuclear Proliferation, box 5, “China,” LBJL.

Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin as soon as possible to discuss the matter.⁶⁰

Indicative of Rusk's thinking at this juncture, at the same September 15 meeting the secretary strongly opposed an American-piloted U-2 mission deep into Chinese territory to collect precise photographic intelligence from the test site being prepared at Lop Nur in China's remote northwest, which CIA Director John McCone argued would help redress serious gaps in U.S. intelligence and provide a more precise indication of when the Chinese would test. However, concerned about the risks of exacerbating Sino-American tensions in the wake of the U.S. bombing of North Vietnam, Rusk responded that he already regarded a Chinese nuclear test as inevitable; since the information obtained would not provide any new avenues for *political* action, there was no justification for the risks of such a potentially provocative mission. Bundy agreed, as did McNamara (if less strongly). In a follow-up meeting later that day, Rusk acquiesced in McCone's compromise plan for a U-2 overflight of the site by a Nationalist-piloted plane with ROC markings, to be flown out of Takhli airbase in northern Thailand (Lop Nur being too far from Taiwan for the U-2). Yet Rusk's original response to the proposed mission points to the fact that the secretary of state—and, it would seem, other senior administration officials—already regarded a nuclear-capable China as a *fait accompli*.⁶¹

As it happened, it fell to McGeorge Bundy, rather than Rusk, to broach the issue with Dobrynin. The U.S. government, Bundy told the ambassador, was “ready for [a] private and serious talk on what to do about this problem if there were any interest in the Soviet Government.” Dobrynin did not directly reply but left Bundy with the distinct impression that

⁶⁰ McGeorge Bundy, memo for the record, September 15, 1964, NSA, *Chinese Nuclear Program*, document 16. Johnson was not in attendance, approving the decision in a meeting later that day. Also see Chang, *Friends and Enemies*, 250; and Burr and Richelson, “‘Strangle the Baby,’” 87.

⁶¹ Memo for the record (in previous note); memo for the record, September 15, 1964, *FRUS, 1964-1968* 30:95-96. The Takhli-Lop Nur mission was subsequently cancelled when administration principals decided that the information it would provide did not warrant the risks. Memo for the record, October 5, 1964, *ibid.*, 106. Two or three American-piloted U-2 missions flown out of Charbatia in India in the spring of 1964 had, in fact, already returned images of the Lop Nur site. And Nationalist-piloted U-2 overflights of other parts of the mainland (joint U.S.-GRC operations that were flown out of Taiwan) had actually begun in 1961. However, Rusk's concern about U-2 overflights of China intensified as tensions in the region increased following the Tonkin Gulf incidents. See memo for the record, August 8, 1964, *FRUS, 1964-1968* 30:77-78; and, on the earlier flights, Chris Pocock, *Dragon Lady: The History of the U-2 Spyplane* (Shrewsbury, UK: Airlife, 1989), 92-99.

the Kremlin (like most senior officials in Washington it seems) already took a nuclear-armed China as a given. And when discussion turned to Sino-American differences, Dobrynin “gently remarked on the continued existence of the treaty between the USSR and the ChiComs.”⁶²

Even had the Soviets proven responsive to Bundy’s overtures for “joint action” (and “preventative military action,” it might be remembered, was only one of several possible forms of cooperative action discussed at the September 15 “Tuesday Lunch”) it is unlikely much would have come of it. Beyond Rusk’s deep cynicism about preventive attacks it is difficult to imagine Johnson endorsing military strikes against China’s nuclear program in the lead-up to the election. Although concerned that his political enemies might capitalise on a Chinese nuclear test should it occur prior to the election,⁶³ any preventive attack on China’s nuclear facilities (presuming the American hand in such action would show) would have been entirely inconsistent with the image of wise restraint Johnson was trying to project. More importantly, China was, to the president’s mind, a hornet’s nest that dared not stir up. Thus, Johnson’s decision-making on Vietnam always accounted for Beijing’s perceived hypersensitivity over threats to its territorial integrity, the president vetoing any military action deemed too provocative.⁶⁴ Neither before nor after the election (or, for that matter, before or after China’s nuclear test) did Johnson ever indicate that he might depart from this cautious track in order to destroy China’s rudimentary nuclear program.

Indeed, by September it was clear that the administration had settled on a politico-psychological response to the anticipated Chinese nuclear test, centred on efforts to publicly talk down the significance of China’s nuclear program. High-level pronouncements from the administration prior to the test emphasising the primitive nature of China’s nuclear program

⁶² Memcon, September 25, 1964, *FRUS, 1964-1968* 30:105. Rusk’s appointment book indicates he met with Dobrynin twice in the fortnight after the September 15 “Tuesday Luncheon,” but no record of either conversation has been found. ““Strangle the Baby,”” 87n93. For his part, Rusk could not recall having made any such approach to Dobrynin. Seaborg, *Stemming the Tide*, 112.

⁶³ Gardner, *Pay Any Price: Lyndon Johnson and the Wars for Vietnam* (Chicago: I.R. Dee, 1995), 119.

⁶⁴ This is discussed in chapter nine.

not only pointed to the track the administration was already set on, but also precluded, as U.S. officials fully recognised, a more radical course.⁶⁵ By the time China became the fifth declared nuclear power on October 16, 1964, the Johnson administration was already resigned to living with a nuclear-armed China.

Inasmuch as some U.S. officials again touched on the possibility of military action against China's nuclear program in the months after the test, it was generally in the context of the post-election expansion of contingency planning on Vietnam. For instance, William Bundy and the Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs, John T. McNaughton, suggested that should the Chinese Air-Force enter the war the United States should respond by attacking targets inside China, including nuclear production facilities.⁶⁶ Such suggestions did not, however, represent a departure from the rather unremarkable position endorsed at the September 15 "Tuesday Luncheon" that in the instance of Sino-American hostilities the administration would need to revisit the possibility of destroying China's nuclear installations.

McNamara's comments in an early November meeting with the Joint Chiefs of Staff are, at first blush, more interesting. If the United States launched a bombing campaign based on the chiefs' list of ninety-four strategic and industrial targets in North Vietnam, it might, McNamara pointed out, be necessary to then attack China's nuclear program.⁶⁷ It may be that McNamara was simply attempting to remind the military brass of the escalatory dangers inherent in the large-scale "knock-out" strategic bombing campaign of the sort the chiefs favoured—a strategy distinct from the steady, graduated application of U.S. air-power that McNamara was advocating. McNamara certainly felt they needed reminding on this score. On numerous occasions before and during the war he had found himself at loggerheads with the

⁶⁵ Rusk, September 29, 1964, *DSB* 51:542-43; Johnson, October 16, 1964, *PPP:LBJ, 1964, Book II*, 1357-58; Johnson, October 16, 1964, *ibid.*, 1377-80; memo for the record, October 16, 1964, *FRUS, 1964-1968* 30:109.

⁶⁶ Kaiser, *American Tragedy*, 357-58.

⁶⁷ On this meeting (but with a different interpretation to that presented here) see Kaiser, *American Tragedy*, 353-54.

chiefs' over their advocacy of military actions that ran a high chance of provoking a Chinese retaliation, and was deeply shaken by their related willingness to risk a nuclear confrontation with China.⁶⁸ Alternatively, the secretary's "tough talk" and "empty promises of future action" during the meeting may have been, as H.R. McMaster insists, a cynical attempt to placate the discontented chiefs, who were growing increasingly frustrated by their lack of influence in the decision-making process on Vietnam.⁶⁹ Both explanations seem plausible; the idea that McNamara was voicing a genuine interest in high-risk preventive military action against China's nuclear program appears markedly less so.⁷⁰

Holding the Line: U.S. China Policy and the International Community

If senior U.S. policymakers were resigned to the reality of a nuclear-capable China, however, they remained deeply concerned about the impact a Chinese nuclear test would have on Beijing's position in the international system. While Chiang was thrown into a near-panic by the achievement of China's nuclear scientists—seeing his dream of a "return to the mainland" falling further out of reach—most foreign governments, including those in China's immediate neighbourhood, appeared to take China's nuclear test in their stride. This was at least partially due to U.S. assurances that a nuclear-armed China would not, for the foreseeable future, change the military balance in Asia, or impair Washington's ability to project U.S. power in the region.⁷¹ Still, the detonation had, as the Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs noted, prompted renewed calls for China's integration into the international community, providing "protagonists of Chinese Communist membership in the UN [with] a flamboyant new

⁶⁸ Robert S. McNamara, *In Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam* (New York: Times Books, 1995), 109, 111, 114, 160-61, 213, 275.

⁶⁹ H.R. McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty: Lyndon Johnson, Robert McNamara, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Lies that Led to Vietnam* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1998), 176.

⁷⁰ The only other examples, of which I am aware, of administration officials arguing for preventive military action following China's first nuclear test are: paper by George Rathjens (ACDA), "Destruction of Chinese Nuclear Weapons Capabilities," December 14, 1964, NSA, *Chinese Nuclear Program*, document 21; and paper by Rowen, "Effects of the Chinese Bomb on Nuclear Spread," November 2, 1964, NSF, Committee File on Nuclear Proliferation, box 5, "China," LBJL.

⁷¹ INR, "Initial World Reaction to the Chinese Communist Nuclear Detonation," October 28, 1964, NSF, Committee File on Nuclear Proliferation, box 5, "China," LBJL; USIA, "Foreign Media Reaction to Communist China's Nuclear Device," October 18, 1964, Cabinet Papers, box 1, "Cabinet Meeting," LBJL.

argument.” And, as Chiang was all too aware, the explosion had made the PRC seem more important, with a corresponding decline in the perceived importance of the GRC. In this context, Beijing would likely find a growing number of non-Communist governments willing to accept it as the rightful (and sole) representative of China. To the extent Beijing interpreted this as a vindication of a foreign policy set against the international status quo—of which its pursuit of weapons of mass destruction was but one (albeit highly significant) element—this would undermine the efficacy of U.S. efforts to “teach” China’s ideologues that their belligerence, as manifest in Beijing’s line on Vietnam, was counterproductive.⁷²

As it was, even prior to the October test the Johnson administration recognised that Beijing was winning its campaign to break out of its international isolation on its own terms. In large part, Beijing’s success here extended from intensified efforts to improve its international standing in the non-Communist world in response to the heightened sense of isolation—and, increasingly, encirclement—occasioned by the collapse of the Sino-Soviet relationship.⁷³ As the U.S. Consulate in Hong Kong forecast in early 1964, Beijing’s diplomatic offensive would present the administration “with new and vastly complicated challenges from Peiping which will test the wisdom, firmness and flexibility of our China policy as never before.”⁷⁴

In the developed Free World the politico-diplomatic challenge was underlined by the growing interest, at both the governmental and non-governmental level, in accessing Chinese markets. Tensions on the trade issue between the Washington and its allies, in fact, dated back to the early years of the Eisenhower administration, the most dramatic manifestation of which was the collapse of a uniform multilateral trade embargo against China during the second

⁷² Memo, Grant to Bundy, October 17, 1964, RG59, ACA, lot 71D423, box 1, “Sino-United States Relations, 1964,” NA; memo, Grant to William Bundy, October 23, 1964, *ibid.*, lot 72D241, box 2, “UN and World Organisations, Nuclear Developments, October 1964”; memo, Rowan to the President, October 19, 1964, Cabinet Papers, box 1, “Cabinet Meeting,” LBJL.

⁷³ INR, “Communist China’s Policy for Establishing Diplomatic Relations,” June 17, 1964, JTP:FE, box 16, “Communist China, INR Reports,” JFKL.

⁷⁴ Airgram-694, Hong Kong, February 21, 1964, NSF:CO, box 237, “China Cables, Vol. I,” LBJL.

Eisenhower administration.⁷⁵ The trade issue was also an occasional source of friction between the U.S. and its allies over the first half of the 1960s, particularly with the volume and diversity of trade between China and non-Bloc countries expanding exponentially as a result of the Sino-Soviet dispute.⁷⁶ However, in the interests of intra-alliance harmony, Washington had grudgingly tolerated the growing allied trade with China, limiting itself to protests over trade deals that crossed (however indirectly) into the strategic sphere, offered better than normal credit terms to the Chinese, or blurred the distinction between economics and politics upon which many governments had justified expanded trade relations—for instance, semi-official trade missions to China from nations not recognising Beijing.⁷⁷

However, Washington's concerns about allied trade with China, and, more broadly, the conciliatory track that many U.S. allies seemed intent on travelling with Beijing, grew in rough proportion to the preoccupation with the situation in Southeast Asia. In this connection expanded trade and contact with the advanced nations of the non-Communist world would, it was reasoned, simply convince Beijing that it should maintain the existing foreign policy line. As Rusk told the Japanese ambassador in 1964, China's militant approach to the world "offers the most immediate threat of war in the world today," so it was "therefore very important that we not take any steps"—meaning closer governmental or quasi-official commercial contacts—"which might encourage Peiping to believe that its aggressive policies could pay dividends."⁷⁸

Trade between America's allies and China was one matter; recognition of Beijing was another, altogether more serious problem. Nothing in this period focused the collective mind of the administration on the changing nature of Beijing's relations with the international

⁷⁵ Shu Guang Zhang, *Economic Cold War: America's Embargo against China and the Sino-Soviet Alliance, 1949-1963* (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2001), 174-203.

⁷⁶ See chapter four, 103.

⁷⁷ Circular airgram-6815 to all posts, December 26, 1962, RG59, ACA, lot 71D423, box 1, "Guidelines, Directives, Basic Studies, May-June 1965," NA; Dean to Grant, August 31, 1964, *ibid.*, "Guidelines, Directives, Basic Studies 1964"; Grant to Bundy, November 3, 1964, *ibid.* Also see Lumbers, "Irony of Vietnam," 69.

⁷⁸ Memcon, Rusk and Takeuchi, February 2, 1964, NSF:CO, box 250, "Japan, Vol. 1," LBJL. Also see Rusk, January 3, 1965, *DSB* 52:71.

community more than the French announcement in January 1964 that they would establish diplomatic relations with the PRC. The French decision was a signal diplomatic coup for Beijing, greatly enhancing its prestige and international legitimacy, and an ominous defeat for Washington and Taipei. As the CIA pointed out, the French move was the “first important break in a line which has been held for 14 years: no European power and no major power anywhere has extended such recognition since the first months of 1950.”⁷⁹ This break was all the more noteworthy given France’s international status. One of the “big five” powers at the United Nations, French influence remained extensive, both in Europe, where the move would likely compound domestic pressures within NATO countries to break with the United States on an unpopular policy, and in francophone Africa, particularly among the relatively conservative “Brazzaville group” of nations that continued to take their cue from Paris on foreign policy.⁸⁰ When the French announced their decision to exchange ambassadors with Beijing no less than forty-two nations had already recognised the PRC. However, as Rusk put it, France was a “special case—if this hole is made in the dam the prospect is that the water will flood through.”⁸¹

The French move had long been on the cards, and the steady decline of Franco-American relations through 1963 had been accompanied by persistent rumours that a French recognition of Beijing was imminent.⁸² Still, the administration proved absolutely ropeable when the French informed Washington of their decision on January 7, not least because only a month earlier de Gaulle had personally assured the administration that he had no present intention of breaking with Washington on the matter.⁸³ Now Paris had jumped ship, arguing that engagement with China could help effect a moderation in Beijing’s outlook, while paving the

⁷⁹ CIA memo (sent to McGeorge Bundy), “Implications of an Assumed French Recognition of Communist China,” January 16, 1964, NSF:CO, box 176, “Recognition of Communist China, Vol. I (3),” LBJL.

⁸⁰ Sullivan to Harriman, February 7, 1964, HP:KJA, Subject File, box 461, “France, Recognition of Communist China,” LCMD; INR, “The Chinese Nationalist Reaction to French Recognition of Communist China,” February 3, 1964, JTP:FE, box 16, “Communist China, INR Reports,” JFKL.

⁸¹ Memcon, Rusk and Tsiang, January 24, 1964, *FRUS, 1964-1968* 30:12.

⁸² INR, “French Recognition of Communist China,” January 22, 1964, NSF:CO, box 176, “Recognition of Communist China, Vol. I (3),” LBJL.

⁸³ Deptel to Paris, January 15, 1964, *FRUS, 1964-1968* 30:1-3; telegram, Rusk (Paris) to Johnson, December 16, 1963, *FRUS, 1961-1963* 22:409-10.

way for a negotiated neutralisation of Southeast Asia. Senior policymakers in the Johnson administration had little sympathy for such logic; recognition at this juncture would confirm, not moderate, Chinese militancy, and de Gaulle's proposal for neutralisation was seen as not only misguided, but also detrimental to the anti-Communist cause in the region.⁸⁴ At any rate, the administration thought the Quai d'Orsay's reasoning more disingenuous than naïve: from Washington the French move appeared little more than a self-seeking corollary of de Gaulle's *politique de grandeur*, where the French president, fully aware of the administration's strong feelings on the issue, had taken a cheap shot at his ally simply to assert French independence, enhance France's (and de Gaulle's) prestige, and publicly highlight French disapproval of U.S. policies in Asia.⁸⁵

Discussing the French move privately with Senator Richard Russell, Johnson conceded that the time would come when the United States would itself have to recognise the PRC, musing that perhaps "we'd have been better off if we'd recognized them three [or] four years ago."⁸⁶ However, the French *act* of breaking with the United States, at a moment when the administration was desperately trying to convince the Chinese that their militant foreign policy was counterproductive, left the administration seething.⁸⁷

Privately, U.S. representatives did not shy from informing their French counterparts of the strength of American feelings on this matter.⁸⁸ Yet the administration's public and formal diplomatic response was one of calm restraint; de Gaulle was clearly set in his course, and any loud protest would only compound the impression that allied solidarity had been seriously

⁸⁴ On Washington's response to the neutralisation proposal, see Fredrik Logevall, "De Gaulle, Neutralization, and American Involvement in Vietnam 1963-1964," *Pacific Historical Review* 41 (February 1992): 69-102; and Charles C. Cogan, "'How Fuzzy Can One Be?': The American Reaction to De Gaulle's Proposal for the Neutralization of (South Vietnam)," in Gardner and Gittinger, *Search for Peace*, 144-61. Beijing, as it happened, was equally averse to de Gaulle's plan. Qiang Zhai, "China's Response to French Peace Initiatives," in *ibid.*, 278-91.

⁸⁵ Cooper to McCone, *supra* note 10; Embtel-3344, Paris, January 15, 1964, *ibid.*; Deptel to Paris, *supra* note 83.

⁸⁶ Editorial note, *FRUS, 1964-1968* 30:3.

⁸⁷ Rusk, testimony to SFRC, January 5, 1965, *Executive Sessions*, 17:13-14. Also see Logevall, "French Recognition," 157-58.

⁸⁸ See, for instance, circular Deptel to Paris, January 18, 1964, *FRUS, 1964-1968* 30:5-7.

undermined.⁸⁹ Nonetheless, Johnson publicly hinted at the depth of the administration's concern about developments when he told the press gallery that "in view of the French recognition of Red China, we have been discussing with the free nations of Asia the necessity of resisting any further temptations to reward the Peking regime for its defiance of world peace and order."⁹⁰

On the back of the nascent Sino-French rapprochement Beijing made impressive diplomatic inroads into the developing world. Indeed it was here, Washington believed, that the Chinese could mount their strongest challenge to the political predominance of both Moscow and Washington while fulfilling, in an atavistic expression of China's middle-kingdom self-image, their desire to provide Maoist tutelage to the newly independent nations of the world.⁹¹ And the political climate of the 1960s Third World seemed to favour Beijing's efforts. Amid growing distrust of the status quo superpowers in the predominantly non-aligned Third World, the Chinese, as the U.S. Consulate in Hong Kong reported, would likely find "expanding opportunities for exploiting Afro-Asian-Latin American resentment, disillusionment, and race consciousness in bidding for leadership of the underprivileged world majority."⁹²

In light of Beijing's diplomatic advances, by the second half of 1964 administration feared that the GRC's position in the UN was becoming untenable, with the ranks of governments prepared to support its claim to the Chinese seat in the international body rapidly diminishing. The erosion of support for the U.S.-GRC position did not, as Harlan Cleveland explained in a lengthy study of the problem, reflect acceptance of PRC behaviour or objectives, so much as

⁸⁹ Tyler to Rusk, January 16, 1964, HP:KJA, Subject File, box 461, "France, Recognition of Communist China," LCMD; telcon, Johnson and McGeorge Bundy, January 15, 1964, 6:30 pm, White House Telcons, tape WH6401.14 PNO 12, LBJL. Washington often adopted this calm approach in its dealings with the de Gaulle government, wary of inflicting lasting damage on a relationship that would, it was hoped, improve post-de Gaulle. See H.W. Brands, "Johnson and de Gaulle: American Diplomacy *Sotto Voce*," *Historian* 49 (August 1987): 478-93.

⁹⁰ Johnson, February 1, 1964, *PPP:LBJ, 1964, Book I*, 254.

⁹¹ NIE 13-9-65, May 5, 1965, *FRUS, 1964-1968* 30:85-86.

⁹² Airgram-142, Hong Kong, NSF:KP, box 410, "China (CPR), 1961-1963 (1)," JFKL; Komer to McGeorge Bundy, October 9, 1964, NSF, Name File, box 6, "Komer Memos, Volume 1 (2)," LBJL.

the belief that China (and, as of mid-October, a nuclear-capable China) might be “tamed” by the United Nations.⁹³

U.S. analysts reported that even presuming that the “important question” resolution was upheld by the General Assembly (thus requiring a two-thirds majority for any resolution affecting the status quo) the vote on the substantive question (which simply called for Taipei’s replacement by Beijing) was too close to call with any confidence. And the loss of a majority on the substantive question “would be a severe and obvious psychological setback even if the ‘important question’ were upheld.”⁹⁴ Moreover, although Rusk had informed Chiang that Kennedy’s 1961 promise to veto PRC entry into the United Nations still stood—should the veto prove necessary *and* effective—this was hardly an attractive option for the administration, particularly if they had to use the veto year after year.⁹⁵

In a meeting held shortly after the November election Stevenson urged the president to start moving towards some form of “two Chinas” arrangement in order to avoid a complete loss on the issue. Although basing his argument on the likelihood that Beijing would reject any “two Chinas” arrangement, Stevenson also referred to his conviction that the Chinese threat could be better managed if China was integrated into the international community. And appealing to the president’s political sensibilities, Stevenson suggested that the American people, if not necessarily their congressional representatives, were amenable to policy change. However Rusk, who had little faith in the “taming” influence of the United Nations, held that the issue involved was not so much one of domestic politics as of war and peace in Asia. Although acknowledging that some new temporisation measure might prove necessary (such as a study committee), Rusk fell back to the familiar line that if the United States were to make a “move that would signal to Peiping that we were weakening” this would simply tempt the Chinese

⁹³ Cleveland to Rusk, November 5, 1964, *FRUS, 1964-1968* 30:120-23; Rowan to Johnson, October 29, 1964, NSF:CO, box 290, “United Nations, Chinese Representation,” LBJL.

⁹⁴ Cleveland and Henry Tasca to Ball, November 5, 1964, RG59, CF:1964-66, box 3328, UN 6 CHICOM, NA.

⁹⁵ Wright to Rusk, April 17, 1964, *FRUS, 1964-1968* 30:55; memo for the record, November 18, 1964, *ibid.*, 126. On the 1961 promise, see chapter three, 81-882.

towards greater aggression in the region. Johnson, preoccupied with the situation in Vietnam, seconded Rusk's reasoning, adding, somewhat caustically, that he did not pay foreigners to advise him on foreign policy, "but he did pay Rusk and that he was inclined to listen to him."⁹⁶

As it happened, there was no vote on Chinese representation in 1964, the issue falling by the wayside due to an unrelated dispute in the General Assembly over the financing of UN peacekeeping missions. However, the status quo approach that Johnson had endorsed in November 1964 also held in the lead-up to the 1965 vote, against warnings from Stevenson (before his death in July 1965) and the U.S. mission to the United Nations that the vote would be perilously close.⁹⁷ The vote on the substantive resolution was indeed close: 47 for, 47 against (with 20 abstentions). In early 1966 William Bundy and the new Assistant Secretary of State for International Organisation Affairs, Joseph Sisco advised Rusk that not only would the United States lose the vote on the substantive question at the next UN General Assembly, it was unlikely the United States could win even on the "important question." Thus, it was necessary to begin, without delay, to develop an alternative approach with the GRC. However, Rusk was unwilling to push the "two Chinas" issue so far out from the vote, no doubt still concerned that Beijing would view any shift in U.S. policy as a political victory. Again Rusk temporised, simply instructing Bundy to discuss with the GRC the 1965 vote and the possibility of an adverse result in 1966, while steering clear of any mention of a "two Chinas" approach.⁹⁸

Some mid-level U.S. officials argued that, at a minimum, the administration needed to stop browbeating its allies and the non-aligned nations of the world into accepting the U.S. line on

⁹⁶ Memo for the record (in previous note), 127. Documents pertaining to the administration's deliberations on the UN representation issue at this juncture are filed in RG59, ACA, lot 72D241, box 2, "UN and World Organisations, 1964," NA.

⁹⁷ Chase to McGeorge Bundy, November 3, 1965, *FRUS, 1964-1968* 30:223-24; William Bundy to Popper (draft memo), November 3, 1965, RG59, ACA, lot 72D241, box 2, "UN and World Organisations, October-December 1965," NA.

⁹⁸ Berger to William Bundy, February 23, 1966, *FRUS, 1964-1968* 30:261. .

trade, diplomatic contact, and Chinese representation in the United Nations. Beyond engendering resentment for its apparent interference in the foreign policies of other nations, the diplomatic energy invested on this score reinforced the link between U.S. prestige and what appeared a losing position, to the detriment of Washington's ability to conduct an effective foreign policy (in the broadest sense) from a position of leadership. Betraying a basic sympathy for the moderation through engagement logic underlying pressures for policy change in foreign capitals, these same officials suggested that the United States should also move to adjust its own policy positions, constructing a more flexible, rational China policy that the international community would find easier to support.⁹⁹

However, from the perspective of senior officials in the administration the pursuit of improved relations with the Chinese by non-Communist governments would undermine the administration's attempt to "teach" China's leaders that their militancy—as manifest in Vietnam—was counterproductive. As Rusk explained, the central issue "is the need to influence a half-dozen key people in China on the question of how China is doing, and whether its present policy is or is not on the right track." Recognition of Beijing by Free World governments, increments to Chinese influence in the developing world, or the admission of the People's Republic of China to the United Nations, inasmuch as these steps occurred prior to Beijing abandoning its advocacy of "wars of national liberation," would only "persuade the Chinese that they were being successful."¹⁰⁰ In this sense, China's integration into the international community in the face of its militant foreign policy line

⁹⁹ Thomson to McGeorge Bundy, October 28, 1964, *FRUS, 1964-1968* 30:117-20; Barnett to Jorden, March 17, 1964, RG59, ACA, lot 71D423, box 1, "Guidelines, Directives, Basic Studies 1964," NA; Dean to Grant, September 1, 1964, *ibid.*, "Sino-United States Relations, 1964"; Robert Johnson to Rostow, January 28, 1965, RG59, Subject Files of the Office of Republic of China Affairs, 1951-1975 (hereafter ROCF), lot 72D145, box 6, "Japan, 1964-65," NA; Grant to William Bundy, March 18, 1965, JTP:FE, box 16, "Communist China, General," JFKL; Leonard Meeker (Acting Legal Adviser, State Department) to Ball, October 22, 1964, RG59, CF:1964-66, box 2019, POL 1 CHICOM-US, NA

¹⁰⁰ Memcon, August 27, 1965, *FRUS, 1964-1968* 30:201; memo for the record, September 21, 1965, NSF, Agency File, box 61, "Department of State—Special State-Defense Study Group Regarding China, 1965," LBJL.

would be tantamount to international acquiescence in China's drive for regional hegemony.¹⁰¹

As such, the logic of isolating Beijing (the logic that Hilsman and his colleagues at the Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs had challenged in 1963) was given new force as the administration moved toward a decision for war in Vietnam. Indeed, U.S. policymakers generally remained wary of giving an inch to foreign critics of U.S. China policy, lest they in take a mile. Paul M. Pople, a desk-level officer in the State Department working on the Republic of China (Taiwan) desk, captured this thinking when he suggested that if the administration pushed too far with the "reasonableness and dispassion" theme (as essayed by Hilsman in December 1963), this:

...would only suggest that we would welcome more conciliatory moves toward the Chicoms. Such moves should certainly be discouraged unless and until Peiping demonstrates that it has in fact learned that belligerence promises no reward.¹⁰²

Thus, rather than trying to accommodate allied pressures for policy change by modifying U.S. posture toward China, in 1964-1965 the Johnson administration, if anything, increased the pressure on other non-Communist nations to toe the line. This was particularly true with regard to U.S. relations with her NATO allies, whose tepid response to the deterioration of the situation in Southeast Asia greatly vexed the Johnson administration. In a November 1964 discussion with Canadian foreign minister, Paul Martin, a patently frustrated Rusk emphasised that the United States would expect its allies to consider the question of diplomatic contacts with Beijing (on this occasion with specific reference to the UN question, on which Ottawa had been wavering) in the context of the developing situation in Vietnam. There should be no confusion, Rusk told Martin, "that if all our allies in NATO do not feel deeply concerned about how China may be turned away from aggression, there could be bad results in NATO as we are forced to turn to problems of the Pacific."¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ Rostow to Rusk, January 10, 1964, NSF:CO, box 237, "China Memos, Vol. I," LBJL.

¹⁰² Pople to Dean, July 1, 1964, RG59, ACA, lot 71D423, box 1, "Sino-United States Relations, 1964," NA.

¹⁰³ Memcon, Rusk and Martin, November 30, 1964, *FRUS, 1964-1968* 30:137-40.

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With Washington increasingly preoccupied with the situation in Vietnam, one official from the Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs conceded in early 1965 that China policy would likely “be made at the margins for some time ahead.”¹⁰⁴ This much was apparent in a paper prepared for William Bundy by Lindsay Grant of the bureau’s Office of Asian Communist Affairs, the section of the State bureaucracy most directly concerned with U.S. China policy. On the one hand Grant outlined efforts to create a more moderate rhetorical framework for U.S. China policy, while making by now familiar proposals for more concrete initiatives that the administration could undertake to improve bilateral relations, such as a modification of trade and travel restrictions. Yet in the same breath Grant admitted that given the uncertainties of the situation in Vietnam and broader instability in the region, “we shall have to resign ourselves to keeping some [Office of Asian Communist Affairs] recommendations on the back burner. We shall not be likely in the next few months to set policies in motion which could be misinterpreted as ‘softening’ toward the Chinese Communists.”¹⁰⁵

Writing to McGeorge Bundy in late 1964, NSC staffer Robert Komer noted the need, broadly recognised throughout the administration, for the United States to ultimately “retreat gracefully from an increasingly isolated position toward a stance which puts the onus for continued friction” on Beijing. The “real question is no longer whether to disengage from the more rigid aspects of our China policy but how and when.” Post-election, the problem of timing did not, Komer continued, turn on the domestic political environment, nor was the question of how policy adjustments might impact on Chiang’s imagined role as champion and future liberator of the Chinese people decisive; rather, it was the inability to move at a time when the United States faced a “crunch with Peiping over Vietnam.” However, Komer noted that after having taken a firmer position in Vietnam “we could use this counterpoint as a justification for our [Vietnam] policy; it would demonstrate that while we were determined to

¹⁰⁴ Barnett to Thomson, April 5, 1965, JTP:FE, box 16, “Communist China, General,” JFKL.

¹⁰⁵ Grant to William Bundy, supra note 99

resist Communist aggression, we were simultaneously prepared to deal with the ChiComs wherever there was some peaceful purpose to be served.”¹⁰⁶

Komer’s analysis provides an early hint of a key irony in the way the Americanisation of the war in Vietnam shaped the China policy discourse in the Johnson administration: In the first instance, the administration’s preoccupation with the war served, as argued in this chapter, to seriously circumscribe the prospects for policy change and reinforce the logic of the existing strategy of “containment and isolation” toward China. Yet as U.S. involvement in the war escalated this both compounded existing pressures and created new opportunities for forward movement in U.S. policy and posture toward China. Indeed, in 1966 contingencies presented by the Vietnam War would inject a new, and in some ways decisive, element into the ongoing bureaucratic discourse on China policy.

¹⁰⁶ Komer to McGeorge Bundy, November 5, 1964, *FRUS, 1964-1968* 30:130-32.

9

THE “HOPEFUL YEAR”: CHANGES IN U.S. POSTURE TOWARD CHINA, 1966

Reflecting on the ebb and flow of the debates on China policy within the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, National Security Council staffer James Thomson wrote that “the hopeful year, the central year of Johnsonian Innovation, was 1966.”¹ Much to the disappointment of advocates of policy change (Thomson included) this spirit of “innovation” did not translate into significant substantive changes in U.S. policy toward China. Still, across the first half of 1966 the posture of the United States toward Mao’s China was modified to better reflect a developing consensus within the administration on the strategic wisdom of “containment without isolation.”

In the most immediate sense, this postural shift was a response to challenges presented by the Americanisation of the war in Vietnam. A measured demonstration of postural flexibility toward China, it was reasoned, would help offset growing disquiet at home and abroad over an approach to East Asia that appeared excessively confrontational and militaristic. And given the U.S. show of strength in Vietnam the administration could underline the constructive, non-militaristic side of U.S. policy in the region from a position of strength, without undue risk of appearing weak or uncertain in the face Chinese belligerence. More importantly, the shift to a posture of qualified conciliation would, in the administration’s estimate, help impress upon China’s leadership that while the United States would stand resolute against Communist aggression in the region, it did not harbour any aggressive designs against the PRC itself.² The more expansive version of this dyadic message, as it was developed through

¹ Thomson, “U.S. China Policy,” 239, 242.

² Similar points are made in Lumbers, “Irony of Vietnam.”

1966, was that the administration accepted the reality of Communist rule in mainland China, and believed that provided Beijing abandoned its aggressive ways it was possible, and indeed desirable, for the United States and the PRC to peacefully coexist.

Yet whereas the 1966 postural adjustments were, in the first instance, a function of the challenges of prosecuting an increasingly unpopular “limited war” on China’s doorstep, in a broader sense they derived from the efforts of mid-level officials in the bureaucracy who, interested in policy moderation independent of the war, seized upon the situation to push an already well-developed agenda for policy change. This is not to suggest that the 1966 policy stirrings were the product of a *coordinated* drive for policy change from within the administration’s bureaucracy; rather, the gains, as one NSC staffer wrote, were “won within our ponderous bureaucracy by honourable but conniving accident.”³ But even allowing that the moderation in U.S. posture toward China did not emerge from a formal policy review, it nonetheless represented a watershed in the internal politico-bureaucratic discourse on China policy during the Democratic 1960s, and an important step forward in the incremental shift toward a policy framework that allowed for the possibility of Sino-American engagement.

The Rising Crescendo of Sino-American Tensions

The prospects for such postural adjustments would have seemed remote in late 1965, with U.S. concerns over Chinese militancy at this juncture as intense as at any moment since the Korean War. The Johnson administration believed that the Chinese, in addition to supporting Hanoi’s aggression against South Vietnam, had urged the Pakistanis on in their conflict with India over Kashmir—likely in an effort to “relieve pressure on their friends in Vietnam”—thereby helping provoke a war on the subcontinent in August 1965.⁴ While most U.S. officials suspected that the Chinese would be reluctant to assume the political burden or military risks

³ Jenkins to Rostow, August 3, 1966, NSF:CO, box 239, “China Memos, Vol. VI,” LBJL.

⁴ Congentel-1479, Hong Kong, February 11, 1966, NSF:CO, box 239, “China Cables, Vol. V,” LBJL.

of launching its own military action against India,⁵ Beijing's menacing posture towards a vulnerable India during the conflict occasioned concern in the upper echelons of the administration that such an attack might be in the offing.⁶ These concerns quickly dissipated after New Delhi and Islamabad agreed to a UN brokered cease-fire agreement on September 22, but the war had nonetheless served to underline existing concerns about the Chinese threat.⁷

Beijing had itself sketched out the broad lines of this threat with the publication in September 1965 of Defence Minister Lin Biao's ideological tract, "Long Live the Victory of People's War!" This new addition to the Maoist canon added little of substance to Beijing's already well-established positions on war and peace, but to Washington it appeared to be both a clarion call and a blueprint for military insurrection against non-Communist governments throughout the world. It was, moreover, the most explicit commitment yet of Mao's ideological prestige to the successful prosecution of "people's war" in Vietnam. McNamara went so far as to call it a "program of aggression...that ranks with Hitler's *Mein Kampf*."⁸

The administration could at least take some comfort from the fact that in the second half of 1965 the wheels had fallen off Beijing's drive for greater international influence. Beyond losing ground to Moscow in the Sino-Soviet competition for allegiances in the Communist bloc, the Chinese found their stock falling in the predominantly non-aligned post-colonial world. Increasingly, developing nations were inclined to look askance at Beijing's combative posturing on the world stage, particularly its vocal opposition to a negotiated settlement in Vietnam. The collapse of preparations for a conference of Afro-Asian nations—the much awaited sequel to the Bandung Conference of 1955—was symptomatic of this trend, with the

⁵ Editorial note, *FRUS, 1964-1968* 25:392; SNIE 13-10-65, September 16, 1965, *ibid.*, 395.

⁶ Deptel to New Delhi, September 8, 1965, *FRUS, 1964-1968* 25:370-71; editorial note, *ibid.*, 371-72; Rusk to Johnson, September 9, 1965, *ibid.*, 375-77.

⁷ Bundy, unpublished manuscript, chapter 32, 9-11.

⁸ Schulzinger, "Johnson Administration," 251; INR, "Lin Piao's Article and the Chinese Communist Build-up of 'People's War,'" September 24, 1965, NSF:CO, box 238, "China Memos, Vol. IV," LBJL; McNamara, *In Retrospect*, 215. Hanoi evidently interpreted Lin's article, with its emphasis on protracted warfare, as a rebuke for their forward strategy. See Qiang, "Vietnam Conflict," 236-37; and Westad, "History, Memory," 10.

greater part of the Afro-Asian world refusing to countenance Beijing's attempts to dictate the terms and agenda of the conference.⁹

Eclipsing these foreign policy disappointments for Beijing, however, was the decimation of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) and the attendant collapse of the nascent Sino-Indonesia "axis" in late 1965, early 1966. An abortive coup in Jakarta in the early hours of October 1, 1965, led by a left-leaning group of mid-ranking Army officers, provided the occasion—or, perhaps, the pretext—for a violent, military-led anti-Communist pogrom. With upwards of half-a-million people massacred the PKI, heretofore the largest Communist party in the world outside of the Soviet Union and China, was destroyed as an effective political force.¹⁰ By March 1966 an already marginalised Sukarno, with whom Beijing had carefully cultivated good relations, was forced to hand over the reigns of power to a right-wing military junta led by General Suharto. The New Order in Indonesia had arrived, and with it a prolonged estrangement in Sino-Indonesian relations. From the West's perspective it was, as *Time* proclaimed in July 1966, the "best news for years in Asia"; from Beijing's, it was an unmitigated disaster.¹¹

Yet senior policymakers in Washington doubted that China's leaders would respond to these reversals by retreating from their present policy course, at least in the near term. Indeed, China's leaders, indignant at the failure of a recalcitrant world to embrace ideologically cast positions that they regarded as axiomatic, might become even more bellicose and

⁹ CIA, "Communist China's Isolation in the Communist Movement," August 5, 1966, NSF:CO, box 239, "China Memos, Vol. VI (1)," LBJL; INR, "Communist China's Reverses in Foreign Relations since January 1965," February 25, 1966, *ibid.*, "China Cables, Vol. V"; USIA, "Reaction to Postponement of the Afro-Asian Conference," November 16, 1965, Office Files of Bill Moyers, box 82, "Red China," LBJL.

¹⁰ Seeking to discredit the PKI, Washington actively encouraged reports incriminating the Communists in the failed putsch, despite its own doubts on this score. See Easter, "'Indonesian Pot Boiling.'" For two competing views on U.S. involvement in Indonesian developments, compare Peter Dale Scott, "The United States and the Overthrow of Sukarno, 1965-67," *Pacific Affairs* 58, no. 2 (1985): 239-64; and H.W. Brands, "The Limits of Manipulation: How the United States didn't Topple Sukarno," *Journal of American History* 76, no. 3 (1989): 785-808.

¹¹ "Vengeance with a Smile," *Time*, July 15, 1966; CIA (OCI), "Peking's Setbacks in Indonesia," April 1, 1966, NSF:CO, box 240, "China Memos, Vol. VI (2)," LBJL. Mao initially put a positive spin on Indonesian developments, privately observing that the PKI would now learn to conduct armed struggle. Yang, "Mao Zedong," 85.

unpredictable. As Rusk put it, the key issue was whether the Chinese would “react in frustration and become more wild and dangerous” or, alternatively, “have second thoughts and take a more moderate approach.”¹²

Americanisation in Vietnam, China, and the Ghosts of Korea

The question, at least as Rusk framed it, had something of a rhetorical quality: China’s leadership had thus far given no indication, he observed, that they might abandon the existing line.¹³ On the contrary, as the U.S. combat role in Vietnam expanded Beijing appeared to firm in its opposition to a negotiated peace. In contrast to hints of qualified flexibility from Moscow, the Chinese not only denounced the administration’s “peace offensive” during the 37-day Christmas bombing pause of 1965-66, but even managed to strike a more intransigent pose than their North Vietnamese allies in doing so.¹⁴ Washington learnt that the Chinese had gone so far as to actively sabotage a Polish-led initiative aimed at encouraging Hanoi to consider Washington’s overtures for negotiations.¹⁵

Admittedly, Johnson had never been particularly optimistic that the bombing pause would bring Hanoi to the negotiating table, the pause directed more towards demonstrating that all non-military options had been exhausted before an anticipated escalation of the war effort in 1966.¹⁶ Moreover, U.S. officials recognised that what ultimately mattered here was Hanoi’s (rather than Beijing’s) attitude apropos negotiations—which would be primarily informed by Hanoi’s reading of the situation in South Vietnam and its willingness to withstand the U.S. air campaign north of the 17th parallel. Still, the administration feared that Beijing’s militancy

¹² Memcon, Rusk and Ambassador Engen (Norway), March 23, 1966, RG59, CF:1964-66, box 2007, POL 2 CHICOM, NA. Also see Lumbers, “Irony of Vietnam,” 86.

¹³ Rusk to Gronouski, February 5, 1966, *FRUS, 1964-1968* 30:254-55.

¹⁴ Congentel-1287, Hong Kong, January 8, 1966, NSF:CO, box 239, “China Cables, Vol. V,” LBJL. On Beijing’s efforts “to sabotage the peace process and to force the North Vietnamese to follow the Chinese lead,” see Qiang Zhai, “Opposing Negotiations: China and the Vietnam Peace Talks, 1965-1968,” *Pacific Historical Review* 68 (February 1999): 21-49.

¹⁵ Harriman, OHI, June 16, 1969, 12, ADST; James G. Hershberg, “Peace Probes and the Bombing Pause: Hungarian and Polish Diplomacy During the Vietnam War, December 1965-January 1966,” *Journal of Cold War Studies* 5 (Spring 2003): 51-58.

¹⁶ Lumbers, “Irony of Vietnam,” 85; Warner, “Lyndon Johnson’s War? Part 2: From Escalation to Negotiation,” 199-200.

emboldened Hanoi in its pursuit of victory on the battlefield, while circumscribing the Kremlin's willingness and ability to counsel restraint in its dealings with the North Vietnamese.¹⁷

Yet, while the administration viewed China as an aggressor in Vietnam, there was also a healthy awareness of Beijing's profound anxiety over the expanding American military presence on China's doorstep. In the wake of the U.S. bombing of the DRV in 1964 this anxiety was given expression in a significant expansion of defensive preparations within China and, as the CIA pointed out in early 1965, improvements in China's military infrastructure in areas contiguous to North Vietnam. Beijing, it seemed, viewed the threat of an American attack on China as not only possible but, in fact, entirely likely.¹⁸

The most unsettling aspect of these developments, as the U.S. Consulate in Hong Kong reported, was that as pronounced as Beijing's fear of an American attack may have been this had not translated into even the "slightest faltering in their resolve to aid and abet [the] DRV and [the Vietcong] regardless of our actions."¹⁹ On the contrary, following Johnson's Americanisation of the ground war in the summer of 1965 U.S. observers watched as China developed its own military presence within North Vietnam. Beijing had apparently started deploying units to the DRV in June, with the number of Chinese troops in the country rising, in the CIA's estimate, to between 30,000 and 47,000 by early 1966. Although these deployments were restricted to logistical support units (excepting a small number of forces

¹⁷ See chapter eight, 201-204.

¹⁸ CIA, "Chinese Communists Brace for Possible Spread of Indochina War," February 12, 1965, NSF:CO/VN, box 48, "Southeast Asia, Special Intelligence Material, Vol. III," LBJL; Hershberg and Chen, "Informing the Enemy," 215. On the effort to relocate China's industrial base to the nation's interior, see Barry Naughton, "The Third Front: Defence Industrialisation in the Chinese Interior," *China Quarterly*, no. 115 (1988): 351-86. Several Chinese scholars suggest that these defensive preparations related first and foremost to Mao's objective of promoting domestic and foreign policies consistent with his concept of "continuous revolution," as opposed to any heightened sense of insecurity extending from the escalation of U.S. involvement in Vietnam. See Li Xiangqian, "The Economic and Political Impact of the Vietnam War on China in 1964," in Roberts, *Bamboo Curtain*, 173-89; and Chen Jian, "China's Involvement in the Vietnam War, 1964-69," *China Quarterly*, no. 142 (1995): 361-66.

¹⁹ Congentel-1851, Hong Kong, June 6, 1965, NSF:CO, box 238, "China Cables, Vol. III," LBJL. Also see CIA study (DDI Research Staff), "The Sino-Vietnamese Effort to Limit American Actions in the Vietnam War" (POLO XX), June 9, 1965, *CPE*.

providing security for these units and rudimentary anti-aircraft support to secure lines of supply), the CIA noted that the Chinese had established a central military authority in the Hanoi area that could, if necessary, serve as a theatre logistics command to coordinate the deployment of Chinese combat forces.²⁰ And while the CIA emphasised that China's troop presence remained defensively orientated, INR's Allen Whiting, the administration's in-house authority on China's intervention in the Korean War, became increasingly concerned that history might yet repeat itself.²¹

This is not to suggest that U.S. officials believed Beijing had any desire to intervene directly in Vietnam. Rather, at each point in the escalation of hostilities the Chinese had, as administration analysts pointed out, been careful not to commit Chinese combat forces to the fight.²² In fact, for the most part Beijing had made a point of emphasising the role of the Vietnamese in prosecuting their own "war of national liberation," albeit with the (vaguely defined) support of other proletarian states. Thus, while Beijing warned Washington that a "debt of blood must be repaid in blood" this did not necessarily mean Chinese blood; rather, the Chinese appeared, as Rusk dryly remarked, "prepared to fight to last North Vietnamese."²³ Indeed, even as the United States and China pursued fundamentally antithetical interests in Vietnam, each side remained ever-mindful of the danger of another Sino-American war. Korea, as Whiting later observed, "remained a restraining memory for both sides."²⁴

However, as a major interdepartmental study prepared in the first half of 1965 suggested,

²⁰ CIA, "Chinese Communist Military Presence in North Vietnam," October 20, 1965, NSF:CO/VN, box 50, "Southeast Asia, Special Intelligence Material, Vol. III," LBJL; CIA, "Chinese Communist Military Presence in North Vietnam," February 28, 1966, *ibid.*, box 51, "Southeast Asia, Special Intelligence Material, Vol. IX." A cumulative total of 320,000 Chinese troops served in Vietnam between 1965 and 1969, with the greatest number at any one time being 170,000 in 1967. Although the Chinese mission was predominantly logistical, a total of 150,000 troops served in air-defence roles. Xiaoming Zhang, "Vietnam War," 757, 759.

²¹ Komer to Bundy, February 16, 1966, JTP:FE, box 16, "Communist China, General," JFKL; Whiting, *Chinese Calculus*, 175; Hershberg and Chen, "Informing the Enemy," 209-12.

²² CIA, "Selected Significant Statements on Intervention in Vietnam," April 7, 1965, NSF:CO/VN, box 49, "Special Intelligence Material, Vol. IV," LBJL; State cable (EHX791), February 14, 1965, *ibid.*, China, box 238, "China Cables, Vol. II."

²³ Embtel, Warsaw, April 21, 1965 *FRUS, 1964-1968* 30:167; Schulzinger, "Johnson Administration," 242. Rusk, testimony to SFRC, February 18, 1966, as quoted in *Executive Sessions* 18:550.

²⁴ Cited in Frank Rogers, "Sino-American Relations and the Vietnam War, 1964-1966," *China Quarterly*, no. 66 (1976): 314.

even with both Washington and Beijing looking to avoid a direct confrontation, events in Vietnam could well acquire an escalatory momentum of their own. For instance, should the U.S. bombing of targets north of Hanoi intensify, the Chinese might deploy fighter aircraft to assist in the air defence of the DRV; the United States would then be forced to strike at airbases and military infrastructure on the Chinese side of the border, likely employing nuclear weapons in the process. The tactical use of nuclear weapons might, in turn, compel the Soviets to extend military assistance to their erstwhile “brothers in arms”; to the extent the integrity of the Chinese regime was threatened by the United States this would “carry grave risks of general war with the USSR.”²⁵

Of course, the level of China’s involvement in Vietnam was contingent on how Beijing read the U.S. position in Vietnam and, more specifically, what this portended for China’s own security. In early 1964 the U.S. Consulate in Hong Kong reported that given Beijing evidently had no wish for a direct conflict with American forces, the United States could step up its military effort in Vietnam “without running [the risk of] unacceptable levels of retaliation.” However, two important caveats were attached to this estimate, echoing warnings sounded in numerous other studies on the matter, and indeed by the Chinese themselves: if the United States threatened either the integrity of China’s borders or the existence of the North Vietnamese regime the Chinese would almost certainly intervene directly in the war.²⁶

Some quarters in Washington felt that although the “China factor” was certainly pertinent, it should not be assigned excessive importance in the administration’s war planning. The National Intelligence Board, for instance, “consistently discounted the possibility of [Chinese]

²⁵ Report by Special State-Defence Study Group, “Communist China (Short Range Report),” April 30, 1965, NSF, Agency File, box 61, “Department of State—Special State-Defense Study Group Regarding China, 1965,” LJB. The sections on nuclear attack in this paper are classified (pages I-6 through I-8) but are alluded to in a summary of the “critical problems” raised by the study. *FRUS, 1964-1968* 30:187.

²⁶ Airgram-694, Hong Kong, February 21, 1964, NSF:CO, box 237, China Cables, Vol. I,” LBJL; Schulzinger, “Johnson Administration,” 243-44. On China’s signals to Washington, see Hershberg and Chen, “Informing the Enemy,” esp. 218-35.

intervention” in Vietnam.²⁷ Meanwhile, the military brass was generally given to a degree of hubris on the U.S. ability to “handle” the Chinese should they decide to join the fray.²⁸ These were, however, minority voices. For senior policymakers, mindful of the lessons of Korea, concerns about Chinese reactions to U.S. moves played a critical role in defining the pace and limits of the American war effort in Vietnam, not least Johnson’s well-documented micro-management of Operation Rolling Thunder, the air campaign against North Vietnam.²⁹

These concerns about Chinese reactions to developments in Vietnam also guided the administration’s decision to limit Nationalist involvement in Vietnam. The Nationalists were, on the one hand, very much a part in the American war effort: Taipei provided substantial levels of technical and logistical assistance to the South Vietnamese, a small number of Nationalist forces participated in covert operations in Vietnam under American command, and, most provocatively, Taiwan was utilised as a base for U.S. aircraft involved in the bombing of the North Vietnam.³⁰ But when Chiang suggested creating a U.S.-supported trilateral alliance between the GRC, South Vietnam, and South Korea, the administration, recognising that Beijing would view the agreement as a diplomatic mechanism for deploying Nationalist forces to the Asian mainland, demurred.³¹ Whereas some of the more hawkish officials in the administration, such as the CIA’s Ray Cline, were willing to make the case for sending Nationalist troops in Vietnam, senior policymakers were evidently more impressed by warnings that the introduction of Nationalist combat forces into the war would run the

²⁷ The quote is from the authors of the *Pentagon Papers*, cited in Hershberg and Chen, “Informing the Enemy,” 213.

²⁸ Notes of meeting, July 22, 1965, *FRUS, 1964-1968* 3:211-12; Gilbert, “Introduction,” 16.

²⁹ See Schulzinger, “Johnson Administration,” 246-50; George McT. Kahin, *Intervention: How America Became Involved in Vietnam* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1987), 338-41; Yuen Foong Khong, *Analogies at War: Korea, Munich, Dien Bien Phu, and the Vietnam Decisions of 1965* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), esp. 136-37, 141-46; and Marilyn Young, “Fighting While Negotiating,” in Gardner and Gittinger, *Search for Peace*, 26-28. A popular—albeit flawed—school of thought on America’s defeat in Vietnam argues that fears of Chinese intervention in the war were largely unfounded. See, in particular, Harry G. Summers, Jr., *On Strategy: A Critical Analysis of the Vietnam War* (New York: Dell, 1982); and Mark Moyar, *Triumph Forsaken: The Vietnam War, 1954-1965* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), esp. xxii, 320-21. For a critique of these views from a Chinese perspective, see Xiaoming Zhang, “Vietnam War.”

³⁰ Tucker, “Threats, Opportunities,” 113; Garver, *Sino-American Alliance*, 204-11.

³¹ Documents on U.S.-GRC diplomacy on this issue in: NSF:CO, box 237, “China Cables, Vol. I,” LBJL; and *FRUS, 1964-1968* 30:20-21, 26-30, 49-51.

extreme danger of provoking PRC intervention.³²

Moreover, the administration recognised that the GRC “had its own axes to grind” in Southeast Asia. While Chiang reportedly thought that the Vietnamese theatre was, in and of itself, peripheral, he clearly viewed the escalation of hostilities there as offering new opportunities for putting a “return to the mainland” effort into motion.³³ In April 1964 Chiang explicitly underlined this connection, imploring the administration to consider Nationalist attacks against southern China, thus creating a *cordon sanitaire* between China and North Vietnam, and ultimately destroying the wellspring of aggression in the region, Red China.³⁴ In a variation on this theme, in September 1965 Chiang’s son, Chiang Ching-kuo, presented the administration with a rudimentary plan, dubbed “Great Torch Five,” for seizing five provinces in south western China. The U.S. response was unequivocal: the administration did not subscribe to Taipei’s view that a conflict with China was inevitable, nor did it believe that the war in Vietnam—for which Hanoi, not Beijing, was primarily responsible—could only be won by attacking China. On the contrary, it remained U.S. policy, GRC officials were told, to contain Beijing while avoiding a Sino-American conflict. Nationalist attacks against the mainland would result in just such a conflict, and as Rusk told Chiang in a remarkably frank exchange on the matter, this would likely lead to the use of U.S. nuclear weapons against China.³⁵

In addition to avoiding actions that might provoke Chinese intervention in Vietnam, the administration also sought to directly and explicitly disabuse China’s leaders of the notion that the United States was angling for a Sino-American war. As such, the dual message to the

³² Cline to McCone, December 6, 1965, *FRUS, 1964-1968* 30:231-32; Congtel-120, Hong Kong, August 2, 1965, NSF:CO, box 238, “China Cables, Vol. IV,” LBJL.

³³ Deptel to Taipei, September 4, 1964, *FRUS, 1964-1968* 30:84; William Bundy to Wright, September 4, 1964, *ibid.*, 83; briefing paper, “General,” June 22, 1966, RG59, ROCF, lot 72D140, box 2, “Secretary’s Visit to Taipei, 3-4 July 1966,” NA.

³⁴ See Garver, *Sino-American Alliance*, 211-14.

³⁵ Embtel-60, Saigon (Rusk to Ball), April 17, 1964, NSF:CO, box 237, “China Memos, Vol. I,” LBJL. The “Great Torch Five” idea, and the U.S. response, is covered in: *FRUS, 1964-1968* 30:211-13, 215-16, 224-26, 236-38, and 242-49.

Chinese at the July 1964 ambassadorial level meeting in Warsaw was, as Rice put it, that the United States was “neither trying to do them and the DRV in, nor are we going to stand by while they do others in.”³⁶ In April 1965 the U.S. representative at the talks expanded upon this message, adding that the administration did not believe, as the Chinese had contended, that the world was divided in two irreconcilably hostile camps; rather, it was President Johnson’s firm conviction that the barriers of hostility between nations must be broken down.³⁷ Invariably, China angrily dismissed these messages as the deceits of an imperialist aggressor bent on war. Yet as Kenneth Young has pointed out, the exchanges at Warsaw nonetheless helped to “implicitly set forth the extent of the interests and delimited the boundaries of the [Vietnam] conflict.”³⁸

Satisfied that the Warsaw channel was adequate for communicating U.S. positions on Vietnam at the bilateral level, senior policymakers decided against sounding the Chinese out on an elevation of the dialogue to the foreign minister’s level, wary such a move might be read in Beijing as a softening of U.S. resolve.³⁹ Likely the same reasoning informed Rusk’s rejection of an April 1966 offer from Pakistan’s foreign minister, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, to facilitate secret talks between the secretary and his Chinese counterpart, Chen Yi.⁴⁰ Nonetheless, by 1966 the bilateral signalling of, by turns, resolve and restraint, had helped clarify for each party the others’ objectives in the war, and as a result reduced the chances of an inadvertent conflict. As William Bundy later suggested, although “there was no clear understanding between Peking and ourselves...I think it could be accurately said that we

³⁶ Deptel to Warsaw, July 23, 1964, *FRUS, 1964-1968* 30:65-69; Thomson to William Bundy, July 15, 1964, *ibid.*, 64. Rice quote from Congentel-48, Hong Kong, July 13, 1964, NSF:CO, box 202, “Cabot-Wang Talks,” LBJL.

³⁷ Deptel-1805 to Warsaw, April 16, 1965, NSF:CO, box 202, “Cabot-Wang Talks,” LBJL.

³⁸ Kenneth T. Young, *Negotiating with the Chinese Communists: The United States Experience, 1953-1967* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1968), 275. Also see John H. Holdridge, *Crossing the Divide: An Insider’s Account of Normalization of U.S.-China Relations* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1997), 22.

³⁹ William Bundy to Rusk, May 13, 1966, *FRUS, 1964-1968* 30:299-300; William Bundy to Rusk, May 20, 1966, *ibid.*, 307.

⁴⁰ See Hershberg and Chen, “Informing the Enemy,” 238-39. .

understood each other.”⁴¹

Toward a Posture of “Containment without Isolation”

However, as of 1966, senior U.S. policymakers were not altogether confident that Beijing properly “understood” the administration’s determination to avoid a Sino-American war over Vietnam. Through 1966 and (to a lesser extent) beyond, the Johnson administration, erring on the side of caution, proceeded under the assumption that key individuals in Beijing still thought a direct conflict with the United States was simply a matter of time.⁴² As such, even after fears of Chinese intervention in Vietnam diminished after the initial Americanisation of the ground war in mid-1965, the administration both continued and expanded its efforts to disabuse the Chinese of the idea that such a conflict was inevitable, and, by extension, communicate the idea that it was possible, and in fact desirable, for the United States and China to live together in comity.

The first official commentary on China matters in 1966, coming on the heels of the resumption of Operation Rolling Thunder in early February following the Christmas pause, reflected the administration’s desire to speak across the prevailing Sino-American enmity and establish that, if nothing else, Washington and Beijing shared an interest in avoiding a direct conflict over Vietnam. Thus, on February 12, in an otherwise a boilerplate survey of China’s aggressive drive for regional hegemony, William Bundy suggested that China’s leaders had at least proven “tactically cautious,” and evidently did not seek a “confrontation of military power” with the United States.⁴³ Several days later Johnson, reiterating his determination to avoid precipitating a “wider war, perhaps against the vast land armies of China,” argued that the United States was not seeking to destroy any regime, but simply to “defend against

⁴¹ Rogers, “Sino-American Relations,” 311n76 (emphasis in source). Also see Schulzinger, “Johnson Administration,” 249-50; and Foot, *Practice of Power*, 160.

⁴² INR, “Recent Chinese Views on Imminence or Inevitability of War with the U.S.,” March 29, 1966, NSF:CO, box 240, “China Memos, Vol. VI,” LBJL; Lumbers, “Irony of Vietnam,” 88-92.

⁴³ Bundy, February 12, 1966, *DSB* 54:310-18.

aggression.” Like Bundy, Johnson also gave a subtle nod to Beijing’s restraint: “We observe in ourselves, and we applaud in others, a careful restraint in action. We can live with anger in word as long as it is matched by caution in deed.”⁴⁴ Although these words were no doubt tailored to reassure domestic audiences that the administration was intent on keeping the war “limited” despite the escalation of hostilities, it seems likely Johnson also hoped his comments would be read in Beijing as an expression of U.S. restraint.

Concerns about the risk of a Sino-American conflict over Vietnam also served to focus attention in the wider American polity on the underlying logic of U.S. China policy. Indeed, much of the impetus for the shift to a more flexible posture toward China in 1966 came from interested individuals outside the administration. In particular, public congressional hearings on China in March 1966 provided a forum for non-governmental Asianists to challenge the idea that the isolation of China served the larger objective of containment.

Undersecretary of State George Ball appears to have played a small part in encouraging these hearings. Ball’s interest on China extended from his long-standing concern that his colleagues were conflating the roles of Beijing and Hanoi in the Vietnam War and his related fear, particularly pronounced in the days prior to the February 1966 resumption of Rolling Thunder, that the country was careering towards a war with China.⁴⁵ Deeply troubled by the prospect of a Sino-American confrontation, and exasperated by what he viewed as a lack of proportion in the administration’s approach to the region generally, two days after American bombs started to fall again on North Vietnam Ball telephoned influential *New York Times* columnist, James “Scotty” Reston, and referred to the pressing need for the administration to reconsider its assumptions on China. Ball suggested that the Senate Foreign Relations Committee (SFRC), then conducting high-profile hearings on Vietnam, might broaden its

⁴⁴ Johnson, February 23, 1966, *PPP:LBJ, 1966, Book I*, 211-12. Also see Lumbers, “Irony of Vietnam,” 94.

⁴⁵ See chapter eight, 202; and William Conrad Gibbons, *The U.S. Government and the Vietnam War: Executive and Legislative Roles and Relationships*, Part IV: *July 1964-January 1965* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 151-52.

focus to include China. This would, as Ball envisioned it, be a public “teach-in,” wherein the administration would be the student. A sympathetic Reston agreed to broach the subject in the *New York Times*, and five days later he wrote a column alluding to the need for a public re-examination of U.S. China policy that continued from where Hilsman had left off in his Commonwealth Club speech of December 1963.⁴⁶

The Chairman of the SFRC, Senator William Fulbright, was himself amenable to such a public re-examination of the China question. Fulbright had been publicly agitating for a more flexible China policy since early 1964, and the apparent threat of a Sino-American conflict over Vietnam seems to have heightened the senator’s interest on China further still.⁴⁷ As such, on March 6 Fulbright announced that the SFRC would conduct public hearings on China in an effort to stimulate public and governmental discussion on the subject, enhance American understanding of the PRC, and thereby reduce the risk of a Sino-American conflict.⁴⁸

Although a wide variety of perspectives on China were presented at the hearings, the predominant theme was established on the opening day by Columbia University Professor A. Doak Barnett, who urged that the United States modify its “basic posture toward the Chinese Communist regime from one of containment plus isolation to one of containment without isolation.” Thus, while the United States should oppose “military or subversive threats and pressures emanating from Peking” it should, at the same time, seek “maximum contacts with and maximum involvement of the Chinese Communists in the international community.”⁴⁹

Fulbright’s hearings also prompted expressions of support for enhanced Sino-American

⁴⁶ Telcon, Ball and Reston, February 11, 1966, Papers of George W. Ball, box 2, “China (Peking),” LBJL; James Reston, “Washington: The New China Experts,” *NYT*, February 16, 1966.

⁴⁷ *NYT*, “Excerpts from Fulbright’s Address Urging United States Foreign Policy Changes,” March 26, 1964; Randall Bennett Woods, *Fulbright: A Biography* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 412-13.

⁴⁸ “Fulbright Warns of U.S.-China War as Growing Peril,” *NYT*, March 7, 1966; Kwan Ha Yim, *China and the U.S. 1964-72*, 105-6; SFRC discussion, March 4, 1966, *Executive Sessions* 18:580-81.

⁴⁹ U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, *U.S. Policy with Respect to Mainland China: Hearings before the Committee on Foreign Relations* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1966), 3-16; Dean to William Bundy, April 4, 1966, RG59, CF:1964-66, box 2025, POL 1 CHICOM-US, NA.

engagement from various public opinion leaders. On March 20, in response to the ongoing hearings, the *New York Times* printed a declaration of support for efforts to improve relations with Beijing signed by 198 academics; the declaration demonstrated, the paper editorialised, “where the weight of informed American opinion lies.”⁵⁰ And between March and May there was a rush of congressional commentary endorsing a more flexible China policy. Adherents to the hardline were by no means silenced—the sale of a West German steel mill to the PRC in March 1966, for example, was loudly protested on the Hill.⁵¹ Yet there were at least as many public opinion leaders and congressional figures who openly argued, as Senator Edward Kennedy did, that U.S. China policy should be released from the “rigid emotional straightjacket which has encased it for so many years.”⁵² To some extent this call for moderation even transcended the party divide. For instance, the Ripon Society, a centrist organisation for young Republicans, urged party leaders to “fill a leadership vacuum” in developing a more reasoned, flexible China policy.⁵³

The growing public interest in U.S. China policy was underlined by the creation of the National Committee on U.S.-China Relations in June 1966. The committee, whose select group of participants included many of the academics who had testified at the Fulbright hearings, presented itself as a non-governmental platform for promoting greater “public discussion of our current China policy: the basic issues, present problems, and possible alternatives.” Although constituted as a forum for policy dialogue, as opposed to a vehicle for policy advocacy, in practice committee members tended to favour expanded Sino-American contacts leading to an eventual rapprochement.⁵⁴ The committee represented, in this sense, the institutionalisation of the liberal critique of U.S. China policy, and, at once, proof-positive of

⁵⁰ Lumbers, “Irony of Vietnam,” 97; editorial, “The China Debate,” *NYT*, March 23, 1966

⁵¹ “Busy Boats to China,” *Time*, April 1, 1966. Also see E.W. Kenworthy, “3 Experts Defend U.S. China Policy,” *NYT*, March 21, 1966.

⁵² Friends Committee on National Legislation, “Congressional Speeches on China Policy, March-May 1966,” August 3, 1966, JTP:FE, box 17, “Communist China, General,” JFKL. For similar comments in 1967 from RFK, see Theodore C. Sorensen, *The Kennedy Legacy* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1969), 201-2.

⁵³ Lincoln P. Bloomfield, “China, the United States, and the United Nations,” *International Organization* 20 (Autumn 1966): 657.

⁵⁴ See Richard Madsen, *China and the American Dream: A Moral Inquiry* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 46-52.

the ever-fading capacity of the ‘China Lobby’ to dictate the parameters of the public discourse on China matters.

Sensing that the political mood in the country favoured a renewed push for policy change, Thomson suggested that the administration should co-opt the theme of “containment without isolation.” Although Thomson had long advocated a more flexible posture towards China, he now framed his case in reference to the impact such changes might have in mobilising domestic support behind U.S. policies in the region. The administration could, Thomson wrote, “take both a wise and a tactically effective line (holding the hawks and undercutting the doves) by being firm and tough on Vietnam but flexible, confident, and dispassionate on China.”⁵⁵

This line of reasoning apparently resonated with the president. On March 13, with Fulbright’s China hearings still in progress, Johnson “unleashed” Vice President Hubert Humphrey—recently returned from a tour of Asia where, as Thomson recalled, “he had dutifully played the role of super-hawk on Vietnam”—to endorse the “containment without isolation” formula on national television, modified to the somewhat less elegant (and marginally more equivocal) “containment without necessarily isolation.” Although Humphrey was privately contemptuous of those senators who understated the Chinese “menace,” in public he praised the Fulbright hearings as one of the “most fruitful procedures under way in this government,” suggesting that it was in the U.S. interest to pursue expanded Sino-American contacts, in the hope of improving bilateral relations.⁵⁶

Three days later Rusk delivered a prepared statement to the House Subcommittee on the Far East and the Pacific, reiterating that the United States had no intention of attacking China, and providing what amounted to a cautious endorsement of the “containment without isolation”

⁵⁵ Thomson to Komer and Valenti, March 8, 1966, JTP:FE, box 17, “Communist China, General,” JFKL. Also see Thomson to Moyers, March 15, 1966, *FRUS, 1964-1968* 30:274-75.

⁵⁶ Thomson, “U.S. China Policy,” 240; Kwan Ha Yim, *China & the U.S.*, 111-12; Carl Solberg, *Hubert Humphrey: A Biography* (New York: Norton, 1984), 289.

concept. While emphasising that the United States would stand by its commitments to the Republic of China and, more generally, oppose Chinese expansionism, Rusk disputed the idea that the hostility characteristic of U.S.-PRC relations was “unending and inevitable.” More importantly, Rusk allowed for the possibility of improved “unofficial contacts between Communist China and ourselves—contacts which may gradually assist in altering Peiping’s picture of the United States.” With respect to official-level U.S.-PRC contacts Rusk simply noted the need to continue the existing ambassadorial level talks, and restated the administration’s willingness to enter into a dialogue with Beijing on issues of disarmament and non-proliferation. Yet in a line of qualified conciliation reminiscent of Roger Hilsman’s December 1963 address on China, Rusk indicated that the United States would “welcome an era of good relations” with the PRC should Beijing retreat from its militant foreign policy line.⁵⁷ Rusk’s statement did not, as Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs Leonard Unger told the Swedish ambassador, represent a new policy so much as a “pulling together of past U.S. statements” on China. Nonetheless, this high-level endorsement of a more flexible posture did “present an atmosphere of wider and more open discussion of the problem, as first essayed, perhaps, in the speech of Roger Hilsman a few years ago.”⁵⁸

The next few months witnessed further steps by the administration towards a posture consistent with the concept of “containment without isolation.” In June Humphrey repeated the administration’s interest in expanding contacts with Beijing, adding that the continued isolation of the Asian Communist states “breeds unreality, delusions and miscalculation.”⁵⁹ Even McNamara, whose view of China was characterised by James Reston as “apocalyptic,” referred to the need to breach “the isolation of great nations like Red China,” suggesting that the U.S. might seek (as the situation allowed) to “build bridges” to such nations through

⁵⁷ Rusk, March 16, 1966, *DSB* 54:686-695; Rusk, *As I Saw It*, 289. The statement, which Rusk put on the record in closed session, was released, as had been intended, on April 16. Read to Rostow, April 16, 1966, RG59, CF:1964-66, box 2025, POL 1 CHICOM-US, NA.

⁵⁸ Memcon, Unger and Ambassador H.E. Hubert de Besche (Sweden), April 18, 1966, RG59, CF:1964-66, box 2018, POL CHICOM-US, NA.

⁵⁹ Humphrey, June 8, 1966, *DSB* 55:2-6.

“properly balanced trade relations, diplomatic contacts, and in some cases even by exchanges of military observers.”⁶⁰ Meanwhile, the United States Information Service issued a policy directive expressing the administration’s desire to project a posture that, on the one hand, underlined Washington’s willingness to combat Chinese aggression and, on the other, made clear the desire to “build bridges” to Beijing in the hope of ending the Sino-American estrangement.⁶¹

Initially, Johnson seemed content to maintain a measure of detachment from the public discussions about U.S. China policy. When asked for his own views on China Johnson simply pointed out that while he was “very anxious” to improve contacts with Beijing, the Chinese had not shown any willingness to travel this road; until Beijing evidenced a change in attitude the new focus on China would therefore do little more “than satisfy people’s yearnings for information.”⁶²

However, in the months following Fulbright’s China hearings the idea of a presidential speech endorsing the “containment without isolation” theme gained momentum. In a letter that was widely circulated within the administration, Columbia Professor Donald Zagoria—who had testified at the Fulbright hearings—suggested that a conciliatory speech on China by the president would inspire confidence in the wisdom of U.S. world leadership, while offsetting domestic criticism of U.S. policies in the region. Zagoria also pointed to benefits occurring within the framework of Sino-American relations: In the short-to-medium term a presidential endorsement of “containment without isolation” might strengthen the hand of moderate elements within the Chinese leadership, explicitly underlining for a post-Mao leadership the prospect of improved relations with the United States. Over the longer term, it could serve as a “beginning of a dialogue leading to more meaningful contacts” between Washington and

⁶⁰ McNamara, May 18, 1966, *DSB* 54:880-81; Reston, “Washington: McNamara’s Nightmare China,” *NYT*, March 2, 1966.

⁶¹ USIS, “Policy Program Directive, No. 7-7-66,” July 15, 1966, JTP:FE, box 17, “Communist China, General,” JFKL.

⁶² Johnson, March 22, 1966, *PPP:LBJ, 1966, Book I*, 346.

Beijing.⁶³ Responding to these recommendations, Johnson's Special Assistant and speechwriter Jack Valenti observed that Zagoria's ideas were "in general accord with the sentiments some of our fresher thinkers here."⁶⁴

Over the next several months Johnson's trusted aide, Bill Moyers—also privy to Zagoria's suggestion⁶⁵—collated evidence that a "containment without isolation" speech by the president would be well received by domestic and foreign audiences, while enhancing support for the U.S. effort in Vietnam.⁶⁶ Evidently impressed by these potential advantages, in July 1966 Johnson directed Moyers to produce a speech that provided a broad explanation for U.S. policies in the region; Moyers, in turn, asked Thomson to prepare the draft. Thomson, who according to William Bundy seemed to make getting conciliatory language on China into official speeches his "his sole mission in life," quickly put together a speech consistent with the "containment without isolation" concept.⁶⁷

The result was a nationally televised address by Johnson on July 12 where the president declared, *inter alia*, that a "misguided China must be encouraged toward understanding the outside world and toward policies of peaceful cooperation." A China isolated by its leaders from the world was, Johnson said, an obstacle to peace in Asia. And although the administration would never waver in its opposition to Chinese aggression, it operated under the assumption that "the greatest force for opening closed minds and closed societies is the free flow of ideas and people and goods."⁶⁸

Johnson did not suggest, however, that he had any immediate plans for modifying the trade

⁶³ Zagoria to Valenti, April 5, 1966, NSF:CO, box 240, "China Memos, Vol. VI," LBJL.

⁶⁴ Valenti to Zagoria, April 12, 1966, White House Central File, Countries (hereafter WHCF:CO), box 21, "CO 50, China," LBJL.

⁶⁵ Valenti to Moyers, April 5, 1966, NSF:CO, box 240, "China Memos, Vol. VI," LBJL.

⁶⁶ Harriman to Moyers, June 3, 1966, *FRUS, 1964-1968* 30:318-19; Hayes Redmon to Moyers, July 11, 1966, WHCF:CO, box 22, "CO 50-2, People's Republic of China, 5/17/66-," LBJL.

⁶⁷ Thomson, "U.S. China Policy," 241-42; Thomson to Moyers, July 12, 1966, JTP:SP, box 11, "7/12/66, White Sulphur Springs, Press Reaction," JFKL; Thomson, OHI, July 22, 1971, 44-46, LBJL; Bundy quoted in Waldron, "Nonexistent to Almost Normal," 239.

⁶⁸ Johnson, July 12, 1966, *PPP:LBJ, 1966, Book II, 721-22.*

embargo or taking specific steps to improve official level contacts. On the contrary, several days after his speech Johnson qualified his in-principle endorsement of a “free flow of ideas and people and goods” by noting that until the administration had a better idea of “what China’s plans are and China’s hopes are, and what China expects to do in her own way in the future, we would not want to determine our complete course of conduct.”⁶⁹

Although not yet ready to implement a wholesale unilateral removal of restrictions on bilateral exchange, Johnson was at least able to point to several steps taken over the first half of 1966 to relax restrictions on American travel to mainland China. The State Department had, in fact, come close to approving a relaxation in these restrictions early in Johnson’s presidency, but the initiative had collapsed under the combined weight of the French recognition of Beijing, the onset of an election year, and concerns about both the impact of China’s anticipated nuclear test and the deterioration of the security situation in Vietnam.⁷⁰ Subsequent initiatives on the travel issue worked their way through the State bureaucracy in the summer of 1965, but despite widespread support at the mid-levels of the bureaucracy these initiatives were either rejected or put on indefinite hold, in no small part because Rusk, unlike the majority of his subordinates at State, remained sceptical about the timeliness of policy moderation.⁷¹

Somewhat by chance, in August 1965 Eisenhower’s personal physician, Dr. Paul Dudley White, provided advocates of changes in the travel restrictions with a vehicle for policy movement when he wrote to Johnson offering his services in “helping to break the deadlock with China.” White had, in fact, been invited to the mainland by the Chinese Academy of

⁶⁹ Johnson, July 20, 1966, *PPP:LBJ, 1966, Book II*, 748. Also see circular Deptel-8063, July 14, 1966, JTP:SP, box 11, “7/12/66, White Sulpher Springs Alumni Council, Diplomatic Reaction,” JFKL.

⁷⁰ Thomson to McGeorge Bundy, June 2, 1965, *FRUS, 1964-1968* 30:172-73; Harald Jacobson to Bundy, December 2, 1965, RG59, ACA, lot 755D342, box 2, “Warsaw Talks, July-December 1965,” NA. On the earlier efforts to relax these travel restrictions, see chapter seven, 182-185.

⁷¹ Bundy to Rusk, June 16, 1965, *FRUS, 1964-1968* 30:174-76; Deptel-2245 to Warsaw, June 28, 1965, RG59, box 2018, POL CHICOM-US, NA; Deptel-2261 to Warsaw, June 29, 1965, *ibid.*; Thomson to McGeorge Bundy, June 29, 1965, *FRUS, 1964-1968* 30:176-77; McGeorge Bundy to Johnson, August 24, 1965, *ibid.*, 196-97.

Medicine back in 1962, and although the State Department had at the time quietly indicated they would validate Dr. White's passport for such travel, the Chinese subsequently withdrew the invitation; efforts by White to elicit another invitation—again, with State's tacit support—had come to naught.⁷² Still, his 1965 letter sparked Johnson's curiosity, providing the added weight necessary to break the bureaucratic "deadlock" on the issue. Johnson sent the letter to McGeorge Bundy, expressing his interest; Bundy, in turn, contacted Thomson, telling him to take his chance and "run with it." Thomson, using Dr. White's offer "as a point of departure for focussing the President's attention on the larger issue," returned a recommendation that the offer be used as a pretext for the issuance of unrestricted passports to medical and public health professionals. At a Tuesday Luncheon on August 24 the president approved the recommendation.⁷³

Despite Johnson's oral approval, and widespread support for the initiative from various quarters in the administration—including, but not limited too, the Bundy brothers and their respective staffs, and Abba P. Schwartz of the Bureau of Security and Consular Affairs—action on the initiative stalled over the fall of 1965, with Rusk apparently still concerned about the "breadth" and timing of the proposal. Although Rusk had signed off on the recommended changes in late September, he subsequently delayed an announcement, and thus the implementation, of the decision. It ultimately took a concerted effort by interested officials, and some measure of connivance by Thomson and his colleagues, to secure final approval of the changes in December.⁷⁴

In December 1965 the State Department announced that it had lifted travel restrictions to

⁷² Background from documents filed in: RG59, ACA, lot 72D175, box 3, "Dudley White's Travel to Communist China, 1964," NA.

⁷³ Thomson to McGeorge Bundy (attaching draft memo for Johnson), August 21, 1965, NSF:CO, box 238, "China Memos, Vol. IV," LBJL; McGeorge Bundy to Johnson, *supra* note 71; Thomson, "U.S. China Policy," 234-35.

⁷⁴ William Bundy and Schwartz to Rusk, September 15, 1965, RG59, ACA, lot 72D175, box 3, "Travel Controls, June-July 1965," NA. (Rusk approved the changes on September 25). For a detailed account of the bureaucratic back-and-forth on the issue over autumn, see Thomson, "U.S. China Policy," 235-38. Thomson's account is borne out by the documents in: NSF, Subject Files, box 50, "Travel Restrictions, Vol. I," LBJL.

China and other Communist countries for American medical personnel. The positive (albeit low-level) response to the announcement encouraged the administration to implement further changes. Thus, on March 10, 1966, the State Department announced it would also consider individual applications for travel to China by American scholars; on July 11, the day before Johnson's abovementioned speech on U.S. Asian policy, the excepted categories to the travel restrictions were broadened further still to include, "at the Secretary's discretion," other professionals whose travel was deemed in the national interest.⁷⁵ As Thomson wrote to McGeorge Bundy shortly before the approval of the December changes the relaxation of the travel restrictions were only an "infinitesimal step in the right direction," but they remained, nonetheless, a step.⁷⁶

Explaining the "Hopeful Year"

The immediate impact of Washington's new flexibility on U.S.-PRC relations was negligible. In part this was because, as the retiring U.S. ambassador to Japan Edwin Reischauer complained, the administration still had far to go in redefining the U.S. "attitude toward Peking," starting with an unequivocal disavowal of the public pretence that the GRC was the "sole, legitimate representative of the Chinese people."⁷⁷ But whatever the administration's position, on the eve of the Cultural Revolution Beijing simply was not ready to countenance an incremental process of engagement with the imperialist enemy. Invariably, Beijing vehemently rejected Washington's "blasts of 'good will'" as disingenuous attempts to deceive the international community and undermine the revolutionary fortitude of the Chinese people.⁷⁸ Meanwhile, specific U.S. initiatives, including new proposals for bilateral

⁷⁵ For text of December 29, 1965 announcement, see *DSB* 54:90. For the March 10, 1966 announcement, see *DSB* 54:491-92.

⁷⁶ Thomson to McGeorge Bundy, undated, JTP:FE, box 16, "Communist China, International Cooperation," JFKL.

⁷⁷ Embtel, Tokyo, August 11, 1966, *FRUS, 1964-1968* 30:369-72.

⁷⁸ Rogers, "Sino-American Relations," 309-10; INR, "Peking Defensively Rejects U.S. Proposals for Improving Relations," March 29, 1966, JTP:FE, box 17, "Communist China, General," JFKL; Kenneth T. Young, *Diplomacy and Power in Washington-Peking Dealings: 1953-1967* (Chicago: University of Chicago, Center for Policy Study, 1967), 27.

exchanges and an invitation to Beijing to participate in an exploratory group for a much talked about World Disarmament Conference, were rejected out of hand.⁷⁹

Of course, those within the administration who had long advocated a shift to a more conciliatory posture fully anticipated that Beijing would respond to U.S. overtures in this fashion. But these same officials had also hoped that by signalling that the United States was not “eternally and implacably hostile to China” the administration would not only shift to China the onus for its isolation, but also, over the long-term, “offer alternative patterns of relationships with the U.S. to China’s leaders, to their successors, and to doubting elements within the Chinese elite.”⁸⁰ It was never clear if this message of qualified conciliation registered with China’s would-be moderates. On the one hand, the U.S. Consulate in Hong Kong speculated that the defensive tone of Beijing’s response to the administration’s overtures suggested that China’s senior leadership was itself concerned that second-tier elements in the Chinese Communist Party might prove responsive to Washington’s overtures.⁸¹ But even if this was the case, not even the most optimistic of observers expected any near-term shift in Beijing’s disposition; whatever the thinking of China’s future leaders, in 1966 the administration could not, as Rusk put it, “hear the flutterings [*sic*] of the wings of doves in Peiping.”⁸²

Still, by redefining the rhetorical parameters of U.S. China policy the administration had broadened its freedom of manoeuvre to pursue more substantive policy shifts in the future. Or, as Robert Barnett put it in specific reference to the trade issue and Johnson’s July 12 speech, the public redefinition of the underlying logic of U.S. policy positions had served to “upset [the] orthodoxy and to create [an] opportunity for [a] review of [the] possibilities” for

⁷⁹ Samuel Berger to Ball, December 15, 1965, RG59, CF:1964-66, box 2018, POL CHICOM-US, NA; and cable traffic pertaining to Warsaw talks, *FRUS, 1964-1968* 30:233-34, 311-17, 374-378, 383-86.

⁸⁰ Thomson to Valenti, March 1, 1966, *FRUS, 1964-1968* 30:262-64; Rice to Rostow, April 15, 1966, *ibid.*, 282-84; airgram-A-432, Hong Kong, December 31, 1965, JTP:FE, box 16, “Communist China, General,” JFKL; Embtel, Baguio, March 2, 1966, WHCF, Confidential File, box 45, “FO (Foreign Affairs) 1966,” LBJL.

⁸¹ Congentel-1819, Hong Kong, April 7, 1966, RG59, CF:1964-66, box 2008, POL CHICOM-US, NA; Congentel-1908, Hong Kong, April 20, 1966, *ibid.*

⁸² Rusk, March 20, 1966, *DSB* 54:568.

forward policy movement.⁸³

It should be noted that for most senior policymakers in the administration considerations of creating a framework for policy change—or, by extension, for an eventual Sino-American rapprochement—were secondary in driving the shift towards a posture of “containment without isolation.” These policymakers were more concerned with the immediate problem of assaying Beijing’s fears of a U.S. attack on China (as discussed above), while offsetting growing discord at home and abroad over U.S. “militarism” in Vietnam. On the home front, the administration continued to enjoy broad popular backing for its stand in Vietnam, yet as the war escalated so too did dissent among foreign policy elites and opinion leaders.⁸⁴ Internationally, support for the U.S. position in Vietnam, not unlike support for U.S. China policy, was tepid at best, and a growing number of foreign governments—several NATO allies among them—proved ready to openly voice their misgivings on this score.⁸⁵ A demonstration of the peaceable, constructive face of U.S. policy in the region, and specifically on China would, Johnson and his advisors reasoned, go some way toward neutralising criticism of U.S. policies in the region at home and abroad, while transferring to Beijing the onus for the continued impasse in Sino-American relations.⁸⁶ And as America’s involvement in Vietnam deepened through 1965, U.S. policymakers sensed that the show of resolve there gave the administration licence to pursue a more flexible line on China without risk of being labelled “soft” by critics at home or appearing irresolute to enemies abroad.⁸⁷

However, as journalist Tom Wicker explained in a report on the administration’s positive

⁸³ Memcon, July 21, 1966, RG59, ACA, lot 72D175, box 4, “Trade with Communist China I, 1966-1968,” NA.

⁸⁴ See Tara Marie Egan, “Vietnam, the Johnson Administration and the Role of Domestic Public Opinion,” *49th Parallel 21* (Autumn 2007): 6-12, <http://www.49thparallel.bham.ac.uk/back/issue21/Egan.pdf>.

⁸⁵ On the lack of international support for U.S. policy in Vietnam, and the implications for the war effort, see Gary R. Hess, “With Friends Like These: Waging War and Seeking ‘More Flags,’” in *The War That Never Ends: New Perspectives on the Vietnam War*, ed. David L. Anderson and John Ernst (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 2007), 55-74; and George C. Herring, “Fighting Without Allies: The International Dimensions of America’s Defeat in Vietnam,” in Gilbert, *Why the North Won*, 77-95.

⁸⁶ Komer to Johnson, March 2, 1966, WHCF, Confidential File, box 7, “CO 50-2, People’s Republic of China,” LBJL; Komer to Johnson, August 16, 1966, NSF:CO, box 239, “China Memos, Vol. VI (1),” LBJL.

⁸⁷ See, for instance, Thomson to McGeorge Bundy, *supra* note 70; Bundy to Rusk, *supra* note 71, 175; Green to Cooper and Thomson, July 9, 1965, *FRUS, 1964-1968* 30:183; William Bundy to Ball, Dec. 4, 1965, *FRUS, 1964-1968* 30:229.

response to Fulbright's China hearings, whereas Johnson had welcomed public discussion of China policy "primarily because the Asian experts have tended to defend the Administration's policy in the Vietnamese war," it was also reliably reported that the president genuinely agreed with Fulbright that the United States needed to openly and dispassionately discuss relations with, as the senator put it, "this immense land whose policies we may not approve but whose existence we cannot ignore."⁸⁸ Suggesting that Johnson may indeed have been disposed toward a more open discussion of China matters, in April 1966 he personally directed his advisors to seek out the views of non-governmental experts on possible changes in U.S. tactics on the Chinese representation problem in the United Nations. And at year's end the administration announced the creation of a formal panel where prominent Sinologists from the academic community to regularly discuss China matters with administration officials.⁸⁹ These steps suggest that even if Johnson's interest in China policy extended, in the first instance, from the diplomatic and military challenges of the Vietnam War, once focused on the issue Johnson appeared genuinely open to the possibility of greater policy flexibility.

Significantly, the Johnson administration was willing to risk offending Taipei in encouraging further discussion of the China issue. Predictably, Taipei reacted with unease to the administration's expressions of flexibility on China policy, and although the reaction at the official level was mild, the tightly controlled Taiwanese press asked how the Johnson administration could possibly have "forgotten Hitler and Mussolini and Tojo" so quickly in their eagerness to "appease" Mao.⁹⁰ Yet while the administration reassured Taipei that the new language did not represent a change in actual policy, it politely refused Taipei's request for a public reiteration of U.S. support for the GRC as the "sole legitimate government" of

⁸⁸ Tom Wicker, "China Problem: We Begin to Admit it Exists," *NYT*, March 20, 1966. Chang makes a similar point. *Friends and Enemies*, 273-75. Also see Thomson, OHI, July 22, 1971, 42-43, 47, LBJL.

⁸⁹ Sisco to Rusk, April 27, 1966, *FRUS, 1964-1968* 30:292; William Bundy to Rusk, May 5, 1966, RG59, ACA, box 1, lot 71D423, "Sino-United States Relations (General) May-June 1966," NA. The State Department announced the formation of the panel on December 7, 1966. *DSB* 55:966. Minutes of the Advisory Panel meetings, held between February 1967 and November 1968, and related materials, in: RG59, EAF, lot 73D8, box 20, NA.

⁹⁰ Tucker, "Threats, Opportunities," 111; CIA (OCI), "Growing Pessimism Among Nationalist Chinese Leaders," May 17, 1966, NSF:CO, box 240, "China Memos, Vol. VI," LBJL; Embtel, Taipei, July 19, 1966, *FRUS, 1964-1968* 30:356-57.

China.⁹¹

Although the Johnson administration clearly hoped its rhetoric of qualified conciliation would offset domestic and international dissatisfaction with U.S. policy positions, this did not mean, as one commentator charged at the time, that the language of engagement was mere “sloganeering.”⁹² On the contrary, by 1966 there was a broad in-principle acceptance in the U.S. foreign policy bureaucracy of the wisdom of a strategy of “containment without isolation” towards China. This much was apparent from a major interdepartmental study of long-term U.S. China policy completed in June 1966. While endorsing continued efforts to contain China militarily and counter its expansionist impulses, the study also made the case for public and private efforts aimed at disabusing the Chinese people and their leaders of the notion that the United States was irreconcilably hostile to the PRC or committed to the overthrow of Communism in China. The study canvassed initiatives directed towards greater levels of constructive bilateral engagement—including, specifically, changes in trade and travel controls—and a generally more conciliatory posture toward China. Such steps, it was reasoned, would serve to moderate Beijing’s aggressively expansionist policies, and increase Beijing’s interest in pursuing a “constructive relationship” with the United States. The key note struck by the report was that containment need not be a “negative defensive strategy,” nor should it necessarily “result in a frozen confrontation.”⁹³

There was, in this sense, a complex interplay of quite distinct dynamics driving the postural shifts of 1966, wherein the immediate political and diplomatic concerns of Johnson and his key advisors provided an opportunity for interested parts of the bureaucracy to effect some progress toward redefining U.S. posture toward China in a manner that better reflected actual

⁹¹ Embtel-1290, Taipei, May 17, 1966, NSF:CO, box 239, “China Cables, Vol. VI,” LBJL; Deptel-1286 to Taipei, June 7, 1966, *ibid.*

⁹² Max Frankel, “Issue of China Policy,” *NYT*, June 9, 1966.

⁹³ Study Prepared by the Special State-Defense Group, “Communist China: Long Range Study,” June 1966, NSF:CO, box 245, “China, Communist China Long Range Study by the Special State-Defense Study Group,” LBJL. The study abstract is printed in *FRUS, 1964-1968* 30:332-43. Also see Tucker, “Threats, Opportunities,” 105-6.

thinking on China in the administration and, in turn, provided a framework for more substantive policy change.

Admittedly, much of the noise on China policy coming from the mid-levels of the bureaucracy went unheard at the decision-making end of the administration, not least because of the divide, as Thomson put it, between the administration's "buried China experts and the Washington brass."⁹⁴ However, this divide was closed somewhat by the appointment in mid-1966 of Alfred Jenkins to Walt Rostow's staff at the NSC (Rostow himself having taken over from McGeorge Bundy as Johnson's National Security Adviser in March). As Rostow's most influential advisor Jenkins, a Foreign Service officer with an involvement in China policy matters dating back to the Chinese Civil War, soon became the nearest thing the administration had to link between the working-level China experts in the bureaucracy and senior policymakers.⁹⁵ *Time* dubbed him, not without cause, the "watcher of the China watchers."⁹⁶

Thomson, who by the summer of 1966 was himself readying to leave the administration, suspected that Jenkins would likely prove "backward-looking," given the new addition to Rostow's staff had once been a close associate of Dulles-era hardliners like Karl Rankin and Graham Parsons.⁹⁷ Yet Jenkins actually arrived at the "Rostow shop" hopeful that there might be room to not only expand on the recent postural shifts, but also to pursue more substantial policy changes. Further carefully measured signals that the United States was not "implacably hostile" to the PRC, Jenkins argued, would not be reciprocated, but would nonetheless help

⁹⁴ Quote from Thomson to Rostow, April 21, 1966, JTP:FE, box 17, "Communist China, General," JFKL. Also see Jonathan Moore to Bundy, December 5, 1965, *ibid.*, box 16, "Communist China, General"; Cooper to McGeorge Bundy, May 26, 1965, *ibid.*, box 13, "General, 1965-1966"; Thomson to McGeorge Bundy, February 4, 1966, *FRUS 1964-68* 30:249-51.

⁹⁵ Jenkins had been stationed in Tientsin when the Red Army seized the city, and had spent several years thereafter working in both the U.S. Consulate in Hong Kong and the U.S. Embassy in Taipei. During the Eisenhower years Jenkins worked in the Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs, and although posted to Europe from early 1961 onward, he maintained a peripheral involvement in China matters as an adviser to the Warsaw talks.

⁹⁶ "Diagnosing the Dragon," *Time*, January 27, 1967.

⁹⁷ Rostow, OHI, Interview I, March 21, 1969, 17, LBJL. On Jenkins relationship with Rankin, see Jenkins, *Country, Conscience*, 147-48. On Rankin, see Tucker, *Uncertain Friendships*, 37. On Jenkins's support for a hardline China policy during the Eisenhower years, see Graebner, "Eisenhower and Communism," 70.

“throw Mao and company off balance, and hopefully [build] for the non-Mao future.”⁹⁸

By July 1966 the prospects seemed reasonable that the administration would take some steps to adjust its policies to better express a strategy of “containment without isolation.” Or, as Thomson put it to Jenkins at the end of the month: “The new rhetoric has moved towards ‘containment without isolation’ and now ‘reconciliation’—or a policy of ‘firmness and flexibility’ (a phrase the President likes). ...Our problem in the months ahead is what kind of substance, and at what pace, to pour into this new rhetorical container.”⁹⁹

A Test of “Containment without Isolation”: UN “Chirep” in 1966

The question of U.S. policy toward Chinese representation in the United Nations provided the first test of how the postural changes of 1966 would affect substantive policy decisions. Several officials in the administration, including U.S. Representative to the United Nations Arthur Goldberg, contended that the positive reaction to the administration’s display of flexibility on the China issue strengthened the case for movement toward a “two Chinas” position in the United Nations, thus bringing U.S. policy on this issue into line with the concept of “containment without isolation.”¹⁰⁰ Independent of the new postural flexibility, however, there was already a broad consensus in the administration that, in light of the tied 1965 General Assembly vote on Chinese representation, the administration would need to consider new tactics designed, as Johnson put it, to get the United States “off the defensive” on the issue.¹⁰¹ Therefore, with circumstance forcing the issue, the question of Chinese representation in the United Nations became an acid test of the relevance of the “containment without isolation” concept to substantive policy decisions.

⁹⁸ Jenkins to Rostow, September 9, 1966, *FRUS, 1964-1968* 30:380-82; Schulzinger, “Johnson Administration,” 257-58.

⁹⁹ Thomson to Jenkins, July 25, 1966, NSF:CO, box 239, “China Memos, Vol. VI (1),” LBJL.

¹⁰⁰ Goldberg to Johnson, April 28, 1966, *FRUS, 1964-1968* 30:293-94; Komer to Johnson, April 19, 1966, *ibid.*, 285-86.

¹⁰¹ Sisco to Rusk, *supra* note 89, 289; Rostow to Rusk, April 23, 1966, *ibid.*, 295n3. On the tied 1965 vote, see chapter eight, 220.

After extensive high-level deliberations on the issue in the spring of 1966, the administration made a tentative decision to consult with Taipei on the likely need for new tactics in order to maintain the parliamentary status quo. Specifically, Rusk indicated that he would discuss the matter with Chiang during his scheduled July visit to Taipei.¹⁰² However, in the weeks prior to Rusk's visit Chiang shot down preliminary attempts by U.S. representatives to lay the groundwork for a meaningful bilateral dialogue on the matter, insisting that all the administration need do was pull wavering allies into line and push ahead on the same tactics used in previous years. Consistent with his position in the past, Chiang was adamant that if the United Nations adopted a "two Chinas" resolution the GRC would withdraw from the international body, irrespective of whether Beijing took up membership under such conditions.¹⁰³

In the early summer of 1966 Washington and Taipei seemed set for a repeat of earlier diplomatic scraps over the optimal approach to take on the UN representation issue.¹⁰⁴ Yet when Rusk visited Taipei in the first week of July he only made a *pro forma* reference to the possibility of an adverse result in the United Nations in his conversation with Chiang, and did not push the Generalissimo to reconsider his position.¹⁰⁵ Meanwhile, Rusk publicly played down the prospect of a more flexible approach to the problem, the secretary telling reporters that the administration would likely oppose PRC membership in the United Nations for "years to come."¹⁰⁶

The half-hearted nature of Rusk's representation to Chiang on the UN question, along with the rigidity of his public explanation of U.S. policy, appears at first blush somewhat incongruous. Only a fortnight earlier Rusk had indicated that he would personally "make [a] major pitch" to Chiang emphasising the precarious parliamentary situation that the GRC

¹⁰² Rusk to Johnson, May 14, 1966, *FRUS, 1964-1968* 30:301-3; Rostow to Johnson, May 17, 1966, *ibid.*, 303-4; editorial note, *ibid.*, 313-14;

¹⁰³ Embtel, Taipei, July 1, 1966, *ibid.*, 344-48.

¹⁰⁴ See chapter three, 73-83.

¹⁰⁵ Embtel, Taipei, July 5, 1966, *FRUS, 1964-1968* 30:349-50.

¹⁰⁶ Seymour Topping, "Rusk Asserts U.S. Will Oppose U.N. Seat for Peking for Years," *NYT*, July 4, 1966.

confronted in the General Assembly, while impressing upon him the need for the GRC to remain in the United Nations in the instance a “two Chinas” resolution, as then being proposed by Ottawa, was adopted.¹⁰⁷ Chiang’s abovementioned obstinacy would have figured in Rusk’s decision to soft-peddle on the issue, yet in previous years Rusk had been ready to confront Chiang when vital U.S. interests were deemed to be at stake. Instead, Rusk’s oddly docile approach to Chiang on the matter was likely informed by early reports of the Cultural Revolution. Although it was by no means clear in the summer of 1966 how the unfolding situation within China would affect the balance of votes in the UN, at this juncture Rusk was apparently inclined to hedge, preferring not to push Chiang on the matter until it became clearer what impact events on the mainland might have on the UN vote.

By summer’s end U.S. analysts were also hedging; whereas in the first half of 1966 it seemed almost certain that reliance on existing tactics would lead to failure, the Cultural Revolution injected a new element of uncertainty into the equation. Nonetheless, most U.S. officials—excluding the staff of the U.S. Embassy in Taipei—continued to favour some kind of tactical shift. But with less pressure for change and more reason to adopt a wait-and-see approach, Rusk now preferred temporisation. As such by early September the administration had decided to proceed on the same tactical basis as in previous years, while keeping a close eye on voting estimates lest a last minute shift in course was required.¹⁰⁸

One minor tactical departure was implemented in 1966, but it did nothing to reconcile substantive policy with the rhetoric of “containment without isolation.” In an attempt to steal support from a “two Chinas” initiative that the Canadians were insistent on pushing ahead with, the administration quietly lined up support for a resolution creating a study committee—the lesser, it was figured, of the two evils, since although a study committee would likely

¹⁰⁷ Deptel to Taipei, June 24, 1966, cited in *FRUS, 1964-1968* 30:344n2.

¹⁰⁸ Embtel-706, Taipei, September 3, 1966, RG59, CF:1964-66, box 3331, UN 6 CHICOM, NA; circular Deptel to certain posts, September 16, 1966, *FRUS, 1964-1968* 30:390-91; Jenkins to Rostow, “Chirep,” September 14, 1966, NSF, Name File, box 5, “Jenkins Memos [Alfred],” LBJL.

report back the following year with a “two Chinas” recommendation, the intervening year would afford the administration additional time to campaign against the adoption of any such recommendation.¹⁰⁹ Taipei, of course, strenuously objected to the idea of a study committee, but after numerous entreaties from Washington, Taipei agreed not to withdraw from the United Nations should a study committee resolution be adopted.¹¹⁰

The vote in late November proved more favourable than U.S. officials had expected, with an improved majority on the “important question” resolution, and a 10 vote majority on the Albanian resolution, a great improvement on the tie-vote of 1965. The study committee resolution, as introduced by the Italian delegation, was easily defeated, a result that senior officials in the administration were more than happy with; although the U.S. delegation had voted in favour of a study committee in order to demonstrate a willingness for forward movement on the issue, the administration’s decision-makers were clearly not ready at this juncture to match the rhetoric of “containment without isolation” with substantive policy change.¹¹¹

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The failure to reconcile U.S. policy toward China’s representation in the UN with the idea of “containment without isolation” can be attributed, in large part, to ongoing caution at the highest levels of the administration—particularly pronounced in the secretary of state’s office—on substantive policy change. On the one hand, by 1966 the administration had arrived at an in-principle acceptance that the United States should move toward a policy of “containment without isolation,” and indeed made important strides in adjusting U.S. posture to better reflect this concept. Yet in practice the administration leadership remained wary of disengaging from concrete policy positions that perpetuated China’s isolation prior to Beijing

¹⁰⁹ Documentation on these deliberations in *FRUS, 1964-1968* 30:358-60, 396-99, 407-10, 412-14, 418-26.

¹¹⁰ On the diplomacy between Taipei and Washington on the study committee proposal, see *FRUS, 1964-1968* 30:427-31, 437-45, 457-69.

¹¹¹ Popper to Rusk, November 29, 1966, *FRUS, 1964-1968* 30:469-70.

itself abandoning its militant foreign policy line.

Still, before the outbreak of the Cultural Revolution the momentum of the China policy discourse within the administration seemed to favour a measured pursuit of substantive policy change. However, the momentum toward a more flexible policy and posture would be quickly lost with the onset of the Cultural Revolution, and the bewildering spectacle of, as Jenkins put it, “the oldest civilization on earth methodically digging up its roots to the tune of raucous, uncivilized ballyhoo and bedlam.”¹¹²

¹¹² Quote from Jenkins to Rostow, September 16, 1966, *FRUS, 1964-1968* 30:389.

10

THE “WAITING GAME”: THE JOHNSON ADMINISTRATION AND MAO’S CULTURAL REVOLUTION

In the second half of 1966 the world watched, astonished, as the world’s oldest continuous civilisation was torn asunder by the violent pandemonium of Mao’s Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. Although taken aback by events unfolding behind the “Bamboo Curtain” observers in the Johnson administration believed that what they were witnessing was likely the culmination of a long-standing dispute between, on one side, Mao and the most zealous devotees of his ubiquitous “Thought,” and, on the other, relatively pragmatic forces within both party and state. At the crux of this momentous struggle was the question not simply of who would govern the People’s Republic of China but, in the most fundamental sense, what kind of place it should be.

Cutting through the high state of confusion within China U.S. analysts posited that although Mao would likely prevail in defeating high-level rivals (both perceived and real), he would prove unable to arrest the long-term “revisionist” drift in Chinese state and society. Indeed, by bringing deep-seated divisions within the Chinese polity to a head the Cultural Revolution would, it was reckoned, hasten the advent of a post-Maoist leadership that would approach the world, and perhaps also relations with the United States, in a less doctrinaire fashion than the current regime. In this analysis, the primacy afforded to ideological politics during the Maoist epoch—and particularly during the Cultural Revolution—was viewed as an aberration, a top-down affront to “traditional Chinese pragmatism.” Thus, the Cultural Revolution appeared as both the apotheosis of and, at once, an early death knell for the fundamentalist form of Mao’s eponymous dogma.

Because the Johnson administration hoped to appeal to the latent pragmatism of China's future leaders, and to impart upon them a vision of improved Sino-American relations, a posture roughly consistent with the "containment without isolation" concept—which the administration had inched towards over the first half of 1966—was maintained throughout the Cultural Revolution. However, the administration also decided that more substantive shifts in U.S. policy and posture towards China would have to await a stabilisation of conditions within China, in part because of uncertainty over how the situation in China would play out in the near term, in part because long-range trends already appeared to favour the eventual emergence of a more pragmatic Chinese regime. In early 1968 Johnson, following tentative reports of a pragmatic turn in the direction of China's foreign policy, thought it time to consider such shifts, his interest on this score driven, at least in an immediate sense, by his determination at this juncture to make some progress towards a "durable peace" in the region. However, the president was advised that the time was not yet ripe for further policy changes. As such, despite a broad consensus on the wisdom of a strategy of "containment without isolation" toward China, the administration decided that substantive steps to properly implement this strategy would have to await a return to relative normality in China.

Predictive Interpretations of the Cultural Revolution

Piercing the fog that had fallen over Chinese political life in the summer of 1966 American analysts were quick to appreciate the import, if not the exact dynamics, of the unfolding situation. Admittedly, the deification of Mao, manifest in the impressive aesthetic of millions of frenzied Chinese crowding into Tiananmen Square to declare their fealty to the Great Helmsman's "Thought," was not itself new. Yet American analysts recognised early in the piece that the Cultural Revolution was not simply more of the same. Rather, as the White House's resident "China-watcher" Alfred Jenkins wrote in August, the Cultural Revolution likely represented nothing less than "the most fundamental attempt to change the very

character of the Middle Kingdom in over two millennia.”¹

Over the second half of 1966 the administration’s “China-watchers” also inched toward a basic understanding of the broad dynamics operative in the Cultural Revolution. In the estimate of these analysts the Cultural Revolution derived from, and was in turn shaped by, three distinct yet closely related processes: a power struggle, a policy dispute, and an ideologically driven attempt by Mao to revivify the Chinese revolution and inoculate it against Soviet-style “revisionism.”² Although estimates produced within the administration varied widely in the causal significance afforded to each of these processes, most U.S. analyses tended to view the Cultural Revolution as driven by an interaction of all three. As such, although this interpretative framework remained vaguely defined, it nonetheless served to inform Washington’s estimates of the likely course of events within China and, of course, their import for Sino-American relations.

The power struggle discerned by analysts within the administration was essentially an elite-level contest for control of the party-state apparatus. On one side of this struggle stood Mao and his newly anointed heir apparent, Lin Biao, the opportunistic and “shadowy” author of the September 1965 tract on “People’s War.”³ While recognising that the diverse and protean nature of Mao’s “opposition” precluded blanket characterisations, analysts in the Johnson administration believed there was a strong undercurrent of opposition to the Mao-Lin faction (if not necessarily Mao personally) among the officials and apparatchiks entrenched within the established party-state system. Although this opposition lacked any clear organisational form, the role of anti-Maoist “leader” in U.S. analyses fell, almost by default, to China’s chief of state, Liu Shaoqi, the *eminence grise* of Zhongnanhai and, prior to his vilification at the

¹ Jenkins to Rostow, August 8, 1966, NSF:CO, box 240, “China Memos, Vol. VII,” LBJL. Also see Congentel, Hong Kong, June 25, 1966, *FRUS, 1964-1968* 30:326-27.

² Administrative History, State Department, vol. I, chapter 7, section C. “Communist China,” 15, LBJL; Lumbers, ““Chinese Muddle,”” 267; Foot, *Practice of Power*, 215.

³ Congentel-1392, Hong Kong (forwarded by Rostow to Johnson), August 30, 1966, NSF:CO, box 240, “China Memos, Vol. VII,” LBJL; memo, Board of National Estimates, September 23, 1966, *FRUS, 1964-1968* 30:400.

hands of the Red Guards, Mao's second-in-command.⁴ This contest had likely been given greater urgency by the unresolved issue of succession, but Mao himself was viewed as having wittingly precipitated the struggle in an attempt to recapture the absolute power that it now appeared he had lost following the failure of the Great Leap Forward.⁵

The overwhelming majority of analysts in the Johnson administration did not, however, believe this was a struggle simply for the sake of power in and of itself. Rather, the principal actors in this drama seemed driven by genuinely felt differences over policy, both domestic and foreign. While allowing for the complexity of these policy differences, to U.S. observers the common underlying issue was the primacy afforded to Mao's "Thought" in informing the policy process. On the home front, U.S. analysts suggested that Mao had become dismayed by the "revisionist tendencies" characteristic of Liu's post-Great Leap social and economic policies, and particularly disturbed by the re-emergence of an incentives economy in the countryside. Meanwhile, Chinese frustrations over a string of foreign policy setbacks, and heightened fears of a U.S. attack on China extending from the Americanisation of the war in Vietnam, had apparently brought long-simmering divisions over the direction of China's foreign and national defence policies to the boil.⁶

The "Red versus Expert" subtext in these policy debates derived, U.S. analysts believed, from a more profound question over the future of a Chinese revolution that, viewed through the

⁴ Rostow to Johnson, January 25, 1967, *FRUS, 1964-1968* 30:503-7; CIA, "Chinese Chess," December 23, 1966, NSF:CO, box 240, "China Cables, Vol. VIII," LBJL; INR, "Possible Outcomes of Dissidence in Mainland China," January 12, 1967, HP:KJA, Subject File, box 443, "China (Taiwan)," LCMD; INR, "The Opposition in Communist China," July 6, 1967, RG59, CF:1967-69, box 1960, POL CHICOM, NA.

⁵ Jenkins to Rostow, June 28, 1964, NSF:CO, box 242, "China Cables, Vol. XII," LBJL; CIA, "The Leadership Upheaval in Communist China," June 17, 1966, *ibid.*, box 239, "China Memos, Vol. VI"; CIA, "Peking, the Army, and the Provincial Authorities," April 25, 1967, *ibid.*, box 244, "China Vol. I, Codeword." Prior to the Cultural Revolution U.S. analysts had tended to be dismissive of the idea of a post-Great Leap decline in Mao's power. See chapter four, 103-105. For a critique of the idea of the Cultural Revolution as a power struggle, see Lowell Dittmer, "The Chinese Cultural Revolution Revisited: The Role of the Nemesis," *Journal of Contemporary China* 5 (November 1996): 255-68.

⁶ Airgram-299, Hong Kong, November 18, 1966 (forwarded to Rusk by William Bundy, November 29, 1966), RG59, ACA, lot 71D423, box 1, "Guidelines, Directives, Basic Studies, September 1966," NA; CIA, "Political Issues in the Cultural Revolution," December 19, 1966, *ibid.*, box 240, "China Memos, Vol. VIII"; Jenkins to Rostow, April 23, 1968, *ibid.*, box 242, "China Memos, Vol. XII." For accounts that reject the relevance of these policy differences, see Teiwes and Sun, *Tragedy of Lin Biao*, 165, 165n7; and (cited therein), Lucien W. Pye, *The Dynamics of Chinese Politics* (Cambridge, MA: Oelgeschlager, Gunn & Hain, 1981).

Maoist prism, had atrophied through institutionalisation and bureaucratisation. In this connection, Mao's immediate objectives of securing absolute political and policy control were, on a theoretical level, ancillary to his larger purpose of tearing down a party-state structure wherein an entrenched bureaucracy had developed organisational interests incompatible with the concept of "continuous revolution." Mao held that in addition to flushing out the "bourgeois ghosts and monsters" lurking within the party-state apparatus, the very process of "struggle" involved this undertaking would inculcate a new generation of Chinese with a resilient revolutionary élan. This would, in turn, head-off the Soviet-style "revisionist backsliding" that Mao viewed as potentially fatal to his beloved revolution. Here then stood Mao as a latter-day Savonarola, violently purging his land of the spiritual corruption wrought by revisionist apostasy. China, in Mao's romantic chimera, would emerge from the catharsis of the Cultural Revolution purified, born again as a "Yenan for the world," wherein the coda of Maoism, rather than the rigid organisational hierarchies characteristic of "real existing socialism," would provide the glue for a utopian Communist society.⁷

Mao was, on the one hand, expected by observers in Washington to prevail in the power struggle transpiring at the highest echelons of power in China. Even allowing for a decline in his control of the party-state since the Great Leap, Mao remained the cynosure of New China, his symbolic value such that it was unlikely any individual or grouping would dare directly challenge his predominance. Admittedly, some high-profile individuals remained officially ensconced in positions of authority even as they found themselves targets of the Red Guard's obloquy. Still, this was viewed as much as an expression of the utility of these individuals as symbols of political heterodoxy against whom the masses could "struggle" as an indication of Mao's inability to remove them from office.⁸

⁷ Airgram-274, Hong Kong, November 4, 1966, NSF:CO, box 240, "China Memos, Vol. VII," LBJL; circular airgram-9306 to all posts, June 5, 1967, RG59, CF:1967-69, box 1960, POL CHICOM, NA.

⁸ Jenkins to Rostow, NSF:CO, box 241, "China Memos, Vol. IX," LBJL; INR, "A Maoist Bestiary," July 20, 1967, RG59, CF:1967-69, box 1960, POL CHICOM, NA.

However, precisely because this was not simply a raw power struggle, there was a rudimentary consensus among American analysts that Mao would fail in his attempts to revivify China's revolutionary spirit and arrest the advent of "pragmatism" (or, in the Maoist vernacular, "revisionism") in Chinese state and society. It was reasonably supposed in Washington that opposition within the party-state to Maoist attempts to establish "revolutionary" policies as the new orthodoxy went deeper than high-level individuals such as Liu Shaoqi, and would only develop further still as the Mao-Lin faction—which, despite Mao's undeniable prestige, was seen as representing the minority position in the party—broadened the scope and policy program of the Cultural Revolution. And although the lack of an organised opposition circumscribed the ability of individuals to directly confront the Maoists, these same individuals could still frustrate the objectives of the Cultural Revolution, while seeking some measure of cover from Red Guard attack by falling back to individual areas of strength within "long-established party mechanisms in the regions and provinces, sections of the central party mechanism itself, and conceivably government ministries and bureaus, and elements of the armed forces as well."⁹

More importantly, in attempting to remake Chinese society Mao was, as Jenkins wrote, "attempting the ultimately impossible."¹⁰ American analyses rarely assigned the Chinese masses an important role in the genesis of the Cultural Revolution, yet it was broadly felt that the "traditionally pragmatic" Chinese would not forever accept the liturgy of Mao's Cult of Personality in lieu of tangible improvements in their material condition.¹¹ Thus, in both the Chinese body politic and in society generally the "long range trends," as the CIA reported, "are moving inexorably against Mao's brand of socialism, and his desperate effort to reverse

⁹ INR, "Political Developments in Communist China—October 1966," November 3, 1966, NSF:CO, box 240, "China Memos, Vol. VII," LBJL (quote); airgram-432, Hong Kong, January 27, 1967, *ibid.*, "China Cables, Vol. VIII"; Fred Greene to Read, October 3, 1967, *ibid.*, box 242, "China Memos, Vol. XI"; and memoranda in *FRUS, 1964-1968* 30:521-24, 548-49, 598-99.

¹⁰ Jenkins to Rostow, April 10, 1967, NSF:CO, box 241, "China Memos, Vol. IX," LBJL.

¹¹ INR, "Recent Developments and New Information on the Cultural Revolution in Communist China," January 12, 1967, HP:KJA, Subject File, box 443, "China (Taiwan)," LCMD; Jenkins to Rostow, September 30, 1966, NSF:CO, box 240, "China Memos, Vol. VII," LBJL; Jenkins to Rostow, February 15, 1967, *FRUS, 1964-1968* 30:518. On the tendency to overlook the deeper societal forces that helped facilitate the extremism of the Cultural Revolution, see Pye, "Reassessing the Cultural Revolution," *China Quarterly*, no. 108 (1986): 598.

the tide may actually hurry his ultimate defeat.” Mao, drawing on his status as an indispensable symbol of the People’s Republic, would likely survive to fight another day: Maoism, at least in its vulgar Cultural Revolution manifestation, would not.¹²

U.S. officials believed, however, that even allowing that a post-Maoist leadership would likely prove more pragmatic in its approach to the world than the current regime, this did not, perforce, mean a government friendlier towards the United States. Still, Mao’s successors would, in all likelihood, be less committed to Maoist concepts of international revolutionary development, and, to the extent that China’s ideological investment in “wars of national liberation” was reduced, expanded opportunities would arise for improved Sino-American relations.¹³

However, if there was a rough consensus that Mao had set himself on a losing track, it remained unclear, as Rostow reported to the president, “how long it will take for this strong, pragmatic opposition to assert itself and what will happen in the meantime.”¹⁴ The principal area of U.S. concern in this regard was, not surprisingly, China’s foreign policy and how it might be affected by the turmoil. Prior to the winter of 1966 most U.S. analysts suggested that even though foreign policy issues were apparently involved in the Cultural Revolution, the upheaval had “simply confirmed, but not altered, the basic Chinese Communist hard line in foreign policy.”¹⁵ Some analysts even speculated that the focus on the “enemy within” had reduced the chances of Chinese adventures abroad or intervention in Vietnam.¹⁶

Yet by the end of 1966 it became apparent that despite Chen Yi’s best efforts to quarantine

¹² Board of National Estimates, *supra* note 3, 401-2; Jenkins to Rostow, September 14, 1967, NSF:CO, box 242, “China Memos, Vol. XI,” LBJL; paper, Jenkins, February 22, 1968, *FRUS, 1964-1968* 30:654; NIE 13-9-68, May 23, 1968, *ibid.*, 678-79. On the American confidence in the latent strength of pragmatism in China, see Madsen, *American Dream*, esp. 41-43.

¹³ Study attached to Rusk to Johnson, February 22, 1968, *FRUS, 1964-1968* 30:647-49; NIE 13-7-67, May 25, 1967, *ibid.*, 573-74; Embtel-1786, Hong Kong, September 21, 1967, RG59, CF:1967-69, box 1960, POL CHICOM, NA.

¹⁴ Rostow to Johnson, July 28, 1966, *FRUS, 1964-1968* 30:361.

¹⁵ Quote from circular airgram-2109 to all posts, September 15, 1966, RG59, CF:1964-66, box 2006, POL 1 CHICOM, NA.

¹⁶ Rostow to Johnson, July 25, 1966, *FRUS, 1964-1968* 30:360; Board of National Estimates, *supra* note 3, 401.

the Foreign Ministry from Red Guard excesses, Chinese diplomacy was being recast within the framework of Maoist “struggle.” In this charged environment, individual diplomats, wary of attracting the revisionist mark, went out of their way to loudly demonstrate their pious loyalty to Mao and his “Thought.”¹⁷ Meanwhile, in sanctioning the violent diplomatic activism of the Red Guards—culminating in the August 1967 torching of the British legation in Beijing—China’s leadership seemed to suggest a remarkable nonchalance towards their international position.¹⁸ “Pragmatic and logical policy judgements,” a July 1967 State cable suggested, “based on long-range Chinese interests and historical realities and relationships with other countries have increasingly been replaced by frenzied posturing and sloganeering in the name and honour of Mao.” In this context, the administration approached China related matters with a healthy understanding of their limited ability to predict the likely near-term course of a foreign policy that was increasingly “irrational, unpredictable, and potentially dangerous.”¹⁹

And yet the administration proceeded under the assumption that, on balance, the radicalisation of China’s diplomacy would not alter Beijing’s underlying caution on matters of war or peace. Beijing’s ambitions of regional hegemony would remain, but so too would the respect for, and indeed fear of, U.S. military power that had always tempered these ambitions.²⁰ Certainly, although calling for “armed struggle” in all the non-Communist nations of Southeast Asia (excluding Sihanouk’s Cambodia) and inciting labour unrest in Hong Kong, on “fundamental issues such as Vietnam, confrontation with the U.S., or [the] forcible occupation of Hong Kong,” China’s foreign policy remained guided by a cautious rationality.²¹ By late 1967, by which time the radicals who had earlier seized control of the

¹⁷ Barbara Barnouin and Yu Changgen, *Chinese Foreign Policy during the Cultural Revolution* (London: Kegan Paul International, 1998), 12-13.

¹⁸ Roderick MacFarquhar and Michael Schoenhals, *Mao’s Last Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006), 222-23; Edward E. Rice, *Mao’s Way* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), 349-81.

¹⁹ Circular airgram-413 to all posts, July 17, 1967, RG59, CF:1967-69, box 1960, POL CHICOM, NA.

²⁰ Rostow to Johnson, May 5, 1967, *FRUS, 1964-1968* 30:554.

²¹ Jenkins to Rostow, July 7, 1967, NSF:CO, box 241, “China Memos, Vol. X,” LBJL (for quote); INR, “China

Foreign Ministry appeared to be losing ground, U.S. analysts were able to report that at least on these key issues Chinese foreign policy had maintained a basic strategic continuity throughout the Cultural Revolution.²²

U.S. Policy and Posture toward China during the Cultural Revolution

However, some U.S. analysts cautioned that China's charged internal atmosphere might make its leaders even more sensitive than normal to the perceived American threat. The U.S. Consul General in Hong Kong, Edward Rice, in particular, warned that the intensified bombing of North Vietnam both compounded the risks of a direct Sino-American confrontation and, at the same time, facilitated Maoist efforts to discredit more pragmatic elements within China.²³ Long an opponent of the bombing, Rice may have been, as Rostow reported to the president, more anxious about the developing situation than his colleagues in Washington.²⁴ Yet analysts at both the White House and the Bureau of East Asian Affairs agreed that the United States needed to proceed, at this juncture, with particular prudence, taking "strict measures just now against the possibility of our doing anything which might be interpreted [by Beijing] as military provocation."²⁵

Although the bombing of North Vietnam continued apace in 1967, the administration simultaneously expanded its attempts to communicate to China's leaders Washington's desire to avoid a Sino-American conflict. Most notably, in June 1967 Johnson asked the visiting Romanian premier, Ion Gheorghe Maurer, who was en route to Beijing, to pass on his personal assurance to the Chinese that the United States did not want war with China, and had

Encourages Violence in Asia," July 14, 1967, *ibid.*; outline of Cultural Revolution briefing, September 1967, *ibid.*, box 242, "China Memos, Vol. XI."

²² INR, "Foreign Ministry Power Struggle Ends in Defeat for Extremists," November 16, 1967, RG59, CF:1967-69, box 1961, POL CHICOM, NA.

²³ Congentel-17, Hong Kong, July 1, 1966, NSF, Name File, box 8, "Thomson Memos," LBJL; Congentel-7581, Hong Kong (Rice to Bundy), May 1, 1967, NSF:CO, box 241, "China Cables, Vol. IX," LBJL.

²⁴ Rostow to Johnson, July 25, 1966, NSF:CO, box 239, "China Memos, Vol. VI," LBJL; Thomson to Jenkins, July 25, 1966, NSF, Name File, box 8, "Thomson Memos," LBJL.

²⁵ Jenkins to Rostow, September 16, 1966, *FRUS, 1964-1968* 30:389; Jacobson to Bundy, November 8, 1966, RG59, ACA, lot 71D423, box 1, "Guidelines, Directives, Basic Studies, September 1966," NA; Richard H. Donald to Bundy, January 10, 1967, *ibid.*, ROCF, lot 70D377, "POL 27 Political Affairs and Relations, Statements and Assessments (Mainland China)."

no designs on Chinese territory or any interest in effecting a regime change on the mainland. On the contrary, Johnson said, the United States would much rather trade with China and pursue a conciliatory relationship. Maurer passed the message on to the Chinese, although his hosts reportedly dismissed Johnson's conciliatory overture as yet another "peace fraud."²⁶ Putting aside China's negative response, Johnson's message is suggestive of his ongoing concern about China's disposition towards the fighting in Vietnam, and his related willingness to entertain the possibility of a less confrontational relationship.

Similarly, throughout the Cultural Revolution senior officials within the administration were in accord on the need to maintain existing lines of communication to the Chinese leadership. Concerned that the Chinese might indefinitely suspend the Warsaw talks, the administration was prepared to meet any moves in this direction with proposals for a shift in the location of the talks or an elevation of the dialogue to a higher-level. In part these plans were crafted to ensure that, should the Chinese suspend the talks, the international community understood the onus for the breakdown in bilateral communications rested with Beijing. However, also at play here was the perceived need to maintain bilateral contact in order to manage potential crisis situations. And there remained at least a slim possibility, as the Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs suggested, "that the talks, on their own merits, could further our communications with the Chinese in terms of peace in Southeast Asia and increased understanding of the basic premises of our China policy."²⁷

The Chinese never moved to suspend the talks, preferring instead to simply reduce the frequency of the meetings. Although succeeding in keeping the talks going—the administration's "minimum objective"²⁸—the substance and tone of the talks weighed heavily against any near-term improvement in relations. The Chinese rejected or ignored what modest

²⁶ Editorial note, *FRUS, 1964-1968* 30:582-83; Walt W. Rostow, *The Diffusion of Power: An Essay in Recent History* (New York: Macmillan, 1972), 434.

²⁷ William Bundy to Rusk, December 30, 1966, *FRUS, 1964-1968* 30:493-84; Deptel to Warsaw, January 3, 1967, *ibid.*, 497-98; Deptel to Warsaw, January 11, 1967, *ibid.*, 500-501; William Bundy to Rusk, December 21, 1966, NSF, Name File, box 5, "Jenkins Memos [Alfred]," LBJL.

²⁸ Embtel, Warsaw, May 29, 1967, *FRUS, 1964-1968* 30:574.

conciliatory overtures Washington made in the meetings, in the process subjecting the U.S. representative, Ambassador John Gronouski, to tedious lectures on Mao's sagacity. Although this was par for the course in the Warsaw talks, during 1967 Beijing's posture at Warsaw, and towards the United States generally, actually hardened. From the long-established position that Washington needed to abandon its commitments to Taiwan's defence before improvements in Sino-American relations could even be considered, the Chinese now held that U.S. opposition to world revolution precluded improved relations; in other words, the Chinese were ruling out any possibility of a Sino-American détente in circumstances short of a complete abrogation of U.S. commitments in the Cold War.²⁹

Beyond the pronounced Chinese hostility in the bilateral meetings the confusion of the mainland situation circumscribed the possibilities for a more substantive Sino-American dialogue. With the Chinese foreign minister, Chen Yi contending with unremitting Red Guard harassment, the State Department, Rusk would later recall, "didn't even know to whom we should address our letters."³⁰ Noting the broader state of flux in China's lines of command, in mid-1967 Rice even suggested that terms such as "Peking" or "the regime" were misleading in that they implied the continued existence of a centrally administered national entity.³¹ Few in the administration would have gone as far as Rice did here—indeed, at least one member of the consulate staff could recall his own ongoing disagreement with Rice on this score³²—but there was a general sense of uncertainty over the apparently ever-shifting configurations of power within China. Thus, as Jenkins explained in 1967 to one concerned citizen, the administration's "rather tentative and admittedly peripheral efforts at 'bridge-building' were now in abeyance, not only because of earlier rebuffs but also because of the uncertainty as to what one would be building bridges toward under the confused circumstances of the Cultural

²⁹ Embtel, Warsaw, January 25, 1967, *ibid.*, 509-12; Congentel-3760, Hong Kong, October 18, 1967, NSF, Name File, box 7, "Roche Memos," LBJL.

³⁰ Rusk, *As I Saw It*, 286.

³¹ Embtel-554, Hong Kong, July 26, 1967, RG59, CF:1967-69, box 1960, POL CHICOM, NA.

³² Nicholas Platt, OHI, July 25, 1994, 7-8, ADST.

Revolution.”³³

Moreover, U.S. officials proceeded under the (well-founded) assumption that the ability of the United States to influence China’s internal situation, at least in the near-term, was marginal. Admittedly, some officials in the administration suspected that the U.S. stand in Vietnam had helped bring certain policy disputes involved in the Cultural Revolution to a head, and others even allowed that the administration’s earlier conciliatory overtures to Beijing may have served as a “minor catalyst” herein.³⁴ All the same, the causes of the Cultural Revolution were viewed as overwhelmingly internal, and, as such, U.S. policymakers recognised that the course of the upheaval would be shaped primarily by forces that operated basically independent of anything the administration did or did not do.³⁵

Notwithstanding a few isolated calls from U.S. officials for an alignment with anti-Maoist forces on the mainland (such as a 1967 Army Staff Study that suggested the administration might attempt to establish clandestine contacts with anti-Maoist elements in regional China, perhaps by way of Taipei’s good offices),³⁶ the administration leadership was loath to meddle in a highly fluid situation, particularly given that long-range trends in China already seemed to favour the emergence of a more moderate leadership. Jenkins captured the administration’s caution on this score when he argued that expanded attempts at bilateral bridge-building would, in the present environment, simply rouse Chinese suspicions of U.S. objectives, thereby inadvertently undermining the standing of relatively moderate elements within China. Thus, the administration should simply maintain a posture “very considerable reserve and even detachment” within the established, and already well-recognised, rhetorical framework

³³ Memcon, Jenkins and Herbert Singer (Chairman, World Health Foundation of the USA), May 19, 1967, NSF:CO, box 241, “China Memos, Vol. IX,” LBJL.

³⁴ Administrative History, *supra* note 2, 19-23; airgram-299, Hong Kong, *supra* note 6; Jacobson to Bundy, *supra* note 25.

³⁵ Jenkins to Rostow, *supra* note 1.

³⁶ Army Staff Study, “The Best of All Chinas” (sent to William Bundy by Harold K. Johnson, U.S. Army, Chief of Staff), March 17, 1967, RG59, ACA, lot 71D423, box 1, “Guidelines, Directives, Basic Studies, 1967,” NA. Officials at State quickly dismissed the idea. Paul H. Kreisberg, memo for the files, April 17, 1964, *ibid*.

of eventual reconciliation.³⁷

The China Trade Package

However, some advocates of policy change within the administration maintained that the United States needed to continue laying the groundwork for future changes in U.S. China policy, in anticipation of the expected pragmatic turn in China's leadership. To this end, the Office of Asian Communist Affairs argued that even allowing that the "range of U.S. initiatives which can and should be undertaken" toward China was limited by the upheaval of the Cultural Revolution, the administration should nonetheless push ahead with earlier proposals for unilaterally lowering barriers on the U.S. side to increased official and unofficial bilateral contacts, while seeking to improve the current Sino-American dialogue.³⁸

Directly answering Jenkins's call for a judicious pause in efforts to change U.S. policy and posture toward China, both Rice and Robert Barnett—articulating a widely held view in the Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs—maintained that the administration should "now be working toward creating a situation, so that when these new leaders begin considering alternative policies toward the U.S., they will not see hostility as the only possibility."³⁹

The trade embargo, in particular, occupied the attentions of those officials hoping to maintain at least a modicum of forward momentum on China policy. The issue had, in fact, been the subject of considerable discussion in interested corners of the bureaucracy since April 1966 when, at the urging of mid-level officials in the Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs seeking to build on the congressional hearings on China, a broad interagency review of the issue was initiated.⁴⁰

³⁷ Jenkins to Rostow, August 20, 1967, NSF:CO, box 241, "China Memos, Vol. X," LBJL; Jenkins to Rostow, November 8, 1967, *FRUS, 1964-1968* 30:607-8.

³⁸ Jacobson to William Bundy, January 4, 1967, RG59, ACA, lot 71D423, box 1, "Guidelines, Directives, Basic Studies, 1967," NA.

³⁹ China Panel meeting, October 24, 1967, RG59, EAF, lot 73D8, box 20, "China Advisory Panel Meeting, October 23-24, 1967," NA.

⁴⁰ This section is based on various meeting minutes, intelligence studies, and internal correspondence, all filed in

Advocates of change pointed to the manifold advantages of a targeted relaxation of the embargo, suggesting this would help ease tensions with U.S. allies, particularly on the delicate matter of extraterritorial controls on the trade of U.S. subsidiaries abroad; demonstrate U.S. flexibility on China to interested audiences at home and abroad; and provide substance and meaning to the administration's rhetoric of "containment without isolation," thereby making "a minor move towards bringing 'policy' in conformity with 'posture.'"⁴¹ At the same time, such steps would, as one official put it, "contribute to the long-term strategy of seeking peace and reconciliation with Communist China and encourage the more pragmatic elements in Peking to question the wisdom of Peking's policy of hostility to the United States."⁴²

On October 4, 1966, a China trade package was sent to Rusk, co-signed by William Bundy and Assistant Secretary of State for Economic Affairs Anthony Solomon. The recommended changes were, admittedly, rather modest: Initially, the administration would simply relax its extraterritorial controls on the trade of U.S. subsidiaries abroad with China. In turn, the embargo would be adjusted to allow for a limited non-strategic trade between the United States and China, with further changes to be kept under active consideration.⁴³

At Undersecretary Nicholas deB. Katzenbach's request the October package was "held in abeyance," likely because of uncertainty about the course of events within China, along with concerns adjustments in the embargo might become politicised in the lead-up to the 1966 mid-terms. However, the same package was again put to Rusk in late March 1967, with Bundy and Solomon expanding upon their previous arguments in favour of approval by reference to the humanitarian threat of several epidemics then cutting a swathe through China,

RG59, ACA, lot 72D175, boxes 3-4, NA.

⁴¹ Barnett to Jacobson, February 8, 1967, RG59, ACA, lot 72D175, box 4, "Trade with Communist China I, 1966-1968," NA.

⁴² Jacobson to Bundy, December 29, 1966, *ibid.*

⁴³ Solomon and Bundy to Rusk, October 4, 1966, *ibid.*

and the possibility of imminent food shortages.⁴⁴

Subsequently, the State Department indicated that it would, for the duration of the epidemics, rescind controls on relevant U.S.-produced pharmaceuticals—an exception that, on William Bundy's recommendation, remained in place even after the epidemics had run their course.⁴⁵ (The Chinese ignored the move, and at no point during these epidemics did they attempt to access drugs directly from the United States.)⁴⁶ However, Rusk declined to make a decision on the China trade package, and as of July he had neither approved nor rejected the recommendations contained therein. But if Rusk had reservations about pursuing substantive China policy changes at this juncture it is apparent that he was not alone. Indeed, in July 1967, as "Red Guard diplomacy" reached its apogee, Bundy and Solomon actually took the initiative in recalling the March package from Rusk's office, citing the need for a reconsideration of their earlier recommendations "in view of recent events in Communist China."⁴⁷

Working within the Existing Rhetorical Framework

The administration's caution on China matters in 1967, so apparent in the lack of momentum on substantive policy initiatives, was also reflected in its detached public response to developments within China. As a rule, U.S. policymakers refrained from any detailed public discussion about the mechanics of the Cultural Revolution or its implications for the United States, lest doing so rouse Chinese suspicions about U.S. interference in China's domestic affairs, and thereby strengthen the hand of the most militantly anti-American Chinese leaders.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ Solomon and Bundy to Rusk, March 29, 1967, *FRUS, 1964-1968* 30:541-43.

⁴⁵ Bundy to Katzenbach, September 18, 1967, *ibid.*, 597-98.

⁴⁶ See Warren Carey and Myles Maxfield, "Intelligence Implications of Disease," *Studies in Intelligence* 16 (Spring 1972): 71-79.

⁴⁷ Background here is from draft memo, Solomon and Bundy to Rusk (unsent), August 4, 1967, RG59, ACA, lot 72D175, box 4, "Trade with Communist China I, 1966-1968," NA.

⁴⁸ Circular airgram-5240 to all posts, January 17, 1967, referred to in *Administrative History*, *supra* note 2, 19n8.

However, because the administration wanted to ensure that China's pragmatic majority recognised the possibility of a less hostile Sino-American relationship, the administration continued to push, in very measured tones, the conciliatory themes established in 1966. On various occasions through 1967 and into 1968 Johnson publicly reiterated his interest in "building bridges" to the PRC, in hope of a day when China's leaders were willing to "live together in peace and harmony" with the United States.⁴⁹ And amid hints of a moderation in the tone of China's foreign policy in late 1967 and early 1968 several officials, particularly William Bundy and Katzenbach, thought it might be time for "another 'reconciliation' speech." Thus, in a May 1968 address to the National Press Club Katzenbach reemphasised the conciliatory themes that had been established two years earlier, while alluding to the ongoing consideration being given to possible changes in the trade embargo.⁵⁰

Of course, even putting aside the fact that these statements were invariably coupled with references to China's aggression, Washington was hardly all sweetness and light toward Beijing across this period. Indeed, in September 1967 McNamara announced that a decision had been made to proceed with the deployment of an anti-ballistic missile system that he pointedly described as "Chinese-oriented."⁵¹ More controversially, in October 1967 Rusk sketched a disquieting picture of China twenty-years down the road, with a population of one billion people, a functional nuclear capability, and a policy no one could predict. Although factually accurate, the tone of Rusk's remarks prompted one prominent columnist to accuse Rusk (perhaps unfairly) of invoking the "Yellow Peril."⁵²

Despite the occasionally confrontational tenor of official American statements on China

⁴⁹ Johnson, October 18, 1966, *PPP:LBJ, 1966, Book II*, 1222; Johnson, September 5, 1966, *ibid.*, 974; Johnson, January 10, 1967, *PPP:LBJ, 1967, Book I*, 13; Johnson, June 19, 1967, *ibid.*, 632; Johnson, December 19, 1967, *PPP:LBJ, 1967, Book II*, 1171-72; Johnson, January 17, 1968, *PPP:LBJ, 1968, Book I*, 14.

⁵⁰ Richard H. Donald to Bundy, December 6, 1967, RG59, ACA, lot 75D342, box 2, "PHKreiserberg: Chron File, 1967," NA ; Katzenbach, May 21, 1968, *DSB 58:737-40*.

⁵¹ McNamara, September 18, 1967, *DSB 57:449-50*; Schulzinger, "Johnson Administration," 259. On the use of the Chinese nuclear threat to justify deploying a limited ABM system, see Tucker, "Threats, Opportunities," 108-9.

⁵² Rusk, October 12, 1967, *DSB 57:563*; Rusk, *As I Saw It*, 289-90.

during the Cultural Revolution, on the whole the administration continued to work within the rhetorical parameters established across the first half of 1966. At the same time the senior leadership of the administration was disinclined to push forward with any further changes in policy and posture toward China while the situation in China remained so volatile. Yet in early 1968, with hints of a pragmatic turn within China and invigorated interest at the upper reaches of the administration in making some progress towards a “durable peace” in Asia, the question of U.S. China policy, and indeed the possibilities for improved Sino-American relations, briefly became the subject of high-level consideration within the administration.

China’s Place in Johnson’s Search for a “Durable Peace,” February 1968

The launch of the Tet Offensive in the breaking hours of January 31, 1968 marked the beginning of the most tumultuous two months of Johnson’s presidency. As cities and regional centres across South Vietnam came under Vietcong assault, doves within the administration echoed the argument that departing Secretary of Defense, Robert McNamara, had tried to impress upon Johnson in November 1967: America’s strategy in Vietnam had failed, and it was time to de-escalate and seek a diplomatic exit from the quagmire.⁵³ From the other side of the ornithological divide, on February 27 General Westmoreland requested 205,000 additional troops in order to deliver a knockout blow to the apparently decimated Vietcong. As if to underline for Johnson the crossroad at which he had arrived, that same evening broadcaster Walter Cronkite, in perhaps the clearest articulation of the centrist critique of the war to date, told his viewing public that despite America’s honourable intentions in Vietnam the war had become “mired in stalemate.”⁵⁴ By mid-March public dissatisfaction with Johnson’s prosecution of the war had translated into resolute challenges to his place on the Democratic ticket from peacenik Eugene McCarthy and, more briefly, though more personally galling,

⁵³ Warner, “Escalation to Negotiation,” 204-9; Clifford, *Counsel to the President*, 456-59.

⁵⁴ On Cronkite’s broadcast, also see Mark Kurlansky, *1968: The Year that Rocked the World* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2004), 57-63. On public reactions to the Tet Offensive, see Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, rev. ed. (London: Pimlico, 1994), 558-62.

Robert Kennedy.⁵⁵ Denied the chance to properly implement his beloved Great Society program, and cheated out of his presidential legacy by “that bitch of a war on the other side of the world,” on March 31 a physically wearied and emotionally spent Johnson declared that he would not seek another term as president.⁵⁶

Remarkably, as his presidency imploded, Johnson still found occasion to invite recommendations from his adviser’s for possible changes in China policy. Three weeks after a team of Vietcong commandos breached the walls of the U.S. Embassy compound in Saigon, and five weeks before announcing that he would not seek re-election, Johnson directed the State Department to prepare an overview study on the situation in China, the Sino-Soviet relationship, China’s foreign policies, and “on the resulting possibilities for change in our own policies.”⁵⁷

In part, Johnson’s newfound interest in China policy extended from factors independent of the predicament he found himself in during February and March. Johnson had maintained a healthy interest in Sino-American relations since 1966, not least because of the perceived (ongoing) danger of Chinese intervention in Vietnam. This interest may have been further stimulated by Johnson’s February 2 meeting with a group of high-profile academic sinologists participating in governmental-scholarly discussions known as the China Advisory Panel, with Johnson’s guests urging the president to build upon his earlier expressions of policy flexibility, and consider more substantial policy initiatives in the “containment without isolation” vein.⁵⁸ Moreover, Johnson might have been well-disposed to these arguments at this particular juncture, given indications of a mellowing in the tone (if not the substance) of

⁵⁵ Jeff Shesol, *Mutual Contempt: Lyndon Johnson, Robert Kennedy, and the Feud that Defined a Decade* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997), esp. 422-36.

⁵⁶ Johnson made the “bitch of a war” comment to his biographer. Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson*, 251.

⁵⁷ The quote here is from a memo from Rusk to Johnson addressing the latter’s request. Rusk to Johnson, February 22, 1968, *FRUS, 1964-1968* 30:645. Johnson had issued the request through Rostow the previous evening. *Ibid.* 645n1.

⁵⁸ Memo for the record, February 2, 1968, *FRUS, 1964-1968* 30:634-38. Also see Schulzinger, “Johnson Administration,” 260; and Lumbers, ““Chinese Muddle,”” 182. On the establishment of the China Advisory Panel see chapter nine, 249.

Chinese foreign policy, as Chen Yi and Zhou Enlai—both regarded as relative “moderates” of the Long March generation—reasserted their control over China’s foreign policy apparatus in the latter half of 1967.⁵⁹

However, Johnson’s call for new policy ideas, made on February 21, cannot be divorced from the context of Tet and the paroxysm of upper-echelon policy deliberations that took place as Johnson weighed both his political future and his options in Vietnam. His directive on China policy, it should be stressed, predated several of the key events that informed Johnson’s double-decision to de-escalate the bombing of North Vietnam and withdraw from the 1968 presidential, including Westmoreland’s troop request; Cronkite’s dramatic broadcast; McCarthy’s strong showing in the March 12 New Hampshire primary; Bobby Kennedy’s announcement of his own candidacy four days later; and the president’s March 25 meeting with a panel of elder statesmen of the American foreign policy establishment, known informally as the Wise Men, whose earlier optimism on the war was now replaced by a unanimous recommendation for disengagement.⁶⁰ Yet three weeks into February, as the situation at home and abroad went from bad to worse, Johnson had already started groping for an “exciting and dramatic” peace proposal on Vietnam that would protect his flank from party “doves” should he decide to run in 1968.⁶¹ And although the full-dress review of his options on Vietnam did not really begin in earnest until after General Westmoreland’s February 27 troop request,⁶² it is almost certain that Johnson was already thinking anew of ways to broaden his diplomatic room for manoeuvre on Vietnam, and perhaps even to make some progress towards constructing a heretofore elusive “durable peace” in Asia.

It seems likely that Johnson would have reasoned that to the extent the pendulum was

⁵⁹ Gronouski to Rusk, January 11, 1968, *FRUS, 1964-1968* 30:632-34; CIA cable, January 15, 1968 (forwarded by Jenkins to Rostow), NSF:CO, box 242, “China Cables, Vol. XII,” LBJL; INR, “China’s Foreign Policy Moderates But Still Wears Mao Button,” February 27, 1968, RG59, ROCF, lot 72D140, box 3, “Background Briefing Book, Fourth Sessions of China Panel, 24-25 April 1968 (Folder 2),” NA.

⁶⁰ On the significance of this meeting, see Clifford, *Counsel to the President*, 507-8.

⁶¹ Karnow, *Vietnam*, 573.

⁶² Clifford, *Counsel to the President*, 481.

swinging in favour of China's pragmatists then once they had consolidated their position they might support, or at least not actively oppose, a negotiated peace on Vietnam. Certainly, Johnson was well aware of Beijing's influence over Hanoi on the issue of negotiations. As Harriman reported to Johnson in 1967, even if Hanoi wanted to move towards negotiations they might hesitate in doing so for fear of losing vital Chinese support. For Harriman this meant that Soviet cooperation was essential, and that the administration needed to recognise that the Kremlin's expansion of aid to the DRV maximised its capacity to influence the decision making process in Hanoi.⁶³ However, the flip-side of this coin, which Johnson could hardly have overlooked, was that moving Hanoi towards the negotiating table would be that much simpler if Beijing softened its ardent opposition to negotiations.⁶⁴ In this sense, Johnson may well have anticipated the logic of what Nixon administration insider Vernon Walters identifies as the most "immediate reason" for Nixon's later pursuit of a Sino-American rapprochement: "getting the Chinese to get the Vietnamese to accept some kind of reasonable peace."⁶⁵

To the extent Johnson had, in fact, entertained hopes that a new relationship with China might broaden his room for manoeuvre on Vietnam he would have been disappointed by the pessimistic response to his inquiry from the State Department. On the one hand, the paper prepared by the State Department reiterated that it was in "the interest of the U.S. to present to a potential or emerging Chinese leadership a variety of options and alternatives to their present policies." However, whereas the administration might continue existing efforts to engage Beijing in a dialogue on disarmament and seek expanded contacts "through travel and

⁶³ Harriman to Johnson and Rusk, May 22, 1967, HP:KJA, Subject File, box 499, "Dean Rusk 1966," LCMD; Harriman to Rusk, September 20, 1967, *ibid*.

⁶⁴ Rusk, OHI, May 1985, "UUU," DROH, RBRL; Congentel-1425, Hong Kong, January 31, 1966, NSF:CO, box 239, "China Cables, Vol. V," LBJL; CIA study prepared by the DDI Research Staff, "The Positions of Hanoi, Peking, and Moscow on the Issue of Vietnam Negotiations, 1962 to 1966" (ESAU XXXI-66), October 31, 1966, *CPE*. Also see chapter nine, 229.

⁶⁵ Cited in Deborah Hart Strober and Gerald S. Strober, eds., *The Nixon Presidency: An Oral History of the Era*, rev. ed. (Washington, DC: Brassey's, 2003), 131. Lumbers also explores Johnson's interest in China policy alternatives in early 1968, but, in contrast to the hypothesis offered here, suggests that the Tet Offensive and the president's subsequent preoccupation with U.S.-DRV negotiations militated against the president's willingness to entertain the possibility of near-term policy departures. "Chinese Muddle," 281-88.

limited types of trade,” there were few other avenues for substantial policy change that could profitably be pursued. Similarly, on the Taiwan issue, the administration would be limited to a gradual effort to get both “Chinas” to tacitly acknowledge the existence of “two Chinas.” Forwarding the study to the president, Rusk, again demonstrating his conservatism on China matters relative to the bureaucracy at the Bureau of East Asian Affairs, maintained that even in considering the low-key policy adjustments canvassed in the study the administration should continue to be guided by the continuing need to signal American resolve in Asia to the Chinese.⁶⁶

A second survey of policy options, this one prepared by Jenkins, was essentially consonant with the recommendations from State. Also concerned with communicating U.S. resolve, Jenkins advised against new bilateral “bridge-building” initiatives. Not only would the administration be rebuffed, Jenkins wrote, but a future Chinese leadership might feel its ability to respond more favourably to similar proposals circumscribed by the record of rejection. Jenkins did allow that “occasional statements in the ‘ultimate reconciliation’ vein, as distinguished from tangible bridge-building offers...should be continued—not too frequently, and in very measured tones.” These restrained overtures would likely be noted in Beijing, helping to “sharpen policy debates in Peking” on the future of Sino-American relations. But essentially Jenkins argued for letting the extremism of the Cultural Revolution play itself out, concluding the “prospect of a different China to come, possibly readier to respond, recommends the waiting game.”⁶⁷

Meanwhile, a third report sent to the president, prepared by scholars who had meet with Johnson as participants of the abovementioned China Advisory Panel, struck a more positive note on possible changes in U.S. China policy than had either Rusk or Jenkins. Whereas Rusk and Jenkins had suggested the internal chaos in China and instability in the broader region

⁶⁶ Rusk to Johnson (with attached paper), February 22, 1968, *FRUS, 1964-1968* 30:645-50.

⁶⁷ Paper, Jenkins, *supra* note 12, 656-59. Jenkins expanded on these ideas in a “sequel” paper that he sent to Rostow in October. Paper, Jenkins, October 9, 1968, *FRUS, 1964-1968* 30:709-18.

mandated a wait-and-see approach, these academics suggested that since a more pragmatic leadership would likely emerge from the “present state of great flux” in China, it was “particularly important for us *at this time* to exercise imaginative initiatives which will broaden in a desirable way the options open to them.” The agenda that was put forth envisioned expanding upon the “containment without isolation” rhetoric of 1966, while making explicit America’s desire for a Sino-American rapprochement on the basis of a de facto “two Chinas” situation. These rhetorical adjustments would be accompanied by more concrete initiatives from the administration, building upon existing proposals for commercial and cultural exchanges, including the removal of all barriers on non-strategic trade. Meanwhile, the administration should push for a broadened dialogue with the Chinese leadership, including on the “fundamental problems” dividing the United States and China.⁶⁸

Dissecting the scholars’ recommendations for the president, Rostow suggested that the issue was not so much one of the underlying logic of the recommendations canvassed, but rather that of breadth and timing. The United States, he continued, was already doing what could reasonably be expected to demonstrate flexibility on China policy, while trying to broaden the dialogue with Beijing and signal to an alternative leadership in Beijing its willingness to improve relations. This approach was likely working, with U.S. overtures “surely a subject of policy debate in Peking—of concern in some quarters and perhaps hope in others.” Moreover, the administration already dealt with the PRC as the de facto government of China, and did not, as Chiang was “painfully aware,” support the GRC as a contender in an ongoing civil war. However, Rostow ignored the call from the scholars to make these positions “explicit,” and rejected as untimely the recommendations for substantive policy change. Rostow agreed the administration should watch for opportunities to push conciliatory themes, but he qualified this by suggesting that at “this stage of the Cultural Revolution, however, this could

⁶⁸ Letters and memoranda on China specialists meeting with Johnson, February-March 1968, WHCF, box 23, “CO 50-2, People’s Republic of China, 5/17/66-,” LBJL (*italics mine*). The academics report, dated February 12, was summarised for the President along with Rusk’s and Jenkins’s report by Rostow. Rostow to Johnson, February 24, 1968, *FRUS, 1964-1968* 30:662-65.

very easily be overdone.” Indeed, given the situation in China the options open to the administration remained, for the time being, “very limited—or rather it seems to me we should keep them limited.”⁶⁹

Advised that the time was not yet ripe to try to build bridges to China’s pragmatic majority, Johnson’s early 1968 reconsideration of China policy was swept aside and quickly forgotten by the president and his senior advisers when, one week after Rostow sent his summary of the three aforementioned papers on China policy to the Oval Office, Johnson announced his decision not to seek re-election. At the same time, Johnson’s *immediate* interest in appealing to moderate elements within China would have dissipated after Hanoi agreed in early April to begin preliminary negotiations. With the diplomatic track (albeit an unsteady and grinding one) already set upon in Vietnam, the mainspring of Johnson’s February inquiry on China had, in large part, been removed.

There was little new in the China policy discourse through the remainder of 1968, which was essentially limited to low-profile discussions about the wisdom of undertaking small policy initiatives before a new administration took power. In light of Johnson’s March 31 Shermanesque statement the interdepartmental China Working Group gave some thought to new China initiatives, but quickly concluded “that the current situation—in the U.S., among the countries of East Asia, and in Communist China—argued against such initiatives unless they were part of a longer post-Vietnam policy for the East Asia area as a whole.”⁷⁰ Similarly, an NSC-prepared review of possible foreign policy initiatives that might be undertaken prior to a new administration taking over—thus leaving it better placed to move—reiterated the wisdom of a “wait-and-see” approach.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Rostow to Johnson, February 22, 1968, NSF:CO, box 243, “China Memos, Vol. XII,” LBJL.

⁷⁰ Report, Interagency China Country Committee meeting, April 16, 1968, NSF:CO, box 242, “China Memos, Vol. XII,” LBJL. The China Working Group was part of EA’s Interdepartmental Regional Group, itself a subgroup of the Senior Interdepartmental Group, created in March 1966 for the interdepartmental coordination of foreign policy. See NSAM 341, March 2, 1966, *FRUS, 1964-1968* 33:128-30.

⁷¹ Read to Bundy (with attached summaries of possible foreign policy initiatives from the White House Staff),

Still, William Bundy's Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, apparently encouraged by the aforementioned signs of a shift in the tone of China's foreign policy, renewed the push for a removal of the "present panoply of regulations" on non-strategic trade with China. The new package—essentially a re-packaging of the earlier recommendations—reiterated familiar arguments in favour of policy change, but now added that in light of "the current political changes taking place in China" a relaxation in trade embargo might "produce a possibly constructive impact on the evolution of attitudes among China's contending future leaders as they consider the options open to them in their formulation of immediate and longer-term domestic and foreign policy."⁷²

However, the package was put on ice out of concern that if the changes were implemented so soon after Johnson's March 31 statement and the commencement shortly thereafter of the Paris peace talks it might confirm fears among the non-Communist nations of East Asia, not least South Vietnam and the Republic of China, that the United States was becoming "soft on Communism."⁷³ Ultimately, however, the prospects for changes in the embargo were undercut by the turmoil of 1968, both at home and abroad. After months of moving back and forth in the bureaucracy, the trade package, as Jenkins reported later in the year, "died with the added burden of the Czechoslovak invasion."⁷⁴

Reading China's "Swing to the Right"

The Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia and Brezhnev's attendant enunciation of the doctrine of "limited sovereignty" had a profound impact on the international outlook of China's

April 30, 1968, RG59, ACA, lot 71D423, box 1, "Sino-United States Relations (General), January-June 1968," NA.

⁷² Draft memo, Rusk to President, April 2, 1968 (attached to draft memo, Solomon and Bundy to Rusk, undated), RG59, ACA, lot 72D175, box 3, "Trade Proposal, 1966, 1968," NA; Bundy to Read, May 3, 1968, RG59, ACA, lot 71D423, box 1, "Sino-United States Relations (General), January-June 1968," NA; Read to Rusk and Katzenbach, May 10, 1968, RG59, Rusk Records, Miscellaneous Subject File, box 66, "DR Personal Papers," NA.

⁷³ Jenkins to Rostow, June 7, 1968, *FRUS, 1964-1968* 30:680. Also see April memoranda in RG59, ACA, lot 72D175, box 3, "Trade Proposal, 1966, 1968," NA.

⁷⁴ Jenkins to Rostow, December 5, 1968, *FRUS, 1964-1968* 30:726.

leaders, both in terms of their sensitivity to the threat of “Soviet social-imperialism” and, by extension, the relative threat posed to China by the United States.⁷⁵ At the same time, with factional fighting across the country threatening to spiral further out of control, by late July Mao was forced to order the army to intervene and put down the multiplicity of groups violently carrying out “continuous revolution” under the Red Guard banner. Thus, although Mao had by 1968 defeated his high-level opponents and secured the People’s Republic as his personal imperium, he was nonetheless left to ponder the disappointments—and China to count the (still rising) costs—of the Cultural Revolution. Faced with danger from abroad and uncertainty at home, one historian has written that for the Chinese leadership “the latter part of 1968 and 1969 was a period of deep uncertainty, perhaps the greatest crisis of faith since the PRC’s establishment.”⁷⁶

It was a point not lost on observers in Washington, who watched as China struggled with the denouement of Mao’s most dramatic experiment in mass politics. In the summer of 1968 there was a brief recrudescence of social disorder, nearing the chaos that had prevailed the previous year, but following the intervention of the army a semblance of stability was restored in Chinese state and society. This development was seen as an important shift in favour of China’s “conservatives”—the “old line, pre-Cultural Revolution, Party-Army ‘revisionists’”—who had been targeted since the start of the Cultural Revolution.⁷⁷

In November 1968, this “swing to the right” brought with it a noticeable moderation in the tenor of China’s foreign policy. Although Beijing kept deferring the Warsaw talks through 1968—the only meeting was in January, with a meeting scheduled for May pushed back to

⁷⁵ Chris Connolly, “The American Factor: Sino-American Rapprochement and Chinese Attitudes to the Vietnam War, 1968-72,” *Cold War History* 5 (November 2005): 502-3; Linda D. Dillon, Bruce Burton, and Walter D. Soderland, “Who was the Principal Enemy? Shifts in Official Chinese Perceptions of the Two Superpowers, 1968-1969,” *Asian Survey* 17 (May 1977): 456-73.

⁷⁶ Westad, “History, Memory,” 11. On the relationship between Mao’s dampened enthusiasm for “continuous revolution” and his decision for rapprochement, see Chen, *Mao’s China*, 239-45.

⁷⁷ Rostow to Johnson, August 30, 1968, NSF:CO, box 243, “China (A), Vol. XIII,” LBJL; CIA, Special Weekly Report, December 6, 1968, *ibid.*; Rostow to Johnson, August 28, 1968, *FRUS, 1964-1968* 30:701-2.

November, and then again February 1969⁷⁸—some U.S. analysts noted that Beijing had tempered its polemics and indicated a willingness to discuss matters of substance with the *incoming* administration.⁷⁹ In November the Chinese press reported Johnson's announcement at the beginning of the month of the complete cessation of U.S. bombing of the DRV, along with Hanoi's agreement to expand the peace talks in Paris. It was, incredibly enough, the first time the Chinese authorities had informed the general population of the existence of the negotiations. Beijing would remain ambivalent about the peace talks for several years yet, not least because of Soviet involvement therein, but it was indicative of an important moderation in Beijing's active hostility to a negotiated settlement in Vietnam.⁸⁰ The same month China's leaders even referred (albeit in highly qualified terms) to the possibility of "peaceful coexistence" with the United States.⁸¹

This appeared, however, a period of pronounced instability in Beijing, U.S. intelligence reports suggesting that the future direction of China's foreign policy, including its relations with Washington, had become the "subject of heated debate in Peking."⁸² In short, the administration sensed that although there was a fundamental change afoot within China, and one which might ultimately allow for a redefinition of the Sino-American relationship, the situation in China had still to play itself out. In the interim, there was little the United States could do but wait.

⁷⁸ See *FRUS, 1964-1968* 30:676-77, 722-24. The February 1969 meeting would again be deferred by Beijing, ostensibly in protest to Washington's decision to grant asylum to a Chinese defector. See *FRUS, 1969-1972* 17:15n6. The next (and last such) meetings were held in January and February, 1970.

⁷⁹ Winthrop G. Brown to Rusk, RG59, ROCF, lot 71D187, box 5, "Political Affairs and Relations, Warsaw Talks, GRC Reactions, 1968," NA.

⁸⁰ Qiang, "Opposing Negotiations," 45-46; Connolly, "American Factor," 504-7.

⁸¹ On the tracking of tonal shifts in Chinese foreign policy in 1968, see Jenkins to Rostow, September 23, 1968, NSF:CO, box 243, "China (A), Vol. XIII," LBJL; INR, "Peking Seeks Better Balance of Insurrection and Diplomacy," July 16, 1968, RG59, CF:1967-69, box 1963, POL 1 CHICOM, NA; INR, "Peking Moves Towards a Less Provocative Foreign Policy Line," October 22, 1968, *ibid*.

⁸² INR, "Peking's Foreign Policy in Flux?" December 23, 1968, RG59, CF:1967-69, box 1963, POL 1 CHICOM, NA. A policy debate in Beijing on relations with the United States is indicated in John W. Garver, *Foreign Relations of the People's Republic of China* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1993), 74-81. A recent analysis based on Chinese sources, however, challenges the idea that any such debate took place. Yafeng Xia, "China's Elite Politics and Sino-American Rapprochement, January 1969-February 1972," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 8 (Fall 2006): 3-28.

A Short Postscript

Alfred Jenkins, as noted in the previous chapter, joined Rostow's "little State Department" in July 1966 convinced that the pursuit of conciliatory initiatives toward China would prove in the long-term interest of the United States. However, as the Cultural Revolution came into view any hopes he had entertained of policy movement were pushed to the backburner, Jenkins sensing that the disorder on the mainland recommended a detached "wait-and-see" approach. It was only now, in December 1968, with a fully-engaged debate apparently underway in Beijing over the direction of China's foreign policy, that Jenkins thought "the time may be near when we might profitably give another signal (a minor but clear one) to Peking that it has policy alternatives in our regard, when and if it is seriously ready to meet some of the prerequisites." Along with a suggestion on the modification of the administration's contentious extraterritorial trade regulations, Jenkins looked to the Warsaw meeting scheduled for February 20, 1969 as affording an opportunity to this end. The upcoming meeting, Jenkins stressed, "must be prepared with special care."⁸³

Rusk's thinking, interestingly enough, seems to have been running along the same lines. Sensing that "something important is brewing in Peking" on January 4, 1969 the outgoing secretary of state, who for eight years had frustrated attempts by the bureaucracy to transform U.S. policy and posture towards China, suggested that Johnson consider relaxing the extraterritorial restrictions on U.S. subsidiaries abroad trading with China. As Rostow reported to the president, Rusk felt this move "might serve as a modest response to the faint signals from Peking suggesting possible changes in their position," while establishing a precedent that would provide the president-elect with room to manoeuvre on China policy without committing him to any particular course of action.⁸⁴

⁸³ Jenkins to Rostow, *supra* note 74.

⁸⁴ Rusk's memo, dated January 4, 1969, is noted in Rostow to President, January 6, 1969, *FRUS, 1964-1968* 30:729-30; Lumbers, "'Chinese Muddle,'" 290-91.

Johnson, however, declined to move, perhaps because, as William Bundy claims, Nixon had asked him to refrain from any changes in policy toward China (likely in order to maximise the impact of the changes when they came),⁸⁵ or perhaps simply because he had no wish to spend his final days in office making seemingly picayune adjustments to trade policy. Johnson, having graduated from lame duck to caretaker status in November, was ready to return to his ranch on the Pedernales; the Sino-American relationship was something his successor could decide upon.

Jenkins, as it happened, would go on to play an important role in the diplomatic grunt work that helped facilitate the Sino-American rapprochement. Of course, he would do so not under President Johnson and his National Security Adviser, Walt Rostow, but under President Nixon and his National Security Adviser, Henry Kissinger. For although the greater part of American officialdom was already prepared to pursue a process of engagement with the People's Republic of China by the end of 1968, the hour was now too late. Ultimately, the task of bridging the Sino-American divide would fall to another president.

⁸⁵ William Bundy, *A Tangled Web: The Making of Foreign Policy in the Nixon Presidency* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1998), 103. (Also cited in Lumbers, "Chinese Muddle," 291).

CONCLUSION

In October 1968 the National Security Council's "China-watcher," Alfred Jenkins, reflecting on U.S. China policy during the Johnson years, thought it worthwhile to highlight the successes. The administration's show of strength in Vietnam, Jenkins wrote, coupled with an even-handed posture that looked toward an eventual Sino-American reconciliation, had likely exacerbated policy differences in Beijing; Maoist China, once considered the "wave of the future" by much of the developing world, was no longer seriously regarded as a workable politico-economic model; the Republic of China, against expectation, had retained its membership within the United Nations; and, for the first time since the establishment of the People's Republic, "there is a better than fair prospect that the very nature of the regime, because of its failures, will have to change." And, despite increments to China's military power (however uneven), the United States had "'contained' Chinese expansionist tendencies remarkably well, thereby buying valuable time for non-Communist Asia." A bilateral accommodation between Washington and Beijing remained as elusive as ever, but given Beijing's persistent refusal to countenance improved relations with the head of the imperialist camp on terms short of a complete abrogation of Washington's Cold War commitments, this was hardly surprising. In short, U.S. China policy had, in Jenkins's estimate, achieved about all that could be reasonably expected in the circumstances. "Our policy has been consistent but not static. It has steadfastly opposed Chinese meddling and aggression; but it has moved toward seeking contact. The ground is well laid to move further when China is ready, if it seems in our interest."¹

¹ Paper, Jenkins, October 9, 1968, *FRUS, 1964-1968* 30:709-18.

China, of course, was not ready for a rapprochement with the United States, nor had it been at any point during the Kennedy or Johnson administrations. And whereas the ground had indeed been “well laid” to pursue substantive policy departures, U.S. officials remained divided on the question of timing—even allowing that differences on this score had, as suggested in the previous chapter, become less pronounced by the end of 1968. Jenkins pointed to this division in his October 1968 paper, observing that there were, on the one hand, “sincere and able people” in both the administration and the academic community who believed policy movement had already been deferred too long, “and we take insupportable risks in not seeking accommodation more actively.” Jenkins, for his part, subscribed to the contrary view: given the prevailing instability in Asia, and Beijing’s pronounced anti-American animus, for the time being “progress in solving [the China problem] cannot be made by direct approach, as some would have us try.”²

Yet these differences over the timing of policy change, important though they may be, obscure the development over the course of the 1960s of a basic bureaucratic consensus on the wisdom of pursuing a strategy toward China that included elements of both containment and engagement. Given the “the time’s not right” line of reasoning won through in Washington, and no major steps were taken to reconcile substantive policy positions with the concept of “containment without isolation,” it might appear that the development of this consensus was, in the final analysis, of little import. Yet it was important, and for several reasons. In the first instance, it translated into an incremental evolution in U.S. posture toward China. Dulles, in suggesting in 1957 that Communism in China was a “passing and not a perpetual stage,” and promising that the United States would do everything in its power to hurry that passing, clearly articulated the basic parameters of an already well-established U.S. posture toward Mao’s China. By contrast, by the end of the 1960s U.S. officials had repeatedly made clear that not only was the United States reconciled to the reality of a

² Ibid.

Communist-controlled mainland, but that the administration believed a cooperative Sino-American relationship would, given certain shifts in China's disposition, be both possible and desirable.

The extent to which this message of qualified conciliation registered within the Chinese polity, and the impact this may have had on the evolution of Chinese attitudes toward the United States in the years preceding the rapprochement, are matters outside the purview of this study. Yet on this score two tentative (and here untested) conclusions are possible. First, Washington had at least a measure of success in impressing upon Beijing the U.S. determination to avoid a Sino-American conflict. Even as China's leaders continued to proclaim that a direct confrontation with the imperialist enemy was inevitable, at critical moments during the 1960s, when Sino-American tensions—in both the Taiwan Strait and Southeast Asia—threatened to boil over into open military conflict, Washington successfully played its part in defusing tensions. In this sense, the incremental shift to a more reasoned, and at times even conciliatory posture, played an important role in helping to avert a direct clash between the two antagonists in an era pregnant with opportunities for a Sino-American war. A second conclusion can be inferred from the first: by moving to disabuse China's leadership of the idea that the United States was inalterably hostile to the People's Republic of China, U.S. officials may also have fostered a greater appreciation of the possibilities for Sino-American relations in Beijing, thereby smoothing the path to a rapprochement.³

More certain conclusions can be offered here on the impact of these postural shifts within the United States itself. The disengagement from rhetorical positions that closely corresponded to the strategic interests of the GRC and, even more importantly, the narrow political priorities of the pro-Nationalist China Lobby, broadened the possibilities for more open, robust

³ In their study of Sino-American "signalling" during the Vietnam War, James Hershberg and Chen Jian make a similar point, suggesting that the steps taken by both Washington and Beijing to avoid a direct conflict during the war likely generated a degree of mutual confidence "that would help pave the way for both sides just a few years later to begin moving toward a more dramatic improvement in their relations even as the Vietnam War continued to rage." Hershberg and Chen, "Informing the Enemy," 195.

discussions about U.S. China policy in official and unofficial circles alike. This, in turn, encouraged the U.S. foreign policy bureaucracy to devote yet more attention still to the underlying logic of existing policy positions and the potential advantages of policy change. The de-politicisation of China policy was, it should be stressed, a complex and oftentimes halting process, driven in large part by shifts in the domestic context that U.S. officials had little if any control over. But in making a the shift toward a posture of “containment without isolation” the administration was not only responding to domestic pressures for policy change, but at once shaping, reinforcing, and legitimising arguments for enhanced Sino-American engagement.

By the time Nixon had taken the presidential oath the idea of “containment without isolation” was already widely accepted, both in the corridors of American power and in interested corners of American society; discussion of improved relations with Communist China, once anathema for the political centre, had become not only acceptable, but indeed respectable. It is instructive to remember that senior U.S. officials up to and including President Johnson had, in effect, already publicly endorsed the underlying logic of “containment without isolation” when Nixon wrote in his oft-quoted 1967 *Foreign Affairs* article that the United States could ill-afford to leave the People’s Republic of China to sit indefinitely in “angry isolation.”⁴ Once the 1968 presidential campaign was fully engaged, both Nixon and Humphrey were hitting on these notes of Sino-American reconciliation: Humphrey, as he had since 1966, spoke of “building peaceful bridges to the people of mainland China”; Nixon, meanwhile, spoke of the need to eventually negotiate “with the leaders of the next superpower, Communist China.”⁵ At the start of the 1960s comments in this vein from national political figures would likely have occasioned considerable controversy; in 1968 they represented the centrist line on U.S. China policy, well within the bounds of America’s mainstream political discourse.

⁴ Richard M. Nixon, “Asia After Viet Nam,” *Foreign Affairs* 46 (October 1967): 121.

⁵ Both cited in Foot, *Practice of Power*, 104. Also see Goh, *U.S. Rapprochement*, 112-13.

The bureaucratic consensus on “containment without isolation” also created a conceptual foundation for more substantive changes in U.S. China policy. Admittedly, the hard “realist” (viz. balance of power) framework in which the “Nixinger” rapprochement was cast set it apart from the liberal vision of a process of Sino-American engagement fostering a moderation of Beijing’s militancy. Yet Nixon’s ideas on China did not take form in a vacuum. On the contrary, Nixon’s growing interest in a Sino-American rapprochement during his “wilderness years” might best be understood in reference to the growing sophistication of the U.S. China policy discourse during the Kennedy and Johnson years.⁶ As Evelyn Goh puts it, Nixon’s views on U.S. China policy during the 1960s evolved in parallel to revisionist “subdiscourses” on China, and while his ideas “were developed in a personal, unofficial, and international context, he did engage with, contribute to, and develop, the official discourse of reconciliation.”⁷

The long-term significance of the emergent consensus on “containment without isolation” in the 1960s might be found less in its immediate connection to the rapprochement, and more in its place in the broader sweep of the U.S. China policy discourse, both during the Cold War and beyond. Although a proper analysis of the issue is (once again) outside the scope of this study, the 1960s can be seen as a key moment in the emerging interplay—and indeed tension—between two distinct, oftentimes contrary impulses that have informed debates over the direction of U.S. China policy through to the current day: on the one hand, the perceived need to contain China’s ability to project its military and political power, at least where U.S. and Chinese interests clash; on the other, the apparent wisdom seen in attempts to engage China’s leadership, thereby establishing areas of overlapping interest in Sino-American relations, while reducing bilateral hostilities, existing or potential.⁸ The concept of

⁶ Nixon points to his April 1967 trip to Europe, East Asia, and Southeast Asia, as the moment when he began to seriously think about a new policy toward China. Richard Nixon, *RN: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon*, vol. 1 (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1978), 280-85. On the evolution of Nixon’s views on China, also see Tucker, “Taiwan Expendable?” 116-17; and Goh, *U.S. Rapprochement*, esp. 101-23.

⁷ Goh, *U.S. Rapprochement*, 106-8, 121-23.

⁸ On the “engagement” versus “containment” debate, see Evelyn Goh and Rosemary Foot, “From Containment

“containment without isolation,” as it was manifest in the Kennedy and Johnson years, represented an intersection of these two impulses.

Echoes of the logic of “containment without isolation”—a logic which implicitly rejects the either/or choice between containment and engagement—can, in fact, be heard in the contemporary discourse on U.S. China policy. For instance, in an influential 1999 RAND critique of U.S. China policy, the authors suggest that the United States should “continue to try to bring China into the current international system while both preparing for a possible Chinese challenge to it and seeking to convince the Chinese leadership that such a challenge would be difficult to prepare and extremely risky to pursue.” This proposed strategy, coupling containment with engagement, is dubbed “conengagement.” The strategy expressed by this portmanteau is offered as a “third way” alternative to, on the one hand, the apparent over-emphasis in the 1990s on the socialising agency of engagement, and, on the other, “Blue Team” arguments for a policy of containment, based on the perception of a hostile, zero-sum power competition between Washington and Beijing.⁹ The attempt to reconcile containment and engagement—rather than treating the two approaches as diametrically opposed—is, however, not as novel as conventional wisdom might suggest. Rather, the consensus that developed in the Kennedy and Johnson years on the need to both contain *and* engage China could be characterised as “conengagement” *avant la lettre*.

*

The push for changes in China policy by officials in the Kennedy and Johnson administrations appears, at first blush, little more than a series of abortive initiatives and missed opportunities;

to Containment? Understanding US Relations with China since 1949,” in Schulzinger, *American Foreign Relations*, 268-70.

⁹ Zalmay M. Khalilzad and others, *The United States and a Rising China: Strategic and Military Implications* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 1999), xvi. Similarly, Gerald Segal proscribes a strategy of “constrainment.” Gerald Segal, “East Asia and the ‘Constrainment’ of China,” *International Security* 20 (Spring 1996): 107-35. “Blue Team” refers to American observers and officials who emphasise the security threat China poses to the United States.

this is, indeed, how these officials have tended to characterise their own experiences in attempting to balance (and enhance) the effort to contain China by creating a policy framework that also allowed for greater Sino-American engagement. Yet upon closer inspection a rather more complex story becomes apparent, wherein an incremental attitudinal shift, mediated by way of the foreign policy bureaucracy, and given expression in a moderation of U.S. posture towards China, unfolded over the course of the Democratic 1960s. For sheer human or geopolitical drama none of this is in the same league as Nixon's "week that changed the world." Nonetheless, these developments deserve to be brought out from the shadow of the rapprochement, afforded their proper significance, and integrated into the larger narrative of U.S. China policy—and, in turn, of Sino-American relations—in the modern era.

LIST OF PERSONS

The résumés provided are not meant to be comprehensive: only roles of direct relevance to the subject matter are listed. Nor is everyone mentioned in the main text or footnotes listed here. My purpose is simply to help the reader navigate the labyrinth of names, titles, and dates of office involved in this study.

In preparing this list, I have utilised the “Lists of Persons” printed in the various volumes of the State Department’s *Foreign Relations of the United States* series. I have also borrowed heavily from the equally valuable lists in Evelyn Goh, *Constructing the U.S. Rapprochement with China, 1961-1974: From “Red Menace” to “Tacit Ally”* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005); and Nancy B. Tucker, *China Confidential: American Diplomats and Sino-American Relations, 1945-1996* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001). Many other sources (too many to mention) have been used to fill in the blanks. Any errors are mine alone.

Acheson, Dean

January 1949–January 1953: Secretary of State

Alsop, Joseph

Columnist

Alsop, Stewart

Columnist

Anderson, William O.

August 1961–August 1963: Officer in Charge, Multilateral Political Relations, Office of Soviet Union Affairs, Bureau of European Affairs, Department of State

Ball, George W.

February–December 1961: Undersecretary of State for Economic Affairs

January 1962–September 1966: Undersecretary of State

June–September 1968: Representative to the United Nations

Bacon, Leonard

1961–August 1963: Deputy Director, Office of Northeast Asian Affairs (East Asian Affairs after December 1961), Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs, Department of State

August 1963–July 1964: Acting Director, Office of East Asian Affairs after December 1961, Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs, Department of State

Lucius D. Battle

March 1961–May 1962: Executive Secretary of the Department of State

Barnett, Robert W.

February 1963–May 1970: Deputy Assistant Secretary for Far Eastern Economic Affairs

Beam, Jacob D.

January–November 1961: Ambassador to Poland and U.S. representative at ambassadorial talks with the PRC

Bowles, Chester A.

1949–1951: Governor of Connecticut

October 1951–March 1953: Ambassador to India

1959–1961: Congressman (D-CT)

January–December 1961: Undersecretary of State

December 1961–June 1963: President's Special Representative and Adviser on African, Asian, and Latin American Affairs and Ambassador-at-Large

July 1963–April 1969: Ambassador to India

Bundy, McGeorge

January 1961–February 1966: Special Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs

June–August 1967: Executive Secretary of the Special Committee of the National Security Council

Bundy, William P.

January 1961–November 1963: Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs

December 1963–February 1964: Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs

March 1964–May 1969: Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs *

Cabot, John M.

March 1962–September 1965: Ambassador to Poland and U.S. representative at the ambassadorial talks with PRC

Chen Yi

1958–1972: Foreign Minister, PRC

Chiang Ching-kuo

General, Minister without Portfolio and Deputy Secretary General of the National Defence Council of the ROC

* The Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs became the Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs in November 1966.

1965–1969: Minister of Defence, ROC

Chiang Kai-shek

March 1950–April 1975: President, ROC

Cleveland, Harlan J.

February 1961–September 1965: Assistant Secretary of State for International Organisation Affairs

Cline, Ray S.

1958–June 1962: Central Intelligence Station Chief, Taipei

July 1962–January 1966: Deputy Director for Intelligence, Central Intelligence Agency

Clough, Ralph

1958–1961: advisor to the ambassadorial talks with the PRC

August 1961–August 1965: Deputy Chief of Mission, U.S. Embassy, Taipei

1966–1967: Policy Planning Staff, Department of State

Cotton, Norris H.

1954–1974: Republican Senator, New Hampshire

Cooper, Chester L.

1958–September 1962: Deputy Assistant Director for National Estimates

1961–1962: Staff Assistant to Ambassador W. Averell Harriman at the Geneva conference on Laos

September 1962–November 1963: Assistant for Policy Support to the Deputy Director for Intelligence

November 1963–November 1964: Assistant Deputy Director for Policy Support, Directorate of Intelligence, Central Intelligence Agency

November 1964–April 1966: staff member, National Security Council

September 1966–1967: Special Assistant to Ambassador at Large W. Averell Harriman

De Gaulle, Charles

January 1959–April 1969: President of France

Dean, David

1959–1962: Consulate General, Hong Kong

1962–1965: Officer in Charge of Mainland China Affairs, Office of Asian Communist Affairs, Department of State

1965–1966: Deputy Director, Office of Asian Communist Affairs, Department of State

1966–1969: Political Counsellor and Chargé, Embassy, Taipei

Dillon, C. Douglas

January 1961–April 1965: Secretary of the Treasury

Dobrynin, Anatoly Fedorovich

1962–1986: Soviet Ambassador to the United States

Drumright, Everett F.

1953–1954: Office of Chinese Affairs, Department of State

1954–1958: Consul General, Hong Kong

February 1958–March 1962: Ambassador to the Republic of China (Taiwan)

Dulles, John Foster

January 1953–April 1959: Secretary of State

Dutton, Frederick

January 1961–November 1961: Special Assistant to the President for Intergovernmental Affairs and Interdepartmental Relations

November 1961–July 1964: Assistant Secretary of State for Congressional Relations

Eisenhower, Dwight D.

January 1953–January 1961: President

Fairbank, John King

Professor of History, Harvard University

1967–1968: member of the China Advisory Panel

Forrestal, Michael V.

January 1962–July 1964: member of the National Security Council Staff

Fulbright, J. William

1959–1974: Democratic Senator from Arkansas and Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee

Galbraith, John Kenneth

April 1961–July 1963: Ambassador to India

Goldberg, Arthur J.

July 1965–June 1968: U.S. Representative to the United Nations

Grant, Lindsay

1962–1964: Officer in Charge of Mainland Chinese Affairs, Department of State

1964: Acting Director, Office of Asian Communist Affairs, Department of State

1964–1965: Director, Office of Asian Communist Affairs, Department of State

Green, Marshall

1956–1959: Regional Planning Advisor, Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs, Department of State

1959–1960: Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary for Far Eastern Affairs, Department of State

November 1961–August 1963: Consul General, Hong Kong

October 1963–June 1965: Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs

June 1965–March 1969: Ambassador to Indonesia

Gronouski, John A.

December 1965–May 1968: Ambassador to Poland and U.S. representative to ambassadorial talks with PRC

Harriman, W. Averell

February–November 1961: Ambassador-at-Large

December 1961–April 1963: Assistant Secretary of State for Eastern Affairs

May 1963–March 1965: Assistant Secretary of State for Political Affairs

April 1965–1968: Ambassador-at-Large

Herter, Christian

April 1959–January 1961: Secretary of State

Hilsman, Roger, Jr.

February 1961–April 1963: Director of the Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Department of State

May 1963–March 1964: Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs

Holyoake, Keith

December 1960–February 1972: New Zealand Prime Minister

Home, Alexander Frederick Douglas (Lord)

July 1960–October 1963: British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs

October 1963–October 1964: British Prime Minister

Hughes, Thomas L.

April 1963–August 1969: Director, Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Department of State

Humphrey, Hubert H.

January 1965–December 1968: Vice President

Hurley, Patrick J.

November 1944–September 1945: Ambassador to China

Jenkins, Alfred Lesesne

July 1966–1969: NSC Staff Member

July 1970–February 1973: Director, Office of Asian Communist Affairs, Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs

Johnson, Lyndon B.

January 1961–November 1963: Vice President

November 1963–January 1969: President

Johnson, U. Alexis

April 1961–July 1964, and November 1965–October 1966: Deputy Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs

July 1964–September 1965: Deputy Ambassador to Vietnam

November 1966–January 1969: Ambassador to Japan

Katzenbach, Nicholas deB.

October 1966–December 1968: Undersecretary of State

Kennan, George F.

May 1947–May 1949: Director of the Policy Planning Staff

May 1961–July 1963: Ambassador to Yugoslavia

Kennedy, John F.

January 1961–November 1963: President

Kirk, Alan G.

July 1962–January 1963: Ambassador to the Republic of China (Taiwan)

Kissinger, Henry A.

January 1969–November 1975: Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs

September 1973–January 1977: Secretary of State

Kohler, Foy D.

December 1959–August 1962: Assistant Secretary of State for European and Canadian Affairs

August 1962–November 1966: Ambassador to the Soviet Union

Komer, Robert W.

January 1961–September 1965: staff member, National Security Council

October 1965–March 1966: Deputy Special Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs

March 1966–May 1967: Special Assistant to the President

June 1967–December 1968: Special Assistant to the President for Peaceful Reconstruction in Vietnam

Kreisberg, Paul H.

1960–1962: Chinese Affairs, Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Department of State

1965–1970: Deputy Director, Senior Advisor to Warsaw Talks; and Director of Asian Communist Affairs

Liu Shaoqi

1959–1968: Chairman of the People's Republic of China

Mao Zedong

1949–1976: Chairman of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party

Martin, Edwin W.

1958–1961: Director, Office of Chinese Affairs, 1958-1961

October 1967–July 1970: Consul General, Hong Kong

Martin, Paul, Sr.,

April 1963–April 1968: Secretary of State for External Affairs, Canada

McCarthy, Joseph

January 1947–May 1957: Senator, Wisconsin

McConaughy, Walter P., Jr.

November 1950–June 1952: Consul General, Hong Kong

June 1952–May 1957: Director, Office of Chinese Affairs

December 1959–April 1961: Ambassador to Republic of Korea

April–December 1961: Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs

March 1962–May 1966: Ambassador to Pakistan

June 1966–April 1974: Ambassador to the Republic of China (Taiwan)

McCone, John A.

November 1961–April 1965: Director of Central Intelligence

McGhee, George C.

February 1961–December 1961: Counselor of the Department of State and Chairman of the Policy Planning Council

December 1961–March 1963: Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs

McNamara, Robert S.

January 1961–February 1968: Secretary of Defense

McNaughton, John T.

July 1964–July 1967: Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs

Moyers, Bill D.

1964–1967: Special Assistant to the President

Nixon, Richard M.

January 1969–August 1974: President

Parsons, J. Graham

June 1959–March 1961: Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs

March 1961–April 1967: Ambassador to Sweden

Pastore, John O.

1950–1977: Democratic Senator, Rhode Island

1962–1964, 1967–1968: Chairman, Joint Committee on Atomic Energy

Popple, Paul M.

June 1962–July 1964: Officer in Charge of ROC Affairs, Office of East Asian Affairs, Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs

Rankin, Karl L.

February 1953–December 1957: Ambassador to Republic of China; resident at Taipei. Rankin served as Chargé d’Affaires ad interim, August 1950–April 1953.

Reischauer, Edwin O.

April 1961–September 1966: Ambassador to Japan

Reston, James Barrett

Journalist (*New York Times*)

Rice, Edward E.

1961: staff member, Policy Planning Council, Department of State

January 1962–December 1963: Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs

January 1964–September 1967: Consul General in Hong Kong and Macau

Rostow, Walt W.

January–December 1961: Deputy Special Assistant to the President for National Security

Affairs

January 1962–March 1966: Counselor of the Department of State and Chairman of the Policy Planning Council

April 1966–December 1968: Special Assistant to the President

Rowan, Carl

February 1964–July 1965: Director of the United States Information Agency

Rusk, Dean

February 1949–December 1951: Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs

1952–1961: President of the Rockefeller Foundation

January 1961–January 1969: Secretary of State

Schlesinger, Arthur M.

January 1961–1963: Special Assistant to the President

Scott, Hugh

1959–1977: Republican Senator, Pennsylvania

Schwartz, Abba P.

October 1962–March 1966: Administrator, Bureau of Security and Consular Affairs

Shen Chang-huan

May 1960–May 1966: Foreign Minister of the Republic of China

Sihanouk, Norodom (Prince)

1960–1970: Head of State, Cambodia

Sisco, Joseph J.

September 1965–February 1969: Assistant Secretary of State for International Organisational Affairs

Solomon, Anthony W.

March 1965–January 1969: Assistant Secretary of State for Economic and Business Affairs

Sorensen, Theodore

Special Counsel to President Kennedy

Steeves, John

October 1959–January 1962: Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs

Stevenson, Adlai E.

1952 and 1956: Democratic presidential candidate

January 1961–July 1965: U.S. Representative to the United Nations

Sullivan, William H.

September 1960–April 1963: United Nations Adviser, Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs, Department of State

Thompson, Llewellyn E.

October 1962–December 1966: Ambassador-at-Large

Thomson, James C., Jr.

April–December 1961: Special Assistant to the Undersecretary of State

December 1961–June 1963: Special Assistant to the President's Special Representative and Adviser on African, Asian and Latin American Affairs (Chester Bowles)

August 1963–July 1964: Special Assistant to the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs

July 1964–September 1966: staff member, National Security Council

Truman, Harry S.

April 1945–January 1953: President

Tsiang Tingfu

1945–July 1962: Ambassador to the United Nations, Republic of China

January 1962–June 1965: Ambassador to the United States

Unger, Leonard S.

January 1965–August 1967: Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs

Valenti, Jack

January 1964–May 1966: Special Assistant to the President

Wang Bingnan

March 1955–April 1964: PRC Ambassador to Poland; representative of the PRC in the ambassadorial talks with the United States

Wang Guoquan

July 1964–July 1970: PRC Ambassador to Poland; representative of the PRC in the ambassadorial talks with the United States

White, Theodore H.

Journalist and author

Whiting, Allen S.

1962–1966: Director of the Office of Research and Analysis for the Far East, Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Department of State

Wright, Jerauld

May 1963–July 1965: Ambassador to the Republic of China (Taiwan)

Yeh, George K.C. (Yeh Kung-ch'ao)

September 1958–November 1961: ROC Ambassador to the United States

Yost, Charles W.

March 1961–1966: U.S. Deputy Representative to the United Nations

Zhou Enlai

October 1949–January 1976: Premier, PRC

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- Country File, Vietnam
- Subject File
- Name File
- Agency File
- National Security Council Meetings File
- National Intelligence Estimates
- Committee File on Nuclear Proliferation
- United Nations
- White House Central File
 - Countries
 - Confidential File
- Administrative History of the Department of State
- Office Files of Bill Moyers
- Cabinet Papers
- Office Files of Harry McPherson
- Oral History Collection (see oral history list)
- Papers of George W. Ball
- White House Telephone Conversations (Tapes)

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- IV. General Office Files
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 - C. Richard Rusk Files

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U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations. *Executive Sessions of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee* (Historical Series). Washington, DC: GPO, 1976-1993.

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Cooper, Chester

Interviewed by Joseph E. O'Connor, May 6, 1966 (JFKL).

Bowles, Chester

Interviewed by Robert R.R. Brooks, February 2, 1965 (JFKL).

Interviewed by Dennis J. O'Brien, July 1, 1970 (JFKL).

Clough, Ralph

Interviewed by Marshall Green, August 9, 1980 (ADST).

Cunningham, William J.

Interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy, March 17, 1997 (ADST).

Dean, David

Interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy, July 21, 1998 (ADST).

Drexler, Robert

Interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy, March 1, 1996 (ADST).

Gleysteen, William

Interviewed by Thomas Stern, June 10, 1967 (ADST).

Grant, Lindsay

Interview by Charles Stuart Kennedy, January 31, 1990 (ADST).

Harriman, W. Averell

Interviewed by Arthur M. Schlesinger, January 17, 1965 (JFKL).

Interviewed by Paige Mulhollan, June 16, 1969 (ADST).*

Kreisberg, Paul

Interview by Nancy B. Tucker and Warren Cohen, April 8, 1989 (ADST).

Platt, Nicholas

Interviewed by Paul McCusker, July 25, 1994 (ADST).

Rostow, Walt

Interviewed by Paige E. Mulhollan, March 21, 1969 (LBJL).

Rusk, Dean

Interviewed by Paige E. Mulhollan, July 28, 1969 (LBJL).

Interviewed by Dennis J. O'Brien, December 9, 1969 (JFKL).

Interviewed by Dennis J. O'Brien, March 30, 1970 (JFKL). Interviewed by Richard Rusk, Thomas Schoenbaum, and Tom Ganschow, April 1985, "OH RUSK TTT" (RBRL).

Interviewed by Richard Rusk, Thomas Schoenbaum, and Tom Ganschow, May 1985, "OH RUSK UUU" (RBRL).

Interviewed by Richard Rusk, January 1986, "OH RUSK WWWW" (RBRL).

Interviewed by Richard Rusk, January 1986, "OH RUSK XXXXX" (RBRL).

Interviewed by Thomas Schoenbaum and Tom Ganschow, September 13, 1991, "OH RUSK KK" (RBRL).

Thomson, James C.

Interviewed by Paige E. Mulhollan, July 22, 1971 (LBJL).

Wright, Jerauld

Interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy, June 18, 1987 (ADST).

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Source: U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, map 800910 (A05999), 9/88.

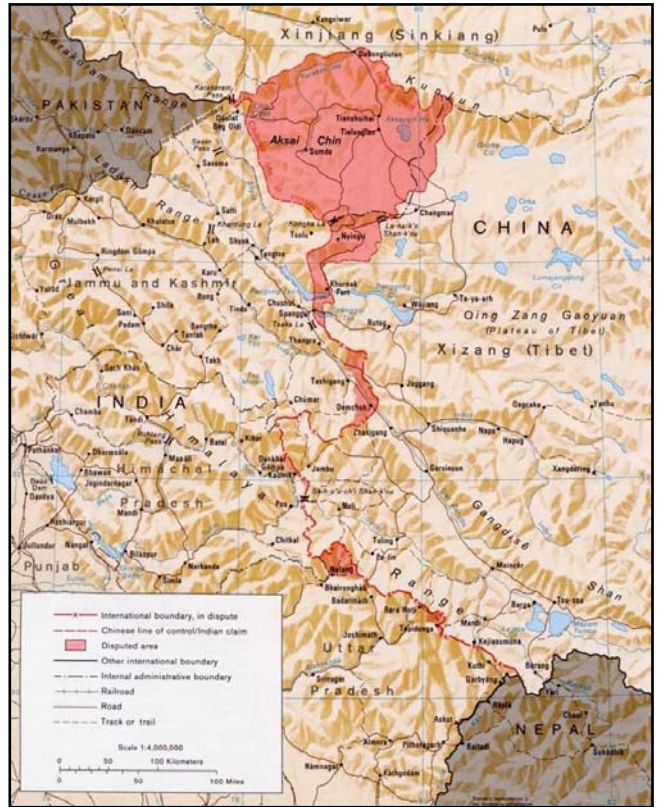


Figure 1. Sino-Indian border, western sector (Aksai Chin)
Source: U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, map 800911 (A06000), 9/88.

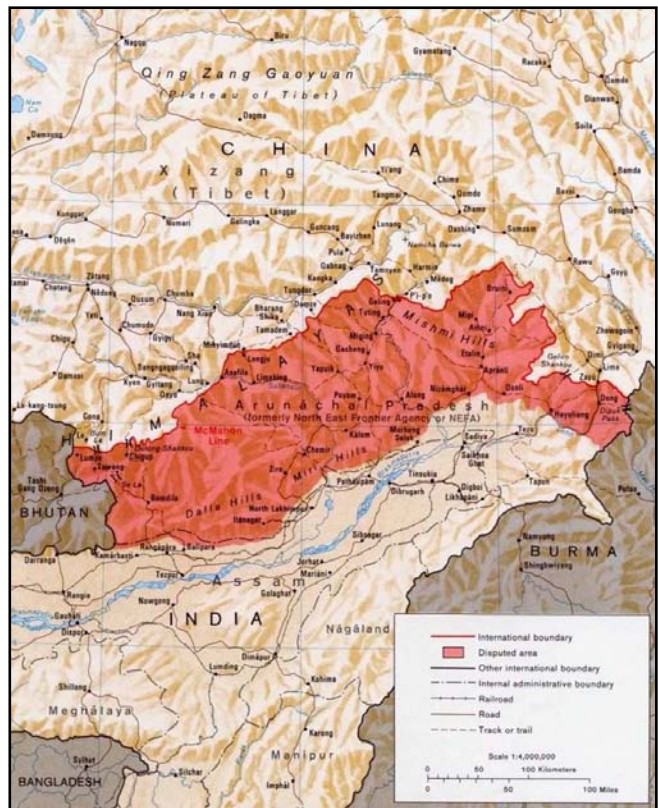


Figure 2. Sino-Indian border, eastern sector (NEFA)
Source: U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, map 800912 (A06001), 9/88.