

Nixon, Kissinger, and the “Soviet Card” in the U.S. Opening to China, 1971–1974*

The dramatic reconciliation with the People’s Republic of China in 1972 stands as one of Richard Nixon’s greatest achievements as the thirty-seventh president of the United States. While previous administrations had attempted minor modifications of the policy of containment and isolation of China, Nixon managed to negotiate a top-level reconciliation that would lead to normalization of relations in 1979.¹ This rapprochement ended more than twenty years of Sino-American hostility and represented the most significant strategic shift of the Cold War era. It was intimately connected to U.S. relations with its super-power rival and the Nixon administration’s general policy of détente. In the writings of Nixon and his national security adviser Henry Kissinger—the key primary accounts of the policy change until recently—the central logic of the U.S.-China rapprochement was “triangular relations.” Within the context of the Sino-Soviet split, this entailed the opening of relations between the United States and China, bringing China into the realm of great power relations as a third vital power separate from the Soviet Union.

The utility of triangular politics was derived from the expectation, according to Kissinger, that “in a subtle triangle of relations between Washington, Beijing and Moscow, we improve the possibilities of accommodations with each as we increase our options toward both.”² The aim of pursuing better relations with both the PRC and the Soviet Union accorded with Nixon’s professed strategy of détente, to reduce international tensions and American overseas defense

*The author would like to thank Rosemary Foot, Alastair Iain Johnston, Jeffrey Engel, Robert Schulzinger, and two anonymous referees for their comments and suggestions.

1. Recent works reveal important deliberations and limited moves to alter China policy during the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, which were unsuccessful because of the constraints of anti-Communist and racist perceptions, the Vietnam War, and the fact that the Chinese were not ready to respond to American moves. See Noam Kochavi, *A Conflict Perpetuated: China Policy during the Kennedy Years* (Westport, CT, 2002); Victor S. Kaufman, *Confronting Communism: US and British Policies toward China* (Columbia, MO, 2001); Evelyn Goh, *Constructing the US Rapprochement with China, 1961–1974: From Red Menace to Tacit Ally* (New York, 2005).

2. Speech written for Nelson Rockefeller, July 1968, quoted in Henry Kissinger, *White House Years* (Boston, 1979), 165. For an analysis of triangular diplomacy from 1969 to 1972, see Raymond L. Gharthoff, *Détente and Confrontation: American-Soviet Relations from Nixon to Reagan* (Washington, DC, 1994), chaps. 6–8.

commitments in the post-Vietnam era. Publicly, the goal was a “stable structure of peace,” which would be forged through “creative diplomacy,” and “coexistence” and “accommodation” with adversaries.³ In private, Kissinger’s objective was to increase American maneuverability, and to carve out a pre-eminent position for Washington as the “balancer” at the pivot of the new triangle by maintaining better relations with each side than they did with each other.⁴

The immediate opportunity for creating the triangular balance of power was afforded by the 1969 Sino-Soviet border conflict, and the likelihood that Moscow might launch a broader attack on China. Then, Beijing’s urgent requirement for a countervailing force persuaded it to put aside ideology, to contemplate at least temporary compromise on Taiwan, and to turn to new relations with the United States.⁵ This was also the opportunity for Washington to exploit concretely the Sino-Soviet schism to its geopolitical advantage. By playing the “China card”—exercising its option potentially to complicate matters for Moscow at its eastern front—the United States could exert pressure on the Soviets for greater responsiveness in the superpower détente process and in trying to find a negotiated settlement in Vietnam.⁶

The rapprochement has often been perceived in terms of how the United States played the China card to gain leverage over the Soviet Union. Yet, the logic of triangular relations suggests that there would have been a parallel “Soviet card” being played by the United States toward China, and a “U.S. card” that was played within the Sino-Soviet relationship.⁷ From the American vantage point, the other side of the triangle—how Washington used the Soviet threat and Soviet-American relations as bargaining tools with Beijing—has seen little research to date. Until recently, the lack of documentary material has forced scholars to focus on the broad strategic context in their analyses of the triangular relationship among the United States, the Soviet Union, and China from the Nixon period onward.

Recently declassified U.S. documents now allow us to investigate how, and to what effect, the Soviet card was played in Nixon and Kissinger’s negotiations

3. Richard Nixon, “Second Annual Report to the Congress on U.S. Foreign Policy,” 2/25/71, *Public Papers of the Presidents: Richard Nixon* [PPP: RN] 1971 (Washington, DC, 1972), 220–22.

4. Kissinger, *White House Years*, 1076; Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval* (London, 1982), 705.

5. John W. Garver, *China’s Decision for Rapprochement with the United States, 1968–1971* (Boulder, CO, 1982); Yang Kuisong, “The Sino-Soviet Border Clash of 1969: From Zhenbao Island to Sino-American Rapprochement,” *Cold War History* 1, no. 1 (August 2000): 21–52; Robert S. Ross, *Negotiating Cooperation: The United States and China, 1969–1989* (Stanford, CA, 1995), 1–52.

6. See Patrick Tyler, *A Great Wall: Six Presidents and China* (New York, 1999), 62–63.

7. The best volume examining the different sides of the strategic triangle is Robert Ross, ed., *China, the United States, and the Soviet Union: Tripolarity and Policy Making in the Cold War* (New York, 1993). However, the authors concentrate on exploring the general impacts of the strategic context on dyads in the triangle, rather than on the details of bilateral bargaining.

with Chinese leaders in the early 1970s. Works based on this new material, particularly the books by James Mann and Patrick Tyler, have revealed the extent to which the idea of the Soviet Union as a shared enemy fueled the new Sino-American relationship. Mann notes that "[w]hile American and Chinese officials gave toasts to friendship, they talked increasingly of their common enemy," and by 1974, Kissinger and the new premier Deng Xiaoping "could barely say hello to each other without swapping lines about the Russians."⁸

The analysis here concentrates on the process of private bargaining that took place between Nixon and Kissinger and the Chinese leaders and their representatives during the first four years of the opening to China, which eventually led to the state of affairs described by Mann. It explores how the triangular strategic context was portrayed and played to advantage to advance the White House's position and to persuade Chinese leaders about the type of new relationship the United States and China ought to pursue. The aim is to understand and assess the nature and value of the Soviet card to the Nixon administration in the development of Sino-American relations.

Given this focus on Sino-American relations, this article offers neither a parallel study of the impact of the China card on Soviet-American relations nor conclusions about the success or otherwise of triangular politics per se. However, concentrating on Sino-American relations does allow us to contextualize triangular politics within the dynamics of bilateral relations. In this regard, declassified records demonstrate the critical importance of an understanding on Taiwan, struck at the beginning during Kissinger's first secret trip to Beijing in July 1971, in facilitating the U.S.-China rapprochement. At these initial talks, Kissinger assured Premier Zhou Enlai that the U.S. government did not advocate either a "two Chinas" or a "one Taiwan one China" solution; that it did not support the Taiwan independence movement; and that it would gradually withdraw U.S. troops on Taiwan as the war in Vietnam ended and as relations with China improved.⁹ The Chinese side compromised by not insisting on U.S. recognition for the PRC prior to Nixon's visit to China, in part because of Kissinger's secret assurance that the Nixon administration would normalize relations with the PRC during the first half of Nixon's second term in office.¹⁰ This understanding on Taiwan was necessary in allowing the talks to proceed. In the realm of triangular politics, the temporary agreement on Taiwan initially facilitated the White House play of the Soviet card in developing Sino-American relations, but as Beijing perceived that Washington was less prepared to deliver on the process of normalization as time went by, Taiwan increasingly

8. Tyler, *A Great Wall*, 107–79; James Mann, *About Face: A History of America's Curious Relationship with China, From Nixon to Clinton* (New York, 1998), 56.

9. Kissinger to Zhou, memcon, 7/9/71, Box 851, National Security Files [NSF], Nixon Presidential Material [NPM], National Archives [NA].

10. Kissinger to Zhou, memcon, 7/10/71, Box 851, NSF, NPM, p. 19. For a fuller discussion on the dispensation on Taiwan, see Goh, *Constructing the US Rapprochement with China*, chap. 8.

resurfaced as a serious constraint in bilateral relations that undermined the effectiveness of the Soviet card.

Kissinger has written that he did not have to wield any card to try to influence China's foreign-policy decisions; the PRC simply cooperated with the United States out of an obvious convergence of interests engendered by Chinese fears of the Soviet Union.¹¹ In contrast, this analysis shows that Nixon and Kissinger felt it necessary to devote considerable effort to playing the Soviet card during the rapprochement in order to persuade the Chinese leaders to develop closer ties with Washington. This was done by emphasizing the Soviet threat to the PRC; by explaining that the United States perceived Soviet militarism as a menace to international stability and U.S. security; and by offering Beijing various means of support in preparing for a Soviet attack. There were three phases in the process. The first was the initial opening from Kissinger's secret preparatory trip to Beijing in July 1971 to the summit in February 1972, during which he and Nixon professed a balanced approach to both the Soviet Union and China, but subtly tilted toward the Chinese. The second phase was from mid-1972 to Kissinger's fifth trip to Beijing in February 1973, when he consciously tried to compensate for the developing Soviet-American détente by playing up the Soviet threat to China and the need for deeper Sino-American strategic relations. The final phase, from mid-1973 to 1974, saw Kissinger battling increasing Chinese skepticism and constraints imposed by domestic political problems, not only by emphasizing Moscow's belligerent intentions toward Beijing, but by offering the Chinese leaders what amounted to a secret alliance.

1971 TO EARLY 1972: PARALLEL DÉTENTE WITH A TILT TOWARD CHINA

Kissinger made two preparatory trips to Beijing in 1971—the infamous secret visit in July, and a publicized one in October. These were followed by an advance trip by his deputy Alexander Haig in January 1972, ahead of Nixon's summit in February. In their talks with the Chinese leaders, the Americans presented their foreign-policy strategy as consisting of three key elements: it was realist and based on the assessment of national interest; it was not aimed at fostering conflict among the major powers and would thus be even-handed; but it was antihegemonic and so would favor a strong PRC which could help to act as counterweight against the Soviet Union. In the process, they played the Soviet card in two ways. First, wielding a “stick,” they firmly assured Beijing that Washington would continue to pursue détente with its superpower rival, implying that China would have to do its part to keep up the Sino-American side of the triangle. Second, they played up the Soviet threat so as to justify the

11. From Kissinger's realist systemic interest-driven account, the card, if it existed, was automatic—it “played itself”—*Diplomacy* (New York, 1994), 729.

need for closer U.S.-China relations and cooperation, while offering the "carrot" of a covert tilt toward China.

From the beginning, Kissinger and Nixon sought to manage, at least rhetorically, Chinese expectations about the implications the Sino-American opening would have for U.S. relations with its superpower rival. They emphasized to the Chinese leaders at the opening stages of the rapprochement that Washington would be even-handed in developing both U.S.-PRC and U.S.-USSR relations. Thus, Nixon informed Zhou that even as the United States was absolutely not looking to collude with the USSR against China, neither was it seeking a Sino-American condominium against the Soviets. Moreover, rather than seeking a destabilizing Sino-Soviet war, Washington hoped for better relations between the Soviet Union and the PRC.¹² Zhou reciprocated the rhetoric, replying that China did not have "the least opposition" to improved Soviet-American relations.¹³

Yet even-handedness vis-à-vis Moscow and Beijing did not mean equal exchanges. As Kissinger's staff expressed it, the United States needed to make clear to China that it would not move to an "overt pro-PRC policy" because it had too much "big concrete business" to do with the Soviets.¹⁴ The truth was, in contrast to concrete superpower negotiations about arms reduction and control and other major global strategic issues, China's strategic influence was relatively confined to Asia, and the contacts between Washington and Beijing were new and still had to overcome basic political differences.

Moreover, Kissinger was candid about the possible negative impacts of Soviet-American negotiations on the Chinese. In the wake of the announcement of Kissinger's secret July trip to Beijing, the Soviets responded to the Sino-American rapprochement by being more forthcoming about the U.S.-USSR summit and other negotiations such as those over Berlin. Kissinger hastened to reassure Zhou that the Nixon administration did not negotiate with the Soviets for the purpose of freeing Soviet hands to concentrate on the East. But he stressed Washington's intention nevertheless to "pursue our interest with Moscow while we try to improve our dialogue with Peking" and warned that the United States could not be "held accountable" if this complicated China's

12. Memcon, 2/23/72, Box 87, President's Office Files [POF], NPM, p. 20; Kissinger to Zhou, memcon, 20/10/71, Box 851, NSF, NPM, p. 3; Memcon, 2/25/72, Box 87, POF, NPM, p. 6. The principle that "any nation can be a friend of the US without being someone else's enemy" was Nixon's deliberate public line on the opening to China—see television address, 7/15/71, *PPP: RN 1971*, 819.

13. Memcon, 22/2/72, Box 87, POF, NPM, p. 18; also Zhou to Kissinger, memcon, 10/20/71, p. 21.

14. National Security Council [NSC] briefing paper, "Polo II—Soviet Union," 10/7/71, Box 851, NSF, NPM, p. 14. See also Kissinger-Zhou memcon, 7/10/71, 12.10-6pm, Box 851, NSF, NPM, p. 36. Indeed, prior to Kissinger's secret trip to Beijing, Nixon urged his adviser to "talk up" SALT and the Soviet proposal for Five-Power nuclear disarmament talks when he met the Chinese leaders—NSC briefing paper, "Polo—Review of US and PRC Views on Other Great Powers," 6/21/71, Box 850, NSF, NPM, p. 6.

problems.¹⁵ The subtext was aimed at maintaining the new strategic triangle: “We are making some progress with the Soviets, and you Chinese should be sure that you keep up with us and improve relations with us, so that we don’t get ahead of you in relations with the Russians.”¹⁶

While it was true that Washington sought good relations with both Moscow and Beijing, it did not necessarily wish for better Sino-Soviet relations. According to Kissinger’s model of triangular politics, while the United States did not seek a Sino-Soviet war, it did require some fridity in Sino-Soviet relations because the pivotal American position would be beneficial only so long as the Chinese and Soviets regarded each other as a greater threat than the Americans. Thus, in their dialogues, Nixon and Kissinger sought to persuade the Chinese leaders that while Moscow harbored ill intent toward them, Washington was China’s firm friend.

During the early talks, the Americans quickly realized that Beijing’s key security concern revolved around superpower collusion to encircle China. At their opening meeting, Kissinger made sure to assure Zhou at the outset that the United States would never collude with other countries against the PRC.¹⁷ He added the remarkable statements that, because—apart from the Taiwan issue which he fully expected to be resolved in the near future—the United States and China had “no conflicting interests at all” in great power relations, the United States would be “your *supporter* and not your opponent.” As evidence, Nixon sent his assurance that Washington would not take any “major steps” affecting Chinese interests without prior discussion with Beijing, and that he was prepared to provide information regarding Soviet-American negotiations to alleviate Chinese concerns. Moreover, the Nixon administration was prepared to make with Beijing any arms control agreement it concluded with Moscow. The Chinese politely declined these offers.¹⁸

Despite their perceived fear of the Soviets, the Chinese leaders were relatively taciturn on the subject in the early meetings: in July 1971, Zhou referred only obliquely to “our northern neighbour” and “the other superpower,” but did not initiate any further discussion on the issue.¹⁹ Kissinger put Zhou’s reticence down to a sense of “face.” During the October trip, although Zhou had placed the Soviet Union last on a list of six key issues on the substantive agenda for the talks and declared that Beijing was not opposed to U.S.-USSR relations, Kissinger was convinced that the Chinese were displaying bravado in the face

15. Memcon, 10/22/71, p. 30; Kissinger to Nixon, “My October China Visit: Discussions of the Issues,” Box 851, NSF, NPM, p. 29. Zhou’s phlegmatic response was that “it does not matter.”

16. Winston Lord oral history interview, in Nancy Tucker, ed., *China Confidential: American Diplomats and Sino-American Relations, 1945–1996* (New York, 2001), 278.

17. Memcon, 7/9/71, Box 851, NSF, NPM, p. 6.

18. Memcon, 7/10/71, 12.10-6pm, pp. 7, 28; Memcon, 7/11/71, 10.35-11.55am, p. 8; 10/22/71, pp. 32–33.

19. Memcon, 7/10/71, 12.10-6pm, p. 35.

of the Soviet threat.²⁰ Thus, he reminded them that the Soviet menace was directed mainly toward China. As his staff noted, even at the public banquet, Kissinger used "anti-Soviet play" and deliberately "always [used] Soviet examples as bad guys."²¹ In private, he warned Zhou that in the wake of the Sino-American rapprochement, Moscow had reached agreement with Washington on Berlin and SALT, and was pushing for a European Security Community, because of its "desire to free itself in Europe so it can concentrate on other areas," namely China.²² Furthermore, he fanned Beijing's ire about superpower nuclear hegemony in August by informing the Chinese leaders that, in bilateral negotiations about an agreement to prevent accidental nuclear war, the Soviets had tried unsuccessfully to make provisions in the agreement which would have obliged Washington to report about nuclear events in China.²³

The first opportunity for the White House to demonstrate to Beijing that Washington recognized and would act to support Chinese national interests occurred during the South Asia crisis at the end of 1971. While the U.S. "tilt" toward Pakistan was motivated by various reasons, the desire to boost the new opening to China played an important role. Kissinger encouraged Beijing to support actively its Pakistani ally in several ways. He provided the Chinese ambassador to the United Nations, Huang Hua, with detailed intelligence information about Indian deployments, including unconfirmed reports that the Indians were moving their divisions away from the Chinese border toward East Pakistan.²⁴ When war broke out between India and Pakistan on 3 December, Kissinger argued that strong U.S. action was necessary to counter the growing Soviet influence on the subcontinent, telling Nixon, "We really don't have any choice. We can't allow a friend of ours and China's to get screwed in a conflict with a friend of Russia's."²⁵

Against this backdrop, he informed Huang Hua about U.S. moves in the subcontinent and indicated "our approval of Chinese support for Pakistan, including diversionary troop movements."²⁶ To demonstrate U.S. support for China and its ally, Kissinger made his first offer to Beijing of U.S. satellite intel-

20. Kissinger to Nixon, "My October China Visit: Discussions of the Issues," pp. 5, 7, 29.

21. Dwight Chapin, "Zhou—Dinner 10/24," 10/25/71, Box 27, Chapin Files, NPM.

22. Memcon, 10/22/71, pp. 29–30.

23. Memcon, 8/16/71, Box 330, Lord Files, LOT 77D112, Record Group [RG] 59, NA, pp. 4–5. But Garthoff argues that Kissinger misread the Soviet position, which was not intended to be anti-Chinese—see *Détente and Confrontation*, 202, 272.

24. Memcon, 11/23/71, Box 330, Lord Files, pp. 12–13.

25. *White House Years*, 897–98; Richard Nixon, *RN: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon* (London, 1978), 527. The State Department, Joint Chiefs of Staff, and CIA disagreed with the White House, and there was "open rebellion" by the interagency Special Action Group for the crisis—see H. R. Haldeman, *The Haldeman Diaries: Inside the Nixon White House* (New York, 1994), 381.

26. Kissinger to Nixon, "My December 10 Meeting with the Chinese in New York," National Security Archives [NSA], *China and the United States: From Hostility to Engagement*, Special Collections Series, Microfiche Document no. 233, p. 1. Emphasis mine.

ligence information about the disposition of Soviet forces.”²⁷ Further, Nixon sent the message that if Beijing “took measures to protect its security” as a result of the situation in South Asia, the United States would “oppose any effort of others to interfere with the PRC.” Clearly, the intention was to encourage the PRC to move its troops to the Indian border as a way to help divert Indian military attention away from Pakistan, by helping to ensure that Beijing was able to monitor its northern flank at the same time. Kissinger stated in his memoirs that “an active if tacit collaboration” developed.²⁸ Yet, the White House’s belief that Beijing would take military action contributed significantly to a series of escalatory and potentially dangerous actions in December, including Nixon’s order for the U.S. naval force to sail toward the Bay of Bengal.²⁹ In any event, Beijing did not accept U.S. offers and instead supported a ceasefire in both East and West Pakistan followed by mutual troop withdrawals.³⁰

In January 1972, Kissinger’s deputy Alexander Haig headed an advance team to China for a “rehearsal” for the president’s visit, and the White House tried to use Haig’s brusque, military style to convey more forcefully the Soviet threat. For instance, Haig told Zhou that in the wake of the South Asian crisis, Soviet policy on the subcontinent had moved toward greater involvement in order to “encircle the PRC with unfriendly states.” Evidence of this included its recent announcement of support for Bangladesh, offer of assistance to Pakistan, increased material support for Hanoi, and Gromyko’s planned visit to Japan. The United States objected to these Soviet moves because “the future viability of the PRC was of the greatest interest to us and a matter of our own national interest.” Because Washington was convinced that the Soviet strategy was first to neutralize the PRC and then turn on the United States itself, the United States and PRC “must concert at this critical juncture.” In Washington’s first substantial offer of cooperation with the PRC against the Soviet Union, Haig told Zhou that the United States would, as it had done during the crisis between India and Pakistan, attempt to “neutralize” Soviet threats in the PRC’s periphery, and to “deter threats against the [PRC].” Specifically, the White House would—“unilaterally and without any reciprocity”—provide Beijing with U.S. strategic and tactical intelligence pertaining to the Soviet threat against China.³¹

27. Kissinger’s talking points for this meeting, however, suggest that there would have been considerable limits to what intelligence information the United States could provide, as the next relevant satellite information would not be available until the end of December or beginning of January, when, as it turned out, the crisis had already passed. See NSC, “Talking Points South Asia,” n.d., NSA Doc. 229, p. 7.

28. Kissinger, *White House Years*, 906.

29. *Ibid.*, 910.

30. Haig-Huang memcon, 12/12/71, Box 330, Lord Files.

31. Zhou-Haig memcon, 1/3/72, Box 1037, NSF, NPM, pp. 2–4, 6; NSC, “Talking Points for Haig Trip,” n.d., Box 1037, NSF, NPM, pp. 6–7. Haig’s presentation did not go down well. Mao reportedly commented, “To worry about us, [the Americans] are the cat who is crying over the death of a mouse! When [the Soviets] are in Vietnam, they want to surround China

During the February 1972 summit, Nixon repeated this offer and assured Zhou that the United States would "oppose" any attempt by the Soviets to engage in "aggressive action" against China.³² The declassified transcript of a meeting on 23 February 1972 shows that Kissinger—along with his aides Winston Lord, Jonathan Howe, and John Holdridge—briefed Marshal Yeh Jianying, the vice chairman of the military commission and Qiao Guanhua, the vice minister of foreign affairs, about the deployment of Soviet forces along the Sino-Soviet border. The briefing included details about ground forces, tactical aircraft and missiles, strategic air defense systems, and strategic attack forces, especially nuclear forces.³³ Kissinger's assistant Robert MacFarlane has revealed that he and other aides provided intelligence briefings to the Chinese on each of Kissinger's subsequent trips to Beijing.³⁴ Winston Lord, Kissinger's key aide on China, confirms that these briefings occurred, but added that they were more a gesture to back up the verbal exchanges than of significant substance; the main purpose was "to build trust, confidence, a sense of shared danger." There was also a degree of "political symbolism": according to Lord, the White House assumed that the Soviets might well "get to hear of it," and by implication, had regarded this action as a means to further load the China card.³⁵ The significance of the intelligence information provided over this period is debatable, as the full documentary record is not available. However, the secret provision of regular intelligence information to Beijing regarding Soviet disposition of forces

from Indochina, and again, when they are in the subcontinent, the Russians want to encircle China from the subcontinent. . . . What about Taiwan, the Philippines, and South Korea? Do all these countries need [U.S.] protection? Isn't it dangerous that China's independence and living should be protected by you?" Accordingly, Zhou took umbrage with Haig, stating that he was "surprised" that the United States seemed to be "all of a sudden express[ing] doubts over China's viability, asserting that it wants to maintain China's independence and viability." Zhou retorted that China would never rely on "external forces" to maintain its independence and viability, because this would make it "a protectorate or a colony." Gong Li, "Chinese Decision Making and the Thawing of Sino-US Relations," in *Re-examining the Cold War: US-China Diplomacy, 1954–1973*, eds. Robert S. Ross and Jiang Changbin (Cambridge, MA, 2001), 352–53; Hong Zhaohui, "The Role of Individuals in US-China Relations, 1949–1972," in *Image, Perception, and the Making of US-China Relations*, eds. Li Hongshan and Hong Zhaohui (Lanham, MD, 1998), 358; Memcon, 1/7/72, Box 1037, NSF, NPM, pp. 2, 4.

32. Nixon-Zhou memcon, 2/23/72, Box 87, POF, NPM, p. 21. Nixon did not elaborate on just how Washington would oppose Soviet aggression.

33. See Nixon-Zhou memcon, 2/22/72, Box 87, POF, NPM, p. 10; Kissinger-Yeh memcon, 2/23/72, Box 92, NSF, NPM. These documents are also available at <http://www.nsarchive.org/NSAEBB/NSAEBB106/index.htm>.

34. See Robert MacFarlane, *Special Trust* (New York, 1994), 149–69. MacFarlane writes that apart from detailed briefings about Soviet military dispositions and readiness at the Chinese border, they also provided information on Soviet military aid to North Vietnam and other Third World countries and guerilla movements.

35. Author interview with Winston Lord, 3/7/01. Moscow apparently did learn about the provision of intelligence information: Anatoly Dobrynin, the Soviet ambassador in Washington, told Kissinger in March that Moscow had it on Chinese sources that Kissinger had given the Chinese "a complete rundown of the 'dislocation' of Soviet forces on the Chinese border, as well as of the location of Soviet missile installations." Kissinger denied it. See Memcon, 3/9/72, Box 493, NSF, NPM, p. 3.

indicates that in spite of their rhetoric about even-handedness, Nixon and Kissinger were prepared to lean covertly toward Beijing in order to strengthen the image of the Soviet Union as a shared adversary.

The Chinese were more cautious. Marshal Yeh responded positively to the February 1972 intelligence briefing, but his remark that the information was “an indication of your wish to improve our relationship” suggested that the Chinese appreciated it mainly as a demonstration of mutual trust and confidence.³⁶ Zhou himself was circumspect in response to Nixon’s indirect references to the Soviet threat,³⁷ agreeing that the Soviets pursued a “policy of expansion” but insisting that China was willing to improve relations with Moscow.³⁸ Zhou’s presentation appears to accord with official Chinese accounts which report that Mao’s understanding of the basic issue in the Sino-American rapprochement was that “no matter whether it is the United States or China, neither of us could fight simultaneously on two fronts.” That is, the Chinese leaders were primarily seeking détente with the United States, but not a de facto alliance—they had decided to rely upon themselves in defending against the Soviets—in order to concentrate on their main Soviet adversary.³⁹

Be that as it may, the Shanghai Communiqué signed at the end of the summit carried clear anti-Soviet overtones. The short list of five issues on which the two sides agreed included the following:

Neither should seek hegemony in the Asia-Pacific region, and each is opposed to efforts by any other country or group of countries to establish such hegemony; and neither is prepared to negotiate on behalf of any third party or to enter into agreements or understandings with the other directed at other states.

As Kissinger’s memoirs noted, these boiled down to an agreement not to cooperate with the Soviet bloc, and to oppose any attempt by any country to dominate Asia. Because the Soviet Union was the only other country capable of such domination, the text suggested that “a tacit alliance to block Soviet expansionism in Asia was coming into being.”⁴⁰ This reflected the centrality of the Soviet threat to the developing U.S.-PRC relationship, and foreshadowed the way in which Kissinger’s progressive construction of this threat would bring the Nixon administration closer to a U.S.-China coalition against the Soviet Union.

36. Kissinger-Yeh memcon, p. 20.

37. For instance, Nixon told Mao that the United States and PRC did not want to dominate each other, or “reach out and control the world,” but “this cannot be said of some other nations,” and observed to Zhou that China was “so significant a power that the Soviet Union has more units on its border with China than it does on the border with Western Europe.” Nixon-Mao memcon, 2/21/72, in William Burr, ed., *The Kissinger Transcripts: The Top Secret Talks with Beijing and Moscow* (New York, 1999), 64; Nixon-Zhou memcon, 2/21/72, p. 10.

38. Memcon, 2/23/72, pp. 22–36; Memcon, 2/25/72, pp. 4–5.

39. Li, “Chinese Decision Making,” 353; Garver, *Chinese Decision for Rapprochement*, chaps. 1–3.

40. Kissinger, *Diplomacy*, 728.

MID-1972 TO EARLY 1973: "FORMAL SYMMETRY" BUT
"TACIT ALLIANCE"

After Nixon's China trip, Kissinger traveled again to Beijing for talks in June 1972 and February 1973. In between, Kissinger and his staff met frequently with Ambassador Huang Hua in New York. During this period, Beijing was more forthcoming in discussing the Soviet threat, and there was such an apparent convergence of Chinese and American strategic viewpoints that in June 1972 Kissinger was moved to tell Nixon that China "can only be described as tacit ally."⁴¹ Eight months later, Kissinger added, "with the exception of the United Kingdom, *the PRC might well be the closest to us in its global perceptions.*"⁴²

Beijing now appeared to recognize that it was in China's interest for the United States to maintain its power to counter Soviet pressures internationally.⁴³ Mao asserted that the United States and China should cooperate in dealing with the Soviet "bastard" and urged that Washington should work more closely with its allies, particularly to maintain NATO unity.⁴⁴ Chinese attitudes toward the U.S.-Japan relationship were also modified. From their previous insistence that Japan was a rising power that might help carve up China, the Chinese leaders now saw Japan as an "incipient ally . . . to counter Soviet and Indian designs."⁴⁵ With Sino-Japanese normalization came the private acknowledgment that Beijing no longer wished an end to the Japan-U.S. security treaty because Washington could restrain militarism in Tokyo and prevent it from being "won over" by the Soviet Union.⁴⁶ Mao urged the United States to create an anti-Soviet axis that would include Europe, Turkey, Iran, Pakistan, and Japan.⁴⁷

This convergence of strategic assessments was accompanied by the further institutionalization of the U.S.-PRC relationship in the form of an agreement during Kissinger's February 1973 trip to set up liaison offices in each other's capitals. These offices—which would be "closely equivalent to Embassies in everything but name"—represented a concrete advance toward normalization, but the simultaneous presence of an ROC embassy and a PRC liaison office in

41. Kissinger to Nixon, "My Trip to Peking, June 19–23, 1972," 6/27/72, Box 851, NSF, NPM, p. 2.

42. Kissinger to Nixon, "My Trip to China," 3/2/73, Box 6, PPF, NPM, pp. 2–3. Italics in original.

43. See, for instance, Zhou-Ye Jianying-Kissinger memcon, 20/6/72, pp. 15–6; 6/21/72, p. 3, in Box 851, NSF, NPM. This trend was noted by Kissinger's staff who accompanied him on the trip. See Howe to Kissinger, "China Trip," 6/24/72, Box 97, NSF, NPM.

44. Mao-Kissinger memcon, 2/17/73, in Burr, *Kissinger Transcripts*, 88–89.

45. Kissinger, "My Trip to China," 16.

46. Zhou-Kissinger memcon, 2/18/73, Box 98, NSF, NPM, pp. 29–33; Mao-Kissinger memcon, in Burr, *Kissinger Transcripts*, 91–92.

47. Kissinger, "My Trip to China," 94. Notably, Mao did not include China in this axis, an indication of the way in which Beijing seemed to regard itself more as a source of "moral support" than a U.S. ally or recipient of U.S. military supplies or aid.

Washington also signified Beijing's continued willingness to downplay the contentious issue of Taiwan.⁴⁸

Kissinger was noticeably taciturn about the effect of the developing Soviet-American détente on these Chinese calculations, noting only that "the growing Chinese preoccupation with the Soviet threat" played an important role.⁴⁹ In fact, although the logic of triangular politics underlay both the American and Chinese moves toward rapprochement, the dynamics of the strategic triangle only became fully functional during 1972, when the U.S.-PRC and U.S.-USSR summit meetings were held within four months of each other. The Nixon White House devoted the months following the China summit to negotiations with the Soviet Union about Berlin, SALT, Vietnam, and the Soviet-American summit. Thus, Beijing's conviction that the United States and China should join in countering Soviet expansionism did not develop suddenly in mid-1972. As the momentum of triangular politics grew, so too did the Chinese leaders' desire for closer relations with the United States to counteract U.S.-USSR ties. At the same time, Chinese disquiet and suspicions about Soviet-American collusion increased, leading to a significant divergence in the Chinese leaders' representation of U.S. and Soviet intentions, which Kissinger played down in his reports to Nixon.

Despite working to deepen Sino-American ties and supporting more aggressive efforts to counter the Soviet threat, Mao and Zhou did not share Kissinger's representation of the United States and PRC as tacit allies. Their account of the developing U.S.-PRC relationship was more ambivalent. While they agreed with the United States about the shared danger of the Soviet threat, Mao particularly questioned American sincerity and intentions in the rapprochement, and portrayed the United States as opportunistically exploiting the Sino-Soviet split in order to achieve its ultimate aim of defeating its superpower rival.

As the Chinese leaders more explicitly probed the anti-Soviet thrust of the Sino-American rapprochement, Beijing articulated a stronger image of an aggressive and expansionist Soviet Union. In February 1973, Zhou warned Kissinger that the "new Czars" were "extremely sly," "extremely aggressive," and willing to "disregard all diplomatic promises," so that "as soon as you slack your steps . . . they will step in."⁵⁰ This stood in contrast to Washington's policy of détente with Moscow, which was predicated on the assumption that the

48. *Ibid.*, 20–21. As far back as May 1971, the Chinese Politburo had recommended that in the interim period while Beijing awaited the full realization of its conditions on Taiwan prior to normalization of relations with Washington, the two sides could set up liaison offices—Zhang Baijia, "The Changing International Scene and Chinese Policy towards the United States, 1965–1970," in Ross and Jiang, eds., *Re-examining the Cold War*, 75.

49. *Ibid.*, 1.

50. Zhou-Kissinger memcon, 2/15/73, pp. 17–18. The Soviets also did not disguise their low opinion of the Chinese: Brezhnev told Nixon that they were "peculiar," "treacherous and spiteful," "extremely sly and perfidious," and "ruthless." Nixon-Brezhnev memcon, 6/23/73, Box 75, NSF, NPM.

Soviet leaders might choose the course of changing its policy in a more peaceful direction.⁵¹ Zhou retorted that the Soviets' "so-called détente is false," but because Moscow feared fighting a nuclear war, it was trying to negotiate a nuclear nonaggression treaty with the United States while shifting its challenges to peripheral areas such as the Middle East.⁵²

Beijing was particularly skeptical about Soviet-American negotiations regarding a nuclear nonaggression treaty in the second half of 1972, which eventually evolved into the Agreement on the Prevention of Nuclear War (PNW) signed in June 1973. The agreement, proposed by the Soviets, would have the two superpowers refrain from using nuclear weapons against each other, and consult with each other in the event of conflicts that might involve nuclear weapons.⁵³ Beijing denounced the proposed agreement as "nakedly aimed at nuclear world hegemony," and thus in violation of the Shanghai Communiqué principle against collusion to divide the world into spheres.⁵⁴

Kissinger responded by constructing an even more menacing Soviet threat and arguing that détente would aid China in containing the Soviet Union. He agreed that Moscow was seeking détente in the West in order to free its hands for aggression in the East: "here is a deliberate Soviet policy to isolate you."⁵⁵ But Washington had every intention of helping its Chinese friends to counter this threat, except that it had to negotiate with Moscow as well, in order to "to play for time." The Nixon administration needed to accustom its domestic audience to the notion that Chinese security affected American interests. In the meantime, agreements such as the nuclear nonaggression treaty ensured that if the Soviets acted aggressively, there would be a moral and legal basis for U.S. military reaction.⁵⁶

But the Chinese disputed Kissinger's representations of both Soviet and American intentions and strategy. In August 1972, Huang Hua declared that the Chinese side was "not so worried about the Soviet attempt to isolate China." On the contrary, there were signs that Moscow was trying to create "through its anti-China propaganda a false sense of security in Europe." In other words,

51. Kissinger to Zhou, memcon, 6/20/72, Box 851, NSF, NPM, pp. 22–23.

52. Zhou-Kissinger memcon, 2/17/73, 10.22-11.10pm, pp. 4–6.

53. The key aspects of the PNW agreement were: a declaration that the superpowers would refrain from the use of force against each other and against others, and an agreement to consult with each other to avert the risk of nuclear war in the event that relations between them or between either side and third countries appeared to involve the risk of nuclear war. See Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation*, 376–86.

54. Kissinger-Huang memcon, 8/4/72, Box 329, Lord Files, pp. 1–2; Note from Zhou, in Huang-Kissinger memcon, 5/27/73, Box 328, Lord Files, pp. 5–6. Chinese sources reveal that there was internal disagreement about the implications of the PNW within the Chinese leadership, but Mao prevailed in his view that it did not signify a true superpower cabal as détente could only be temporary because Soviet-American "contradictions" were too entrenched. Gong Li, *Mao Zedong yu Meiguo* [Mao Zedong and America] (Beijing, 1998), 358–59.

55. Kissinger-Huang memcon, 8/4/72, pp. 7–8.

56. Kissinger-Zhou memcon, 2/16/73, pp. 12–15.

Beijing believed that Moscow retained its primary designs on the West, and the United States ought to reexamine its policy of détente.⁵⁷

By February 1973, Chinese skepticism about U.S. intentions shifted from an overt U.S.-USSR cabal toward the possibility of more subtle U.S. strategies to overcome its superpower rival using the PRC. As their concern grew about developments in Europe—the establishment of the European Security Community, the Mutual and Balanced Force Reductions (MBFR) negotiations, and Ostpolitik in general—Zhou and Mao suggested that the U.S. policy of détente in the West was really an appeasement tactic to “push the ill waters of the Soviet Union . . . eastward,” toward China, the Middle East, and the Indian subcontinent.⁵⁸ Zhou pointed to “historical examples” of such (unsuccessful) attempts by the Western Europeans in trying to push German aggressors eastward, during two world wars.⁵⁹ In this Chinese representation, the United States was not a tacit ally, but a false friend.

Mao ascribed to the United States even more devious intentions, suggesting that Washington’s aim was not only to encourage Moscow to target the East, but to let the Soviets “get bogged down in China,” as the United States had been in Vietnam. Washington might then even assist Moscow against China. The American strategic objective would be to exhaust the USSR, and after a period of years, to confront Moscow and “bring the Soviet Union down.”⁶⁰ This extreme scenario was Mao’s way of reminding Kissinger that Beijing was aware that the Nixon administration’s China policy was a means toward the goal of ultimate victory in the U.S.-USSR superpower contest.

Faced with the Chinese image of the United States as an unscrupulous exploiter, Kissinger was forced to emphasize the common danger faced by west and east. The United States would “never knowingly cooperate in an attack on China,” and had no desire for a stalemated Sino-Soviet war, he told Mao, as this would lead to massive international instability.⁶¹ As such, “We would con-

57. Huang-Howe memcon, 8/14/72, Box 850, NSF, NPM, p. 2. On 10 July 1972, Mao himself had warned the French foreign minister about the danger of the Soviet “feint towards the East”: “While they speak of attacking China, the reality is that they want to conquer Europe”—*Mao Zedong waijiao wenxuan* [Selected Diplomatic Papers of Mao Zedong] (Beijing, 1994), 597.

58. Zhou-Kissinger memcon, 2/15/73, p. 11; Mao-Kissinger memcon, 2/18/73, in Burr, *Kissinger Transcripts*, 89.

59. Memcon, 2/17/73, 10.22-11.10pm, pp. 2, 4.

60. Mao-Kissinger memcon, in Burr, *Kissinger Transcripts*, 100. Both Zhou’s and Mao’s analyses of U.S. intentions of pushing the Soviets eastward were presented by the “Four Marshals” in their 1969 report—see “Our Views about the Current Situation,” 9/17/69, in *Cold War International History Project Bulletin* 11 (Winter 1998): 167.

61. Mao-Kissinger memcon, in Burr, *Kissinger Transcripts*, 89, 99–100. Ironically, both the Kennedy and Johnson administrations had contemplated joint action with the Soviet Union in a preemptive strike against Chinese nuclear facilities in the first half of the 1960s—see William Burr and Jeffrey T. Richelson, “Whether to ‘Strangle the Baby in the Cradle’: The United States and the Chinese Nuclear Program, 1960–64,” *International Security* 25, no. 3 (Winter 2000/01): 54–99; Gordon Chang, *Friends and Enemies: The United States, China and the Soviet Union, 1948–1972* (Stanford, CA, 1990), 242–45.

sider aggression against China as involving our own national security."⁶² He reminded the Chinese that Moscow retained aggressive intentions on Europe, because there were now twice as many Soviet divisions in Europe as there were on the Chinese border, with far more air power. Thus, Europe and China were in equal peril, and it was important to prevent the Soviet Union from "breaking out in one direction or another."⁶³

Rather than taking it at face value, the extreme form of U.S.-USSR collusion suggested by Mao should be interpreted as a bargaining tactic. These Chinese probes were designed to question the sincerity of Kissinger's assurances against the ill effects of détente for China's position, and to indicate Beijing's disagreement with Washington about the means of dealing with their common adversary.⁶⁴ It was clear to Beijing that Nixon's opening to China was motivated by the desire to play the China card in order to persuade the Soviet Union to negotiate détente with the United States. Beijing's fundamental concern was that, having successfully exploited the China card, Washington would deemphasize its containment policy, and might not perceive the urgency of fully normalizing relations with the PRC or of doing so on terms favorable to Beijing. Hence Zhou's observation in February 1973 to Kissinger that "[y]ou want to reach out to the Soviet Union by standing on Chinese shoulders," and his warning that "[t]he more you do this, the more naughty the Soviet Union becomes."⁶⁵

Essentially, the U.S. strategy of détente diverged from the preferred Chinese style of direct containment of the Soviet Union. Nixon and Kissinger wanted to exploit Chinese worries about Soviet intentions in order to tie Beijing into a strategic relationship with the United States, so that the China card could be played more effectively in persuading the Soviet Union to develop détente and restraint. Mao and Zhou, on the other hand, saw Chinese security as intertwined with the U.S. role as a strong countervailing force to the Soviet Union, and tried to use the new Sino-American relationship to influence Washington toward a firmer containment policy against the Soviet Union.⁶⁶ Moreover, Beijing's opening to the United States was not motivated primarily by the desire to deter a Soviet attack on China; instead, its aim was the longer-term one of

62. "My Trip to China," 6.

63. Zhou-Kissinger memcon, 2/15/73, pp. 11–12; 2/17/73, 10.22–11.10pm, p. 3.

64. For a detailed analysis of the implicit ways in which Kissinger and the Chinese leaders communicated intents and commitments to each other during these talks, see Evelyn Goh and Gavan Duffy, "From Tacit to Secret Alliance: Dialogical Analysis of Kissinger's 1973 Dialogues with the Chinese Leadership," paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Chicago, September 2004.

65. Memcon, 2/15/73, p. 18. Kissinger tried twice to forestall this Chinese worry by an attempt to convince Zhou that the "speeding up" of U.S.-USSR relations in the wake of the China summit was "not a case that we particularly sought." Memcon, 6/20/72, pp. 3, 22–23; Memcon, 2/16/73, p. 11.

66. This divergence in aims is discussed in Harry Harding, *A Fragile Relationship: The United States and China since 1972* (Washington, DC, 1992), 48–50.

preventing superpower collusion to contain China, which seemed increasingly likely as the Sino-American détente developed. Thus, the détente that Nixon and Kissinger sought with the Soviets in parallel to rapprochement with China was anathema to Beijing. Finally, Beijing's hard bargaining tactics may also have been aimed at exerting pressure on Washington to deliver on its promise of Sino-American normalization.

In order to counter Beijing's divergent views on U.S. and Soviet intentions and strategies, Kissinger tried to demonstrate that American strategy was one of developing closer relations with the PRC to contain Soviet power. From the beginning, Nixon and Kissinger attempted to convince the Chinese leaders that Washington perceived vital stakes in China's national security, and that "a strong, self-sufficient, independent China exercising control over its destiny is in our own interest."⁶⁷ As the Chinese leaders more insistently expressed their doubts about U.S. intentions, Kissinger reiterated this principle. In August 1972, he told Huang Hua that Washington wanted to establish "enough of a relationship with [the PRC] so that it is plausible that an attack on you involves a substantial American interest."⁶⁸ The Nixon administration would do this in three ways. First, the growing convergence of Washington's and Beijing's strategic assessments must be accompanied by a strengthening of the bilateral relationship.⁶⁹

Second, Washington would continue to pursue détente with Moscow. In addition to buying time to prepare domestic opinion, Kissinger argued that the U.S.-USSR détente was a means to ease *Moscow's* suspicions. In order to avoid giving the Soviet Union "the pretence of claiming they are being encircled" with the U.S.-PRC rapprochement, Washington had to "do enough with the Soviet Union to maintain a formal symmetry."⁷⁰ This allusion to a "formal symmetry" between U.S.-USSR relations and U.S.-PRC relations was a transparent attempt to elevate the status of the latter, because the superpower relationship clearly outweighed the Sino-American one in form as well as substance.

Kissinger also provided a timeline for this strategy: "The period of greatest danger" for China, he told Huang, would be in 1974-1976, when the USSR would have completed the "pacification" of the West through détente and disarmament, the shifting of its military forces, and the development of its offensive nuclear capabilities.⁷¹ Of course, this time period coincided with that by which Nixon and Kissinger had promised the Chinese they would achieve nor-

67. Kissinger to Zhou, memcon, 2/15/73, p. 4.

68. *Ibid.*, 8.

69. Kissinger-Zhou memcon, 2/15/73, p. 7.

70. Kissinger-Huang memcon, 8/4/72, Box 329, Lord Files, pp. 7-9.

71. Kissinger-Huang memcon, 8/4/72, pp. 11-12.

malization.⁷² Thus, the implication was that Beijing should await U.S.-PRC normalization, and in the meantime, trust that U.S. engagement with the Soviets through negotiations might help to temper some of the excesses of Soviet ambitions. Nixon and Kissinger sought other channels to send this message to Beijing. At the end of May 1972, Kissinger told French president Pompidou, who was due to visit Zhou in Beijing, that the U.S. objective was to "gain some years for the Chinese-American relationship to mature as a counterweight to Soviet power." Because there was "no sense in choosing the stronger against the weaker," America's "deliberate policy" was to support China against the Soviet Union. Indeed, it had "the intention to turn rapidly toward China in the space of two or three years."⁷³ These loaded remarks—which could have implied diplomatic or military relations—were probably made with the expectation that Pompidou would "leak" them to the Chinese, and perhaps also to the Soviets. In any case, to make doubly sure, Kissinger showed Huang the transcripts of this meeting.⁷⁴

Third, Washington would make certain commitments to the PRC to counterbalance U.S.-USSR agreements. In the run-up to the U.S.-USSR summit in June 1973, Kissinger reaffirmed that "anything we are prepared to do with the Soviet Union, we are prepared to do with the People's Republic." But in view of the impending PNW agreement, he added, "We may be prepared to do things with the People's Republic that we are not prepared to do with the Soviet Union."⁷⁵ Specifically, he offered to consider a joint public declaration that neither side would engage in any negotiation against the other or join in any agreement without consultation with each other.⁷⁶ Here, Kissinger appeared to have been somewhat carried away, for it is difficult to see how the Nixon administration could have justified such an agreement with a country with which it still had no diplomatic relations. In any event, the Chinese declined the offer, and Nixon contented himself with sending Zhou a formal note, promising that "in no case will the US participate in a joint move together with the Soviet Union under [the PNW] agreement with respect to conflicts . . . where the PRC is a party."⁷⁷ The Nixon administration also paid attention to material demonstrations of U.S. interest in strengthening the PRC. In response to Chinese requests for Rolls Royce technology, the U.S. government, which could not supply it due to existing trade restrictions on strategic goods, arranged with

72. In February, Kissinger specifically told Zhou that the Nixon administration was working to achieve "full normalization and full diplomatic relations" with the PRC "before the middle of 1976"—memcon, 2/16/73, p. 4.

73. Kissinger to Nixon, "Meeting with President Pompidou," n.d., Box 949, NSF, NPM; "Dr. Kissinger's Remarks to President Pompidou, May 1973," n.d., Box 328, Lord Files.

74. Kissinger-Huang memcon, 6/14/73, Box 95, NSF, NPM, p. 5.

75. Kissinger to PRCLC Chargé Han Xu, memcon, 5/15/73, Box 238, Lord Files, p. 7.

76. Kissinger to Huang Zhen, memcon, 5/29/73, Box 328, Lord Files.

77. Nixon to Zhou, 6/19/73, Box 328, Lord Files.

the British to provide the technology instead, thus circumventing U.S. regulations.⁷⁸

MID-1973 TO 1974: STRATEGIC SHIFTS, ATTEMPTED SECRET ALLIANCE, AND STYMIED NORMALIZATION

From July 1973 onward, Washington's bargaining position vis-à-vis Beijing faded gradually as external and internal political pressures increased, challenging the détente policy and limiting the Nixon administration's flexibility regarding China policy. As Beijing's worry that U.S.-USSR relations would continue to improve or that the Soviets would attack China diminished, its bargaining position regarding normalization became stronger.

While a downturn in Sino-American relations in the second half of 1973 arose from Chinese suspicions of the PNW agreement signed in June 1973 and Sino-American disagreements about the war in Cambodia, domestic pressures on both sides played a greater role. In the United States, Kissinger was worried about the state of triangular relations in the context of the unfolding Watergate crisis and congressional challenges to the war in Cambodia, U.S. force deployments in Europe, and the defense budget. Kissinger feared that the Chinese leaders now questioned the value of the relationship with the United States, because they saw "a paralyzed President unable to provide firm support in matters affecting their security."⁷⁹

The Chinese side was influenced by a combination of domestic political factors and strategic considerations. In the run-up to the Party Congress, Zhou and other moderates were attacked by hard-line factions, and had to back off from the high-profile posture of U.S.-PRC normalization.⁸⁰ The U.S. Liaison Office (USLO) in Beijing assessed that the Chinese might have felt that they could afford to "show pique" because "they no longer believe a Soviet attack to be at all likely, or at least imminent."⁸¹ This Chinese confidence might well have stemmed partly from the fact that the U.S.-China opening was functioning as a successful deterrent to potential Soviet aggression against China.⁸²

At this juncture, Kissinger's key aide, Winston Lord, wrote him a memorandum identifying a watershed in relations with the PRC. He warned that they were now at an "ambiguous and fragile stage where if we do not go forward, we may go backwards." Strengthening the relationship with the United States remained a priority for Beijing as the twin pressures of domestic politics and

78. Kissinger to Huang Zhen, memcon, 7/6/73, Box 328, Lord Files.

79. Memcon, Kissinger, Scowcroft, Eagleburger, Lord, Howe, Solomon, Rodman, 7/19/73, Box 328, Lord Files.

80. Solomon to Kissinger, "Mao and Chou under Pressure? Some Recent Pieces in the Chinese Puzzle," 7/24/73, Box 328, Lord Files; Bruce to Kissinger, 8/19/73; Bruce to Kissinger, "My Meeting with Ch'iao Kuan-hua," 8/29/73, p. 4, Box 95, NSF, NPM.

81. Jenkins/Holdridge to Kissinger, 7/20/73, Box 328, Lord Files, p. 2.

82. Department of State [DoS] briefing paper, "Developments in PRC Foreign Policy," c. 7/73, Box 2694, Subject-Numeric Files [SNF] [1970-3], RG59, NA.

advanced age impelled Mao and Zhou's desire to commit China to a path that would not be easily reversed in the event of a succession struggle.⁸³ Thus, in his coming trip to Beijing, Kissinger needed to seek a "major advance" in order to strengthen Mao and Zhou's policy position. The time had arrived for the rapid turn toward China that Kissinger had discussed with Pompidou. As Lord saw it, Kissinger now had two options by which to produce significant momentum in U.S.-PRC relations: they could establish a "more concrete security understanding" with the Chinese, or seek significant progress in the normalization of bilateral relations.⁸⁴ Lord strongly favored the latter; but Kissinger tried to do both.

During Kissinger's next trip to Beijing in November 1973, the tenor of the Chinese leaders' discourse on U.S.-PRC relations was more ambivalent than before. In a three-hour-long interview, Mao denigrated the Soviet threat in two ways. First, he argued that Moscow had very little reason to attack China. He declared that China's nuclear capability was "no bigger than a fly"—it would need thirty to fifty years to develop a threatening nuclear capability—and thus not worth a Soviet attack.⁸⁵ Furthermore, Mao argued that Soviet forces were thinly spread around the world, leaving only one million troops for the Sino-Soviet border—insufficient for the defense of the Soviet eastern front, much less for attacking China.⁸⁶

Mao also questioned U.S. intentions again. He noted that the Soviet Union could not attack China "unless you let them in [by] . . . first giv[ing] them the Middle East and Europe so they are able to deploy troops eastward."⁸⁷ This reinforced Chinese concerns about at best the unintended consequences on the East of the superpower détente or, at worst, the possibility of deliberate U.S. collusion with the Soviets against China. In this regard, Mao hinted at Beijing's conviction that Washington and Moscow had made secret deals at the Washington summit.⁸⁸ Stressing the need for the United States to regard China as a coequal partner in containing the Soviet Union, rather than a pawn in the game, Mao reminded Kissinger that, just as the United States helped to prevent a Soviet attack on China by keeping the Soviets occupied in the Middle East and Europe, China's anti-Soviet posture helped to hold part of Moscow's attention and troops in the East and served U.S. interests. Washington and Beijing were mutually dependent in strategic terms.⁸⁹

83. Lord to Kissinger, "Your Trip to China," 10/11/73, Box 370, Lord Files, pp. 1–2.

84. *Ibid.*, 3.

85. Mao-Kissinger memcon, 11/12/73, in Burr, *Kissinger Transcripts*, 183.

86. *Ibid.*, 183, 180.

87. *Ibid.*, 184.

88. *Ibid.*, 182–83. See also Priscilla Roberts, ed., *Window on the Forbidden City: The Beijing Diaries of David Bruce, 1973–1974*, University of Hong Kong Centre of Asian Studies Monograph no. 145 (Hong Kong, 2001), 28–30.

89. *Ibid.*, 184.

These were obviously attempts to reduce Washington's perceived strategic leverage in the U.S.-PRC relationship, and to improve Beijing's bargaining position with regard to conditions for normalization.

Against Mao's portrayal of the United States and PRC as doubtful strategic partners, Kissinger offered Beijing a stronger security understanding in order to preserve the momentum in Sino-American relations. In his pretrip memorandum, Lord had been openly skeptical of this option which would indicate a change from "balanced" diplomacy to one that clearly favored Beijing over Moscow. He particularly warned against any secret commitments for constitutional, legal, and political reasons, in the wake of Vietnam and Watergate. Besides, he argued, secret commitments would be useless to Beijing as a deterrent against Soviet attack and thus would inevitably be leaked. More importantly though, the Chinese leaders "don't expect, and probably wouldn't even want such a move"; and they "would not necessarily believe such a commitment, or at least this President's ability to fulfill it."⁹⁰

Against Lord's advice, Kissinger tried to advance the U.S.-PRC relationship by offering to consolidate the bilateral security dialogue with concrete measures. Upon arrival in Beijing, Kissinger told Zhou that the United States could aid China against Soviet attack in "covert ways." A "formal relationship" (that is, an alliance) was not desirable, but Washington could unilaterally provide help of a "technical nature": they could set up a "hot-line" arrangement which would allow Washington to provide Beijing with early-warning information about Soviet military action directed against China, and Washington could also sell to Beijing its superior high-resolution satellite images to heighten the accuracy of Chinese targeting on Soviet sites.⁹¹ In the event of a Soviet attack, Kissinger suggested that the United States could supply "equipment and other services," help with the improvement of communications between Beijing and the various Chinese bomber bases "under some guise," and provide the technology for "certain kinds of radars" which the Chinese could build.⁹²

In sum, Kissinger offered to the PRC material aid and proposed the beginnings of a military supply relationship between them. Together, these steps indicated Washington's willingness to lean toward Beijing in a far more obvious and concrete way than hitherto acknowledged. Zhou's response was measured, but reasonably receptive. He commented that American cooperation with early

90. Lord to Kissinger, "Your Trip to China," 3.

91. Kissinger-Zhou memcon, 11/10/73, in Burr, *Kissinger Transcripts*, 171-72. These steps were proposed to Kissinger before his trip by Fred Iklé, director of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency. See Iklé to Kissinger, "Your Trip to Peking: Arms Control Aspects," 10/22/73; Solomon to Kissinger, "Director Iklé's Memorandum Suggesting Arms Control Issues for Possible Discussion in Peking," 11/1/73, Box 370, Lord Files. The idea was also being mooted by RAND China scholar Michael Pillsbury, who submitted a study to the various government agencies in the autumn of 1973, suggesting that the United States might establish a military relationship with China. See Mann, *About Face*, 57-60; Michael Pillsbury, "US-Chinese Military Ties?" *Foreign Affairs* 20 (Fall 1975): 50-64.

92. Zhou-Kissinger memcon, 11/13/73, NSA Doc. 283.

warning would be "intelligence of great assistance," but this had to be done in a manner "so that no one feels we are allies." He cautioned that Beijing would need to study the proposals further before responding.⁹³ Kissinger's proposal would be controversial and explosive, given the bitter Sino-Soviet rivalry, and the internal dissent in the Chinese bureaucracy about Zhou's U.S. policy. In any event, given the decline in his position and health, and because of Mao's personal opposition, Zhou never managed to steer the proposals through the decision-making channels, and there is no evidence thus far to show that any Chinese official responded to Kissinger's proposals.⁹⁴

Kissinger's inconclusive play of the Soviet card in November 1973 was intimately related to his inability to further resolve the Taiwan issue. In the Shanghai Communiqué, the United States had acknowledged that "all Chinese on either side of the Taiwan Strait maintain that there is one China and that Taiwan is a part of China." However, at the time, the two sides effectively agreed to postpone the political resolution of the status of Taiwan, the assumption being that Washington would transfer official diplomatic recognition and relations from Taipei to Beijing when normalization eventually occurred.⁹⁵

During his November 1973 trip, Kissinger negotiated a joint communiqué with Zhou that contained the statement: "The Chinese side reiterated that the normalization of relations . . . can be realized only on the basis of confirming the principle of one China." Excitedly, Kissinger informed Nixon that this indicated that normalization would require only the "principle" of one China and not necessarily the "practice," suggesting that Beijing might be willing to settle for "considerable autonomy for Taiwan and continuing US ties [after U.S.-PRC normalization] so long as the nominal juridical framework reflects the one China approach."⁹⁶

Yet, the Chinese leaders had not indicated such a compromise. In normalizing relations with other countries, Beijing had insisted on them severing all official intergovernmental relations with Taipei—the so-called "Japan formula." But in November, Kissinger offered to speed up the process of normalization if the two sides could work out an alternative, more flexible formula, "along the lines of the Shanghai Communiqué," which would "make clear that that principle [of one China] is not being abandoned."⁹⁷ In other words, Kissinger asked for a declaration of principle in exchange for Chinese acquiescence to the continuation of some form of official U.S. relations with Taiwan

93. Zhou-Kissinger memcon, 11/14/73, NSA Doc. 284.

94. See Tyler, *A Great Wall*, 174.

95. See Ross, *Negotiating Cooperation*, 1–54.

96. Kissinger to Scowcroft for Nixon, Situation Message no. 51, 11/13/73, Box 41, NSF, NPM; Kissinger to Nixon, "My Visit to China," 11/19/73, Box 330, Lord Files, pp. 1–2, 4–5.

97. For a succinct summary of the six alternative normalization formulae considered by the Nixon and Carter administrations, see Yufan Hao, *Dilemma and Decision: An Organizational Perspective on American China Policy-Making* (Berkeley, CA, 1997), 61–66.

while normalizing U.S.-PRC relations. Zhou's response to this was markedly evasive.⁹⁸

Mao, on the other hand, told Kissinger flatly that the Japanese formula for normalization was the only acceptable one for Beijing. Moreover, Mao declared, "I do not believe in a peaceful transition." Nevertheless, he suggested that there was no rush—"we can do without Taiwan for the time being, and let it come after one hundred years"⁹⁹—the issue was not important, unlike the "overall international situation," that is, the Soviet threat.¹⁰⁰ His meaning was ambiguous. In effect, Mao refused to commit to peaceful reunification with Taiwan, and refused to consider any formula for U.S.-PRC normalization that did not include complete eradication of official ties between Washington and Taipei. For the Chinese leaders, the status of Taiwan remained a central nationalistic issue, and strategic cooperation with the United States against the Soviet threat, while important, was not sufficiently critical to induce Mao to compromise on Taiwan. Rather, he seemed to suggest, to no avail, that the Soviet factor ought to be important enough to induce Washington to deliver on its promises for normalization with China.

By November 1973, therefore, it seemed that the U.S.-PRC relationship had washed indeterminately over a watershed. The principal interlocutors on both sides desired some forward movement in the relationship. For the Chinese side, in spite of Mao's rhetoric playing down the Soviet threat, closer ties with the United States remained an important means of countering Beijing's Soviet adversary. This was evident in Zhou's thoughtful—though cautious—reception to Kissinger's offers of an intensified strategic relationship. On the other hand, the brewing power struggle in Beijing acted as a significant constraint on moderates such as Zhou. As the factional challenges intensified, Zhou had to tread a tightrope between maintaining the momentum in his policy of rapprochement with the United States while avoiding criticisms of having leaned too far toward the American imperialist camp.¹⁰¹ An important consequence was that, as Kissinger's staff pointed out, Zhou now needed to produce results in terms of regaining control over Taiwan, which would demonstrate that the policy of reconciliation with America was yielding results for China.

Similarly, the Nixon administration needed movement, preferably a breakthrough, in U.S.-PRC relations. The extent to which Kissinger was prepared

98. Zhou-Kissinger memcon, 3-5:30pm, 11/12/73, Box 372, Lord Files, pp. 4-5. Zhou did not reply directly, but repeatedly referred to the interpreter, saying that she knew what Kissinger meant. On the internal conflict within the Chinese leadership on this issue, see Tyler, *A Great Wall*, 167-74.

99. Mao-Kissinger memcon, 11/12/73, in Burr, *Kissinger Transcripts*, 187; "My Visit to China," 7.

100. Mao-Kissinger memcon, in Burr, *Kissinger Transcripts*, 186-87.

101. On the increasing attacks on Zhou from the left in 1973, see Ross Terrill, *Mao: A Biography* (Sydney, 1995), chap. 21; and Roderick MacFarquhar and John Fairbank, eds., *The Cambridge History of China Vol 15* (Cambridge, UK, 1991), 428-29; Ross, *Negotiating Cooperation*, 60-77.

to lean toward Beijing to achieve this was clear. The eventual move toward a military relationship with China during the Carter administration is well known, and was seen as a way to strengthen the U.S. position vis-à-vis the Soviet Union with the collapse of détente.¹⁰² But the foregoing analysis shows that the seeds were planted by Kissinger five years earlier. Initially, at the height of détente, the prospect of a closer strategic relationship was a means to reassure and keep the Chinese in play in the strategic triangle; and in late 1973, it was employed as a strategic incentive to persuade Beijing to consider normalization of relations on U.S. terms. However, Kissinger's attempt was unsuccessful. The strategic offers failed to sweeten the pill of U.S.-Taiwan relations, and were never again mentioned during the rest of the Nixon administration. As Lord had warned, Taiwan and normalization remained key Chinese concerns, and the centrality of the Taiwan issue was reinforced as domestic pressures increased on both sides, and the U.S. leverage was reduced with rising domestic challenges to the détente policy.

In the last eight months of the Nixon administration, the sense of momentum toward normalization that Kissinger had lauded at the end of 1973 proved to be an illusion. In 1974, the domestic political crisis in Washington came to a head. The Watergate imbroglio was closing in on Nixon and his immediate circle of advisers, and the administration's policy of détente was coming under sustained attack in Congress.¹⁰³ Kissinger was not only preoccupied with shuttle diplomacy in the Middle East, the oil crisis, and the U.S.-USSR relationship, but with defending and maintaining the overall fabric of the administration's foreign policy in general.¹⁰⁴ Under these circumstances, progress in the Sino-American rapprochement was not possible, especially because, on the crucial Taiwan issue, the question now became not one of whether particular changes in policy would be defensible, but "whether the gain would be worth the risk and effort to an administration already up to its ears in problems."¹⁰⁵

Partly in recognition of the grave domestic political consequences of having been seen to have "sold Taiwan down the river" in 1972, Kissinger and his advisers concluded that the administration's goal must now be the maintenance of the "greatest possible links" with Taiwan as the normalization process was carried to its diplomatic conclusion with the PRC.¹⁰⁶ Washington appointed a new ambassador to the mission in Taipei, which had been headed by a chargé for over two years. Construction of a new U.S. embassy building in Taipei was

102. Ibid., chaps. 4, 5; Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Power and Principle: Memoirs of the National Security Adviser, 1977–1981* (New York, 1983).

103. See Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation*, chap. 12.

104. Kissinger's account of this period of the Nixon administration under siege fills an entire volume of his memoirs—see *Years of Upheaval*.

105. Osborn (Consulate General/Hong Kong) to Lord, 12/14/73, Box 380, Lord Files. See also Tyler, *A Great Wall*, 185–86, 201–4.

106. Hummel/Lord to Kissinger, "Normalization of Relations with the PRC and the Issue of Taiwan," 1/29/74, Box 330, Lord Files, p. 6.

begun, and the ROC was allowed to open a new consulate in New York. When Nixon resigned on 8 August 1974 and Gerald Ford took over as president, Kissinger informed his new boss that they had to make clear to China that “we are not committed to delivering Taiwan to Peking rule, and that U.S. public opinion would not allow us to make unilateral decisions about the future of 15 million people.” They were to continue to seek an alternative to the Japan formula for normalization.¹⁰⁷ Thus, Washington dug in its heels on the Taiwan issue. Certainly Kissinger calculated that the domestic political climate would not permit Ford to even think about normalizing U.S.-PRC relations by severing ties with Taiwan. Yet, Kissinger might still have believed that Washington retained the Soviet card leverage over Beijing, because, as he told Ford, while Taiwan was “a question of national destiny,” the Soviet threat remained Beijing’s “overwhelming national security problem.”¹⁰⁸

That was not Beijing’s assessment. Kissinger’s hardened position coincided with a parallel resolution on the Chinese side against further compromise. During Kissinger’s next trip to Beijing in November 1974, he again emphasized the need for some Chinese undertaking for a peaceful settlement of the Taiwan issue, and stated Washington’s desire to retain liaison offices in Taipei after normalization.¹⁰⁹ But this was a doomed effort. The leadership succession was now underway, and with Zhou critically ill, Vice Premier Deng Xiaoping and Qiao Guanhua were the new, harder-line American policy principals. They insisted on the Japanese formula, and warned that Beijing would brook no external interference in the reunification process, and would not consider a renunciation of force.¹¹⁰ Deng even turned the tables on Kissinger with the taunt, “The Polar bear is after you,” pointing out that the Soviet military strength in the East was also directed against American allies and forces in the region.¹¹¹

From the start, Kissinger had privileged the strategic aspects of the U.S.-PRC rapprochement, and emphasized Beijing’s national security motivations. However, as triangular politics intensified and then began to break down in 1973 and 1974, Washington’s leverage was seriously reduced. While a renewed bout of leadership crisis partly accounted for Beijing’s harder line toward normalization, it was also the result of a perceived strengthening of China’s position in the strategic triangle because of the domestic disarray in the United States and snags in the U.S.-USSR détente process. Thus, Kissinger’s continuing efforts

107. Kissinger to Ford, briefing paper, “PRC,” 8/14/74, NSA Doc. 307, p. 11.

108. Kissinger to Ford, “Commitments to the PRC,” 8/74, Box 371, Lord Files, p. 1.

109. Memcon, “Normalization,” 11/26/74, in Burr, *Kissinger Transcripts*, 295–98.

110. Deng-Qiao-Kissinger memcon, 14/4/74, *ibid.*, 275–84; Deng-Qiao-Kissinger memcon, “Sino-Soviet Relations; Europe,” 11/27/74, Box 372, Lord Files, pp. 21–22.

111. Memcon, “Sino-Soviet Relations; Europe,” pp. 4–6; Memcon, “Europe; Japan; Middle East; South Asia; Cambodia, Energy and Food; Normalization,” 11/27/74, pp. 1–2; Deng-Kissinger memcon, 11/28/74, Box 372, Lord Files.

to construct the Soviet menace increasingly fell on deaf ears.¹¹² For his part, serious domestic constraints aside, Kissinger appeared to retain considerable faith in the overriding value of the shared Soviet threat in propelling Sino-American relations forward. It seemed that having pulled off the coup of the compromise on Taiwan in the Shanghai Communiqué, he believed that the Chinese would be indefinitely patient on the subject. Yet, that Beijing ultimately measured the developing U.S.-China relationship by progress toward normalization and thus a resolution of Taiwan's status was made clear when low-level bilateral talks and exchanges were halted and contacts in Beijing soured in 1974. At the same time, Kissinger's personal credibility declined, and the Chinese leaders tried to cultivate more sympathetic interlocutors such as Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger, who was known to oppose the policy of détente.¹¹³ In a situation where the Nixon administration's strategic option of closer clandestine military ties with China had been exercised and found wanting, while domestic constraints prevented the fulfilment of earlier understandings on Taiwan and normalization, the Sino-American rapprochement was stalemated by the end of 1974.

CONCLUSION

Nixon and Kissinger's immediate aim in seeking rapprochement with China in 1969 had been to boost the momentum of détente with the Soviet Union; that is, it was conceived as leverage to *improve* relations with and seek cooperation from Moscow, not to form a quasi-alliance to contain it.¹¹⁴ However, the concepts of triangular balance of power and a de facto Sino-American alliance to contain the potential Soviet hegemon often coexisted. In the process of creating the bases for the new relationship with the Chinese, Kissinger played up the Soviet threat and the value of the U.S. relationship to China, thus implicitly presenting a tacit alignment as U.S. policy. Yet, the continuing U.S.-USSR summitry and agreements suggested that superpower détente was still Washington's priority. As pressure mounted on the détente policy and on U.S.-PRC

112. For instance, when Kissinger informed Huang Zhen after the June 1974 Moscow summit that Washington would not consider Brezhnev's suggestion to Nixon of a treaty of mutual assistance if either were attacked by a third party—meaning China—Huang rudely replied, "We don't care." Memcon, "The Secretary's Meeting with PRC Liaison Office Chief Huang Chen after the Moscow Summit," 7/15/74, NSA Doc. 303.

113. In November 1974, Deng extended an invitation to Schlesinger to visit China, which was rapidly quashed by Kissinger—see Deng-Kissinger memcon, 11/27/74, NSA Doc. 325. On Kissinger and Schlesinger's divergent views on détente and China policy, see Banning Garrett and Bonnie Glaser, "From Nixon to Reagan: China's Changing Role in American Strategy," in *Eagle Resurgent: The Reagan Era in American Foreign Policy*, eds. Kenneth Oye et al. (Boston, 1987), 291.

114. Banning Garrett, "The Strategic Basis of Learning in US Policy toward China, 1948–1988," in *Learning in US and Soviet Foreign Policy*, eds. George W. Breslauer and Philip Tetlock (Boulder, CO, 1991), 229; Mann, *About Face*, 56.

normalization due to the inherent tensions of triangular politics and domestic pressures, Kissinger began to play the Soviet card to a greater degree than before. He not only identified China rhetorically as tacit ally, but also actively tried to forge an alliance relationship by means of bilateral security agreements and a new military relationship.

Kissinger would argue that this was part of the normal vagaries of triangular politics—there was a need to balance U.S.-USSR détente with closer U.S.-PRC relations as part of creating better U.S. relations with each of the two Communist powers, while ensuring that their mutual relations remained acrimonious. And yet, the extent to which Kissinger's propositions to the Chinese was judicious balancing behavior is arguable. A fundamental element of successfully maximizing the pivotal position in a strategic triangle is to "convince each [of the other two] players that the pivot's relationship with the other is not based on shared antagonism."¹¹⁵ Kissinger, on the contrary, ran the risk of over-compensating for détente. Consider, for instance, the consequences should the Chinese have accepted his November 1973 offers: the secret arrangements would almost certainly have been leaked, for, as Lord observed, they had no deterrence value if kept secret. Brezhnev had specifically warned against such a U.S.-PRC quasi-alliance in mid-1973, although the question of what he might have done in the event was an open one.¹¹⁶ More importantly though, Soviet worries about the U.S.-China relationship had diminished from the end of 1973 onward and leaks about Kissinger's proposals to Zhou might have rekindled Moscow's concerns with unpredictable consequences.¹¹⁷ At the same time, the Nixon administration's exclusion of the Soviet Union from the process of brokering a settlement in the Middle East crisis of 1973 left Moscow disgruntled and posed problems for détente. Brezhnev was coming under pressure domestically as debates about the wisdom of a policy of détente without a corresponding emphasis on defense, and about the expected economic benefits of détente, grew within some factions in the Soviet leadership.¹¹⁸ These, in combination with the growing domestic political pressures faced by the White House, might have caused revelations of Kissinger's attempts at a secret alliance with the Chinese to have further negative effects on the prospects for détente. Thus, even if Kissinger had intended the offers as a further demonstration to the Soviets that the United States had other options which could complicate Moscow's policies, this would have been a risky move.

115. Lowell Dittmer, "The Strategic Triangle: An Elementary Game-Theoretical Analysis," *World Politics* 33, no. 4 (July 1981): 511.

116. Brezhnev-Nixon-Kissinger memcon, 6/23/73, Box 75, NSF, NPM. During the June 1973 U.S.-USSR summit, Brezhnev speculated that Washington and Beijing might conclude "a military arrangement" that year, adding: "We do not intend to attack China but it will be different if China has a military arrangement with the United States. That will confuse the issue."

117. See Stephen Sestanovich, "US Policy toward the Soviet Union, 1970-90: The Impact of China," in *China, the United States, and the Soviet Union*, ed. Ross, 132-33.

118. Burr, *Kissinger Transcripts*, 218-19; Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation*, 480-85.

So why did Kissinger try to advance along the "secret alliance" trajectory in developing U.S.-PRC relations in the second half of 1973? He might have miscalculated. Kissinger's own deliberate progressive construction of the Soviet threat to China and his conviction that Beijing was motivated primarily by its security requirements produced a "discursive entrapment" effect. He overplayed the Soviet card because he had overperceived Beijing's need for reassurance, and thus decided that the United States should more blatantly tilt toward the PRC rather than maintain equilibrium in the triangle. The alternative explanation is that Kissinger's offer of a closer strategic relationship with China was "cheap talk." On the one hand, it could have been aimed at unsettling Moscow at a time when détente was again slowing down. On the other hand, it could have been calculated upon Lord's argument that the Chinese neither wanted nor needed it, and so would not accept it, and thus was a deliberate gesture in increasingly trying times to demonstrate America's commitment to the U.S.-PRC relationship and to reassure Beijing that Washington understood its strategic concerns. Kissinger was probably influenced by a combination of both these factors.

The above analysis highlights two issues about China policy during the Nixon years. The first relates to the concentration of power that is often ascribed to the executive branch of Nixon's administration. In the case of China, Nixon's thinking about the policy change predated Kissinger's; and in the run-up to and around the February 1972 visit to China, Nixon exerted as much control over policy as his national security adviser did.¹¹⁹ From 1973 onward, however, it seems from the available record that Kissinger and his close advisers exercised more independent initiative over the subsequent development of the bilateral relationship. For instance, unlike in 1971 and early 1972, there is little written record of Nixon suggesting policy or even publicity moves, or offering handwritten comments on reports on China. Furthermore, while Kissinger kept Nixon well-briefed about each of his trips to Beijing, his written reports to the president were selective portrayals and did not contain references to his November 1973 proposals of strategic aid to Zhou, and his suggestions to Mao and Zhou of an alternative normalization formula that would allow the United States to retain ties with Taiwan. Kissinger's relatively free hand in determining China policy from 1973 may have reinforced his confidence in the effectiveness of his negotiating strategy and tactics.

Second, the findings here will deepen the controversy about triangular politics. The analysis here suggests that the inherent tensions within the logic of triangular relations, combined with domestic pressures and Kissinger's own discursive tenacity, led him to overplay the Soviet card and to offer a secret alliance with the Chinese. Whether Kissinger harbored the intention of creating an alliance with the Chinese in the first place—a question on which the available

119. See Mann, *About Face*, chaps. 1 and 2; Goh, *Constructing the US Rapprochement with China*, chap. 5.

material allows only conjecture—may be the key on which our evaluation of the strategic triangle turns ultimately. For now, we may observe that while the Soviet Union was the subject of Sino-American conversations during the Nixon administration, and while Kissinger did exploit the Soviet factor against the Chinese, a Soviet card, in the orthodox sense, was not played. That is, there was not a parallel to the use of the developing U.S.-China relationship as an implicit bargaining tool to put pressure on the Soviets. Kissinger did not—except at the very beginning—use U.S.-Soviet détente as a means to persuade the Chinese to be more forthcoming. Instead, Kissinger's Soviet card was a simpler one: he concentrated on emphasizing the Soviet threat to convince Beijing that it shared common security interests with Washington, and to develop closer bilateral relations. In terms of triangular politics, his aim in doing so was primarily to load the China card against the Soviets. This finding reinforces the argument that the strategic triangle was in fact a highly unequal one.¹²⁰ It also suggests that the triangle broke down earlier than previously thought, because Kissinger's earliest significant moves toward a quasi-alliance between the United States and China can be traced to 1973.¹²¹ This, in turn, was the precursor to the debate about the nature of, and how to use, the China card that would plague the Carter and Reagan administrations to come.¹²² In any event, U.S.-PRC relations would be sidetracked by domestic political considerations on both sides for the next four years, until Jimmy Carter and Deng Xiaoping managed to agree on the normalization of relations in 1979 under a different set of pressures.

120. See Stephen Sestanovich, "US Policy toward the Soviet Union, 1970–90: The Impact of China," in *China, the United States, and the Soviet Union*, Ross, ed.

121. Dittmer has suggested that Nixon and Kissinger's strategy of amity with both the Soviet Union and China evolved into one of amity or "marriage" with the Chinese and enmity with the Soviets from 1976, when the superpower détente disintegrated—*Sino-Soviet Normalization*, chap. 13.

122. For a summary of the contending positions on China policy between Carter's secretary of state Cyrus Vance and his national security adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski, and between Reagan's successive secretaries of State, Al Haig and George Shultz, see Robert Ross, "US Policy toward China: The Strategic Context and the Policy-Making Process," in *China, the United States, and the Soviet Union*, ed. Ross, 157–71.