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# Taiwan Expendable? Nixon and Kissinger Go to China

Nancy Bernkopf Tucker

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There were two stories of Sino-American relations in the 1960s and 1970s, the oft-told tale of normalization with the People's Republic of China and the less-noted saga of friction with, and final abandonment of, the Republic of China. These chronicles of triumph and tragedy progressed simultaneously, with nearly identical casts of characters on the American side and with the pivot of action for both the decision to alter Washington's official commitments in East Asia. For the United States this could be seen as a coming-of-age story: the Americans finally facing reality, accepting the People's Republic's existence after decades of denial, triggering choruses of relief worldwide. In fact, because the change in policy was so radical, a myth came to surround it, originated and cultivated by Richard M. Nixon and Henry Kissinger, that told of a bolt-from-the-blue initiative undertaken at great political risk but carried out with consummate skill by the only individuals who could have realized it. One day the United States was wedded to its ally, the Republic of China situated on the island of Taiwan, and the next it had opened relations with the People's Republic, which dominated the mainland.<sup>1</sup>

As is true of myths in general, this one encompassed elements of truth and of fiction, papering over sins and weighing heavily on future efforts to understand, not just the development of U.S. relations with China, but especially the trajectory of U.S. relations with Taiwan. The legend of Nixon and Kissinger's outwitting the American China lobby, slaying the Taiwan dragon, and storming the Gate of Heavenly Peace in Beijing to engage Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai leaves a variety of issues obscure. Reexamination of the opening to China clarifies the dynamics of foreign policy making at a watershed in the Cold War. Once Kissinger went to Beijing and reached an understanding with his

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<sup>1</sup> Henry Kissinger shaped the history of the China opening in Henry Kissinger, *The White House Years* (Boston, 1979); Henry Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval* (Boston, 1982); and Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy* (New York, 1994). He upstaged Richard M. Nixon, whose memoir appeared the year before Kissinger's first volume. Richard M. Nixon, *RN: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon* (New York, 1978). Nixon grumbled in 1971 that Kissinger wanted to steal credit for the China opening. See H. R. Haldeman, *The Haldeman Diaries: Inside the Nixon White House* (New York, 1994), 365, 367. Since Nixon was as zealous as Kissinger in keeping the archival record on China closed, nonspecialists saw the events of 1971–1972 the way Kissinger intended. The most influential biography of Kissinger followed his mythological version of the China initiative, declaring “as if by magic the American attitude . . . turned around. . . .” Suddenly, Kissinger sanctified the Chinese as human and relations with them became acceptable. See Walter Isaacson, *Kissinger: A Biography* (New York, 1992), 334. Kissinger's dominance over the record meant that few questioned his assertions regarding Taiwan.

Chinese hosts, after all, the United States had more Communists on its side than did the Soviet Union.

Analysts generally agree that Nixon and Kissinger acted in the national interest when they launched normalization.<sup>2</sup> The central argument of this study, however, is that the means to that laudable end were deeply flawed, that they fundamentally undermined U.S. credibility and sowed the seeds of continuing distrust in United States–Taiwan and United States–China relations. Nixon and Kissinger wanted so intensely to realize their goal that they surrendered more than was necessary to achieve it, and the price was paid, not in the near term by the Nixon White House, but over the long term by the people of Taiwan and by U.S. diplomacy writ large. Indeed, their promises were bigger, their compromises more thoroughgoing, and their concessions more fundamental than they believed the American people would readily accept. Thus, they relied on secrecy and “China fever” to mask the collateral damage. Subsequently, they ensured that for decades the historical record would remain inadequate and inaccurate. What biographers, commentators, and historians wrote under such circumstances continued to mislead, subject to the complex interplay of misunderstanding, misperception, and falsehood.

To Nixon and Kissinger the overarching geopolitical significance of a relationship with China justified eliminating all intervening obstacles. Thus the effort to replace an established relationship with the Republic of China in favor of an exciting new tie with a more exotic mainland China progressed in secret, involving a minimum of staff to provide analysis.<sup>3</sup> The pace was grueling, and the focus relentlessly on Beijing. Although Nixon understood that to placate domestic political constituencies he had to create an appearance of concern about Taiwan, neither he nor Kissinger actively worried about the survival of the government under Chiang Kai-shek or thought seriously about the will of the people on the island. Indeed, the record that can be assembled today shows that Nixon and Kissinger rarely reflected on Taiwan at all.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Two works proved especially helpful for this study. For its critique of Nixon and Kissinger, see James Mann, *About Face: A History of America's Curious Relationship with China, from Nixon to Clinton* (New York, 1999). On China's role, see Chen Jian, *Mao's China and the Cold War* (Chapel Hill, 2001). U.S.–Taiwan relations play a small part in the otherwise thoughtful literature on the China opening. See Rosemary Foot, *The Practice of Power: U.S. Relations with China since 1949* (Oxford, 1995); Patrick Tyler, *A Great Wall: Six Presidents and China: An Investigative History* (New York, 1999); Harry Harding, *The Fragile Relationship: The United States and China since 1972* (Washington, 1992); and Robert Ross, *Negotiating Cooperation: The United States and China, 1969–1989* (Stanford, 1995). For evidence that the field is changing, see the fine studies of Alan D. Romberg, *Rein In at the Brink of the Precipice: American Policy toward Taiwan and U.S.-P.R.C. Relations* (Washington, 2003); Richard C. Bush, *At Cross Purposes: U.S.-Taiwan Relations since 1942* (Armonk, 2004); and John Garver, *Sino-American Alliance: Nationalist China and American Cold War Strategy in Asia* (Armonk, 1997).

<sup>3</sup> Participants in normalization, frustrated by Kissinger, have sought to correct the record. Marshall Green helped fund an oral history project at the Foreign Service Institute in Arlington, Virginia, and coauthored an account: Marshall Green, John H. Holdridge, and William N. Stokes, *War and Peace with China: First-Hand Experiences in the Foreign Service of the United States* (Bethesda, 1994).

<sup>4</sup> New resources are becoming available at an accelerating pace. The Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts (Telcons) were released by the National Archives and Records Administration in mid-2004. The Nixon White House Tapes have been released in several segments and are also at the National Archives. Complete transcripts of Kissinger's July 1971 meetings and Nixon's February 1972 trip were finally declassified in December 2003 and were posted by William Burr, see National Security Archive, *Nixon's Trip to China* <<http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB106/index.htm>> (Feb. 7, 2005). An expanding universe of oral history interviews is available from the U.S. Foreign Affairs Oral History Collection (Arlington, Va.). See Nancy Bernkopf Tucker, ed., *China Confidential: American Diplomats and Sino-American Relations, 1945–1996* (New York, 2001). Records from the Chinese side have been released sporadically, with some appearing in the Woodrow Wilson Center's *Cold War International History Project Bulletin* <<http://cwihip.si.edu>> (Feb. 7, 2005). Unfortunately, Taiwan lacks a program for the regular declassification of Cold War–era documents or a vehicle for disseminating its records abroad.



As Premier Zhou Enlai watches, Chairman Mao Zedong lectures National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger during his 1971 trip to China. *Courtesy National Archives, 22 Feb 73 E 320.*

The place of Taiwan in the calculus of the American China initiative illustrates the problem of relating to and dispensing with U.S. client states, given the dynamic ways democracy may intervene in foreign policy making.<sup>5</sup> If Taiwan appeared expendable to those in the White House who were defining policy, others in the government, the Congress, and the public did not agree. The disagreement set up a struggle on the right and left of U.S. politics, and it ought to have mobilized the reputedly indomitable China lobby, with its potent American and Taiwan branches, to keep the Nixon administration from damaging Taiwan's interests. But derailing the rush to Beijing proved a mighty challenge even for a force conventionally rated second only to the pro-Israel lobby for its effectiveness in Washington.<sup>6</sup>

Developments in the United States during the 1960s troubled Taiwan, yet they did not spur officials there to attempt serious preemptive actions. Taipei did little more than complain about U.S. fickleness and failed to incite supporters, to reinvigorate the movement

<sup>5</sup> Nixon's and Kissinger's biographers were not especially concerned about the Taiwan variable in the China equation. See Stephen E. Ambrose, *Nixon*, vol. II: *The Triumph of a Politician, 1962–1972* (New York, 1989); Richard Reeves, *President Nixon: Alone in the White House* (New York, 2001); Herbert S. Parmet, *Richard Nixon and His America* (Boston, 1990); Joan Hoff, *Nixon Reconsidered* (New York, 1994); Roger Morris, *Richard Milhous Nixon: The Rise of an American Politician* (New York, 1990); Isaacson, *Kissinger*; Robert D. Schulzinger, *Henry Kissinger: Doctor of Diplomacy* (New York, 1989); Roger Morris, *Uncertain Greatness: Henry Kissinger and American Foreign Policy* (New York, 1977); and Seymour M. Hersh, *The Price of Power: Kissinger in the Nixon White House* (New York, 1983).

<sup>6</sup> The classic works are Ross Koen, *The China Lobby in American Politics* (New York, 1974); and Stanley D. Bachrack, *The Committee of One Million: "China Lobby" Politics, 1953–1971* (New York, 1976). The former was not published for over a decade because of the lobby.

against the People's Republic, or to restore interest in the fate of what cold warriors called Free China. No juggernaut emerged to stop Nixon and Kissinger. Indeed, once Nixon assumed the presidency, secrecy imposed by the White House provided an excellent excuse for Taiwan's inaction, relieving the mission in Washington and the government in Taipei of responsibility for preventing something they presumably could not have known about. Delay certainly became an important element of strategy, as Taipei hoped some event would disrupt Sino-American reconciliation. But, although the historical record shows awareness of changing trends among Taiwan policy makers, it appears that those who could have shaken Taiwan out of its lethargy—having perhaps become too accustomed to dependence—fecklessly ignored signs and remained largely inert. Ultimately, that suggests a failure of leadership in Taiwan as much as the difficulty of deterring the United States from a goal that its leaders had come to see as a key security interest.

Finally, this study seeks to dispel normalization mythology by demonstrating that history did not begin with Kissinger's secret trip to Beijing, and that prior events had created an environment that permitted bolder action and lessened the potential for political retribution. The oft-repeated claim that only Nixon could have gone to China exaggerates the courage required for his change in policy and obscures the near certainty that, building on preceding trends, others would have made the journey if Kissinger and Nixon had not.<sup>7</sup> In fact, the heretofore-shrouded records of White House conversations reveal alarm that someone else, most likely a member of Congress, would get to Beijing first. Nixon therefore insisted that the Chinese not allow other political figures to upstage him. Even in such small ways the urgency felt in the Nixon White House ensured that Taiwan would pay the price.

### Historical Precursors

Although the United States–Taiwan relationship remained a formal alliance in 1969, interest in the new China had been growing among policy makers and the general public. Beneath the surface of animosity toward Beijing and encouragement of Taipei, a movement had gradually gathered force in the corridors of power, in the minds of key actors, and among the citizenry that pointed to the need to rationalize America's China policy. Nixon and Kissinger would later take credit not simply for instigating a revolutionary breakthrough in American foreign policy but also for overcoming the resistance of the diplomatic corps, the Congress, and public opinion.

In reality, the shift grew out of a more complex coincidence of factors than the machinations of two individuals on a crusade. For instance, even at the height of the Cold War, when the People's Republic stood indicted as a puppet of Moscow, Washington and Beijing conducted a continuing, if erratic, diplomatic dialogue. These ambassadorial talks, convened in Geneva and Warsaw, solved few problems, but they brought China into direct contact with the United States more often than with most states with which it enjoyed formal relations.<sup>8</sup> President Dwight D. Eisenhower believed that trade with, and diplo-

<sup>7</sup> On Nixon's cultivation of the idea that only someone like him could have launched the China initiative, see William Safire, *Before the Fall: An Inside View of the Pre-Watergate White House* (New York, 1975), 366–67. Cf. Melvin Small, *The Presidency of Richard Nixon* (Lawrence, 1999), 118; and John K. Fairbank, *The United States and China* (Cambridge, Mass., 1983), 457.

<sup>8</sup> There is still no full scholarly analysis of the talks, but see Wang Bingnan, *Nine Years of Sino-American Ambassadorial Talks* (Beijing, 1985); and Kenneth T. Young, *Negotiating with the Chinese Communists: The United States*

matic recognition of, the People's Republic made sense. "The trouble," he complained to his National Security Council in April 1954, "was that so many members of Congress want to crucify anyone who argues in favor of permitting any kind of trade between the free nations and Communist China." This he declared shortsighted because commerce brought fiscal and economic benefits, including incentives for people to rise up against Communist oppressors, and because, as a weapon of psychological warfare, it could be "a means of weakening the bonds between Soviet Russia and Communist China."<sup>9</sup> He did not act on his convictions, however, deferring to right-wing Republican pressures and, even more critically, giving higher priority to improving relations with Moscow.<sup>10</sup>

Eisenhower's secretary of state, John Foster Dulles, belying his often passionate anticommunist rhetoric, entertained a keen interest in a two-Chinas solution to conflicts across the Taiwan Strait.<sup>11</sup> Repeated crises in the 1950s over inconsequential islands in the strait close to China's coast convinced him that Chiang was trying to manipulate the United States into war with China. Although he would not abandon the Republic of China and signed a defense treaty with it, he repeatedly raised the idea of seating both Chinas in the United Nations (UN) rather than maintain the pretense that Taipei still represented all of China. In 1956 he attempted to pilot a two-Chinas approach through Congress and contemplated a plan to substitute India for China as a permanent member of the UN Security Council, after which the administration could safely acquiesce in the representation of both Chinas in the General Assembly. Further, ignoring pressure from Taipei and Congress, he would not pledge to use the U.S. veto to exclude the People's Republic should a majority of members vote to admit Beijing.<sup>12</sup>

Over the following decade, changes in public attitudes and small alterations in official policies demonstrated a slow but rising awareness that "Red China" would not collapse. Instead, it was growing more powerful and influential in the world community, especially among newly emerging postcolonial states. In 1959, when the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations commissioned a study on options for China policy, the resulting Conlon Report, written by the political scientist Robert Scalapino, called not just for

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*Experience, 1953–1967* (New York, 1968).

<sup>9</sup> Once thought to have relinquished management of foreign policy to his secretary of state, Dwight D. Eisenhower has emerged in the revisionist literature as active and savvy. Few of those works, however, deal at any length with China policy. See Fred I. Greenstein, *The Hidden-Hand Presidency: Eisenhower as Leader* (New York, 1982); Blanche Wiesen Cook, *The Declassified Eisenhower: A Startling Reappraisal of the Eisenhower Presidency* (Garden City, 1981); Richard A. Melanson and David Mayers, eds., *Reevaluating Eisenhower: American Foreign Policy in the Fifties* (Urbana, 1987); and Stephen E. Ambrose, *Eisenhower*, vol. II: *The President* (New York, 1984). *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952–54* (17 vols., Washington, 1985), XIV, pt. 1, 409–10.

<sup>10</sup> Ronald W. Pruessen, "Over the Volcano: The United States and the Taiwan Strait Crisis, 1954–1955," in *Re-examining the Cold War*, ed. Robert S. Ross and Jiang Changbin (Cambridge, Mass., 2001), 81–82; David Allan Mayers, *Cracking the Monolith: U.S. Policy against the Sino-Soviet Alliance, 1949–1955* (Baton Rouge, 1986), 115–25.

<sup>11</sup> For the traditional picture of John Foster Dulles as an inflexible anticommunist, see Townsend Hoopes, *The Devil and John Foster Dulles* (Boston, 1973). The opening of the archives made a more sophisticated portrait possible. See Richard H. Immerman, ed., *John Foster Dulles and the Diplomacy of the Cold War* (Princeton, 1990).

<sup>12</sup> 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. Immerman, 251–59; Dean Rusk, *As I Saw It* (New York, 1990), 285; Warren I. Cohen, *Dean Rusk* (Totowa, 1980), 164. On the Taiwan Strait crises of 1954–1955 and 1958, see Robert Accinelli, *Crisis and Commitment: United States Policy toward Taiwan, 1950–1955* (Chapel Hill, 1996); Gordon H. Chang, *Friends and Enemies: The United States, China, and the Soviet Union, 1948–1972* (Stanford, 1990), 116–42; Zhang Shu Guang, *Deterrence and Strategic Culture: Chinese-American Confrontations, 1949–1958* (New York, 1992); and Gordon Chang and He Di, "The Absence of War in the U.S.-Chinese Confrontation over Quemoy and Matsu in 1954–55: Contingency, Luck, Deterrence," *American Historical Review*, 98 (Dec. 1993), 1500–1524.

relations with Beijing but also, to Taipei's anger and chagrin, for re-recognizing the Republic of China as the Republic of Taiwan. By the mid-1960s polling surveys suggested considerable public support for a two-Chinas approach on representation in the UN, for increased contacts with the People's Republic, and even for eventual rapprochement. Hearings held in 1966 by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee may have been the most important milestone, because they introduced the concept of "containment without isolation," which sought greater inclusion of China in the world community.<sup>13</sup>

### Taiwan's Response to Shifting U.S. Policy

Taipei, perpetually wary of the smallest suggestion of an American softening toward Beijing, nevertheless contented itself with a framework for Taipei-Washington interaction that did not adjust to trends in the United States. The leaders of Chiang Kai-shek's Guomindang party on Taiwan through the 1950s and early 1960s absorbed themselves in domestic political reorganization and economic restructuring, which American advisers had ardently encouraged and their own experience showed to be essential. Chiang sustained a strong, if less active, hold on politics and remained the deciding voice on government policies. Although corrupt and incompetent officials were purged and factionalism suppressed, this meant, not greater democracy, but stronger control by the Chiangs—Chiang Kai-shek and his son Chiang Ching-kuo. Taiwan nonetheless prospered, with programs of land reform, infrastructure development, and industrialization that were more farsighted and better implemented than those on the mainland, all assisted by American funding—U.S. nonmilitary aid averaged \$100 million a year from 1950 to 1965.<sup>14</sup>

But innovation did not extend to foreign and security policy. The views of Chiang Kai-shek and his inner core of advisers remained fixed on Cold War struggles and civil war frustrations. Officials responsible for external affairs focused their attention on old battles: international recognition for Taipei and the isolation and destruction of Beijing. They increasingly feared that the United States, which had been unreliable in the past, might abandon them, compel them to adopt dangerously conciliatory policies, or miscalculate its own approach, leading to collapse or surrender. Chiang, however, believed that the United States had no alternative to backing him.<sup>15</sup>

During the 1950s and into the early 1960s, the efforts of the China lobby appeared so successful that there seemed no need for a change in strategy or tactics. This amorphous and informal coalition of U.S. officials, members of Congress, businessmen, publishers, journalists, scholars, church officials, missionaries, and representatives from Taiwan kept aid flowing, the People's Republic out of the UN, and diplomatic relations between Taipei and Washington in place. Friction did arise during both the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations over Chiang's determination to attack the People's Republic and force

<sup>13</sup> U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, *U.S. Policy in Asia*, 86 Cong., 1 sess., Nov. 1, 1959; Leonard A. Kusnitz, *Public Opinion and Foreign Policy: America's China Policy, 1949–1979* (Westport, 1984), 115–16; Chang, *Friends and Enemies*, 272–73; U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, *US Policy with Respect to Mainland China*, 89 Cong., 2 sess., March 1966. On an earlier conditional containment without isolation, see Noam Kochavi, *A Conflict Perpetuated: China Policy during the Kennedy Years* (Westport, 2002), 213–33.

<sup>14</sup> Nancy Bernkopf Tucker, *Uncertain Friendships: Taiwan, Hong Kong, and the United States, 1945–1992* (New York, 1994), 53–62.

<sup>15</sup> Garver, *Sino-American Alliance*, 84–88.

the United States into a war to recapture the mainland. Similarly, Chiang's insistence on sustaining forces in Burma that raided southwestern China triggered repeated international crises and destabilized the Burmese government. But despite anger at an unruly client state, Washington's support continued, a support bolstered by anticommunism, domestic partisanship, and the Cold War.<sup>16</sup>

By the mid-1960s, however, the picture had begun to look more uncertain to Taipei. On the one hand, Taiwan's growing involvement in Vietnam produced a new strategic tie to Washington that could be exploited. Some twenty thousand Americans resided on the island to support the Vietnam War, and Washington's fear of intervention in Indochina by the People's Republic prompted it to maintain tactical nuclear weapons in Taiwan ready for use. On the other hand, U.S. flirtation with Beijing—a modifying of the ban on travel to China by U.S. citizens, for instance—eroded Chiang Kai-shek's confidence in U.S. wisdom and protection. When the People's Republic tested a nuclear device in 1964, Chiang insisted that the United States mount immediate strikes on Chinese reactors and was deeply disturbed when the embassy rebuffed his entreaties. Officials at the top of the Republic of China government, probably including Chiang and his son, concluded that Taiwan must defend itself and launched a covert nuclear program.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, as American intelligence agencies reduced their funding of surveillance and sabotage against the People's Republic, Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) agents noted a new level of hostility among their Taiwan interlocutors. Services from the two states “began to watch each other as much as they cooperated.”<sup>18</sup>

The Johnson administration sought to parry Taipei's apprehensions and warnings with expedited delivery of aircraft, continued cooperation in gathering intelligence from signals and surveillance flights by U-2 planes, briefings on the ambassadorial talks, and invitations to visit Washington.<sup>19</sup> Perhaps more comforting to the Taipei government, however, was the inability of the Johnson administration to turn its minor initiatives into a new beginning for United States–China relations. Officials on Taiwan could see a reassuring constancy in disputes between Washington and Beijing over many issues, including the fiction that Taipei governed all China.

## Nixon and the New Direction in China Policy

Taipei would have been more anxious had its leaders realized how far the thinking of the next American president, Richard Nixon, had evolved on the need to deal with Beijing. Taiwan's leaders put their faith in the Nixon who had built his political career as an anti–Red China cold warrior. They knew, although few others did, that his 1950 Senate

<sup>16</sup> Tucker, “John Foster Dulles and the Taiwan Roots of the ‘Two Chinas’ Policy,” 244–51; Kochavi, *Conflict Perpetuated*, 64–67.

<sup>17</sup> Robert S. Norris, William M. Arkin, and William Burr, “Where They Were,” *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 55 (Nov.–Dec. 1999), 26–35; David Albright and Corey Gay, “Taiwan: Nuclear Nightmare Averted,” *ibid.*, 54 (Jan.–Feb. 1998), 55–56; Amembassy Taipei to Department of State, “Indications GRC Continues to Pursue Atomic Weaponry,” airgram 1037, June 20, 1966, National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No. 19, *National Security Archive* <<http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB20/18-01.htm>> (Jan. 31, 2005).

<sup>18</sup> Jay Taylor, *The Generalissimo's Son: Chiang Ching-kuo and the Revolutions in China and Taiwan* (Cambridge, Mass., 2000), 286.

<sup>19</sup> Arthur W. Hummel Jr., cable 993, March 17, 1966, folder: China cables, vol. 6, 3/66–9/66, box 239, National Security Files, Country Files (Lyndon B. Johnson Library, Austin, Tex.); Dean Rusk to Lyndon B. Johnson, memo, n.d., folder: China—Visit of C. K. Yen 5/9–10/67 Briefing Book, box 244–45, *ibid.*



campaign had benefited from the help of Allied Syndicates, a public relations firm with a large Republic of China account dedicated to blocking Beijing's admission to the UN and protecting sizable Guomindang assets in the United States. Nixon had advocated using Chiang's troops to fight the Korean War and a decade later, in his campaign against John F. Kennedy, he pledged to veto any attempt to replace Taipei with Beijing in the UN. Nixon claimed friends among the Guomindang elite and in an interview years later declared, "I didn't need to be lobbied on [the Republic of] China. It would be like carrying coals to Newcastle."<sup>20</sup>

Nixon's sympathies for the Republic of China had, however, been dampened by his expanding foreign policy experience and changes in the importance of Taipei and Beijing. As vice president, he had listened to Chiang Kai-shek talk of his anticipated return to the mainland, knowing that the dream would not come to pass. In the 1960s, out of office but planning his rehabilitation, Nixon traveled extensively to build his image as an international statesman. He would later write of his dismay to find that "to our Asian friends and allies it looked as if . . . political expediency, public apathy . . . and partisan politics [were] undermining America's will to fight against communism in Asia." Chiang, for one, insisted that only invasions of North Vietnam and China would resolve the Vietnam conflict and the Red China threat because the only way to defeat Communists was with "bullets." Nixon later remarked, "Chiang was a friend and unquestionably one of the giants of the twentieth century. I wondered whether he might be right, but my pragmatic analysis told me he was wrong."<sup>21</sup>

In 1965, during a trip Nixon made to Asia, evidence of his reorientation became known to a scattering of individuals. In Taipei Nixon told the American diplomat Arthur W. Hummel Jr. that the Nationalists would never go back to the mainland and that Washington would have to improve relations with the People's Republic. Nixon and Hummel both knew that the future presidential candidate's room at the Grand Hotel was bugged and that his reflections would be reported to Chiang. Thus from quite early on, unless a critical intelligence failure occurred, knowledge of Nixon's apostasy existed at the highest level of Taiwan's leadership. Nixon went on to tell Roger Sullivan, in the American embassy in Singapore, the rough outlines of his later path to normalization with Beijing. On a subsequent trip, he argued to a unenthusiastic Chester Bowles, then serving as U.S. ambassador to India, that "good relationships with China were more important than good relations with the Soviet Union."<sup>22</sup>

These private indicators of Nixon's changing views laid the basis for his 1967 *Foreign Affairs* article asserting the need to end China's "angry isolation." Though rightly considered a campaign document, it set out markers suggesting Nixon's subsequent choices. Given the very public nature of this manifesto, it is striking how many supporters of the Taipei government missed its clear operational message. Marvin Liebman, impresario of conservative causes and head of the Committee of One Million Against the Admission of Communist China to the United Nations, remarked upon that fact to a longtime proponent of the Republic of China, the Republican congressman from Minnesota Walter

<sup>20</sup> Koen, *China Lobby in American Politics*, 41; Morris, *Richard Milhous Nixon*, 590–91; Kusnitz, *Public Opinion and Foreign Policy*, 95; Parmet, *Richard Nixon and His America*, 210.

<sup>21</sup> Nixon, *RN*, 126, 256, 258, 282.

<sup>22</sup> Arthur W. Hummel Jr. interview by Nancy Bernkopf Tucker, May 1992, transcript (in Nancy Bernkopf Tucker's possession); Mann, *About Face*, 17–18.

Judd, just days after Nixon's election. "Prophetically," wrote the committee's chronicler, Stanley D. Bachrack, Liebman cautioned that they "might be too confident about Nixon's dedication to existing China policy."<sup>23</sup>

China issues had had far less impact on Henry Kissinger before Nixon brought him to the White House as national security adviser. Kissinger had written about a possible future Sino-Soviet rift in 1961, evidently unaware that the crucial split had already occurred. As foreign policy adviser to presidential candidate Nelson Rockefeller in 1968, Kissinger dealt with China questions, but he exhibited little curiosity and minimal expertise. Early on, Kissinger's biographers Marvin Kalb and Bernard Kalb observed, "Kissinger was a mere passenger on the Administration's China train. The President was clearly its sole engineer."<sup>24</sup>

Kissinger apparently became interested in China only as he realized how seriously the president took efforts to improve relations with China and how useful a U.S. relationship with China could be in providing Washington with strategic leverage against the Soviet Union. He believed that the United States could play the Soviet Union and the People's Republic each against the other and enjoy better relations with each than either had with the other. Having given Beijing a starring role in a strategic contest of such immense import, Kissinger dismissed Taiwan as inconsequential—little more than a domestic U.S. political pawn. Throughout his negotiations with the Chinese, Kissinger would consistently minimize the significance of Taiwan as an issue for Beijing and as an impediment to progress.

To implement the early phases of his China policy, Nixon used the State Department, but he told the China specialists nothing about his broader intentions, allegedly believing they were wedded to a pro-Taipei perspective that would interfere with rapprochement. In fact, opinion throughout the government was mixed, but the first initiatives taken by the White House were based on State Department proposals, including the forward-leaning idea of exchanging high-level emissaries. Nixon and Kissinger nevertheless preferred to divert State Department and CIA analysts with task forces and studies. The CIA veteran James Lilley recalled that "as we bickered over the finer points [of policy, we] . . . were taken by surprise when news of Kissinger's July trip to Peking was made public even though we represented some of the most informed and experienced China hands in the U.S. government."<sup>25</sup>

Some secrecy surrounding the opening to Beijing was necessary to protect tentative steps from attack by proponents of the Republic of China. Nixon, who had reveled in pillorying the Democrats for their softness on Communism, understood better than most how easily efforts to alter China policy could disintegrate into a vicious political brawl.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Richard M. Nixon, "Asia after Viet Nam," *Foreign Affairs*, 46 (Oct. 1967), 111–25; Bachrack, *Committee of One Million*, 261.

<sup>24</sup> Kissinger, *White House Years*, 164; Isaacson, *Kissinger*, 334. Marvin Kalb and Bernard Kalb, *Kissinger* (New York, 1975), 248–53, esp. 253; Raymond L. Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation* (Washington, 1985), 214–15; Haldeman, *Haldeman Diaries*, 365; Morris, *Uncertain Greatness*, 204–5. Kissinger gets more credit for an independent interest in China in John L. Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of Postwar American National Security Policy* (New York, 1982), 282.

<sup>25</sup> John H. Holdridge, *Crossing the Divide: An Insider's Account of the Normalization of U.S.-China Relations* (New York, 1997), 35; James Lilley, *China Hands: Nine Decades of Adventure, Espionage, and Diplomacy in Asia* (New York, 2004), 156.

<sup>26</sup> Robert S. Litwak, *Détente and the Nixon Doctrine: American Foreign Policy and the Pursuit of Stability, 1969–1976* (New York, 1984), 64–65; Garry Wills, *Nixon Agonistes: The Crisis of the Self-Made Man* (New York, 1971), 87–90.

Although he knew that the China lobby had declined in importance, he believed Taipei could muster a powerful coalition to stop a new venture if it became public prematurely. In fact, by the time of Nixon's election, the Committee of One Million was in disarray, its chief money raiser having moved to London. In April 1970 the *New York Times* proclaimed the China lobby's virtual demise. Soon after, the Republic of China's embassy in Washington had difficulty arranging a breakfast for the heir apparent, Chiang Ching-kuo.<sup>27</sup>

Nixon, however, insisted that Kissinger keep in contact with China lobby leaders and meet with the ambassador from the Republic of China to assure them that only modest steps were being taken to better relations with China. He even appeared to seek approval for reaching out to China, as when he instructed Kissinger to consult Sen. Karl Mundt, a South Dakota Republican prominent in the China lobby, "and see whether he would be willing to have another move in that direction." Nixon worried about being condemned for betrayal of old friends. Although Taipei would "see it in black and white," he would not do "what the Kennedy administration did to [Ngo Dinh] Diem either physically or philosophically . . . [it] has Diem's blood on its hands."<sup>28</sup> But once he had a scheduled visit to Beijing, the president expected to stun the liberals who normally belittled him and carry all but the diehards in his own party when he stood for reelection.

As it turned out, secrecy did not just deprive policy makers of advice and information as the China opening proceeded. Concealment also hampered the maintenance of smooth relations with Taiwan. Nixon and Kissinger were acutely aware of the need to keep domestic supporters of the Republic of China as well as the Taipei government distracted and contented without making commitments that would hamper agreement with Beijing. As time passed, American officials withheld growing amounts and wider varieties of information to deprive Taipei of a clear sense that a U.S. opening to China was gaining momentum and to prevent confrontation or sabotage. "Even the fact that we had sat down to talk with the Chinese Communists [at Warsaw] was bad news from Chiang Kai-shek's viewpoint," recalled Ralph Clough, a foreign service officer deeply involved in the process. "We kept Chiang Kai-shek generally informed, but, of course, he wasn't confident that we were telling him everything." Indeed, the Nixon administration failed to brief Taiwan's representatives prior to Warsaw sessions, as had been routine, and provided unsatisfactory summaries afterward. Walter McCaughy, the U.S. ambassador to the Republic of China, repeatedly importuned his superiors to clarify their intentions to Chiang. If the United States did not, Beijing might be able to offer its version to create a rift between Washington and Taipei. The U.S. consul general in Hong Kong, David Dean, could see that the People's Republic had already begun to use the talks "to worry Taipei and particularly cast doubt in . . . [Taiwan officials'] minds about the steadfastness and reliability of its U.S. ally."<sup>29</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Marvin Liebman, *Coming Out Conservative: An Autobiography* (San Francisco, 1992), 180, 189; Bachrack, *Committee of One Million*, 261; *New York Times*, April 26, 1970, p. A14; Walter McCaughy, cable 9917, [c. April 1970], vol. I: Visit of Vice Premier Chiang Ching-kuo of China, April 21–23, 1970, box 913, VIP Visits, National Security Council Files, Nixon Presidential Materials Project (National Archives, College Park, Md.).

<sup>28</sup> Mann, *About Face*, 22; Foot, *Practice of Power*, 107; Nixon, Alexander Haig, and Walter McCaughy, conversation 532-17, June 30, 1971, Nixon White House Tapes (National Archives, College Park, Md.).

<sup>29</sup> State, cable 27529, Feb. 24, 1970, Paul Kreisberg Freedom of Information case (in Tucker's possession); Tucker, ed., *China Confidential*, 97; James C. Shen, *The U.S. and Free China: How the U.S. Sold Out Its Ally* (Washington, 1983), 66; McCaughy, cable 1314, March 24, 1970, vol. I, box 913, VIP Visits, National Security Council Files, Nixon Presidential Materials Project; David Dean, cable A-206, July 21, 1970, pol. Chicom-US folder, Subject-Numeric Files 1970–73, General Records of the Department of State, RG 59 (National Security Archive, George Washington University, Washington, D.C.).

An early indicator of the difficulties ahead arose in conjunction with a visit to Washington by Chiang Ching-kuo. Nixon and Kissinger worried about Beijing's reaction, but the younger Chiang's future leadership role as successor to his aging father called for giving him broad exposure to U.S. officials and institutions. Furthermore, trust between Taipei and Washington was being eroded not just by inklings of changing China policy but also by declining U.S. support for South Vietnam. Nguyen Van Thieu, an old friend of Chiang Kai-shek's, had stopped in Taipei en route home from his unsettling summit with Nixon in June 1969. Alerted that the Americans would be withdrawing troops from Vietnam, Chiang unhappily asked Thieu, "Why did you let them do it?" Worried Taiwan's position would be compromised next, the younger Chiang came to Washington primed for a discussion of seven key issues in United States–Taiwan relations. As his chief adviser on American affairs, Fred Ch'ien (Ch'ien Fu), laid them out, they were: (1) U.S. compromise with China on the Republic of China's interests, (2) U.S. preservation of the Republic of China's Security Council and General Assembly seats at the UN, (3) U.S. protection of the offshore islands, (4) U.S. defense of Taiwan against nuclear attack, (5) U.S. termination of support for independence activists, (6) U.S. acquiescence in a Taiwan assault on the mainland in the event of civil war there or Sino-Soviet conflict, and (7) U.S. maintenance of a military balance across the Taiwan Strait. The Republic of China's foreign ministry urged Washington to sign an upbeat communiqué incorporating at least some of those points to demonstrate U.S. commitment to Taiwan.<sup>30</sup>

When, after several postponements, Chiang Ching-kuo arrived in Washington in spring 1970, the administration greeted him with a ceremonial welcome ordinarily reserved for heads of state. The young Chiang stayed at Blair House, enjoyed a black-tie dinner, and met with top officials—with Nixon for a surprisingly generous seventy-five minutes. The president sought to be comforting about plans for improving relations with China, pledging, "I will never sell you down the river." Kissinger, also attempting encouragement, emphasized that the United States believed in standing by its friends and would never yield to any Communists on any issue.<sup>31</sup>

Chiang Ching-kuo felt neither mollified nor persuaded by his discussions in Washington. According to his closest confidants, the trip convinced him that relations with the United States would soon change decisively. Washington would continue to protect the island, but the ties that had kept the United States–Taiwan relationship healthy and dependable were fraying. Nixon would normalize with Beijing, undermining the one-China policy that had sustained the Republic of China since Japan's surrender, fatally challenging Taipei's status as the legitimate capital of China, and thereby drastically weakening the Guomindang's hold on power.<sup>32</sup>

Taiwan did enjoy the continued backing of high-level but essentially powerless members of the administration, a group aptly symbolized by Vice President Spiro Agnew.

<sup>30</sup> Nguyen Tien Hung and Jerrold L. Schecter, eds., *The Palace File* (New York, 1989), 34–35; Ch'ien Fu, report, spring 1970, file 412.21: Vice Premier Chiang's Visit to the US (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archives, Taipei, Taiwan); Ministry of Foreign Affairs to Chow Shu-kai, cable 157, April 14, 1970, folder: specific telegrams to R.O.C. ambassador, file 412.21, *ibid.*; Chow, cable 3022 (694), April 15, 1970, folder: specific telegrams to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> Shen, *U.S. and Free China*, 51; Taylor, *Generalissimo's Son*, 296–98, esp. 297; Kissinger, Chiang Ching-kuo, John Holdridge, James Shen, and Chow, memcon, April 22, 1970, vol. I, box 913, VIP Visits, National Security Council Files, Nixon Presidential Materials Project.

<sup>32</sup> Taylor, *Generalissimo's Son*, 300.

Nixon repeatedly dispatched his vice president to Taiwan but never informed him about plans for a China opening and sought to keep him on a tight leash in Taipei. Agnew was to say that cuts in military assistance had been unfortunate but unalterable and that the United States did not support a return to the mainland. He must neither endorse the Republic of China as the only legitimate government of China nor accept that it "has the exclusive right to the *only* seat for China" in the UN. He should support the U.S.-Republic of China Mutual Defense Treaty of 1954 but emphasize that Taiwan must not impede relations with Beijing.<sup>33</sup>

Preparing carefully for talks with the vice president, Chiang's advisers could not know that Nixon saw Agnew's visits as a sop. Their agenda ran the gamut from military cooperation and creation of an Asia-Pacific security system to defense of Taiwan's UN seats. If officials in Taipei had reservations about the Agnew channel, none was made apparent.<sup>34</sup> And Agnew spoke up for them, telling the press that reduced support for Taipei was "bothering the hell out of me." Of course, Agnew's views had no influence on the president, who was enraged when reporters wrote of Agnew's opposition to normalization. Dismissing the vice president as incompetent, Nixon called him his "insurance policy against assassination." Agnew's sympathies and expendability, then, made him a good emissary for soothing Taipei's anxieties.<sup>35</sup>

Meanwhile, evidence of changing U.S. priorities mounted. On April 6, 1970, the public phase of rapprochement began with the invitation a Chinese Ping-Pong team extended to its American counterpart to play in China. The U.S. government accepted, and on April 14 news of Americans being greeted in China by Zhou Enlai reached Taipei and media outlets around the world. Less dramatic but also important was a statement made by the State Department spokesman C. W. Bray early in the month to the effect that China and Taiwan ought to negotiate the status of Taiwan directly, since it remained undetermined. Bray's remarks roiled the waters in Taipei and Beijing. The People's Republic's protest was shrill and got wide attention, but the Republic of China, whose survival depended on nuances and definitions, was far more dismayed. Foreign Minister Chow Shu-kai reminded McConaughy that during World War II the Cairo and Potsdam declarations had affirmed that Japan should return Taiwan to the Republic of China and that both the peace treaty with Japan and the 1954 Mutual Defense Treaty had explicitly recognized Taiwan as part of the Republic of China's territory.<sup>36</sup> Nixon's speech to the American Society of Newspaper Editors on April 16 laid out the direction of administration thinking when he "confided" to his audience that he had advised his daughters to travel to China as soon as they could and that he himself hoped to do so. Chiang Kai-shek made his shock and displeasure clear to the president's special envoy, Ambassador Robert

<sup>33</sup> Henry Kissinger to Spiro Agnew, memo, Aug. 22, 1970, folder: Vice President's Briefing Book, Aug. 1970, Republic of China, box 406, Subject Files, National Security Council Files, Nixon Presidential Materials Project; Objectives Paper, [c. Aug. 1970], *ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> Wei Tao-ming, Foreign Minister, to President's Office, Dec. 10, 1969, files 551 and 565: Agnew Visits (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archives); Agnew and Yen Chia-kan, memcon, Jan. 1970, *ibid.*; Tai Rei-ming to Chiang Kai-shek, memo, Aug. 18, 1970, *ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, 92; Kissinger, *White House Years*, 713, 729; Haig to Kissinger, memo, March 25, 1971, folder: Items to discuss with the President 1/1/71-7/31/71, box 336, Policy Coordination Staff/Policy Planning Staff Director's Files (Winston Lord), 1969-1977, General Records of the Department of State, RG 59 (National Archives, College Park, Md.).

<sup>36</sup> The U.S. view that Taiwan's status was "undetermined" was reflected in "US China Policy," National Security Study Memorandum 106, Feb. 16, 1971; see Romberg, *Rein In at the Brink of the Precipice*, 22-25.

Murphy, when they met several days later, remarking “the various overtures Washington has made to placate Peiping [Beijing] have reached a maximal limit, beyond which any further steps would bring disasters.”<sup>37</sup>

Taipei leaders understood more clearly than their American counterparts that Beijing wanted rapprochement not just to protect against the Soviet threat, to secure admission to the UN, or to trade with the United States, but to recover Taiwan. In the 1950s the People’s Republic had adopted the position that no breakthrough on any issue could be considered until agreement had been reached on the Taiwan problem. The United States had insisted that progress required a Chinese renunciation of the use of force. If Sino-American relations now appeared on the brink of change, that could only mean either that the Americans were blind to Beijing’s manipulation or that Washington stood ready to capitulate.

### Rapprochement and Taiwan’s Future

The White House did in fact decide that Washington could accommodate Beijing’s long-sought preconditions to facilitate talks, as Ambassador Walter J. Stoessel was instructed when he prepared to meet in Warsaw on January 20, 1970, with Lei Yang, the Chinese ambassador to Poland. During the encounter, where Lei emphasized Taiwan to the exclusion of almost everything else, Stoessel asserted that the American military presence on the island constituted no threat to China. But, acknowledging that Beijing wanted more than vague reassurances, he explicitly pledged, “we will also not support and in fact will oppose any offensive military action from Taiwan against the mainland . . . and it is our hope that as peace and stability in Asia grow, we can reduce these facilities on Taiwan that we now have.” He also made clear that Washington was prepared to accept a negotiated resolution between Beijing and Taipei.<sup>38</sup>

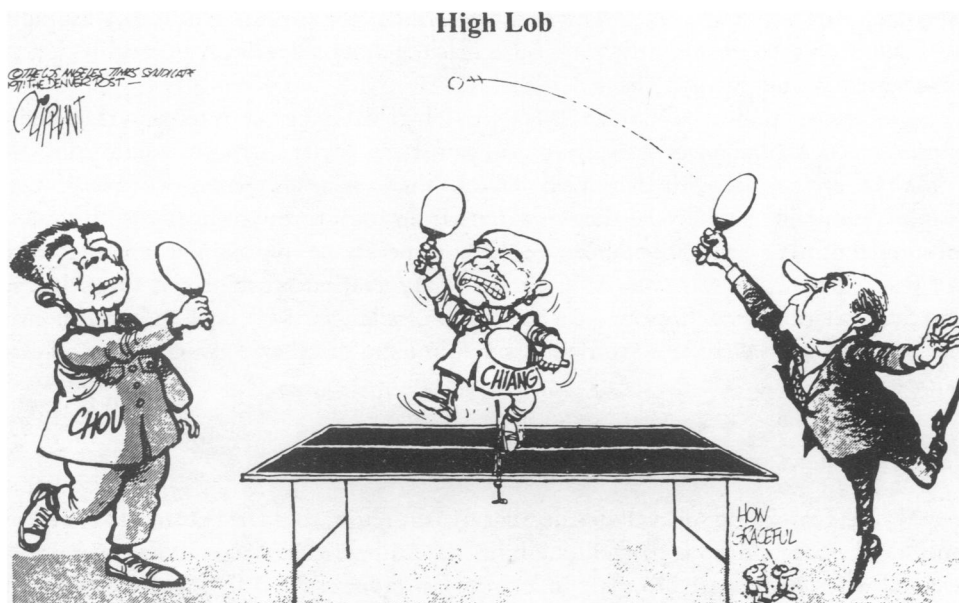
What made 1971 the first truly viable occasion for rapprochement was the strategic impetus provided by Soviet aggression. Under the Brezhnev doctrine of 1968, Moscow claimed the right to violate sovereignty in order to protect socialism, placing China’s security at risk. Nixon and Kissinger shared Chinese eagerness to stop Moscow’s expansion and to do so sought to play the “China card.” But as eager as Mao and Zhou might be for a U.S. counterweight to Moscow’s threats, they were not willing to make any fundamental sacrifices that would impede the recovery of Taiwan. That and that alone remained the basic purpose of a high-level emissary’s journey to Beijing. Nixon later recalled that among the first messages transmitted through Bucharest as the United States and China reached out to each other was the Chinese assertion that “there is only one outstanding issue between us—the U.S. occupation of Taiwan.”<sup>39</sup>

In July 1971, when Kissinger finally stepped off the aircraft onto Chinese soil, protection of Taiwan’s interests did not rank toward the top of a U.S. agenda that focused on

<sup>37</sup> Richard M. Nixon, “Panel Interview at the Annual Convention of the American Society for Newspaper Editors,” April 16, 1971, in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Richard Nixon* (Washington, 1972), 144; Kissinger to Nixon, May 3, 1971, box 1031: Exchanges Leading Up to the Henry A. Kissinger trip to China—Dec. 1969–July 1971 (1), National Security Council Files, Nixon Materials (National Security Archive).

<sup>38</sup> Warsaw, cable A-25, Jan. 24, 1970, folder: Stoessel-Lei Talks, report of the 135 meeting, Jan. 20, 1970, POL Chicom-US folder, Subject-Numeric Files 1970–73, General Records of the Department of State, RG 59 (National Security Archive).

<sup>39</sup> Nixon, *RN*, 547.



As normalization of relations between the United States and the People's Republic of China commenced, Richard M. Nixon and the Chinese premier Zhou Enlai refused to allow Chiang Kai-shek any role in the game of "Ping-Pong diplomacy." The cartoonist Pat Oliphant aptly captured Taiwan's frustration. *Courtesy Los Angeles Times, copyright 1971. Reprinted with permission.*

anti-Soviet maneuvering and efforts to end the Vietnam War. Kissinger and his entourage were astonished simply to be in Beijing, and the euphoria of what their arrival signified overwhelmed them, as it would the American people when the trip became public. In his memoir *The White House Years*, Kissinger maintained that during his foray to Beijing, he barely discussed Taiwan and had not jeopardized its interests. But declassified transcripts of the first meeting between Kissinger and Zhou Enlai demonstrate that this contention is not true. Zhou immediately challenged Kissinger to address China's core interests: acknowledgment that Taiwan was part of China and withdrawal of military forces and facilities from the island in a limited time. Zhou harked back to the history of United States–China interaction over Taiwan, reminding Kissinger that in 1949 “the U.S. stated . . . that it had no territorial ambitions regarding Taiwan” and would not “interfere in China’s internal affairs.” After “the Korean war broke out . . . you surrounded Taiwan and declared the status of Taiwan was still unsettled. Even up to the present day . . . this is your position. That is the crux.”<sup>40</sup>

On that very first day, in his opening statement to Zhou, Kissinger gave Beijing more than it could have expected. Cautioning the Chinese to be discreet because Nixon had authorized him to make offers before vetting them inside his government or with Congress, Kissinger withheld only formal recognition. He agreed to remove U.S. troops from Taiwan: two-thirds with the end of the Vietnam War and the other third progressively as relations got better. He did not demand that Beijing renounce force, and he asserted that

<sup>40</sup> Kissinger, *White House Years*, 749; Kissinger and Zhou Enlai, memcon, 4:35–11:20 p.m., July 9, 1971, box 1033: China, Henry A. Kissinger memcons July 1971, National Security Council Files, Nixon Materials (National Security Archive).

the military issue would not be “a principal obstacle between us.” He ruled out pursuing a policy of two Chinas or of one China, one Taiwan. He pledged that no one in the U.S. government would give any support to the Taiwan independence movement and promised to enforce the policy himself. The United States would also refrain from running covert CIA or other intelligence operations out of Taiwan.<sup>41</sup>

On the second day, Zhou reiterated, in tough terms, his insistence on his Taiwan agenda to make certain the Americans understood his priorities. Zhou observed, “the Taiwan question is a very small matter to you. As you said, it was created by President Truman, and what use is Taiwan to you at the present moment?” But Zhou wanted to impress upon the Americans that for Beijing “Taiwan is not an isolated issue.” Without settlement on Taiwan, he insisted, there would be no reconciliation. Washington had yielded ground on Taiwan and must go further, abandoning the position that its status remained in any way undetermined. Zhou would be delighted to find that Kissinger would give more. Kissinger added that the United States would not give Chiang Kai-shek assistance for an assault against the mainland, rendering such a venture impossible. The United States would also favor China’s entry into the UN even as it tried to keep a seat for Taiwan. To Zhou’s objections, Kissinger responded that this was a necessary, but hardly permanent, expedient. Finally, Kissinger reassured Zhou that “we will strongly oppose any Japanese military presence on Taiwan.”<sup>42</sup>

Given that the exchange on Taiwan proved difficult and lengthy, Kissinger’s subsequent comment that he found the Chinese relaxed on the Taiwan question might seem deceitful, but it may have been sincere in two ways. First, Kissinger may have spoken with conviction, thinking he was telling the truth, because he never grasped the real importance of Taiwan to Beijing. Part of the reason for that was the relative unimportance of Taiwan to him. Domestic American politics and the anticommunist struggle had given the Guomindang influence on the U.S. government, but the island never appeared to possess great intrinsic value. In 1950 the U.S. military had been willing to see it fall to the Chinese Communists rather than expend men and matériel to save it. Although Douglas MacArthur had called it an unsinkable aircraft carrier, Washington had no desire for a base of military operations against the mainland. Kissinger, who had no inherent interest in Asia, could comfortably imagine, even more readily than Nixon, bartering away Taiwan’s interests to reconfigure the Cold War.<sup>43</sup>

Nixon had ideological baggage, personal experience, and political instincts that made his position on China and Taiwan more complex. As a young congressman he had worried about Chiang Kai-shek because the generalissimo fought in the front lines against Communism. He knew Chiang personally, had visited Taiwan, had worked alongside the stalwarts of the China lobby in Congress, and had benefited from right-wing money that also sustained the interests of Taipei in Washington. But for Nixon as president, the demands

<sup>41</sup> Chen, *Mao’s China and the Cold War*, 263–64; Kissinger, *White House Years*, 749; Kissinger and Zhou, memcon, 4:35–11:20 p.m., July 9, 1971, box 1033: China, Henry A. Kissinger memcons July 1971, National Security Council Files, Nixon Materials (National Security Archive).

<sup>42</sup> Kissinger and Zhou, memcon, 12:10–6:00 p.m. and 11:20–11:50 p.m., July 10, 1971, box 1033: China, Henry A. Kissinger memcons July 1971, National Security Council Files, Nixon Materials (National Security Archive).

<sup>43</sup> Kissinger, *White House Years*, 1092; Tucker, ed., *China Confidential*, 254; Douglas MacArthur to Dept. Army, cable C-56410, May 29, 1950, folder 4: Formosa file March 1948–Oct. 1950, box 8, Far East Command Records, RG 6 (MacArthur Memorial Bureau of Archives, Norfolk, Va.); Tucker, *Uncertain Friendships*, 68–69.



of the Cold War and electioneering had become more intense. Whereas standing behind Taiwan might ensure backing from his customary supporters, it would not win the adulation his ego and his campaign required. Nixon instructed Kissinger, "Having in mind the fact that . . . [the Chinese] have to be tough on Taiwan . . . we've got to be tough on Taiwan in order to end up where we're going to have to end up." Still, a slightly chagrined Nixon urged, "I wouldn't be so forthcoming . . . until necessary."<sup>44</sup> The Republic of China could not be ignored but must not stand in the way of his anticipated foreign policy triumph.

Second, Kissinger's view that the Taiwan situation did not constitute an urgent priority for the People's Republic may best be understood in the context of the first remarks that he delivered in Beijing. Washington had conceded so much on Taiwan, had met China's preconditions so fully, that the Beijing leadership believed it could wait before trying to extract more. Thus Beijing yielded ground on timing, accepting the idea that U.S. troop withdrawals would come in stages linked to increased peace and stability in the region rather than instantly. Similarly, although the Mutual Defense Treaty remained illegitimate in the eyes of Mao and the Politburo and they made an agreement to withdraw U.S. troops a prerequisite to Nixon's visit, they also accepted a termination of the treaty undertaken over the twelve-month period prescribed in the treaty.<sup>45</sup> These Chinese compromises, however, never equaled what Nixon and Kissinger endorsed in Beijing, leaving China's leaders much to savor after Kissinger's July visit.

Kissinger, in contrast, consistently believed that the emphasis on the future of Taiwan was exaggerated by his advisers and the academic China experts. He considered it inconsequential to his Chinese interlocutors compared to the opportunity to gain U.S. support against the Soviets. Beijing, purposefully or not, proved misleading on this point. China quite naturally emphasized a common anti-Soviet agenda. Warnings from Chinese leaders that American Taiwan policy could jeopardize cooperation never stopped. But perhaps because they were muted, they failed adequately to trouble the hopeful American practitioners of rapprochement. Kissinger, even after his trip to Beijing, told the former foreign service officer John S. Service that the Chinese were not serious about Taiwan, they were just using it as a bargaining chip. Nixon assured French president Georges Pompidou at a December 1971 meeting in the Azores that the Chinese "do not view the talks as producing immediate results in Taiwan . . . regard[ing] these talks as the beginning of a long process."<sup>46</sup> In fact, Beijing anticipated that Kissinger's visit would rapidly lead to diplomatic relations and that once formal recognition had been removed, Taipei would quickly collapse.

Did Kissinger believe that Taiwan would survive rapprochement as either a separate state with which the United States enjoyed diplomatic relations or as a political entity clinging to some form of autonomy? On one hand, in 1971 and for the foreseeable future, the People's Republic would lack the military capabilities to attack and occupy the island. On the other, Kissinger's expectations about the future of the Taipei regime were reflected in his exchange with Zhou on July 9 in Beijing. The prime minister asserted without hesitation that "the U.S. must recognize that the PRC is the sole legitimate government in China and that Taiwan Province is an inalienable part of Chinese territory

<sup>44</sup> Nixon and Kissinger, conversation 534-3, July 1, 1971, Nixon White House Tapes.

<sup>45</sup> *Zhonghua renmin gongheguo shilu* (A factual record of the People's Republic of China) (3 vols., Changchun, 1994), III, 713-14.

<sup>46</sup> Tucker, ed., *China Confidential*, 254; Kissinger, *White House Years*, 705; William Burr, ed., *The Kissinger Transcripts: The Top-Secret Talks with Beijing and Moscow* (New York, 1998), 42.

which must be restored to the motherland.” Kissinger replied that “as a student of history, one’s prediction would have to be that the political evolution is likely to be in the direction which Prime Minister Chou En-lai indicated to me.” Kissinger continued by assuring Zhou, “we will not stand in the way of basic evolution.”<sup>47</sup>

Chinese leaders, then, came away from their July 1971 meetings with Henry Kissinger encouraged by Nixon’s national security adviser to assume that their most cherished goal had been accomplished. The Americans would not stand in the way; Taiwan would be theirs. The fact that this did not happen—that Beijing subsequently felt misled—engendered a sense of betrayal that simmered below the surface of rapprochement. It did not have a significant impact so long as no radical departures in Taiwan’s politics, cross-strait interaction, and United States–Taiwan relations occurred. Once the balance began to shift in all those areas, however, the course set by Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger came back to haunt the corridors of power and decision making.

### Taiwan and the Diplomacy of the Opening to China

Taipei learned of the Kissinger mission just thirty minutes before Nixon announced to the world that he had initiated the opening to China and would himself be traveling to Beijing in 1972. By contrast, Anatoly Dobrynin, the Soviet ambassador, heard directly from Kissinger almost twelve hours before Nixon’s television broadcast. Chiang Ching-kuo immediately assembled his advisers and, although he had met privately with Kissinger in Washington just a year earlier, grilled Fred Ch’ien on the man’s character and strategic thinking.<sup>48</sup> Chiang, suddenly confronted with the long-expected and much-dreaded event, had to decide on his government’s immediate and long-term reaction.

For Taiwan’s leaders the disadvantages of dependence had never been more conspicuous and the grounds for despair never clearer. Even as the White House reached out to the Soviets with what Dobrynin called goodwill gestures, Secretary of State William Rogers offered James Shen, the Republic of China’s ambassador, neither adequate information nor constructive compensation for previous and prospective slights. In Taipei Walter McCaughy, the U.S. ambassador, did not learn of the Kissinger mission until an hour before its public announcement; such timing called into question Nixon’s Oval Office statement to him that, regardless of the attempt to better relations with China, we are “trying to continue our close primary relations with” Taiwan. Indeed, Nixon had observed to Kissinger earlier that spring that the opening to China was inevitable “and it better take place when they’ve got a friend here rather than when they’ve got an enemy here.” Kissinger added, “It is a tragedy that it has to happen to Chiang at the end of his life. But we have to be cold about it.” And Taiwan’s friend in the White House responded, “Yeah, we have to do what’s best for us.”<sup>49</sup>

<sup>47</sup> Kissinger and Zhou, memcon, 4:35–11:20 p.m., July 9, 1971, box 1033: China, Henry A. Kissinger memcons July 1971, National Security Council Files, Nixon Materials (National Security Archive).

<sup>48</sup> Anatoly Dobrynin, *In Confidence: Moscow’s Ambassador to America’s Six Cold War Presidents, 1962–1986* (New York, 1995), 226–28; Jussi M. Hanhimäki, “‘Dr. Kissinger’ or ‘Mr. Henry’? Kissingerology, Thirty Years and Counting,” *Diplomatic History*, 27 (Nov. 2003), 650–51; Taylor, *Generalissimo’s Son*, 304.

<sup>49</sup> McCaughy, cable 3632, July 26, 1971, folder: United Nations 6 Chicom, July 23, 1971, box 3211: United Nations (Chicom–Chinat), Central Foreign Policy Files, 1970–73, General Records of the Department of State, RG 59 (National Archives, College Park, Md.); Nixon, Haig, and McCaughy, conversation 532-17, June 30, 1971, Nixon White House Tapes; Nixon and Kissinger, conversation 1-91, April 14, 1971, Nixon White House



Meeting in Mao Zedong's study in the Beijing leadership compound, February 1972, are (from left to right) Premier Zhou Enlai, translator Nancy Tang, Chairman Mao Zedong, President Richard M. Nixon, and National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger. *Courtesy National Archives, 26 Feb 72 8528-02.*

Not only did Kissinger's trip frighten officials of the Republic of China, the U.S. government at first did little to reassure Taipei. American officials assumed that Taipei would be shaken by the event and the president's announcement. When the National Assembly denounced Nixon for betraying Taiwan and both the government-controlled and the independent press castigated the United States for its treachery, few Americans were surprised. To Ambassador Shen, Nixon and Kissinger emphasized that Taipei must "do nothing to rock the boat"; Shen took the statement as a warning not to "spoil the American plans." Over time, Washington grew more concerned about Taiwan's reaction. In August, Richard Helms, director of the CIA, sent Kissinger the transcript of a conversation between two Taiwan air force officers in which they discussed using a surveillance flight by a U-2 plane to provoke the People's Republic into canceling Nixon's trip. Helms admitted that such an incident seemed unlikely, particularly since it would mean Taiwan's loss of a critical intelligence link to the United States, but he was worried enough to caution Kissinger. Zhou Enlai similarly warned that Chiang could not control rogue elements who would "deliberately . . . create trouble for him, and for you. That's why we maintain defenses along our coast."<sup>50</sup>

Although no militant demonstrations erupted, Nixon decided to solicit a staunch supporter of Taipei to travel to Taiwan to try to mollify Chiang's government. Gov. Ronald Reagan of California agreed, with some misgivings, to go to Taiwan for the Republic of China's national day observances on October 10 as part of a wider trip to Asia. Ironically, as with Agnew, Nixon was not sending a close confidant but a man he found "strange" and someone who "isn't pleasant to be around." According to the American diplomat Roger Sullivan, "Taiwan didn't want to be briefed, didn't ask to be briefed. So it was a symbolic kind of gesture so they wouldn't feel they were being abandoned. Maybe a ges-

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Tapes (National Security Archive). The transcript was created by Sharon Chamberlain of George Washington University.

<sup>50</sup> Taylor, *Generalissimo's Son*, 304; Mann, *About Face*, 37; Shen, *U.S. and Free China*, 110; Haig to Kissinger with Richard Helms report attached, memo, Aug. 26, 1971, folder: Aug. 1971, box 340: Winston Lord Chronology File, May 1971 through Feb. 1972, Policy Coordination Staff/Policy Planning Staff Director's Files (Winston Lord), 1969–1977, General Records of the Department of State, RG 59 (National Archives); Kissinger and Zhou, memcon, 11:20–11:50 p.m., July 10, 1971, box 1033: China, Henry A. Kissinger memcons July 1971, National Security Council Files, Nixon Materials (National Security Archive).

ture to protect Richard Nixon from his own people in the US.”<sup>51</sup> Reagan’s status secured a meeting with Chiang Kai-shek, but reportedly Chiang sat “like a stone, looking straight ahead silently” as the emissary tried to explain why Nixon had chosen to send Kissinger to Beijing.<sup>52</sup> Of course, for Taiwan the crisis had not passed, and as Reagan spoke, a struggle at the UN for the China seat raged. Indeed, the governor would barely be out of Taipei when a new disaster struck.

## The United Nations

In October 1971 two events significantly undermined Taiwan’s international status and prospects for survival. Washington and Beijing were aware of the approaching vote on the United Nations China seat when they agreed on a date for Kissinger’s second visit to China. The documents reveal that Beijing proposed October and that Kissinger refused to change the timing when the coincidence surfaced. He later explained that his Chinese plans needed to be fixed before the expulsion of the Republic of China from the UN or announcement of a Soviet-American summit could derail them. Indeed, Nixon feared that domestic backlash from Taiwan’s ouster would undermine the China initiative. The two men therefore concluded that it would be preferable to lie to the secretary of state and pretend that they had asked the Chinese to reschedule, rather than actually to do so.<sup>53</sup> Ultimately, Nixon would instruct Kissinger to delay his return to avoid a triumphal homecoming on the day of the vote, but that gesture in no way lessened the U.S. contribution to the Taiwan debacle.

As early as March 1970, Rogers had written to Nixon urging that efforts to improve relations with Beijing not be allowed to interfere with the UN membership question. But the president required no reminder of the Chinese representation issue that had plagued Eisenhower and each president thereafter. Mounting pressures for admission of the People’s Republic, interrupted by a decade of Cultural Revolution violence, had resumed, indicating an urgent need for a new U.S. policy. By autumn 1970 the United States itself no longer advocated unconditional exclusion of Beijing, having shifted to a posture of keeping Taiwan in rather than the mainland out. American diplomats feared that UN members viewed Taiwan as a “sinking ship,” assuming its removal to be unavoidable. The president reminded Kissinger that he wanted “a position in which we can keep our commitments to Taiwan” but not be embarrassed by them.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>51</sup> Haig to Kissinger, memo, Feb. 23, 1971, folder: Items to discuss with the President 1/1/71–7/31/71, box 336: Winston Lord Chronological File, Jan.–May 1973 through Winston Lord Travel Information, Policy Coordination Staff/Policy Planning Staff Director’s Files (Winston Lord), 1969–1977, General Records of the Department of State, RG 59 (National Archives); Richard Allen interview by Tucker, Feb. 1, 2001, typescript (in Tucker’s possession); Jonathan D. Salant, “New Recordings Show Nixon No Fan of Reagan,” Associated Press, Dec. 11, 2003; Roger Sullivan interview by Tucker, Feb. 2, 2001, typescript (in Tucker’s possession).

<sup>52</sup> Kissinger and Zhou, memcon, 4:42–7:17 p.m., Oct. 21, 1971, box 1034: Polo II–Henry A. Kissinger China Trip Oct. 1971, National Security Council Files, Nixon Materials (National Security Archive); Michael K. Deaver, *Behind the Scenes* (New York, 1987), 66.

<sup>53</sup> Kissinger to Nixon, memo, “My August 16 Meeting with the Chinese Ambassador in Paris,” Aug. 16, 1971, box 330: China Exchanges July–Oct. 20, 1971, Policy Coordination Staff/Policy Planning Staff Director’s Files (Winston Lord), 1969–1977, General Records of the Department of State, RG 59 (National Archives); Nixon and Kissinger, conversation 581-1, Sept. 30, 1971, Nixon White House Tapes (National Security Archive), transcript by Chamberlain; Nixon and Kissinger, conversation 582-3, Sept. 30, 1971, *ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> Kissinger to Nixon, draft memo, Nov. 19, 1970, folder: Winston Lord, Nov. 1970, box 334: Winston Lord Chronological File, Sept. 1970–Nov. 1970, Policy Coordination Staff/Policy Planning Staff Director’s Files (Win-

American policy makers faced a complicated and ultimately unmanageable set of obligations. Believing there must be a reasonable and pragmatic solution, U.S. diplomats leaned toward a dual-representation formula that would place both the People's Republic and the Republic of China in the UN. Any dual-representation initiative, and National Security Study Memorandum 107 examined six variations, faced enormous obstacles. Most formidable was the reality that neither China considered any version acceptable. Moreover, the UN membership would probably see U.S. sponsorship of such an arrangement as cynical manipulation of the system since Americans had previously promoted it partly because Chiang Kai-shek could be compelled to accept while Beijing's rejection would shift the burden for exclusion onto the Communist Chinese.<sup>55</sup>

In 1971 Nixon and Kissinger, convinced that Beijing would never tolerate dual representation and would be angered by Washington's advocacy, concluded they should withhold White House support. Nixon personally may also have found the policy unpersuasive. He remarked to Ambassador McConaughy that keeping the Republic of China in the Security Council is "why the whole two China thing is so really rather ridiculous." But officials at the State Department and the National Security Council believed that a majority could be mustered for dual representation with a provision awarding the Security Council seat to Beijing while leaving a place for Taipei in the General Assembly, if the United States worked vigorously for its adoption. That would be better than being held responsible for Taipei's ouster.<sup>56</sup>

Taiwan, appalled that Washington might turn to, or even cosponsor, a dual-representation resolution, declared that it could not stay in the UN if Beijing occupied the Security Council seat. Chiang Kai-shek instructed his foreign minister to emphasize that the Republic of China's presence in the General Assembly and Security Council remained "inseparable and indivisible." Having been a founding member of the organization, the Republic of China could not relinquish the Security Council seat without undermining its legal rationale for existence. Chow Shu-kai, the foreign minister, had long implied "that whether a bandwagon mood in favor of PRC admission develops depends in large measure upon the U.S. attitude," ignoring the fact that U.S. influence in the UN was diminishing. Assistant Secretary of State Marshall Green, lamenting Taipei's unwillingness to explore options, attempted to convince officials of the Republic of China that their hold on the UN would be weakened, not by considering alternatives, but by their refusal to do so. If Taipei quit the UN, not only would it be isolated, but its intransigence might psychologically release the United States from promises to protect Taiwan.<sup>57</sup>

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ston Lord), 1969–1977, General Records of the Department of State, RG 59 (National Archives); Winston Lord to Kissinger, memo, Nov. 25, 1970, *ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> "The Entire UN Membership Question: US-China Policy," National Security Study Memorandum 107, March 15, 1971, folder: United Nations 6 Chicom, box 3210: United Nations (Chicom-Chinat), Central Foreign Policy Files, 1970–73, General Records of the Department of State, RG 59 (National Archives).

<sup>56</sup> Kissinger, *White House Years*, 773; Nixon, Haig, and McConaughy, conversation 532-17, June 30, 1971, Nixon White House Tapes; Charles Yost to William Rogers, Feb. 8, 1971, folder: United Nations 6 Chicom, Feb. 1, 1971, box 3209: United Nations (Chicom-Chinat), Central Foreign Policy Files, 1970–73, General Records of the Department of State, RG 59 (National Archives).

<sup>57</sup> McConaughy, cable 3387, July 11, 1971, folder: United Nations 6 Chinat, July 1, 1971, box 3211: United Nations (Chicom-Chinat), Central Foreign Policy Files, 1970–73, General Records of the Department of State, RG 59 (National Archives); Chow, Marshall Green et al., memcon, Jan. 25, 1971, folder: United Nations 6 Chicom, Jan. 20, 1971, box 3209: United Nations (Chicom-Chinat), *ibid.*; Samuel DePalma, Assistant Secretary International Organization Affairs, to Kissinger, memo transmitting study pursuant to National Security Studies Memo-

Much of the diplomacy on the issue had to be conducted by Taiwan's ambassador in Washington, James Shen, who did not strike Americans as a first-rate diplomat or "a source of new initiatives." Unforgivably, he had publicly criticized the administration; predictably, his demarches and entreaties made little headway. In July he sought to prick Rogers's conscience, reminding him of Nixon's pledge not to allow the People's Republic to take China's UN Security Council seat, warning "this will be looked on as a test case of your repeated assurance that you will not do anything at [the] expense of an old friend." By August 1971, as the UN clock wound down, Shen could reach Kissinger only by inviting him to dinner "to see if [a Republic of China] . . . cook couldn't equal or excel the level of the Chinese cooks in Peking."<sup>58</sup>

Washington understood that the final decisions on Taiwan's stance belonged to Chiang Kai-shek and that he would not be easy to persuade. Chiang, Arthur Hummel, the deputy assistant secretary for East Asia, later remarked, "was a very old fashioned, authoritarian figure. Not very well educated. Not understanding a whole lot about the dynamics of foreign countries, even the government of the US. . . . How we work, what Congress does, what can be done, and what can't be done. He was very narrow minded" and, diplomats feared, would doom their efforts through stubbornness and illusion. Chiang doubtless thought he had made it clear that he dismissed compromise with the bandits in Beijing because "there is no room for patriots and traitors to live together" (*hanzi bu-liangli*) and that he expected the United States to live up to promises to use its veto in the UN. Not only John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson but also Nixon in his 1960 campaign had made such promises.<sup>59</sup> To a Nixon emissary he remarked caustically, "should the ROC one day leave the UN, the world would know that she has been forced out not by the Communists, but by the us."<sup>60</sup>

To others in Taipei, the thought of Beijing enjoying UN privileges while Taiwan watched from the outside seemed worse. In the legislature and the press, they argued Taiwan should "fight the bandits from within."<sup>61</sup> Taiwan representatives at the UN and in Washington repeatedly confided to American officials that they agreed with the U.S. position but were dismissed at home as "unduly pessimistic." After Kissinger's astonishing secret trip to China became public, however, frightened Taipei officials capitulated, abandoning months of resistance. They quickly discovered that dual representation was almost as unpopular with the international community as it had been in Taiwan. Accord-

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random 107 "The Entire United Nations Membership Question: US-China Policy," Feb. 6, 1971, folder: United Nations 6 Chicom, March 15, 1971, box 3210: United Nations (Chicom-Chinat), *ibid*.

<sup>58</sup> Presentation of Credentials, May 18, 1971, folder: [EX] CO34-1, Republic of China (Formosa-Taiwan) 1/1/71-[1 of 2], box 18, Subject Files, White House Central Files, Nixon Presidential Materials Project; State, cable 134611, July 24, 1971, folder: United Nations 6 Chinat, July 23, 1971, box 3211: United Nations (Chicom-Chinat), Central Foreign Policy Files, 1970-73, General Records of the Department of State, RG 59 (National Archives); McConaughy, cable 3680, July 28, 1971, *ibid*.; John H. Holdridge to Kissinger, memo, Aug. 19, 1971, folder: [EX] CO34-1, Republic of China (Formosa-Taiwan) 1/1/71-[1 of 2], box 18, Subject Files, White House Central Files, Nixon Presidential Materials Project.

<sup>59</sup> Tucker, ed., *China Confidential*, 209; *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963* (25 vols., Washington, 1996), XXII, 46; Yost, cable 087, Jan. 13, 1971, folder: United Nations 6 Chicom, Jan. 1, 1971, box 3209: United Nations (Chicom-Chinat), Central Foreign Policy Files, 1970-73, General Records of the Department of State, RG 59 (National Archives).

<sup>60</sup> Kissinger to Nixon, memo, May 3, 1971, box 1031: Exchanges Leading Up to Henry A. Kissinger Trip to China, Dec. 1969-July 1971(1), National Security Council Files, Nixon Materials (National Security Archive).

<sup>61</sup> McConaughy, cable 1255, March 20, 1971, folder: United Nations 6 Chicom, March 15, 1971, box 3210: United Nations (Chicom-Chinat), Central Foreign Policy Files, 1970-1973, General Records of the Department of State, RG 59 (National Archives).

ingly, in August 1971, Rogers asked Taiwan to speak out in favor of dual representation, throwing the Foreign Ministry into disarray. Taiwan did instruct all Republic of China ambassadors to ask their host governments to vote for the resolution even though Taipei would not, but Fred Ch'ien, Chiang Ching-kuo's adviser, conceded that some ambassadors refused to follow ministry guidance. Even Ambassador Shen, having watched the process from his perch in Washington, recalled in his bitter memoir that "when asked by governments friendly to us how we would wish them to vote, we did not know what to say. . . . As a result, many of our friends were in a quandary. In the end this proved to be our undoing because they did not know what we really wanted them to do."<sup>62</sup>

Having acquiesced in the possibility of a dual-representation vote, Taipei still had to decide on its reaction to the result. The foreign minister told McConaughy in the greatest secrecy that there had been quite a fight among the highest officials during a full-day meeting in the capital on September 9. Hard-liners passionately advocated a principled, if doomed, response regardless of the consequences. Internationalists, however, appeared to triumph, convincing Chiang Kai-shek to make the "painful" decision not to threaten to walk out. Washington could not expect Chiang to go further than that. As Rogers averred to the president, "Taipei has come a very long way toward developing a more pragmatic foreign policy—much farther than many would have predicted."<sup>63</sup>

As it turned out, the arduous lobbying and clever maneuvering failed to secure dual representation and to preserve a seat in the United Nations for the Republic of China. Of course, coexisting China delegations in the UN may have been unattainable from the start. Kissinger dismissed the effort as an "essentially doomed rearguard action" mounted because it was "the only piece of the action on China under State Department control." The administration, in any case, declared it would neither threaten to use its Security Council veto nor withhold financial support to keep the People's Republic out.<sup>64</sup>

But Kissinger's October trip to Beijing swept aside any chance that the policy might succeed, signaling that Washington considered normalization its highest priority. Rogers ineffectually opposed the visit, perhaps partly out of pique at being left behind again, but also because of the delicate UN situation. Rogers argued that changing the date of the mission made more sense than carrying out an advance trip four months before the president would actually go to China. "It almost looks as if we were suckers," he warned, "to do it right at the time that we've got the most important issue between us coming to a vote." Kissinger in retrospect insisted that "the problem was not any one trip but the basic trend." Anticipating a loss, Kissinger simply preferred not to go as a "defeated man," and he shared the president's concern that "there may be some pressure" exerted by Congress and the public "to reconsider if we should go to China" at all.<sup>65</sup>

<sup>62</sup> Bennett, cable 2063, July 30, 1971, folder: United Nations 6 Chicom, July 23, 1971, box 3211, *ibid.*; George H. W. Bush, cable 2280, Aug. 18, 1971, folder: United Nations 6 Chicom, Aug. 16, 1971, box 3212, *ibid.*; McConaughy, cable 4206, Aug. 24, 1971, folder: United Nations 6 Chicom, Aug. 20, 1971, *ibid.*; Shen, *U.S. and Free China*, 62.

<sup>63</sup> McConaughy to Rogers, cable 4553, Sept. 10, 1971, folder: United Nations 6 Chicom, Sept. 10, 1971, box 3213: United Nations (Chicom-Chinat), Central Foreign Policy Files, 1970–73, General Records of the Department of State, RG 59 (National Archives); Rogers to Nixon, memo, Sept. 11, 1971, folder: United Nations 6 Chicom, Sept. 10, 1971, *ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> Nixon, Rogers, and Kissinger, conversation 581–6, Sept. 30, 1971, Nixon White House Tapes (National Security Archive), transcript by Chamberlain; Garver, *Sino-American Alliance*, 261.

<sup>65</sup> Nixon, Rogers, and Kissinger, conversation 581–6, Sept. 30, 1971, Nixon White House Tapes; Kissinger, *White House Years*, 770, 772, 776. John Connally and Kissinger, telcon, Oct. 1, 1971, folder: 1971, 1–4 Oct. (8), box 11, Nixon Presidential Materials Project; Nixon and Kissinger, telcon, 1:22 p.m., Oct. 2, 1971, *ibid.*

George H. W. Bush and the other exhausted members of the U.S. delegation at the UN struggled vigorously, if forlornly, through the grueling weeks and days before the vote. Asserting the principles of universality, reality, and practicality, Bush made the case that Taipei exerted effective control over a population of some 14 million who should not be cavalierly ejected from an international forum dedicated to peace, particularly since membership would have no bearing on the final resolution of the Taiwan-China dispute. Harry Thayer, the mission deputy, felt “there was no question that Bush was convinced that this was the right thing to do. He was indefatigable in lobbying for this policy . . . he had a marvelous touch in dealing with the human beings behind the title, invited them out to his home town . . . to seats at a baseball game. . . . So when he said we, the U.S., will do this . . . people believed him.” Bush, perhaps naïvely, expected to be able to win in the UN, according to Daniel Patrick Moynihan, who was then serving under him at the mission. Bush told the *Washington Post*, “I know for a fact that the president wants to see the policy implemented.”<sup>66</sup> But Bush, a relative novice in foreign affairs, did not enjoy the full confidence of his superiors. Rogers dismissed him as a “lightweight,” and Kissinger told Nixon that Bush was “too soft and not sophisticated enough” to represent the United States in the Beijing negotiations with Zhou Enlai—a judgment with which Nixon agreed. Bush waged a ferocious campaign on what he believed to be Nixon’s orders, not knowing that just days before the final vote Kissinger doctored a Rogers speech, dropping references to UN universality and to the fact that the population of Taiwan exceeded the populations of two-thirds of member states.<sup>67</sup>

As a man with aspirations to higher office, however, Bush barely complained about being undermined by the White House and abandoned by allies. Years later he recalled the “bitterness” and “disgust” he felt at the countries that reneged on pledges to vote alongside the United States and the delegates who celebrated Taiwan’s expulsion and their success in weakening Washington’s influence within the international organization. For many, he believed, “Taiwan wasn’t really the issue. Kicking Uncle Sam was.” As Taiwan’s representatives walked out before the final ballot had been cast, Bush strode from his seat to catch Taiwan’s UN ambassador and momentarily “put an arm on his shoulder.” But Bush felt that it was not just foreign governments that had let down Taipei and the United States mission to the UN. Although he agreed with the Nixon administration’s China initiative, he nevertheless saw Kissinger as the instrument of Taiwan’s shameful ouster. “What was hard . . . to understand was Henry’s telling me he was ‘disappointed’ by the final outcome of the Taiwan vote. . . . given the fact that we were saying one thing in New York and doing another in Washington, that outcome was inevitable.”<sup>68</sup>

Nixon seemingly had more difficulty accepting the idea of a UN defeat than did Kissinger. Until the end, he believed there might be a chance to keep Taiwan’s seat and hoped to rally countries that owed the United States support, such as Israel, Venezuela, Turkey, and Greece. The president, who sought to use normalization with China in a vast

<sup>66</sup> Tucker, ed., *China Confidential*, 264–65; *Washington Post*, Aug. 9, 1988, p. A1; Herbert S. Parmet, *George Bush* (New York, 1997), 152.

<sup>67</sup> Nixon and Kissinger, telcon, April 27, 1971, box 1031(1), National Security Council Files, Nixon Materials (National Security Archive); Bush, cable 3738, Oct. 21, 1971, folder: United Nations 6 Chicom, Oct. 21, 1971, box 3215: United Nations (Chicom-Chinat), Central Foreign Policy Files, 1970–73, General Records of the Department of State, RG 59 (National Archives); Kissinger and Rogers, telcon, 8:50 a.m., Oct. 4, 1971, folder: 1971, 1–4 Oct. (8), box 11, Kissinger Telcons (National Archives, College Park, Md.).

<sup>68</sup> George Bush, *Looking Forward* (Garden City, 1987), 114–16.



geopolitical maneuver against the Soviet Union, wanted to maintain geopolitical leverage against Beijing as well by keeping Taipei in the General Assembly. But he also worked hard at rationalizing his willingness to allow Taiwan to be superseded at the UN. Although he had been an early supporter of the international organization, by 1971 he dismissed it as a "damn debating society." "What good does it do?" he asked McConaughy rhetorically in June. "Very little. . . . No, my feelings about the UN, I must say, that . . . none of our vital interests have ever been submitted to the UN and will never be while I'm here. . . . I think [Taiwan] . . . ought not to give much [of] a damn what happens at the UN. I don't think it hurts them one bit." Besides, whatever the potential cost for Taiwan, Nixon told Kissinger "there's nothing in it for us to start slobbering over the [Republic of China] Chinese and have . . . [the UN] slap us in the face."<sup>69</sup>

Kissinger made a brief attempt in Beijing to persuade Zhou not to push ahead with the UN campaign. He pointed out that some 62 percent of Americans opposed Taiwan's ouster and suggested that a clash on this issue could disrupt rapprochement. But when Zhou did not respond, Kissinger let the matter drop, assuring the Chinese that the administration had no intention of backing away from promises made in July, whether or not UN entry was pressed and whether or not Beijing declared that it would settle the Taiwan question by peaceful means. Kissinger did finally take a tough stand against the Americans' abandoning Taiwan, telling Zhou that such behavior would hardly be a good basis for a new bond with China. Zhou remembered Kissinger's paean to loyalty some months later when, in discussing Vietnam and Taiwan, he observed cynically, "that is still your old saying—you don't want to cast aside old friends. But you have already cast aside many old friends." Besides, Zhou added, "Chiang Kai-shek . . . was even an older friend of ours than yous."<sup>70</sup>

In the end Nixon and Kissinger benefited from the misguided actions of Taiwan's leaders. During the months of maneuvering over the UN, Chiang Kai-shek and his associates forced Washington to wheedle, to plead, and to threaten in order to mount something resembling a unified position. But so long as Taipei insisted that Taiwan was part of China, it doomed any argument that the 14 million people on the island—who determined their own affairs on territory they ruled—were entitled to representation under the UN's universality principle. When Taipei claimed to be the capital of all of China, it undermined confidence in the government's grasp of reality. Finally, so long as Taipei demanded that countries choose between Taiwan and China, it convinced delegates there was no sense in trying to keep both parties in the UN.<sup>71</sup> At no point, in October 1971 or the weeks and months before, did Chiang Kai-shek permit a vigorous initiative to capture the imaginations of Taiwan's flagging supporters. Admittedly, even a creative proposal would probably not have withstood the Nixon/Kissinger July shock, but Taiwan's passivity in the face of almost-certain defeat suggested poor choices and ineffective leadership.

Conservatives and China lobby stalwarts in the United States who might have responded to a vigorous rallying cry therefore remained disorganized and similarly want-

<sup>69</sup> Nixon, Haig, and McConaughy, conversation 532-17, June 30, 1971, Nixon White House Tapes; Nixon and Kissinger, telcon, 9:35 a.m., March 30, 1971, folder: 1971 25-31 March (6), box 9, Kissinger Telcons.

<sup>70</sup> Kissinger and Zhou, memcon, 10:30 a.m.-1:45 p.m., Oct. 21, 1971, box 1034: Polo II-Henry A. Kissinger China Trip Oct. 1971, National Security Council Files, Nixon Materials (National Security Archive); Kissinger, *White House Years*, 782; Nixon, Kissinger, and Zhou, memcon, 2:10-6:00 p.m., Feb. 22, 1972, box 87: "Beginning February 20, 1972," President's Office Files, Nixon Materials (National Security Archive).

<sup>71</sup> Garver, *Sino-American Alliance*, 256-62.



During his February 1972 trip to China, Richard M. Nixon (third from left) shares a banquet meal with Chinese premier Zhou Enlai (second from left) after discussions about Taiwan, Japan, the Soviet Union, and other issues. *Courtesy National Archives, 27 Feb 72 08616-29.*

ing. Even as a group led by the conservative intellectual William F. Buckley Jr. broke with the president, questioning Nixon's conservative credentials, many were loath to be seen as attacking Nixon and swallowed their discontent. Ronald Reagan, for instance, having supported the China opening only to see Taiwan expelled from the UN, chafed at the stain on his credibility. Kissinger sought to reassure him, promising there would be consequences "for every country that voted against us that didn't have an overpowering reason." Kissinger counseled patience, explaining "we feel we have to do it in our own devious way," and Reagan went along because he put the anti-Soviet thrust of administration policy ahead of Taiwan's interests. Walter Judd secretly pledged support for the president, confidentially telling Kissinger that reports of his opposition would actually "strengthen [the national security adviser's] hand" in negotiations with the Chinese.<sup>72</sup>

## Conclusion

When Nixon traveled to China in 1972, the parameters had already been set for agreements on Taiwan, as had the practice of saying different things in public and in private. Upon opening his substantive dialogue with Zhou on February 22, 1972, Nixon immediately raised Taiwan and reiterated understandings reached by Kissinger, hoping to set the issue aside and discuss matters that interested him more. "Principle one," he began, "There is one China, and Taiwan is a part of China." He went on to disavow support for Taiwan independence movements, Japanese involvement, references to Taiwan's status as undetermined, and military action against the People's Republic. Nixon emphasized his fears that domestic groups would manipulate the Taiwan question to block his China

<sup>72</sup> Parmet, *Richard Nixon and His America*, 623; Kissinger and Ronald Reagan, telcon, 5:15 p.m., Oct. 29, 1971, folder: 1971 15–30 Oct. (11), box 11, Kissinger Telcons; Kissinger and Walter Judd, telcon, 4:42 p.m., Nov. 23, 1971, folder: 1971 15–23 Nov. (2), *ibid.*

initiative. Language had to be found to disguise concessions so that a joint communiqué between the United States and the People's Republic setting out areas of agreement at the end of the president's visit "would not stir up the animals," motivating them to hurl charges that "the American President went to Peking and sold Taiwan down the river." Under such circumstances, he might be "forced . . . to make a strong basically pro-Taiwan statement," obstructing implementation of commitments on both sides. "The problem here," Nixon told Zhou, "is not what we are going to do, the problem is what we are going to say about it."<sup>73</sup>

The resulting Shanghai Communiqué, therefore, did not tell the people of the United States, Taiwan, or China that privately Nixon had accepted Beijing's key demand. Rather, in this first agreement between the United States and the People's Republic on the normalization of their relations, Americans said that the United States "acknowledges" and "does not challenge" the idea that only one China existed in the world—a view shared at the time by authorities in both Beijing and Taipei.<sup>74</sup> Indeed, in 1972 their dispute centered, not on independence for Taiwan, but on which rightfully ruled all of China. So Washington outwardly assumed a neutral posture, emphasizing that resolution of the Taipei-Beijing conflict must be peaceful, but not asserting what the outcome should be.

In the wake of the communiqué, which did not open diplomatic relations with Beijing, the United States remained tied to the formalities of a decaying alliance with the Republic of China that seemed as awkward to Washington as it was indispensable to Taipei. To avoid raising false hope about a change in direction, U.S. officials afforded only grudging compliance with commitments. Washington continued to trade with, and to sell arms to, Taiwan, but minimizing provocation of the People's Republic became a key priority lest the latter renounce rapprochement.

In Taipei illusion and disillusion paralyzed policy makers. Before Nixon's trip, Taipei's ambassador to Washington had tried to secure a congressional resolution reaffirming treaty obligations, only to be rebuffed. After the trip, torn between the desire for retribution and the need for help, leaders and diplomats hoped for a miracle and seemed unsure of what else to do. Although the Taiwan lobby continued to be talked about in reverential terms, it had little success in stalling the slow but steady progress toward United States–China diplomatic relations. In 1973, when the United States fled Vietnam, officials in Taipei feared the event was a warning that no treaty was safe. James Shen remarked sardonically that it would provide Taipei "a breathing space" because top U.S. officials would recognize that "selling one ally down the river was quite enough for one year."<sup>75</sup>

By the end of 1973, the two Chinas had essentially changed places in the hearts and minds of American leaders and the public. Washington and Beijing were doing business through liaison offices that became more important than the U.S. and Republic of China embassies, and the State Department had placed an informal ban on meetings between Taiwan officials and the president, secretary of state, and other high-level executives. Tai-

<sup>73</sup> Nixon, Kissinger, and Zhou, memcon, 2:10–6:00 p.m. Feb. 22, 1972, box 87: "Beginning February 20, 1972," President's Office Files, Nixon Materials (National Security Archive) <<http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB106/press.htm>> (Dec. 11, 2003); Romberg, *Rein In at the Brink of the Precipice*, 47.

<sup>74</sup> The Chinese and English texts of the communiqué are not the same, and the Chinese is stronger; see Dong Mei, *Zhong Mei guanxi ciliao xuanbian* (Selected compilation of materials on U.S.-China relations) (Beijing, 1982), 3–8; Joint Communiqué between the P.R.C. and the U.S.A., Feb. 27, 1972, *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Richard Nixon, 1972* (Washington, 1974), 376–79.

<sup>75</sup> Gerald R. Ford and Kissinger, telcon, 5:35 p.m., Feb. 8, 1972, folder: 1972 5–10 Feb. (3), box 13, Kissinger Telcons; Shen, *Free China*, 13.

wan stood on the verge of derecognition, spared until 1979, not by altered policies, but largely by domestic upheaval in the United States and the People's Republic.

Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger had been successful in redirecting U.S. foreign policy. They had unquestionably been right to press ahead to normalize relations with the People's Republic, a policy too long in coming and clearly in the national interest, although not necessarily dependent upon them to accomplish. A case can even be made that some secrecy helped facilitate the effort, although they carried it to an extreme that threatened the enterprise, and they imposed such urgency—fearing a race for glory—that needless complications arose. Less defensibly, however, they willingly betrayed an ally, conceding Taiwan's interests before negotiations began. Nixon and Kissinger forfeited not simply the right of Taiwan's people to self-determination, but potentially their ability to avoid Communist rule, and they did so at a time when a popular movement for representative government in Taiwan was seeking greater U.S. support. Of course, the popular movement had no power, and the people in Taiwan with power proved ineffective in devising any strategy to cope with the trend of U.S. policy. Along with many others in the world, and in the United States, they were no match for Kissinger or Nixon. At their best, they might have failed; given the stakes, their near paralysis could have been tragic. They averted disaster, not by their own actions, but because the Watergate scandal gave the pro-Taiwan right wing of the Republican party the leverage it required to stall the normalization process until 1978.

The president and his national security adviser viewed Taiwan as expendable, as less valuable than the strategic and political advantages that a new relationship with the People's Republic would secure. As a result, Nixon and Kissinger searched their consciences and decided to give Beijing what it wanted in order to make a deal. In the process they misled China's rulers into believing that the United States would step aside and allow Taiwan to collapse. When that did not happen, Beijing—like Taipei and the American friends of Taiwan—felt betrayed. In their eagerness to play the China card, Nixon and Kissinger undermined the effectiveness and durability of their own initiative. They failed to see that other Americans would be more determined to help Taiwan defend itself and that Taiwan would be capable of meaningful political reform that would provide the wherewithal for survival.<sup>76</sup> Their shortsightedness, fueled by ignorance and secrecy, nevertheless misled everyone. It is this collateral damage to U.S. integrity, diplomacy, and democracy, at home and abroad, that constitutes the most serious indictment of the policies they pursued.

<sup>76</sup> The Taiwan Relations Act, passed by the U.S. Congress in 1979, provided for the conduct of routine business after the United States broke diplomatic relations with Taiwan. Since neither President Jimmy Carter nor his national security adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski worried a great deal more about Taiwan than did Nixon and Kissinger, Congress added security provisions to the legislation originally proposed by the executive branch. Taiwan began its gradual democratization in the mid-1980s.