

Sino-American Normalization

The National Security Advisor's Quest, 1976-1978

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I. Introduction

In an era of domestic strife, Jimmy Carter entered the national political stage as a breath of fresh air, escaping the seeming political corruption of the Nixon administration. The global conflict with the Soviet Union was ever-present but Carter had an appetite to assert his own vision of American foreign policy, regardless of external circumstance.¹ Richard Nixon initiated the thawing of US-China relations through his historic trip to China in 1972. However, it was Jimmy Carter who normalized the Sino-American relationship, cementing his historic role in the bilateral relation. Carter campaigned on the issue of normalizing relations with the Chinese but initially seemed hesitant on the issue as he entered his term. Following the template set forth by Nixon through the Shanghai Communiqué in 1972, Carter's administration initiated a two-year process to normalize relations that culminated into the release of the Joint Communiqué of 1979. The agreement, established between the People's Republic of China and United States, formalized relations between the two nations in the context of a global Cold War. The foreign policy communiqué that has held steady did not come about without compromise and hard negotiating. This is evident specifically within the context of the narrative of bureaucratic infighting between Zbigniew Brzezinski and Cyrus Vance, the National Security Advisor and the Secretary of State, regarding the road to normalization.

Current historical analysis of the normalization process argues that administrative infighting contributed to and was a crucial factor in this policy pursuit.² However, this paper argues that the battle for strategic leverage within the Carter administration was not a product of competing interests but rather, was continuously facilitated by the National Security Adviser,

¹ Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith: Memoirs of a President* (New York: Bantam Books, 1982), 20-22.

² Jean A. Garrison, "Explaining Change in the Carter Administration: Foreign Policy Manipulation of the Policy Agenda," *Asian Affairs* Vol. 29, No. 2 (Summer, 2002): 83-98.

Zbigniew Brzezinski and his staff member Michel Oksenberg. Though Secretary Vance did play a role in advising the President on the normalization process, his influence was much less than that of Brzezinski with regards to diplomatic normalization of relations with the People's Republic of China. Ultimately, the Carter administration's diplomatic victory achieved through the normalization of relations is the product of the National Security Advisor's active political and administrative efforts.

The initial analysis of the Carter administration's foreign policy was hypercritical. A *New York Times* article polled a group of historians asking for the initial assessment of Carter's term after his election loss and only three percent of respondents stated that he would be noted as an outstanding president.³ Half graded him as "below average" or "poor."⁴ However, this view was contradicted by the initial historical study of his foreign policy by scholars such as Gaddis Smith who asserted "the four years of the Carter Administration were among the most significant in the history of American foreign policy in the twentieth century."⁵ Though Smith does fault the administration for its inability to execute a coherent foreign policy, he does place value on the intentions and long-lasting narrative shift the administration created with regard to the American role in the world regarding arms control, human rights and diplomacy.⁶ Smith's analysis perceived the Brzezinski-Vance conflict as a tool to argue that it was their interpersonal differences that determined their individual authority in the normalization process.⁷

³ Scott Kaufman, *Plans Unraveled: The Foreign Policy of the Carter Administration* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2008), 3-4.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Gaddis Smith, *Morality, Reason, and Power: American Diplomacy in the Carter Years* (New York, New York: Hill and Wang, 1986), 3-13.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

Later analysis faults the executive disregard of the President towards Congress and the Democratic Party for slowing the ability of the administration to execute coherent foreign policy. Work by Charles O. Jones argue that the tension the President engendered through his foreign policy limited the execution of his agenda.⁸ Additionally, Jones argues that Carter's managerial style in executing foreign policy hindered his ability to execute his agenda.⁹

Later historical writing points to the external factors that ultimately influenced the decision-making process of the President. David Skidmore asserts that the pressing nature of Soviet aggression in Afghanistan and Vietnamese aggression with regard to China abroad, alongside with the rise of the neoconservative movement domestically, played roles in influencing the focus of Carter's administration. Factors outside of administrative control hindered foreign policy pursuits. At times, there was too much to allow a fully focused foreign policy from the White House.¹⁰

The most recent iteration of analysis regarding the Carter administration's foreign policy and Sino-American normalization still seems to vary. Jean Garrison, in an *Asian Affairs* journal piece, places extraordinary value in the perceived conflict between the State Department and the National Security Advisor.¹¹ However, there is a relative comparative nuance in recent historical analysis regarding the processes that engendered the normalization of relations with the People's Republic of China. Recent work has respectively outsized the role of Carter's foreign policy advisors.¹² It correlates the chief negotiator of the respective period of the normalization process

⁸ Charles O. Jones, *The Trusteeship President: Jimmy Carter and the United States Congress* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988).

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ David Skidmore, *Reversing Course: Carter's Foreign Policy, Domestic Politics, and the Failure of Reform* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1996).

¹¹ Pace Garrison, "Explaining Change in the Carter Administration's China Policy," 83-98.

¹² Garrison, "Explaining Change in the Carter Administration's China Policy," 83-86.

to the amount of power that figure held in the administrative decision-making process -- Vance and the State Department up until his first visit, and Brzezinski and the National Security Council staff up until the normalization process -- utilizing articles, and the relevant stakeholders autobiographies.¹³ In contrast, other works provide a more nuanced analysis of the normalization process, utilizing external events to justify the lack of progress with regard to normalization, specifically, the issue of the Panama Canal.¹⁴ In addition, other works argue that the role of National Security Advisor Brzezinski was structurally stronger than the Secretary of State, throughout the course of the President's term.¹⁵ This paper belongs in the latter camp. For comparison, this paper does sympathize with the historical argument that the vast portfolio Carter wished to manage did deprioritize the normalization of relations with China for a period. Further, this paper concurs with the argument that Carter's managerial style of governance that prioritized a compromise in positions, negatively affected the process of normalization. Ultimately, this paper argues from a position of understanding regarding the complexity of executing foreign policy. The normalization of relations with the People's Republic of China was a historic accomplishment for Carter's foreign policy legacy. Though there are historical ambiguities with regard to the impact and effectiveness of Carter's administration, this paper passively argues that the normalization process - though elongated - is a bright spot in the Carter administration's legacy. This paper actively argues that the strength of the Carter's

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Kaufman, *Plans Unraveled*. See also, Hugo Meijer, *Trading with the Enemy: The Making of US Export Control Policy toward the People's Republic of China* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

¹⁵ Betty Glad, *An Outsider in the White House: Jimmy Carter, His Advisors, And the Making of American Foreign Policy* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2009). Derek Chollet & Samantha Power, *The Unquiet American: Richard Holbrooke in the World* (New York: Public Affairs, 2011).

administration's pursuit of normalization is derived from Brzezinski's diplomatic and administrative actions.

The release of the "Foreign Relations of the United States: 1977-1980 China" portfolio by the State Department in 2013, has provided an inordinate amount of memos, notes on conversations, and policy briefs that have yet to be fully utilized in current historical writing regarding the era.¹⁶ This paper utilizes these various memos, transcripts and briefs, alongside with the autobiographies of the stakeholders, their writings, overarching historical analyses, newspaper articles from the era and the Carter White House Diary to build a narrative regarding the process of normalization. These sources, pieced together, establish the timeframe which this paper studies: from the day after Carter's electoral victory on November 3, 1977 to the date that the language of the Joint Communiqué was agreed upon on December 15, 1978. The information and story established by this trail of memos and transcripts, alongside the well-established historiography, demonstrate the unparalleled influence of Brzezinski in the White House.

Studying the process of normalization solely through the White House lens does not provide a holistic assessment of the many stakeholders involved, given the complexity and scope of Sino-American normalization. This paper does not explore the influence and perspective of the legislative branch in depth, the series of events in the Chinese domestic political landscape which engendered their respective desire for normalized relations, nor does this paper attempt to provide a comprehensive analysis and linkage of global events to contextualize the global power dynamic of the era. However, the context of these respective lenses of analysis on the normalization process informs the narrative even if not explicitly referenced.

¹⁶ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1977-1980, Volume XIII, China*, eds. David P. Nickles and Adam M. Howard (Washington: Government Printing Office, 2013).

James Earl "Jimmy" Carter entered the White House as a Washington outsider. The nation still reeled from Richard Nixon's disgraceful exit from office as the slender, five foot, nine inch tall two-term State Senator and Governor from Georgia took office in 1977. A racially moderate, fiscally frugal, born-again Christian, Carter ran a campaign based on Christian values, morality and openness in government action.¹⁷ As a result of the tenets of his campaign, Carter galvanized the party core, secured the nomination, and ultimately won the presidency.¹⁸

Carter wished to pull American foreign policy focus away from the Soviet Union and towards the interests of American strategic allies.¹⁹ The strategic decision to divert away attention from the *realpolitik* perspective on the Soviet Union was a result of the advice of his foreign policy advisor, Zbigniew Brzezinski.²⁰ Brzezinski utilized the trilateral vision of foreign policy -- a perspective that valued the growth of relations with Japan and Western Europe -- in contrast to Kissinger's foreign policy perspective of ruthless global pragmatism.²¹ Jimmy Carter appointed Brzezinski as his National Security Advisor after his victory and institutionalized him as a central influence in his foreign policy.²²

The top two foreign policy advisors Carter chose to staff his administration contrasted in style and priorities.²³ Brzezinski, National Security Advisor, was vocal and self-promoting.²⁴ He viewed change as the central threat to American interests and worked as the first director of the Trilateral Commission to strategically place the United States in a position of power through

¹⁷ Kaufman, *Plans Unraveled*, 10-12.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ John Maclean, "2d Debate Battle Between Advisers." *The Chicago Tribune*, October 5th, 1976.

²¹ Kaufman, *Plans Unraveled*, 14-16.

²² Ibid. *The Chicago Tribune*, December 16th, 1978. Further, the Jackson-Vanick amendment

²³ Ibid., 17-20.

²⁴ Ibid. Henry Jackson in 1974.

technological innovation and the development of strategic alliances.²⁵ Cyrus Vance, Secretary of State, was quiet and hardworking.²⁶ Vance also opposed the idea of having the conflict with the Soviet Union be the central point of American foreign policy.²⁷ Vance viewed the Cold War as a threat that would consume American foreign policy. However, both advisors were part of the Trilateral Commission. They consistently sparred on foreign policy decisions but had a common strategic evaluation of foreign affairs.²⁸

However, aside from the foreign policy conflicts inside of the administration, there were other domestic political actors who influenced Carter's foreign policy agenda and execution. Elected officials, including Democratic Senator Henry Jackson of Washington, Democratic Senator Edward Kennedy of Massachusetts and Republican Senator Barry Goldwater of Arizona, all attempted to exert their influence on the decision-making process.²⁹ Whether it was a preemptive political effort like the Jackson-Vanik amendment introduced in 1974 to restrict trade with communist countries, after the fact tirades against diplomatic talks with Chinese officials, Goldwater's threat to sue Carter for overreaching executive action, or the efforts of all the officials at the federal level attempted to enter the debate, domestic actors continuously worked to influence Sino-American policy.³⁰ The continuous efforts to influence China Policy by American legislators pressured Carter throughout his administration.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid., 20-23.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Meijer, *Trading with the Enemy*, 14.

³⁰ Meijer, *Trading with the Enemy*, 25. "China Policy Change: Politicians React with Protest, Praise." *The Chicago Tribune*, December 16th, 1978. Further, the Jackson-Vanick amendment was also seen as a move to create political noise for the potential Presidential aspirations of Senator Henry Jackson in 1974.

The influence of domestic political actors was smaller than that of the actions of external actors. The actions of foreign countries, whether it was aggression by the Soviet Union in Afghanistan, the arms sales by American allies to the People's Republic of China, or aggression on behalf of Vietnam, influenced American behavior in the context of normalization.³¹ Domestic political actors agitated the administration through their comments and political actions, but the actions of foreign actors more directly influenced the reactions of the Carter administration.

Carter entered the presidency looking to assert the influence of his administration on the global stage. As such, it seemed that Carter prioritized Secretary Vance's slower and measured perspective at the start of his Presidency.³² Carter established Vance as the chief negotiator for the United States with the People's Republic of China when he first entered the Presidency.³³ The collective narrative that supports the split responsibility of power over time highlights this point. However, it was Brzezinski and the National Security Council that executed and voiced the most prominent perspective on Sino-American normalization. As tensions rose between the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China and between the Soviet Union and the United States, President Carter removed the Sino-American portfolio from Vance and assigned it to Brzezinski.³⁴ While Vance was less inclined to compromise regarding the treatment of Taiwan, Brzezinski was far more willing to compromise to achieve a superior American position for change.³⁵ The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, border skirmishes between the Soviet Union and

³¹ Meijer, *Trading with the Enemy*, 46-50.

³² Kaufman, *Plans Unraveled*, 20-22.

³³ Joseph J. Sisco, "What Vance Will Find on His Mission to China." *The Chicago Tribune*, July 12, 1977.

³⁴ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 190-200.

³⁵ Kaufman, *Plans Unraveled*, 16-20.

the People's Republic of China, and the desire from Brzezinski and his staff to actually pursue the issue, engendered a more rapid approach to normalization.³⁶

II. News from The Era

The facts reported through the press ultimately influenced the presentation of the Carter administration's normalization efforts to the world. The media portrayal of the conflict between Vance and Brzezinski was also evident in reporting. A *Foreign Affairs* analysis regarding the possible implication of the potential China policy for the next Presidency in the middle of the campaign of 1976 was released in the heat of the general election. The article pointed out the essential policy question that the next President would have to face, which was what general posture the United States should assume towards the militarily mighty Soviet Union and the militarily modest People's Republic of China.³⁷ In pointing out the potential options for American policy decision makers, a writer in *Foreign Affairs* acknowledged that both Republicans and Democrats wanted to normalize relations while in political debate.³⁸ However, it was evident that the Democrats wished for a peaceful resolution with the People's Republic of China and of the issue of sovereignty in Taiwan while the Republicans made no mention of the issue of Taiwan.³⁹ This triangular relationship in the context of an ever-present Cold War presented a critical policy question for the incoming Presidential administration.

The article went on to state that an attempt of even-handedness favored the Soviet Union by default. Fair treatment of two disproportionately capable countries perpetuated the

³⁶ Meijer, *Trading with the Enemy*, 35.

³⁷ Jerome Allen Cohen, "A Policy for the Next Administration," *Foreign Affairs* Volume 55, No. 1 (October, 1976): 20-37.

³⁸ Cohen, "A Policy for the Next Administration," 22-23.

³⁹ Ibid.

disproportionate nature of the relationship.⁴⁰ It contextualized the issue on a global scale by asserting that since United States allies, including France, Britain, and West Germany, had been selling defensive militaristic technologies to the Chinese, the United States should have debated whether it should have pursued a trade policy that would have allowed for Chinese military modernization.⁴¹ Further, some American politicians and leaders were already in favor of thawing diplomatic relations, including then Governor Ronald Reagan, Senators Mike Mansfield and Robert Taft Jr., and Commerce Secretary Elliot Richardson.⁴² If not for the issue of diplomatic relations with the Republic of China, the positioning of many American officials leaned heavily towards the rapid normalization of relations between the People's Republic of China and the United States.⁴³

The author of the *Foreign Affairs* piece, himself, noted that given the United States' previous commitment to Taiwan, it would be difficult to ease relations with the People's Republic of China.⁴⁴ The initial communiqué drawn up by Nixon with China even asserted that the relationship between Mainland China and the United States could not be shored up without addressing the issue of Taiwan and the issue still persisted in Carter's administration.⁴⁵ However, he stated that even with all the difficulties regarding the attempt to normalize relations, the United States should have attempted to normalize relations with the People's Republic of China sooner rather than later.⁴⁶

⁴⁰ Ibid., 28-30.

⁴¹ Ibid., 30-33.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid., 33-35.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 35-37.

After Carter won the Presidency, he affirmed a campaign commitment to arms cuts and reiterated the point that he would ask for allies to curb arms sales as well.⁴⁷ This statement highlighted his desire to pursue a policy of de-escalation during his administration and his desire to ultimately bring about a new era of American foreign policy. Carter attempted to practice the concept of de-escalation through the Sino-American normalization process.⁴⁸ As Secretary of State, Vance made a trip to China in August 1977. Press speculation focused on how the United States could properly negotiate with the Chinese in the context of the Taiwan predicament.⁴⁹ News reports were also quick to point out that in the context of the time, there would be little room to maneuver diplomatically.⁵⁰ This was proven true as Vance returned without any major shift in diplomatic relations.⁵¹ This was evidently a point of soreness to Vance in his autobiography.⁵² Since the People's Republic was unwilling to compromise with the Secretary, he returned from his voyage empty-handed, evident to the press.⁵³ The issue of Taiwan still barred progression on any and all normalization talks.⁵⁴

Without an abrupt shift in foreign affairs, most news outlets showcased the fact that there could be no real movement to normalize relations with the People's Republic of China. Popular

⁴⁷ "Arms Cut My Goal: Carter: Broad Aims Told in First Interview." *The Chicago Tribune*, January 24, 1977.

⁴⁸ Smith, *Morality, Reason, and Power*, 12-13.

⁴⁹ Joseph J. Sisco, "What Vance Will Find on His Mission to China." *The Chicago Tribune*, July 12, 1977.

⁵⁰ Sisco, "What Vance Will Find on His Mission to China." *The Chicago Tribune*.

⁵¹ Cyrus Vance, *Hard Choices: Critical Years in America's Foreign Policy* (Simon and Shuster: New York, 1984): 75-83.

⁵² Vance, *Hard Choices*, 82-83.

⁵³ Stanley Karnow, "Our Next Move on China." *The New York Times*, August 14, 1977. Vance expands in his autobiography that mistaken reporting from the Hearst Chain, asserted that Vance reported signs of progress to the President and this caused the Chinese to publicly admonish the United States for misrepresenting the actual results of Vance's trip.

⁵⁴ Graham Hovey, "Carter Lauds Vance on his China Talks: Meeting Secretary on his Return, President says 'Major Step' was taken Toward Normal Ties." *The New York Times*, August 28, 1977.

polling from the era also highlighted the fact that while most Americans were inclined to support the normalization of relations with the People's Republic of China, they did not want to do so at the expense of Taiwan.⁵⁵ The two seemingly simple desires were deeply rooted in contradiction.

The United States had established strong diplomatic relations with the Taiwanese people to counteract the influence of the Soviet Union in 1954. However, as it became more evident that the United States could gain more from a strong relationship with the People's Republic of China, the Carter Administration called for a review of the entire diplomatic situation.⁵⁶ The review highlighted the fact that the only way that the United States could normalize relations with the People's Republic of China would be to sever ties with the Taiwanese people.⁵⁷

This impasse was evident in reporting by the *Washington Post*. An editorial in mid-May of 1978, made quick judgment of the President's foreign policy pointing out that "why Carter could be politically masterful as a campaigner and so politically inept as president is not too baffling."⁵⁸ The piece asserted that Carter's inability to execute foreign policy was inexcusable even if it seemed as if he pursued too much.⁵⁹ With the failure of Vance's China trip, the inability to find peace in Vietnam and growing Soviet aggression, this scathing editorial embodied the worst perspective on the ineffectiveness of the Carter administration's first year and a half in power.

However, in mid-June 1978, the press started to show that the gridlock due to American popular sentiment and Mainland China's inability to compromise was possibly giving way.⁶⁰ The

⁵⁵ Karnow, "Our Next Move on China," *The New York Times*.

⁵⁶ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 75-77.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Kenneth Crawford. "Can Carter's Presidency Be Redeemed?" *The Washington Post*, May 16, 1978.

⁵⁹ Crawford. "Can Carter's Presidency Be Redeemed?" *The Washington Post*.

⁶⁰ James Reston, "Inching Towards China," *The New York Times*, June 14, 1978.

shift was evident when President Carter cleared a request for the sale of airborne geological survey equipment that could be repurposed to serve as an anti-submarine warfare tool from American manufacturers to the People's Republic of China.⁶¹ The strategic decision to begin selling technology with possible military applications was made as the United States became aware that France and Britain had begun talks regarding selling modern military arms and technology to Beijing.⁶² Further, in contrast to Vance's trip to China, Brzezinski strongly reaffirmed the American desire to normalize relations with the People's Republic, stating a "commitment to normalization and perhaps to make a modest contribution of an indirect sort to it."⁶³ The decision in December of 1978 to send Brzezinski, an advisor who was reported to be favorable to normalizing relations in contrast to the more reluctant Cyrus Vance, also highlighted a shift in approach.⁶⁴ The *New York Times* editorialized that practical steps to normalize US-China trade, through the sale of dual purpose technology and an American-approved sale of allied arms could and should cause Beijing to compromise its position on Taiwan.⁶⁵ The willingness of Brzezinski to compromise to achieve normalization was in stark contrast to Vance's negotiation perspective in the media's view.

Less than two weeks after the leak of a possible shift in diplomatic relations between the People's Republic of China and the United States, the *Chicago Tribune* highlighted a shift in Sino-Soviet relations. In a stark editorial, the *Tribune* highlighted the fact that the power balance between the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China was in danger of dramatically

⁶¹ Reston, "Inching Towards China," *The New York Times*.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Reston, "Inching Towards China," *The New York Times*.

⁶⁴ Harry Kelly, "2 Key Signals Led to a New Era in US-China Relations." *Chicago Tribune*, December 17, 1978.

⁶⁵ Reston, "Inching Towards China." *The New York Times*.

shifting due to the Chinese call to industrialize and modernize.⁶⁶ A small Soviet and Chinese border skirmish on the northern reaches of Asia, along with increasingly scathing political rhetoric on both sides, only served to elevate Sino-Soviet tensions.⁶⁷ Arms sales by the French, British, and West Germans to the People's Republic of China exasperated the diplomatic relation further.⁶⁸ The editorial then states that if a conflict were to arise, the Soviet Union would be able to partially credit a Sino-American alliance for the aggression.⁶⁹ Brzezinski's visit to China suggested that the United States meant to serve as a "worldwide *cordon saintaire*," a guarding line meant to prevent the world from the spread of metaphorical disease.⁷⁰ The editorial then goes on to say that if the Soviet Union believed the potential military growth of the People's Republic of China was happening too quickly, it would destroy the base of Chinese power quickly and destabilize the Peking regime creating a national loser in the political context.⁷¹ The alarmist nature of the article highlighted the polarized sentiments in the nation at this time, ultimately giving Brzezinski the policy window to argue his own perspective with regards to China.⁷²

In December 1978, Carter formally announced the full diplomatic recognition of China.⁷³ Through a joint communiqué, the United States announced that it would both terminate diplomatic relations with Taiwan and cease a military mutual defense treaty that had been in

⁶⁶ Michael Ledeen, "How Russia Will Attack China: How the Russians Could Attack China and Win." *Chicago Tribune*, June 25, 1978.

⁶⁷ Ledeen, "How Russia Will Attack China," *Chicago Tribune*.

⁶⁸ Ledeen, "How Russia Will Attack China," *Chicago Tribune*.

⁶⁹ Ledeen, "How Russia Will Attack China," *Chicago Tribune*.

⁷⁰ Ledeen, "How Russia Will Attack China," *Chicago Tribune*.

⁷¹ Ledeen, "How Russia Will Attack China," *Chicago Tribune*.

⁷² Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Power and Principle: Memoirs of the National Security Adviser, 1977-1981* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1983): 190-200.

⁷³ Harris Kelley, "US Recognizes Red China: Peking's Teng Plans Visit; Full Diplomacy Set for January 1." *Chicago Tribune*, December 16, 1978.

place between the Taiwanese people and the United States since 1955.⁷⁴ In a striking comment, Carter announced that "in recognizing the government of the People's Republic of China is the single government of China, we are recognizing simple reality."⁷⁵ He acknowledged that the people of Taiwan might not have the most favorable reaction to the outcome but stated that the United States would still carry out informal relations with the group.⁷⁶ Most interestingly in the announcement, he pointed out that he believed the normalization of relations would not negatively affect Soviet-American relations.⁷⁷ The Soviet Union and the United States were in the midst of the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks. Carter's belief that the United States' diplomatic position would not be affected was peculiar amongst the political backlash and commentary in the press at the time.

Consequently, the action received much backlash from individuals all over the world. The *New York Times* captured the popular sentiment in Taiwan that regarded Jimmy Carter as a communist due to his action to de-recognize Taiwan.⁷⁸ However, Former President Ford and Senator Edward Kennedy ultimately endorsed Carter's decision to extend United States diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China.⁷⁹ Congressman Clement Zablocki, the Chairman of the House International Relations Committee said he feared what the split from Taiwan would mean for American interests with our allies while Senator Richard Stone cited the

⁷⁴ Kelly, "US Recognizes Red China," *Chicago Tribune*.

⁷⁵ Kelly, "US Recognizes Red China," *Chicago Tribune*.

⁷⁶ Kelly, "US Recognizes Red China," *Chicago Tribune*.

⁷⁷ Kelly, "US Recognizes Red China," *Chicago Tribune*. Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 201-203. Carter truly believed that if he attempted to curb arms sales to China, there would not be that large of an issue.

⁷⁸ James P. Sterba, "It's a Lonely Life on Taiwan for a Supporter of Carter: Carter Denounced in Banners," *The New York Times*, August 10, 1980.

⁷⁹ "China Policy Change: Politicians React with Protest, Praise," *The Chicago Tribune*, December 16th, 1978.

lack of congressional consultation as his main concern.⁸⁰ The mixed reception from prominent officials nationwide showcased how controversial the decision was.

Further, reporting through the *Washington Post* brought to light interdepartmental conflicts between the National Security Council and the State Department. The news of a secret meeting regarding the importance of keeping policy disputes inside the administration leaked to the press in early February, following the normalization of relations with China. The article released reports on severe differences in policy between Brzezinski and Vance and ultimately fed into the narrative that the White House was divided and incoherent.⁸¹

The Soviet response was critical but diplomatic. In a Soviet note to China that was not released to the public, the Soviet Union stated that it would be watching the Sino-American relationship closely.⁸² Soviet Union officials were known to be fearful of encirclement by a hostile alliance, so the normalization of relations was a strain on diplomatic relations between the United States and the Soviet Union.⁸³ Georgi Arbatov, a Soviet advisor, noted that the Chinese-American rapprochement was legitimate but that it did not address concerns on Chinese efforts to acquire Western arms.⁸⁴ Further, the Soviet news agency, TASS, scolded the United States for allowing European allies to sell sophisticated weapons to China without checking the behavior stating that the United States seemed eager to ignite a global conflict.⁸⁵

⁸⁰ "China Policy Change," *The Chicago Tribune*.

⁸¹ Jim Hoag, "Carter Orders State Dept. To Contain Policy Disputes," *The Washington Post*, February 8, 1979.

⁸² David K. Shipler, "Soviet, Citing it's note to Carter indicates Concern on China Ties," *The New York Times*, December 22, 1978.

⁸³ Shipler, "Soviet, Citing it's note to Carter indicates Concern on China Ties," *The New York Times*.

⁸⁴ Shipler, "Soviet, Citing it's note to Carter indicates Concern on China Ties," *The New York Times*.

⁸⁵ "Tass Rips Arms Sales to Chinese," *Chicago Tribune*, January 6, 1979.

The progression of Sino-American relations under Carter was deliberate and not linear at times. Under the leadership of Cyrus Vance, the United States did not concede on the issue of Taiwan. With his visit, it was evident through reporting that the press did not perceive any actual progress on normalization. However, as Zbigniew Brzezinski started to achieve a larger role on the issues regarding the People's Republic of China, a more concerted effort to normalize relations became evident through the news media. There was also a shift in narrative after the Soviet Union began to express a more aggressive position against the People's Republic of China and Afghanistan. The editorial by the *Chicago Tribune* highlighted the impact of potential Sino-Soviet aggressions on the United States. In pursuit of normalization, the United States took a more pragmatic approach following the aggression by acknowledging "simple reality," as Carter stated.⁸⁶ Further, the seeming shift in power was not lost to the media. Leaks from the State Department to the press fed into the narrative that not all was in sync within the administration. Ultimately, these various pieces of information influenced the narrative established regarding normalization at the time.

III. The Initial Trek to Beijing

The news of the era established an overview of the normalization process between the United States and the People's Republic of China. However, the narrative established by the actions of Vance, Brzezinski and the entire administration, recorded through dozens of memos that led up to the initial visit to Beijing, provides a contextualized account of the events leading up to the first visit to Beijing.

The road to the normalization process began the day after the American electorate allocated two hundred and ninety-seven electoral votes to the outsider Governor of Georgia,

⁸⁶ Kelly, "US Recognizes Red China," *Chicago Tribune*.

James Earl Carter. Campaign advisors Zbigniew Brzezinski, Richard Gardner, and Henry Owen drafted a memo to President-Elect Carter asking to call a meeting between Secretary of State Kissinger, the incoming Secretary, Cyrus Vance, and the Chinese Foreign Minister to initiate the conversation on normalization.⁸⁷

The first meeting between the new administration and the Chinese government took place on January 8, 1977 in Washington, D.C.⁸⁸ Secretary of State-designate Cyrus Vance, the current Secretary, Henry Kissinger, Under Secretary for Political Affairs Philip Habib, and Winston Lord, from the Policy Planning Staff represented the American diplomatic force while Ambassador Huang Chen, the Chief of the People's Republic of China's liaison office, and Tsien Ta-yung, his counselor, represented the People's Republic of China.⁸⁹ The conversation was meant to establish an initial rapport between the incoming administration and the Chinese Ambassador. The meeting initiated a continuous thread of diplomatic exchanges. Both parties agreed that the starting point of Sino-American diplomatic relations should be based on the Shanghai Communiqué, initially drafted by the Chinese and then President Nixon's administration.⁹⁰ Ambassador Huang asserted that there had to be three initial actions to completely normalize relations: the severing of the diplomatic relationship with Taiwan, withdrawal of US troops from Taiwan and the abrogation the Treaty between the Taiwanese people and the American government.⁹¹ It became apparent through Secretary Kissinger's banter that the relationship between the past administration and the Chinese government was close, as Kissinger and the ambassador discuss how the language of the treaty was established through

⁸⁷ *Foreign Relations of the United States*, Document 1.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, Document 2.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

many glasses of Mao Tai's and late night conversations.⁹² Secretary Vance credits this initial conversation as the base from which he approached the entire diplomatic relationship.⁹³

Vance stated that it was this conversation that guided him forward and drove him to create a diplomatic team to work on the issue of Chinese diplomatic normalization, initially including Richard Holbrooke, Tony Lake, Michel Oksenberg, and William Gleysteen.⁹⁴ The initial effort by Brzezinski to ensure that there would be a smooth transition of administrative interests seemed to have worked with regards to Vance's interest in strengthening the pursuit of normalization.⁹⁵ Following the meeting, Oksenberg sent a memo to then Assistant for National Security Affairs Brzezinski, to highlight possible courses of action towards normalization with the Chinese.⁹⁶ In the memo, Oksenberg asserted that the lack of communication with the People's Republic of China coupled with the diplomatic attention that President Carter was giving the Soviet Union engendered an unbalanced foreign policy.⁹⁷ Oksenberg then proposes that Carter host a meeting with Ambassador Huang and that he establish a working group to create a strategy for dealing with China during the coming year.⁹⁸ Brzezinski signed off on both ideas.⁹⁹ Throughout the normalization process, Oksenberg consistently pressured Brzezinski to pursue the normalization of relations with the People's Republic of China.¹⁰⁰

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 75-83.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ *Foreign Relations of the United States*, Document 3.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Brzezinski recounts Oksenberg's crucial role in his autobiography stating "he was to play a central role in moving the American-Chinese relationship forward, in developing the conceptual framework for it, and in helping me overcome some of the key obstacles." Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 198.

President Carter hosted the meeting with Ambassador Huang, alongside Vice President Mondale, Secretary Vance, Brzezinski and Oksenberg. The topics discussed remained the same. Both parties agreed on the importance of the precedent set forward by the Shanghai Communiqué.¹⁰¹ Carter stated the importance of a peaceful resolution with the Taiwanese people and the Ambassador respectfully mentioned that it was an internal matter.¹⁰² This brief conversation occurred in early February 1977, and not much movement was made to pursue normalization until weeks later.¹⁰³ Unless there was a severe concession on either side, it seemed that there would be no room for negotiation on normalization.

Brzezinski, placing great value on Oksenberg's memo, continuously attempted to convince the President of the gravity that the normalization process held for the United States. He utilized a memo by Secretary of Defense Harold Brown to highlight the dangers of not pursuing a "triangular" diplomatic policy.¹⁰⁴ Brzezinski stated that the administration should "be careful not to slight China in our dealings with the Soviet Union." The importance Brzezinski consistently placed on ensuring that Carter heard the strategic dangers of not prioritizing Chinese diplomacy eventually paid off when Carter signed off on the creation of an interagency task force to draft a paper analyzing the impact of normalization.¹⁰⁵

However, even after the initial approval, Brzezinski continued to solicit information to strengthen his argument for normalization efforts. Brzezinski received assistance in his case from Commerce Secretary Kreps. Kreps stated, "From the viewpoint of the Department of Commerce,

¹⁰¹ Ibid., Document 5.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 189-190. At this time, Carter began to understand the perspective of the PRC. In his book however, he never mentioned possible complications with regards to the issue of Taiwan.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., Document 6.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid. *Power and Principle*, 18-31.

normalization of relations... should be considered.”¹⁰⁶ The request slightly backfired for Brzezinski as Secretary Kreps ultimately pointed out that political aspects were paramount in the discussion and that the steps taken towards normalization should fully lie within the province of the Secretary of State.¹⁰⁷

However, the National Security Advisor and his staff did not relent. Equipped with economic information from the Commerce Secretary and information gathered from the Treasury Secretary, Brzezinski drafted a statement to the President to highlight the economic impact that the lack of a truly normalized economic relationship with the People’s Republic of China engendered.¹⁰⁸ He credited domestic turbulence, a lack of payment transparency, and most importantly, punishment from Beijing for not having full diplomatic relations as the reasons for the trade deficit with the People’s Republic of China in 1976.¹⁰⁹ It was this consistent and clever pressure from Brzezinski, commonly aided by Oksenberg, which ultimately added pressure to President Carter to pursue normalization.¹¹⁰

This was possible due to the access that Brzezinski’s role structurally allowed. He was allowed unfettered access to the President, gave the President a national security briefing every morning, and had the duty of ultimately regulating what documents the President was presented.¹¹¹ The influence Brzezinski held on the President was much to Vance’s dismay and it

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., Document 17.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 200-201. Brzezinski was utilizing his daily morning briefings to convince the President that pursuing normalization was important for American interests.

¹¹¹ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 18-31.

ultimately became evident in administrative conversations and was exhibited in Vance's autobiography.¹¹²

The Republic of China was concurrently pressuring the Carter administration to reassert its commitment to Taiwan. Through a back and forth series of telegrams between Washington and Taipei, Vance and Under Secretary Habib discussed how to handle the pressure from Taipei. Vance consistently ordered Habib to continue the "conditioning process" that had been occurring for years.¹¹³ He stated, "we should continue to prepare them psychologically for the eventual break in diplomatic relations with the United States, withdrawal of our military and termination of the Mutual Defense Treaty."¹¹⁴ Vance, knowing that the United States wanted to distance itself from Taipei, understood the importance of a slow separation. Even if he did not agree with a rapid pace in normalization, Vance still knew that normalization was a crucial step in Sino-American relations.¹¹⁵

The back and forth between Habib and Vance eventually reached a critical point when it became evident that the Republic of China was actively pursuing nuclear proliferation in late March.¹¹⁶ The Secretary sent an extraordinarily thorough message to the Taiwanese embassy to highlight the conditions, talking points, and consequences regarding nuclear proliferation for the Taiwanese.¹¹⁷ Ultimately, the effort worked. In late April, Brzezinski informed the President that Vance's guiding message to the embassy in the Republic of China ultimately ensured that the Taiwanese close their heavy water reactor project and hot laboratory.¹¹⁸

¹¹² *Foreign Relations of the United States*, Document 24.

¹¹² Vance, *Hard Choices*, 37.

¹¹³ *Foreign Relations of the United States*, Document 22.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 75-77.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ *Foreign Relations of the United States*, Document 23.

It is in this context that Brzezinski brought forward Presidential Review Memorandum-24 on April 5, 1977. The memo was drafted to the Vice President, Secretary of State and Defense Secretary directly and notified the Treasury Secretary, Secretary of Commerce, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, and the U.S. Representative to the United Nations.¹¹⁹ Brzezinski tasked the State Department with the duty of assessing the broad implications of normalization efforts with the People's Republic of China, in effort to provide an analysis of best practices for the removal of troops from Taiwan, and to report on potential transfers of defense-related technologies.¹²⁰ The drafting of this memo proved a critical point for the Carter administration due to its call to action. Immediately following the memo, Vance sat down with Ambassador Chen to discuss a potential visit to China in August.¹²¹

Soon after the introduction of a diplomatic trip to Beijing, Vance responded to the inquiry set forward by PRM-24 by asserting the potential impact and global context regarding normalization. The paper outlined that the only real issue impeding the process of normalization was the issue of Taiwan.¹²² He then argued the benefits of normalizing relations included the continued Sino-Soviet rivalry, improvements to the United States' strategic position in Asia, and if pursued and executed rapidly, minimal legislative agitation from the Taiwan Lobby in Congress.¹²³ However, he also argued for a far more cautious normalization process.¹²⁴ Vance believed that despite the People's Republic of China's unhappiness with the pace of forward

¹¹⁹ *Foreign Relations of the United States*, Document 24.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, Document 25.

¹²² *Ibid.*, Document 26.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ *Ibid.* Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 200. Brzezinski notes that he came out heavily in favor of rapid pursuit of normalization with the People's Republic of China in the PRM-24 meetings but did not receive much support from other staff members. He again utilized his morning briefings to lobby the President directly.

movement, the Sino-American relationship was structurally strong.¹²⁵ Further, an effort to normalize would still have lodged a psychological blow against the Taiwanese people.¹²⁶ In light of these factors, Vance argued that he would have preferred to move slowly with the Chinese so that they could understand that the relationship was established with global consequences in mind and without jeopardizing the well-being and security of the Taiwanese people.¹²⁷ However, Vance also asserted that the benefit of improving the strategic position of the United States in contrast to the Soviet Union was also a factor at play.¹²⁸ After establishing the case for normalization, Vance asserted that it would be in the best interests of the administration to pursue the chance of establishing formal diplomatic relations with China on his trip without conceding on the issue of Taiwan.¹²⁹

Following Vance's position on normalization, Brzezinski sent Carter a variety of memoranda to voice his perspective on the issue of foreign assets that were seized by the Chinese, the ability of the Chinese to be flexible and possible initiatives that could catalyze normalization.¹³⁰ The implementation of his proposals became true objects of discussion after the National Security Council staff secretary, Christine Dodson, released the response to PRM-24 highlighting the possible routes to normalization and the strategic removal of troops from Taiwan.¹³¹ The memo led to an hour-and-a-half-long meeting on June 27 that ultimately helped establish the strategy Vance would utilize while in China.

¹²⁵ *Foreign Relations of the United States*, Document 26.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

¹²⁷ *Ibid.* Vance, *Hard Choices*, 77.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

¹²⁹ *Ibid.* Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 200-201. Brzezinski viewed the trip as a potential source of disappointment to both sides because the United States would be perceived as stepping backwards with regards to normalization efforts.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, Document 28. *Ibid.*, Document 29. *Ibid.*, Document 30. *Ibid.*, Document 31.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, Document 33.

Carter convened his senior foreign policy staff following the release of the review of PRM-24. Over the course of an hour-and-a-half, Vance, Habib, Holbrooke, Blumenthal, Brzezinski Brown, and junior staff sat and discussed the possible route forward with regards to Sino-American diplomatic normalization.¹³² The group was also wary of making diplomatic decisions before Vance went on his journey to Beijing. Treasury Secretary Blumenthal, Brown and Brzezinski all agreed that, "While the effect of Sino-American relations upon Sino-Soviet relations may be hard to ascertain, the impact of the Sino-US connection on Soviet-US relations was more evident. Leverage could be secured over the Soviets."¹³³ This was a recurrent point in the conversation. The group established that efforts to ease diplomatic relations had to be done in a strategic and globally aware context.¹³⁴ Further, it was established that troop withdrawal and the question of Taiwan were issues best addressed after Vance's visit.¹³⁵ The next moves regarding the normalization effort had to wait until after Vance's China trip.

The talks leading up to Vance's trip to China ranged across a variety of topics. Secretary Brown discussed the contradiction in public polling numbers in the United States.¹³⁶ Data showed that the majority of Americans favored a strong relationship with the Republic of China but also a shift towards normalization between the United States and the People's Republic of China.¹³⁷ Oksenberg took the initiative and worked to formulate a rough draft of a communiqué between the US and the PRC. Secretary Vance sent a memo to the President stressing the importance of valuing the sovereignty of the Republic of China and Brzezinski pointed out that

¹³² *Foreign Relations of the United States*, Document 34.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, Document 41.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, *Keeping Faith*, 191.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, Document 44.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, Document 35. *Ibid.*, Document 37. *Ibid.*, Document 40.

the Taiwanese lobby was rallying to derail normalization efforts at home by meeting legislators in DC.¹³⁸

Eventually, President Carter sat his advisors down to discuss the implications of normalization before the trip to Beijing. President Carter wished to explore the implications of normalization on a global scale and with regards to Taiwan.¹³⁹ Vance was quick to point out that the world would largely respond favorably to an easing of Sino-American relations. Holbrooke also asserted “there are really two things which the Chinese will have to accept. First, the Chinese will have to understand that they cannot talk publicly about the right to liberate Taiwan by force. Second, through indirection... they will have to accept our continued sale of arms.” The group then establishes with Brzezinski’s guidance that the discussion in Beijing revolve around three central components: first, with regards to global elements including the Soviet Union; second, normalization; and third, aspects of the bilateral relationship, including trade technology transfer, credit and other factors.¹⁴⁰ Ultimately, Carter left the conversation understanding that moving at a modest pace could prevent a diplomatic impasse.¹⁴¹

Vance sent out a telegram to the embassy in the Republic of China to let them know of the normalization talks that will occur in Beijing and arrives for his first talk in Beijing on August 22, 1977.¹⁴² Secretary Vance entered the diplomatic conversations ready to negotiate the thawing of diplomatic relations with the People’s Republic of China. Michel Oksenberg drafted a set of communiqués that he thought could have been potentially useful during the trip.¹⁴³ Vance

¹³⁸ Ibid. Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 202. Brzezinski comments on this trip as being a “critical moment in the normalization effort, placing the U.S.-Chinese relationship on the

¹³⁸ Ibid., Document 36.

¹³⁹ Ibid., Document 41. *Foreign Relations of the United States*, Document 47.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 191.

¹⁴² *Foreign Relations of the United States*, Document 44.

¹⁴³ Ibid., Document 46.

had discretion to negotiate on his trip to Beijing and it was up to him to influence the outcome of the diplomatic effort.¹⁴⁴

Secretary Vance entered the diplomatic conversations with Ambassador Woodcock, Under Secretary Habib, Assistant Secretary Holbrook and Oksenberg in his delegation. The initial conversations revolved around the US role in global affairs.¹⁴⁵ Vance briefed the Chinese Foreign Minister, Huang Hua, on the domestic political landscape and the work the President's staff had pursued to ensure that the administration could pursue foreign policy interests effectively.¹⁴⁶ The first hot button topic that piqued the Foreign Minister's and the Vice Premier's interest was the issue of the Soviet Union. Vance asserted that the "competition [between the Soviet Union and the US] is a military strategic competition but at heart is also a competition between political and value systems."¹⁴⁷ The Minister held his tongue on the issue until after Vance pitched the US proposal for the normalization of diplomatic relations. Vance proposes the removal of American troops from Taiwan, the deconstruction of formal relations with Taipei, and the appearance of a withdrawal from Taiwan while maintaining informal arms sales.¹⁴⁸ The Chinese did not like this. When Vance asked for Minister Huang's perspective, the Foreign Minister answered curtly, "I would suggest we conclude today's session at this point... as for China's principled position with regard to US-China relations on the Taiwan issue, I believe we have repeatedly stated our position."¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁴ Ibid. Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 202. Brzezinski comments on this trip as being a setback with regards to the normalization effort, placing the U.S.-Chinese relationship on the back burner.

¹⁴⁵ *Foreign Relations of the United States*, Document 47.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

The Minister waited until another session of discussions to give his view on the bilateral relations and the international situation. Huang stated that the US seems to be afraid of the Soviet Union and the current trajectory of the global competition seems to be leading to a world war.¹⁵⁰

He then goes on to describe the issue of Taiwan, claiming, the fact that the issue of Taiwan has become an obstacle to normalization between our two countries is caused by US aggression against China... In order to realize normalization, the US must accomplish the following three things: first, the US must sever its so-called diplomatic relations with Chiang Ching-kuo in Taiwan and the Taiwan Strait. Third, it should abrogate its so called joint defense treaty with the Chiang Clique in Taiwan.¹⁵¹

The minister closed by stating that it is China's duty to liberate Taiwan.¹⁵² There is no movement from Chinese officials after this statement.

A series of talks followed after this issue but they prove to be inconsequential. Towards the end of the negotiations, Vance raised the possibility of drafting a potential communiqué between both nations but the Foreign Minister brushed that possibility aside because they could not see any progress with regards to diplomatic talks.¹⁵³ Vance left the series of talks with no real progress on the normalization of relations.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Ibid. Document 53.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 202. Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 192. Vance, *Hard Choices*, 83. Brzezinski viewed these talks as a large setback for the normalization process while Carter viewed this as a signal of Chinese priorities. Carter believed that the Chinese were not ready to negotiate as a result of Vance's failure while Vance believed that his trip neither helped nor hurt the normalization process.

Though the conversations between Vance and the Chinese diplomatic leadership were not as fruitful as the Carter administration would have hoped, a short but meaningful conversation between Michel Oksenberg and a junior official from the People's Republic's Foreign Ministry on the car ride to the airport, arguably achieved more than the three days of high-level talks.

The conversation started casually as Oksenberg and the individual discussed the daily duties of their roles and the capacity of their respective foreign policy institutions.¹⁵⁵ Casually, Oksenberg raised the point that he hoped the People's Republic was aware of the intensive lobbying effort Taipei was undertaking to affect US thinking on the China issue.¹⁵⁶ The counterpart agreed and understood that he knew the pressure was especially heavy in Congress.¹⁵⁷ After the reciprocated comment, Oksenberg engaged further and highlighted the point that given the intensity of Taiwan's lobbying effort, the trend line was not in favor of normalization.¹⁵⁸ If normalization was not pursued before the 1980 election, the issue of Sino-American relations could gain a political tinge that would not benefit either nation.¹⁵⁹ Oksenberg stated that the nation still remembered Nixon and Ford and their role to pursue normalization but if and when their roles begun to fade, it would become more and more difficult to receive bipartisan support.¹⁶⁰ Oksenberg stressed the importance of a timely pursuit of normalization, with positive reception from the official.¹⁶¹

The official then pressed on the issue of the news coverage on Presidential Review Memorandum-24, the memorandum exploring possible routes and benefits of normalization of

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., Document 53.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., Document 53.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid. Oksenberg was a high-ranking official in President Ford's administration. *Foreign Relations*

¹⁶¹ Ibid., Document 53.

relations between nations.¹⁶² He enquired as to why the PRM was set aside and why the President had not considered it.¹⁶³ Oksenberg replied promptly that the PRM was not reported on accurately.¹⁶⁴ Oksenberg asserted strongly against two inaccuracies on the coverage of the PRM.¹⁶⁵ First, the issue of division between China specialists and top administrative figures - the President, Vance and Brzezinski - were inaccurate.¹⁶⁶ Second, press reporting that the President has not made up his mind on China policy and the issues of PRM 24 were inaccurate.¹⁶⁷ The President was very serious about his commitment to the normalization process, the press just lost the nuance of Secretary Vance's presentation.¹⁶⁸ Oksenberg then took the opportunity to elaborate that where reporting on PRM 24 elaborated on the true thrust of the paper, which was to explore the implications of potentially modifying diplomatic relations with the People's Republic, reporting on Presidential Review Memorandum-10 was comparatively worse.

Where the issue of news coverage on PRM-10 was raised in talks between Vance and Vice Premier Deng Xiao-ping, Deng took the chance to ask about American military posturing.¹⁶⁹ The PRM was a comprehensive review of military posturing around the world and reporting indicated that it was a call for an isolationist shift in American foreign policy, a concrete manifestation of the Sonnenfeldt Doctrine.¹⁷⁰ Where coverage of PRM-24 was still

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., Document 50.

¹⁷⁰ Sonnenfeldt was a high-ranking official in President Ford's administration. *Foreign Relations of the United States*, Document 53.

faulty, Oksenberg credited the coverage of PRM 10 as being extremely inaccurate due to partial leaks.¹⁷¹

Oksenberg then took the time to discuss the point that the key figures influencing China policy included himself, Gleysteen, Holbrooke, Thayer, Romberg, Roy and various other figures within the Defense Department and the Treasury.¹⁷² When prodded as to whether or not Vance had any negotiating latitude on his trip to China, Oksenberg was quick to change the subject, asserting that there were no Kissinger-Rogers type rivalries in the Carter administration.¹⁷³ After some additional banter, Oksenberg inquired on the officials rank and upon return, reported that he believed that the conversation would be reported back to the Chinese official's superiors, as well.¹⁷⁴

This conversation, which occurred on a vehicle ride to the airport was much more fruitful than the three days of formal talks between Vance and the highest-ranking officials in the People's Republic. Where Vance was unable to assert the Carter administration's desire to normalize relations with the People's Republic – even with a draft communiqué in his pocket – Oksenberg was able to contextualize the nature of the American position on Sino-American relations.¹⁷⁵ Though the lack of diplomatic pressure presented in a joint ride to the airport was in stark contrast to the formality of the talks Vance participated in, the effectiveness of Oksenberg's

¹⁷¹ Ibid., Document 53.

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Ibid. Within the Nixon administration, Kissinger played an outsized role with regards to foreign policy, leaving Secretary of State, William Rogers as a mere diplomatic figure with no negotiative authority in comparison to Kissinger.

¹⁷⁴ *Foreign Relations of the United States*, Document 53.

¹⁷⁵ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 75-83.

conversation asserted the inability of Vance to negotiate competently with the People's Republic.¹⁷⁶

As Cyrus Vance entered his term in the Carter Administration, he carried favor with the President with regards to Sino-American diplomacy.¹⁷⁷ However, in his autobiography, he admitted the fact that Brzezinski's posturing within the administration brought out the worst of competition between the two senior advisors.¹⁷⁸ Further, even with the role that Vance played in actually negotiating with the People's Republic of China, he was unable to truly bring about any progress on the route to normalization. Vance argued that the competitive nature of the administration was detrimental because it forced debate for far too long, without any action.¹⁷⁹ The frustration exhibited by Vance was a product of the influence that Brzezinski and the National Security Council Staff exhibited.¹⁸⁰ Following the inability of Vance to convince the People's Republic of China to compromise, Brzezinski's role initial role as the seeming driver of the normalization process grew.

IV. The Slow Return to Beijing

Following Vance's inability to progress the American effort to normalize relations with the People's Republic of China, the need for a more heavy hand became evident to the National Security council staff, namely Michel Oksenberg. This effort, almost directly after the ineffective trip on behalf of Vance, was initiated a month after his return in September of 1977 and ultimately culminated in the release of the Joint Communiqué between President Carter and Prime Minister Deng Xiaoping on December 15, 1978.

¹⁷⁶ *Foreign Relations of the United States*, Document 53.

¹⁷⁷ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 34-42.

¹⁷⁸ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 34-42.

¹⁷⁹ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 34-42.

¹⁸⁰ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 75-83.

A month after the conversation between Oksenberg and the Chinese official, Oksenberg sent a memo to Brzezinski asserting the importance of maintaining momentum on the issue of normalization in light of other international events.¹⁸¹ The administration was currently facing the issue of garnering support for the Panama Canal treaty -- the treaty to shift the ownership of the Panama Canal to Panama by 2000 -- thus shifting the brunt of the Carter administration's attention.¹⁸² Given that SALT negotiations -- talks to lessen armament levels concurrently between the Soviet Union and the United States -- were currently also in progress, Oksenberg viewed any pressure from Vance to be potentially detrimental to the normalization effort.¹⁸³

As such, Oksenberg asserted to Brzezinski that Vance should seek to affirm the progress made during his trip to the People's Republic and be aware of any potential backlash that could have risen.¹⁸⁴ He listed a few ways in which the United States could have showcased its commitment to the normalization process, though Brzezinski questioned all.¹⁸⁵

Ultimately, the most important thing that Oksenberg received out of this memo was the permission to structurally increase the burden of pursuing normalization to the National Security Council and specifically to himself, stating "I frankly think that in this context, the burden will increase for the NSC and me in particular to seek and push the initiatives [for normalization]. I trust I will have your continued backing."¹⁸⁶ This proved to be a pivotal moment in which Oksenberg asked Brzezinski to position him to prioritize action for normalization of relations with China.

¹⁸¹ *Foreign Relations of the United States*, Document 59.

¹⁸² Michel Oksenberg, "A Decade of Sino-American Relations," *Foreign Affairs* Vol. 61, No. 1 (Fall, 1982): 175-195.

¹⁸³ Michel Oksenberg, "A Decade of Sino-American Relations," 175-195.

¹⁸⁴ *Foreign Relations of the United States*, Document 59.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

The lessening of Vance's influence on the normalization process was furthered only a few days later as he met with Foreign Minister Huang.¹⁸⁷ When both initially encountered each other, Vance stated that the context of normalization has shifted given other events on the global sphere.¹⁸⁸ Normalization was going to be hard. To this, Huang almost taunted, responding that "While in Peking, the Secretary of State was hopeful but now says it's hard."¹⁸⁹ Vance responds that he's hopeful for the possibility of an improvement in relations in the future but Huang interjects stating, "Secretary Vance is always an optimist."¹⁹⁰ Vance attempts to change the conversation by talking about the Foreign Minister's inability to attend a meeting with Carter but the Foreign Minister brushes that off as well. Ultimately, all Vance could say with regards to normalization was that until the Administration fully assessed the strategic effects of normalization, they would wait to get back in touch with the Chinese people.¹⁹¹ Vance consistently faced an inability to progress in his diplomatic conversations with the People's Republic.¹⁹²

Meanwhile, Oksenberg was consistently sending memoranda to Brzezinski, contextualizing cultural differences between the United States and China, the Chinese interpretation of American diplomatic behavior and trying to assess why the administration treated the Chinese differently.¹⁹³ Brzezinski takes this information to heart as he attends a formal lunch with Vice President Walter Mondale and the Ambassador Huang Chen, on November 3, 1977. At this lunch, the Ambassador casually invited Brzezinski to China in

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., Document 62.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Vance, *Hard Choices*, 75-83.

¹⁹³ *Foreign Relations of the United States*, Document 63.

conversation, which was captured by the news media. Casually, Brzezinski accepted.¹⁹⁴ This is the first time that Brzezinski is invited to the People's Republic of China and Brzezinski noted this as the moment in which he started to seriously entertain the idea.¹⁹⁵

In the months following, the administration reviewed the logistics and implications of selling weapons to the People's Republic and also of starting to remove troops from Taiwan.¹⁹⁶ Further, Vance had additional meetings with Huang Chen, though still continuously fruitless.¹⁹⁷ In retrospect, Vance expressed his continued frustration at his diminishing ability to balance his role as chief diplomat across all foreign relations.¹⁹⁸ Oksenberg drafted additional memoranda to assert the importance of pursuing normalization in the context of the unknown political feasibility of addressing normalization in the future. In his series of memos, Oksenberg covered the impact of other foreign policy actions, Chinese customs, and expediting the normalization process.¹⁹⁹ Further, Brzezinski discussed his potential travel in early February of 1978, with the Ambassador to China, Leonard Woodcock, to which he agreed on possible benefits but raised concerns as to whether the timing of the visit would politicize the issue of normalization since it was nearing the midterm elections.²⁰⁰ He also expressed concerns about how the Chinese would feel about a trip that would not have advanced normalization.²⁰¹ Woodcock later raised the point with President Carter and stated the same concerns.²⁰² Oksenberg's consistent prodding for stronger pursuit of normalization by the National Security Council and the initiation by Huang

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., Document 66.

¹⁹⁵ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 200-210.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., Document 62.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., Document 68.

¹⁹⁸ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 83-83.

¹⁹⁹ *Foreign Relations of the United States*, Document 70. Also, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, Document 80.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., Document 77.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Ibid.

Chen, though informal, ultimately drove Brzezinski to lobby the President, himself, for permission.²⁰³

Ultimately, Brzezinski sent a note to Carter on February 27, 1978, asking about the political pursuit of normalization with China. In the memo, he stated "A couple weeks ago you [Carter] said that you felt that a consultative visit by me to China would be useful... the time is ripe for your decision on the subject."²⁰⁴ Brzezinski was sure to support his visit to China by stating that the trip would be advertised to the press and the Soviet Union as a purely consultative visit.²⁰⁵ Carter did not decide on sending Brzezinski to China immediately, but took time to ponder the implications before giving his approval.²⁰⁶

As Carter was deciding, Oksenberg found out through conversation with Richard Holbrooke, the Assistant Secretary of State for Asia, that Vance was beginning to talk to Senators about the administrative intention to normalize relations with the People's Republic of China.²⁰⁷ Oksenberg expressed concerns with this behavior because he found it likely to lead to leaks.²⁰⁸ Additionally, he learned through Holbrooke that Vance was wary of Brzezinski's potential trip to China and strongly advocated for a lower-ranking official to attend, like Secretary of Agriculture Bergland.²⁰⁹ Oksenberg was vehemently against this proposition asserting, "Do we take the Chinese seriously or not? Further, what is Bergland going to talk about – peddling wheat?"²¹⁰

²⁰³ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 200-210.

²⁰⁴ *Foreign Relations of the United States*, Document 86.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁶ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 190-200.

²⁰⁷ *Foreign Relations of the United States*, Document 85.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*

Oksenberg was attempting to inform Brzezinski of Vance's opposition to his trip while also concurrently stressing the strategic benefits of a timely pursuit of normalization. He reiterated the fact that a timely move had to be made, boldly and strategically, to show the Chinese that the administration was not drifting away from normalization.²¹¹ Further, Secretary of Defense Harold Brown, in a note to Carter, highlighted the importance of pursuing normalization in the context of Soviet aggression in the Horn of Africa, elaborating, "normalization would be understood domestically as an element of countering the Soviets."²¹² This, alongside with signals by the Chinese that showed interest in broadening the relationship, including the granting of exit visas to reunify families, the offering of a compound to house the American Liaison Office and other moves, indicated an effort from the Chinese to show their receptiveness to momentum in the relationship.²¹³ Ultimately, a paper prepared by the National Security Council staff argued the importance of a rapid effort to normalize relations with the Chinese. The staff argued that Brzezinski's trip should be scheduled as soon as possible to signal unmistakably to Beijing that the United States was willing to move rapidly on normalization.²¹⁴ The evidence was convincing to both Carter and Brzezinski ultimately causing Carter to clear the decision to approach the Chinese for talks.²¹⁵ Oksenberg then scheduled Brzezinski's trip to China for mid-May in early April of 1978.²¹⁶ With the meetings scheduled, the administration had to establish a plan of action for the trip.

Two critical decisions were made that established the Carter administrative strategy regarding Brzezinski's trip to China. The first occurred on April 11, 1978, as Holbrooke,

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² Ibid., Document 90.

²¹³ Ibid., Document 85.

²¹⁴ Ibid., Document 84.

²¹⁵ Ibid., Document 85. Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 185-190.

²¹⁶ Ibid., Document 89.

Oksenberg, and Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense Abramowitz discussed the implications of pursuing normalization before or after the Midterm elections with Brzezinski, Brown and Vance.²¹⁷ The prospect of Senator Goldwater's response alongside with the strategic implications regarding the political backlash ultimately left the room divided.²¹⁸ Further, Vance believed that moving too quickly on the process could negatively influence the SALT negotiations.²¹⁹ Regardless, Vance ordered the lower-level staff to assess the three options for normalization: before the election, after the election, or postponing until the second term.²²⁰ After the assessment, Vance, Brzezinski and Brown drafted a memo to Carter, highlighting the possible courses of action regarding normalization on May 10, 1978.²²¹ After Carter received this information, he ultimately decided to fully prioritize the pursuit of normalization.²²²

With Brzezinski's trip to China set for less than two weeks after the decision, the National Security Staff prepared and briefed him to enter the talks well informed on Chinese policy and the global context of the trip. There was the issue of Soviet control of the Horn of Africa, Chinese perception of the SALT negotiations, a Soviet-sympathizing leadership in Afghanistan, a developing incursion in Zaire, and arms sales in the Middle East.²²³ Further, the brief ordered Brzezinski to attempt to achieve balance when discussing American ability to achieve global objects and awareness of global problems, appreciating the Chinese perspective on foreign affairs but not pandering, and asserting confidence in American strength but not

²¹⁷ Ibid., Document 91.

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 110-115.

²²⁰ *Foreign Relations of the United States*, Document 91.

²²¹ Ibid., Document 99.

²²² Ibid. Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 195.

²²³ *Foreign Relations of the United States*, Document 106.

appearing to protest too much.²²⁴ The many factors that culminated in contextualizing Brzezinski's trip muddled the best strategic route to take as he entered the talks.



Figure 1: Brzezinski and Deng Xiaoping enjoying tea on Brzezinski's trip to China.

Brzezinski arrived in Beijing on May 20, 1978.²²⁵ Understanding the historic nature of his visit, Brzezinski entered the negotiations ready to pursue the prospect of normalization the first moment the opportunity arose.²²⁶ His talks began with Foreign Minister Huang Hua as he brought in Leonard Woodcock, Holbrooke, Oksenberg, Abramowitz, Gleysteen and other National Security Council staff.²²⁷ After introductions, Brzezinski began by stating Carter's reaffirmation towards his commitment to full normalization of relations between the two countries, the importance of seeking ways to broaden relations, the importance of consulting on

²²⁴ Ibid.

²²⁵ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 200-210.

²²⁶ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 200-210.

²²⁷ *Foreign Relations of the United States*, Document 110.

matters of parallel strategic interests and mutually reinforcing actions to increase Sino-American common interests.²²⁸ Brzezinski described the importance of preventing the hegemony of a single country, addressing Soviet expansion and the importance of insuring a world of diversity.²²⁹ The initial encounter was mostly a lecture on behalf of the United States that Brzezinski used to contextualize Sino-American relations in relation to the Soviet Union. In the next talk, Hua ultimately agreed with Brzezinski's perspective. He stated,

Our discussions show that there is a fundamental congruity in our perspective on basic trends... our discussions show mutual... understanding of the central issues... confronting mankind is either that of hegemony or diversity... I believe our discussions show that there is a mutual and an equal interest in parallel actions and closer relations between the PRC and the US.²³⁰

Brzezinski and Huang's congruent perspective ultimately created a mutual sense of respect between the two figures.²³¹ It is in this context that Brzezinski entered into his talks with Vice Premier Deng Xiao-ping, later that day.

Brzezinski entered the conversation with the Vice Premier asserting Carter's position on the importance of the Sino-American relationship in a global context, elaborating that it was based "on a long term common strategic interest... and as a relationship which we hope to expand and grow to a fully normal condition."²³² Deng responded that the improvement of their relationship was based on the issue of Taiwan, and asked for Brzezinski's perspective on the issue of normalization, to which he responded by affirming American support for the idea of one

²²⁸ Ibid.

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ Ibid., Document 112.

²³¹ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 210-215. *Foreign Relations of the United States*, Document 112.

²³² *Foreign Relations of the United States*, Document 110.

China and affirmed the five points set forward by the previous White House Administration.²³³ This seemed to please Deng as the conversation shifted into the topic of Soviet aggression where both agreed on the necessity to fight efforts of Soviet hegemonic design.²³⁴ Ultimately, Brzezinski left the conversation with Deng on good terms and a belief that they shared a strategic understanding of the world.²³⁵

Brzezinski reached his last round of talks with Chairman Hua Kuo-feng the following evening. The talks started quite friendly as Hua Kuo-feng stated that Brzezinski's first visit, "means the beginning, not the end. It seems that the first visit here will bring the second, third, and fourth visits."²³⁶ In this talk, Brzezinski and Hua discussed the issue of Taiwan, and the importance of both addressing the Chinese perspective of the Taiwanese issue of supposed sovereignty as an internal matter and the United States desire that the Taiwan issue be resolved through peaceful means.²³⁷ They also discussed the importance of the larger global issues, including the strategic relationship in contrast to the Soviet Union.²³⁸ Brzezinski pointed out that he felt the American relationship with China was an enduring one, with long-term strategic importance and Kuo-Feng agrees to this.²³⁹ Following this agreement, Brzezinski provided the largest strategic ask: Were the Chinese are willing to begin secret negotiations to reach the normalization of relations? When asking, Brzezinski addresses the issue of the Taiwan question and the importance of the strategic relationship,

²³³ Ibid. The Five Points were a series of secret concessions that the Nixon and Ford Administration made towards the People's Republic of China upon the initial Joint Communiqué in 1972.

²³⁴ Ibid.

²³⁵ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 210-215.

²³⁶ *Foreign Relations of the United States*, Document 111.

²³⁷ Ibid.

²³⁸ Ibid.

²³⁹ Ibid.

In any case, there is going to be a period of historical transition during which presumably the United States will maintain a full range of economic relations with Taiwan and in the course of which many of the historical legacies of the past can then gradually be diluted, overcome or resolved. Bearing in mind our common strategic interests, bearing in mind the good will that is in our mutual interests, bearing in mind the flexibility which you have already shown in regard to some other countries on this matter, bearing in mind the need for us to weigh difficult internal political struggles over this issue, I feel quite confident that we can jointly find a solution in keeping with your three points, satisfy the requirements of the Shanghai Communiqué, and make possible reasonable rapid resolution of this issue.²⁴⁰

It is in this quote that Brzezinski established the argumentative standard for the United States as they entered the formal negotiations for normalization with the People's Republic of China.²⁴¹

Hua Kuo-Feng ultimately agreed to the request that Brzezinski rose to initiate secret negotiations and the two finished the conversation to leave for dinner.²⁴²

This conversation signaled the end of Brzezinski's trip to China and the rounds of talks that he would experience with the Chinese. When recollecting the arc of the normalization process, Brzezinski credits this talk as the crucial moment that asserted the normalization of relations as achievable and equally desired by both nations.²⁴³

In review, Oksenberg wrote an ecstatic memorandum summarizing his perspective on all of Brzezinski's negotiations. He highlighted the fact that there had been enormous progress on

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

²⁴¹ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 205-215.

²⁴² *Foreign Relations of the United States*, Document 111.

²⁴³ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 215-220.

behalf of the United States through the frame of a "non-negotiation."²⁴⁴ Though Oksenberg called for tempered expectations on the issue of normalization, he understood that this was a crucial step for the process.²⁴⁵

Brzezinski also wrote a detailed report to Carter elaborating on the trip. In it, he states that his trip had four objectives: first, to deepen Sino-American consultation on strategic matters of common concern and to make separate actions mutually reinforcing; second, to expand cultural and economic ties; third, to set the stage for Woodcock's negotiations; fourth, to acquire a personal feel for the Chinese leaders.²⁴⁶ Brzezinski believed that he was able to succeed in with regards to all four objectives.²⁴⁷ In this note, he also highlights the fact that since the talks were so productive, they should actively pursue further action on normalization, possibly the drafting of a normalization communiqué.²⁴⁸ Following the success of his trip, the reality for normalization seemed near.

Brzezinski nudged the President to begin negotiations in mid-June of 1978.²⁴⁹ Brzezinski, the National Security Council staff, and the President all worked to establish the negotiation talking points for Woodcock as he entered conversations with the People's Republic. Ultimately, the details were managed in a secret meeting between the President, Vance, Brown, Brzezinski and the President's assistant, Hamilton Jordan on June 20.²⁵⁰ They established that the negotiations had to be very secret, their negotiative end date would be set for December 15,

²⁴⁴ *Foreign Relations of the United States*, Document 112.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, Document 110.

²⁴⁷ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 215-220.

²⁴⁸ *Foreign Relations of the United States*, Document 111.

²⁴⁹ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 190-200.

²⁵⁰ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 190-200.

1978, and Woodcock would conduct negotiations every ten days with Oksenberg and Holbrooke to assist with negotiations.²⁵¹

After the negotiation tactic was established, Brzezinski and Oksenberg send memoranda consistently to address issues. Brzezinski sent a memo to Carter reminding him of the policy victory that normalization will provide.²⁵² Brzezinski and Vance strategized on how best to address the questions of the People's Republic when it came to the post-normalization American presence on Taiwan, choosing to organize a very ambiguous presentation for Ambassador Leonard Woodcock to present on the matter.²⁵³ Oksenberg highlighted the importance of utilizing the increasingly influential figure, Deng Xiao-ping to further advocate for normalization.²⁵⁴ Further, Oksenberg points out in a later statement that the Chinese were beginning to favor the United States in opposition to the Soviet Union.²⁵⁵

The sending of memos continuously back and forth to strategize reached another checkpoint in mid-September as Carter met with Chinese Ambassador Ch'ai Tse-min. In the conversation, Carter made it clear that Ambassador Woodcock spoke for him personally while in negotiations.²⁵⁶ Most importantly however, Carter used this meeting to concede the three points that the Chinese government asked for in negotiations regarding the issue of Taiwan, including the severance of diplomatic relations, the withdrawal of military forces and installations from Taiwan and the abrogation of the Defense Treaty with Taiwan.²⁵⁷ In context, this meeting finally

²⁵¹ *Foreign Relations of the United States*, Document 119.

²⁵² *Ibid.*

²⁵³ *Ibid.*, Document 127.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, Document 128.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, Document 149.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, Document 135.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, *Keeping Faith*, 200-210.

allowed for a break in negotiations as the United States conceded to the People's Republic of China's largest negotiative asks.²⁵⁸

In October, Carter began conversations with his negotiator, Leonard Woodcock to discuss the drafting of a communiqué to bring forth to the Chinese.²⁵⁹ Upon Brzezinski's counsel, Carter agreed and Leonard began to draft a possible agreement.²⁶⁰ Ultimately, Carter approves of the first draft communiqué on October 13, 1978.²⁶¹ The communiqué asserted mutual recognition as the sole governments of their countries, commitment against global hegemonic forces, a reaffirmation of the Shanghai Communiqué, and a formal process for a shift away from Taiwan.²⁶² After this decision, Brzezinski handed his weekly report on the same day and stated that if the United States truly wished to pursue normalization; it'll have to be done in less than two months or they would have had to wait an additional year and risk facing unforeseen shifts in circumstances.²⁶³

Major breakthroughs in negotiations occurred on November 2, 1978 as Woodcock presented and tabled the American version of the communiqué.²⁶⁴ Even though the Chinese had many questions, Woodcock assessed that the thrust of the negotiations was quickly moving towards normalization.²⁶⁵ However, turmoil in the People's Republic due to Deng Xiao-ping's actions towards other political leaders endangered the prospects of negotiations.²⁶⁶ Eventually, by the end of November, Deng was able to maintain control of his leadership and Oksenberg

²⁵⁸ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 190-200.

²⁵⁹ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 190-200.

²⁶⁰ *Foreign Relations of the United States*, Document 142.

²⁶¹ Ibid.

²⁶² Ibid.

²⁶³ Ibid., Document 143.

²⁶⁴ Ibid., Document 149.

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

²⁶⁶ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 200-210.

believed that this worked out best for the normalization process due to Deng's critical role as an advocate for normalization.²⁶⁷

Woodcock reported on December 4, 1978, that the Chinese had agreed to the general call for normalization and were looking to formalize the final portions with the United States.²⁶⁸ After deliberation, the White House redrafted portions to send back to Teng and allowed him to negotiate further.²⁶⁹ Ultimately, the Chinese accepted a redraft from the United States on December 13, 1978 and agreed on a formal draft on December 15, 1978²⁷⁰. Through continuous negotiations by Woodcock and the heavy hand of President Carter and Brzezinski, relations between the People's Republic of China and the United States were finally thawed.

The process towards normalization following Secretary Vance's trip to China was arduous and convoluted. As Brzezinski, Oksenberg, and the National Security staff organized themselves to approach their trip to China, they had to consistently deal with the reckless behavior of various figures within the administration. Vance would leak information regarding normalization efforts to Congress when Brzezinski was working to make a trip to the People's Republic of China.²⁷¹ He undermined efforts to build Sino-American trust and leaked information regarding Brzezinski's trip to China hours before it was announced.²⁷² Further, he actively lobbied against Brzezinski's effort to participate in a diplomatic trip to China even though his own effort to further diplomatic relations with the People's Republic failed earlier.²⁷³

²⁶⁷ Michel Oksenberg, "A Decade of Sino-American Relations," *Foreign Affairs* Volume 61. No. 1 (Fall, 1981): 175-195.

²⁶⁸ *Foreign Relations of the United States*, Document 167.

²⁶⁹ Backchannel Message From the Chief of the Liaison Office in China (Woodcock) to Secretary of State Vance and the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Brzezinski).

²⁷⁰ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 230-235.

²⁷¹ *Foreign Relations of the United States*, Document 97.

²⁷² Ibid.

²⁷³ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 110-115.

However, conflict arose intra-departmentally as well. In a scalding memo, Thomas Thornton, of the National Security Council staff wrote "We should not let ourselves be cowed by incantations from the Sinologists in the academic community nor by a misplaced guilt complex," because of Ambassador Huang Hua's lack of desire to meet with the President following Vance's trip to China.²⁷⁴ The memo was meant to be a direct comment against Oksenberg and rightfully received an equally pointed response from Oksenberg²⁷⁵. Both memos were sent to the two individuals directly involved and Brzezinski, though Brzezinski's sole response was a comment that "Things are getting lively!"²⁷⁶ This highlighted Brzezinski's personality and taste for confrontation.

Throughout the second half of the normalization process with the People's Republic of China, Brzezinski played a more publicized role than prior.²⁷⁷ News coverage established a narrative of conflicting advice within the administration and asserted the point that the internal conflicts between Vance and Brzezinski ultimately influenced the policy-making process in the administration.²⁷⁸ It seems that the root of this narrative is found in the interpersonal desire to control foreign policy by Secretary Vance but in reality, the influence of Brzezinski on the issue of normalization is irrefutable when studying the actual proceedings of the normalization process.²⁷⁹ Vance's desire to maintain his control of foreign policy seemingly manifested itself when he leaked the Brzezinski trip to the Soviet Union but it remained ineffective. Further, the role that Michel Oksenberg, the dedicated Asian affairs National Security Advisor staff member,

²⁷⁴ *Foreign Relations of the United States*, Document 60-61.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁷ Glad, *An Outsider in the White House*, 123.

²⁷⁸ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 30-35. Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 40-45. Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 50-55.

²⁷⁹ Pace Smith, *Morality, Reason and Power*, 88-89.

held with regards to normalization, seems more impactful than that of Vance. Brzezinski outwardly controlled the road to normalization following Vance's trip to China.²⁸⁰

V. Conclusion

The National Security Council was established in 1947 and the role of the National Security Advisor was created six years later in 1953. The advisor position is not subject to Senate confirmation and has historically played the role of chief in-house advisor to the President on all matters related to security. The capacity for uninhibited access present in the role is astounding. The ability to influence the information that the President receives is evident in the history of Zbigniew Brzezinski's time as National Security Advisor to President Carter.

Brzezinski recounts an encounter with the head of the Central Intelligence Agency in his autobiography. Upon hearing Brzezinski's intention to deliver the intelligence report to the President directly, the Director of Central Intelligence, Admiral Stansfield Turner approached the National Security Council staff and quizzed the individuals on the procedures set in place to create the briefings. The Admiral then made a point of reminding Brzezinski that he was the chief national intelligence advisor and historically, the CIA head had briefed the President daily. Brzezinski nodded in approval and told the Admiral he had a point. Immediately after, Brzezinski changed the name from "intelligence briefing" on the White House schedule to the "national security briefing" and called the Admiral to say the problem had been resolved. The matter was never raised again.²⁸¹

That was the nature of Brzezinski's behavior in the White House: assertive, composed, and calculated. Through the historic arc of the normalization process, Brzezinski, with the help

²⁸⁰ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 233.

²⁸¹ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 64.

of his National Security Council staff member Michel Oksenberg, consistently played the key role of advancing the normalization process. The narrative engendered by the reporting of the day minimized the role that Brzezinski and his team played in the process of normalization. The scores of memos and conversations distributed by Oksenberg and Brzezinski to build the case for the active pursuit of a strong bilateral relationship that has now extended far beyond mere normalization speak to the vision and ability to execute that the two individuals held. Even in the face of seeming failure following Vance's trip to China, Oksenberg was able to gain valuable insight into the Chinese perspective and utilized that information to advance the normalization process. Ultimately, through Brzezinski's guidance, and pressure on the President, normalization was achieved. Following the finalization of the joint communiqué, Brzezinski asked the President how he felt about the journey towards normalization, to which the President responded, "You were genuinely the driving force behind the whole effort. Whenever I wavered you pushed me and pressed me to go through with this." Brzezinski appreciated the gesture.²⁸²

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²⁸² Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 233.

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