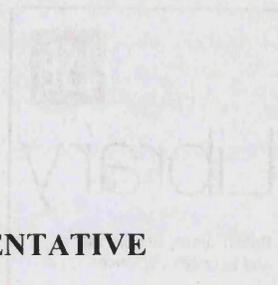


UNIVERSITY OF LONDON



**PIERCING THE BAMBOO CURTAIN: TENTATIVE
BRIDGE BUILDING TO CHINA DURING THE JOHNSON YEARS**

**A THESIS SUBMITTED TO
THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

**DEPARTMENT OF INTERNATIONAL HISTORY
LONDON SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS AND POLITICAL SCIENCE**

**BY
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NOVEMBER 2005



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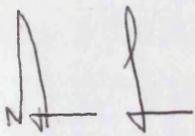
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The undersigned declares that the work presented in this thesis is his own.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized 'M' followed by a 'L' and a horizontal line extending to the right.

Michael Lumbers

Abstract

While a small flood of literature has ably demonstrated that the Sino-American rapprochement of the early 1970's was rooted in part in the evolution of U.S. attitudes and perceptions during the preceding decade, it has provided only a sketchy overview and has not adequately linked these critical developments to events which historians have hitherto taken to be a cause of deadlock between Washington and Beijing, namely the Vietnam War and the Cultural Revolution. Drawing on a wide array of recently declassified American archival sources, this study, the first full-length account of Lyndon Johnson's China record, traces the shifts in context at home and abroad that prompted tentative bridge building to the People's Republic. In assessing Johnson's role in the policymaking process, it also builds on recent works that offer a new perspective on his foreign policy leadership by looking "beyond Vietnam." Johnson's cautious reading of domestic sentiment and suspicions of Beijing's role in Vietnam certainly discouraged the administration from initiating any grand departures from the inherited line of containment and isolation, much to the dismay of several mid-level China hands pressing for new approaches. Yet Vietnam ironically created pressures for an accommodation of sorts between the two adversaries and encouraged American decision-makers who might not otherwise have been inclined to reassess long-standing strategy toward the mainland. Johnson's fear of Chinese intervention in the conflict and his attempts to mobilize public support for Vietnam by burnishing his peace credentials yielded symbolic and substantive alterations in China policy: a relaxation of the travel ban, the promotion of expanded contacts, and a shift toward conciliatory rhetoric.

The outbreak of the Cultural Revolution in 1966 led to the deferment of further bridge building efforts. Johnson and his senior aides expressed persistent uncertainty over the direction of the mainland's turmoil and were increasingly distracted by Vietnam. Over the long term, however, China's internal upheaval set in motion a reappraisal of the country's political dynamic and threat potential. By late 1967, most China watchers concluded that revolutionary fervor had peaked on the mainland and that the regime's moderate elements, possibly inclined toward reconciliation with the outside world, had outmaneuvered hard-line Maoists. As official attitudes thawed, the attention of policymakers focused on what orientation a post-Mao regime might assume and whether or not the U.S. could facilitate this transition by further policy reform. In short, this period witnessed the establishment of many of the perceptual preconditions for the Sino-American rapprochement that unfolded during the Nixon years.

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Acknowledgements

Even though an acknowledgements page often appears at the beginning of a book, it is written only at the very end of a long, gruelling process. It is for this reason why I thought many times I would never get to write one. Few days have passed over the last four years when I have not cringed over something in these pages, maybe a word or a sentence, sometimes a paragraph, and made what I felt to be the necessary correction. The next week, I'd find this as well to be unsatisfactory. A perfectionist is never happy with his work. I could probably spend the rest of my life revising this project, but then I would never receive my degree. With this in mind, I have finally decided to submit my thesis, warts and all.

This work was written under the supervision of Odd Arne Westad. Dr. Westad read the entire manuscript, offering encouragement and helpful suggestions throughout. He also shares credit for the title of my thesis, a distinction, I am sure, which will always be a source of great pride. Dr. Westad, of course, has done his fair share of editing, and I profited from his experience. Perhaps most importantly, he eventually instilled in me an acute aversion to paragraphs that are three pages long. The reader will most likely still grimace at the length of my paragraphs, yet one need only compare the present volume to a certain article published in a 2004 edition of *Journal of Cold War Studies* to see that I have at least started to heed his wise counsel.

I am also indebted to Nigel Ashton, Steven Casey, and Jussi Hanhimaki. These individuals kindly read portions of my work and took out time from their taxing schedules to discuss various ideas or provide other assistance.

My greatest academic influence is Robert Accinelli. He has endured countless self-pitying monologues, engaged me in conversation about American politics, read everything I have ever sent, and helped me to develop and refine ideas. He has spent even more hours encouraging, reassuring, inspiring, pushing, and guiding me. I have never asked him why he is willing to invest so much time in someone he taught only once as an undergraduate at the University of Toronto almost ten years ago. I suppose it is in part a measure of the faith and confidence he has in me. Coming from someone I so deeply respect, this is truly humbling and means more to me than he could imagine. If I had the money, I would send the Accinelli family on a long trip to Hawaii, if only so they could get away from me. Robert Accinelli has not written the most books, published the most articles, edited the most volumes, spoken at the most conferences, or visited every archival collection on the planet, although anyone in the profession would be proud to have a CV like his. If the true measure of a great professor is instead the ability to transfer his own passion for learning onto others, to descend from an academic's ivory tower

and actually *interact* with, and *care* for, his students, then he is unquestionably in a class of his own. No one is better: past, present, or future. Here's to you, Bob. Thank you.

This project could never have been completed (or attempted) without the invaluable financial assistance provided by Mom and Dad, the London Goodenough Association of Canada, the Lyndon Baines Johnson Foundation, the John Fitzgerald Kennedy Foundation, Universities UK (Overseas Research Student Award), and (without their knowing it) Intercon Security. The bulk of the research was undertaken at a number of American archives. I must single out for praise and gratitude the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library in Austin, Texas. My trips to Austin were productive and quite enjoyable, aside from the one night I was pelted with an egg by an anonymous hooligan. There is obviously no better place to indulge one's interest in surely one of the most fascinating and formidable political personalities in American history. LBJ, whose competitive streak was legendary, can rest easy that his library has more than earned its reputation as the nation's leading depository for presidential papers. The library has performed a great service in making most of its holdings available to the public in a timely manner. The staff are knowledgeable, courteous, and efficient. Moreover, they all seem to be genuinely interested in their jobs. Mike Parrish and Shannon Jarrett were especially helpful. My research also profited from interviews with former Johnson officials Walt Rostow and James Thomson, both of whom were very generous with their time.

I would be truly remiss if I did not acknowledge the four most important people in my action-packed life. Buffy is a sweet little soul who manages to make me smile (even if it's only on the inside) every time I see her. A rare feat indeed. Ken never thanked me in his high school yearbook, but I am willing to be the bigger boy. He is the only person on this planet who understands my sense of humor. Yes, I do have one. Despite being a brother, he is a tremendous friend who is dearly loved. If subjected to painful interrogation, he would probably admit the same of me. "Your the best," he might say. Neither one of us will ever leave the house.

And then there is Mom and Dad. I won't even attempt to set down on paper what they mean to me, because mere words would not do them justice. It is surely one of nature's great riddles that the most beautiful, wonderful, loving, and selfless people ended up with someone who has such a bad haircut. I really am the luckiest guy in the world. Hubert Humphrey once remarked that one of Johnson's more endearing character traits was that his eyes would well up every time he started talking about his mama. I know very well where Lyndon was coming from. My mother and father are my best friends and, alongside Franklin Roosevelt, my heroes. I love you both, even though I have a bizarre way of showing it. This work is dedicated to them. "Not only is it the last show of the tour, but it's the last show that we'll ever do. Thank you."

Abbreviations

CCNE	Chinese Communist Nuclear Explosion
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
ChiCom	Chinese Communists
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CINCPAC	Commander in Chief, Pacific
CRG	Cultural Revolution Group
CWIHP	Cold War International History Project (Washington, D.C.)
DRV	Democratic Republic of Vietnam (North Vietnam)
<i>DSB</i>	<i>Department of State Bulletin</i>
EA	Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, Department of State (from November 1966)
FE	Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs, Department of State (1949-October 1966)
FO	Foreign Office
<i>FRUS</i>	<i>Foreign Relations of the United States</i>
GRC	Government of the Republic of China (Taiwan)
INR	Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Department of State
ISA	Bureau of International Security Affairs, Department of Defense
JCT Papers	James C. Thomson Papers (JFKL)
JFK	John Fitzgerald Kennedy
JFKL	John Fitzgerald Kennedy Library (Boston, Massachusetts)
LBJ	Lyndon Baines Johnson
LBJL	Lyndon Baines Johnson Library (Austin, Texas)
NA	National Archives (College Park, Maryland)
NIE	National Intelligence Estimate
NLF	National Liberation Front
NSC	National Security Council
NSCM	National Security Council Meetings
NSF	National Security File
OH	Oral History
PKI	Indonesian Communist Party
PLA	People's Liberation Army (PRC)
PPC	Policy Planning Council, Department of State
<i>PPP:LBJ</i>	<i>Public Papers of the Presidents: Lyndon B. Johnson</i>
PRC	People's Republic of China
PRO	Public Record Office (Kew, London)
RG	Record Group
SNIE	Special National Intelligence Estimate
UN	United Nations
WPB Papers	William P. Bundy Papers (LBJL)

NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION

Chinese names and places are rendered throughout the text in the Pinyin system of transliteration, except where they occur in different form in quotations, or where familiar names might be confused if changed.

Introduction

A few years following his voluntary departure from government, James Thomson, a frustrated mid-level China hand who had served in both the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, speculated that the 1960's would be remembered as "a period of drearily sustained deadlock" between Washington and Beijing. Notwithstanding his own misgivings over the priorities and leanings of his superiors, Thomson noted with bittersweet pride that some of the seeds of the thaw that unfolded during the Nixon years had been planted in the preceding decade, thus warranting this period "a chapter, or at least an extended footnote, in the history of the Sino-American relationship."¹ Of the voluminous literature on America's encounter with the People's Republic of China (PRC) produced in the interim, the Kennedy-Johnson years have received by far the least attention. This apparent oversight has been in part a function of the obstacles that historians of U.S. foreign relations must endure in waiting for the declassification of relevant archival sources. As records from the Truman and Eisenhower presidencies emerged in the 1970's and 1980's, scholars focused their attention on exploring the origins of Sino-American tension, the question of whether or not there existed a "lost chance" for an early reconciliation, the Korean War, and the Taiwan Strait crises.² Implicit in the relative neglect of the 1960's, however, is the sense that "nothing happened;" both the incentives and opportunities for a breakthrough appeared to be few as Democratic administrations, acutely sensitive to charges of "softness" on Asian communism, endeavored to contain Chinese expansionism in Vietnam and became confused onlookers to the cataclysmic Cultural Revolution. General surveys documenting the American opening to China ignore this period and continue to take 21 January 1969 as the logical starting point for discussion, much like the fall of the Berlin Wall signifies for most the end of the Cold War.³

Some historians have questioned the tendency to attribute the shift in U.S. attitudes and policies almost solely to the political and geostrategic calculations of Richard Nixon and Henry

Kissinger. Such an approach, the pioneering Rosemary Foot writes, “leads to a focus on relatively short-term events and obscures broader currents of change that were taking place in the period after 1949.”⁴ Just as Truman and Eisenhower’s papers offered a fresh perspective and forced a rethinking of conventional wisdom about both administrations’ dealings with the mainland, the massive flood of documentation from the 1960’s has had something of the same effect. Indeed, perusal of John F. Kennedy’s China record has yielded valuable findings. Building on a reserve of existing scholarship and incorporating new primary materials, Noam Kochavi’s aptly titled *A Conflict Perpetuated*, the first and only full-length account of the subject, reveals a President prone to alarmist interpretations of Beijing’s motives and hostile to policy reform. Beneath the surface, however, an agenda that foreshadowed the sweeping changes of the Nixon era was articulated by a growing chorus of U.S officials lobbying for a reappraisal of existing policies, particularly those efforts aimed at ostracizing the PRC.⁵

Lyndon Johnson’s China policy awaits a similarly comprehensive treatment. Early assessments, written without the benefit of archival research, invariably painted a decidedly bleak portrait, focusing on the ill will that Vietnam engendered among U.S. decision-makers toward their Chinese counterparts.⁶ Nancy Bernkopf Tucker, a leading authority on Sino-American relations and one of the first historians to utilize sources from the Johnson Library, confirmed the primacy of the war in determining the administration’s attitudes toward Beijing and cited it as the chief impediment to fresh thinking. Charging the Johnson team with a lack of “energy and imagination,” she concluded that Washington’s fixation with Vietnam and its misunderstanding of China’s role in the conflict, as much as the disruption and chaos provided by the Cultural Revolution, precluded movement toward normalization.⁷

Without disputing the centrality of Vietnam or the marginal advancement in U.S. China policy, an embryonic revisionist school of thought has recently offered a more nuanced perspective of the Johnson years. Championed by Foot and corroborated by subsequent works, this view holds that significant alterations in the domestic and strategic context of American

diplomacy in the mid- to late 1960's created a more auspicious setting for the Nixon opening. Images of an expansionist Chinese menace were gradually superseded by the example of Chinese caution in Vietnam and the implosion wrought by Mao Zedong's Cultural Revolution. The steady depoliticization of the China issue at home, coupled with intermittent outbursts of popular and congressional pressure for a more flexible stance toward the PRC, provided a politician even as deliberate as Johnson with both the leeway and motive for extending modest feelers to the mainland.⁸

This work affirms that the Johnson presidency did not represent a period of stagnation, and that senior officials contemplated significant departures from long-standing China policy more than was recognized at the time. Yet it differs from all previous efforts in four notable ways. First, as the only full-length analysis of the Johnson administration's China record, it makes the most extensive use of the considerable documentation and offers the only detailed policymaking study, carefully tracing the personalities, ideas, and events that shaped approaches to the PRC during these years. Existing literature on this subject has appeared either in the form of short essays or portions of projects with a longer time frame. A concentrated focus on the Johnson era provides much needed context to the Nixon opening and allows us to consider questions critical to our understanding of Sino-American relations in the 1960's and on which still very little has been written. How did U.S. policy evolve? Why did the Johnson team approve bridge building efforts? What accounted for their modest nature? Who were the key decision-makers? To what extent were their actions guided by strategic, ideological, or political considerations? How did U.S. officials view the intensified Sino-Soviet schism, and what were the ramifications for China policy?⁹ How did the administration interpret and respond to the Cultural Revolution?

Second, this study explores the Chinese dimension of America's experience in Vietnam, which has not received proper attention from U.S. historians of the conflict. Indeed, careful examination of primary sources reveals not only the profound impact that Vietnam had on Johnson policymakers' views of the PRC, but also how perceptions of the mainland's intentions

in turn shaped the administration's decision to commit forces to a ground war in Southeast Asia and its subsequent conduct of the fighting. More than recent literature has stressed or recognized, Washington devoted considerable effort to anticipating Beijing's response to U.S. military moves against its North Vietnamese ally. Johnson's fear of Chinese intervention accounted in large part for the process of tentative bridge building that peaked in 1966. As the mainland became enveloped in revolutionary fervor, China watchers wondered if this made it more or less likely to come to the aid of Hanoi; this was an important consideration as the administration debated the merits of expanding the war in the spring of 1967. The Johnson team's downgrading of the strategic threat posed by China likely made it easier for them to ponder de-escalation of the war effort in 1968. In short, the "China factor" broadens our understanding of many of the pivotal U.S. decisions in Vietnam.

Third, while the focus of this project is overwhelmingly on American perceptions and actions, it seeks to flesh out the discussion by incorporating the steadily growing volume of secondary literature on Chinese foreign policy. Few areas of Cold War history over the past decade have benefited more from the opening of archives. While access to Chinese papers remains regrettably limited, much light has nevertheless been shed on a host of issues with which Johnson officials grappled: Beijing's reaction to American intervention in Vietnam, the prospects of its own military involvement in the war, its evolving relationship with both Moscow and Hanoi, and the effect of the Cultural Revolution on its diplomacy.¹⁰ Armed with this Chinese perspective, judgement can now be passed on the accuracy of U.S. decision-makers' reading of the aforementioned, as well as on the success of their efforts to avert a Sino-American clash in Vietnam and of their bridge building to the mainland.

Fourth, this work examines Lyndon Johnson's role in the decision-making process and draws wider conclusions on his foreign policy leadership. LBJ retired from office in January 1969 with his reputation in ruins, leaving in his wake a stalemated Asian conflict that had cost the nation dearly in blood and treasure, the worst domestic unrest since the Civil War, and a fractured

Democratic Party that still has not recovered its footing. His first biographers mercilessly portrayed him as a shady wheeler-dealer whose only guiding principle appeared to be the acquisition of power for its own sake. Johnson hardly fared better in samplings of public opinion throughout the 1970's and 1980's, consistently ranking near the bottom in a broad range of categories that are typically used to grade Presidents.¹¹ The passage of time and the proliferation of released material from Austin, Texas, particularly the endlessly fascinating recordings of telephone conversations that Johnson personally authorized, have offered a different perspective.¹² LBJ is now rightfully remembered not only as the man who led his nation into Vietnam, but as a politician of uncommon drive and vision, the architect of a far-reaching program of domestic reform –the Great Society –that was surpassed perhaps only by Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal, and a leader who played as large a role as any in extending civil rights to millions of disenfranchised African Americans.¹³ As a reflection of this reversal in fortunes, a poll of 90 historians conducted by C-SPAN in 2000 ranked Johnson a very respectable tenth overall among U.S. Presidents, placing first in the category of Congressional relations and second in the pursuit of equal justice.¹⁴

While Johnson's standing as a domestic leader and political operator has soared, his foreign policy record remains an issue of pointed controversy.¹⁵ The massive declassification of Johnson-era documents in the early 1990's inspired an outpouring of scholarly volumes dedicated to his diplomacy. Much of this literature confirmed long-standing criticisms of his statesmanship, concluding that those same qualities enabling Johnson to excel as a legislator –the ability to bridge differences and find common ground –were particularly ill suited for the fine art of foreign relations. His assertiveness and effectiveness at home were unfavorably contrasted with his passiveness and ineptness abroad. Johnson emerged from this research as an unimaginative Cold Warrior with little knowledge of, or interest in, the outside world, and whose overriding objective was to simply execute the commitments undertaken by his predecessors and espoused by his seasoned advisers.¹⁶ The Texan's "appreciation of foreign relations was shallow, circumstantial,

and dominated by the personalities of heads of state he had met,” Waldo Heinrichs noted rather condescendingly. “Lacking a detached critical perspective, he was culture-bound and vulnerable to clichés and stereotypes about world affairs.”¹⁷ Vietnam, unsurprisingly, continues to dominate the historiography. Recent studies have faulted Johnson for transforming his predecessor’s limited commitment to helping Saigon defend itself against a communist insurgency into a full-scale war, for reasons owing to insecurity, vanity, machismo, impulsiveness, stubbornness, and a hawkish predilection for force.¹⁸

A handful of historians have mounted a vigorous counter-defense on behalf of the embattled LBJ. Robert Dallek, Johnson’s most prominent biographer, contends that his elusive and infinitely complex personality has lent itself to constant misinterpretation of, and confusion over, his motives. Only by looking “beyond Vietnam” can a more definitive, balanced understanding of Johnson as a world leader be attained.¹⁹ In this vein, Thomas Alan Schwartz’s groundbreaking *Lyndon Johnson and Europe* portrays a subtle and savvy President engaged with the delicacies of policy, deftly handling the prickly Charles De Gaulle, preserving the solidarity of the Atlantic Alliance even as centrifugal forces threatened to pull it apart, and advancing the post-Cuba era of détente with the Soviet Union.²⁰

An in-depth look at Johnson’s dealings with China does not plausibly afford the same opportunity for as starkly a revisionist interpretation; as has already been documented elsewhere, and as this work reiterates, both America’s misadventure in Vietnam and the mainland’s preoccupation with domestic transformation for the period under consideration were not conducive to constructive relations between the two adversaries. Still, even as the evidence presented here confirms some of the shortcomings traditionally associated with our protagonist (susceptibility to Cold War-shaped thinking, wariness of foreign policy reform, distracted by Vietnam, unduly influenced by parochial political considerations), it also highlights many attributes that have only just surfaced: an attentive and well informed leader who dominated the foreign policy process, intellectually flexible, adaptable to changing variables at home and

abroad, adept conflict manager, empathetic with the concerns of the other side, and mindful of the limits of America's capacity to shape events to its liking.

This study is organized chronologically. Chapter 1 sets the stage for our discussion by providing a broad overview of America's approach to the PRC prior to November 1963, focusing primarily on the Kennedy years. The second chapter takes a look at how China figured in Johnson's worldview as he assumed the presidency, and the events in 1964—French recognition and the Chinese nuclear test—that steadily undermined the policy he inherited. The next two chapters analyze how the Johnson administration's entanglement in Vietnam governed its relations with Beijing, first sharpening senior decision-makers' hostility to policy reform as they escalated America's military role in 1964-65, then providing the impetus for tentative bridge building in 1966 as they worked to head off the threat of Chinese intervention and disarm critics of the war by burnishing their peace credentials. Chapters 5 and 6 examine how the outbreak of the Cultural Revolution influenced perceptions of the PRC and the process of bridge building. A concluding section summarizes the study's findings and highlights the implications for the historiography of both Sino-American relations and Lyndon Johnson's role in U.S. foreign policy.

1

Staying Firm: John F. Kennedy's China Policy, 1961-1963

The logical starting point for an examination of Lyndon Johnson's encounter with the PRC is January 1961, when John F. Kennedy assumed control of the White House after eight years of Republican rule. The overlap in personnel, perceptions, and policies between the Kennedy and Johnson administrations was truly unique, perhaps unparalleled in American history for two successive presidencies, and had considerable consequences for the direction of both domestic and foreign affairs during the 1960's. JFK inherited a Sino-American relationship plagued by mutual mistrust and antagonism, sealed in blood by the agonizing stalemate of the Korean War. There was some anticipation that a new President would advance new initiatives toward the mainland, ultimately a misreading of Kennedy's eagerness to take political gambles and an underestimation of his profound suspicions of the communist regime. The broad features of the Truman-Eisenhower line of containment and isolation in fact remained unchanged during the Kennedy years. Drawing on archival sources and a growing volume of secondary literature, this chapter also demonstrates that the seeds of policy revision were planted during this period, as a handful of mid-level officials and their sponsors pressed for a reappraisal of attitudes. This pattern of high-level resistance to reform amidst agitation for change from below would be characteristic of much of the Johnson administration's China record.

The acute hostility that colored Sino-American relations for more than twenty years after the founding of the PRC in October 1949 was not necessarily predetermined. Indeed, many Americans serving in China during the Second World War regarded Mao Zedong's Chinese Communist Party (CCP) as a dynamic movement with genuine appeal to much of the country. Unique among other communist parties, the CCP could also stake its claim as an autonomous actor un beholden to the whims of puppet masters in the Kremlin. Joseph Stalin's spotty record of

support for his ally throughout the 1930's and 1940's did not go unnoticed by those officials in the Truman administration looking for signs of Titoism in China.¹ President Truman and his advisers could barely disguise their contempt for the CCP's rival for power, the Nationalist regime of Chiang Kai-shek, which was widely seen as corrupt, inept, and dangerously predisposed to using force as a cure-all for its problems. Washington's overriding objective during the Chinese civil war was not so much providing what aid it could to Chiang's discredited government as preventing the Soviets from exploiting communist gains in northern China. Apprehensive of diverting scarce resources from more vital Cold War theaters in Europe and the Middle East, and increasingly impatient with the Generalissimo's machinations, George Marshall, who had led a fruitless year-long mission to arrange a cease-fire in China and became Secretary of State in January 1947, concluded that only a program of limited assistance could maximize U.S. leverage over the Nationalists and minimize the possibility of the Soviets intervening on behalf of the CCP.

Dean Acheson shared his predecessor's distaste for Chiang and for entanglement in China. He was primarily interested in containing Soviet influence on the mainland. Once the Nationalists had been driven to Taiwan, he sought to manage U.S. disengagement from the conflict and prevent a consolidation of the PRC's ties to Moscow. Acheson persuaded Truman in early 1950 to forgo any military responsibilities for the protection of Taiwan, knowing full well that the communists would eventually assume control of the island; intervention in China's civil war would only galvanize Chinese opinion against the U.S. and undermine any chances of driving a wedge between the Soviet Union and Mao's new regime.² Some historians have discerned in Acheson's conduct a determination to forge an accommodation with the PRC, a lofty aim that was only derailed by the subsequent fighting in Korea.³

More recently, scholars with access to Chinese documents have convincingly debunked the notion of a "lost chance" for an early reconciliation between Washington and Beijing. Acutely suspicious of American intentions toward the new Chinese government, intent on

maintaining the internal momentum of the revolution, and certain that the security of the PRC rested on close alignment with the Soviet Union, Mao and his comrades were not inclined to reciprocate any U.S. overture.⁴ Yet it is also apparent that the Truman team's interest in averting a conflict with the mainland did not translate into any coherent policy of offering olive branches to their Chinese counterparts or bargaining with them in an even-handed manner. Deluged by stinging criticism from Chiang's supporters in Congress and the press for having "lost" China to the communists, U.S. decision-makers would have found it exceedingly difficult to sustain any domestic consensus for a conciliatory approach to the PRC.⁵ Moreover, most senior officials did not sense a compelling strategic need to meet the People's Republic half-way. His sporadic contemplation of recognition and limited trade notwithstanding, Acheson rather arrogantly assumed that the U.S. did not have to rush into these commitments. It was taken for granted that China's new leadership would confront myriad economic difficulties, forcing them to turn to America for assistance that the Kremlin could not hope to provide. As Melvyn Leffler has aptly noted, this was "not a strategy of accommodation...it was infused with ideological antipathy and designed to force the Chinese Communists to appear as supplicants."⁶

Attitudes toward Beijing were in fact hardening before Korea. China's anti-American rhetoric and the conclusion of a Sino-Soviet alliance in February 1950 appeared to render the prospect of a schism between the two communist giants increasingly remote.⁷ Against the backdrop of a wide-ranging overview of U.S. national security policies, set in motion by the drafting of NSC 68, a number of officials in both the State and Defense departments questioned Acheson's complacency toward Taiwan's fate and started examining means by which the island could be defended against a communist takeover. When war broke out in Korea in June 1950, the administration immediately ordered the Seventh Fleet into the Taiwan Strait. The move was designed to head off an expansion of the conflict by discouraging either Chinese combatant from attacking the other, yet it also reflected the strategic and politico-psychological value that U.S. policymakers assigned to the preservation of a non-communist Taiwan.⁸ The American

commitment to this objective would poison relations with Beijing into the 1960's and beyond. Leaders in Beijing were incensed by the deployment of the Seventh Fleet, condemning the act as nothing less than an infringement on Chinese sovereignty.⁹

China's military intervention in Korea in November, coming after American-led forces crossed the thirty eighth parallel and threatened to overthrow the communist regime in Pyongyang, had a profoundly negative impact on elite and popular opinion alike in the U.S. The ensuing bloody stalemate yielded an enduring bipartisan strategy of containment and isolation, as Washington maintained a total embargo on trade with, and travel to, the mainland; sustained strong military and diplomatic ties to Taiwan; exerted pressure on its allies to avoid contact with, or recognition of, Beijing; and committed itself to preserving Taipei's seat in the United Nations (UN) and preventing the PRC's membership in that organization.¹⁰

The broad parameters of this policy remained intact during the Eisenhower years. As with so many other facets of the Eisenhower administration's foreign policy, however, its approach to China was not nearly as rigid and dogmatic as its harsh rhetoric suggested.¹¹ To be sure, Secretary of State John Foster Dulles authorized the purge of several China hands and assigned high profile Asian posts at Foggy Bottom to hard-liners, yet much of this public posturing was not so much an indicator of his personal convictions as it was a shrewd effort to protect his right flank from the feared China Lobby and avoid the political fate of the much-maligned Acheson.¹² And while both President Eisenhower and Dulles valued Taiwan as a bastion of anti-communism in Asia, they were persistently suspicious of what they regarded as Chiang's duplicitous attempts to entangle the U.S. in a fanciful scheme to return to the mainland. After stalling on Taipei's repeated requests for a mutual defense treaty, the administration finally relented in the fall of 1954 during the first offshore islands crisis, yet not without first covertly securing the Generalissimo's pledge to seek American approval of any major assault on the PRC. The Eisenhower team's attempts to contain Chiang's adventurism reflected their wish for a peaceful and stable Asia, which would enable them to concentrate their resources and attention on Europe. It was also an implicit

recognition that Mao's regime, however unsavory, was a fact of life. Eisenhower and Dulles were ultimately willing to acquiesce in a "two Chinas" arrangement, perhaps to be recognized formally by the UN.¹³ Dulles reportedly attempted to recruit the services of Dean Rusk, a former colleague from Truman's State Department, for rallying Congressional Democratic opinion in favor of this option in 1956.¹⁴

A review of the documentary record has also revealed that, contrary to impressions at the time, Eisenhower officials were sensitive to signs of Sino-Soviet tension and sought to exploit these to their advantage. Seen in this light, the administration's reluctance to alter the inherited line of containment and isolation has struck some historians as a deliberate strategic ploy rather than a manifestation of knee-jerk anti-communism. As Dulles explained to one skeptic, "the best way to get a separation between the Soviet Union and Communist China is to keep pressure on Communist China and make its way difficult so long as it is in partnership with Soviet Russia. Tito did not break with Stalin because we were nice to Tito...It seems to me that if China can win our favors while she is also working closely with Moscow, then there is little reason for her to change."¹⁵ According to this logic, a "closed door" policy would increase Beijing's dependency on Moscow for its security. When the Soviets proved unwilling or unable to help, the two allies would become increasingly estranged from one another.¹⁶ Even more intriguingly, Eisenhower periodically voiced misgivings with this approach and wondered whether the Chinese could be lured away from the Soviets by the promise of trade. While political considerations at home precluded any modification of the U.S. economic embargo, the President acquiesced in the decisions of some allies to relax trade restrictions against the mainland.¹⁷

This stark dichotomy between nuanced perceptions and uncompromising official pronouncements was lost on most contemporary observers: domestic critics, exasperated allies, and, most importantly, the Chinese. Scarred by the political bloodletting over the "loss" of China, the Eisenhower administration discerned few advantages in departing from post-Korea China policy and chose to project unambiguous resolve. Yet Eisenhower's militancy cannot be solely

attributed to crude political calculations. The President and the Secretary evidently shared the intense animosity toward Beijing that the traumatic experience of Korea had engendered among most Americans. At the heart of their distaste for the PRC was the sense that Mao and his comrades were implacable revolutionaries who sought to overturn the regional status quo. This image crystallized in the latter half of the 1950's as U.S. decision-makers pursued détente with the Soviet Union, giving rise to unfavorable comparisons between the perceived prudence of their counterparts in the Kremlin and the bellicose Chinese.¹⁸ Eisenhower and Dulles worked to build positions of strength and to "create a regional Asia Pacific structure in which American advantages would be maximized while China's role and opportunities would be dramatically curtailed."¹⁹

Thus a "closed door" policy, besides preserving harmony within the Republican Party, served as a tool of coercion, designed to secure any eventual reconciliation with China strictly on American terms by withholding recognition and trade until the Chinese had learned how to "behave." The consequences of this heavy-handedness were considerable. Eisenhower's brinkmanship during the 1954-55 offshore islands crisis, particularly his threat to utilize America's nuclear arsenal, alarmed China's leadership and played no small role in their decision to acquire the bomb.²⁰ The administration's refusal to compromise its ties to Taiwan most likely contributed to the radical orientation of China's foreign policy in the late 1950's. After the inconclusive outcome of the 1954-55 crisis, Beijing shifted course and announced that it was willing to resolve Taiwan's status by peaceful means. The objective of sowing discord between Washington and Taipei remained unchanged, yet Mao now hoped to elicit U.S. concessions on Taiwan by presenting a more conciliatory face.²¹ The Chairman's disillusionment with this stillborn initiative, most notably the failure to achieve a constructive dialogue with the Americans at the ambassadorial talks launched in Geneva in August 1955, fed his growing opposition to Nikita Khrushchev's pursuit of détente with the U.S. Mao found the idea of Soviet collusion with an adversary that continued to obstruct his dream of reunification both unconscionable and

unsettling.²² Eisenhower bequeathed to his successor a tense Sino-American relationship that was nearly as prone to confrontation as it had been eight years earlier.

As the Kennedy team prepared to assume the reins of power in January 1961, speculation abounded that there would be a concerted attempt to reverse this grim state of affairs.²³ Part of this impression, no doubt, can be attributed to the successful efforts of the charismatic leader and his aides to project a veneer of dynamism and openness to innovation, an image that was only magnified by the seeming drabness of the departing Eisenhower administration. Long after the young President's assassination, his apologists insisted that, despite a record suggesting the contrary, Kennedy would have used a second term in office to forge new approaches to the PRC.²⁴ Expectations of new China initiatives were fuelled as well by the fact that several prominent members of the incoming administration, namely Adlai Stevenson (who was named Ambassador to the UN) and Chester Bowles (appointed as the Undersecretary of State), had expressed impatience with existing strategy toward the mainland. While no less susceptible to alarmist interpretations of Chinese behavior than Eisenhower officials, they contended that an emphasis on isolating Beijing had alienated allied opinion and foreclosed any possibility, however remote, of arriving at a mutual understanding with the PRC. Both believed that the effective containment of China required the cooperation of regional partners, which could only be secured by discarding the more rigid and unpalatable elements of U.S. policy and shifting the blame for Sino-American hostility. With precisely this consideration in mind, Stevenson and Bowles found much to recommend in adopting a "two Chinas" position at the UN (whereby both Beijing and Taipei would be offered a seat).²⁵

John Kennedy was neither politically nor ideologically predisposed toward policy departures as he entered office. For reasons owing to a combination of conviction, the need to distance himself from his father's controversial isolationist views, and a desire to advance his political standing on a national level, JFK had consistently advocated the vigorous containment of

international communism throughout his congressional career.²⁶ As a Democratic congressman in 1949, he immediately recognized the political opportunities that the triumph of the CCP presented to Republicans and the pitfalls associated with appearing “soft” toward the new regime. To insulate himself from the resultant political firestorm, Kennedy joined the throng of those condemning the Truman administration and the State Department’s Sinologists for “selling out” the Nationalists.²⁷ His instinctive caution on China could only have been reinforced by his slender margin of victory in the 1960 presidential election; the new President reportedly carried with him a slip of paper bearing the small plurality of 118, 574 votes as a constant reminder of his limited room for maneuver.²⁸

Moreover, Kennedy had based much of his campaign on the premise that America needed fresh leadership to regain the initiative in the Cold War. While his promises to “pay any price, bear any burden” in stemming further communist advances were stirring enough, they had the unfortunate side effect of narrowing his options in foreign policy, as a premium was placed on demonstrating firmness and resolve abroad.²⁹ Parting words from Eisenhower during the transition in January 1961 may well have contributed significantly to the new administration’s trepidacious approach toward experimentation in the China policy sphere. Whether Eisenhower in fact warned his successor that he would come out of political retirement should the PRC be recognized or seated in the UN remains somewhat uncertain,³⁰ although Kennedy frequently referred to this threat in conversations with foreign leaders.³¹ In later years, his Secretary of State, Dean Rusk, left no doubt that political considerations dominated the President’s thinking on China. He recalled in his memoirs a private meeting in May 1961, during which Kennedy alluded to his “razor-thin victory” as a factor militating against a change in policy. “Fearing the issue might divide Congress and the American people,” Rusk wrote, “he decided the potential benefits of a more realistic China policy didn’t warrant risking a severe political confrontation.”³²

If political timidity constituted a major impediment to policy reform during the Kennedy years, so too did high-level hostility toward the Chinese communists. Indeed, Kennedy’s

concerns about a Chinese menace predated his ascension to the Oval Office. A tour of Southeast Asia in the early 1950's left an indelible impression, alerting him to the region's hunger and poverty, and the opportunities these conditions presented for communist expansion. The young congressman subsequently developed an enduring fascination with counterinsurgency and cultivating non-communist elites.³³ JFK's sense that an East-West struggle for the allegiance of the developing world would be one of the defining foreign policy challenges of his presidency was confirmed by a speech Khrushchev delivered on 6 January 1961, in which the Soviet Premier declared his support for "wars of liberation or national uprisings." Kennedy anticipated a stepped-up communist effort to infiltrate those nations struggling to emerge from colonial rule or that had just attained independence.³⁴

Suspicious of China's role in Asian wars of national liberation were rampant within Kennedy's inner circle.³⁵ The early months of Kennedy's presidency coincided with what U.S. analysts recognized as a period of acute economic upheaval in China, as the country coped with the disasters wrought by Mao's Great Leap Forward.³⁶ Somewhat paradoxically, however, it was judged that the mainland's internal troubles did not diminish the threat it posed to its neighbors. A November 1961 Special National Intelligence Estimate defined the Chinese challenge as primarily politico-psychological in nature, asserting that the country's rulers eschewed overtly confrontational tactics and sought instead to expand their influence abroad "at far less cost and risk through the techniques of Communist political warfare." Rather than engage the Americans or their Asian allies directly, the Chinese were providing materiel assistance and guidance to local communist forces seeking to overthrow Western-backed regimes.³⁷ Believing that these movements took their inspiration from Beijing, Kennedy encouraged his aides to read Mao's writings on revolution and guerrilla warfare.³⁸

Impressions of China were colored as well by evidence of growing Sino-Soviet friction. While the administration's initial assessments of the schism tended to err on the side of caution, officials even at this early stage interpreted the dispute as arising out of clashing worldviews. One

of the intelligence community's first overviews of the global outlook for the Kennedy team predicted that the Kremlin would "stick to its present policy of seeking to win victories without incurring serious risks, and of alternating or combining shows of anger and bellicosity with poses of reasonableness and compromise...[and] a recognition of some areas of common interest with the West." The PRC, by contrast, could be expected to press for "a more militant bloc policy" and oppose moves toward détente.³⁹ According to this view, which had been prevalent among Eisenhower officials, the Soviet Union had evolved into a mature power that accepted the inadmissibility of war in a nuclear age and sought regulated superpower competition.⁴⁰

Haunted by memories of China's intervention in Korea and repelled by the mainland's reversion to a radical line in foreign policy by the end of the 1950's, U.S. policymakers were struck by Mao's apparent indifference to the implications of his bellicose rhetoric. As George Kennan, the eminent Kremlinologist recruited by JFK to be his Ambassador to Yugoslavia, remarked, "We have much more difficult problems with the Chinese than with the Russians. The latter have much more in common with Western civilization."⁴¹ Beijing's uncompromising public posture in early 1961 only exacerbated Kennedy's inherent distaste for China's leadership. It seemed that "the Chinese Communists were just as hostile to the new administration as they were to the old, and were attacking him personally already," he complained to New Zealand's Prime Minister Keith Holyoake. "Their attitude indicated that they did not wish to be on better terms with us but preferred to maintain an intransigent [sic] position."⁴² Kennedy's sense that the PRC represented the more dangerous and unpredictable of the communist giants sharpened over time, to the extent that he hoped to foster the Kremlin's interest in containing its nominal ally.

Kennedy's first sustained engagement with China policy in 1961 illustrated the primacy of domestic political considerations in the decision-making process. Washington's success in isolating the mainland throughout the 1950's rested in large part on mobilizing sufficient international support. This had often been secured by grudgingly tolerating its allies' interests in

establishing economic contacts with Beijing “in exchange for [their] adherence to a policy seen as more vital –that of non-recognition and support of Taiwan in the United Nations.”⁴³ The Eisenhower administration deferred consideration of any motion to unseat Taipei and admit Beijing as the sole Chinese representative by offering a moratorium resolution when the issue came up for debate each year. By 1961, however, the proliferation of newly independent African nations and allied impatience with American rigidity had rendered this approach almost untenable.⁴⁴ Rusk, Stevenson, and Bowles recognized the pressing need for a shift in tactics if Taiwan was to retain its UN membership.⁴⁵

One of the more ambitious efforts to provide a strategic rationale for a new policy on Chinese representation came from Robert Komer, a senior aide to National Security Adviser McGeorge Bundy. Like most officials in the new administration, Komer did not foresee any relaxation of Sino-American hostility in the near term; Beijing’s inherent need for an external bogeyman around which to rally domestic support for the regime would continue to stand as the primary obstacle to a new era in relations. All the more reason, then, for softening the harsher edges of America’s posture toward China. Komer pinpointed Washington’s reliance on the moratorium procedure as a decidedly contentious matter among allied capitals, who for long had accepted the PRC as a legitimate political entity deserving of UN membership. Demonstrating moderation on this question would prove particularly useful in appeasing sentiment in India and Japan, whose cooperation was deemed critical for the long-term containment of China.⁴⁶ As Komer framed the stakes for Kennedy, adopting a “two Chinas” stance was “not just one of our acceding to the inevitable...but of using greater flexibility on the UN issue to secure greater Free World support for preserving the GRC [Government of the Republic of China –Taiwan].”⁴⁷

The President’s concerns were more parochial. He confided to British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan that “it would be best from our standpoint if Red China were not admitted this year...from a purely domestic political point of view it did not look good for a new administration to have allowed Chinese Communist admission so soon.” The problem, as he saw

it, was to “find a formula for keeping them from wanting to get in.”⁴⁸ Rusk addressed the latter point in a memorandum he prepared for Kennedy at the end of May. Arguing that the moratorium was no longer a viable option and that a majority in the General Assembly would vote to admit Beijing over Taipei as the occupant of a single China seat if presented with such a stark choice, the Secretary advanced “two Chinas” as a solution to the administration’s problem. It would most likely “result in the continued exclusion of the Chinese Communists[,] who have been strongly opposed to a ‘Two Chinas’ concept. It should also serve to shift the onus for their exclusion [from the UN] to the Chinese Communists themselves.”⁴⁹ Betraying his persistent fears of a domestic backlash, Kennedy tentatively endorsed the idea, but insisted that the U.S. “should not take the lead” in guiding such a motion through the UN and that “a good discussion with key political figures in the U.S.” was required before a final decision could be made. He worried that an aggressive push for the measure could “adversely affect the foreign aid bill and other objectives of his Administration.”⁵⁰

Kennedy’s lukewarm support for a “two Chinas” approach was soon shaken by his reading of domestic and international developments in the summer of 1961. There seemed to be little indication that U.S. acquiescence in such a formula would receive support at home. Rumors of an impending change in UN policy yielded a unanimous Senate resolution opposing any variant of “two Chinas.”⁵¹ Public opinion was barely more receptive; a Gallup poll taken in September revealed a majority of 65 percent against the PRC’s admission to the world body, with only 18 percent in favor.⁵² Moreover, deliberations over Chinese representation occurred against the backdrop of a particularly troubling period for Kennedy’s foreign policy leadership. The humiliating failure at the Bay of Pigs, the retreat in Laos, Khrushchev’s harsh treatment of the President at the Vienna summit, and his brandishing of the Berlin ultimatum all instilled in Kennedy an acute aversion to another diplomatic debacle. In this context, he was concerned that U.S. acquiescence in a move to seat Beijing, even if it was expected to fail and prolong the status quo in the UN, might convey an image of weakness. “Such a success for the Communists –when

we face them in Southeast Asia and Berlin,” he remarked, “would give impetus to their prestige at a difficult and important time for us. It would be a very damaging blow to United States prestige.”⁵³ Nor could discordant noises from Taipei be ignored. Bundy reported to JFK in early July that “the Chinese Nationalists are more disturbed about their relation to the U.S. than at any time in the past five years.” In part the product of Taiwan’s bias toward presumably friendlier Republicans, Bundy noted that suspicions had also been stirred by the possibility of U.S. support for a “two Chinas” resolution. Ominously, he speculated that Chiang’s disenchantment could trigger “dangerous adventures...up to and including a suicidal landing on the mainland.”⁵⁴

Attention soon turned to finding a less unpalatable alternative. At a White House meeting in late July, the President and his senior aides decided to push for an “important question” formula, which would raise the bar substantially higher for the mainland’s admission to the UN by requiring a two-thirds majority vote in the General Assembly.⁵⁵ The motion passed by a comfortable margin in December. Even more momentous was Chiang’s success in securing from Kennedy a secret pledge to use the American veto if necessary to prevent Beijing’s entry.⁵⁶ JFK’s willingness to grant what his predecessor had refused stemmed from the need to discourage the Generalissimo from sabotaging Outer Mongolia’s admission to the UN, a move which would have triggered similar Soviet action against Mauritania’s simultaneous bid for membership and a wave of French African resentment against the Nationalists.⁵⁷

Kennedy’s ambivalent flirtation with “two Chinas,” his opting for the “important question” measure, and the secret veto pledge were all determined by the same factor that had poisoned Sino-American relations for over a decade: a fierce resistance to compromising the alliance with Taipei. Agitation for a change in UN tactics had been propelled only by the sense that Taiwan’s hold on the China seat could no longer be secured by traditional methods. It was assumed by the President and his aides that “two Chinas” would be spurned by Beijing, thereby safeguarding Taiwan’s status and shifting the blame for the mainland’s isolation away from the U.S. In short, any contemplated departures from long-standing China policy at this time were, as

Noam Kochavi has observed, “undertaken chiefly for reasons other than seeking to bring about a rapprochement with the PRC.”⁵⁸ Kennedy’s deference to perceived public sentiment and his persistent hostility to Mao’s regime, so fundamental to his China mindset at the outset of his presidency, derailed even this defensive initiative and would continue to define the parameters of his China policy.

A horrific famine on the mainland, largely induced by the Great Leap’s utopian effort to expedite China’s economic development through mass mobilization, introduced new strains into the Kennedy team’s already prickly relationship with Taipei and was occasion for further consideration of a new approach to Beijing. Reports of China’s domestic crisis, which peaked in 1960-61, only whetted Chiang’s appetite for a military landing across the Taiwan Strait. In separate meetings with Roger Hilsman, director of State’s bureau of Intelligence and Research (INR), and Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs Averell Harriman in March 1962, he conveyed his impression that recent events afforded a unique opportunity to exploit popular discontent with the CCP and advance his dream of reunification. The Generalissimo assured Hilsman that the administration’s role in a military operation need not be substantial, asking only for its “tacit consent to this course of action plus covert logistic support.”⁵⁹ U.S. officials were hardly convinced. Intelligence reports agreed that mass suffering and resentment were widespread on the mainland, yet even these miserable conditions were not seen as conducive to a GRC attack or a popular rebellion; the regime’s monopoly on the country’s instruments of coercion would enable it to ride through the current storm with little threat to its rule.⁶⁰

Haunted by the Bay of Pigs fiasco, Kennedy harbored no thoughts of acquiescing, let alone participating, in any adventure to overthrow the PRC. Like Truman and Eisenhower, JFK’s unstinting political and diplomatic solidarity with Taiwan did not translate into any unqualified backing for its wilder ambitions. Yet Chiang’s perceived capriciousness seemed to dictate an ambiguous reply from the administration, lest an outright refusal of his request triggered an

irrational response.⁶¹ During a meeting with Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) Director John McCone, the President inquired “what Chiang would do if he were told flatly that the United States would not support him in any military operation against the Mainland. It was agreed that Chiang might then ‘go it alone.’ ”⁶² Accordingly, the White House directed its envoys to handle the Generalissimo’s probes evasively, gently reminding him to honor his obligations to consult with the U.S. before opting for an attack.⁶³

The administration’s studied ambiguity became increasingly difficult to sustain, as Beijing grew alarmed over Taiwan’s thinly veiled intentions. In June 1962, more than 100 000 Chinese troops were deployed to the coast to prepare for the contingency of a Nationalist assault. While a vocal minority of U.S. officials interpreted the maneuver as a possible prelude to a Chinese strike on the offshore islands, Kennedy’s inner circle concluded that Mao’s actions were primarily defensive.⁶⁴ They determined that defusing yet another crisis in the Taiwan Strait depended, as it had before, on alerting the PRC’s leadership to America’s readiness to repel aggression against Taiwan or its offshore possessions. More importantly, however, the Kennedy team also moved to disabuse China of its impression of U.S. hostility by utilizing a variety of diplomatic channels at their disposal. Through the Soviets and British, Washington signalled that it had no intention of supporting an attack on the mainland.⁶⁵ Ambassador John Moors Cabot relayed the same message to the Chinese during an exchange at the ongoing ambassadorial talks in Warsaw, highlighting the significance of this forum as a tool of crisis management.⁶⁶

A nuanced reading of Beijing’s intentions and sensitivity to its security concerns contributed handsomely to the administration’s resolution of the affair. Some officials interpreted China’s relatively prudent conduct during the brief crisis as evidence that the regime had been chastened by the severe economic fallout from the Great Leap. Hilsman speculated in July 1962 that these conditions “may well encourage it to focus on domestic concerns and contribute to the adoption of a more moderate line in foreign policy during the 1960’s.”⁶⁷ There was in fact some indication that elements of the Chinese hierarchy supported such a course. In a conversation with

a senior British diplomat that same month, the contents of which were forwarded to Washington, Foreign Minister Chen Yi explained that his government “wants international peace so that it may be left free to get on with the vast tasks of improving the people’s standard of living and of national development...since they must mobilize all their resources for internal development, they do not want to get involved in any wars, big or small.”⁶⁸ Chen’s remarks were foreshadowed the previous summer by Ambassador Wang Bingnan in Warsaw, when a conciliatory appeal for a *modus vivendi* of sorts was issued to his American counterpart.⁶⁹ U.S. analysts had viewed this overture with some suspicion, thinking it nothing more than a public relations ploy or perhaps another effort to exacerbate tensions between Washington and Taipei.⁷⁰ Rusk authorized the embassy in Warsaw to reciprocate Wang’s sentiment, yet the refusal of either side to discuss concessions over Taiwan failed to produce a breakthrough.⁷¹

Nevertheless, these hints of Chinese moderation were seized on by a handful of Kennedy officials as an opportunity for modifying America’s economic embargo against the PRC. The most persistent members of this camp were Chester Bowles and Walt Rostow, who became head of State’s Policy Planning Council (PPC) in November 1961 after briefly serving as Bundy’s deputy. While they pressed their case without any apparent coordination, both shared “a rather expansive sense of China’s susceptibility to American power and solution.”⁷² The core of their argument was that Beijing’s grave troubles, more specifically its dire shortage of food, could be used as a source of U.S. leverage over Chinese behavior. Despite “Chicom [Chinese Communist] verbal toughness,” Rostow wrote the President, “they are in such bad trouble at home...that they may be seeking a limited accommodation with the West.” He suggested that the administration exploit its position of strength and consider offering grain to the mainland in exchange for a curtailment of its subversive activity in Laos and Vietnam.⁷³

A similar recommendation for lifting restrictions on the sale of foodstuffs and medicines appeared in a major October 1961 study authored by Edward Rice, a mid-level China hand at the PPC who had somewhat miraculously emerged unscathed from the McCarthyite purges of the

1950's. Unlike Bowles and Rostow, he believed America's capacity for shaping events in China was limited, yet the vast array of policy proposals outlined in his report were no less ambitious and were a source of inspiration to sympathizers throughout the administration.⁷⁴ Rice took as his starting point the idea that "the bulk of our China policy...is related not to the mainland directly but to measures for the support and defense of the Free World countries and areas around China's periphery." By focusing solely on containment and isolation, previous administrations had made "no perceptible progress toward a Communist China with which we can live." In canvassing policy options, Rice rejected both a course of "maximum pressure," which promised only to further estrange the U.S. from world opinion without effecting a commensurate decline in Chinese power, and one of "accommodation," which would be tantamount to an admission of defeat in a vital region of the world.

The most innovative feature of his call for a "new look" was the contention that demonstrating U.S. flexibility and openness toward Beijing, besides tarring the Chinese in the eyes of the world with the charge of obstinacy (a consideration which had initially recommended "two Chinas" to JFK), held out the possibility of appealing to younger, pragmatic elements of China's ruling circle who had become accustomed to American hostility. The means by which long-term reconciliation with a new generation of leaders could be set in motion read like a shopping list of items that would be deliberated for the duration of the decade: the permission of trade in non-strategic goods, removal of the passport ban, avoidance of unnecessary provocations, disarmament talks, enhanced dialogue in Warsaw, and closer examination of the conditions under which non-recognition and Chinese exclusion from the UN could be reassessed.⁷⁵

The advocates of food relief for China in 1961 were hampered by their minimal access to Kennedy or his most trusted aides. The senior rank of both Bowles and Rostow belied their inconsiderable influence on the foreign policymaking process and lack of rapport with their superiors.⁷⁶ When an idea for providing wheat to the PRC through Burmese intermediaries came up for discussion in November, it was struck down by the same considerations that had thwarted

a new approach to Chinese representation. A State Department cable approved by Rusk asserted that the proposal was “bound to create an extremely sensitive political problem for this country.” Furthermore, any food assistance was simply out of the question when Beijing appeared to be “splitting even from Moscow in pursuance of a more aggressive policy, and when our own contacts with the Chinese Communist authorities show no indication or desire on their part to lessen the threat or reduce tensions” in Southeast Asia.⁷⁷ A meeting of National Security Council (NSC) staffers similarly dismissed any food program as too “politically risky.”⁷⁸ A brief paper drafted by State’s INR bureau in January 1962 highlighted the strategic drawbacks associated with any change in the economic embargo. It advised against an initiative at this time, as assistance at a moment of great peril for China might spare the regime from making difficult choices, such as diverting its expenditures from heavy industry and armaments to agriculture and restricting its regional activism. The implication here was that Chinese moderation would be best brought about by letting the country stew in its own juice.⁷⁹

Ironically, Bowles and Rostow’s cause was given something of a lease on life after a bureaucratic purge in November 1961 (the so-called “Thanksgiving Day Massacre”), of which they were the primary victims, Bowles losing the second most powerful post at Foggy Bottom for an ineffectual role as a roving Ambassador and Rostow moving from the White House to the PPC.⁸⁰ With some consequence for China policy, one beneficiary of this changing of the guard was Averell Harriman, the formidable Washington power broker who had steadily gained Kennedy’s trust. Elevated to head of the Far East bureau, he recruited Edward Rice as one of his deputies, thereby ensuring that revisionist thinking would get a fair hearing.⁸¹ Indeed, Rice’s appeal for cultivating more accommodating Chinese elites evidently resonated more among senior policymakers as they debated the merits of food assistance in the spring of 1962 than the Bowles-Rostow thesis that Chinese subversion could be tamed by the offer of food relief. By early April, general agreement within the State Department had been reached on using the Warsaw channel to inform the Chinese that Washington was willing to reconsider its embargo

against the shipment of food grains if adequate supplies could not be secured elsewhere.⁸² Harriman found much to recommend in the idea, as “Evidence that the US would be willing to play a part in moving our relationship away from one of implacable mutual hostility might strengthen the hand of any elements [in China] which might favor doing so, now or later.”⁸³ This theme figured prominently in a briefing paper used by Rusk to discuss the subject with the President on 29 May.⁸⁴

While Bowles’ numerous memoranda on the advantages of food for China ensured that Kennedy had been exposed to this view, his own thoughts are difficult to trace. He may well have been favorably influenced by Michael Forrestal, who was appointed as an Asian hand on the NSC staff in early 1962. Forrestal’s cordial relationship with both Kennedy and Harriman effectively “eased communications” between the Oval Office and the Far East bureau.⁸⁵ One may surmise that JFK acquiesced in State’s proposal, as the embassy in Warsaw was alerted the day after his meeting with the Secretary that it might be instructed soon to raise the offer of food in a “normal and low-key manner” (thereby alleviating any Chinese suspicions that it was a propaganda ploy) at a future ambassador’s session.⁸⁶

This bridge building gesture, the first of Kennedy’s presidency, was soon overtaken by a confluence of external events. The sudden escalation of tensions in the Taiwan Strait in June distracted the attention of U.S. decision-makers.⁸⁷ The sense that the moment might be ripe for sending a signal to certain factions of the CCP’s hierarchy gave way to an acute hardening of attitudes. An especially significant catalyst for this shift in perception was China’s mounting conflict with India, a country whose fate many in Washington, including the President, assumed would be decisive in determining the allegiance of much of the developing world.⁸⁸ Only a few weeks after endorsing the idea, Rusk doubted “how food from outside could have much effect on the general situation in China” and thought it would be “essential...to have some indication from the Chinese communists that they were relaxing their tactics of pressure on India and elsewhere in order to get it through the Senate.”⁸⁹ When a brief Sino-Indian war erupted in October, the

Kennedy team's most alarmist preconceptions about China's belligerent and aggressive tendencies were corroborated. William Bundy, then working in the Pentagon, recalled the widespread impression, New Delhi's share of blame for the conflict notwithstanding, that "China was thrusting to become the dominant power in the area, that it had now shown considerable cohesion and capacity for sophisticated pressure-type action...the central policy conclusion was reached...that it was more than ever necessary to 'contain' Peking as a real threat."⁹⁰

While the mainland's role in the simultaneous Cuban missile crisis was much less direct, senior U.S. officials interpreted Beijing's vitriolic condemnation of Khrushchev for "capitulationism" in removing Soviet missiles from the island as further evidence of its recklessness. Some came to believe that the Kremlin had been goaded into action in the Caribbean by the militant influence of the Chinese.⁹¹ These events made an indelible impression on Kennedy, who contrasted the Soviets' ultimate willingness to step away from the brink with China's seeming disregard for the utility of international compromise. "We would be far worse off," he concluded, "if the Chinese dominated the Communist movement, because they believe in war as a means of bringing about the Communist world."⁹²

This resurgence of high-level animosity toward the PRC, following a brief reprieve occasioned by the imperative of conflict management in the Taiwan Strait and by the hope of nurturing potentially moderate factions disenchanted with Mao's failed Great Leap, not only relegated China policy reform to the backburner. It also spurred the President's obsession with pre-empting the mainland's acquisition of nuclear weaponry, a national security priority for which he was willing to work in concert with Moscow.

The notion of a Soviet-American identity of interests in checking Chinese ambitions had in fact been an article of faith for many U.S. officials since the advent of the Kennedy administration. Barely settled into office, two of Kennedy's most senior advisers on Soviet affairs, George Kennan and Llewellyn Thompson, pressed him to develop relations with Moscow

as a means of exacerbating Sino-Soviet tensions and encouraging the Kremlin's apparent drift from Beijing's hard-line. This same logic was repeated in several memoranda prepared for the President in the weeks leading up to his Vienna meeting with Khrushchev in June 1961.⁹³ The intelligence community agreed that the USSR was by far the more moderate and amenable of the two communist countries. A lengthy CIA report in April documented the steady decline in Sino-Soviet relations since the 1950's, attributing this major development in large part to sharp differences over how best to confront the U.S. Khrushchev's groping for détente with Washington had aroused Chinese suspicions of a superpower condominium working against their interests and ran counter to their insistence on a revolutionary offensive. The PRC's "adventurism," in turn, was viewed with some concern by the Soviets, who were decidedly reluctant to be drawn into unwanted conflicts. Despite the pressures straining the communist alliance, however, this report and others stopped short of predicting a definitive rupture. While Sino-Soviet relations would remain cool and at times hostile for the foreseeable future, competition with the West mandated at least some semblance of cooperation.⁹⁴ Even as they closely followed the troubles plaguing the Sino-Soviet bloc, the Kennedy team was initially reluctant to publicly acknowledge the existence of a split or to tilt decisively in favor of either side, a caution borne out of uncertainty over the durability of the feud and apprehension that any American action might unwittingly prompt a reconciliation.⁹⁵

The administration's passivity was increasingly challenged as new evidence pointed to an aggravation of the dispute. A January 1962 meeting of State Department principals, presided over by Rusk, provided one of the first forums for sustained discussion of the topic. The participants concurred that Moscow and Beijing had reached an impasse, which seemed to offer long-term advantages for the U.S., yet consideration of an appropriate response was deferred.⁹⁶ An impetus to policy revision came with a new National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) produced the following month. Discarding the hedged analysis that had hitherto dominated official deliberation, it rather starkly concluded that "Sino-Soviet relations are in a critical phase just short of an acknowledged

and definitive split. There is no longer much chance of a fundamental resolution of differences...the chances that such a split can be avoided during 1962 are no better than even.”⁹⁷ Embracing this thinking, Rostow’s PPC responded with a detailed list of recommendations. Asserting that there was no longer any need to “inhibit ourselves from action because of fear of driving Moscow and Peiping together,” the paper covered familiar ground, calling for intensified efforts to search for “areas of overlapping interest” with the Kremlin, specifically the containment of China’s nuclear program and its subversive activity in Southeast Asia. More innovatively, it advocated a two-pronged strategy toward the PRC, combining firm declarations and military pressures to deter Chinese aggression with a fresh focus on establishing “new lines of communication” with the mainland. The latter would be undertaken in the hope that Beijing might be “interested in bettering its relations with the West so as to be independent of bloc pressures” and with an eye as well to “moderating the attitudes of the post-Mao generation of Chinese Communist leaders.”⁹⁸

As on the issue of food relief, however, Rostow’s was a minority view. A more influential school of thought, articulated by the administration’s senior Kremlinologists (Kennan, Thompson, Charles Bohlen), held that February’s NIE had underestimated the potential for a temporary accommodation between the two communist powers and overestimated America’s ability to influence the relationship; “in view of the insufficiency of our knowledge of the real factors in operation between these countries,” Bohlen cautioned, “we certainly should not predicate any policy on the fact of the Chinese-Soviet dispute.”⁹⁹ Rusk evidently agreed. He shelved Rostow’s proposals, save for a modest idea to psychologically exploit the conflict via the dissemination of information concerning its development.¹⁰⁰

Since assuming office, Kennedy had taken a keen personal interest in tracking Sino-Soviet relations.¹⁰¹ He tended to side with those who favored a discreet public posture, thinking it “unwise for the United States to talk about a matter over which we have only limited control.”¹⁰² Privately, however, the President was less impartial and neutral, ultimately hopeful

that he could cultivate a mutual Soviet-American interest in thwarting China's nuclear program. When he raised the prospect of a nuclear PRC during a tense session with Khrushchev in Vienna, however, he was rebuffed.¹⁰³ The Soviet leader's reticence appeared to confirm the view that Moscow was unwilling to imperil its leadership of the international communist movement for the sake of acting in collusion with the "imperialists" against Beijing. Even as intelligence reports pointed to an intensification of the Sino-Soviet rivalry in the aftermath of the Cuban missile crisis,¹⁰⁴ several officials opined that the Kremlin's sensitivity to China's stinging indictment of "peaceful co-existence," which was increasingly resonating among Asian communist parties, would continue to tie its hands and complicate East-West dialogue on a host of issues.¹⁰⁵

Kennedy does not seem to have been discouraged by this advice. Having just barely averted a nuclear catastrophe in the Caribbean, he believed that future crises could best be contained by reining in the arms race and discouraging the efforts of other powers to acquire weapons of mass destruction.¹⁰⁶ His push for Soviet-American détente in 1963, culminating in the signing of the Limited Test Ban Treaty in August, was determined in no small part by mounting concerns over the PRC's nuclear program. In January 1963, McGeorge Bundy asked McCone for a new estimate on China's nuclear progress, explaining that "the President was of a mind that nuclear weapons in the hands of the Chinese Communists would so upset the world political scene it would be intolerable to the United States and to the West."¹⁰⁷ JFK's fear of a nuclear China was intense and long-standing.¹⁰⁸ His interest in obstructing or postponing this development sprang from both a general aversion to nuclear proliferation and, more importantly, animosity toward Mao's regime. Expounding on the nature of this threat during a press conference, he drew attention to a "government [that] is not only Stalinist in its internal actions, but also has called for war, international war, in order to advance the final success of the Communist cause...And then you introduce into that mix, nuclear weapons." The potential acquisition of these weapons by an inherently bellicose leadership amounted to "a more

dangerous situation than any we faced since the end of the Second [World] War, because the Russians pursued in most cases their ambitions with some caution.”¹⁰⁹

Kennedy’s apparent willingness to contemplate military action against China’s nuclear facilities, including the possibility of a joint Soviet-American strike, remains a point of controversy. Some historians and former aides have insisted that the President merely engaged in “speculative contingency planning” and was not irrevocably committed to the radical pre-emptive option.¹¹⁰ Nevertheless, JFK’s sustained consideration of this alternative (even if speculative) provides much insight into his China mindset during his last year in office, his perceptions of Sino-Soviet differences, and how he hoped to exploit these to America’s strategic advantage. He had all of this mind when he pressed for the conclusion of a test ban agreement with Moscow during a January 1963 meeting of the NSC. “Our primary purpose in trying to get a treaty with Russia is to halt or delay the development of an atomic capability by the Chinese Communists,” he explained. He thought this feasible since “the Russians are believed to be as concerned about [this] as we are.”¹¹¹ The considerable faith invested in a treaty rested not so much on the expectation that Beijing would willingly accede to its terms as on the hope that the Kremlin could be recruited as a partner in applying pressure on the mainland to deist from its nuclear ambitions.¹¹²

Kennedy evidently believed that this pressure could assume any number of forms: political, economic, and, if necessary, military. He hinted at the latter when he personally instructed Harriman, his envoy to the Moscow test ban talks that started in July, to “elicit Khrushchev’s view of [the] means of limiting or preventing Chinese nuclear development and his willingness to take Soviet action or to accept US action aimed in this direction.”¹¹³ Harriman likely did not explicitly raise the topic of a joint strike, Soviet acquiescence in a U.S. attack, or coordinated pressure of another sort; once the Soviet leader refused to concede concern over the prospect of a nuclear China, even after gentle prodding from his American interlocutor, the issue had been settled.¹¹⁴ While a Soviet-American initiative seemed to have been taken off the table,

the option of unilateral U.S. action against the mainland's facilities was still being considered at the time of JFK's assassination and was one of many outstanding issues that would have to be resolved by his successor.¹¹⁵

High-level enmity toward the PRC in 1963 co-existed, as it had throughout the Kennedy presidency, with pressure from below for a reappraisal of attitudes. Just as Harriman's appointment to State's Far Eastern bureau in November 1961 had lent considerable momentum to the administration's discussion of a food initiative, the promotion of Roger Hilsman to the same post in April 1963 spurred a renewed outburst of pro-reform sentiment in government circles.¹¹⁶ Brash and impudent, the West Point graduate ruffled the feathers of many, with the notable exception of Kennedy, with whom he shared a fascination with counterinsurgency.¹¹⁷ Striking a dissonant note, Hilsman assumed his new role with a nuanced reading of Chinese intentions and capabilities. He surmised that Beijing's warlike oratory belied tactical caution and that its threat to U.S. security interests had been exaggerated. The decision to attack India, for example, had been in part a "rational" reaction to New Delhi's provocative construction of military posts on its border. Criticism of Khrushchev's move to remove the missiles from Cuba had arisen from "an opportunity...to assault the Soviets for what Peiping considered a clumsy handling of the crisis" and was therefore not an accurate indicator of "what the Chinese would themselves have done under similar circumstances." Indeed, Hilsman believed that China's instinctive wariness of rash military action, which had for long been conditioned by fear of an American reply, would only be strengthened over time by doubts about Soviet backing and by the overriding need to focus on economic reconstruction at home.¹¹⁸ Intelligence analysts generally affirmed this image of a risk-averse China, particularly when speculation that Beijing might lash out in reaction to its growing isolation following the successful test ban talks in Moscow was convincingly dismissed.¹¹⁹ Similarly calm assessments of the implications of a Chinese nuclear test appeared late in Kennedy's tenure and helped shape the Johnson team's handling of this issue.¹²⁰

Hilsman's sober reflection on the Chinese challenge fed his interest in revising America's traditional approach to the mainland. He came to favor a "policy of contact as well as containment: contact to break down the Chinese isolation and containment to prevent any further Communist aggression." Ultimately an emphasis on the former would "hasten the changes which domestic economic pressures and international problems will force on Peiping."¹²¹ This thinking was strongly influenced by a core of State Department China hands, men such as James Thomson (who had served as an aide to Bowles before moving to the Far Eastern bureau) and Marshall Green (the Consul General in Hong Kong), who held that there was a compelling short- and long-term rationale for projecting moderation toward the PRC. While it was conceded that gestures of goodwill would most likely fail to elicit a positive Chinese reply, they would at minimum serve the purpose of burnishing America's peaceful image. Reviving an idea that had been discussed in Edward Rice's October 1961 paper, these officials also recommended that attempts be made to encourage a more favorable impression of the U.S. among those younger leaders, presumably disillusioned with the excesses of Maoism, who would succeed the Chairman and his comrades.¹²² Only by "broadening as far as possible our present tenuous lines of communication into Communist China," Green posited, could Washington hope "to counteract Peiping's hate campaign [against the U.S.], to establish a better long-range basis for rapprochement, and to abet already discernible tendencies toward moderation and realism within certain elements of the Chinese Communist bureaucracy".¹²³ Hilsman departed from the China "doves" in placing the burden on Beijing for an improvement in relations,¹²⁴ yet the policy review undertaken at his direction firmly ensconced him within the reform camp. He alerted his superiors to the dearth of Chinese expertise at Foggy Bottom and successfully lobbied for the creation of an Office of Asian Communist Affairs (ACA) in the Far Eastern bureau.¹²⁵ By late 1963, proposals for a relaxation of trade and travel restrictions, and for China's inclusion in disarmament talks had been prepared.¹²⁶

The most notable product of this bureaucratic ferment was a landmark speech delivered by the Assistant Secretary on 13 December. While carefully worded, paying due lip service to popular images of an expansionist China and offering a rationale for the continuation of its containment, the address was path-breaking in two respects. First, in a highly significant symbolic gesture, Hilsman explicitly acknowledged what policymakers had for long implicitly recognized, that the communist regime on the mainland was not a passing phenomenon. Second, reference was made to a “second echelon” of Chinese leaders possibly inclined to rapprochement with the outside world. With this faction in mind, he called for an “Open Door” policy based on “strength and firmness, accompanied by a constant readiness to negotiate.” By announcing an American willingness to reciprocate good behavior, he hoped to alert Mao’s successors to “the prospect that the way back into the community of man is not closed.”¹²⁷ As such, the speech represented a subtle critique of ongoing efforts to isolate the PRC from the world community. Explaining his motives in a subsequent letter to Adlai Stevenson, Hilsman asserted that there was a need to justify the divergence in U.S. relations with the major communist powers. Détente with the Soviets, he reasoned, had arisen from both U.S. resolve in facing down the Kremlin and an openness to responding in kind to signs of Soviet moderation. His hope was that, in signalling the administration’s readiness to reward prudent Chinese conduct, a similar state of affairs could emerge with the mainland.¹²⁸

Had Kennedy been converted to this embryonic line of “containment without isolation” on the eve of his death? Those answering in the affirmative have cited an oft-quoted remark of the President’s at his last press conference: “When the Red Chinese indicate a desire to live at peace with the United States, with other countries surrounding it, then quite obviously the United States would reappraise its policies. We are not wedded to a policy of hostility to Red China.”¹²⁹ This interpretation, of course, falls short on several fronts. It exaggerates the significance of a policy review that, by late 1963, had not advanced beyond the mid-ranks of the bureaucracy.¹³⁰ Moreover, it attributes to Kennedy a view for which there is no empirical evidence; given his

propensity for confidentiality and off the record discussions, it may well never be known whether he had been kept fully abreast of Hilsman's project or, if he had, where his sympathies lay. The most authoritative account of JFK's China record, sensibly, does not arrive at any firm conclusions as to his disposition in the fall of 1963.¹³¹ Yet if the dynamics that had clearly prevailed through the summer –a conservative reading of his political mandate in general and of public attitudes toward the mainland in particular, a sense that the extension of any olive branch would only be spurned by Beijing, and a pronounced concern about China's behavior and the progress of its nuclear development –are to be taken as any guide, then one could plausibly surmise that the President was not prepared to launch new China initiatives, most certainly not before the 1964 election. There appears to have been little of the ambiguity in the China policy sphere that characterized most other aspects of John Kennedy's legacy.

The scarcity of policy innovation and continued deadlock between Washington and Beijing notwithstanding, it does not follow that the Kennedy years marked an inconsequential or even stagnant phase in the Sino-American relationship. A particularly noteworthy theme that emerges from an overview of this period is the sustained agitation for new approaches to the mainland voiced by several Kennedy officials. The rationale employed to advance their case varied. Perhaps the most common refrain, to which even Kennedy occasionally subscribed (as when he conditionally accepted a switch to "two Chinas" and appeared to signal his approval of a food initiative), was that the U.S. needed to divest itself of much of the heavy baggage associated with the "isolation" component of its China policy and thereby deflect the blame for continued Sino-American friction. By evincing an openness to expanding contacts with Beijing, and exposing the mainland's rigidity in the process, Washington could stem the loss of international support for Taiwan and bolster its justification for containing the PRC.

The more enthusiastic advocates of policy reform certainly agreed with this defensive logic, yet they also maintained that America could favorably influence China's orientation. The

most ambitious reformers (Bowles, Rostow) harbored what were surely misplaced hopes that the country's expansionist designs could be reined in by the offer of American largesse, a grandiose idea that won few converts and was largely abandoned even by its most vociferous proponents in the aftermath of events in India and Cuba.¹³² A more modest and enduring school of thought (Hilsman, Rice, Green, Thomson) asserted that the first generation of Chinese revolutionaries in power, while more cautious and risk-averse than prevailing assumptions among U.S. decision-makers allowed, were inherently opposed to accommodation with Washington. Long-term trends in China, however, offered reason for hope. A younger faction of leaders, more pragmatically inclined to focusing their energies on consolidating political and economic order at home, would eventually assume responsibility. Relaxing the more obdurate and antiquated aspects of U.S. policy, particularly the trade and travel embargo, would signal restraint to these elements and possibly set the stage for a new era in Sino-American relations. In short, as international acceptance of the PRC gathered steam and conditions on the mainland evolved, so too did attitudes and perceptions in U.S. government circles. Both what might be called the "defensive" and "activist" rationales for policy revision, having taken root in the early 1960's, would be pressed with greater frequency during Lyndon Johnson's presidency.

The short-term legacy of Kennedy's antagonistic dealings with China was, of course, decidedly negative. Recent literature has confirmed that Beijing bore its fair share of blame for the Sino-American impasse at this time. JFK's tenure in office coincided with a period of profound anxiety for Mao, whose fears of growing collaboration between Moscow and Washington were overshadowed only by the sense that the revolution at home had been hijacked by Soviet-style revisionism. As the Chairman turned his attention to turning aside the threat of capitalist restoration, he saw a radical line in foreign policy as a natural complement to this project and a catalyst for domestic mobilization.¹³³ Maoist rhetoric, particularly the espousal of revolutionary upheaval throughout the Afro-Asian world and hostility toward Moscow's search for "peaceful co-existence" with the West, made a deep impression on Kennedy. It served only to

confirm the deeply-ingrained image of a militant, expansionist China with no regard for American conceptions of international order that he had harbored before occupying the Oval Office. It is doubtful he ever parted from this preconception; its most dramatic manifestation came late in his presidency as he and his most senior advisers seriously considered taking action to disrupt the PRC's nuclear program. Kennedy's steady resistance to new approaches to the mainland, cultivation of détente with the Soviets, and staunch diplomatic solidarity with Taiwan undoubtedly unnerved his Chinese counterparts and contributed to their growing sense of encirclement. Camelot's record also cast an imposing shadow for an insecure successor set on hewing as close as possible to the inherited line in foreign affairs.

Holes in the Dam: French Recognition and the Chinese Nuclear Test, 1963-1964

When Lyndon Johnson unexpectedly inherited the presidency in November 1963, a multitude of domestic and foreign items crowded his agenda. China policy, for which he had evinced minimal interest throughout his long political career, was not one of them. LBJ approached foreign affairs in general and Asian communism in particular with some trepidation, fearful that a misstep in this arena could potentially sap his domestic standing and imperil the passage of his legislative program. It was therefore ironic that Johnson's first year in power coincided with a momentous change in the PRC's international relationships. Both France's recognition of Beijing and China's nuclear test exposed the surreality of ostracizing the world's most populous nation, and brought forth a torrent of calls from home and abroad for the new administration to revise America's traditional approach to the PRC. Johnson's reaction to these developments provides considerable insight into his China mindset and modus operandi as a foreign policy leader in the early stages of his presidency. In stark contrast to his predecessor, Johnson displayed neither overt concern over the prospect of a nuclear China nor sustained interest in the option of a military strike against Beijing's facilities. At the same time, however, he was content to let the foreign affairs team bequeathed by Kennedy handle the diplomatic response to China's growing international stature while he focused on more pressing concerns. Thus despite a moderating presence in the Oval Office, there was no commensurate shift in America's posture toward the mainland.

By the time he assumed the reins of the presidency in November 1963, Johnson held deeply ingrained impressions of the world which governed his approach to foreign affairs in general and his views of China in particular. As with so many of his generation, the "lessons" of Munich left an indelible mark. From the failure of the Western democracies to deter fascist

aggression in the 1930's, Johnson acquired the conviction that America had an indispensable role to play in ensuring world peace and security, that it had to maintain a high standard of military preparedness, and that it had to make its determination to protect its far-flung interests credible to foe and friend alike.¹ LBJ's overriding preoccupation with credibility stemmed from the belief that tests of American resolve had to be successfully met and aggressive conduct decisively checked so as to avert the horrors of another global conflagration. In justifying his decision to intervene in Vietnam to Doris Kearns after he left office, Johnson reasoned that the voices of appeasement and isolationism had conveyed "the wrong messages to Hitler and the Japanese...I firmly believe we wouldn't have been involved in World War II if it hadn't been for all the vacillation."² It therefore followed that failure to take a stand in Vietnam would only whet the appetite of expansionist powers like China and heighten the possibilities of greater conflict.

Another seminal event of the 1930's, this one closer to America's shores and to his heart, shaped Johnson's worldview. Reared in the remote Texas hill country and constantly exposed to economic hardship –as a child, as a high school teacher of impoverished Mexican Americans, as congressional representative of a district hit hard by the Depression – his imagination was fired and forever altered by Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal. The idea and example of government playing a positive role in alleviating poverty and giving the underprivileged a new lease on life formed the core of LBJ's political philosophy and the overriding ambition of his own presidency. As one biographer has observed, Johnson "impose[d] his conception of relations within American society onto relations between discordant nations." The populist and American nationalist in Johnson believed that all people –whatever their origin, religion, or ideological affiliation – aspired to a life of wealth and opportunity, just like every Texan.³ His genuine sympathy for, and identification with, society's "have-nots" accounted in no small part for a greater interest in America's role in the developing world, particularly Asia, than in relations with its industrialized and prosperous European allies.⁴

Johnson's reformist impulse endowed him with an intuitive understanding of the socio-economic maladies that afflicted so many of the newly independent nations of Southeast Asia, and the opportunities that this widespread discontent presented to adversaries such as China in the battle for the "hearts and minds" of Asians. His May 1961 tour of the region as Vice President, which evidently struck an emotional chord, was a perfect demonstration of the Munich-New Deal mindset that defined his own conceptualization of the politico-psychological challenge that China posed to American interests. The greatest threat emanating from the region, LBJ informed Kennedy upon his return, "stems from hunger, ignorance, poverty and disease." American leadership in the Far East rested on making "imaginative use of our scientific and technological capability" in combating these dangers and on fostering "knowledge and faith in United States power, will and understanding." Without an effective courting of local opinion, these disillusioned countries would lose faith in the United States as a guarantor of peace and prosperity and turn to the communists for support. The administration, he concluded alarmingly, would then have to "surrender the Pacific and take up our defenses in our own shores."⁵

Yet if the lessons of Munich demonstrated the imperative of *containing* the PRC, the example of Chinese intervention in the Korean War underlined the risks of *confronting* the mainland. The frightening image of a seemingly endless horde of PLA troops pouring across China's frontier proved to be an enduring one and instilled in Johnson an acute sensitivity to Chinese security interests and an aversion to any scheme that threatened to ignite another Sino-American conflict; when presented with the choice of a potentially provocative course of action vis a vis the PRC or a less combative alternative, LBJ consistently opted in favor of the latter.⁶ The contradictions inherent in Johnson's views of China were displayed during the 1954-55 Taiwan Strait crisis. As a senior member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, he firmly supported President Eisenhower's decision to seek congressional approval of his authority to use American forces in defending the Pescadores and Formosa from Chinese attack. He successfully opposed the efforts of fellow Democrats to exclude the offshore islands from the Formosa

Resolution. Johnson's reluctance to challenge a popular commander in chief at a time of heightened international tension was buttressed by his own hostile interpretation of Chinese intentions in the Pacific. These hawkish instincts, however, were tempered by recent memories of Korea. Thus when Eisenhower and Dulles announced in March 1955 that the U.S. might use nuclear weapons in any conflict with the PRC, and Republican Senator William Knowland pressed the administration to resist by force any Chinese assault on Quemoy and Matsu, Johnson cautioned against entanglement in "an irresponsible adventure for which we have not calculated all the risks...we do not want a war party on the American political scene any more than we want an appeasement party."⁷

Beyond a concern with Chinese subversive activity in Southeast Asia, a vague adherence to the Cold War-infused stereotype of a militant and aggressive PRC, and an overriding determination to avoid a replay of Korea, however, Johnson did not have a distinct China policy agenda in November 1963. Unlike his predecessor, who had developed a keen interest in the outcome of the Sino-Indian "development contest" in Asia as a Senator⁸ and was acutely fearful of China's nuclear program as President, LBJ's congressional and vice presidential years were characterized by a lack of engagement with the China policy sphere. Kennedy duly included his Vice President in formal discussions of foreign affairs, as in the Cabinet or the NSC, yet never took him into his confidence or showed any interest in granting his subordinate an influential role in the administration's various diplomatic initiatives.⁹ It was an uneasy political partnership between the two men, Johnson viewing JFK as an upstart who had punched above his weight into the White House, the President wary of the Texan's oversized ego.¹⁰ LBJ's role in the 1963 deliberations over the possibility of joint Soviet-American action against the PRC's nuclear installations remains unclear. Given the prevailing dynamic of the Kennedy-Johnson relationship, it is likely that LBJ was at most kept abreast of the debate, playing nothing akin to a leading role.¹¹

Inherent in this relative aloofness from mainland affairs was a notable reserve of intellectual flexibility toward China. Indeed, holdovers from the Kennedy administration have noted the contrast between JFK's complete absorption with the notion of a Chinese menace and LBJ's more detached perspective.¹² While Johnson's populism alerted him to the threat of Chinese subversion, it inspired a corresponding inclination to appeal over the heads of the PRC's leadership to the Chinese masses, whom he naturally assumed were desirous of the American way of life. While Kennedy was "a somewhat more precise ideologue," NSC staffer James Thomson later observed, his successor was "less troubled by Maoism's twists and turns and more interested in how you feed and clothe and give schools and clinics and roads to all those kids in China, all those hungry people who have no long-term reason to hate us."¹³ Of two minds concerning the PRC, Johnson was predisposed to retaining the policy of containment and isolation bequeathed to him, a policy sufficiently firm to check the expansionist tendencies of Communist China's rulers, yet prudently measured so as to avert provoking another Sino-American confrontation or antagonizing the Chinese people. Over time, Johnson hoped a less dogmatic leadership would emerge on the mainland, one that was more preoccupied with tending to the material needs of their populace than with exporting the revolution. Once a more agreeable regime was in place, America could adjust its own attitudes. According to Walt Rostow, the President's National Security Adviser from April 1966 onwards, LBJ did not believe that Mao and his comrades represented "the last word" on China's relationship with the rest of the world.¹⁴

More importantly, Johnson's predilection for preserving intact U.S. China policy stemmed from an article of faith that governed his general approach to foreign affairs. As one aide put it most succinctly, "In his opinion, politicians, whether comfortable with foreign policy or not, ventured into the field at their own peril."¹⁵ A veteran of Washington warfare, LBJ was well versed in the ways in which developments abroad could undermine a President's authority at home. "I knew that Harry Truman and Dean Acheson had lost their effectiveness from the day



that the Communists took over in China,” he later recalled. “I believed that the loss of China had played a large role in the rise of Joe McCarthy.”¹⁶ The political fallout from events in the Far East during the early 1950’s –the vitriolic “who lost China” debate, the emergence of a “China Lobby,” the zenith of McCarthyism, public disenchantment with the Korean War, and the Republicans’ seizure of the White House in 1952 –underscored the hazards of being branded “soft” on Asian communism, especially for a Democrat with presidential ambitions. Consequently, Johnson was not one to openly question Cold War orthodoxy. For much of his tenure as Senate Majority Leader, he assumed a decidedly discreet stance in foreign affairs, championing a bipartisan foreign policy and recoiling from mounting a major challenge to Eisenhower’s diplomatic stewardship. This derived from both a shrewd strategy aimed at exploiting divisions in the Republican party over international affairs and the pitfalls he assumed were associated with too conspicuous a role in questions of national security.¹⁷ In the Kennedy White House, LBJ closely guarded his opinions on foreign matters, rarely offering his thoughts in group meetings, even when given a platform by the President.¹⁸ “If I speak one word of disagreement with the Cabinet and White House staff looking on,” Johnson confided to a friend, “then they’ll put it out...that I’m a damned traitor.”¹⁹

Perhaps most famously, LBJ bitterly complained in retirement about how “that bitch of a war on the other side of the world” in Vietnam had diverted attention from “the woman I really loved –the Great Society.”²⁰ Crude and self-pitying, Johnson’s remark nevertheless highlighted the priority he assigned to domestic policy as President. It was at home where he believed he could accomplish the most and lay a foundation for the esteemed legacy he so zealously craved. Johnson approached foreign policy from a decidedly negative and defensive perspective, viewing it primarily as a political minefield that could potentially obliterate the capital and prestige required for domestic achievements. His governing instinct beyond American shores was to fulfill the diplomatic commitments of his predecessors and avoid committing any embarrassing or controversial mistakes that could be used as ammunition by enemies of his ambitious legislative

agenda.²¹ Thus even as LBJ privately mused to a close confidant in January 1964 that the U.S. should have earlier recognized the PRC, China policy remained one of those “hot button” issues on which it was unwise to jump ahead of perceived popular sentiment.²²

Continuity in foreign affairs was all the more imperative given the extraordinary circumstances in which Johnson inherited the Oval Office. LBJ was determined to retain the services of Kennedy’s senior advisers, both to reassure a shaken nation in the government’s stability and to avert the spectacle of an en masse walkout that could be taken as a sign of non-confidence in the new President. “I needed that White House staff,” he later explained. “Without them I would have lost my link to John Kennedy, and without that I would have had absolutely no chance of gaining the support of the media or the Easterners or the intellectuals. And without that support I would have had absolutely no chance of governing the country.”²³ Or, he might have added, securing his own mandate in 1964. Profoundly insecure and thin-skinned, Johnson was highly sensitive as to how his international leadership was assessed. He harbored a tortured inferiority complex, thinking that his Texan origins made him a potential target of ridicule among the media, the Eastern establishment that held sway over American national security, and the public at large for any and every misstep on the world stage.²⁴ “I don’t believe that I’ll ever get credit for anything in foreign affairs, no matter how successful it is,” Johnson once complained to a journalist, “because I didn’t go to Harvard.”²⁵ LBJ’s worst suspicions were hardly alleviated by the proliferation of press reports in the early months of his presidency that alluded to a perceived lack of sure-footedness and interest in diplomacy.²⁶ In striving to reach foreign policy decisions based on the consensus of his martyred predecessor’s hand-picked senior staff, a biographer has noted, Johnson wanted to avoid appearing “foolish or incompetent.”²⁷

For his advice on international affairs, Johnson depended heavily on Rusk, McNamara, and McGeorge Bundy. Johnson’s reliance on a small number of advisers comported with a collegial style of decision-making honed during his years in the Senate; he shunned large-scale gatherings, such as meetings of the unwieldy NSC, because they did not offer a forum for the

intimate discussion that he preferred.²⁸ While Kennedy shared LBJ's affinity for confidentiality and dislike of press leaks, he had opted for a more freewheeling and disorderly approach to foreign policy management, frequently seeking the input of various subordinates in the State and Defense departments so as to encourage debate and explore different options.²⁹ Johnson, by contrast, had no wish to enmesh himself in internal disputes at Foggy Bottom or the Pentagon. Consequently, he accorded Rusk and McNamara a considerable degree of leeway in the running of their respective departments, making it a practice not to interact directly with officials below their rank without prior notification.³⁰ In turn, Rusk, McNamara, and Bundy shared Johnson's impatience with the diplomatic bureaucracy, worked diligently to contain intra-departmental conflicts and present unified views, and were completely deferential to presidential authority.³¹

This centralized decision-making system reflected the trust and respect that Johnson had for the judgement of all three men. As a graduate of Groton and Yale and a former dean of Harvard College, the urbane Bundy was the embodiment of the Eastern elite that LBJ feared and despised. Bundy's privileged upbringing, his close ties with the Kennedy family, and his inability to establish any rapport with the earthy Texan all made for a strained relationship that reached near breaking point by mid-1965, culminating in his departure from government the following February.³² Personal differences aside, however, Bundy was in constant contact with Johnson and was absolutely pivotal in familiarizing the new President with the foreign policy agenda and in framing his understanding of the issues.³³ Johnson considered McNamara to be the most versatile and impressive member of Kennedy's cabinet. By most accounts, he was in awe of the Secretary's commanding intellect and expended considerable effort in wooing him.³⁴

Rusk experienced the greatest change in fortune as a result of the events of November 1963. Derided by contemporaries and many historians as a weak personality, the aloof and soft-spoken Georgian was selected by Kennedy precisely because he did not want an assertive State Department hijacking his diplomatic agenda.³⁵ Despite even these low expectations, Kennedy evidently grew impatient with Rusk's cautious and deliberate style, to the point where

he considered the possibility of replacing him after the 1964 election.³⁶ However, Rusk's humble southern origins, self-effacing manner, political acumen, and unstinting loyalty earned LBJ's personal regard. Nor did it escape Johnson's attention that his Secretary of State, unlike McNamara or Bundy, had not been an intimate of Kennedy's or that his personal relations with the much-loathed Robert Kennedy were less than cordial. All of this enabled Rusk to acquire vastly more influence with Johnson than he had with Kennedy.³⁷ Rusk, the President gushed, "was not a mean, scheming, conniving man...you could fire Dean Rusk at noon and he would come for dinner at night and be just as nice about it as if it had never happened[,] and for that reason he would be Secretary of State as long as he wished to stay."³⁸

Johnson's reliance on this triad had considerable consequences for U.S. China policy. All three men shared JFK's heightened threat perception of 1962-63 and drew alarming conclusions from Beijing's nuclear weapons program, its espousal of revolutionary upheaval throughout the Afro-Asian world, and its hostility toward Moscow's search for "peaceful co-existence" with the West; their image of a reckless, militant, and expansionist China with no regard for American conceptions of international order was crystallized well before LBJ assumed office.³⁹ Bundy, in fact, had been Kennedy's point man in the administration's efforts to counter China's nuclear effort.⁴⁰ Yet it was Rusk who emerged as the most forceful and articulate voice of opposition within Johnson's inner circle to any modification of America's posture toward the PRC. By far the most experienced hand in Asian affairs among Johnson's men, Rusk's unpleasant encounter with Communist China dated back to March 1950, when he commenced an eventful stint as Truman's Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs. Unlike many of the Atlanticists who dominated the Truman administration, Rusk's wartime service in the China-Burma-India theater imbued him with the conviction that the U.S. had a vital role to play across the Pacific in ensuring peace and security.⁴¹ His reaction to the CCP's victory in October 1949, he later wrote, was akin to that of a "jilted lover," as he took strong exception to the new regime's efforts to "erase from memory all traces of more than a century of goodwill and friendly relations between

the American and Chinese peoples.”⁴² He was foremost amongst those at State agitating for a more robust commitment to Taiwan to deter a possible communist invasion in the spring of 1950.⁴³ China’s intervention in the Korean War and its accompanying anti-American political campaigns were milestones in Rusk’s formulation of a Chinese menace.⁴⁴ Over time historians have come to the rescue of this much-maligned figure, absolving him of much of the blame for the paralysis that characterized China policy during the Kennedy years. Rusk seems to have harbored more flexible and subtle views of the PRC than previously assumed; it was ultimately the political timidity and militancy of JFK that shaped his administration’s dealings with Beijing.⁴⁵ A thorough reading of the documentary record for the Johnson presidency, however, makes it plainly evident that Rusk was by this point deeply hostile to any China policy reform. The decisive consideration here, as explained in the pages to follow, was the mainland’s role in furnishing the communist insurgency in South Vietnam. It was not until the closing months of the Johnson administration, when signs emerged of a more accommodating Chinese leadership, that his interest in extending modest feelers toward the PRC was revived.

Johnson did not share his Secretary of State’s fixation with the mainland, yet he deeply appreciated his experience. The fact that Rusk had emerged unscathed from the politically sensitive Far Eastern portfolio must have assured LBJ that he was tried and tested in Asian affairs, a seasoned professional who offered sensible counsel. Moreover, as one of the President’s most senior aides recalled, there was a “kinship, a kinetic energy between Johnson and Rusk on the issue of the right wing and the injury done to the body politic by that right wing attack over China and Korea.”⁴⁶ Fearing a renewed domestic backlash, both men were not inclined to reconsider the fundamental tenets of America’s China policy.

The foundations of this policy, which ultimately rested on the mobilization of sufficient international support for isolating the mainland, were steadily eroding as Johnson assumed power. In December 1963, Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai embarked on an extensive tour of Africa. Part of

a larger strategy aimed at enhancing the PRC's prestige in the underdeveloped world, Zhou showered his hosts with technical and economic assistance, calls for an Afro-Asian conference, and exhortations to fend off the forces of imperialism and colonialism.⁴⁷ U.S. officials regarded Zhou's diplomatic offensive as a considerable success. While China could not match the aid proffered by the Western or Soviet blocs, it compensated for its limited economic clout with the allure of its revolutionary zeal. "Many Africans," an intelligence report concluded, "are attracted by [the] vehemence [of the] Chicom anti-imperialist line and Chicom support for violence in [the] national liberation struggle." In articulating an identity of Chinese and African interests, Zhou had heightened awareness of the mainland throughout the continent and created pressures for African recognition of the PRC.⁴⁸ Five more African nations established diplomatic relations with Beijing in January, bringing the number to a total of fourteen. The consequences of this shift in allegiances for the issue of Chinese representation in the UN were self-evident. Exacerbating the problem, Chinese overtures coincided with the landmark French decision to extend recognition to the mainland that same month. In assessing the fallout from this French initiative, State's INR bureau predicted that more African governments, particularly former French colonies (among which Taiwan had its greatest support), would conclude that "time is running out" on the Nationalists and therefore prompt further approaches to Beijing.⁴⁹

Rumors of a Sino-French rapprochement had been rampant since June 1963, when both nations rejected the Limited Test Ban Treaty.⁵⁰ Rusk attempted to gauge de Gaulle's intentions toward the PRC during a visit to Paris in December, all to no avail.⁵¹ When the French government informed Ambassador Charles Bohlen on 7 January of its decision to recognize Beijing, the reaction in Washington was one of disdain and outrage. Senior Johnson officials bristled at the French leader's provocation, taking it to be the latest in a long line of attempts to buttress his country's standing as a world power at the expense of America's strategic interests. Harriman vigorously protested to the French Ambassador, asserting that Paris was "throwing away a great deal of good will and affection here in the US only for the sake of demonstrating its

independence of US policy.’’⁵² State Department analysts provided a more nuanced rationale for de Gaulle’s actions, carefully noting that there was a tangible benefit for France that extended beyond any pleasure derived from provoking the ire of the Americans. As the only major Western power to have full political relations with the PRC, France would enhance its diplomatic leverage with both the U.S. and the Soviets. Above all, reconciliation with the mainland tapped into a wider European sentiment that “an isolated China is more dangerous to world peace than one in contact with other states, and that, in any case, China is a power that must be dealt with in world affairs.’’⁵³

Few, if any, of Johnson’s advisers expected the headstrong de Gaulle to reverse his decision. Bundy recommended that the President remain above the fray and let the State Department register the administration’s complaints in Paris. In the likely event of French defiance, he wrote LBJ, “You yourself will want to be in a position to shrug this off.’’⁵⁴ Johnson needed little convincing. His reaction to French recognition was decidedly mild, bordering on indifference. This posture was a reflection of both his aforementioned detachment from the China policy sphere and of the myriad concerns, many of them related to the recent presidential transition, then competing for his attention. From Johnson’s perspective, the greatest potential threat arising from the affair would be the public spectacle of an ally spurning the entreaties of a new President. He was certain that de Gaulle would “pay no attention” to Washington’s grievances. In a conversation with his mentor Senator Richard Russell, Johnson remarked that he was inclined “to play it [French recognition] as low key and just make a little protest for the record.’’⁵⁵

Officials outside the White House were less nonchalant. A CIA estimate postulated that recognition would lead to the severing of ties between France and Taiwan, since neither Beijing nor Taipei would countenance a “two Chinas” scenario whereby one nation enjoyed relations with both claimants to the Chinese government. The reluctance of several nations to discard their present ties to the Nationalists for the sake of establishing relations with the communist regime

would still prevent any stampede to recognize Beijing. Nevertheless, the report concluded, the French maneuver would give impetus to the “gradual erosion of Nationalist China’s international position...enhance Communist China’s prestige, and would be seen by much of the world as a harbinger of eventual general recognition.” Countries such as Belgium, Luxembourg, Austria, Italy, and Canada –unsympathetic to the American conception of an expansionist China and not constrained by the equivalent of a “China Lobby”- would come under formidable domestic pressure to follow the French example.⁵⁶

It was precisely this prospect of a snowball effect that most alarmed Rusk. Sensing a more immediate threat than that outlined by intelligence analysts, he believed the administration would “be faced probably quite soon with a danger of recognition of Peiping by some African countries, by Belgium, by Canada, by Japan and by other countries.” Rusk reasoned that France represented a “special case,” as no government of comparable stature had extended such a gesture to the PRC since the beginning of the Korean War. The French action would encourage others to take the same step: “if this hole is made in the dam[,] the prospect is that the water will flood through.” With these ominous consequences in mind, he underlined the “importance of doing all we can to frustrate Paris’ and Peiping’s move.”⁵⁷

While confining himself to the sidelines, Johnson acquiesced in efforts aimed at enlisting the services of French allies, notably Italy and West Germany, to dissuade de Gaulle from playing any China card.⁵⁸ To minimize the effects of a Sino-French settlement, the administration resorted to both crude arm-twisting and diplomatic maneuver. Rusk allegedly summoned the Belgian Ambassador and warned him that “if France recognized China and other members of the Alliance followed suit[,] there would be neither depth nor warmth in the Alliance.”⁵⁹ LBJ was encouraged by the State Department to use the occasion of a January 1964 visit by the Canadian Prime Minister to “Warn against closer relations with Peiping”.⁶⁰ U.S. officials devoted most of their attention to advising their Taiwanese counterparts against any rash decision to cut off relations with France, in the hopes that this would then place the burden on Paris to choose between

Beijing or Taipei. According to this logic, if de Gaulle proved reluctant to unilaterally break relations with the Nationalists, the PRC (hostile to a “two Chinas” arrangement) would cancel further negotiations with France. If, on the other hand, the French cast their lot with the mainland, Rusk argued that this would be “very embarrassing for President De Gaulle...and would tend to discourage other countries from following the French tactic.”⁶¹ To the chagrin of the administration, Chiang Kai-shek relieved the French leader of this dilemma by withdrawing Taiwan’s diplomats from Paris in early February.

French recognition presented a quandary to many of America’s allies, who had to carefully balance the demands of managing ties to the U.S. with their own interests in broadening contacts with the PRC. Canada’s China policy, for example, epitomized this dynamic. Wary of antagonizing the White House, Canadian Prime Minister Lester Pearson ruled out any dramatic departure in strategy, such as recognizing the mainland. Yet a combination of factors –pressure from the Department of External Affairs for the adoption of a “two Chinas” policy, growing public criticism of the U.S. posture, high-level consensus that peace and stability in East Asia rested on an accommodation with Beijing, and the Prime Minister’s own conviction that the Americans faced an impending diplomatic debacle at the UN over Chinese representation- moved him to gently prod Johnson for a change in tactics. In his January 1964 visit to Washington, Pearson argued that a continued emphasis on ostracizing the mainland would only imperil Taiwan’s seat at the UN, since this would force many countries to opt for relations either with the Nationalists or with the communist regime that was steadily gaining international stature. French recognition provided the necessary political covering for a shift toward a “two Chinas” formula that would preserve Taiwan’s status in the General Assembly even as the PRC was integrated into the same body.⁶² More bluntly, a senior Canadian official informed the American Ambassador in Ottawa that same month that “Canadian policy was not identical with that of the United States...ultimately it would be necessary for the west to move in the direction of a two-China policy...[the] GOC (Government of Canada) did not believe Communist China could or should

be diplomatically isolated indefinitely.’’ Hints were dropped of a possible Canadian initiative following the American presidential election in November.⁶³ In the spring, the Department of External Affairs studied the pros and cons of introducing a one-China, one-Taiwan declaratory resolution in the UN.⁶⁴

Reactions in Tokyo to developments in the early months of 1964 opened up a widening rift between the United States and its most significant Asian partner on how best to manage China’s growing influence. Throughout the 1950’s vocal elements within the business community and the governing Liberal Democratic Party, keen on diversifying Japan’s trade and skeptical of the American-defined image of a menacing China, advocated overtures to the mainland, even as the U.S. expressed opposition. Successive Japanese administrations juggled these competing concerns by fashioning a policy of “separation of politics and economics,” that is, permitting private trade with the PRC while maintaining exclusive diplomatic relations with the Nationalists. French recognition placed new strains on this delicate formula, as “many Japanese [began] to worry that Tokyo would be left allied to Taiwan while most major nations dealt with Beijing.”⁶⁵

Japan’s government felt obliged to accommodate this sentiment. In January 1964, Foreign Minister Masayoshi Ohira explained to Rusk that his people felt “remote and uninvolved” from the national liberation struggles raging in Southeast Asia and were far more inclined to view the Soviets rather than the Chinese as their primary adversary. “In contrast to [the] US reaction,” he continued, “Japanese political parties and newspapers are expressing [the] feeling that [the] French action opens up new opportunities for contacts with [the] mainland.”⁶⁶ Ohira’s remarks were only one of many signs of a new Japanese assertiveness toward the China question. A June 1964 State Department study concluded that “even conservative Japanese governments will give steadily less weight to dependence on the US as a reason for caution in improving relations with Communist China.”⁶⁷ U.S. officials observed with some disquiet the rapid growth in Sino-Japanese trade during 1963-64. Most agreed that Japan’s enthusiasm for reappraising its policy on more sensitive matters such as recognition and Chinese representation

in the UN was tempered by the objective of maintaining harmonious relations with Washington. Still, the lure of greater trade, cultural and geographic ties between the two great Asian peoples, and widespread hopes among elite and popular opinion alike in Japan for fresh initiatives toward the PRC portended troubling implications for any long-term American strategy of isolating China. "The basic question" for officials in Tokyo, according to the CIA, was "merely the manner and timing of the inevitable approach to Peiping".⁶⁸

U.S. decision-makers were exasperated by allied interest in forging new ties to the mainland and the implicit critique of American intransigence that underlay this thinking. In a consistent refrain, Rusk wondered why "the question of Peking's admission to the United Nations had been renewed without adequate reproaches being made over their policies in South East Asia."⁶⁹ Johnson's entourage contrasted America's global responsibilities with the evident unwillingness of their friends to shoulder the burdens of containing Asian communism, a point they never hesitated to raise in diplomatic settings. Alluding to this disparity, a testy Rusk pointedly reminded Ohira in January 1964, "At a time [when] our resources and blood go to [the] support of countries threatened by Peiping, Peiping should not be helped." While the U.S. could "pull out of Southeast Asia" and still "survive...other Asian states could not."⁷⁰ To his Canadian counterpart, Paul Martin, the Secretary sardonically remarked that he could better "understand" Canada's desire to bring the mainland into the UN only if Ottawa was "willing to put a division into Southeast Asia to help contain Peiping's expansion."⁷¹ The administration attributed the irresponsibility of its allies to a cynical attempt to appease domestic opinion. When LBJ asked why Canada would contemplate changing its vote on Chinese representation, Bundy explained that this would be "politically popular" at home.⁷²

The growing likelihood of a Chinese nuclear test sometime in 1964 confronted the Johnson team with the prospect of another diplomatic coup for the PRC and further pressures for its inclusion in the international community. It also required conclusive deliberation over the

option of a pre-emptive military strike against Chinese nuclear installations. Kennedy's consideration of this course never seems to have advanced far beyond the speculative stage; it fell to his successor to work out the costs and benefits, logistics, and implications of such an operation.⁷³

Even as Kennedy explored this contingency, elements of the U.S. bureaucracy raised doubts about both the feasibility and necessity of a forceful response to China's nuclear effort. While it is uncertain whether or not JFK was ever exposed to this line of thinking,⁷⁴ the favorable impression it made on several senior decision-makers, including Rusk and most likely Johnson himself, determined the new administration's decidedly restrained reply to China's detonation of a nuclear device in October 1964. The leading voices of caution in 1963 were the State Department's INR bureau and Policy Planning Council (PPC). In assessing the likely consequences of China's acquisition of nuclear weaponry, an INR report in May offered a more sober prognosis than the gloomy forewarnings emanating from the White House. It discounted the military significance of a nuclear test, arguing that Beijing's awareness of its relative impotence and fear of American retaliation would deter it from brandishing a nuclear weapon for any offensive purpose; Chinese foreign policy would continue to be distinguished by its prudence and aversion to risk-taking behavior. The PRC would instead seek to use a nuclear capability as a political instrument to enhance its international standing, promote neutralism among its neighbors, and stiffen the will of national liberation movements.⁷⁵

The INR bureau also poured cold water on any hope of securing Moscow's assent to a U.S. strike against Chinese facilities, much less Soviet-initiated action. While Soviet leaders did not welcome the possibility of Chinese membership in the nuclear club, they would contemplate military measures only if "Chinese behavior were so bellicose, and China's weapons program so advanced, as to constitute a threat to the security of the Soviet Union." According to U.S. intelligence experts, the Kremlin viewed this as a remote prospect and saw no cause for alarm.⁷⁶ These estimates of Soviet attitudes, as well as Harriman's failure to elicit Khrushchev's interest in

a military operation during the test ban talks, evidently gave those who viewed Soviet cooperation, tacit or otherwise, as a prerequisite for any move against China pause for thought. Rusk noted to the Dutch Ambassador in November that the Soviets “told us that they felt we were overestimating the possibility of China becoming a nuclear power.”⁷⁷ Walt Rostow, chairman of the PPC, was convinced that the USSR was not prepared “to join with us in a great venture to deny the Chinese Communists a nuclear capability, since such a venture would mean a total denial of ideological commitment to communism”.⁷⁸

A major study drafted by PPC staffer Robert Johnson in October 1963 yielded similar conclusions to those reached by the INR. “The great asymmetry in Chinese Communist and U.S. nuclear capabilities and vulnerabilities,” Johnson contended, “makes Chinese Communist first-use of nuclear weapons highly unlikely except in the event of an attack upon the mainland which threatened the existence of the regime.” Like the INR, Johnson focused on the political and psychological ramifications of a detonation, which were not inconsiderable. Indeed, nuclear status would aid Beijing in “weakening the will of countries resisting insurgency...inhibiting their requests for U.S. assistance and...stimulating and exploiting divisions within Asia and between Asian countries and the West.” The security demands of America’s regional partners in the wake of a test, however, were expected to be modest. Countering Chinese nuclear subversion would likely entail nothing more than reassuring allies of existing U.S. defense guarantees and their applicability to nuclear contingencies, and offering various forms of nuclear cooperation and increased conventional military assistance.⁷⁹

A widely circulated April 1964 report, prepared as well by the PPC’s Robert Johnson, elaborated on this analysis. Its central finding was that overt military action against Chinese nuclear facilities was inadvisable unless it could be justified as part of a larger response to “potential or actual Chinese Communist aggression” or as enforcement of an international norm that scorned nuclear weapons production and testing.⁸⁰ “In the absence of such a basis for action,” Johnson wrote, a “U.S. attack is likely to be viewed as provocative and dangerous and

will play into the hands of efforts by Peiping to picture U.S. hostility to Communist China as the source of tensions and the principal threat to the peace in Asia.’’⁸¹ The likelihood of securing the necessary political covering for a strike was deemed remote. In view of the anticipated reluctance of even a nuclear-armed PRC to incur the risk of an “imperialist” counterstrike, the administration faced an uphill task in convincing its allies of the imperative of taking out Beijing’s program. Asian and European nations alike would invariably “weigh their interest in not having Communist China become a nuclear power against their interest in avoiding actions which will threaten the possibility of broadened hostilities in Asia.’’⁸²

Moreover, it could not be safely assumed that even if international opinion was successfully mobilized against nuclear proliferation, that this would sanction “unilateral U.S. military enforcement action against a non-participant Communist China.” Besides, the establishment of any such consensus would most likely follow the Chinese detonation of a device, at which point the mainland would be seen as a legitimate nuclear power.⁸³ Covert action against the PRC’s nuclear program was identified as “the politically most feasible” option for decision-makers, yet it too carried the risk of being viewed by much of the world as “U.S.-inspired and supported.’’⁸⁴ While the probability of lasting damage to American prestige and moral authority as a result of an unprovoked attack was very real, the advantages accrued from such a drastic step were uncertain. Even a successful campaign against China’s nuclear facilities “would, at best, put them out of operation for [only] a few years.’’⁸⁵

Many were persuaded by the thrust of this analysis. Rostow enthusiastically forwarded a condensed version of Robert Johnson’s findings to LBJ in April.⁸⁶ A conversation that same month with Chiang Kai-shek in Taipei revealed the extent to which Rusk had been converted to this non-alarmist mode of thinking. Referring to the possibility of a Chinese nuclear test, Rusk explained that he “was not thinking of the military significance of such an event because it would be many years before Peiping could develop any significant nuclear power and the United States had plenty of nuclear force to counter it. What he was wondering about was the psychological

effect of such an event.”⁸⁷ Rusk’s remarks cannot be dismissed as merely an effort to assuage the concerns of a nervous ally. He had followed the PPC’s deliberations with keen interest since the fall of 1963 and, like Rostow, recommended them to the President at the end of April.⁸⁸

Yet while the proponents of restraint maintained that their views represented the “broad consensus” of the PPC-chaired interdepartmental committee (composed of the State and Defense departments, the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, and the CIA) assigned to study this problem,⁸⁹ a meeting of the minds in fact remained elusive. In December 1963, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, displaying none of the misgivings advanced by many in the State Department, concluded that a nuclear attack against Chinese facilities was feasible.⁹⁰ McGeorge Bundy, who had been intimately involved in developing the Kennedy administration’s response to China’s nuclear project and appeared to share JFK’s anxieties, favored further examination of the opportunities for a pre-emptive strike in early 1964.⁹¹ He thought that the PPC’s April report had “defused the issue too much” and that a Chinese nuclear capability “would have far greater political consequences” than either Rostow or Robert Johnson allowed.⁹²

Bundy’s interest in obstructing China’s effort was shared by others. Alarmed by mounting evidence of an imminent test, the Commander in Chief of U.S. forces in the Pacific (CINCPAC) advised the Joint Chiefs in July 1964 that this event would embolden the PRC and “hurt our cause” throughout Asia. Accordingly, “everything possible should...be done to defer the day when the Chinese detonation takes place.” CINCPAC recommended a covert effort to impede the delivery or sabotage the quality of components essential to the production of a nuclear device.⁹³ Rostow was sufficiently concerned by the emergence of views, particularly within the Defense Department’s Bureau of International Security Affairs (ISA), diverging from those at Foggy Bottom that he brought this to Rusk’s attention at the end of September. Rostow insinuated that failure to achieve a high-level consensus would send a mixed message and undermine the administration’s efforts to downplay the ramifications of a possible Chinese detonation to its Asian allies.⁹⁴

An interdepartmental meeting held that same month was emblematic of the diversity of opinion among U.S. officials. Henry Rowen of ISA asserted that the State Department had vastly underestimated the “horrendous” long-term consequences of a nuclear China. He drew a parallel with the “immense effect” that Soviet acquisition of these weapons fifteen years earlier had inflicted on American policies, postures, and defense budgets. He predicted that Washington would be inundated with demands for costly new aid commitments from its friends. China’s regional rivals, particularly India, would be tempted to embark on their own nuclear projects. Echoing what had been Kennedy’s greatest concern, a militant China that espoused a revolutionary foreign policy “might be even more adventuresome once they went nuclear than the Soviets had been.” Beijing could cause further mischief by “handing around nuclear technology” to potential clients. Rowen claimed that a “limited non-nuclear air attack” against Chinese installations would secure a crucial two to five year delay in the PRC’s nuclear development and possibly discourage any attempt to resuscitate it. While the administration could exploit a “major blow-up” in Southeast Asia for this purpose, a military strike did not have to be based solely on the pretext of Chinese aggression. Rowen was confident that the U.S. could “handle this as a completely open matter and justify it at the time” to the rest of the world. The gathering ended with no agreement among the attendees.⁹⁵

On the basis of the available documentation, LBJ’s direct participation in this debate is difficult to trace. In contrast to Kennedy, he never made public reference to the PRC’s nuclear ambitions.⁹⁶ Nor does there appear to be any record of Johnson’s private views on an issue that had gripped the attention of his predecessor. It is possible, however, to fill in the blanks by briefly examining the interrelationship between Johnson’s relatively moderate China mindset in 1963-64 and those decisions that were ultimately taken regarding the appropriate response to the PRC’s program. The most significant decision in this respect was reached on 15 September, during a meeting that the President held with his principal foreign policy advisers (Rusk, McNamara, Bundy, and CIA Director John McCone). In accordance with the State Department’s views, it

was agreed that the administration would “prefer to have a Chinese test take place than to initiate” a unilateral strike. Left open were the possibilities of “appropriate military action” in the event that the U.S. found itself engaged in hostilities with China or “joint action” with the Soviets.⁹⁷ This ambiguous compromise reflected Johnson’s penchant for a flexible, consensus-based foreign policy and it undoubtedly satisfied those aides, particularly Bundy and McNamara, who were still troubled by the specter of a nuclear China. Indeed, in a November 1964 meeting with the Joint Chiefs one month following the first Chinese test, McNamara disclosed his continuing interest in a “strike against the Communist nuclear facilities”, possibly as part of a bombing campaign against North Vietnam. “What worries me”, he mused, “is the long-term picture of the capabilities of the 700 million people within the boundaries of China.”⁹⁸

For Johnson, the September decision flowed from the same dynamic –preoccupation with domestic matters and a lack of sustained interest in China policy – that had governed his reaction to the French recognition controversy. As William Burr and Jeffrey Richelson have plausibly surmised, the President’s opposition to an unprovoked pre-emptive attack stemmed from his overriding determination to present himself during the presidential campaign as the responsible, statesmanlike alternative to the hawkish Barry Goldwater.⁹⁹ The strategic rationale underlying LBJ’s decision –that the minimal military significance of a Chinese nuclear capability did not warrant the harm to American diplomatic interests that a pre-emptive strike would exact-comported with his own relatively mild assessment of Chinese power. Upon entering the Oval Office, Johnson viewed the PRC as primarily a subversive, politico-psychological threat, certainly not a strategic adversary on a par with the Soviet Union. Reinforcing his cautious stance toward an impending Chinese test was an ingrained aversion to confrontation with the mainland, rooted in the horrific precedent of the Korean War. This sentiment governed his behavior in the fall of 1964, just as it would during the Vietnam War. If Kennedy’s personal absorption with China’s nuclear effort provided impetus to the contemplation of military action in 1963, it can

also be said that LBJ's comparatively detached posture left its own imprint on the deliberative process and its ultimate outcome.

Pursuant to the 15 September discussions, Bundy met with Soviet Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin ten days later and raised the administration's interest in a "private and serious talk on what to do about" China's weapons program. Dobrynin's indifferent reply sealed the fate of the pre-emptive option.¹⁰⁰ High-level attention turned to the implementation of a political plan that had been developed by the PPC-chaired interdepartmental committee during the summer. The plan, as Rostow outlined it, did not necessitate any bold changes in policy. The objective was simply to "minimize the adverse impact" of a detonation by "reassur[ing] other nations" and "insur[ing] that the Chinese do not miscalculate the value of their capability".¹⁰¹ As part of this strategy, the State Department delivered a background briefing to the press on 29 September. Reporters were informed that the U.S. expected a Chinese test in the very near future, the military value of which would be diminished by the lack of a reliable nuclear delivery system.¹⁰² In presenting a calm statement of anticipation, the administration sought to deny the PRC any diplomatic advantage arising from the element of surprise and to convey an image of steadfast vigilance to the mainland, Asian allies, and domestic critics alike. With the latter particularly in mind, LBJ remarked to his aides, "Our position should not be provocative but we should not give the impression of being unconcerned."¹⁰³ When China tested a nuclear device on 16 October, a White House statement issued the same day covered similar ground, stressing to the same audiences that this "would have no effect upon the readiness of the United States to respond to requests from Asian nations for help in dealing with Communist Chinese aggression."¹⁰⁴

Johnson officials were generally satisfied with the mild reaction of China's neighbors (aside from Taiwan) to the test, attributing this in no small part to their careful preparation of world opinion for the event. Most regional leaders, one report found, "seem to have thought through the implications of a CCNE [Chinese Communist Nuclear Explosion] and to have decided that they could live with them."¹⁰⁵ Yet the scale of China's feat, which dramatically

shattered any lingering illusions that the communist regime in Beijing was a passing phenomenon, presented new unsettling strategic realities for an administration that, even as it shunned military conflict with the mainland, was determined to perpetuate its status as an international pariah. A sampling of elite and popular reaction in allied nations by the State Department in late October revealed “renewed calls for admitting Peiping to the United Nations” and for the U.S. to “take the initiative in trying to bring Communist China ‘into the community of nations.’”¹⁰⁶ Within a week of the detonation, UN Secretary General U Thant called for the convening of a nuclear disarmament conference, with the PRC’s full-scale participation alongside other nuclear nations.¹⁰⁷ Reports from Tokyo pointed to a definitive shift in sentiment in favor of normalizing relations with Beijing and downgrading ties to Taipei.¹⁰⁸ U.S. analysts held out little hope that even the new Prime Minister, Eisaku Sato, reputed to be wary of the PRC’s intentions, could halt the momentum within conservative political circles toward Sino-Japanese rapprochement; “his practical course of action,” an intelligence report speculated, “may be limited to minimizing the effects and extent of such a movement, rather than preventing it completely.”¹⁰⁹

The dramatic events of October revived the Canadian government’s interest in advancing a one-China, one-Taiwan declaratory resolution at the UN, an initiative that had been shelved during the summer out of concern for the American reaction. This resolution now served as the basis for joint discussions with Italy and Belgium.¹¹⁰ In a mid-November meeting with Rusk, the Canadian Ambassador to Washington, Charles Ritchie, explained that the CCNE had created a swelling of support among the Canadian public for engaging in dialogue with China. He opined that many other countries felt the same way. While his government would continue to support the “important question” formula at the UN, it no longer felt obliged to oppose the Albanian resolution (which would seat the the PRC and expel the Nationalists). To avert Taiwan’s possible ejection and a diplomatic debacle for the U.S. at the upcoming vote on Chinese representation in the 19th General Assembly, Ottawa intended to sponsor its own “two Chinas” solution.¹¹¹

Even before receiving this unwelcome news, many in Washington were bracing themselves for a change in fortune. At the end of October, Harlan Cleveland, the Assistant Secretary of State for International Organization Affairs, thought it likely that the administration could eke out a victory on the “important question” resolution in the next few weeks. Without a change in tactics, however, Cleveland glumly forecasted “a serious defeat on the issue in the 20th General Assembly.” Many countries that had hitherto upheld Taiwan’s status at the UN, partly in deference to the U.S., were now “impatient to get on some new track that is not vulnerable to the political charge [that] they are ‘ignoring’ the world’s most populous nation”, and were inclined to blame “the rigid posture of the United States” for “somehow preventing an accommodation with the CHICOMS.”¹¹²

Just as U.S. decision-makers had weighed world opinion when pondering a pre-emptive strike, they now confronted the prospect of allied resentment and a possible loss of face at the UN if they persisted with a hard-line China policy. In a November 1964 article in *The New York Times Magazine*, George Kennan, one of the nation’s most respected authorities on foreign affairs, picked up on this theme. In a “psychological and political sense,” he perceived China as posing a challenge more vexing than any in the post-war era. Yet both diplomatic recognition and UN membership were inevitable for a country of its size and influence. For reasons perhaps owing as much to domestic politics as to grand strategy, America could not be expected to take the lead in embracing the PRC. Yet by investing their resources in an indefinite campaign to quarantine the mainland, Kennan warned the Johnson team that they were irritating friends and courting “unnecessary prestige defeats for ourselves in the event the decisions eventually go against our wishes.”¹¹³

Kennan was only one of several public figures voicing growing uneasiness with America’s stance toward the PRC. Most significantly, many of these voices emanated from Congress, the bastion of pro-Chinese Nationalist sentiment in the 1950’s.¹¹⁴ In an address delivered shortly after French recognition, Senator J. William Fulbright, the Democratic chairman

of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, affirmed his belief that the prevailing freeze in Sino-American relations was destined to change, “if not to friendship, then perhaps to ‘competitive coexistence.’ ” To facilitate this development, Fulbright, while unprepared to advocate recognition, thought it would be “an extremely useful thing if we could introduce an element of flexibility, or more precisely of the capacity to be flexible, into our relations with Communist China.”¹¹⁵ A May 1965 report from a House Subcommittee chaired by Democrat Clement J. Zablocki reached similar conclusions, proposing that the White House give “consideration to the initiation of limited but direct contact with Red China through cultural exchange activities with emphasis on scholars and journalists.”¹¹⁶

That senior Democrats felt free to express these opinions without any apparent fear of political retribution indicated that the terms of the China debate had subtly evolved in the early 1960’s. Polling results in mid-1964 revealed a plurality of Americans identifying the PRC as the greatest danger to world peace. According to a Harris survey in June, support for China’s admission to the UN was opposed by a seven-to-one margin. When the question was predicated on the President’s approval of the mainland’s entry into the world body, however, the gap was substantially reduced to a 53 to 31 majority in favor of the status quo.¹¹⁷ This dichotomy between widespread antagonism toward the PRC and strong hints of a public willingness to acquiesce in a presidential initiative, Rosemary Foot has explained, resulted from “the growing realization that the Chinese Communist regime was a hard fact of life that had to be accommodated and, after China’s 1964 explosion of an atomic bomb, one that would be ignored at America’s peril.”¹¹⁸

Indeed, the Chinese test appeared to elicit from many Americans something akin to the conciliatory sentiment among allied public opinion that so nettled U.S. officials. A steady stream of newspaper editorials pressed the administration for more constructive approaches toward the PRC.¹¹⁹ Another Harris poll taken at the end of November showed a 15 percent increase in those favoring the mainland’s membership in the UN since June, with those opposed to such a move having fallen 17 percent.¹²⁰ While anything approaching a consensus remained elusive for an

issue as sensitive as Chinese representation, the public displayed greater interest in modest measures that would still go some way in expanding contacts with Beijing and lowering tensions. A study sponsored by the Council on Foreign Relations revealed majority support for a mutual exchange of news correspondents (53 percent), remaining in the UN if the PRC was seated (54 percent), and enhanced dialogue with Chinese representatives (51 percent). Perhaps most startling was the large number (as much as a quarter) of respondents who expressed no opinion or were even unaware that the mainland regime was ruled by communists, all of which suggested a significant degree of indifference toward an issue that had scourged the Democrats in the previous decade. Writing to his politically conscious superiors, an official at State's Asian Communist Affairs (ACA) bureau opined that these numbers suggested that the China problem had been effectively depoliticized: "public 'stickiness' is not a principal deterrent to changes in our China policy, so long as it does not appear that we are selling out to Communism."¹²¹

To the dismay of the Johnson team, the PRC steadily gained acceptance throughout 1964 as a legitimate member of the international community, a power whose inclusion in the world's deliberative organs was deemed essential by many to the greater cause of peace and stability. Allied interest in forging economic and political contacts with the mainland, of course, was hardly new. Yet the PRC's growing diplomatic and military clout, coming against the backdrop of mounting tensions in Southeast Asia, highlighted for many world capitals the folly of forgoing relations with Beijing for the sake of the corrupt and authoritarian government in Taipei. What was relatively new was the frequency and forcefulness with which a growing number of domestic elites echoed some of this thinking. Moreover, there were indications that sizeable elements of the public had become either more flexible or detached in their views of the mainland.

The administration was not inclined to respond in kind to this sentiment. Johnson approved a number of initiatives aimed at minimizing the diplomatic fallout from French recognition and China's nuclear test, and at ultimately prolonging the PRC's isolation. His

instinctive hostility to China policy reform sprang more from a politically-infused aversion to rocking the boat and a determination to preserve his martyred predecessor's record than from any personal fixation with Chinese power. Indeed, when some of his advisers pushed for the option of a pre-emptive strike against China's nuclear installations, LBJ showed little enthusiasm for militarized containment. The most immediate concern in the fall of 1964, as the President saw it, was not the specter of a nuclear-armed China wreaking havoc, but how to reconcile the escalating pressures for a reassessment of existing China strategy with the communist insurgency engulfing South Vietnam.

3

In Vietnam's Shadow: The Reaffirmation of U.S. China Policy, 1964-1965

In justifying its military involvement in Vietnam to the American public, the Johnson administration frequently cited the pressing need for containing Chinese expansionism.¹ Curiously, however, in most of the scholarly literature pertaining to the pivotal Vietnam decisions of 1963-65, discussion of America's perception of China's role in the conflict has been effectively relegated to the sidelines, lost in a maze of Saigon cables and in meticulous narratives of the events that compelled U.S. decision-makers to seek a military solution in the North in lieu of a political one in the South.² The implication here is that on the long list of factors accounting for the commitment of U.S. air and ground forces to the defense of South Vietnam in 1965, containing China ranked near the bottom. Indeed, the author of one very well-received study recently concluded that geostrategic considerations in general and concerns over Chinese ambitions in particular did not play a decisive role in the decision-making process.³ No less an authority than John Lewis Gaddis has argued that the PRC was simply too "impotent" to be of any concern to Johnson policymakers, who were far more preoccupied with averting an embarrassing defeat in South Vietnam than in checking a Chinese threat that never in fact existed.⁴ Some historians have suggested that those same officials who spoke alarmingly of a Chinese menace may have privately viewed Beijing as little more than a convenient bogeyman for mobilizing popular support for the war.⁵ Those who have offered a contrasting view and affirmed that the President and his advisers were genuinely moved to arrest the spread of Chinese influence in Southeast Asia have failed to adequately explore what underpinned this threat perception.⁶

Even less ink has been spilled on how assessments of the PRC's role in Vietnam stifled concurrent pressures from within and outside the administration for a modification of America's China policy.⁷ Developments in the early stages of the Johnson presidency appeared to point the

way to a redefinition of the U.S. posture. The positive press reviews of Roger Hilsman's December 1963 speech and the muted reaction from the China Lobby indicated a relaxed political climate, while LBJ's sweeping victory in the 1964 election provided the opportunity to give substance to Hilsman's words.⁸ As Johnson led his nation into war in July 1965, however, the policy of containment and isolation bequeathed by his predecessors remained firmly intact, hostage to the fervently-held belief among the President and his most senior advisers that China's support of North Vietnam was part of a larger strategy of indirect aggression aimed at expelling American influence from Southeast Asia. This chapter examines the basis for the Johnson administration's heightened threat perception of 1964-65 and the consequences for China policy.

The sequence of events outlined in the preceding chapter – French recognition, the Chinese nuclear test, steady pressure from allied nations and elite U.S. opinion for a reappraisal of attitudes – presented the administration with the challenge of how best to respond to the PRC's growing international stature. The fall of 1964 brought a bumper crop of competing policy prescriptions from Johnson officials. The striking divergence of opinion revealed a yawning chasm over the overarching question of whether or not the established strategy of containment and isolation served the purpose of effecting a moderation in China's external behavior.

One well-defined group argued in favor of seizing the initiative and overhauling China policy. Advocates of change during the Kennedy years, they contended that recent international developments underscored the imperative of departing from past practices. James Thomson, a Far East specialist in the State Department until July 1964 and thereafter a China watcher in the NSC, was one of the most vocal and adamant proponents of such a view.⁹ The son of China missionaries, raised in China and a student of its history, Thomson's self-admitted "obsession" was "getting back on a better track with China."¹⁰ Unique among many Johnson officials, Thomson dismissed the notion that China was an expansionist threat; ruling the mainland, he thought, was a "full-time job" that did not allow for a bold and ambitious foreign policy.¹¹

Writing to McGeorge Bundy in October 1964, he warned of the “danger in pushing too far the thesis of Peking’s responsibility for the South Vietnam crisis.” Urging his superiors to look beyond Vietnam, he asserted that there was little that the United States could do to prevent China’s eventual admission to the UN and its wider acceptance as a member of the international community. This presented the administration with a stark choice: “we can either sit tight in increasingly lonely isolation; or we can seek ways to cut our losses.”

Thomson proposed a wide range of measures –acquiescence in a “one China, one Taiwan” UN arrangement, the loosening of travel restrictions to the mainland, and the placing of trade in non-strategic goods with China on the same basis as that with the Soviet Union –to deflect escalating allied criticism and thereby shift the blame for poor Sino-American relations. Behind this defensive, short-term tactic was a long-term strategy. Returning to an argument that had won Hilsman’s endorsement in 1963, Thomson contended that the “careful use of free world goods, people, and ideas –instruments which have proven their long-term corrosive value in our relations with other totalitarian societies,” would expose the PRC to moderating outside influences, encourage the “domestication” of the Chinese revolution, and help erode the distorted worldview of its leadership.¹² One month later, he argued that Johnson’s electoral triumph offered an ideal opportunity for enacting these initiatives. As a start, he suggested that the President deliver a briefing to the nation’s leading journalists and express both his wish for improved relations with the mainland and a willingness “to search for areas, however small, of mutual self-interest.”¹³

Robert Komer joined his fellow NSC staffer in insisting that the domestic and international climate augured well for a shift in course. He interpreted the American public’s recent repudiation of Barry Goldwater as “partly a vote for cautious responsibility in a nuclear world.” LBJ’s mandate at home and his continued support for a non-communist South Vietnam endowed him with the necessary political covering to change tactics on Chinese representation and “retreat gracefully from an increasingly isolated position toward a stance which puts the onus

for continued friction more on Peiping and less on us.” Komer reasoned that the only way Washington could stem the erosion of Taiwan’s international position was to demonstrate greater flexibility by allowing its allies to take the lead in promoting a “two Chinas” solution at the UN. While this shift would buttress America’s standing in world opinion, it could also serve as a stepping stone toward the ultimate objective of making “our ChiCom policy more like that toward the USSR –tough where they push us but flexible where there’s something to be gained”.¹⁴

Equally enthusiastic in pushing for change was Edward Rice, author of the far-reaching PPC study in October 1961 and now serving as Consul General in Hong Kong. Rice maintained that the Chinese threat to U.S. interests had been exaggerated. China’s warlike oratory belied tactical caution; its call for wars of national liberation as a means of advancing the revolutionary cause placed the burden on local insurgent groups so as to avert another war with the U.S. Identifying the Chinese as overt aggressors only served to “blow them up to fearsome size in the eyes of their threatened neighbors” when, in reality, the PRC played “chiefly an off-stage role” in regional affairs. Moreover, Washington’s confrontational stance played into Mao’s hands, enabling him to use a hostile America as a catalyst for domestic mobilization. As with Thomson and Hilsman, Rice saw a bridge building opportunity for the administration in China’s looming succession struggle. He speculated that the next generation of leadership was likely to be “more concerned with the problems of managing a nation-state than with consummating a revolutionary struggle in the outside world.” A unilateral relaxation of trade and travel restrictions would almost certainly be rejected by the “first-generation of religious zealots” currently in power, but these conciliatory gestures could send a message to Mao’s successors and thereby “bridge the enormous spiritual gulf between these people and ourselves...[by] plant[ing] in some of their minds the seeds of doubt as to our irreconcilable enmity.”¹⁵

A second group of Johnson officials were far less ambitious in their policy proposals, recommending only cosmetic and symbolic changes in America’s posture, and were far more concerned with what they saw as a menacing Chinese presence in Southeast Asia. This camp was

not so much interested in laying the foundation for a new relationship with China as they were in reducing America's growing isolation and re-energizing the policy of containment. Still, even their ambivalent endorsement of change underscored the tenuousness of the U.S. position. In a November 1964 memorandum to LBJ, for example, UN Ambassador Adlai Stevenson reasoned that while China would continue to pose the "principal threat" to America's global leadership, the old prescription of containment and isolation was no longer feasible. He envisioned a new strategy that would enlist the support of regional actors such as Japan and India in checking Chinese ambitions by primarily political and economic means. Yet to mobilize support for international vigilance against the PRC, the U.S. had to demonstrate to "potential allies and neutrals" alike that its policy was "directed against Chinese aggressiveness, not against the Chinese people...and that we are quite ready to negotiate modus vivendi or even real settlements, on a quid pro quo basis, whenever Peiping is ready to accommodate itself to a peaceful world." Chief among Stevenson's recommendations was a "progressive relaxation" of the administration's opposition to the mainland's membership in the UN.¹⁶

Along somewhat similar lines, Assistant Secretary of State for International Organization Affairs Harlan Cleveland cast doubt on the assumption that the Chinese could be "tamed by the application of sweetness and light." Of greater interest to him was finding a way of "mobilizing all of the world's nations that oppose the way the Chinese Communists are using their power, in a new strategy that puts the primary stress on future improvements in Chinese behavior." Cleveland argued that this did not entail altering China policy in a "fundamental sense"; successful containment merely required the *appearance* of a change in attitude. Demonstrating a statesman-like willingness to move onto a negotiating track on items such as nuclear testing and Chinese representation would convey a sorely needed image of American flexibility at little expense, since the "implacable hostility" of China's leadership would guarantee minimal progress on these issues. Any deadlock could then be attributed to Chinese

intransigence. In this way, a policy of firm containment would be justified and made more palatable to world opinion.¹⁷

William Bundy, who succeeded Hilsman in the Far East portfolio in March 1964, did not share his predecessor's zeal for new approaches to Beijing. Thomson recollected that his new boss (until July 1964, when Thomson was then assigned to the NSC) regarded him as a "thorn in the flesh."¹⁸ Bundy's China mindset was indelibly influenced by his extensive engagement with Vietnam policymaking. In late 1964, he insisted that the problems of Chinese representation and the insurgency in South Vietnam could not be separated. Beijing's backing of, and potential intervention in, that conflict made this a particularly inopportune time "to add the element – however purely psychological in importance – of international acceptance of Communist China."¹⁹ Even as he favored holding the line on current policy, however, Bundy, somewhat ambiguously, wrote that if this proved counterproductive, Washington would then "have to find ways to preserve the GRC [Government of the Republic of China] position by rolling with the punch in some fashion." On issues of less symbolic significance, he showed interest in a loosening of travel regulations and initiating limited trade in food and medicines.²⁰ Indeed, Bundy's evident discomfort with domestic and international criticism of the administration's inflexibility yielded cautious advocacy of policy reform, even if only for defensive purposes. Thus in June 1965, most likely in response to Zablocki's House subcommittee report from the previous month, he proposed broadening the categories of Americans eligible to travel to China to include scholars and graduate students. Bundy argued that this would demonstrate to critics "that it is the Chinese Communists rather than ourselves who fear the exchange of ideas."²¹

Both of these groups, especially the most ardent advocates of reform, lacked the clout and standing of those who had the President's ear. The brash Hilsman had served with the blessing of Kennedy, and the assassination of his patron left him with very few friends in high places. Hilsman's resignation from government in February 1964 stemmed primarily from strained relations with his old colleagues and the new President, particularly over the matter of his hearty

encouragement of the overthrow of South Vietnam's President Ngo Dinh Diem the previous November.²² Yet his views on China were clearly not shared by LBJ's entourage. Hilsman later claimed that he learned through a third party that the President in fact thought the December 1963 speech was "very good", a reaction that would appear to mesh with Johnson's aforementioned intellectual flexibility toward China.²³ This flexibility, however, did not translate into any sustained engagement with China policy in the early months of his administration, and he seemed more willing to defer to the hard-line counsel of his seasoned advisers.²⁴ According to some accounts, the December 1963 address, by a quirk of bureaucratic politics, never received proper clearance from the White House and Rusk failed to inquire about its content. As one Asian hand in the State Department recalled, it caused the Secretary "considerable agony" and "came as something of a shock to him."²⁵ Undoubtedly aware of the "uneasy" response of his superiors, Hilsman was forced to backtrack somewhat from the implications of his remarks in subsequent media appearances.²⁶

Hilsman's departure from the scene dealt a decisive blow to the policy review he had initiated in the spring of 1963. Those left to champion the cause encountered considerable difficulty. In keeping with his tolerance of dissent within the NSC, McGeorge Bundy gave Thomson free rein to express his thoughts on China.²⁷ As the President's gatekeeper, however, Bundy was far more circumspect in the information and opinions that he presented to Johnson. Thomson later speculated that his views were not assiduously conveyed to the White House, likely because Bundy did not share them or possibly out of concern for safeguarding his continued access to LBJ.²⁸ For his part, Bundy thought Thomson was morbidly consumed by the fear of another Sino-American clash. As a result, he tended to "overestimate the likelihood of such a collision and...underestimate the good sense of others in the Administration...his estimates of both Chinese and American behavior were consistently too gloomy."²⁹

LBJ's inner circle was alarmed by international developments in the fall of 1964. While they eschewed the option of an unprovoked pre-emptive strike against Chinese nuclear

installations, they expressed considerable anxiety over the politico-psychological ramifications of the PRC's successful test on 16 October. Referring to an "intense fear of fallout" throughout Asia over this occurrence at an NSC meeting the following day, Rusk intoned, with no dissension, "Now is no time for a new policy toward Communist China."³⁰ The simultaneous ouster of Soviet Chairman Nikita Khrushchev, the Kremlin official most identified with Soviet-American détente, exacerbated concerns over China's growing prestige and self-confidence. Few in Washington immediately understood the reasons for Khrushchev's departure, or what this meant for both the future of détente and Sino-Soviet relations. It seemed certain, however, that Beijing's struggle for leadership of the international communist movement had acquired considerable momentum. "The Soviet position has been weakened by the change [in rulers]," the American Ambassador in Moscow, Foy Kohler, reported shortly after the purge. "With the disappearance of Khrushchev, Mao...remains the only old-line world-known communist figure, with no visible Russian rivals of significant stature."³¹ This rapid succession of Chinese coups, Rusk remarked to British Foreign Secretary Patrick Gordon Walker, "must have confirmed the Chinese leaders in their view that primitive militancy paid."³² The State Department's INR bureau noted in November a decidedly "aggressive and uncompromising tone" to Beijing's latest foreign policy pronouncements.³³

This palpable sense of Chinese ascendancy produced a strong counter-reaction among LBJ's closest aides, especially Rusk. The "central question," as the Secretary defined it, was "the need to influence a half-dozen key people in China on the question of how China is doing, and whether its present policy is or is not on the right track. Such actions as the recognition of China by France or its future admission into the UN would, of course, be very bad in that it would persuade the Chinese that they were being successful. Unless other things demonstrate to the Chinese that they are not on the right track we will be faced with much greater danger in the future."³⁴ Coming of age at the height of the West's failed policy of appeasement in the 1930's, the Johnson team rejected the notion that the behavior of a brazenly confident and aggressive

adversary could be moderated by the extension of olive branches. Gestures of this nature would be misinterpreted as a sign of weakness and would only encourage further probes of American resolve, perhaps setting off another global conflagration. Images of a belligerent China were frequently contrasted with Soviet prudence, as they had been since the beginning of the Kennedy presidency. “The countries of the Warsaw and NATO pacts are now likely to work out their problems without recourse to war,” Rusk observed in November. “We can’t, however, say the same thing about Communist China.”³⁵ Veterans of the Cuban missile crisis, these Cold War liberals maintained that instilling restraint in an opponent rested on the judicious application of politico-military pressure.³⁶ This logic underlay Johnson’s hard-line proclamation in April 1964: “so long as the Communist Chinese pursue aggression...[and] preach violence, there can be and will be no easing of relationships...It is not we who must reexamine our view of China. It is the Chinese Communists who must reexamine their view of the world.”³⁷

This policy remained unchanged in the fall, as the administration worked to perpetuate China’s international isolation. In September, a State Department circular telegram was sent to all U.S. diplomatic missions in non-Communist bloc countries, urging personnel stationed abroad to ensure that those governments now recognizing Taiwan “not move closer” to the PRC at a time when it was “inciting aggression in Asia, encouraging rebellion in Africa and extolling militant revolution in much of the world.”³⁸ Particular attention was paid to Africa, where it was feared that the combined effect of French recognition and loan offers by Beijing would sway opinion on the continent in favor of the PRC’s admission to the UN. Some officials cautioned against an overreaction to Chinese activity in Africa, warning that heavy-handed attempts to counter it could alienate sensitive African leaders and enhance the PRC’s influence.³⁹ These sensible objections were overridden by the larger priority of recovering enough votes for the “important question” resolution at the upcoming 19th General Assembly. A number of pressure tactics were reviewed, including letters from the President, high-level missions to critical African nations, and the

promise of greater economic aid.⁴⁰ To monitor Chinese progress in the region, the State Department established a special monthly series of intelligence studies in January 1965.⁴¹

In November, Stevenson urged Johnson to approve a “two Chinas” policy, arguing that this would stave off an impending diplomatic defeat and ensnare the PRC in a web of interlocking relations with the world community. A State Department policy paper prepared two months earlier warned that such a move entailed “serious losses and risks,” namely the dilution of Taiwan as a diplomatic counter to the mainland. Moreover, a shift in U.S. policy would likely have unsettling effects on the morale of Asian allies –such as South Korea, South Vietnam, and Thailand- and create pressures for their accommodation with the PRC.⁴² When the topic came up for discussion at a White House meeting, Rusk objected to Stevenson’s proposal on the grounds that it would send the wrong message to China. “If we appeared to falter before...Communist China,” he cautioned, “this would be interpreted as a reward for the track they have been following, and this would increase the chance of war.” Remarking that he did not want to be party to “a pay-off for the...ChiCom hard line,” LBJ sided with his Secretary of State.⁴³ The timing of Johnson’s decision was particularly noteworthy, coming as it did after being comfortably elected, which leads one to conclude that his motives were not strictly political. Rusk’s invocation of the lessons of Munich undoubtedly resonated with the President. McGeorge Bundy fully concurred with this logic, reminding Johnson the following month that China’s “nuclear explosion and her aggressive attitudes toward her neighbors make her a major problem for all peaceful people. This is not the time to give her increased prestige or to reward her belligerence –at the UN or elsewhere.”⁴⁴

Rusk pressed this theme in conversations with those allies –Britain, Canada, and Japan- seen as increasingly wobbly on the issue of Chinese representation.⁴⁵ Owing in no small part to American pressure, Ottawa dropped its sponsorship of a one-China, one-Taiwan declaratory resolution.⁴⁶ The new Labour government of Harold Wilson, more flexible on Chinese representation than its Conservative predecessor yet just as interested in solidifying the “special

relationship” with the U.S., maintained London’s position.⁴⁷ Incidentally, no vote was taken on the question in 1964 because of a crisis over the funding of UN peacekeeping operations. Nevertheless, the administration remained vigilant. In a January 1965 meeting with Japanese Prime Minister Eisaku Sato, Rusk insisted that it was “essential for the United States and Japan to maintain the closest contact” in preventing Beijing’s seating at the UN.⁴⁸

In June, the Secretary vetoed William Bundy’s aforementioned proposal for the eligibility of scholars and graduate students to travel to China, and grudgingly opted instead for the more limited category of medical doctors and public health specialists. In his recommendation to Johnson, Rusk cited pressures from Congress (the Zablocki House Subcommittee) and the academic community for a loosening of travel restrictions, and advanced the negative rationale that Beijing’s inevitable refusal to grant any visits would “underline that it is they, not we, who are intractable and perhaps fearful of the contagion of ideas.”⁴⁹ At a luncheon with his senior aides, however, LBJ rejected this suggestion as well, explaining that “it would not be wise to change our current policy” at that time.⁵⁰

What accounted for this high-level resistance to altering China policy? LBJ’s deference to Rusk on China cannot be separated from his conception of foreign policy as an intensely political process. As discussed in the previous chapter, surveys at this time offered no unambiguous barometer of public attitudes toward the mainland. A majority of Americans continued to identify China as the greatest danger to world peace. In a 1965 Gallup poll, for example, 53 percent held the PRC responsible for Vietcong operations in South Vietnam, an impression no doubt fostered by the administration’s rhetoric.⁵¹ Yet even as China’s nuclear status and its role in Vietnam cemented impressions of an international pariah, polling results revealed an interest in expanding contacts with Beijing. Whether or not these contradictions in opinion reflected public indifference or genuine recognition of the need for new approaches to China remains unclear. Nor is it clear if Johnson closely monitored this data. LBJ’s reading of the politics entwined with China policy was colored by lessons gleaned from the “who lost China”

debate of the early 1950's and by his own short-term domestic priorities. By the summer of 1965, the most outspoken critics of the administration's rigid posture were editorialists and academics. If there was indeed greater tolerance among the public at large for rethinking China strategy, this latent sentiment had not been effectively mobilized by the proponents of reform into any widespread clamoring for change. China policy reform had not been elevated to a pressing item on the American political agenda. Accordingly, a politician as cautious as Johnson, instinctively wary of bold gestures in foreign policy, was inclined to stay the course.

Immediate circumstances recommended this option. Throughout 1964, LBJ's consuming objective was fending off an electoral challenge from the hawkish Goldwater. While Johnson saw advantages in contrasting his prudent statesmanship with the bellicose statements of his opponent, which had likely played a role in his rejection of military action against China's nuclear program, he undoubtedly perceived dangers in creating too much space between himself and the Senator on matters such as Chinese representation. Goldwater had been closely aligned with the China Lobby since the mid-1950's, and he urged withdrawal from the UN if Beijing was ever admitted.⁵² Even in the aftermath of his sweeping mandate, Johnson was unwilling to invest substantial political capital in a diplomatic venture that could undermine his domestic authority. He repeatedly stressed to his aides that he viewed the early months of 1965 as a small window of opportunity for enacting his Great Society legislation, knowing full well that his honeymoon with the electorate and Congress would not last indefinitely.⁵³ On 20 April, 321 legislators –51 Senators and 270 Representatives –issued a declaration opposing the PRC's admission to the UN, U.S. diplomatic recognition, or trade relations with the mainland.⁵⁴ Lingering hostility to China on Capitol Hill, at a time when votes were being courted for crucial domestic bills, could not have escaped the attention of the White House.

The Johnson team's interpretation of the PRC's role in Southeast Asia contributed decisively to the reaffirmation of China policy through the summer of 1965, and it is to this

heightened threat perception that this chapter now turns. Paradoxically, this threat was seen as an outgrowth of China's relative weakness. For while it was acknowledged that China had recovered somewhat by 1964-65 from the disastrous Great Leap Forward, U.S. analysts were more impressed by the "monumental economic problems" still bedeviling Mao and his comrades. China's rapidly growing population, inadequate arable land, low level of technology, and loss of Soviet assistance in 1960 all made for a gloomy forecast. A January 1964 national intelligence estimate asserted that it would be "many years" before the PRC became a modern industrial state.⁵⁵ Lacking the economic resources and level of development needed to sustain a modern military machine, senior officials dismissed any notion of a *conventional* Chinese menace. When Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield inquired at one point about the "military strength" of China, McNamara contended that Beijing "presented us with no strategic threat. They cannot touch us with [the] strategic weapons they now possess. We can now counter their non-strategic strength without adding to our existing strength."⁵⁶ A steady stream of intelligence analyses all concluded that Chinese leaders respected America's military superiority and were anxious to prevent another Korea-like confrontation. Accordingly, the country's military orientation would remain decidedly defensive for the foreseeable future.⁵⁷

These same officials, however, postulated that the discretion of China's leadership compelled them to adopt alternative methods in pursuit of hostile long-term ambitions. This threat was most coherently and elaborately defined in the administration's June 1966 Long Range Study on China, prepared jointly by the State and Defense Departments. The mainland's ultimate objective, according to the report, was to make itself "the center and guiding light of a Communist world." The prerequisites for securing this position, and to which the Chinese were now dedicating themselves, were the gradual expulsion of American power and influence from Asia, the strengthening of their own influence among the world's less-developed nations, and the displacement of Soviet leadership of the international communist movement. In lieu of the conventional tactics of invasion and conquest for attaining these ends, the PRC had

accommodated itself to its relative impotence vis a vis its Great Power rivals and relied instead on a low-risk strategy of “indirect aggression, subversion and diplomatic maneuver, conceived as a totality and designed to drain the energies of their antagonists.” The greatest danger facing Southeast Asia was “militant dissidence within the nations of the area, encouraged, supplied, or fomented by Communist China.” In aiding local insurgencies, Beijing aimed to “usurp the functions of legitimate governments, to take them over, and to replace them with regimes permanently sympathetic or subservient to the Chinese Communists.”⁵⁸ In short, then, the Chinese threat was more a function of its perceived intentions, the zeal with which its leaders were devoted to exporting their values, and the socio-economic vulnerabilities of its neighbors, than it was of any traditional measurement of power and capability.

Communist Chinese ideology, as articulated in speeches and writings, was a critical component of the administration’s threat assessment. Bemoaning the importance ascribed to these pronouncements, McNamara later recalled, “we –certainly I –badly misread China’s objectives and mistook its bellicose rhetoric to imply a drive for regional hegemony.”⁵⁹ Correlations were often drawn between the country’s recent revolutionary experience and the worldview of its rulers. A May 1965 NIE, emblematic of this tendency, makes for interesting reading. Beijing’s foreign policy, the authors posited, was “a projection into the world arena of the principles and concepts developed in the prosecution of China’s long civil war...[and] is primarily a strategy for revolutionary war...conceived in terms of conflict rather than of adjusting relations with other states by negotiations...International politics is viewed as a great guerrilla struggle in which the opponent is to be constantly harassed and threatened.” Infused with this militant philosophy, and with an historic sense of the centrality of their nation and culture, these “dedicated, even fanatic Communists” held no stake in either the Western or Soviet conception of world order and therefore felt “relatively free to encourage and exploit chaos wherever they are able to do so.”⁶⁰ The publication in September 1965 of Defense Minister Lin Biao’s article, *Long Live the Victory of People’s War!*, with its call for the “rural areas of the world” (the developing nations) to

overtake “the cities” (the industrialized nations) by means of local revolution, confirmed the worst suspicions of Chinese intentions, with many in Washington likening it to a blueprint for aggression on a par with Hitler’s *Mein Kampf*.⁶¹

The challenge posed by China was perceived most acutely in South Vietnam, where an American-sponsored regime was attempting to fend off a ferocious communist insurgency. Johnson inherited a rapidly deteriorating position in Saigon. His predecessor, highly ambivalent toward extensive involvement in Indochina yet wary of the domestic and international repercussions of a defeat, had settled on a middle course, avoiding an open-ended commitment while sending materiel aid and U.S. advisers to counter the southern National Liberation Front (NLF) and their patron, communist North Vietnam (the Democratic Republic of Vietnam – DRV). In the hopes of fostering a more vigorous and popular government in Saigon, the Kennedy team acquiesced in the coup of President Diem in November 1963.⁶² In doing so, Washington unwittingly triggered a prolonged period of political turmoil in the South, characterized by a series of military coups, increasingly corrupt and inefficient administration, and mounting discontent among the populace.

In the early months of his presidency, Johnson was inundated with reports of steady progress by the NLF and predictions of an impending collapse in Saigon.⁶³ Yet the new President balked at recommendations, particularly from the Joint Chiefs of Staff, that he adopt a program of military pressures against the DRV to deter its support of the insurgency. Johnson feared that these escalatory measures would provoke Beijing. It “looks to me like we’re getting into another Korea,” he frowned to McGeorge Bundy in May 1964. “I believe that the Chinese Communists are coming into it. I don’t think that we can fight them ten thousand miles away from home.”⁶⁴ Determined to preserve Kennedy’s commitment to South Vietnam without igniting a wider conflagration that could derail his hopes for election in 1964, LBJ (with the exception of limited air strikes against the North in response to the Gulf of Tonkin incidents of August) deferred a decision for military intervention, opting instead for stopgap measures that aimed to avert disaster

for the remainder of the year by expanding economic assistance and the number of American advisers.⁶⁵

The administration's perception of the PRC's role in Vietnam, as with its general assessment of Chinese power, was riddled with contradictions. The most zealous advocates of military intervention in Vietnam frequently cited the imperative of containing Chinese expansionism. Yet in pressing the President for this course of action, they sought to assuage his fears of an enlarged war by calling attention to China's military feebleness and its reluctance to enter the fighting in lieu of a direct threat to its own security.⁶⁶ As the application of military pressure against the North was contemplated in the early months of 1964 and afterwards, U.S. officials devoted considerable effort to deciphering the threshold of Chinese restraint and the extent to which action could be safely taken against the PRC's ally without the possibility of setting off a wider conflict. In accordance with the widely accepted image of a cautious, defensive-oriented China, intelligence analysts advanced a consistently optimistic appraisal of the most likely Chinese response to a program of American military coercion against Hanoi. Drawing on these reports, the Joint Chiefs asserted in March 1964 that the mainland viewed the war as a "DRV problem" and was unwilling to introduce significant ground units into North Vietnam; it would offer at most fighter aircrafts and volunteers.⁶⁷

In the spring, a national intelligence estimate predicted that, in the event of U.S. air strikes against the North, China would merely deploy forces to areas bordering Vietnam and offer its ally anti-aircraft units. For all of their bravado, the PRC's leaders were determined to avoid a clash with the United States and would only consider direct intervention in response to an unambiguous threat to their own security, such as an attack on Chinese territory or the deep penetration of U.S. ground forces into North Vietnam. Otherwise, Beijing would remain "niggardly with tangible support" for its client.⁶⁸ In a similar vein, the CIA interpreted the rapid build-up of Chinese military strength in South China and its moves to bolster Hanoi's air defenses in the aftermath of the Gulf of Tonkin incidents in August as strictly defensive gestures, intended

to demonstrate the PRC's continued support for the Vietnamese insurgency and to deter further American military action, all the while keeping itself above the fray with no commitment to enter the fighting.⁶⁹

Many senior U.S. officials doubted that the DRV would welcome such a commitment. This view, commonly espoused by the most hawkish elements of the administration such as the Joint Chiefs and Walt Rostow, rested on the notion of Vietnamese nationalism and the historical enmity existing between the Vietnamese and Chinese. They contended that the DRV's leaders jealously guarded their independence and were loath to request troops from their socialist brethren. Consequently, this camp asserted that this political dynamic created greater leeway for vigorous U.S. military action against the North.⁷⁰ Those policymakers less enamored of this option also made reference to Sino-Vietnamese tensions in arguing their case. In a lengthy October 1964 paper, William Bundy explored the ways in which the detrimental effects of a political solution to the Vietnam imbroglio could be blunted. In contemplating a negotiated withdrawal from the war, the Assistant Secretary forwarded the idea of continuing the present course of U.S. assistance to South Vietnam while preserving a credible threat of force against the North to enhance America's bargaining position at the conference table. Bundy fully understood that a "neutralist" outcome in the South would in fact "lead in a period of months...to a Saigon government dominated by Communists and then to a unified Communist Vietnam." One consolation arising from such an arrangement, however, was that this would amount to "a *Vietnamese* solution without Chinese participation, and almost certainly Hanoi would bend every effort to have it this way...China would not have re-entered Southeast Asia in any concrete sense, and there is at least some hope that a Communist Vietnam...would be to some extent a buffer against [the] further spread of Chinese influence."⁷¹

Yet those same officials who emphasized China's prudence and the resilience of Vietnamese nationalism elevated the Vietnam War to a textbook case of Chinese strategy, one that sought to extend the mainland's influence across Southeast Asia by furnishing aid and

encouragement to communist insurgencies. In Vietnam, Rostow wrote in terms aimed at grabbing Johnson's attention, "*we are confronted with the most sophisticated effort mounted by the Communists since the war. They aim, by salami tactics, to produce a climax not in the form of an overt Communist military victory, but in the form of political and psychological fragmentation and collapse in...Saigon...and from that political breakdown they plan to move on, via neutralization, to Communist domination.*"⁷² In keeping with the administration's conception of a non-conventional Chinese menace, what was dreaded was not so much Chinese military aggression as the politico-psychological rewards Beijing would accrue from a North Vietnamese victory.

In March 1964, McNamara framed the stakes of America's involvement in Vietnam for the President. The U.S. commitment to preserving a non-communist government in Saigon, he asserted, was regarded by all of Asia, indeed the whole world, "as a test case of U.S. capacity to help a nation meet a Communist 'war of liberation.' " A communist victory in South Vietnam would have a disastrous bandwagon effect throughout the region. Allies confronting similar threats of communist insurgencies would lose faith in American credibility and feel forced to adjust their strategic orientation in line with Chinese interests.⁷³ McNamara's contention that a toppled Saigon would represent the first in a long line of dominoes falling under China's domination was widely shared. A June 1964 CIA analysis, which the Defense Secretary later cited as "confirming my and others' fear...that the West's containment policy lay at serious risk in Vietnam,"⁷⁴ concluded that China would emerge as the real victor from a North Vietnamese triumph, as it would vindicate Beijing's "thesis that the underdeveloped world is ripe for revolution, that the US is a paper tiger, and that local insurgency can be carried through to victory without undue risk of precipitating a major international war."⁷⁵ In losing Saigon without a fight, Washington would send an impression of vacillation and indecisiveness to other governments in the region. When LBJ questioned his advisers in September 1964 whether safeguarding South Vietnam's independence was "worth all this effort," Maxwell Taylor (the U.S. Ambassador in

Saigon), the Joint Chiefs, CIA Director McCone, and Rusk unanimously concurred that “if we should lose in South Vietnam, we would lose Southeast Asia. Country after country would give way and look toward Communist China as the rising power of the area.”⁷⁶

Concurrent events beyond Vietnam’s borders shaped an image of Chinese ascendancy in the region. Washington observed with dismay the gradual alignment in the foreign policies of Indonesia and China and the steady rise in political influence of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI), which was thought to be Beijing’s proxy. In Cambodia, the PRC shrewdly exploited that country’s traditional fear of its Vietnamese and Thai adversaries by enticing it with promises of aid and assurances of its continued sovereignty. The administration attributed the emergence of a communist insurgency in Thailand in early 1965 to the hidden hand of China. Many U.S. officials believed that these unsettling developments were intertwined with the commitment in South Vietnam, in so far as it was assumed that this multi-front assault on America’s interests in Southeast Asia and the lack of a reliable fallback position rendered a retreat from Saigon unthinkable.⁷⁷ Surveying the war from this perspective, Michael Forrestal, a Far East specialist at the State Department, wrote toward the end of 1964: “if China did not exist, the effect of our withdrawal from a situation in which the people we were trying to help seemed unable to help themselves might not be politically so pervasive in Asia.”⁷⁸

With the blessing of the Indonesian army and the PKI, President Sukarno renounced Indonesia’s parliamentary system in March 1957 and gradually reinstated presidential rule. Sukarno promoted the aggrandizement of the PKI’s influence, appreciating the party as an effective political vehicle that could deliver mass support and serve as a counterweight to the powerful army.⁷⁹ The complexities of Sukarno’s delicate balancing act frequently resulted in domestic paralysis, and encouraged him to undertake bold initiatives abroad as a means of rallying public opinion and perpetuating his unique leadership role.⁸⁰ One such initiative came in 1963, when the Indonesian ruler declared his opposition to British plans for ending its colonial rule in Malaya, Singapore, and two small crown colonies in Northern Borneo by merging them

into the new federation of Malaysia. Sukarno's line of "Confrontation" with Malaysia, anti-American diatribes, flirtation with the PKI, and apparent complicity in repeated occurrences of local violence against American offices and business properties distressed officials in Washington. By the time he entered office, Johnson faced growing calls from Congress for barring new aid to Indonesia.⁸¹ Despite their frustration, LBJ's aides cautioned him against rash action, arguing that any severing of American aid would probably have no constructive effect and could provoke hostile countermeasures, such as the seizure of U.S. oil assets or further harassment of diplomatic offices. Moreover, the administration would surrender any leverage it still possessed in that country, thereby crippling efforts to strengthen anti-communist elements (primarily the armed forces). By virtue of its size, resources, and strategic location, Indonesia could not be altogether abandoned.⁸²

Developments in 1964 gave little ground for hope that Jakarta's drift away from the West could be reversed. Sukarno's virulently anti-American Independence Day speech on 17 August in particular confirmed for many the clout of the PKI. A CIA memorandum took the address as a sign that the enigmatic leader had irrevocably announced his affiliation with the "anti-Western Asian world" and that he was "well on his way to becoming a captive of the Communists."⁸³ Sukarno's apparent deference to the PKI was of particular concern because it was commonly assumed that the party took its inspiration and marching orders from China. Indeed, Rusk was convinced that it had "swung from Moscow to Peking" in the Sino-Soviet dispute.⁸⁴ Sukarno's decision to withdraw from the UN in January 1965, his efforts to convene a rival Conference of the New Emerging Forces and galvanize international opinion against American actions in Vietnam, and a series of high-level meetings with Chinese representatives were all interpreted as evidence of a flourishing Beijing-Jakarta axis that was working to expunge American influence from Southeast Asia.⁸⁵ A major report prepared by roving Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker in April 1965 seconded many of these gloomy forecasts and recommended a sizeable reduction in the American presence in Indonesia, in view of the increasingly inhospitable climate for U.S.

diplomats and businessmen.⁸⁶ Throughout the summer, an enhanced role for the PKI, the marginalization of the military, and closer ties with China were all seen as foregone conclusions.⁸⁷ Yet while it was agreed that a formal communist takeover of the country, an increasing likelihood, would make little difference in terms of the direction and substance of Indonesia's domestic and foreign policies, a special national intelligence estimate in September postulated that such a development could have considerable psychological repercussions for the entire region. Beijing would be greatly encouraged by the triumph of "one of its closest associates." The PKI's accession to power "would be seen as a major change in the international balance of political forces and would inject new life into the thesis that communism is the wave of the future".⁸⁸

Cambodia presented to the Johnson team a variation on the same problem of Chinese preponderance in Southeast Asia. Since gaining its independence from France in 1953-54, Cambodia, under the rule of Prince Norodom Sihanouk, had charted a non-aligned course in foreign affairs. To wean Phnom Penh from deepening its relations with Beijing, both the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations furnished economic and military assistance. Yet relations between the two countries ultimately deteriorated because the demands of tending to Sihanouk's security concerns clashed with the overriding U.S. priority of containing Asian communism.⁸⁹ Incensed by mounting South Vietnamese and Thai incursions into Cambodian territory throughout 1963 and by their support of the rightist Khmer Serei movement, Sihanouk renounced all U.S. aid just days prior to JFK's assassination, evidently under the assumption that the Americans were unwilling or unable to rein in their allies. Washington's complicity in the Diem coup also played a part in the decision, as it stoked the prince's fears of American objectives toward his own leadership. The renunciation was soon followed by a call for the reconvening of the 1954 Geneva Conference to reach an international agreement on Cambodia's neutrality.⁹⁰ To induce American participation in such a conference, Sihanouk threatened to recognize North Vietnam and sign a defensive arrangement with the PRC.⁹¹

U.S. diplomats in the region were sensitive to Sihanouk's predicament, cognizant that his actions stemmed from fears of Cambodia's historic enemies in Thailand and Vietnam. He above all dreaded the prospect of his country becoming engulfed in the Vietnam War and sought an international guarantee of his borders. The embassy in Phnom Penh, somewhat condescendingly, likened his behavior to that of a "small, intelligent trapped animal desperately seeking exit from [a] trap, dashing back and forth [in] all directions, and keeping up continuous high-pitched shrieking." Superiors in Washington were encouraged to "avoid pushing Sihanouk against [the] wall and driving him into desperation."⁹² Johnson's advisers greeted this recommendation with little enthusiasm, due in large part to the objections of Saigon and Bangkok toward an international conference. Any hint of U.S. willingness to discuss Cambodia's neutrality would make it that much more difficult to convince these allies of "our commitments and will to win in Viet-Nam."⁹³ The administration appeared willing to run the risk of rebuffing the wishes of the mercurial Cambodian ruler and facilitating an accommodation of sorts between Phnom Penh and Beijing for the sake of preserving solidarity with its Cold War partners. "If the issue is whether an unbalanced Sihanouk will irrationally turn to the communist North," Rusk reasoned, "we must balance this against the impact of a complete loss of morale in South Viet-Nam and Thailand."⁹⁴

Washington's stalling on a conference had predictable consequences. Throughout 1964, Sihanouk escalated his anti-American rhetoric and dispatched economic and military delegations to China.⁹⁵ Efforts to repair Cambodian-American relations, culminating in ten days of talks in New Delhi during December, came to naught. By the end of the year, the U.S. embassy in Phnom Penh was reduced to only twelve officers. On 3 May 1965, Sihanouk completely severed diplomatic relations following a border incident involving American planes.⁹⁶ The prince's pro-Chinese neutrality was widely understood among U.S. officials as a tactical maneuver, owing little to any affinity for Maoist ideology but rather to the practical calculation that the PRC was destined to emerge as the dominant regional power and that Cambodia's sovereignty therefore depended on cooperation with the mainland.⁹⁷ "In the longer term," the senior U.S. representative

in Phnom Penh wrote in December 1964, “the chance of re-establishing American prestige and influence here continues to be a function of our success (or lack thereof) in South Viet-Nam. If the war there continues to go badly, the process of Cambodian adjustment to the reality of Communist Chinese power in Southeast Asia will almost certainly continue to our detriment”.⁹⁸ Many within the Johnson administration applied this logic to the entire region; however unsavory or fickle a character Sihanouk might be, his lack of faith in an American victory in Vietnam and his gravitation toward the PRC represented a sentiment that could be contagious.

Indeed, communist advances in South Vietnam, alongside setbacks in Indonesia and Cambodia, convinced several U.S. officials of the need to stiffen Bangkok’s resolve and encourage its continued allegiance through increased military and economic assistance.⁹⁹ Thailand was greatly valued as a staging ground for an ever expanding number of covert operations in the Vietnam War.¹⁰⁰ The Joint Chiefs of Staff asserted in September 1964 that the “principal US objective for Thailand is to insure that it remains a stable nation, allied to the United States, and available as a forward base for the projection of US power into Southeast Asia. Militarily, Thailand is the only secure mainland base for US operations in that area at this time.”¹⁰¹ Yet Thai cooperation, both as an ally in Vietnam and as a bastion of anti-communism in the region, could not be taken for granted. The American Ambassador in Bangkok, Graham Martin, contended that this could only be secured by clarifying the administration’s commitment in Saigon. “They are not yet certain whether we are really prepared to use force to achieve our policy aims in Southeast Asia,” Martin explained in June 1964. Until “they are certain that we have the *will* to use such force as appears appropriate, they will wait to see how the situation unfolds. They will not this time be willing to use their real estate as an American base without a clear view of the end of the road.”¹⁰² Thai officials wasted no effort in pressing Washington for a vigorous defense of Saigon, even raising the possibility of direct attacks against the DRV. In a December 1964 meeting with LBJ, Thai Foreign Minister Thanat Khoman referred to “the indivisibility of the area and to the fact that any loss of South Viet-Nam would constitute an

immediate threat to Thailand.” In such an event, Laos and Cambodia “could hardly hold out, and his implication was that Thailand would do its utmost, but that the issue would be in some doubt.”¹⁰³ Only a few weeks earlier, William Bundy’s interagency Vietnam Working Group had broadly reached the same conclusion.¹⁰⁴

The outbreak of a communist insurgency in northeastern Thailand in early 1965 reinforced concerns about Bangkok’s confidence in American leadership.¹⁰⁵ Washington had little doubt that the mainland, in providing direction and support to the newly formed Thailand Independence Movement (TIM) and the Patriotic Front of Thailand (PFT), was opening up another front in the contest for Southeast Asia. Particularly ominous were Chinese Foreign Minister Chen Yi’s alleged remarks to a French diplomat that guerrilla warfare would spread to Thailand in 1965, reports that Beijing was purchasing large sums of Thai currency in Hong Kong, and the new priority assigned to the study of Thai in the PRC’s Foreign Language Institute.¹⁰⁶ Johnson officials were cautiously optimistic that Bangkok could counter the subversive threat by diverting its resources to those economically depressed pockets of the country most vulnerable to communist propaganda. Critically, however, Thailand’s success in meeting this challenge was seen as directly linked to the outcome of the war in Vietnam. As a CIA estimate noted, “the Thais have a long history of accommodating to external political pressures believed necessary for national survival.” Thus if Saigon fell, the Thais, much like Sihanouk’s Cambodia, “would almost certainly conclude that the best hope for maintaining a national identity lay in neutralism.”¹⁰⁷

It was against this troubling regional backdrop that the most fateful decisions of America’s role in Vietnam were taken. By the end of November 1964, LBJ was presented with a list of options for the bombing of North Vietnam.¹⁰⁸ The Johnson team believed at this point that the only remedy for the malady in the South lay in inflicting punishment on the North and raising the costs of its support for the NLF to an unbearable level. In urging the President to approve bolder actions in defense of the besieged government in Saigon, LBJ’s advisers invoked the

specter of Chinese expansionism. Typical in this respect was William Bundy's decidedly glum appraisal in the first week of January 1965. By insisting on a more stable South Vietnamese government as a precondition for bombing the North, he observed, "our friends in Asia must well be asking whether we would support them if they too had internal troubles in a confrontation situation." Having insinuated only a few months before that the U.S. could live with a communist outcome in Vietnam, Bundy now maintained that the administration had to at least offer token resistance so as to offset latent neutralist sentiment, bolster the will of Asian governments to resist communist subversion, and prepare the ground for holding "the next line of defense, namely Thailand."¹⁰⁹

Elaborating on this theme in his landmark memorandum of 27 January, McGeorge Bundy pressed the President to "use our military power in the Far East and to force a change of Communist policy." Continuation of the current "passive role" would only court disaster. The problem in Saigon was primarily one of morale and "the spreading conviction that the future is without hope for anti-communists...they see the enormous power of the United States withheld... [and] feel that we are unwilling to take serious risks."¹¹⁰ When he advocated sustained bombing of the North following a Vietcong attack on U.S. Army barracks in Pleiku on 6 February, LBJ's National Security Adviser again made reference to the larger stakes involved. Even if bombing failed to produce the intended effects, "the policy will be worth it. At a minimum it will damp down the charge that we did not do all that we could have done, and this charge will be important in many countries, including our own." Moreover, a forceful reprisal policy would set a precedent by establishing "a higher price for the future upon all adventures of guerrilla warfare."¹¹¹

U.S. officials believed that China, as the standard bearer of national liberation and as the most vocal proponent of upheaval and violent change in the Third World, was ideally positioned to capitalize on the anticipated fallout from an American defeat in Vietnam. A May 1965 national intelligence estimate affirmed that China's expansionist designs fed on the vulnerabilities and

insecurities of its neighbors, whose “weak, inexperienced governments are highly vulnerable to Peiping’s line. With large expectations and small capabilities, their people are frustrated by the status quo and naturally inclined to blame their woes on such external factors as colonialist exploitation and racial domination.” Under such circumstances, “It is not too hard to sell them radical ‘solutions’ to their problems.”¹¹² Leaving these governments in the lurch would only exacerbate their grievances, real or imagined, and create an opportunity for Chinese solicitation. In short, the PRC’s revolutionary dynamism, both as an instrument of enticement (as with Cambodia, for example) and intimidation (against Thailand), compensated for its own military and economic deficiencies in the pursuit of an ambitious foreign policy agenda. In one of his more morose moods, McGeorge Bundy brooded over the possibility of “a new polarization of the world, which will...see the poor, restless, non-white peoples, led or pushed by China, isolate themselves from Europe (East and West) and America...economically if they can, but certainly culturally and politically.”¹¹³

The administration’s most senior Vietnam dissident, Under Secretary of State George Ball, believed that the consequences of an American defeat or withdrawal had been vastly exaggerated. He reasoned that reactions across the region to a compromise settlement in Saigon would be “highly parochial,” based on each country’s calculation of its own interests, its vulnerability to communist insurgency, and its confidence in the sanctity of America’s security guarantees. Ball identified only Taiwan and Thailand as favoring “extreme U.S. actions [in Vietnam], including a risk of war with Communist China.”¹¹⁴ American credibility would suffer in the eyes of foe and friend alike more from fruitless engagement in a protracted guerrilla war than from a tactical retreat.¹¹⁵ Privately, Ball doubted that China posed a serious danger to American interests. He thought “China would like to extend its influence but [only] on a limited liability basis” and “did not think for a minute that China invented the SVN war.”¹¹⁶ In all of his memorandums to Johnson, however, the Under Secretary never directly addressed the validity of the prevailing assumptions of a Chinese threat. It is most likely that he never shared his

misgivings out of fear that further questioning of conventional wisdom would only undermine the plausibility of his arguments. As it was, his relatively sanguine appraisal of the consequences of disentanglement from the Vietnam morass had precisely this effect among those more attentive to the imperative of containing the PRC. As one senior participant in the 1965 debates recalled, Ball “just put zero on the China factor...[which] rendered his analysis much less cogent than it might otherwise have been.”¹¹⁷

While Beijing’s backing of the Vietnamese insurgency held the potential of upsetting the balance of power in Southeast Asia, the administration also believed that the consequences of a setback in Saigon would reverberate further afield. U.S. officials, for example, linked events in Vietnam to the steady deterioration in Soviet-American relations in 1964-65.¹¹⁸ Following the Cuban missile crisis, Washington noted a decline in Soviet authority among Asian communist movements as the Kremlin pursued détente with the West.¹¹⁹ In the spring of 1963, Khrushchev informed Averell Harriman that he had effectively “written off and given up” on Southeast Asia, evidently under the assumption that the region was primarily an arena for Sino-American competition.¹²⁰ Indeed, on the eve of his removal from power in October 1964, the Soviet leader remained deliberately above the fray in the Vietnam War. Irritated by Hanoi’s refusal to side with Moscow in the Sino-Soviet dispute and intent on avoiding another Great Power conflict in the aftermath of his misadventure in the Caribbean, he provided North Vietnam with little more than rhetorical support and limited economic aid.¹²¹

As a striking measure of how gravely China’s apparent sway over the DRV was viewed by U.S. officials, many within the administration welcomed the more assertive efforts of Khrushchev’s successors to gain a foothold in North Vietnam and restore Soviet prestige in the region. In January 1965, Moscow began delivering anti-aircraft weaponry to the North, followed the next month by Premier Alexei Kosygin’s visit to Hanoi.¹²² Many reasoned that the Soviets, as the proponents of a more conciliatory line in foreign affairs, might counter China’s belligerent influence and induce Hanoi to curtail its involvement in the South.¹²³ Some continued to entertain

ambitions, stretching back to the Kennedy years, of a Soviet-American identity of interests in blocking Chinese expansionism. With the Soviets “moving with some confidence back into Southeast Asia with the double purpose of expanding their own influence in the East and containing the Chinese,” McGeorge Bundy wrote hopefully to LBJ, “we can possibly make a little money on it.”¹²⁴

Coupled with these hopes, however, was an understanding that the Kremlin’s room for maneuver was small. The Soviets’ new activism in Vietnam was widely seen by the Americans as a defensive gesture, compelled by China’s ascendancy in the international communist movement and by Beijing’s constant taunting of Moscow’s reluctance to assist a socialist ally under American bombardment.¹²⁵ Ambassador Kohler poured cold water on the notion of any “grand global deal” with the Kremlin, as any sign of Soviet-American collusion in Vietnam would be tantamount to Moscow’s “defeat by Peiping for control of [the] world Communist movement.”¹²⁶ Thus while the Soviets were seen as interested in halting the drift toward an escalation of the conflict, U.S. policymakers realized that Chinese pressure had created an intractable dilemma for the Kremlin. “It is a pity that the U.S. and the USSR are being dragged along by North Vietnam,” Rusk remarked in March 1965. “The Soviets are paralyzed by U.S. bombing and, as long as it continues, they cannot take any political action [to encourage negotiations] without exposing themselves to the criticism that they are not defending a socialist country.”¹²⁷ As American analysts understood it, China’s firm support for the DRV had painted Moscow into a corner, forcing it to choose between unmitigated support for Hanoi, even at the risk of war with the U.S., or disengagement, which would only lend credence to Beijing’s charges of a Soviet betrayal.¹²⁸

The Soviets in fact attempted to straddle the issue. Moscow increased economic and military aid to the DRV to preserve its standing among communist allies, while quietly encouraging a peaceful outcome in such a way that would not open it to accusations of coddling the American imperialists.¹²⁹ The conflicting demands of Soviet policy, however, produced shifts in behavior which exasperated Johnson officials in 1965. First, the Kremlin rejected U.S. attempts

to enlist its assistance in pressuring Hanoi to negotiate. In July, Kosygin insisted to Harriman that he could not serve as an intermediary between the two sides, explaining that the Americans would have to approach the North Vietnamese themselves.¹³⁰ Second, a gradual freeze in Soviet-American relations took hold. Washington detected a more “militant, anti-Free World position on such issues as colonialism, national liberation wars, [and] Indochina” from the new Soviet leadership “in response to Chinese rivalry for influence...among radical Afro-Asian states.”¹³¹

In April 1965, Kohler concluded that the imperative of competing with the Chinese for the allegiance of socialist allies had assumed greater priority for the Kremlin than developing relations with Washington. For the foreseeable future, there would be no further movement toward détente, “no new initiatives on [the] Soviet side or acceptance of initiatives from [the] American side.”¹³² Similarly, a Policy Planning Council paper discerned in recent Soviet actions “an inclination to terminate the post-Cuba phase [of relations] and to return to a harder stance in relations with the West.”¹³³ Johnson’s lieutenants held that Moscow’s new posture toward the U.S. bespoke Chinese momentum in the Sino-Soviet dispute, with ominous implications for the future. Testifying before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in March, Rusk observed that “If Peiping can demonstrate that their course of policy is paying substantial dividends, as successes in Southeast Asia...would indicate, then there is a much greater possibility that Moscow would attempt to close the gap between Moscow and Peiping by moving toward Peiping’s more militant attitude toward the world revolution.”¹³⁴

What role did images of China play in Lyndon Johnson’s most significant Vietnam decisions? The President’s motives for Americanizing the war were, of course, complex and multifaceted. As the prevailing line of literature has convincingly argued, LBJ independently reached the conclusion in 1965 that leaving South Vietnam to its fate would be more inimical to his cherished domestic program than the launching of sustained bombing or the dispatch of U.S. combat troops. His decision for intervention stemmed from a thoroughly conservative instinct in

foreign affairs, one that placed a premium on the avoidance of errors in the international arena, such as losing “free world” real estate to communism. Burdened by memories of the “who lost China” debate and the ravages of McCarthyism, Johnson was never sufficiently confident that he could continue to govern effectively at home and contain the political firestorm he believed to be inevitable should he cut his losses in Southeast Asia. Tragically, Johnson thought that the road to the Great Society led through the jungles and rice paddies of Vietnam.¹³⁵

Yet it is also evident that LBJ did not dispute the image presented by his most influential advisers of a Chinese menace, propelled by an implacable ideology and an insatiable appetite for expansion, buoyed by a string of promising international developments, and best positioned to take full advantage of the unravelling of America’s position in Asia in the event of a defeat in South Vietnam. Johnson assumed the presidency with a set of beliefs –the Munich-New Deal mindset –which alerted him to the challenges posed by the PRC. The common assumption that China’s revolutionary élan offered immense appeal to impoverished and malnourished Asians tapped into his own populist impulse. As Vice President, Johnson had urged Kennedy to use all of the economic and technological assets at America’s disposal to counter the lure of communism in Southeast Asia. In 1965, he shuddered at the consequences of a wholesale abandonment of Saigon, wondering whether “all these countries [will] say Uncle Sam is a paper tiger –wouldn’t we lose credibility [by] breaking the word of three Presidents’?”¹³⁶ LBJ’s acceptance of McNamara’s doom-laden scenario of falling dominoes comported with his own reading of history, which emphasized the need to check aggression before it spawned a wider conflict.¹³⁷ “I don’t believe I can walk out [on South Vietnam],” he explained. “If I did, they’d [the communists] take Thailand...Cambodia...Burma...Indonesia ...India...the Philippines...I’d be another [Neville] Chamberlain and...we’d have another Munich.”¹³⁸

The President and his senior aides were temperamentally inclined to believe that the primary beneficiary of a North Vietnamese victory would be China. Their Cold War mindset tended to underplay the indigenous origins of the insurgency and to inflate the role of their

primary adversaries. Barely settled in the Oval Office, Johnson defined Vietnam as a test of American resolve and of his own determination to contain international communism. He remarked to one assistant, "If we don't do something...it'll [Saigon] go under...The Chinese. The fellas in the Kremlin...[will] be taking the measure of us. They'll be wondering just how far they can go."¹³⁹ Notwithstanding Hanoi's prickly nationalism, the administration perceived a DRV tilt toward Beijing in the Sino-Soviet contest during 1963-64, citing the North's disenchantment with Moscow's line of "peaceful co-existence" and marginal support for national liberation struggles, its reliance on the mainland for heavier firepower and improved transportation and communications facilities, and the inspiration it took from Maoist war strategy and the Chinese revolutionary experience.¹⁴⁰ North Vietnam's dependence on China and the PRC's objective of undermining U.S. influence in Asia, the Vietnam Working Group concluded in November 1964, had given rise to "close cooperation" between the two countries and frequent consultation "on major decisions regarding South Vietnam."¹⁴¹

Developments in the new year crystallized this impression. Frustrated by Hanoi's resilience, even after the initiation of air assaults in February, the Johnson team believed that China's steadfast opposition to any negotiated settlement and its exhortations to the North that it stand firm only stiffened the latter's resolve and encouraged the perpetuation of the conflict.¹⁴² Consequently, the notion of Hanoi serving as Beijing's proxy acquired currency. Rusk, for one, was convinced that "Hanoi seemed now to be coming gradually more under Chinese influence."¹⁴³ He saw the PRC as the real enemy in Vietnam and warned Johnson that a defeat there would fan Chinese-inspired subversion: "If the Communist world finds out we will not pursue our commitment to the end, I don't know where they will stay their hand."¹⁴⁴ The President was receptive to this message and dismissed the expressed possibility of a unified, communist Vietnam ever acting as a bulwark against China as "sheer Fulbright nonsense."¹⁴⁵ In a highly publicized address at Johns Hopkins University in April, LBJ contended that China cast a shadow over the war and all of Asia. As part of "a wider pattern of aggressive purposes," the

DRV was being “urged on” by the mainland.¹⁴⁶ McNamara recollected that he “totally underestimated the nationalist aspect of Ho Chi Minh’s movement. We saw him first as a Communist and only second as a Vietnamese nationalist.”¹⁴⁷

Even as Johnson inched toward taking a stand in South Vietnam to thwart Chinese ambitions, however, his inner circle continued to recoil from any direct confrontation with the mainland. They narrowly defined the objective of any military action as curtailing the North’s support of the NLF without provoking Chinese intervention.¹⁴⁸ As throughout 1964, the advocates of escalation in 1965 discounted the possibility of a wider Sino-American war by highlighting the discrepancy between Beijing’s effusive rhetorical support for Hanoi and its unwillingness to incur imperialist reprisals for the sake of socialist solidarity. In arguing for the sustained bombing of North Vietnam in February (what would become Operation Rolling Thunder), the Joint Chiefs of Staff maintained that the Chinese remained reluctant to participate in the fighting and at most would reply to this move by dispatching a limited number of volunteers to the North “to raise the specter of further escalation” and ward off the Americans. The Joint Chiefs essentially urged the President to call the PRC’s bluff and proceed with the air strikes. In the unlikely event of Chinese intervention, they were confident that “the United States and its allies can deal with them adequately.”¹⁴⁹

Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield and George Ball offered a different viewpoint. Mansfield insisted to Johnson that an air offensive was unwise in light of China’s substantial military presence on Hainan and its own airfield infrastructure in North Vietnam.¹⁵⁰ Ball supported limited air strikes against the North only as a means of enhancing America’s bargaining position in a negotiated withdrawal from Saigon. He was highly dubious, however, of the course of sustained military pressure championed by McNamara and McGeorge Bundy, largely out of fear that this would ignite a conflict with the PRC. Relying heavily on intelligence and analysis provided by Allen Whiting, a State Department expert on China, the Under Secretary

was convinced that the recent deployment of 350 Chinese jet fighters to South China conveyed a willingness to deter or engage the United States should the battle line be extended too far northwards.¹⁵¹ Moreover, Beijing could not be expected to acquiesce in any humiliating setback for Hanoi, simply because this “would mean the collapse of the basic Chinese ideological position which they have been disputing with the Soviets.” Considerations of prestige and credibility among their allies, Ball opined, might compel the PRC’s leadership to confront the United States on the ground and in the air before the objectives of America’s bombing program could be met. Once China had entered the war, he glumly warned LBJ, the administration would then be faced with considerable political pressure to forcefully repel the Chinese –if necessary, by the use of nuclear weapons – so as to avert the spectacle of another Korea-like war of attrition.¹⁵²

Despite these concerns, Johnson sided with his senior civilian and military advisers and authorized the bombing of the North, hopeful that this drastic step would coerce Hanoi into seeking a solution on American terms. At a White House meeting following the Pleiku attack on 6 February, an impatient and testy President bluntly dismissed Mansfield’s cautionary counsel, arguing that he “had kept the shotgun over the mantel and the bullets in the basement for a long time.” Johnson “realized that there was a risk of involving the Soviets and Chinese but...neither of these are friendly with us and the problem is to face up to them both.”¹⁵³ LBJ’s bluster belied his own profound anxieties over a wider war in Vietnam. Johnson hedged his bets against Chinese intervention by insisting on a gradual, controlled bombing program that steered clear of sensitive targets. On 6 April, he signed an order that specifically forbade hitting M-19 aircraft bases near Hanoi, lest Chinese technicians working there were caught in the line of fire. Similarly, attacks on North Vietnamese airfields and surface-to-air missile (SAM) sites under construction were prohibited. U.S. pilots could not fly over Hanoi or Haiphong without explicit permission from the White House; strikes against either were not authorized until June 1966.¹⁵⁴

Johnson’s cautious escalation of the war was heavily governed by memories of Korea and the failure to anticipate China’s entry into that conflict in the fall of 1950. The pressures for

firm military measures against a PRC “client” and the promises of Chinese quiescence that LBJ received from his military aides were eerily reminiscent of the same advice given to Truman by General MacArthur.¹⁵⁵ He relied more on his own instincts and preconceptions. Contrary to much of the intelligence he received, Johnson believed that the bonds of ideology overrode any strategic tensions among America’s communist adversaries. He thought, for example, that in the event of a Sino-American clash, the Soviets would “go with them [the PRC] as soon as the fight started. They wouldn’t forsake that Communist philosophy.”¹⁵⁶ It therefore followed that Beijing would not stand idly by while Hanoi was pulverized.

The limits imposed on Rolling Thunder exasperated those within the administration pressing for a more vigorous response. “By limiting our attacks to targets like bridges, military installations and lines of communication,” CIA Director McCone advised Johnson in April, “we signal to the Communists that our determination to win is significantly modified by our fear of widening the war.” The U.S. could dictate the terms of any settlement in Indochina only by “damaging important economic or military assets in North Vietnam.”¹⁵⁷ Throughout the late spring and early summer, the Joint Chiefs pressed for the mining of Northern ports, attacking major bridges along the routes from Hanoi to China, bombing POL storage areas, and raiding airfields and SAM batteries as part of a stepped-up effort to weaken the North’s will to resist.¹⁵⁸ LBJ resisted these recommendations, fearful that any bombing near Hanoi “would bring China into the struggle.”¹⁵⁹ Johnson’s micromanagement of Rolling Thunder was indicative of how he oversaw the larger Americanization of the war effort in 1965, a process which one historian has likened to “an elaborate cat-and-mouse game.” Wary of the military’s influence on Capitol Hill, the President chose not to challenge the Joint Chiefs directly, giving them “enough to suggest that they might get more later” while, in order to control the risks of escalation, he “denied them several of the items they deemed crucial to their own strategy.”¹⁶⁰

Recent scholarship has confirmed that Johnson did in fact possess some room for maneuver in waging war against the DRV. Mao consistently supported the establishment of a

unified Vietnam under communist rule, yet the lengths to which he was willing to go in support of this objective turned on calculations of Chinese strategic interests, relations with the Americans and Soviets, and, not least of all, domestic priorities. Thus for most of the 1950's, particularly during the Geneva Conference in 1954, Beijing counselled caution to its ally in Hanoi, out of concern that forceful prosecution of an insurgency in the South could provoke American intervention and divert Chinese resources from the tasks of economic reconstruction and consolidation of the CCP's rule in the wake of the Korean War.¹⁶¹ Elements within the Chinese leadership continued to argue in favor of this line well into the next decade. In February 1962, Wang Jiaxiang, head of the CCP's International Liaison Department, contended that China required a stable and peaceful international environment to pursue its recovery from the Great Leap Forward. Mao interpreted Wang's proposals as a threat to his own leadership and as another disquieting sign of the Soviet-style revisionism that was sapping China's revolutionary vigor.¹⁶²

A fusion of domestic and international concerns elicited Mao's personal interest in a protracted Vietnamese conflict and a shift towards more active support of the North's armed struggle from 1962-63 onwards: the need to counter what was perceived as America's hostile encirclement of China and bleed U.S. resources dry, to promote China's leadership of international communism by cultivating national liberation movements, and to exploit regional tensions as a means of mobilizing domestic support for his vision of "continuous revolution" and vigilance against capitalist restoration at home.¹⁶³ The apparent change in U.S. strategy heralded by the air strikes against North Vietnam in August 1964, following the Gulf of Tonkin incidents, alarmed Chinese leaders and galvanized them into delivering on their promises of support to Hanoi. That same month, China delivered fifteen MIG-15 and MIG-17 jets to the DRV, agreed to train North Vietnamese pilots, and initiated the construction of new airfields in areas adjacent to the Vietnamese border. In the aftermath of Rolling Thunder, the PRC sent ground-to-air missiles, anti-aircraft artillery, and railroad, engineering, minesweeping, and logistic units to the North.¹⁶⁴

Throughout the first half of 1965, Beijing vigorously opposed Ghanaian, French, and Polish peace initiatives to settle the conflict.¹⁶⁵

Like its American adversary, however, China's interest in a victory in Vietnam was tempered by its fear of a Great Power collision. Sinologists have argued that Mao's determination to launch the Cultural Revolution, even as early as January 1965, made this a particularly inopportune time for another Korea-like clash. Far from a statement of aggression, Lin's *Long Live the Victory of People's War!* encouraged local insurgency groups to bear the brunt of liberation struggles and "indicated that China would put increasing proportions of its energy not into exporting people's war but in assuring revolutionary continuity inside the country." In these circumstances, Mao sought or at least welcomed assurances of American military restraint in Vietnam.¹⁶⁶

Even as Beijing increased its aid to Hanoi, it moved to limit its own direct participation in the fighting. Much to the disappointment of the DRV's leadership, China retracted an April 1965 pledge to dispatch volunteer pilots.¹⁶⁷ In June, PLA Chief of Staff Luo Ruiqing and his North Vietnamese counterpart, Van Tien Dung, finalized an arrangement whereby the North would continue to wage the struggle by themselves, with continued materiel support from China, so long as the U.S. confined itself to only bombing the DRV.¹⁶⁸ Years later, North Vietnam's Prime Minister Pham Van Dong snidely observed that Mao "was always ready to fight to the last Vietnamese."¹⁶⁹ Mao and his comrades evidently hoped that the Korean precedent would serve as a brake against American aggression in the North and deter any action that threatened China's own borders. To heighten the Johnson administration's calculation of risk, they used the Sino-American ambassadorial talks in Warsaw as a forum to issue deliberately vague, ominous warnings against U.S. escalation.¹⁷⁰ On 21 April 1965, Wang Guoquan, the Chinese Ambassador to Poland, stated in a typical exchange that "Chinese security was directly threatened by U.S. aggression [in] South Viet-nam [sic] ...[the] Chinese share [the] same destiny with people all over [the] world and must join hands with them."¹⁷¹

A joint State-Defense study group, echoing previous findings, concluded barely one week later that China's bark was worse than its bite. While the continued prosecution of an air war against the DRV carried risks of "limited Chinese military involvement," the far more dangerous scenario of a large-scale Chinese offensive in Southeast Asia or an attack on American planes and ships from bases in South China would arise only if the United States "appeared to threaten the very existence of a Communist regime in North Viet Nam [sic] or...[made] an effort to deal serious blows to China itself."¹⁷² This was ultimately a very accurate reading of Chinese attitudes. The implication here was that China's prudence provided considerable leeway for American operations in the North. Intriguingly, the report went on to argue that should the U.S. find itself engaged in war with China, the initial objective of preserving a non-communist South Vietnam would be "wholly inadequate to the large-scale hostilities going on and some adjustment would have to be made." An expanded conflict would present an opportunity to " 'settle' once and for all some of the more troublesome problems facing us in the Far East." Washington could pursue a "restoration of the geographic status quo through elimination of [the] Chinese Communist military presence in all the Southeast Asian countries to reunification, under non-communist regimes, of Viet Nam [sic] and Korea, and ultimately to the extreme objective of destroying communist control of mainland China."¹⁷³

Still, as the State-Defense group acknowledged, the cost of securing any of these goals would "far exceed the level of hostilities experienced in the Korean War."¹⁷⁴ Johnson himself displayed no interest in contemplating such an option. Furthermore, he was far less sanguine than many of his advisers in pinpointing the hair-trigger for Chinese intervention and he took very seriously the warnings issued by Chinese officials. On 31 May, Chen Yi delivered a new message, courtesy of the British Foreign Office, which appeared to be an attempt to establish the ground rules for America's conduct of hostilities in Vietnam. It may have only succeeded in muddying the waters for LBJ. The statement affirmed that (1) China would not provoke war with the United States; (2) what China said counted; (3) China was prepared; and (4) if America

bombed China, that would mean war and there would be no limits to the war. The problem with this declaration, McGeorge Bundy wrote, was that “it does not tell us at all at what point the Chinese might move in Vietnam itself in a way which would force us to act against China. And that of course is the \$64 question.”¹⁷⁵

Chinese intentions weighed heavily on Johnson as he contemplated the next stage of the war. Within a month of the launching of Rolling Thunder, the President was informed that a bombing offensive alone could not guarantee a reversal of fortunes in the South.¹⁷⁶ In July, the Pentagon, led by McNamara, pushed for an additional 100 000 troops in South Vietnam. In addition to these forces, the White House was urged to place the country on a war footing - by calling up 235 000 Reserves and the National Guard, declaring a state of national emergency, and asking Congress for an increase in taxes –so as to convey a sense of determination and resolve to both the American people and the enemy in Vietnam.¹⁷⁷ Drawing on intelligence analyses, the Defense Secretary assured Johnson that these measures would not trigger Chinese intervention on the ground or in the air provided “we do not invade North Vietnam, do not sink a Chinese ship and, most important, do not strike China.”¹⁷⁸

Following the pattern established in February, Johnson instinctively opted for the middle ground, striking a delicate balance between the imponderability of withdrawal and the intense effort deemed necessary by many to win the war. He approved the request for troops but rejected those other items on the agenda (including an expansion of Rolling Thunder) that he thought unduly provocative to the PRC. LBJ used a meeting with the Joint Chiefs on 22 July to legitimize his preference and foster consensus for a course of measured escalation. Johnson pressed the attendees, asking “If we come in with hundreds of thousands of men and billions of dollars, won’t this cause them [China and the USSR] to come in?” When Army Chief of Staff Harold Johnson replied in the negative, the President reminded everyone of the same advice that Truman had received from MacArthur and insisted that he had to “take into account” the possibility that China might intervene militarily.¹⁷⁹

Johnson's resistance to placing the country on a war footing stemmed in large part from his apprehension that conservative opponents of his domestic legislation might seize a national debate on Vietnam as an opportunity to stifle the Great Society, particularly the Voting Rights and Medicare bills then awaiting congressional approval.¹⁸⁰ Yet as LBJ also told his advisers, he only wanted "to do what is necessary to meet the present situation... We will neither brag about what we are doing or thunder at the Chinese Communists and the Russians."¹⁸¹ In August, Johnson chided Senator John Stennis, a senior member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, for publicly speculating on how much the country would have to spend to win the war. He thought that this would only compel Ho Chi Minh to ask Beijing and Moscow for more aid. "I'm trying to keep from forcing the Chinese to come in," the President explained.¹⁸² Thus as Johnson gradually led his nation into war, he deliberately tailored the effort in such a way as to preclude another Sino-American battle whose destructive potential had grown inestimably since the PRC's testing of a nuclear device. In doing so, Johnson consciously accepted the constraints this strategy placed on America's military muscle and underlined his preference for *containing*, rather than *confronting*, China.

As the viability and wisdom of America's China policy of containment and isolation came under attack abroad and increasingly at home, several Johnson officials, to varying degrees, urged a change in approach. The most ambitious advocates of reform contended that the administration's firm posture in South Vietnam provided the necessary political covering to unilaterally relax trade and travel restrictions and acquiesce in a "two Chinas" arrangement at the UN. An injection of flexibility into America's attitude toward China would shift the blame for continued friction between the two nations in the short term, and pave the way for a long-term reconciliation with a less doctrinaire second generation of Chinese leaders. Far less inclined to view the PRC as an expansionist power and doubtful of any substantial Chinese role in Vietnam, mid-level officials such as James Thomson and Edward Rice reasoned that a policy of

engagement –alleviating persistent Chinese fears of American enmity and exposing China to the moderating influences of the world beyond its borders- would effect a gradual whittling away of the mainland’s hostility to the international status quo.

For the first two years of his presidency, Lyndon Johnson did not enmesh himself in the details of China policy; he was far more preoccupied with the priorities of election, the passage of domestic legislation, and the unfolding war in Vietnam. Images of the PRC were inextricably linked to all three, which ultimately accounted for his resistance to policy innovation. The perceived political baggage associated with China militated against a departure from his predecessor’s record. As this chapter has argued, the reaffirmation of U.S. China policy was also the by-product of the administration’s obsession with Vietnam, where Johnson’s senior advisers saw Beijing’s support of the insurgency in the South as confirmation of a subversive agenda aimed at securing Chinese hegemony in Southeast Asia by means short of war. China’s conventional weaknesses -its economic and military feebleness, tactical caution, and tensions between Hanoi and Beijing – were reconciled with, if not overshadowed by, its non-conventional strengths: the capacity to fan anti-Western sentiment, exert politico-psychological pressure against its vulnerable neighbors, undermine the credibility of America’s security commitments, and complicate Soviet-American détente.

The Johnson team believed that there was a direct correlation between the international community’s conciliatory gestures toward the PRC and China’s threatening behavior. As Rusk complained, “the recent reactions of the West –the French recognition of Peking; the gradual strengthening of trade links between the West and China; the relatively mild Western reaction to the recent Chinese detonation of a nuclear device- were...encouraging...the Chinese to believe that militancy paid.”¹⁸³ Frowning upon its allies’ tentative engagement with China, Washington worked assiduously to perpetuate the PRC’s ostracism from the international system. Seen in this light, the administration had not so much a policy toward China at this time as an attitude. Expressing a view with wide currency among LBJ’s inner circle, Walt Rostow asserted, “until it

is demonstrated that the game of 'Wars of National Liberation' is not viable and that the borders of China and North Vietnam are firm, the acceptance of Communist China within the world community and in the UN could be a major disaster...[and] would signal to those on the spot that we have granted Chinese Communist hegemony in Southeast Asia.''¹⁸⁴ Any change in attitudes toward the PRC ran contrary to the overriding priority of demonstrating resolve in Vietnam to foe and friend alike. Johnson's decision to commit American forces to the defense of Saigon, the ultimate expression of American credibility and clarity of purpose, ironically triggered the China policy review for which so many at home and abroad had called.

The Irony of Vietnam: The Emergence of a Two-Pronged China Policy, 1965-1966

America's relationship with the PRC during the Johnson years was dominated by Vietnam. This does not mean, however, that policy remained stagnant. In her broad overview of the Johnson team's record, Nancy Bernkopf Tucker argues that their tendency to view China through the prism of Vietnam precluded any policy innovation or movement toward normalization with the mainland.¹ The evidence presented in this chapter points to a different conclusion. While communist advances in Vietnam and setbacks throughout Southeast Asia initially focused Washington's attention on projecting strength toward Beijing, changing circumstances soon dictated a new approach. Indeed, one of the unexamined ironies of Vietnam, a war undertaken in part to check Chinese expansionism, is that it created pressures for an accommodation of sorts with Beijing and encouraged U.S. decision-makers who might not otherwise have been inclined to reassess the tenets of a policy of containment and isolation. Johnson's acute fear of Chinese intervention in the conflict and his attempts to mobilize public support for a frustratingly prolonged war by burnishing his peace credentials yielded symbolic and substantive alterations in China policy in 1966. The culmination of this process was a nationally televised speech delivered by the President on 12 July, in which he affirmed both his commitment to an eventual reconciliation with America's greatest Asian adversary and an interest in fostering the free flow of ideas, people, and goods between the two countries.

Recent literature has somewhat modified Tucker's thesis by placing greater emphasis on these bridge building efforts, yet it has not adequately linked this critical development to the Johnson administration's domestic and strategic objectives in Vietnam.² To be sure, Sino-American relations continued to be plagued by mutual mistrust and hostility during this period. Washington's persistent suspicions of China's drive for regional hegemony and of its role in supporting North Vietnam accounted in large part for the modest nature of these conciliatory

steps and continued to impede progress on more ambitious proposals for policy reform, particularly on the question of Chinese representation in the UN. Nevertheless, the tentative bridge building outlined here set in motion a process of thawing that would reach its fruition during the Nixon presidency.

A rapid sequence of events in the fall of 1965 appeared to undermine one of the primary justifications for the administration's refusal to engage the mainland. As China suffered a number of embarrassing reversals abroad, many of the assumptions underlying the Johnson team's unyielding posture –that the PRC was thrusting forward in pursuit of an expansionist agenda, that it was riding a wave of favorable developments, and that it represented the most pressing threat to the sovereignty of its neighbors –were cast in a new light. The proximity in timing between these events and Washington's China initiatives of 1966, however, was mostly coincidental. As before, China's perceived *intentions* excited as much, if not more, attention and concern as its *actions*. Pressures stemming from Vietnam and shifting political currents at home in fact provided the impetus for bridge building. The significance of Beijing's stumbling rests not so much on the immediate impact on China policy, but on the administration's evolving threat assessment.

A landmark in this respect was the Indo-Pakistani War of August-September 1965. Alarmed by India's efforts in December 1964 to integrate the disputed territory of Kashmir and by its crash program of military modernization, the Pakistani leadership, sensing a narrowing window of opportunity, launched Operation Gibraltar on 5 August. Utilizing local insurgents in an assault on India's portion of Kashmir, Islamabad evidently hoped to provoke a regional crisis, thereby rallying Muslim opinion throughout the world and forcing the Americans to arbitrate a fair settlement over the state.³ Pakistan's actions occurred against the backdrop of growing U.S. dismay in South Asia. The Kennedy team's dogged determination to woo New Delhi with economic and military aid, particularly in the aftermath of the Sino-Indian War, had inflicted considerable strain on America's alliance with Pakistan. Disheartened by Washington's courtship

of his mortal enemy, President Mohammed Ayub Khan turned to Beijing in his continuing search for security.⁴ LBJ had little patience for Pakistan's flirtation with the PRC, and he spared no effort in warning Ayub that this endangered the continued flow of U.S. assistance. Johnson's irritation reached its peak in March 1965, when he abruptly cancelled the Pakistani leader's forthcoming visit to the White House.⁵ Ayub's gambit in August raised the prospect of further Chinese meddling in the region. Indeed, he may have felt emboldened to take military action, operating on the (mistaken) assumption that Beijing's anti-Indian rhetoric amounted to a virtual promise of aid in the event of an Indo-Pakistani clash.⁶

The question of Chinese intentions came to the fore when Ayub, in an effort to rescue the floundering infiltration, dispatched a large armored force on 31 August to cut off the Indian military in Kashmir. New Delhi responded one week later with a drive toward Lahore. Fearful that India would deal a decisive blow to Pakistan, China moved to warn the former and reassure the latter. On 7 September, Foreign Minister Chen Yi affirmed his country's "firm support for Pakistan in its just fight against aggression and solemnly warns the Indian Government that it must bear full responsibility for all the consequences of its criminal and extended aggression."⁷ U.S. intelligence analysts saw no cause for alarm and minimized the risks of overt Chinese involvement in the unfolding conflict. A steady stream of reports concluded that Beijing's saber-rattling amounted to nothing more than an attempt to frighten New Delhi. Beyond this act of deterrence, Chinese leaders had little interest in committing themselves to any action that would divert attention and resources from the far more vital theater in Southeast Asia. It could therefore be expected that the mainland would exhaust every conceivable option before resorting to force in defense of its ally.⁸

LBJ's inner circle, perhaps unsurprisingly given their China mindset, took a strikingly different view. Rusk took China's bellicose words as confirmation of an understanding between the PRC and Pakistan. Chinese military intervention in the war, he advised the President, was "a clear contingency." Yet even if the mainland remained aloof from the fighting, Rusk estimated

that continued Indo-Pakistani hostilities would only benefit Beijing. The fighting would drain both combatants and consequently “negate our effort to build there a viable counterweight to Communist China.” An Indian collapse would fan the latent neutralism of powers such as Japan and dramatically enhance the mainland’s prestige.⁹ Sufficiently concerned by the prospect of a wider conflict, the State Department instructed the American Ambassador in Warsaw to caution his Chinese counterpart against any action that “could create a most dangerous situation, [in] which it would be difficult to confine to the areas or parties initially affected.”¹⁰

Tensions escalated on 17 September when Beijing delivered an ultimatum to New Delhi, demanding that it dismantle a string of military structures along the Sikkim-Tibet border within 48 hours or face “grave consequences.” Johnson immediately ordered the State and Defense departments to prepare a set of military options in the event of a Chinese attack on India, and implored New Delhi and Islamabad to comply with a UN ceasefire resolution before events veered out of control.¹¹ The crisis over China’s ultimatum ended barely after it had begun. The Chinese effectively withdrew their demands on 20 September, dubiously claiming that India had fulfilled its obligations. This decision most likely resulted from a reading of Soviet attitudes; the Kremlin’s tacit refusal to lean on India or to promise Beijing support against an American attack apparently convinced the PRC’s leadership that they would be completely isolated in a second Sino-Indian war.¹²

U.S. officials interpreted the climb-down as a humiliating admission of impotence. “Our impression of [the] Chicom handling of [the] Sikkim affair is that Peking hardly comes out of this one smelling like a rose,” the consulate office in Hong Kong reported. “By acting precipitously and then hastily backing off instead of gradually building up pressure, [the] Chicoms run [the] risk of causing any subsequent threats...to be heavily discounted by all concerned.”¹³ Johnson was struck by how the Chinese “have done a great deal of talking in the past week or so, but have not acted, and they have probably lost a great deal of prestige in many quarters.”¹⁴

A more stunning reversal of Chinese fortunes occurred almost simultaneously in Indonesia. On 30 September, a leftist faction within the army, supported by the PKI, launched a revolt against the high command. The abortive coup was ruthlessly suppressed by the Strategic Reserve, headed by Major General Suharto, and then used as the pretext for a bloody purge of the PKI, the army's greatest rival for political influence in the country. The next few weeks and months also witnessed a wave of anti-Chinese demonstrations and a significant downgrading of Sino-Indonesian relations.¹⁵ The affair seemed to have originated from an intra-army dispute rather than from a PKI-inspired plot. Moreover, the army's charges of Chinese complicity, as the U.S. intelligence community eventually acknowledged, could not be corroborated. The mainland's interests had in fact been best served by its existing relationship with Sukarno, not by the orchestration of a violent rift between the PKI and the army.¹⁶

As reports of the country's anti-communist campaign and Sukarno's marginalization poured in, Johnson officials sensed a major alteration in the balance of forces in the region. By early 1966, the CIA reported that the PKI, whose takeover of Southeast Asia's crown jewel had been glumly predicted only months earlier, had been "reduced to an underground organization of unknown size," with the possibility of any revival "virtually nil for the next few years."¹⁷ Yet it was commonly thought that the greatest loser in this debacle was the party's presumed sponsor. The collapse of the Sino-Indonesian axis, the U.S. Ambassador to Jakarta told LBJ, amounted to "a great loss of international prestige for Peking."¹⁸ The dismal fate of the PKI, according to another CIA report, would impair China's standing in the international communist movement: "Communists abroad sympathetic to Peking may begin to have second thoughts about too close an identification with the Chinese."¹⁹

These dramatic events were seen as part of a wider pattern of Chinese setbacks in the developing world. The limits of China's influence were starkly illustrated in November 1965, when Beijing was forced to abandon its year-long effort to forge a unified bloc opposed to American and Soviet power in the Third World at a new Afro-Asian conference in Algiers.

Several of those invited balked at Moscow's exclusion from the proposed meeting, fearful that this would jeopardize future deliveries of Soviet aid. Beijing's latest stumble was enthusiastically welcomed in Washington.²⁰ By the summer of 1966, it was estimated that Beijing's international status had plummeted to the point where it could rely only on Albania and New Zealand's Communist party for unconditional loyalty in the Sino-Soviet dispute. Moscow's leadership of the communist movement, assumed to be in peril throughout 1964-65, had been restored. This development was attributed to both the PRC's "rigid dogmatism and political ineptitude" and the Kremlin's increased materiel assistance to North Vietnam. By demonstrating their support for armed revolutionary struggle, Khrushchev's successors had neutralized repeated Chinese charges of Soviet collusion with the West.²¹

The Soviet factor figured prominently in Washington's evolving understanding of the Sino-Vietnamese relationship. Hanoi's persistent requests for advanced Soviet weaponry, U.S. analysts opined, bore the hallmarks of a quasi-independent actor striving to lessen its reliance on China and to maintain its freedom of action by assuming a neutral stance in the Sino-Soviet competition for its allegiance.²² There was speculation by the end of 1965 that the DRV's flourishing ties with the Kremlin signified the ascendancy of the leadership's moderate and pragmatic wing. Led by Premier Pham Van Dong, this pro-Soviet faction was thought to have some interest in an eventual negotiated settlement of the war, which, as one intelligence report noted hopefully, "is a considerable step away from the Chinese Communist position that there should be no talks on any terms, and that the war must be carried through to a complete Communist military victory."²³

China's foreign policy defeats had a contradictory impact on the administration's thinking. Senior officials, perhaps betraying an ingrained need to highlight any sign of progress amidst the protracted fighting in Vietnam, hailed these developments as a turning point of sorts. As Johnson contemplated the question of American intervention in Vietnam in 1965, his advisers had insisted that a credible defense of Saigon was imperative to alleviating the worries of nervous

allies and thwarting the PRC's subversive designs in Southeast Asia. Within a year of making that fateful commitment, the President was now told that "Hanoi's operation, backed by the Chicoms, is no longer being regarded as the wave of the future out there."²⁴ American resolve in Vietnam and the crushing of the PKI, William Bundy wrote Rusk in March 1966, had created a "markedly healthier" atmosphere throughout the region and restored Asian allies' faith in U.S. leadership.²⁵

At the same time, however, decision-makers remained wedded to the longstanding assumption of a Chinese threat. As Bundy recollected, "the fact that China had suffered reverses in 1965 was not seen as changing the basic judgment that she was militant ... Although we in government had followed the Chinese setbacks... we had also seen more closely the extraordinary stiffness and arrogance of Chinese handling of each situation."²⁶ The challenge posed by China had never been defined in purely conventional terms. It was deemed primarily politico-psychological in nature, a product of the belligerency of Maoist ideology and the fragility of China's neighbors. Even as the PRC's fortunes soured, Johnson officials held that its hostile intentions and capacity to stir trouble remained virtually unchanged. In a February 1966 speech, Bundy repeated this concern, reminding his audience that Mao was not "another Hitler, building a vast military machine with the aim of conquest by conventional warfare." His ambitions relied instead on "the instigation and support of movements that can be represented as local movements, designed to subvert and overthrow existing governments and replace them with regimes responsive to Peking's will."²⁷

Beijing's behavior during the 37-day bombing pause, initiated by the administration toward the end of December 1965, reinforced these impressions. The sincerity of Johnson's Vietnam "peace offensive" has been disputed by many historians; most likely it was intended to shift the blame for continued hostilities to Hanoi and secure political justification for the sustained military effort that he privately believed to be unavoidable.²⁸ As anticipated, the DRV was highly suspicious of American motives and spurned offers of negotiation. In assessing North Vietnam's intransigence, U.S. officials apportioned considerable blame to the PRC's militant

influence. Beijing was seen as the fiercest opponent of peace talks, including even the North. Its overriding objective of ejecting the U.S. from the Pacific demanded vigorous prosecution of the communist insurgency in the South. By virtue of geography, shared ideology, and the volume of Chinese aid, the mainland was believed to be well positioned to press its views on its ally, notwithstanding the inroads made by Moscow.²⁹ “Peking has actively intruded on any talks between Hanoi and [the] U.S.,” Rusk informed Johnson as the pause came to an end in January. “Hanoi appears to be somewhere between Moscow and Peking –but closer to Peking.”³⁰ Recent Chinese sources have confirmed that there was some basis for this sentiment. Beijing’s vehement objection to negotiations appears to have played a significant role in shaping the DRV’s decidedly hostile response to an American fourteen-point peace plan delivered by Polish intermediaries.³¹

LBJ’s aides continued to point to the threat of Chinese-inspired subversion as a major justification for the war in Vietnam. Despite the improved regional climate, they contended that the strategic considerations undergirding the 1965 decisions were still relevant. As part of a review of Vietnam policy options in April 1966, the State Department advised Johnson that “for the next year or two any chance of holding the rest of Southeast Asia hinges on the same factors assessed a year ago, whether Thailand and Laos in the first instance and Malaysia, Singapore, and Burma close behind, would –in the face of a US failure for any reason in Viet-Nam –have any significant remaining will to resist the Chinese Communist pressures that would probably then be applied.” A defeat in Saigon would be regarded throughout the region as “proof that Communism from the north was the decisive force in the area.”³² Steadfast containment of China remained the most logical course, especially since it could not be taken for granted that the PRC had been chastened by its diplomatic failures. “The Chicoms have had a bad time during the last 15 months,” Rusk noted. “The future will turn on whether they become more dangerous and strike out at their opponents or recoup and reconsider peaceful co-existence. We don’t know how this will come out.”³³

It was precisely this intangible element of Chinese unpredictability or perceived irrationality, rather than any reassessment of Chinese intentions and capabilities, which prompted the administration to supplement containment with new tactics toward the mainland in 1966. From his post in Hong Kong, Edward Rice argued that Beijing's reckless adventurism in the Indian subcontinent and its subversive activity in Indonesia had been concocted by a group of aging ideologues, men distrustful of their successors' revolutionary fervor and therefore desperate for "convincing external successes which would justify keeping China on course towards the same aims they have set after they have passed."³⁴ Chinese setbacks on the world stage had instilled within the leadership an "emotional state of great frustration," which was only exacerbated by the scale of the American presence in Vietnam.³⁵

Rice likened Beijing's profound anxieties in Vietnam to those it had experienced just prior to the fall of Pyongyang to UN forces in 1950. While Mao and his comrades probably hoped to avert any commitment to enter the fighting, further escalation of America's air attacks against the North would only "lend credence to their belief that we are acting under mechanistically increasing pressures to attack their country." Consequently, the administration's war planners were urged to heed the PRC's siege mentality and inherent need for domestic mobilization. The outcome in Vietnam had become so inextricably linked to Mao's revolutionary ambitions at home and abroad that he would ultimately accept the full consequences of assisting Hanoi, even if this led to a clash with the Americans. If it came, Mao might actually welcome an enlarged war, as it would rally the country behind his vision and imbue younger generations with a militant spirit. "Prudence," Rice warned Washington, "requires that we pursue a course designed...to disappoint any expectations of Communist China's leaders that we will play to their strength by fighting them on their own terrain."³⁶

Rice was only one of several officials who had pressed decision-makers throughout 1964-65 to reduce Sino-American tensions by alleviating Beijing's paranoid fears of U.S.

intentions. These voices had been effectively relegated to the sidelines as the Johnson team focused their attention on defending the besieged government in Saigon, largely out of concern that any relaxation in the administration's posture toward the PRC would be interpreted as a sign of weakness and encourage further Chinese aggression. Once they had actually committed the U.S. militarily to Vietnam and were confronted with the prospect of another Korea-like war, however, even the most enthusiastic advocates of intervention gradually became more receptive to some of the arguments advanced by the China policy reform camp.

Robert McNamara, for example, expressed growing dismay over the evident stalemate on the battlefield during the latter half of 1965, particularly after a draining fight in the Ia Drang Valley in November, and he wondered whether a military victory could be secured within acceptable risks.³⁷ In December, he told LBJ that "a substantial number of additional forces" – 200 000 ground troops in 1966 and likely the same figure for the following year – would be needed "if we are to avoid being defeated". Drawing heavily on the latest CIA estimate, McNamara argued that there was only a slightly better than even chance that these deployments would "prevent the DRV/VC from sustaining the conflict at a significant level." If the limits of the North's tenacity were reached, however, there was an "almost equal" chance that the Chinese, with their ideological and emotional interests invested in a North Vietnamese victory, would dispatch their own forces to salvage the situation. Thus there existed the grim possibility, the Defense Secretary concluded, that "we will be faced in early 1967 with a military standoff at a much higher level...with any prospect of military success marred by the chances of an active Chinese intervention."³⁸

McNamara's concerns were buttressed by a number of intelligence reports in the late fall alerting Washington to signs of Chinese unease over U.S. designs in Vietnam. The CIA noted that there had been a steady flow of Chinese military support units into the DRV since the summer. It was also surmised that the construction of new airfields in southern China and the deployment of Chinese jet fighters to Hainan in October had been triggered by the fear that U.S. airstrikes in

northeastern North Vietnam would be extended to targets on the mainland.³⁹ Particularly ominous were reports of Beijing's extensive efforts to psychologically prepare the country for a possible war with the U.S. through an intensification of civil defense and mass propaganda campaigns. The State Department's INR bureau informed Rusk in early December that the regime was evacuating "non-essential persons," small factories, and many government facilities from urban and coastal areas to the remote interior of the country. Regional broadcasts and press reports were issuing frequent warnings to the population that U.S. actions against the DRV threatened Chinese security. Taken together, these actions indicated that "Peking itself estimates the possibility of...overt involvement [in the war] in 1966 to be a serious one."⁴⁰

Much of this analysis was well informed. These elaborate preparations for war, particularly Mao's Third Front project of industrial development in the interior provinces, were indeed taken in response to Washington's escalation of the fighting after the Gulf of Tonkin incidents in August 1964. The Johnson administration's military maneuvers shook China's leadership and forced them to counter a seemingly renewed U.S. strategic threat. Mao also understood that increased tensions could be exploited in his campaign to organize opposition against domestic "revisionism." As part of his plans for radicalizing China's political and social life, the Third Front was accompanied by a "Resist America and Assist Vietnam Movement" and a series of mass rallies.⁴¹ For senior U.S. officials, however, the distinction between military mobilization and political propaganda remained blurred. At a meeting in early December 1965, both Rusk and McNamara expressed "increasing concern about possible Chinese involvement" in Vietnam.⁴²

To defuse tensions, William Bundy successfully proposed that an upcoming meeting in Warsaw on 15 December be used to inform Chinese diplomats that the U.S. was taking a number of unilateral steps to reassure them that "we still seek to avoid a major confrontation." Bundy's suggestions included an initiative to "admit Chinese journalists to the United States without reciprocity" (since 1959, Washington had insisted on only a *mutual* exchange of newsmen) and

an offer to “jointly examine their charges of air and sea violations of their territory and attacks on Chinese vessels on the high seas.” Most important was a relaxation of travel controls that would permit doctors and scientists in the fields of public health and medicine to visit the mainland.⁴³ This particular measure, of course, had been vetoed by Johnson in June. Its fortunes were revived when Paul Dudley White, Dwight Eisenhower’s physician, wrote LBJ on 10 August, briefly describing his contacts with some Chinese colleagues living on the mainland and offering his services “in helping to break our deadlock with China.”⁴⁴ Johnson immediately indicated his interest in the travel package.

Why was he now willing to approve a proposal he had rejected five weeks earlier? Part of the answer was provided in a memorandum McGeorge Bundy wrote to the President shortly following the arrival of White’s letter. Directly appealing to Johnson’s political instincts, he contended that new circumstances –responding to an appeal by a noted Republican “at a time when our policy in Vietnam has reached a new level of clarity and firmness” –augured well for the adoption of an item that would address domestic criticism of the administration’s rigid China policy.⁴⁵ Indeed, any apprehension of appearing “soft” on Asian communism had been offset by the Vietnam decisions of July. LBJ most likely appreciated this conciliatory measure as a symbolic rebuttal to elements within Congress, the press, and the academic community who bemoaned the President’s resort to military force in Southeast Asia.⁴⁶ The travel initiative remained holed up in the State Department until late November, when its supporters orchestrated another White letter, this one addressed to Rusk.⁴⁷ When finally announced on 29 December, it marked a subtle yet significant departure from the Johnson team’s previous insistence that there could be no modification of China policy until the PRC had learned to co-exist peacefully with its neighbors. Taken in part to deflect criticism of this unyielding stance, it was also clearly seen as a way to convey a sense of moderation to Beijing and thereby reduce the chance of any miscalculation or misunderstanding of U.S. intentions igniting a wider conflagration in Vietnam.

The ban on travel to the mainland was further relaxed in March 1966, when scholars and writers were exempted from any restrictions.⁴⁸

Historians have argued that both countries, by displaying mutual restraint in Vietnam, reached a tacit understanding by early 1966 that kept the war limited.⁴⁹ A closer look at the record, however, indicates that Johnson and his advisers were still struggling at this time to reconcile the objective of forcing Hanoi to the negotiating table with the strategic imperative of averting Chinese intervention. In a series of meetings in late January, LBJ was encouraged to resume the bombing of the North. McNamara, who had been one of the primary proponents of the pause, reported that the communists had taken advantage of it to build up forces for “intensified action in South Vietnam.” Prolonging the pause would only send the “wrong signal to Hanoi, Peking and our own people.” Rusk concurred, remarking that without new bombing, the PRC would be led to believe that “a sanctuary has been approved and they can do more than ever.”⁵⁰ The President, initially skeptical of the value of a bombing halt and irritated by Hanoi’s refusal to respond positively to his overtures, needed little prodding.⁵¹

Yet considerable anxiety was expressed over how Beijing would interpret a renewed offensive. Under Secretary of State George Ball bluntly asserted in a 25 January memorandum to Johnson that a resumption of air attacks against the DRV would “more than likely lead us into war with Red China –probably in six to nine months.” As frustration mounted over the North’s continued resistance, he warned, the administration would be tempted to include increasingly sensitive targets –such as Haiphong harbor or petroleum, oil, and lubricants (POL) supplies –in its bombing program. In such an event, China could hardly be expected “to stand by and let us destroy the industrial life of North Viet-Nam without increasing its assistance to the point where, sooner or later, we will almost certainly collide with Chinese interests.” The mainland’s ongoing internal war preparations suggested that it was bracing for this possibility.⁵²

While Johnson’s inner circle was not prepared to surrender their trump card, they agreed, as Rusk put it, that new bombing should “be kept under firm control...[because of the] dangers of

the Chinese coming in.”⁵³ When Rolling Thunder was relaunched on 31 January, LBJ prohibited attacks on any target within a 30-mile radius from the center of Hanoi and a 10-mile radius from the center of Haiphong.⁵⁴ The uncertainty surrounding Chinese intentions in the war factored heavily in the selection of military targets. Intelligence sources continued to document the PRC’s growing military presence in North Vietnam. Johnson was informed at the end of February that as many as 47 000 Chinese military personnel, most of them engineering troops, were now serving in the country. In a calculated act of deterrence, these forces entering the DRV made little effort to conceal their identity and used non-secure methods of communication. It was also revealed that a central authority had been set up in the vicinity of Hanoi, which could possibly be used as “a theater logistic command to support the introduction of a Chinese combat force.”⁵⁵ The INR bureau reported the following month that there had been a marked increase in the number of official statements making reference to a Chinese obligation to send men to the North. On the basis of this bellicose rhetoric, China’s leaders appeared to “consider the danger of an ‘imminent’ war to be as great as before and...they are more than ever convinced that some sort of war with the US at some time is ‘inevitable.’ ”⁵⁶

Heightened sensitivity to the PRC’s perception of U.S. aggression governed Washington’s circumspect handling of a number of other initiatives that were thought to be unduly provocative to China. One such example was Taipei’s ongoing efforts to enlist America’s support in an invasion of the mainland. During a visit to Washington in September 1965, Taiwan’s Defense Minister Chiang Ching-kuo revived his father’s plan of seizing the PRC’s five southwestern provinces, insisting that Beijing’s hold on this region was weak and its rule deeply unpopular. Chiang assured his hosts that there would be no need for extensive American participation, only air and naval cover for the operation. McNamara was cool to the idea, thinking that it eerily resembled the Bay of Pigs disaster, in so far as “it obviously contemplated [a] large scale popular uprising against the Communists” with no palpable evidence that the conditions were ripe for such a revolt.⁵⁷ The Joint Chiefs of Staff were no more enthusiastic, branding the

plan “militarily unsound.” Because of Taiwan’s limited capacity to strike airfields in south China, a successful outcome would require the full use of American air and naval power. The Joint Chiefs recommended that the administration continue consultations with its ally, if only to give Chiang Kai-shek the impression that his views were taken seriously and to maintain him as “a fully cooperating partner rather than as a...potential disruption to our policies and objectives in Asia.”⁵⁸

The embassy in Taipei reported at the end of January that this hands-off approach had engendered “considerable disappointment and irritation” among the country’s leadership, and counselled Washington to ease this anger by promising to re-examine the question of an assault on the mainland if other options in Vietnam were exhausted and there appeared to be no hope for a peaceful settlement.⁵⁹ The suggestion came just as Johnson was hoping to keep a lid on the hostilities in Vietnam. Accordingly, the State Department vetoed this idea on the grounds that it “would not only encourage further GRC mainland attack plans...but would also be subject to misinterpretation and possible anticipatory action by [the] ChiComs should they learn of [the] statement, as is entirely possible.”⁶⁰

Similar considerations derailed plans for the CIA to establish a “gray” radio targeted at the PRC, a project first proposed in October 1965 and tentatively endorsed the following April.⁶¹ As the project made its way through the bureaucratic channels, however, a number of China hands weighed in with their objections. Both Rice and James Thomson contended that Beijing would regard a new wave of radio propaganda as proof of America’s determination to encircle and overthrow the regime, undermining U.S. efforts to head off a possible confrontation.⁶² Citing these concerns, as well as the substantial costs of such a large-scale investment, a meeting of the 303 Committee in July 1966 concluded that the project should be shelved and that the United States Information Agency instead continue its broadcasts to the mainland.⁶³

Yet what truly distinguished the administration’s attempts to prevent China’s overt involvement in Vietnam in the early months of 1966, aside from the restrained bombing of the

North and attempts to forestall heightened tensions, was a concerted political and diplomatic campaign to disabuse the PRC of its sense of American hostility. To address the troubling questions raised by George Ball's memorandum, McNamara said it was necessary to "tell China we do not intend to destroy the political institutions in NVN [North Vietnam]." ⁶⁴ The result was a shift from the alarmist, vaguely threatening rhetoric employed against Beijing in 1963-65 to a decidedly more conciliatory tone. Grim warnings of a Chinese menace in Southeast Asia and solemn pledges to contain it were de-emphasized in favor of calming assurances of Washington's limited aims in Vietnam. Directing his remarks toward Beijing, LBJ declared in a speech on 23 February, "We have threatened no one, and we will not. We seek the end of no regime and we will not. Our purpose is solely to defend against aggression." ⁶⁵ The embassy in Warsaw was instructed to stress the desire for peaceful relations in its periodic meetings with Chinese diplomats. ⁶⁶

More importantly, senior U.S. officials signalled their interest in new approaches to Beijing. In a prepared statement to the House Subcommittee on the Far East and the Pacific on 16 March, Rusk asserted, "We must avoid assuming the existence of an unending and inevitable state of hostility between ourselves and the rulers of mainland China." He outlined a two-pronged China policy, coupling the traditional goal of containment with a new emphasis on expanding "the possibilities for unofficial contacts between Communist China and ourselves –contacts which may gradually assist in altering Peiping's picture of the United States." As part of the latter strategy, the Secretary advocated steps "to reassure Peiping that the United States does not intend to attack mainland China," continued talks in Warsaw, and a dialogue with Chinese officials on matters concerning disarmament and non-proliferation. Looking toward the future, he speculated that a younger generation of leaders would draw the appropriate lessons from Mao's failed foreign policies and adopt a more pragmatic approach to the world. Rusk assured this leadership-in waiting that the U.S. would "welcome an era of good relations" with a responsible China. ⁶⁷ This implicit courting of a less doctrinaire ruling circle

broadly resembled Roger Hilsman's landmark address of December 1963, which the Johnson team hitherto had neither repudiated nor embraced. The prevailing view of both the Kennedy and Johnson administrations had rested on the notion that only the firm application of politico-military pressure could instill prudence in Chinese behavior. Rusk's statement suggested that policymakers were now contemplating a mixture of carrots and sticks.

McNamara elaborated on this theme in a speech in May, calling for "practical alternatives" to the current relationship with the PRC and for the adoption of concrete measures to reduce "the danger of potentially catastrophic misunderstandings" between the two nations. He had in mind "properly balanced trade relations, diplomatic contacts, and in some cases...exchanges of military observers."⁶⁸ In September, the State Department reversed previous policy and authorized diplomatic officers abroad to "establish informal social contacts with the Chinese Communists when this can be done without publicity...[or] conveying the public impression of a change in the US policy of non-recognition of Communist China." The hope here was that increased interaction would enable the U.S. to better gauge Chinese attitudes and provide a forum for countering "the 'devil image' of the United States that Peking inculcates in all its cadres."⁶⁹

The strategic logic of this tentative bridge building was elucidated in the administration's State-Defense Long Range Study on China, completed in June. This major report examined three options for managing Chinese power: disengagement, showdown, and containment. The drawbacks inherent in the first two choices were thought to outweigh any benefits. A policy of disengagement from the Pacific would effectively "ensure domination of much of Asia by a single hostile power," while the pursuit of a showdown with the PRC would "lead to a war which would impose on us uncertain, but probably large, costs in blood, treasure and prestige for highly uncertain gains."⁷⁰ It therefore followed that American objectives in Southeast Asia would best be secured by maintaining a sizeable military presence in the region to check the spread of Chinese influence and by strengthening non-communist Asia to the point where it could

successfully repel repeated probes from the mainland. The fight to preserve an independent government in Saigon was seen as consistent with both of these ends. Over time, the authors posited, Mao's successors would discover that there was an unbridgeable gap between Chinese aspirations and capabilities. Greater awareness of this dynamic would bring about "a cautious and conservative approach to problems of foreign policy."⁷¹

Yet the study also advanced the notion that the administration could facilitate this transition and "induce moderation of Peking's current expansionist policies." Washington could influence the direction of Chinese foreign policy by encouraging present and future leaders to reappraise U.S. intentions and, over the long term, by enhancing the PRC's stake in a constructive relationship. This strategy called for both confidence-building gestures –declaring America's interest in peace and avoiding any actions that would unnecessarily irritate or harass the mainland –and more substantial alterations in policy, such as the gradual loosening of the travel ban and the offer of "a general step-by-step relaxation of our economic controls in the context of reciprocal Chinese moves toward improved relations." Once engaged in commerce with lucrative U.S. markets, Beijing would feel "less free to act in ways which might threaten to cut off that source of scarce foreign exchange" and would therefore develop "a practical interest in developing and maintaining a measure of détente."⁷²

To be sure, the report did not advocate immediate implementation of many of these latter initiatives; China's militant conduct precluded such a dramatic shift in policy.⁷³ By conditioning significant policy reform on an improvement in China's behavior, the Long Range Study struck a cautionary note and departed from those China "doves" favoring rapid movement on these items. The most articulate member of this group, Ambassador to Japan and prominent Asian scholar Edwin Reischauer, was mildly encouraged by the tentative bridge building of the first half of 1966, yet still thought the administration's new approach to China, as epitomized by the State-Defense report, too timid. Reischauer ultimately believed that the PRC's myriad diplomatic setbacks and stagnant economy would be of far greater importance in effecting a curtailment of

its foreign policy ambitions than any combination of American carrots and sticks. Yet he argued that a fundamental “redefinition of our long-term China policy” would ease this process. Once Beijing understood that the U.S. recognized its legitimacy and was willing to co-exist peacefully, it would then feel sufficiently secure to concentrate its attention on domestic concerns. “For such a stand to have any meaning,” he wrote, “we would have to state our readiness to see...[the mainland] admitted into the United Nations.”⁷⁴

Reischauer’s disenchantment with the Johnson team’s China policy led him to fend off efforts to recruit him in a new role as the administration’s senior China watcher. He saw “only futility and frustration” with the proposal, “because I am not enough on the same wave length with the Secretary on this specific subject and not enough of the type to ever develop a close relationship with the President to be at all effective.”⁷⁵ Disagreements over China likely played a role in his decision to surrender the Tokyo post in July 1966, yet a more decisive consideration was his gradual marginalization from the policymaking process since Kennedy’s assassination.⁷⁶ The administration’s thinking on China was in fact starting to move in the direction espoused by officials like Reischauer, albeit at a slower pace than they would have preferred. Interdepartmental endorsement of the broad outlines of an agenda previously associated almost exclusively with this isolated camp signified an important turn in Washington’s China debate.

The second major factor accounting for the emergence of a more flexible China policy was another outgrowth of the Vietnam War, namely, growing public pressure at home. Agitation from some quarters in Congress and among elite opinion-shapers in the media and the academic community had played a significant role in the adoption of the December 1965 travel package. Samplings of public attitudes throughout 1964-65 hinted at a greater tolerance for a modest opening toward China, a noteworthy evolution from the previous decade yet hardly sufficient to encourage a conservative politician like Lyndon Johnson to make a bold move in this direction.

By 1966, however, popular views of Sino-American relations had become intertwined with Vietnam. Consequently, LBJ's eagerness to sustain backing for the war effort all but demanded that he demonstrate an interest in forging constructive ties to the mainland. One of the administration's pollsters concluded in December 1965 that the American people supported measured military force in Vietnam as a prerequisite for obtaining a position of strength from which to negotiate. A clear majority opposed more provocative actions, such as extending the ground war to the North or bombing the PRC. Blunting the public's mounting frustration and impatience with the indeterminate hostilities required "a series of moves –preferably dramatic –to assure them that we are active in the pursuit of peace."⁷⁷ Even as he abandoned the bombing pause at the end of January, his most "dramatic" peace offering to date, Johnson stressed to his aides the political necessity of "keep[ing] [the] peace emphasis on."⁷⁸ That this peace emphasis should incorporate China was borne out by popular anxiety over the prospect of an enlarged war. A poll in March 1966, for example, revealed a 46 to 27 percent plurality anticipating Chinese intervention in Vietnam.⁷⁹ Thus the constant reiteration of the administration's limited war aims served to relieve the fears of both Beijing and the U.S. population.

That same month, America's China policy was subjected to the most intense public scrutiny in well over a decade. Dismayed by the failure of LBJ's "peace offensive" and alarmed by what he characterized as a drift toward a Sino-American confrontation, Senator Fulbright presided over three weeks of hearings devoted to China in a bid to promote enhanced understanding of the PRC.⁸⁰ Among the prominent Sinologists invited to testify were A. Doak Barnett, John K. Fairbank, and Donald Zagoria. While most of the witnesses carefully voiced support for the Vietnam War and underlined Beijing's unremittingly belligerent behavior in their statements, they questioned the wisdom of quarantining the mainland. Barnett in particular articulated a strategy of "containment but not isolation," which would "aim on the one hand at checking military or subversive threats and pressures emanating from Peking[,] but at the same time would aim at maximum contacts with and maximum involvement of the Chinese

Communists in the international community.” As part of this effort, he advocated removing the embargo on all non-strategic trade and a “two Chinas” solution to Chinese representation in the UN. Like the government’s China doves, Barnett did not anticipate reciprocal action from Beijing, yet he believed a new China policy would reap long-term rewards in pacifying the PRC’s worldview.⁸¹ These ideas were subsequently endorsed in a declaration signed by 198 academic experts.⁸²

Fulbright’s China hearings marked something of a watershed. This highly publicized forum effectively legitimized the airing of views that would have been considered heresy in the Red-baiting climate of the 1950’s and, as James Thomson recollected, emboldened proponents of China policy reform inside and outside government to press their agenda.⁸³ Polling results throughout the spring and summer of 1966 revealed growing openness to expanding relations with the PRC. In a Harris survey taken in June, 57 percent of the respondents favored recognizing Beijing, while an identical 55 percent supported the mainland’s admission to the UN if this would foster peace in the Pacific.⁸⁴

The spotlight cast on China policy provoked somewhat divergent responses from within the President’s entourage. Rusk, Johnson’s most influential adviser on Asian affairs, remained fixated with China’s obstructionist and bellicose role in Vietnam and was hesitant to alter established strategy toward the mainland for the sake of mollifying public opinion. Just after the beginning of the Fulbright hearings, he confided to Vice President Hubert Humphrey that he was “reluctant to see the Administration involved in this China business.”⁸⁵ Furthermore, Rusk displayed little enthusiasm for revisiting sensitive matters such as Chinese representation. “With the Southeast Asian situation as it is,” he noted, “it remains very difficult for us to see Peiping seated in the United Nations.”⁸⁶

Senior White House officials, on the other hand, counselled LBJ to directly address some of the pointed questions raised by the China hearings. When an apparently freelancing Humphrey expressed his approval of Barnett’s doctrine on national television, Robert Komer, now serving as

McGeorge Bundy's interim replacement, advised Johnson not to disavow the remarks and instead let them stand as a trial balloon. "To withdraw from what was rather grossly overplayed by the press would only start another debate with our VN critics," he reasoned.⁸⁷ Komer posited that demonstrating flexibility in relations with Beijing would disarm domestic and foreign critics of U.S. China policy and make some headway in recapturing those elements of the Democratic party disenchanted with the involvement in Vietnam.⁸⁸

Arguably the decisive voice in this internal debate belonged to Johnson's chief political lieutenant, Press Secretary Bill Moyers, whose influence in foreign policy deliberations reached its peak in 1966.⁸⁹ The avid interest he took in China policy reflected the extent to which this issue had become politicized and enmeshed with the larger goal of mobilizing domestic support for the fighting in Vietnam. More importantly, Moyers' identification with policy reform exposed LBJ to a view that hitherto had been shunned by his inner circle. As the administration came under fire for its conduct of the war, Moyers became increasingly convinced of the urgency of presenting the peaceful side of America's face in Asia. At the end of February, he notified the President that his approval rating for his handling of the war had fallen from 63 percent to 49 percent in the aftermath of that month's televised Senate hearings on Vietnam.⁹⁰ Moyers saw China as one of those "issues that history may judge absolutely critical to the Johnson Administration. How we increased the 'thaw' toward China is just that."⁹¹ The young aide enthusiastically forwarded polling data to the President supporting his claims, and pushed for an infusion of Chinese expertise at Foggy Bottom to assist in the formulation of a new China strategy.⁹²

Johnson –less dogmatic than his Secretary of State, still troubled by the prospect of Chinese intervention in Vietnam, acutely sensitive to scrutiny of his foreign policy leadership, and sensing a compelling political need to respond to the shift in popular moods –was receptive to Moyers' arguments. The result throughout the spring and summer was an unprecedented degree of presidential engagement with the China policy sphere. In April, Walt Rostow, the new

National Security Adviser, alerted Rusk to Johnson's personal interest in "Imaginative ways of handling the China problem, which would get us off the defensive, and deal with the Chirep issue in the next General Assembly...the President emphasized he wants fresh study groups, including the best people in the country in and out of the government."⁹³ The idea for a "Chinese Tommy Thompson," a China watcher that would enjoy the President's ear as Llewellyn Thompson did for matters pertaining to the USSR, received "highest level blessing" at the White House in the spring, an offer that was later rebuffed by Reischauer.⁹⁴ When Senator Edward Kennedy called for the establishment of a commission of distinguished academics to make recommendations for fresh approaches to Beijing, LBJ was anxious to nip this implicit criticism in the bud. Through Moyers, he pressed Rusk to speak to journalists about "the Kennedy suggestion re reviewing China policy and point out we have been doing this for a long time...there was [a] constant review of our relations with China; [the] President thought we should be pretty tough on this at the [press] briefing."⁹⁵ For an upcoming Warsaw session on 25 May, Johnson insisted on clearing the instructions to the embassy himself, which were to place special emphasis on "our peaceful intentions toward Communist China."⁹⁶

This same fusion of strategic and domestic factors yielded the most significant bridge building initiative of the Johnson years, the 12 July 1966 address to the American Alumni Council. As early as March, LBJ was considering a proposal to include POL storage facilities in Hanoi and Haiphong as targets in the bombing of the North, in the hope that this would cripple the enemy's capacity to supply the insurgency in South Vietnam.⁹⁷ An escalation of the air war was thought to be feasible in part because of a cautiously optimistic reading of the PRC's intentions in Vietnam. As one China hand in the State Department observed in June, "there had been a significant shift in Chicom attitudes since February, which...[was] attributed to their belief that we would resume bombing after the [37-day] pause with a real 'bang.' When we had not done so...the Chicoms had drawn the correct conclusion that we were not moving to wipe out

North Vietnam, or threaten China, and their 'war warning' propaganda had since become considerably less strident than before.''⁹⁸

At a National Security Council meeting on 17 June, both Rusk and CIA Director William Raborn dismissed the possibility of a Chinese military reply to an expansion of Rolling Thunder. Only Arthur Goldberg, the Ambassador to the United Nations, dissented from this assessment. Johnson did not respond directly to this point, yet he underscored his determination to secure his military objectives "with minimum loss and minimum danger of escalating the war''.⁹⁹ It was within the context of these deliberations over increased bombing that the Johnson team saw some value in further signalling American restraint as a hedge against Chinese intervention. When Donald Zagoria sent a proposal to the White House in April for a presidential speech on China, the State Department welcomed the idea as an ideal "opportunity for the United States to demonstrate that its aims toward Peking are not hostile and belligerent.''¹⁰⁰ Similarly, Rostow thought it advisable that the targeting of POL sites be accompanied by a "communication to the Chinese Communists indicating our intentions remain limited.''¹⁰¹

As expected, China's reaction to the new bombing, launched on 29 June, was relatively mild. While numerous statements from Beijing denounced the action as an act of aggression against the mainland and declared China's readiness to undertake any sacrifice in providing aid to the DRV, U.S. analysts were impressed by the "controlled and hedged nature'' of these remarks. They were regarded more as an attempt to deter further American encroachment than as a commitment to enter the war.¹⁰² A Special National Intelligence Estimate concluded in early August that the recent air strikes had not altered the PRC's reluctance to join the fighting. Overt involvement in the war would only be triggered by an American invasion of North Vietnam or the imminent collapse of that regime. At the present level of hostilities, it was thought that China's leaders would limit their role to one of diplomatic and materiel support for their ally and the provision of troops for logistical functions.¹⁰³

Thus Johnson's address in July, delivered at a time when fears of Chinese intervention had somewhat subsided, cannot be explained by strategic considerations alone. Indeed, the idea for a speech on Asian policy took shape as the President's aides were searching for ways to counter popular restlessness over the war and to bolster Johnson's sagging political standing before mid-term congressional elections in the fall. By the summer, Americans were more or less evenly split between those favoring a withdrawal from Vietnam and those who thought it best to stay the course.¹⁰⁴ The protracted fighting, more specifically LBJ's inability to put forward a timetable for its completion or to articulate a statesmanlike vision of peace, pleased neither of these groups and was seen by the White House as a major cause for concern.¹⁰⁵ While new bombing might satisfy those elements who wanted to end the war by force, it raised anew the problem of how to placate those who favored negotiations. As Rostow admitted to Johnson, "Bombing POL will look like an Administration move to the hard side -giving in to the JCS [Joint Chiefs of Staff], etc. We need something new on the dove side to balance our account."¹⁰⁶ In these circumstances, extending the hand of friendship to America's greatest Asian adversary would confirm that Johnson was looking beyond the war and offer dramatic proof of his interest in peace, even as he expanded Rolling Thunder. This sentiment was perhaps best captured in a memorandum Ambassador at Large Averell Harriman wrote to a sympathetic Moyers in June, which forcefully stated that it was "difficult to carry the worldwide unpopularity and misunderstanding of Vietnam along with an unpopular China policy inherited primarily from [John Foster] Dulles. I feel the President could well gain in most parts of the world by a spectacular change in attitude towards Red China. It would then...be easier to gain better understanding of Vietnam."¹⁰⁷

LBJ's televised overview of Asian policy, co-drafted by Moyers and Thomson¹⁰⁸, touched on the importance of events in the region for U.S. security, in particular the campaign to defend Saigon against communist aggression. In the most intriguing passage, he stated that peace and stability in the Pacific ultimately rested on "reconciliation between nations that now call

themselves enemies.” As a counterpoint to the bloodshed in Vietnam, Johnson affirmed his willingness to utilize diplomatic means in pursuit of this long-term objective. To move the PRC “toward understanding of the outside world and...policies of peaceful cooperation,” he told his audience that “the greatest force for opening closed minds and closed societies is the free flow of ideas and people and goods.”¹⁰⁹ This theme, of course, had been propounded in one form or another by senior officials throughout the spring. Moreover, the deliberately vague nature of these remarks comported with the cautious style of a consummate politician who was willing to identify himself with an agreeable principle without committing his prestige to specific proposals that could be potentially controversial. The true significance of the speech is that it represented the first *Presidential* articulation of the rationale for a new China policy. As such, it contributed in no small part to laying the rhetorical foundation and justification for redefining America’s relationship with the mainland.

On a tour of Asia in October, highlighted by his attendance at the Manila Conference, Johnson publicly reiterated his hope for a new era in relations with the PRC.¹¹⁰ While anxious to secure the backing and support of regional allies for the war, the Johnson team made a conscious effort to ensure that the meeting in Manila did not assume anti-Chinese overtones or exacerbate tensions. William Bundy insisted to LBJ’s speechwriters that any “references to aggression [in Vietnam] should focus on North Vietnam, with Communist China being referred to only in a supporting role and no implication that the [Manila] group is a new alliance to combat the over-all menace of Communist Chinese aggression.”¹¹¹ Keeping the war limited depended as it had before on projecting restraint to Beijing.

While Vietnam defined the imperative of bridge building, it also imposed clear limits on the process. Even as domestic and strategic pressures arising from the war compelled the Johnson administration to adjust tactics toward China, preoccupation with America’s posture in Southeast Asia stifled more substantive policy innovation. Closely related to this concern was the

apprehension that any hint of accommodation with Beijing would alarm steadfast Asian allies and undermine their will to withstand Chinese pressure, a consideration that had influenced the decision for military intervention in Vietnam. During the spring of 1966, the embassies in Taipei and Seoul reported that the Fulbright hearings and speculation in the U.S. press of a change in China policy had stirred doubts of the administration's devotion to containing communist expansion.¹¹² Senior U.S. officials catered to allies' sensitivities by firmly denying the grounds for these charges.¹¹³ The State-Defense Long Range Study pointedly cautioned that any conciliatory moves toward the mainland had to be "applied with proper attention to timing, in order to avoid causing our Communist adversaries to believe that their expansionist policies are succeeding and our Asian friends to fear that we are wavering in our resistance to these policies."¹¹⁴

One casualty of this logic was a proposal Bundy sent to Rusk in May for a Sino-American meeting at the Foreign Minister's level. While an affirmative response from Beijing was deemed unlikely, he believed, perhaps with plans for the bombing of POL sites in mind, that some approach was "essential...to avoid a wider war growing out of tensions or miscalculations in the Far East."¹¹⁵ Had the idea been approved, it would have accorded the PRC unprecedented diplomatic status and prestige by departing from the established practice of confining official dialogue to the ambassadorial talks in Warsaw. Policymakers, however, were wary of initiatives that, in their eyes, threatened to derail more significant objectives in Vietnam. Upon further reflection, Bundy withdrew the recommendation one week later, noting that "in the existing political circumstances in South Vietnam such a message at the present time would only be construed as a sign of weakness by Peiping, and would not have the positive effect we had envisaged."¹¹⁶

The most glaring example of resistance to policy reform centered on the pivotal matter of Chinese representation, on which Johnson only briefly flirted with a "two Chinas" solution in the spring and summer of 1966. Arthur Goldberg led the charge of those in favor of an overhaul of

tactics at the UN. When a vote on the dreaded Albanian resolution produced a 47-47 tie (with 20 abstentions) in the General Assembly in November 1965, he saw this as a disquieting harbinger of things to come. The next vote, Goldberg warned the President, could very well result in Taipei's ejection unless the administration shifted its discredited focus on excluding Beijing from the world body to one of guaranteeing Taiwan's inclusion.¹¹⁷ This pessimism was widely shared. In February, both William Bundy and Assistant Secretary of State for International Organization Affairs Joseph Sisco opined that there was little hope of sustaining majority support in the General Assembly for the notion that changing the China seat was an "important question" requiring two-thirds approval. They suggested to Rusk that Bundy use an impending visit to Taipei to convey this view and float the option of "some arrangement that would reaffirm Taipei's seat but that would permit –by the initiative of others –some form of proposal involving an offer of membership for Peiping as well."¹¹⁸ The rationale for a "two Chinas" strategy, then, was strictly negative in that it was seen as the only means of averting a diplomatic debacle and a diminution of Taiwan's status as a bulwark of anti-communism. A decidedly skeptical Rusk balked, reasoning that it was not the appropriate time "to take this issue up with the President." He limited Bundy's mandate to one of merely ascertaining the opinions of his hosts in Taipei on the voting prospects at the UN.¹¹⁹

This bureaucratic ferment coincided with Johnson's own heightened interest in fresh approaches toward the PRC. He was reminded how a new policy at the UN could advance this objective. A switch to "two Chinas," Komer wrote in April, would "show that 'LBJ is not a stick-in-the-mud'...all the hints about new flexibility in our China policy have netted out a big plus so far."¹²⁰ When Bundy and Goldberg presented their views at a White House meeting, Bundy recollected that Johnson was intrigued and "didn't fight the problem for a minute."¹²¹ At the President's invitation, the UN Ambassador set down his thoughts on paper. Once again Goldberg underscored the dismal prospects for maintaining Taiwan's exclusive hold on the China seat, pointing to the enthusiasm of allies such as Japan and Canada for admitting the mainland. To

secure Taiwan's membership and to place the burden on Beijing for its isolation, he urged that the U.S. recognize both the PRC and Taiwan as "Successor States" with equal entitlement to representation in the UN.¹²²

Goldberg's proposal provoked familiar misgivings. A report prepared by the Far East bureau at Foggy Bottom contended that such a change in policy would "encourage the ChiComs, raise Hanoi's morale, downgrade US prestige and depress Asian and other friendly states. While the ChiComs are aiding and abetting the aggression in Viet-Nam, it would be unthinkable for us to support or 'not oppose' or seek to initiate a proposal to give the ChiComs UN representation."¹²³ The hawkish Rostow echoed these concerns, alerting Johnson to the potential side-effects of such a move on the alliance with Taiwan and the war in Vietnam.¹²⁴ Evidently struck by the thrust of Goldberg's analysis, however, LBJ leaned on Rusk to review the administration's options at the UN.

The result was yet another landmark of sorts, a 14 May memorandum in which the Secretary posited that reliance on previous tactics posed "an unacceptable risk of defeat and expenditure of U.S. influence." As an alternative to the Albanian resolution, a "two Chinas" approach offered the best possibility of preserving Taiwan's presence in the UN. Moreover, Beijing's anticipated rejection of such a compromise would only highlight its own belligerence and deflect growing criticism of the American position. To minimize any fallout among friendly Asian opinion, another government, perhaps Ottawa, could take the lead in guiding such a motion through the General Assembly. Before taking this step, however, Rusk insisted that Taipei had to be convinced of the gravity of the situation and encouraged to "stand steady, rather than withdraw from the UN" as the administration modified its tactics.¹²⁵

What followed illustrated the importance accorded to the views of America's regional partners. The plan foundered in part on the rocks of Chiang Kai-shek's intransigence. At a meeting with Ambassador Walter McConaughy in early July, the Generalissimo expressed his confidence that Washington could keep its Western allies in line on a new vote. More ominously,

he warned that passage of a “two Chinas” resolution would “cause disillusionment in Taiwan...[and] would also be a betrayal of the majority of the people in mainland China who look to [the] GRC as a symbol of hope and steadfastness.” Under such circumstances, he would have no other choice but to walk out of the UN.¹²⁶ This message remained the same when Rusk visited Taipei only days later. When pressed by his hosts for a public statement reiterating continued U.S. support for the “important question” formula, Rusk demurred, explaining that no commitment to any specific tactic could be made “without a better idea of the outcome.”¹²⁷ While striving to keep Johnson’s options open, Rusk was clearly alarmed by Chiang’s threats and by the lukewarm reaction of other Asian allies to a possible change in UN strategy. Relaying his impressions to his Canadian counterpart Paul Martin, he remarked that those “Asian countries who face the militancy of Communist China would feel great pain if she were admitted” to the UN, and wondered whether such an initiative should be taken “merely to please sentiment in Canada and European countries.”¹²⁸

Chaotic events on the mainland, the beginnings of what became known as the Cultural Revolution, added an unforeseen element to the administration’s deliberations during the summer. Reports of Red Guard assaults on CCP authorities throughout the country were widely perceived as an orchestrated Maoist purge of a party that did not share the Chairman’s zeal for continuous revolution.¹²⁹ In August, Rostow was notified by Alfred Jenkins, a China hand on the NSC staff, that enthusiasm for a “two Chinas” motion had waned among mid-level officials at Foggy Bottom “at the time when the hard liners are riding high in Peking.”¹³⁰ The uncertain fate of what appeared to be an intra-party dispute reinforced the inherent caution of senior decision-makers. Rusk, for one, believed it would be “tragic if the militant factions felt that their militancy was rewarded by an embrace in the form of an invitation to the UN, to the detriment of the factions opposing the hard militancy of Peking.”¹³¹

Political considerations, never far from LBJ’s mind, served as another inhibitive influence. Instinctively cautious in his reading of the public’s foreign policy attitudes and mindful

of the upcoming congressional election, Johnson likely saw potential hazards in moving forward on an issue that had for long stirred emotions at home. As he explained to Canadian Prime Minister Lester Pearson in August, “American public opinion had moderated somewhat as a result of the Fulbright hearings...He thought, however, that opinion could quickly swing back, although he was not sure that would be good if one believes the UN should include those who disagree with one’s position.”¹³²

All of these factors came into play when the President met with his top aides to discuss UN affairs on 13 September.¹³³ While no record of this session was kept, U.S. embassies around the world were informed three days later that there would be no change in U.S. policy for the next vote on Chinese representation, and that efforts would be concentrated on defeating the Albanian resolution and affirming the “important question” motion. Among the reasons given for this decision were the “militancy and unyielding mood” of the ascendant Maoist faction in the mainland’s political struggle and the “hardening of attitude toward Communist China among those Asian governments which are most directly exposed to [the] dangers of activity advocated and supported by [the] ChiComs as in Vietnam.”¹³⁴

Washington’s hostile reaction to a Canadian initiative in early November underscored its determination to preserve the status quo as best it could. Ottawa’s plan called for the introduction of a one-China, one-Taiwan motion specifically allotting China’s seat on the Security Council to the PRC. Alluding to political pressures at home for a fair settlement of the Chinese representation problem, a Canadian official confided to the Americans that his government could no longer justify its opposition to the Albanian resolution without offering a constructive alternative.¹³⁵ Rusk was taken aback. A Canadian abstention on the Albanian formula, he wrote Johnson, would trigger a bandwagon effect, encouraging other allies to do the same and thus guaranteeing majority approval of that resolution for the first time. While the administration could fall back on the “important question” procedure to prevent its passage, a dangerous precedent would nevertheless have been set. The challenge, then, was to persuade Ottawa to

sponsor a resolution that would be “a less radical departure from past tactics” and ultimately “more palatable to our close Asian allies.” Rusk proposed a resolution calling for the formation of a study committee that would examine the issue and report its findings to the General Assembly.¹³⁶ He fully understood that this amounted to nothing more than a holding action, and that the committee could very well recommend a variant of “two Chinas.” At the very least, however, tying up Chinese representation in deliberations could buy the U.S. some time and perhaps “complicate” the issue for a year or two.¹³⁷

With LBJ’s approval, the Secretary sent off an uncharacteristically blunt letter to Pearson outlining Washington’s objections to the Canadian idea. An offer of membership to Beijing now, Rusk intoned, would effectively embolden the radical Maoist forces on the mainland and thereby undermine any prospects for peace in Vietnam. Accordingly, the administration would “exert every ounce of our influence to defeat” Ottawa’s proposal “by the heaviest possible margin.” Reminding Pearson of “the seriousness of such a split between our two nations,” he suggested that the Canadians instead throw their weight behind the study committee, which would still represent “clear forward movement on the issue along the line that your government feels under political pressure to obtain.”¹³⁸

This arm-twisting did not have the desired effect. In the end, however, Italy, Belgium, and Chile were recruited as co-sponsors of the study committee option. Sensing that the one-China, one-Taiwan measure would not pass, Ottawa then abandoned its project. The 1966 vote was an entirely satisfactory outcome. In a reversal of the embarrassing results from the previous year, the Albanian resolution was soundly defeated (46 for, 57 against, 17 abstentions) and the “important question” reaffirmed (66-48-7). The victim of competing proposals, the study committee was strongly rejected (34-64-25).¹³⁹ The issue of Chinese representation, a nagging concern for the first three years of the Johnson administration that had produced nail-biting votes, would not rear its head for the remainder of the decade. U.S. officials well understood that the turmoil on the mainland had worked to their advantage, helping to dilute the support that had

been gaining momentum for Beijing's entry into the UN.¹⁴⁰ The last-minute encouragement of the study committee was consistent with the September decision to hold the line in that it was conceived as an acceptable alternative to a "two Chinas" approach, which the Johnson team, distracted by Vietnam and discouraged by the recent outburst of Chinese militancy, could not countenance. The limits of bridge building had been established.

America's relationship with China underwent considerable change in the year following the Vietnam decisions of 1965. For some contemporary observers, Beijing's inability to project power on the Indian subcontinent, the destruction of its "proxy" in Indonesia, and the deterioration of its influence in the international communist movement called into question the urgency of checking the PRC's ambitions in Southeast Asia.¹⁴¹ Yet for senior U.S. decision-makers, China's probes, while a failure, confirmed the image of a bellicose, implacable adversary. According to this prevailing view, the politico-psychological threat posed by the mainland to its neighbors, while perhaps diminished, remained intact. Rusk held in early 1966 that the Chinese leadership's "experience over the past forty years, their deep-seated beliefs, their dispute with the Soviets and their projection of Viet-Nam as a test-case, their vision of the future, and their nationalistic aspirations have combined to convince them that their current policies are right regardless of the consequences."¹⁴²

Of far more importance to the direction of China policy in 1966 was the Johnson administration's realization that containing the spread of Asian communism in Vietnam entailed the risk of unwittingly setting off a region-wide catastrophe. While they were determined to discourage Hanoi's support of the insurgency in South Vietnam through the steady application of America's military might, LBJ and his aides, with memories of Korea still fresh and ominous reports of China's preparations for war, moved to relieve Beijing's evident anxieties over U.S. intentions. At minimum, this required constant assurances that Washington did not harbor designs of toppling North Vietnam or attacking the PRC. These considerations, of course, had in large

part determined Johnson's cautious prosecution of the war at the outset. In 1966, the need for *political* signalling to China rose in proportion to the gradual escalation of *military* pressure against its ally, first with the end of the bombing pause in January and then with the targeting of POL facilities in June. These signals took the shape of relaxations of the travel ban, the promotion of expanded contacts, and a striking change in rhetoric.

It was no coincidence that the high-water mark of policy innovation in 1966 dovetailed with LBJ's personal engagement with China strategy, a level of interest that hitherto had been lacking. For some officials, such as the authors of the Long Range Study, a more flexible American stance was a means by which the mainland's foreign policy could be channelled in a more moderate direction. The President's immediate interests were keeping the war limited and selling it to an impatient and confused public. Thus Lyndon Johnson's domestic and strategic objectives in Vietnam increasingly depended on demonstrating restraint and openness toward the PRC. Yet when this accommodation was seen to clash with Asian alliances or the military campaign against the DRV, the latter concerns still took precedence. Sensing the tentative nature of the administration's opening to China, James Thomson noted shortly after the 12 July speech that, having established the justification for a new China policy, "Our problem in the months ahead is what kind of substance, and at what pace, to pour into this new rhetorical container."¹⁴³ For the duration of the Johnson years, deliberations on this point would continue to be overshadowed by Vietnam and by a new factor: the cataclysm of the Cultural Revolution.

Bridge Building in Limbo: The Impact of the Cultural Revolution, 1966-1967

Since the early 1960's, China watchers both inside and outside government had urged that U.S. policy toward the mainland be tailored in such a way as to exploit the apparent differences in perspective between the rigid ideologues ruling the country and the younger, presumably more pragmatic leadership-in-waiting. According to this logic, a more accommodating approach would relieve any fears of American hostility harbored by Mao Zedong's potential successors and encourage them to concentrate their energies on domestic concerns. The broad outlines of this strategy were most prominently articulated in Roger Hilsman's December 1963 address. There is little indication, however, that the Johnson team was influenced by these considerations during their first couple of years in office. Images and perceptions of the PRC were strongly conditioned by its threatening external behavior, particularly its role in encouraging and supplying the communist insurgency in South Vietnam. When a two-track China policy of containment and tentative bridge building took shape in 1966, it was propelled by strategic and domestic objectives closely related to the Vietnam War rather than by any long-term project of engaging moderate elements in Beijing.

The explosion of China's Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution later that same year, however, opened an entirely new dimension to Washington's discourse on the mainland. The distinct possibility of internal tensions spilling over into neighboring countries, most notably Vietnam, meant that senior decision-makers could ill afford to ignore or overlook political developments on the mainland. Moreover, the opposition that Mao Zedong provoked at home in his efforts to overhaul the party-state apparatus focused Washington's attention on what orientation a post-Mao regime might assume. This chapter and the next will discuss how the Johnson administration responded to these extraordinary events.

Literature pertaining to LBJ's handling of the Cultural Revolution is very sparse and has not made full use of the extensive primary sources now available to scholars. Existing accounts provide only a sketchy overview and adopt a broadly revisionist line, arguing that China's domestic turmoil prompted the Johnson team to forge new approaches to the PRC.¹ A reading of the full documentary record, however, reveals a more complicated story. Mainland affairs were watched intently by U.S. decision-makers and, as the existing scholarship suggests, gradually set in motion a reappraisal of the country's political dynamic and threat potential. Yet for at least the first year of the Cultural Revolution, Johnson and his advisers, while not discarding the new emphasis on broadening contacts with Beijing, were disinclined to approve more substantive policy reform. Taken aback by the chaotic and volatile character of China's political struggle, they settled on a cautious stance of deferment.

The evidence presented here offers the first sustained account of how the ongoing war in Vietnam shaped policymaking deliberations during the Cultural Revolution. While some China watchers feared that the country's mayhem might precipitate an irrational decision for intervention in Vietnam, LBJ evidently believed that events on the mainland increased the scope for intensified military action against Hanoi and therefore lessened the urgency of reaching out to Beijing. In the summer and fall of 1967, he authorized a substantial escalation of the air war. Simultaneous efforts to develop *détente* with the Soviet Union, having as its ultimate objective the Kremlin's assistance in finding a settlement to the war, provided further incentive for postponing any China initiatives that might only exacerbate Moscow's persistent concerns about Sino-American reconciliation. Bridge building, as a result, was relegated to a state of limbo at this time.

The Cultural Revolution, one of the most profound political and social upheavals of the twentieth century, stemmed from Mao's "restless quest for revolutionary purity in a postrevolutionary age".² In the aftermath of the disastrous Great Leap Forward, the CCP

establishment, led by Head of State and Vice Chairman Liu Shaoqi and Party Secretary General Deng Xiaoping, enacted a program of economic recovery that utilized the expertise of former capitalists and technical specialists, reimposed central bureaucratic controls, and catered to the material self-interests of the population. Mao gradually came to view these policies as a threat to both his political authority and utopian socialist ideals. At the heart of the Chairman's estrangement from his colleagues was a divergence of opinion over the severity of the economic crisis gripping China and the degree of retrenchment necessary to overcome it. Mao's vast ambition of continuous revolution and his contention that the country had sufficiently recovered by the early 1960's to withstand another campaign of mass mobilization clashed with the priorities of Liu and Deng. They were decidedly more pessimistic about China's condition, wary of disruptive ideological movements, and determined to pursue political and economic development through Party channels.

Mao's fear of creeping revisionism at home was conditioned in large part by his reading of concurrent events in the Soviet Union. Khrushchev's program of de-Stalinization and his erratic efforts to forge an accommodation of sorts with the "imperialist" West served as a disquieting example of how the agenda of a communist state could be usurped by individuals unsympathetic to the cause. Mao undoubtedly contemplated the uncertain fate of his own legacy if placed in the hands of those who did not share his revolutionary zeal. The Soviet leader's subsequent ouster in October 1964 stirred concerns of a similar end. To counter his own sense of marginalization, he cultivated like-minded allies among the military and radical intelligentsia, and moved to organize a groundswell of opposition from below against those in charge of the Party machine.³

China's descent into chaos was triggered by a series of shrewdly choreographed political machinations. In November 1965, Yao Wenyuan, a propagandist based in Shanghai, published a scathing indictment of *Hai Rui Dismissed From Office*, a play written by Wu Han. Wu served as the principal deputy of Peng Zhen, a Politburo member and Mayor of Beijing, a powerful Party

leader who embodied the bureaucratic stagnation that Mao abhorred. Yao's critique, likely written with the Chairman's tacit approval, branded Wu's work a thinly veiled attack on Mao's purge of Defense Minister Peng Dehuai in 1959. This placed Peng Zhen in the unenviable position of having either to defend his subordinate or admit his own guilt for harboring a revisionist. His ill-conceived attempt to dismiss the entire affair as an academic dispute sealed his fate. Mao seems to have regarded Peng's political demise as the prerequisite for securing the removal of his most formidable opponent and designated heir, Liu Shaoqi. Liu played into Mao's hands when, in June 1966, he dispatched work teams to universities and high schools in an effort to establish Party control over a burgeoning student revolt. Mao seized upon the suppression of the campus movement, which had been stoked by his underlings, as justification for his own offensive. At the Eleventh Plenum of the Central Committee in August, Liu was demoted, his vice chairmanship transferred to Minister of Defense Lin Biao. At the same meeting, a Sixteen Point Decision on the Cultural Revolution approved the broad outlines of Mao's program, calling for a "struggle against...those persons in authority who are taking the capitalist road."⁴

Mao's primary agents of "struggle," those to whom he looked to shake the Party establishment to its foundations and infuse the country with revolutionary fervor, were the Red Guards. Hopes for a unified mass movement, however, came to naught as the Red Guards split into opposing factions. Students from cadre and military families tended to discourage attacks on the Party and instead directed their wrath against intellectuals, former capitalists and landlords, and bourgeois culture. Students from bourgeois backgrounds, on the other hand, were aggrieved by the privileged status accorded to the children of CCP officials and eager to lash out at a system from which they had little to gain. Adding to this confusion were the attitudes of provincial and local leaders, who adopted a variety of tactics to obstruct or divert Red Guard interrogations. Many Red Guard groups were placed under tight restrictions or counterbalanced by the formation of conservative mass organizations. Toward the end of 1966, the Maoists, in a bid to retake the

initiative and break the political stalemate, condemned senior Party figures for refusing to subject themselves to mass criticism.⁵

Washington's understanding of the mainland's turmoil was largely framed by reports from the consulate office in Hong Kong. The fluidity of events and backstage political maneuvering baffled even those charged with watching China on a day-to-day basis. "At no time in recent years," Consul General Edward Rice cabled in June 1966, "have there occurred...developments at once so important and so clouded in obscurity as those of the past few months." He discerned a multidimensional character to the unfolding political drama, one that was at once an ideological purge, a policy dispute, and a power struggle. Rice was sure that recent events were intertwined with the country's looming succession question, yet was uncertain as to who was pulling the strings. Alluding to rumors of Mao's disenchantment with his colleagues, he allowed for the possibility of the leader's involvement, yet noted that the Chairman had remained outside Beijing for much of the past six months and was furthermore disinclined to play a hands-on role. Rice speculated that the assault on the Party apparatus was "spear-headed by or in the name" of Lin Biao, now apparently the new second in command.⁶ The passage of time offered a clarified perspective, as analyses from Hong Kong in the fall left no doubt as to Mao's culpability. "Mao to our mind" read a typical assessment, "is architect, authority, and chief executor of the Great Cultural Revolution. It represents his final, and seemingly desperate, attempt to recreate Chinese society in accordance with his own revolutionary model." Mao's actions were placed in the context of his own growing sense of mortality and his despondency over the revisionist course that his rivals were charting.⁷

While Mao's behavior reinforced for most U.S. officials the long-standing image of an implacable, perhaps even unstable, revolutionary, the fierce resistance he faced at home shattered high-level assumptions of a unified Chinese leadership. A July 1966 CIA memorandum, which Rostow forwarded to the President, posited that Peng Zhen's purge had undermined the cohesion and stability of Beijing's ruling circle, creating "deep suspicion and mistrust within the Chinese

party from top to bottom”. Any chance of a “peaceful and orderly” succession to Mao had probably been ruined. Just as significantly, the Chinese people were wary of another round of political indoctrination: “Support for the regime will further weaken as the policy of substituting exhortation for material incentives is pushed.”⁸

Mao’s most immediate concern, as reported from Hong Kong, was the vast majority of CCP functionaries who disapproved of their leader’s unholy alliance with the Red Guards. To protect their own institutional interests, this nascent opposition had settled on a low-key strategy of “waiting and blocking in every passive and unobtrusive way possible” the Mao-Lin bid for unencumbered power.⁹ Notwithstanding Mao’s considerable assets and strengths, intelligence analysts opined that “even in defeat the former party leaders could throw the nation into great confusion.”¹⁰ Indeed, in a brief survey of China’s troubled landscape, Rostow wrote Johnson in early 1967 that “Mao’s regime is in serious difficulty, to a degree that civil war has become a distinct possibility.”¹¹ The Cultural Revolution had settled into a virtual deadlock, as the obstinacy of “fragmented and embittered leaders” compelled frequent tactical withdrawals by the Maoists. The revered Chairman’s own prestige and standing among the Chinese people had been “seriously, perhaps irretrievably, tarnished in this as yet unavailing fracas.”¹²

Another strategic retreat, forced on Mao as he confronted the unintended consequences of his own radicalism, occurred soon after Rostow’s observation. As provincial authority dissipated in the wake of intensified mass pressure, Mao enthusiastically endorsed the overthrow of the Shanghai Party Committee in January 1967 and the subsequent seizure of power by rebel groups in seven other provinces and cities. When the question arose of what would replace this collapsed apparatus, however, his fear of anarchy took precedence over his revolutionary ardor. Mao most likely envisioned the Cultural Revolution as a campaign of Party rectification whereby those taking the “capitalist road” would be criticized and brought to heel, rather than as an enterprise aimed at creating an entirely new structure of power. Hence his ambivalence toward the notion of a system based on the Paris Commune, an idea favored by many of his allies and which inspired

the establishment of the Shanghai People's Commune on 5 February. Mao instead encouraged the creation of a "three-in-one combination" of revolutionary rebels, PLA representatives, and veteran cadres. The intervention of the Red Army in Chinese politics, formalized by a 23 January directive ordering the military to assist "the broad masses of revolutionary Leftists in their struggle to seize power," was an effort to restore order to a process that was quickly spinning out of control.¹³

The administration's China watchers interpreted these developments as a major setback to the Chairman's ambitions and as a decisive shift in favor of the regime's relatively moderate elements. Based on what is now known about the political maneuverings of this period, particularly when senior civilian and military leaders were rebuked during the February Adverse Current for their criticism of the Cultural Revolution, this was somewhat of a misreading of events.¹⁴ British officials, with whom the Americans often shared information about the PRC, certainly believed that Washington had exaggerated the strength and influence of Mao's opposition in the Party.¹⁵ U.S. analysts were struck by the military's new role. Despite Lin's leadership of the PLA, the office in Hong Kong believed the Red Army to be an unreliable ally for the Maoists. Rice cited the close mutual relationships between many military commanders and the CCP's provincial and municipal leaders as evidence for this view. Moreover, the army's identification with domestic order was at variance with the Red Guards' self-interest in uprooting it.¹⁶ With the PLA's political influence evidently ascendant, the State Department discerned in late February a distinct change in the "pace, intensity and direction" of the Cultural Revolution. The radicalism of the preceding months had been replaced by an emphasis on restoring economic and administrative order, protecting government officials from political attack, and reining in the activities of the Red Guards.¹⁷

A second factor accounting for this change in course, U.S. officials believed, was the apparent rise in fortunes of Premier Zhou Enlai. Among those in the higher echelons of leadership, Zhou was regarded as the most pragmatic, a statesman with wide exposure to the

outside world who was familiar with the give and take of diplomacy, whose Maoist rhetoric belied his conservative instincts and distaste for the Chairman's extremism.¹⁸ Indeed, according to one Swedish source, Zhou had confided to several visitors from Eastern Europe that "while he opposes the cultural revolution personally, he is careful about making public criticism in order to remain in the inner circle, and thereby exercise some degree of moderation."¹⁹ To the extent that China watchers perceived signs of hope in early 1967, they attributed this in large part to the steadying influence of the canny political veteran.²⁰

These events provoked considerable speculation as to the likely outcome of the mainland's political conflict. In February, a panel of academic experts on China, which had been established the previous fall by the State Department, listed four possibilities: a Mao-Lin victory, a compromise orchestrated by Zhou, the forging of a triumphant alliance between the Party apparatus and the PLA, or the disintegration of the country into regional units under military leadership. The third scenario was deemed the most feasible, with Mao probably assuming a largely ceremonial position in the hierarchy.²¹ The advantages of a relatively moderate successor regime were self-evident. There was some hope that those same groups who disapproved the Chairman's radicalism at home might exercise similar prudence abroad. Alfred Jenkins, the NSC's China hand, thought that a Zhou-led China would be more preoccupied with internal concerns and therefore less prone to stir up mischief among its neighbors. To the extent that he sought international acceptance and the legitimization of his own rule, Zhou might be tempted to return to the "Bandung spirit" of the mid-1950's and project an image of restraint and "rationality."²²

In a similar vein, a May 1967 National Intelligence Estimate advanced the possibility that "over the long term, internal changes in the direction of moderation...will create more favorable conditions for reappraising foreign policy and perhaps for introducing elements of greater moderation."²³ The alternative, a regime dominated by the Mao-Lin partnership, alarmed many in Washington. The enigmatic Defense Minister, "author" of the notorious *Long Live the Victory*

of People's War!, was viewed as “a thorough Communist, xenophobic in his nationalism, and lacking in true appreciation of the outside world.”²⁴ Lin, Rostow informed LBJ, was “bad news.”²⁵

On balance, however, Johnson officials discouraged expectations of a dramatic change in China's foreign policy orientation no matter what the ultimate fate of the Cultural Revolution. The office in Hong Kong postulated that Mao's opposition, while not ideological zealots, were nevertheless “disciplined Marxist-Leninists” whose worldview did not diverge markedly from the Chairman's. Any change in policy by his successors would be “more of style and procedure than in basic goals or priorities.”²⁶ State's Policy Planning Council likened the entire affair to “a domestic squabble among Communists” in which differences over external strategy were not the issue at stake. A relatively moderate successor government, should one emerge, would most likely de-emphasize the primacy of class struggle in the PRC's domestic affairs, yet the implications of such a shift for the country's foreign relations were harder to predict. There was little to suggest that Beijing would relax its hostile attitude toward the U.S.²⁷ By the fall of 1967, Jenkins had revised his previous estimate and was less hopeful of a new foreign affairs posture if Zhou was the victor. He noted that there was “very little to substantiate the theory that Chou would wish to deviate in any basic way from the policies he has long mouthed.”²⁸

Nor did China's troubles diminish in the eyes of senior U.S. decision-makers the continuing relevancy of the commitment in Vietnam. In a bid to convince LBJ that international conditions were favorable for a de-escalation of the war, Robert McNamara made the rather startling assertion in May 1967 that “To the extent that our original intervention and our existing actions in Vietnam were motivated by the perceived need to draw the line against Chinese expansionism in Asia, our objective has already been attained” because of the PRC's internal disarray.²⁹ The Defense Secretary by no means represented high-level thinking. William Bundy thought his comments were “wholly inadequate” and disputed the notion that “we can in any sense rest on our oars.” A premature withdrawal from Vietnam would be condemned by Asian

opinion and undermine American influence in the region.³⁰ Even as the Johnson team acknowledged that Mao's own recklessness had hobbled his regional ambitions, they maintained that this unprecedented bout of militancy underscored that China was still a threatening international actor. Just as in 1965, Rostow argued that a U.S. defeat in Vietnam in 1967 would "leave Southeast Asia at the mercy of Communist China. Without the U.S., there is no force...capable of deterring Communist China."³¹ Johnson agreed that a robust American posture in Vietnam "has had its effect. It has hampered China's policy and caused reversals against China in Indonesia and other parts of the world."³²

Thus while fascinated, even somewhat encouraged, by the turn of events in China, Johnson and his advisers recoiled from any grand departures in policy. The uncertain outcome of China's political struggle and the rampant chaos gripping the country were major factors accounting for this cautious stance. To be sure, long-standing proponents of policy reform within the administration continued to press their case, arguing that this confusion presented Washington with an opportunity to modestly influence the PRC's future orientation to its advantage. James Thomson was convinced that "the present commotion...makes more desirable than ever U.S. 'intervention' in the Chinese political process through further development of a multiple strategy."³³ In August 1966, he alerted Rostow to a trade initiative that was then in its deliberative stages. Thomson favored White House intervention to give the process a push. A modification of the embargo, besides serving the familiar objective of deflecting domestic and international criticism of American intransigence, would send "a new and supportive message to elements within mainland China that are pushing for policies of pragmatism and accommodation with the outside world."³⁴ While mindful of the mainland's unsettled climate, Rice also advised his superiors that this should not halt the momentum toward the eventual normalization of relations with Beijing. With an eye to the future and to the possible replacement of Mao, he stressed how a more flexible policy would "facilitate the possibility of...a successor regime acting as we would wish a responsible government of the most populous nation in the world to

act.’’³⁵ Several members of the State Department’s panel of China experts were sympathetic to this line of reasoning and pinpointed the loosening of trade restrictions as a means to serve this end.³⁶

A far more significant voice in this debate belonged to Alfred Jenkins, who, upon Thomson’s departure from government in August 1966, became the NSC’s resident China watcher. A former Deputy Director of Southeast Asian Affairs at Foggy Bottom who had also served in Hong Kong and Taipei, Jenkins played a substantial role in shaping the White House’s reaction to the Cultural Revolution. Key to this influence was his access to the President via Rostow, who thought highly of his aide and frequently forwarded his memorandums to Johnson. Rostow counted him among his most trusted sources on Chinese matters; he later contrasted Jenkins’ sober judgement with that of his immediate predecessor who, perhaps owing to his background as a missionary offspring, Rostow thought had too much of an emotional investment in advancing the cause of Sino-American reconciliation.³⁷

Jenkins’ own attitudes evolved slowly. Early in his tenure at the NSC, he believed, much like Thomson, that mainland events demanded a clarification of Washington’s benign intentions. Most strikingly, he confided to Rostow that the administration was ill-served by the hardline views of decision-makers like Rusk, whose approach to the PRC “scares me. He is so orderly and judicial and a sheaf of other virtues, that he wants all the returns in before he moves. On China we are not going to get as many returns as we want; and inaction is an act watched by mainlanders, especially, I should think, the ChiCom moderates.’’³⁸ Yet Jenkins’ enthusiasm for further bridge building efforts was eventually dampened by the mainland’s persistent turmoil and by the sense that any goodwill gesture would be spurned in Beijing. In these circumstances, he argued, any fundamental overhaul of China policy should be postponed “until we can make a much better judgment as to the course of events in China.’’³⁹ Rostow saw much to recommend this view. China, as he recollected, “was like a dragon with a bellyache...They were caught up in

a great debate and struggle as to how they should behave with respect to themselves and the rest of the world. They were not in a mood or in a position to talk to us.’’⁴⁰

The Johnson team’s posture of “relative silence and careful scrutiny”⁴¹ –as it was coined by Jenkins –effectively derailed the momentum for further policy revision that had been generated by the President’s 12 July speech. As discussed in the previous chapter, deliberations over the merits of adopting a “two Chinas” formula in the UN during the summer and fall of 1966 were influenced by the outbreak of Red Guard violence on the mainland. It was felt by some, notably Rusk, that a conciliatory overture at this point might encourage or reward the country’s militant elements and possibly tip the balance in favor of the Mao-Lin faction. In lieu of a settlement of the politically sensitive issue of Chinese representation, many within State’s East Asian bureau pushed for alternative means of deepening relations with the PRC. In December 1966, Bundy and Leonard Meeker, the State Department’s Legal Adviser, sent Rusk a far-reaching proposal for the removal of all passport restrictions for travel to the PRC. The idea was justified in part as a way of “eventually persuading mainland China to turn its energies into non-aggressive, responsible channels.”⁴² The measure, however, reached Rusk’s desk at a time most analysts recognized as an acutely radical phase in the Cultural Revolution, and was shelved as a result. Bundy evidently had second thoughts, withdrawing the idea a few months later “in view of the unsettled political condition inside China and the xenophobic behavior of the mobs of Red Guards...committing excesses or threatening foreigners...in Peking and elsewhere.”⁴³

Similar logic determined the fate of trade proposals under discussion since the spring of 1966.⁴⁴ In September, Bundy, again acting at the behest of his subordinates, recommended that the State, Defense, Treasury, Commerce and Agriculture departments agree to a set of changes in America’s trade and transaction controls against Beijing. Among the suggestions were the general licensing of those U.S. citizens with valid passports to China for engagement in all transactions incidental to their travel and the eventual licensing of foodstuffs, medical supplies, and art objects for import and export. The package was framed as a natural extension of the administration’s

efforts to increase contacts with the PRC. Johnson's 12 July address, with its call for the "free flow of ideas and people and goods" between the two countries, raised expectations of such a move. Whether or not the inclusion of "goods" in the speech was seriously deliberated remains unclear.⁴⁵ By the fall, however, events in China had clearly changed minds. Rostow favored deferment of the trade package, thinking it best that Rusk "take this up directly with the President *at the right time.*"⁴⁶ Reflecting this cautious mood, Under Secretary of State Nicholas Katzenbach suggested that "we should hold this awhile."⁴⁷

Deteriorating conditions on the mainland were in fact the basis for the approval of a modest trade initiative in April 1967. Bundy reported to Rusk at the end of March that the breakdown of order and authority had jeopardized food supplies and contributed to the spread of various diseases. "Neither U.S. public opinion, that of China, or that of the rest of the world," he wrote, "should be presented with a picture of total U.S. indifference to [the] prospect of famine in China." Bundy used the occasion to revive his trade program from the previous fall and to submit a new recommendation for the licensing of medical supplies.⁴⁸ In accordance with the prevailing distaste for policy experimentation, Bundy's original proposals were yet again postponed. Yet the compelling humanitarian rationale forced unusually prompt agreement on the latter idea. On 19 April, the administration announced the license for sale to China pharmaceutical and medical supplies directly related to the prevention or treatment of meningitis, cholera, or infectious hepatitis.⁴⁹ While noteworthy, the decision was defensive and bore little relation to any long-term strategy. It was motivated mostly by the need to safeguard America's benign international image.

Officials were evidently taken aback by what they characterized as an "overwhelmingly hostile" public reaction to this gesture and were apprehensive that any further trade liberalization would undermine the President's simultaneous efforts to win Congressional approval of an East-West trade bill.⁵⁰ In contrast to the spring of 1966, when public perceptions of the PRC were shaped in large part by Fulbright's China hearings and rumors of Beijing's preparations for war, surveys of popular attitudes in 1967 did not reveal widespread support for new bridge building

efforts or offer the Johnson team any direct incentive for overhauling China policy. Media reports of political purges and Red Guard brutality deepened impressions of Chinese irrationality and lawlessness. A Gallup poll taken in March revealed that 71 percent of Americans deemed China to be the major threat to world peace.⁵¹

Yet the scarcity of policy innovation at this time cannot be solely attributed to political timidity or knee-jerk aversion to Mao's radicalism. Indeed, inherent in the U.S. posture of aloofness toward the Cultural Revolution was a significant degree of sophistication and foresight. Senior officials acknowledged that their capacity to shape events on the mainland to their liking was severely limited, and were fearful lest any hint of American interference in Chinese politics unwittingly sabotaged the chances of a more pragmatic leadership succeeding the Chairman.⁵² Jenkins cited the "unpredictability of what effect our actions might have on a Chinese situation which seemed, from our standpoint, to be developing quite satisfactorily without any help from us."⁵³ This consideration accounted for the calculated decision to refrain from public commentary on either the PRC's state of affairs or the administration's preferred outcome. In February 1967, Bundy cancelled a scheduled speech on China and instead provided an off the record session for reporters. As he explained to a colleague, "anything in the nature of an official statement on China at the present time is subject to misconstruction...[and] will be deemed to thrust our influence one way or the other and to be thus harmful." It was therefore prudent to "stand aside wholly from the current struggle."⁵⁴

In lieu of any forward movement on the policy front, the Johnson team upheld the conciliatory bridge building rhetoric from the previous year. The embassy in Warsaw was instructed to continue emphasizing Washington's interest in peace during the Sino-American ambassadorial talks. With so few opportunities for interaction with their Chinese counterparts, U.S. officials viewed this forum as a critical " 'holding operation'...to keep open some dialogue with [the] ChiComs."⁵⁵ In his January 1967 State of the Union address, LBJ again asserted his "hope for a reconciliation between the people of Mainland China and the world community –

including working together in all the tasks of arms control, security, and progress on which the fate of the Chinese people...depends.” Reiterating the broad sentiments of Hilsman’s December 1963 speech, he maintained that the U.S. would be “the first to welcome a China which decided to respect her neighbors’ rights.”⁵⁶ That same month, the State Department circulated a set of guidelines for public statements on China to all diplomatic and consular posts. The paper advised U.S representatives stationed abroad to underline America’s limited objectives in Vietnam and to “Seek ways of recognizing the past and potential greatness of China and the history of friendly relations between the American and Chinese peoples.” While it was conceded that this would not alter the outlook of the current leadership, it was thought “conceivable that potential future leaders might be influenced.”⁵⁷

Most notably, Johnson used the occasion of a visit in June by Romanian Premier Ion Gheorghe Maurer, who remained on good terms with the Chinese and was soon scheduled to travel to Beijing, to convey his good intentions. Adhering to the counsel of his aides that he “*not* get into any discussion on the internal situation in Communist China,”⁵⁸ the President asked his guest to relay the message that “we do not want war with China or to change the system of government in China...We have no designs on her territory or her philosophy. All we want to do is to trade with China and get along with her to the extent that she will permit.”⁵⁹ In all of these subtle ways, the administration, without overtly involving itself in China’s political debate, sought to signal to various contenders for power on the mainland that options existed for improved relations between the two countries.

The most pressing concern for Johnson and his advisers was whether the pressures emanating from China’s domestic crisis portended any change in its willingness to intervene in Vietnam. This consideration, largely overlooked in the existing literature, heavily influenced the administration’s conduct of the war in 1967 and its posture toward the PRC. Recent studies have confirmed that the Cultural Revolution, particularly in its early stages, exercised significant

influence on the conduct of Chinese foreign relations, lending it a decidedly ideological and revolutionary cast. Contrary to the hopes of professional diplomats like Zhou and Foreign Minister Chen Yi, who sought to insulate the conduct of the nation's diplomacy from Mao's anti-revisionist campaign, the Maoists viewed domestic and international politics as two sides of the same coin. Propagation of Mao Zedong Thought abroad was a means by which popular opinion could be mobilized and their own power consolidated on the mainland. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs became a battleground for these competing moderate and radical visions. In early 1967, the former lost considerable ground to the latter, as Chen was sidelined due to his complicity in the February Adverse Current. Consequently, the Central Cultural Revolution Group assumed a more prominent role in the formulation and implementation of policy. The result was chaos. All but one of the country's ambassadors were recalled for indoctrination. Chinese embassies were instructed to distribute Mao badges, and protests were frequently organized against other countries for minor offenses.⁶⁰ John Gronouski, the American Ambassador to Poland, observed an unnerving change in the deportment of his Chinese interlocutors at the Warsaw sessions. Officials "all appeared in identical dark blue Chungshan uniforms with Mao Tse-tung buttons on [the] left chest...Repeated references to 'great leader of [the] Chinese people,' Mao, and to thought of Mao [is] an unusual feature in [the] talks".⁶¹ Alfred Jenkins confirmed reports in the summer of 1967 that "a group of radical Red Guards, who know little about international affairs and diplomacy, but who are letter-perfect in the thoughts of Mao Tse-tung, have taken over the [Foreign] Ministry."⁶²

Most U.S. intelligence analysts thought it unlikely that China's foreign policy would be affected for the worse by the country's internal confusion. On the contrary, many speculated that Mao's preoccupation with vanquishing his rivals would reinforce his natural aversion to a major commitment to Hanoi. As a July 1966 CIA report concluded, "it might be prudent for the regime to seek a certain equilibrium abroad, lest foreign developments intrude on internal programs. Recent Chinese propaganda –e.g., that the main enemies are internal ones –seems to point in this

direction.”⁶³ The PRC’s relatively muted response to the targeting of North Vietnam’s POL sites that same month corroborated this view. Observers were careful to note that Beijing’s vehement objections to the bombing and its affirmation as “the reliable rear area of the Vietnamese people” were intended primarily to reassure a nervous ally and did not represent any change in strategy. The Chinese would continue to hold their fire unless directly provoked.⁶⁴ A Special National Intelligence Estimate attributed this gun-shyness in part to the disarray within the armed forces and throughout the country at large.⁶⁵ Similarly, the shift toward an even more radical line in foreign relations in 1967 was calmly assessed. The Maoists’ intensified rhetorical support of Asian national liberation movements amounted to little more than “propaganda, political support, limited financial assistance and the training of cadres”. In its actions abroad, the mainland would continue to be “guided by a realistic appraisal of feasible courses of action.”⁶⁶

The State Department’s China hands were not nearly as sanguine as the intelligence community on the question of Chinese intentions in Vietnam. Edward Rice, long a skeptic of Rolling Thunder, strenuously contended that any complacency derived from Beijing’s troubles was dangerously misguided. Any estimate of China’s intervention in the war could not be attempted without reference to Mao’s dogged efforts to instill revolutionary purity into the next generation of leadership, a scheme which called into question his own “sense of mental balance and predictability.”⁶⁷ Rice advocated greater concentration of the military effort in the South and the avoidance of potentially provocative actions against the DRV; the Chairman’s fatalistic belief in the inevitability of a clash with the forces of imperialism and his appreciation of conflict as an instrument of mass mobilization made Chinese entry into the war “a possible contingency.”⁶⁸

The mainland’s charged political climate evidently gave many senior U.S. decision-makers pause for thought. Shortly following the bombing of the North’s POL facilities in July 1966, diplomats were explicitly discouraged from publicly speculating on how the mainland’s purges might impair its military preparedness. It was thought that China’s “hypersensitivity to mockery of their effectiveness and resentment over [an] outside effort to

profit from internal problems...may only serve to strengthen any Chinese disposition...to make [a] strong, dramatic display of power.”⁶⁹ This consideration underpinned Bundy’s “grave reservations” the following month over Pentagon proposals for air strikes against steel plants and the Haiphong docks. An expansion of Rolling Thunder, he argued, might be interpreted by the Chinese “as a sign that we thought we could get away with something because of the political confusion in Communist China. This could trigger irrational action.”⁷⁰ Rusk as well took seriously the possibility that the country’s “leaders might react irrationally because of tensions in [the] regime.”⁷¹

The risk of stoking China’s siege mentality figured prominently in the administration’s heated debate over war planning in the spring and summer of 1967. Seizing upon General William Westmoreland’s request in March for an additional 200 000 troops, the Joint Chiefs of Staff pressed the White House for the adoption of several measures designed to dramatically curtail Hanoi’s support of the insurgency in the South: ground raids on enemy sanctuaries in Laos and Cambodia and across the demilitarized zone; mobilization of the reserves; the bombing of military and industrial facilities in the Hanoi-Haiphong area and along the rail lines to China; and mining the DRV’s major ports.⁷² These proposals provoked considerable unease among Johnson’s civilian aides. The long-standing assumption that China would directly intervene in the war only if North Vietnam was invaded or on the verge of collapse remained intact. Yet as both the CIA and State’s INR bureau posited in April, mining Haiphong harbor or attacking the rail lines might convince Beijing’s leaders that either scenario was imminent and therefore precipitate a decision for a broadened role in the fighting, possibly involving air or ground action.⁷³

LBJ’s inner circle, while differing over the appropriate bombing strategy, was even more adamant about the dangers inherent in the Joint Chiefs’ program. Though predisposed to increased military pressure on the North, Rostow concluded that the advantages of concentrating action against the “top of the funnel” were outweighed by “the risks of Soviet and Chinese countermeasures and heightened world tensions.” To encourage Hanoi’s continued participation

in the war, Beijing would counter any American escalation by introducing additional engineering and anti-aircraft forces. More ominously, he wrote, "given the turmoil inside Communist China, an irrational act...cannot be ruled out."⁷⁴ McNamara, distraught by the seemingly endless stalemate and convinced that American bombing was not producing the desired effect of reducing the North's infiltration into the South, was "appalled" by the military's "continued willingness to risk a nuclear confrontation."⁷⁵ In a 19 May memorandum to the President, he asserted that an escalation of the conflict along these lines would have minimal impact on Hanoi's resolve and instead likely provoke "a serious confrontation, if not war, with China and Russia." McNamara recommended an increase of only 30 000 troops, arguing that granting Westmoreland's request would only create pressure for additional forces. He steadfastly opposed expanding the ground war beyond South Vietnam or bombing the DRV north of the twentieth parallel. Fearful of going over the brink, he hoped that these limited steps would prove sufficient in serving as "a lever toward negotiations."⁷⁶

The State Department's position, as articulated by Bundy and Katzenbach, reiterated the argument that the PRC might perceive increased military pressure on Hanoi as a concerted effort to destroy its ally. Among other considerations, the need to avert heightened Sino-American tensions dictated a "cut back [in Rolling Thunder] in the near future to concentration on supply routes and re-strikes north of the 20th parallel limited to those necessary to eliminate targets directly important to infiltration." The distinguishing feature of Bundy and Katzenbach's paper was its contention that intensified bombing of the North would have detrimental effects on China's internal condition. Relying heavily on reports from Hong Kong, they argued that enacting the Joint Chiefs' recommendations would set off a crisis atmosphere that could unite the mainland's disparate factions, which would either "calm down the Chinese internal situation or...assist Mao to gain control" of the reins of power. Besides undermining the prospects of a moderate post-Mao regime, an easing of China's domestic conflict would increase Beijing's

leverage on the North and thereby discourage Hanoi from seeking a negotiated settlement. Put another way, the DRV's interest in peace talks depended in part on continued Chinese disarray.⁷⁷

Whether or not Johnson factored Chinese politics into his military decisions of 1967 remains uncertain. More likely his general fear of triggering a replay of Korea, so prominent since the outset of the war, was a decisive consideration. Swayed by the cautionary advice of his aides, he rejected any mining of the DRV's ports or incursions into Laos, Cambodia, and North Vietnam. Tilting toward his Secretary of Defense, he authorized only 55 000 additional troops, far below what the Joint Chiefs had requested. On the issue of bombing, however, LBJ sought to "steer a course midway between the proposal of those who wanted to cut back our air action and the plan advanced by those who believed we should step up strikes...I felt that a cutback to the 20th parallel at that time would have been misunderstood in Hanoi as a sign of weakness."⁷⁸ While Johnson genuinely believed in the utility of new bombing to convince the DRV of American resolve, he was also troubled by the prospect of divisions within his administration being driven into the open. As befitted his consensus-based approach to policymaking, he attempted to juggle competing recommendations by weaving elements of them together. When Senator John Stennis opened public hearings on bombing strategy on 9 August, giving the military a forum for airing their grievances, the approval of expanded bombing became a matter of political necessity. By no coincidence, he selected sixteen new targets on the same day that Stennis called his session into order, ten of which were in the DRV border area with China.⁷⁹

The President took this step despite the opposition of most of his senior civilian advisers. Bundy raised anew his concerns that Beijing "could well see [these] systematic attacks as an attempt by us to take advantage of their internal weakness and confusion, and...drive them to action however irrational." Moreover, bombing near the border might compel the PLA, a possible agent of moderation, to close ranks with Mao.⁸⁰ Yet Johnson believed that circumstances provided some leeway for more vigorous military action. As he explained, "Our strategy, as I see it, is that we destroy all we can without involving China and Russia...but I do not believe China

and Russia will come in.” While he agreed that “we must be careful about the [Sino-Vietnamese] buffer zone because of the danger in going over the border,” he felt that “targets more than eight to ten miles away from the buffer zone could be hit without danger.”⁸¹

LBJ’s confidence likely stemmed in part from the counsel of one his most trusted confidants, Clark Clifford, who, upon returning from a tour of Southeast Asia in early August, urged that “the [bombing] margins be moved closer to Red China and that additional targets be approved.” Clifford assured his friend that there was “no concern anywhere in the countries [I] visited about Red China entering the war.”⁸² Indeed, in an interview that spring with American correspondent Simon Malley, Zhou implied that China did not wish to provoke a war with the U.S. and would only fight if attacked.⁸³ Johnson may well have been satisfied that he had signalled sufficient restraint through his aforementioned meeting in June with the Romanian Premier. At a press conference on 18 August, he insisted that “these air strikes are not intended as any threat to Communist China...the United States does not seek to widen the war in Vietnam.”⁸⁴

Apparently encouraged by Chinese quiescence, Johnson authorized air strikes on the Phuc Yen airfield in October, once again overruling the reservations of Rusk and McNamara, both of whom raised the possibility of a strong Chinese reaction.⁸⁵ Thus while Johnson’s continued worries over Chinese intervention led him to rebuff the more belligerent elements of the Joint Chiefs’ agenda, his escalation of the air war in the summer and fall of 1967 suggested that this fear had receded somewhat since the previous year. China’s internal disorder and the dearth of evidence that it was taking tangible steps to prepare for war contributed to this impression.⁸⁶ The United States Intelligence Board affirmed in the spring that the PRC’s military strategy continued to place primary emphasis on defense.⁸⁷

The ramifications for China policy were significant. Just as the possibility of Chinese intervention kindled LBJ’s personal interest in bridge building in 1966, the diminished threat of an enlarged war as China turned inward rendered the need for new overtures to the mainland less urgent.⁸⁸ Consequently, there was a discernible decline in his engagement with the intricacies of

China strategy. With a raging Cultural Revolution and the growing unlikelihood of Sino-American hostilities, substantive policy reform was put on the backburner.

While creating an opening for increased military activity against the North, another geopolitical side-effect of the Cultural Revolution offered equally alluring benefits to U.S. policymakers: the intensification of the Sino-Soviet schism. Indeed, Johnson officials were struck by the depths to which relations between the two communist giants plunged. Few events better illustrated this phenomenon than the Red Square incident of 25 January 1967. When Soviet authorities suppressed a gathering of Chinese students for publicly reading quotations from Mao at the tombs of Lenin and Stalin, millions of angry Chinese protested at the Soviet embassy in Beijing. In retaliation, a group of Soviet citizens was dispatched to the PRC's embassy in Moscow one week later, at which point a number of Chinese diplomats were mauled.⁸⁹ Even casual observers of mainland affairs could not fail to notice that the tenor of Mao's campaign –the vilification of Liu Shaoqi as “China's Khrushchev” and the exhortations against “revisionism” –was decidedly anti-Soviet. As the Hong Kong office reported in the fall of 1966, “the Soviet Union has matched, if not replaced, the U.S. as Peking's major propaganda target...an emotional trend of hostility to the USSR has been set off which perhaps over the years will lead to less concentration on Peking's fundamental enmity toward the U.S.”⁹⁰

State's INR bureau documented a significant shift in Moscow's posture toward China in response to this heightened propaganda warfare. Abandoning previous efforts to maintain a semblance of civility, the Soviet media in the fall of 1966 counterattacked with its own charges of Chinese irrationality and isolation within the communist camp.⁹¹ Rostow notified LBJ of rumors that the Soviets were “instigating and aiding anti-Mao resistance in Sinkiang, Manchuria and possibly Inner Mongolia.”⁹² Inherent in Soviet attitudes, intelligence analysts believed, was profound concern over developments on the mainland and a fear that the breakdown of CCP authority could “set dangerous precedents for other socialist states.”⁹³ There seemed to be few

advantageous outcomes to China's political conflict from the Kremlin's perspective. A Maoist victory would only prolong tensions between Moscow and Beijing, while continued disorder threatened the security of Soviet borders. As a hedge against these and other contingencies, the USSR had reinforced armed forces along the frontier it shared with its adversary.⁹⁴

This mutual fear and suspicion took its toll. In its long-term forecast of Sino-Soviet relations, a December 1966 NIE postulated that much would depend on China's future political orientation. Should the Mao-Lin faction triumph, relations would deteriorate even further, possibly leading to "a sudden explosion of the dispute into a new and more virulent form in the near term." Yet even a more accommodating Chinese leadership that was eager to mend fences with its neighbor could not be expected to make major concessions to serve this end, such as recognizing Moscow's leadership of the world revolution. "Divergent Chinese and Soviet national interests" would "remain a source of friction and distrust for many years to come."⁹⁵

As China's prestige in the communist bloc plummeted and Moscow became increasingly preoccupied with the threat on its eastern flank, these same reports surmised, the Kremlin would feel both emboldened and compelled to improve relations with the West.⁹⁶ In February 1967, British Prime Minister Harold Wilson relayed to Rostow his impressions of recent talks with Soviet Premier Alexei Kosygin. Most noteworthy was the new "Soviet attitude about involvement in efforts to obtain a [Vietnam] settlement...Kosygin had clearly revealed in private the extent to which he was now willing to play a role." Wilson attributed this "substantial shift in the Soviet position" to the "almost obsessional concern shown by Mr. Kosygin about events in China."⁹⁷ There is some evidence that suggests Soviet strategy toward the U.S. at this time was influenced in part by the Chinese threat. In January 1967, the Politburo approved a foreign policy memorandum that affirmed the imperative of "avoid[ing] a situation where we have to fight on two fronts, that is against China and the United States. Maintaining Soviet-American relations on a certain level is one of the factors that will help us achieve this objective."⁹⁸ An additional

concern arguing in favor of engaging the Americans was the specter of an exclusive Sino-American bargain in Vietnam that would eradicate Soviet influence in Southeast Asia.⁹⁹

Some Johnson officials argued that the Sino-Soviet rift could be used as leverage in inducing the Kremlin to apply pressure on North Vietnam to negotiate. Expounding on a strategy in November 1966 that would gain considerable currency during the Nixon presidency, Zbigniew Brzezinski of State's Policy Planning Council opined that "some public intimation...of a developing U.S. interest in US-Chinese accommodation may spur the Soviet Union into considering the advantages of greater US-Soviet cooperation."¹⁰⁰ Douglass Cater, one of LBJ's most senior political aides, soon picked up on this theme. Without sufficient prodding, he wrote the President, Moscow would have little incentive to help extricate America from the war by facilitating peace talks. A possible solution to this quandary would be to "undertake a series of calculated moves to stimulate anxiety among the Soviets about the state of our conversations with Communist China."¹⁰¹

Cater's idea was forwarded to Jenkins and fellow NSC staffer Nathaniel Davis for comment. Their frosty reaction reflected the thinking of their superiors and constituted another reason for the deferment of further bridge building to China during this period. Jenkins' reservations stemmed from familiar concerns that any new gestures toward the PRC would be inappropriate without "some semblance of order on the mainland."¹⁰² Perhaps more importantly, Davis contended that precisely because the Soviets were in "an emotional lather about China," any attempt to unnerve them would probably have a counterproductive effect and undermine ongoing efforts to engage the Kremlin in talks on Vietnam, non-proliferation, and arms control. As he wrote, "Their response may be more hostility and withdrawal, if they think we are systematically using the Chinese against them."¹⁰³ Washington's image of an increasingly militant China dovetailed with heightened expectations that Khrushchev's conservative successors were interested in developing a stable international climate and mediating an end to the hostilities in Vietnam.

The U.S. intelligence community was, on balance, skeptical about the USSR's willingness to play a constructive role in Vietnam. The Soviet attitude toward greater political and diplomatic involvement in the war was depicted as one of ambivalence. On the one hand, it was assumed that Moscow had an obvious stake in containing the fighting, as U.S. escalation or the DRV's stubbornness could force its hand and trigger a superpower confrontation. Balanced against these considerations, however, was the Soviets' appreciation of the war as an open wound that diverted American resources from Europe and alienated world opinion. Moreover, the Kremlin would be loath to forsake its hard-earned influence in Hanoi on behalf of U.S. interests, whether by a cutoff in military aid or the application of crude political pressure.¹⁰⁴ A typical CIA assessment concluded in April 1967, "the Soviets see no feasible alternative but to follow their present policy of continuing the current level of support to Hanoi, while avoiding any great pressure on either North Vietnam or on the US to end the war. The Soviet leaders probably hope that the conflict will...end without any further substantial escalation."¹⁰⁵

This was a reasonably accurate reading of Soviet policy. As Ilya Gaiduk's research has shown, the USSR was reluctant to assume a visible and prominent role in the peace process. During the latter half of 1966, Soviet officials believed that China's waning clout in Hanoi afforded an opportunity to gently push their Vietnamese comrades toward negotiations. Yet the DRV proved mostly resistant to this counsel, particularly in the spring of 1967 as it increased its military effort in the South. Aware of its limited influence and protective of its self-image as the guardian of national liberation struggles, Moscow settled on "a consistent though cautious and sometimes ineffective policy of indirect pressure and persuasion [to negotiate] so as not to antagonize its allies."¹⁰⁶

Yet the Johnson team, anxious to exhaust every option for ending the war on favorable terms, invested considerable faith in the Soviet card. More so than intelligence analysts, they believed that the USSR was displaying greater willingness to cooperate on issues of major concern to the administration toward the end of 1966. Following a meeting with Foreign Minister

Andrei Gromyko in October, LBJ thought that “our relations with the Soviet Union were better at present than they have ever been since he assumed the Presidency.” He was particularly encouraged by Gromyko’s hints that “the Soviets now have some influence in North Viet-Nam and that, if the [U.S.] bombing were to cease, there was reason to hope that this would be followed by positive action on the part of the North.”¹⁰⁷

These hopes were fuelled by numerous indications that the Sino-Vietnamese alliance, assumed to be virtually watertight in 1964-65, was roiled by tension. Hanoi’s military and diplomatic ties to the Soviet Union, a source of irritation to the Chinese since Khrushchev’s purge, deepened in 1966-67. Efforts to maximize support from both communist patrons and to maintain a neutral stance in the Sino-Soviet dispute were dramatically displayed when the DRV sent a delegation to the Soviets’ Twenty Third Party Congress in the spring of 1966. Like their Russian counterparts, Chinese leaders were reluctant to damage their standing in Hanoi by overtly imposing their views. Yet the Maoists were clearly upset by the emergence of elements in North Vietnam favoring a “fighting while negotiating” strategy. Mao’s interests rested on a perpetuation of the war, both as a means of bleeding American resources and rallying popular support for his campaign against capitalist restoration at home. China continued to press its ally for vigorous prosecution of the fighting and advised against peace talks.¹⁰⁸ U.S. intelligence reports recognized discord between the PRC and the DRV over Soviet aid and the utility of negotiations.¹⁰⁹ China’s intense preoccupation with domestic affairs was seen to be another source of irritation for the North. The CIA surmised that the mainland had been “exposed as a rather uncertain and unstable ally, and the net result may be a loss of Chinese influence in Hanoi.”¹¹⁰ Rusk detected a similar change in the early stages of the Cultural Revolution, noting that “Peiping...probably had somewhat greater influence than [the] Soviets in Hanoi but [the] latter was rising.”¹¹¹

Against this backdrop, the administration believed that the USSR, presumably eager to head off a wider war, was well positioned to exert a moderating influence on the DRV. The most

enthusiastic adherent to this view was Averell Harriman, who headed a committee assigned to explore possibilities for negotiations. Convinced that the road to peace went through Moscow, he urged that the Kremlin be offered “compensating inducements” –such as relieving its fears of a nuclear West Germany –for undertaking any mediatory role.¹¹² While less optimistic than Harriman, Johnson’s inner circle saw some merit in canvassing the Soviets for support in Vietnam. Even Rostow, who thought that the Soviets’ influence with its ally had been somewhat exaggerated and believed that the firm application of U.S. military power would ultimately prove more decisive, agreed that Moscow preferred a negotiated settlement and that it was therefore necessary to “maintain as close and direct a dialogue with the USSR and Eastern Europe as we can.”¹¹³ This consideration factored heavily in the recommendations of LBJ’s senior advisers for meeting Kosygin at Glassboro in June 1967.¹¹⁴

Johnson himself expressed hope for progress on peace talks once the Kremlin exhibited “the same weight that apparently the Chinese have [in Hanoi]. When the Chinese get a little weaker and the Russians stronger, we’re going to have a peace.”¹¹⁵ Indeed, the President placed major emphasis on advancing Soviet-American détente at this time. At the beginning of 1967, he wrote Kosygin to convey “the great importance I attach to the improvement of relations between our two countries,” and sent Llewellyn Thompson, the administration’s most senior Kremlinologist, as his new Ambassador to Moscow.¹¹⁶ In pushing aggressively for arms control measures, which would go some way in addressing the USSR’s concerns of a costly arms race, Johnson may well have thought that he could encourage Soviet cooperation in securing a settlement in Vietnam.¹¹⁷

It is within the context of these efforts to enlist the Kremlin as a potential partner for peace that the Johnson team’s resistance to exploiting the Sino-Soviet rivalry can be best explained. The administration in fact took several steps to assuage Soviet anxieties about any hint of Sino-American reconciliation. Rusk cited this as one of many factors in his opposition to a “two Chinas” posture in the fall of 1966. Such a move, he explained to Canadian officials, would

“confront the Soviet Union with serious problems. In terms of the really serious interest the USSR and its Eastern European friends now appear to be taking toward peace in Vietnam, I doubt very much if they would feel that a new controversy on this issue would be helpful.”¹¹⁸ Similarly, when Thompson proposed in March 1967 that the U.S. share some of its intelligence on mainland developments with Moscow as a conciliatory gesture to “help allay Soviet suspicions of our relations with the Chinese,” senior State officials readily agreed.¹¹⁹ When Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield sought White House approval the following month for a trip to Beijing to gauge China’s interest in resolving the war in Vietnam, Rusk once again successfully voiced his misgivings. Aside from unwelcome congressional interference in a matter of national security and the implausibility of China’s openness to such a visit, he insisted that even granting the request would only make the Kremlin “upset and suspicious.”¹²⁰

In short, LBJ and his advisers implicitly agreed with Brzezinski’s diagnosis for peace in Vietnam –the need for Soviet pressure on the North –yet disagreed with his suggested remedy of a policy of ambiguity toward the PRC. Senior decision-makers fully recognized that the Cultural Revolution had irreparably damaged relations between Moscow and Beijing, but decided that an unambiguous tilt toward the former suited the administration’s interests, particularly while the latter remained acutely militaristic and unsettled. Events in China strongly reinforced an inherent tendency among U.S. officials, most prevalent since the Kennedy years, to regard the Soviets as the more “civilized” of the communist powers, with whom they could compromise and manage global conflict.

With the benefit of hindsight, the outbreak of the Cultural Revolution in 1966 can be seen as a watershed in U.S. relations with the mainland, the point at which several of the perceptual preconditions for America’s eventual opening to China were established. The campaign directed against Mao’s “revisionist” colleagues destroyed the myth, based more on preconception than empirical proof, of an impenetrable Chinese leadership that was unanimous in its devotion to the

Chairman's vision of continuous revolution. The resistance and obstruction mounted by elements of the régime, while somewhat exaggerated by China watchers, stirred guarded hopes in some quarters that domestic "moderates" such as Zhou Enlai and factions of the PLA would show a concomitant interest in relaxing international tensions. One can plausibly surmise that the decidedly optimistic reading of mainland developments in early 1967 was colored in part by an underlying desire to co-exist peacefully with a reformed China and to search for signs of common interest. The apparent waning of the Maoist forces elevated the question of how best to prepare for a post-Mao China to a pressing consideration on Washington's mainland agenda.

China's disarray, coming on the heels of a series of diplomatic setbacks in the fall of 1965, set in motion a gradual reassessment by U.S. policymakers of the PRC's threat potential. The sole focus of Mao's Cultural Revolution, after all, was internal transformation, a project so sweeping that it dictated a lower profile in international affairs and the country's insulation from the outside world.¹²¹ Among the consequences of this shift in emphasis, Johnson officials noted, was the targeting of domestic opponents and Soviet influence. In 1964-65, the Johnson team resisted domestic and international pressure for the adoption of a more flexible China policy out of a sense that this would be perceived as a sign of weakness by Mao and his comrades, and embolden them to foment more trouble among their neighbors. With the advent of China's intense political and social turmoil, the deferment of substantive policy reform was no longer mandated by an expansionist menace, but by the calculation that a xenophobic, inward-looking leadership would refuse to accept any olive branch offered to them. This marked a subtle, yet significant, evolution in strategic thinking.

Yet while highly significant for altering Cold War images of the PRC, the immediate impact of the Cultural Revolution on U.S. China policy was far more complex. The twists and turns of the mainland's power struggle left most in Washington bewildered. LBJ and his aides opted for a prudent course of awaiting a definitive resolution of these events before proceeding with any major new initiatives. A posture of aloofness and relative silence, it was sensibly judged,

would not pose the same risk of discrediting potentially pragmatic factions vying for the reins of leadership in China as would one of overt intervention. More importantly, the imperative of expanding relations with the mainland was gradually deemed to be less urgent. Indeed, as the mainland turned inwards and the contingency of China's military involvement in Vietnam became less apparent, the logic underpinning the extension of tentative feelers to Beijing in early 1966 –the need to relieve its fears of American intentions –lost its momentum. The Johnson team hoped that a combination of American military muscle and Soviet diplomatic pressure would prod Hanoi toward the conference table. Moscow's preoccupation with its increasingly unpredictable neighbor raised expectations among many in Washington that the Soviets would now be more willing to play a constructive role in Vietnam. To the extent that it was felt that a more accommodating stance toward the PRC would alienate the Kremlin, the administration consciously resisted the temptation to exploit the Sino-Soviet split. The cumulative effect of all of these factors, then, was a slowdown in the tentative bridge building that had been gaining momentum during the first half of 1966. Developments on the mainland would spark Johnson's interest in reviving this very option in early 1968.

Testing the Waters: An Aborted Policy Review and Closing Moves, 1968-1969

As the Johnson administration entered what would be its final year in office, its brief flirtation with policy experimentation had given way to a mostly reactive posture, as both the timing and nature of new approaches to the PRC awaited the outcome of the Cultural Revolution. While it challenged long-held assumptions about the mainland's domestic and foreign politics, the onset of this turmoil in 1966 dislodged China policy from the President's crowded agenda. LBJ was kept fully apprised of mainland developments, yet various trade and travel initiatives that had piqued the interest of the White House were shelved indefinitely. As much as the suspension of further bridge building was a logical response to the virtual civil war engulfing China, it was also in accordance with the *modus operandi* of a highly cautious national security team inherently suspicious of bold foreign policy ventures, and whose attention and imagination was consumed by the war in Vietnam. The dominant refrain among U.S. officials throughout 1967 was that the unsettled, inhospitable climate in Beijing militated against any sustained engagement with the mainland. LBJ's National Security Adviser doubted that there would be any "appreciable reciprocation during the Maoist era from any attempted rapprochement [sic]."¹

Implicit in this sentiment was an inclination to extend conciliatory gestures to a more agreeable successor regime, should one emerge. The Johnson team's openness to accommodation was tested in 1968 as reports of a potential turning point in the Cultural Revolution reached Washington. Yet even as the President directed his aides to explore means of nurturing moderate elements in Beijing, continuing uncertainty over the direction of the PRC's political struggle and an inability to separate China policy from overriding priorities in Vietnam discouraged high-level approval of new measures. A Chinese offer to revive the moribund talks in Warsaw in late November was promising and prompted further consideration of an appropriate response, however the opportunities for major departures were few as the administration prepared to

transfer power to its successor. Notwithstanding the lack of conspicuous policy innovation, an examination of the closing stages of LBJ's tenure in office is most instructive, as it marked a further thawing of official attitudes toward China and a resultant readiness to explore alternative approaches.

Developments on the mainland continued to unfold at a pace that left many in Washington perplexed. While U.S. officials discerned a marked shift toward moderation in early 1967 after the military was invited to assist the masses in "seizing power," the year in fact witnessed several twists and turns in China's domestic crisis. The PLA's intervention in Chinese politics reflected a preference among some central authorities for restoring order and reining in the Red Guards, yet the army's new role was by no means unanimously welcomed by all of the country's contending factions. For the leaders of the Cultural Revolution Group (CRG), whose institutional interests and ideological leanings diverged substantially from those of the army, suspicions were heightened during the so-called February Adverse Current, when senior PLA officials and like-minded allies in the Party voiced their misgivings with the prevailing disorder. Mao viewed this criticism as a challenge to his leadership and an impediment to his ongoing campaign against his revisionist rivals. With the Chairman's tacit support, the CRG exploited the pretext of a counter-revolutionary movement in their own bid for power. Regional military commanders, many of whom sympathized with local veteran cadres, were subsequently ordered to refrain from any harassment of radical mass organizations.

Tensions between the CRG and the armed forces came to a head in July. Emboldened by the exhortations of the former, Red Guards in Wuhan organized protests against those local leaders resisting central directives. A conservative group composed mostly of Wuhan's Party members, calling itself the "Million Heroes," emerged to counter these pressures. When a delegation of the CRG arrived from Beijing to endorse the radicals and reprimand the military's region command, they were promptly taken captive by a local garrison. This nascent rebellion

against central authority was quickly suppressed, yet the fallout from the Wuhan Incident proved momentous for the direction in which Mao chose to steer his political movement. Returning to a hero's welcome in Beijing, Wang Li, one of those who had been detained, argued that the affair necessitated a decisive push against the Cultural Revolution's enemies. With the apparent backing of Lin Biao and Mao's wife Jiang Qing, Wang outlined his views in an August editorial of *Red Flag*, calling for an offensive against the "handful of military leaders taking the capitalist road."

While the Chairman had expressed his displeasure with the army's support of conservative workers' groups and floated the idea of arming students, Wang's proposal for an assault on the PLA evidently went too far. Denouncing the editorial as a "poisonous weed," Mao ordered the arrest of Wang and his associates. As the only institution capable of bringing an end to the armed struggles raging throughout the country, the military was authorized to use force against radical groups and it increasingly assumed a pre-eminent role in the provincial revolutionary committees. Having rid himself of most of his rivals in the higher echelons of the Party and eager to consolidate his gains, Mao turned his attention in the fall of 1967 toward the reconstruction of China's political system, which was to be pivoted on a cleansed and reformed CCP.²

Johnson officials watched these events with great interest. Upon completing his service in Hong Kong in September, Edward Rice delivered a cautious assessment. He believed that China remained mired in a stalemate, with no faction having yet attained a position of supremacy and no consistent or coherent guidance flowing from the center. Still, he saw the PLA's most recent rehabilitation as evidence that pragmatists had mounted a tenacious effort to wrest the reins of power from the CRG. While any definitive reading of China's stormy political climate remained premature, Rice surmised that Mao's excesses had provoked the emergence of an alliance of convenience between the Zhou-led bureaucracy and conservative elements in the army. He was convinced that ultimately Mao "cannot win and consolidate supreme power."³

This was the prevailing sentiment in subsequent reports from varying sources, many of which reached LBJ's desk. Indeed, it was commonly assumed that the Chairman's leadership was the primary casualty of this apparent conservative resurgence. Mao, who seems to have deliberately opted for stability as the Cultural Revolution threatened to veer out of control, was seen instead by many U.S. analysts as a senile old man with an irrational and self-destructive predilection for continuous upheaval. The CIA concluded that he "has always been an apostle of violence and revolutionary mass action...and probably will never be satisfied with stability achieved at the expense of his revolutionary programs."⁴ Alfred Jenkins, the principal China watcher for the White House, was struck by what he saw as the Chinese leader's detachment from reality and his stubborn resistance to the advances of the moderate Zhou-PLA camp: "Mao shows no understanding that the Cultural Revolution did not work, cannot work, and already has proven to be a near disaster." Jenkins believed that the "military are still the people to watch. Their power continues to grow. In coming weeks they may well quietly shelve most of the by now probably generally hated group around Mao, declare Mao's thought to have triumphed and proceed to run the country in an un-Mao-like manner."⁵ The events of August suggested that the army had already "begun to 'insulate' Mao."⁶

Washington was encouraged in so far as the Chairman's presence was regarded as an impediment to any eventual Sino-American reconciliation. A State Department paper prepared for Johnson in early 1968 affirmed that any change in Chinese attitudes toward the U.S. was highly unlikely as long as the wily revolutionary retained influence. Nevertheless, the moderating trend of recent months was cause for hope. The PLA's assertion of power represented a forceful rejoinder to, and weariness with, Mao's recklessness. As new leaders focused on recovering from the mayhem of the Cultural Revolution and putting the country's house back in order, this preoccupation with domestic concerns raised the probability for "a re-examination of the premises and priorities of China's foreign policy."⁷

The waxing and waning of the Cultural Revolution's fervor naturally spilled over into China's foreign relations. As they maneuvered for advantage in the aftermath of the Wuhan Incident, the CRG radicals, in addition to targeting the army, stepped up their attack on the diplomatic establishment. In an incendiary speech delivered on 7 August without Mao's apparent knowledge or approval, Wang Li encouraged rebels in the Foreign Ministry to weed out their superiors. The words had their effect. Barely one week later, Foreign Minister Chen Yi's deputies were imprisoned and provocative orders issued to Chinese representatives stationed abroad. The chaos peaked with the burning of the Office of the British charge d'affaires on 22 August. When finally informed of these actions, Mao reacted swiftly. Alarmed by China's international isolation, particularly as the perceived Soviet threat steadily escalated, he authorized a sharp reversal in the country's diplomacy. Zhou and Chen gradually regained their influence in the latter half of 1967 and ideology was de-emphasized in favor of a more traditional, interest-based policy. Mao specifically forbade agitation by Chinese diplomats and criticized the promotion of Mao Zedong Thought as an unwelcome intrusion in the domestic affairs of other countries.⁸

The Johnson administration was alert to this change in tone and welcomed it as a sign that the "professional" old-line bureaucracy, intent on restoring "some semblance of normalcy and amity to Peking's diplomacy," was in the ascendant.⁹ A CIA report in early 1968 quoted Zhou as telling a meeting of Afro-Asian leaders that he had been "greatly disturbed about China's image abroad and...was now in firm control of China's foreign policy."¹⁰ Most intriguingly, Ambassador Gronouski, who had been discouraged by his conversations with the Chinese in Warsaw throughout 1967, reported directly to Rusk that an encounter in early January had been distinguished by "a sharp downturn in invective as compared to each of the other meetings in which I have participated, and a complete absence of reference to the cultural revolution and the sayings of Chairman Mao." The Chinese had reverted to their traditional position that the dispute over Taiwan was the most pressing issue in Sino-American relations, rather than U.S. opposition to world revolution. Gronouski echoed the findings of the intelligence community, attributing this

apparent about-face to the “downgrading of the influence on foreign policy of hard-nosed Cultural Revolution types.” As a gesture of goodwill, he suggested that Washington end its stance of silence toward the mainland’s political conflict and arrange for either LBJ or Rusk to deliver “a major speech designed to appeal to and encourage the moderate element in Communist China. If the Chinese posture at this meeting was designed to signal a positive change in China’s policy toward us...it is important for us to quickly respond.”¹¹ While somewhat less optimistic, Jenkins agreed that the latest Warsaw session was “an additional indication that the more extreme phase of the Cultural Revolution may be over.”¹² Perhaps encouraged as well by signs of a new Chinese approach, Under Secretary of State Katzenbach instructed both the East Asian bureau and the Policy Planning Council to prepare a study on how a Sino-American rapprochement might unfold.¹³

This heightened interest in reappraising the U.S. posture was undoubtedly influenced as well by a more nuanced, less alarmist reading of the PRC’s threat potential. Indeed, a notable feature of the various Asian crises confronting the administration in early 1968 was the degree to which the role of a hobbled China, which had for long been seen as the primary instigator or beneficiary of America’s troubles in the region, was judged to be marginal. One such example was North Korea’s seizure of the USS *Pueblo* on 23 January. As befitted their Cold War mindset, the Johnson team assumed that Pyongyang had coordinated its action with a major communist patron, yet blame was initially cast on the Soviets. When North Vietnam launched the Tet Offensive only days later, senior decision-makers concluded that the *Pueblo* incident had been concocted as a ploy to distract Washington’s attention from that impending attack.¹⁴ The PRC did not figure prominently in either interpretation. Intelligence officials carefully noted how relations between China and North Korea had deteriorated since the mid-1960’s, as the mainland became engulfed by internal turmoil and Pyongyang expanded links to Moscow to counterbalance Chinese influence. Beijing’s delayed public acknowledgement of the *Pueblo* affair only served to confirm how estranged the allies had become from one another.¹⁵ “The Chinese were not

involved in the Pueblo thing,” William Bundy remarked to Rusk. “They were not the ones that most concern us.”¹⁶

Sino-Vietnamese tensions, bubbling beneath the surface since 1965, broke out into the open in 1968 and offered dramatic evidence of wartime partners working at cross-purposes. Hanoi’s decision at the end of January to switch to the offensive by attacking urban centers in the South diverged sharply from Mao’s strategy of protracted people’s war, which emphasized guerrilla warfare in the countryside. The DRV’s change in tactics irritated China’s leaders, as it threatened to provoke a strong American counter-response, then forcing them to choose between withdrawing their support of the North or sustaining it at the risk of being drawn into a war with the U.S. Beijing’s sense that it was steadily losing influence over the direction of its ally’s policies was sharpened in early April when Hanoi, without consulting the mainland, responded to LBJ’s 31 March offer of a partial bombing halt and peace talks by agreeing to negotiations. Mao’s unstinting opposition to a peace process stemmed from the same fear that had determined his position since the outset of the war: that it would invariably be dominated by the Soviets and Americans, possibly serving as a launching pad for collusion against regional national liberation struggles or, more ominously, against the PRC itself. China’s disillusionment with its ally set in motion a prolonged and subtle process of disengagement from the Vietnam War, beginning with the first withdrawal of Chinese armed forces from the North in the spring of 1968.¹⁷

The stark divergence of opinion between Beijing and Hanoi on the advisability of peace talks was particularly revealing. As UN Secretary General U Thant noted to Johnson, it was “important that Peking has not broadcast Hanoi’s statement [on accepting the U.S. proposal for negotiations]...Hanoi ignored Peking...Hanoi doesn’t care about Peking’s attitude. These are factors that indicate Hanoi is somewhat independent of Peking.”¹⁸ The President received the same message from his own advisers. Intelligence information collected throughout the year documented a steep decline in the Sino-Vietnamese relationship, as attested by numerous staged demonstrations against DRV consulates in China, the interruption of Chinese deliveries to the

North, and Beijing's less effusive public backing of its comrade.¹⁹ High-level assumptions of a close Sino-Vietnamese axis, so prevalent as the pivotal decisions for American intervention were made in 1965, gave way to an understanding that the two communist powers acted according to their own national interests. The notion that North Vietnam served as the PRC's proxy in undermining American influence in Southeast Asia now seemed increasingly far-fetched; Johnson admitted in the summer of 1968, "We cannot certify how much influence on Hanoi China is."²⁰ Rusk, for whom military involvement in Vietnam had been seen as part of the struggle against international communism, acknowledged in an interview at the time that he no longer regarded Beijing as the "real enemy" in the war.²¹

Against this backdrop of evolving attitudes, LBJ perceived a sense of opportunity and, for the first time since the spring and summer of 1966, became actively involved in China policy deliberations.²² He saw "some very important things taking place right in China today that will contribute to, we hope, a better understanding and a more moderate approach to their neighbors in the world."²³ Johnson's State of the Union address in January 1968 suggested that the administration was flirting with a strategy of offering tangible bridge building gestures as a means of signalling to potential successors that the option of a new Sino-American relationship existed. In contrast to the vague aspirations for "reconciliation" with the PRC articulated in the previous year's speech to Congress, delivered at a time when the hope for reciprocity from Beijing was at its nadir, the President outlined specific proposals for "the travel of journalists to both our countries...cultural and educational exchanges...[and] the exchange of basic food crop materials."²⁴

As a reflection of his heightened interest in Chinese affairs, Johnson met with a group of prominent Sinologists on 2 February to discuss the merits of adopting more ambitious initiatives. Urging LBJ to build on the conciliatory rhetoric of his 12 July 1966 speech, the scholars –among them, Edwin Reischauer, A. Doak Barnett, and Lucian Pye –presented a familiar list of items

(trade and travel liberalization, “two Chinas” in the UN) on which action needed to be taken sooner rather than later. Perhaps hoping to appeal to Johnson’s political instincts, they argued that enacting these measures would display a far-sighted ability to “look beyond present crises” and satisfy the desire of elite and popular opinion alike in the U.S. for “a more flexible approach” to China. Meeting only days after the beginning of the Tet Offensive, however, Johnson was clearly preoccupied with “present crises.” Improved relations with the PRC, he replied, “was only one thing the public was interested in...It was also interested in Vietnam. That is the great cost of Vietnam –because of it we do not get the chance to do some of the other things which would be desirable.” Still, he asked the group to set their ideas down on paper, noted his interest in having a senior China expert in government akin to a Llewellyn Thompson or Charles Bohlen for the USSR, and directed both the State Department and National Security Council to offer recommendations.²⁵

The President’s invitation afforded the academics an opportunity to elaborate on the rationale for substantive policy reform. The resultant memorandum reasoned that the mainland’s disorder, precisely the factor cited by many administration officials as cause for caution, called for a bold approach. With the very real possibility of a new leadership emerging in Beijing, one willing to consider departures from Maoist dogma, it was “particularly important for us at this time to exercise imaginative initiatives which will broaden in a desirable way the options open to them.” The authors made it clear that inducing Mao’s successors to shed the policies of the past required an adjustment in America’s own attitude, that is, a willingness “to recognize China’s legitimate interests as a major power” and “to diminish the friction and psychological pressures the Chinese feel from what they regard to be our close-in military encirclement.”²⁶ Forwarding his comments on the paper to Johnson, an evidently skeptical Rostow counselled against immediately acting on the Sinologists’ agenda. While not averse to demonstrations of flexibility toward the PRC, he believed that much of this had already been accomplished in the last couple of years and that the administration continued to be well served by waiting for a “further maturing

of the fundamental changes taking place on the mainland...[and] staying out of this Chinese muddle.’’²⁷

Rostow’s wariness was heavily influenced by Alfred Jenkins’ contribution to the administration’s review of China policy, an eleven-page paper composed in February. Employing the same logic he had used since the outset of the Cultural Revolution, Jenkins, notwithstanding the perceived glimmer of hope for a moderate successor regime, essentially advocated staying the course and “keeping relatively quiet while mainland China is trying to sort itself out.” The option of major policy reform as outlined by many in the academic community was at best futile and at worst counter-productive. While Mao’s grip on power appeared to be faltering, he retained, at least in the short term, sufficient clout to reject any U.S. overture. Reconciliation with a Mao-led China was virtually impossible, since this was anathema to the Chairman’s *raison d’être*: “He believes that he can keep his revolution pure, and wound up, only through class hatred at home and devil hatred abroad.” While the scholars insisted that the unlikelihood of Chinese reciprocity should not deter new initiatives, Jenkins reasoned that taking action now could unwittingly undermine the long-term project of Sino-American reconciliation. Should a pattern of repeated Chinese rejection of American feelers be established, this would tie the hands of Mao’s heirs in so far as “*a successor regime may well feel sufficient continuity with the present one so as to make renunciation of that record awkward...*the prospect of a different China to come, possibly readier to respond, recommends the waiting game.”

Accordingly, Jenkins’ policy recommendations were modest and mostly cosmetic, aimed only at altering some of the atmospherics of the administration’s present approach to the PRC. While continuing to oppose Beijing’s admission to the UN, he believed that China’s international isolation now enabled the U.S. “to twist arms in New York with less ferocity and anxiety on the Chinese Representation issue,” as a nod to European and Afro-Asian sentiment. Similarly, he favored retaining most trade controls against the mainland, yet thought that “removing the opprobrious ‘trading with the enemy’ label” would demonstrate “readiness for *future* flexibility

by moving slightly from the total embargo wicket,” a welcome departure from the “former black-and-white days in China policy”.²⁸

The decisive voice, as always, belonged to Dean Rusk, whose sensitive political antennae continued to be a source of comfort and reassurance to Johnson. Rusk is most notoriously remembered for publicly invoking in October 1967 the specter of “a billion Chinese on the mainland, armed with nuclear weapons, with no certainty about what their attitude toward the rest of Asia will be.”²⁹ This remark, uttered in response to a journalist’s query about the continuing relevancy of fighting in Vietnam, has been taken out of context and suggests an almost irrational fear and loathing of the Chinese communists that is in fact overstated.³⁰ While instinctively more predisposed toward a hard-line on China than LBJ or his colleagues, the Secretary had carefully watched events on the mainland. The upheaval reinforced his natural aversion to any major initiative, as evidenced by his firm objection to a “two Chinas” formula during the fall of 1966. Yet it is also clear that the Cultural Revolution effected a significant alteration of Rusk’s understanding of the PRC’s role in Vietnam, particularly as signs of Sino-Vietnamese differences emerged with greater frequency. He was also converted to the view that that the prevailing chaos in China called for restrained force against the DRV, lest the ire of the increasingly erratic Chinese were provoked. Moreover, the apparent ebbing of the Maoists in the latter half of 1967 evidently stirred Rusk’s interest in probing the intentions of the Chairman’s potential successors. In December, for example, he asked the Policy Planning Council to explore “the feasibility of bringing Peking into international technical organizations, as a means of augmenting mainland China’s contacts with the outside world.”³¹

Rusk’s recommendations to Johnson in February 1968 indicated that he saw some advantage in taking additional steps: discarding the ban on travel to the mainland and modifying trade restrictions, particularly those pertaining to U.S. subsidiaries abroad, and perhaps permitting the export of foodstuffs, fertilizer, insecticides, and farm machinery to the PRC. An accompanying memorandum produced by State Department analysts affirmed that it was in “the

interest of the U.S. to present to a potential or emerging Chinese leadership a variety of options and alternatives to their present policies.”³² Yet like Jenkins, although for different reasons, Rusk opposed the wide-ranging program advanced by the academics. He remained irrevocably hostile to seating the mainland in the UN. While Jenkins’ misgivings revolved around the matter of proper timing, the Secretary expressed his consistent belief that “we can take only very limited steps since our firm posture in Asia generally remains crucial and any significant ‘concessions’ to Communist China would be seriously misunderstood in key quarters, not to mention the Congress.”³³

Notwithstanding this tentative endorsement of modest bridge building, Rusk’s proposals for trade and travel liberalization never reached the President’s desk.³⁴ The most obvious explanation for the aborted policy review is that the administration was simply swept up by the extraordinary domestic turmoil of 1968, the search for a negotiated settlement in Vietnam, and the distraction provided by a presidential election. Political calculations, as always, played a major role. Although many in the academic community maintained that the depoliticization of China policy afforded the Johnson team considerable leeway in adopting new measures, there was lingering skepticism within government circles. The contrast in the political contexts of 1966, when public pressure for a relaxation of policy mounted in the aftermath of Fulbright’s China hearings, and 1968, when the Cultural Revolution still appeared to be at its zenith, was telling. In lieu of a compelling political rationale for action, some contended that changing policy was not only unnecessary but, as Rusk implied in his memorandum to the President, might only succeed in providing ammunition for the administration’s enemies in a heated election year. As one State Department official explained his opposition to lifting the travel ban, “The change being recommended would please certain liberal elements in the Congress, but it is not something they are pressing for...The only important result would be to stir up certain conservative elements who would have a negative reaction...we would create more trouble for ourselves...without in any appreciable way gaining new support for the President.”³⁵

At any rate, Johnson's landmark address of 31 March 1968, in which he announced his withdrawal from the presidential race, confined him to the unenviable status of a political lame duck for most of the year, which considerably restricted his own authority. Rostow later insisted that had he not been politically handicapped, LBJ would have charted a new course in China policy without hesitation. The President, according to his aide, was sensitive as well to the needs of his successor, whomever that might be, and did not wish to tie his hands by undertaking bold departures so close to the transfer of power.³⁶ While plausible, Rostow's claim suggests more momentum for advancing relations with the PRC than in fact existed. For example, Johnson seems not to have been discouraged either by his diminished political standing or by the possible concerns of the next administration in his last-ditch efforts to secure a strategic arms deal with the Soviets; his ambitions were crushed only by Moscow's decidedly inconvenient invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968.³⁷

Even as they detected significant changes taking place on the mainland, U.S. decision-makers continued to view China policy through the prism of Vietnam, as merely one component of a far greater whole. The decisive consideration in the spring of 1968 was the Johnson team's judgement that new initiatives toward the mainland clashed with more pressing regional concerns. LBJ's offer of a partial bombing halt and peace negotiations with the DRV in the aforementioned 31 March speech aggravated old divisions between his civilian and military advisers. Arrayed on one side were Rusk, Rostow, Ellsworth Bunker (the U.S. Ambassador in Saigon), and the Joint Chiefs of Staff, all of whom thought that the North had been dealt a shattering blow during the Tet Offensive. Skeptical of the value of peace talks and opposed to any sell-out of South Vietnam, they advised the President to move very deliberately and to sustain military pressure against Hanoi as a means of enhancing America's bargaining position. Newly appointed Defense Secretary Clark Clifford, Katzenbach, and Averell Harriman (the envoy to the talks) were critical of this approach. This camp urged Johnson to gradually disengage from the war and resist any escalatory action that threatened to derail the peace process. Ever the cautious

consensus-seeker, LBJ sought to straddle the issue. As George Herring has written, “Torn between wanting out of Vietnam and his fear of losing, he veered erratically between a hard line and a softer position.” While the President rejected any expansion of the fighting in the North, he authorized intensified operations in the South. Siding with Rusk and Rostow, he was reluctant to extend any concessions to the DRV without the promise of reciprocation.³⁸

The consequent emphasis on a tough negotiating stance dampened any enthusiasm for conciliatory gestures toward Beijing, either from the U.S. or its allies. When the new Canadian government of Pierre Trudeau announced its intention of recognizing the PRC, Johnson officials expressed concern that this move could have damaging effects at the conference table. “Such an initiative,” Bundy warned the Canadian Ambassador in June, “would give encouragement to hard liners, both within Communist China itself and in Hanoi, and this might well rub off on [the] North Vietnamese position in the Paris talks.”³⁹

Moreover, many within the administration continued to hold that any change in strategy toward the PRC had to take into consideration the sensitivities of Asian allies. Even as the strategic threat posed by China appeared to recede, U.S. decision-makers were convinced that stability in the Pacific rested, as it had since the end of the Second World War, on these nations having the necessary resolve to rebuff communist subversion. This could only derive from confidence in American credibility and adherence to its security commitments, a perception that had underpinned Washington’s decision to take a stand in South Vietnam. Katzenbach touched on this thinking in a speech delivered in early 1968. “Whether China is truly an expansionist country, or whether it is too consumed in its own domestic problems...to follow its aggressive words with aggressive deeds, is a debatable matter,” he noted. “But the nervousness of its neighbors is not debatable at all. It is a very palpable thing.”⁴⁰

These words took on added significance in the aftermath of 31 March, as Seoul and Bangkok, among other stalwart allies, openly expressed apprehension that Johnson’s declared interest in a Vietnam settlement portended a wider abandonment of the region to the communist

powers.⁴¹ In this context, holding the line on China was seen as a means by which a gradual withdrawal from Vietnam could be made more palatable to these governments, charges of appeasement offset, and allegiance to America's regional leadership preserved. Jenkins reported to Rostow in June that a modest trade package was being held "in abeyance largely because of [the] reaction of peripheral friendly countries to the President's March 31 statement and the Paris talks...i.e., fears that we are becoming soft on communism."⁴² Bundy also expressed second thoughts on relaxing the trade embargo in the spring, arguing that this could be "seriously over-interpreted as an indication of a major shift in our East Asian policy."⁴³

While the melee of the Cultural Revolution, the imperatives of firm negotiating in Paris, and the concerns of Asian friends made it a highly inauspicious time for major departures in China policy, the Johnson team reverted to their practice of signalling interest in lower tensions and broadened contacts with the mainland through less controversial, symbolic channels. In early May, the U.S. Information Agency issued an invitation to Chinese journalists to cover the presidential campaign.⁴⁴ Most significantly, Under Secretary Katzenbach broke the administration's calculated silence on the PRC on 21 May, delivering the first extended remarks on China since LBJ's 12 July 1966 address. This satisfied in part the urgings of officials like Gronouski for a formal high-level response to recent developments. Katzenbach's speech to the National Press Club amounted to a restatement of many of the broad conclusions that had already been reached in private and a justification of Washington's stand pat approach. While taking note of the PLA-led attempts to "reorganize and stabilize political and administrative organizations" throughout the country, he stressed that the "dominant element" in Beijing's leadership still clung to the dogma that "easing tensions with the United States would represent a betrayal of the revolution." Confronted with this intransigence and the PRC's unreasonable demands for the "control" of Taiwan, any movement toward Sino-American diplomatic relations or a loosening of trade controls was simply "unrealistic."

The general thrust of the speech, however, was decidedly mild and in some respects went beyond the conciliatory bridge building language of recent years. As one British official wrote approvingly, it was “an energetic repudiation of the policy of containment at least in its old and unsophisticated form...[and] serves as a useful reminder of how far the official attitude to China has evolved during the Kennedy and Johnson administrations.”⁴⁵ Most pointedly, Katzenbach acknowledged that the threat posed by the mainland “can be, and perhaps at times has been, exaggerated” and recognized that the PRC “has legitimate security interests of its own in Asia.” As evidence of Washington’s benign intentions, he reminded his audience that the U.S. had not attempted to exploit “the many occasions when the mainland was weak or wracked by internal problems.” In what had now become standard procedure, the Under Secretary reiterated the Hilsmanesque line that any Chinese desire for improved relations would be enthusiastically reciprocated, offering as a possible inducement a willingness to issue visas to Chinese visitors.⁴⁶

These soothing words, of course, did not tell the whole story. The speech in part served the defensive purpose of shifting blame for the Sino-American deadlock to the Chinese for domestic and international consumption. And while it was contended, correctly to be sure, that Maoist orthodoxy posed a formidable impediment to a thaw in relations, LBJ’s telling remark on “the great cost of Vietnam” to the academics in February suggested that the Johnson team remained hostage to their own mindset, one shaped and framed by that simmering war. China’s turn of misfortune, in stark contrast to the perceived circumstances of 1965, was attributed in no small part to U.S. resolve and unwavering containment, best exemplified by the defense of Saigon. American intervention in Vietnam, Jenkins postulated to superiors who needed little convincing, had not only purchased “valuable time for non-communist Asia,” but had also “exacerbate[d] policy differences in Peking, contributing to the disunity and weakness of our self-proclaimed adversary.” It therefore followed that “the very degree of success of our present policies toward China recommends caution in altering them, until the nature of China itself is more clearly altered.”⁴⁷ Katzenbach’s speech, then, perfectly encapsulated the contradictory

forces of change and paralysis that had characterized U.S. China policy since the spring of 1966: bold, forward-looking rhetoric and cautious, minute substantive action.⁴⁸

The last six months of Lyndon Johnson's presidency witnessed stirrings of change on both sides of the Pacific, with momentous implications for the future. America's prolonged disengagement from Vietnam, set in motion by the President's 31 March announcement, coincided with a dramatic escalation of the Soviet threat to China's security. The invasion of Czechoslovakia in August, the Kremlin's subsequent assertion that it had the right to intervene in the affairs of other socialist states, and mounting tensions on the Sino-Soviet border accelerated a reordering of priorities in the PRC's foreign policy already underway since the waning of the Cultural Revolution. This did not escape the attention of U.S. officials. "In the wake of the Czech developments," Jenkins observed, "the Chinese evidently consider the Soviets rather than the U.S. as the primary threat."⁴⁹

As China's strategic environment changed, so too did the thinking of its leaders. Mao and Zhou came to question the viability of sustaining hostile competition with both Moscow and Washington; a tilt toward the latter could deter a possible Soviet strike against the mainland or, perhaps more importantly, derail what some perceived as an emerging Soviet-American condominium in Asia aimed at containing China.⁵⁰ Increasingly concerned about Soviet intentions, Mao asked four senior military commanders in early 1969 to closely monitor international developments. While the outbreak of border clashes in March and August of that year appeared to portend a more aggressive Soviet posture toward the PRC, the marshals concluded in September that Moscow's readiness to attempt a decisive blow ultimately "depends on the attitude of the U.S. imperialists". Indeed, the Kremlin's persistent worries over "possible Sino-American unity makes it more difficult for them to launch an all-out attack on China." In this context, it made strategic sense to unnerve the Soviets and heighten their calculation of risk by dropping hints of a new approach to the Americans.⁵¹

Well before he saw this report, Mao demonstrated interest in playing the American card. According to some accounts, he was considerably encouraged by an article that Richard Nixon, the eventual Republican nominee for President in the 1968 election, wrote for *Foreign Affairs* in October 1967.⁵² In the chronicling of the thaw in Sino-American relations, Nixon's piece has been accorded prominent symbolic status, a landmark of sorts in America's evolving attitudes toward the PRC and a notable point of departure from the rigid policy stance of his predecessors.⁵³ Nixon's National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger, unsurprisingly, has encouraged this view. Taking full credit for the opening to China, he claims that Nixon's article was only the first in a series of conscious efforts to change the tenor of Sino-American relations by discarding the Johnson team's confrontational approach.⁵⁴

This line of argument both overlooks the bridge building initiatives of the Johnson years and exaggerates the groundbreaking nature of Nixon's overture. There was in fact nothing in the article that had not already been articulated by Johnson officials, including the President. In an oft-quoted passage, Nixon wrote, "Any American policy toward Asia must come urgently to grips with the reality of China...Taking the long view, we simply cannot afford to leave China forever outside the family of nations, there to nurture its fantasies, cherish its hates and threaten its neighbors." Yet he coupled this moderation with an unyielding insistence that the U.S. should not be "rushing to grant recognition to Peking, to admit it to the United Nations and to ply it with offers of trade—all of which would serve to confirm its rulers in their present course." Like those in government, Nixon believed that the Cultural Revolution served as confirmation that Beijing remained a hostile and unpredictable adversary; the imperative of new approaches to the mainland did not obviate the need for its containment. The most pressing objective for U.S. decision-makers was to strengthen the countries of non-communist Asia so as to make them impervious to Chinese-inspired subversion, much like how the consolidation of the Atlantic Alliance had deterred the Soviets from pursuing their expansionist ambitions in Western Europe. In the "short run," a modification of China's threatening behavior could only be effected via "a

policy of firm restraint, of no reward, of a creative counterpressure designed to persuade Peking that its interests can be served only by accepting the basic rules of international civility.”⁵⁵ Thus Mao’s decision to respond positively on 25 November 1968 to a U.S. proposal for resuming the stalled ambassadorial talks in Warsaw likely stemmed not so much from the sense that the newly elected Nixon team, soon set to take office, offered a stark alternative to the Johnson line of “containment without isolation,” but from the pragmatic calculation that he would be dealing with this administration for at least the next four years.

The Chinese offer to meet on 20 February, accompanied by a call for agreeing to principles of co-existence, stirred considerable interest among U.S. officials. Did this signify a turning point in Chinese foreign relations and, if so, how should it be reciprocated? The reaction, on balance, was one of cautious optimism. Mid-level China watchers at Foggy Bottom interpreted the development as another welcome sign that moderate elements of the regime had asserted control over Chinese diplomacy. These elements, it was assumed, were preoccupied with breaking out of the international isolation wrought by the PRC’s steadfast opposition to the Paris peace talks and “test[ing], at little actual cost, [the] intentions of [the] new US administration by seeming [to] take [a] more conciliatory position.”⁵⁶ The consulate office in Hong Kong reported that its contacts in Beijing believed the move was a genuine effort to improve relations with the U.S. in view of the heightened Soviet threat.⁵⁷ The office was more guarded in its own assessment, agreeing with those at the State Department who regarded the Warsaw offer as a defensive reaction to China’s exclusion from regional diplomacy, yet still discerning little in Beijing’s attitude that held out the promise for an improvement in Sino-American relations in the short term.⁵⁸

Jenkins echoed this sentiment. While mildly encouraged, he cautioned against investing too much hope in the mainland’s action, seeing it more as “a shift in style and tactics away from Cultural Revolution extremism” than as a fundamental change in strategy.⁵⁹ A more accurate reading of China’s intentions would have to await a resolution of the country’s domestic disputes.

Until then, “it is obvious that very little indeed is obvious about the policy debate concerning Sino-U.S. relations which must be going on in Peking.” To help steer this debate in a favorable direction, however, he thought the timing appropriate to provide “a bit of ammunition for those who may be somewhat less inimical to us than the full-fledged Maoists.”⁶⁰

This ammunition came in the form of a memorandum that the Secretary of State sent to Johnson in the first week of January. Indeed, the reaction of Rusk, consistently the most skeptical of LBJ’s inner circle toward policy reform, to Beijing’s proposal for renewed talks was the most intriguing. His recommendation for permitting U.S. subsidiaries abroad to sell a limited range of non-strategic goods to the PRC, an idea he had first broached a year earlier as part of the policy review, was modest enough. The rationale used to justify the move, however, displayed a notable evolution in thinking. Rusk placed particular emphasis on the timing of this olive branch, coming as it would at “a time when the Cultural Revolution appears to be entering a new stage...It is possible that something important is brewing in Peking. We should, prior to the February meeting with us at Warsaw...show that we are listening and interested and capable of being responsive.” Besides encouraging Chinese moderation, the Secretary argued that relaxing the trade embargo would “arouse Soviet curiosity” and remind the Russians that “better relations with the United States are very much in their long-run interests.”⁶¹

The latter point was particularly significant, as it suggested that senior decision-makers had come to see the advantage of flirting with the Chinese so as to maximize America’s strategic position against the Kremlin and elicit its assistance on a broad range of issues. Existing accounts have credited Nixon and Kissinger for initiating the shift away from the decidedly pro-Soviet bias that had characterized America’s Cold War approach toward the two communist powers⁶²; a more likely interpretation, based on these new archival materials, is that the duo built on ideas that had already gained high-level credence toward the end of the Johnson administration. Previously advocated by mid-level officials such as Zbigniew Brzezinski of State’s PPC as a lever to induce the Kremlin’s cooperation in facilitating a Vietnam settlement, the Johnson team had passed on

the opportunity to exploit Soviet fears of China throughout 1966-67, largely out of the sense that this would provoke the opposite reaction from Moscow. Underlying this conservatism was an understanding that the lack of receptivity in Beijing rendered any game of triangular politics unviable. The PRC's feeler in November 1968 seemed to provide Washington with new policy options. The suspicions of Soviet officials, who had for long been anxious about any movement toward Sino-American rapprochement even when the prospect appeared remote, were immediately kindled. They nervously probed their U.S. counterparts for any hints of what approach might be taken toward the mainland by the incoming Nixon administration.⁶³ Rusk welcomed the Soviets' predicament, noting how "this latest development worries [the] Russians somewhat... We are not... trying to straighten out this confusion and do not mind if [the] Soviets and Chicoms sometimes worry about each other."⁶⁴

For reasons that remain unclear, LBJ did not act at Rusk's behest. The trade proposal, advanced on the eve of Johnson's departure from office, may have simply been relegated to the sidelines and lost in the confusion of a transition from one presidency to the next.⁶⁵ If one is to believe William Bundy's unsubstantiated account, Nixon personally asked Johnson to refrain from authorizing any change in trade or travel restrictions relating to China, possibly hoping to put his own indelible stamp on this policy sphere.⁶⁶ In any case, the only intended audience for Mao's advance was Nixon and it occurred far too late in Johnson's tenure, despite some last-minute consideration, to elicit any major counter initiative. It fell to the new administration to determine the American response.

At quick glance the last year of Lyndon Johnson's presidency brought more of the same on the China front: curious scrutiny of the mainland's mayhem, deliberation over the appropriate response, and deferment of substantive policy reform until the dust had settled. On closer inspection, however, this period offered hints of a new approach. Dramatic events in the latter half of 1967 led many U.S. observers to conclude that revolutionary fervor had peaked and

moderate elements had outmaneuvered hard-line Maoists. This domestic realignment and an overriding preoccupation with restoring order was thought to have significant ramifications for Chinese foreign policy, as the ideological imperative of propagating Mao Zedong Thought was set aside in favor of greater attentiveness to narrowly defined security interests. China seemed unusually isolated from regional affairs in 1968, most notably in its increasingly strained relations with Hanoi.

Johnson's keen interest in these events, as measured by the policy review undertaken at his direction, was especially noteworthy. His first sustained engagement with the China policymaking process in 1966 had resulted from fixation with a war that cast a long shadow over all of the administration's diplomatic initiatives. LBJ's personal intervention in early 1968, by contrast, was a response to signs of change in the PRC's orientation and the resultant hope of some that new leaders in Beijing could be cultivated. The magnitude of the Cultural Revolution was such that it compelled U.S. decision-makers to start looking at China from a new perspective, one that was not narrowly defined by the Cold War strategy of containment and isolation. The most ardent advocates of policy reform had for long maintained, as Edward Rice did in his October 1961 study, that America's approach to China was distorted by the single-minded focus on providing for the defense of its neighbors, with scant regard for what occurred inside its borders.

This, of course, was a work in progress. While the initiation of a policy review revealed a groping for departures from old policies and an alertness to evolving conditions on the mainland, the outcome was inconclusive and overshadowed by Vietnam. Interest in modest initiatives gave way to the sense that altering the broad outlines of established China policy would send the wrong message to Hanoi and undermine America's firm negotiating stance at the Paris peace talks. The widespread unease of regional allies that the U.S. harbored plans to curtail its involvement in Southeast Asia, galvanized by the President's 31 March address, served as an additional impediment to change. Closely related to these considerations was the specter of a

China that still struck many in Washington as hostile and fanatic. Ironically, the very factor that reduced the PRC's threat potential –its persistent turmoil –argued for continued vigilance and colored the Johnson team's estimation of the prospects for rapprochement.

In short, there were substantial perceptual roadblocks on the American side to reconciliation with the mainland, stemming from enduring Cold War images of China that were only exacerbated by the cataclysmic Cultural Revolution. Yet one can easily run the risk of faulting the Johnson administration with the benefit of hindsight. Mao only seems to have entertained notions of a tilt toward the U.S. in the latter half of 1968. Prior to this point, Beijing vehemently spurned various feelers from Washington. While Mao's suspicion of U.S. motives and influence in Asia was genuine, he also clearly saw America as a convenient bogeyman for whipping up domestic support for his political objectives. Any relaxation of attitudes toward the U.S. in 1966-67 would have undermined his authority and diverted attention from his anti-revisionist campaign. Thus a reorientation of Chinese foreign policy only became possible once the Chairman became disenchanted with his own grand enterprise of continuous revolution.⁶⁷ When a new Chinese position finally became evident toward the end of 1968, senior U.S. officials expressed interest in, as Rostow put it, "a modest response to the faint signals from Peking" and giving the next administration "additional room to maneuver should opportunities present themselves."⁶⁸

Conclusion

By November 1963, U.S. policy toward China had changed very little since the founding of the PRC in 1949. Over time, historians have unearthed fascinating evidence showing that, even at the height of the Cold War confrontation between the two adversaries, American interactions with the mainland were often much more complex than either contemporary appearances or rhetoric suggested. The Truman, Eisenhower, and Kennedy administrations all developed a nuanced understanding of Beijing's immediate intentions and capabilities, implicitly recognized that the communist regime on the mainland was there to stay, sought to keep Chiang Kai-shek on a short leash, and pursued strategies aimed at driving the Soviets and Chinese apart or luring one away from the other. Still, as Robert Ross has reminded us, both the U.S. and China throughout this period were ultimately wedded to "unrealistic and destabilizing foreign policy objectives, which made any negotiated resolution of their conflicts all but impossible...[and] contributed to avoidable crises and war."¹

The bipartisan line of containment and isolation inherited by Lyndon Johnson derived from the widely shared impression that the PRC was an implacable revolutionary foe, preaching the violent overthrow of governments without any apparent concern that its expansionist ambitions could set off large-scale warfare in a nuclear age. Underlying this perception was a powerful emotional current; the very fact that China, for long considered a country onto which American values and institutions could be projected, was governed by so alien a regime repelled U.S. policymakers. China's decision to fight American soldiers in Korea stood as the ultimate betrayal.² The hard-line policy adopted by LBJ's predecessors, then, cannot be depicted as one that a zealously anti-communist public forced on successive administrations against their better judgement. Springing from an expansive conception of U.S. interests and power in Asia, it was an instrument of coercion and pressure designed to teach the unruly Chinese how to behave and accommodate themselves to American preponderance in the region.³

At the dawn of the 1960's, a number of China hands and their political sponsors (Stevenson, Bowles, Harriman, Hilsman) in the new Kennedy administration posited that this approach had outlived its usefulness: it alienated allies anxious to broaden contacts with the PRC, projected an unpalatable image of rigidity and stubbornness, and made little headway in moderating Chinese behavior. The rationale advanced for policy reform varied, with some eager to get the U.S. off the defensive, others more interested in courting certain elements of Beijing's ruling circle. Whatever the motive, the persistent appearance on the administration's agenda of such items as "two Chinas," food relief, and the relaxation of trade and travel controls suggested a perceived urgency to redressing tactics toward the mainland that had been lacking during the Truman-Eisenhower years.

Kennedy and his most senior aides proved largely unresponsive to this prodding, intent like their predecessors on building and maintaining positions of strength in Asia, and viewing Beijing as the primary source of inspiration and aid to the region's national liberation movements. Hints of flexibility on JFK's part –his tentative endorsement of "two Chinas" and deft management of tensions in the Taiwan Strait –were often overtaken by his more aggressive instincts. The President's interest in modifying the U.S. stance on Chinese representation was motivated solely by the need to bolster Taiwan's sagging international position, and soon gave way to the search for a formula that would raise the bar higher for Beijing's entry to the UN and to the issuance of a secret veto pledge to Chiang. His eagerness to explore means of taking out the PRC's nuclear program stood in contrast to his otherwise pragmatic aversion to another Sino-American confrontation. Contrary to the hopes of contemporary observers and the reminiscences of staunch defenders, Kennedy's cautious reading of the political potency of the China issue at home and hostility toward the communist regime acted as a brake against any reconsideration of policy.

Lyndon Johnson, whose sensitivity to the political baggage tied to China was just as acute as Kennedy's and who came to regard the PRC as a menacing influence in Vietnam, his

overriding obsession in foreign affairs, hardly seemed the ideal candidate to initiate changes in America's relationship with China. If politics and threat perception had hitherto constituted the chief impediments to policy reform, it follows that the tentative bridge building undertaken by a President instinctively wary of bold diplomatic initiatives was facilitated, even prompted, by significant shifts in context at home and abroad. Put another way, the alterations in China policy outlined in this study resulted more from reaction to unanticipated circumstances and events beyond the control of decision-makers than from design or natural inclination.

As scholars like Rosemary Foot have demonstrated, the seeming political imperative of projecting antagonism toward the mainland gradually receded during the 1960's. Samples of public opinion at the time offered contradictory findings. When asked which country posed the greatest threat to world peace, Americans consistently cited China. Yet despite, or perhaps because of, its growing stature, particularly after the explosion of a nuclear device in October 1964, a majority of those polled increasingly expressed a willingness to expand ties to the PRC, possibly with the hope of taming it or arriving at a mutual understanding. Much of this sentiment was latent, reflecting more a mellowing of attitudes than any concerted demand for change. The Johnson team initially proved either unaware of, or unwilling to respond to, the subtle shift in mood. Indeed, as they steadily escalated America's involvement in Vietnam, the harsh rhetoric employed against Beijing bore striking similarity to the language of the past; a congenial pose in 1963-65 would have contradicted efforts to mobilize backing for stemming the flow of Asian communism.

The administration shifted course only when the war's critics successfully targeted its intransigence toward China as emblematic of its misguided overall approach to Asia, culminating in Senator Fulbright's March 1966 hearings. As the conflict in Vietnam bogged down and settled into a messy stalemate, statesmanlike expressions of support for long-term reconciliation with the PRC became a means by which opponents of the war could be disarmed, and the electorate assured that the White House was planning for peace and thinking beyond the fighting. This was

the primary motive for LBJ's landmark address of 12 July 1966. In strictly political terms, China by the late 1960's had ceased remaining, to borrow Thomas Christensen's phrase, a "useful adversary." It was now advantageous to be seen reaching out to the mainland. The appearance of Richard Nixon's *Foreign Affairs* article in 1967 was particularly reflective of the changed environment. Both Nixon and Hubert Humphrey supported the idea of developing a new Sino-American relationship during the 1968 campaign.⁴

A far-reaching reassessment of China's international role coincided with this evolution in domestic attitudes. Successive Cold War administrations had for long insisted that any modification of policy would reward bad behavior and whet an expansionist appetite. These sentiments certainly prevailed during the early stages of Johnson's presidency. Preoccupied by the growing communist insurgency in South Vietnam and susceptible to the view that it was being stoked by the Chinese, LBJ opposed a switch to "two Chinas" in November 1964 on the basis of such reasoning. U.S. decision-makers, Rusk in particular, regarded a firm stand in Vietnam as pivotal to deterring Chinese aggression. A rapid sequence of Chinese setbacks in South Asia, Indonesia, and Tangiers in the fall of 1965 stirred considerable interest and seemed to indicate that the regime's bark was worse than its bite, yet suspicions lingered that Beijing was testing American resolve while it was distracted elsewhere.

The perceptual breakthrough came with the outbreak of the Cultural Revolution. As the mainland turned inwards, and the Red Guards directed their attacks against domestic "revisionists" and vestiges of Soviet influence, the administration gradually amended long-standing assumptions about China's priorities and capacity to project power beyond its borders. Thus Walt Rostow could write Johnson with confidence in February 1967 that "Mao's grand design in foreign policy of two years ago has failed completely, and it now appears that his domestic economy may well be disrupted by the Cultural Revolution as seriously as it was by the Great Leap of 1958-59."⁵ The President's own view that the PRC's turmoil had diminished any

remaining enthusiasm for external adventures factored in his approval of increased bombing against North Vietnam later that year.

By this point, reference to China as a justification for continuing the war was almost completely dropped from official pronouncements and appeared with even less frequency within government circles. Vietnam had instead become so inextricably linked to LBJ's political leadership that a withdrawal, as he saw it, would be tantamount to an admission of failure and a humiliation from which he might not recover.⁶ The war had developed a momentum of its own, assuming a symbolic status of presidential resolve that was far more important than the strategic factors that had first prompted American intervention. A highly sensitive CIA study prepared specifically for Johnson in September 1967 in fact postulated that the drawbacks of an unfavorable outcome in Vietnam, while potentially serious, could be mostly offset by convincing America's regional allies that it would remain steadfast in support of their defense. In so far as China was concerned, while it would undoubtedly seek to take advantage of an American setback and displace U.S. influence, its persistent domestic difficulties would hinder any overtly aggressive action.⁷ Other analyses reached broadly similar conclusions. A State Department paper that Rusk forwarded to the President in early 1968 affirmed that "Peking's internal problems will somewhat reduce the degree of pressure [on its Southeast Asian neighbors] from what would have been foreseen prior to the Cultural Revolution, and specifically in the 1965 period when the U.S. made its major decision on Viet Nam."⁸

Underlying America's shift away from a confrontational stance toward China, aside from political calculations and a substantial downgrading of Beijing's threat potential, were the pressures and strains wrought by its own strategic overextension. While military involvement in Vietnam was certainly the product of decisions made by unique personalities at a particular moment in time, it can also be seen as the logical culmination of Washington's traditional interest, predating the Cold War, in ensuring a stable Asian order responsive to its ideals and leadership. The resultant stalemate and bitter divisiveness on the homefront signified to U.S.

policymakers that the militarized containment of the 1950's and 1960's could no longer be sustained by stretched resources or supported by a weary populace.⁹ Alternative, less costly, means of securing American objectives in Asia –and grappling with the PRC's own ambitions –had to be found. A new relationship with Beijing, as Rusk insinuated to Johnson at the end of their tenure in office, could also be of use in checking a more conspicuous Soviet threat. These were considerations with which Nixon and Kissinger ultimately had to contend, yet they formed the implicit backdrop to deliberations in the latter stages of the Johnson administration. Repeated assertions by Johnson officials that the defense of Saigon had instilled “greater hope and confidence than ever before” in non-communist Asia expressed their hope that U.S. allies would bear a greater share of the manpower burden in guaranteeing their own security in the future.¹⁰

The immediate catalyst for effecting the first significant shift in U.S. dealings with the PRC was Vietnam, a war nominally fought to arrest the spread of Chinese-inspired subversion. Neither the Chinese nor the Americans were spoiling for a replay of Korea. A simmering, protracted conflict in Vietnam served Mao's objectives of rallying support for the coming purge of his political enemies and of draining U.S. resources, yet he was careful enough to limit his own country's role on the battlefield. To deter the Americans from bringing the war closer to their border, Chinese officials pursued a two-pronged strategy of deterrence and reassurance. On the one hand, they warned their U.S. counterparts via the Warsaw channel that a major attack on North Vietnam would be considered an attack on the mainland, and little effort was made to conceal the dispatch of Chinese units to the DRV. On the other hand, Washington was informed through sources such as the British that Beijing would not provoke a clash.

Johnson signalled his own interest in a limited war by cautiously escalating America's military involvement and refraining from those actions that could be misconstrued as a direct threat to Chinese security. These efforts notwithstanding, China's leaders were greatly alarmed by

the administration's increased activity in Vietnam; U.S. airstrikes against the North in the wake of the Gulf of Tonkin incidents in August 1964 were particularly unnerving, and compelled Mao to reconsider the image of an American paper tiger that he had harbored and propagated since the late 1950's. Stepped up aid to Hanoi and the relocation of Chinese industrial and governmental facilities to the interior were undertaken with a view to creating a tense climate at home for the Cultural Revolution, yet the Chairman's actions undoubtedly reflected a sense of uncertainty over Washington's intentions. By the spring of 1965, the potential for a misunderstanding or miscalculation erupting into renewed Sino-American hostilities was as pronounced as any time since the Taiwan Strait crises of the previous decade. As reports of Beijing's anxieties accumulated toward the end of the year, the President and his aides determined that a more unambiguous effort to disabuse the PRC of American antagonism was necessary.

The resultant tentative bridge building may be viewed with some ambivalence. It was narrowly conceived, forced on decision-makers who were strictly interested in keeping a lid on the hostilities in Vietnam. It did not address the question of formulating a long-term strategy for accommodation with the mainland, for which mid-level China hands had been advocating since the early 1960's. The promotion of expanded contacts and the adoption of conciliatory language, however, went considerably beyond the conflict management tactics of the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations. Indeed, the most enduring achievement of this process was that it established the rhetorical justification for the American opening that unfolded under Nixon. While the notable change in atmospherics failed to elicit a constructive response from Beijing, it at minimum played a part in checking an expansion of the war. It also evidently made an impression on certain elements of the Chinese hierarchy. Wang Guoquan, China's Ambassador in Warsaw and one of the officials most exposed to the change in tone in 1966, recollected with some disappointment that his superiors' radical posturing precluded a reciprocation in sentiment: "We lost a favorable opportunity to give Sino-American relations a timely push. It must be a regretful thing in the history of diplomacy."¹¹ Had they known of this reaction, even the most

zealous proponents of policy reform inside and outside the administration, all of whom had never anyways entertained hopes of appealing to the highest echelons of Chinese officialdom, would have been heartened.

1966 proved to be the high-water mark of policy innovation during the Johnson years. The President's 12 July address hinted at greater changes to come, particularly in the sphere of trade, yet it was delivered just as Washington was receiving reports of extraordinary developments on the mainland. The outbreak of Red Guard violence and the stridently radical line of Cultural Revolution foreign policy served as an unsettling counterpoint to Chinese restraint in Vietnam. Relying on fragmentary, often speculative, reports from the consulate office in Hong Kong and a variety of third party sources, the administration's China watchers came to understand this turn of events as a last-ditch attempt by an ageing Mao to reverse the trend toward moderation and Soviet-style revisionism at home. With these unyielding leaders at the helm, the timing seemed decidedly inauspicious for a new round of bridge building.

Critically, however, deferment was rationalized not just as a logical response to Chinese radicalism, but as the best means of facilitating an eventual Sino-American reconciliation. Many in Washington expressed hope that out of the chaos of Maoist excess, a more accommodating and pragmatic leadership would emerge. It was determined that waiting out the expected political demise of the Chairman and letting the country stew in its own juice stood a far better chance of securing a favorable outcome than any U.S. effort to influence the mainland's political discourse. The notion that competing factions in the CCP presented opportunities for U.S. patronage, long an article of faith for the administration's China "doves," gradually gained currency among decision-makers as evidence emerged of an apparent counter-attack against the Maoists. The result in 1967-68 was a maturation of high-level attitudes toward Beijing, arguably a more significant development than the tangible bridge building steps of 1966 which, as noted above, stemmed mostly from Vietnam-related objectives. As their tenure in office drew to a close, the Johnson team seriously considered initiatives aimed at influencing the outcome of China's

political struggle. Recall LBJ's authorization of the policy review in early 1968 and Rusk's January 1969 memorandum advising the President to probe Beijing's intentions following its agreement to reconvene the Warsaw talks.

The foregoing analysis would seem to suggest that American thinking had reached a turning point, that the primary stumbling block to enactment of a more ambitious agenda during the latter stages of the Johnson era was the volatile political climate in China. After all, the changes in Chinese orientation that would prove so critical to bringing about the rapprochement with Washington –Mao's determination that the Soviet threat outweighed the American, and his shift toward consolidation and stabilization at home –only came to fruition for the next U.S. administration. The problem with this interpretation is that it presumes American options and decisions were hostage to unfolding events on the mainland. It gives short shrift to *American* dynamics that shaped the policymaking process and precluded bolder initiatives. As significant as the Johnson years were to framing and adumbrating the Nixon opening, consideration of these dynamics reveals that the obstacles to a substantive thaw in the late 1960's lay on both sides of the Pacific.

1. *Domestic Politics*. Faulting the Johnson administration for overestimating the political opposition to China policy reform and for failing to adopt measures in accordance with relaxed public sentiment, an implicit argument of Rosemary Foot's, overlooks a fundamental point. Most politicians' understanding of popular opinion on a given issue, and LBJ was no exception, is colored more by formative experiences and political lessons of the past than by contemporary polls.¹² Memories of how Truman and Acheson were pilloried for "losing" China to the communists and of McCarthyite witch-hunts guided Johnson's incrementalist approach to China policy throughout his entire presidency. His keenness to hew closely to the bipartisan line of containment and isolation during his first two years in office derived mostly from a consummate politician's instinct for survival than from any personal commitment to the policy. Even after his sweeping victory in the 1964 election, a time many China hands saw as ripe for movement,

Johnson proved highly resistant to any action that would distract attention from his cherished domestic program or provoke the ire of his conservative opponents.

Johnson felt compelled to act only once the spotlight cast on China policy in early 1966 rendered the administration's intransigence untenable. Even so, he was only willing to move as far as he thought public opinion would allow. With an eye on the mid-term congressional elections later that year, for example, he doubted that the "two Chinas" option could be advanced. Once public attention and pressure abated after the onset of the Cultural Revolution, so too did the perceived urgency and advantages of more bridge building. Betraying persistent apprehension of a negative political fallout, many officials, notably Rusk, cautioned the President against major initiatives in early 1968. Thus even as the administration's firm stance in Vietnam afforded some leeway for marginal advancements on the China front, Johnson and his aides could never shake the sense that they remained vulnerable to renewed Republican charges of appeasement.

The divergence in political context between the Johnson and Nixon administrations was striking. Though Nixon took great care to sell the opening to his right flank, his painstakingly cultivated reputation as an unabashed Cold Warrior meant that his insecurities were not as pronounced as those of his Democratic predecessor. Moreover, Nixon's flair for, and delight in, the dramatic gesture in diplomacy stood in stark contrast to Johnson's conservative predilection for avoiding mistakes in this sphere.

2. *Alliance Politics*. Existing accounts of the Johnson period have emphasized the role of international pressure in pushing the U.S. to modify some of the more obdurate elements of its mainland policy. To be sure, as the administration confronted increasing demands from allies like Japan and Canada for engaging the PRC, policymakers sought means of deflecting blame for acrimonious Sino-American relations and stemming the loss of support for Taiwan's international standing; the Nationalists' endangered hold on the Chinese seat in the UN provided the impetus for Johnson's consideration of "two Chinas" in the spring and summer of 1966.

Yet a powerful countervailing current of opinion among its staunchly anti-communist Asian allies, one to which Washington ultimately proved more sensitive, imposed sharply defined limits on any feelers extended to Beijing. Johnson officials constantly felt obligated to demonstrate strength and resolve to Saigon, Bangkok, Seoul, and Manila in the battle against communist subversion, fearful that their friends' loyalties and allegiances were easily transferable. The President's inner circle was profoundly concerned in 1965 that failure to take a stand in South Vietnam would undermine confidence in U.S. credibility and encourage neighboring countries to seek security guarantees through strategic bargains with the mainland. Moves to expand contacts with the PRC the following year were coupled with assurances to this audience that the American will to contain Chinese expansionism remained undiminished. A similar need to placate allied sentiment deterred the administration from approving further China initiatives in 1968, particularly once the decision to de-escalate the Vietnam War touched off worries of a wider American pullback from Asia.

The Johnson team's complex relationship with Taiwan, largely unexamined and deserving of a full-length treatment, stood as one of the most imposing barriers to a breakthrough in China policy. Like his predecessors, LBJ strove on many occasions to discourage Chiang from attempting a return to the mainland, all the more so while the war in Vietnam was raging. On balance, however, Johnson was reluctant to alter the contour of America's political and diplomatic commitment to Taipei. The one major instance to the contrary, the aborted "two Chinas" initiative of 1966, was quickly shelved once the Generalissimo voiced his displeasure and threatened to storm out of the UN. Underlying the administration's deference was the pragmatic concern that the mercurial Chiang might attempt something suicidal or rash, such as military action against the PRC, should he feel that the U.S. was abandoning him. Even more importantly, senior U.S. decision-makers continued to value the Nationalist regime, for all of its deficiencies, as a major Cold War ally and a bastion of anti-communism in the Pacific. While there was certainly no love lost between the mutually suspicious partners, it is nevertheless

exceedingly difficult to imagine LBJ or Rusk ever exercising the same ruthlessness and callous disregard for Taipei's interests as Nixon and Kissinger did in 1971-72, particularly since Johnson was averse to acquiescing in any arrangement that could be portrayed by his opponents as a "sell out" of Chiang.¹³

The consequences of Johnson's ties to the Nationalists for Sino-American relations were, of course, toxic. Chinese reunification remained the overriding foreign policy objective of Mao and his comrades throughout the 1950's and 1960's. A reading of the Warsaw talks during the Johnson years reveals that the U.S. attitude toward Taiwan, much more than its activities in Vietnam, was Beijing's greatest grievance. Chinese officials consistently used this forum to castigate their U.S. counterparts for interference in the mainland's domestic affairs, and to inform them that a normalization of relations was out of the question until Washington recognized the PRC's sovereignty over the island. Nixon's willingness to offer overt and covert concessions over Taiwan ultimately proved decisive in convincing Mao to consummate a new relationship with the Americans.

3. *Ideology.* An examination of America's tense encounter with China during the Johnson years highlights the central role that ideology played in framing U.S. perceptions and decisions.¹⁴ Michael Hunt's observation that reliance on a core set of values and beliefs can offer "simplifying clarity" to leaders confronted by complex and indecipherable problems seems especially relevant to our discussion.¹⁵ Washington's understanding of its Chinese adversary was bound to be disproportionately influenced by the anti-communism of U.S. authorities; ideology filled a vacuum created by the absence of diplomatic relations, minimal face to face contacts, and a dearth of high-level Chinese expertise. The contrast with the administration's dealings with its other major communist competitor was stark. Respected, well-connected Kremlinologists such as Llewellyn Thompson and Charles Bohlen provided their superiors with sophisticated, calm appraisals of Soviet intentions and behavior. Communications between the White House and the Kremlin were facilitated by a number of useful channels, notably Soviet Ambassador Anatoly

Dobrynin. In short, the avenues for easing misunderstandings and managing crises were not inconsiderable.

Johnson officials were often impressed more by Chinese words than deeds. Militant Maoist rhetoric offended the sensibilities of a liberal, internationalist mindset that placed a premium on order and stability.¹⁶ This fixation with radical Chinese pronouncements gave rise to striking contradictions in threat perception. Even while the Johnson team recognized the mainland's defensive orientation and distaste for large-scale conflict, they interpreted its vehement endorsement of national liberation struggles and advocacy of revolutionary upheaval as evidence of an expansionist agenda. Recall the decidedly alarmist reaction to Lin Biao's *Long Live the Victory of People's War!* Similarly, Beijing's supply of materiel assistance to, and words of encouragement for, Hanoi convinced the President's lieutenants that China was fuelling and prolonging the communist insurgency in South Vietnam, even though they were vaguely cognizant of historical Sino-Vietnamese friction.

The onset of the Cultural Revolution stirred up familiar images of a reckless, unpredictable outcast. More specifically, U.S. officials consistently misunderstood Mao's role in the unfolding drama. They interpreted China's turn toward moderation in the latter half of 1967 as an unmitigated defeat for the Chairman, when in fact he authorized or at least acquiesced in it. While Mao was seen as fully responsible for subjecting his country to the crazed pursuit of some fanciful revolutionary utopia, few believed he had any stake in reining in the disruptive forces he had unleashed. Policymakers underestimated Mao's tactical flexibility and failed to recognize that he was willing to practice *realpolitik* in safeguarding the security of the Chinese revolution, even if this eventually entailed allying himself with the world's leading "imperialist" power in opposition against another communist state. With profound irony, it was determined that Sino-American rapprochement was impossible so long as Mao, one of the architects of the thaw, continued to rule. As Evelyn Goh has demonstrated, these ideologically tinged attitudes precluded elements of the Nixon administration from seeing the potential for reconciliation with the

mainland. “Confined by the limits of the gradualist 1960’s discourse of reconciliation,” the State Department’s China experts, many of them holdovers from the Johnson years, continued to regard the PRC as primarily a revolutionary power opposed to the international status quo. To an audience accustomed to Chinese radicalism, Beijing’s various feelers toward the U.S. in 1969-70 were viewed as little more than a ploy designed to upset the Soviet Union rather than an attempt to reach a genuine *modus vivendi* with Washington.¹⁷

While shedding new light on the evolution of Sino-American relations during the 1960’s, this study has also built on recent works that offer a new perspective on Lyndon Johnson’s foreign policy leadership by looking “beyond Vietnam.” In keeping with an infinitely complex character who has always defied easy categorization or unqualified judgement, the evidence presented here provides ammunition for both critics and defenders. On the one hand, LBJ could be excessively cautious and short-sighted, displaying an inherent distaste for foreign policy initiatives and a penchant for orthodox thinking borne out of sporadic participation in China policymaking. Johnson’s most glaring shortcomings in this respect, as we have seen, were evident during his first two years in office. Assuming the presidency with no China agenda of his own, and distracted by domestic political maneuvering and the war in Vietnam, he passively deferred to his inherited foreign policy team and clung tenaciously to the policy of containment and isolation in the face of mounting criticism from home and abroad. Johnson uncritically embraced the conventional wisdom, espoused most prominently by Rusk and McNamara, that the communist insurgency in South Vietnam represented the frontline in China’s battle for regional hegemony; at best this was indicative of careless and dubious strategic reasoning, at worst of a disturbing readiness to deliberately distort and magnify an external threat for domestic consumption. There can be no doubt, as many scholars have charged, that Johnson’s obsession with Vietnam came at the expense of furthering other policy objectives. Indeed, his receptivity to China initiatives in particular depended on his reading of events on the ground in that war. Just as

the possible contingency of Chinese intervention yielded the modest bridge building gestures of 1966, the passing of this threat with the PRC's implosion sapped the President's immediate interest in this project. His preoccupation with peace talks in 1968, and the priority of projecting resolve to Hanoi, derailed further reform.

On the other hand, scrutiny of LBJ's China record reveals several admirable attributes associated with his stewardship of U.S. foreign policy, many of which have failed to come to light in the Vietnam-dominated literature. In some ways, it is instructive to recall the example of Kennedy, to whom Johnson has often been unfavorably compared. It is no contradiction to say that while Johnson shared many of the most common Cold War stereotypes of the PRC, he was less prone to excitable assumptions about Chinese behavior and demonstrated more intellectual flexibility and nuanced thinking than his predecessor. While Kennedy's fixation with Beijing's nuclear program propelled him to seriously explore a military response, there is no record of Johnson harboring the same interest, even though McNamara and McGeorge Bundy pressed him to keep this option open. Furthermore, while JFK's determination to contain the mainland at times blinded him to the fears and insecurities this instilled in China's leadership,¹⁸ Johnson empathized with Chinese concerns to a greater extent and recognized that U.S. actions could trigger a hostile counter-response. The measured escalation of the American role in Vietnam (against the wishes of his military advisers), the careful selection of bombing targets, and the steps taken to defuse tensions with Beijing were all hallmarks of a prudent, responsible leader fully capable of independent judgement and keenly aware of the dangerous precedent of Korea.

The historian H.W. Brands has suggested two criteria by which a President's foreign policy can be appraised.¹⁹ The first concerns the issue of leadership, that is, whether the policy in question was shaped by presidential initiative or instead represented the handiwork of subordinates. Despite an intimidating larger than life personality, Johnson has often been branded a weak diplomat who willingly submitted to the counsel of others.²⁰ For the purposes of our discussion, Lyndon Johnson was, on balance, a forceful, attentive, and informed leader whose

China policy reflected his own preferences and inclinations. His initial passivity gave way to steady engagement with this sphere once the U.S. became fully embroiled in Vietnam. The most notable developments on the China front during his administration, not coincidentally, occurred when the President intervened in the decision-making process. Johnson's unease with existing policy and his responsiveness to changing domestic and international variables in the spring of 1966 provided decisive momentum to the aforementioned bridge building gestures. He even prodded the foot-dragging Rusk to re-examine tactics toward Chinese representation. His persistent fear of an enlarged war dictated a sizeable appetite for information on the PRC, which can surely be measured by Rostow's voluminous correspondence to the President regarding the Cultural Revolution. Johnson's expressed interest in nurturing Chinese moderates, coming late in his tenure and producing little in the way of a tangible policy outcome, nevertheless demonstrated a capacity to look at mainland affairs in a non-Vietnam context.

On Brands' second yardstick of achievement, whether the policy was successful in attaining its stated objectives, LBJ again scores reasonably well. His primary goal vis a vis China, avoiding another Sino-American conflagration, was met. James Hershberg and Chen Jian's verdict that the measures taken to check the drift toward a wider war in Vietnam were a milestone on the road to Sino-American reconciliation is surely correct.²¹ Yet a more indirect accomplishment has gone relatively unnoticed. Given the minimal potential for a constructive Sino-American dialogue, Johnson's instinctive caution, particularly his recognition that there was little Washington could do to influence the course of the Cultural Revolution, suited the times in which he governed and may well have reaped long-term rewards. Rostow later recalled that Mao was one of two leaders whom Johnson deliberately refrained from condemning in public.²² By refusing to explicitly take sides in China's domestic conflict or intervene in the country's political affairs, he averted the folly of adding fuel to the fire of Sino-American hostility and nourishing Mao's siege mentality. In doing so, he maximized America's policy options and his successor was well positioned to pursue rapprochement with the PRC if he so chose.²³ As Alfred Jenkins

aply reflected in a sober assessment of the Johnson team's record, "our policy toward Communist China in recent years has accomplished in good measure about all that could be expected, short of bilateral accommodations which are just not yet in the cards. Our policy has been consistent but not static. It has steadfastly opposed Chinese meddling and aggression; but it has moved toward seeking contact. The ground is well laid to move further when China is ready, if it seems in our interest."²⁴

Notes

Introduction

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7. Nancy Bernkopf Tucker, "Threats, Opportunities, and Frustrations in East Asia," in Warren I. Cohen and Nancy Bernkopf Tucker, eds., *Lyndon Johnson Confronts the World: American Foreign Policy, 1963-1968* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 99-111. The quote is taken from p. 99.
8. Foot, *Practice of Power*; Arthur Waldron, "From Nonexistent to Almost Normal: U.S.-China Relations in the 1960's," in Diane B. Kunz, ed., *The Diplomacy of the Crucial Decade: American Foreign Relations During the 1960's* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994); Robert Garson, "Lyndon B. Johnson and the China Enigma," *Journal of Contemporary History* 32, no. 1 (January 1997), pp. 63-80; Victor S. Kaufman, *Confronting Communism: US and British Policies toward China* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2001), chs. 7-8; Robert D. Schulzinger, "The Johnson Administration, China, and the Vietnam War," and Rosemary Foot, "Redefinitions: The Domestic Context and America's China Policy in the 1960's," both in Robert S. Ross and Jiang Changbin, eds., *Re-examining the Cold War: US-China Diplomacy, 1954-1973* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001); Evelyn Goh, *Constructing the U.S. Rapprochement with China, 1961-1974: From "Red Menace" to "Tacit Ally"* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 17-98.
9. While Chang's *Friends and Enemies* nominally encapsulates the Johnson years, the overwhelming bulk of its research concentrates on the Truman- Eisenhower-Kennedy years.

10. John Garver, "The Tet Offensive and Sino-Vietnamese Relations," in Marc Jason Gilbert and William Head, eds., *The Tet Offensive* (Westport: Praeger, 1996); Qiang Zhai, "Beijing and the Vietnam Peace Talks, 1965-68: New Evidence From Chinese Sources," Cold War International History Project (hereafter CWIHP) Working Paper No. 18 (June 1997); Roderick MacFarquhar, *The Origins of the Cultural Revolution*, vol. 3: *The Coming of the Cataclysm, 1961-1966* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997); Barbara Barnouin and Yu Changgen, *Chinese Foreign Policy During the Cultural Revolution* (London: Kegan Paul International, 1998); Chen Jian and David Wilson, eds., "All Under the Heaven is Great Chaos: Beijing, the Sino-Soviet Border Clashes, and the Turn toward Sino-American Rapprochement, 1968-1969," *CWIHP Bulletin* 11 (Winter 1998-1999); Qiang Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars, 1950-1975* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Chen Jian, *Mao's China and the Cold War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); Li Jie, "Changes in China's Domestic Situation in the 1960's and Sino-U.S. Relations" and Gong Li, "Chinese Decision Making and the Thawing of U.S.-China Relations," both in Ross and Changbin, eds., *Re-examining the Cold War*; Yang Kuisong, "Changes in Mao Zedong's Attitude toward the Indochina War, 1949-1973," CWIHP Working Paper No. 34 (February 2002).

11. Goh's *Constructing the U.S. Rapprochement with China*, hitherto the most extensive account of the Johnson era, focuses on the evolution of U.S. policymaking groups' images of China, and sheds little light on the role of personalities in the formulation of policy.

12. Robert Dallek, *Lone Star Rising: Lyndon Johnson and His Times, 1908-1960* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp. 3-6.

13. Many of these conversations, at least from 1963-65, have been transcribed. See the volumes edited by Michael Beschloss, *Taking Charge: The Johnson White House Tapes, 1963-1964* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997) and *Reaching For Glory: Lyndon Johnson's Secret White House Tapes, 1964-1965* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001). A third volume is apparently in the works.

14. For Johnson's renaissance, see Lewis L. Gould, "The Revised LBJ," *The Wilson Quarterly* (Spring 2000), pp. 80-83.

15. <http://www.americanpresidents.org/survey/historians/35.asp> (accessed 15 February 2005).

16. The C-SPAN poll of historians ranked Johnson a poor 36th in the category of international relations. See *Ibid.*

17. Waldo Heinrichs, "Lyndon B. Johnson: Change and Continuity," in Cohen and Tucker, eds., *Lyndon Johnson Confronts the World*, David Kaiser, "Men and Policies: 1961-69," in Kunz, ed., *Diplomacy of the Crucial Decade*, pp. 12-13; H.W. Brands, *The Wages of Globalism: Lyndon Johnson and the Limits of American Power* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 28-29; David Fromkin, "Lyndon Johnson and Foreign Policy: What the New Documents Show," *Foreign Affairs* 74, no. 1 (January/February 1995), pp. 161-170.

18. Heinrichs, "Change and Continuity," in Cohen and Tucker, eds., *Lyndon Johnson Confronts the World*, p. 26.

19. For example, see Michael H. Hunt, *Lyndon Johnson's War: America's Cold War Crusade in Vietnam, 1945-1968* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1996), p. 78; Kai Bird, *The Color of Truth: McGeorge Bundy and William Bundy, Brothers in Arms* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998), p. 275; Fredrik Logevall, *Choosing War: The Lost Chance For Peace and the Escalation of War in Vietnam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), pp. 389-399; David Kaiser, *American Tragedy: Kennedy, Johnson, and the Origins of the Vietnam War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000).

20. Robert Dallek, "Lyndon Johnson As a World Leader," in H.W. Brands, ed., *The Foreign Policies of Lyndon Johnson: Beyond Vietnam* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1999), pp. 6-9, 17.

21. Thomas Alan Schwartz, *Lyndon Johnson and Europe: In the Shadow of Vietnam* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003). While less complimentary, John Dumbrell, *President Lyndon Johnson and Soviet Communism* (New York: Manchester University Press, 2004) acknowledges LBJ's contributions to the advancement of Soviet-American détente.

Chapter 1

1. Chang, *Friends and Enemies*, p. 11; Nancy Bernkopf Tucker, *Taiwan, Hong Kong, and the United States, 1945-1992: Uncertain Friendships* (New York: Twayne, 1994), p. 18; John Lewis Gaddis, *The Long Peace: Inquiries into the History of the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 161-164.
2. Melvyn P. Leffler, *A Preponderance of Power: National Security, the Truman Administration, and the Cold War* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), pp. 127-130, 168-170, 246-251, 336-337.
3. Nancy Bernkopf Tucker, *Patterns in the Dust: Chinese-American Relations and the Recognition Controversy, 1949-1950* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983); Warren I. Cohen, "Acheson, His Advisers, and China, 1949-1950," in Dorothy Borg and Waldo Heinrichs, eds., *Uncertain Years: Chinese-American Relations, 1947-1950* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), pp. 32-52. For an opposing view which holds Truman and Acheson responsible for institutionalizing Sino-American tensions, see Arnold A. Offner, *Another Such Victory: President Truman and the Cold War, 1945-1953* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), ch. 12.
4. For further discussion, see "Symposium: Rethinking the Lost Chance in China," *Diplomatic History* 21, no. 1 (Winter 1997), pp. 71-115; Chen, *Mao's China and the Cold War*, pp. 50-53.
5. Some scholars have argued that Truman deliberately opted for a hard-line toward the PRC, as a conciliatory approach would have contradicted ongoing efforts to mobilize domestic opinion in favor of unprecedented military and economic commitments in Europe. See Thomas J. Christensen, *Useful Adversaries: Grand Strategy, Domestic Mobilization, and Sino-American Conflict, 1947-1958* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), ch. 4.
6. Leffler, *A Preponderance of Power*, p. 293.
7. Chang, *Friends and Enemies*, p. 78.
8. Robert Accinelli, *Crisis and Commitment: United States Policy toward Taiwan, 1950-1955* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), pp. 17-33, 255.
9. Gong Li, "Tension Across the Taiwan Strait in the 1950's: Chinese Strategy and Tactics," in Ross and Changbin, eds., *Re-examining the Cold War*, p. 144.
10. Foot, *Practice of Power*, pp. 30-31, 54-55.
11. For a conventional indictment of Eisenhower's China policy, written well before the opening of archival records, see Dulles, *American Policy Toward Communist China*, chs. 9-11.
12. Nancy Bernkopf Tucker, "A House Divided: The United States, the Department of State, and China," in Warren I. Cohen and Akira Iriye, eds., *The Great Powers in East Asia, 1953-1960* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), pp. 36-41, 55.
13. Nancy Bernkopf Tucker, "John Foster Dulles and the Taiwan Roots of the 'Two Chinas' Policy," in Richard H. Immerman, ed., *John Foster Dulles and the Diplomacy of the Cold War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990); Accinelli, *Crisis and Commitment*, p. 113.
14. Cohen, *Dean Rusk*, p. 164.
15. Quoted in Chang, *Friends and Enemies*, p. 85.
16. Gaddis, *The Long Peace*, pp. 174-187.

17. Qing Simei, "The Eisenhower Administration and Changes in Western Embargo Policy Against China, 1954-1958," in Cohen and Iriye, eds., *Great Powers in East Asia*.
18. Chang, *Friends and Enemies*, pp. 143-144, 160.
19. Ronald W. Pruessen, "Over the Volcano: The United States and the Taiwan Strait Crisis, 1954-1955," in Ross and Changbin, eds., *Re-examining the Cold War*, p. 99.
20. Shu Guang Zhang, "Between 'Paper' and 'Real Tigers': Mao's View of Nuclear Weapons," in John Lewis Gaddis, Philip H. Gordon, Ernest R. May, and Jonathan Rosenberg, eds., *Cold War Statesmen Confront the Bomb: Nuclear Diplomacy Since 1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 198-202; John Wilson Lewis and Xue Litai, *China Builds the Bomb* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), pp. 22-40.
21. Chen, *Mao's China and the Cold War*, pp. 170-171.
22. Odd Arne Westad, "The Sino-Soviet Alliance and the United States," in Odd Arne Westad, ed., *Brothers in Arms: The Rise and Fall of the Sino-Soviet Alliance, 1945-1963* (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1998), pp. 174-175, 181; Zhang Baijia, "The Changing International Scene and Chinese Policy toward the United States, 1954-1970," in Ross and Changbin, eds., *Re-examining the Cold War*, pp. 51-52.
23. Leonard A. Kusnitz, *Public Opinion and Foreign Policy: America's China Policy, 1949-1979* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1984), pp. 95-96.
24. Roger Hilsman, *To Move A Nation: The Politics of Foreign Policy in the Administration of John F. Kennedy* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1967), pp. 347-348; Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *A Thousand Days: John F. Kennedy in the White House* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965), p. 479; Thomson, "On the Making," p. 221. See as well Marshall Green's quote in Nancy Bernkopf Tucker, ed., *China Confidential: American Diplomats and Sino-American Relations, 1945-1996* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), p. 192.
25. The best discussion of the incoming Kennedy team's views of China is provided in Kochavi, *A Conflict Perpetuated*, ch. 2. For references to Stevenson and Bowles, see pp. 29-31. See as well Chang, *Friends and Enemies*, pp. 218-219.
26. For Kennedy's pre-presidential foreign policy views, see Robert Dallek, *An Unfinished Life: John F. Kennedy, 1917-1963* (Boston: Little, Brown, 2003), pp. 148-149, 158-168, 183-187, 221-224, 288-290.
27. Kochavi, *A Conflict Perpetuated*, pp. 38-39.
28. Richard Reeves, *President Kennedy: Profile of Power* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993), p. 18.
29. James N. Giglio, *The Presidency of John F. Kennedy* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1991), p. 45. An excellent, if somewhat overstated, discussion of the sources of Kennedy's foreign policy is provided in Thomas G. Paterson, "Introduction: John F. Kennedy's Quest for Victory and Global Crisis," in Paterson, ed., *Kennedy's Quest For Victory*.
30. For further discussion, see Kochavi, *A Conflict Perpetuated*, p. 56.
31. For example, see Memorandum of Conversation, 24 February 1961, *Foreign Relations of the United States* (hereafter *FRUS*), 1961-1963, vol. 22, p. 15; Memorandum of Conversation, 3 March 1961, *Ibid.*, p. 21; Memorandum of Conversation, 5 April 1961, *Ibid.*, pp. 42-43.
32. Dean Rusk, *As I Saw It* (New York: Norton, 1990), pp. 282-283.
33. Dallek, *An Unfinished Life*, pp. 165-167.

34. Lawrence Freedman, *Kennedy's Wars: Berlin, Cuba, Laos, and Vietnam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 287.
35. Fetzer, "Clinging to Containment," in Paterson, ed., *Kennedy's Quest For Victory*, pp. 181-182; Noam Kochavi, "Limited Accommodation, Perpetuated Conflict: Kennedy, China, and the Laos Crisis, 1961-1963," *Diplomatic History* 26, no. 1 (Winter 2002), pp. 100-101.
36. Special National Intelligence Estimate (SNIE) 13-61, "The Economic Situation in Communist China," 4 April 1961, *FRUS*, 1961-1963, vol. 22, pp. 40-41; CIA Memorandum, "The Situation in Mainland China," 27 July 1961, National Security Files (hereafter NSF), Countries, Box 22, China General: 7/21/61-7/31/61, John Fitzgerald Kennedy Library (hereafter JFKL).
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39. National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) 1-61, "Estimate of the World Situation," 17 January 1961, *FRUS*, 1961-1963, vol. 5, pp. 18-19.
40. For example, see Telegram, Moscow to State Department, 1 February 1961, *Ibid.*, p. 53.
41. Record of the Policy Planning Staff Meeting, 8 February 1961, *Ibid.*, p. 63.
42. Memorandum of Conversation, 3 March 1961, *FRUS*, 1961-1963, vol. 22, p. 21. For Beijing's early views of the Kennedy Administration, see MacFarquhar, *The Origins of the Cultural Revolution*, Vol. 3, pp. 130-131.
43. Foot, *Practice of Power*, p. 80.
44. Tucker, *Taiwan, Hong Kong, and the United States*, pp. 48-49.
45. Kaufman, *Confronting Communism*, pp. 150-151; Cohen, *Dean Rusk*, pp. 164-166.
46. "Strategic Framework For Rethinking China Policy," by Robert W. Komer, 7 April 1961, NSF, Countries, Box 22, China General: "Strategic Framework For Rethinking China Policy," 4/7/61, JFKL.
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48. Memorandum of Conversation, 5 April 1961, *FRUS*, 1961-1963, vol. 22, pp. 44-45.
49. Dean Rusk to JFK, 26 May 1961, *Ibid.*, p. 68.
50. Memorandum of Conversation, 24 May 1961, *Ibid.*, p. 64.
51. Kaufman, *Confronting Communism*, p. 151.
52. Robert Garson, *The United States and China Since 1949: A Troubled Affair* (London: Pinter, 1994), p. 81.
53. Memorandum of Conversation, JFK-Ch'en Ch'eng, 31 July 1961, NSF, Countries, Box 22, China General: 8/1/61-8/10/61, JFKL.

54. McGeorge Bundy to JFK, 7 July 1961, *FRUS*, 1961-1963, vol. 22, pp. 89-90.
55. Memorandum of Conversation, 28 July 1961, *Ibid.*, pp. 99-101.
56. M. Bundy to Ray Cline, 11 October 1961, *Ibid.*, pp. 154-155.
57. Kochavi, *A Conflict Perpetuated*, pp. 66-67; Tucker, *Taiwan, Hong Kong, and the United States*, pp. 49-50.
58. Kochavi, *A Conflict Perpetuated*, p. 55.
59. Telegram, no. 620, Taipei to State Department, 8 March 1962, NSF, Countries, Box 23, China General: Return to the Mainland, 1/1/62-5/6/62, JFKL. See as well Telegram, Taipei to State Department, 15 March 1962, *FRUS*, 1961-1963, Vol. 22, pp. 195-196.
60. SNIE 13-3-62, "Probable Consequences of Chinese Nationalist Military Operations on the China Mainland," 28 March 1962, *FRUS*, 1961-1963, vol. 22, pp. 200-201; NIE 13-4-62, "Prospects for Communist China," 2 May 1962, *Ibid.*, p. 222.
61. Freedman, *Kennedy's Wars*, p. 252.
62. Memorandum for the Record, 18 June 1962, *FRUS*, 1961-1963, vol. 22, pp. 246-247. Harriman and Hilsman expressed similar concerns. See Memorandum for the Record, 31 March 1962, *Ibid.*, pp. 204-205.
63. JFK to Averell Harriman, 9 March 1962, *Ibid.*, pp. 192-193; Memorandum for the Record, 12 March 1962, *Ibid.*, p. 194; Memorandum to Ray Cline, 31 March 1962, *Ibid.*, p. 206; M. Bundy to Cline, 6 March 1962, NSF, Countries, Box 23, China General: Return to the Mainland, 1/1/62-5/6/62, JFKL.
64. Kochavi, *A Conflict Perpetuated*, p. 117.
65. Memorandum of Conversation, 22 June 1962, *FRUS*, 1961-1963, vol. 22, pp. 268-269; Telegram, State Department to London, 22 June 1962, *Ibid.*, p. 270.
66. Telegram, Warsaw to State Department, 23 June 1962, *Ibid.*, p. 274. For a brief discussion of the utility of the Warsaw talks in resolving this crisis, see Steven M. Goldstein, "Dialogue of the Deaf?: The Sino-American Ambassadorial-Level Talks, 1955-1970," in Ross and Changbin, eds., *Re-examining the Cold War*, pp. 228-229.
67. Roger Hilsman to Rusk, 9 July 1962, NSF, Robert W. Komer Series, Box 410, China (CPR) 1961-1963 (2 of 3), JFKL.
68. Telegram, State Department to Taipei, 28 July 1962, *FRUS*, 1961-1963, vol. 22, p. 296. Divergences over the future direction of Chinese foreign policy emerged among Chinese elites in 1962, with momentous consequences for the duration of the decade. This is discussed in chapter 3 of this volume.
69. Telegram, Warsaw to State Department, 30 June 1961, *Ibid.*, pp. 87-89.
70. Office of Current Intelligence Memorandum, "The Signs of Chinese Communist Friendliness, 17 July 1961, NSF, Countries, Box 22, China General: 7/15/61-7/24/61, JFKL; Hilsman to Walter P. McConaughy, 17 July 1961, *Ibid.*
71. For Rusk's instructions to Cabot, see Telegram, State Department to Warsaw, 13 August 1961, *FRUS*, 1961-1963, vol. 22, pp. 118-119.
72. Kochavi, *A Conflict Perpetuated*, p. 248.

73. Walt Rostow to JFK, 22 November 1961, NSF, Countries, Box 22A, China General: 11/1/61-11/26/61, JFKL. See as well Chester Bowles to JFK, 6 February 1962, James C. Thomson Papers (hereafter JCT Papers), Box 15, Food for China 1/62-2/62. JFKL; "U.S. Policies in the Far East: Review and Recommendations," by Bowles, 4 April 1962, Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. Papers, White House Files, Box WH-3a, Bowles, Chester, 4/62, JFKL; Bowles to JFK, 27 June 1962, JCT Papers, Box 15, Food for China 6/62-7/62 and undated, JFKL.
74. Thomson, "On the Making," p. 223.
75. "U.S. Policy toward China," 26 October 1961, JCT Papers, Box 14, S/P 61159: US Policy toward Communist China 10/26/61, JFKL.
76. Warren I. Cohen, "Kennedy's China," *Diplomatic History* 28, no. 1 (January 2004), p. 157.
77. *FRUS*, 1961-1963, vol. 22, p. 175, n. 5.
78. Fetzer, "Clinging to Containment," in Paterson, ed., *Kennedy's Quest For Victory*, p. 191. Even Robert Komer, generally sympathetic to an overhaul of China policy, posited that grain sales could have an "unfavourable side effect" on the administration's concurrent efforts to secure congressional passage of the Trade Expansion Act. Komer to Carl Kaysen, 24 January 1962, NSF, Robert W. Komer Series, Box 410, China (CPR) 1961-1963 (3 of 3), JFKL.
79. "Chinese Communist Food Deficits and U.S. Policy," 5 January 1962, JCT Papers, Box 15, Food for China 1/62-2/62, JFKL.
80. For the reasons behind this shake-up, see Dallek, *An Unfinished Life*, pp. 436-437; Freedman, *Kennedy's Wars*, pp. 38, 337-338.
81. Fetzer, "Clinging to Containment," in Paterson, ed., *Kennedy's Quest For Victory*, pp. 190-191.
82. Draft memorandum, Rusk to JFK, 4 April 1962, *FRUS*, 1961-1963, vol. 22, pp. 208-210.
83. Harriman to Rusk, 13 April 1962, JCT Papers, Box 15, Food for China 3/62-5/62, JFKL.
84. "Food for China," 24 May 1962, *Ibid.*
85. Thomson, "On the Making," p. 228.
86. *FRUS*, 1961-1963, vol. 22, p. 233, n. 2.
87. Kochavi, *A Conflict Perpetuated*, p. 113.
88. For the centrality of India in the Kennedy administration's China mindset, see *Ibid.*, pp. 28-29, 40, 145-146.
89. Memorandum of Conversation, Rusk-Lord Home, 25 June 1962, JCT Papers, Box 15, Communist China: General, 4/62-6/62, JFKL.
90. William P. Bundy Papers (hereafter WPB Papers), Box 1, ch. 7, p. 6, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library (hereafter LBJL). These papers compile an unpublished manuscript written by Bundy about the 1961-65 Vietnam decisions, and are a valuable source for the foreign policy establishment's views of China in the mid-1960's. See as well Goh, *Constructing the U.S. Rapprochement with China*, p. 85.
91. Cohen, *Dean Rusk*, pp. 169-170.
92. Quoted in Kusnitz, *Public Opinion and Foreign Policy*, p. 107.

93. Chang, *Friends and Enemies*, pp. 220, 229-232; *FRUS*, 1961-1963, vol. 5, p. 63, n. 1.
94. CIA Memorandum, "The Sino-Soviet Dispute and its Significance," 1 April 1961, NSF, Countries, Box 21A, China General: "The Sino-Soviet Dispute and its Significance" 4/61, JFKL. See as well NIE 10-61, "Authority and Control in the Communist Movement," 8 August 1961, *FRUS*, 1961-1963, vol. 22, pp. 116-117. For the causes of the Sino-Soviet schism, the best volume is Westad, ed., *Brothers in Arms*. See especially Westad's introduction; Constantine Pleshakov, "Nikita Khrushchev and Sino-Soviet Relations"; Chen Jian and Yang Kuisong, "Chinese Politics and the Collapse of the Sino-Soviet Alliance."
95. Kochavi, *A Conflict Perpetuated*, pp. 190-195.
96. For a record of this meeting, see James C. Thomson, Jr. to Harriman, 12 January 1962, JCT Papers, Box 15, General 1/62-3/62, JFKL.
97. NIE 11-5-62, "Political Developments in the USSR and the Communist World," 21 February 1962, *FRUS*, 1961-1963, vol. 5, p. 375.
98. "U.S. Policy Re the Sino-Soviet Conflict," 2 April 1962, enclosed in Rusk to Rostow, 30 April 1962, JCT Papers, Box 14, Sino-Soviet Conflict and U.S. Policy 4/30/62, JFKL.
99. Charles E. Bohlen to M. Bundy, 25 May 1962, NSF, Countries, Box 178A, USSR General: 5/62 and undated, JFKL. See as well Telegram, no. 3070, Moscow to State Department, 26 May 1962, *Ibid.*; Telegram, no. 636, Belgrade to State Department, 11 April 1962, NSF, Countries, Box 178, USSR General: 4/62, JFKL.
100. Rusk to Rostow, 30 April 1962, JCT Papers, Box 14, JFKL.
101. Chang, *Friends and Enemies*, p. 220.
102. Airgram, no. CA-976, State Department and USIA to All American Diplomatic and Consular Posts, 24 July 1963, Record Group (hereafter RG) 59, Central Files, 1963, Box 3863, POL CHICOM-USSR, National Archives, College Park, Maryland (hereafter NA). See as well JFK's remarks in Summary Record of the 516th Meeting of the National Security Council, 31 July 1963, *FRUS*, 1961-1963, vol. 22, p. 374.
103. William Burr and Jeffrey T. Richelson, "Whether to 'Strangle the Baby in the Cradle': The United States and the Chinese Nuclear Program, 1960-64," *International Security* 25, no. 3 (Winter 2000/01), p. 61. For a summary of Kennedy and Khrushchev's discussions of China at Vienna, see Editorial Note, *FRUS*, 1961-1963, vol. 22, pp. 70-72.
104. CIA Memorandum, "Soviet Policy in the Aftermath of the Cuban Crisis," 29 November 1962, *FRUS*, 1961-1963, vol. 5, pp. 586-587; CIA Memorandum, "Sino-Soviet Relations at a New Crisis," 14 January 1963, NSF, Countries, Box 180, USSR General: 1/9/63-1/14/63, JFKL.
105. Telegram, no. 2310, Moscow to State Department, 16 March 1963, NSF, Countries, Box 180A, USSR General: 3/16/63-3/21/63, JFKL; Llewellyn E. Thompson to Rusk, 24 April 1963, *Ibid.*, USSR General: 4/15/63-4/30/63, JFKL; Telegram, no. 5505, State Department to Paris, 21 May 1963, NSF, Countries, Box 181, USSR General: 5/63, JFKL.
106. Dallek, *An Unfinished Life*, pp. 613-621.
107. Editorial Note, *FRUS*, 1961-1963, vol. 22, p. 339.
108. The best sources on this topic are Chang, *Friends and Enemies*, ch. 8; Burr and Richelson, "Whether to 'Strangle the Baby,'" pp. 54-79; Kochavi, *A Conflict Perpetuated*, ch. 8.

109. Quoted in Roderick MacFarquhar, ed., *Sino-American Relations, 1949-1971* (New York: Praeger, 1972), p. 200.
110. On this point, see Kochavi, *A Conflict Perpetuated*, p. 217. Some Kennedy aides have corroborated JFK's militancy on this issue. William C. Foster, head of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, recalled the President once remarking, "You know, it wouldn't be too hard if we could somehow get kind of an anonymous airplane to go over there, take out the Chinese facilities—they've only got a couple—and maybe we could do it, or maybe the Soviet Union could do it, rather than face the threat of a China with nuclear weapons." William C. Foster Oral History, p. 37, JFKL.
111. Remarks of President Kennedy to the NSC Meeting of 22 January 1963, NSF, Meetings and Memoranda, Box 314, National Security Council Meetings, 1963: No. 508, 1/22/63, JFKL.
112. Chang, *Friends and Enemies*, p. 238; Michael R. Beschloss, *The Crisis Years: Kennedy and Khrushchev, 1960-1963* (New York: Edward Burlingame Books, 1991), pp. 619-620. Harriman strongly encouraged Kennedy's impression that the Soviets wanted to pressure China. Telegram, no. 195, Moscow to State Department, 18 July 1963, NSF, Departments and Agencies, Box 263, ACDA –Disarmament: Nuclear Test Ban Cables, Moscow 7/63 Incoming, JFKL.
113. Telegram, no. 191, State Department to Moscow, 15 July 1963, NSF, Departments and Agencies, Box 263, ACDA –Disarmament: Nuclear Test Ban Cables, Moscow 7/63 Outgoing, JFKL.
114. Telegram, no. 365, 27 July 1963, *Ibid.*, Incoming, JFKL. An internal review of the Moscow negotiations one year later did not turn up any evidence that Harriman had broached any "proposal for a joint US-USSR effort to slow down Red China's nuclear weapons development." Editorial Note, *FRUS*, 1961-1963, vol. 22, p. 370.
115. Burr and Richelson, "Whether to 'Strangle the Baby,' " pp. 71-75.
116. The Hilsman-led China policy review of 1963 has only very recently received sustained attention in the literature. See Kochavi, *A Conflict Perpetuated*, pp. 225-233; Kevin Quigley, "A Lost Opportunity: A Reappraisal of the Kennedy Administration's China Policy in 1963," *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 13, no. 3 (September 2002), pp. 175-198.
117. Kaiser, *American Tragedy*, p. 153.
118. Hilsman to Rusk, 26 February 1963, NSF, Countries, Box 24, China General: 1/63-3/63, JFKL.
119. SNIE 13-4-63, "Possibilities of Greater Militancy by the Chinese Communists," 31 July 1963, National Security File (hereafter NSF), National Intelligence Estimates (hereafter NIE), Box 4, Communist China (2 of 2), LBJL; George C. Denney, Jr. to Rusk, 22 July 1963, NSF, Countries, Box 24, China General: 7/63-8/63, JFKL; Thomas L. Hughes to Rusk, 10 August 1963, RG 59, Records of the Policy Planning Council, 1963-64, Lot 70D199, Box 250, NA.
120. See chapter 2 of this volume.
121. Hilsman to John M. Cabot, 25 October 1963, RG 59, Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs, Office of the Assistant Secretary: Subject Files, 1964, Lot 66D93, Box 1, NA.
122. Hilsman, *To Move A Nation*, pp. 349-350.
123. Marshall Green to Bowles, 13 February 1963, attached to Airgram, no. A-755, Hong Kong to State Department, 1 February 1963, RG 59, Central Files, 1963, Box 3862, POL CHICOM-US, NA.
124. Kochavi, *A Conflict Perpetuated*, pp. 248-249.

125. Paper Prepared in the Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs, undated, *FRUS*, 1961-1963, vol. 22, pp. 397-399.
126. Hilsman to Rusk, 22 October 1963, *Ibid.*, p. 403; Hilsman, *To Move A Nation*, pp. 348-349.
127. Roger Hilsman, "United States Policy toward Communist China," 13 December 1963, NSF, Country File, Box 237, China memos, vol. I, LBJL.
128. Hilsman to Adlai Stevenson, 19 December 1963, *FRUS*, 1961-1963, vol. 22, pp. 411-412. Against Hilsman's wishes, Beijing reportedly interpreted the speech as a provocative endorsement of "two Chinas." See Foot, *Practice of Power*, p. 98, n. 42.
129. Quoted in Hilsman, *To Move A Nation*, p. 348.
130. Hilsman's proposal for a modification of the travel ban in October 1963, for example, never even reached Rusk's desk. See Editor's note on source, Hilsman to Rusk, 22 October 1963, *FRUS*, 1961-1963, vol. 22, p. 403.
131. Kochavi, *A Conflict Perpetuated*, pp. 231-232, 250.
132. *Ibid.*, p. 121.
133. MacFarquhar, *Origins of the Cultural Revolution*, vol. 3; Chen and Yang, "Chinese Politics and the Collapse of the Sino-Soviet Alliance," in Westad, ed., *Brothers in Arms*.

Chapter 2

1. Eric F. Goldman, *The Tragedy of Lyndon Johnson* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1969), p. 380; Heinrichs, "Change and Continuity," in Cohen and Tucker, eds., *Lyndon Johnson Confronts the World*, p. 28; Brands, *The Wages of Globalism*, p. 24.
2. Quoted in Doris Kearns Goodwin, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, Revised ed. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991), pp. 329-330.
3. *Ibid.*, pp. 94-97.
4. Goldman, *Tragedy*, p. 386.
5. LBJ to JFK, 23 May 1961, NSF, International Meetings and Travel File, Box 1, VP Johnson's Trip to the Far East, May 1961 (2 of 2), LBJL.
6. For the influence of the Korean analogy on LBJ, see Yuen Foong Khong, *Analogies at War: Korea, Munich, Dien Bien Phu and the Vietnam Decisions of 1965* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), ch. 5.
7. Thomas Mayhew Gaskin, "Senator Lyndon B. Johnson and United States Foreign Policy," Ph.D. Dissertation (University of Washington, 1989), pp. 294-305.
8. Noam Kochavi, "Limited Accommodation, Perpetuated Conflict: Kennedy, China, and the Laos Crisis, 1961-1963," *Diplomatic History* 26, no. 1 (Winter 2002), p. 101; Robert J. McMahon, "Choosing Sides in South Asia," in Paterson, ed., *Kennedy's Quest*, p. 200.
9. Robert Dallek, *Flawed Giant: Lyndon Johnson and His Times, 1961-1973* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 16.
10. Beschloss, *The Crisis Years*, pp. 511-512; Reeves, *President Kennedy*, pp. 118-119.
11. See Chang, *Friends and Enemies*, p. 242.
12. WPB Papers, Box 1, ch. 16, p. 15, LBJL; Telephone interview with James C. Thomson, 18 February 2002.
13. James C. Thomson Oral History (hereafter OH), p. 47, LBJL.
14. Author's interview with Walt Rostow, Austin, Texas, 17 January 2002.
15. Goldman, *Tragedy*, p. 379.
16. Quoted in Goodwin, *Lyndon Johnson*, p. 252.
17. Gaskin, "Senator Lyndon B. Johnson and United States Foreign Policy," pp. 4-5, 293; Dallek, *Lone Star Rising*, p. 433.
18. Heinrichs, "Change and Continuity," in Cohen and Tucker, eds., *Lyndon Johnson Confronts the World*, p. 15.
19. Quoted in Beschloss, *The Crisis Years*, p. 513.
20. Quoted in Goodwin, *Lyndon Johnson*, p. 251.

21. Brands, *The Wages of Globalism*, pp. 28-29; David Kaiser, "Men and Policies: 1961-9," in Kunz, ed., *Diplomacy of the Crucial Decade*, p. 12.
22. Telcon, LBJ-Richard Russell, 15 January 1964, in Beschloss, ed., *Taking Charge*, p. 162.
23. Quoted in Goodwin, *Lyndon Johnson*, pp. 177-178.
24. Richard Goodwin, LBJ's chief speechwriter in 1964-65, documented the darker side of the President's infinitely complex personality in his memoirs, claiming that Johnson displayed unmistakable signs of paranoia. See Richard N. Goodwin, *Remembering America: A Voice From the Sixties* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1988), ch. 21. Bill Moyers, one of Johnson's most senior political aides, later confirmed that he shared Goodwin's fears. Dallek, *Flawed Giant*, pp. 280-284.
25. Quoted in Thomas A. Schwartz, "Lyndon Johnson and Europe: Alliance Politics, Political Economy, and 'Growing Out of the Cold War,'" in Brands, ed., *Beyond Vietnam*, p. 38.
26. Dallek, *Flawed Giant*, pp. 84-85; Telcon, LBJ-Walker Stone, 31 January 1964, in Beschloss, ed., *Taking Charge*, p. 200.
27. Goodwin, *Lyndon Johnson*, p. 256.
28. David C. Humphrey, "Tuesday Lunch at the Johnson White House: A Preliminary Assessment," *Diplomatic History* 8, no. 1 (Winter 1984), pp. 83, 93.
29. Kai Bird, *The Color of Truth: McGeorge Bundy and William Bundy, Brothers in Arms* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998), pp. 185-186.
30. Heinrichs, "Lyndon B. Johnson," in Cohen and Tucker, eds., *Lyndon Johnson Confronts the World*, p. 22; George C. Herring, *LBJ and Vietnam: A Different Kind of War* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994), p. 7; Hilsman, *To Move A Nation*, p. 535; Paul Y. Hammond, *LBJ and the Presidential Management of Foreign Relations* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1992), pp. 2, 14.
31. David L. DiLeo, *George Ball, Vietnam, and the Rethinking of Containment* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), p. 102; David C. Humphrey, "NSC Meetings During the Johnson Presidency," *Diplomatic History* 18, no. 1 (Winter 1994), p. 31.
32. Bird, *Color of Truth*, pp. 189, 299-300, 320-323.
33. Dallek, *Flawed Giant*, p. 90.
34. Deborah Shapley, *Promise and Power: The Life and Times of Robert McNamara* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1993), pp. 276-278.
35. Freedman, *Kennedy's Wars*, p. 37.
36. Reeves, *President Kennedy*, p. 561. For JFK's less than flattering assessment of Rusk, see Beschloss, *The Crisis Years*, pp. 356-360.
37. Cohen, *Dean Rusk*, pp. 94-96, 218-221; Brands, *The Wages of Globalism*, pp. 6-7; Thomas J. Schoenbaum, *Waging Peace and War: Dean Rusk in the Truman, Kennedy, and Johnson Years* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1988), pp. 409-414; Jeff Shesol, *Mutual Contempt* (W.W. Norton & Co., 1997), p. 297. For Rusk's take on his frosty relationship with Robert Kennedy, see Rusk, *As I Saw It*, pp. 268, 280-281.
38. Diary entry, 12 December 1965, Papers of Orville L. Freeman, Diary, volume 6: August 28 1965 - May 17 1966, LBJL.

39. Kochavi, *A Conflict Perpetuated*, pp. 153-154, 230-232, 250; Fetzer, "Clinging to Containment," in Paterson, ed., *Kennedy's Quest for Victory*, pp. 193-197.
40. Burr and Richelson, "Whether to 'Strangle the Baby,'" p. 55.
41. Thomas W. Zeiler, *Dean Rusk: Defending the American Mission Abroad* (Wilmington: SR Books, 2000), p. 12; Schoenbaum, *Waging Peace and War*, ch. 3.
42. Rusk, *As I Saw It*, pp. 135-136.
43. Accinelli, *Crisis and Commitment*, pp. 17-27.
44. Kochavi, *A Conflict Perpetuated*, pp. 35-36; Cohen, *Dean Rusk*, ch. 4; Schoenbaum, *Waging Peace and War*, pp. 218, 222-225.
45. Kochavi, *A Conflict Perpetuated*; Cohen, *Dean Rusk*, pp. 163-167; Schoenbaum, *Waging Peace and War*, pp. 387-388.
46. Bill Moyers, quoted in Dallek, *Flawed Giant*, p. 88.
47. Kuo-kang Shao, *Zhou Enlai and the Foundations of Chinese Foreign Policy* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996), pp. 227-234.
48. Airgram, no. CA-8112, Department of State to All African Posts, 14 February 1964, RG 59, Central Files, 1964-66, Box 2011, POL 7 VISITS CHICOM, NA; Telegram, no. 1231, Department of State to Paris, 27 February 1964, *Ibid.*
49. George C. Denney, Jr. to Rusk, 13 February 1964, RG 59, Records of the Policy Planning Council, 1963-64, Lot 70D199, Box 250, NA.
50. Denney to Rusk, 22 January 1964, NSF, Country File, Box 176, Recognition of Communist China, vol. I (3 of 3), LBJL; Kochavi, *A Conflict Perpetuated*, p. 223.
51. Telegram, Rusk to Department of State, 16 December 1963, *FRUS*, 1961-1963, vol. 22, pp. 409-410.
52. Telegram, Department of State to Paris, 15 January 1964, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, vol. 30, p. 2.
53. Denney to Rusk, 22 January 1964, NSF, Country File, Box 176, LBJL.
54. M. Bundy to LBJ, 8 January 1964, NSF, Memos to the President, Box 1, vol. I (2 of 2), LBJL.
55. Editorial Note, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, vol. 30, p. 3.
56. CIA memorandum, "Implications of an Assumed French Recognition of Communist China," 15 January 1964, NSF, Country File, Box 176, Recognition of Communist China, vol. I (3 of 3), LBJL.
57. Telegram (unnumbered), Department of State to Tokyo, 24 January 1964, NSF, Country File, Box 176, Recognition of Communist China, vol. I (2 of 3), LBJL.
58. Telegram, no. 1976, Department of State to Bonn, 16 January 1964, NSF, Country File, Box 176, Recognition of Communist China, vol. I (3 of 3), LBJL; Telegram, no. 1685, Department of State to Rome, 16 January 1964, *Ibid.*
59. Telegram, no. 35, David Ormsby-Gore to the Foreign Office, 22 January 1964, FO 371/175922, Public Record Office (hereafter PRO).

60. Talking Points Paper, "Communist China," 17 January 1964, NSF, Country File, Box 167, Pearson Visit Briefing Book 1/21-22/64 (1 of 2), LBJL.
61. Memorandum of Conversation, Rusk-Ambassador Kim Chong-yul, 21 January 1964, RG 59, Office of East Asian Affairs, Lot 66D225, Box 10, NA; Telegram, Department of State to Taipei, 18 January 1964, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, Vol. 30, p. 8.
62. Norman St. Amour, "Sino-Canadian Relations, 1963-1968: The American Factor," in Paul M. Evans and B. Michael Frolic, eds., *Reluctant Adversaries: Canada and the People's Republic of China, 1949-1970* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), pp. 106-110.
63. Telegram, no. 928, Ottawa to Department of State, 20 January 1964, NSF, Country File, Box 176, Recognition of Communist China, vol. I (2 of 3), LBJL.
64. St. Amour, "Sino-Canadian Relations," in Evans and Frolic, eds., *Reluctant Adversaries*, p. 110.
65. Michael Schaller, "Altered States: The United States and Japan During the 1960's," in Kunz, ed., *Diplomacy of the Crucial Decade*, pp. 269-272.
66. Telegram (unnumbered), Tokyo to Department of State, 28 January 1964, NSF, Country File, Box 250 (1 of 2), Japan memos, vol. I, LBJL.
67. "Department of State Policy on the Future of Japan," p. 58, 26 June 1964, NSF, Country File, Box 250 (1 of 2), Japan cables, vol. II (2 of 2), LBJL.
68. CIA Special Report, "The China Problem in Japanese Politics," NSF, Country File, Box 237, China memos, vol. I, LBJL.
69. Record of Rusk-Patrick Gordon Walker meeting, 8 December 1964, FO 371/175095, PRO.
70. Telegram (unnumbered), Tokyo to Department of State, 27 January 1964, NSF, Country File, Box 250 (1 of 2), Japan cables, vol. I, LBJL.
71. Memorandum of Conversation, 30 November 1964, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, vol. 30, p. 139.
72. Memorandum for the Record, 18 November 1964, *Ibid.*, p. 128.
73. Kochavi, *A Conflict Perpetuated*, pp. 220-221.
74. Burr and Richelson, "Whether to 'Strangle the Baby,' " p. 96.
75. Denney to Rusk, 6 May 1963, RG 59, Records of the Policy Planning Council, 1963-64, Lot 70D199, Box 250, NA.
76. Hughes to Rusk, 11 September 1963, *Ibid.*
77. Memorandum of Conversation, Rusk-Ambassador J. Herman van Roijen, 1 November 1963, RG 59, Central Files, 1963, Box 3717, DEF CHICOM, NA.
78. Rostow to Harriman, 30 July 1963, Papers of W. Averell Harriman, Box 518, USSR: General, 1963, Library of Congress.
79. "A Chinese Communist Nuclear Detonation and Nuclear Capability: Major Conclusions and Key Issues," pp. 1-3, 15 October 1963, RG 59, Records of the Policy Planning Council, 1963-64, Lot 70D199, Box 250, NA.

80. "An Exploration of the Possible Bases for Action Against the Chinese Communist Nuclear Facilities," p. 5, enclosed in Rostow to M. Bundy, 22 April 1964, NSF, Country File, Box 237, China memos, vol. I, LBJL.
81. *Ibid.*, p. 32.
82. *Ibid.*, pp. 11-12.
83. *Ibid.*, p. 26.
84. *Ibid.*, pp. 3, 32.
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86. Rostow to LBJ, 17 April 1964, NSF, Country File, Box 237, China memos, vol. I, LBJL.
87. Memorandum of Conversation, 16 April 1964, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, vol. 30, p. 50.
88. Burr and Richelson, "Whether to 'Strangle the Baby,' " pp. 78, 83.
89. Rostow to M. Bundy, 22 April 1964, NSF, Country File, Box 237, China memos, vol. I, LBJL.
90. *FRUS*, 1964-1968, vol. 30, p. 24, n. 7.
91. *Ibid.*, p. 24, n. 8.
92. Memorandum for the Record, 20 April 1964, *Ibid.*, pp. 56-57.
93. CINCPAC to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, July 1964, NSF, Country File, Box 237, China cables, vol. I, LBJL.
94. Rostow to Rusk, 26 September 1964, RG 59, Records of the Ambassador at Large Llewellyn E. Thompson, 1961-1970, Lot 67D2, Box 4, NA.
95. Komer to M. Bundy, 18 September 1964, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, vol. 30, p. 97.
96. Burr and Richelson, "Whether to 'Strangle the Baby,' " p. 79.
97. Memorandum for the Record, 15 September 1964, NSF, Memos to the President, Box 2, vol. VI (1 of 2), LBJL.
98. Quoted in Kaiser, *American Tragedy*, p. 354.
99. Burr and Richelson, "Whether to 'Strangle the Baby,' " p. 88.
100. Memorandum of Conversation, 25 September 1964, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, vol. 30, p. 105.
101. "Program of Action: A Chinese Communist Nuclear Detonation and Capability," enclosed in Rostow to M. Bundy, 25 September 1964, RG 59, Records of the Policy Planning Council, 1963-64, Lot 70D199, Box 250, NA.
102. Memorandum for the Record, 29 September 1964, RG 59, Records of the Ambassador at Large Llewellyn E. Thompson, 1961-1970, Lot 67D2, Box 26, NA; Burr and Richelson, "Whether to 'Strangle the Baby,' " pp. 89-90.

103. Summary Notes of 543rd NSC Meeting, 17 October 1964, NSF, National Security Council Meetings (hereafter NSCM), Box 1, vol. 3, tab 25, LBJL.
104. "Statement by the President on Chinese Communist Detonation of Nuclear Devices," 16 October 1964, RG 59, Records of the Policy Planning Council, 1963-64, Lot 70D199, Box 250, NA.
105. Lindsey Grant to William Bundy, 23 October 1964, RG 59, Central Files, 1964-66, Box 1615, DEF 12-1 CHICOM, NA.
106. Hughes to Rusk, 28 October 1964, NSF, Committee File, Box 5, China, LBJL. See as well Carl Rowan to LBJ, 19 October 1964, NSF, Country File, Box 290, United Nations Chinese Representation, LBJL.
107. Waldron, "From Nonexistent to Almost Normal: U.S.-China Relations in the 1960's," in Kunz, ed., *Diplomacy of the Crucial Decade*, p. 236.
108. Telegram, no. 1125, Department of State to Tokyo, 23 October 1964, RG 59, Central Files, 1964-66, Box 2012, POL 16 INDEPENDENCE CHICOM, NA; Airgram, no. A-692, Tokyo to Department of State, 10 December 1964, RG 59, Central Files, 1964-66, Box 1614, DEF 12-1 CHICOM, NA; Telegram, no. 2044, Tokyo to Department of State, 28 December 1964, NSF, Country File, Box 253 (1 of 2), Sato's Visit: Memos & Cables (2 of 4), LBJL.
109. Hughes to the Acting Secretary, 10 November 1964, NSF, Country File, Box 250 (1 of 2), Japan memos, vol. II (2 of 2), LBJL.
110. St. Amour, "Sino-Canadian Relations," in Evans and Frolic, eds., *Reluctant Adversaries*, p. 111.
111. Don Page, "The Representation of China in the United Nations: Canadian Perspectives and Initiatives, 1949-1971," in *Ibid.*, p. 92.
112. Harlan Cleveland to George Ball, 31 October 1964, pp. 2-4, NSF, Country File, Box 290, United Nations Chinese Representation 10/65, LBJL.
113. George F. Kennan, "A Fresh Look at Our China Policy," *New York Times Magazine*, 22 November 1964, p. 144.
114. Foot, "Redefinitions," in Ross and Changbin, eds., *Re-examining the Cold War*, p. 278. For a discussion of the 1950's, see Stanley D. Bachrack, *The Committee of One Million: "China Lobby" Politics, 1953-1971* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), chs. 3-7.
115. Quoted in Waldron, "From Nonexistent," in Kunz, ed., *Diplomacy of the Crucial Decade*, p. 235.
116. James C. Thomson, Jr. to M. Bundy, 2 June 1965, NSF, Country File, Box 238, China memos, vol. III, LBJL.
117. Kusnitz, *Public Opinion and Foreign Policy*, p. 109.
118. Foot, "Redefinitions," in Ross and Changbin, eds., *Re-examining the Cold War*, p. 277.
119. Thomson to Douglass Cater, 24 November 1964, White House Central Files (hereafter WHCF), Box 10, Federal Government, LBJL.
120. Kusnitz, *Public Opinion and Foreign Policy*, p. 112.
121. Grant to W. Bundy, 30 October 1964, RG 59, Subject Files of the Office of Asian Communist Affairs, 1961-73, Lot 71D423, Box 1, NA.

Chapter 3

1. A number of Vietnam statements delivered by senior Johnson officials were compiled by the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations in March 1966 and published in a manual entitled "Background Information Relating to Southeast Asia and Vietnam." This may be located in White House Central File (hereafter WHCF), Countries (CO), Box 8, CO 1-3, LBJL. For references to China's role in Vietnam, see Address by McNamara, 26 March 1964, pp. 119-121; Address by William P. Bundy, 23 January 1965, pp. 145-149; Rusk's news conference, 25 February 1965, pp. 166-167; Address by LBJ, 7 April 1965, pp. 206-207; Speech by LBJ, 13 May 1965, p. 232. See as well F.M. Kail, *What Washington Said: Administration Rhetoric and the Vietnam War: 1949-1969* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), pp. 23-30.
2. Among the more notable volumes covering the 1963-65 Vietnam decisions are Larry Berman, *Planning A Tragedy* (New York: Norton, 1982); Bird, *The Color of Truth*; David DiLeo, *George Ball, Vietnam, and the Rethinking of Containment* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1992); Lloyd C. Gardner, *Pay Any Price: Lyndon Johnson and the Wars for Vietnam* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1995); George C. Herring, *America's Longest War*, Second ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1986); Hunt, *Lyndon Johnson's War*; Kaiser, *American Tragedy*; Khong, *Analogies at War*; Logevall, *Choosing War*; R.B. Smith, *An International History of the Vietnam War*, vol. 2 (London: Macmillan, 1985); R.B. Smith, *An International History of the Vietnam War*, vol. 3 (London: Macmillan, 1991); Brian VanDeMark, *Into the Quagmire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).
3. Logevall, *Choosing War*, pp. 291-292, 388-389
4. John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 212.
5. Garson, "Lyndon B. Johnson and the China Enigma," pp. 63-64, 78.
6. For example, see VanDeMark, *Into the Quagmire*, pp. 121-122; Kaiser, *American Tragedy*, pp. 361-362; Schulzinger, "The Johnson Administration, China, and the Vietnam War," in Ross and Changbin, eds., *Re-examining the Cold War*.
7. Nancy Bernkopf Tucker and Rosemary Foot have touched only briefly on this topic. See Nancy Bernkopf Tucker, "Threats, Opportunities, and Frustrations in East Asia," in Cohen and Tucker, eds., *Lyndon Johnson Confronts the World*, pp. 99-111; Foot, "Redefinitions," in Ross and Changbin, eds., *Re-examining the Cold War*, pp. 284-285.
8. Foot, "Redefinitions," in Ross and Changbin, eds., *Re-examining the Cold War*, pp. 277-278; Bachrack, *The Committee of One Million*, pp. 210-217; Kunitz, *Public Opinion and Foreign Policy*, p. 112.
9. McGeorge Bundy once playfully referred to his aide as "Mao Tse-Thomson." Bird, *Color of Truth*, p. 346.
10. James Thomson OH, p. 5, LBJL.
11. Telephone interview with author, 18 February 2002.
12. Thomson to M. Bundy, 28 October 1964, NSF, Country File, Box 238, China memos, vol. II, LBJL.
13. Thomson to Cater, 24 November 1964, WHCF, Federal Government, Box 10, LBJL.
14. Komer to M. Bundy, 23 November 1964, NSF, Country File, Box 238, China memos, vol. II, LBJL.
15. Airgram, no. A-309, Hong Kong to Department of State, 6 November 1964, NSF, Country File, Box 238, China cables, vol. II, LBJL. Intelligence analyses, which were more widely circulated among senior officials, tended to downplay divisions among China's leaders and to accentuate the uniformity of their radical worldviews. A March 1964 CIA report, for example, concluded that the first generation of leaders

were all “intensely nationalistic and appear deeply committed to a militant brand of Communism.” As for the leadership-in-waiting, the potentially more pragmatic elements to whom Rice wanted to appeal, their constant subjection to Party indoctrination and limited contact with the outside world likely made them just as dogmatic and impervious to compromise. CIA memo, “The Chinese Communist Leadership and the Succession Problem,” 19 March 1964, NSF, Country File, Box 237, China memos, vol. I, LBJL. See as well NIE 13-9-65, “Communist China’s Foreign Policy,” p. 13, 5 May 1965, NSF, National Intelligence Estimates (hereafter NIE), Box 4, Communist China (2 of 2), LBJL.

16. Stevenson to LBJ, 18 November 1964, in Walter Johnson, ed., *The Papers of Adlai E. Stevenson*, vol. VIII (Boston: Little, Brown, 1979), pp. 634-635.

17. Cleveland to Ball, 31 October 1964, NSF, Country File, Box 290, United Nations Chinese Representation 10/65, LBJL.

18. Telephone interview with author, 18 February 2002. In 1991, Bundy stated that, like many in the administration, he viewed China at the time as an “overpowering mass threat.” Quoted in Ted Gittinger, ed., *The Johnson Years: A Vietnam Roundtable* (Austin: Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs, 1993), p. 9.

19. W. Bundy to Arnold Heeney, 21 December 1964, RG 59, Subject Files of the Office of the Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, 1961-74, Lot 85D240, Box 10, NA.

20. W. Bundy to Rusk, 2 November 1964, RG 59, Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs, Office of the Assistant Secretary: Subject Files, 1964, Lot 66D93, Box 2, NA.

21. W. Bundy to Rusk, 16 June 1965, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, vol. 30, p. 175.

22. Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, Revised ed. (New York: Penguin Books, 1991), p. 356; Bird, *Color of Truth*, p. 275.

23. Roger Hilsman OH, Interview 1, p. 38, LBJL.

24. An excellent illustration of LBJ’s deference to his aides on China policy came in an unremarkable, yet revealing, telephone conversation with McGeorge Bundy on 18 April 1964. While being briefed on a major foreign policy address he was to deliver two days later, which included a brief statement on U.S. attitudes toward Beijing, Johnson asked his National Security Adviser, “What are we saying about Communist China,” explaining that “I haven’t seen it in the speech.” Bundy reiterated the hard-line stance: “The speech says that if there’s going to be any change [in U.S. policy toward the PRC], it’s they who’ll have to change.” Almost offhandedly, the President remarked, “Yeah, that’s good. That’s alright.” Telcon, LBJ-M. Bundy, 18 April 1964, Recordings of Telephone Conversations and Meetings, WH6404.10 PNO 19, LBJL. In having to ask Bundy what he would be saying about China, this brief exchange underscores Johnson’s passive role in the formulation of China policy during the early months of his administration. It also corroborates Robert Dallek’s characterization of the Johnson-Bundy relationship as that of an eager student taking notes from an at times patronizing professor. See Dallek, *Flawed Giant*, pp. 89-90.

25. Marshall Green, quoted in Nancy Bernkopf Tucker, ed., *China Confidential: American Diplomats and Sino-American Relations, 1945-1996* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), p. 196; Thomson, “On the Making,” pp. 230-231; James Thomson OH, pp. 38-39, LBJL.

26. Thomson to J.C.T. Files, 6 May 1964, JCT Papers, Box 9, 12/13/63 San Francisco: Thomson Notes on Genesis and Reaction, JFKL.

27. Bird, *Color of Truth*, p. 18.

28. Telephone interview with author, 18 February 2002.

29. M. Bundy to *New York Times* (Draft Letter), 4 June 1967, NSF, Name File, Box 7, Rostow memos (2 of 2), LBJL.
30. Summary Notes of NSC Meeting, 17 October 1964, NSF, NSCM, Box 1, vol. III, tab 25, LBJL.
31. Telegram, no. 1333, Moscow to Department of State, 28 October 1964, NSF, Country File, Box 219, USSR Cables, vol. VI, LBJL. The State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research had no doubt that "the retirement of Khrushchev will be interpreted by the Chinese as a victory for their policies." Hughes to Rusk, 15 October 1964, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, vol. 14, p. 121.
32. Record of Rusk-Gordon Walker Talks, 26 October 1964, FO 371/175977, PRO.
33. Hughes to Rusk, 27 November 1964, NSF, Country File, Box 238, China Memos, vol. II, LBJL.
34. Meeting on China Study, 27 August 1965, NSF, Agency File, Box 61, Special State-Defense Study Group re China, LBJL.
35. Memorandum of Conversation, Rusk-Halvard M. Lange, 13 November 1964, RG 59, Central Files, 1964-66, Box 1898, POL 1 ASIA SE, NA.
36. Rusk to Department of State, 16 December 1963, *FRUS*, 1961-1963, vol. 22, pp. 409-410. Also see Rusk's remarks in Minutes of Cabinet meeting, 18 June 1965, p. 28, Cabinet Papers, Box 3, LBJL.
37. Remarks on Foreign Affairs at the Associated Press Luncheon in New York City, 20 April 1964, *Public Papers of the Presidents: Lyndon B. Johnson* (hereafter *PPP:LBJ*), 1963-1964, vol. 1, p. 499.
38. Circular Telegram from the Department of State to Certain Posts, 5 September 1964, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, vol. 30, p. 85.
39. David Dean to Marshall Green, 21 August 1964, RG 59, Subject Files of the Office of Asian Communist Affairs, 1961-73, Lot 72D41, Box 2, NA.
40. Telegram (unnumbered), Department of State to the American Embassy in Bangui, 7 October 1964, NSF, Country File, Box 290, United Nations Chinese Representation 10/65, LBJL; G. Mennen Williams and W. Bundy to Rusk, 19 October 1964, RG 59, Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs, Office of the Assistant Secretary: Subject Files, 1964, Lot 66D93, Box 1, NA.
41. WPB Papers, ch. 21, p. 10, Box 1, LBJL.
42. National Policy Paper, "The Republic of China," 11 September 1964, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, vol. 30, p. 93.
43. Meeting with the President on United Nations Matters, 18 November 1964, *Ibid.*, pp. 126-127. In a similar vein, Walt Rostow argued that the U.S. could only "acquiesce in Chinese Communist entrance into the UN after Southeast Asia was pacified on terms which preserve the independence of Laos and South Viet Nam [sic]." Walt Rostow to Rusk, 17 October 1964, NSF, Vietnam Country File, Box 54, Southeast Asia memos, vol. IV, LBJL.
44. M. Bundy to LBJ, 16 December 1964, NSF, Memos to the President, Box 2, vol. VII (1 of 2), LBJL.
45. For Rusk's consultations with the Canadians, see Memcon, Canadian Views on Chinese Representation at the UN, 14 November 1964, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, vol. 30, pp. 124-125; with the British, see Record of Rusk-Gordon Walker Talks, 26 October 1964, FO 371/175977, PRO and Record of Rusk-Gordon Walker Meeting, 7 December 1964, PREM 13/104, PRO.
46. St. Amour, "Sino-Canadian Relations," in Evans and Frolic, eds., *Reluctant Adversaries*, p. 113.

47. Kaufman, *Confronting Communism*, pp. 178-179.
48. Memcon, Rusk-Sato meeting, 12 January 1965, NSF, Country File, Box 253 (1 of 2), Sato's Visit: Memos & Cables (3 of 4), LBJL. See as well Rusk to LBJ, undated, NSF, Country File, Box 253 (1 of 2), Sato's Visit Briefing Book 1/11-14/65 (1 of 2), LBJL.
49. Rusk to LBJ, 28 June 1965, NSF, Memos to the President, Box 3, vol. XI (1 of 3), LBJL. James Thomson was scornful of Rusk's suggestion, dismissing it as "irrelevant and inadequate." Thomson to M. Bundy, 29 June 1965, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, vol. 30, p. 177.
50. M. Bundy to LBJ, 24 August 1965, NSF, Memos to the President, Box 4, vol. XIII (3 of 3), LBJL. Bundy makes reference to the 29 June luncheon in this memorandum.
51. Tucker, ed., *China Confidential*, p. 202.
52. Bachrack, *The Committee*, p. 211.
53. VanDeMark, *Into the Quagmire*, p. 180.
54. Bachrack, *The Committee*, p. 222.
55. NIE 13-64, "Economic Prospects for Communist China," 28 January 1964, NSF, NIE, Box 4, Communist China (2 of 2), LBJL.
56. President's Meeting with Congressional Leadership, 22 January 1965, NSF, Files of McGeorge Bundy, Box 18, Miscellaneous Meetings, vol. I, LBJL.
57. SNIE 13-4-63, "Possibilities of Greater Militancy by the Chinese Communists," 31 July 1963, NSF, NIE, Box 4, Communist China (2 of 2), LBJL; NIE 13-3-65, "Communist China's Military Establishment," 10 March 1965, *Ibid*; NIE 13-9-65, "Communist China's Foreign Policy," 5 May 1965, *Ibid*; "Communist China-Long Range Study," June 1966, NSF, Country File, Box 245, LBJL.
58. "Communist China -Long Range Study," pp. 35-38, 203.
59. Robert S. McNamara, *In Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam* (New York: Times Books, 1995), p. 33.
60. NIE 13-9-65, "Communist China's Foreign Policy," 5 May 1965, pp. 2, 4-5. Underlying this view was the widespread ethnocentric sentiment that the PRC's leadership placed little value on human life and was therefore willing to incur substantial losses in pursuit of external objectives. Kochavi, *A Conflict Perpetuated*, p. 191.
61. McNamara, *In Retrospect*, p. 215; Cohen, *Dean Rusk*, p. 285; WPB Papers, ch. 32, p. 2, Box 1, LBJL; Hughes to Rusk, 24 September 1965, NSF, Country File, Box 238, China memos, vol. IV, LBJL.
62. Freedman, *Kennedy's Wars*, pp. 367-397; Kaiser, *American Tragedy*, pp. 213-279; William J. Rust, *Kennedy in Vietnam* (New York: De Capo Press, 1985); Herring, *America's Longest War*, ch. 3.
63. A CIA estimate produced in February 1964 concluded that Saigon "has at best an even chance of withstanding the insurgency menace during the next few weeks or months." SNIE 50-64, "Short-Term Prospects in Southeast Asia," 12 February 1964, NSF, NIE, Box 7, Southeast Asia, LBJL.
64. Telcon, LBJ-M. Bundy, 27 May 1964, in Beschloss, ed., *Taking Charge*, p. 370. For the Pentagon's enthusiasm for military pressure against Hanoi in early 1964, see Kaiser, *American Tragedy*, pp. 298-304.

65. Herring, *America's Longest War*, p. 108; Telcon, LBJ-McNamara, 20 February 1964, in Beschloss, ed., *Taking Charge*, p. 249; Telcon, LBJ-M. Bundy, 2 March 1964, *Ibid.*, p. 263; Memorandum of Conversation, 4 March 1964, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, vol. 1, p. 129.
66. In May 1964, LBJ noted that Rusk, McNamara, Bundy, Harriman, and Cyrus Vance were just "like MacArthur in Korea—they don't believe that the Chinese Communists will come into this thing." Telcon, LBJ-Richard Russell, 27 May 1964, in Beschloss, ed., *Taking Charge*, pp. 364-365.
67. The Joint Chiefs of Staff to McNamara, 2 March 1964, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, vol. 1, p. 117.
68. SNIE 50-2-64, "Probable Consequences of Certain US Actions with Respect to Vietnam and Laos," 23 May 1964, NSF, Files of McGeorge Bundy, Box 18, Meetings on Southeast Asia, vol. I, LBJL.
69. CIA memo, "Chinese Communists Brace For Possible Spread of Indochina War," 12 February 1965, NSF, Vietnam Country File, Box 48, Southeast Asia Special Intelligence Material, vol. III, LBJL.
70. Rostow to Rusk, 15 February 1964, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, vol. 1, pp. 81-82. In July 1965, General Earle Wheeler, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, stated to LBJ that "the one thing all NVN [North Vietnamese] fear is Chinese. For them to invite Chinese volunteers is to invite China's taking over NVN." Meeting on Vietnam, 22 July 1965, Meeting Notes File, Box 1, LBJL.
71. Bundy's emphasis. WPB Papers, ch. 17, pp. 22-24, Box 1, LBJL.
72. Rostow's emphasis. Rostow to LBJ, 7 June 1964, NSF, Vietnam Country File, Box 54, Southeast Asia memos, vol. III (B), LBJL.
73. McNamara to LBJ, 16 March 1964, NSF, NSCM, vol. I, tab 5, LBJL. See as well SNIE 50-64, "Short-Term Prospects in Southeast Asia," 12 February 1964, NSF, NIE, Box 7, Southeast Asia, LBJL.
74. McNamara, *In Retrospect*, p. 33.
75. Sherman Kent to McCone, 9 June 1964, NSF, Vietnam Country File, Box 54, Southeast Asia memos, vol. III (B), LBJL.
76. Meeting on South Vietnam, 9 September 1964, NSF, Memos to the President, Box 2, vol. VI (1 of 2), LBJL.
77. This critical point is made in Smith, *An International History*, vol. 2, p. 203. Smith's multi-volume work is one of only very few studies that properly places the Vietnam War in a regional context.
78. Michael V. Forrestal to W. Bundy, 4 November 1964, Papers of Paul C. Warnke: John McNaughton Files, Box 8, Book II: Department of State Material (1964), LBJL.
79. J.D. Legge, *Sukarno: A Political Biography*, Second ed. (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1984), pp. 320-328; Michael Leifer, *Indonesia's Foreign Policy* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1983), pp. 54-55.
80. Leifer, *Indonesia's Foreign Policy*, p. 56.
81. Brands, *The Wages of Globalism*, p. 156; Ang Cheng Guan, "The Johnson Administration and 'Confrontation,'" *Cold War History* 2, no. 3 (April 2002), p. 111; Matthew Jones, "U.S. Relations with Indonesia, the Kennedy-Johnson Transition, and the Vietnam Connection, 1963-1965," *Diplomatic History* 26, no. 2 (Spring 2002), pp. 249-257.
82. Rusk to LBJ, 6 January 1964, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, vol. 26, p. 6; M. Bundy to LBJ, 7 January 1964, *Ibid.*, pp. 13-14; Rusk to LBJ, 29 June 1964, *Ibid.*, pp. 116-117. For further discussion of the internal debate over aid to Indonesia in early 1964, see Jones, "U.S. Relations with Indonesia," pp. 261-265.

83. Current Intelligence Memorandum, 20 August 1964, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, vol. 26, p. 136. For similar assessments, see Marshall Green to Rusk, 19 August 1964, *Ibid.*, p. 131; Komer to LBJ, 3 September 1964, NSF, Country File, Box 246, Indonesia memos, vol. III, LBJL.

84. Memorandum of Conversation, 27 October 1964, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, vol. 26, p. 175. This perception was widespread. For example, see Ellsworth Bunker to LBJ, undated, *Ibid.*, p. 255; Marshall Green, *Indonesia: Crisis and Transformation, 1965-1968* (Washington, D.C.: The Compass Press, 1990), p. 25. The PKI's relations with Beijing during this period are covered in David Mozingo, *Chinese Policy Toward Indonesia, 1949-1967* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1976), pp. 216-220. Even as the PKI's line of a peaceful transfer of power to socialism in Indonesia clashed with China's philosophy, Beijing was willing to overlook these ideological differences to gain the party's support in the Sino-Soviet dispute. The PKI, in turn, tilted toward China in 1963 because it was alienated by Moscow's pursuit of détente with the West.

85. CIA memorandum, "Principal Problems and Prospects in Indonesia," 26 January 1965, NSF, Country File, Box 246, Indonesia memos, vol. III, LBJL; George Ball to LBJ, undated, NSF, Country File, Box 247, Indonesia memos, vol. IV, LBJL; WPB Papers, ch. 28, p. 12, Box 1, LBJL; Smith, *An International History*, vol. 3, p. 50; Green, *Crisis and Transformation*, p. 12; Rizal Sukma, *Indonesia and China: The Politics of a Troubled Relationship* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 32. Washington likely exaggerated the degree of convergence between Jakarta and Beijing. Mozingo writes that the 1963-65 relationship was inherently unstable, held together only by shared opposition to the creation of Malaysia. See Mozingo, *Chinese Policy*, pp. 194, 220-230.

86. Report from Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker to President Johnson, undated, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, vol. 26, pp. 255-263.

87. NIE 54/55-65, "Prospects for Indonesia and Malaysia," 1 July 1965, *Ibid.*, pp. 270-271.

88. SNIE 55-65, "Prospects for and Strategic Implications of a Communist Takeover in Indonesia," 1 September 1965, *Ibid.*, pp. 289-292.

89. Kenton J. Clymer, "The Perils of Neutrality: The Break in U.S.-Cambodian Relations, 1965," *Diplomatic History* 23, no. 4 (Fall 1999), pp. 612-613.

90. Smith, *An International History*, vol. 2, p. 204; Milton Osborne, *Sihanouk: Prince of Light, Prince of Darkness* (St. Leonards, Australia: Allen & Unwin, 1994), pp. 161-162.

91. *FRUS*, 1964-1968, vol. 27, p. 260, n. 3.

92. Telegram from the Embassy in Cambodia to the Department of State, 26 March 1964, *Ibid.*, p. 289. For Sihanouk's hostility toward Vietnam and Thailand, see Osborne, *Sihanouk*, pp. 107-108, 151-155.

93. Telegram, no. 517, Department of State to Phnom Penh, 8 February 1964, NSF, Country File, Box 236, Cambodia cables, vol. I (1 of 3), LBJL. See as well Clifford L. Alexander, Jr. to M. Bundy, 6 December 1963, NSF, Country File, Box 236, Cambodia memos, vol. II, LBJL; Telegram, no. 990, Bangkok to Department of State, 28 December 1963, NSF, Country File, Box 282, Thailand memos, vol. I, LBJ. For a discussion of Cambodia as an irritant in U.S.-Thai relations, see Arne Kislenko, "Bamboo in the Wind: United States Foreign Policy and Thailand During the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations, 1961-1969," Ph.D. Dissertation (University of Toronto, 2000), pp. 192-196.

94. Telegram from the Department of State to the Embassy in the United Kingdom, 22 March 1964, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, vol. 27, p. 285.

95. Telegram, no. 737, Phnom Penh to Department of State, 30 January 1964, NSF, Country File, Box 236, Cambodia cables, vol. I (1 of 3), LBJL; Telegram, no. 775, Phnom Penh to Department of State, 12 February 1964, RG 59, Central Files, 1964-66, Box 1615, DEF 12-1 CHICOM, NA.

96. Clymer, "The Perils of Neutrality," pp. 620, 628-630.
97. CIA report, "The Situation in Cambodia," 20 December 1963, NSF, Country File, Box 236, Cambodia cables, vol. I (2 of 3), LBJL; Telegram, no. 546, Phnom Penh to Department of State, 19 December 1963, Ibid; Rusk to McCone, 30 June 1964, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, vol. 27, p. 318; Thomson to LBJ, 28 December 1964, Ibid., p. 338; Smith, *An International History*, vol. 3, p. 110.
98. Alf E. Bergesen to W. Bundy, 14 December 1964, RG 59, Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs, Office of the Assistant Secretary: Subject Files, 1964, Lot 66D93, Box 1, NA.
99. S.A. Loftus, Jr. to John McNaughton, 30 May 1964, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, vol. 27, pp. 584-586; Kislenko, "Bamboo in the Wind," pp. 179-181.
100. Kislenko, "Bamboo in the Wind," pp. 182-183.
101. Joint Chiefs of Staff to McNamara, 23 September 1964, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, vol. 27, p. 609.
102. Martin's emphasis. Memorandum for the Record, 1 June 1964, Ibid., pp. 590-591.
103. Memorandum of Conversation, 11 December 1964, RG 59, Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs, Office of the Assistant Secretary: Subject Files, 1964, Lot 66D93, Box 1, NA. See as well Kislenko, "Bamboo in the Wind," p. 181.
104. Kislenko, "Bamboo in the Wind," p. 180.
105. For example, see W. Bundy to McNaughton, 24 April 1965, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, vol. 27, pp. 625-626. The insurgency is discussed in Kislenko, "Bamboo in the Wind," pp. 217-220.
106. Telegram, no. 948, Bangkok to Department of State, 20 January 1965, NSF, Country File, Box 282, Thailand cables, vol. II, LBJL; CIA memorandum, "The Threat of Communist Subversion in Thailand," 10 September 1965, NSF, Country File, Box 283, Thailand memos, vol. III, LBJL; Memorandum for the Record, 29 January 1965, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, vol. 27, pp. 613-615.
107. CIA memorandum, "The Threat of Communist Subversion in Thailand," 10 September 1965.
108. Memorandum for the Record, 24 November 1964, NSF, Files of McGeorge Bundy, Box 18, Miscellaneous Meetings, vol. I, LBJL.
109. W. Bundy to Rusk, 6 January 1965, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, vol. 2, pp. 31-32. Bundy later contended, "If it [Vietnam] had stood alone, I have no doubt whatever that the United States would have pulled back and said 'enough'...[however] it was judged that failure to act would mean a dangerous unravelling of the balance of power in East Asia." WPB Papers, ch. 28, p. 1, Box 1, LBJL.
110. M. Bundy to LBJ, 27 January 1965, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, vol. 2, p. 96.
111. M. Bundy to LBJ, 7 February 1965, Ibid., p. 184.
112. NIE 13-9-65, "Communist China's Foreign Policy," 5 May 1965, NSF, NIE, Box 4, Communist China (2 of 2), LBJL. This dimension of the Chinese threat is further discussed in Annex V, "Chinese Communist Efforts to Expand Their Influence By Means Short of Overt Aggression, and Free World Counteraction," in "Communist China -Long Range Study," June 1966, NSF, Country File, Box 245, LBJL.

113. Quoted in Lloyd C. Gardner, "Fighting Vietnam: The Russian-American Conundrum," in Lloyd C. Gardner and Ted Gittinger, eds., *International Perspectives on Vietnam* (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 2000), p. 31.
114. Paper by the Under Secretary of State, undated, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, vol. 3, p. 110.
115. See Ball's remarks in Meeting on Vietnam, 21 July 1965, Meeting Notes File, Box 1, LBJL.
116. Telcon, Ball-James Reston, 1 March 1966, Papers of George W. Ball, Box 2, China (Peking), LBJL.
117. William Bundy, quoted in DiLeo, *Ball, Vietnam, and the Rethinking of Containment*, p. 121.
118. Hitherto, the only effort that indirectly looks at this angle is Gardner, "Fighting Vietnam," in Gardner and Gittinger, eds., *International Perspectives on Vietnam*.
119. WPB Papers, ch. 7, p. 7, Box 1, LBJL.
120. This episode is recounted in Telegram, no. 437, Vientiane to Department of State, 3 November 1965, enclosed in M. Bundy to LBJ, 3 November 1965, NSF, Memos to the President, Box 5, vol. XVI (2 of 3), LBJL.
121. Khrushchev's Vietnam policy in the 1960's is covered in Ilya V. Gaiduk, *The Soviet Union and the Vietnam War* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1996), pp. 3-19, and Douglas Pike, *Vietnam and the Soviet Union: Anatomy of an Alliance* (Boulder: Westview, 1987), pp. 45-49, 73-74.
122. Gaiduk, *The Soviet Union and the Vietnam War*, p. 27.
123. WPB Papers, ch. 21, pp. 9, 19, Box 1, LBJL; "Communist China (Short Range Report)," Section I, p. 6, 30 April 1965, NSF, Agency File, Box 61, LBJL; Hughes to Acting Secretary, 12 May 1965, NSF, Country File, Box 238, China memos, vol. III, LBJL; SNIE 10-9-65, "Communist and Free World Reactions to Possible US Course of Action," 23 July 1965, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, vol. 3, p. 229.
124. M. Bundy to LBJ, 3 November 1965, NSF, Memos to the President, Box 5, vol. XVI (2 of 3), LBJL. For a similar view, see Special Report Prepared in the CIA, "The Soviet Union Since Khrushchev," 9 April 1965, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, vol. 14, pp. 284-285. See as well Dumbrell, *President Lyndon Johnson and Soviet Communism*, pp. 103-104.
125. Telegram, no. 2377, Moscow to Department of State, 15 February 1965, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, vol. 14, p. 241; Special Report Prepared in the CIA, "The Soviet Union Since Khrushchev," 9 April 1965, *Ibid.*, p. 278; Policy Planning Council memorandum, "Soviet Policy in the Light of the Vietnam Crisis," 15 February 1965, NSF, Country File, Box 220, USSR memos, vol. VIII, LBJL.
126. Telegram, Moscow to Department of State, 17 April 1965, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, vol. 14, p. 286.
127. Summary Notes of 550th NSC Meeting, 26 March 1965, NSF, NSCM, Box 1, vol. III, tab 32, LBJL.
128. SNIE 10-3-65, "Communist Reactions to Possible US Actions," 11 February 1965, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, vol. 2, p. 245; "Communist China - Long Range Study," p. 38, June 1966, NSF, Country File, Box 245, LBJL.
129. Gaiduk, *The Soviet Union and the Vietnam War*, p. 19.
130. M. Bundy to LBJ, 15 July 1965, NSF, Memos to the President, Box 4, vol. XII (2 of 3), LBJL; Telegram, no. 216, Moscow to Department of State, 21 July 1965, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, vol. 14, p. 313.

131. Background Paper, "Soviet Bloc Situation," 4 January 1965, NSF, Country File, Box 253 (1 of 2), Sato's Visit: Briefing Book (1 of 2), LBJL.
132. Telegram, no. 2920, Moscow to Department of State, 6 April 1965, NSF, Country File, Box 220, USSR cables, vol. VIII, LBJL. See as well M. Bundy to LBJ, 7 June 1965, NSF, Memos to the President, Box 3, vol. XI (3 of 3), LBJL.
133. Policy Planning Council memorandum, "Soviet Policy in the Light of the Vietnam Crisis," 15 February 1965.
134. Quoted in Gaiduk, *The Soviet Union and the Vietnam War*, p. 26.
135. Logevall, *Choosing War*, pp. 390-393; Berman, *Planning A Tragedy*, p. 146; VanDeMark, *Into the Quagmire*, p. 213; Brands, *The Wages of Globalism*, p. 231; Dallek, *Flawed Giant*, pp. 277-279; Joseph A. Califano, Jr., *The Triumph & Tragedy of Lyndon Johnson* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991), pp. 51-52.
136. Meeting on Vietnam, 21 July 1965, Meeting Notes File, Box 1, LBJL.
137. Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, p. 330.
138. Telcon, LBJ-Drew Pearson, 23 March 1965, in Beschloss, ed., *Reaching For Glory*, p. 238.
139. Quoted in Dallek, *Flawed Giant*, p. 100.
140. WPB Papers, ch. 16, p. 7, Box 1, LBJL; CIA Report, "North Vietnam's Military Establishment," 27 December 1963, NSF, Vietnam Country File, Box 48, Southeast Asia Special Intelligence Material, vol. I, LBJL; CIA Report, "Chinese Communist Military Doctrine," 7, 17 January 1964, NSF, Country File, Box 237, China memos, vol. I, LBJL. Hanoi's tilt toward Beijing is covered in Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars*, pp. 122-129; Yang, "Changes in Mao Zedong's Attitude Toward the Indochina War, 1949-1973," pp. 25-29.
141. NSC Working Group on Vietnam, "Section I: Intelligence Assessment: The Situation in Vietnam," p. 14, 24 November 1964, Papers of Paul C. Warnke: John McNaughton Files, Box 8, Book IV: Department of State Material (1964), LBJL.
142. Summary Notes of 550th NSC Meeting, 26 March 1965, NSF, NSCM, Box 1, vol. III, tab 32, LBJL; Summary Notes of 553rd NSC Meeting, 27 July 1965, *Ibid.*, tab 35, LBJL; Telegram, no. 2224, Department of State to Warsaw, 24 June 1965, NSF, Country File, Box 202, Cabot-Wang Talks, LBJL; Hughes to Acting Secretary, 12 May 1965, NSF, Country File, Box 238, China memos, vol. III, LBJL; CIA memo, "Asian Communist and Soviet Views on the War in Vietnam," 25 May 1965, NSF, Vietnam Country File, Box 50, Southeast Asia Special Intelligence Material, vol. VI (B), LBJL; "Communist China (Short Range Report)," Section II, pp. 5-6, 30 April 1965, NSF, Agency File, Box 61, Special State-Defense Study Group re China, LBJL; Memo, Office of Current Intelligence to John McCone, 23 February 1965, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, vol. 2, pp. 360-361; Raborn to LBJ, 12 June 1965, *Ibid.*, p. 770.
143. Record of Rusk-Harold Wilson Conversation, 14 May 1965, PREM 13/1890, PRO.
144. Meeting on Vietnam, 21 July 1965, Meeting Notes File, Box 1, LBJL.
145. Quoted in Goodwin, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, p. 330.
146. Address at Johns Hopkins University, 7 April 1965, *PPP:LBJ*, 1965, vol. 1, p. 395.
147. McNamara, *In Retrospect*, p. 33.

148. See McNamara's remarks in Minutes of Cabinet Meeting, p. 51, 18 June 1965, Cabinet Papers, Box 3, LBJL; Rusk to LBJ, 1 July 1965, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, vol. 3, pp. 104-105.
149. Joint Chiefs of Staff to McNamara, 11 February 1965, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, vol. 2, p. 241. This assessment was mirrored in SNIE 10-3-65, "Communist Reactions to Possible US Actions," 11 February 1965, *Ibid.*, p. 248.
150. Mike Mansfield to LBJ, 8 February 1965, NSF, Name File, Box 6 (2 of 2), Mansfield Memo & Reply, LBJL.
151. DiLeo, *Ball, Vietnam, and the Rethinking of Containment*, p. 81.
152. Ball to LBJ, 13 February 1965, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, vol. 2, pp. 252-259.
153. Memorandum for the Record, 6 February 1965, *Ibid.*, pp. 159-160.
154. Shapley, *Promise and Power*, pp. 324-325; Mark Clodfelter, *The Limits of Air Power: The American Bombing of North Vietnam* (New York: The Free Press, 1989), pp. 84-85.
155. For the influence of the Korean analogy on LBJ's Vietnam decisions of 1965, see Khong, *Analogies at War*, ch. 5.
156. Telcon, LBJ-Richard Russell, 27 May 1964, in Beschloss, ed., *Taking Charge*, p. 368.
157. McCone to LBJ, undated, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, vol. 2, pp. 521-522.
158. Clodfelter, *The Limits of Air Power*, p. 83.
159. Memorandum of Senator Mansfield, 3 June 1965, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, vol. 2, p. 709. See as well Telcon, LBJ-Drew Pearson, 23 March 1965, in Beschloss, ed., *Reaching for Glory*, pp. 238-239; Telcon, LBJ-Richard Russell, 26 July 1965, *Ibid.*, pp. 408-409.
160. Herring, *LBJ and Vietnam*, p. 36.
161. Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars*, pp. 4, 49-63; Chen, *Mao's China and the Cold War*, pp. 138-144.
162. Chen Jian and Yang Kuisong, "Chinese Politics and the Collapse of the Sino-Soviet Alliance," in Westad, ed., *Brothers in Arms*, pp. 276-277; Yang, "Changes in Mao Zedong's Attitude toward the Indochina War," pp. 21-22.
163. Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars*, pp. 139-152; Chen, *Mao's China and the Cold War*, pp. 209-212. For Mao's dismay with China's internal direction in the first half of the 1960's, there is no better source than MacFarquhar, *Origins of the Cultural Revolution*, vol. 3, esp. pp. 261-473.
164. Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars*, pp. 132-135. For the impact of American intervention in Vietnam on Mao's threat perception in 1964-65, see Odd Arne Westad, "History, Memory, and the Languages of Alliance-Making," in Odd Arne Westad, Chen Jian, Stein Tonnesson, Nguyen Vu Tung, and James G. Hershberg, eds., "77 Conversations Between Chinese and Foreign Leaders On the Wars in Indochina, 1964-1977," CWIHP Working Paper No. 22 (May 1998), p. 9.
165. Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars*, pp. 157-167; Zhai, "Beijing and the Vietnam Peace Talks, 1965-68, pp. 1-10, 16-18.
166. Thomas Robinson, "China Confronts the Soviet Union: Warfare and Diplomacy On China's Inner Asian Frontiers," in Roderick McFarquhar and John K. Fairbank, eds., *The Cambridge History of China*, vol. 15: *The People's Republic, Part 2: Revolutions Within the Chinese Revolution, 1966-1982*

(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 227. See as well MacFarquhar, *Origins of the Cultural Revolution*, vol. 3, p. 376.

167. Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars*, pp. 134-135.

168. Chen, *Mao's China and the Cold War*, pp. 216-221.

169. Quoted in Karnow, *Vietnam*, p. 345.

170. For example, see Telegram from the Embassy in Poland to Department of State, 29 July 1964, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, vol. 30, pp. 73-74; Telegram from the Embassy in Poland to Department of State, 23 September 1964, *Ibid.*, p. 100; Telegram from the Embassy in Poland to the Department of State, 24 February 1965, *Ibid.*, p. 149; M. Bundy to LBJ, 25 May 1965, NSF, Country File, Box 202, Cabot-Wang Talks, LBJL.

171. Warsaw to Department of State, 21 April 1965, NSF, Country File, Box 202, Cabot-Wang Talks, LBJL.

172. "Communist China (Short Range Report)," Section I, pp. 3-4, 30 April 1965, NSF, Agency File, Box 61, LBJL. See as well Raborn to LBJ, 12 June 1965, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, vol. 2, pp. 768-769.

173. "Communist China (Short Range Report)," Section I, pp. 1-2, 20.

174. *Ibid.*, Section I, p. 20.

175. M. Bundy to LBJ, 4 June 1965, NSF, Memos to the President, Box 3, vol. XI (3 of 3), LBJL. For further discussion of Chen Yi's May 1965 message, see James G. Hershberg and Chen Jian, "Reading and Warning the Likely Enemy: China's Signals to the United States About Vietnam in 1965," *International History Review* XXVII, no. 1 (March 2005), pp. 71-79.

176. M. Bundy to LBJ, 6 March 1965, NSF, Memos to the President, Box 3, vol. IX (3 of 3), LBJL.

177. Berman, *Planning A Tragedy*, pp. 103-104, 125-126.

178. McNamara to LBJ, 20 July 1965, NSF, Memos to the President, Box 4, vol. XII (1 of 3), LBJL.

179. Meeting on Vietnam, 22 July 1965, Meeting Notes File, Box 1, LBJL.

180. Herring, *America's Longest War*, p. 140; Dallek, *Flawed Giant*, pp. 276, 284; Berman, *Planning A Tragedy*, pp. 147-149.

181. Meeting on Vietnam, 27 July 1965, NSF, National Security Council History, Box 43, Deployment of Major U.S. Forces to Vietnam, July 1965: vol. VII, tabs 421-438, LBJL.

182. Telcon, LBJ-John Stennis, 18 August 1965, Recordings of Telephone Conversations and Meetings, WH6508.05 PNO 11, LBJL.

183. Record of Rusk-Gordon Walker Meeting, 7 December 1964, PREM 13/104, PRO.

184. Rostow to Rusk, 10 January 1964, NSF, Country File, Box 237, China memos, vol. I, LBJL.

Chapter 4

1. Tucker, "Threats, Opportunities, and Frustrations in East Asia," in Cohen and Tucker, eds., *Lyndon Johnson Confronts the World*, p. 99.
2. For example, see Waldron, "From Nonexistent to Almost Normal," in Kunz, ed., *Diplomacy of the Crucial Decade*; Foot, *Practice of Power*; Garson, "Johnson and the China Enigma"; Schulzinger, "The Johnson Administration, China, and the Vietnam War," in Ross and Changbin, eds., *Re-examining the Cold War*. A very brief reference to the link between bridge building and Vietnam in 1966 is provided in Kaufman, *Confronting Communism*, pp. 196-197.
3. Sumit Ganguly, *Conflict Unending: India-Pakistan Tensions Since 1947* (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2001), pp. 31-43; Dennis Kux, *The United States and Pakistan, 1947-2000: Disenchanted Allies* (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2001), pp. 158-160.
4. For further discussion of JFK's policy dilemmas in South Asia, see Robert J. McMahon, "Choosing Sides in South Asia," in Paterson, ed., *Kennedy's Quest for Victory*; Robert J. McMahon, *The Cold War on the Periphery: The United States, India, and Pakistan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), pp. 272-304; Kux, *United States and Pakistan*, pp. 115-146.
5. McMahon, *Cold War on the Periphery*, pp. 306-322.
6. Ganguly, *Conflict Unending*, pp. 42-43.
7. Andrew Hall Wedeman, *The East Wind Subsides: Chinese Foreign Policy and the Origins of the Cultural Revolution* (Washington, D.C.: Washington Institute Press, 1987), p. 141.
8. CIA memorandum, "Chinese Communist Intentions and Capabilities With Respect to the Kashmir Crisis," 7 September 1965, NSF, Country File, Box 244, China vol. I CODEWORD, LBJL; Hughes to Rusk, 6 September 1965, NSF, Country File, Box 238, China memos, vol. IV, LBJL; SNIE 13-10-65, "Prospects of Chinese Communist Involvement in the Indo-Pakistan War," 16 September 1965, NSF, NIE, Box 4, Communist China (2 of 2), LBJL.
9. Rusk to LBJ, 9 September 1965, NSF, Country File, Box 129, India memos & misc., vol. V (2 of 2), LBJL.
10. *FRUS*, 1964-1968, vol. 30, p. 203, n. 3.
11. McMahon, *Cold War on the Periphery*, p. 331.
12. Wedeman, *The East Wind Subsides*, pp. 144-146.
13. Telegram, no. 479, Hong Kong to Department of State, 22 September 1965, NSF, National Security Council History, Box 24, vol. 3: Indo-Pak War, State Department History [II] (1 of 2), LBJL. See as well WPB Papers, Box 1, ch. 32, p. 1, LBJL.
14. Memorandum of Conversation, 23 September 1965, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, vol. 30, p. 217.
15. Sukma, *Indonesia and China*, p. 33. For the American reaction to these events (and a persuasive case for Washington's passive role in the affair), see H.W. Brands, "The Limits of Manipulation: How the United States Didn't Topple Sukarno," *Journal of American History* 76, no. 3 (December 1989), pp. 785-808.
16. For further discussion, see Mozingo, *Chinese Policy toward Indonesia*, pp. 235-244. The CIA's dismissal of China's implication in the 30 September coup is in CIA memorandum, "Peking's Setbacks in Indonesia," 1 April 1966, NSF, Country File, Box 248, Indonesia memos, vol. VI, LBJL.

17. CIA memorandum, "Indonesian Communist Party," 29 April 1966, Ibid.
18. Memorandum of Conversation, 15 February 1966, Ibid.
19. CIA memorandum, "Peking's Setbacks in Indonesia," 1 April 1966, Ibid.
20. WPB Papers, Box 1, ch. 28, pp. 7-9, LBJL; Airgram, no. A-431, Hong Kong to Department of State, p. 5, 31 December 1965, RG 59, Central Files, 1964-66, Box 2019, POL CHICOM-US, NA. In February 1966, the State Department's INR bureau prepared an extensive list of Beijing's recent reversals in foreign relations. See Denney to Rusk, 25 February 1966, NSF, Country File, Box 239, China cables, vol. V, LBJL. China's effort to convene the conference is discussed in Wedeman, *The East Wind Subsides*, pp. 119-126.
21. CIA memorandum, "China's Growing Isolation in the Communist Movement," 5 August 1966, NSF, Country File, Box 239, China memos, vol. VI (1 of 2), LBJL.
22. CIA memorandum, "The Chinese Position in North Vietnam," 5 August 1966, Ibid; CIA memorandum, "The Deterioration of Sino-Soviet Relations," p. 31, 22 April 1966, NSF, Vietnam Country File, Box 51, Southeast Asia Special Intelligence Material, vol. IX (1 of 2), LBJL; CIA memorandum, "Status of Soviet and Chinese Military Aid to North Vietnam," 3 September 1965, NSF, Vietnam Country File, Box 50, Southeast Asia Special Intelligence Material, vol. VIII, LBJL; Hughes to Rusk, 9 August 1966, RG 59, Central Files, 1964-66, Box 2020, POL CHICOM-VIET N, NA.
23. CIA memorandum, "The Militant and Moderate Elements in the North Vietnamese Communist Party," 1 December 1965, NSF, Vietnam Country File, Box 25, Vietnam memos (A), vol. XLIII, LBJL.
24. Rostow to LBJ, 25 June 1966, NSF, Vietnam Country File, Box 33, Vietnam memos (A), vol. LV (1 of 2), LBJL. See as well William J. Jordan to Rostow, 24 June 1966, NSF, Memos to the President, Box 8 (2 of 2), vol. VII (1 of 2), LBJL.
25. W. Bundy to Rusk, 14 March 1966, RG 59, Central Files, 1964-66, Box 1897, POL ASIA, NA.
26. WPB Papers, Box 1, ch. 32, pp. 37-39, LBJL.
27. William P. Bundy, "The United States and Communist China," *Department of State Bulletin* (hereafter *DSB*), 28 February 1966, p. 313.
28. Gardner, *Pay Any Price*, pp. 269-280; Dallek, *Flawed Giant*, pp. 342-347.
29. Denney to Rusk, 26 January 1966, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, vol. 4, pp. 148-149; Memorandum by John Whitman and Lou Sandine, 29 December 1965, NSF, Vietnam Country File, Box 25, Vietnam memos (B), vol. XLIII, LBJL; Telegram, no. 1287, Hong Kong to Department of State, 8 January 1966, NSF, Country File, Box 239, China cables, vol. V, LBJL; CIA memorandum, "Communist Views of the Present State of the Conflict in Vietnam," 20 January 1966, NSF, Country File, Box 221, USSR memos, vol. XI, LBJL.
30. Notes of Meeting, 28 January 1966, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, vol. 4, p. 179.
31. Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars*, p. 164. For the best discussion of China's obstructionist role in various Vietnam peace initiatives, see Zhai, "Beijing and the Vietnam Peace Talks," CWIHP Working Paper No. 18.
32. Rusk to LBJ, 24 April 1966, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, vol. 4, p. 365.
33. Memorandum of Conversation, Rusk-Paul Hasluck, 11 April 1966, RG 59, Central Files, 1964-66, Box 2006, POL CHICOM 1966, NA.

34. Airgram, no. A-431, Hong Kong to Department of State, p. 2, 31 December 1965, RG 59, Central Files, 1964-66, Box 2019, POL CHICOM-US, NA.
35. Rice to W. Bundy, 2 November 1965, RG 59, Central Files, 1964-66, Box 2006, POL CHICOM 1966, NA.
36. Airgram, no. A-454, Hong Kong to Department of State, pp. 2-4, 6, 7 January 1966, NSF, Country File, Box 239, China cables, vol. V, LBJL.
37. Shapley, *Promise and Power*, pp. 358-359; McNamara, *In Retrospect*, pp. 221-222.
38. McNamara to LBJ, 4 December 1965, NSF, Vietnam Country File, Box 25, Vietnam memos (A), vol. XLIII, LBJL. The analysis from which much of McNamara's report was derived is in Kent to Raborn, 2 December 1965, *Ibid*.
39. CIA memorandum, "Possible Change in Chinese Communist Military Posture Vis-à-vis Vietnam," 17 October 1965, NSF, Vietnam Country File, Box 50, Southeast Asia Special Intelligence Material, vol. VII, LBJL; CIA memorandum, "Chinese Communist Military Presence in North Vietnam," 20 October 1965, *Ibid*.
40. Hughes to Rusk, 3 December 1965, NSF, Vietnam Country File, Box 25, Vietnam memos (A), vol. XLIII, LBJL. See as well Hughes to Rusk, 5 November 1965, *Ibid*; Thomson to M. Bundy, 2 December 1965, *Ibid*. In a front-page article, the *New York Times* reported that several Johnson officials feared that the U.S. and China "may be within months of a direct clash." See "Some U.S. Aides See Risk of Direct Clash With China," *New York Times*, 3 December 1965, p. A1.
41. Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars*, pp. 140-141; Chen, *Mao's China and the Cold War*, pp. 214-215; John W. Garver, "China and the Revisionist Thesis," in William Head and Lawrence E. Grinter, eds., *Looking Back on the Vietnam War: A 1990's Perspective on the Decisions, Combat, and Legacies* (Westport: Praeger, 1993), pp. 110-111.
42. M. Bundy to LBJ, 3 December 1965, NSF, Memos to the President, Box 5, vol. XVII (2 of 3), LBJL. McGeorge Bundy told Johnson that his own thinking on Chinese intervention diverged somewhat from that of his colleagues. He wrote, "[the] Chinese Communists will not fight for South Vietnam but only for what they regard as [the] survival of North Vietnam."
43. W. Bundy to Rusk, 4 December 1965, RG 59, Central Files, 1964-66, Box 2018, POL CHICOM-US, NA.
44. Paul Dudley White to LBJ, 10 August 1965 (enclosure), NSF, Memos to the President, Box 4, vol. XIII (1 of 3), LBJL. For an indispensable insider's account of the 1965 travel initiative and of the political and bureaucratic impediments to China policy reform within the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, see Thomson, "On the Making," esp. pp. 232-238.
45. M. Bundy to LBJ, 24 August 1965, NSF, Memos to the President, Box 4, vol. XIII (1 of 3), LBJL.
46. For Johnson's concern over domestic criticism of the Vietnam War in 1965, see Melvin Small, *Johnson, Nixon, and the Doves* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1988), ch. 2; Dallek, *Flawed Giant*, pp. 257-262, 285-286; Herring, *LBJ and Vietnam*, pp. 125-126.
47. Thomson, "On the Making," pp. 235-238.
48. *FRUS*, 1964-1968, vol. 30, p. 271, n. 2.
49. Frank E. Rogers, "Sino-American Relations and the Vietnam War, 1964-66," *China Quarterly* 66 (June 1976), pp. 307-311; Foot, *Practice of Power*, p. 160. Thomas Robinson traces this understanding to

as early as mid-1965, arguing that at this point China knew that the U.S. “would likely confine its ground activities to the South and...Washington had understood and heeded Chinese warning signals.” See Robinson, “China Confronts the Soviet Union,” in MacFarquhar and Fairbank, eds., *Cambridge History of China*, vol. 15, p. 224.

50. Meeting in the Cabinet Room, 22 January 1966, Meeting Notes File, Box 1, LBJL.

51. Dallek, *Flawed Giant*, pp. 349-350.

52. Ball to LBJ, 25 January 1966, NSF, Vietnam Country File, Box 26, Vietnam memos (A), vol. XLVI, LBJL.

53. Notes of Meeting, 27 January 1966, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, vol. 4, p. 164. Jack Valenti, one of LBJ’S most trusted political aides, also recommended that renewed bombing be done “on a surgical basis –picking out strictly military targets, and avoid, if we can, any target that summons up a direct response from the Chicoms.” Jack Valenti to LBJ, 25 January 1966, *Ibid.*, p. 139.

54. Clodfelter, *The Limits of Air Power*, p. 92.

55. CIA memorandum, “Chinese Communist Military Presence in North Vietnam,” 28 February 1966 (enclosure), NSF, Vietnam Country File, Box 51, Southeast Asia Special Intelligence Material, vol. IX (1 of 2), LBJL; Garver, “China and the Revisionist Thesis,” in Head and Grinter, eds., *Looking Back*, p. 109.

56. Hughes to Rusk, 29 March 1966, NSF, Country File, Box 240, China memos, vol. VI, LBJL. See as well “CPR Statements on Its Encirclement,” RG 59, Briefing Books, 1958-1976, Lot 70D187, Box 26, Secretary’s Appearance Before the House Foreign Affairs Far East Subcommittee, 3/16/66, NA; Telegram, no. 1539, Hong Kong to Department of State, 19 February 1966, NSF, Country File, Box 239, China cables, vol. V, LBJL; Komer to M. Bundy, 16 February 1966, NSF, Files of McGeorge Bundy, Box 14, CHRON File: February 1-28, 1966 (2 of 3), LBJL. A sampling of letters from mainland residents and refugee reports documented the Chinese propaganda preparing the populace for war. See Denney to Rusk, 25 February 1966, JCT Papers, Box 16, Communist China: General, 1/66-2/66, JFKL.

57. Memorandum of Conversation, 22 September 1965, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, vol. 30, pp. 211, 213.

58. Joint Chiefs of Staff to McNamara, 16 November 1965, *Ibid.*, pp. 224-225.

59. Telegram, Taipei to Department of State, 25 January 1966, *Ibid.*, pp. 242-245.

60. Telegram, Department of State to Taipei, 28 January 1966, *Ibid.*, p. 246.

61. *Ibid.*, p. 354, n. 2.

62. Rice to Rostow, 15 April 1966, NSF, Country File, Box 240, China memos, vol. VI, LBJL; Thomson to Rostow, 3 May 1966, NSF, Files of Walt W. Rostow, Box 18, Special Group Memoranda, LBJL.

63. Memorandum for the Record, 8 July 1966, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, vol. 30, p. 355.

64. Memorandum of Conversation, 26 January 1966, Meeting Notes File, Box 1, LBJL.

65. Lyndon B. Johnson, “Viet-Nam: The Struggle To Be Free,” *DSB*, 14 March 1966, p. 393.

66. Telegram, no. 1303, Department of State to Warsaw, 10 March 1966, NSF, Country File, Box 202, Gronouski-Wang Talks 12/65-7/68, LBJL; Telegram, Department of State to Warsaw, 23 May 1966, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, vol. 30, pp. 308-313; Telegram, Department of State to Warsaw, 31 August 1966, *Ibid.*, pp. 374-378.

67. Statement by Secretary Rusk, "United States Policy Toward Communist China," *DSB*, 2 May 1966, pp. 686-695.
68. Robert McNamara, "Security in the Contemporary World," *DSB*, 6 June 1966, pp. 880-881. LBJ's resentment over McNamara's 18 May address in Montreal stemmed primarily from the sense that he was being upstaged by his Defense Secretary's peace posturing. The passage concerning China was in fact consistent with the administration's rhetoric at this time. For further discussion, see Shapley, *Promise and Power*, pp. 383-384; Gardner, *Pay Any Price*, p. 305.
69. Administrative History of the Department of State, Box 3, ch. 7, section C, pp. 49-50, LBJL.
70. "Communist China - Long Range Study," pp. 1-2, June 1966, NSF, Country File, Box 245, LBJL.
71. *Ibid.*, pp. 225-226.
72. *Ibid.*, pp. 216-218.
73. *Ibid.*, Annex IV, "Non-Military Means of Influencing the Chinese Communists," p. 1.
74. Comments on "Communist China: Long Range Study (Interim Report, 1 December 1965)," enclosed in Edwin Reischauer to Thomson, 23 March 1966, JCT Papers, Box 8, Edwin O. Reischauer, 1963-1966, JFKL. Reischauer forcefully repeated this argument in August. See Telegram, Tokyo to State Department, 11 August 1966, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, vol. 30, pp. 366-372.
75. Reischauer to Thomson, 23 March 1966, JCT Papers, Box 8, Edwin O. Reischauer, 1963-1966, JFKL.
76. Schaller, "Altered States," in Kunz, ed., *The Diplomacy of the Crucial Decade*, pp. 262-263.
77. Hayes Redmon to Bill Moyers, 27 December 1965, Office Files of Bill Moyers, Box 11, Memos to the President, LBJL.
78. Quoted in Dallek, *Flawed Giant*, p. 351.
79. Kuznitz, *Public Opinion and Foreign Policy*, p. 114.
80. Randall Bennett Woods, *Fulbright: A Biography* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 412-413; William C. Berman, *William Fulbright and the Vietnam War: The Dissent of a Political Realist* (Kent: Kent State University Press, 1988), pp. 59-60; "Fulbright Warns of U.S.-China War As Growing Peril," *New York Times*, 7 March 1966, p. A1.
81. *China, Vietnam, and the United States: Highlights of the Hearings of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee* (Washington, D.C.: Public Affairs Press, 1966), pp. 16-17. For the administration's summary of the hearings, see David Dean to W. Bundy, 4 April 1966, RG 59, Office of the Country Director for the Republic of China, 1963-1966, Lot 69D28, Box 1, NA.
82. "Experts On China Urge U.S. To Seek A Peking Accord," *New York Times*, 21 March 1966, p. A1.
83. Telephone interview with author, 18 February 2002.
84. "57% Would Recognize Mao While Keeping Chiang Ties," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 27 June 1966, in Office Files of Fred Panzer, Box 179, China, LBJL.
85. Telcon, Rusk-Hubert Humphrey, 10 March 1966, RG 59, Records of Secretary of State Dean Rusk: Transcripts of Telephone Calls, Lot 72D192, Box 55, NA.

86. Memorandum of Conversation, Rusk-Ambassador Ryuji Takeuchi, 13 April 1966, RG 59, Central Files, 1964-66, Box 3330, UN 6 CHICOM, NA.
87. Komer to LBJ, 14 March 1966, NSF, Memos to the President, Box 6 (2 of 2), vol. XXI (2 of 3), LBJL. Of 22 newspapers that commented editorially on the Vice President's remarks, 20 endorsed them. See Thomson to Komer, 22 March 1966, NSF, Files of Robert W. Komer, Box 2, Memos to the President: March-June 1966, LBJL. Humphrey's comments were reported in "Humphrey Hints U.S. Is Altering Policy On China," *New York Times*, 14 March 1966, p. A1.
88. Komer to LBJ, 2 March 1966, NSF, Files of Robert W. Komer, Box 1, Chrono: March 1-20, 1966, LBJL; Komer to LBJ, 27 March 1966, *Ibid.*, Chrono: March 21-31, 1966.
89. John Prados, *Keepers of the Keys: A History of the National Security Council From Truman to Bush* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1991), p. 154. For brief references to Moyers' central role in China policy during 1966, see Thomson, "On the Making," p. 239; Kusnitz, *Public Opinion and Foreign Policy*, p. 115.
90. Woods, *Fulbright*, p. 410.
91. Moyers to Rostow, 17 June 1966, NSF, Name File, Box 7, Moyers memos, LBJL.
92. Moyers to LBJ, 18 January 1966, WHCF, Countries, Box 21, CO 50 China, LBJL.
93. Rostow to Rusk, 23 April 1966, NSF, Files of Walt W. Rostow, Box 15, Non-Vietnam: April-July 1966, LBJL.
94. Thomson to Jorden, 18 May 1966, JCT Papers, Box 8, Edwin O. Reischauer, 1963-1966, JFKL.
95. Telcon, Rusk-Moyers, 3 May 1966, RG 59, Records of Secretary of State Dean Rusk: Transcripts of Telephone Calls, Lot 72D192, Box 56, NA.
96. W. Bundy to Rusk, 20 May 1966, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, vol. 30, p. 306.
97. Clodfelter, *The Limits of Air Power*, p. 95.
98. Paul Kreisberg, quoted in Memorandum for the Record, 22 June 1966, RG 59, Subject Files of the Office of the Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, 1961-74, Lot 85D240, Box 3, NA.
99. Summary Notes of 559th NSC Meeting, 17 June 1966, NSF, NSCM, Box 2, vol. 3, tab 41, LBJL.
100. Benjamin Read to Rostow, undated, RG 59, Subject Files of the Office of Asian Communist Affairs, 1961-73, Lot 71D423, Box 1, NA. For Zagoria's proposal, see Valenti to Moyers, 5 April 1966, NSF, Country File, Box 240, China memos, vol. VI, LBJL.
101. Rostow to LBJ, 10 May 1966, NSF, Vietnam Country File, Box 31 (2 of 2), Vietnam memos (A), vol. LII (1 of 2), LBJL. One day after the intensification of Rolling Thunder, Johnson remarked, "There is nothing we want in Communist China. There is nothing the American people want from Communist China." See "Two Threats to Peace," 30 June 1966, *PPP:LBJ* 1966, vol. 1, p. 683.
102. Hughes to Rusk, 22 July 1966, NSF, Country File, Box 239, China memos, vol. VI (1 of 2), LBJL; Telegram, no. 43, Hong Kong to Department of State, 4 July 1966, RG 59, Records of Negotiations About Vietnam, 1965-69, Lot 69D277, Box 6, Communist Positions and Initiatives: Communist China 1966, NA; Telegram, no. 200, Hong Kong to Department of State, 12 July 1966, *Ibid.*

103. SNIE 13-66, "Current Chinese Communist Intentions in the Vietnam Situation," 4 August 1966, RG 59, Policy Planning Council: Subject and Country Files, 1965-1969, Lot 72D139, Box 309, Vietnam 1966, NA.
104. Herring, *LBJ and Vietnam*, p. 138; Dallek, *Flawed Giant*, pp. 364-365.
105. Redmon to Moyers, 9 June 1966, Office Files of Bill Moyers, Box 12, BDM memos June-July 11, 1966, LBJL.
106. Rostow to LBJ, 10 May 1966, NSF, Vietnam Country File, Box 31 (2 of 2), LBJL.
107. Harriman to Moyers, 3 June 1966, Papers of W. Averell Harriman, Box 488, Moyers, Bill D., Library of Congress.
108. Thomson's account of the 12 July speech is provided in Thomson, "On the Making," pp. 241-242.
109. Remarks to the American Alumni Council: United States Asian Policy, 12 July 1966, PPP: LBJ 1966, vol. 2, pp. 721-722.
110. For references to China during LBJ's tour of Asia, see Manila Summit Conference Documents, 25 October 1966, *Ibid.*, p. 1259; Remarks Upon Arrival at Bangkok, 28 October 1966, *Ibid.*, p. 1274; Remarks at the State Dinner in Parliament House, Kuala Lumpur, 30 October 1966, *Ibid.*, pp. 1282-1283.
111. W. Bundy to Moyers, John Roche, Harry McPherson, and Douglass Cater, 6 October 1966, NSF, National Security Council History, Box 46, vol. IV: Backup Material Not Referenced in Narrative [I], LBJL.
112. Telegram, no. 1086, Taipei to Department of State, 6 April 1966, NSF, Country File, Box 239, China cables, vol. VI (2 of 2), LBJL; Telegram, no. 1092, Seoul to Department of State, 30 March 1966, RG 59, Central Files, 1964-66, Box 1897, POL ASIA, NA.
113. Telegram, no. 1040, Department of State to Seoul, 22 April 1966, *Ibid.*; Telegram, no. 1048, Department of State to Taipei, 14 April 1966, RG 59, Central Files, 1964-66, Box 2018, POL CHICOM-US, NA.
114. "Communist China - Long Range Study," p. 219.
115. W. Bundy to Rusk, 13 May 1966, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, vol. 30, p. 299.
116. W. Bundy to Rusk, 20 May 1966, *Ibid.*, p. 307.
117. Arthur Goldberg to LBJ, 20 November 1965, NSF, Agency File, Box 71, Goldberg correspondence (2 of 2), LBJL.
118. W. Bundy and Joseph Sisco to Rusk, 16 February 1966, RG 59, Office of the Country Director for the Republic of China, 1963-1966, Lot 69D28, Box 1, NA.
119. Samuel Berger to W. Bundy, 23 February 1966, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, vol. 30, p. 261.
120. Komer to LBJ, 19 April 1966, *Ibid.*, p. 285.
121. William Bundy OH, Tape 5, pp. 22-23, LBJL.
122. Goldberg to LBJ, 28 April 1966, RG 59, Central Files, 1964-66, Box 3330, UN 6 CHICOM, NA.

123. Ruth Bacon to W. Bundy, 4 May 1966, RG 59, Subject Files of the Office of Asian Communist Affairs, 1961-73, Lot 72D41, Box 2, NA.
124. Rostow to LBJ, 30 April 1966, NSF, Memos to the President, Box 7, vol. I (1 of 3), LBJL.
125. Rusk to LBJ, 14 May 1966, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, vol. 30, pp. 301-303.
126. Telegram, Taipei to Department of State, 1 July 1966, *Ibid.*, p. 346.
127. Administrative History of the Department of State, Box 4, ch. 10 (2 of 2), pp. 23-24, LBJL.
128. Telegram, Department of State to Ottawa, 25 July 1966, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, vol. 30, p. 359.
129. Rostow to LBJ, 28 July 1966, NSF, Country File, Box 239, China memos, vol. VI, LBJL; Text of Cable from Hong Kong (1988), 19 September 1966 (enclosure), NSF, Country File, Box 240, China memos, vol. VII, LBJL; ONE (Office of National Estimates) Special Memorandum 14-66, "The China Tangle," 23 September 1966, *Ibid.*
130. Alfred Jenkins to Rostow, 27 August 1966, NSF, Files of Alfred Jenkins, Box 1, CHICOM –General, LBJL.
131. Memorandum of Conversation, Rusk-President Senghor, 28 September 1966, RG 59, Central Files, 1964-66, Box 3331, UN 6 CHICOM, NA.
132. Memorandum of Conversation, 21 August 1966, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, vol. 30, p. 373.
133. *Ibid.*, p. 387, n. 2.
134. Circular Telegram from the Department of State to Certain Posts, 16 September 1966, *Ibid.*, p. 391.
135. Memorandum of Conversation, 3 November 1966, *Ibid.*, pp. 412-414. For the Canadian perspective, see St. Amour, "Sino-Canadian Relations," in Evans and Frolic, eds., *Reluctant Adversaries*, pp. 115-121.
136. Rusk to LBJ, 5 November 1966, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, vol. 30, pp. 418-419.
137. *Ibid.*, p. 418, n. 3. As a State Department cable explained, "Our support for [a] study committee resolution was to prevent support building up for [the] Canadian resolution. Our tactic was designed to cut the ground from under the Canadian resolution, which represented a new danger this year." Telegram, Department of State to Taipei, 21 November 1966, *Ibid.*, p. 444.
138. Telegram, State Department to Ottawa, 9 November 1966, *Ibid.*, p. 423.
139. St. Amour, "Sino-Canadian Relations," in Evans and Frolic, eds., *Reluctant Adversaries*, pp. 120-121.
140. Bacon to W. Bundy, 1 December 1966, RG 59, Subject Files of Office of Asian Communist Affairs, 1961-73, Lot 72D41, Box 2, NA.
141. On this point, see George Kennan's Senate testimony in *China, Vietnam, and the United States*, p. 196.
142. Rusk to John Gronouski, 5 February 1966, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, vol. 30, p. 254.
143. Thomson to Jenkins, 25 July 1966, NSF, Country File, Box 239, China memos, vol. VI (1 of 2), LBJL.

Chapter 5

1. Garson, "Johnson and the China Enigma"; Schulzinger, "The Johnson Administration, China, and the Vietnam War," in Ross and Changbin, eds., *Re-examining the Cold War*, pp. 255-260; Kaufman, *Confronting Communism*, ch. 8.
2. Harry Harding, "The Chinese State in Crisis, 1966-9," in Roderick MacFarquhar, ed., *The Politics of China: The Eras of Mao and Deng*, Second ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 148.
3. Leiberthal, "The Great Leap Forward and the Split in the Yan'an Leadership," in *Ibid.*, pp. 87-147; Macfarquhar, *Origins of the Cultural Revolution*, vol. 3, chs. 12, 15, 18-19; Philip Short, *Mao: A Life* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2000), pp. 518-526.
4. Harding, "The Chinese State in Crisis," in MacFarquhar, ed., *The Politics of China*, pp. 165-178; Short, *Mao*, pp. 527-542; MacFarquhar, *Origins of the Cultural Revolution*, vol. 3, pp. 440-447, 452-465.
5. Harding, "The Chinese State in Crisis," in MacFarquhar, ed., *The Politics of China*, pp. 159-161, 180-189.
6. Telegram, no. 2327, Hong Kong to State Department, 25 June 1966, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, vol. 30, pp. 326-332.
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41. Jenkins to Rostow, 8 November 1967, NSF, Files of Alfred Jenkins, Box 1, CHICOM-Warsaw Talks, LBJL.
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Chapter 6

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14. Mitchell Lerner, "A Failure of Perception: Lyndon Johnson, North Korean Ideology, and the *Pueblo* Incident," *Diplomatic History* 25, no. 4 (Fall 2001), pp. 647-649. The administration's assumption of Soviet complicity in the *Pueblo* affair was wide off the mark. New research has shown that Soviet leaders were not informed by Pyongyang in advance of the move, and were fearful that Kim Il Sung would drag them into an unwanted war on the Korean peninsula. Although the Kremlin attempted to rein in North Korea in the aftermath of the seizure, its ideological commitments to Kim's regime narrowed its leverage.

See Sergey S. Radchenko, "The Soviet Union and the North Korean Seizure of the USS *Pueblo*: Evidence From Russian Archives," CWIHP Working Paper No. 47 (April 2005).

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22. Author's interview with Rostow, Austin, Texas, 23 January 2002.

23. "A Conversation with the President," *DSB*, 8 January 1968, p. 38.

24. Annual Message to the Congress on the State of the Union, 17 January 1968, *PPP:LBJ*, 1968-69, vol. 1, p. 26.

25. Memorandum for the Record, 2 February 1968, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, vol. 30, pp. 634-638.

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32. "Situation in Communist China and United States Policy Alternatives," enclosed in Rusk to LBJ, 22 February 1968, NSF, Country File, Box 243, China memos (continued), vol. XII, LBJL.
33. Rusk to LBJ, 22 February 1968, Ibid.
34. The proposals outlined in Rusk's 22 February 1968 memorandum to Johnson were formally drawn up by State Department officials in subsequent memorandums, yet they did not win the Secretary's approval. See W. Bundy and Anthony Solomon to Rusk, undated, NSF, Country File, Box 243, China (C), vol. XIII, LBJL; W. Bundy to Rusk, 6 March 1968, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, vol. 30, pp. 666-669.
35. William B. Macomber, Jr. to Rusk, 8 March 1968, RG 59, Subject Files of the Office of Asian Communist Affairs, 1961-73, Lot 72D41, Box 2, NA.
36. Author's interview with Rostow, Austin, Texas, 17 January 2002.
37. See John Prados, "Prague Spring and SALT: Arms Limitation Setbacks in 1968," in Brands, ed., *Beyond Vietnam*, pp. 19-36; Schwartz, *Lyndon Johnson and Europe*, pp. 205-222.
38. Herring, *LBJ and Vietnam*, pp. 164-171. The quote is taken from p. 166. See as well Richard H. Immerman, " 'A Time in the Tide of Men's Affairs': Lyndon Johnson and Vietnam," in Cohen and Tucker, eds., *Lyndon Johnson Confronts the World*, pp. 83-86; Gardner, *Pay Any Price*, pp. 464-483.
39. Telegram, State Department to Ottawa, 10 June 1968, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, vol. 30, p. 682. See as well Richard H. Donald to W. Bundy, 6 June 1968, RG 59, Subject Files of the Office of Republic of China Affairs, 1951-75, Lot 72D145, Box 7, NA.
40. Nicholas Katzenbach, "Viet-Nam and the Independence of Southeast Asia," *DSB*, 12 February 1968, p. 203.
41. Editorial Note, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, vol. 29, p. 410; Summary of Discussion and Decisions at the 36th Meeting of the Senior Interdepartmental Group, 13 May 1968, Ibid., p. 874. See as well "Koreans Fear Vietnam Settlement Will Bring U.S. Pullout From Asia," 5 April 1968, *Washington Post*, p. A25; Robert J. McMahon, "Ambivalent Partners: The Lyndon Johnson Administration and Its Asian Allies," in Brands, ed., *Beyond Vietnam*, pp. 181-183.
42. Jenkins to Rostow, 7 June 1968, NSF, Country File, Box 242, China memos, vol. XII, LBJL.
43. W. Bundy to Read, undated, RG 59, Subject Files of the Office of Asian Communist Affairs, 1961-73, Lot 71D423, Box 1, NA.
44. MacFarquhar, ed., *Sino-American Relations, 1949-1971*, pp. 235-236.
45. James Murray to Wilkinson and Samuel, 28 June 1968, FCO 21/61, PRO.
46. Nicholas Katzenbach, "A Realistic View of Communist China," *DSB*, 10 June 1968, pp. 737-740.
47. "Further Thoughts on China," by Jenkins, 9 October 1968, NSF, Country File, Box 243, China (A), vol. XIII, LBJL.
48. For contemporary criticism of the administration's reluctance to match deeds with words, see Allen S. Whiting, "Time For a Change In Our China Policy," *New York Times Magazine*, 15 December 1968, p. 28; Edwin O. Reischauer, *Beyond Vietnam: The United States and Asia* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1968), pp. 170-173; A. Doak Barnett, *A New U.S. Policy Toward China* (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1971), pp. 15-19, 52-59.

49. Jenkins to Rostow, 5 October 1968, NSF, Files of Alfred Jenkins, Box 3, CHICOM-Cultural Revolution, July-December 1968, LBJL.
50. Garver, *China's Decision for Rapprochement with the United States*, pp. 5-13, 32-39, 149-157. See as well Jonathan D. Pollack, "The Opening to America," in MacFarquhar and Fairbank, eds., *Cambridge History of China*, vol. 15.
51. Quoted in Chen and Wilson, eds., "All Under the Heaven is Great Chaos," p. 170.
52. Chen, *Mao's China and the Cold War*, p. 245; Gong Li, "Chinese Decision Making and the Thawing of U.S.-China Relations," in Ross and Changbin, eds., *Re-examining the Cold War*, p. 332.
53. In his otherwise excellent study of U.S. China policy, James Mann makes the questionable claim that Nixon's views on the PRC in the mid-1960's "ran contrary to the dogma of the American foreign policy establishment." Mann, *About Face*, p. 18.
54. Henry Kissinger, *White House Years* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1979), pp. 167-168.
55. Richard M. Nixon, "Asia After Viet Nam," *Foreign Affairs* 46, no. 1 (October 1967), pp. 121-123.
56. Telegram, no. 279939, State Department to Hong Kong, Taipei, and Warsaw, 30 November 1968, RG 59, Central Files, 1967-69, Box 1972, POL CHICOM-US, NA.
57. Telegram, no. 10675, Hong Kong to State Department, 19 December 1968, Ibid.
58. Airgram, no. A-25, Hong Kong to State Department, 24 January 1969, RG 59, Central Files, 1967-69, Box 1973, POL CHICOM-US, NA.
59. Jenkins to Rostow, 4 December 1968, NSF, Files of Alfred Jenkins, Box 1, CHICOM-Warsaw Talks, LBJL.
60. Jenkins to Rostow, 30 December 1968, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, vol. 30, p. 728.
61. Rusk to LBJ, 4 January 1969, enclosed in Rostow to LBJ, 6 January 1969, NSF, Memos to the President, Box 44, vol. CXIII (3 of 3), LBJL. Rusk's memo seems to corroborate Noam Kochavi's observation that the Secretary's views on China were more sophisticated and flexible than the prevailing line of historical literature has stressed. As Kochavi concludes, dating back to the 1950's Rusk demonstrated an interest in nurturing moderates in Beijing's ruling circle during periods of relative Chinese quiescence on the world stage. Kochavi, *A Conflict Perpetuated*, pp. 37-38, 81, 111, 247.
62. Goh speculates that had the Johnson team been confronted with the Sino-Soviet border clashes of 1969, they would have remained aloof from the affair rather than opt for Nixon's strategy of moving toward Beijing. Goh, *Constructing the U.S. Rapprochement with China*, pp. 93-94. See as well Chang, *Friends and Enemies*, pp. 283-284; Mann, *About Face*, pp. 21-22; Ross, *Negotiating Cooperation*, p. 30; Walter Isaacson, *Kissinger: A Biography* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992), ch. 16; Michael Schaller, "Détente and the Strategic Triangle: Or, 'Drinking Your Mao Tai and Having Your Vodka, Too,'" in Ross and Changbin, eds., *Re-examining the Cold War*, pp. 363-364.
63. For example, see Memorandum of Conversation, Boris Davydov-Daniel I. Davidson, 21 December 1968, RG 59, Central Files, 1967-69, Box 1972, POL CHICOM-US, NA.
64. Telegram, no. 291080, State Department to Paris, 21 December 1968, Ibid.
65. Rostow's forwarding memo on Rusk's 4 January 1969 proposal bears the following handwritten note from an unidentified official: "I don't want to rush these and do them in the last two weeks." *FRUS*, 1964-1968, vol. 30, p. 729, n. 1.

66. William Bundy, *A Tangled Web: The Making of Foreign Policy in the Nixon Presidency* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1998), p. 103.

67. For further discussion, see Chen, *Mao's China and the Cold War*, pp. 239-245.

68. Rostow to LBJ, 6 January 1969, NSF, Memos to the President, Box 44, vol. CXIII (3 of 3), LBJL.

Conclusion

1. Ross, "Introduction," in Ross and Changbin, eds., *Re-examining the Cold War*, p. 9.
2. This is effectively argued in David McLean, "American Nationalism, the China Myth, and the Truman Doctrine: The Question of Accommodation with Peking, 1949-50," *Diplomatic History* 10, no. 1 (Winter 1986), pp. 25-42.
3. For a good discussion, see Pruessen, "Over the Volcano," in Ross and Changbin, eds., *Re-examining the Cold War*, pp. 100-105.
4. For references to China during the 1968 campaign, see Goh, *Reconstructing the U.S. Rapprochement with China*, p. 112.
5. Rostow to LBJ, 20 February 1967, NSF, Memos to the President, Box 13, vol. XXI (2 of 4), LBJL.
6. This particular point is well argued in Dallek, *Flawed Giant*, pp. 460-461.
7. CIA Memorandum, "Implications of an Unfavorable Outcome in Vietnam," 11 September 1967, enclosed in Helms to LBJ, 12 September 1967, NSF, Vietnam Country File, Box 259, Vietnam, Outcome (CIA Study), LBJL.
8. "Situation in Communist China and United States Policy Alternatives," enclosed in Rusk to LBJ, 22 February 1968, NSF, Country File, Box 243, China memos (continued), vol. XII, LBJL.
9. Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, p. 298.
10. For example, see Rusk Interviewed by Reader's Digest, 25 November 1967, *DSB*, 18 December 1967, p. 822.
11. Quoted in Zhang Baijia and Jin Qingguo, "Steering Wheel, Shock Absorber, and Diplomatic Probe in Confrontation: Sino-American Ambassadorial Talks Seen from the Chinese Perspective," in Ross and Changbin, eds., *Re-examining the Cold War*, p. 193.
12. The author is indebted to Professor Steven Casey for this insight.
13. For a good discussion of Nixon and Kissinger's willingness to sacrifice Taiwan's concerns for the sake of establishing a new relationship with China, see Nancy Bernkopf Tucker, "Taiwan Expendable? Nixon and Kissinger Go to China," *Journal of American History* 92, no. 1 (June 2005).
14. A convincing appeal for incorporating ideology as a basis for understanding U.S. foreign policy is made in Odd Arne Westad, "The New International History of the Cold War: Three (Possible) Paradigms," *Diplomatic History* 24, no. 4 (Fall 2000), pp. 552-556.
15. Michael H. Hunt, "Ideology," in Michael J. Hogan and Thomas G. Paterson, eds., *Explaining the History of American Foreign Relations*, Second ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 221.
16. This is effectively discussed in Cohen, *Dean Rusk*, pp. 280-289.
17. Goh, *Constructing the U.S. Rapprochement with China*, ch. 6. The quote is taken from p. 265.
18. Kochavi, *A Conflict Perpetuated*, p. 250.
19. H.W. Brands, "Introduction," in Brands, ed., *Beyond Vietnam*, p. 4.

20. On this point, see Kaiser, "Men and Policies," in Kunz, ed., *Diplomacy of the Crucial Decade*.
21. Hershberg and Chen, "Reading and Warning the Likely Enemy," pp. 83-84.
22. Author's interview with Rostow, Austin, Texas, 17 January 2002. The other leader, unsurprisingly, was de Gaulle.
23. A similar argument is made in Kaufman, *Confronting Communism*, pp. 209-210.
24. "Further Thoughts on China," by Jenkins, 9 October 1968, NSF, Country File, Box 243, China (A), vol. XIII, LBJL.

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