

## Chinese Rapprochement under Nixon: A Case Study in Foreign Policy Bureaucracy and Decision-making

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*Richard M. Nixon's historic 1972 trip to Beijing, a gesture that ultimately paved the way for Sino-American rapprochement, was widely considered to be a watershed moment in both the Cold War and American diplomatic strategy.<sup>1</sup> One of the trip's more important developments, however, was the way in which diplomatic negotiations themselves were carried out: long distrustful of the State Department, President Nixon opted to manage communication with Beijing primarily through his National Security Advisor, Henry Kissinger, and the National Security Council. The strategy effectively managed Sino-American relations during his administration, but the lengths Nixon and Kissinger went to do so would have important implications for the future of U.S. foreign policymaking.*

Shortly after taking office in January 1969, newly elected President Richard M. Nixon convened a meeting with members of the National Security Council (NSC) to discuss diplomatic strategy during his first term. Amid a small group of senior staff members and his new National Security Advisor, Henry Kissinger, Nixon announced that he and the Council would henceforth manage all sensitive matters relating to America's foreign policy—in short, that the American Foreign Service would no longer “run” Washington's diplomatic efforts. “If the State Department has had a new idea in the last twenty-five years,” Nixon gruffly told the room, “it is not known to me” (Komine 2008, 56).

The NSC—originally formulated under the Truman Administration as a means of integrating military, domestic and diplomatic advice to the president—had previously functioned as an ancillary body, one that allowed the Chief Executive to make informed decisions (Best 2009, 4-7). The State Department, on the other hand, was meant to be an actionable organization, the executive bureaucracy that conducted foreign affairs, interacted with foreign leaders and communicated with the public. Within a matter of months after taking office,

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<sup>1</sup>English representations of Mandarin in this paper use *pinyin*, the standard contemporary transliteration method. Texts utilizing older systems like Wade-Giles have been altered and bracketed for clarity's sake.

however, Nixon had already successfully reengineered this apparatus to centralize power within the White House and, under Kissinger's leadership, the Council usurped even the most basic responsibilities of its counterpart.

In no Nixonian strategy was this shift better illustrated than in the administration's approach to *rapprochement* with the People's Republic of China (PRC). The President saw this maneuver as fundamental to American success in the Cold War against the Soviet Union and considered it the centerpiece to his foreign policy—but the means by which he did so systematically disenfranchised the State Department and Secretary William Rogers. Nixon entrusted the drafting of Washington's first diplomatic messages to Beijing, for example, to Kissinger; once the National Security Advisor assumed provisional control over the project, he continued to take extraordinary measures to distance State from the Sino-American process.

Kissinger arranged to receive secret intelligence briefings through backdoor channels with the express purpose of confounding Rogers' influence; he also spent more than forty hours coaching Nixon before the president's landmark 1972 trip to the PRC—but barred China experts from the proceedings, fearful that any representatives from State would compromise the secrecy of the ongoing diplomatic efforts. When the president finally met with Chairman Mao Zedong in February 1972, it was an NSC staffer, not Secretary of State Rogers, who was allowed to observe the proceedings.

Scholars of the presidency have often conceded that—no matter their opinion regarding Nixon's leadership—the Sino-American *rapprochement* was “a wise act of statesmanship” and that Kissinger “was a highly effective instrument” of the diplomatic effort (Dallek 2007, 617). The systematic overhaul of the foreign policy bureaucracy had unintended effects, however, creating a path-dependent apparatus that shaped America's China policy well into the next several decades.

This paper seeks to understand the motivations, strategies and implications of Nixon's pro-NSC diplomatic strategy, employing as a case study the process of Sino-American *rapprochement* in 1972. To this end, the paper will examine three facets of the process: First, it will examine the concrete historical motives, processes and outcomes of White House-NSC policy—why Nixon felt the need to reorganize the departments, how Washington managed communication with Beijing and how negotiations effected a change in policy. Second, the paper will examine the implications of the policy—how Nixon's model was replicated in successive administrations, focusing specifically on those processes that shaped Sino-American interactions after the Nixon presidency. Third, the paper seeks to engage in a normative discussion of these patterns: was Nixon's strategy efficacious? Did it help or hinder future administrations? Was it an appropriate exercise of his constitutional powers as Chief Diplomat? It goes without saying that the record of the *rapprochement* itself—and each link in the chain of events between 1969 and 1974—has been scrutinized thoroughly; this paper is less a historical investigation than one of organizations and processes.

As a case study of Sino-American rapprochement, this paper will contribute to scholarly analysis surrounding Nixon's diplomatic strategy, detailing the means by which he centralized U.S. foreign policy power within the White House. As a study of the precedent Nixon set, the paper will contribute to a more longitudinal understanding of the trends within the diplomatic bureaucracy. In its effort to understand the costs and benefits of such a strategy, the paper may also shed light on the wisdom of shifting the NSC-State balance.

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Nixon had set himself upon a *rapprochement* strategy long before he became president in 1968. After witnessing China's relationship with the Soviet Union fracture in the early 1960s, which "demonstrated to him that the communist world was no longer monolithic," (MacMillan 2008, 108) he became convinced that opening American doors to Beijing could stabilize interests in East Asia and provide an effective counterweight to Moscow (Garrison 2005, 21-22). Before he began campaigning for the presidency in 1968, Nixon published in *Foreign Affairs* magazine an entreaty to befriend Communist China:

Nations not possessing great power can indulge in the luxury of criticism of others; those possessing it have the responsibility of decision...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 (Nixon 1967, 119-121).

One of the first directives Nixon gave upon assuming office, then, ordered Kissinger and the NSC to review American policies toward China, assess Beijing's geostrategic motives in East Asia, and weigh "alternative U.S. approaches on China and their costs and risks" (Dallek 2007, 84).

Even before the president took office, there had been no doubt that the NSC would enjoy wide-ranging privileges in his administration. In the interregnum between his election and presidency, Nixon had announced that he would select a strong Secretary of State "and that Kissinger would not subvert the State Department, even though that was exactly what he was planning to do" (Ladley 2002, 68). Nixon betrayed these intentions when he selected William Rogers to serve as Secretary, "mainly because he had so little background in foreign affairs" (Dallek 2007, 83). Nixon's internal logic here incalculably shaped the means by which he acted on his anti-State policy; thus it is worth considering his rationale before proceeding.

Nixon's motives in organizing the foreign policy apparatus this way were, to be sure, far from clear. John H. Holdridge, an aide in the Council who later

became one of Kissinger's four companions on the first diplomatic trip to Beijing, notes that the President's antipathy toward State originated from personal slights:

President Nixon's negative attitude toward the State Department was at least partially derived from the rather shabby treatment he received at the hands of some of our overseas diplomatic missions while he traveled abroad as a private citizen after serving as Eisenhower's vice president... the Nixon antipathy toward the State Department [had also] stemmed from the Republican 'massive retaliation' doctrine towards the Soviet Union, which was generated when Nixon was vice president but was not heartily endorsed by State (Holdridge 1997, 33).

It may be more reasonable to assert, given the historical record, that these personal grudges played a secondary role to other idiosyncrasies of Nixon's temperament—distrust, hunger for recognition and power, dislike of collaboration, and introversion—that have been understood to shape his presidency.

First among these was Nixon's all-consuming desire to achieve presidential greatness, the clearest means he could devise by which would be to orchestrate unparalleled White House success in the foreign arena. To this end, Nixon had always been "determined to be his own secretary of state, with the support of national security advisors" (Dallek 2007, 82)—in short, Nixon wanted to make sure all important national security decisions were made by and attributed publicly to his own office.<sup>2</sup>

Desire for control was a strategic option, as well: Nixon believed, and correctly so, that the bureaucracy of the State Department had become sluggish and complacent (Dallek 2007, 85). This, he argued, was counterproductive to his aims of crafting an innovative foreign strategy:

Nixon [believed] that the primary enemy of a wise, more successful diplomacy was a turgid, self-serving bureaucracy. His study of past and contemporary history convinced him that a successful foreign policy began at home, where a statesman needed to free himself from the accepted wisdoms of cautious bureaucrats frightened by innovative thinking (*Ibid.*).

As Kissinger once noted: "It seemed to me no accident that most great statesman had been locked in a permanent struggle with the experts in their foreign offices" (*Ibid.*).

Nixon's belief that the State Department would limit his foreign policy endeavors was grounded in plausible logic, however. First among these was the

<sup>2</sup>This obsession was one that plagued Nixon throughout the China process. He continually attempted to downplay others' participation in the process—even Kissinger's, which was substantial, needless to say—in order to craft his public image as a world leader.

simple institutional makeup of the body. As a highly bureaucratized body that had slowly accumulated responsibilities in the wake of World War II, the department possessed qualities characteristic of most bureaucracies of its size: It was predisposed to slow decision-making and consistency over time.

State's decision-making process was also discordant with Nixon's personal preferences about policymaking. Whereas the Department's bureaucratic structure involved subtle variations on policy formed by multiple actors, Nixon "made it clear that he wanted distinct options presented to him from which he could choose, rather than consensus opinions [that] require only acceptance or rejection." Under Kissinger, then, this is exactly what the National Security Council became.

The Department under Rogers, moreover, had a number of vested policy interests that complicated Nixon's efforts to broach talks with Beijing. Recognition of Taiwan—the island governed by the Guomindang (GMD), the Communist Party's antagonist in the Chinese Civil War that also claimed sovereignty over the mainland—was, to be sure, the thorniest issue. Washington had recognized the GMD as the legitimate Chinese sovereign for several decades, a position the State bureaucracy was unwilling to give up.

The dissonance that emerged from Nixon's *rapprochement* policy had its strongest ramifications in the United Nations, where Taiwan still held the 'Chinese' seat on the Security Council. The State Department and the PRC had been locked in a decades-long lobbying effort to determine which government would maintain voting status: in fact, Rogers' administration had established a "special office headed by...Harvey Feldman, to pursue the matter of keeping Taiwan in the United Nations and keeping China as far away from membership as possible" (Holdridge 1997, 50).

This was not a matter, moreover, of State choreographing its Taiwan objectives and diplomatic niceties with Beijing; the Foreign Service actively opposed Nixon's plans on this front and purposely dragged their feet on others. Ambassadors were hesitant to utilize the Pakistani and Polish embassies as backdoor communications channels; when Premier Zhou Enlai finally extended an offer to receive an American emissary, Rogers balked:

[A]s State perceived the issue, the Chinese were likely to exploit the U.S. position [in order] to gain power and influence in East Asia at our expense... Accordingly, the department wanted to slow the momentum of the emissary proposal by discussing the modalities under which the emissary would be received... (*Ibid*, 37).

As Nixon continued to meet with what he believed was State obstructionism, then, he found it an easier strategy to distance the Department from policy planning altogether.

Finally, the two knew the State Department “leaks like a sieve,” as Nixon put it, and believed this flaw might compromise the mission’s overall success (Ladley 2002, 296; *Ibid*, 46; MacMillan 2008, 112). Indeed, the prospect of opening diplomatic relations to a nation publicly understood as an enemy was a tricky one: Nixon was afraid his policies would be attacked by hawkish anticommunist conservatives, who were skeptical about *détente* as a general policy (Garrison 2005, 21-46).

The public, likewise, was “were antagonistic to Communist China and particularly to seeing it replace Taiwan in the UN” (Dallek 2007, 266). The White House adopted an “incremental strategy” in response, whereby they committed legislators and the public “to small acceptable steps before potential opposition recognized the extent to which the policy would change the status quo (Garrison 2005, 34).

Any suspected leaks from the State Department also “might have touched off a fierce debate that would have made it more difficult to convince the Chinese that Americans favored a new day in Sino-American relations” (Dallek 2007, 300). Nixon speechwriter William Safire articulated the philosophy thusly: “[W]e are obliged to conceal truth in order to help the truth to be victorious” (*Ibid.*).

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Nixon’s first tactic, then—aside from the critical selection of Kissinger as National Security Advisor—was to revamp the NSC structure, which had become underutilized in previous administrations. He tasked General Andrew Goodpaster, NSC Staff Secretary under Eisenhower, with developing a new organizational model to strengthen the Council (Komine 2008, 47). Goodpaster’s primary innovation concerned the flow of information, which he recommended to be streamlined into a single channel of data:

All communication directed to the President originating in executive departments and agencies, including those from department and agency heads, should be delivered to the office of the Assistant for National Security Affairs. The NSC office under the direction of the Assistant to the President will establish secretariat control of all incoming papers prior to forwarding them to the office of the President. National security papers which the president asked upon or otherwise disposed of will be preceded out of the President Secretariat to the NSC office (*Ibid.*).

Kissinger also “sought to recruit the best available young experts” from within the executive branch, in order to draft the most clear and comprehensive policy memoranda for the president (Komine 2008, 53).

These changes revitalized the flagging Council, which came to be responsible for nearly all foreign policy-related information going in and out of the

president's office. By 1970, Nixon's annual Foreign Policy Report to Congress was drafted "entirely inside" the National Security Council without any input or knowledge from the State Department—an event Holdridge termed "a turning point" for the decision-making apparatus (Holdridge 1997, 55). Kissinger, more strikingly, came to represent the sole mouthpiece of the organization: "Kissinger gathered the information from his staff and did all the briefing of the President himself, even on subjects on which he was not necessarily an expert" (Komine 2008, 57).

Some reports note that Kissinger feared Nixon's prior friendship with Rogers and believed his influence would be marginalized as a result (Isaacson 2005, 196). These concerns were almost certainly unwarranted, as Nixon's selection criteria for the State position made clear, but Kissinger actively worked to strategically undermine Rogers at every turn: "To secure his position, Kissinger reinforced the president's mistrust of the bureaucracy at every opportunity and undercut Secretary of State William Rogers's position by blaming him for policy failures" (Garrison 2005, 22-23).

Secrecy was the most critical tool in this exercise, as Rogers could not participate in projects of which he was totally unaware—which was the case for most aspects of the project before Kissinger's secret trip to Beijing in July 1971 (Dallek 2007, 290). "The only way secrecy can be kept is to exclude from the making of the decision all those who are theoretically charged with carrying it out," Kissinger told his staff regarding the State Department. "You do not tell them what is going on" (Komine 2008, 53).

Given the complex web of communication within the executive branch at that time, Kissinger was forced to devise means of reorganizing and sometimes subverting the existing information flows. In some ways, the physical distance between State and the NSC made this hurdle less difficult: Since Rogers' office was located in Foggy Bottom, it was possible for Kissinger to keep many of his department's activities within the structural bounds of the White House.

To this end, the White House simply held meetings without the Secretary's knowledge and declined to inform him of general strategic decisions. In some cases, when Nixon feared that a lack of knowledge would leave Rogers and his staff "speculating all over the place" to the press—which could be just as deleterious to the president's designs—he had Kissinger prepare "a highly sanitized version of his discussions" that would prevent him from knowing "everything that went on" (Dallek 2007, 298; *also see* Komine 2007, 56, 34). The only time Rogers was allowed to accompany Nixon to China, moreover, his knowledge of the events was kept to a minimum.

The books [State was] to prepare would concern the practical, bilateral issues affecting U.S.-China relations; the NSC staff would prepare the books on the more politically sensitive issues, particularly those dealing with the Soviet Union and Vietnam. There were, in fact, to be two sets of books (Holdridge 1997, 50).

*Rapprochement* with Beijing also required sensitive intelligence, however, the dispersal of which could theoretically have been made available to Rogers. Kissinger and Nixon relied continually during the opening process on intelligence briefings about the Communist Party's intentions, biographical information on its leaders and probabilities of success. The normal channels through which this communication normally flowed—the Central Intelligence Agency and the diplomatic corps' Bureau of Intelligence and Research—were open to the State Department as well, however.

Kissinger sidestepped this potential liability by arranging to receive all of his most sensitive intelligence through 'backdoor channels,' private contacts with diplomats and agents who could give him the data he needed. Kissinger "could not even turn to the CIA [formally] for support in learning about senior Chinese leaders for his first trip to Beijing in July 1971," for example. "Thus, Solomon personally developed a covert 'off-line' arrangement with CIA analysts to 'draw on the intelligence community's expertise and grasp of history'" (Komine 2008, 56).

This secrecy extended even to the lower levels of the Council, which was often kept in the dark in order to prevent challenges to the hierarchical structure: "At times Kissinger even had three competing groups working on a problem in the NSC with none knowing about the others" (Garrison 2005, 24).

Lest it appear that Rogers and his staff were wholly oblivious to the *rapprochement* process, it is worth noting that the State Department did participate: "While the NSC staff functioned as the mini and 'operational State Department,' the State Department itself continued to manage most of the routine things" (Komine 2008, 244). Its duties were still, however, transparently ancillary and superficial. Rogers was only informed of events as they happened, and his high-ranking staff members formulated some policy during the more intense planning sessions—that is, when more manpower was needed (Dallek 2007, 90).

When Rogers accompanied Nixon to Beijing, moreover, it was made clear that "there were to be two separate levels of meetings in Beijing"—and that he would handle only second-tier matters with PRC Foreign Minister Ji Pengfei (Holdridge 1997, 47):

The State Department...covered U.S.-China bilateral issues such as the question of American citizens still remaining in China...and the question of Chinese assets frozen by the United States from the time China had entered the Korean War; on the Chinese side there was the matter of substantial amounts of American property in China that the Chinese had seized following their defeat of the Kuomintang. Issues such as these [were] secondary to the major policy issues in U.S.-China relations... [and] they were assigned entirely to the State Department (*Ibid*, 47).



While the resolution of many of these issues was critical for higher-level negotiations to proceed, they were still very much secondary to the greater aims of the trip.

For years, conventional wisdom has held that the Department of State is an increasingly marginalized cog in the wheel of U.S. foreign policy—that critical diplomatic maneuvering is done within the White House and National Security Council alone. Nixon and Kissinger are, in large part, responsible for such a trend. That the administration shifted the diplomatic center of gravity in such a way held important implications for future negotiations with the People's Republic of China.

First and foremost, Nixon's rejuvenation of the National Security Council shaped not only the way in which policies were made, but also the type of interactions officials conducted when they met with Communist Party members in Beijing. From the very beginning, the White House had made gestures to indicate that Zhou and Mao Zedong would be dealing with high-ranking American officials—that *rapprochement* was sufficiently important to concern the upper echelons of Washington's foreign policy apparatus.

In late 1969, for example, when the White House was extending carefully worded messages to Beijing through intermediaries in mutually friendly countries, they made sure to stress the utmost attention *rapprochement* would receive from the highest levels. One Bucharest official forwarded a letter to Zhou Enlai from Theodore White, a famous journalist; what was otherwise a simple request to visit the PRC contained one critical instruction to the interlopers: "The Romanians were asked to emphasize that White had close contacts with Nixon and Kissinger" (Dallek 2007, 266).

Likewise, Kissinger was the leader of the first envoy to Beijing in 1971, and his interactions with Premier Zhou created expectations that America's emissaries would always be as high-profile as the National Security Advisor, whose "diplomacy gave [him] visibility on a level with heads of state and celebrities." Zhou "clearly considered...Kissinger a worthy counterpart" (Dallek 2007, 350).<sup>3</sup>

Because the Watergate scandal—which eventually led to the resignation of Nixon—left Kissinger untouched, he remained in his position as Advisor in the Gerald Ford administration and simultaneously managed the role of Secretary of State. His continued presence in the White House allowed him to cultivate personal relations for years to come—Kissinger traveled to Beijing eight more times before 1976—and to consolidate his organizational control over the Washington foreign policy apparatus.

<sup>3</sup>Kissinger similarly considered Zhou "stunning" and had nothing but good remarks about his skill as a leader: "Urbane, infinitely patient, extraordinarily intelligent, subtle, he moved through our discussions with an easy grace that penetrated the essence of our new relationship as if there were no sensible alternative." (Holdridge 1997, 45)

Nixon's landmark 1972 trip had similar effects—the message being, as the president once put it, “We’re the ones you should talk to, and don’t pay much attention to these others” (*Ibid*). Beijing responded in kind: “Shortly after their [1972 arrival in Beijing], a summons came from Mao to the president and Kissinger, but not the secretary of state, who was transparently a man of less importance” (Dallek 2007, 363).

The Chinese understood this foreign policy organization, for Mao's own diplomatic apparatus was small, personalized and firmly under his control well into the late twentieth century (Medeiros and Fravel 2003, 22-35). Successive U.S. presidents came to find, then, that their most successful interactions with Beijing occurred when they themselves or high-ranking members of the administration interacted personally with Chinese leaders. Even when leaders like Presidents Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton—who were inclined to lead “decentralized systems with multiple advisers involved in the decision process” (Garrison 2005, 5)—were forced to use high-level intermediaries to conduct relations.

During the 1996 Taiwan Straits Crisis, for example, National Security Advisor Anthony Lake was sent to manage negotiations as a personal representative of the White House after Beijing responded poorly to State Department overtures (*Ibid*, 145).

[T]he Taiwan Strait controversy convinced the president and others to become more regularly involved in China policy...An interagency review concluded it was time to anchor China policy in the NSC...and to end agencies running off on their own and freelancing on sanctions. [Then-Chief of Staff] Leon Panetta states that it was a lack of both presidential involvement and careful vetting of options in the first place that produced the major problems (Garrison 2005, 146).

This ‘demonstration effect’—in which strategies that yielded previous successes were repeated in successive scenarios—compounded both the influence of the NSC within the policymaking apparatus and encouraged the president to become more active in China affairs. It is worth noting, of course, that this was not mirrored in every administration's wholesale foreign policy operations—but the general Nixon-Kissinger pattern of centralizing policy within the White House did persist relative to Sino-American relations in every successive administration.

Second, Nixon's reorganization considerably weakened the State bureaucracy. Komine particularly notes the “demoralization of the State Department and its expertise” (2008, 60), a problem that continued to plague subsequent iterations of the body. This occurred in a number of ways: because Kissinger limited interactions between State diplomats and Chinese officials, there were fewer opportunities for foreign service officers to develop relationships—and the mutual respect upon which they relied—with their Beijing counterparts.

When State was kept uninformed about White House actions, moreover, its officials were more gaffe-prone—and their mistakes likely hurt their efforts to steer policy later on. The recognition of Beijing on the UN Security Council was foremost among these, as the Department's efforts to maintain Taiwan's status were naturally upsetting to the Chinese. Information deprivation also likely prevented State Officials—particularly those in the East Asia Bureau—from developing and refining their understanding of internal Chinese affairs, making them less valuable assets than NSC members in successive administrations.

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If the organizational implications of Nixon's decisions are clear—a Cold War *coup de grace* coupled with a stultified State bureaucracy and path-dependent Sino-American relations—its normative calculus is somewhat less clear. Nixon certainly achieved his objectives: strategically, to centralize foreign policy decision-making under his office and, internationally, to shift the balance of global politics in a way that ultimately benefited American interests vis-à-vis the Soviet Union.

It bears discussion, however, as to whether we need weigh the normative value of his NSC centralization relative to other considerations—organizationally, constitutionally, and historically. Many elements of the Nixon-Kissinger dynamic with regard to China—secrecy, dishonesty, competitive self-aggrandizement—tend to be considered *en masse* with a larger historical evaluation of Nixon's character and presidency; that is, contemporary understandings of Watergate tend to make a normative analysis of bureaucratic secrecy the same as those of what is understood to be a larger moral corruption within the administration, thereby flattening what might be a more nuanced evaluation.

The question of legality—whether Nixon's actions lay within the constitutionally defined bounds of his presidential powers—is, of course, an *a priori* consideration. Primary to this discussion is the president's role as Chief Diplomat, overseer of the foreign relations of the United States. While the phrase does not explicitly appear in the Constitution, a number of excerpts from Article II executive powers make clear what this function needs constitute.

The president is “Commander in Chief of the Army and Navy of the United States” and “shall receive Ambassadors and other public Ministers” (U.S. Const. art. II §2, 3)—thus granting him or her power to control diplomatic relations. As the Chief Executive who appoints “Ambassadors, other public Ministers and Consuls...and all other Officers of the United States,” (*Ibid*, art. II §1, 2) moreover, the Constitution leaves the implementation of foreign policy to the discretion of the president. The framers make reference to executive Departments (*Ibid*, art. II § 2) but otherwise the Secretary of State's role is not delimited constitutionally.

We can say at the very least, then, that Nixon had the legal prerogative to alter the structure of the foreign policy apparatus in a way that suited him. The

long-lasting and broad-based natures of Nixon's changes, however, add dimensions that complicate the question of legality.

First among these is the issue of path dependence. Nixon certainly set a strong precedent for the nature of Sino-American relations going forward, although we may say the same for any monumental shift in diplomatic grand strategy. Within the Executive Branch, however, the strategy had noticeable effects for those organs that last beyond changes in administration. Was it responsible for Nixon to enact policies that hindered the State Department for years afterward—thus potentially inhibiting future presidents' ability to conduct foreign policy? If a president feels the need to reorganize any bureaucratic apparatus to achieve policy goals, the potential long-term ramifications bear a healthy consideration.

Second, Nixon's policies stifled inter-organizational debate, limiting his discussions to closed rooms and close advisors—a process that, while not specifically forbidden in the Constitution, violates its spirit. The Advise and Consent provisions in Article II, Section 3 make clear that the legislature ought to play some deliberative role in the formation of foreign policy, that the president is not to have unchecked ability to conduct foreign affairs. It is also clear that if the president serves as Chief Diplomat, he or she is still to allow for agency control over a portion of foreign affairs. Nixon's efforts to conceal his actions from Congress and from the State Department can be understood, then, to be questionable in this regard. As Dallek notes:

The Nixon-Kissinger attraction to secrecy was a way to ensure their control over a policy for which they wanted exclusive credit. Neither man could rise above his affinity for backdoor operations or their own political interest to see that so large a shift in foreign policy was best done as part of a national dialogue rather than as the product of their inventiveness in managing foreign affairs (Dallek 2007, 299-300).

Nixon's writings make clear that he believed his objectives were only attainable by maneuvering around Congress and public opinion—and while the collaborative and often combative democratic process does not always allow for the correct decisions to be made, the system is designed to prevent the uninhibited exercise of presidential power. As Robert Miller wrote, "the brutal truth was that, at heart, neither [Kissinger nor Nixon] had a steadfast faith in the democratic process, least of all as applied to the conduct of foreign policy" (*Ibid.*, 302).

The argument exists, of course, that Nixon's ends justified his means. That is, even if political scientists disagree with the means by which he achieved *rapprochement* with China, he did what he knew was best for the nation the only way he could.

This argument can convincingly be made in favor of secrecy, but only insofar as the policy was applied to the broader public. As noted above, frenetic

public discussion might have startled the hesitant Chinese, which made a plausible rationale in favor of strategically releasing information (Garrison 2005, 21-46). The president also used the secret negotiations—and the revelation of them later—as a means of building consensus, not as a tactic to push through an unpopular strategy: “the boldness of their *fait accompli*, largely silenced critics and created a stable consensus for something that seemed so transparently sensible” (Dallek 2007, 111).

Secrecy within the administration, however, was neither as effective nor as indispensable as Nixon and Kissinger believed. First, it was wholly possible to exercise a strategy of secret, highly personal interactions while still allowing the State Department to participate in the process. As Komine writes,

[D]espite their pursuit of secrecy, Nixon and Kissinger still could have brought in a few key State Department officials on the China policy and ‘sworn them to secrecy and used their expertise and had more bureaucratic support’...he knew that he could provide intellectual leadership; he found that [State analysts] provided a lot of expertise (Komine 2008, 61).

Not only was it possible to include State officials, it would likely have improved the process. For one, Rogers’ ignorance of a number of White House actions made coordination more difficult among the various agencies. Holdridge notes one White House discussion in which Rogers urged the president to slow American gestures to the People’s Republic—on the grounds that their intentions were not clear. “What State did not have,” he writes, “and what might have helped considerably to clear the air, was background knowledge of the White House efforts to open communications with the PRC, including its backchannel messages sent via sources friendly to both countries” (Holdridge 2005, 37). On matters like the Taiwanese recognition question, moreover, State officials were working to negotiate a difficult diplomatic question that the White House had already solved (*Ibid*).

In some cases, moreover, would have provided a “greater realism about international challenges” in area-specific knowledge for which Kissinger himself could not have adequately prepared (Dallek 2007, 111). The truth of this matter is betrayed by the White House’s use of State’s diplomatic strategies, even if its officials were loath to admit this fact:

Kissinger was dismissive of the State Department... Yet he and the president ever expressed reservations about the department’s approach... Indeed, in their own future dealings with the Chinese they would adopt elements of that approach (Accinelli 2005, 18).

If we can demonstrate that (a) NSC-centric policy was not the only means by which Sino-American *rapprochement* could have been achieved and that (b) the

process may actually have suffered as a result of the Department's exclusion, it is difficult to justify Nixon's strategy on utilitarian grounds.

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Ultimately, we can assess Nixon's actions along a swirl of considerations: a president's prerogative to oversee foreign policy creation, his or her ability to achieve goals and whether it is appropriate to do so. While we often allow for expanded presidential action in the face of vital policy decisions, the case of Sino-American *rapprochement* can be understood as a case where the White House utilized more secrecy and bureaucratic isolation than necessary to attain its ends, perhaps even to the detriment of future administrations.

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