CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Normalizing Relations from the Cold War to the Present: Continuing War, Pursuing Peace, and Building Empire

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Abstract

"Normalization of relations" is a phrase of recent origin, widely used by scholars, politicians, and journalists. Defining normalization, however, is remarkably difficult. While we know a great deal about specific instances of normalization, we lack a sustained study of normalization itself, a gap this article begins to address. Using case studies of U.S. relations with China, Vietnam, and Cuba, this article examines the idea of normalization, its history, and its consequences. Focusing on pivotal moments in which "normalization" was at stake, we argue that in the American rendering, normalization was a process that unfolded in three phases. In turn, normalizing relations became a key nonmilitary means through which U.S. officials escalated and then deescalated the Cold War. Like other facets of U.S. diplomacy of the postwar period, normalization policies were premised on many of the assumptions and institutions of the "liberal international order" and have endured into the twenty-first century.

"The United States of America is changing its relationship with the people of Cuba," announced President Barack Obama on December 17, 2014. One year after a "handshake that shocked the world," with Cuban President Raúl Castro at Nelson Mandela's memorial service in South Africa, U.S.–Cuban relations were once again making headlines.[1] Obama proclaimed that the Cold War adversaries aimed to "normalize relations between our two countries."[2] Fifteen months later, the U.S. president visited Havana. In a well-choreographed and symbolic show of diplomacy, Obama met and held a joint press conference with Castro. While observers agreed these highly publicized events signaled a new chapter in Cuban–American relations, Obama's overtures also sparked sharp controversy and provoked many

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[1]Alan Gomez, "The Obama-Castro Handshake that Shocked the World," *USA Today*, Dec. 10, 2013, https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2013/12/10/obama-castro-handshake/3967087/.

[2]"Transcript: Obama's Remarks on U.S.-Cuban Relations," *Washington Post*, Dec. 17, 2014, https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/transcript-obamas-remarks-on-us-cuba-relations/2014/12/17/08366538-8612-11e4-9534-f79a23c40e6c_story.html?utm_term=.6a8f8cbda114 (accessed Dec. 28, 2020).

questions. Would the change in U.S. policy help promote democracy in Cuba or tighten the hold of the Castro regime? How would the powerful Cuban–American bloc respond? Would Congress lift the embargo?

While these and other concerns framed public discussions, one fundamental question was notably absent: what did the professed "normalization of relations" actually mean? Did the Obama–Castro summit signal that normalization was fully achieved, formally beginning, or something in between? The ambiguity of that diplomatic incident forces a broader reflection: what does normalization entail, when does it end, and who gets to decide? In this article, we seek to provide preliminary answers to these questions using case studies of U.S. relations with Cuba, China, and Vietnam.

When American officials employ the language of normalization in international relations, we argue they follow a three-phase process characterized by contradictions and predicated on preponderant U.S. power. Phase I begins after unacceptable military outcomes: the "loss" of China, the humiliation of the Bay of Pigs invasion, and the abysmal failure in Vietnam. After such perceived military and diplomatic debacles, American policy makers severed ties with adversaries abroad, inflicted hostile policies, and insisted that a return to full bilateral connections required normalization. In Phase I, U.S. policy makers are animated primarily by emotional reactions, domestic political audiences, and ideological motivations. Phase II, which often lasts for decades, witnesses a striking incongruity in which Washington insists that bilateral relations remain "frozen," even as governmental and nonstate efforts to address issues of mutual bilateral concern progress and other domestic actors aim to thwart or fundamentally alter the form or function of further engagement. While implementing highly hostile policies, in other words, U.S. diplomats often need the assistance of the very governments (and leaders) that they try to exclude from the community of nations. Finally, in Phase III, other geopolitical realities, including often changing political and economic circumstances, move to the fore. In our case studies we find rifts in adversaries' alliances (such as in Sino–Soviet relations), changing economic realities (for example the oil shock and stagflation), or innovative agendas driven by politicians or parties interacting across nations given changes in the international system (consider détente, the end of the Cold War). Phase III kickstarts with a breakthrough—a moment when a seemingly abrupt change in relations inaugurates more conciliatory approaches, such as president Richard Nixon's revelation of national security adviser Henry Kissinger's secret trip to Beijing, the U.S.-authored 1991 Roadmap to U.S.–Vietnamese Relations, and the Obama–Castro handshake.

Understanding more fully the process and patterns of normalization in U.S. foreign relations is essential to a wide range of historical inquiries precisely because of the nature of U.S. power during this period, which ensured that American policies reverberated far beyond bilateral ties. American policy makers' decision to sever all relations with Cuba, for instance, not only impacted relations between Washington and Havana, but altered the broader diplomatic, military, cultural, and economic terrain. The explicit and implicit audiences for normalization, moreover, were both national—that is, U.S. domestic political audiences—and global. Ultimately, the full process of normalization functioned as a nonmilitary form of warfare, a key component of "cold" conflict during the Cold War. Like after other forms of conflict, part of this larger process included devising ways to reduce tensions and chart a more peaceful path forward. Normalization, as a tool of U.S. statecraft, therefore, served as a key mechanism for escalating and de-escalating the Cold War. It offers an underutilized lens into understanding the nature of war and peace in the post-1945 era.

Normalization also served as an aspect of imperial policy with clear colonial resonances. Scholars have documented at length how policing borders and enumerating terms of entry constitute state sovereignty.[3] Normalization served as a primary means of "American gatekeeping,"

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[3]John Torpey, *The Invention of the Passport: Surveillance, Citizenship and the State* (Cambridge, UK, 2000); Christopher Rudolph, *National Security: Policy Development and Western Europe Since 1945* (Stanford, CA,

to borrow a phrase from historian Erika Lee, by determining which nations could enter the sphere of American influence and under what terms.[4] In addition to demarcating the literal and metaphorical boundaries of U.S. empire in the postwar period, normalization projected U.S. power on a decolonizing landscape in ways that buttressed white supremacist and patriarchal systems of power. In examining normalization in its own right rather than in episodic fashion, we provide a new framework for understanding an important tenet of U.S. Cold War diplomacy and a fresh perspective for analyzing familiar, iconic historical moments.

Historians and political scientists know a great deal about specific instances of normalization. Far from being overlooked, normalization has remained central to the study of United States foreign relations in the second half of the twentieth century, as the many articles and monographs devoted to U.S. relations with Cuba, China, and Vietnam attest.[5] Paradoxically, despite our extensive knowledge about specific case studies, normalization, as a concept, lacks theorization. Most sweeping histories of the global Cold War and the United States' role in it have no index reference to normalization nor do they spend much time examining the constituent parts of normalization, even as they often focus extensively on conflict and rapprochement. In fact, the existing literature suggests an absence of stable definitions of the term across both historical and political science fields.[6]

Part of the explanation for this lack of theorization and definitional clarity may lie in the often unstated assumption that normalization occurred rapidly (or nearly instantaneously) with the resumption of official diplomatic relations. As political scientist Lowell Dittmer observed in 1992, however, "'normalization' was an ongoing *process*."[7] We, and a growing number of scholars, agree with Dittmer.[8] Building on the strong foundation of existing studies of

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2006); Aristide R. Zolberg, *A Nation by Design: Immigration Policy in the Fashioning of America* (Cambridge, MA, 2006); Daniel Kanstroom, *Deportation Nation: Outsiders in American History* (Cambridge, MA, 2007).

[4]Erika Lee, "The Chinese Exclusion Example: Race, Immigration, and American Gatekeeping, 1882–1924," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 21, no. 3 (Spring 2002): 36–62. Öyvind Österud also used this term with regard to diplomatic recognition long before Lee's more expansive theorization of the concept. See Öyvind Österud, "The Narrow Gate: Entry to the Club of Sovereign States," *Review of International Studies* 23, no. 2 (Apr. 1997): 167–8.

[5]For work on U.S.–Cuban relations, see William M. LeoGrande and Peter Kornbluh, *Back Channel to Cuba: The Hidden History of Secret Negotiations between Washington and Havana* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2014); Lars Schoultz, *That Infernal Little Cuban Republic: The United States and the Cuban Revolution* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2009); Morris Morley and Chris McGillion, *Unfinished Business: America and Cuba after the Cold War, 1989–2001* (New York, 2002); Michael J. Kelly, Erika Moreno, and Richard C. Witmer, eds., *The Cuba–U.S. Bilateral Relationship: New Pathways and Policy Choices* (New York, 2019); and Gary Hufbauer and Barbara Kotschwar, *Economic Normalization with Cuba: A Roadmap for US Policymakers* (Washington, DC, 2014). For work on U.S.–China relations, see William Kirby, Robert S. Ross, and Gong Li, eds., *Normalization of U.S.–China Relations: An International History* (Cambridge, MA, 2005) and note 11. For U.S.–Vietnamese relations, see H. Bruce Franklin, *M.I.A. or Mythmaking in America* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1993); Lewis Stern, *Defense Relations Between the United States and Vietnam: The Process of Normalization, 1977–2003* (Jefferson, NC, 2005); Robert D. Schulzinger, *A Time for Peace: The Legacy of the Vietnam War* (New York, 2006); Edwin A. Martini, *Invisible Enemies: The American War on Vietnam, 1975–2000* (Amherst, MA, 2007); Michael J. Allen, *Until the Last Man Comes Home: POWs, MIAs, and the Unending Vietnam War* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2009); and Amanda C. Demmer, *After Saigon's Fall: Refugees and U.S.–Vietnamese Relations, 1975–1995* (Cambridge, MA, 2021).

[6]Chris Brown, "International Relations and International Political Theory," in *The Oxford Handbook of International Political Theory*, eds. Chris Brown and Robyn Eckersley (New York, 2018), 48–59.

[7]Lowell Dittmer, *Sino-Soviet Normalization and Its International Implications, 1945–1990* (Seattle, 1992), 10. Italics in original.

[8]In addition to the scholarship on U.S.–Vietnamese normalization, which emphasizes normalization as contested process, see Gong Li, "Preface," in *Normalization of U.S.–China Relations: An International History*, eds. William C. Kirby, Robert S. Ross, and Gong Li (Cambridge, MA, 2005), ix, xiii; Evelyn Goh, *Constructing the U.S. Rapprochement with China, 1961–1974: From "Red Menace" to "Tacit Ally"* (New York, 2005), 13–4; Kelly L. Gosa, "From Normalization of Relations to War: United States–Libya Relations 2001–2011" (M.A. thesis,

normalization with Cuba, China, and Vietnam, we aim to historicize and theorize normalization itself.

What follows is a basic taxonomy and political and intellectual genealogy of normalization as a tool in modern U.S. foreign relations. First, we interrogate the "when" of normalization in an attempt to uncover the concept's origins. Why did normalization emerge when it did, and how was the phrase used? How is the concept derived from a specific time and place yet also an overarching category that transcends those parameters, at least in theory? Second, we explore the "what," analyzing common (mis)conceptions about normalization and offering our own definition of what normalization has meant in practice. Third and finally, we lay out our provisional assessments of "why" normalization emerged at the moments when it did and elaborate on what we see as the three main phases of normalization. We conclude by addressing how scholars might benefit from a more holistic approach to the concept, history, and consequences of normalization. Throughout, we illuminate many areas that need further research, offering an agenda for building on the preliminary account of normalization we compile here.

When? The Importance of Timing

The concept of normalization emerged as a tool in the United States's diplomatic arsenal during the Cold War. This timing was important for three interrelated reasons: the burgeoning Cold War, relative U.S. power vis-à-vis the rest of the world in the 1940s and 1950s, and the international landscape of decolonization. Understanding normalization's form and function requires centering its origins at this specific, yet fluid, historical moment.

One lens into normalization's genealogy is its sudden appearance in major newspapers in the postwar period. It was not until the late 1940s and early 1950s that the phrase "normalization of relations" began appearing in the *New York Times* and *Wall Street Journal*.[9] From the late 1940s and even into the 1960s, when these outlets used the term they usually did so sparingly, often directly quoting a foreign leader or diplomat, or referring to "normal ties" or "softening" of policy.[10] When the term appeared not as direct quotation, U.S. journalists still frequently put the word normalization and the phrase normalization of relations in quotation marks, highlighting the novel and ambiguous nature of these concepts.[11] Although normalization would soon become a powerful tool in U.S. policy makers' hands, then, it is clear that normalization originated abroad. While a complete treatment of normalization's non-American usages in the early Cold War is far beyond the scope of this article, a brief exploration is

DePaul University, 2013), 10; Enrico Fardella, "The Sino-American Normalization: A Reassessment," *Diplomatic History* 33, no. 4 (Sept. 2009): 547; and Breck Walker, "'Friends, But Not Allies'—Cyrus Vance and the Normalization of Relations with China," *Diplomatic History* 33, no. 4 (Sept. 2009): 579.

   [9]The *New York Times* has only one article containing the phrase "normalization of relations" from the 1930s and five from 1940–1948. While "normalization" does appear in earlier instances, these usages were almost always disconnected from diplomacy and therefore are not considered here.

   [10]Henry Raymont, "U.S. and Hungary Prepare to Renew Normal Ties Soon," *The New York Times*, Aug. 9, 1963, 1; Paul Underwood, "Red Bloc Looks West: East Europe Sees Trade and Prestige in Hints about Softening of U.S. Policy," *The New York Times*, Aug. 12, 1963, 2.

   [11]One characteristic article notes that the Soviets were pursing "increasing rapport—they call it 'normalization' of relations—between Russia and Yugoslavia." See "Fish on the Shore," *Wall Street Journal*, June 6, 1955, 10. This practice also occurred in the official record. See "The Acting Secretary of State to the Office of the United States High Commissioner for Germany, at Bonn," April 13, 1953, *Foreign Relations of the United States,* 1952–1954 [hereafter *FRUS*], Germany and Austria, vol. VII, part 2, no. 574, https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1952-54v07p2/d574; and "The Ambassador in France (Dillion) to the Department of State," November 15, 1954, FRUS, 1952–1954, Indochina, vol. XIII, part 2, no. 1319, https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1952-54v13p2/d1319.

necessary to understand the context in which U.S. policy makers ultimately embraced and deployed the concept for their own ends.

Preliminary research suggests that normalization began as a term to describe the often-extended process of going from a state of war to a state of peace after World War II.[12] The difficulties of bringing a war of such size and scope to a formal, legal end were only exacerbated by the relatively quick dissolution of wartime alliances, the division of Germany, and the occupation of Japan. In the early 1950s, Japan and the Soviet Union were still legally at a state of war, and thanks to the protracted ratification process for the European Defense Treaty, Western Germany also remained at war with all of the former Allies. With the war casting a long shadow over the peace, Japanese, Soviet Union, and West German diplomats all used the phrase "normalization of relations" to describe the way they hoped to rectify the situation in the early 1950s.[13] In the immediate postwar period, the definition of normalization clearly remained in flux. On the one hand, policy makers used the term to describe the shift from war to postwar relations, including questions such as diplomatic recognition and the return of prisoners of war, among others.[14]

Yet, on the other hand, the surging Cold War imbued the idea of normalization with added significance. The example of West Germany in the mid-1950s illustrates this point. In 1955 West German diplomats were quick to remind their counterparts in the United States, given Washington's recognition of the Soviet Union in 1933, "Diplomatic relations … must not be confused with the normalization of relations."[15] Policy makers in Bonn argued that while they could not dispute the existence of the Soviet Union, their disagreements with Moscow on the legitimacy of East Germany and future of European security were so intractable that normal relations were impossible.[16] While normal relations included formal diplomatic recognition, it was becoming clear that they also went beyond that simple binary to connote a more complex balance of interests and influences.[17]

Contemporaries' views of what constituted normal relations evolved largely because of the Cold War. This was particularly true because officials in Moscow used the phrase normalization of relations before their American counterparts.[18] Although the Soviets suggested that they

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[12]On the nebulousness of this process, see Mary Dudziak, *War Time: An Idea, Its History, Its Consequences* (New York, 2012).

[13]"Germans Approve Move to End War," *New York Times*, July 11, 1951, 40; "Japanese to Talk to Soviet Union at U.N.," *New York Times*, Feb. 4, 1955, 4.

[14]Clifton Daniel, "Moscow and Bonn Agree to Diplomatic Relations," *New York Times*, Sept. 14, 1955, 1; "Soviet Irks Japan on Prisoner Issue," *New York Times*, June 18, 1955, 6.

[15]M. S. Handler, "Adenauer Calls Soviet Strength Cause of Bonn Tie," *New York Times*, Sept. 17, 1955, 1, 3.

[16]Ronald Granieri, *The Ambivalent Alliance: Konrad Adenauer, the CDU/CSU, and the West, 1949–1966* (New York, 2003). For a U.S. intelligence report on this position, see "Telegram from the Embassy in the Soviet Union to the Department of State," September 10, 1955, *FRUS*, 1955–1957, Austrian State Treaty, Summit and Foreign Ministers Meetings, 1955, vol. V, document 272, https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1955-57v05/d272. See also Jost Dülffer, "'No More Potsdam!': Konrad Adenauer's Nightmare and the Basis of His International Orientation," *German Politics & Society* 25, no. 2 (Summer 2007): 19–42.

[17]The scholarship on diplomatic recognition is vast. Useful entry points include Visoka Gëzim, John Doyle, and Edward Newman, eds., *Routledge Handbook of State Recognition* (Abingdon, Oxon, UK, 2020); Francis M. Carroll, "Diplomatic Recognition," *The Encyclopedia of Diplomacy* (Hoboken, NJ, 2018); Bridget Coggins, *Power Politics and State Formation in the Twentieth Century: The Dynamics of Recognition* (Cambridge, UK, 2014); and Mikulas Fabry, *Recognizing States: International Society and the Establishment of New States Since 1776* (New York, 2010). Recognition and nonrecognition are both heavily studied and theorized concepts. While delving into the relationship between these phenomena and normalization is beyond our scope here, we see them as especially fruitful areas for future research and interdisciplinary collaboration.

[18]We find this particularly in the journalistic coverage of Soviet diplomacy and public pronouncements. On a broader history of U.S. leaders co-opting phrases coined abroad for their own uses, see the excellent example of Woodrow Wilson and self-determination in Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (New York, 2007), 38–45.

were pursuing normalization to foster an East–West rapprochement, the American press remained unconvinced. "Of course," a September 1955 article explained, the Soviets' "basic objective is to undercut United States influence."[19] As another article put it, the Soviets were "waging a relentless campaign … to 'normalize' relations everywhere," including with the United States, Western Germany, Japan, Yugoslavia, China, and others.[20]

While Moscow's actual intentions are beyond the purview of our analysis, this is a case where perception was perhaps more important than the reality. In the wake of George Kennan's Long Telegram and the omnipresence of containment across policies, institutions, and security commitments, from the Truman Doctrine to the Marshall Plan, and from the National Security Act of 1947 to the United States' leadership role in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), it is clear that U.S. officials perceived the Soviets' normalization campaign as an explicit attempt to gain the upper hand in the Cold War. In the zero-sum worldviews that predominated at the time, U.S. officials could not let the challenge go unmatched. They responded in kind, moving in the late 1950s and early 1960s to "normalize" relations or "renew ties" where they were already severed, with Bulgaria, Hungary, and Lebanon, while at the same time vehemently refusing to do so with Cuba and China.[21] It is here, in the case studies where normalization took decades to unfold, that we focus for the remainder of this article.[22]

While normalization's emergence during the early Cold War is crucial to understanding the concept's scope and significance, relative U.S. power during the same years explains why the process took on such importance in American hands. Given Washington's "uniquely preeminent position" conferred by "overwhelming power" in the postwar years, U.S. normalization processes reverberated far and wide.[23] When U.S. officials severed or limited relations, in other words, they wielded not just the ability to withhold American goods, consumers, and political favor, though those consequences were significant. U.S. officials also possessed the ability to leverage Washington's pervasive influence in foreign capitals, in the English language press and media, and in the myriad of new international institutions, including the United Nations, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund. Indeed, as Mark Mazower has argued, U.S. officials helped create and operate these new international organizations with the belief that the values of American liberalism were "identical to the interests of the world writ large," a system wherein these organizations provided "assistance and cover" pivotal to the United States' ascendency to global power after 1945.[24] Exercising such definitive (though never unlimited) influence over these levers of power allowed the United States to wield preponderant influence in a way that, conceivably, no other nation in the world could mobilize. In this context, Washington's decisions about the speed and scope of normalization carried a particularly heavy burden. Normalization's first phase (refusing to acknowledge defeat and accept realities) was appealing

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[19]"Japanese-Soviet Talks," *New York Times*, Sept. 24, 1955, 18.

[20]Clifton Daniel, "Moscow and Bonn Agree to Diplomatic Relations," *New York Times*, Sept. 14, 1955, 1; "What's News," *Wall Street Journal*, Jan. 3, 1955, 1.

[21]"U.S. and Bulgaria Will Renew Ties, Broken Since '50," *New York Times*, Mar. 27, 1959, 1; M. S. Handler, "U.S. Nearing Normal Ties with Communist Hungary," *New York Times*, May 13, 1963, 1; "U.S. and Hungary Prepare to Renew Normal Ties Soon," *New York Times*, Aug. 9, 1963, 1; "Red Block Looks West," *New York Times*, Aug. 12, 1963, 2; "Relations with Hungary," *New York Times*, Aug. 12, 1963, 20; "U.S. Proposes Normalizing of Relations with Lebanon," *New York Times*, July 15, 1967, 2.

[22]The Cuba, China, and Vietnam case studies were selected because of the duration of the U.S. normalization process with each country and the sustained scholarship devoted to each case that has permitted us to synthesize and draw broad conclusions. While depicted as the rule in this initial, exploratory article, it might come to pass that these three case studies turn out to be more of an exception.

[23]Melvyn P. Leffler, *A Preponderance of Power: National Security, The Truman Administration, and the Cold War* (Palo Alto, CA, 1992). See also Daniel Bessner and Fredrik Logevall, "Recentering the United States in the Historiography of American Foreign Relations," *Texas National Security Review* 3, no. 2 (Spring 2020): 38–55.

[24]Mark Mazower, *Governing the World: The History of an Idea* (New York, 2012), xvii.

and feasible only because of the reality, perception, and pursuit of an American "preponderance" of power."[25]

The case of U.S.–Vietnamese relations after 1975 illustrates how this dynamic played out in practice. Perhaps the only point of agreement in the vast historiography on the Vietnam War is that the United States lost. Every other aspect of the conflict (including how and why the United States lost and if it could have won) remains hotly contested.[26] From this position of defeat, the U.S. government rejected overtures from Hanoi to establish diplomatic ties and move toward normal relations in the late 1970s, and, instead, as Edwin Martini has shown, "continued to wage economic, political, and cultural warfare on Vietnam long after 1975."[27] Despite the U.S. refusal to recognize the existence of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (SRV), the SRV maintained diplomatic relations with many in the West and was a member of the United Nations.[28] Because of the United States' ultimately definitive influence in international lending institutions, however, the SRV received paltry international aid outside of Moscow for the first fifteen years of its existence.

Once the United States acquiesced to international lending to Vietnam and began to create some loopholes in the U.S. embargo in 1993, however, Hanoi's financial fortunes changed overnight.[29] As Martini recounts, Vietnam had received "an average of less than $100 million during the late 1980s and early 1990s. At the fall IMF and World Bank meetings, with no more U.S. opposition, Hanoi received aid pledges of nearly $2 billion."[30] As this brief example shows, the ramifications of U.S. policies were not only vast, reverberating far beyond bilateral relations, but deeply contradictory, since forcing Hanoi to rely on solely communist sources of financial support ultimately reinforced Cold War dichotomies. The Cold War and the emergence of normalization in the U.S. diplomatic arsenal were not merely simultaneous events; they were mutually constitutive.

They were also imperial. Historians have documented that the United States had an empire long before 1945 or even 1898.[31] While scholars disagree somewhat about what to call the United States after 1945, they acknowledge that using the aforementioned new array of global institutions, a monetary system predicated on preponderant U.S. influence, new technological innovations, and a global infrastructure of military bases, the United States was able to, as Daniel Immerwahr put it, enjoy "many of the benefits of empire without

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[25]Leffler, *A Preponderance of Power*.

[26]The historiography of the Vietnam War is impossibly large and contentious. For a useful entry point to how scholars have debated these questions, see Gary R. Hess, *Vietnam: Explaining America's Lost War*, 2nd ed. (Hoboken, NJ, 2015).

[27]See Kosal Path, *Vietnam's Strategic Thinking during the Third Indochina War* (Madison, WI, 2020), 27–8; and Martini, *Invisible Enemies*, 2.

[28]The Carter administration acquiesced to the SRV's admission into the UN in the late 1970s during a moment of optimism about U.S.–Vietnamese relations, but ultimately changed course. See Demmer, *After Saigon's Fall*, ch 2.

[29]"Renewal of the Trading with the Enemy Act and U.S. Policy Toward the Embargo Against Vietnam," Sept. 13, 1993, The White House Office of the Press Secretary, National Security Council, Office of Press and Communications, and Philip "PJ" Crowley, "Vietnam [2]," Clinton Digital Library, https://clintonwhitehouse6.archives.gov/1993/09/1993-09-13-renewal-of-trading-with-the-enemy-act-and-vietnam-policy.html (accessed Dec. 20, 2023).

[30]Martini, *Invisible Enemies*, 199.

[31]Richard H. Immerman, *Empire for Liberty: A History of American Imperialism from Benjamin Franklin to Paul Wolfowitz* (Princeton, NJ, 2010); Thomas R. Hietala, *Manifest Design: American Exceptionalism and Empire*, rev. ed. (Ithaca, NY, 2003). Eliga H. Gould argues that "from the beginning" the American Revolution was "a struggle for dominion over others" whereby Americans "reproduced key features of the European empires." Eliga H. Gould, *Among the Powers of the Earth: The American Revolution and the Making of a New World Empire* (Cambridge, MA, 2012), 4.

having to actually hold colonies."[32] This imperial project was built on a decolonizing landscape.[33] As Antony Anghie has observed, the post-1945 period "witnessed the end of formal colonialism, but the continuation, consolidation and elaboration of imperialism."[34]

Centering normalization both makes U.S. imperial power more visible and helps us see it in new ways. Historians, political scientists, and sociologists have shown how creating, enforcing, and policing borders serves as a mechanism for the creation and maintenance of sovereignty.[35] While nations are imagined, they are also codified and territorialized.[36] Despite mythologies about the United States' "golden door" welcoming immigrants immortalized in Emma Lazarus's poem on the statue of liberty, the United States has also been, as Aristide Zolberg put it, *A Nation by Design*.[37] Much of that design has concerned delineating which groups and individuals can be incorporated and welcomed into the U.S. body politic (or not), the determinations of which have been policed at both internal and external borders.[38] As the United States supplanted the British Empire as the hegemon of a self-proclaimed "Western world," the policing of borders became both deeply national and global, requiring delineation and defending of U.S. national borders and those of "the West." U.S. officials and American jurists simultaneously sought to promote U.S. power and to construct a legal geography of citizenship through international law and a legalist interpretation that legitimized the varied formations of the United States' burgeoning empire.[39] Creating and enforcing those boundaries reinforced the power and sovereignty of the United States.[40] Normalization was one of the tools that served this gatekeeping function for the post-1945 American empire by demarcating which nations were unacceptable for "entry" into the U.S.-led, Western world order and under which terms they could (re)enter.

In seeking to offer an initial framework for studying normalization as a tool of American statecraft, we see the question of "when" not as incidental but essential to the power and function of normalization itself. The arguably unprecedented nature of U.S. global power in 1945 and for decades thereafter, combined with the belligerent zero-sum worldview of the Cold War, created the conditions that made normalization a policy both feasible and strategic. We now turn to a more detailed examination of how normalization functioned in practice.

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[32]Regarding the debate on terminology, Daniel Immerwahr terms the post-1945 U.S. a "pointillist empire," while A. G. Hopkins argues "aspiring hegemon" is more accurate. See Daniel Immerwahr, *How to Hide an Empire: A History of the Greater United States* (New York, 2019), 18; and A. G. Hopkins, *American Empire: A Global History* (Princeton, NJ, 2018), 41. For the history of military bases, see David Vine, *Base Nation: How U.S. Military Bases Abroad Harm America and the World* (New York, 2017), 4. Finally, see Immerwahr, *How to Hide an Empire*, 18.

[33]Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (New York, 2005).

[34]Antony Anghie, *Imperialism, Sovereignty, and the Making of International Law* (Cambridge, UK, 2005), 12.

[35]See footnote 3.

[36]Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, rev. ed. (London, 2006).

[37]Zolberg, *A Nation By Design*.

[38]In addition to note 3 and Lee, "The Chinese Exclusion Example," see, Roger Daniels, *Guarding the Golden Door: American Immigration Policy and Immigrants since 1882* (New York, 2004); Mae E. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton, NJ, 2004); Linda Kerber, "The Stateless as the Citizen's Other: A View from the United States," *American Historical Review* 112, no. 1 (2007): 1–34; Dorothee Schneider, *Crossing Borders: Migration and Citizenship in the Twentieth-Century United States* (Cambridge, MA, 2011); Erika Lee, *America for the Americans: A History of Xenophobia in the United States* (New York, 2019); and Sarah Coleman, *The Walls Within: The Politics of Immigration in Modern America* (Princeton, NJ, 2021).

[39]Immerwahr, *How to Hide an Empire*; Christopher McKnight Nichols, *Promise and Peril: America at the Dawn of a Global Age* (Cambridge, MA, 2011); Benjamin Coates, *Legalist Empire: International Law and American Foreign Policy in the Early Twentieth Century* (New York, 2016).

[40]Kori Schake, *Safe Passage: The Transition from British to American Hegemony* (Cambridge, MA, 2017); Bridget Coggins, *Power Politics and State Formation in the Twentieth Century: The Dynamics of Recognition* (Cambridge, UK, 2014).

Preliminary Definitions: Normalization's Three Phases

Studying episodes of normalization in collective fashion illustrates the need for a more comprehensive definition, even as it heightens the complexity of the task. A quick survey of U.S. normalizations with China, Vietnam, and Cuba, for instance, demonstrates that the normalization process has not always followed a specific trajectory. That is, to borrow a concept from mathematics, normalization has not had a precise order of operations. With regard to U.S.–Chinese relations, "Ping-Pong Diplomacy"—Beijing's invitation of the U.S. ping-pong team for a match in Beijing—signaled that bilateral relations might be thawing, and three months later Kissinger made his secret trip to China.[41] While Nixon went to China quickly thereafter, in February 1972, it was not until January 1979 that the Carter Administration granted China full diplomatic recognition.[42] For U.S.–Vietnamese relations, similar events unfolded differently. A glance at sanctions, in this case embargo policies related to presidential pronouncements, helps to illuminate the story. U.S. officials, led by Congressional action, lifted the embargo on Vietnam in 1994 before the resumption of diplomatic relations the following year. An official visit by a sitting U.S. president (Bill Clinton in November 2000) followed rather than preceded the resumption of diplomatic ties. Every U.S. president from Clinton through Trump as made an official visit to Vietnam. While with Cuba, Obama and Raúl Castro met in person, but abroad, in December 2013, when they both attended Nelson Mandela's funeral. A little over a year later, Obama made his historic announcement and the U.S. flag began to fly in Havana at the newly opened U.S. embassy as of summer 2015, but the embargo has remained in place (since 1962). Congress has been unwilling to alter embargo policy toward Cuba even as high-level normalization efforts moved forward during the Obama years, culminating in the National Security Presidential Memorandum (NSPM) in 2017 on "Strengthening the Policy of the United States Toward Cuba."[43] As these episodes reveal, the most highly visible aspects of normalization—resumption of diplomatic ties, economic relations, and visits by heads of state—depend on the context of each particular case. These normalization processes also depend on the interaction—and cumulative efforts—of both the executive and legislative branches. For normalization to be as definitive in effects as it appears in rhetoric, legislative and executive actions must combine to press forward in law through economic, cultural, and security relations as well as via symbolic and strategic actions and diplomacy.

While defining normalization as a process that unfolds according to specific steps would be too rigid and would fail to reflect the concept's flexibility, it is possible to speak broadly about phases. Provisionally we would like to offer a three-phase definition. In each of these cases, Phase I included, from Washington's perspective, an unacceptable outcome followed by a

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[41]Pete Millwood, *Improbable Diplomats: How Ping-Pong Players, Musicians, and Scientists Remade US-China Relations* (Cambridge, UK, 2022); "Ping-Pong Diplomacy: Artifacts from the Historic 1971 U.S. Table Tennis Trip to China," National Museum of American Diplomacy, https://diplomacy.state.gov/ping-pong-diplomacy-historic-1971-u-s-table-tennis-trip-to-china/ (accessed Dec. 29, 2023).

[42]On the political theater value of Nixon's summits abroad, see Tizoc Chavez, "'One Picture May Not Be Worth Ten Thousand Words, but the White House Is Betting It's Worth Ten Thousand Votes': Richard Nixon and Diplomacy as Spectacle," in *The Cold War at Home and Abroad: Domestic Politics and U.S. Foreign Policy since 1945*, eds. Andrew Johns and Mitchell Lerner (Lexington, KY, 2018), 146–72. The sequence is as follows: Nixon began lifting the embargo on China with executive actions prior to 1971, the Beijing ping-pong invitation was extended April 6, 1971, by June 1971 the embargo had been largely removed, Henry Kissinger's trip was July 9–11, and Richard Nixon went to China February 21–28, 1972. It was not until 1978 that Jimmy Carter decided to pursue further formal aspects of normalization. After intense negotiations, on December 15, 1978, Carter announced in a national address a new diplomatic relationship with China while acknowledging the U.S.'s "interest in the peaceful resolution of the Taiwan issue." On January 1, 1979, U.S. recognition of the People's Republic of China became official, and in March the two nations opened embassies and exchanged ambassadors, marking a new era in U.S.–P.R.C. relations.

[43]U.S. Department of State, Economic Sanctions Policy and Implementation, Cuba Sanctions, documents, overview, https://www.state.gov/cuba-sanctions/ (accessed Dec. 29, 2023).

break in relations. In each of our case studies, U.S. officials severed ties with foreign states after failed attempts (of different magnitudes) to intervene. Mao Zedong's victory in the Chinese Civil War was framed as an American failure (the so-called "loss" of China)—a perceived foreign policy disaster exacerbated by Moscow's successful atom bomb test that same year. These events fueled a major rethinking of U.S. policy and practices that culminated in the 1950 National Security Council Paper-68 (NSC-68), a highly-classified report completed by the U.S. State Department's Policy Planning Staff, which became one of the most important strategic plans of the Cold War; it embraced a global vision of permanent military readiness, prescribing "a rapid build-up of political, economic, and military strength in the free world."[44] The disaster of the 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion combined with the repeated failures of U.S. efforts to assassinate Fidel Castro in Operation Mongoose leveled a similar, if more limited, blow to the American policy-making psyche.[45] Finally, the cataclysmic failure of U.S. escalation of the war in Vietnam, which prompted so much official and public discontent, also challenged many preexisting assumptions and threw the limits of American power into sharp relief.[46] In response to these events, U. S. policy makers largely refused to accept the results.

To a significant degree, they did so because of domestic political incentives. Campbell Craig and Fredrik Logevall argue that the Cold War was largely sustained by "the 'politics of insecurity': a political culture in America in which lawmakers in Washington recognized a powerful incentive to inflate threats, demonize adversaries, and perennially deny that the United States was in fact enviably secure."[47] In this context, when geopolitical outcomes ran so counter to national mythology and the narrative of American exceptionalism, U.S. officials also had much to gain from crafting and deploying normalization in the ways that they did.

In Phase I, normalization provided a means to reassert power and, at least rhetorically, to gain the upper hand. Obstinate U.S. officials combatively set the normalization agenda on American terms, usually declaring conditions U.S. policy makers knew would be nonstarters, if not outright insulting (e.g., "Two Chinas"). That was the point. After "loss," humiliation, and defeat, refusal to acknowledge that defeat *and* to continue hostile policies toward the governments that had embarrassed the United States, while not practical, were deeply emotionally satisfying for U.S. officials and domestic political audiences.[48] As Barbara Keys has argued, despite the mythology surrounding the ability of diplomats to act in the so-called national interest, emotion plays a major role in U.S. statecraft.[49] If all diplomacy is highly susceptible to emotion, it seems normalization policies are especially so. One cannot discount the power of emotions like shame, humiliation, anger, pride, and vengeance. Carol Anderson has

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[44]National Security Council Report, NSC-68, "United States Objectives and Programs for National Security," Apr. 14, 1950, 54, Wilson Center Digital Archive, https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/national-security-council-report-nsc-68-united-states-objectives-and-programs-national (accessed Dec. 19, 2023).

[45]John F. Kennedy, "Address Before the American Society of Newspaper Editors, Washington, D.C., Apr. 20, 1961," John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, https://www.jfklibrary.org/archives/other-resources/john-f-kennedy-speeches/american-society-of-newspaper-editors-19610420 (accessed Dec. 19, 2023). For documents related to Operation Mongoose, see Papers of John F. Kennedy, "Special Group (Augmented): General, 1962: January–June" folder, Presidential Papers, National Security Files, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, https://www.jfklibrary.org/asset-viewer/archives/JFKNSF/319/JFKNSF-319-007 (accessed Dec. 19, 2023).

[46]Christian G. Appy, *American Reckoning: The Vietnam War and our National Identity* (New York, 2016). See also Andrew J. Bacevich, *The New American Militarism: How Americans Are Seduced by War*, updated ed. (New York, 2013).

[47]Campbell Craig and Fredrik Logevall, *America's Cold War: The Politics of Insecurity*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, MA, 2020), x.

[48]Frank Costigliola, "Reading for Emotion," in *Explaining the History of American Foreign Relations*, 3rd ed., eds. Frank Costigliola and Michael J. Hogan (New York, 2016), 356–73.

[49]Barbara Keys, "The Diplomat's Two Minds: Deconstructing Foreign Policy Myth," *Diplomatic History* 44, no. 1 (Jan. 2020): 1–21.

shown how policy making gives a veneer of respectability to often combative, hostile policies. Using the levers of power to register discontent is powerful precisely because it is often invisible. Is "not about visible violence," Anderson writes, noting that policy often "wreaks havoc subtly, almost imperceptibly."[50] While Anderson was writing about the ability of policy to sanitize and legitimize white rage in a domestic context, we observe something similar happening in foreign relations during the same period.

Combative Phase I policies were also premised on American understandings of relative power, a balance which, U.S. politicians, policy makers, and diplomats often insisted, largely remained unchanged despite setbacks. It was this asymmetry that empowered American officials, at least in theory and in the assumptions that clearly were foundational to their thinking, to set normalization agendas on the United States' terms. We find ample evidence for this in the public speeches and statements and private writing of politicians and policy makers involved in U.S. foreign relations. As Senator Bob Dole (R-KS) opined in a 1977 speech about "Normalizing Relations with Communist Regimes": "It is important that one fundamental factor be clearly understood at the outset: the three Communist governments [in Beijing, Hanoi, and Havana] have as much and more to gain from improved relations with the United States, as we have to gain from the arrangement."[51] This relative need, the senator argued, was directly tied to relative power: "We hold the bargaining chips."[52] These remarks, simultaneously confrontational and self-reassuring, are emblematic of the ways diplomatic audiences were forefront in U.S. normalization rhetoric. The language and policies that emphasized uncompromising demands and extracting concessions, nearly ubiquitous in U.S. politico-diplomatic rhetoric during Phase I, pleased American domestic audiences despite and even because of their colonial and imperial resonances.

Nearly every scholar who has written about the U.S. empire has noted that the American public remains willfully ignorant of the fact that an American empire exists—and hostile toward the very idea that it might. In our case studies, normalization provided a means for policy makers to navigate these nuanced waters. As Jodi Kim suggests, imposing rules or conditions on others while declaring oneself exempt from those same requirements "is … a kind of sleight of hand: its very exercise or imposition is accompanied by a vanishing act that causes it to disappear."[53] Even in embarrassment and defeat, the United States still insisted that it got to make the rules. In this way, normalization provided an incredibly useful rhetorical device. U.S. policy makers did not need to specify that, despite policy failures and outright defeat, Washington would still rely on imperial power to impose extractive terms, as if from a position of authority or victory. Instead, it could simply break relations and then pursue normalization. The rhetoric of normalization, in other words, helped "hide" the empire, at least for U.S. domestic audiences. The function of normalization, however, helped to build it.

Normalization was predicated on ideas and ideologies, prejudices and priorities, which were clearly imperial and colonial. Studying normalization in its own right rather than in episodic fashion, therefore, invites intersectional analysis.[54] The contrast between the relatively homogenous white men at the helm of U.S. policy making during this era and the peoples and nations in Latin America and Asia that became the subject of normalization policies—

[50]Carol Anderson, *White Rage: The Unspoken Truth of Our Racial Divide* (New York, 2016), 3.

[51]Bob Dole, "Normalizing Relations with Communist Regimes," *Congressional Record*, 95 Cong., 1 sess., Apr. 29, 1977.

[52]Ibid.

[53]Jodi Kim, *Settler Garrison: Debt Imperialism, Militarism, and Transpacific Imaginaries* (Durham, NC, 2022), 18.

[54]Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color," *Stanford Law Review* 43, no. 6 (July 1991): 1241–65.

which U.S. policy makers discussed and envisioned through paternalistic, racialized, and heavily gendered lenses—is striking.[55] The potential for expanded research about the intersecting relationships of race, gender, and emotion as shaping forces in U.S. foreign affairs and the ideologies that guided U.S. foreign policy, which has already proven so revealing in other areas, is vast. U.S. officials used the language and methods of normalization to perpetuate a colonialism both very real—in terms of power and access to resources—and imagined. The latter included projecting a vision of bilateral relations based more on Washington's hopes than on actual conditions on the ground or realistic possibilities.

Phase II of normalization is fundamentally more amorphous and incongruous than Phase I. To varying degrees, this phase is characterized by contradiction, as it has historically included both prolonged stalemate—"frozen" relations to use Cold War parlance—and episodic compromise. Despite a lack of relations and the United States's insistence on setting the normalization agenda to bolster its imperial power and underwrite a quasicolonial discourse, American policy makers could not completely deny the existence of foreign states, and, in certain cases, required their active assistance. Such moments abound in the history of U.S.–Cuban relations. In 1973, Washington and Havana signed an antihijacking agreement, addressing frustrations with hijackers, who had taken over ninety commercial and private planes in the U.S. and routed them to Havana between 1968 and early 1973.[56] The policy marked the first accord between the two nations since Fidel Castro came to power in 1959. Almost immediately after that first accord was another antihijacking agreement the following year. This episode reveals that despite American enforcement of the embargo and vehement declarations of Cuba as an incorrigibly bad actor and "other" in the hemisphere, U.S. officials pragmatically required Cuban diplomatic buy-in.[57] Even when the two nations failed to reach an agreement, such as in 1993 discussions about migration concerns, contact and negotiation with their Cuban counterparts fostered individual relationships between policy makers and facilitated governmental ties that contradicted official rhetoric about cataclysmic breaks and zero-sum worldviews.[58]

We find similar trends in U.S.–Vietnamese relations. After 1975, Washington demanded that Hanoi help facilitate the "full accounting" of missing American servicemen and permit the emigration of Vietnamese with familial and employment ties to the United States. Both of these demands served Phase I goals by rewriting pre-1975 narratives, (re)branding the

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[55]For the homogeneity of the era's policy makers, see Robert D. Dean, *Imperial Brotherhood: Gender and the Making of Cold War Foreign Policy* (Amherst, MA, 2001). The quintessential example of U.S. paternalism in the Vietnam case study is a 1956 speech by then-Senator John F. Kennedy, who argued, "If we are not the parents of little Vietnam, then surely we are the godparents. We presided at its birth, we have assistance to its life, we have helped to shape its future…. This is our offspring—we cannot abandon it." Remarks of Senator John F. Kennedy at the Conference on Vietnam Luncheon in the Hotel Willard, Washington, DC, June 1, 1956, John F. Kennedy Library, https://www.jfklibrary.org/archives/other-resources/john-f-kennedy-speeches/vietnam-conference-washington-dc-19560601 (accessed Dec. 19, 2023). For policy makers' racialized worldview, see Adriane Lentz-Smith, "The Unbearable Whiteness of Grand Strategy," in *Rethinking American Grand Strategy*, eds. Elizabeth Borgwardt, Christopher McKnight Nichols, and Andrew Preston (New York, 2021), 329–45. On the importance of gender to the study of U.S. foreign relations, the following state of the field essay is a useful entry point into a large subfield of scholarship: Judy Tzu-Chun Wu, "Gendering American Foreign Relations," in *Explaining the History of American Foreign Relations*, 3rd ed., eds. Frank Costigliola and Michael J. Hogan (New York, 2016), 271–83.

[56]On the initial 1973 antihijacking agreement and on thinking both about U.S.–Cuba relations and hijackers as critical transnational actors whose actions shaped diplomatic relations in profound ways, see Teishan A. Latner, "Take Me to Havana! Airline Hijacking, U.S.–Cuba Relations, and Political Protest in Late Sixties' America," *Diplomatic History* 39, no. 1 (Jan. 2015): 16–44; and H.R.3858 from the 93rd Congress on Mar. 7, 1974, the Anti-Hijacking Act, https://www.congress.gov/bill/93rd-congress/house-bill/3858 (accessed Dec. 19, 2023).

[57]For a study of what we call Phase II with regard to U.S.–Cuban relations, see LeoGrande and Kornbluh, *Back Channel to Cuba*.

[58]Hideaki Kami, "Migration Normalcy: Havana's Dialogue with Washington before the Balsero Crisis," *Diplomatic History* 47, no. 1 (Jan. 2023): 85–111.

United States as a humanitarian actor and the government in Hanoi as an evil, oppressive regime.[59] Just as hijacking issues prompted the U.S. to work with Cuba amid an otherwise hostile approach, however, achieving "full accounting" and implementing migration programs were predicated on contact and cooperation. These initiatives were not minor endeavors. Each involved sustained negotiations and compromise with officials representing governments that Washington refused to recognize. Washington spent exorbitantly, and U.S. officials traveled frequently to Hanoi and conducted search operations on Vietnamese territory, all in the absence of formal ties.[60] Collaboration on migration programs also saw U.S. and Vietnamese officials meet regularly in New York City, Geneva, and Hanoi, where they negotiated, signed, and implemented over half a dozen bilateral and multilateral accords.[61] In Phase II, then, the lack of relations has often been accompanied by small steps toward closer ties. Depending on the example, these include collaboration on humanitarian issues, migration programs, prisoner exchanges, and/or exploratory business ties.

Foregrounding normalization as a political, economic, and cultural process demands that we acknowledge the concept's temporal dimensions. In each of the cases highlighted here, normalization of relations took decades. The process was far from static, but it was slow moving. Take, for example, U.S. relations with China. Kissinger's secret negotiations and Nixon's personal visit are iconic moments, well-known turning points in the process's trajectory. As is widely acknowledged, however, these promising seeds only bore fruit years later, with a different president, national security advisor, and political party occupying the White House.[62] The protracted nature of normalization creates an opening for a diverse array of official and nonstate actors to become involved in the process.

Undeniably, the president is a critical actor, often *the* critical architect of normalization policy. The "imperial" presidency overlapped with normalization's origins, with significant consequences.[63] Epitomized by unilateral actions, such as executive orders, presidential rhetoric, and high-profile personal actions (the apotheosis of which was Nixon and the "opening" of China), presidential diplomacy appears to have been the *sine qua non* of normalizations in U.S. foreign relations from the late Cold War through the present.

The presidential politics of normalization also suggests some of the ways that the process is contingent, even chaotic. Recent history is instructive on this point. Barack Obama pushed for an opening and normalization with Cuba, largely via executive orders and personal actions, resting not on the firm footing of treaties or legislation, but, rather, on the more immediate instruments available. Donald Trump reversed virtually all those maneuvers. Similarly, Trump suggested rapprochement with North Korea. Deploying personal and rhetorical diplomacy (highlighted by the 2018 Singapore Summit and the 2019 Hanoi Summit), Trump met with Kim Jong-Un and signed vague joint statements that affirmed a goal of some level of

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[59]Heather Marie Stur, "'Hiding Behind the Humanitarian Label': Refugees, Repatriates, and the Building of America's Benevolent Image after the Vietnam War," *Diplomatic History* 39, no. 2 (April 2015): 224; Phuong Tran Nguyen, *Becoming Refugee American: The Politics of Rescue in Little Saigon* (Urbana, IL, 2017), 73.

[60]Allen, *Until the Last Man Comes Home*; Martini, *Invisible Enemies*; Franklin, *M.I.A. or Mythmaking in America*.

[61]Historically, refugee politics, migration, and related human rights issues have been inextricably linked to the politics of normalization. See Demmer, *After Saigon's Fall*. On the importance of migration policies in the context of normalization, see Hideaki Kami, *Diplomacy Meets Migration: US Relations with Cuba During the Cold War* (New York, 2018); Meredith Oyen, *The Diplomacy of Migration: Transnational Lives and the Making of U.S.–Chinese Relations in the Cold War* (Ithaca, NY, 2015); and Sabrina Thomas, *Scars of War: The Politics of Paternity and Responsibility for the Amerasians of Vietnam* (Lincoln, NE, 2021).

[62]On Jimmy Carter and Zbigniew Brzezinski's efforts as "in no way just a simple finalizing of the work carried out previously by Nixon and Kissinger," see Fardella, "The Sino-American Normalization," 545.

[63]Arthur Schlesinger Jr., *The Imperial Presidency* (Boston, 1973).

normalization in return for some reciprocal denuclearization.[64] This is unlikely to move forward and already appears on the verge of being definitively reversed by the Biden Administration.

While the Oval Office remains a vitally important component, a benefit of foregrounding normalization as a process that transcends specific case studies is that it invites us to consider the significant number of other individuals and institutions that play a formative role in normalization policies. To capture the diverse actors and organizations involved in the specific case study of U.S.–Vietnamese normalization, one of us has previously used the term *nonexecutive actors*, which we find apt for other case studies as well.[65] A key contingent of nonexecutive actors included members of Congress. In addition to wielding the power of the purse, members of Congress have had the opportunity to contribute decisively to ongoing normalization efforts in other ways. This has been particularly true for legislators who remained in office for decades and took special interest in normalization, either out of personal concern or due to the demands of their constituents and powerful lobby groups. When Bill Clinton announced the resumption of diplomatic relations with Vietnam in July 1995, for instance, he stood flanked on both sides by members of Congress who had served in the Vietnam War. Their presence was far more than symbolic. By passing resolutions, creating committees, sending delegations, and a variety of other measures, legislators exerted a definitive influence on the normalization process.[66] Like the potential for more comprehensive, comparative analysis about the role of gender, race, emotion, and nonstate advocacy and actors in U.S. foreign relations, a broader perspective on normalization also invites scholars to explore normalization as one of the means through which members of Congress sought to (re)assert Capitol Hill's role in U.S. foreign affairs.

Those outside the corridors of power have also exerted meaningful, sometimes definitive, influence on normalization. Understanding normalization as a process therefore requires centering "sub-state diplomacy."[67] Substate diplomacy can be characterized by the actions of peoples, groups, and organizations that operate below the level of formal state power but have the ability to impact nation state outcomes (e.g., transnational human rights activists and organizations or multinational corporations).[68] Normalization's amorphous and protracted nature creates the time and space for the development of highly influential nonstate lobbies and organizations.

If, especially during Phase I, the American public has served as an important audience, in Phase II, domestic organizations have engaged in normalization as powerful actors, even co-architects of U.S. policy. It is striking that in each of our case studies, the most well-known and powerful domestic lobbies repeatedly acted as breaks, working to slow or stall the normalization process. The power of the Cuban-American lobby centered in Miami, Florida, is well

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[64]Most journalistic accounts emphasize this personal-presidential diplomacy; they tend to suggest that the personal dynamics at stake and as central to the process are also likely why such initiatives have frequently had less chance of success. Because the underlying policy bureaucracy is not as involved, a change of administrations fundamentally alters the personal-as-political presidential diplomacy. For a recent example, see Uri Friedman, "Inside the Collapse of Trump's Korea Policy," *The Atlantic*, Dec. 19, 2019, https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2019/12/donald-trump-kim-jong-un-north-korea-diplomacy-denuclearization/603748/ (accessed Dec. 30, 2020).

[65]Demmer, *After Saigon's Fall*, 14.

[66]Demmer, *After Saigon's Fall*.

[67]Noé Cornago, "On the Normalization of Sub-State Diplomacy," *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy* 5, nos. 1–2 (Feb. 2010): 11–36, especially 15.

[68]This is poignantly demonstrated regarding human rights activists in Sarah B. Snyder, *Human Rights Activism and the End of the Cold War: A Transnational History of the Helsinki Network* (Cambridge, UK, 2011); Sarah B. Snyder, *From Selma to Moscow: How Human Rights Activists Transformed U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York, 2018); Lauren Frances Turek, *To Bring the Good News to All Nations: Evangelical Influence on Human Rights and US Foreign Relations* (Ithaca, NY, 2020); and Vanessa Walker, *Principles in Power: Latin America and the Politics of U.S. Human Rights Diplomacy* (Ithaca, NY, 2020).

documented.[69] While many immigrant or refugee groups exhibit what Donna Gabbacia calls "homeland politics," the politics of exile in the electorally important state of Florida repeatedly echoed, amplified, and co-created Washington's combative Phase I rhetoric, pulling U.S. officials toward a more conservative stance on normalization and scuttling bilateral negotiations well into the 1990s.[70] The National League of POW/MIA Families, or simply "the League," as it was known, became "among the most formidable groups in wartime and postwar Washington." Thanks in part to the League's advocacy, the cause of missing Americans "alter[ed] U.S. politics and foreign policy for over four decades."[71] In a similar vein, the so-called "China Lobby" became an ensconced, formidable force in Washington, DC, deeply opposed to the recognition of the People's Republic of China and attached to the defense of Taiwan.[72] Each of these lobbies coexisted with other, often less well known, individuals and organizations that were attempting to thaw relations and bring peace between former adversaries.[73] The point here is not to attempt to solve this complexity but to use it to highlight the importance of nonexecutive actors and the fact that, although sometimes adversarial to it, nonstate actors often became enmeshed in official U.S. policy.

If Phase I of normalization began with a rupture and Phase II is characterized by contradiction and input from a wide variety of state and nonstate actors, Phase III kicks off with a "breakthrough" moment that signals a dramatic change in tone, if not always a complete reversal of policy. Despite the fact that incremental steps taken during Phase II often help lay the groundwork and lead to more normalized relations, for the general public, a seemingly abrupt declaration suddenly signals a reversal in longstanding policy. Nixon's headline-making reveal of Kissinger's secret trip and his announcement of his intent to go to Beijing, the 1991 Roadmap to Normalization of U.S.–Vietnamese relations, and the 2013 Obama–Castro handshake all signaled that U.S. relations with China, Vietnam, and Cuba, respectively, had entered a new phase.[74] This final phase, while still protracted and contentious in nature, involves far greater compromise than the previous two. It is there, usually decades after the suspension of formal relations, where policy makers in Washington begin to more genuinely work toward repairing the relations that they declared irreconcilable decades prior.

In this final phase, the relative importance of competing incentives undergo a considerable shift. While Phase I combative rhetoric appeals intensely to domestic political audiences and global ideological divisions, Phase III foregrounds economic and new, less-bipolar geopolitical priorities. In the 1970s, Nixon's and Kissinger's dramatic opening to China appealed to both men's penchant for secrecy and need to fashion themselves as great statesmen. Shifting

[69]Kami, *Diplomacy Meets Migration*; Patrick J. Haney and Walt Vanderbush, *The Cuban Embargo: The Domestic Politics of an American Foreign Policy* (Pittsburgh, PA, 2005); Susan E. Eckstein, *The Immigrant Divide: How Cuban Americans Changed the US and Their Homeland* (New York, 2009).

[70]Donna R. Gabaccia, *Foreign Relations: American Immigration in Global Perspective* (Princeton, NJ, 2012). For an entry point into the field of "diaspora diplomacy," see Eytan Gilboa, "Theorising Diaspora Diplomacy," in *Routledge International Handbook of Diaspora Diplomacy*, ed. Liam Kennedy (New York, 2022), 379–92. On scuttling talks, see Kami, "Migration Normalcy."

[71]Allen, *Until the Last Man Comes Home*, 4, 1.

[72]Millwood, *Improbable Diplomats*, 35–70; Warren I. Cohen, "While China Faced East: Chinese-American Cultural Relations, 1949–71," *Educational Exchanges: Essays on the Sino-American Experience*, eds. Joyce K. Kellgren and Denis Fred Simon (Berkely, CA, 1987), 44–57; Michael Lumbers, *Piercing the Bamboo Curtain: Tentative Bridge-Building to China during the Johnson Years* (Manchester, UK, 2008); Stanley D. Bachrach, *The Committee of One Million: "China Lobby" Politics, 1953–1971* (New York, 1976).

[73]For China, see Rosemary Foot, *The Practice of Power: U.S. Relations with China since 1949* (Oxford, UK, 1995), 83–113. For Vietnam, see Demmer, *After Saigon's Fall*; Hang Thi Thu Le-Tormala, *Postwar Journeys: American and Vietnamese Transnational Peace Efforts Since 1975* (Lawrence, KS, 2021); and George Black, *The Long Reckoning: A Story of War, Peace, and Redemption in Vietnam* (New York, 2023).

[74]"Roadmap to US-S.R.V. Normalization," April 9, 1991, OSS 91-2128, Box 61, Declassified Files, Record Group 46, Records of the United States Senate, Records of the Senate Select Committee on POW/MIA Affairs, 102nd Congress, 1991–1993, National Archives, Washington, DC.

from making immovable demands to rapid compromise—including major American concessions—exacerbated the Sino–Soviet split and removed the Vietnam War from the front pages, both of which were incredibly helpful during an election year.[75] In the early 1990s, in the midst of rapid geopolitical changes that upended the previous decades' assumptions, U.S. officials also saw new incentives in Southeast Asia. Aware of preexisting and growing changes in Vietnam's economic and foreign relations, U.S. policy makers saw Hanoi's potential as another "Asian Tiger" and its possibility of serving as a counterweight to Beijing, both of which made rapid renewal of official ties seem advantageous. Once again, compromise was paramount, though in this case the United States refused to pay Vietnam the promised war reparations and instead insisted that Hanoi pay over $208 million to the United States.[76] While the geopolitical and economic benefits of formal relations with Cuba did not equal those with China or Vietnam, Cuba's close proximity and long historical importance in the U.S. imagination and policy were enough for Obama, once safely elected to a second term, to act.

By Phase III, normalization becomes much more of a peace process. Phase III involves genuine efforts to achieve reconciliation and create a new baseline for "normal" ties, while simultaneously covering over the inherent violence of the ruptures that precipitate the need for and endure as part of normalization.[77] Our main case studies reveal that American officials have been quite explicit about connecting normalization to the goal of overcoming war-like relations and achieving peace. Upon returning from China in 1972, Nixon described his trip "as a journey for peace," conceding that while "in a technical sense, we were at peace with" Beijing prior to the trip, the president nevertheless aimed to bridge "a gulf of almost 12,000 miles and 22 years of noncommunication and hostility," which had "separated" Washington from the government in Beijing and "one-fourth of all the people in the world."[78] Nixon argued that his initiatives had replaced "the mere absence of war" with "the basis of a structure for peace."[79]

U.S. politicians and diplomats spoke in similar terms about normalization with Vietnam and Cuba. Senator John McCain (R-AZ), a Vietnam War veteran, former prisoner of war, and a key leader in the U.S.–Vietnamese normalization process, equated "improving relations" with Hanoi to concluding "the final chapter of the war in Vietnam."[80] President George H. W. Bush concurred in remarks he gave in 1992, arguing that with accelerated steps toward normalization, "We can begin writing the last chapter of the Vietnam War."[81] When in Havana in 2016, Obama dramatically invoked history, citing the Cuban Revolution, Bay of Pigs, and Cuban Missile Crisis, when "the entire world held its breath, watching our two countries, as

[75]Carolyn Woods Eisenberg, *Fire and Rain: Nixon, Kissinger, and the Wars in Southeast Asia* (New York, 2023). Elizabeth O'Brien Ingelson's *Made in China: When US-China Interests Converged to Transform Global Trade* (Cambridge, MA, 2024) was published just as this article was finished and promises to add considerably to our already robust knowledge about the economic incentives pursued in Phase III.

[76]Martini, *Invisible Enemies*, 202. On Nixon's secret promise of billions of dollars, see "Message from the President of the United States to the Prime Minister of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam," February 1, 1973, folder "Vietnam (1)," box 18, The National Security Adviser, Presidential Country Files for East Asia and the Pacific, 1974–1977, Gerald Ford Presidential Library, Ann Arbor, MI.

[77]For recent works on the complexity of peace, see Mary Dudziak, "War and Peace in Time and Space," *Seattle Journal for Social Justice* 13, no. 2 (Fall 2014): 381–98; and Petra Goedde, *The Politics of Peace: A Global Cold War History* (New York, 2019).

[78]"Richard Nixon, Remarks Upon Returning from China, Feb. 28, 1972," USC US-China Institute, https://china.usc.edu/richard-nixon-remarks-upon-returning-china-feb-28-1972 (accessed Dec. 19, 2023).

[79]Ibid. For extended analysis of Nixon's rhetoric during this trip, see Michelle Murray Yang, "President Nixon's Speeches and Toasts during His 1972 Trip to China: A Study in Diplomatic Rhetoric," *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 14, no. 1 (Spring 2011): 1–44.

[80]John McCain, "A New Relationship with Vietnam," Oct. 10, 1990, *Congressional Record*, S14835.

[81]"Remarks by the President After Meeting with General Vessey," The White House Office of the Press Secretary, Oct. 23, 1992, Walter H. Kansteiner Files—Subject Files, Vietnam 1992 [OA/ID CF01770], Bush Presidential Records: Staff and Office Files, George Bush Presidential Library, College Station, TX. On McCain and Bush's comments, see Demmer, *After Saigon's Fall*, ch. 5.

humanity came as close as we ever have to the horror of nuclear war."[82] In the following decades, Obama continued, "our governments settled into a seemingly endless confrontation, fighting battles through proxies." While Obama did not mention peace specifically, he did explain his desire "to leave the past behind," declaring that he came to Havana "to extend the hand of friendship to the Cuban people" and "build bridges between our people."[83]

This rhetoric about war and peace has been more than just posturing. Recognizing normalization as a process, which generally unfolds in three phrases beginning with something akin to war and culminating with a state of relations much closer to peace, invites us to view normalization as a key aspect of U.S. statecraft during the Cold War. Scholars have widely documented the nuances and complexities of the seemingly black-and-white Cold War, including the ways that war occurred in abstract "cold" ways, in deadly "hot" confrontations, and as simultaneous superpower conflicts and decolonial independence movements unfolded.[84] Normalization is an underutilized lens into how American policy makers (mis)understood, reacted to, and perpetuated these various forms of violence.[85]

Normalization also provides a useful means of exploring the complexities of reconciliation. When considering U.S. approaches to the transition from extremely tense to less conflictual relations in the Cold War context, the term détente has garnered far more direct attention from historians and scholars across disciplines than normalization.[86] While détente is and ought to be an integral part of our study of U.S. foreign policy during the Cold War, the preliminary research presented here suggests that normalization deserves similar attention. Future study on the relationship(s) between détente and normalization also seems needed and worthwhile.

A fuller reckoning of the scope and implications of normalization also challenges us to think critically about the war–peace binary. "War has burst out of its old boundaries," Rosa Brooks observes about armed conflict in the twenty-first century, adding, "The lines we have drawn between 'war' and 'nonwar' grow indistinct."[87] Historians have shown how these trends far predate the War on Terror, demonstrating that fundamental questions about a war—the who, what, when, and where—are not simple or straightforward.[88] Acknowledging the complexity of the normalization process in individual case studies and, especially, broadening our perspective to examine normalization as a larger phenomenon add to our understanding of how modern American policy makers pursued war and peace during and after the Cold War. They also prompt us to continue to interrogate the concepts of war and peace writ large.[89]

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[82]"Remarks by President Obama to the People of Cuba," Mar. 22, 2016, The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2016/03/22/remarks-president-obama-people-cuba (accessed Dec. 19, 2023).

[83]Ibid.

[84]Paul Thomas Chamberlain, *The Cold War's Killing Fields: Rethinking the Long Peace* (New York, 2018).

[85]Such a perspective also underscores Mary Dudziak's keen insight that war at least during and after the Cold War "is not an exception to normal peacetime, but instead an enduring condition." Dudziak, *War Time*, 5.

[86]Détente factors prominently in all the major surveys of U.S. foreign relations, notably George Herring's magisterial *From Colony to Superpower: U.S. Foreign Relations Since 1776* (New York, 2008); Melvyn Leffler, *For the Soul of Mankind: The United States, the Soviet Union, and the Cold War* (New York, 2007); and Odd Arne Westad, *The Cold War: A World History* (New York, 2017). Jeremi Suri excavates the origins of détente in *Power and Protest: Global Revolution and the Rise of Détente* (Cambridge, MA, 2003), as does Mary Sarotte with a focus on Germany in *Dealing with the Devil: East Germany, Détente, and Ostpolitik, 1969–1973* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2001). For a concise overview of political science approaches, definitions, periodization, sources, and key questions, see Jittipat Poonkham, "Détente Studies in Cold War International History: Questions (Un) Marked?" *Interstate – Journal of International Affairs* 2015/2016, no. 3: http://www.inquiriesjournal.com/articles/1439/detente-studies-in-the-cold-war-international-history-questions-unmarked (accessed Dec. 19, 2023).

[87]Rosa Brooks, *How Everything Became War and the Military Became Everything* (New York, 2016), 13.

[88]Dudziak, *War Time*.

[89]Demmer, *After Saigon's Fall*, 5.

Because of its highly ambiguous and paradoxical nature, normalization presents challenges for scholars. Nevertheless, foregrounding normalization as a subject worthy of study in its own right is a necessary venture. Transcending the rich, yet episodic, approach that has characterized the existing scholarship hitherto, a broad examination of normalization sharpens our understanding of the particularities of specific case studies and offers comparative insights often difficult to glean from narrower approaches.[90]

Preliminary Conclusions, Implications, and Avenues for Future Study

The reverberations of U.S. normalization policies were profound and enduring. U.S. policy makers did not just conceive of a Cold War world in black and white; they helped make it so. After breaking relations, Washington possessed the ability to severely limit the options of a foreign state by, effectively, wielding power not only as one nation among many but as an imperial hegemon, cutting off access to much of the West's resources and forcing foreign adversaries even further into the communist bloc. By removing potential alternatives for new regimes in Beijing, Havana, and Hanoi, U.S. officials reinforced an American perception of a bipolar world by setting off a feedback loop that suggested officials in Washington had interpreted foreign states' intentions correctly in the first place, reinforcing an "us" versus "them" worldview bolstered by racial and ideological categories.

Buttressing bipolarity involved an ultimately temporary yet protracted halt to the reconciliation processes that might actually have been able to grapple with existing animosities and conflicts. Using the language of normalization—declaring "normal" relations or normalization talks as tabled, or, alternatively, declaring them resumed—served a variety of functions for U.S. policy makers. Normalization appealed to domestic audiences by providing a means to dispute (or perhaps even disregard) unacceptable outcomes abroad and keep narratives about American exceptionalism intact. As we consider avenues for future research, deeper interrogation into the roles of emotion, gender, and race and the U.S. approach to normalization seems especially worthwhile.

Normalization also revealed and helped create the boundaries of U.S. empire by excluding those deemed inadmissible and setting the terms for (re)entry. At the same time, the targets (explicit and implicit) of the United States's normalization polices were global and imperial. In Phase I especially, these policies were largely driven by American grievances that were the longstanding products of colonialism, decolonialization, and Cold War interventionism—the legacies of white supremacy and exploitation. From presidents and politicians to diplomats, Washington officials used normalization to send much broader messages about what the United States was and was not willing to tolerate and uphold as "normal."

An examination of normalization as an and idea and as a process also invites, indeed, demands, attention to both the highest, elite echelons of policy making at the national level and much more diffuse governmental and nongovernmental actors. Decisions for the two "breaks"—the break in relations and then the breakthrough to resuming more formal ties—have been announced by (and require the endorsement of) the most powerful leaders and policy makers in Washington, DC. In these cases, the power of presidential rhetoric and the foreign policy prerogatives that have accumulated in the "imperial" presidency were crucial. A great deal of normalization has rested on the resolute desk in White House or in the State

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[90]One might fruitfully incorporate a focus on normalization as a thematic approach into U.S. historical research and teaching on the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, in U.S. and/in the world and political history scholarship and teaching, and international and world history. For example, beyond the episodic approach, one might embed a consistent exploration of the theme of normalization to explore developing and deepening debates and policies regarding the ebb and flow of normalization throughout any course dealing with the period from the beginning of the Cold War to the present.

Department, dependent on executive vision and the agenda-setting role of the president and the secretary of state.[91]

At the same time, however, the incredibly important, often invisible diplomacy that takes place between and after those moments did not always emanate from the White House. Nonexecutive actors were not just the audience for normalization policies; they were co-creators. Our case for the existence and importance of Phase II, in particular, challenges historians and international relations scholars to recognize that even though the formal status of bilateral relations might remain static, the demographic, bureaucratic, and institutional ties between states can transform dramatically. Greater attention to the input of this diverse group of actors is essential to understanding the full scope of normalization.

Normalization has been first and foremost premised on perceptions of relative power. As we have seen, it has also been structured by dualities. Understanding normalization as Janus-faced helps us to hold the contradictions in view, showing that it involves both combative and conciliatory policies, often simultaneously. While it is customary to conceive of normalization as a return to "normal" relations, this framing is inadequate, and even misleading, because the passage of decades—often including major advances in technology, global norms, and the like—renders the notion of a "return" nonsensical. There were no halcyon days to return to. Instead, normalization as both concept and process has tended to obscure the realities of the before/after divide—of colonialism, decolonialization, and the interventionism that propped both systems up.

This is not, of course, to suggest that normalization erases the entire history of bilateral relations. Rather, we wish to emphasize the extent to which history reveals that normalization processes, in often unintended ways, were less about "returning" and, eventually, more about *building something new*, often in a radically changed geopolitical environment. Exploration of normalization in its own right, therefore, can act as a vital link between the vast, interdisciplinary literatures about war's nebulous boundaries, and reconciliation and rapprochement located in specific, changing historical contexts. We also see significant benefit to linking future studies of normalization with the extensive literatures on détente, diplomatic recognition, and nonrecognition. Such research will no doubt add great detail to the broad brushstrokes we offer in this article.

We recognize that this exploration of normalization has been American-centric. It seems clear from our research that U.S. officials co-opted the language of normalization and deployed the term(s) to their own ends in specific instances to help Washington to leverage its disproportionate geopolitical power in the aftermath of unacceptable—often unanticipated—Cold War losses to communism. Normalization also served a gatekeeping function for the postwar iteration of U.S. empire. Understanding how U.S. officials wielded normalization, how they understood and deployed it, and how those definitions and uses changed over time are incredibly valuable means to assessing U.S. foreign relations in the twentieth century that we have yet to fully seize.

And yet, we acknowledge that while the United States was a hegemon that cast a long shadow, its power was never absolute or ubiquitous. Phase III involved significant U.S. compromise, even capitulation, on major issues. Although beyond the confines of this exploratory essay, we remain keenly interested in the ways that other nations, peoples, and groups understood, adapted, and co-opted normalization to suit their own needs and agendas. Scholars who take this approach will no doubt clarify, expand upon, and, we are sure, challenge normalization as we have discussed it here. We welcome that conversation.

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[91]Jeremi Suri, *The Impossible Presidency: The Rise and Fall of America's Highest Office* (New York, 2017). The classic work on this subject is Schlesinger, *The Imperial Presidency*. A new introduction in 2004 brings the analysis up to George W. Bush.

Understanding normalization as something that unfolds in broadly predictable yet particular ways is the first step toward developing a richer, historicized definition of this undertheorized concept. While normalization lacks a specific order of operations, it has unfolded following what we see as three broad phases. In part, then, our goal here is not to provide a definitive answer but to shed light on the importance of our animating question: what is normalization, and what might a richer understanding of this diplomatic tool reveal? We look forward to the possibilities that training a fuller array of methodological, theoretical, and geo-temporal approaches now embraced by our colleagues in various subfields of history might yield in helping to flesh out further answers to this deceptively simple question.

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