

## Cold War Thawing: Richard Nixon's 1972 China Visit and the Renewing of Sino-American Relations

During the Cold War, the United States found itself trying to prevent the spread of communism. By the time Richard Nixon was president, the U.S. was attempting to stop Soviet backed movements in Asia. China, although communist itself, was at odds with the Soviet Union. Realizing this, Richard Nixon a staunch anti-communist, set out to forge new relations with China that would be mutually beneficial to the U.S. and China.

President Nixon was well aware of the growing popularity of communism and like many Americans was concerned about it spreading in Asia. Although China did not have the economic or military capacity of the U.S. or Soviet Union, it was a substantial power on the Asian continent. Due to the U.S. efforts in Vietnam Nixon knew that it would be beneficial for the US to establish relations with a country of influence in the region.<sup>1</sup> Not only could this potentially slow the spread of communism but it could prove to be beneficial for U.S. interests globally.

Indeed, there were many Americans that were concerned about the potential areas of American society that could be vulnerable to infiltration. Many thought that unions and schools were especially prone to permeation. Numerous Americans including those in the government, knew that in the long term, it would benefit both sides to create an open

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<sup>1</sup> Scott Kaufman, *Confronting Communism: U.S. and British Policies Toward China*. (Columbia: University of Missouri Press 2001), 41-42

dialogue. China presented a more amicable link to communism and was not as feared by most Americans because of the mystique surrounding their hiatus with U.S. relations.<sup>2</sup>

During Nixon's time as vice president, his rhetoric began to shape the hardliner image that many associated him with once he became president.<sup>3</sup> Privately however, he was much more of a pragmatist and willing to make more concessions than he would publicly admit. His 1972 China trip challenged both aspects of his political approach.<sup>4</sup> The long hiatus in U.S.-China relations added to the uncertainty regarding the trip because it was an issue Americans had not dealt with for several generations.

Prior to his presidency, Nixon had been instrumental in U.S. efforts to resist entry of China into the United Nations.<sup>5</sup> There was also the issue of his previous rhetoric condemning China for most U.S. problems in Asia. However, realizing that American allies and companies would want to do business with China, Nixon agreed that this could be done without formally recognizing China.<sup>6</sup> In addition, an openness to trade would help the U.S. create a further divide between China and the Soviet Union.

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<sup>2</sup> Warren I. Cohen, *America's Response to China: A History of Sino-American Relations* (Sixth ed. New York: Columbia University Press, 2019), 149

<sup>3</sup> Fredrik Logevall and Andrew Preston, *Nixon in the World: American Foreign Relations, 1969-1977*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2008), 6-8

<sup>4</sup> Chris Tudda, *A Cold War Turning Point: Nixon and China, 1969-1972*. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2012), 1-3

<sup>5</sup> Evelyn Goh, *Constructing the U.S. Rapprochement with China, 1961-1974: From "Red Menace" to "Tacit Ally"* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 102-104

<sup>6</sup> Evelyn Goh, *Constructing the U.S. Rapprochement with China, 1961-1974: From "Red Menace" to "Tacit Ally"* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 106-109

In terms of the parameters for a rapprochement with China, the U.S. had to acknowledge that China may not have been a super power but it was much more influential than other Asian countries. Warfare was not an option due to the war weary American public and allies. Opening trade for new economic opportunities would be the only way to sway China to the US side and provide a sense of opportunity for all involved.<sup>7</sup>

Nixon and many others in the U.S. government were aware that the American advantage in economics and military over China would not last forever.<sup>8</sup> As a second-rate power, they would become exponentially more influential once they sided with a superpower. Beating the Soviets to this was unquestionably vital for the U.S. and Nixon knew that this would have to be addressed quickly but delicately.<sup>9</sup>

Equally, it was important for the U.S. to maintain the support of its European allies. While China may have been the concern in Asia, western Europe and NATO members in particular, were in an especially dangerous position during the Cold War. Nixon's popularity amongst European leaders was crucial in assuring that the U.S. would not trade stability in Asia with security in Europe.<sup>10</sup> The U.S. needed to create a similar buffer with China in Asia as it did with NATO in western Europe.

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<sup>7</sup> Evelyn Goh, *Constructing the U.S. Rapprochement with China, 1961-1974: From "Red Menace" to "Tacit Ally"* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 112-113

<sup>8</sup> People's Republic of China. Congressional Hearing, 1997-09-18, 1997.  
<https://search.proquest.com/congressional/view/app-gis/hearing/hrg-1997-iss-0003>.

<sup>9</sup> Robert, Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger: Partners in Power*. (1st ed. New York: HarperCollins Pub. 2007), 78

<sup>10</sup> Gordon H. Chang, *Fateful Ties: A History of America's Preoccupation with China*. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2015), 91

Time was of the essence in building diplomatic ties with China, the Soviets would likely make concessions at some point especially if the U.S. was able to maintain control over Taiwan and Japan.<sup>11</sup> There was also the issue of the increasingly unpopular Vietnam War. If Nixon could bring the war to an end with favorable results for the U.S., he would likely be re-elected and his public and political support would increase exponentially. The overarching issue was the uncertainty of China's inner workings. There had been several decades without contact and they had undergone a revolution during that time.<sup>12</sup>

China had been isolated since the late 1940's and was feeling pressure from its lack of resources and massive population. Following the Second World War and subsequent polarization of the Cold War, the United States and its allies developed a misconception that Moscow was the headquarters for all communism.<sup>13</sup> Undenounced to the U.S. and its allies, China had been at odds with the Soviet Union for some time.<sup>14</sup>

These tensions led to Soviet incursions in Asia which threatened both China and the U.S. Richard Nixon who was a staunch anti-communist, realized that this presented an opportunity for the U.S. to open relations with the communist world and gain an ally in dialogs with the

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<sup>11</sup> Fredrik Logevall and Andrew Preston, *Nixon in the World: American Foreign Relations, 1969-1977*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2008), 112

<sup>12</sup> Robert S. Ross, *Negotiating Cooperation: The U.S. and China, 1969-89*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 26

<sup>13</sup> Chris Tudda, *A Cold War Turning Point: Nixon and China, 1969-1972*. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2012), 125

<sup>14</sup> Chris Tudda, *A Cold War Turning Point: Nixon and China, 1969-1972*. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2012), 19

Soviet Union.<sup>15</sup> Although Nixon's 1972 visit to China was a historic moment, Nixon's Secretary of State Henry Kissinger was responsible for many of the early interactions between the two governments.<sup>16</sup>

Nixon and many other U.S. officials believed that building up and securing Asian countries would make them less desperate or weak. If this were the case, the Chinese and Soviets would not be able to threaten or entice them as easily.<sup>17</sup> This was the prevailing attitude with the Korean and Vietnam wars, and the buildup of NATO forces. However, both wars resulted in North and South divisions and created public outrage. When it became apparent that China was at odds with the Soviets, it was more logical for them to be worked with rather than opposed.<sup>18</sup>

One of the largest issues facing the outcome of Nixon's China visit was Taiwan. China and the United States had very different views of Taiwan's future. China was concerned about the presence of U.S. troops in Taiwan and the U.S. did not want to remove them due to the growing popularity of communism in the region.<sup>19</sup> Whereas previous U.S. presidents sought to

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<sup>15</sup> Gordon H. Chang, *Fateful Ties: A History of America's Preoccupation with China*. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2015), 228

<sup>16</sup> Henry Kissinger *On China*. (New York: Penguin Press 2011), 3-4

<sup>17</sup> Evelyn Goh, *Constructing the U.S. Rapprochement with China, 1961-1974: From "Red Menace" to "Tacit Ally"* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 19-23

<sup>18</sup> Henry Kissinger and William Burr. *The Kissinger Transcripts: The Top Secret Talks with Beijing and Moscow*. (New York: New Press. 1999), 232

<sup>19</sup> Nicholas Griffin, *Ping-Pong Diplomacy: Ivor Montagu and the Astonishing Story Behind the Game That Changed the World*. (London: Simon & Schuster, 2015), 66

establish a coexistence-based relationship with China, Nixon was aware that this was ideologically not possible.<sup>20</sup>

Prior to Richard Nixon's official visit, Henry Kissinger was sent as a part of an American envoy to prepare the delegation with Chinese officials. This secretive visit was facilitated in cooperation with the Pakistani government and was named "Operation Marco Polo".<sup>21</sup> It was aimed at getting Henry Kissinger into China through a mutual party and keeping his visit secret prior to Nixon's which would be covered heavily by the press. Many of the sources that I consulted for this paper covered Henry Kissinger more than Richard Nixon and draw from his own personal accounts of how his visit and Nixon's subsequent visit were facilitated by the U.S. government.<sup>22</sup>

There was a mutual understanding that the media coverage of the visit would be just as crucial as the negotiations. Nixon, Kissinger and many other in the president's cabinet were regularly brief on their respective areas and worked cohesively to maintain a fluid coverage of the trip. As with many U.S. presidents, some elements of the media were not favorable to Nixon and he was renowned for his clashes with the press. This was a major concern for Nixon's advisors, who were worried that any blunder during the trip would be amplified by the media.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Fredrik Logevall and Andrew Preston, *Nixon in the World: American Foreign Relations, 1969-1977*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2008), 58

<sup>21</sup> Chris Tudda, *A Cold War Turning Point: Nixon and China, 1969-1972*. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2012), 86-87

<sup>22</sup> Henry Kissinger *On China*. (New York: Penguin Press 2011), 68

<sup>23</sup> Evelyn Goh, *Constructing the U.S. Rapprochement with China, 1961-1974: From "Red Menace" to "Tacit Ally"* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 118

Henry Kissinger's earlier visit was centered on convincing Chinese officials to extend a formal invitation to Nixon. This would legitimize the visit and give the appearance of China reaching out to the U.S.<sup>24</sup> Nixon himself also served as an excellent emissary for capitalism due to his strong anti-communist views. This image of him would be presented to the media during and after his visit.<sup>25</sup>

Nixon and other U.S. officials placed a large emphasis on determining the mood of the Chinese officials. It was assumed that they would be welcomed and treated with an attitude similar to that indicated in the correspondence with Henry Kissinger prior to the visit.

However, given the momentous nature of the visit, the first contact and interactions between the officials on both sides were extremely important in shaping the precedent that the rest of the trip would follow.<sup>26</sup>

Kissinger had pointed out to Nixon and others that there were cultural differences to consider with the delegation. The two leaders were likely to have conversations at times that were intended to take place solely between them without any aids or officials present. Nixon was concerned about how to receive advice from his people without offending the Chinese officials and still conveying himself as the leader of the U.S.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Doak A Barnett. *China after Mao* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), 71

<sup>25</sup> Robert S. Ross, *Negotiating Cooperation: The U.S. and China, 1969-89*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 17

<sup>26</sup> Henry Kissinger and William Burr. *The Kissinger Transcripts: The Top Secret Talks with Beijing and Moscow*. (New York: New Press. 1999), 78

<sup>27</sup> Henry Kissinger and William Burr. *The Kissinger Transcripts: The Top Secret Talks with Beijing and Moscow*. (New York: New Press. 1999), 61

Traditionally, most Americans had viewed their relationship with China as paternalistic and special. China was often looked at as a dependent that required US economic and military power to secure trade and security in the region.<sup>28</sup> After World War II, the Soviet Union was the only power that could rival the U.S. This fueled the divide between ideologies since smaller countries had to choose one side or be conquered by the other.

From the U.S. perspective, China's support of North Korea and other communist governments in southeast Asia was seen as proof of collaboration with communist powers like the Soviet Union.<sup>29</sup> As with many new communist systems, China and the Soviet Union assisted them in establishing their countries under the communist ideology. What would not be understood until later by Western powers was that as countries developed their governments, they implemented different forms of communism that were not necessarily in line with those of their benefactors.<sup>30</sup>

Once the U.S. and its allies begin to realize that there were rifts within the communist world, there would be opportunities to play them against each other. Throughout the 1960s much of China's actions were perceived as aggression by the U.S. and its allies. This often prompted the U.S. to not legitimize the Chinese government and take more aggressive actions in the region such as placing troops in or near Taiwan.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Nicholas Griffin, *Ping-Pong Diplomacy: Ivor Montagu and the Astonishing Story Behind the Game That Changed the World*. (London: Simon & Schuster, 2015), 234

<sup>29</sup> Nancy Bernkopf Tucker, *China Confidential: American Diplomats and Sino-American Relations, 1945-1996* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 15-18

<sup>30</sup> Fu-Mei Chiu Wu, *Richard M. Nixon, Communism and China*. (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1978), 164

<sup>31</sup> Chris Tudda, *A Cold War Turning Point: Nixon and China, 1969-1972*. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2012), 197



Naturally, the U.S. became concerned about China's nuclear capabilities and this was fueled by their connection to the Soviet Union. While the U.S. was constantly voicing concerns about nuclear proliferation, they themselves were responsible for proliferation on the western side of the Cold War. Unlike World War II where the United States was the only country to possess such weapons, the potential for multiple communist countries to obtain nuclear weapons added pressure to U.S. foreign policy.<sup>32</sup>

When Kissinger went to China in 1971, he noticed that most Chinese officials had the revolutionary ideologies at heart but were quite pragmatic in their approach to solving some of the regional disputes.<sup>33</sup> Based on Kissinger's opinions of the political climate in Asia, Nixon was determined to seize the opportunity to reach out to China. This not only brought China into the fold but also alleviated concerns about the Vietnam War.<sup>34</sup>

Kissinger and Nixon were tentative about the sincerity of the communiqué because of the presuppositions about the Chinese government. Chief among these concerns was that Chinese officials would not disagree with each other or the party line because they may be

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<sup>32</sup> Gordon H. Chang, *Fateful Ties: A History of America's Preoccupation with China*. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2015), 221

<sup>33</sup> U.S. Vice-President Nixon's state visit to Free China: a collection of Mr. Nixon's speeches and remarks on Free China

<sup>34</sup> Albert Claude Buss, *China: The People's Republic of China and Richard Nixon*. (San Francisco: W.H. Freeman, 1974), 88

punished.<sup>35</sup> While this may have influenced some of the content in the communiqué, it would later be revealed that it was not as corrupted as the Nixon administration believed.<sup>36</sup>

Nixon and Kissinger were both aware that the two governments meeting presented fundamental and ideological problems. On one hand, the Chinese government operated under a system that sought to fight systems like the U.S. and vice a versa. Fortunately for Nixon his reputation as a steadfast anti-Communist would help the legitimacy of his contact with the Chinese to the American public.<sup>37</sup> The Nixon administration had to consider these challenges on the part of the Chinese government as well.

During his visit, Nixon had several private meetings with Mao. Kissinger and others had mixed feeling about these meetings. Some favored them since they were away from the spotlight of the press from both countries, whereas others were concerned about the lack of advisors present to council Nixon. Some were concerned that without input from specialists, he may make agreements with Mao that were unrealistic.<sup>38</sup>

Taiwan proved to be a very valuable bargaining chip for the Nixon administration. Nixon agreed to withdraw two thirds of U.S. troops from Taiwan with the assurance that China would not aid North Vietnam or any of its allies. Nixon was straightforward with Chinese officials

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<sup>35</sup> Nancy Bernkopf. Tucker, *China Confidential: American Diplomats and Sino-American Relations, 1945-1996* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 44

<sup>36</sup> Margaret, MacMillan, *Nixon and Mao: The Week That Changed the World* (New York: Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2008), 303-308

<sup>37</sup> James C, Humes and Jarvis D Ryals, *Only Nixon: His Trip to China Revisited and Restudied*. Lanham, (Md.: University Press of America, 2009), 18-20

<sup>38</sup> Henry Kissinger and William Burr. *The Kissinger Transcripts: The Top Secret Talks with Beijing and Moscow*. (New York: New Press. 1999), 65

explaining that he could not recognize the PRC as the official government of China until his second term.<sup>39</sup> Agreements such as these were prevalent during Nixon's visit and Chinese officials were understanding of the domestic political challenges in the U.S.

Taiwan would prove to be a central issue in the talks with China. The Chinese told Nixon that the US attitude toward Taiwan could make or break relations with China. While the U.S. had signed a treaty in 1954 to defend Taiwan, Nixon knew that the Chinese relationship would prove more important in the long term especially as they grew in power. The U.S. had multiple interests in Taiwan but they seemed relatively minuscule compared to the potential for conflict with China in the future.<sup>40</sup>

Naturally, the differences between the political systems of the two countries would have an impact on how they were able to honor their part of the deal. China had a system which was representative but contained within one party. In contrast, the U.S. had a much more complex system that went beyond government to include lobbying, election cycles and media. Scrutiny from the press would play a very large role in Nixon's ability to act on the agreements made during his visit.<sup>41</sup>

Though Nixon's visit was amicable, the actual progress between the two countries was very tedious and involved a lot of assertion and yielding to the other. There were concerns on both sides as to the plausibility of two nations with such different models of governance could

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<sup>39</sup> Doak A Barnett, *China after Mao* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), 298

<sup>40</sup> Scott Kaufman, *Confronting Communism: U.S. and British Policies Toward China*. (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2001), 222-224

<sup>41</sup> Chris Tudda, *A Cold War Turning Point: Nixon and China, 1969-1972*. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2012), 64

work in tandem for common interests. The U.S. side of the negotiations were especially precarious because of the many branches in levels of government in the U.S. This created a more complicated system to contend with when implementing agreements.<sup>42</sup>

While Chinese and U.S. officials were sincere about their intentions and verbal agreements, both had domestic challenges that required the agreements to go through a process. This was especially true of the U.S. where there were multiple branches of government that would be involved in the decision-making process. However, there were executive powers that Nixon could use to at least begin to commit the U.S. to the deals made before, during and after his visit.<sup>43</sup>

Nixon was open with Chinese officials about the difficulties he faced as a first term president. It was clear that an understanding of the U.S. political system by the Chinese would be essential during the talks. As a part of the initial talks between Beijing in Washington, Nixon assured the Chinese that of some of the issues raised which he could not address during his first term would get immediate attention in his second should he be re-elected.<sup>44</sup>

Zhou Enlai was one of the most respected and well-liked officials in China. Kissinger also spoke highly of Zhou and trusted his agreements in regard to Nixon's second term. Both Zhou and Kissinger were relying on good faith to ensure that neither Beijing or Washington would

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<sup>42</sup> Scott Kaufman, *Confronting Communism: U.S. and British Policies Toward China*. (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2001), 222

<sup>43</sup> Nancy Bernkopf Tucker, *China Confidential: American Diplomats and Sino-American Relations, 1945-1996* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 370

<sup>44</sup> Henry Kissinger and William Burr. *The Kissinger Transcripts: The Top Secret Talks with Beijing and Moscow*. (New York: New Press. 1999), 406

side with Moscow against the other.<sup>45</sup> This assurance was the foundation upon which all of the future agreements would be built on.

Just as in the U.S. there were inner issues with China that created internal strife. Some were very amenable to talks with the U.S. and even the Soviet Union. Others were more radical and hoped China could develop and prosper independently. Both countries had differing opinions about relations within their own governments. Either way, U.S. and Chinese officials had a political labyrinth to navigate in their efforts to uphold their verbal agreements.<sup>46</sup>

Due to China's relative underdevelopment, the U.S. had to be careful about how Nixon's visit would be perceived. There was the risk that the U.S. could be seen as paying tribute to China rather than reaching out for diplomacy. China claimed to differ from Moscow by not wanting a world based on hegemony but rather equality amongst all countries regardless of economic or military power.<sup>47</sup>

China was indeed quite different culturally than Russia. Whereas Russia experienced a complete overhaul of its systems during its 1917 revolution, China was keeping many of its traditions, culture and mores intact. Chinese cultural and societal ideals were still very much in line with *min-ben* and the mandate of heaven. While the communist government held authority over society, there were few major changes to the function of society as a whole.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Henry Kissinger and William Burr. *The Kissinger Transcripts: The Top Secret Talks with Beijing and Moscow*. (New York: New Press. 1999), 203

<sup>46</sup> Warren I. Cohen, *America's Response to China: A History of Sino-American Relations* (Sixth ed. New York: Columbia University Press, 2019), 150

<sup>47</sup> Doak A Barnett. *China after Mao* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), 281

<sup>48</sup> Warren I. Cohen, *America's Response to China: A History of Sino-American Relations* (Sixth ed. New York: Columbia University Press, 2019), 151-152

This consistency aided the U.S. in “picking up where they left off” in their previous dealings with China. With Mao Zedong essentially taking the place of an emperor, the U.S. could use his persona to their advantage. In exchange for policies favorable to the U.S., Mao and the Chinese government could use the U.S. visit to reinforce faith in the Chinese communist party and its achievements.<sup>49</sup>

Chinese officials were cautious about the terms that they agreed to and regularly sought assurances that the United States would not attempt to encircle or carve up China. Kissinger and Nixon both guaranteed that no such action would be taken under the Nixon administration. Kissinger noted that the U.S. had no justification to do so since China had never taken any such action itself during its long history. Even China’s reputation for tributary relations served to bolster trust from the U.S.<sup>50</sup>

Though there were many agreements and promises made between the Chinese and American governments, there was also an understanding that the United States was involved in large global issues that required interaction and concessions with the Soviet Union. Due to these challenges, the U.S. could not take a strictly pro-China stance or leave the Soviets out of every conversation.<sup>51</sup> Kissinger was adamant about the fact that the U.S. and Soviet Union

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<sup>49</sup> John Pomfret, *The Beautiful Country and the Middle Kingdom: America and China, 1776 to the Present* (New York, N.Y.: Picador, 2017), 230

<sup>50</sup> Evelyn Goh, *Constructing the U.S. Rapprochement with China, 1961-1974: From "Red Menace" to "Tacit Ally"* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 74

<sup>51</sup> Henry Kissinger *On China*. (New York: Penguin Press 2011), 225

were super powers that were clearly in different camps. Beijing on the other hand, was in a less absolute political position leaving aspirations of their international influence unclear.<sup>52</sup>

Kissinger's aide Winston Lord mentioned the improving U.S.-Soviet relations and encouraged the Chinese government to do so as well. This would avoid the U.S. having to go back on its promises to China if U.S. relations with the Soviets improved but China did not. Such a scenario might require the U.S. to side with the Soviets, especially mitigate the dangers presented by the nuclear capabilities of both countries.<sup>53</sup>

China and the U.S. found common ground on many issues including the prevention of Soviet expansion in Asia and Japanese militarism. Since these were issues that both countries could agree on they served to solidify the agreements that were reached during Richard Nixon's presidency. Kissinger was careful to present these ideas from a point of national security for both countries rather than on an ideological basis.<sup>54</sup>

Nixon reiterated that the U.S. was not reaching out to China in a charitable or patronizing manner. China's strength and independence was important to the security of U.S. national and global interests.<sup>55</sup> Unsurprisingly, Nixon omitted the fact that the U.S. did not want to share power or allow China to eclipse the U.S. in power or influence. Kissinger noted

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<sup>52</sup> Albert Claude, Buss, *China: The People's Republic of China and Richard Nixon*. (San Francisco: W.H. Freeman. 1974), 65

<sup>53</sup> Chris Tudda, *A Cold War Turning Point: Nixon and China, 1969-1972*. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2012), 112

<sup>54</sup> Chris Tudda, *A Cold War Turning Point: Nixon and China, 1969-1972*. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2012), 214

<sup>55</sup> Jim Mann, *About Face: A History of America's Curious Relationship with China from Nixon to Clinton* (New York: Vintage Books, 2000), 334-337

that China's cooperation was entirely voluntary based on shared interests and he did not have to leverage them.<sup>56</sup>

Due to China's comparative underdevelopment, the U.S. officially treated China as an equal in talks and negotiations, but aimed to maintain economic and military supremacy in the relationship. As with many Cold War relationships, the U.S. funded, trained and armed those who openly opposed Soviet aggression.<sup>57</sup> While this was certainly the approach Nixon and his administration wanted to take, China's size and ambitions made it much too formidable to simply control through economic or military aid. Following Nixon's visit, the White House provided the Chinese government with intelligence on Soviet movements in the region.<sup>58</sup>

Even with the positive results from Nixon's visit, an unforeseen consequence was that U.S.-China relations were being established chiefly on a shared opposition to the Soviet Union. This meant that any future dialogue or agreements could be compromised in the absence of a common enemy.<sup>59</sup> To offset this, Kissinger highlighted the shared concerns about Japanese hegemony in the region. Since the end of World War II, the U.S. had been hawkish about Japan's capacity for war.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Robert S. Ross, *Negotiating Cooperation: The U.S. and China, 1969-89*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 142-145

<sup>57</sup> Fu-Mei Chiu Wu, *Richard M. Nixon, Communism and China*. (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1978), 144

<sup>58</sup> Scott Kaufman, *Confronting Communism: U.S. and British Policies Toward China*. (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2001), 224

<sup>59</sup> Warren I. Cohen, *America's Response to China: A History of Sino-American Relations* (Sixth ed. New York: Columbia University Press, 2019), 223-225

<sup>60</sup> Scott Kaufman, *Confronting Communism: U.S. and British Policies Toward China*. (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2001), 214



U.S. influence over Japan could be used as a future bargaining chip should the need arise. Kissinger was forced to acknowledge Japanese militarism but also assure the Chinese government that the U.S. would not tolerate a resurgence of Japanese power as it did leading up to World War II.<sup>61</sup> Nixon promoted a new U.S.-China relationship as a means to monitor and/or control the Japanese activity in the region.

Mutual concerns about Japan were easy to present to the American public, as many had been impacted by the Second World War. Since Japan's previous expansion in the Pacific harmed both China and the U.S., it presented an issue through which the governments and citizens of both countries could find solidarity. Kissinger and others advised Nixon to use matters such as this to lessen concerns about issues such as communism or Taiwan.<sup>62</sup>

Even though the U.S. and China found very strong common ground on the Japan issue, their approaches to the country itself were very different. China sought to suppress both Japan's economy and military, fearing that a strong economy could allow them to rebuild their military. In contrast, the U.S. intended to have a strong economic presence in Japan and many U.S. companies had very lucrative operations there.<sup>63</sup>

Nixon and Kissinger were forced to acknowledge that if Japan did not feel protected by the U.S. it would likely rearm on its own repeating the expansion and invasion that occurred

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<sup>61</sup> John Pomfret, *The Beautiful Country and the Middle Kingdom: America and China, 1776 to the Present* (New York, N.Y.: Picador, 2017), 216

<sup>62</sup> James C. Humes and Jarvis D Ryals, *Only Nixon: His Trip to China Revisited and Restudied*. Lanham, (Md.: University Press of America, 2009), 77

<sup>63</sup> Nicholas Griffin, *Ping-Pong Diplomacy: Ivor Montagu and the Astonishing Story Behind the Game That Changed the World*. (London: Simon & Schuster, 2015), 123

during the 1930s and 1940s.<sup>64</sup> Many Chinese officials agreed with this point but expressed great concerns about Japan potentially obtaining its own nuclear weapons. Kissinger reiterated that Japan's nuclear energy facilities would have provided them with enough materials to make a bomb and U.S. oversight was the only way to mitigate the danger.<sup>65</sup>

In an attempt to further ease China's concerns about Japanese influence in the region, Nixon pointed out that U.S. influence over Japan meant that it was not likely that the Soviet Union could establish any real control there. Kissinger warned Zhou that any undermining of U.S.-Japanese relations could harm the ability of the U.S. to control Japan or worse, the Soviet might be able to appeal to them.<sup>66</sup> An abrupt withdrawal of U.S. forces could create a power vacuum that would be favorable for the Soviet Union or Japan.

Logically, this same argument was used to garner support for U.S. efforts in Vietnam. Kissinger argued that it would be in the best interest of China if the U.S. could bring countries in Southeast Asia to its side. This would in theory, function much like U.S.-Japanese relations, giving them security and keeping the Soviets from establishing themselves in the area. Nonetheless, China supported Hanoi on the grounds that it believed all foreign troops should leave the region and allow countries to decide for themselves which system they wanted.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Henry Kissinger and William Burr. *The Kissinger Transcripts: The Top Secret Talks with Beijing and Moscow*. (New York: New Press. 1999), 57

<sup>65</sup> Henry Kissinger and William Burr. *The Kissinger Transcripts: The Top Secret Talks with Beijing and Moscow*. (New York: New Press. 1999), 59

<sup>66</sup> Henry Kissinger and William Burr. *The Kissinger Transcripts: The Top Secret Talks with Beijing and Moscow*. (New York: New Press. 1999), 62

<sup>67</sup> Nancy Bernkopf. Tucker, *China Confidential: American Diplomats and Sino-American Relations, 1945-1996* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 202-204

While Beijing did not help with the U.S. objectives in Vietnam, it did nothing to interfere and hence did not jeopardize its relationship with the U.S. Kissinger would later acknowledge that China was already risking its standing within the communist world by agreeing to relations with the U.S. Assisting a capitalist country in a war against another communist government would only further damage their reputation.<sup>68</sup>

Thus, it was important for both countries to operate on common goals and interests rather than ideology. Doing so justified their interaction with each other and avoided the clash of ideologies that could potentially discredit the other. Kissinger and Zhou were determined to maintain, at least officially, a relationship that was founded on shared goals such as the Soviet issue and the security of the region.<sup>69</sup>

This was a solid plan theoretically, but it presented challenges when both countries needed to cooperate on an issue that put their ideological differences to the test. U.S. policy tended to favor strong economic sanctions followed by bold military intervention.<sup>70</sup> China on the other hand used its influence to encourage countries to allow their citizens to decide what they wanted. Vietnam was one such issue, the U.S. wanted China's assistance but China was constrained by sharing the same political aspirations as North Vietnam.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Robert S. Ross, *Negotiating Cooperation: The U.S. and China, 1969-89*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 167

<sup>69</sup> Fredrik Logevall and Andrew Preston, *Nixon in the World: American Foreign Relations, 1969-1977*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2008), 260-261

<sup>70</sup> Chris Tudda, *A Cold War Turning Point: Nixon and China, 1969-1972*. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2012), 180

<sup>71</sup> Robert S. Ross, *Negotiating Cooperation: The U.S. and China, 1969-89*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 126

Kissinger and Nixon both knew that China, although not a superpower, would have to be afforded some regard as an equal. Notably, the U.S. would have to discuss any new issues with China privately and maintain a public image of cooperation with China to curtail the influence of the Soviet Union and its allies throughout the region and the world. Both sides had to move forward trusting that they would both abide by these considerations.<sup>72</sup>

Central to this agreement was the reliability of the U.S. in providing crucial intelligence to China regarding the region. Contrariwise, China would have to be cautious about its contributions to and interactions with other communist countries. Both of these promises were never officially solidified but were vital to the integrity of the U.S.-China rapprochement.<sup>73</sup>

These agreements were tested during the 1971 South Asian Crisis when Pakistan and India were on the threshold of war. This incident required both the U.S. and China to use their influence to stabilize the region. The U.S. called on the Soviet Union to pressure India into negotiations with Pakistan and China called upon Pakistan to open itself to terms with India. Eventually, the situation was resolved but it proved to China that it was important to have a connection to the United States for its consistent dialogue with the Soviet Union and its allies.<sup>74</sup>

Kissinger was forced to explain to Chinese officials that pro-Indian sentiment in the U.S. presented challenges for the U.S. with regard to assisting Pakistan. However, he clarified on

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<sup>72</sup> Nicholas Griffin, *Ping-Pong Diplomacy: Ivor Montagu and the Astonishing Story Behind the Game That Changed the World*. (London: Simon & Schuster, 2015), 166

<sup>73</sup> Nancy Bernkopf Tucker, *China Confidential: American Diplomats and Sino-American Relations, 1945-1996* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 388

<sup>74</sup> Fredrik Logevall and Andrew Preston, *Nixon in the World: American Foreign Relations, 1969-1977*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2008), 260-261

Nixon's behalf that the U.S. would never side with India in a conflict.<sup>75</sup> Many Chinese officials were sympathetic to this position because of their own political restraints in relation to Vietnam. Though the conflict did not hurt the relationship between China and the U.S., it certainly showed that it was not foolproof.<sup>76</sup>

Taiwan remained the biggest point of contention between China and the U.S. Nixon acting upon the advice of Kissinger, agreed that some concessions would have to be made in their official stance toward Taiwan. China would not accept Taiwan as an independent country and the U.S. could not afford to jeopardize the entire relationship for one issue.<sup>77</sup> Zhou was receptive to Nixon's reasoning behind the slow reduction of U.S. forces in Taiwan. The U.S. could not be seen as selling out to allies or going back on its obligations in the Pacific.<sup>78</sup>

Because of the disparity between the Chinese and U.S. militaries, Nixon knew that there was time for the U.S. to take action on the Taiwan issue before it could turn into a crisis. Although formidable, China's lack of nuclear weapons and its rudimentary military meant that if necessary, the U.S. could force its hand on the Taiwan issue. Both Kissinger and Nixon agreed that the time afforded to them by this disproportion should be used to slowly reduce presence in Taiwan.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Henry Kissinger *On China*. (New York: Penguin Press 2011), 268

<sup>76</sup> Gordon H. Chang, *Fateful Ties: A History of America's Preoccupation with China*. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2015), 208

<sup>77</sup> Warren I. Cohen, *America's Response to China: A History of Sino-American Relations* (Sixth ed. New York: Columbia University Press, 2019), 223

<sup>78</sup> Fu-Mei Chiu Wu, *Richard M. Nixon, Communism and China*. (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1978), 172

<sup>79</sup> Chris Tudda, *A Cold War Turning Point: Nixon and China, 1969-1972*. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2012), 197

Reducing U.S. presence in Taiwan was something that Nixon was in a unique position to do. Kissinger explained to Zhou that Nixon's conservative and reliable anti-Communist reputation in the U.S. allowed him to push for changes to U.S.-Taiwan policy. Many Americans would have greater faith in his motives knowing that he would not be likely to sell out or bend to communist interests. It was in this sense that Nixon's reputation served this goal because of the good faith that he possessed domestically.<sup>80</sup>

China's very long history and track record of primary focus on internal issues earned it particular trustworthiness. Whereas the U.S. had a reputation for expansionism, China for most of its known history remained isolated and did not concern itself with the affairs of other countries in the same manner that the U.S. did. This reputation gave China plausibility as a prospective future partner and eased concerns about China's ambitions to the U.S. public and government.<sup>81</sup>

American fears of communism were to some degree offset by China's seclusion and friction with the Soviet Union. Most Americans were chiefly concerned about the Soviet Union whereas China had not received the same negative press as the Soviet Union. The long gap in contact between the U.S. and China also provided more intrigue than fear for most Americans. There was a predominant attitude of uncertain but peaceful aspirations for the two countries.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Chris Tudda, *A Cold War Turning Point: Nixon and China, 1969-1972*. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2012), 212

<sup>81</sup> Scott Kaufman, *Confronting Communism: U.S. and British Policies Toward China*. (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2001), 213

<sup>82</sup> Gordon H. Chang, *Fateful Ties: A History of America's Preoccupation with China*. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2015), 41

Contributing to the public support for Nixon's talks with China, was their shared areas of concern. These included preventing Soviet and Japanese expansion and militarism as well as finding a peaceful resolution to the conflict in Vietnam. By both countries sharing common adversaries, the U.S. and China were able to cooperate based on shared interests rather than openly admitting or accepting the other's political ideologies.<sup>83</sup>

This was very important for both countries since there was the overarching issue of how two systems that were fundamentally opposed to each other could cooperate. Kissinger advised Nixon that the agreements between China and the U.S. should be based solely on shared interests rather than ideological reasons. Doing so would not require either government to violate its own edicts with regard to the opposing system.<sup>84</sup>

Although both countries failed to act directly within their respective political arenas, i.e. the U.S. with Japan and China with Vietnam, their refusal to directly assist or intervene with either country meant that they were not taking deliberate action against each other's interests. While this was a precarious approach to the conflicts in the region, it was the best way for China and the U.S. to remain respected by their allies.<sup>85</sup>

Much of the resulting Shanghai Communique was structured around the blocking of Soviet movements and political aims in Asia. Though this was veiled in its wording, the

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<sup>83</sup> Scott Kaufman, *Confronting Communism: U.S. and British Policies Toward China*. (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2001), 228

<sup>84</sup> Fredrik Logevall and Andrew Preston, *Nixon in the World: American Foreign Relations, 1969-1977*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2008), 229

<sup>85</sup> Nancy Bernkopf Tucker, *China Confidential: American Diplomats and Sino-American Relations, 1945-1996* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 213

intention was clear: to show that the U.S. and China regardless of their differences were equally opposed to Soviet expansion and would cooperate in preventing it regardless of other issues between them. Kissinger later mentioned that this was a back channel to the formal agreement that both governments were avoiding.<sup>86</sup>

By placing this common goal in writing both governments effectively signed an agreement to support each other. The shared resistance to Soviet interests was at the very core of the entire China visit and subsequent talks. Stating this in the communique aligned the interests of both countries by solidifying their cooperation on other issues without officially stating them. This provided room for deniability if one side should do something unfavorable to the other since both were required to offset the Soviet threat.<sup>87</sup>

Japan remained one of the most contentious issues between China and the U.S. Both countries wanted to curtail Japan's capacity for expansion and militarism, but the U.S. maintained control over Japan giving it a presence in the region that could become a proxy at any time.<sup>88</sup> Kissinger docilely suggested to Nixon that the U.S. influence in Japan was no different than China's influence with Vietnam. He also explained to the Chinese that it was not in the interest of the U.S. to allow Japan to expand or build its military.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Henry Kissinger and William Burr. *The Kissinger Transcripts: The Top Secret Talks with Beijing and Moscow*. (New York: New Press. 1999), 385

<sup>87</sup> Nicholas Griffin, *Ping-Pong Diplomacy: Ivor Montagu and the Astonishing Story Behind the Game That Changed the World*. (London: Simon & Schuster, 2015), 127

<sup>88</sup> Scott Kaufman, *Confronting Communism: U.S. and British Policies Toward China*. (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2001), 229-230

<sup>89</sup> Henry Kissinger and William Burr. *The Kissinger Transcripts: The Top Secret Talks with Beijing and Moscow*. (New York: New Press. 1999), 39



Due to the centrality of the Soviet threat to the Nixon era rapprochement with China, the ever-changing climate of the Cold War would both threaten and reinforce the integrity of the U.S.-China relationship. Later administrations would be faced with the challenge of appealing to China based on the current standing of the Soviet Union in the world. Future administrations would be forced to balance improved relations with the Soviet and honoring the agreements with China.

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