Parting the bamboo curtain: The enigmatic political and strategic quest of Richard Nixon for detente with Communist China

Ian C Harrison

University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalscholarship.unlv.edu/rtds

Repository Citation

https://digitalscholarship.unlv.edu/rtds/3162

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Scholarship@UNLV. It has been accepted for inclusion in UNLV Retrospective Theses & Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Digital Scholarship@UNLV. For more information, please contact digitalscholarship@unlv.edu.
INFORMATION TO USERS

This manuscript has been reproduced from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps. Each original is also photographed in one exposure and is included in reduced form at the back of the book.

Photographs included in the original manuscript have been reproduced xerographically in this copy. Higher quality 6" x 9" black and white photographic prints are available for any photographs or illustrations appearing in this copy for an additional charge. Contact UMI directly to order.

UMI
A Bell & Howell Information Company
300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor MI 48106-1346 USA
313/761-4700 800/521-0600

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
"Parting the Bamboo Curtain: The Enigmatic Political and Strategic Quest of Richard Nixon for Detente With Communist China"

by

Ian C. Harrison

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of

Master of Arts

in

History

Department of History
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
August, 1996
The Thesis of Ian C. Harrison for the degree of M.A. in American History is approved.

Sue Fawn Chung  
Chairperson, Sue Fawn Chung, Ph.D.

Eugene P. Moehring  
Examining Committee Member, Eugene Moehring, Ph.D.

Robert W. Davenport  
Examining Committee Member, Robert Davenport, Ph.D.

Bill Leaf  
Graduate Faculty Representative, Bill Leaf, M.A.

Ronald W. Smith, Ph.D.
Dean of Graduate College

University of Nevada, Las Vegas  
August, 1996
ABSTRACT

President Richard Nixon's decision to unofficially recognize Communist China during the early 1970s represented an apparently sudden political and strategic turnabout for both he and the United States. After decades of virulent anti-Communism upon which a meteoric political career was built, Nixon, faced with mounting domestic pressures to end the Vietnam War and the necessity of obtaining policy concessions from the Soviet Union, embarked upon a course of detente with Mainland China that seemed to completely contradict his hawkish, Cold Warrior image. Far from being a strictly political maneuver in the months leading to the 1972 presidential election, Nixon's decision was instead a pragmatic, geopolitical strategy designed as much to pressure the U.S.S.R. and balance the power in Asia as it was to bring the Chinese back into the world community of nations. Richard Nixon's conservative background made the decision and subsequent Peking summit possible, as did his diplomatic partnership with Henry Kissinger.
# Table of Contents

Abstract............................................................................................................... iii

Introduction.......................................................................................................... 1

Chapter 1: **Background to Nixon’s Detente Overtures**................................. 6

   Endnotes........................................................................................................... 16

Chapter 2: **An Enigmatic Political Ascendance**............................................ 17

   **Congressman Nixon: True Conservative or Pragmatic Politician?**........... 18
   **Nixon’s Destruction of Helen Gahagan Douglas**................................... 20
   **Senate and Vice-Presidency Years: Moving Toward the Center**......... 22
   **The Specter of Barry Goldwater**............................................................... 24
   **The Dual Foreign Policy Conservatism of Citizen Nixon**................. 26
   **1968: A United GOP Forsakes Ideology**.................................................. 30
   **Post 1968: Nixonian Conservatism Portends China Recognition**........ 33

   Endnotes........................................................................................................... 36

Chapter 3: **Strategic Considerations and Contradictions**........................... 39

   **Changing Attitudes and the Kissinger Factor**......................................... 40
   **The Nixon Doctrine and Chinese Detente**............................................. 46
   **The Soviet Role in the China Equation**.................................................... 50
   **China Recognition: The Vietnam Link**................................................... 54

   Endnotes........................................................................................................... 57

Chapter 4: **The Trip to China and Beyond**.................................................. 59

   **The China Decision Unfolds: Shuttle Diplomacy and Ping-Pong**....... 60
   **The Journey East: Nixon in China**........................................................... 67
INTRODUCTION

President Nixon's trip to Communist China in 1972 was the symbolic capstone of his own China initiative, conceived before his administration began and leaving its legacy well into the Carter administration. With satellite television beaming images of Nixon and Mao as well as Nixon at the Great Wall to the entire world, the President achieved his greatest foreign policy success in the form of an unprecedented personal and political reversal of policy. Long the preeminent Republican anti-Communist spokesman and courtier of the right wing, Richard Nixon seemed to be one of the least likely presidents of the Cold War era to attempt detente with the People's Republic of China.

His decision to unofficially recognize China was one of great paradox and philosophical contradiction; Nixon the crusading anti-Communist suddenly, upon reaching the presidency, engineered a major change in U.S. foreign policy that entailed detente overtures to both Communist China and the U.S.S.R., implacable enemies of American and American conservatives. The switch from the aggressive containment policy of the Eisenhower administration to balance-of-power strategy anchored in the Nixon Doctrine of regional defense pacts was in reaction to an emerging multipolaric world in which the United States had neither the resources or popular will to serve as global policeman. Nixon, assuming the presidency as a compromise candidate, attempted to end hostilities with China to end the war in Vietnam and prevent ultimately futile confrontations with communist forces in Asia in the future.

To position himself in a politically acceptable position to unveil his China initiative, Nixon promoted himself to the American public as a sensible, law-and-order conservative with virtually unparalleled foreign policy credentials, built through years of public service. Within the Republican Party, Nixon's years of fundraising, speechmaking for candidates and hard-line stance against world communism offset lingering doubts true conservatives harbored over his presidential potential. Only
as a staunch Republican trying to save American lives in Southeast Asia could Richard Nixon have overtly pursued detente with Communist China, a move that would have been politically impossible for a Democratic president.

The following pages will trace the dynamics of Richard Nixon's rise to political power as well as the nature of his evolving philosophies, the strategic factors and circumstances that informed the detente decision, and the summit itself as well as its after effects. The thesis of this work is that the China initiative, despite its outward appearance as a pre-election political move, was actually designed to gain diplomatic leverage over the U.S.S.R. to pressure the Soviets into arms control and other policy concessions. Taking advantage of the deepening Sino-Soviet schism and their respective paranoia of future violent aggression against one another, Nixon's detente overture to Communist China was a purely geopolitical strategy that completely disregarded his past anti-Communism and contradicted the staunchly pro-American image that he had risen to power on.

Many contemporary biographies and works tracing Richard Nixon's public career have concentrated on portraying him as a 'political animal,' a man consumed with achieving power through politics regardless of the cost to others and weighing policy decisions by their cost or benefit to him politically. Tom Whicker's *One of Us: Richard Nixon and the American Dream* gives us the image of a skilled politician who valued political tact over personal character, a Nixon who entered politics ostensibly to overcome low self-esteem and gain public approval. In the same vein, Roger Morris' *Richard Milhous Nixon: The Rise of An American Politician* portrays the president as an overachiever who defined life by winning or losing, a negative interpretation of Nixon that links his accomplishments to an unquenchable thirst for personal gain and recognition. Highly negative in tenor and bordering on vicious, Fawn Brodie's *Richard Nixon: The Shaping of His Character* described a Nixon consumed by an internal rage that convinced him that destructive attacks and pathological lying without remorse were acceptable means to the end of political power, his lone goal.
Also portraying Nixon as a negative personality type with pathological tendencies was Bruce Mazlish, whose *In Search of Nixon: A Psycho-Historical Inquiry* focused more on Nixon’s early relations with his family than Brodie did, concluding that his repressed relationship with his mother Hanna Nixon contributed to his later self-destructive tendencies.

However, upon close examination of Nixon’s own words and more strategic interpretations of his career and policy motives, it becomes apparent that detente with Communist China had much less to do with political considerations than what may have been believed or assumed at the time. Instead, as Nixon wrote in the retrospective *In The Arena*, the China initiative had nothing to do with his attitude towards communism, an attitude that had generated enough political capital over the decades to elevate him from the House of Representatives to the Senate, to the vice-presidency and finally to the Presidency in 1968. Nixon’s memoir, *R.N.: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon*, traces the evolution of the China plan, and makes minimal mention of domestic political concerns other than the need to have kept the plan confidential until the right moment. Detente overtures formulated by Nixon and Henry Kissinger were part of a larger strategy not only to end the war in Vietnam, but also designed to eliminate automatic future U.S. military entanglements in Asia to combat Communist aggression, an option no longer tenable due heavy American casualties in Southeast Asia and growing domestic discontent with the U.S. role as world policeman. A skilled statesman and personal diplomatist, Nixon’s trip to Peking achieved foreign policy goals simultaneously: a thaw in relations and an opening of communications with Communist China, as well as indirectly increasing pressure on the U.S.S.R. to cease aggression in Asia and make arms control concessions to the U.S.

Over the years, strategically and policy-oriented works on Richard Nixon have generally been more sympathetic to his legacy and himself than those based on explaining his actions based on character. Particularly admiring of Nixon is C.L. Sulzberger’s *The World and Richard Nixon*, a book documenting the President’s foreign policy initiatives that commends Nixon for vision and necessary
risk-taking on initiatives concerning Communist China and the U.S.S.R. While characterizing Nixon as a semi-distant figure with a quirky personality, former Nixon speechwriter Frank Mankiewicz nonetheless recognized his foreign policy record as the outstanding part of his presidency in Perfectly Clear: Nixon from Whittier to Watergate. Stephen Ambrose' Richard Nixon: The Triumph of a Politician. 1962-1974 devotes several pages to the China initiative, portraying it as a momentous achievement brought about largely by Nixon himself. Though Ambrose was not enamored with Nixon's personality or ascent to power, his exploration of Nixon's diplomacy revealed it to be highly visionary and conducted in a secretive manner that led to its success. Perhaps the most flattering biography of Nixon consulted for this work was Jonathan Aitken's Nixon: A Life. Very respectful of Nixon's political career as well as his foreign policy record, it is perhaps ironic that the volume is the only major Nixon biography to be written by a non-American, in this case a British Member of Parliament.

The substantial role of Henry Kissinger in the detente initiative has been acknowledged in several volumes about the Nixon administration as well as Nixon-Kissinger diplomacy, although judgments about Kissinger's performance itself has been mixed. Marvin and Bernard Kalb's Kissinger, written in the wake of Watergate, treats Kissinger's role in Nixonian diplomacy as being indispensable, as does Robert Littwak in his scholarly Detente and the Nixon Doctrine: American Foreign Policy and the Pursuit of Stability, 1969-1976. Kissinger's own White House Years describes pre-summit negotiations and backchannel diplomacy in more detail than Nixon's memoirs and may be the preeminent source for behind the scenes information on the events leading to Peking. Highly critical of both men and their respective styles is Seymour Hersch's The Price of Power, a volume that gives Nixon most of the credit for detente but finds major flaws in the apparent usurpation of diplomatic power that the two engaged in away from the State Department.
In essence, Richard Nixon's decision to recognize Communist China was a non-partisan action made possible by his own past political career. Having built a reputation on years of anti-Communism, hard-line stances against those he perceived to be the slightest bit unpatriotic and extensive foreign policy experience, Nixon found himself in an opportune position in 1972 to change long-standing U.S. policy toward China without risking inordinate political damage. Impossible for a liberal Democrat to pull off in the prevailing Cold War atmosphere, Nixon's trip to China was above politics but at the same time made possible by it. The longtime cold warrior took advantage of his stock of conservative political capital to advance his administration's agenda and prevent future Vietnams, at the minimal cost, in hindsight, of starkly reversing himself.

With a diplomatic initiative of the magnitude of detente with Communist China, several peripheral issues were involved in a web of negotiation, domestic politics and geopolitical strategies. This study focuses on the China policy of Richard Nixon and his evolving attitudes toward Communist containment and will superficially explore the link of Vietnam to the initiative as well as the China policies of Presidents Ford and Carter. Though the latter subjects stand on their own merit in relation to Nixon-era recognition of China, a degree of restraint must be placed on the main thesis.

Thus, Richard Nixon, monumental world statesman to some and conservative turncoat to others, presents an enduring enigma to the understanding of his China. Contradictory from a political viewpoint but logical from the diplomatic perspective. President Nixon's decision to pursue detente with Communist China was an important post-World War II foreign policy objective that helped define U.S.-Sino relations in the modern era. The man, his past and the summit itself coalesced into a subject that is as fascinating as it is complex, as contradictory as it is clear.
CHAPTER I

Background to Nixon's Detente Overtures

In 1946, the year in which Richard Nixon was elected to Congress, the “loss” of China loomed as Chiang Kai-shek’s Nationalist forces were engaging in a civil war with Mao Tse-Tung’s Communists for control of Mainland China and the minds of the Chinese people. For a hundred years before the image of China in the United States had been one of an exotic, potentially endless market for U.S. manufactured goods, whose subjection to American benevolence and Christian ideals would represent a natural westward extension of Manifest Destiny. Although the U.S.-Sino diplomatic relationship in decades past had been marred by such popular uprisings in China as the Boxer Rebellion of 1900 and persistent underground resistance to perceived American imperialism, relations between the two nations remained friendly, if strained, though the closing years of the second world war.

By the time of Richard Nixon’s election to the U.S. Senate in 1950, Communist forces in China had triumphed, pushing Chiang’s forces to the offshore island of Formosa and producing a tremendous controversy within America and its government over who had “lost” China. On January 12, 1950, Secretary of State Dean Acheson delivered a speech before the National Press Club in Washington, entitled “Crisis in China,” defending the Truman administration’s past actions in Asia. Acheson declared that the U.S. would be prepared to military defend a line that ran from the Aleutian Islands to Japan, to the Ryukyu Islands and south to the Philippines, but excluding Taiwan and Korea. Acheson commented that in the event of a military attack on any nation beyond this defense perimeter, “the initial reliance must be on the people attacked to resist it and then upon the commitments of the entire civilized world under the charter of the United Nations.” Both in the aftermath of his speech and in years to come. Acheson was criticized for apparently encouraging
Communists to believe that either Korea or Taiwan could be attacked with relative impunity, as neither was mentioned as an American military protectorate in his speech.

In the next few months of 1950, Sen. Joseph McCarthy (R-Wisconsin) began his paranoiac reign in the public eye by leveling charges that the U.S. State Department was riddled with Communist sympathizers with questionable loyalties to the United States. On Feb. 9, McCarthy, in a speech in Wheeling, W. Va., charged that 205 communists were working in the department, a charge that the State Department denied. Soon expanding his targets to Ambassadors, university professors and even Gen. George Marshall, McCarthy's fear mongering sparked a phenomenon of heightened domestic paranoia about domestic communist infiltration that reached fever pitch and provided a platform for ambitious politicians such as Nixon to express outspoken pro-Americanism for political advantage, no matter the damage incurred to an opponent's reputation or career. Writing in his work Senator Joe McCarthy, Richard H. Rovere described McCarthyism as a by-product of the Cold War and a movement supported by certain vested interest elements and a popular revolt against the upper classes. Rovere quoted noted sociologist Talcott Parsons as labeling McCarthyism as a "revenge of the outsiders," a role that the young Richard Nixon would fit perfectly.

During this era, lasting from 1950 until McCarthy's censuring by the full U.S. Senate in 1954, politicians such as Helen Gahagan Douglas, with even the slightest appearance of sympathy towards China, real or perceived, were susceptible to vicious political partisan attacks on their voting records that more often than not resulted in the end of their public service careers. McCarthy's vendetta against the State Department in the wake of the Communist triumph in China targeted practically all experienced sinologists within that agency, forcing many of them to resign and draining the government of its expertise on dealing with China. Before serving as vice-president in the Eisenhower White House, Representative Nixon had jumped upon the McCarthy bandwagon, stating in a speech to the House in early 1950 that the nation was in the grips of a large Communist conspiracy designed to alter U.S. foreign affairs. "The great lesson to be learned is that we are not just
dealing with espionage agents who set thirty pieces of silver to obtain the blueprints of a new weapon,” Nixon explained. “This is a far more sinister type of activity, because it permits the enemy to guide and shape our policy.  

At the heart of Nixon’s anti-Communism, formed largely during the McCarthy era, was his personal alarm over what he believed to be the penetration of American institutions such as the State Department, federal law enforcement agencies and the media by domestic Communists promoting a radical political and economic agenda. Hailing from a middle-class, White Anglo Saxon Protestant background, Nixon had a natural reverence for traditional institutions, and was alarmed at what he perceived to be unchecked infiltration into various agencies by anti-American radicals. McCarthyites and McCarthy sympathizers believed that Communist influence was pervading America stealthily and subtly by anti-American propaganda spread by front groups, opinions that undermined the U.S. ability to be aggressive against its enemy, the U.S.S.R. A Naval veteran of World War II, Nixon’s patriotism was also offended by the communist phenomenon. At a deeper level, he held an unshakable conviction that pro-American patriotism was at the core of every moral personality, so those who held even vaguely unpatriotic sentiment must have been automatically suspect to Nixon.  

Though Nixon never came out in total support of McCarthy, his rhetoric during that era closely reflected McCarthyite sentiment and was used to smear political enemies. As Eisenhower’s designated attacker during the 1952 presidential campaign, Nixon took aim at Democratic nominee Adlai Stevenson, calling him “an appeaser...with a Ph.D. from Dean Acheson’s cowardly college of Communist containment.” Statements such as this bolstered Nixon’s status as not only a staunch anti-Communist, but also as an aggressive campaigner who was willing to burn bridges in the pursuit of national office.

In the early morning of June 25, 1950, over 75,000 North Korean troops poured across the 38th parallel in an invasion of South Korea that would subsequently change the tide of American
sentiment towards China from ally to enemy, as Chinese volunteers joined North Korean regulars against American G.I.'s. Two days later, June 27. President Truman ordered U.S. air and naval forces in the Far East to the aid of South Korea, and ordered the 7th Fleet to prevent any preemptive attack on Taiwan by Mainland forces. Shortly after these orders the first U.S. land troops entered South Korea from Japan, and the United Nations voted to appoint General Douglas McArthur as U.N. commander in Korea. The first American armed forces in Korea were attacked by the Chinese Communists on November 2, 1950, resulting in reversal of fortune for U.S. troops that the New York Times described as "ominous." The Times went on to describe the disaster befalling overwhelmed U.S. forces:

Reinforced by Chinese Communist troops... the beaten North Koreans... have so successfully ambused parts of one American regiment that rescue efforts had to be abandoned and the men involved had to be told to save themselves as best they could—which meant leaving the wounded to a horrible fate.

A Mutual Defense Assistance Agreement signed by the U.S. Republic of China soon followed, whereby America would provide the Nationalists with war material in case they were attacked by the Communists. The agreement infuriated the Communist Chinese, and went far to harden anti-American sentiment on the mainland. This defensive stance became the status quo of U.S. policy toward China until relations between America and Mainland China began to thaw during the Nixon era. By the end of 1953, 142,277 Americans had died in Korea.

Upon Dwight Eisenhower's election to the presidency in 1952, the U.S. anti-Communist policy became even more rigid than that of the Truman administration. This was also the John Foster Dulles era, lasting until 1959, during which Eisenhower's Secretary of State maintained a hard-line position against any concessions to Communist China, or for that matter, any potential thaw in relations. In his February 2, 1953 State of the Union Message, President Eisenhower declared that the U.S. Seventh Fleet would no longer shield Nationalists on Formosa from any potential Communist attack. This statement was actually psychological warfare against the Communists, with the
implication that America would no longer hold back Chiang Kai-shek from invading the mainland while Chinese troops were committed to the war in Korea. Though Eisenhower would not commit U.S. forces in the area to take part in aggression against the mainland, he nevertheless had sent the message that America would not protect Communists fighting it in Korea. The message was well received by the American public and Eisenhower was praised by the Los Angeles Times for identifying Communism as an unquestioned world aggressor that the U.S. would stand up against:

At the outset of his message, the President made clear that this nation does not propose to live any longer in a posture of paralyzed tension, leaving forever to the aggressor...to cause great hurt to us...Few Presidents have ever set forth so lucidly a line of policy, foreign and domestic, in their first appearance before or message to Congress.10

Sino-American relations of the 1950s were extremely tense, and the decade was dominated by two crises over the tiny islands of Quemoy and Matsu, strategically located in the Taiwan Strait but claimed by both the Communist Chinese and the exiled Nationalists. During the summer of 1954, the mainland government launched a campaign to liberate Taiwan, building up coastal defenses and mobilizing over two million citizens for militia duty. On August 26, 1954, Communist Chinese troops began a bombardment of Quemoy, creating a scenario of potential intervention for Eisenhower that could well have escalated into a Third World War.11 The Joint Chiefs of Staff informed Eisenhower that the loss of Quemoy would have a devastating psychological impact on Taiwan and create a huge outcry domestically. Rather than risk massive American intervention that would have resulted in casualties and a role in helping the Nationalists bomb the mainland, Eisenhower chose the option of restraint. The Communists ceased their campaign against Quemoy after a few tense days, and on April 24, 1955, China Premier Zhou Enlai was quoted in the New York Times as agreeable to begin negotiations with the U.S. over the Taiwan issue:

The Chinese people are friendly to the American people. The Chinese people do not want to have war with the U.S.A. The Chinese government is willing to sit down and enter into negotiations with the U.S. government to
discuss the question of relaxing tension in the Far East
and especially the question of relaxing tension in the
Taiwan area.12

The year 1954 witnessed not only the Geneva Conference that brought a truce to Korea, but
increased American aid to the French in Indochina, an ominous foreshadowing of U.S. involvement
in Southeast Asia during the next decade that cost thousands more American lives and strained U.S.-
Sino relations even further. When the French fort of Dien Bien Phu fell on May 7, the stage was set
for not only the entrance of U.S. military "advisors" into Southeast Asia, but the suddenly pressing
need for a collective defense treaty in Asia that would hopefully stem the tide of Communist
aggression in the region. On September 8, the South East Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) was
sponsored by the United States and signed by eight nations in Manila, including Australia, Britain,
France, New Zealand, Pakistan, the Philippines, the U.S. and Thailand. The states pledged them­
selves to joint measures of defense against aggression in the area (Southeast Asia). and the agreement
was hailed by Secretary of State John Foster Dulles as an "Asiatic Monroe Doctrine."13 The creation
of SEATO served as a hedge against potential Chinese and Soviet aggression in Southeast Asia, and
was a forerunner of the central principle of the Nixon Doctrine- a collective defense apparatus with
self-defense against Communist aggression at its core, ultimately backed up, if necessary by U.S mili­
tary force.

In 1958 a second crisis over the island of Quemoy erupted, as on August 23, Chinese
Communists shelled the island and set up a naval blockade to cut it off from all supplies. This time
the stakes were higher than the first attack in 1954, as Eisenhower announced on Sept. 4 that the U.S.
would use force against the Communist mainland if a physical invasion of Quemoy was attempted.
Dulles and Vice-President Nixon concurred, and the prospect of war with China was suddenly very
real.14 The Communist attack had in large measure been provoked by a large deployment of
Nationalist troops on Quemoy by Chiang Kai-shek, an obvious provocation done with the assumption
that the U.S. would automatically defend Taiwan in the case of an outbreak of war. Responding to popular domestic pressure to refrain from intervention on behalf of Taiwan in the Quemoy crisis, Dulles told a press conference on Sept. 30 that the U.S. had "no legal commitment" to defend the islands, and it had been rather "foolish" of Chiang to put such a large force on the island in the first place. This shift in U.S. position was not a softening of position, but was instead aimed at achieving a cease-fire with the Communists similar to the conclusion of the 1954 crisis. On October 2, 1958, the New York Times editorialized that while the Communists were not appeased by U.S. restraint.

The pity is that this more flexible policy was not adopted long before the Chinese Communists attack could put us in our present dilemma. President Eisenhower himself now says the offshore islands as such are not vital to the defense of Taiwan...Secretary Dulles...goes so far as to call the Nationalist move 'rather foolish'...then it was also 'rather foolish' to expose the United States to the risks now involved in defending these islands.  

During the 1960 presidential election, Quemoy and Matsu became major issues of contention between candidates Richard Nixon and John Kennedy. Addressed during the television debates of 1960 that marked the turning point of Nixon's campaign against Kennedy, the islands became the focal point of each candidate's stand on when the United States should intervene militarily abroad in the fight against Communism. The second debate, October 7, 1960 was centered on foreign affairs. When asked about the Quemoy-Matsu controversy, Kennedy answered that the islands were strategically indefensible, and that "this country has never made a flat commitment to defend them." Only in the case of an overall Communist attack on Taiwan would Kennedy defend the islands, but otherwise, the risk of war over a "hazy" defense line was not worth a major loss of American lives.  

Kennedy did not advocate backing down against the Communist Chinese, but his pragmatism called for negotiation versus automatic counter-aggression.

In contrast, Nixon emphatically supported defense of the islands at virtually any cost, casting them as symbols of America's overall commitment to containing communism. His response to the
issue epitomized his pre-presidential view of America’s anti-Communist efforts, and sought to cast Kennedy as soft on communism for suggesting that the islands were not worth defending. “It’s the principle that counts,” said Nixon. “The islands are an area of freedom and we should not force our Nationalist allies to get off of them.” Labeling Kennedy’s thinking as “woolly,” Nixon said that he “would never tolerate it as president.”

For Nixon, it appeared that his vigorous stand in favor of defending Quemoy and Matsu at practically all costs went too far for mainstream America, just as Barry Goldwater’s hawkish stances in 1964 alienated many voters of both parties. On Oct. 27, 1960, the New York Times endorsed John F. Kennedy for the presidency, citing Nixon’s opinions on the two islands as examples of apparently questionable judgment. The Times editorial board lamented the fact that Quemoy and Matsu dominated the foreign policy debate, but supported Kennedy’s statement that he would not go to war with Communist China over the principle of defending two tiny islands. However, the Times criticized Nixon for his alleged oversimplicity on the issue:

There are large areas of the world—particularly in Southeastern Asia—where ideological conflict between communism and anti-communism may break out at any moment into local warfare. Are we, as Mr. Nixon indicates, to use American manpower to prevent the loss of ‘one inch of free territory’ in such areas? The choice is not so easy as Mr. Nixon implies...It involves the question of...the possible cost of American intervention in terms of American lives. The oversimplification of Mr. Nixon’s sweeping declarations in these matters is not reassuring.

Nixon went on to lose the election by the closest margin in presidential election history, and went back to life as a private citizen still as anti-Communist as he had been during the 1950s under Eisenhower.

The decade of the 1960s leading to Nixon’s first term contained no significant change in U.S.-Sino relations, as the war in Vietnam kept the two nations at perpetual odds and wary of each other’s motives. President Kennedy was optimistic about the future relations, but remained wary as memories of the Quemoy-Matsu crises of the 1950s were still fresh. En route to Vienna on June 2.
1961 to meet Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev. Kennedy was asked at a Paris news conference how
Communist China could achieve normalized relations with the West. He replied:

We desire peace and we desire to live in amity with the Chinese people. But I will say that since long before I assumed office...the attacks on our Government and the United States were constant, immediate, and in many cases malevolent...We want goodwill. But it takes two to make peace. and I am hopeful that a peaceful existence with its neighbors represents the best hope for us all. We would welcome it...20

His administration cut short by an assassin’s bullet. Kennedy’s successor, Lyndon Johnson, maintained Kennedy’s stance that a change in the nature of U.S.-Sino relations would depend on steps taken by the Communists. Early in his first term, April 20, 1964, President Johnson told an Associated Press luncheon in New York that America would stand strong against China as long as the Communists remained dogmatic in their approach towards the U.S.:

So long as the Communist Chinese pursue conflict and preach violence, there can be and will be no easing of relationships. There are some who prophesy that these policies will change. But America must base our acts on present realities and not on future hopes. It is not we who must re-examine our view of China. It is the Chinese Communists who must re-examine their view of the world.21

As Johnson’s term progressed and the United States was dragged deeper and deeper into a losing effort in the Vietnam War, the Chinese became more powerful militarily and at the same time slid towards social anarchy as the Cultural Revolution turned into an internal Chinese disaster. On June 16, a paranoid Chinese Foreign Ministry declared that foreign journalists gaining information from wall posters or Chinese newspapers would officially be accused of spying; the next day. China exploded its first hydrogen bomb, drawing international attention to its rapidly growing nuclear weapons program.22 By the end of 1967, Lyndon Johnson would announce that he would neither seek nor accept a presidential term, and Richard Nixon would come to the realization that to end the war in Southeast Asia, Communist China would have to be brought back into the community of nations.

Elected to the presidency on Nov. 6, 1968 and inaugurated Jan. 20, 1969, Richard Nixon dropped a major hint of his impending China policy change during his inaugural speech, in which he
declared that "After a period of confrontation, we are entering an era of negotiation." Immediately after taking office, Nixon ordered National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger to re-examine U.S. policy toward China, as his rapprochement policy slowly began to be formulated within the Oval Office and away from the State Department. In the first few months of Nixon's term, deteriorating relations between Communist China and the U.S.S.R. accelerated, as from March 3 to March 7 an estimated 260 million people participated in anti-Soviet demonstrations throughout China. In Peking, the Soviet Embassy was placed under siege by demonstrators.

Later in 1969 Soviet-Sino border clashes intensified, as their schism began to take precedence over adversarial relations with the West. On June 8, President Nixon announced the phased withdrawal of 25,000 American troops from Vietnam, predating further troop reduction on future decision-making. The combination of deepening Sino-Soviet problems and the beginning of a pull-out from Vietnam made U.S. detente with China more inevitable, as a historic window of opportunity was opening for Nixon to take advantage of. Detente overtures, though still in the planning stage, would take advantage of Soviet preoccupation with China to pressure them to not only isolate Hanoi and hopefully hasten the end of the war in Vietnam, but also send the Communist Chinese the message that the U.S. had limited interests in Southeast Asia beyond existing treaties and wanted to prevent future Soviet aggression in the area.

Thus, by July 15, 1971, the day Nixon announced to America that he would visit Communist China, the time was strategically right for detente overtures. If successful, a detente initiative would achieve three foreign policy goals simultaneously: exploitation of the Sino-Soviet schism to gain diplomatic leverage against the Soviet Union (applicable to arms control talks and containment of Third World communist insurgencies), isolation of Hanoi and a rapidly negotiated settlement of the war in Vietnam, as well as the creation of an atmosphere conducive to implementing the Nixon Doctrine of regional security pacts and decreased U.S. world policing responsibilities.
Endnotes- Chapter I

2 Ibid. 89.
3 Richard H. Rovere. Senator Joe McCarthy (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1959). 265. Rovere is severely critical of McCarthy, portraying him as a phenomenon that was pushed onwards by an economically deprived middle class that taking out its frustrations.
4 David Oshinsky. A Conspiracy So Immense: The World of Joe McCarthy (New York: The Free Press, 1983). 108. This is a more objective volume about McCarthyism, less judgemental about the man himself and more of a historical interpretation of the era.
8 Congressional Quarterly. China & U.S. Far East Policy. 90.
9 Charles R. Kitts. The United States Odyssey in China, 1784-1990 (Lanham: University Press, 1991). 203. In response to Eisenhower’s apparent diplomatic aggression, the Chinese government became determined to liberate Taiwan, which it considered to be matter of internal affairs. This plan of action led directly to the Quemoy crisis of 1954.
10 The Los Angeles Times. February 3, 1953. part II. p. 5.
11 Ibid. 204.
12 Ibid. 205. Less than one month before Zhou Enlai’s peace overture, Secretary of State Dulles had traveled to the Taiwan Strait to review the situation, and returned to tell Eisenhower that the situation was so serious that atomic weapons might have to be used against mainland airfields.
13 Congressional Quarterly. China & U.S. Far East Policy. 94. Ratified on Feb. 1, 1955 by the U.S. Senate by an 82-1 roll call vote, the treaty did not contain the word “Communist.”
16 Ibid. October 2, 1958. p. 36.
18 Ibid.
19 The New York Times. October 27, 1960. p.30. Times editors also believed that as Democrat with a more than likely Democratic House of Representatives and Senate, Kennedy would be able to accomplish more legislatively than the Republican Nixon. Calling a potential deadlock “costly,” the newspaper commented that “this is a time when...no tug-of-war between the opposite ends of Pennsylvania Avenue should be permitted to jeopardize the efficient operation of the American government.”
21 Ibid. 138.
22 Ibid. 140. The bomb was detonated at the Lop Nor test site in Xinjiang province. The official government statement after the detonation called it “a decisive victory of the great Cultural Revolution in our country,” and a “fresh great victory of Mao Tse-tung’s thought.”
23 Ibid. 364.
24 Ibid. 142.
25 Ibid. 184. At the time of Nixon’s announcement, the U.S. had 540,000 troops in Vietnam.
CHAPTER II
An Enigmatic Political Ascendancy

Judging from his hard-line, anti-Communist rhetoric as a congressional candidate and the law-and-order image he created as president, Richard Nixon appeared to the American public as a true Republican conservative. Nixon employed venomous smear tactics and charges of Communist sympathies to defeat Jerry Voorhis for the 12th California Congressional District seat in 1946, giving him instant notoriety on Capitol Hill as an aggressive right-wing Republican. Later involvement with the House Un-American Committee and his major role in the Alger Hiss perjury hearings enhanced and nationalized Nixon’s conservative Republican status, as did his rabid anti-Communist statements and extreme positions in his 1948 reelection bid and 1950 Senate campaign. To President Dwight Eisenhower’s Eastern Establishment supporters, Senator Nixon must have appeared as an ideal choice to be the general’s vice-presidential running mate in 1952; Nixon’s outspoken conservatism pleased the extreme right wing of the Republican Party, adding balance to Eisenhower’s moderation on the ticket.

Coming as he did with such a reputation for conservatism and right-leaning domestic policy positions, President Richard Nixon in 1972 shocked Republicans when he made official détente overtures to Communist China. It seemed to contradict not only Nixon’s years of rigid anti-Communism, but his Republican credentials as well. Though his decision to informally recognize Communist China was in fact a pragmatic necessity, it nevertheless belied the principles of the core right wing faction of the Republican Party which contributed heavily but warily to Nixon’s election to the presidency in 1968.

Although any Democratic president’s attempt to reach out to Communist China would have been virtually impossible during the Cold War era of the early 1970s, Nixon risked alienating a significant
and wealthy minority of his own party by appearing to placate the Communist Chinese. However, significant foreign policy experience, respect from his “Silent Majority” of Americans in that area, and the fact that his traditional image as a staunch conservative made Nixon’s move acceptable, and even welcomed, in the United States. Therein lies the political contradiction of his decision to recognize Communist China. Why would Nixon believe he could pull off Chinese détente without seriously risking his voter and financial bases for his 1972 reelection campaign? What domestic political dynamics drove his decision, and how did these forces propel him into the presidency in 1968? Perhaps most fundamentally, despite years of conservative posturing and heated anti-Communist rhetoric, was Nixon actually as conservative as the image he projected? The answers to questions such as these reveal much about the inner and outer political personas of Richard Nixon and provide an insight into his decision to recognize Communist China.

**Congressman Nixon: True Conservative or Pragmatic Politician?**

Though raised during childhood in an Orange County, California, Republican household and naturally inclined as a young man towards that party, it cannot be assumed that fledgling congressional candidate Nixon, if left to his own devices, would have chosen the path of anti-Communist smear tactics and relentless attack campaigning to capture a House seat in 1946. A great admirer of Woodrow Wilson, a liberal Democratic with internationalist philosophies, Nixon believed to a large degree that great things could be accomplished through progressive activism, particularly on a global scale.1 According to A. James Reichley, the early Nixon appears to have been inclined toward a moderate liberal position. His first political hero was his father’s old favorite, progressive Wisconsin Gov. Robert La Follette. Anything but a slash-and-burn conservative during his early private citizen years, Nixon was relatively left of center in the Republican ideological spectrum.2 Nixon was, though, from early in his career a political animal, adapting to the post-World War II
Cold War era with hard-line anti-Communism and later, tough pro-law enforcement rhetoric directed at urban criminals and anti-war protesters.\(^3\) His pragmatic approach later went beyond domestic politics and manifested itself in the foreign policy arena, appearing prominently in the China initiative and its sensitive political nature.

Set against Nixon's moderate background was the entrance of Murray Chotiner into his 1946 congressional campaign— one of the defining moments of the candidate's shift to serious conservatism. A Southern California lawyer embarking upon a new career as a campaign strategist, Chotiner set Nixon upon a path of overt aggression and could well have been the main catalyst in Nixon's pragmatic shift to the right in his quest to capture national office.\(^4\) Running in an era of heightened suspicions of domestic Communism and Republican outcries against alleged national security lapses within Truman's State Department, Nixon adopted Chotiner's campaign philosophy of winning no matter what the cost to his opponent:

Chotiner's message— as it was to young candidate Nixon in 1946— is "attack."... Chotiner's presence in the campaign in the 12th district in 1946 may have been overkill. There is evidence enough that the young Nixon... had enough Chotiner in him to win without the master.\(^5\)

The young Nixon's attacks on his opponents, accusing them of un-American sympathies without possessing deep and genuine anti-Soviet or anti-Chinese sentiment himself, clearly surfaced during the 1946 Nixon-Jeny Voorhis campaign. Prior to that campaign, Nixon's views were tempered with the kind of progressive idealism advocated by heroes such as Woodrow Wilson, such as American leadership of the world and mobilization of the power of government to ameliorate societal ills. However, post-1946 Nixonian rhetoric was rigidly conservative and Republican, especially on Communism and domestic order, especially during the heat of campaigns. How did Nixon's strident conservatism reconcile with his innate pragmatism, particularly during his congressional years?
Observers such as Bruce Mazlish, a Nixon era observer who wrote a psycho-historical interpretation of the president, concluded that Nixon’s conception of national interest bridged that ideological gap and allowed him to take positions that were consistent with the overall welfare of the U.S., even if they contradicted his personal views. “Like most politicians, only more so, Nixon believed in his mission and identified his own self and fortunes with the success of his country. It is part of the secret of his political success, since the total belief in himself is a means by which a politician convinces others to believe in him.” Nixon’s political strategy of publicly espousing strict conservatism while privately remaining relatively moderate helps to not only explain the right wing’s later distrust of him, but ironically, the very trust put in him by the American people when he established relations with China and arms control measures with the U.S.S.R. In the case of Nixon, dismantling Jerry Voorhis and his smear-filled attacks on Helen Gahagan Douglas in the 1950 California senatorial race were merely hurdles to clear in his effort to influence U.S. foreign policy through his own brand of natural moderation and pragmatic reaction to international conditions.

**Nixon’s Destruction of Helen Gahagan Douglas**

Though Nixon’s defeat of Voorhis set the tone for his anti-Communist image and aggressive campaigning style, his 1950 quest for the U.S. Senate against Helen Gahagan Douglas cemented Nixon’s conservative credentials and moved him closer to national office. By the time the race was over his attack style and personal boldness reinforced his “true” Republicanism to the public and earned the lasting eminence of America’s liberal establishment. However, in light of Nixon’s later political pragmatism while president and his penchant for opportunism, it is just as likely that viciously impugning Douglas’ character and her congressional voting record was Nixon’s method of reaching the Senate rather than truly embracing the conservative GOP cause.

A respected legislator, Douglas was at one point voted by the Washington press corps as the second most outstanding Western representative in the 79th Congress, as well as listed as one of the
“twelve smartest women in the world” by the Book of Knowledge. However, her strong support of civil rights, marriage to the Jewish actor Melvyn Douglas and skeptical approach to domestic Communist hysteria made her an appealing target to both the California and national GOP parties—to say nothing of her outspoken opposition to the House Un-American Committee, one which sat her opponent, freshman Congressman Richard Nixon. Though in 1946 Douglas condemned the Soviet Union as “the cruelest, most barbaric autocracy in world history....” statement such as “I think we all know that communism is no real threat to the democratic institutions of this country” left her vulnerable to Nixon’s aggressive campaigning style.*

Nixon recognized Helen Douglas as a formidable opponent both in terms of her striking personal presence as well as her large degree of influence within the California entertainment industry. However, in his memoirs, Nixon characterized Douglas as a legislator without strong personal support in the House and implied that he did the U.S. Congress a favor by running an aggressive campaign against her:

Mrs. Douglas was a handsome woman with a dramatic presence, but she was not, to put it mildly, the most popular member of the House of Representatives. Generally when two members of the House run against each other for another office their fellow congressmen maintain a friendly attitude and wish both of them well. But in our case, even may of the House Democrats let me know that they hoped I could defeat Helen Douglas.9

Referring to Douglas as “one of the most left wing members of Congress— and a woman.” Nixon’s strategy was to emphasize “her extremist record” and let the voters decide who was more pro-American.10 This tactic epitomized Nixon’s early approach to campaigning before he served as president: combine his own hyper-patriotism with attacks on his opponent’s voting record. Although he used it effectively to sway public opinion, it was not a true barometer of is conservatism. Rather, it appeared to be pure politics, designed solely to elevate Nixon to a level at which he could pursue his passion, foreign policy.
It was during the campaign that Nixon's nationalism began to replace his Republican conservatism. Though the most memorable tactic Nixon employed was public comparison of Helen Douglas' voting record to that of Congressman Vito Marcantonio of New York, the lone openly Communist representative in the House, his tactics also included catchy slogans such as labeling Douglas as the "Pink Lady," and self-promotion as a man always on guard against Communist agitators. Though Nixon won his seat in the Senate by a margin of 680,000 votes, the results of his ostentatious display of overt flag-waving and personal attacks were mixed. Nixon's relentless attacks on Helen Douglas and his McCarthy-like use of the "Communist" label alienated many influential figures within the Washington, D.C., political establishment, including leading Democrats who despised Nixon for his brand of attack politics.

Senate and Vice-Presidency Years: Moving Toward the Center

Between 1951 and 1960 Nixon slowly shifted towards the ideological center of the Republican spectrum, voting against his party's isolationist sentiment towards Europe and for increased foreign economic aid. Nixon still traveled the nation and campaigned vigorously for Republican House and Senate candidates who sought the endorsement of the nation's most prominent neo-conservative, but his stance on many congressional bills began to deviate from his America-first image. During his two years as U.S. Senator, Nixon became more of an internationalist, as political historian A. James Reichley observed:

In his two years in the Senate (1951-1953), Nixon's voting record closely resembled that of his California colleague, William Knowland, later identified as an extreme conservative, but then very much under the moderate influence of Governor Warren...On foreign policy issues Nixon often voted with a handful of Republican internationalists, such as Henry Cabot Lodge of Massachusetts and Irving Ives of New York, rather than the neo-isolationist bloc led by Taft.
Having attained national office, Nixon apparently felt he could begin to be more pragmatic in foreign affairs. This is not to imply, however, that his philosophy towards communism, especially Communist China, had softened. If anything, his enmity toward China had hardened after Peking's intervention in the Korean War. "Thousands of American boys are dead because the Communist Chinese supported the attack on South Korea," Nixon wrote in a U.S. News & World Report documented address, September 9, 1955. "Korea is divided today because the Communist Chinese refuse to agree to free elections," he continued. "They encourage, incite and support insurrection, rebellion and subversion in every free country of Asia..." Holding fast to the containment strategy of the Eisenhower administration formulated by George Kennan, Nixon opposed China's admittance to the United Nations as long as it remained an "outlaw nation," violating the principles of the world diplomatic community.

By the end of the 1950s, Richard Nixon's ideological stance within the Republican Party was ambiguous at best as his support for U.S. financial and military intervention in Europe and Southeast Asia and furtive support for domestic civil rights combined with an unwavering stand against communist nations such as China. This "mixed political legacy" alienated stalwart Republicans from the prospect of a Nixon presidency in 1960, but his activism and moderate domestic views enhanced his standing with middle-of-the-road Republicans looking for a continuation of the Eisenhower administration's steady course. Nixon seemed to apply conservative methods to achieving moderate goals, always with the animus of politics in the background. Though it was necessary to adopt such a stance as vice-president in a moderate Republican administration, historians such as Mary C. Brennan view Nixon's maneuvering as purely politics:

The confusion surrounding Nixon's political ideology resulted in part from a deliberate policy implemented by the candidate himself. At heart a centrist, Nixon usually occupied the middle ground...As a government official, Nixon believed in finding workable solutions, a practice that generally required compromise and concession. As a politician, he followed a path that would give him the most votes.
Approaching the presidential election of 1960, Richard Nixon's experience in the Eisenhower administration positioned him as a Republican centrist, but to the public, his arch-conservative image largely endured because of his refusal to back down to Communist leaders such as Khrushchev and Mao, as well as his HUAC fame. The global menace of communism remained a potent political issue for the confirmed pro-American.

The Specter of Barry Goldwater

The meteoric rise of Arizona Senator Barry Goldwater through the Republican ranks to leadership in the late 1950s was due not only to his foreign policy hawkishness and outspoken conservatism, but also to a steadily growing revolt at the GOP state and local levels against the perception of Richard Nixon as a closet liberal. In 1960 this trend was observed by the fledgling national conservative press, William F. Buckley's influential National Review. Reporting on April 9, 1960 that "There are mounting within the Republican Party pressures against Mr. Nixon's attempt to Liberalize the party in time for the national election," the Review supported Goldwater early on and symbolized conservative intellectual opposition to Nixon. Enthusiastic editorializing for Goldwater against Nixon in the National Review and the ultra-conservative Human Events magazine broadened on opening schism within the GOP.

In a larger sense, support for Goldwater by young members of the Republican Party and the national conservative press represented disenchantment with not only Nixon's centrist stance, but with the man himself. Tired of Eisenhower's "dime store New Deal" policies, conservatives yearned for a candidate who would vigorously oppose further extension of the welfare state. Not entirely trusting of Nixon, the growing GOP conservative youth brigade, epitomized by the Young Americans for Freedom, threw its support behind Goldwater in what amounted to a stark repudiation of Nixon's eight years as a moderate vice-president. "It was Goldwater, not Nixon or Eisenhower, who was the
hero of the bright and dominant forces at the Chicago convention." Buckley asserted. "Youth was
everywhere at the Republican convention, and the ones who will be working hardest to guide the
Republican Party in the future were conservatives: and most of them Goldwater fans."19

Nixon realized that he would still need conservatives support to win the presidency, but it
was doubtful that a disclosure of his plans to pursue peace-oriented diplomacy with any Communist
nation would have gained him much stalwart Republican support. In the early 1960s, conservatives,
especially Southerners and wealthy right-wingers, supported Goldwater's policies of direct
confrontation with the Communist bloc in the Cold War, withdrawal of diplomatic recognition from
all Communist nations and the use of nuclear weapons as a last resort to protect free nations from
hostile communist aggression.20 Barry Goldwater's stature within the GOP grew tremendously after
John F. Kennedy defeated Nixon in 1960. Goldwater's popularity contrasted with Nixon's image as a
"loser" and a compromiser on conservative issues. To Mary Brennan, Nixon's defeat at the hands of
an East Coast liberal Democrat infuriated conservative stalwarts who saw through the apparent
conservative transparency of Richard Nixon:

Conservatives, frustrated by Nixon's narrow defeat in the election of 1960 and
still angry at what they saw as his turn toward liberalism, lashed out. In a letter
to the National Review, a reader voiced his disgust that Nixon had given up
his advantages by trying to simply outpromise Kennedy. The journal's editors
agreed that Nixon had surrendered the ideological high ground to appear more
like his opponent and chastised him for leaving no legacy but merely the memory
of his defeat.21

Barry Goldwater's nomination in 1964 represented a high-water mark for the GOP conservative
faction on the national level, as their delegates rejected both Nixon and the liberalism of New York's
Nelson Rockefeller. Nixon's loss to Edmund Brown in the 1962 California gubernatorial race, his
decision not to seek the GOP presidential nomination in 1964 and the subsequent Democratic victory
had all the appearances of dooming Richard Nixon; but events turned out to have been a personal
boon for him and Republican moderates.
The deathknell to Goldwater's presidential campaign and perhaps to right-wing dominance of the Republican Party in the early 1960s came during his nomination acceptance speech at the 1964 GOP Convention in San Francisco's Cow Palace. With the phrase, "Extremism in defense of liberty is no vice. Moderation in pursuit of justice is no virtue." the figurehead of neo-conservative resurgence had ventured too far into the fringe of Republican politics for most Americans. Though his resounding defeat was disastrous to the Republican Party, for Richard Nixon it opened the possibility of a compromise presidential nomination in 1968. Nixon, always the Party man, was disappointed with Goldwater's nomination, but stumped for him nevertheless:

It was frustrating to me to see as inept candidate as Goldwater running for President. It was especially heartbreaking because Republican voters seemed to be interested in the campaign that year...But time after time the senatorial or congressional candidate...begged me to avoid associating his candidacy with Goldwater...in every speech I gave my personal support for Goldwater. I made over 150 appearances in thirty-six states. But it was a hopeless task. From the time the campaign began I knew that we were going to lose heavily.

Barry Goldwater's nomination in 1964 represented a high-water mark for the GOP conservative faction on the national level, as their delegates rejected both Nixon and the liberalism of New York's Nelson Rockefeller. Nixon's loss to Edmund Brown in the 1962 California gubernatorial race, his decision not to seek the Republican presidential nomination in 1964 and the subsequent Democratic victory had all the appearances of dooming Richard Nixon's political career but events turned out to have been a personal boon for him and GOP moderates.

**The Dual Foreign Policy Conservatism of Citizen Nixon**

The interim years of 1964-1968 afforded Nixon the opportunity to travel around the globe on fact-finding missions and to traverse the United States giving speeches for private groups and the Republican Party. Nixon spoke out against possible accommodation with the Soviets and Communist Chinese to assuage conservatives of his hard-line position regarding communism. Not as hawkish as
Goldwater but confrontational nonetheless, private citizen Nixon was willing to escalate the war in Vietnam in 1965 at the risk of antagonizing China. In a speech to the Sales Executive Club of New York, January 26, 1965, Nixon "stated bluntly" that the war was being lost and "urged that we take the war to North Vietnam by naval and air bombing of the Communists' supply routes in South Vietnam and by destroying the Vietcong staging areas in North Vietnam and Laos."^25

At this point in Nixon's political career, confrontation with Communist China was an ultimately acceptable option for winning the Vietnam War. Drawing distinction between himself and the GOP's right-wing, he stated that he would endorse an escalation of bombing but not the nuclear option. "Unlike some extremist hawks, I did not think that we should use nuclear weapons in Vietnam...I said that we should instead quarantine the war in Vietnam by using our air and sea power...I was aware that this policy would risk involving Red China..."^26 So, Nixon appeared to be tilting back towards overt aggressiveness a full two years before the 1968 presidential election, shoring his right flank with firm stances on winning Vietnam and refusing to back down to Communists in Asia.

At the same time Nixon was mollifying his critics in the area of foreign policy he was advocating philosophical centrism as the unifier of a factionalized Republican Party."^27 His dual conservatism satisfied a large part of the mid-1960s GOP, with exceptions being Rockefeller liberals and what remained of Goldwaterites, neither of which had supported Nixon in 1960. In his memoirs, Nixon wrote of his use of political dualism to unite the party behind himself and the ideological center:

"In a number of speeches before 1965, I urged my audiences to be Lincoln Republicans: liberal in their concern for people and conservative in their respect for the rule of law. I deliberately used the terms liberal and conservative, which in 1964 had been the sorrow of the party...I said, if being a liberal means federalizing everything, then I'm no liberal. If being a conservative means turning back the clock... then I'm no conservative."^28
The year 1967 marked a watershed for both the Republican Party and Richard Nixon: it was then that the party recognized the need to nominate a moderate for president. The year also witnessed a significant change in Nixon's policy toward Communist nations such as China. In April, 1967, Nixon embarked on a tour of Asia that significantly altered his world view of communism. The trip not only enhanced his credentials as the foreign policy spokesman of the Republican Party, but also exposed him to the growing reality of Communist China's immense power and influence in the region that showed no sign of abatement. He later noted that:

Every leader I talked to in Asia expressed support for a strong American position in Vietnam. But I also found on the trip a growing concern about Communist China. Some who had adamantly opposed any change of American policy toward China had come around to the view that some new and direct relationship between the two nations was essential if there was to be any chance at all after Vietnam was over to build a lasting peace in Asia in which free nations would have a chance to survive.  

Leaders seeking a new American policy toward China included Prince Norodom Sihouk of Cambodia, a neutral nation bordering Vietnam that had already been infiltrated by Vietcong forces and would ultimately fall to the Communists in the 1970s.

Following this trip Nixon wrote his famous Foreign Affairs article, “Asia After Vietnam,” an opinion piece in a widely respected and read foreign policy establishment journal which contained the seeds of a new China policy. The turning point in Nixon’s view of U.S.-China relations, the article was aimed not only at foreign policy personnel but at the American public as well, who wanted a change in American policy in Asia that was costing thousands of lives. Suggesting that the time was rapidly approaching to “pull China back into the world community” for the sake of future peace in Asia and the entire world. Nixon also conceded that nationalistic Communism was different in nature from the international Communist front.

Implicit was that Communism’s threat to the United States democracy might not be as serious as he had once believed, and that regional wars of communism versus democratic regimes were more civil wars than possible falling dominoes.  

Though this modification of Nixon’s anti-
Communism owed more to prevailing world conditions and the shift from bipolarity to multipolarity than a personal retreat from ardent hawkishness, in nonetheless represented a significant crack in his conservative facade. The *Foreign Affairs* article represented a dividing line between Nixon's old and new China policies, and suggested that he had the wherewithal to both formulate as well as implement new policy changes. A legacy emerging already from Vietnam was the future reluctance of the American people to become involved in Asian land wars, a problem that would have to be averted by altering U.S. relations with Communist China, the greatest threat to instability in the region that could potentially lead to further pressure on America to intervene.

If Nixon's flexibility on the China question prompted conservative questioning of his determination for confronting Communism on the international stage. Republicans were reassured by his continuing support for total victory in Vietnam. Even though growing levels of U.S. troops and bombing needed for victory potentially could have brought China into the war, Nixon knew that he could not abandon his conservative stance in the 1968 election. Nixon's hint of eventual détente with China and simultaneous avocation of increased military pressure on North Vietnam fits into the dual conservatism model that he had so carefully built in the years leading to the election of 1968. Richard Nixon particularly needed Southern support to be elected president, and to that end a strong stance on Vietnam could offset the abstractions of future overtures towards the Chinese.³¹

To presidential historian Stephen Ambrose, Nixon's strong support for victory in Vietnam was a combination of personal philosophy and political strategy. Both unwilling and politically unable to support the dishonorable peace of a complete American surrender to Communist forces. Nixon by virtue of default of options staked his future candidacy on defeating communist insurgency:

> Perhaps it was a gamble...but Nixon had no choice. His options did not include taking a cut-and-run position on Vietnam, because his constituents, especially but by no means exclusively in the South, would have deserted him in droves. Beyond that factor, he personally was by no means ready to give up. His basic position on how to end the war remained unchanged: send more bombs to Vietnam and more Republicans to Washington.⁴²
Tempering toughness on Vietnam with pragmatism toward China. Nixon gravitated towards the foreign policy center as he became more and more confident of retaining the South by gaining the support of influential GOP Senators Strom Thurmond of South Carolina and John Tower of Texas. Nixon’s “Southern Strategy” began to take shape, enhanced by his reputation as a hawk on communism and a strong proponent of domestic law and order in an atmosphere of demonstrations, destructive racial rioting and increasing public fear of crime. Illustrating the importance of the South to Richard Nixon in 1968 was the fact that eleven traditional Southern states plus Kentucky and Oklahoma accounted for 356 delegates in that year, more than half of the 667 that were needed for the nomination.

1968: A United GOP Forsakes Ideology

After having spent four years walking a political tightrope between moderation and true conservatism, enduring the label “two-time loser” and tirelessly promoting the GOP, Nixon was finally elected President of the United States in 1968 as a compromise candidate within his own party. Though the world “compromise” suggests a weakened position, Nixon’s standing in the middle gave him the leeway needed for the decision to pursue détente with Communist China. Such an initiative would have undoubtedly been unacceptable to the party as a whole had he been elected on a strictly liberal or right-wing Republican platform.

Benefiting from Goldwater’s defeat in 1964, Nixon became the leading Republican candidate in 1968 as conservatives sought a hedge against the liberal wing of their party. By virtue of having supported Goldwater and continual efforts to reach common ground with Southern conservatives on such issues as Vietnam and domestic law and order, Nixon appealed to the Goldwaterites who were nervous about the possibility of such Republican liberals as George Romney or Nelson Rockefeller representing the GOP in 1968. According to Garry Wills, Nixon stepped into the leadership vacuum of the far right thanks to his political staying power:
In 1965 and 1966, when it looked as if Rockefeller or Romney had the nomination, Nixon was the only palatable candidate surviving on the Right...He played this role carefully, giving and getting support from all the leaderless Goldwater types still running or maneuvering to run. He earned their gratitude and prior commitment.36

Receiving commitments of support from Thurmond and Tower not only helped Nixon carry the region in 1968, but his Southern strategy was also central to turning back a strong challenge to his nomination by Ronald Reagan, a new hero to the conservatives after his 1966 election to the governorship of California. Reagan, an avowed anti-Communist, foe of busing and nationally known actor and politician was an appealing candidate to Southern conservatives searching for an electable alternative to Nixon.37 A strong Reagan showing at the 1968 Republican Convention in Miami could have derailed Nixon’s nomination by splitting conservative delegates and propelling a liberal, most likely Rockefeller, to the nomination. Reagan, despite his meteoric rise within the GOP, was not a direct challenger to Nixon’s ascendancy due to his late start (he declared his candidacy at the convention), but rather threatened to play the spoiler.

Integral to beating back Reagan’s challenge in 1968 was the groundwork Nixon had laid by modifying his conservatism to attract Southern support. Tough rhetoric and a commitment to winning the presidency helped the candidate overcome not only conservative Southern reluctance to support a traditional moderate, but also his image as unelectable after his 1962 gubernatorial defeat in California. Nixon’s early procurement of Southern conservative endorsements and his long-term party loyalty curbed the late Reagan surge at the Miami convention.37 An example of Nixon’s payoff at the convention was his victory in Texas, a staunchly conservative state, which pledged 41 delegates to Nixon and 15 for Reagan— a feat largely due to Nixon’s political alliance with John Tower.38

Nominated for president, Nixon had successfully cleared the hurdles put before him by the conservative South, in large measure to pledges and promises of continued anti-Communism. This course of action was of particular importance to Strom Thurmond, an important Nixon supporter.
whose super-patriotism practically superseded his segregationist attitudes. In the aftermath of Nixon’s
GOP convention victory, an exchange between the Senator and the nominee vividly illustrated the
hopes of conservatives for Nixon, only later to be disappointed:

Thurmond, for all his anti-civil rights views, had even higher priorities: “Why Dick, when you’re President, all I want is that you never, ever let
let up against them Communists,” said Thurmond. “Senator, you know I
never will,” responded Nixon. “I sure know you won’t,” answered Thur­
mond, pumping the candidate’s hand, evidently in the belief that a
solemn bond had been sealed, for he sorrowfully reminded Nixon of these
words during his Presidency at the time of the antiballistic missile (ABM)
treaty and the China initiative.  

Episodes such as this illustrate the paradox between Nixon the conservative Republican
politician and later, Nixon the presidential pragmatist responding flexibly to conditions even if it
meant altering doctrinal U.S. foreign policy. Though he was indeed a conservative at heart regarding
domestic issues and general foreign policy principles as standing up to Communist aggression and
peace with honor in Vietnam, the international relations arena as handled by the president required a
sense of balance and credibility. Despite the lingering mistrust of Reagan supporters during the drive
for the nomination, Nixon’s campaign conservatism never faltered and in large measure was carried
over into his administration. Richard Nixon’s main priority remained the practice of high level
foreign policy, an area which he considered presidential domain and excelled in.

In an interview with U.S. News & World Report before the general election, Nixon told an
interviewer. “I think the President’s mind and attention must be left clear to deal with those problems
where only he can provide leadership— that is, first, in the field of foreign policy, where only he in
some instances can make the great decisions.” This belief in executive control over the nation’s
foreign affairs, combined with his intense interest in the subject, goes far in explaining his shifting
degrees of conservatism amid party factionalism and national politics.
Post 1968: Nixonian Conservatism Portends China Recognition

Though Nixon’s election was not necessarily a triumph for staunch conservatives, it was nevertheless a Republican victory. President Nixon’s tough public image was bolstered by his choice of Spiro T. Agnew as vice-president, who subsequently became Nixon’s point man for attacking dissenting intellectuals and the liberal media, a long time nemesis of the new president. Attempting to repay the South for its electoral support, Nixon called for a “moratorium” on court-ordered busing until July 1, 1973, justifying the move by his personal belief that forced integration busing was the wrong solution to correct racial imbalances. Within his administration, Nixon hired Patrick Buchanan, an arch-conservative as a speechwriter, and named John Mitchell, a conservative lawyer, as his Attorney General.

The conservative nature of the Nixon administration on domestic issues created a political climate that made détente with Communist China acceptable. This would have been impossible for the Democrats with their traditional reputation for supporting Civil Rights, labor unions and “letting the dust settle” in China, a phrase uttered by Secretary of State Dean Acheson during the Truman administration regarding the U.S. role in the outcome of China’s civil war. By attempting to combat social unrest in the nation with tough rhetoric, President Nixon reassured his Silent Majority that he was a competent leader who deserved their trust in matters of foreign affairs. Thus, most Americans regarded his visit to China as a tremendous feat of personal diplomacy, and criticism from both the right and left wings was muted as his political capital for reelection skyrocketed.

Despite the President’s appeal to the average Republican, the GOP right-wing was less than satisfied with Nixon’s foreign policy initiatives in the years leading to the China trip. The proposed collective regional security organizations and reinforced commitment to communist containment proposed within the Nixon Doctrine would reduce America’s future world policing responsibilities, while at the same time, maintain a staunch vigilance against foreign aggressors of sovereign nations.
However, military conservatives worried about Nixon’s tendencies toward détente with the Soviets. In their eyes, détente with a Communist superpower would be interpreted as a tacit acceptance of that system, and invite further aggression against weaker nations.45

Ultimately, however, Nixon’s election enthroned moderate conservatism as the prevailing philosophy of the United States from 1968 to 1972. Finally awarded the presidency by the American people, Nixon enjoyed a honeymoon period in which he retained relative autonomy in decision-making, until the invasion of Cambodia and other controversial episodes once again limited his options. His election marked a repudiation of the policies of his two Democratic predecessors and a national shift towards the right of center. In the wake of his 1968 victory, the National Review editorialized:

Richard Nixon has, thus, a clear mandate from the nation. And it is a conservative mandate. Not ‘extreme right wing’ or even clear-cut un-mixed conservatism perhaps, but undeniably from the conservative side of the spectrum.46

The Los Angeles Times, a newspaper which had endorsed Nixon for the presidency, observed that Nixon would have a tough time uniting the country due to extensive national alienation, but expressed faith that Nixon’s leadership qualities would pave the way for a successful first term:

There is reason for optimism on this score, not only on the basis of Nixon’s experience but because of his expressed views on the nature of the Presidency...It won’t be easy for the President-elect to build the coalition for progress...but he deserves the help of all of us in making the effort.47

The Times labeled his victory “the most impressive comeback in the history of American presidential politics.” and stated that “We are all one people, one country, and it is the responsibility of people and politicians alike to see that Nixon succeeds.”48

Though The New York Times did not endorse Nixon in 1968, it nevertheless expressed admiration qualities that it saw fit for a President:

...we have always recognized that he is an intelligent, able man who is essentially a moderate, responsible conservative on most issues. His long years in national politics have
given him the political skills which are a necessary part of a successful President's equipment.\textsuperscript{49}

Observing that difficulties lay ahead as a result of a Democratic Senate and House, \textit{Times} editorialists believed that Nixon would have to make special efforts to enlist bipartisan support. Foreign policy would also be critical, as ending the Vietnam War would require delicate and skilled negotiations in Paris:

\begin{quote}
In foreign affairs, the first priority is to establish a secure relationship between the incoming and outgoing Administrations in the management of the Paris peace negotiations. Next in importance is the early ratification of the nuclear nonproliferation treaty. Now that the campaign has ended, we hope Mr. Nixon will encourage speedy Senate action.\textsuperscript{50}
\end{quote}

By creating and holding together a fragile Republican coalition of longtime supporters and wary right wingers, Richard Nixon finally gained his ultimate goal. The road to détente with China, an initiative well into the formative stages by 1968, was ready to be embarked upon but not yet ready to be revealed to the American people. Nixon as president began his unprecedented transfer of foreign policy decision-making from the State Department to the Oval Office, a shift that would make his ensuing personal diplomacy and trip to China all the more stunning to the American public.
Endnotes - Chapter II


3 Fawn Brodie. Richard Nixon: The Shaping of His Character (New York: W.W. Norton. 1981). 112. This is a highly critical Nixon biography that described him as being "warped."


5 Ibid. 237.

6 Bruce Mazlish. In Search of Nixon: A Psycho-Historical Approach (New York: BasicBooks. 1972). 86. This is a psychological biography of Nixon while still in office that attempted to trace much of his behavior back to his relationship with his mother, Hannah Nixon.


8 Ibid. 542.

9 Nixon, R.N., 75.

10 Ibid.

11 Brodie. The Shaping of His Character. 244.

12 Reichley. Conservatives In An Age of Change. 48.


14 Ibid.

15 Ibid.


17 Ibid. 29.

18 The National Review (April 9, 1960). 221. This magazine was founded and is still published by William F. Buckley, Jr., a young (at the time) conservative intellectual from Nixon's despised 'Elite East Coast Establishment.' Buckley remained a critic of Nixon through and even after his trip to China.

19 Ibid. (Sept. 24, 1960), 172.


23 Ibid. Sen. Barry Goldwater was the second presidential candidate this century, other than Harry Truman, to seek the presidency without a college degree.
Such statements foreshadowed Nixon’s secret and controversial decision in 1969 to order the carpet bombing of neutral Laos, in order to cut off the Ho Chi Minh trail. Though Nixon apparently had no problem with expanding the war illegally without the permission of Congress, the executive action led directly to a perception of Nixon as fundamentally untrustable and unaccountable as president.

Reichley, Conservatives In An Age of Change, 53.

Nixon used conservative respect for law and order as a major campaign theme in 1968, in the midst of widespread inner city rioting following the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr.

Among Asian leaders most enthusiastic for a change in U.S. policy was Cambodia’s Prince Norodom Sihanouk, leader of Vietnam’s neighbor, who believed American aid, not soldiers, could best turn the tide against Asiatic communism.

This realization can be viewed in retrospect as a belated repudiation of the Eisenhower administration’s ‘domino theory’ of entire regions falling to communist waves. Recognition of the Vietnam War as a nationalistic civil war changed the nature of U.S. defense strategy in Asia, making detente with China a prerequisite to no longer requiring the commitment of massive resources to regional ideological conflicts.


Ambrose’s two volume biography of Nixon is perhaps the most comprehensive work to date that documents, in great detail, Nixon’s political ascendancy and the events and policies of his presidency. Ambrose is more concerned with actions rather than character, unlike biographers such as Fawn Brodie and Roger Morris.

Kolkey. The New Right, 279.

Hess and Broder. The Republican Establishment, 182.


Garry Wills. Nixon Agonistes: The Crisis of a Self-Made Man (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1970), 240. This volume, written during Nixon’s first term, is highly critical, generally characterizing him as paranoid and blinded by personal ambition. It could well have been influenced by Brodie's portrayal, as themes of performance based on personality are similar.

Brennan. Turning Right in the Sixties, 126. Another Reagan conservative credential was serving as spokesman for the General Electric Corporation in the 1950s. General Electric had ties to the defense industry, and Reagan’s clean-cut, conservative image fit the company’s well.

Reinhard, The Republican Right, 219. Reagan’s surge at Miami was simply too late; he did not even declare himself willing to be drafted as a nominee until after the first day of the convention.


Richard Nixon. “If Nixon is President,” U.S. News & World Report LXV (October 7, 1968), 49. Nixon’s belief that the president should have virtually exclusive domain over foreign policy decisions was manifested in his unprecedented centralization of decision-making into the Oval Office, away from the State Department. During the China initiative planning, Nixon and Kissinger basically circumvented Secretary of State William Rogers and his staff.

Ibid., 593-596.

Brennan, *Turning Right in the Sixties*, 136. John Mitchell, one of Nixon’s closest confidantes and a friend from his post vice-president days practicing law in New York City, was later to be a convicted felon of the Watergate scandal. Patrick Buchanan went to a career as a television political commentator, and unsuccessfully sought the GOP presidential nomination in 1992 against George Bush, and in 1996 against nominee Bob Dole. In both years, his appeals to voters were strongly reminiscent of Nixon’s call to his Silent Majority in 1968 and 1972.


Ibid.

The *National Review* (November 19, 1968), 1150.

The *Los Angeles Times*, November 7, 1968, p. 6- Part II.

Ibid.


Ibid.
CHAPTER III
Strategic Considerations and Contradictions

On the surface, the foreign policy of President Richard Nixon toward the People’s Republic of China appeared to be as enigmatic as the man himself. Having built his meteoric political career on a foundation of ardent anti-Communism and adversarial rhetoric against the Chinese and Soviets, Nixon, upon assuming the presidency, switched tactics and pursued a course of rapprochement with both nations at the height of the war in Vietnam. Nixon’s display of political agility in changing diplomatic tact in the shadow of a looming Communist Chinese threat to all of Asia represented a startling turnabout to Republicans, who feared the new path was an inevitable disaster and acquiescence to Communism.

Though it is fair to assume that Nixon’s conservative Republican credentials made it possible for him to pursue détente with Communist China in an atmosphere of simmering east-west tension, the diplomatic aspects of the decision were far more prominent than domestic political reactions. Though Richard Nixon embodied the term “political animal,” the decision to bring Communist China into the contemporary world arose from geopolitical factors relatively beyond one man’s control, even the President of the United States. These factors not only represented the dawning of a new age within twentieth century international diplomacy, but held in the balance the lives of thousands of American soldiers around the world.

A new dimension to the Nixon political persona, pragmatism on his part, was the realistic middle path between those of complete escalation of a destructive and unpopular war in Southeast Asia and a potentially crippling (in terms of U.S. prestige) capitulation to a hated Communist foe. Though all signs from Nixon’s past pointed towards a continuing hard-line stance against China, the destruction of his predecessor’s career as well as his own desire to implement a new and stable peace structure for the world inspired Nixon’s pragmatism toward Communist China. However, it must not
be assumed that Chinese rapprochement was purely a forced hand or the manifestation of a grand vision of peace. Geopolitics was central if not paramount, the practice of which was manifested in Nixon-Kissinger balance-of-power diplomacy.

By pursuing détente with Communist China at the same time as the Sino-Soviet schism deepened, Nixon was able to indirectly pressure the Soviet Union by means of subtly taking sides in that conflict. The Soviet Union was in a perfect position for Nixon to engage in balance-of-power pressure, as it was threatened at the time by Chinese troop emplacements along their common border as well as intimidated by the prospect of a nuclear China. American overtures towards the Chinese allowed China a chance to reduce its military presence in Vietnam as well as its own coastal defense positions near Taiwan, and reinforce its internal security. President Nixon’s position on China moved him closer to his three core foreign policy imperatives simultaneously: “peace with honor” in Vietnam, arms control and other policy concessions from the U.S.S.R. and a reformulation of America’s international peacekeeping role.

**Changing Attitudes and the Kissinger Factor**

Though the pragmatic nature of Nixonian foreign policy may well have been forced upon the president by the emerging specters of a losing effort in Vietnam and a growing international multipolaric power structure, the inevitability of reopening China did not reconcile with his anti-Communism during his service in the Eisenhower administration. As late as 1958, Nixon wished to have on record that he was “unequivocally opposed at this time to recognition of Red China.” and wrote to a Duke Law School friend that in his view, “recognition of China would have a catastrophic effect on the anti-Communist and non-Communist nations in Asia.”¹ Such statements, made in the wake of the Korean War and just before American military intervention in Southeast Asia, represent Nixon’s pre-presidential sense of unflagging opposition to communism.
By the closing years of the 1960s, the public writings and addresses of Nixon regarding the importance of the China question began to close the gap with his personal beliefs. In the Foreign Affairs article of 1967, Nixon articulated a dire warning to the American foreign policy establishment about the consequences of China's isolation that represented a complete reversal from his stance as vice-president:

Taking the long view, we simply cannot afford to leave China forever outside the family of nations, there to nurture its fantasies, cherish its hates and threaten its neighbors...The world cannot be safe until China changes. Thus our aim, to the extent that we can influence events, should be to induce change.*

As a private citizen, Richard Nixon viewed China not only as a potential menace to world peace in the near future, but also as the linchpin to any conceivable peace in Vietnam with honor for the United States. Eventual detente with China and the Soviet Union was to Nixon, the key to maintaining a stable regional security structure that would avert further U.S. military entanglements in Asia as well as give America diplomatic leverage by playing the Communist nations off of one another. "Unless the superpowers adopt a new live-and-let-live relationship, the world will not see real peace in this century. If we fail to work toward that end suicidal war is inevitable."*

Another question centered on the Nixon historical record and the reopening of China is the amount of credit that should be given to the President for the initiative itself. Was it Nixon, the long time anti-Communist but shrewd politician and diplomatic visionary, who formulated and carried out the policy with the power of his office, who deserves full historical credit? What was the role of Henry Kissinger, Nixon administration Deputy National Security Advisor and later Secretary of State, a man of acknowledged tactical and intellectual brilliance who set up the breakthrough Peking meeting by utilizing backchannel, clandestine diplomacy?*4

As evidenced by the themes of his Foreign Affairs article, candidate Nixon recognized the growing threat of a belligerent China to the peace of the free world and intended to set in motion gestures of rapprochement if elected to the presidency. Though Nixon's political ascendancy had in
large measure been based on stringent anti-Communism, heavy American losses in Vietnam, strong domestic pressure to end the war and the growing problem of Soviet conventional arms superiority forced Nixon to adopt a more flexible approach to world affairs. The Sino-Soviet rift offered Nixon an opportunity to exploit their schism to achieve the U.S. goal of limited international military commitments as well as extraction of American forces from an unpopular war.

According to journalist Marvin Kalb, a print reporter who covered the Nixon presidency, the Sino-Soviet rift gave Nixon an opportunity to use the Chinese against the real enemy, the Soviet Union:

By the time Nixon changed his status from candidate to President, he had already pieced together the elements of a new policy toward China. Though Nixon was still a staunch anti-Communist, he was aware of America’s changing mood, and he recognized the...advantages of proclaiming a new era of reconciliation with the Communist world...Given the sharp tension in Sino-Soviet relations, he began to see Peking as his major weapon in the diplomatic game to gain leverage over the Kremlin.

The China plan was Nixon’s, to be carried out in tandem with Kissinger and taking advantage of his tactical expertise. “The China initiative was Nixon’s,” said General Alexander Haig, a close Nixon advisor. “Henry was very skeptical until he analyzed its potential consequences, and then he became the most effective tactical operator in getting it done.” Kissinger was an effective messenger for the president and provided invaluable diplomatic support to Nixon in pre-summit talks in Peking that set the stage for the Shanghai communiqué. According to Kissinger himself, Nixon modern day balance-of-power scheme with peaceful equilibrium replacing forced Communist containment was a plan he was immediately able to endorse. To Kissinger critic Seymour Hersch, writing in The Price of Power, the depth of Kissinger’s knowledge of China was surprisingly shallow for a nationally renowned Harvard University professor specializing in international diplomacy:

There is no evidence that Kissinger seriously considered the question of an American-Chinese rapprochement before his appointment as Nixon’s national security advisor...Nixon emerged as the grand theoretician and Kissinger as his occasional operative, the agent who found some back-channels and delivered a few messages...By the end of the summer (1969), Kissinger-- not surprisingly-- had become convinced that Nixon was right.
about the possibility of rapprochement with China... 8

Kissinger, preoccupied with Cold War confrontational diplomacy between the United States and Soviet Union, subscribed to the theory of Sino-Soviet ideological unity prominent in the 1950s. He gave little effort to studying the thought process of Chairman Mao and general Chinese history, and therefore "his vision of China retained its Cold War grimness, unchanged since the days of John Foster Dulles." 9

Although it is evident that the China initiative was formulated and put into motion by Nixon, Henry Kissinger's lack of expertise in the area before his appointment to the administration was eclipsed by his brilliant collaboration with Nixon in their attempt to create peaceful geopolitical equilibrium by way of détente with China. The Nixon-Kissinger strategy of regional stability was marked by a symbiotic relationship between the two men, a "unique fusion of style and substance." 10

The Nixon presidential decision-making process, characterized by solitary deliberation and consolidation of policy making power within the Oval Office, was enhanced by the rare trust that Nixon extended to Kissinger. Whether intellectually or comrade-based, this contradicted the mistrust and contempt Nixon felt towards the Eastern establishment and represented a personal leap of faith by him. Kissinger articulated his view of the working relationship between the two men to Italian journalist Oriana Fallaci in 1972, conceding the importance of Nixon's foreign policy knowledge as well as the fusion that had occurred between them:

We mustn't forget that, before he ever met me, President Nixon had always been active in matters of foreign policy... Even before he was elected it was obvious that foreign policy mattered greatly to him. He has very clear ideas on the subject. I am not at all so sure I could have done what I've done with another president. Such as special relationship, I mean the relationship between the President and me, always depends on the style of both men. What I've done was achieved because he made it possible for me to do it. 11
This sense of achievement based on mutually similar styles of foreign policy was critical to the success of the China initiative, for it represented a check of egos on the part of Nixon and Kissinger that in turn created the fluidity necessary for complex and relatively secretive diplomacy. "You have to give both Nixon and Kissinger the credit—Nixon because he is the president," said Winston Lord, former Ambassador to the People's Republic of China. "Within less than a month after the inauguration, there was a memorandum from Nixon to Kissinger which, in effect, said: 'I want to start getting in touch with the Chinese.' Kissinger was brilliant in carrying out this approach and in implementing the vision of the president."\(^1\text{2}\)

Given the dynamic nature of the Nixon-Kissinger partnership, as well as their individual inclinations for power consolidation and chess board diplomacy, it was inevitable that a new approach to containing communism would evolve and be unilaterally implemented by Nixon. This approach was simply the use of detente as an updated and revitalized version of traditional containment. American rapprochement with a Communist superpower such as China would maintain the international balance-of-power by remaining consistent with the availability of U.S. resources.\(^1\text{3}\) No longer would or could ideology alone qualify an apparently hostile nation as an adversary. The Nixon administration shifted away from the dogmatic communist containment theories subscribed to by the previous four presidents upon the realization that by the late 1960s, even ideologically opposed nations such as the U.S. and China shared some common objectives. in this case the strategic necessity of preventing Soviet encroachment into Asia.\(^1\text{4}\)

Representative of Nixon’s shift to foreign policy pragmatism in light of popular discontent with the Vietnam War, the growing nuclear capability of China and the need to curtail U.S. world policing responsibilities, detente as policy stood in sharp contrast to the president’s previously staunch anti-Communism. Nixon, one of America’s preeminent cold warriors, had to reduce the chances of future U.S. military intervention abroad, particularly in Asia, as he was elected on a platform that called for the end of the Vietnam War. According to Robert Littwak, the new Nixon-
Kissinger foreign policy strategy of reduced U.S. physical commitments in lieu of creative diplomacy resulted in a major change of decision making processes:

...the adoption of a rather more Byzantine, less ideological foreign policy approach, characterized by maneuver and manipulation, marked a fundamental shift in American national style of conducting international affairs. Here, the close bond between style and substance is unequivocal as a transformation of the former led to one of the latter.\textsuperscript{15}

This policy transformation, predicated as much upon the Nixon-Kissinger partnership as the President’s view of world security, was the catalyst for creating a blueprint for a new regional peace structure with the end of Chinese isolation at its core. Integral to the new foreign policy approach would be Nixon’s acceptance, under domestic pressure to end the war and lessen America’s international military commitments to contain communism in such far-off places as Southeast Asia and Africa, of pragmatism in the face of a personal history of Cold War intransigence.\textsuperscript{16} By all appearances, Nixon became a convert to pragmatic thinking regarding China after his April 1967 tour of Asia. Writing in the 1980s, Nixon justified his Chinese policy reversal by extolling themes of pragmatism at the presidential level as a necessary way to accomplish goals that may be unpopular:

Those who practice pragmatism as an end in itself and those who oppose it as an unmitigated evil are both wrong. Pragmatism can be justified, but only as a means to achieve great goals...In short, to achieve great goals a leader must find ways to persuade others to reinterpret, even to sometimes go against, their interests and principles. But at times he must go against his own interests and principles to achieve those same goals. This is especially true in foreign policy.\textsuperscript{17}

Nixonian pragmatism formed the foundation for new foreign policy flexibility towards Communist nations, as well as a structural change that would ultimately reduce the chances of U.S. military entanglements in other countries. More importantly, though, regarding the Asian dilemma, Nixon’s new outlook moved towards overtly reducing tensions between the U.S. and China as his rhetoric de-emphasized tensions caused by past dogmatism. Beginning in the opening minutes of his
first term as president in January, 1969. Nixon’s words served as harbingers of detente. “After a period of confrontation, we are entering an era of negotiation. We seek an open world; open to ideas, open to exchange of goods and people, a world in which no people, great or small, will live in angry isolation.”

The Nixon Doctrine and Chinese Detente

At the foundation of Nixon’s shift to detente with China was the advent and implementation of the Nixon Doctrine. The Doctrine was based on the continuing need to maintain international order through the treaty system but at the same time reduce U.S. military commitments throughout the world. The appearance of pulling back U.S. forces from conflict with Communists was unthinkable to a young Nixon, who, following a civilian trip to East Berlin in 1963, wrote that meeting the challenge of counteracting communism was the ultimate responsibility of free nations:

The Communist goal is to impose slavery on the Free World. Our goal must be nothing less than to bring freedom to the Communist world. Our policy must be guided by one overriding principle: We stand for freedom— not only for ourselves, but for all people.

By 1970, though, Chinese support of the resilient North Vietnamese, strong domestic opposition to the war and the need to apply pressure to the Soviet Union for arms control concessions convinced Nixon that peace with China could only occur by changing the nature of America’s defense commitments. Unacceptably high casualty rates in Vietnam made it clear that the U.S. had overextended itself in protecting vulnerable Southeast Asian nations. So, the Nixon Doctrine proposed that regional security organization based on treaties and committed to negotiation rather than aggression would be the first line of defense against communism around the world, with the United States agreeing to ultimately honor its military commitments to maintain its own credibility. In this scenario, collective defense pacts served as deterrents to aggression and spared America the burden of dispatching large numbers of troops to foreign countries immediately to counter communist
insurgency or invasion. With a large segment of the American people tired of losing sons to defending tiny foreign nations from communists, the will present in post-World War II and Korean War eras to sacrifice for the freedom of foreign peoples had largely evaporated. Foreign policy commentator Earl Ravenal argued that "The Nixon Doctrine itself was a response primarily to certain domestic problems, which can be defined as economic stringency and lack of a concerted ‘national interest.’"20

However concerned Nixon may have been with the tide of domestic dissent with his Asian policy during his first administration, his public writings before the 1968 presidential campaign indicate his belief that the key to international peace was to bring China into the community of nations. In accordance with implementing the Nixon Doctrine in Asia to reduce U.S. military presence there, Nixon strongly believed that the China problem had to be dealt with sooner than later. “Any American policy towards Asia must come urgently to grips with the reality of China,” he wrote in “Asia After Vietnam.” Nixon explained that the nations of the free world had to come to grips with the contemporary Communist China, as ignoring the main source of aggression in Asia and its populace would bode darkly for the future:

Taking the long view, we simply cannot afford to leave China forever outside the family of nations, there to nurture its fantasies, cherish its hates and threaten its neighbors. There is no place on this small planet for a billion of its potentially most able people to live in angry isolation.21

Deviating from his former position of inflexible determination against Communism, Nixon’s doctrine provided the world community with a stark and measure policy that affected both American allies and enemies. After years of relative indecision and lack of focus regarding the war in Southeast Asia, the Nixon Doctrine set forth principles of regional defense and reinforced American commitment to its treaty partners that would save the U.S. military from unpopular entanglements in the future as well as reassure the public that its president had the best in mind for it as well as the
nation’s credibility. “A formal statement for the American position provided for the first time clear-
cut criteria for friend and foe,” wrote Henry Kissinger. “Domestically, it supplied a coherent answer
to charges to overextensions; and nations in Asia dreading American withdrawal found in the
doctrine considerable reassurance once they found them.”

Though the Nixon Doctrine was an overall framework for America’s role in maintaining
world stability and defending its allies, it was primarily aimed at making contact with and assuaging
China’s fear of U.S. imperialism in Asia, triggered by MacArthur’s invasion of North Korea in 1950.
Coupled with its underlying message of attacking the Soviet Union with Chinese rapprochement, the
doctrine served dual Cold War purposes of increasing pressure on the Soviets by decreasing pressure
on China. “The improvement of relations with China was regarded as the logical corollary to the
application of the Nixon Doctrine in Southeast Asia,” wrote Robert Littwak. “For it was envisioned
that the development of a comprehensive Sino-American rapprochement would contribute to the
creation of the stable regional conditions which would permit the orderly devolution of American
power.” Nixon’s vision of peace through negotiation backed by regional security organizations as
articulated in the doctrine recognized that the absence of American troops fighting Communist
soldiers would decrease the propaganda of Communism and the will of populations to rebel and resist
perceived U.S. imperialism. “In Asia, where the Nixon Doctrine was enunciated, partnership will
have special meanings for our policies...our cooperation with Asian nations will be enhanced as they
cooperate with one another and develop regional institutions.” Nixon wrote in Foreign Affairs.

Designing a Pacific security apparatus was central to the Asian application of the Doctrine,
as Nixon recognized the futility of America’s policing Asian wars of nationalism. A collective Asian
security organization would lessen the U.S. military burden in the region by shifting away from the
bipolar nature of U.S.-China confrontation, and towards multipolarity in the form of treaty
organizations. The plan called for increased inter-Asian cooperation and response to communist
threats as the first firewall against aggression. Instead of instant committal of U.S. troops to nations
under threat, they would be the final fallback in the defense of liberty. Nixon wrote of such a Pacific community:

this has to be a community in the fullest sense; a community of purpose, of understanding and of mutual assistance, in which military defenses are coordinated while economies are strengthened; a community embracing a concert of Asian strengths as a counterforce to the designs of China...25

To Nixon, the alternative to collective security in Asia was a grim vision of constant threats to free nations both within and outside of China’s sphere of influence as well as the impending reality of an immense and restless nation with the nuclear option. The quagmire in Vietnam and failure of outdated and inflexible containment policy convinced the ardently anti-Communist Nixon that rapprochement was not only in the best interests of the United States and himself as a politician, but the world at large, as well. Speaking at an AFL-CIO convention on Dec. 13, 1971 in Bal Harbour, Florida, Nixon explained the troubling prospect of continued U.S.-Chinese confrontation, as well as the responsibilities of his office:

There are over 750 million people in China...within 20 years they will have atomic weapons...that’s a very significant threat to the peace of the world if they want it to be a threat. What do we do about it? Do we wait 10, 15, 20 years from now and continue to stand in confrontation?...With the advent of nuclear warfare, a President of the United States, with an obligation to future generations, has no choice but to talk about them...26

Richard Nixon still maintained that China was an aggressive outlaw nation which sponsored worldwide communist subversion. However, it appears that recognition of the military debacle in Vietnam, domestic disillusionment with it as well as the office of the presidency softened Nixon’s rigidity and prodded him towards pragmatism. True, any perceived appeasement of China or the Soviet Union would inevitably invite criticism and cries of “Nixon the hypocrite” from Old Guard Republicans. Nixon’s core constituents. Nevertheless, the Nixon Doctrine was, at face value, a modification of purpose from a superpower gradually witnessing the shocking limits of its power. The

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
middle ground replace extremism. pragmatism replaced dogmatism and true balance-of-power strategy returned to the world stage for the first time since the days of the European Triple Entente. In praising the Nixon Doctrine and its unique combination of resolve and flexibility, Henry Kissinger wrote:

We developed a military strategy that fit our capacities for dealing with the more plausible dangers. And we advanced a doctrine for the security of the Pacific area that gave new assurance to our allies and friends. Of all the achievements in Nixon's first term, I consider the preservation of the sinews of our military strength among the most significant... For moderation is a virtue only in those who are thought to have a choice.  

The Soviet Role in the China Equation

According to Nixon himself, the importance of recognizing Communist China was strictly a matter of geopolitical strategy to insure world peace, rather than a decision based on his own political goals. It seems as though the "old" Nixon, preoccupied with the worldwide and domestic threat of monolithic communism would have operated upon his instinctual abhorrence of communism once in office and continued the greatest ideological conflict of the 20th century with military means. Instead, balance-of-power diplomacy was utilized to spare American lives and non-confrontationally apply pressure to the Soviet Union. Describing the China plan in his own words, Nixon wrote:

And yet my visit was an act of cold, dispassionate pragmatism. When it was announced in 1971, I was praised by the left and attacked by the right, both for the wrong reasons... The China initiative had nothing to do with my attitude towards communism. My decision was based on my belief that the security of the United States would be served by developing better relations with the one Communist power that was not on good terms with the other, the Soviet Union—a much more formidable adversary.  

Strategically, then, the decision to proceed with a Sino-American rapprochement was designed as much to gain leverage over the Soviet Union, the main military rival of the United States, as it was to ease tensions with China, a rapidly expanding nuclear power and key player in the Vietnam War.
According to Allen Whiting, the Nixon administration believed that if Moscow was faced with a U.S.-Chinese entente at the same time as tensions were escalating with Beijing, it would be more apt to make SALT concessions and limit its support of Middle Eastern insurgency. In turn, the Chinese would obtain a counterbalance against the Soviets in exchange for setting the Taiwan issue aside while U.S.-China relations thawed. Most importantly for Nixon, however, was that détente would serve to isolate Hanoi from both of its communist allies, in the process reducing Soviet military aid to North Vietnam and China’s political opposition to a negotiated end to the war.³⁰ No longer would Cold War confrontation simply by a U.S.-Soviet conflict; China was now a legitimate nation on the world stage due to military capacity, commitment to pure communist ideology and its growing schism with the Soviet Union over border concerns and fear of physical military encirclement.

Nixon’s goal of keeping the U.S. out of costly military ventures abroad and at the same time maintaining American credibility demanded a new kind of diplomacy based on playing the two communist powers against one another. “Triangle diplomacy” became the new term for the delicate maneuvering which would preserve not only an Asian balance of power, but a deterrent to nuclear war as well.³⁰ Addressing American exploitation of the Sino-Soviet split, Nixon wrote than though this type of diplomacy was risky, it provided a moderate course for the U.S. that did not involve committal of American troops.

Triangular diplomacy can work to our advantage or our disadvantage. As long as that rivalry persists, however, it not only ties down a large portion of the Soviet forces militarily and affects the overall balance of power; it also seriously undermines the Soviet position in the Third World.³¹

Fundamental to the application of triangular diplomacy was the high state of tensions between China and the Soviet Union, a growing problem between the two nations over differing communist ideology as interpreted by Mao and traditional Marxist-Leninists. A territorial dispute over parts of historically Chinese lands now controlled by the Soviets (i.e. Outer Mongolia), rivalry for leadership over other communist nations such as Hungary and Cuba, and personal animosity between
Mao and Nikita Khrushchev. Most pressing to the Chinese in the late 1960s was a Soviet military buildup around China particularly concentrated on the 4,000-plus mile common border the two nations share. The Soviets, nervous about China's nuclear capacity and the sheer strain of its growing population, perceived a vivid Chinese threat to its own national security as well as its border area. "Some Russian leaders seemed to take very seriously Chinese hints that they might press claim to large portions of Soviet territory," wrote A. Doak Barnett on the shifting strategic balance in Nixon-era Asia. "Moscow watched with considerable apprehension the progress the Chinese were making from 1964 on, in developing an independent nuclear capacity. It was also angered by Peking's relentless ideological and propaganda attacks and its efforts to compete against and undermine Soviet influence throughout the world."

Soviet military superiority over China's forces was crucial to Nixon's decision to extend rapprochement that eventually led to diplomatic relations. The potentially staggering size of the Chinese military, their development of the atomic bomb in 1964 and China's enormous civilian resource base worried Nixon particularly in light of its intervention in the Korean War, but their historical isolation and fear of invasion, especially by the Soviets, played into his hands. "On the Chinese side, the incentive was about the Soviets," said Winston Lord, former Ambassador to China. "...the two nations had just had a border clash, and the Chinese were worried about their security. They also saw eventual trade and economic advantages with us..." With a combination of massed Soviet forces on its flank and an acute threat of internal destabilization due to Cultural Revolution chaos, China was clearly nearing a concession in ideology by dealing directly with the U.S. to prevent a potential nuclear war. "The immediate cause for the breakthrough was fear in Peking of Moscow, and of scores of divisions on the borders of China," contended Marshall Green, Nixon administration Assistant Secretary for East Asian and Pacific Affairs. China, the weaker power, was in an untenable position regarding its national security without the help of the United States, creating a clear opportunity for Nixon. The U.S. was not
directly involved in the Communist split, allowing Nixon to use detente in place of American firepower to re-balance the power. The man who had once said, “Communism requires a worldwide defense” may well have come to the rescue of one of his greatest political and diplomatic enemies.36

The goal of both the U.S. and China was preventing hostile Soviet encroachment into Asia. Writing in retrospect, Nixon described why he put decades of personally virulent anti-communism behind him to pursue detente with China:

In view of ...irreconcilable differences, what brought us together?... The real reason was our common strategic interest in opposing Soviet domination in Asia. Like the Soviet Union, China was a Communist country. The United States was a capitalistic nation. But we did not threaten them, while the Soviet Union did. It was a classic case of a nation’s security interest overriding ideology.37

The Soviets had also become preoccupied with the possibility of a major military clash with the Chinese, and went on a diplomatic offensive to appeal to the world community for condemnation of Chinese military aggression at the border. The Nixon administration, notably Henry Kissinger, recognized that gains could be extracted from the Soviet Union on various diplomatic issues if the U.S. moved towards a policy of Chinese containment. In an internal report to Nixon on diplomatic advantages for the U.S. while the Sino-Soviet border crisis raged, Kissinger wrote:

I believe this is solid evidence of the growing obsession of Soviet leaders with their China problem...at least it suggests that the Soviets may become more flexible in dealing with East-West issues... Thus, Soviet concern may have finally reached a point that it can be turned to our advantage...38

This point in time could well have been the realization that border animosities and strained diplomacy with an erratic and paranoid Chinese foreign policy apparatus cold have realistically escalated into warfare. As a member of the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions, Fred Warner Neal recognized that China did not agree with the policy of coexistence with the West supported by Khrushchev, intended to avert a massive war caused by the final showdown between

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
capitalism and communism. Peking, in its ideological fervor, espoused the inevitability of war and this attitude worried the Soviet Union:

While both the Soviet Union and People's Republic of China have as their immediate aim the spread of socialist ideology. Moscow feels that success depends on avoiding war, something also in the Soviet national interest. Peking, on the other hand, accepts the risk of war as perhaps a necessary corollary to both her national and ideological interests.39

Even before the first Nixon administration there had been congressional testimony that detente with the Soviet Union was the only realistic way to prevent Communist China from dominating Asia. Such an undertaking was beyond the abilities of either the United States or the U.S.S.R., but collectively, containment was possible. Although this would require a tenuous political balancing act by Nixon to avoid right-wing Republican criticism of Communist appeasement, alliance through detente was critical to easing tensions that could have resulted in nuclear war or U.S. military intervention in the Sino-Soviet rift. At the 1966 Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearings about U.S. policy toward China, former Senator Joseph Clark agreed with Professor Hans Morgenthau's testimony that American policy should be geared towards detente with the Soviet Union. "Senator Clark felt that only with a relaxation of strained Soviet-American relations could a realistic containment of Peking come about, not to crush China, but for some sort of sensible accommodation that would restrain the more belligerent tactics and points of view within the Maoist hierarchy."40

China Recognition: The Vietnam Link

One of the most striking aspects about Nixon's decision to extend detente to China was its linkage to the war in Vietnam: more specifically, the President's willingness to make overtures to a Communist arch-enemy in order to extricate American troops with honor from the land of another enemy. Chinese detente would be a concrete step towards isolating Hanoi, with which Peking had a historically tenuous relationship at best. As proposed in the Shanghai communique, a document
issued at the end of Nixon’s China visit, the U.S. would gradually wind down its military presence in Taiwan and Southeast Asia as ‘tensions’ in the area decreased—a veiled reference to China’s help in ending the war. However, playing two Communist superpowers off of one another to end American involvement in Southeast Asia represented a major turnaround for Nixon, the former hawk, a man who as vice-president had advocated using nuclear weapons to save French forces under siege at Fort Dien Bien Phu by communists.

Ardent anti-Communism and avocation of extreme measures to combat what he viewed as imminent Communist domination of Southeast Asia characterized the Nixon worldview during his early political career. A disciple of Eisenhower’s ‘domino theory,’ Nixon saw a Communist victory in Vietnam triggering the fall of the remainder of Southeast Asia, and subsequent Communist Chinese and Soviet domination of the entire region.41 From this perspective it becomes clear that Nixon’s desire to extend detente to China seventeen years later to gain leverage over the U.S.S.R. resulted from American difficulties in Southeast Asia and the need to reformulate U.S. security commitments. It is noteworthy that by the time of America’s diplomatic overtures to China, Nixon had abandoned the domino theory after a reevaluation of the war’s very nature. Members of his foreign policy staff, such as American Ambassador to Vietnam William Sullivan, believed that China was reluctant to have a unified Vietnam relatively hostile to Peking, perched on its southern flank and supplied by the Soviet military. According to Sullivan, “China sought a Balkanized Indochina with two Vietnams and independent states of Laos and Cambodia. If Vietnam were to be united under the Hanoi government and control Laos and Cambodia, one of the strongest states in Asia would be created and might establish a role in Asian affairs inimical to that of China.”42

In the pre-summit years of his presidency, Nixon viewed detente with China as inevitably leading to a negotiated peace in Vietnam. A loose Sino-American alliance would insure a continuing American presence in South Vietnam during the short term, allaying Chinese fears of Soviet encirclement in the event of a sudden U.S. withdrawal. In the long run, however, Nixon was wrong.
The Peking summit produced no concrete agreement between the U.S. and China to work together to end the war. Only a vague reference in the Shanghai communiqué to ‘diminish’ tensions in the area as a peaceful and internal solution was applied by China to Taiwan. The lack of such an agreement to end the war gave conservative Nixon critics the ammunition they needed to insist that the summit was a failure in the immediate cause of obtaining definite results and cooperation from China over Vietnam.

While Nixon’s decision to pursue diplomatic relations with China did not result in the end of the Vietnam War, it did signal American recognition of the end of anti-Communist dogma as an end to a mean. The Nixon Doctrine reversed two decades of increasingly outdated containment strategy, allowing the U.S. to reduce it role as world policeman against communism and the first, immediate line of military defense of small nations under aggression. Under intense domestic pressure to end the automatic committal of U.S. troops to foreign countries to fight communism, Nixon’s plan for regional security organizations would scale back American involvement in Asia while simultaneously maintaining U.S. credibility to its allies under defense treaties. Richard Nixon was forced to adjust to the emergence of multipolarity with China’s military ascension and the growing capacity of the U.S.S.R. to produce weapons, and his response to this scenario was engagement in previously unthinkable policy of balance-of-power diplomacy with Communist nations. If he did not, Nixon would have surely ended up as another presidential casualty of the Vietnam War.

Nixon took a significant political risk in implementing the Nixon Doctrine and initiating detente overtures towards China, but the need to counterbalance the Soviet Union and reduce casualties in Vietnam until ‘peace with honor’ could be achieved made pragmatism the only realistic path. With the invaluable aid of Henry Kissinger, Nixon took advantage of a window of historical opportunity for great personal success, if limited strategic triumph.
Endnotes - Chapter III

1 Ambrose, *The Education of a Politician*, 460.
4 Marvin & Bernard Kalb, *Kissinger* (Boston: Little Brown & Co., 1974), 256. The Kalb brothers, both television journalists, were admirers of Kissinger in their volume.
5 Ibid., 270.
10 Ibid., 72. Though the Nixon-Kissinger working relationship was close, their personal relationship can only be described as “cordial.”
14 Ibid., 360.
15 Littwak, *Detente and the Nixon Doctrine*, 53. Nixon’s shift away from ideologically-based foreign policy decisions was the cornerstone of his personalized diplomacy.
16 Ibid., 52.
19 Richard Nixon, “Krushchev’s Hidden Weakness,” *The Saturday Evening Post* (February, 1963), 23-29. Almost four years later to the month, Nixon’s view on Asian communism contradicted his goal of freeing the world’s population from communism, as the war in Vietnam was being lost by 1967 and a withdrawal pledge was necessary for the nomination.
Kissinger strongly believed that anti-American propaganda spread by the North Vietnamese was having a debilitating effect on America’s effort to ‘liberate’ the Vietnamese people. Without an American troop presence labeled as ‘imperialistic,’ Kissinger thought the battle for the minds of the Vietnamese could be won by the forces of democracy.

Kissinger’s account of detente but criticizes Nixon’s version in R.N. as a “somewhat pallid and truncated account.” The author gives Nixon credit for great political courage, risking possible humiliation if he were to fail in Peking.

Allen S. Whiting, “Soviet-American Detente,” The China Quarterly, No. 82 (June, 1980), 337. Writing the article as a review of the diplomatic aspect of Kissinger’s White House Years, Whiting praises Kissinger’s account of detente but criticizes Nixon’s version in R.N. as a “somewhat pallid and truncated account.” The author gives Nixon credit for great political courage, risking possible humiliation if he were to fail in Peking.


Kissinger’s account of detente but criticizes Nixon’s version in R.N. as a “somewhat pallid and truncated account.” The author gives Nixon credit for great political courage, risking possible humiliation if he were to fail in Peking.

Allen S. Whiting, “Soviet-American Detente,” The China Quarterly, No. 82 (June, 1980), 337. Writing the article as a review of the diplomatic aspect of Kissinger’s White House Years, Whiting praises Kissinger’s account of detente but criticizes Nixon’s version in R.N. as a “somewhat pallid and truncated account.” The author gives Nixon credit for great political courage, risking possible humiliation if he were to fail in Peking.


A. Doak Barnett believed the Sino-Soviet split began in the early 1960s with Krushchev’s ascension having much to do with developing hostilities that exploded in 1969 along the Sino-Soviet border.

The prevailing sentiment among members of the Nixon administration was that the U.S.S.R., in the immediate short term, was the main catalyst for detente with China. Fearing the territorial ambitions and acknowledged military superiority of the Soviet Union, the Chinese were amenable by the late 1960s to a lessening of tensions with the United States, despite their irreconcilable ideological differences. The U.S., along with a need to isolate Hanoi from Moscow to hasten the end of the Vietnam War, sought detente with China in order to exert leverage on Moscow in such areas as SALT concessions and containment of Third World communist insurgencies that would require U.S. resources in the future to combat.

Ambrose, Triumph of a Politician, 187.

Fred Warner Neal, Asian Dilemma: U.S., Japan and China (Santa Barbara: Center For the Study of Democratic Institutions). 25. Avoidance of a final war between capitalistic nations and Communist nations was one of the major ideological differences between the Chinese and Soviets that led to their schism. The Soviets, already a major nuclear power and targeted by the U.S., undoubtedly had much more to lose, not to mention having already sustained almost 25 million casualties in World War II, just twenty years before.


Whicker, One of Us, 148.

Kissinger’s account of detente but criticizes Nixon’s version in R.N. as a “somewhat pallid and truncated account.” The author gives Nixon credit for great political courage, risking possible humiliation if he were to fail in Peking.

This strategy by China was primarily to insure that a united Vietnam would not become a Soviet puppet state in the region. If this occurred, it would represent another concrete step of Soviet encirclement of China.
CHAPTER IV
The Trip to China and Beyond

Stepping onto an airport tarmac in Peking, February 21, 1972, President Nixon began a highly promising if short lived policy of détente with Communist China, an era of mutual goodwill that came crashing down along with his presidency by 1975. By establishing himself as an expert on foreign affairs as well as a right-leaning Republican president, Nixon possessed the right confluence of diplomatic and political credibility to embark upon the China initiative and shepherd it, with Kissinger's help, to the Peking summit. At the minimum, his initiative created an instant thaw in Sino-American relations, producing an atmosphere that Nixon hoped would lead directly to peace in Vietnam. The famous handshake between Nixon and Chairman Mao was beamed around the globe via satellite, a compelling symbol of communism and capitalism living in harmony, at least in Asia.

However, behind the historical summit and festive dinners lay troublesome issues for both Nixon and Mao. After literally decades of staunch and sometimes strident anti-Communism, Nixon confronted the brutal truth that growing Chinese military power posed a serious threat to both American security and interests, and that an adversarial confrontation with China could well lead to nuclear war. No longer could domestic political points be scored by inflamed anti-Communist rhetoric; with stakes so high and détente with the Soviet Union in the balance, public talk of preemptive strikes and aggressive containment action was no longer responsible. Nixon as president had transcended the partisanship he had for so long espoused as a candidate, and the summit and its aftermath recast him in the public eye as a statesman working diplomatic wonders.

The controversy surrounding U.S. military protection of Taiwan as well as America's support of its Nationalist government was the major obstacle to improved relations. The refusal by four presidents to recognize Taiwan as a legitimate part of the People's Republic had resulted in not
only China’s isolation from the world, but its unrelenting antagonism toward the U.S., and its willingness to intervene militarily in Asia if necessary. Although the Chinese leadership was not willing in 1971 to make the initial overture for a Sino-American détente, it desperately needed improved relations to offset the Soviet military threat to its borders as well as growing Soviet influence in Southeast Asia. A formal summit with Richard Nixon on Chinese soil may have had the appearance to the Chinese public of an American act of tribute to Mao, but to the communist hardliners, it represented an ideological softening of the Revolution.

Thus, the stake were high for both Nixon and the Communist Chinese leadership during the détente years of 1971-1975, a short but monumental period in which China was reopened, the war in Vietnam was ended, and Richard Nixon was forced to resign from office. Though Nixon reaped tangible benefits from his decision to informally recognize Communist China in terms of performing a diplomatic tour de force one year before the next presidential election, did the nation as a whole benefit as much as he? Was the Peking summit substantively successful enough to lead to genuinely improved Chinese-American relations, or was it simply a one-time diplomatic show to increase pressure on the Soviets from both nations? In terms of history, how important was the Shanghai Communiqué, and did it actually support the themes of the Nixon Doctrine?

The China Decision Unfolds: Shuttle Diplomacy and Ping-Pong

With the Nixon presidency entering its second full year in 1970, tensions between the Kremlin and China escalated enough to promote détente as a response to a looming Soviet threat. As the Ussuri River clashes of 1969 broke the threshold of physical violence the ideal time had arrived for Nixon to set his realpolitik China initiative in motion. Moving slowly at first, Nixon exploited Sino-Soviet friction by relaxing American trade sanctions against China by allowing non-strategic
sales to the Chinese and welcoming $100 worth of Chinese goods into the U.S. from Hong Kong-returning tourists. Though such moves were fairly undramatic, they nonetheless sent strong messages of conciliation to Peking without overtly hinting to the American people of the course to come. The administration, however, indicated that it would not proceed to the diplomatic stage without Chinese reciprocation in some form, a signal that indicated relaxing hostility towards the United States. In his second Foreign Policy Report submitted to Congress, February 25, 1971, the president reiterated his lingering doubts about Chinese willingness to begin direct contacts with the U.S. Nevertheless, his administration was actively considering ways to reach out to the Chinese and would not be deterred by slow Chinese response:

We should, however, be totally realistic about the prospects. The People's Republic continues to convey to its own people and to the world its determination to cast us in the devil's role...So long as Peking continues to be adamant for hostility, there is little we can do by ourselves to improve the relationship. What we can do, we will.

Nixon went on to declare that the United States was prepared to "open a dialogue" with Peking without recognizing the validity of its political ideologies or ambitions in Asia.

President Nixon's proclamation of U.S. willingness to make contact with the Chinese was a tacit acknowledgment of his Two-China approach. In essence, Nixon would not completely abandon the Nationalist Taiwanese at that point for full recognition of Communist authority over the mainland and the island, but at the same time he was prepared to push the People's Republic towards admission into the international community and possible U.N. participation. The latter was a particularly sensitive political issue for Nixon and the U.S. Congress of 1972, as Republican conservatives would never accept Communist China's growing influence with American help. To many it was too sharp a departure in policy for a congress that for each of the past twenty years had passed resolutions opposing China's admittance into the U.N.

To the American public and especially the GOP, Nixon remained purposefully vague regarding the China question and its relation to the U.N. When asked during his March 4, 1971 press
conference whether he personally favored seating Communist China, the President circumvented the
issued by citing Peking’s intransigence towards Taiwan as the main stumbling block towards any
progress. Declaring the question “moot,” Nixon said that the two nations remained at odds over
China’s refusal to engage in any dialogue as long as the U.S. remained committed to Taiwan.5

Within a month and a half, as American trade restrictions against China were lifted and détente had
actually begun, Nixon was noticeably more outspoken about his administration’s goal of normalizing
relations with Mainland China. Speaking at an April 29, 1971 presidential press conference, Nixon
not only reiterated his hopes for continuing progress between the two superpowers, but broached the
idea of a visit publicly for the first time:

We will proceed on the path that we have been proceeding on. And
that is the way to make progress… I would just summarize it this
way: What we have done is broken the ice; now we have to test the
water to see how deep it is. I would finally suggest that…I hope, and,
as a matter of fact, I expect to visit Mainland China sometime in
some capacity—I don’t know what capacity. But that indicates what
I hope for the long term.6

Perhaps the watershed in improved relations between China and the United States occurred
in April, 1971, with the advent of so-called “Ping-Pong Diplomacy.” In what appeared as a Chinese
overture toward Nixon in response to his détente efforts, the Communists invited the U.S. Table
Tennis Team to visit the People’s Republic following their participation in the world championships
at Nagoya, Japan.7 For the first time in nearly two decades, Americans would be official guests in
Peking, an event that presaged the visit of the president to China. The team was greeted by Prime
Minister Zhou Enlai, whose welcoming words to the athletes confirmed Chinese desire for contact on
an official level:

‘My request to you,’ he declared, ‘is that upon your return to the
USA you convey greetings to the American people from the
Chinese people. In the past there have been many contacts
between China and the USA. They have been in suspension for
a long time, but now… a new page has been opened in the relations
between the Chinese and American peoples.’8

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
Nixon was delighted. "I was surprised as I was pleased by this news," he recalled. "I had never expected that the China initiative would come to fruition in the form of a Ping-Pong team."

A secret message from Zhou Enlai, channeled through the office of Pakistan's Ambassador to the United States Agha Hilaly on April 21, 1971 was the catalyst for the shuttle diplomacy of Henry Kissinger than in turn led to the historic Peking summit. Though in historical hindsight the China initiative itself appears to have been Nixon's idea, Kissinger's secret trip to Peking was a classic example of 'preparing the way' diplomacy, an action designed to smooth over Sino-American differences and create an atmosphere of mutual appreciation for the upcoming summit. Under the guise of making a fact-finding mission to Pakistan to cover for secret, high level talks, Kissinger flew from Nathia Gali, East Pakistan to Beijing on July 9, 1971, to engage Zhou Enlai on issues of strategic cooperation and Nixon visit.

At the heart of the Kissinger-Zhou dialogue was the willingness of both sides to make concessions, or more aptly, strategic deferments, in order for a summit to take place. China needed a public display of detonate with the United States to offset Soviet pressure and signal its emergence from the isolation of the Cultural Revolution. Nixon sought relaxed tensions to not only wind down the war in Vietnam and implement the Nixon Doctrine, but to shore his reelection campaign in 1972. Kissinger, under heavy pressure from a 48-hour time limit imposed by the secrecy of the trip, extracted from the Chinese a high degree of flexibility regarding preconditions for diplomatic dialogue. The Communists, unlike decades past, did not insist on full U.S. withdrawal from Taiwan before talks could begin, although any further concessions would subsequently hinge on devolving American influence on the island. The common link between the two nations remained counterbalancing the Soviet Union and its military influence in Asia, a mutual goal that required at least a small degree of cooperation.

True to his penchant for maintaining airs of complete secrecy around sensitive presidential decisions, Nixon was desperate to keep the talks secret and maintain the pace of the progress. To be
sure, he had no qualms with conducting personal foreign policy, in many ways circumventing the U.S. State Department. "Without negotiations in secret, there will be few agreements to sign in public. In some cases, it is simply the only way to conduct the business of international politics," he wrote in his memoirs. The protective shroud Nixon cast around the China initiative was also influenced by domestic political concerns: the suddenness of the summit announcement would be necessary to catch conservatives off guard and mute mainstream media criticism by staunch anti-Communists determined not to give an inch to China. Nonetheless, preliminary summit talks in China were kept in the strictest confidentiality by Nixon, who feared diplomatic and political catastrophes if leaks to the press occurred:

Our delicate negotiations with China would have collapsed if my preliminary diplomatic messages to Chou Enlai or Henry Kissinger's trip to Beijing in 1971 had become public. Opponents of our new relationship in both countries would have sabotaged our moves toward rapprochement. After an American gossip columnist reported a conversation which had taken place in a top-secret National Security Council meeting regarding the Indo-Pakistan War in 1971, Chou understandably asked if he could speak candidly with us given the danger of leaks.

A week later Richard Nixon, along with Kissinger, flew by helicopter from the Western White House in San Clemente to a Burbank television studio to make an announcement that shocked the world. Having been satisfied by the Chinese premier's reaction to American overtures and a subsequent invitation issued by the Premier to Nixon for an official visit, the President explained that "I have requested this television time tonight to announce a major development in our efforts to build a lasting peace in the world." Proceeding to read a statement issued simultaneously in the United States and Peking, Nixon announced that he had accepted Zhou's invitation to journey to China, and framed the upcoming trip in terms of improved relations and the quest for world peace:

The meeting between leaders of China and the United States is to seek normalization of relations between the two countries and also to exchange views on questions of concern to both sides...I have taken this action because of my profound conviction that all nations will gain from a reduction of tensions...It is in this spirit that I will undertake what I deeply hope will become a
journey for peace, peace not just for our generation but for future
generations on this earth we share together. 17

Public reaction to Nixon’s proposed visit was generally positive, except for angry
denunciations from the GOP’s right-wing. Characterizing the China initiative as “immoral, indecent,
insane and fraught with danger,” columnist William Loeb of the Manchester Union Leader
symbolized the betrayal that conservatives felt toward Nixon and his apparent softening against
Communism. 18 Led by National Review editor William F. Buckley, who labeled the China trip as “a
real blow to American anti-Communism,” a group of Review intellectuals formed the Manhattan-12
committee that resolved to abandon its support for the President. 19 The right-wing regarded Nixon’s
China trip as a complete contradiction of genuine GOP principles and foreign policy strategy; adding
insult to injury was the fact that the plan had been encouraged and executed in secrecy with little to
no consultation of Republicans outside of Nixon’s inner circle.

Newspaper reaction to Nixon’s announcement was mostly positive regardless of region,
hailing the announcement as historic and a recognition of reality. To the editors of The Kansas City
Star, Nixon’s disclosure to the nation “was a moment of high history, to be recorded ultimately as one
of the most significant moments of the 1970s.” 20 According to the St. Petersburg Times, “President
Nixon hit a home run with the bases full when he announced he would visit Peking next spring. And
its a whole new ballgame.” 21 In the South, a region long wary of Nixon’s actions and motives, editors
largely supported the president and rarely mentioned politics in reference to his China initiative. The
editorial board of The Atlanta Constitution called Nixon’s decision “stunning...a marvelous
breakthrough in the history of international relations.” Acknowledging that Nixon was taking a risk
that his trip would be used for Communist propaganda purposes, the paper nonetheless praised the
president and his foreign affairs skills:

He is an enthusiast of foreign policy, and probably feels more at
home there than in the rest of the Presidency. He is going to
establish his foreign policy credentials even more strongly with
the trip. 22

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
However, dissent came from The New York Times, which described Nixon’s sudden announcement as an undercutting of Japan. “The abrupt announcement of President Nixon’s planned visit has caused acute embarrassment to the Government of Japan, imposing unfortunate and largely unnecessary new strains on United States relations with its most important ally in Asia.” Times editors, sympathetic to the Sato Government, faulted Nixon for apparently leaving an important ally out of the loop at a critical juncture in U.S. decision-making on China, especially one that had fully supported the American position on Taiwan:

The Japanese have firmly adhered to the United States policy on Taiwan, a policy that has been a principal obstacle to improved relations with Peking for both Washington and Tokyo. Now Japanese officials fear they have been left out on a limb by some secret understanding...It would be incredibly shortsighted of the United States Government to make such a sweeping change in its Asian policy without first consulting its principal Asian ally.

Within the U.S. Congress, reaction to the upcoming China trip from conservative quarters was not uniformly negative. Though most Republicans remained against Communist Chinese admission into the United Nations, few would come out on record opposed to Nixon’s plans. Even staunch conservative Sen. Strom Thurmond supported the summit and expressed doubt that a majority of Congress would oppose U.N. seating. At this stage of Nixon’s rapidly growing diplomatic triumph moderate and relative conservatives stepped into line with their president. They were suspicious of his future plans for U.S. Taiwanese policy but unwilling to contradict public support for the endeavor by publicly criticizing the apparent midstream Nixonian switch. The far right-wing remained relentless in its hounding of Nixon, but his coalition from 1968 remained relatively intact and kept isolationist Republicans out of the mainstream and into a hard-line conservative clique.

Ultimately, President Nixon’s most pressing concerns regarding his trip was the opening of communication lines between the two nations and an effective dialogue dealing with their many
differences. Vital to Nixon's success in China would be the ability of both sides to acknowledge the validity of each other's foreign policy and governing philosophy—diplomatic pragmatism that the President had practiced in the preceding three decades. Willing to forsake conservative Republican ideology and initiate constructive talks with Communist China leading to détente, Nixon the moderate extolled the importance of talk in preserving world peace. Addressing the AFL-CIO Ninth Constitutional Convention in 1971, he sounded every bit the Quaker as he spoke of his personal responsibility:

"With the advent of nuclear warfare, a President of the United States, with an obligation to future generations, has no choice but to talk about those differences, talk about them with his goal in mind...talking about them with the great goal of seeing that the peoples of this world can have different systems but will not be engaged in nuclear destruction."

The Journey East: Nixon in China

In the weeks before he flew to China, Nixon simultaneously played down expectations of the summit and magnified the trip's importance. The talks, Nixon predicted, would be just that—talk. "They will be primarily dialogue," he said on Feb. 10, 1971. "In the case of Peking, there will necessarily have to be a substantial amount of dialogue before we can come to the point of negotiating on substantive matters."

Nixon, faced with the monumental challenge of breaking through 20 years worth of tensions that he played a large role in creating, knew in advance that Kissinger had already resolved many policy differences but nonetheless cautioned the public not to expect an instant solution to traditional conflicts:

"...I think we could say this, this trip should not be one which would create very great optimism or very great pessimism. It is one in which we must recognize that 20 years of hostility and virtually no communication will not be swept away by one week of discussion...However, it will mark a watershed in relations..."
Nixon landed in Peking on Feb. 21, 1972, in Air Force One, renamed *The Spirit of '76* for the trip east. Prior to his landing, the American and Chinese flags had been run up two flag poles, leaving fifteen other poles around them bare. On a gray and overcast day a small delegation of Communist officials waited on the edge of the tarmac; Zhou Enlai stood at the foot of the plane ramp, wearing a heavy overcoat against the weather. Upon arrival, Nixon, fully aware of diplomatic protocol and particularly the Chinese tribute system, reached his hand towards Zhou on deplaning in an effort to erase a past Cold War sleight and accord to custom:

> I knew that Chou had been deeply insulted by Foster Dulle's refusal to shake hands with him at the Geneva Conference in 1954. When I reached the bottom step, therefore, I made the point of extending my hand as I walked toward him. When our hands met, one era ended and another began.

Zhou accompanied Nixon for much of the trip, including trips to the Great Hall of the People, the Forbidden City and state dinners. Though the two men engaged in some face-to-face negotiations, most of the groundwork had already been covered during Kissinger's preliminary meetings and their respective positions were known to each other. Therefore, though the Peking summit meetings were fairly substantial, progress on key issues such as Taiwan was limited. However, Nixon and Zhou Enlai made important diplomatic strides in simply meeting together and opening lines of communication, but both men realized that the breach that had opened over two decades could not be closed within a week's time. Dialogue was opened and common concerns recognized, but Zhou would not compromise on Taiwan. This was the key issue of the summit, and the Americans conceded that, for the time being, the only progress would be American acknowledgment that Taiwan was indeed part of China proper.

With memories of how the U2 Incident had wrecked the Paris Summit with Khrushchev in 1960, Nixon worried that Chinese demands for the annexation of Taiwan could destroy the summit and empower anti-Chinese factions within the U.S. He reasoned that if the Chinese used the summit for propaganda reasons and refused to make a civil statement of mutual disagreements:
I would come under murderous cross fire from any of all the various pro-Taiwanese, anti-Nixon, and anti-P.R.C. lobbies and interest groups at home. If these groups found common ground on the eve of presidential elections, the entire China initiative might be turned into a partisan issue. Then, if I lost the election, whether because of this particular factor or not, my successor might not be able to continue developing the relationship between Washington and Peking.  

Though Nixon walked a fine line at the summit between actively pursuing a U.S. national interests and mollifying the Chinese over Taiwan. his political acumen made worries about his successor's relationship with China dubious at best. Had Nixon lost the 1972 election it would have been to a Democrat. The combination of a failed summit and subsequent Democratic capture of the White House would have made prospects for continued détente bleak for diplomatic and political reasons. Thus, for Nixon, it was vital that the China initiative gave the impression of being non-partisan, at least until after the 1972 party conventions.

Richard Nixon Meets "God"

Perhaps the most memorable image to be beamed internationally over satellite television was that of President Nixon sitting next to Chairman Mao before entering into private talks. The specter of two of the most powerful world leaders meeting together at the most high profile summit of the post-war years not only solidified the credibility of new U.S.-China relations, but boosted Nixon's stature tremendously in the U.S. and internationally as a preeminent world statesman. Because of his stature as leader of the world's most populous nation, Nixon held the charismatic Mao in high esteem. Mao's aura was at its height as he neared the end of his life, as Andre Malraux told Nixon at a White House dinner before his trip to Peking:

You will be meeting with a colossus, but a colossus facing death...
You will meet a man who has had a fantastic destiny and who believes that he is acting out the last act of his lifetime. You may think he is talking to you, but he will in truth be addressing Death...
Mr. President, you operate within a rational framework, but Mao
does not. There is something of a sorcerer in him. He is a man inhabited by a vision, possessed by it.\textsuperscript{36}

Nixon's meeting with the Chairman mostly concerned the philosophy underlying the new Sino-American détente, rather than substantive policy details.\textsuperscript{37} However, Nixon did breach certain subjects that concerned the security interests of both nations, including the Soviet military presence on the Sino-Soviet border, the future of Japan and its possible rearmament, and the issue of potential Soviet aggression against both China and the United States. Nixon emphasized his belief that the Soviets would fill any power vacuum in Asia to achieve their goal of hegemony in the region.\textsuperscript{38} Recalling later that Mao was animated, yet seemed tired by the end of their conversation, Nixon wrote that the two men shared the commonality of having come from poor families to rise to the peaks of power. Both men also understood what their rapprochement had meant for history, as Mao was also concerned with the impact their détente had on the course of international peace:

\begin{quote}
I also came from a very poor family, and to the top of a very great nation. History has brought us together. The question is whether we, with different philosophies, but both with feet on the ground, and having come from the people, can make a breakthrough that will serve not just China and America, but the whole world in the years ahead. And that is why we are here.\textsuperscript{39}
\end{quote}

At a banquet honoring the President in Peking on Feb. 21, 1972, Nixon toasted Premier Zhou and Chairman Mao and their efforts for peace. In summarizing the spirit and substance of the summit, President Nixon conveyed the sentiment that although major differences in policy and philosophy remained between China and the U.S., opening an official line of communication was the vital foundation upon which future relations and peace would be built:

\begin{quote}
We have at times in the past been enemies. We have great differences today. What brings us together is that we have common interests which transcend those differences. As we discuss our differences, neither one of us will compromise our principles. But while we cannot close the gulf between us, we can try to bridge it so that we may be able to talk across it.\textsuperscript{40}
\end{quote}
Thus, the Peking summit was a dramatic first step (albeit relatively hollow in terms concrete results) in improving U.S.-Sino relations. That two separate and distinct cultures as Communist China and the United States were on positive terms was secondary to the primary objectives of President Nixon and Premier Zhou Enlai: each nation took advantage of historical circumstances to use the other for national security purposes. As the absent third party in détente negotiations, the U.S.S.R. remained the conspicuous target of the U.S.-China thaw. Both the U.S and China sought leverage against the Soviet Union and were prepared to discard diplomatic precedent to obtain the upper hand. Taking a tremendous but pre-planned political gamble that the summit would pressure the Soviets into concessions, Nixon was willing to appease Communist China to a degree in order to continue the American policy of Russian containment in a different, indirect and non-confrontational form.

The Shanghai Communiqué

On the eve of President Nixon’s departure from Peking, a joint statement was issued by China and the United States outlining summit talking points and mutual policy stances. Known as the “Shanghai Communiqué,” the document was the result of week-long negotiating sessions and contained surprisingly honest viewpoints concerning several points of contention between the U.S. and China. Above all was the general expression of new goodwill between the nations, a drastic change from decades of Cold War hostilities, suspicions and official diplomatic silence. Though there were relatively few areas of solid agreement within the communiqué, one section crucial to de-escalating future conflicts in the area was that of the agreement that neither nation “should seek hegemony in the Asian-Pacific region and each is opposed to efforts by any other country or group to establish such hegemony.” Key to this passage was the use of the word “hegemony,” translated by many in the foreign policy establishment as a code word used by China to mean Soviet expansionism. Heavy losses and strong domestic pressures to withdraw forces from Vietnam.
combined with the regional security plan of the Nixon Doctrine practically insured that the United States would be minimally involved in Asian wars in the future.

Characterizing Sino-American cooperation against hegemonic drives "perhaps the most vitally important section of the Shanghai Communiqué," Richard Nixon viewed the pledge as not only a stand against the Soviet Union in Asia, but as a statement of self-imposed restraint by both nations. Neither China nor the United States would, in the future, threaten any Asian nation unless it was defensive in nature. The agreement gave China the leeway to reconcentrate its troops elsewhere, namely the Sino-Soviet border. Nixon would subsequently not have to worry about a direct confrontation in Southeast Asia with Chinese forces and could reduce American military presence in the region as his public demanded, substituting instead regional defense pacts for U.S. personnel. Finally. President Nixon's informal regional agreement with China, too loose to be formally labeled as an alliance but substantial nonetheless, allowed Nixon to use Sino-American détente against the Soviet Union to reduce the chances of future Sino-Soviet cooperation against the U.S. Due to timing more than historical opportunism, Nixon kept both China and the U.S.S.R. divide against each other by pursuing détente with both of them.

Though cooperation between the two superpowers to prevent future Soviet hegemony in Asia was a preeminent section of the communiqué, the crux of the document was mutual statements of policy and intentions concerning the status and future of Taiwan. The Communist Chinese used the communiqué as a vehicle to assert their unequivocal stand that Taiwan was a province of China, and until the U.S. recognized that fact, the Taiwan question would continue to be "the crucial question obstructing the normalization of relations between China and the United States." The Communists firmly believed that issues surrounding Taiwan involved Chinese national interests and should be handled without American intervention. Moreover, China demanded that the U.S. reduce its influence on the island and desist form attempts to create two Chinas:

The liberation of Taiwan is China's internal affair in which no other country has the right to interfere; and all U.S. forces and
military installations must be withdrawn from Taiwan. The Chinese government firmly opposes any activities which aim at the creation of 'one China, one Taiwan,' 'one China, two governments,' 'two Chinas,' and 'independent Taiwan..."46

For its part, the Nixon administration acknowledged the existence of one China of which Taiwan was a part. Not only did the American response espouse a peaceful resolution of this conflict by the Chinese, but it declared that America's long-term goal was to withdraw military forces from Taiwan as a key U.S. goal was met:

With this prospect in mind, it affirms the ultimate objective of military withdrawal of all U.S. forces and military installations on Taiwan as the tension in the area diminishes."47

This pledge marked a major reversal of U.S. foreign policy regarding Taiwan; in effect, President Nixon made clear his intentions of leaving the Taiwanese problem to the Chinese to solve for themselves in a peaceful manner in exchange for 'diminishing tensions' in Asia, a veiled reference to China's help in winding down the war in Vietnam. Deviating from past Cold War policy of taking a hard-line against Communism and pursuing rigid containment, Nixon was now willing to make a complete shift to linkage.

The policy of linkage to achieve foreign policy goals and especially the pressing need to extricate U.S. forces from Southeast Asia with honor was wholly consistent with Nixon-Kissinger diplomacy, but others in the American diplomatic establishment viewed the Chinese agreement as a sell-out of Taiwan. George Ball, President Eisenhower's Under-Secretary of State, compared Nixon's agreement to Neville Chamberlain's appeasement of Adolph Hitler at Munich, which presaged Germany's invasion of Poland. A shocked and disappointed President Thieu of South Vietnam commented during the China summit that "America has been looking for a better mistress, and now Nixon has discovered China. He does not want to have the old mistress hanging around. Vietnam has become old and ugly."48 Though not entirely accepted by all leaders in the international community, especially Asian nations such as Japan which worried about America's future commitment to mutual

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
defense pacts, the communique nevertheless represented a significant breakthrough for both the U.S.
and Nixon regarding future of national security and communist containment.

Though the summit accomplished little substantially regarding major policy changes, Nixon had established the foundation for a détente with China. After decades of virulent, hawkish rhetoric aimed against Communists worldwide and advocacy of direct aggression against their forces if necessary, Nixon the pragmatic president realized that a philosophy of silent hostility was counter-productive and potentially dangerous:

...unlike some anti-Communists who think we should refuse to recognize or deal with the Communists lest in doing so we imply or extend an ideological respectability to their philosophy and their system. I have always believed that we can and must communicate and, when possible, negotiate with Communist nations. They are too powerful to ignore. 49

Many Americans expected that the summit would quickly end hostilities in Vietnam. At a March 24, 1972 Presidential press conference, Nixon was circumspect about the possible results of his linkage policy, reiterating that the main purpose of the trip had been to engage in dialogue and that “as far as Vietnam is concerned, I don’t think it would be helpful to indicate what was discussed, what was not discussed. Only time will tell what is going to happen there.” 50 However, it appeared by mid-1972 that much more than talking had been on Nixon’s mind during the China summit. With his reelection bid approaching and the war in Vietnam still not over, the President pursued Soviet détente initiatives in May, 1972. 51

Aftermath: Nixon’s Last Great Triumph

Richard Nixon’s decision to make détente overtures to Communist China and subsequent trip to Peking won the support of the American people, but right-wing conservatives were outraged by his actions, which they feared would lead to China’s annexation of Taiwan. 52 Potential abandonment of Taiwan was the main conservative objection to Nixon’s détente overtures to the Communists, as
several members of Congress, including Republicans, attacked what they believed was the central message of the communiqué. Future presidential candidate John Ashbrook (R-Ohio) expressed his indignation with Nixon’s blatant reversal of policy by conjuring images of a helpless Taiwanese people left to the mercy of a hostile Communist regime:

> For over two decades, it is we who have fostered and supported, both by words and deeds, the concept of an independent Republic of China on Taiwan. Now, in a single week, we have abandoned that position—and in doing so we have set up the framework to abandon 15 million people to the tender mercies of a regime...that has managed to slay, at conservative estimate, 34 million of its own citizens.53

Sen. Hubert Humphrey (D-Minnesota), the Senate’s leading liberal voice, publicly doubted Nixon’s veracity regarding his insistence of not negotiating Taiwan’s future in secret, and criticized the President for contradicting the democratic ideal of self-determination in dealing with Taiwan. “It is now clear.” Humphrey declared, “that the rug has been pulled out from under the Taiwanese, though the people of the island of Formosa once aspired to determine their own destiny.”54

However, criticism of Nixon’s initiative was relatively muted compared to mainstream support for the trip within Congress. Respected Democratic Senators George McGovern and Ted Kennedy praised Nixon, as did William Fullbright, Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and a consistent critic of Nixon’s Vietnam policies. With conservative favorite Ronald Reagan just off the national center stage ready to mount a right-wing challenge in 1972 if the president’s popularity waned, Nixon’s prospects for holding together his tenuous Republican coalition received a shot in the arm by the support of Sen. Barry Goldwater gave for the trip.

Press reaction to Nixon’s visit in his home region of the West was uniformly positive, as his longtime allies at the editorial boards of the Los Angeles Times and the San Diego Union solidly supported him without much hint of dissent. Early in the trip, the day after Nixon touched down on Chinese soil, the Times opined that the mere presence of the President in Peking after years of tension meant that positive change was virtually imminent:
Certainly change is in the air, and what has been publicly seen of the president's first days in China vies support to the hope that change will be for the better. If this means some diminution of mutual ignorance, then well and good; the two nations and the world could only be ahead of the game.55

However, certain arch-conservatives refused to credit Nixon for attempting détente with China, characterizing the mission as a U.S. kow-tow to Communism abroad. The same day that the Times editorial board praised Nixon for his boldness in visiting Peking, William F. Buckley's column in the same newspaper ridiculed Nixon for compromising the credibility of U.S. foreign policy. Buckley, an early Goldwater supporter and longtime conservative spokesman, argued that:

From the point of view of the Communists, it was a masterstroke. Throughout, we have positioned ourselves as the supplicants, they as the presence which, hearing the 'knock on the door,' in Chou Enlai's words, permitted the visitor an audience.56

Published by the Chandler family, powerful Los Angeles Republicans who first endorsed Nixon in 1946 against Jerry Voorhis, the Times supported the President during and after the summit, buttressing his support among California moderates and conservatives in the aftermath of a risky political maneuver.

Upon Nixon's return to Washington, The San Diego Union interpreted domestic support of the trip as an endorsement of both the president and his initiative, and complimented him for beginning a new era. "The dialogue between us and our most outspoken antagonist in the world has begun auspiciously, due to the exemplary personal statesmanship of the President and First Lady."

The Union editorial board called Nixon "a renowned student of communistic imperialism" who "certainly realizes that we are playing with fire...He did indeed structure a 'week that changed the world,' as he said."57 Though not as supportive, The Arizona Republic endorsed the summit, commenting that:

The least that can be said for President Nixon's visit to China is that he caused the Chinese revolution to make a temporary turn—from darkest secrecy to partial exposure before the world...Certainly all those Nixon critics who have been blaming him for...
reacting instead of acting received an answer to their criticism last week.\textsuperscript{58}

Perhaps most important for Nixon’s media image was the reaction of the nation’s major daily newspapers with mass circulation. His longtime bitterness against the Eastern Establishment notwithstanding, one of its three main organs, the \textit{New York Times}, tacitly supported the president and his summit but remained cynical about the Administration’s pre-summit hype that made talks appear more monumental than they actually were. On Feb. 27, 1972, the \textit{Times} editorialized that:

\begin{quote}
Surprise was unwarranted because this summit meeting, unlike others, was prepared meticulously during the prior conversations of Henry Kissinger and Chou Enlai. The difficulty evidently encountered in drafting the communiqué suggests that there were some gaps, but unless enough had already been agreed upon earlier to assure the right atmosphere, the summit meeting could hardly have taken place.\textsuperscript{59}
\end{quote}

Another national voice of the East Coast establishment, the \textit{Wall Street Journal}, was much less restrained in its endorsement of the China trip but recognized that value of its results. In the wake of the President’s return to the U.S., the \textit{Journal} assessed the summit as “as display to the world that the United States and China are seeking a new and peaceful relationship...That’s what they got, which makes the trip a success.”\textsuperscript{60} Although \textit{Journal} editors remained unconvinced that the trip did much to resolve Asian instability, their positive words represented election-year support from business for the President’s agenda.

The third leg of the East Coast national daily triumvirate, the \textit{Washington Post}, perhaps the most influential Democratically-owned paper in the nation, faintly praised the trip but was critical of Nixon for what it believed was his overdramatics before, during and after Peking. To \textit{Post} editorialists, the initiative was “undeniably a great event... the potential is vast and for this much the President is entitled to great credit for what was a bold stroke, skillfully brought off by painstaking and clandestine preparations...” However, in its final analysis, the \textit{Post} lambasted Nixon for apparently misrepresenting what was accomplished in China for his own personal benefit, undoubtedly for reelection purposes:
But neither will it be easy for him to make the most of what he has achieved in Peking if he continues to overstate—or misstate—the foreseeable gains. "This was the week that changed the world," he declared in Shanghai, as his visit ended, and nobody would deny him that...It is enough, for now, to acknowledge a great event, which speaks for itself, and speaks well for the President. To embellish it with rhetoric and flamboyance and jazz, as Mr. Nixon was himself suggested, is to encourage the suspicion that he doesn't have all that much to sell.  

Unfortunately, the darkening clouds of the Watergate scandal and Nixon's apparent preoccupation with SALT talks with the Soviet Union slowed Chinese détente in the waning days of his presidency. The power of the American presidency was significantly weakened during this period and was psychologically carried over into diplomatic affairs in the form of perceived indecisiveness and diminished U.S. credibility on the international stage. However, all was not lost, as Nixon's predecessors carried on in the wake of his August 9, 1974 resignation. Nevertheless, a large element of American leadership in the quest for détente with China was lost with the exit of Richard Nixon from the presidency, a blow that was felt in both the U.S. and Communist China. Finding it hard to believe that a statesman of Nixon's caliber could be forced to resign over a domestic political scandal, Chairman Mao was reported to have told an American official in China, "Watergate! What reason is that to get rid of a president?"

Epilogue: U.S.-China Relations in the Ford and Carter Administrations

Continuing his predecessor's attempts to reach productive détentes with China as well as the Soviet Union, President Gerald Ford traveled to Peking in December, 1975, but his talks with new Communist leader Deng Xiaoping produced neither substantial progress nor an updated communiqué. The mid-1970s were characterized by increasing threats of Soviet expansionism, and corresponding Chinese worries that the new American president lacked the resolve or diplomatic experience to combat the renewal of perceived Soviet designs on Asia. Indeed, during Ford's visit
Deng warned him that the danger of war with the U.S.S.R. was growing and American détente talks with the Soviet Union were increasingly worrisome to the Chinese. For his part, Ford believed that Chinese paranoia regarding the Soviet Union had grown to the point where they "seemed in no hurry to press for full diplomatic recognition or the termination of our long-standing commitments to Taiwan." Whether this view resulted from Ford's own lack of diplomatic experience with the Chinese or reflected an accurate appraisal of China's obsession with Soviet intentions, there is little doubt that his visit occurred during a decline in Sino-American relations. A less moderate Deng espoused an increasingly hard-line stance against the West and was less receptive than his predecessors to détente with the U.S. During the Ford administration there was generally a loss of diplomatic momentum in China relations thanks to the pressures of presidential politics. Challenging Ford for the 1976 Republican nomination was Ronald Reagan, who hammered his rival for being soft on communism. In response, Ford slowed progress on U.S.-China relations.

Jimmy Carter sought normalized relations with China in order to strengthen his bargaining position with the Soviets regarding SALT negotiations, regain the momentum Nixon had lost, and bolster his own foreign policy credentials. Like his predecessor Gerald Ford, Carter was cautiously optimistic about the China question, and sought to continue détente without taking firm action on Taiwan. Strategic deferment of this nature seems to have been the prevailing policy of all three administrations, but Carter was particularly sensitive to the issue as by the late 1970s, the Soviets began closing the missile gap with the United States and were actually ahead of the U.S. in conventional weapons. Carter depended heavily on his own version of Kissinger, National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski. Asked in 1978 after the signing of the Panama Canal Treaty about Carter's interest in a strategic relationship with China, Brzezinski replied:

I think Carter liked the idea. He knew it would increase his leverage vis-a-vis the Soviets...But he did not want anything that smacked of an anti-Soviet American-Chinese alliance, which is what the Chinese came close to advocating at the time, especially when Deng Xiaoping

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
came to America and spent the first evening at my home talking to me and the others. 69

It was Brzezinski who during the winter of 1977-1978 persuaded Carter to accelerate the Chinese détente to the level of diplomatic recognition, and in 1978 Brzezinski himself made a trip to China that ultimately led to normalized U.S.-Chinese relations. 70 Engaging in talks with Vice-Chairman Deng, Brzezinski based his negotiations on the common strategic interests of the U.S. and China, particularly their opposition to Soviet regional hegemony. 71 Based on key sections of Nixon’s communiqué, Brzezinski’s strategy was bound to upset the Soviets with their emphasis on dominance in the midst of SALT II negotiations. In the long run, however, Brzezinski’s aggressive pro-China policy quelled fears that his policy would drive the Soviets from the bargaining table. Normalized relations between the United States and Communist China were announced by Jimmy Carter on Dec. 15, 1978, six and-a-half years after Richard Nixon’s trip to China. 72
Endnotes- Chapter IV

2 Nixon, R.N., 548.
6 Ibid., 163. On April 30, 1971, American writer and Sinologist Edgar Snow wrote in Life magazine that in December, 1970, Mao had told him that Nixon was welcome in China.
7 Anthony Kubek. The Red China Papers (New Rochelle: Arlington House Publishers, 1978), 190. During this period the Nixon administration also terminated all restrictions on the use of American passports for travel to China (March 15), and terminated a 21-year-old trade embargo on Communist China (April 14).
9 Nixon, R.N., 548.
10 Robert Garson. The United States and China Since 1949: A Troubled Affair (Teaneck: Fairleigh Dickinson Press, 1994), 134. On this same date, Nixon assured the U.S. Table Tennis Association that he would cooperate with its invitation to the Chinese national team to visit America.
13 Nixon, In The Arena, 327.
14 Ibid.
15 Kubek, The Red China Papers, 197. During this television event Nixon revealed to the world the secret diplomacy of Kissinger- his diversion from a trip around the world to meet with Zhou Enlai face-to-face, in Peking on July 9-11.
16 Congressional Quarterly, China & U.S. Foreign Policy, Appendix-7.
17 Ibid. Nixon also stressed that the trip would not be “at the expense of our old friends,” generally taken to mean Nationalist China. On July 16, Taiwanese Premier C.K. Yen issued a statement of regret about Nixon’s proposed visit.
18 Reinhard. The Republican Right Since 1945, 224.
19 Ibid.
21 The St. Petersburg Times, July 17, 1971, Editorials on File, Vol. 2, No. 14, 1971, 922. The Times believed that Nixon’s announcement amounted to “de facto recognition of the People’s Republic of China,” and as a result of the trip, the Democratic Party would have a difficult time raising funds.


Congressional Quarterly, China & U.S. Foreign Policy, 52. Admission of Communist China to the U.N. hinged on the expulsion of Nationalist China. Conservatives in Congress reacted strongly against that option, among them California Representative John G. Schmitz, a member of the John Birch Society, who called the Peking regime a “bandit government” and “a bunch of butchers.” The Nationalists were expelled on October 25, 1971, despite overwhelming congressional opposition.


U.S. Government Printing Office, Public Papers of the President: Richard Nixon, 1971. 1121. In the months leading to the China trip, Nixon often framed his initiative in terms of a quest for peace rather than a strategic geopolitical mission. Speaking in Centerville, Iowa on July 31, 1971, Nixon stated that “The purpose of the journey involves not just peace for my generation...it affects peace for generations to come...”

Johnson, Nixon Press Conferences, 229.

Congressional Quarterly, China & U.S. Foreign Policy, 1972, 11.

Nixon, R.N., 559.

Ibid.

Nixon, In The Arena, 12.

Garson, The United States and China Since 1949, 136. Based on Kissinger’s pre-summit talks with the Peking leadership, it was generally known before Nixon even left U.S. soil that progress on the Taiwan issue would be postponed for the sake of progress.

Nixon, R.N., 571.


Nixon, R.N., 563. The talks between Nixon and Mao were primarily philosophical and concerned with larger, more abstract themes of peace and history than practical strategy.

Ibid.

Nixon, In The Arena, 14.


Sutter, The China Quandary, 19. This section of the communique was prefaced by a statement that disputes would be settled by reference to the Five Principles, irregardless of differing ideology. The dogma of containment was broken.

Nixon, R.N., 577.


Ibid.

Ibid. This statement was qualified with the declaration that “The United States acknowledges that all Chinese on either side of the Taiwan Strait maintain there is but one China and that Taiwan is a part of China.”

Garson, The United States and China since 1949, 137.

Nixon, R.N., 344.
Many conservatives voiced outrage at Nixon's apparent abandonment of Taiwan, but most still supported him in the 1972 general election.

Garson, The United States and China Since 1949, 151.

Kitts, The United States Odyssey in China, 231. Gerald Ford, elevated from the House of Representatives to assume the Vice-Presidency after the resignation of Spiro Agnew, slowed down the détente process as a result of his own attempts to portray himself as tough on Communism as well as the increasingly anti-Western tenor of new Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping.

In his face-to-face talks with Deng, Brzezinski stressed containment of the Soviet Union as the main reason to normalize relations between the U.S. and China, a return to the underlying strategy of the Nixon-Kissinger era.

Moens, Foreign Policy Under Carter, 124.

Vorontsov, From Missionary Days to Reagan, 167.
CONCLUSION

In retrospect, it appears that Richard Nixon's China initiative was much more a personal triumph than a seminal event for United States foreign policy. The limited detente with Communist China did shift the global balance-of-power at a critical juncture for American national security, and also increased U.S. diplomatic leverage against the U.S.S.R. for arms control concessions. Of equal importance was the implementation of the Nixon Doctrine, a plan for regional security pacts around the world that reduced American policing responsibilities in the containment of communism, while at the same time maintained U.S. military credibility in enforcing defense treaties. Nixon's detente strategy, an updated version of traditional containment, represented diplomatic pragmatism superseding obsolete and costly dogmatism: America could no longer commit unlimited resources to conflicts abroad that had neither public support nor clearly defined objectives beyond defeating an ideology. Nixon realized that the key to avoiding future Vietnams in Asia and further U.S. entanglements in that region was to extend rapprochement to Communist China, regardless of the ideological differences between the two nations.

Although no direct link with Nixon's detente decision can be definitively established, U.S. commercial interest in the China market, a constant since the mid-19th century, may have also played a role in the initiative. Addressing the National Press Club on June 24, 1971, James C.H. Shen, Ambassador of the Republic of China said, "much of today's pressure for a thaw with Peiping comes from a handful of business interests seeking profitable mainland markets."1 Though American exports to China had never reached more than five percent of the total in the hundred years preceding Nixon's trip, large U.S.-based multinational corporations such as General Motors, Xerox, Monsanto

---

1 Congressional Quarterly, China and U.S. Foreign Policy, 39.
and United Air Lines had all expressed interest in trade with China. On May 4, 1971, Pan American
World Airlines President Najeeb E. Halaby told shareholders that the airlines had been seeking
Chinese approval for three years to resume its air route on the Mainland that it served in 1947-1949.
Halaby said he saw "a real possibility of doing so," and described China as a huge untapped market.
Eight years prior to the Nixon trip, Chase Manhattan Bank President David Rockefeller had also
indicated his desire for commercial contacts with Communist China, predicated on not yielding
American principles.\footnote{Ibid}

However, despite the drama of the Peking summit and the respect given to Nixon by the
press after his return, the trip and subsequent Shanghai communique did not end the Vietnam War or
resolve the Taiwan question. The communique itself symbolized the general progress made in Peking
and at the very least, committed China and the U.S. to mutual cooperation in preventing future Soviet
expansionism in Asia. President Nixon did obtain from the Communist Chinese a pledge to respect
the territorial sovereignty of neighboring nations as well as their form of governments, a major
concession from a Communist superpower championing an ideology of exporting proletarian
revolution. The Shanghai communique embodied the principles of the Nixon Doctrine, but postponed
a resolution of the Taiwan question for the sake of friendly relations.

The major beneficiary of Nixon's trip to China was the President himself. The Peking
summit confirmed his stature as a world diplomat, and international television coverage of the even
gave the American public a glimpse of their President taking active steps to end hostilities with the
world's most populous country. Nixon's pragmatic diplomacy paid off handsomely in 1972, as he
defeated George McGovern for a second term in the second most lopsided presidential election in
American history.

\footnote{Ibid}
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Public Documents

Public Papers of the Presidents- Richard Nixon, 1969.


Primary Sources- Richard Nixon

Books


Articles

“Asia After Vietnam.” Foreign Affairs. (October, 1967)

“If Nixon is President.” U.S. News & World Report. (October, 1967)

“Krushchev’s Hidden Weakness.” The Saturday Evening Post. (October 12, 1963)
“Needed in Vietnam: The Will To Win.” Reader's Digest. (August 1964)


Secondary Sources


Secondary Articles


Riccards, Michael P. “Richard Nixon and the American Political Tradition.” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* XXXIII (Fall, 1993), 739-742.


Newspapers

Los Angeles Times
- February 3, 1953
- November 7, 1968
- February 22, 1972
- February 28, 1972

The New York Times
- October 1, 1958
- October 2, 1958
- October 13, 1960
- October 27, 1960
- November 7, 1968
- February 27, 1972
- February 28, 1972

Editorials On File
Vol. 2, No. 14, 1971:
- The Atlanta Constitution
- The Kansas City Star
- The New York Times
- The St. Petersburg Times

Editorials On File
Vol. 3, No. 4, 1972:
- Chicago Daily Defender
- The Arizona Republic
- The Chicago Tribune
- The New York Times
- The San Diego Union
- The Washington Post

Secondary Government Publications


A valuable edition of CQ, devoted entirely to U.S.-China relations during the Nixon Administration. Includes a chronological summary of events leading to the President's trip to Peking, texts of Presidential remarks, toasts, answers to media questions.