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## Secrets, Schemes, and Strategies: Nixon Opens Relations with Communist China

Kelsey Swanson

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In the Cold War era, the United States faced challenges from two Communist giants: the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China (PRC). The United States considered both nations to be a threat to international stability, but had failed to significantly improve relations with these countries in the 1950s and 1960s. While the United States was already engaging in talks with the Soviet Union at this time, it had failed to even recognize the existence of the PRC for over twenty years. President Nixon and his advisor Henry A. Kissinger devised a grand plan to normalize relations with the PRC while continuing to better relations with the Soviet Union. Although such a strategy succeeded to some degree in the immediate aftermath of the event, in the long run, the Soviet Union had more pressing reasons for improving relations with the United States. What initiated this change in policy? Because the Chinese and Soviets were hostile toward one another, Nixon and Kissinger sought rapprochement with the PRC mainly to gain more leverage in dealing with the Soviet Union.

In October 1949, the Chinese Communists, led by Mao Tse-tung, proclaimed victory for the new People's Republic of China over the United States-supported Nationalists.<sup>1</sup> The Nationalists' leader, Chiang Kai-Shek, fled to Formosa (Taiwan), establishing the Republic of China on this island. While the Republicans blamed Truman and the Democrats for having "lost" China to the Communists, in fact, there really was not much that the United

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<sup>1</sup>United States Department of State, *Issues in United States Foreign Policy: People's Republic of China* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office (GPO), 1972), 3.

States could have done to prevent this end result. The Chinese people simply saw their interests better served with Mao. After 1949, the U.S. was hesitant in formally recognizing the PRC because of the support for Chiang by many in government office and because of a sense of mistrust toward Mao and the Communists.<sup>2</sup> During the Korean War that began in 1950, relations between the United States and the PRC deteriorated as the Communists intervened to help the North Koreans, pushing back American and United Nations forces to the Thirty-eighth Parallel. This confrontation with the PRC garnered more support for the Nationalists on Formosa, as the United States saw the anti-American Mao as the enemy.

The Republican Party regained the Presidency in 1952 with World War II hero Dwight David Eisenhower as their nominee. Once elected, he promised not to recognize “Red China” under current conditions, hoping to isolate the PRC. Later American involvement in the Vietnam War to contain the spread of Communism harmed relations between the two countries further. The fact that Vice President Richard Nixon, as early as 1954, believed that the PRC was backing the Vietnamese Communists by providing them military supplies, made the possibility of rapprochement even more distant.<sup>3</sup>

In his October 1967 *Foreign Affairs* article entitled “Asia After Vietnam,” Nixon hinted at the need for the United States to better relations with China in the future, but only after it changed its aggressive policies. In the conclusion of the article, Nixon explained his view on U.S. policy toward China: “For the long run, it means pulling China back into the world community—but as a

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<sup>2</sup>Warren I. Cohen, *America's Response to China* (New York: Columbia U. Press, 2000), 167.

<sup>3</sup>Richard M. Nixon, *The Memoirs of Richard Nixon* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1978), 150.

great and progressing nation, not as the epicenter of world revolution.”<sup>4</sup>

How could Nixon advocate such a policy toward the Communists? First, Nixon had a history of being firmly anti-communist. Not only was he a charter member of the “Who Lost China Club?”, but he was also a steadfast realist who recognized the importance of balance of power and geopolitical stability.<sup>5</sup> This position allowed him to work towards future relations with China without seeming “soft” on Communism when he was elected President in 1968. Nixon also was a Republican and therefore able to exploit the idea that the Democrats “lost” China. If a Democratic president had shown signs of wanting to improve relations between the two countries, he would be seen as trying to appease the Communists. Nixon, on the other hand, would just be trying to work with the situation that the Democrats left him. Thus, President Nixon had the right political position to make rapprochement with the PRC even possible.

A complimentary asset to Nixon in his hope for better relations with China was Henry A. Kissinger, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs and later Secretary of State. Kissinger was a true believer in peace through stability and longed for order in the world.<sup>6</sup> In the Cold War era, Kissinger had two main strategies to achieve his goal of stability: détente and linkage diplomacy, which worked hand-in-hand. As defined by Kissinger, détente was “the search for a more constructive relationship with the Soviet Union.”<sup>7</sup> It was more broadly used to describe the relaxation of tensions between hostile countries, including

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 235.

<sup>5</sup>Walter Isaacson, *Kissinger: A Biography* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992), 334.

<sup>6</sup>John G. Stoessinger, *Henry Kissinger: The Anguish of Power* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1976), 13.

<sup>7</sup>“Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger Defines Détente, 1974,” *Major Problems in American Foreign Relations Volume II: Since 1914* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000), 487.

Communist China. Kissinger saw détente as something imperative in the age of nuclear power, when each side could potentially destroy the other.<sup>8</sup> Détente, however, was not about coming to agreement on ideological values. Instead, the goal was to come to peace without compromising the vital interests of either nation involved.

In order to achieve détente between two nations, Kissinger believed that linkage between issues was necessary. This strategy, known as linkage diplomacy, involved moving talks along with the Soviet Union on arms control while settling political differences at the same time. Thus, the strategy was essentially the idea that progress in one area was dependent on progress in other areas. At one of Nixon's first presidential press conferences as President, he enunciated the concept of linkage as having "strategic arms talks" in such a way as to promote "progress on outstanding political problems *at the same time*," especially on "problems in which the United States and the Soviet Union can serve the cause of peace."<sup>9</sup>

Kissinger's linkage approach dealt with issues in the global sense, not just as isolated events. Issues could not just be compartmentalized, for Kissinger believed that the Soviet Union would then use cooperation in one area while simultaneously trying to get the upper hand elsewhere.<sup>10</sup> This policy would create both incentives and negative consequences for Soviet action, so that in the end, the Soviet Union would be led to détente with the United States.<sup>11</sup> The ultimate end of the linkage strategy was to make both United States and Soviet policy in line with the realities of the world situation. Most Americans, however, saw linkage diplomacy as just the Administration's way of stalling arms limitations

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<sup>8</sup>Isaacson, *Kissinger*, 610.

<sup>9</sup>Robert S. Litwak, *Détente and the Nixon Doctrine* (Cambridge: Cambridge U. Press, 1984), 93-4.

<sup>10</sup>Henry A. Kissinger, *White House Years* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co.), 129.

<sup>11</sup>Isaacson, *Kissinger*, 166.

talks with the Soviet Union.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, when Nixon and Kissinger saw the rise of China as threatening global stability, the policies of détente and linkage were used to normalize relations.

On July 23, 1969, President Nixon articulated what came to be known as the Nixon Doctrine. This statement limited the extent of U.S. involvement in Asia in order to ensure that there would be no future situations like Vietnam.<sup>13</sup> The United States would respect its existing treaty obligations, but it would not make any more commitments in the area unless essential to American interests. In addition, the United States would issue arms and money to help Asian nations fight aggression, but it would be the responsibility of the country to provide the manpower necessary to fight. There was one main exception to the aforementioned conditions: if an ally was threatened by a nuclear power, referring to the Soviet Union or the PRC, the United States would be compelled to act directly.<sup>14</sup> Thus, although the United States saw the trouble in further involvement in Asia after the Vietnam War, it was not ready to totally remove itself from Asia, where the two largest Communist states were located.

Was there a higher purpose than solely to limit United States involvement in Asia at work in the Nixon Doctrine? International relations expert Robert Litwak argues that one of the keys to the Nixon Doctrine was in détente with both China and the Soviet Union. If the United States could normalize relations with these two countries, then the Asian continent would be more stable in terms of United States interests, and the U.S. could start to transfer its power to its ally nations in the area.<sup>15</sup> As long as the United States and China were enemies, it was not likely that the United States would surrender significant interest in Asia even if the Nixon Doctrine outlined such a position. Therefore, one reason for

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<sup>12</sup>Litwak, *Détente*, 94.

<sup>13</sup>Nixon, *Memoirs*, 395.

<sup>14</sup>Isaacson, *Kissinger*, 241.

<sup>15</sup>Litwak, *Détente*, 134.

the beginning of Sino-American rapprochement under Nixon was that it flowed logically from the Nixon Doctrine and provided stability in Southeast Asia.

Nixon and Kissinger had other motivations in seeking to normalize relations between the United States and the PRC after over twenty years of non-recognition and hostility. Nixon clearly stated the obvious reason that better relations were “certainly in our interest, and in the interest of peace and stability in Asia and the world.”<sup>16</sup> Just as détente with the Communist Soviet Union was beneficial to maintaining peace during the Cold War, détente with the PRC would provide similar results, especially after U.S.-Sino conflicts in Korea and Vietnam. Therefore, rapprochement simply for the sake of better relations was an important consideration. The sheer size of mainland China was another factor. The existence of a 3.7 million square mile expanse of land with approximately 750 million people could not be ignored or isolated politically and economically.<sup>17</sup> President Nixon, speaking in Kansas City explained, “Mainland China, outside the world community, completely isolated, with its leaders not in communication with world leaders, would be a danger to the whole world that would be unacceptable.”<sup>18</sup> Although these were important considerations, the possibility of improving relations with the Soviet Union was the most significant cause for a United States interest in normalization with the PRC.

There were ideological disagreements between the Soviets and the Chinese during this time, even though both nations were Communist. Mao Tse-tung believed Chinese Communism to be purer than that of the Soviets, since China had achieved Communism without going through a stage of socialism.<sup>19</sup> Another

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<sup>16</sup>Nixon, *Memoirs*, 545.

<sup>17</sup>United States Department of State, *Issues in United States Foreign Policy: People's Republic of China*, 5.

<sup>18</sup>Nixon, *Memoirs*, 552.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, 166.

ideological contention was the Chinese accusation that the Soviet leaders were “revisionists,” and thus the real head of the Communist revolution was Mao Tse-tung, located in the Chinese capital of Peking.<sup>20</sup> Mao thought the Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev was too intent on peaceful relations with the West, giving up the revolutionary aspect of Communism. Before, the United States believed in the monolithic character of international Communism—that Communism was under control of the Soviets and everything stemmed from their wishes. However, with the nationalism of the Chinese Communists and open hostility with the Soviets, this theory failed. Kissinger believed that this history of hostility that had existed before and after the 1950s between China and the Soviet Union would continue to exist, and thus the United States’ policies had to adjust to this new world power structure.

Kissinger’s idea to stabilize the world order in this era of the Sino-Soviet split involved what political scientists call “triangular diplomacy,” a branch of linkage diplomacy. Triangular diplomacy was the concept that the interests of the United States were best served if it preserved better relations with both the Chinese and Soviets than these two countries did with each other.<sup>21</sup> The policy “linked” progress with China to further progress with the Soviet Union. The United States was to hold the most favorable position in the triangle and act like a fulcrum, with the two other countries depending on the U.S. In this way, both China and the Soviet Union would try to gain favor with the United States against the other country. The United States would then act as the balancer between the two countries, establishing better relations with each country as well as a global equilibrium in the process.<sup>22</sup> However, the key was not to antagonize one of the countries too much, for it

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<sup>20</sup>Franz Michael, “The New United States-China Policy,” *Current History* (Sep. 1972): 127.

<sup>21</sup>Kissinger, *White House Years*, 712.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, 192.



was like “walking a delicate tightrope.”<sup>23</sup> If the United States could achieve rapprochement with the PRC, the idea was that it would gain huge leverage over the Soviet Union, which would lead to greater Soviet cooperation. Plus, the Chinese had reasons to want to seek normalization of relations with the United States. The PRC was experiencing definite hostility with the Soviet Union, a nation with superior military force. Would the Chinese really want to be isolated from both the United States and the Soviet Union? Since Kissinger believed that the Chinese feared the Soviet Union more than the United States, reconciliation between the two Pacific powers seemed possible.<sup>24</sup> Thus, triangular diplomacy was based on using continuing hostilities between the two Communist superpowers to achieve global stability.

Once the Nixon-Kissinger strategy was established to seek rapprochement with the PRC, a series of subtle diplomatic exchanges traveled between Washington and Peking aimed at showing each country’s good intentions about establishing relations. The United States first tried to resume Sino-American talks after a two-year break. This was achieved with talks beginning on January 20, 1970 in Warsaw between the U.S. Ambassador to Poland, Walter Stoessel, and Lei Yang from the PRC, eventually resulting in the Chinese accepting the U.S. proposal to send a high-ranking American official to Peking to serve as leader of the American delegation in discussions there.<sup>25</sup> In Nixon’s Foreign Policy Report to Congress in February 1970, the President reported, “The Chinese are a great and vital people who should not remain isolated from the international community...But it is certainly in our interest, and in the interest of peace and stability in Asia and the world, that we take what steps we can

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<sup>23</sup>Henry A. Kissinger, “My Visit to China,” Declassified White House Memorandum, 19 Nov. 1971, 3, Digital National Security Archive.

<sup>24</sup>Stoessinger, *Anguish of Power*, 117.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, 118.

toward improved practical relations with Peking.”<sup>26</sup> Although the talks between the PRC and the United States were temporarily halted due to the American invasion of Cambodia, diplomatic channels reopened after a couple of months.

Nixon opened up indirect channels to China through President Yahya Khan of Pakistan and President Nicolae Ceausescu of Romania in order to keep the State Department out of the negotiations.<sup>27</sup> The Department of State had a large bureaucracy and was not very secretive, which was important to Nixon and China in the beginning of this new relationship. In another positive gesture towards China, on October 26, 1970, Nixon actually called China the “People’s Republic of China” instead of “Communist China.”<sup>28</sup> After a series of messages between the White House and Chou En-lai discussing the sending of an American envoy to Peking and identifying the main obstacle to diplomatic relations as Taiwan, a breakthrough occurred. On April 27, 1971, a message was received through the Pakistan channel from Chou En-lai that stated, “The Chinese government reaffirms its willingness to receive publicly in Peking a special envoy of the President of the U.S. (for instance Mr. Kissinger) or the U.S. Secretary of State or even the President of the U.S. himself for a direct meeting and discussion.”<sup>29</sup> The scene was now set for the United States and the PRC to openly discuss, in person, the differences hindering improved relations.

During the same month, the Chinese sent another signal proving their desire for better relations. Both the Chinese and the United States table tennis team were participating in the World Table Tennis Championship in Nagoya, Japan. Nineteen-year-old Glenn Cowan from Santa Monica, California, approached the Chinese team captain to get a ride on a bus with them to see the

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<sup>26</sup>Nixon, *Memoirs*, 545.

<sup>27</sup>Kissinger, *White House Years*, 699.

<sup>28</sup>Nixon, *Memoirs*, 546.

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*, 549.

pearl farms. In retrospect, Kissinger noted that such an event never would have happened unless Mao and Chou En-lai explicitly told the team to be nice to the Americans.<sup>30</sup> Cowan later gave the Chinese captain a T-shirt and he received a Chinese scarf in return. However, what became known as ping-pong diplomacy was more than just an exchange of gifts. The Chinese actually invited the American team to visit on April 6, and when they arrived at the reception that Chou En-lai arranged, he proclaimed, "You have opened a new chapter in the relations of the American and Chinese people."<sup>31</sup> An invitation was extended to the Chinese team to visit the United States as well. Chou En-lai's overture to the ping-pong team was symbolic of the readiness of the Communist Chinese government to develop relations with the United States.

After it was certain that an American official was welcome in Peking, the question became who to send. After brainstorming for possible candidates, Nixon decided on Kissinger, for he knew Nixon's policy best and the President could exert the most control over him.<sup>32</sup> As part of his plan, Nixon wanted his representative to go on a secret trip to China beforehand to formally arrange the details of the President's trip. If the trip were secret, Nixon did not have to worry about other countries, such as the Republic of China, attempting to thwart the trip, wanting a list of concessions, or making the U.S. promise not to compromise.<sup>33</sup> In addition, the United States was simply not familiar with China or its officials, and, not knowing what to expect, wanted to keep this first trip secret. Kissinger was the perfect person for a secret trip. Not only was he furtive by nature, but he also had a reputation of being a playboy, dating many different women, including the actresses Jill St. John, Shirley MacLaine, Marlo Thomas, Candice Bergen, and

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<sup>30</sup>Kissinger, *White House Years*, 709.

<sup>31</sup>Isaacson, *Kissinger*, 339.

<sup>32</sup>Kissinger, *White House Years*, 717.

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*, 725.

Liv Ullmann.<sup>34</sup> So, if he were to “disappear” for a couple to days to go to China, no one would be surprised, imagining that he was with a woman somewhere.

Given the codename “Polo,” after the explorer Marco Polo, the first Westerner to travel to China, Kissinger’s trip broke the ground for President Nixon’s visit.<sup>35</sup> To keep the trip to China secret, Kissinger suddenly became ill with a “stomach ache” while in Pakistan, requiring bed rest for a couple of days.<sup>36</sup> It was during these days, July 9-11, 1971, that Kissinger flew to China to meet with Chou En-lai, the foreign minister with an understanding of the Western world. Kissinger came back from this journey with a sense of the personality and ideology of the Chinese, especially Chou En-lai, and had laid the groundwork for the President’s own trip. Kissinger and Chou En-lai worked out a joint communiqué to be issued at the end of the trip, revealing both countries’ interest in having the President go to China for a summit and the President’s acceptance of such an invitation. In addition, the document mentioned the purpose of the President’s trip, which was to seek normalization of relations and to discuss “questions of concern to the two sides.”<sup>37</sup> This communiqué was what President Nixon read to the American people over national television on July 15, adding that this beginning of relations with the PRC was “not directed against any other nation.”<sup>38</sup> With this qualification, it appeared on the outside that the United States was not opening up talks with the PRC to use as leverage against the Soviet Union, although this was exactly what the Nixon-Kissinger strategy of triangular diplomacy was all about. By improving relations with China, Nixon and

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<sup>34</sup>Isaacson, *Kissinger*, 361.

<sup>35</sup>Kissinger, *White House Years*, 726.

<sup>36</sup>Nixon, *Memoirs*, 553.

<sup>37</sup>Henry A. Kissinger. “My Talks with Chou En-lai.” Declassified White House Memorandum, 17 July 1971, 10, Digital National Security Archive.

<sup>38</sup>United States Department of State, *Current Foreign Policy: The United States and the People’s Republic of China* (Washington D.C.: GPO, 1971), 2.

Kissinger hoped the Soviet Union would be more eager to work with the U.S.

The meetings between Kissinger and Chou En-lai, however, amounted to more than just what was read to the public. Kissinger reported privately to the President that the Taiwan issue was still the main impediment to normalization of relations, and that the Chinese were still very fearful of the Soviet Union, which played nicely into the Nixon-Kissinger strategy of triangular diplomacy.<sup>39</sup> The Chinese were adamant about the United States recognizing Taiwan as part of China and removing troops from the Taiwan Strait, but these issues would be discussed in detail later when Nixon met with Mao Tse-tung. Nevertheless, Kissinger explained to Chou En-lai that removal of troops from Taiwan was linked to the conflict in Vietnam.<sup>40</sup> Thus, if China wanted progress on the removal of U.S. troops, progress had to be made in ending the war in Vietnam. Besides general discussions on these issues, Chou En-lai and Kissinger worked out the basics of the President's trip, including what cities to visit, how long to stay, and which Americans should attend.

Kissinger went on a second trip to Peking in October 1971, but this time publicly, to negotiate the joint communiqué that would be issued after the President's journey in February 1972.<sup>41</sup> After wrangling by both Chou En-lai and Kissinger about the wording of the communiqué, a document that highlighted the common interests of both countries while also including a section where both countries could assert their differences, was created. While Kissinger was in China, the United Nations (UN) voted to expel the Republic of China on Taiwan from the General Assembly, while giving the PRC a seat on the Security Council.<sup>42</sup> Although

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<sup>39</sup>Kissinger, "My Talks with Chou En-lai," 11.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., 14.

<sup>41</sup>Isaacson, *Kissinger*, 351.

<sup>42</sup>"Secretary Rogers' View of UN Action on China Question," *Department of State Newsletter* (Nov. 1971): 4.

the United States had supported Taiwan remaining in the UN, the fact that Kissinger's trip to China coincided with the UN vote caused many to speculate that Kissinger's visit had caused the outcome.

President Nixon's historic journey to China on February 21, 1972, the first ever by an American President while in office, was largely symbolic in nature. When President Nixon stepped off the plane, he greeted Chou En-lai with a handshake, something Secretary of State John Foster Dulles refused to do in Geneva in 1954.<sup>43</sup> With this handshake, a new era of relations between the two countries began. The main workings of the joint communiqué had already been finished months in advance between Kissinger and Chou En-lai, and so all that was left to do was to complete the details of the document. This job was basically left to Kissinger and his foreign policy aides. Nixon spent his days in China meeting with Chou En-lai, discussing issues of policy, sightseeing, and attending banquets. During the few times that Nixon was able to meet with Mao Tse-tung, they discussed Chiang Kai-shek, American politics, world affairs, and general policy issues between the two countries.<sup>44</sup> What they discussed did not really matter. The fact that these two leaders, after years of impasse, were speaking face to face was significant by itself.

The Shanghai Communiqué, which was issued at the end of the President's trip, outlined what had been discussed and agreed upon at the summit.<sup>45</sup> The United States reaffirmed its desire for peace both in Asia and the world, its support of the South Korea and Japan, and its agreement with Nixon's latest peace proposal for Vietnam. The PRC, on the other hand, declared its support for the struggle of oppressed people and nations, its opposition to Japan,

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<sup>43</sup>Stephen E. Ambrose, *Nixon, The Triumph of a Politician 1962-1972*, vol. 2 (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1989), 512.

<sup>44</sup>Nixon, *Memoirs*, 561-63.

<sup>45</sup>President Nixon, "Shanghai: Joint Communiqué," *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents* (Feb. 28, 1972): 473-76.

and its support of North Korea and the Communist peace position in Vietnam. On the issue of Taiwan, the United States acknowledged that Taiwan was part of China, but that it was an issue the Chinese should deal peacefully with themselves. In time, the United States confirmed it would remove its military presence surrounding the country as long as “the tension in the area diminishes.”<sup>46</sup> This last phrase shows the Nixon-Kissinger linkage diplomacy, giving the Chinese government reason to work to end the war in Vietnam. China also asserted that Taiwan was part of China, but that the People’s Republic was the only government of China.

Besides the talk of expanded trade, more regular diplomatic communication, and exchanges of culture, the only true agreement that came out of the communiqué was that both countries opposed any country, including themselves, gaining hegemony in the Asian-Pacific area. This can be seen as directed toward the Soviets, whom the Chinese thought wanted influence in the region. This agreement also reflects the Nixon-Kissinger desire for stability in Asia. Essentially, the communiqué just showed that the Chinese and the Americans agreed to disagree. Thus, the importance of President Nixon’s trip is not what came from it, but simply that it occurred.

The question then becomes whether or not the President’s trip was actually effective in achieving the Nixon-Kissinger goals. In other words, did improved relations with the PRC really give the United States an advantage in talks with the Soviets, as linkage diplomacy suggested? In the months immediately following the President’s announcement of his trip to Peking, Moscow did appear to respond to the new international situation. In a July 24, 1971 article in *Pravda*, less than ten days after the President’s broadcast, the Soviets commented on the new chapter in Sino-American relations: “It goes without saying that any designs to use

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<sup>46</sup>Ibid., 475.

the contacts between Peking and Washington for some ‘pressure’ on the Soviet Union...are nothing but the result of a loss of touch with reality.”<sup>47</sup> Although the Soviet rhetoric alluded to standing firm, shortly thereafter, the Soviet Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin indicated his desire for the President to attend a summit in Moscow. Progress was also made in late August 1971 on Berlin, which had been an area of contention with the Soviet Union. An agreement was reached to limit the harassment of travelers from East Berlin to West Berlin, allow West Berliners to travel using West German passports, and permit a Soviet consulate to be established in West Berlin.<sup>48</sup> Even though the President had yet to visit Peking, just the idea that he was going made the Soviets a little more anxious and encouraged them to work with the United States.

The President went to Moscow in May 1972, three months after opening up China, to work on arms agreements. At the Moscow summit, the Nixon-Kissinger strategy of linking limits on offensive weapons with limits on defensive agreements was successful. The two countries agreed to limit antiballistic missiles (ABMs), and also signed an interim offensive agreement limiting the number of offensive weapons to those currently in existence.<sup>49</sup> In the wake of President Nixon meeting with Chairman Mao Tse-tung, the Soviets naturally became more concerned about their relationship with the United States. They did not want to be left alone in this new era of Sino-American cooperation. It was almost as if Nixon’s trip to Peking shocked the Soviet Union into compromising with the United States, at least in the short run.

However, regardless of whether or not normalization was occurring with China, the Soviet Union needed the strategic arms limitations with the other nuclear superpower, the United States.

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<sup>47</sup>Kissinger, *White House Years*, 766.

<sup>48</sup>Nixon, *Memoirs*, 524.

<sup>49</sup>*Nixon: The Fourth Year of His Presidency*, (Washington D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Inc., 1973), 12.



An arms race between the two countries was occurring during this time, making it in the Soviets' best interests, both economically and strategically, to work out an agreement with the United States, sooner rather than later. In this way, the United States and the Soviet Union would remain on nuclear parity. Strategic Arms Limitations Talks (SALT) began to progress more rapidly after a period of impasse even before Nixon announced that he was going to Peking, which testifies to the fact that the Soviets were serious in wanting improvements.<sup>50</sup> Indirectly, Nixon's trip could have had an effect on Moscow's willingness to cooperate in the later stages of the talks, especially so soon after the historic event. Still, a better relationship between the Soviet Union and the United States in and of itself was probably the main motivator for the increased Soviet cooperation.

As the United States slowly moved towards more normal relations with China in the 1970s after Nixon's initial trip, there is no evidence that Soviet action was influenced as a result. The United States continued to work mainly on arms agreements with the Soviet Union to reduce the chances of nuclear annihilation. During the same time, China and the United States were taking baby steps to diplomatic relations, including the establishment of liaison offices in Washington and Peking in 1973.<sup>51</sup> The relationship between China and the United States was in no way resilient, especially since the Chinese refused to establish diplomatic relations or extensive trade with the United States until Nixon gave up recognition of Chiang Kai-shek's regime on Taiwan and the 1954 defense pact the United States had with him.<sup>52</sup> Nixon was not ready to commit himself to abandoning Taiwan, especially during Watergate when he needed the support of conservative members in Congress who had traditionally supported Chiang Kai-shek. Therefore, from the Soviet perspective, although loose relations

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<sup>50</sup>Nixon, *Memoirs*, 523.

<sup>51</sup>Cohen, *America's Response*, 199.

<sup>52</sup>*Ibid.*

did exist between China and the United States, there were still many issues that needed to be resolved on both sides. The idea that the Soviet Union would feel compelled to work with the United States because of China is not a strong argument because it was in the Soviet Union's best interest to cooperate with the United States to keep nuclear power in balance.

The Nixon-Kissinger strategy of using linkage diplomacy in order to achieve détente with the two largest Communist nations was a great plan on paper, but in reality, not extremely successful. Both the Soviet Union and the PRC were better off working with the United States regardless of whether their rival Communist country was also. The Sino-Soviet split could not hurt the United States in improving relations with these countries, yet it had only an indirect effect, if any, on Soviet motivations for cooperation. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that Nixon's opening of China was beneficial. With a strong anti-communist background and a capable national security assistant in Kissinger, Nixon was able to begin normalization of relations with the PRC that eventually led to full diplomatic recognition in 1979.<sup>53</sup> The Nixon-Kissinger strategy of using China as an incentive for Soviet cooperation was ineffective, but the results of the policy led to a new era in Sino-American relations.

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<sup>53</sup>Ibid., 202.