

Part 1

During the 20th century, there was a major shift in international politics with the emergence of nuclear powers in the 1940s and 1950s. The United States (US) and then later, the Soviet Union (USSR) developed nuclear weapons at the end of the Second World War. Throughout the 20th century, these two nuclear powers split the world into two camps; the US-led capitalist world and the USSR-led Communist world. With the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949 as a Communist state, China was squarely in the USSR's corner.¹ However, with the disintegration of Sino-Soviet relations beginning in the 1960s, the US began courting China in the hopes of establishing a diplomatic relationship with a Communist state.²

It was a shock to the world when US President Nixon traveled to China in 1972 to meet with Chairman Mao Zedong. This trip was part of Nixon's foreign policy plan called detente with the goal of relaxing tensions with the Communist world.³ This was the leader of the 'free world,' a staunch anti-Communist going to visit the second largest Communist country. These two leaders had nothing in common. They had drastically different ideologies, approaches to foreign policy, and goals for their respective countries. However, the goal of the trip was to attempt to build a relationship between the two countries, bridging the two worlds together. It was at this time that the USSR was gaining strength, forcing the US to build up their alliance system and that included China. However, there was little that could be gained from these two powerful leaders meeting. There was little to be progress to be made from these meetings as there were no concessions that either one would make. This was a significant turning point in the Cold War because it demonstrated how little ideology had to do with War by this point.

¹ Lorenz M. Lüthi. Cold Wars: Asia, the Middle East, Europe. (UK: Cambridge University Press, 2020) pg. 117-118

² Lorenz M. Lüthi. Cold Wars: Asia, the Middle East, Europe. (UK: Cambridge University Press, 2020) pg.353-354

³ Lorenz M. Lüthi. Cold Wars: Asia, the Middle East, Europe. (UK: Cambridge University Press, 2020) pg. 524-526

Part 2-

The media coverage of US President Nixon's trip to China in 1972 was widely supportive of the President and his decision to establish a more positive and cooperative relationship with China. American newspapers covered President Nixon's trip to China well in advance of the trip itself. Prior to the trip itself, the media speculated on what the purpose of the visit would be. The announcement of his trip in July of 1971 was met with positive reactions from the press. Some reporters characterized the trip as a smart decision that would help alleviate the economic issues that the United States was facing while others saw this trip as a potential avenue for improving Sino-American relations. Later, there was widespread media coverage of the President while he was in China. At the time of the trip, the American public was supportive. Even after the trip, Nixon's efforts to build a better relationship with China was seen as admirable. Nevertheless, there were people who had reservations about the trip. There were people who did not see this trip as a genuine effort on either party to establish better relations but this was the minority opinion.

Before the trip, the articles were published at intermittent times and given lesser priority than other stories. The highest density of articles prior to the trip were published with the announcement of the trip itself. The scope of the articles were focused on the issues that the US was facing and how China can be used to fix that. The major issues were the economic stagnation in the US, the continued war in Vietnam, as well as the issue of Taiwan.⁴ The US hoped to use China as a way of expanding the US market.⁵ Furthermore, the NYT published that with Nixon's announcement of his trip he planned to maintain all other relationships. Nixon was

⁴ "Four issues: The war, Taiwan, Japan and Russia: Nixon needs China more than China needs Nixon." *Boston Globe* (1960-), Aug 22, 1971.

⁵ A new Marco Polo?: Economic rewards of president's trip to China are hazy at this juncture economic analysis: Benefits of Nixon's trip to China are nebulous. *New York Times* (1923-), Feb 16, 1972.

quoted as saying “our action in seeking a new relationship with the People’s Republic of China will not be at the expense of our old friends.”⁶ The inclusion of multiple issues happening in the southeastern Pacific demonstrates how involved the US was in the southeastern Pacific as part of the Cold War.

One of the earliest mentions about Nixon’s trip was in the New York Times in April 1971 where it was reported that Nixon was skirting questions about Chinese relations,⁷ which was a shift in policy from American presidents’ previous stances as staunchly against China and the Communist world. This was an early indicator that a change was going to take place when the timing was right.

During the trip, there was widespread coverage of the US President and his entourage traveling throughout China. The articles are overwhelmingly supportive of Nixon suggesting popular support of Nixon. There was also evidence of Chinese support of the US President making the trip to China. There are details published in the Boston Globe that chronicled the Chinese’s preparation for the Americans’ arrival.⁸ One American official was quoted in the article as saying “our visit convinced us the Chinese on all levels are looking forward to President Nixon’s visit and that they expect some positive results.”⁹

During the week of President Nixon’s trip in China, there was a poll conducted, and later published in the Boston Globe, that stated that 74% of likely voters in New Hampshire were in support of Nixon’s trip.¹⁰ While this statistic is only indicative of a small population in the US,

⁶ NIXON WILL VISIT CHINA BEFORE NEXT MAY TO SEEK A 'NORMALIZATION OF RELATIONS'; KISSINGER MET CHOU IN PEKING LAST WEEK: MOVE A SURPRISE PRESIDENT SAYS ACTION IS NOT AT EXPENSE OF 'OLD FRIENDS' NIXON WILL VISIT CHINA BEFORE MAY. *New York Times* (1923-), Jul 16, 1971.

⁷ Nixon cools china speculation: Nixon discourages speculation about moves with china nixon warns of too much china guessing. *Los Angeles Times* (1923-1995), Apr 30, 1971.

⁸ Chinese seen eager for visit: Nixon's China party to exceed 300. *Boston Globe* (1960-), Feb 13, 1972.

⁹ Chinese seen eager for visit: Nixon's China party to exceed 300. *Boston Globe* (1960-), Feb 13, 1972.

¹⁰ New Hampshire Poll: 74% of Primary Voters Back Nixon’s China Trip. 1972. *Boston Globe* (1960-), Mar 04, 1972.

New Hampshire, as a voting block, has been historically influential on public perception. New Hampshire holds their primary earlier in the cycle, and is typically a good predictor of a presidential candidate's popularity. 1972 was an American election year and Nixon was running for re-election at this time. Therefore, this poll was indicating that Nixon's popularity was soaring prior to the election in the fall of 1972.

There was a minority in the country that were not as strongly in support of the US President and his attempt to build a relationship with China. There was an article that was published in the NYT during Nixon's trip which recognizes the magnitude of what Nixon was trying to accomplish by going to China and meeting with Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai, the Chinese Foreign Minister. However, the article was critical of the trip and what the author, Vincent Miceli, sees as a weak policy from the American government. Instead of praising Nixon for his impressive attempt at establishing positive diplomatic relations, the author compares Nixon and detente to Neville Chamberlain and his policy of appeasement.¹¹ This article attacks Nixon for being weak and questions why Nixon would make the trek to China if for nothing than to generate feelings of peace without delivering results in the hope of securing the election.¹²

After the trip, well into 1973, the media continued to support Nixon's trip to China as well as the US's continued efforts to establish diplomatic relations.¹³ The American people continuously viewing this trip as a positive thing throughout the early 1970s could suggest that the public perception of the Cold War was shifting. For years, the Communist Bloc and Southeast Asia were propagated against influencing American public opinion against them. For much of the 20th century, the American public was pitted against the Communist world. However, in the 1970s, the American public was becoming receptive to having an established

¹¹ Nixon in China -- A political pilgrim. *New York Times* (1923-), Feb 19, 1972.

¹² Nixon in China -- A political pilgrim. *New York Times* (1923-), Feb 19, 1972.

¹³ Mr. Nixon's remarkable China policy: WASHINGTON. *New York Times* (1923-), Feb 23, 1973.

relationship with the Communist country. The reason for this shift could have something to do with the dissatisfaction with the continued tension between the US and foreign powers.

Part 3-

The official government documents from the United States show an intricate network of confidential communications between American and Chinese officials. The documents are evidential of genuine effort on the Americans' part to establish diplomatic relations. The documents show US government officials discussing the policies of US involvement in Vietnam, Pakistan, and Taiwan. The key figures that are most commonly mentioned in the confidential documents were surprising. While Nixon and Mao are often expectedly discussed, it is American National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger whose name is startlingly found on almost every document.

The overwhelming evidence suggests that the American government was trying to establish a mutual relationship with China from various communications and memorandums between American leaders and officials like Nixon and Kissinger. The conversations between American officials included details about Nixon's trip to China and the level of preparation that went into planning it.¹⁴ Much of the confidential documentation focused on ways to entice China to ally themselves with the US. There was also documentation about the US's incentives to establish a better relationship with China. These incentives included economic benefits which the US desperately needed due to their stagnating economy.

However, there were reservations on behalf of the Americans and Chinese that were also well documented. Kissinger wrote a memorandum to Nixon in late October, 1971, detailing that the Chinese were civil in their manners but that the Americans were not as warmly greeted as he might have hoped for.¹⁵ The rest of the memorandum described the visit, including details about

¹⁴ "Transcript of a Telephone Conversation Between President Nixon and his Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)" April 27, 1971, FRUS, 1969-1972 volume XVII, doc. 120

¹⁵ "Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon," October 29, 1971, FRUS, 1969-1972 volume XVII, doc. 163

the convoy's arrival to their lodgings where the Americans discovered English anti-American propaganda. Kissinger describes taking down the propaganda and returning to the Chinese officials which was awkward for both parties.¹⁶ From this memorandum, it was indicated to American government officials that progress on diplomatic relations was stalled. It was clear to the Americans that there were government officials in China that did not want a diplomatic relationship with the US.

There is extensive discussion over American policy on Vietnam and Taiwan. When the Americans would discuss their police action in Vietnam in the context of their relationship with China, they discussed Chinese assistance in ending the continued police action. In contrast, China defended Vietnam's military actions against the US in a note to the Defense Attache Walters in 1972, with the intention of having the information later given to Kissinger. The Chinese Ambassador, who delivered the note, told Walters that the US's aggression against the Vietnamese made any action against the US justifiable.¹⁷ The Ambassador explains that because the US invaded Vietnam, and humiliated Vietnam, there is no boundary that the Vietnam military could not cross. The Chinese government made it clear that they would not support US involvement in Vietnam. This could be a setback for Sino-American relations because the Chinese were, in effect, supporting a country that was actively fighting with the US.

The issue of Taiwan and its independence was also a subject of great debate in the official government documents. However, Kissinger informs Nixon in a memorandum in late 1971 the details of his October meeting with Zhou Enlai.¹⁸ The Chinese government was actively looking for the Americans' support for reunifying China. Kissinger explained that he made it clear to

¹⁶ "Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon," October 29, 1971, FRUS, 1969-1972 volume XVII, doc. 163

¹⁷ From the Defense Attaché in France (Walters) to the President's Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs (Haig) January 30, 1972, FRUS, 1969-1972 volume XVII, doc. 187

¹⁸ Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon November 1971, FRUS, 1969-1972 volume XVII, doc. 164

Zhou that the US could not make any commitments. He adds that the US will begin to move troops out of Taiwan after the Vietnam War.¹⁹ This was an interesting concession to make as there was not a clear end to the War in sight.

The key government officials that were the most often mentioned in the government documents was one of the most compelling elements of the archives. The most frequently mentioned individuals are Nixon and Mao which is unsurprising as they are the official heads of state for their respective countries. However, it is interesting to note that Kissinger played such a substantive role in the decisions. Kissinger says in a conversation with various US government officials, including Nixon, “actually I don’t want to toot my own horn, but I happen to be the only one who knows all the negotiations.”²⁰ While Kissinger held a powerful position in the US government, he did take liberties with his privileges. Kissinger communicated with the President on an almost daily basis according to official White House documentation. From these documents, it was clear that Kissinger had a significant amount of influence over the US’s involvement in China and the rest of southeastern Asia.

¹⁹ Memorandum From the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon November 1971, FRUS, 1969-1972 volume XVII, doc. 164

²⁰ “Transcript of a Telephone Conversation Between President Nixon and his Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)” April 27, 1971, FRUS, 1969-1972 volume XVII, doc. 120

Part 4-

The newspaper coverage and official government documents from the United States in the early 1970s depict a similar narrative. Both the newspaper coverage and official government documents discuss the hope for a cooperative relationship between the US and China. In the newspapers, there was widespread speculation of what Nixon and Chairman Mao would discuss when they met in China. This was also a common theme in the government documents. Many sources that were written immediately after President Nixon's visit to China were still optimistic about the potential shift in Sino-American relations. However, many recognized the little slow progress that had been made despite both sides' efforts.

There was an overwhelming commitment to establishing a positive diplomatic relationship with the People's Republic of China in the primary sources from the early 1970s. In the majority of newspaper articles, Nixon was trumpeted as a strong leader who was undertaking the impressive feat that no president has dared to do before him.

While there were some articles that questioned the end goals of Nixon's trip to China, it was a small minority. It was unclear to the public what a successful trip would look like. In confidential government documents, it was communicated between American officials that the progress was slow moving and marginal.

In both types of sources, there was a wide discussion of issues that needed to be resolved between the US and China including the US intervention in Vietnam which proved to be another source of discourse. The US wanted the Chinese government to engage with the Vietnamese and back the US intervention. However, the Chinese government was clear that it had no intention of supporting the continued US assault on the Vietnamese. Furthermore, there was a broader scope of issues mentioned in the official government documents including the US policy on Taiwan.

Similarly to the Chinese maintaining neutrality in Vietnam, the US wanted to maintain neutrality with the issue of Taiwanese independence. The key difference between the media coverage and the government documents was in what figures are mentioned and discussed. In newspapers, it was the official heads of state that are the primary figures. The media was focused on President Nixon as well as Chairman Mao. However, in the government documents, it was National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger that had his name on almost every document. This disparity between the public newspaper coverage and the confidential government documents presents an understanding that Kissinger had a secret influence over the US's involvement in Chinese relations.

In conclusion, the primary sources from the early 1970s suggest that the United States was committed to establishing cooperative diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China. This was significant as it was a marked shift from the two states' previous policies of tension and opposition. There was a genuine effort on behalf of the US to have a working relationship with China. However, the ideological split between the two countries, as well as a lack of trust, made developing a committed and cooperative diplomatic relationship difficult. The disagreement in the handling of US intervention in Vietnam and lack of the US's support for Chinese reunification were two issues that caused contention. The policy of detente was a marginal success that fell short simply because of the two states' inability to make significant concessions due to their deeply entrenched ideological differences.