

China's Elite Politics and Sino-American Rapprochement, January 1969–February 1972

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Western scholars have long assumed that opposition existed in the upper levels of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to the efforts by Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai in the late 1960s and early 1970s to reach out to the United States.¹ Documents and first-hand accounts published in China over the last two decades cast doubt on this argument. The new Chinese-language sources contravene the rumors that Chinese leaders were divided over the rapprochement with the United States—rumors that stem mainly from Henry Kissinger's account of the way Mao depicted Lin Biao during a meeting with Richard Nixon in February 1972.

This article examines China's policymaking process vis-à-vis the United

1. During the Sino-American summit in February 1972, Mao intentionally gave this impression, telling Nixon, "In our country also there is a reactionary group which is opposed to our contact with you. The result was that they got on an airplane and fled abroad." See "Memorandum of Conversation [Mao and Nixon], 21 February 1972," Box 91, National Security Council Files (NSCF), Nixon Presidential Materials Project (NPMP), National Archives II (NARA). Henry Kissinger wrote in his memoirs that Lin Biao, then Chinese defense minister and Mao's designated successor, opposed China's rapprochement with the United States. See Henry Kissinger, *White House Years* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1979), pp. 696–697. This allegation has been continually disseminated in Western writings. See, for example, Kenneth Lieberthal, "Domestic Politics and Foreign Policy," in Harry Harding, ed., *China's Foreign Relations in the 1980s* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), p. 52; John Garver, *China's Decision for Rapprochement with the United States, 1969–1971* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1982), pp. 134–137; Robert S. Ross, "From Lin Biao to Deng Xiaoping: Elite Instability and China's U.S. Policy," *China Quarterly*, No. 118 (June 1989), pp. 267–268; Rosemary Foot, *The Practice of Power: U.S. Relations with China since 1949* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1995), p. 105; Robert Ross, *Negotiating Cooperation: The United States and China, 1969–1989* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995), p. 27; and William Bundy, *A Tangled Web: The Making of Foreign Policy in the Nixon Presidency* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1998), pp. 109, 165. Most recently, James Mann, *About Face: A History of America's Curious Relationship with China* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999), p. 26; and Jeffrey Kimball, *Nixon's Vietnam War* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1998), p. 261. Robert Garson claimed that Mao's wife, Jiang Qing, the leader of the radicals, was against rapprochement with the United States. See Robert Garson, *The United States and China since 1949* (Teaneck, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1994), p. 123. In a recent, controversial biography of Mao Zedong, Jung Chang and Jon Halliday say nothing about Lin Biao's alleged role in Sino-American rapprochement. See Jung Chang and Jon Halliday, *Mao: The Unknown Story* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005).

States during the crucial period from January 1969 to February 1972. It traces the positions of senior Chinese leaders (especially Mao, Lin, and Zhou) regarding major events in U.S.-China relations, including the “Four Marshals’ Study Group”; the instructions given to Lei Yang regarding the final two Sino-American ambassadorial talks; the advent of “ping-pong diplomacy;” the CCP Politburo meeting in May 1971 regarding Kissinger’s secret visit in July; the rough treatment of Alexander Haig’s advance team in China in January 1972; and the controversy over drafts of a joint communiqué during Nixon’s China trip.

China’s Foreign Policymaking Structure under Mao: 1949–1976

Domestic politics is the “internal setting” of foreign policy.² In a democratic society, domestic constraints on foreign policy include public opinion, the legislature, the media, and powerful interest groups. Under Mao’s autocratic control, however, foreign policy decision-making in China was left to a small coterie of political elites. Some Western scholars have assumed that “opinion groups” in China were able to exert influence on the CCP Politburo and that factions existed within the Chinese leadership.³ This article challenges the “factionalism model” by focusing on China’s foreign policymaking in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

From the time the People’s Republic of China (PRC) was founded in 1949, Mao, as the chairman of the CCP, had sufficient power to set the foreign policy agenda and guidelines on his own. He consigned Premier Zhou Enlai, who was also foreign minister, to the role of a manager overseeing day-to-day aspects of foreign affairs. The role of the five-man CCP Secretariat, and later the Standing Committee of the Politburo, was to accord legitimacy to major policy decisions made by Mao. The Politburo meetings helped him weigh the pros and cons of major foreign policy decisions and to overcome opposition and build consensus once he had made up his mind.⁴ Until the

2. Richard C. Snyder, H. W. Bruck, and Burton Sapin, “The Decision-Making Approach to the Study of International Politics,” in James N. Rosenau, ed., *International Politics and Foreign Policy: A Reader in Research and Theory* (New York: Free Press, 1969), p. 203.

3. Andrew Nathan, “A Factionalism Model for CCP Politics,” *China Quarterly*, No. 53 (January–March 1973), p. 34. Responding to Nathan’s “factionalism model,” Tang Tsou argues that “Nathan’s model explains only a small part of Chinese elite politics” and has a narrow focus. See Tsou, “Chinese Politics at the Top: Factionalism or Informal Politics? Balance-of-Power Politics or a Game to Win All?” *China Journal*, No. 34 (July 1995), p. 122.

4. Lu Ning, *The Dynamics of Foreign-Policy Decision-Making in China*, 2nd ed. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2000), pp. 161–162.

Cultural Revolution in 1966, “Mao alone received Foreign Ministry options papers from Zhou Enlai for decision, with information copies to Liu Shaoqi, Deng Xiaoping, and Peng Zhen.”⁵ This procedure was temporarily interrupted during the early period of the Cultural Revolution, especially from May to August 1967.⁶ Mao and Zhou, however, were able to resume full control of foreign policy decision-making after August 1967.

Because interest groups, the media, and public opinion in China had no independent influence on foreign policy during the Maoist era (1949–1976), analysis of China’s elite politics is crucial in understanding how policy was made during that time. The elite is a collectivity “having a separate identity, internal structure, and elevated status based upon its special role in the decision-making and enforcing process.”⁷ During the Maoist decades, China’s political elite consisted of the key CCP, state, and military leaders,⁸ and China’s foreign policy political elite included Mao, Lin, Zhou, and other Politburo members. This article analyses the positions and interactions of these key figures in the making of China’s policy toward the United States from 1969 to 1972.

Four Marshals’ Study Group

Since 1965, China and the Soviet Union had continually expanded their military forces along their shared border. Tensions between the two countries increased further during the Cultural Revolution, and by 1968–1969 each side had amassed several hundred thousand troops along the border. In early 1968, Sino-Soviet conflict erupted around Qilixin Island, on the Chinese side of the main channel of the Ussuri River, a prelude to large-scale armed

5. Carol Lee Hamrin, “Elite Politics and Foreign Relations,” in Thomas W. Robinson and David Shambaugh, eds., *Chinese Foreign Policy: Theory and Practice* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1994), p. 83.

6. From May to August 1967, the Foreign Ministry did not function normally because of the assault from the “rebel faction.” All leading cadres, including Foreign Minister Chen Yi, were under fire and not allowed to work. China’s relations with many countries deteriorated. The office of the British chargé d’affaires in Beijing was set on fire by the “rebel faction” on 22 August 1967. After this incident, Zhou Enlai, with Mao’s support, regained control over foreign affairs. For a Chinese version of this period, see Jin Ge, “Zai wajiaobu ‘duoquan’ qianhou” [The Beginning and End of “Seizing Power” in the Foreign Ministry], in An Jianshe, ed., *Zhou Enlai de zuibou suiyue, 1966–1976* [Zhou Enlai’s Final Years, 1966–1976] (Beijing: Zhongyang Wenxian Chubanshe, 1995), pp. 207–243.

7. Robert A. Scalapino, “Introduction,” in Robert A. Scalapino, ed., *Elites in the People’s Republic of China* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1972), p. vi.

8. Avery Goldstein, “Trends in the Study of Political Elites and Institutions in the PRC,” *China Quarterly*, No. 139 (September 1994), p. 714.

conflicts the following year.⁹ The Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968 heightened Chinese leaders' concern about Soviet intentions.

When intense armed conflicts between Chinese and Soviet border forces broke out in March 1969 on Zhenbao Island (called Damansky Island in Russian) near the bank of the Ussuri River, China's security situation dramatically worsened. Soon border conflicts spread to other areas as tension increased along the entire length of the border. These incidents brought China and the Soviet Union to the brink of a major military confrontation. Kissinger claims that Soviet leaders even considered conducting a preemptive nuclear strike against their former Communist ally.¹⁰ It is not surprising that Mao and his colleagues felt compelled to respond to the Soviet Union by embarking on major changes in China's foreign and security strategy.

After the Ninth CCP Congress in April 1969, the most radical phase of the Cultural Revolution was over. Chinese ambassadors, who were recalled at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, returned to their posts one by one, and Chinese diplomacy gradually returned to normality.¹¹ The stabilization of Chinese politics was favorable to the improvement of Sino-American relations. Even before the Ninth Party Congress, Zhou Enlai had been giving Mao articles about notable developments in international affairs, important commentaries, and possible Chinese responses. This was an oft-employed technique by Zhou when important policies were under consideration, insofar it allowed him to exert discreet influence on Mao's decision-making.¹²

In mid-May, Zhou Enlai at Mao's behest asked four veteran marshals—Chen Yi, Ye Jianying, Xu Xiangqian, and Nie Rongzhen—to “pay attention to” international affairs. He urged them to meet “two to three times a month” to discuss “important issues” of international security and to provide the CCP Central Committee (CC) with their suggestions.¹³ Zhou told the marshals

9. Yang Kuisong, “Cong Zhenbaodao Zhizhan dao Huanhe Zhong Mei Guanxi” [From the Battle at the Zhenbao Island to Sino-American Rapprochement], *Dangshi yanjiu ziliao* [Materials on Party History Research], No. 12 (1997), pp. 7–8; and Xu Yan, “1969 Nian Zhong Su bianjie chongtu” [The Sino-Soviet Border Conflict of 1969], *Dangshi yanjiu ziliao*, No. 5 (1994), pp. 6–10.

10. Kissinger claimed in his memoirs that in August 1969 a Soviet diplomat in Washington inquired “what the U.S. reaction would be to a Soviet attack on Chinese nuclear facilities.” See Kissinger, *White House Years*, p. 183; and discussions in Yang, “Cong Zhenbaodao Zhizhan dao Huanhe Zhong Mei Guanxi,” p. 12. Later that year the Western press also reported rumors of Soviet plans to strike at Chinese nuclear bases. Whether these overtures reflected actual planning or were merely part of a disinformation campaign to exert psychological pressure on Chinese leaders is uncertain.

11. All Chinese ambassadors except Huang Hua in Egypt were called back to take part in the Cultural Revolution.

12. Gao Wenqian, *Wannian Zhou Enlai* [Zhou Enlai's Later Years] (Hong Kong: Mirror Books, 2003), p. 407.

13. Xiong Xianghui, *Wo de qingbao yu waijiao shengya* [My Career in Intelligence and Diplomacy] (Beijing: Zhongyang Dangxiao Chubanshe, 1999), p. 166. Because Xiong was assistant to the Four

not to be “restricted by any established frame of reference.” They should help Mao “gain an understanding of new strategic developments” in the world. Zhou stressed that Mao had assigned them the task because they were marshals with a good deal of military experience and clear strategic vision. Presumably, they would have a much better grasp of China’s position in the changing world situation. Only Mao, Zhou, the four marshals, and their two assistants—Xiong Xianghui, a high-ranking intelligence and foreign service officer; and Yao Guang, the director-general of the Foreign Ministry’s Department of European and American Affairs—knew about the study group.¹⁴

Another major border clash, much larger than the two at Zhenbao Island in March, broke out between Chinese and Soviet garrisons in Xinjiang on 13 August.¹⁵ Chinese leaders warned that Moscow was preparing to launch a major war. The situation deteriorated rapidly in subsequent weeks. On 27 August, the CCP Central Committee and Central Military Commission issued an urgent order to set up a new “National Leading Group for the People’s Air Defense,” with Zhou Enlai as the head, assigning to it the task of immediately organizing the large-scale evacuation of people and major industries from the big cities.¹⁶ On 28 August, the CCP Central Committee ordered a military mobilization in the provinces and regions bordering the Soviet Union and Mongolia.¹⁷

Although the Four Marshals’ Study Group believed that the Soviet Union would probably not wage an all-out war against China, they emphasized the need for Beijing to be prepared for a worst-case scenario. Chen Yi and Ye Jianying contended that in order for China to be ready for a major confrontation with the Soviet Union, “the card of the United States” should be played. In a written report, “Our Views about the Current Situation,” completed on 17 September, they pointed out that although Moscow was intending to

Marshals’ Study Group, his account is more reliable than other Chinese sources. The marshals’ first meeting was on 7 June 1969. According to Chinese scholar Wang Yongqin, Mao first instructed the four marshals on 19 February to study the international situation. He again asked them on 22 March and 19 April to survey the international scene. See Wang Yongqin, “1966–1976 Nian Zhong Mei Su guanxi jishi, lianzai 1” [Chronicle of Sino-American-Soviet Relations, 1966–1976, Part I], *Dangdai Zhongguoshi yanjiu* [Contemporary China History Studies], No. 4 (1997), pp. 118–119, 121.

14. Xiong, *Wo de qingbao yu waijiao shengya*, pp. 166–167.

15. Xu, “1969 Nian Zhong Su bianjie chongtu,” p. 10; and Yang, “Cong Zhenbaodao Zhizhan dao Huanhe Zhong Mei Guanxi,” pp. 11–19.

16. CCP Central Committee and Administrative Group of the Central Military Commission, “Report on Measures Needed to Be Taken to Enhance Air Defense,” 27 August 1969, Chinese Central Archives: quoted in Yang Kuisong, “The Sino-Soviet Border Clash of 1969: From Zhenbao Island to Sino-American Rapprochement,” *Cold War History*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (August 2000), pp. 36–37.

17. See “The CCP Central Committee’s Order for General Mobilization in Border Provinces and Regions,” 28 August 1969, *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, Issue No. 11 (Winter 1998), pp. 168–169.

“wage war against China” and had actually deployed forces for this purpose, the Soviet Politburo was unable “to reach a final decision” because of political considerations. The marshals proposed that, in addition to waging “a tit-for-tat struggle against both the United States and the Soviet Union,” China should use “negotiation as a means of struggle against them.” Perhaps the Sino-American ambassadorial talks should be resumed “when the timing is proper.”¹⁸

The report by the Four Marshals’ Study Group provided Chinese leaders with a strategic assessment that emphasized the benefits of improving Sino-American relations. As subsequent developments revealed, the marshals’ reports to Mao and Zhou was the catalyst for important decisions regarding the United States, paving the way for the Sino-American rapprochement. During the heyday of the Cultural Revolution, Mao’s power was unchallengeable, but he had to take into consideration potential opposition from the “ultra-leftists,” many of whom would have had difficulty understanding an abrupt change in policy toward the United States.¹⁹ There is no evidence, however, that Lin Biao, Mao’s second in command, was informed or aware of the marshals’ assignment. The marshals themselves, in their memoirs or biographies, gave no indication that they had ever consulted in any fashion with Lin Biao about Sino-American relations.²⁰

The war scare gave Chinese leaders sufficient incentive, both strategically and psychologically, to reconsider their long-standing confrontation with the United States. The perception of an extremely grave threat from the Soviet Union pushed Mao Zedong to break with the existing conceptual framework of Chinese policy.²¹ The catch was how to establish a communication channel.

18. Xiong, *Wo de qingbao yu waijiao shengya*, pp. 184–186.

19. Gao, *Wannian Zhou Enlai*, p. 408.

20. Xu Xiangqian, *Lishi de huigu* [Reflections on History], 3 vols. (Beijing: Jiefangjun Chubanshe, 1987), 3: p. 848; and “Dangdai Zhongguo Renwu Zhuanji” Congshu Bianjibu [Editorial Board of Biographical Series of Contemporary Chinese Figures], *Chen Yi zhuan* [Biography of Chen Yi] (Beijing: Dangdai Zhongguo Chubanshe, 1991), pp. 614–615.

21. The historian Chen Jian contends that the geopolitics-centered interpretation alone does not fully reveal the complicated reasons for Mao’s decision to improve relations with the United States. To achieve a better understanding of the issue, he places the Sino-American rapprochement in the context of the fading status of Mao’s continuous revolution. Chen points out that the Sino-American rapprochement came at a time when the Cultural Revolution and the more general enterprise of Mao’s continuous revolution had been declining. See Chen Jian, *Mao’s China and the Cold War* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), p. 239. My own view is that multiple factors, including the decade-long Sino-American ambassadorial talks, China’s nuclear arsenal, the U.S. quagmire in Vietnam, and Nixon’s personality contributed to the U.S.-China rapprochement.

The Resumption of the Warsaw Channel

In September 1969, Soviet leaders attempted to hold a summit meeting with their Chinese counterparts in order to relax the tension that had been building since March. After some complications, Soviet Prime Minister Aleksei Kosygin was able to meet with his Chinese counterpart, Zhou Enlai, at Beijing airport on 11 September.²² Mao had several reasons for agreeing to these talks. He was interested in mitigating the tension with the USSR after the two costly border clashes and was seeking to avoid a two-front war (against both the Soviet Union and the United States). He also wanted to reduce any chance of Soviet-American collusion. Zhou sought to use the occasion to provoke U.S. interest in a possible Sino-American rapprochement. To this end, Zhou tried hard to avoid “closeness” and “friendliness” with Kosygin, lest he send the wrong signals to Washington. The subsequent Sino-Soviet border negotiations at the level of deputy foreign ministers gave the United States another impetus to improve relations with the PRC.²³

The Chinese strategy seemed to work well. U.S. officials began to rethink their policy toward China. In late 1969 and early 1970, the Nixon administration made several attempts to establish direct talks with China. During the summer senior U.S. officials had been in secret contact with the Chinese through the Pakistanis and Romanians.²⁴ To supplement these indirect chan-

22. Western journalists suspected that Kosygin planned to meet with Zhou Enlai at Ho Chi Minh's funeral in early September 1969. Zhou led a Chinese delegation to the funeral, arriving on 4 September and leaving the same day. Chinese spokesmen denied that Zhou had deliberately avoided a meeting with Kosygin, though the snub was obvious. After arriving in Hanoi on 6 September, Kosygin with help from the Chinese embassy proposed to meet with Zhou in Beijing en route to Moscow. However, Kosygin did not hear back until 11 September, by which time he was already in Dushanbe, the capital of Soviet Tajikistan. See Jin Chongji, ed., *Zhou Enlai zhuan, 1949–1976* [A Biography of Zhou Enlai, 1949–1976], 2 vols. (Beijing: Zhongyang Wenxian Chubanshe, 1998), pp. 1083–1084; and Wang Taiping, ed., *Zhonghua renmin gongheguo waijiaoshi, 1957–1969* [A Diplomatic History of the People's Republic of China, 1957–1969] (Beijing: Shijie Zhishi Chubanshe, 1998), pp. 274–276.

23. Gao, *Wannian Zhou Enlai*, p. 411. The Sino-Soviet border negotiations, which started on 20 October 1969, continued with a few interruptions until the late 1980s. Chinese leaders tried to give the impression that if the United States remained uncompromising in negotiation with the PRC, a breakthrough might occur in Sino-Soviet relations. See Alexei Elizavetin, “Kosygin-Zhou Talks at Beijing Airport,” *Far Eastern Affairs*, Nos. 1–3 (1993), pp. 52–54.

24. During an around-the-world trip in August 1969, Nixon informed Romanian and Pakistani leaders that he was interested in improving relations with the PRC. In the late summer and fall of that year, Pakistani president Yahya Khan offered to play an active role in the quest. The Pakistani channel gave Nixon and Kissinger a secret avenue for communication that bypassed the State Department. In December, the Pakistani ambassador to the United States, Agha Hilaly, transmitted the first direct message from the PRC. Hilaly reported that Chinese leaders had released two detained Americans and were willing to resume the Warsaw talks without preconditions. Kissinger replied that the United States was interested in improving relations. See Steven Phillips, “Nixon's China Initiative, 1969–1972,” in U.S. Department of State, *Documenting Diplomacy in the 21st Century* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2001), p. 135.

nels, Nixon and Kissinger decided to reopen the long-suspended U.S.-China ambassadorial talks in Warsaw.²⁵ In September 1969 they ordered Walter Stoessel, the U.S. ambassador to Poland, to contact his Chinese counterpart for a new meeting. To Kissinger's irritation, it took almost three months before Stoessel could approach Chinese diplomats in Warsaw. Kissinger was exploring possible paths for an earlier meeting when U.S. intelligence learned of a secret directive issued by Zhou Enlai to Chinese embassies in November calling for greater diplomatic flexibility to protect China from the Soviet Union. Zhou declared that the PRC's "flexible tactics" would include a resumption of talks with Washington to keep Moscow off balance and exacerbate U.S.-Soviet tensions. Meanwhile, for domestic political consumption, Zhou stated that Beijing would not abandon its "revolutionary principles," the first of many times over the next few years that Chinese leaders made this pledge.²⁶

Stoessel acted in an unusual fashion when, on 3 December, he spotted Chinese diplomats at a Yugoslav fashion show at Warsaw's Palace of Culture and followed them outside the building afterward. The Chinese diplomats, caught off guard, quickly fled. Stoessel ran after them and was able to catch the Chinese interpreter, telling him in "broken Polish" that he had an important message for the Chinese embassy.²⁷

The Chinese embassy sent a report to Beijing about the U.S. ambassador's "unusual behavior," and it was conveyed to Zhou Enlai. Up to this point, Mao and Zhou had regarded Nixon's probing as only exploratory. But

25. China and the United States had originally agreed to hold the 135th session of the ambassadorial talks on 20 February 1969.

26. U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, Intelligence Memorandum, "Signs of Life in Chinese Foreign Policy," 11 April 1970, copy at National Security Archive; quoted in William Burr, "Sino-American Relations, 1969: Sino-Soviet Border Conflict and Steps toward Rapprochement," *Cold War History*, Vol. 1, No. 3 (April 2001), p. 97.

27. Xue Mouhong, ed., *Dangdai Zhongguo waijiao* [Contemporary Chinese Diplomacy] (Beijing: Zhongguo Shehui Kexue Chubanshe, 1990), p. 219. See also Stoessel to Secretary of State, 3 December 1969, pp. 23–28, POL-US, Subject-Numeric Files, 1967–1969, Record Group (RG) 59, NARA. In the telegram Stoessel mistakenly said that the Chinese diplomat he tried to approach was Lei Yang, the Chinese chargé d'affaires to Poland. Actually, it was Li Juqing, the Chinese embassy's second secretary, and the interpreter was Jing Zhicheng. See Luo Yisu, "Zai Bolan de suiye" [My Years in Poland], in Wang Taiping, ed., *Dangdai Zhongguo shijie waijiao shengya* [Diplomatic Careers of Contemporary Chinese Envoys] (Beijing: Shijie Zhishi Chubanshe, 1996), pp. 179–180; and Zong Daoyi, "Xin Zhongguo waijiaoshi ruogan shishi kaoding" [Textual Research into Some Facts of Chinese Diplomatic History], *Dangdai Zhongguoshi yanjiu*, No. 6, (1997), pp. 103–109. Kissinger was dissatisfied with Stoessel's delay in establishing contact and sent three cables warning him that "either you do it or we will get someone who will." Stoessel claimed that he was unable to approach Chinese officials privately at any party or diplomatic reception that fall and winter. See Seymour M. Hersh, *The Price of Power: Kissinger in the White House* (New York: Summit Books, 1983), p. 359. It is not clear why the United States did not contact Beijing through the extant channel between the Chinese and U.S. embassy second secretaries in Warsaw. One possibility is that the second-secretary-level contact was only for routine issues, and the Chinese did not regard the channel as important.

upon hearing about the incident, the Chinese leaders seemed convinced that the Americans were serious, and they responded swiftly. Zhou told Mao that “the opportunity is coming; we now have a brick in our hands to knock at the door.”²⁸ At Mao’s instruction, Zhou acted at once to let the Americans know of Beijing’s interest in reopening communication with Washington. On 4 December, Zhou, with Mao’s approval, made a goodwill gesture by ordering the release of two Americans who had been held in China since mid-February 1969, when their yacht had strayed into China’s territorial water off Guangdong.²⁹

Stoessel’s encounter with the Chinese diplomats at the Yugoslav fashion show was a turning point in U.S.-China relations. It convinced Mao and Zhou that the United States was genuinely interested in improving relations with the PRC, and it happened at a time when the Chinese leaders were fearful of war with the Soviet Union. They were looking for opportunities to ameliorate relations with the United States in order to offset the Soviet Union. Moreover, the circumstances of the Stoessel incident were useful for Mao and Zhou, who could cite it in telling their Chinese colleagues that “it is the Americans who need something from us, not the other way around.” The two leaders would retell the story and repeat the theme time and again.³⁰

In reality, the PRC’s quest to resume the ambassadorial talks had been under way for some time. When the first group of Chinese ambassadors returned to their posts after the Ninth Party Congress, Lei Yang was appointed chargé d’affaires in Poland in June 1969. Although Lei was not an ambassador in rank, he was a senior diplomat, having served as director of the Foreign Ministry’s education department for many years. Before Lei left for Poland, Zhou Enlai urged him to study the record of Sino-American ambassadorial contacts and to keep an eye out for signs of change in U.S. policy so that he could report back on anything significant. Zhou emphasized the importance of retaining the “Warsaw channel.” As instructed, Lei carefully went through the records of the Sino-American ambassadorial talks and other written materials on U.S.-China relations before departing for Warsaw.³¹

On 20 January 1970, China and the United States agreed to resume the ambassadorial talks, with sessions alternating between the Chinese and U.S.

28. Jin, ed., *Zhou Enlai zhuan*, Vol. 2, p. 1087.

29. Zhongyang wenxian yanjiushi [Division of CCP Central Archives and Manuscripts], comp., *Zhou Enlai nianpu: 1949–1976* [Chronicle of Zhou Enlai], Vol. 3 (Beijing: Zhongyang Wenxian and Renmin Chubanshe, 1997), p. 336; Jin, ed., *Zhou Enlai zhuan*, Vol. 2, p. 1088; and Kissinger, *White House Years*, p. 188.

30. Interview with CCP historians who requested anonymity, in Beijing, January 2002.

31. Qian Jiang, “Huifu Zhong Mei Huasha Huitan de Qibu” [The Beginning of the Renewal of Sino-American Warsaw Talks], *Bainianchao* [Hundred-Year Tide], No. 3 (2000), pp. 20–21.

embassies.³² To prepare for the talks, the Foreign Ministry drafted instructions and an opening statement for Lei Yang, and submitted the drafts to Zhou Enlai for amendment. Zhou added the following instructions:

After your speech, if the U.S. reiterates that the U.S. and Taiwan have a relationship based on a treaty, you should reply in such terms as “The U.S.-ROC (the Republic of China) Treaty is not recognized by the Chinese people”; if the U.S. side inquires about what the higher-level talks or other channels refer to, you should respond by saying that if the U.S. government is interested, it can make a proposal or work out a solution upon mutual agreement at the ambassadorial-level talks.³³

The Chinese leaders believed that because “Nixon at present appears to be a bit more sober-minded than Brezhnev . . . the policy of engagement is necessary.”³⁴

Meanwhile, Zhou had to spend much time and energy to surmount obstacles posed by the ultra-leftists on the home front. Because China was still in the midst of the Cultural Revolution, it was inconceivable even to talk about improving relations with the United States—the number one imperialist country. Even the PRC Foreign Ministry, which was under Zhou’s direct supervision, was not immune to leftist influence. Besides, the Chinese government had proclaimed in 1960 that no progress was expected in U.S.-PRC relations until the Taiwan issue was solved. The rank and file at the Foreign Ministry were understandably slow in responding to any change. Zhou was worried and reported the problem to Mao, who offered his support. Zhou then relayed Mao’s instruction to his subordinates, assuring them it was ideo-

32. Luo, “Zai Bolan de suiye,” p. 181; Stoessel to the Secretary of State, 8 January 1970, POL Chicom, Subject-Numeric Files, 1970–1973, RG 59, NARA. Two points should be noted here. First, in the past the U.S.-Chinese ambassadorial talks in Warsaw had been held in a venue arranged by the Polish government. This time, by contrast, the Americans sought to preserve secrecy by shifting the meetings to the two embassies, a proposal immediately accepted by the Chinese. Informal meetings were held in the respective embassies in Warsaw on 11 December 1969 and 8 January 1970. Stoessel was invited to the Chinese embassy for tea on 11 December and was instructed to arrive at the front door in order to send a signal to Moscow. Second, because China did not have an ambassador in Poland at the time, the final two sets of talks were held between Chinese chargé d’affaires Lei Yang and U.S. ambassador Stoessel. The Chinese ambassador to Poland, Wang Guoquan, had been recalled to China in July 1967 to take part in the Cultural Revolution. The 134th session of the ambassadorial talks was held between Chinese chargé d’affaires Chen Dong and U.S. ambassador John Gronouski as “a temporary solution” in Warsaw on 8 January 1968. On the Sino-American ambassadorial talks in the 1960s, see Yafeng Xia, “Negotiating at Cross-Purposes: Sino-American Ambassadorial Talks, 1961–1968,” *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, Vol. 16, No. 2 (June 2005), pp. 297–329.

33. Zhongyang wenxian yanjiushi, *Zhou Enlai nianpu*, p. 344.

34. “Zhou Enlai’s Talk with Khwaja Mohammad Kaiser, Pakistan’s Ambassador to China, 22 January 1970,” cited in Robert Ross and Jiang Changbin, eds., *Re-examining the Cold War: U.S.-China Diplomacy, 1954–1973* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2001), p. 337.

logically acceptable to improve relations with the United States.³⁵ There is no evidence from Chinese sources that Lin Biao or other senior officials ever objected to the resumption of the Warsaw talks.

Ping-Pong Diplomacy

The 136th session of the Sino-American ambassadorial talks (it turned out to be the final session) was held on 20 February 1970. In late April, when Nixon ordered U.S. troops in South Vietnam to conduct a large-scale cross-border operation to destroy Vietnamese Communist bases inside Cambodia, the Chinese halted the talks in Warsaw.³⁶ The collapse of the Warsaw channel moved the venue of communications with the Chinese to the White House, which had been in secret contact with the Chinese through the Pakistanis since the previous summer.

By the fall of 1970, Chinese leaders were shifting to higher-level talks with Washington as U.S. forces withdrew from Cambodia and tensions eased.³⁷ Both behind the scenes and in public, Mao and Nixon lent their personal encouragement to improvements in Sino-American relations. On 1 October, the leftist American journalist Edgar Snow and his wife were invited to review the annual National Day celebration parade on the wall of the Forbidden City overlooking Tiananmen Square. They were escorted by Zhou Enlai to meet Mao and stood by the chairman's side throughout the parade, the first Americans to be given such an honor. A picture of Snow and Mao together appeared on the front page of major Chinese newspapers on 25 December.³⁸ A Chinese historian observes, "Mao was sending a message, which he in-

35. Gao, *Wannian Zhou Enlai*, p. 415.

36. Kissinger, *White House Years*, p. 692.

37. The United States withdrew from Cambodia on 30 June 1970. See *ibid.*, p. 516.

38. One Chinese source claims that Zhou Enlai oversaw all of this, even determining the size of the photograph published in *Renmin ribao*, which served as a model for all other major Chinese newspapers to follow. See Yang Mingwei and Chen Yangyong, *Zhou Enlai waijiao fengyun* [Diplomatic Winds and Clouds of Zhou Enlai] (Beijing: Jiefangjun Wenyi Chubanshe, 1995), p. 243. Other historians dispute this portrayal. Zong Daoyi argues that no evidence exists showing that Zhou personally specified the size of the picture. See Zong, "Xin Zhongguo waijiaoshi ruogan shishi kaoding," pp. 103–114. Unfortunately, Nixon and Kissinger missed the significance of the Chinese gesture. See Henry Kissinger, *White House Years*, p. 698; Pang Xianzhi and Jin Chongji, eds., *Mao Zedong zhuan, 1949–1976* [A Biography of Mao Zedong, 1949–1976], Vol. 2 (Beijing: Zhongyang Wenxian Chubanshe, 2003), p. 1628. Snow had been a friend and admirer of Mao and the CCP since the mid-1930s, when he visited the Communist base areas in northern Shaanxi province and interviewed Mao and many other CCP leaders. His highly acclaimed book, *Red Star over China*, first published in 1938, helped create a positive image of the Chinese Communist movement both within and outside China. See Edgar Snow, *Red Star over China*, rev. ed. (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1968).

tended not only for the Americans but also for people all over China.” Mao was trying to use this public show as a first step to prepare the Chinese people psychologically for major changes in Sino-American relations.³⁹

During a lengthy interview with Snow on 18 December, Mao said he was considering allowing Americans of all political persuasions—left, right, and center—to come to China.⁴⁰ He emphasized that he would like to welcome Nixon to Beijing because the U.S. president was the person with whom he could “discuss and solve problems between China and the United States.” Mao made it clear that he “would be happy to meet Nixon, either as president or as a tourist.”⁴¹

The Nixon administration was also signaling its interest in a new relationship. In an interview with *Time* magazine in October 1970, Nixon declared that he viewed China as a world power. He observed,

Maybe that role won't be possible for five years, maybe not even ten years. But in 20 years it had better be, or the world is in mortal danger. If there is anything I want to do before I die, it is to go to China. If I don't, I want my children to go.⁴²

This statement did not go unnoticed in Beijing. Zhou Enlai later recalled that the Chinese leaders who initiated the normalization dialogue were heartened that Nixon was willing to deal with them on a personal level and treat China as an equal: “From the beginning he [Nixon] took the attitude that he was willing to come to Beijing to meet us.”⁴³

These early and indirect contacts between Washington and Beijing involved delicate exchanges regarding an agenda for direct talks between top leaders of the two sides. In these exploratory communications, the Chinese tried to focus the anticipated talks on the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Taiwan and the establishment of U.S.-PRC diplomatic relations. The United States attempted to define a much broader, open-ended agenda that would include discussion of global and regional security issues. Via the Pakistani channel, the Americans and Chinese haggled over the terms for high-level meet-

39. Chen, *Mao's China and the Cold War*, p. 256.

40. Snow had been waiting to interview Mao since early October. On 5 November, he had a lengthy interview with Zhou Enlai covering international issues. But his meeting with Mao was postponed repeatedly.

41. “Minutes, Interview with Edgar Snow, 18 December 1970,” in *Jianguo yilai Mao Zedong wengao* [Mao Zedong's Manuscripts since the Founding of the PRC], 15 vols. (Beijing: Zhongyang Wenxian Chubanshe, 1987–1999), Vol. 1, pp. 166–168.

42. “I Did Not Want the Hot Words of TV” and Other Presidential Reflections in a Crisis Week,” *Time*, Vol. 96, No. 14 (5 October 1970), p. 12.

43. Memorandum of Conversation [Kissinger and Zhou Enlai], 9 July 1971, Box 1032, NSCF, NPMP, NARA.

ings. Zhou had stated that the sole purpose of the talks would be to discuss Taiwan, a limitation the Nixon administration could not accept. When Kissinger sent Nixon a memorandum of his conversation with Romanian ambassador Bogdan, Nixon wrote at the top, "I believe we may appear too eager. Let's cool it. Wait for them to respond to our initiative."⁴⁴

Although U.S. officials continued to bargain hard, they were willing to make further good-will offers. On 25 February 1971, the Nixon administration issued its second "Foreign Policy Report," which reiterated its desire to improve relations with China and was the first U.S. government document to refer to the PRC by its official name.⁴⁵ The administration also eased restrictions on trade with China. On 15 March the State Department announced that it would end all restrictions on the use of U.S. passports for travel to the People's Republic of China.⁴⁶

The advent of ping-pong diplomacy came against the backdrop of all these steps. Mao's decision to invite the U.S. table tennis team to China was partly intended as further preparation of the Chinese people for the forthcoming transformation of Sino-American relations. China sent its ping-pong team to Japan in April 1971 to take part in the 31st International Table Tennis Tournament in Nagoya in which an American team also participated. In sending the Chinese team to Japan, Mao and Zhou overruled dissenting views from the Foreign Ministry and State Physical Culture and Sports Commission. When officials from these two agencies recommended not sending the Chinese team to Japan, Zhou contacted Mao on 13 March urging him to support the Chinese team's participation. Mao concurred and instructed, "Act accordingly. Our team should go and should be prepared to be assassinated. Of course, it is better not to be killed. Not to be afraid of both hardships and death."⁴⁷

Before the Chinese team departed for Japan, Zhou met with the Chinese players and told them that China's participation in this international tournament was a "political struggle" and that they should observe the principle of "friendship first, competition second."⁴⁸ Evidently with Zhou's encourage-

44. Henry Kissinger to the President, "Conversation with Ambassador Bogdan," 11 January 1971, Folder 2, Box 1031, NSCF, NPMP, NARA.

45. "Foreign Policy Report," Folder 1, Box 86, NSCF (HAK Office files), NPMP, NARA.

46. "U.S. China Policy 1969-72," p. 3, Folder 1, Box 86, NSCF (HAK Office Files), NPMP, NARA. Earlier on 21 July 1969, the U.S. State Department announced that it was easing restrictions on travel to China. U.S. tourists were permitted to bring back \$100 worth of Chinese goods.

47. "Mao Zedong dui Zhou Enlai xin de pishi" [Written Instructions to Zhou Enlai's Letter from Mao Zedong], 15 March 1971: quoted in Gao, *Wannian Zhou Enlai*, p. 430; and Qian Jiang, *Xiaogou zhuandong daqiu: Pingpang waijiao muhou* [Little Ball Moves Big Ball: Behind the Ping-Pong Diplomacy] (Beijing: Dongfang Chubanshe, 1997), p. 140.

48. Zhongyang wenxian yanjiushi, *Zhou Enlai nianpu*, p. 435.

ment, the Chinese and U.S. teams treated each other in a friendly manner. Out of these meetings came an “official” invitation for the U.S. team to visit China.⁴⁹ Although the Foreign Ministry on 3 April suggested that it would not be advantageous for the Chinese side to invite the U.S. team to China, Zhou was unhappy with this recommendation and asked for Mao’s decision. Mao once again overruled the Foreign Ministry and decided to invite the U.S. team.⁵⁰

It was no accident that China sought to improve its relations with the United States in the early 1970s by way of ping-pong diplomacy. The Chinese excelled in table tennis, and their superior skills would be seen in a positive light. On 7 April, after Mao gave his approval for the invitation to the U.S. team, Zhou confided to his long-time aides Huang Hua and Zhang Wenjin: “This [visit] offers a very good opportunity to open relations between China and the United States. In our handling of this matter, we must treat it as an important event and understand that its significance is much greater in politics than in sports.”⁵¹ Richard Solomon notes that the Chinese leaders made “political use of a sport in which the Chinese were world champions—and thus were ‘number one.’”⁵²

The U.S. ping-pong team’s visit to China was widely covered by the Chinese media. Matches between Chinese and American players were covered live on television and radio.⁵³ The highlight of the visit was Zhou’s meeting with the U.S. and Chinese teams as well as teams from four other countries at the Great Hall of the People on 14 April. The Chinese premier declared, “Your visit has opened a new chapter in the history of relations between Chinese and American peoples.”⁵⁴ A few hours after the meeting, Washington announced five new measures concerning China, including the termination of the 22-

49. Xue, ed., *Dangdai Zhongguo waijiao*, p. 220.

50. Qian, *Xiaoqiu zhuandong daqiu*, pp. 214–216; and Gao, *Wannian Zhou Enlai*, pp. 430–432.

51. Qian, *Xiaoqiu zhuandong daqiu*, p. 236; and Xu Dashen, ed., *Zhonghua renmin gongheguo shilu* [A Factual Record of the People’s Republic of China] (Changchun, China: Jilin Renmin Chubanshe, 1994), pp. 698–699. Huang Hua was a long-time associate of Zhou Enlai and in 1971 was China’s ambassador to Canada. Zhang Wenjin was the head of the Foreign Ministry’s West European and American Department, having been a close assistant to Zhou since the Marshall Mission in 1946.

52. Richard Solomon, *Chinese Negotiating Behavior: Pursuing Interests through “Old Friends”* (Washington D. C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1999), p. 30.

53. The Chinese television commentator’s opening remarks at the matches, emphasizing that “for a long time, friendship has existed between the Chinese and American peoples” and that “the visit by the American table tennis team will enhance such friendship,” were carefully examined and revised by Zhou Enlai himself. See Qian Jiang, *Pingpang waijiao shimo* [The Ping-Pong Diplomacy: The Beginning and the End] (Beijing: Dongfang Chubanshe, 1987), pp. 268–271.

54. “Minutes, Zhou Enlai’s Conversations with the American Table Tennis Delegation,” 14 April 1971, in *Zhou Enlai waijiao wenxuan* [Selected Diplomatic Papers of Zhou Enlai] (Beijing: Zhongyang Wenxian Chubanshe, 1990), pp. 469–475. The Chinese media reported the meeting extensively. See, for example, *Renmin ribao* (Beijing), 15 April 1971, p. 1.

year-old trade embargo, permission for trade in commodities nearly equivalent to those traded with the Soviet Union, the end of U.S. currency controls relating to China, and expedited processing of visas for any Chinese seeking to visit the United States.⁵⁵ In a few short days, ping-pong diplomacy had changed the political atmosphere between China and the United States. As Kissinger put it, the gradual Sino-American reconciliation became “an international sensation” that “captured the world’s imagination.”⁵⁶

After the U.S. team’s visit, Beijing and Washington began planning for the high-level meetings that had been discussed since early 1970. The Pakistani channel continued to play a crucial role in facilitating communications between the two sides. On 27 April, Washington received a hand-written two-page letter (as opposed to oral or indirect statements) from Zhou Enlai in response to Nixon’s message of 16 December 1970. Zhou formally invited Nixon to visit China. The two sides soon agreed that Kissinger should visit Beijing secretly to work out an agenda for the presidential visit. All evidence indicates that Lin Biao was unaware of the initial planning and played no role in the ping-pong diplomacy.

May 1971 Politburo Meeting Regarding Kissinger’s Secret Visit

On 25 May 1971, in the lead-up to Kissinger’s secret visit, Zhou Enlai met with senior Foreign Ministry officials to discuss how to respond to Nixon’s messages of 10 May accepting Zhou’s invitation to visit China.⁵⁷ The next day, the CCP Politburo met to consider China’s policy toward the United States. At Mao’s behest, Zhou presented an overview of U.S. foreign policy, arguing that when the United States was at the height of its power immediately after World War II, it could interfere with “anything anywhere in the world.” But in recent years, U.S. power had declined. The intervention in Vietnam, Zhou maintained, had lost the support of the American people, forcing the administration to withdraw U.S. troops gradually from Vietnam. In the meantime, U.S. economic and political influence in the world, he claimed, had begun to decline. Under these circumstances, Zhou speculated, U.S. leaders had to consider whether to continue their “going-all-out” policy or to reduce their international involvement. As a first step toward the latter

55. “U.S. China Policy 1969–72,” Tab 23.

56. Kissinger, *White House Years*, p. 710.

57. Zhongyang wenxian yanjiushi, *Zhou Enlai nianpu*, p. 458; and Jin, *Zhou Enlai zhuan*, Vol. 2, p. 1096.

option, Washington needed to pull out of Vietnam, and the Americans thus found it necessary to establish contact with China. These developments, Zhou stressed, had provided China with “an opportunity to improve Sino-American relations . . . [that] will be beneficial for the struggle against imperialist expansion and hegemonism, beneficial to the maintenance of peace in Asia as well as in the world, and beneficial to our country’s security and to our efforts to unify the motherland in a peaceful way.”⁵⁸

The consensus at the Politburo meeting was summarized afterward in a “Report on Sino-American Talks” drafted by Zhou. It specified eight “basic principles” that became China’s new guidelines on relations with the United States:

1. All American armed forces and special military facilities should be withdrawn from Taiwan and the Taiwan Straits region within a fixed time. This is the key question in the restoration of relations between China and the United States. If no agreement can be reached on this matter in advance, it is possible that Nixon’s visit will be deferred.
2. Taiwan is China’s territory, and the liberation of Taiwan is China’s internal affair. No foreign intervention should be allowed. Vigilance toward the activities of Japanese militarism in Taiwan is essential.
3. We will try to liberate Taiwan through peaceful means, and efforts concerning Taiwan affairs should be carried out conscientiously.
4. Efforts to create “two Chinas” or “one China and one Taiwan” will be resolutely opposed. If the United States wants to establish diplomatic relations with China, it must recognize the People’s Republic of China as the sole legitimate government representing China.
5. If the above-mentioned three terms [1, 2, and 3] are not fully realized, it will not be suitable for China and the United States to establish diplomatic relations, but a liaison office can be established in each other’s capital.
6. We will not raise the question of [China’s membership in] the United Nations. If the Americans bring up this question, we will tell them clearly that we will not accept the arrangement of “two Chinas” or “one China and one Taiwan.”
7. We will not raise the question of Sino-American trade. If the Americans bring up this question, we may discuss it with them only after the principle of an American troop withdrawal from Taiwan has been accepted.
8. The Chinese government maintains that U.S. military forces should

58. Yang and Chen, *Zhou Enlai waijiao fengyun*, pp. 247–248.

be withdrawn from the three countries of Indochina, from Korea, from Japan, and from Southeast Asia to ensure peace in the Far East.⁵⁹

These eight principles embodied three noticeable changes from China's previous position. First, while demanding that U.S. troops withdraw from Taiwan, China no longer insisted that the United States openly sever diplomatic relations with Taiwan as a precondition for relations between the Chinese and U.S. governments. Second, although China continued to claim that the "liberation" of Taiwan was China's internal affair, this issue was to be resolved solely through peaceful means. Third, China advanced the idea of establishing liaison offices in both capitals if the Taiwan problem could not be resolved in the immediate future.⁶⁰ These three changes amounted to a much more flexible negotiating position.

The eight principles also demonstrated that Chinese leaders were not quite ready to make major concessions, especially on the Taiwan issue. This caution was hardly surprising in light of the profound enmity that had existed between Beijing and Washington for more than two decades. Moreover, as the Politburo report made clear, Chinese leaders realized that the Sino-American talks might fail. But the main point was that whatever the result, the talks would do no harm to China. If Kissinger's visit led to agreement, Nixon could come to China openly. If further progress could be achieved with Nixon, a formal announcement about normalization would most likely occur before the U.S. presidential election. China's guiding principle was to deal with the incumbent administration. However, if Kissinger's visit ended in failure, Nixon would not be likely to visit China. In that case, China's demonstration of flexibility on Sino-U.S. relations would help Nixon's rivals in the presidential election.⁶¹

To clear up suspicions within the CCP, the Politburo stipulated that its endorsement of Kissinger's secret visit did not mean that it had softened its firm opposition to U.S. imperialism. The report emphasized that a Sino-

59. "Central Committee Politburo's Report on the Sino-American Meeting" (drafted by Zhou Enlai), 26 May 1971: quoted in Gong Li, *Kuayue honggou: 1969–1979 Nian Zhongmei Guanxi de Yanbian* [Across the Chasm: The Evolution of Sino-American Relations, 1969–1979] (Zhengzhou, China: Henan Renmin Chubanshe, 1992), pp. 103–104; Jin, ed., *Zhou Enlai zhuan*, Vol. 2, pp. 1096–1097; and Zhongyang wenxian yanjiushi, *Zhou Enlai nianpu*, pp. 458–459.

60. Gong, *Kuayue honggou*, p. 104.

61. Gong Li, "Zhongguo de Gaocong Juece yu Zhong Mei Guanxi Jiedong" [China's High-Level Decision-Making and the Thawing of U.S.-China Relations], in Jiang Changbin and Robert Ross, eds., *Cong Duizhi Zouxiang Huanbe Lengzhan Shiqi de Zhong Mei Guanxi zai Tantao* [From Confrontation to Détente—Reexamining Sino-American Relations during the Cold War] (Beijing: Shijie Zhishi Chubanshe, 2000), p. 697.

American rapprochement would not impair the American people's struggle against the "monopoly capitalist ruling class." A rapprochement, the Politburo indicated, might cause a short-term "ripple" in the Vietnam War and the Paris peace talks, but progress in the Sino-U.S. discussions would eventually bolster Hanoi's position at the Paris talks. The United States would have greater incentive to withdraw its troops if a Sino-American rapprochement showed that the focus of U.S.-Soviet rivalry was in Europe and the Middle East, not East Asia. The Politburo stressed that the opening of Sino-American communications was the "victorious result of our struggles against imperialism, revisionism, and reactionary forces," as well as the "inevitable outcome of the internal and external crises facing the U.S. imperialists and the competition for world hegemony between the United States and the Soviet Union." If the opening succeeded, the "competition between the two superpowers" would be fiercer; whereas if the opening failed, the "reactionary face" of U.S. imperialism would be further exposed, and "our people's consciousness" would be elevated.⁶²

The Politburo report was full of the ultra-leftist, revolutionary rhetoric of the Cultural Revolution era—a sign of the difficulty that Chinese leaders were having in deciding how to present the new relationship with the United States. The report was relatively accurate in its assessment that the U.S. strategic focus was in Europe rather than the Far East, that Washington's interest in holding talks reflected domestic and international difficulties, and that the U.S.-Soviet rivalry would continue. Despite the lurid rhetoric, the report provided a political foundation for China's rapprochement with the United States.

Mao approved Zhou's draft of the report on 29 May.⁶³ Mao had not even attended the Politburo meeting, but he alone had the final word on the report. He determined that China would not insist on preconditions for opening high-level talks with the United States, and he was prepared to accept only partial success. Mao and Zhou did believe, however, that Nixon needed a breakthrough with China to support his reelection campaign and that Kissinger would be under great pressure to reach an agreement. They sensed an opportunity to pressure Kissinger to make concessions. Zhou used the Pa-

62. Gong, *Kuayue honggou*, pp. 105–106. According to the official record, some Politburo members who were concerned about the new U.S.-China contacts raised a series of questions. Some believed that the talks were unusual and might have negative effects on the "militant spirit" of the American people. Others asked whether the Sino-American talks would have a negative impact on the Vietnam War and the peace talks in Paris. Some asked whether the talks might be a ruse by Nixon and Kissinger. See Xu, *Zhonghua renmin gongheguo shilu*, pp. 713–714.

63. Jin, ed., *Zhou Enlai zhuan*, Vol. 2, p. 1096; Zhongyang wenxian yanjiushi, *Zhou Enlai nianpu*, pp. 458–459; and Pang and Jin, eds., *Mao Zedong zhuan*, p. 1633.

kistani channel to send a formal response to Washington on 29 May, clearing the way for Kissinger's secret trip to Beijing in July.⁶⁴

The Lin Biao Incident

After Kissinger's secret visit to Beijing proved successful in July 1971, the Chinese government began preparing the Chinese people for an open and "comfortable" second visit by Kissinger in October. Although no organized opposition existed to Mao's policy of rapprochement with the United States, the Chinese leader had to couch his policy in an ideologically coherent way. After all, for more than twenty years the United States had been demonized in CCP propaganda. On 17 August 1971, *Renmin ribao* (People's Daily) published Mao's essay "On Policy." First formulated and published in 1940, the essay justified a policy of cooperation with the Chinese Nationalists against the Japanese. Mao called for "an extremely complex struggle" involving a tactical united front with a less immediately dangerous adversary (the "secondary enemy") against a more dangerous foe (the "principal enemy").⁶⁵ A similar, slightly more explicit explanation had been given in a confidential internal CCP document in mid-July 1971, assuring the rank-and-file that Mao himself had invited Nixon and that the offer was "another tactic in the struggle against imperialism."⁶⁶

An unexpected political crisis in the CCP leadership in September 1971 made Kissinger's visit easier to sell to the party. Chinese defense minister Lin Biao, who was Mao's designated successor and had been known as Mao's "closest comrade-in-arms" and "best and most loyal student," was accused of plotting a coup to assassinate Mao. Lin, together with his wife, his son, and a handful of supporters, fled from Beijing but died in a mysterious plane crash over Mongolia on 13 September.⁶⁷ Lin's downfall boosted the position of

64. Gong, *Kuayue honggou*, p. 107.

65. "A Strong Weapon to Unite the People and Defeat the Enemy—Study 'On Policy,'" *Renmin ribao* (Beijing), 17 August 1971, pp. 1, 4.

66. The document, dated 21 July 1971, is apparently authentic. See Chao Ch'un-shan, "The Change in Peiping's Foreign Policy as Viewed from the Line Adapted by the CCP," *East Asia Quarterly*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (October 1973), pp. 81–97.

67. Wang Nianyi, *Da dongluan de niandai* [In the Years of Great Upheaval] (Zhengzhou, China: Henan Renmin Chubanshe, 1988), pp. 415–433. Two recent books analyzing the Lin Biao incident shed new light on what happened. Jin Qiu, the daughter of General Wu Faxian (commander of the Chinese air force who was later accused of plotting with Lin against Mao), challenges Beijing's official account of the Lin Biao incident. She argues that Lin Biao and the generals were not actually plotting against Mao. Jin provides rich details about the Lin family's disputes during the final hours before his fatal crash. She claims that Lin Ligu, the son of Lin Biao, was unable to execute an unsophisticated

Zhou, who was a strong advocate of opening China's relations with other parts of the world in general and the United States in particular. The Lin Biao incident also damaged the myth of Mao's "eternal correctness." Mao was now even more eager to have a major breakthrough in China's foreign relations to offset the domestic political crisis and salvage his declining reputation and authority.⁶⁸

After the Lin Biao incident, Zhou started to de-radicalize China's domestic and foreign policies. With Mao's approval, Zhou launched a political education drive, toned down anti-American propaganda, and restored the names of old stores and shops, many of which had been either changed or abolished since the beginning of the Cultural Revolution. Through Ambassador Huang Zhen in Paris, the Chinese leaders notified Washington that the Lin Biao incident would not change China's attitude toward the United States and that China would proceed with the preparation for Nixon's visit—a reassurance that was greeted with relief in Washington.⁶⁹

Haig's Trip to China

The most important task of Kissinger's second visit to Beijing was to work out a draft summit communiqué to be issued at the conclusion of the presidential visit. The negotiations about this matter turned out to be tortuous. By the time of Kissinger's departure from Beijing on 26 October 1971, the two sides had agreed on all points except the Taiwan section.⁷⁰ Having failed to devise a mutually acceptable formulation, Kissinger assured Zhou that his deputy, Alexander Haig, would come with a new proposal in January 1972.⁷¹ The dates were set for President Nixon's visit: 21 to 28 February 1972.

plan to assassinate Mao and that Lin Biao himself was never prepared to challenge Mao's authority, let alone kill him. Jin contends that Lin Biao's flight from Beijing on 13 September 1971 was the "accidental" result of his fear of Mao's purge. See Jin Qiu, *The Culture of Power: The Lin Biao Incident in the Cultural Revolution* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), esp. ch. 7. Frederick C. Teiwes and Warren Sun conclude that Lin Biao was the tragic victim of Mao's absolute power. They write: "Lin Biao was indeed tragically entrapped by his political system and political culture . . . a victim who could not escape Mao's increasingly unpredictable demands." See Frederick C. Teiwes and Warren Sun, *The Tragedy of Lin Biao: Riding the Tiger during the Cultural Revolution, 1966–1971* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1996), pp. 166–167. However, Lin Biao's role in foreign policy, especially policy toward the United States, is not the focus of these two books.

68. Gao, *Wannian Zhou Enlai*, pp. 427–428; and Chen, *Mao's China and the Cold War*, p. 270.

69. Gao, *Wannian Zhou Enlai*, pp. 441–442.

70. Wei Shiyun, "Jixinge Dierci fang Hua" [Kissinger's Second Trip to China], in Pei Jianzhang, ed., *Xin Zhongguo waijiao fengyun* [Winds and Clouds in New China's Diplomacy] (Beijing: Shijie Zhishi Chubanshe, 1994), p. 69.

71. POLO II—Transcript of Meeting (October 26, 1971, 5:30–8:10 a.m.), p. 15, Box 1034, NSCF, NPMP, NARA.

When Haig came to China, he met privately with Zhou Enlai on 3 and 7 January 1972 to discuss the India-Pakistan crisis, U.S.-Soviet relations, and Vietnam. Haig gave Zhou a new American counter-draft for the sensitive Taiwan passage in the proposed final communiqué.⁷² The new draft read:

The U.S. side declared: The United States acknowledges that all Chinese on either side of the Taiwan Straits maintain there is but one China and that Taiwan is a province of China. The United States Government does not challenge that position; it reaffirms its abiding interest that the settlement of the Taiwan question be achieved through peaceful negotiations; and it states that it will work to create the conditions which will permit the progressive reduction of the U.S. troops and military installations on Taiwan.⁷³

Zhou on balance seemed accommodating, saying he would respond after consulting with Mao. But Zhou added that if the United States truly desired to improve relations with China, it should adopt a more positive attitude on the Taiwan issue: “If [we have to] yield to certain forces opposed to the normalization of Sino-U.S. relations and backing down from the former position, that will bring no benefit to China and the United States.”⁷⁴

Haig inadvertently offended the Chinese when he delivered an assessment from Nixon and Kissinger about the recent Indo-Pakistani conflict. During the crisis, Haig told Zhou, the Soviet Union tried hard to encircle the PRC by inviting Kissinger “to visit Moscow personally on several occasions as a guest of Mr. Brezhnev” and offering “to reach agreements with the U.S. in areas of accidental war and militarily provocative acts.” The United States rejected the Soviet offer not only because the U.S. government “could not tolerate use of force to dismantle” Pakistan but also because the maintenance of China’s viability was in the fundamental interests of the United States.⁷⁵ When Zhou reported this to Mao, the Chairman reacted negatively: “Why should our viability become America’s concern? . . . If China’s independence and viability were to be protected by the Americans, it would be very dangerous [for us].”⁷⁶ Mao emphasized that China would stick to its position of self-reliance.

Haig and his advance team were treated coldly in both Shanghai and

72. Haig Trip—Memoranda, 3 January 1972 (Midnight), pp. 1–8, Box 1037, NSCF, NPMP, NARA; Wei Shiyao, “Heige Shuai Xianqianzu wei Nikesong Fanghua Anpai de Jingguo” [The Course of Haig’s Advance Team to China in Preparation for Nixon’s Visit to China], in Pei, ed., *Xin Zhongguo waijiao fengyun*, Vol. 3, p. 73; and Kissinger, *White House Years*, p. 1051.

73. Kissinger’s Memorandum for the President, “Briefing Papers for the China Trip (Taiwan),” p. 11, Folder 4, Box 847, NSCF, NPMP, NARA.

74. Haig Trip—Memcoms, 7 January 1972 (11:45 p.m.), p. 5, Box 1037, NSCF, NPMP, NARA

75. Haig Trip—Memcoms, 3 January 1972 (Midnight), p. 3, Box 1037, NSCF, NPMP, NARA

76. Wei, “Heige Shuai Xianqianzu wei Nikesong Fanghua Anpai de Jingguo,” pp. 78–79.

Hangzhou after he failed to reciprocate a toast to the Shanghai officials who hosted a dinner for them on 7 January.⁷⁷ Chinese Foreign Ministry officials reported the incident to Zhou Enlai over the phone. Mao had to intervene directly with the Shanghai officials to get them to treat Haig's team cordially, including a warm farewell reception at the Shanghai airport on 10 January.⁷⁸ This incident underscored the extent of Mao's control of foreign policy decision-making.

Controversy over the Communiqué

The climax of Nixon's trip was the signing of the Shanghai Communiqué, which heralded a new era of Sino-American relations.⁷⁹ After Secretary of State William Rogers had accepted the communiqué on the morning of 26 February 1972, State Department officials discovered a potentially serious flaw. In the document, they pointed out, Washington reaffirmed its treaty commitments to all of its allies in Asia—Japan, South Korea, the Philippines, and Thailand—with the exception of Taiwan, despite the continued validity of the mutual defense treaty with Taiwan. The omission of Taiwan, Assistant Secretary of State Marshall Green noted, was strikingly similar to Secretary of State Dean Acheson's famous exclusion of the Korean peninsula from the U.S. defense perimeter in January 1950, five months before the North Korean invasion of South Korea.⁸⁰ Although Green acknowledged that the omission of Taiwan would probably not mislead Chinese officials if the United States followed up with unilateral statements, he argued that the similarity to Acheson's

77. The Shanghai leaders were close supporters of the "Gang of Four," headed by Mao's wife Jiang Qing. While in Hangzhou, Haig's advance team was sent out on the West Lake in midwinter—ostensibly at the direction of the Shanghai leaders—in an unheated boat with no food provided. For more detail on this issue, see "Interview with Zhang Hanzhi, Interpreter, Chinese Foreign Ministry," *American Experience: Nixon's China Game*, VHS (PBS Home Video, 2000).

78. Mao gave orders to the highest Shanghai officials, who were then in Beijing, and asked them to fly back to Shanghai to arrange a farewell party for Haig's advance team. For more on this issue, see "Interview with Zhang Hanzhi."

79. On 27 February 1972 the United States and China signed a formal communiqué. Because the two countries had no formal diplomatic relationship, it was designated the "Shanghai Communiqué." See John H. Holdridge, *Crossing the Divide: An Insider's Account of the Normalization of U.S.-China Relations* (Boulder, CO: Rowman & Littlefield, 1997), p. 95; and Kissinger, *White House Years*, p. 1084.

80. When talking about the U.S. defense perimeter in Asia during a speech at the National Press Club, Acheson excluded Korea and Taiwan. Critics later charged that this helped inspire North Korea's attack on South Korea. See Dean Acheson, *Present at the Creation: My Years in the State Department* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1969), pp. 356–358. For an assessment of the relevance of Acheson's speech, see Mark Kramer, "Ideology and the Cold War," *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 25, No. 4 (October 1999), pp. 541–544.

mistake would undoubtedly anger the right wing of the Republican Party and damage Nixon's bid for reelection.⁸¹

At the last moment, State Department officials were able to bring the issue to Nixon's attention.⁸² The president concurred and ordered Kissinger to ask the Chinese to amend the statement. Kissinger tried to reopen negotiations with Vice Foreign Minister Qiao Guanhua that evening. Qiao refused to alter the draft, arguing that it was too late and that China had already made many concessions in response to American wishes. "The Chinese Politburo," he claimed, "had approved the final draft the previous night on the basis of U.S. assurance that the President had accepted it." Qiao then asked, "How could we reopen this discussion less than 24 hours before the formal announcement of the Communiqué?"⁸³ But when Zhou Enlai was apprised of the situation, he was more willing to accommodate the U.S. concerns. Zhou told Qiao that creating a psychological basis for the new relationship with the United States was more important than the objections Qiao had raised. Zhou conferred with Mao, who indicated that "all could be reconsidered except the part concerning Taiwan. Any attempt to change the Taiwan section would preclude issuing a Communiqué."⁸⁴ When Kissinger and Qiao reopened the talks, they resolved the problem by eliminating the references to other treaty commitments so that Taiwan would not be omitted.⁸⁵ This episode once again showed that Mao had the final word on all major decisions without the need to consult other Politburo members.

Conclusion

Both Washington and Beijing hoped to benefit their security by achieving a Sino-American rapprochement. As a foreign policy president, Nixon was determined to shore up the U.S. position in world affairs. The withdrawal of U.S. forces from Vietnam was Nixon's top priority, and he believed that im-

81. Marshal Green, John H. Holdridge, and William N. Stokes, eds., *War and Peace with China, First-Hand Experiences in the Foreign Service of the United States* (Bethesda, MD: Dacor Press, 1994), pp. 145–146; and Nancy Tucker, *Pattern in the Dust: Chinese-American Relations and the Recognition Controversy, 1949–1950* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), p. 275.

82. Ross, *Negotiating Cooperation*, p. 48.

83. Hong Wen, ed., *Hezuo Huanshi Duikang: Jijiedou Zhong Mei Fenghui* [Cooperation or Confrontation—Decoding Sino-American Summits], Vol. 3 (Beijing: Jincheng Chubanshe, 1998), p. 955; and Qiao-Kissinger Talks (26 February 1972, 10:20–1:40 a.m.), in "Dr. Kissinger's Meetings in the PRC During the Presidential Visit, 1972," p. 9, Box 92, NSCF, NPMP, NARA.

84. Hong, ed., *Hezuo huanshi duikang*, pp. 955–957; and Kissinger, *White House Years*, pp. 1083–1084.

85. Qiao-Kissinger Talks, p. 4.

proving relations with China would facilitate that goal. For Chinese leaders, the Soviet Union by the late 1960s had become China's number one enemy, whereas the United States was becoming less threatening. The border clashes with the Soviet Union in 1969 fueled Mao's determination to seek a rapprochement with the United States.

The domestic political situation in both countries was also conducive to a better U.S.-China relationship. In China, political conditions were slowly improving after the devastation caused by the radical phase of the Cultural Revolution, a phase that ended in April 1969. Both Mao and Zhou wanted to improve relations with the United States, and they controlled Chinese foreign policy. Mao encountered no open opposition to his new policy, but he was mindful of the need to prepare the CCP and the public for a dramatic turnaround in China's foreign policy. His public meeting with Edgar Snow on China's National Day in October 1970 was designed to create a positive image of Americans. In sending China's ping-pong team to Japan and inviting the U.S. team to China in the spring of 1971, Mao overruled the recommendations of the PRC Foreign Ministry. He regarded the ping-pong diplomacy as a useful way to prepare the Chinese people and elite for the forthcoming U.S.-China rapprochement.

Throughout this period, Mao made all important decisions regarding China's policy toward the United States. As a charismatic leader at the height of his personality cult, Mao did not need to consult other senior Chinese officials. Chinese sources give no indication of any organized opposition to Mao's policy. The sensitive process leading to the breakthrough with the United States strengthened the "Mao-in-Command" model. Lin Biao, his wife Ye Qun, and four generals serving under Lin were Politburo members.⁸⁶ But Lin was not present at any of the CCP Politburo meetings from late 1969 to August 1971 that focused on Sino-American relations. Zhou Enlai presided over these meetings and sent summary reports to Mao and Lin for their instructions. Because Lin was in charge of military affairs rather than foreign policy, he apparently played only a marginal—indeed almost non-existent—role in policymaking vis-à-vis the United States. His usual comments on these documents were "Completely Agree with the Chairman [Mao]'s Instruction," or "Do as the Chairman Instructs." Lin never had any direct influence on U.S.-China relations.⁸⁷

Chinese documents and memoirs confirm that neither Lin nor other radical leaders played any appreciable role in, or mounted any opposition to,

86. Lin's wife, Ye Qun, and four army generals (Huang Yongsheng, Wu Faxian, Li Zuopeng and Qiu Huizuo) became Politburo members at the Ninth CCP Congress in April 1969.

87. Gao, *Wannian Zhou Enlai*, p. 427.

China's policy toward the United States. Moreover, the evidence indicates that Lin himself was not opposed to the Sino-American rapprochement.⁸⁸ Had he or his followers genuinely opposed Mao's decisions on this matter, the Chinese government surely would have declassified the relevant Politburo records to buttress Mao's charge.⁸⁹ Yet no such documents have ever surfaced.

The findings here permit a new interpretation of China's elite politics and the Sino-American rapprochement, particularly what this episode reveals about the attitude of the "ultra-leftists" toward Mao's major foreign policy decisions. The ultra-leftists—including Lin Biao and his followers, radical leaders such as Jiang Qing (Mao's wife), Kang Sheng, Chen Boda, and other officials from different central ministries who rose to prominence during the Cultural Revolution because of their radical views and loyalty to Mao—posed no organized opposition to Mao on seemingly controversial foreign policy issues. Although the ultra-leftists may have been wary of an abrupt change of policy toward the erstwhile "number one enemy," the United States, they deferred to Mao's views and competed for Mao's favor. Their dependence on Mao's patronage greatly limited their room to oppose him. Thus, although they were strong supporters of the Cultural Revolution and of radical policies abroad, they were unwilling to confront Mao on policy toward the United States.

The notion that Lin was scheming against Mao during this period does not hold up. Lin was not particularly interested in being designated Mao's successor in August 1966 and was mainly concerned about self-protection. To Lin, the best way to protect himself was by following Mao unconditionally. He adhered closely to Mao's every decision and never made a decision himself

88. The Lin Biao incident continues to attract the attention of scholars. More studies have been published in Hong Kong and the United States (in Chinese) in the last two years. None has much to say on Lin's role in China's foreign policymaking, let alone his opposition to Sino-American rapprochement. See, for example, Xian Weiyue, *Lin Biao shijian zhiqingzhe zhengci* [The Lin Biao Incident: Testimony from the People in the Know] (Hong Kong: Xianggang Remin Chubanshe, 2006); Wang Nianyi, He Shu, and Chen Zhao, "Mao Zedong bichulai de 'jiu.yisan Lin Biao chutao shijian'" [Mao Zedong Forced out "the Lin Biao Flee Incident of September 13"] in He Qinglian, chief ed., *Ershi shiji houbanye lishi jiemu* [Decoding History, 1950–2000] (Sunnyvale, CA: Broad Press Inc., 2004), pp. 267–291.

89. There is some evidence, however, that in 1950 Lin differed with Mao on sending Chinese troops to Korea and refused to lead them. Lei Yingfu, a military aide to Mao and Zhou during the Korean War, recalled in his memoirs that Lin argued strongly against Chinese involvement in the Korean War at a senior leaders' conference on 6 October 1950. According to Lei, Lin exclaimed, "Fight, fight. We have been fighting over several decades in the past . . . People now want peace. It is utterly against the people's will to engage in more fighting. [Our] nation has just been liberated, the domestic economy is a huge mess, the army's equipment needs to be updated. . . . How can we afford more warfare? Besides, we could be confident of fighting the Guomindang, but fighting the modern American [army] equipped with atomic bombs [is quite another matter]. Are we [really] capable of it? In my view the Party Center should consider the matter carefully and adopt a safe approach." See Lei Yingfu et al., *Tongshuaibu canmo de zhuihuai* [Recollections of the Headquarters Staff] (Jiangsu, China: Jiangsu Wenyi Chubanshe, 1994), pp. 169–170.

unless he knew Mao's opinion. Lin's attitude toward Mao was "truly one of 'Do whatever the Chairman says.'"⁹⁰ Lin once told his secretary Zhang Yunsheng that "I don't have any talent. What I know, I learned from Chairman Mao."⁹¹ Moreover, according to Zhang Yunsheng (Lin's secretary), Lin had little interest and experience in foreign affairs. At one point after meeting with the Albanian defense minister, Lin complained to his staff that "it is unbearable to deal with foreigners."⁹² Lin's main interests seemed to be military strategy and armaments. According to the historian Jin Qiu, who was the daughter of General Wu Faxian, Lin "had a keen interest in meeting the Americans, from whom he expected to learn about advanced military technology."⁹³ Lin and his followers never attempted to challenge Mao's policy toward the United States.

The problem with Western scholars who believe that Lin Biao was opposed to the U.S.-China rapprochement is that they use Western political models to gauge Chinese politics. As Frederick C. Teiwes and Warren Sun observed, "Westerners think of politics in certain ways which make it difficult to accept Chinese realities."⁹⁴ This article shows that it is problematic to use the "factional politics" model to examine Chinese policymaking toward the United States in the late 1960s and early 1970s. As the historian Michael Hunt noted a decade ago, "It would prove ironic indeed if the factional model turns out to offer a no more subtle treatment of Chinese politics than does the former dependence of the CCP's own analysts on struggles within monopoly capitalism to explain American politics."⁹⁵

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90. Gao, *Wannian Zhou Enlai*, p. 427; and Jin, *The Culture of Power*, p. 79.

91. Zhang Yunsheng, *Maojiawan jishi: Lin Biao mishu huiyilu* [True Account of Maojiawan: Reminiscences of Lin Biao's Secretary] (Beijing: Chunqiu Chubanshe, 1988), p. 227.

92. Zhang, *Maojiawan jishi*, p. 330.

93. Jin, *Culture of Power*, p. 205.

94. Teiwes and Sun, *The Tragedy of Lin Biao*, p. 164.

95. Michael H. Hunt, *The Genesis of Chinese Communist Foreign Policy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), p. 242.