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Analysis of Nixon's Opening of China

“Only Nixon could go to China.”<sup>1</sup> This line was uttered in a science-fiction film, but accurately sums up the feelings of many regarding Nixon’s visit to China. On February 21<sup>st</sup>, 1972, Richard Nixon became the first American president in 30 years to visit the People’s Republic of China, effectively ending American non-recognition of the Communist government. This visit capped a year of behind-the-scenes maneuvering by Henry Kissinger, President Nixon’s then National Security Advisor. Both hailed and derided by critics, this visit opened a new chapter in Sino-American relations and opened the door to formally recognizing the People’s Republic of China (PRC) as the legitimate government of mainland China. Nixon’s visit permitted high-level communication between the United States and the PRC, allowing both governments to air their opinions on Taiwan, Vietnam, mutual relations with the Soviet Union, and the continuing US presence in Japan.

While on the surface Nixon’s visit to China was about opening and improving direct Sino-American relations, this historic visit was less about China’s relations with the US and more about Sino-Soviet relations. For many years, the PRC and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), had been in a downward spiral of worsening relations. Because of the international isolation Mao Tse-Tung’s government faced after its founding, the PRC found itself relying almost exclusively on the good intentions and exports of the USSR. Mao used this relationship in various ways, including building native heavy industry and military capacity. These agreements were usually worked out by direct communication between either Joseph Stalin, the head of the Communist Party and the Soviet government, Mao or Chou En-Lai, who acted as the PRC’s head diplomat for many years.

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<sup>1</sup> Star Trek VI, The Undiscovered Country. This line is said by Spock when talking to Kirk about undertaking a diplomatic mission to the Klingons.

After the death of Joseph Stalin, Mao's and China's relationship with the Soviet Union changed. Many scholars, including Jung Chang, author of *Mao*, attribute this change to Nikita Khrushchev's succession to power. Relations between the two Communist nations devolved into a campaign of public denunciations, accusations of ideological impurity, and finally military conflict.

There are three themes which illustrate US Chinese relations. The first is the world-events surrounding Nixon's visit to China, including the worsening of Sino-Soviet relations. The second is Chou's meeting with Nixon, which took place on February 22, 1972. Specifically, this paper will analyze the text and substance of Nixon's conversation with Chou, looking at the major policy changes including the change of US policy towards Taiwan. Lastly, this paper will examine how Nixon's visit has impacted international relations since 1972.

On February 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1972 Nixon was able to meet with Chou En-lai for a substantive meeting and exchange of policy views. This meeting, which lasted nearly four hours, was recorded and transcribed into a document called a Memorandum of Conversation. The document is a transcript, detailing a high level summit between primarily President Nixon and Chinese Premier Chou En-lai. Representing the US at this meeting were President Nixon, Dr. Henry Kissinger, and two National Security Council staffers, John Holdridge and Winston Lord. Representing the PRC were Chou En-lai, Ch'iao Kuan-hua (Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs), Chang Wen-chin, Wang Hai-Jung (Deputy Director of Protocol), Chao Chi-hua (a Foreign Affairs ministry staff member), two interpreters, and two notetakers. This conversation occurred in Beijing during Nixon's historic visit. The specific date noted on the document is February 22, 1972. The topics of conversation were wide ranging, but the two principles (Nixon and Chou)

seem to spend a lot of time discussing US involvement in Vietnam and warming relations between the US and the PRC.

The surprising revelation in this document is the extent to which relations between the PRC and the US were warming. Nixon told Chou he has a summit meeting scheduled with the Soviet Premier. However, this was not the surprising part. The surprise is that Nixon promised to send Kissinger back to brief Chou on all conversations that took place during the summit, essentially giving the Chinese government an insider's briefing of the meeting.

Nixon and Chou also commented on the Soviet reaction to Nixon's visit stating the USSR is expressing displeasure and anger at the apparent betrayal of their Communist 'allies.' Chou commented to Nixon that the Soviets can be as angry as they wanted, it did not make any difference to the PRC's agenda. This sentiment was basically echoed by Nixon and Kissinger. Besides raising the Soviet question, this meeting heralded the end of the two China policy that the US had been maintaining towards Taiwan and China.

#### THE DOCUMENT

On February 22, 1972 President Richard Nixon met with Prime Minister Chou En-lai in Beijing. This meeting occurred after President Nixon's historic meeting with Chairman Mao and was transcribed into a document called a Memorandum of Conversation. This document serves as more than a simple transcript, it also serves as a high level briefing to US government officials. Both figures were accompanied by their respective entourages, which included Dr Henry Kissinger in Nixon's party. Kissinger, acting as Nixon's National Security Advisor, played an instrumental role in bringing the meeting about. Conspicuously missing from this meeting was Nixon's Secretary of State, sidelined by Nixon throughout his administration in favor of Dr. Kissinger. The minimization of Secretary Rogers occurred due to Nixon's belief that the "State

Department leaks like a sieve” and any secret details discussed during the meeting would not remain secret<sup>2</sup> One interesting point raised in the book *Nixon & Mao* regarding this meeting is it was held in the same room as Chou En-lai’s initial meeting with Dr. Kissinger: the Fukien Room. According to author Margaret MacMillan, the true irony lies in the fact this room is named after the Chinese province facing Taiwan.<sup>3</sup>

The first point which President Nixon stressed to Chou is the strict nature of confidence under which this meeting is taking place. Nixon made repeated reassurances that any transcript of this conversation would be released in full only to President Nixon, Dr Kissinger, and Kissinger’s aide General Haig. Nixon promised that Secretary of State Rogers would get “a memorandum only for those matters that can be generally discussed and regarding which the State Department must act.”<sup>4</sup> Chou’s response to these assurances was somewhat telling: he first states his belief in Nixon’s promises and went on further to state “we understand that is really quite difficult” for the US government to act in utter confidence, especially in this matter.<sup>5</sup>

Nixon then moved on to state his position on several issues, beginning with Taiwan. Nixon made it very clear that the US viewed the situation thus: “there is one China, and Taiwan is a part of China,” which was a complete reversal of previous administrations’ positions on this issue.<sup>6</sup> Since the end of the Chinese Civil War and the founding of both the PRC and the ROC, US administrations had used the so-called two China policy as part of a larger policy of containing the spread of Communism to new states. The policy was in the hope that the KMT-controlled ROC might be able to marshal enough force to embark on a reconquest of mainland China, which eventually proved to be futile.

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<sup>2</sup> Memorandum of Conversation, pg 3

<sup>3</sup> MacMillan, *Nixon and Mao*

<sup>4</sup> Memorandum of Conversation, pg 4

<sup>5</sup> Memorandum of Conversation, pg 4

<sup>6</sup> Memorandum of Conversation, pg 5

In conjunction with his previous statement, Nixon then went on to state the US has “not and will not support any Taiwan independence movement.”<sup>7</sup> This statement combined with the first point, effectively ended the two China policy. The eventual ROC response to this was understandably cool, with the ROC government viewing this as virtual abandonment by the Nixon administration. As stated above, Nixon’s pronouncement of the new policy towards Taiwan was a fundamental change in US – PRC relations. Despite the number of administrations since and the public outcry against abandoning the two-China policy, this policy has gone unchanged since 1972.

Nixon’s third point was an assurance to the PRC that the US would block any move by Japan to pull Taiwan into their influence and/or encourage a Taiwanese independence movement. Nixon gave himself a clever out on this point, stating he “cannot say what Japan will do, but so long as the US has influence with Japan” the US will block all attempts at a Japanese backed, pro-independence movement on Taiwan.<sup>8</sup> Although later governments of Taiwan have restated their demand to be independent, this policy of Nixon’s had remained in place.

The fourth point Nixon brought up was an extension of his three earlier points regarding Taiwan, stating the US would only support the peaceful re-unification of the PRC and the ROC. The comment given by Nixon was that the US “will not support any military attempts by the Government on Taiwan to resort to a military return to the mainland.”<sup>9</sup> Unstated by Nixon at this point, but brought up by subsequent administrations, is the US opposes *any* attempts by any party to militarily reunify Taiwan and mainland China. Those who have commented on this policy have pointed out this does not back one side over the other, only that the US supports the

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<sup>7</sup> Memorandum of Conversation, pg 5

<sup>8</sup> Memorandum of Conversation, pg 5

<sup>9</sup> Memorandum of Conversation, pg 5

eventual peaceful reunification of China. To this day, US administrations still hold this position, but also play a game of brinkmanship with regards to economic and military aid to the ROC.

Nixon's final point was to declare the US wanted to normalize relations with the PRC, recognizing that the issue of Taiwan might act as a barrier to this normalization. As an assurance to Premier Chou, Nixon promised that approximately two thirds of US forces stationed on Taiwan would be removed once fighting in Vietnam has concluded, stating that those forces "are related to the support of" forces in Southeast Asia.<sup>10</sup> Nixon went on to further dangle the carrot of complete removal of US forces from Taiwan once a peaceful resolution of the Southeast Asian problem is reached.

Later in the document, Nixon called into question the Chinese view of US imperialism, stating the US had no designs on imperialist-style power. However, due to certain US obligations, the US was required to maintain its military presence in Europe, Japan and the Pacific Ocean. Nixon justified this by saying any drawdown in US military forces would represent a danger to China, the subtext being only the US was keeping the USSR in check. By removing this check, Nixon argued, the PRC would then face the full might of the USSR in a confrontation the PRC would be certain to lose.

Underscoring his point, Nixon said despite Chinese demands to back out of Japan, the US would remain there. Nixon played on some very Chinese fears at this point, saying if the US backed out of Japan three things could happen: Japan could re-arm without the security guarantee of the US, Japan could come into the Chinese orbit, or Japan could come under the Soviet orbit. Only one of these scenarios was beneficial to China. In saying this, Nixon was in effect again stating that only the US was keeping the PRC from being completely encircled by the USSR and/or USSR client states.

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<sup>10</sup> Memorandum of Conversation, pg 5

After a lengthy opening statement by President Nixon, Premier Chou started to air the Chinese position on issues. An interesting statement made in the opening was the PRC concern about the military budgets of the USSR and the US. Chou questioned what he saw as excessive spending, stating “the worst possibility is . . . that you all would attack China.”<sup>11</sup> Chou went on to state he knew the PRC and the US have no conflict, in effect mitigating his previous statement. In the next breath, Chou validated Nixon’s statement regarding the US role in the world, saying the US should not revert to total isolationism.

Chou moved on from this point to state as long as the US supported the immediate “Vietnamization, Laoization, and Cambodianization policy,” then the PRC would view this as a positive move by the US.<sup>12</sup> In effect, Chou was saying as long as US forces withdrew from Southeast Asia in a quick manner, then the PRC would not be compelled to act against American interests. This statement led into a discussion of Vietnam. Nixon’s position was if the North Vietnamese agreed to an immediate release of prisoners, a cease-fire could go into effect within six months. However, to immediately jump out of Vietnam without a slow reduction in forces would destroy the US’s reputation as being a “country which any other nation could depend upon.”<sup>13</sup> Ultimately, the question of Vietnam was shelved for discussion at a later point, with Nixon and Chou reaching no agreement on this issue.

So then what was the point of Nixon’s visit to China? Although some observers and critics thought it was to discuss ways to bring about an immediate end to the Vietnam war, this transcript shows this was not the visit’s sole purpose. On first glance, most of this meeting was taken up with Nixon declared the new position of the US vis-à-vis Taiwan, but even this was not the real purpose of this meeting. In his paper titled *A Decade of Sino-American Relations*,

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<sup>11</sup> Memorandum of Conversation, pg 18

<sup>12</sup> Memorandum of Conversation, pg 22

<sup>13</sup> Memorandum of Conversation, pg 25

Michel Oksenberg posits this visit was less about détente between the US and the PRC and more about Nixon taking advantage of deteriorating Sino-Soviet relations. Oksenberg stated “driving the debate was the need to respond to the ominous signs that Moscow was considering military action against China, made credible by the border clashes of considerable intensity.”<sup>14</sup> These clashes, discussed later in this paper, were clearly a source of worry for Mao and the survival of his regime.

#### BEFORE THE VISIT

In the years leading up to Nixon’s visit to China, the PRC had been faced with several immediate threats to its continued existence. The first event which showed the fracture in the Communist world was the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. Many observers saw this as an expression of a new Soviet doctrine designed to underlie Soviet supremacy in all Communist nations. The Brezhnev Doctrine, as this came to be called, stated that Soviet Union had the right to invade any formerly Communist nation in order to hold that nation to Soviet style Communism. Mao took this doctrine as a direct challenge to his rule, especially since he had been drifting away from Soviet influence after the death of Josef Stalin. After Khrushchev’s rise to power, Mao had slowly stepped up ideological attacks on both the USSR and Khrushchev, calling into question the ideological purity of the Soviet system. This touched off a series of increasingly hostile denunciations between the two nations, heralding a schism in Sino-Soviet relations.

Added to this escalating tension was the fact that the PRC and USSR had engaged in an increasingly hostile border dispute. In question were a series of islands used for fishing by both nations. These islands were mostly in the Amur River, which formed part of the somewhat mutually agreed upon 4,000 mile border between the PRC and the USSR. Numbering

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<sup>14</sup> Oksenberg, “A Decade of Sino-American Relations,” pg 177

approximately 700, about 600 of these islands were claimed by the USSR, which at worst excluded Chinese fisherman from these waters or at best meant the same fisherman had to secure Soviet permission for fishing rights and entry at best. Additionally, parts of Xinjiang province, the western most part of China, were under Soviet military control, bringing grazing areas under Soviet jurisdiction. When a mutual attempt to lessen this dispute ended in failure after Chinese demands to turn over large parts of Siberia and most of the above-mentioned islands, both sides felt they had no choice but to patrol these areas with military units.<sup>15</sup> This inevitably resulted in conflicts between the two sides.

According to the book *Nixon and Mao*, between 1964 and 1968 there were four thousand clashes between PRC and USSR elements. Most “seem to have been at a fairly low level, though, with patrols spraying each other with water or hitting out with sticks.”<sup>16</sup> These conflicts quickly escalated to the point where both sides posted mainline combat forces opposite of one other, prepared to respond to any major border provocation. In late 1968 and early 1969, the conflicts had escalated to the point of armored battles and artillery exchanges, killing soldiers on both sides. Tensions had reached such a point the Soviet ambassador to the UN spoke of the Soviet desire to punish “those yellow sons-of-bitches.”<sup>17</sup> The Soviets even went as far as asking what the American response might be “if the Soviet Union were to bomb a Chinese nuclear facility.”<sup>18</sup>

During the Cultural Revolution in 1967 the Red Guards loyal to Mao surrounded the Soviet embassy, which eventually forced an evacuation of Soviet citizens, adding to the tension. “Soviet women and children who were being sent home for safety had to crawl under an arch at

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<sup>15</sup> MacMillan, *Nixon and Mao*, pg 135

<sup>16</sup> MacMillan, *Nixon and Mao*, pg 135

<sup>17</sup> Quoted by MacMillan, *Nixon and Mao*, pg 138

<sup>18</sup> Quoted by MacMillan, *Nixon and Mao*, pg 138

the airport while Red Guards beat and spat at them.”<sup>19</sup> Combining this with the PRC’s limited international relations and was solely dependent on the USSR for economic necessities magnified the impact of the widening schism between the PRC and the USSR.

Since the war in 1962, it was barely on speaking terms with India. Japan – even the peaceful post-1945 Japan – could not be trusted. Taiwan was still run by a government that claimed authority over the whole of China. The United States was present in force in Vietnam, just to the south. And along China’s northern and western borders, Soviet troops were massing.<sup>20</sup>

This environment of hostilities called to mind ancient fears that both the Chinese and the Soviets held of each other. Both sides feared having hostile states on their borders. Each nation held a mutual distrust of the other based on their shared history. Russian history had engrained in the Russian psyche “a generational fear of the Yellow Peril and sweep from the East” of oriental hordes.<sup>21</sup> The Chinese psyche remembered long standing slights such as Russian occupation of China during the Qing Dynasty and the role Czarist Russia played in putting down revolts such as the Boxer Rebellion. In short, the mutual ideology of Communism was not enough to lessen the impact of centuries of historical slights and generational fears each had for other. It was into this context Nixon planned his visit to China, the first since the founding of the Communist PRC.

On the US side of the table, there were fears as well. The Chinese intervention in the Korean War was recent history to many US politicians and officials as were accusations that the Truman administration had lost China to the Communists. Into this mix of recent historical events came the US intervention in Vietnam, part of the containment doctrine developed and espoused by the very administration accused of losing China: the Truman administration.

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<sup>19</sup> MacMillan, *Nixon and Mao*, pg 113

<sup>20</sup> MacMillan, *Nixon and Mao*, pgs 114 and 115

<sup>21</sup> Christensen interview.

Through the previous administrations of Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson, the US had taken over the French war in Vietnam, slowly escalating until the US military was involved in full combat operations. Since the beginning of his time in office, President Nixon had been searching for a way to get the US out of Vietnam. After realizing the Sino-Soviet split offered a chance for the US to work both sides for advantage, Nixon decided to open talks directly with Mao and the PRC. Nixon did not want to be accused of simply abandoning South Vietnam to its eventual fate, but could not get the North Vietnamese to negotiate. By opening direct diplomacy with China, Nixon hoped to press any advantage he could in order to end American involvement in Southeast Asia.

Prior to Nixon's visit, the US had been making a series of overtures designed to get the PRC's attention. Among the most visible of these overtures was abandoning long-standing US opposition to giving the PRC the United Nations China seat. This is important because in addition to having a seat in the UN General Assembly, China also held one of the five permanent seats on the UN Security Council. This meant that the PRC could exercise the veto power accorded to the permanent members of the Security Council. As part of their pro-Taiwan policy, the US had always interfered with any attempts to move the UN seat away from the ROC to the PRC. This was a change in position which was unmistakable to miss.

#### THE VISIT

On the day of Nixon's visit to China, three of the major US newspapers carried the trip as their front story. Pictures of Nixon meeting Chou En-lai at the Beijing Airport were printed for millions of Americans, as well as the rest of the world to see. "Nixon arrives in Peking to begin 8 day visit, met by Chou at airport."<sup>22</sup> The New York Times went on to comment on the

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<sup>22</sup> New York Times, front page. "Nixon Arrives in Peking to begin 8-Day Visit."

reception at the airport, calling it “a quiet greeting.”<sup>23</sup> Chinese authorities, unsure of what type of reception to give President Nixon, erred on the side of caution choosing not to call up any crowds until the day after Nixon had met Mao.

Reaction was fairly swift and divided, as to be expected. However, the Soviets either ignored the visit completely in their press or vehemently opposed it outright. Perhaps the best commentary on this visit from the Soviet point of view came from the American Communist Party. In a New York Times article titled “Communists here assail Mao policy,” James Jackson, the international secretary of the USCP, charged that Mao and Nixon were united by a hatred of the USSR which was the only reason they were meeting. Chou commented on the Soviet reaction in his meeting with Nixon saying the Soviets could say whatever they wanted; it did not matter to the Chinese.

Actual Soviet commentary on the visit was recorded in another New York Times article titled “In Soviet, the trip rates two sentence coverage,” dated on February 22, 1972. This article stated the Soviets were accusing Peking of betraying the Communist camp. The article goes on to further state the US was using Peking “for its own purposes the rupture of the Chinese leaders with the international movement and to extract advantage from their anti-Sovietism.”<sup>24</sup> This view was echoed later by Vietnamese Communist leaders.

Nixon’s policy of détente is aimed at achieving the objective of dividing the socialist camp in an attempt to weaken the revolution. In implementing a policy of “détente” with the big countries, the U.S. imperialists are scheming to “control” the socialist countries in their movement to develop the revolutionary offensive, while the United States is continuing its limited counteroffensives against the revolutionary movement in various areas and small countries.<sup>25</sup>

Nixon’s visit to China was understandably covered in three of the largest US papers. The New York Times, The Washington Post, and The Los Angeles Times all covered the visit on

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<sup>23</sup> New York Times

<sup>24</sup> New York Times, pg 14. February 22, 1972

<sup>25</sup> *Quan Doi Nhan Dan*, quoted in Morris

the front page. Although coverage on the first day of the visit, February 21<sup>st</sup>, was light in comparison to the historical importance of the visit, all three papers devoted multiple pages of their front sections on later dates. However, of the three papers The New York Times devoted the most coverage to the visit with three full pages on the first day and second days of the visit.

At the end of Nixon's visit, a joint communiqué signed by the US and the PRC was issued detailing the issues discussed and agreements made. This statement summarized the US and the PRC positions on various issues such as Taiwan, the ongoing Indian-Pakistani conflict, the war in Vietnam. This document disclosed the new one China policy to the world, with the PRC reiterating its opposition to any two China policy or any Taiwanese independence movement. The most telling point in this communiqué is when it states "both sides are of the view that it would be against the interests of the peoples of the world for any major to country collude with another against other countries, or for major countries to divide up the world into spheres of interest."<sup>26</sup> This statement could be interpreted in many ways. On the surface this statement would seem to voice concern against dividing the world into first world and second world nations based on national patronage. It also seems to be a clear warning to the USSR not to use the Brezhnev Doctrine to uphold Soviet supremacy in the international Communist movement.

#### AFTER THE VISIT

One major effect of Nixon's courting and visit to China was a dramatic re-arrangement of the international scene. By acknowledging China under Communist rule, Nixon extended the branch of formal diplomatic recognition. Ever since the KMT government fled to Taiwan, US policy had been extremely clear. In the opinion of the American government, the KMT government of Chiang Kai-shek was the legal, rightful government of China.

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<sup>26</sup> Public Papers of the President, pg 378

Nixon's visit to China changed international relations by effectively creating a tri-polar world scene. Previously, the acknowledged powers in the Cold War were the US and the USSR, which dominated the world and sought to bring other nations under their influences. According to thought prior to this visit, nations were regulated to either the first world (the US and its allied), the second world (the USSR and its allies), or the third world (everyone else not aligned). Because Cold War thought dictated nations must align themselves with either side, a significant amount of pressure was put on the so-called non-aligned nations to accept either American or Soviet influence. While the PRC was under Communist rule, after the 1955 Bandung Conference, China was viewed as being more independent of Moscow than other Communist nations were. This pattern was especially noticeable after the death of Josef Stalin and the rise of Khrushchev to power. While Nixon's visit to China did not make the PRC into a superpower, it opened the door to the PRC becoming a world power.

Even so, the question must arise why would a détente in Sino-American relations have any effect on American-Soviet relations? For that matter, why was Nixon's visit to China more about Sino-Soviet relations than Sino-American relations? In his meeting with Chou En-lai, Nixon himself gave an important clue. "Before 1959, it did seem to us in the US that the socialist world was monolithic, and that the Czar was in Moscow." For many years, the first world (especially the US) believed that the PRC, being another Communist state, simply toed whatever line the USSR mandated. While this was mostly true under Stalin, what was not apparent was the behind the scenes maneuvering among Mao, Stalin, and Mao's rivals. Books such as *Mao: the Unknown Story* by Jung Chang and Jon Halliday detail the move and counter-move common to exchanges between Mao and Stalin, pointing out that although Mao could not challenge Stalin outright, Mao none-the-less found ways to lessen Stalin's influence over the

Chinese Communist Party and the PRC. In a 1971 exchange with Vietnamese Communists Le Duan and Pham Van Dong, Chou En-lai questioned the necessity of taking the Soviet side with regards to the Vietnam war. “If we take the Soviets’ side, they will control us . . . If we establish a world-wide people’s front that includes the Soviets, they will control this front.”<sup>27</sup> While on the surface this comment was directed at Soviet involvement in setting Communist policy regarding the Vietnamese war, it could have been easily meant as a general statement of displeasure with the central control of Communism which the USSR wanted.

Many observers have argued Mao, from the outset of his rise to power, sought an independent China even though he chose the path of Communism, which must be further analyzed. Mao chose the path which best suited him. Though Mao was many things, it can be argued that Mao was first and foremost a nationalist. Granted, in his desire for national Chinese glory Mao undertook horrific policies such as the mass famine and starvation of the Great Leap Forward and the widespread purges of the Three and Five Antis Campaign. These campaigns culminated in the socially and cultural destructive Cultural Revolution.

It was during the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution campaigns the schism between the PRC and the USSR became pronounced. Soviet officials, including many who visited the PRC, were bewildered at the economic devastation Mao was doing to his own country and people. As Soviets continued to watch the Great Leap Forward they became increasingly concerned and eventually felt they were obliged to denounce the Great Leap as a destructive policy which ultimately led the PRC nowhere. Nixon, seeking to use this split to US advantage, opted to visit the PRC to further US interests in withdrawing from Vietnam and bring the Soviets to the negotiating table on other issues.

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<sup>27</sup> Cold War International History Project, “Discussion between Zhou Enlai, Le Duan and Pham Van Dong”

As mentioned earlier, subsequent US administrations have accepted the new One China policy in the form mentioned earlier. As long as the PRC makes no aggressive moves towards Taiwan and as long as Taiwan does not seek independence, the One China policy is not in question. Despite the fact that subsequent US administrations have made noises about defensive arms sales to Taiwan, PRC protests regarding the One China policy are usually enough to derail any sales or transfers. This policy is outlined in the Taiwan Relations Act, passed by Congress in 1979.

There is also no question the PRC has benefited economically from opening relations with the US. Increasing amounts of goods are manufactured in China and then exported to the US for resale. American companies seeking to tap the vast economic potential of the Chinese market have begun investing large sums of capital in Chinese factories and development. According to the 2007 CIA World Fact Book, China ranks as the second largest exporter of goods to the US, behind Canada. Additionally, the World Fact Book states “measured on a purchasing power parity (PPP) basis, China in 2006 stood as the second-largest economy in the world after the US.”<sup>28</sup> Many experts predict that China will soon overtake the US in terms of the largest economy in the world.

Ultimately, Nixon’s visit to China was in his own words, a week which changed the world. In addition to opening direct communication after nearly 40 years of non-communication and non-recognition, the visit moved China from a rising Communist power to a rising world power. China used its newfound position to its immediate benefit, taking what it considered to be its rightful position in the United Nations and on the Security Council. While direct relations between the US and the PRC would not be established until 1979, there is no question that Nixon’s visit did much to jumpstart this process. In terms of international relations, this visit

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<sup>28</sup> China page, CIA World Fact Book

forced the US, the USSR, and ultimately the PRC to re-examine their roles in the new tri-polar system, shifting their thoughts away from the previous bi-polar system.

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