Rapprochement between America and China during the Nixon Era: A Product of Timing or the Leadership?

Nixon Dönemi Amerika ve Çin Arasındaki Uzlaşma:
Zamanın bir Ürünü mü yoksa Liderlik mi?

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Abstract

This article explores the rapprochement between America and China in the 1970s. By ending two-decade old antagonism and realizing the most important strategic shift of the Cold War era, both states have changed the course of the world politics since the middle of the Cold War. In elaborating one of the historical events in American foreign policy, the article seeks to find an answer for one big question: Was Nixon a unique leader to initiate the U.S. opening to China or was it purely a product of timing? The findings suggest that although timing provided important motivation for rapprochement, this had not been possible if Nixon did not show his determination.

Keywords: *: Rapprochement between America and China, Leadership, Realpolitik, American Foreign Policy.*

Öz

Bu makale, Amerika ve Çin arasında 1970'lerdeki uzlaşmayı incelemektedir. Yirmi yıllık düşmanlığı sonlandıran ve Soğuk Savaş'ın en önemli stratejik kayışını gerçekleştiren iki devlet, Soğuk Savaş'ın ortasından itibaren dünya politikasının gidişatını değiştirmiştir. Amerikan dış politikasındaki en önemli tarihi olaylardan bir tanesini ele alan bu makele, büyük bir soruya: Amerikanın Çin'e açılması için Nixon eşsiz bir lider miydi yoksa bu süreç tamamen zamanın bir ürünü müydü? cevap aramaktadır. Bulgular, zamanlama uzlaşma için önemli bir motivasyon sağlamasına rağmen, Nixon'ın kararlılığı olmasa bu uzlaşmanın imkansız olduğunu önermektedir.

Anahtar kelimeler: *Amerika ve Çin Arasında Uzlaşma, Liderlik, Realpolitika, Amerikan Dış Politikası.*

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Introduction

The People's Republic of China (PRC) appeared on the international stage in 1949, when the PRC encountered bitter opposition from the United States. The emerging communist China in East Asia led to America's interests over the Asia-Pacific being harmed considerably and the equilibrium obtained by the Soviet Union and America being changed in favor of the Communist Block. Communism developed gradually into the major ideological approach in the Far East and East Asia. Consequently, differences between Washington and Beijing in terms of ideology, identity, worldview and values created tremendous antagonism.

The deep antagonism between both states was fuelled by a series of military and political conflicts and crises on China's periphery. The Korean War and the Vietnam War exacerbated the relations between the U.S. and the PRC. The former war set the framework for the U.S. – China confrontation which was experienced throughout the 1950s and 1960s due to the American support for the Chinese Nationalist regime in Taiwan. It was crucial in discouraging both countries to take a step for normalization for more than two decades.

The Vietnam War, particularly, led the U.S. and the PRC to perceive each other as posing a serious threat to their basic security interests in the region. To prevent this emerging condition in East Asia resulting from Communist China, America followed certain strategies such as the PRC was tried to be isolated from international society, like the U.N and several states close to American foreign policy were inhibited to recognize the PRC. Washington's policy toward the PRC caused them to see America as the biggest enemy. Insomuch as that one of the main conflicts between the PRC and the Soviets occurred when Khrushcev wanted to reach a compromise with the U.S. Some Chinese leaders assumed that collaboration among the U.S., the Soviet Union and possibly Japan could target the PRC. However, in the 1960s America and the PRC faced the new conditions both at home and abroad. The perceptions of both American and Chinese leaders of the international situation in general and of each other's threat in particular began to change in the 1960s[1]. These changes coincided with the beginning of Richard Nixon's presidency and Henry Kissinger's diplomacy.

Under the lights of the historical background given above, this article seeks to elaborate certain conditions which helped both countries to shift their old policy to a new rapprochement derived from 'Realpolitik'. In so doing, the article aims at observing whether the available conditions and timing affected both states to establish new relations, or if Nixon was purely placed to initiate the American opening to China. To scrutinize this question, the article consists of three parts, in turn, the first part shows the background of the normalization, the second part examines Nixon's role over the rapprochement and the final part illustrates the road to normalization.

1 Martha, J. Barnett, *China Policy: Old Problems and New Challenges,* p. 2

New Conditions and Opportunities

In the late 1960s the perceptions of U.S. and PRC changed gradually due to certain factors, affecting the U.S. and the PRC to discover a new foreign policy strategy both on the regional and global levels. As a result of these factors, both states were under pressure to adjust their foreign policy by taking national interests into consideration rather than ideological views. To begin with, in China, the 'Cultural Revolution'[2] had a great impact on the management of Chinese foreign policy. Mao did consider China 'the key to Asia's future' and he did adopt, for the most part, a "you come to us" attitude to all foreign countries except Russia[3]. The Cultural Revolution, indeed, preceded a tough policy and efforts to spread the 'revolution' to every area which as a consequence produced fear for some states willing to establish relations with China. Such exposition supported by the Cultural Revolution caused PRC to become an isolated power in world politics. As a result of this China decided to establish a multidimensional foreign policy strategy. According to the new strategy, China had embraced a much softer policy which was called relations from "state to state" instead of relations from "people to people". The new strategy gave an opportunity to China to establish multidimensional foreign policy vis-à-vis the Soviet Union by extending its foreign policy hinterland[4].

The Cultural Revolution encouraged Chinese leaders to embark on new relations with the U.S. from that time onwards. Part of the reason for this is that with the Cultural Revolution, it was realized that Japan became an economic giant in East Asia with American support. On the other hand, China was an overwhelmingly agricultural land for which a basic self-sufficiency was not a mere ideological but an economic necessity[5]. The advocacy of the Communism caused China to fall behind from Japan and to remain a backward region. From the rational point of view, Beijing considered that normalization with Washington would also serve Chinese economic development and technological advancements.

Another point is that by 1967, relations with the Soviet Union became severely strained[6]. Afterwards the Soviet Union followed several expansionist policies such as the invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968. These policies set

2 The Cultural Revolution was a socio-political movement that took place in the People's Republic of China from 1966 until 1976. It was set into motion by Mao Zedong, then Chairman of the Communist Party of China, to preserve 'true' Communist ideology in the country by purging remnants of capitalist and traditional elements from Chinese society, and to re-impose Maoist thought as the dominant ideology within the Party. The Revolution marked the return of Mao Zedong to a position of power after the Great Leap Forward. The movement paralyzed China politically and significantly negatively affected the country's economy and society.

3 Ross Terril, 'U.S. - China Relations'

4 Fahir Armaoğlu, *20. yy Dunya Siyasi Tarihi,* pgs. 582-4

5 Terril, *ibid*

6 Amos Yoder, *The Conduct Of American Foreign Policy Since World War I,* p.24

by the 'Brezhnev Doctrine'[7] proved that the Soviet Union had justified its action, forced the Chinese to look outward, to face the danger on their borders. Moreover, the Soviet Union had increased its military capability in East and Central Asia. 'The warning was clear enough: might China be next?'[8]. One may assert that China might be considered as a nuclear power with thermonuclear warheads and missiles that could deliver them, but Chinese leaders did not wish to confront with Russia at the time. Mao feared that China would become the next victim of the Brezhnev doctrine. While Mao condemned the invasion, and accused Brezhnev of behaving like a Russian czar, Moscow intended to involve Japan in the creation of a new Asian security system aimed at the containment of China[9]. China thought that the relations between the Soviet Union and Japan would restrict Chinese interests on the region and China would become isolated. It is clear enough to consider that by depending on the international atmosphere, China had one option which was the policy of rapprochement with the U.S.. This was considered to provide a chance to avert this new regional structure formed by the Soviet Union and Japan and to prevent it from becoming isolated in the region.

As Warner noted[10], the escalation of the existing Sino-Soviet dispute turned into a series of armed clashes on the Russian and Chinese border during the spring and summer of 1969. This was the principal catalyst in promoting the PRC to transform itself for new conditions. While Moscow demanded negotiations to settle the disagreements, China's response was to embark on a massive military buildup and prepare for war with the Soviet Union. The Moscow's potential broader attack on China caused the Chinese leaders to divide into two camps. Some Chinese leaders, with the exception of Lin Biao, were not seemed to be interested in seeking reconciliation with the Soviet Union[11]. Needless to say, Lin was the most ardent opponent of any opening to the U.S.. This opposition was almost discredited after his death[12].

Some Chinese leaders claimed that the Americans were not such a threat to China as the Soviets were. Small countries near to China and the Soviet Union posed a bigger threat than the U.S.[13]. Some in China thought that the Soviet threat could only be balanced on the ground of relations with the U.S.. For instance, Mao and Premier Chou En-lai concluded that they should explore the tie to the U.S., which might create a new balance to restrain Moscow. In fact, this tie would have helped them to provide new symmetry in the region

7 The Doctrine suggests use of force and intervention in Eastern bloc if any states within the bloc try to leave the Soviet sphere of influence or even moderate its policies.

8 Warren, I. Cohen, *America's Response to China: A History of Sino-American Relations,* p. 195

9 Robert Garson, *The United States and China Since 1949: A Troubled Affair*, pgs. 120-1.

10 Geoffrey Warner, 'Nixon, Kissinger and the Rapprochement with China 1969-1972'

11 Cohen, *ibid*, p.196

12 Garson, *ibid*, p. 129

13 Terril, *ibid*

among the four powers which were the U.S., the Soviet Union, Japan and the PRC there.

For Americans certain conditions coincided with China pushing the U.S. toward a rapprochement with the PRC. The anti-war movement, which climaxed with scenes of public turmoil in Chicago in August 1968 during the democratic convention, highlighted the bitter divisions that the war had created within the U.S.[14]. The Vietnam War forced the American leadership to find a new solution instead of war. The impact of this on the American economy was substantial. U.S. troop strength stood at 543,000 and its cost to Americans leaped to $30 billion annually[15]. Moreover both the American public and its European allies were discontent because of America's tough policy toward Vietnam. Nixon scrutinized this situation correctly. During the election campaign, he guaranteed that he would wind down the war in Vietnam and look for new solutions. He also indicated that he would not feel bound by his predecessors' policies towards the PRC[16]. This is clear that Nixon signaled the new foreign policy approach during his election campaign.

Throughout the 1960s, while America tried hard to end the Vietnam War, the Soviets ascended in East Asia, and extended its effectiveness towards other issues of containment such as Europe and the Middle East. Moreover the Sino-Soviet rivalry which occasionally moved to the brink of major fighting posed a dilemma for America and its democratic allies. As Seabury noted[17], China was inadequately prepared in arms, and war would be likely to change the global balance of power greatly in favor of the Russians. America's neutrality would cause her to concede the Soviet dominance in East Asia: then the full force of Soviet power could focus on the West. One may consider this as America might have lost the maneuverability inducing the Soviet Union for detenté process.

The Sino-Soviet rivalry seemed to be the only one alternative serving the American interests. America, for instance, could contain both states simultaneously by using two powers against each other. Besides, America had a chance to put pressure on North Vietnam for ending the war honorably without losing either its troops or additional military expenditure. Consequently, the Soviet Union could have evaluated that the U.S. did not only have one strategy in the region as America could extend her strategy over the PRC.

In a nutshell, during the late 1960s the weakness of both countries is undoubtedly clear-cut. The international atmosphere proved that both states shared the same interests within the context of domestic policy and foreign policy. Yet there was no parallelism between both states in terms of identity, world

14 Garson, *ibid,* p. 122

15 Walter LaFeber, *The American Age*, p.638

16 Garson, *ibid,* p.122

17 Paul Seabury, *America's Stake in the Pacific,* p. 23

view and values. The most challenging issue is that both state's people saw each other as the biggest enemy. For example, as indicated by Garrison, public opinion polls from the late 1960s reflected the perception that China was the greatest threat to the U.S.[18]. In 1967, China was chosen by 70 percent of respondents compared to Russia's 20 percent. Also, the Taiwan issue was the biggest obstacle causing both states to take a step towards normalization. However, during this borderline case, the alternative policy with China was stated by Richard Nixon. Writing in Foreign Affairs in October 1967, Nixon argued that 'the U.S. should reassess the Chinese threat and instead embrace the opportunity China represented for U.S. policy'[19]. The next section takes the issues from the available timing facilitating the rapprochement between U.S. and PRC to the leadership of Nixon.

Shifting from Old Asia Policy to *Realpolitik*

In the period of the multi-faceted international atmosphere, Nixon, was the best known of the Republican Party's candidates. He came to power in the U.S. on January 20th , 1969. The new president believed that 'the vehicle for making the turn had to be foreign policy. Foreign relations, unlike internal affairs also allowed the President much freedom of action'[20]. Nixon, with his wide experiences and contacts, wanted the management of international affairs to be conducted with greater ease and efficiency. He strongly believed that international stability could best be achieved through the personal direction of policy[21]. Centralizing decision making was Nixon's way to maximize the control of policy-making[22]. One thing is obvious that Nixon did not want to get the bureaucratic structures involved in his foreign policy decisions in order to establish a pragmatist foreign policy combination.

During his first term as president in Washington, Henry Kissinger was appointed as a National Security adviser, and William P. Rogers, Nixon's old friend, was appointed as the Secretary of State. According to Melanson and Sharpe[23] , Nixon might have thought that Rogers would keep the State Department preoccupied with minor matters while Nixon and Kissinger conducted major politic matters. As Kissinger articulated the policy strategy, the President made himself dependent on Kissinger for information and advice. Namely, 'Nixon supplied power and will; Kissinger presented an intellectual framework and negotiating skills'[24]. This system worked well for several years because Nixon

18 Jean, A. Garrison, *Making China Policy: From Nixon to G.W.Bush,* pgs. 21-28

19 Richard M. Nixon, Asia After Viet Nam, (erişim: https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/asia/1967-10-01/asia-after-viet-nam, 29.04.2016).

20 LaFeber, *ibid,* p. 634

21 Garson, *ibid,* p. 123

22 Garrison, *ibid,* p. 22

23 Richard A. Melanson and M.E. Sharpe, *American Foreign Policy Since The VietnamWar,* p.635

24 Times, "Nixon and Kissinger: Triumph and Trial", Men Of The Year/Cover Story,Monday, Jan. 01,1973,(http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,903628-1,00.html accesed 22 April 2016)

and Kissinger were kindred spirits who shared the same approach to politics and foreign policy[25]. Nixon and Kissinger considered certain situations resulting from the international atmosphere and domestic affairs which compelled them to build up America's new stance over the world.

The common idea for both Nixon and Kissinger was to launch a new policy toward the PRC. As Steiner[26] remarked, a meaningful new policy toward the PRC would serve such objectives as 'halting the proliferation of nuclear weapons, reducing the challenge to U.S. security interests posed by the Soviet Union, and minimizing the costs and risks of fulfilling our defense commitments in South East and North East Asia' which form more compelling reasons for looking hard at America's ability to develop a long-term policy toward China'. What is more is that 'this new policy could provide America, to screw the Russians, help for Vietnam quagmire, keep the Japanese in line, get another ball in play and lastly way down the road to have some relations with China'[27]. In fact, this radical transformation within the context of the China rapprochement divided up American domestic policy into two parts. As Garrison stated[28], while many conservatives saw rapprochement as a compromise that betrayed old allies like Taiwan, liberals pushed the administration to move more rapidly toward rapprochement with China because of the opportunity for peace it offered.

Apparently, the Taiwan question mostly restricted Nixon's hand over his position regarding China. Seeing public opinion polls in the U.S indicated that any actions which appear to abandon Taiwan would not be politically acceptable, or at least would encounter great political opposition. Common belief among Americans was that Taiwan could continue to attract commercial investment and maintain its access to world markets[29]. Kissinger and Nixon, accordingly, tried to persuade Taiwan's supporters at home. Initially their position for Taiwan was: 'That it is not going to just stand by and let Taiwan go down the drain, we are trying to hold their position as best we can'[30]. However, there were many factors which led Kissinger and Nixon to think about the realpolitik of East Asia.

Firstly, the Vietnam nightmare mostly affected Nixon's vision towards Asia. Nixon and Kissinger were in a position to reassess assumptions about the communist world that had governed American policy for over twenty years. As

25 Garrisson, *ibid,* p.22

26 Artur, H. Steiner, 'Re-Thinking U.S. China Policy'

27 Warner, *ibid*

28 Garrison, *ibid*, p. 21

29 Victor Li and John W. Lewis, 'Resolving the China Dilemma:Advancing Normalization, Preserving Security'

30 Steven, I. Levine, 'China and the Super Powers: Policies Toward the United States and the Soviet Union',

nicely said by Garson[31], Nixon did not wish to be seen to be caught in the web of the past or to be ensnared by his earlier reputation for intransigence. Before being a president, Nixon implied that the new international atmosphere requires more stability and balance of power. Since being a president, Nixon's main aim was to end the Vietnam War honorably with the utmost dispatch because increasing public opposition toward the Vietnam War helped him to be elected and he wanted to keep his promise which was given during his election campaign. According to Nixon's Vietnam Address on 14th May, 1969, his plan would 'end this war in a way that will bring us closer to that great goal to which Woodrow Wilson and every American President in our history has been dedicated the goal of a just and lasting peace'[32]. Later on Nixon's doctrine and the idea of Vietnamization proved that Nixon wanted to abandon the old American policy.

Nixon was expecting that it would enhance both his personal reputation and the standing of the U.S. in the world by means of considering a new approach towards North Vietnam. Besides, had Nixon been able to end the war without fighting, it would ensure that America's withdrawal would not look like a defeat. Alternatively, Nixon wanted to use both China and the Soviet Union to compel Hanoi for accepting peace terms. His expectation about Vietnam, however, eventuated easily. Especially after the secret bombing of Cambodia and expanded bombing campaign in South Vietnam in 1971, Nixon faced some difficulties in terms of normalization with China and anti-war demonstrations in America.

Equally or more importantly, Nixon and Kissinger wished to achieve greater leverage in dealing with Moscow, which they viewed as Washington's primary adversary. Thus, they believed that improved U.S.-China relations could oblige new constraints on the Russians and might push them toward greater compromise and détente[33]. China, having more than one fifth of the world's population, had great importance for the détente process.

The major objective of Nixon's foreign policy was to use the China card in order to deter the Soviet threat. The Sino-Soviet conflict gave him an opportunity to use the China card against the Soviet Union. Nixon later noted in his memories[34]:

> Our relationship with China is a key element of our strategy vis-à-vis the Soviet Union. Our mutual interest in deterring the Soviet threat, both China and U.S. should increase their military strength to deter Soviet aggression in Asia. Such a relationship, based on the prospects for long-term benefit rather than the dictates of short-term expediency, will require careful tending.

31 Garson, *ibid,* p.123

32 Melanson, *ibid,* p.56

33

34 Richard Nixon, *Real Peace,* pgs. 69-70

Almost simultaneously with this Soviet officials seemed constantly persuaded that the U.S. and the Soviet Union might jointly act against China[35]. Thereby, America held two vital cards in its hand to change the progress of the Cold War. Goh asserted[36] that 'Kissinger's objective was to increase American maneuverability, and to carve out a prominent position for Washington as the 'balancer' at the pivot of the new triangle by maintaining better relations with each side than they did with each other'. In fact, Nixon and Kissinger skillfully played Russian and Chinese desires and fears off against one another to establish a non-ideological basis for relations among the three great powers. As a consequence, the Soviet Union as a common threat mostly fuelled the new Sino-American relations.

The end of the 'Cultural Revolution' also coincided with the beginnings of Nixon and Kissinger Diplomacy[37]. With the Cultural Revolution in China, Nixon and Kissinger realized that the PRC was desired to enhance its political and economic power in the world by setting aside advocacy of the communist enthusiasm. This transformation provided a unique opportunity for economic growth. Most experts, on the other hand, agreed that trade would not increase to any substantial level until the U.S. and China sorted out their political differences. Furthermore some sinologists in America issued various articles about China and the Cold War. Those believed that American foreign policy had to make adjustments in the light of this historical revision. These provided the Nixon administration with a ready-made image of new China, stamped with the scholars' seal of approval[38] .

Garson believed that 'there was one other motive for the move towards normalization which was probably shared by Nixon and Mao. Both of them inflated senses of their own political grandeur and were convinced of the uniqueness of their contributions to the unfolding of history'[39]. Despite the strong support of Taiwan, the changing atmosphere abroad convinced Nixon and Kissinger that the isolation of China no longer served America's interests. Normalization seemed to be one way to create new political dimensions in accordance with realpolitik. Table 1 illustrates 'the Component of the Nixon's China Policy Frame'[40].

35 Jonathan, D. Pollock, The Implications of Sino-American Normalization'

36 Evelyn Goh, 'Nixon, Kissinger and the "Soviet Card" in the U.S. Opening to China, 1971-1974'

37 Martha Jeanne Barnett, *China Policy: Old Problems and New Challenges,* p. 4

38 Garson, *ibid,* pgs. 130-3

39 *Ibid,* p. 130

40 Garrison, *ibid,* p. 37

Table 1:Components of Richard Nixon's China Policy Frame

Problem diagnosis	▪ Need to redefine China from threat to essential ally in struggle with the Soviet Union
Themes that resonated with president and public presidential beliefs	▪ PRC a priority and seen as useful counter to USSR ▪ Personal confidence in his foreign policy expertise solidified his efforts
Policy themes	▪ China as a strategic opportunity and anti-Soviet
Political considerations	▪ Peace and stability in East Asia ▪ Need to move carefully between opposition from political left (critics of Vietnam policy) and right (original China lobby or Taiwan lobby) ▪ Spring 'opening' to China to undercut opposition
Supporting conditions/tactics	▪ Back-channel negotiations essential 'spring' the surprise ▪ Incremental change to prepare domestic ground

Road to the Normalization

The breakthrough towards China can be described as one of the most important events in both States' history. Even if Nixon mentioned about normalization with China, in Foreign Affairs in 1967 and during his election campaign in 1968, it would not have been eventually as easy as it had been expected due to issues resulting from both country's history and their domestic affairs. The Taiwan issue and America's approach to Vietnam were the most complicated problems. Each country's public particularly did not seem to be ready for relations between the U.S. and the PRC. For instance, in the late 1960s, while the American public saw China as one of the biggest threats[41]; on the other hand the possibility of normalization with the U.S. aroused stronger opposition from the revolutionary people in China[42]. For America, the Republic of China caused the public to become more opposed to the PRC. For China, the America's stance against the Communist world and the Vietnam War fuelled anti-

41 Garrison, *ibid,* p. 28

42 Garson, *ibid,* p. 129

American sentiment at home. Many in China, in particular, considered Nixon as one of the most ardent anti-communists among all American presidents. In such a case, the leader must act carefully in order not to be confronted with strong opposition. For this reason, it is noticeably clear that on both sides the leaders' roles were extremely important in order to establish rapprochement.

The effort for breaking away from the old China policy began in 1969. By that time while 'the Soviet Union was seriously considering a pre-emptive strike against China to forestall its further production of nuclear weapons'[43], Nixon expressed the conviction that 'we could not allow China to be smashed' by Soviet attack[44]. The first positive message was welcomed by the Chinese leader. Subsequently, the U.S. took a concrete step to convince the PRC of its readiness to reduce the tension by suspending the regular patrol of two destroyers from the 7th Fleet through the Taiwan straits[45].

On the China side, some important developments accelerated the negotiations. For example, Lin Biao, known as one of the biggest challengers of any relations with America, died after a plane crash. Subsequently the official imaginary of the U.S. in the Chinese press incrementally changed. American power in the Pacific was ebbing that there was no longer a threat to China[46]. Therefore Mao persuaded Zhou to take new initiatives for normalization with America before the end of the 1970s. Beijing believed that the tide of American expansionism in Asia was turned because American's promethean spirit weakened, and the dollar and the Marines could not quite do what they had been able to do 25 years ago[47]. Thus the new realism in America under Nixon was appreciated by Beijing.

This positive climate continued mutually with some motion. For example the American table-tennis team suddenly received an invitation to play in China. The team was very welcomed by Zhou himself. Similarly Nixon responded by personally announcing the lifting of a host of remaining trade restrictions and signaling his interest in going to China[48]. The normalization process was begun with ambassador level dialogue in 1970. Nixon and Kissinger in fact wanted to conduct relations secretly by using the backdoor channels via France, Romania and Pakistan due to the domestic policy constraints.

Three important factors caused Nixon to use backdoor channels. First, Nixon wanted to sideline the State Department from the negotiations. Second, he did not want to inform some opposition groups in America which thought

43 LaFeber, *ibid,* p. 647

44 Yoder, *ibid,* p. 124

45 Warner, *ibid,*

46 Cohen, *ibid,* p. 197

47 Terril, *ibid*

48 Cohen, *ibid,* p. 198

that Nixon sacrificed Taiwan for the rapprochement. Thirdly, Nixon wanted to persuade Moscow for détente. He did not want the Soviet to be prepared itself for the potential U.S-China rapprochement. In addition to backdoor channels, Nixon ordered Kissinger to conduct this breakthrough by himself.

Throughout the normalization, Kissinger's secret visits to China deserved critical importance. Kissinger's secret mission was to arrange a visit for President Nixon to China in general and to compromise about the controversial subject in particular. Kissinger made considerable efforts to convince both Mao and Zhou En Lai. First of all, Kissinger tried to assure that " we do not deal with communism in the abstract but we collaborated with specific communist states on the basis of their specific action toward us as an abstract crusade"[49]. This proves the distinction between ideology and realpolitik. In addition Kissinger expressed that "we had to distinguish between what could be done immediately and what had to be left to historical evolution"[50]. Kissinger and the Chinese leader debated about the Taiwan issue which had been the most controversial issue between both countries. In short, the Taiwan issue was handled in three different ways: 'the German Solution of one nation – two states' policy, 'one China, one Taiwan' policy and 'one China but not now policy'[51]. Also the seat of rivals of the Chinese government in the U.N, China's seat as one of the five permanent members of the U.N., Taiwan, and the Taiwan straits are an alienable part of China and was discussed during Kissinger's secret visit. Yet Kissinger highly insisted on the Chinese leader not to be limited only to the Taiwan question but would encompass other steps to improve relations and reduce tensions[52]. The secret visit of Kissinger to China disconcerted people in the U.S. because few people in the U.S. administration knew about Kissinger's visit to Beijing until it was over.

Meanwhile the secret bombing of Cambodia affected America's China policy in two ways. First, Nixon underestimated the extent and intensity of the domestic reaction. Second, China cancelled the ambassadorial talks scheduled. Furthermore Mao issued a statement calling on all people of the world to unite together against the aggressors of American imperialism and its running dogs[53]. Yet Nixon and Kissinger was able to continue the normalization process because the cancellation of the Warsaw Talks provided an opportunity for the White House to end the State Department's involvement in the tortuous negotiation process to focus on a 'back door channel' which could be closely controlled and monitored[54]. In this case, one can argue that Nixon's determination towards the rapprochement was clear-cut. Regardless of Mao's statement

49 Cited in Warner, *ibid*

50 *ibid*

51 Steiner, *ibid*

52 Warner, *ibid*

53 *ibid*

54 Garson, *ibid,* p. 128

and China's withdrawal from the Warsaw Talks, Nixon did not give up on the normalization process.

The breakthrough was eventually occurred in December 1970, when the Pakistani ambassador in Washington informed Kissinger of the Chinese Prime Minister Zhou Enlai's reply to a message from Nixon which had been given to him by President Yahya Khan during the latter's visit to China[55]. The year 1971 was perhaps the brightest spot in the blighted career of Richard Nixon. In his 'State of the World' message to Congress in February, the President spoke of the need to establish a dialogue with Beijing. He called for a place for the People's Republic in the United Nations without sacrificing the position of the Republic of China. However Nixon avoided giving any detail about the normalization process due to the Taiwan issue. Nixon did not wish to deteriorate the normalization process by explaining what they had. On July 15th 1971, Nixon announced that Kissinger met with Zhou and that Nixon accepted an invitation to visit China within the next year[56]. Needless to say that the meeting date was arranged before May 1972 because it was dictated by America's wish not to have the visit involved in the run-up to the presidential election in November[57].

In February 1972, Nixon became the first U.S. president to step on Chinese soil. He seemed awestruck by what he was doing[58]. Shanghai communiqué was issued at the end of Nixon's trip. The Shanghai communiqué was a skilful diplomatic combination of agreement and disagreement of the "two sides". Despite their essential differences, however, the two sides agreed that they should conduct their relations on the basis of respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity of all states with non- interference in the internal affairs of other states[59]. In a thinly veiled reference to Soviet power, they declared that they would oppose anyone trying "to establish hegemony" in "the Asia-Pacific region"[60]. They also agreed to broaden their relations through scientific, cultural, and economic exchanges as well as some political ties.

> On the critical Taiwan issue, this had been the most crucial issue blocking U.S-China ties. Both sides reaffirmed their basic position that for China; "the Government of the People's Republic of China is the sole legal government of China", "Taiwan is a province of China." "The liberation of Taiwan is China's internal affair." "U.S. forces and military installations must be withdrawn from Taiwan." Of course America did not accept Beijing's sweeping claims. For

55 Warner, *ibid*

56 Cohen, *ibid,* pgs. 197-8

57 Warner, *ibid*

58 LaFeber, *ibid,* p. 648

59 Yoder, *ibid,* p.126

60 LaFeber, *ibid*, p. 649

> America; "All Chinese on either side of the Taiwan strait maintain that there is but one China and that Taiwan is part of China." "The U.S. Government does not challenge that position" but "reaffirms its interest in a peaceful settlement of the Taiwan issue by the Chinese themselves" and will "progressively reduce its forces and military installations on Taiwan as the tension in the area diminishes"[61].

By completing the rapprochement, both states had changed the shape of the world since the beginning of the Cold War. Two countries ended their antagonism which lasted more than two decades. It was the most important strategic shift of the Cold War era. Although the reactions of America's allies generally were favorable, Soviets, Asian and Pacific countries varied from cautious approval through surprise to concern and dismay. Understandably, the reaction from Taiwan was the most hostile[62].

This rapprochement produced immediately some major results, such as the danger of Sino-American war was eliminated. Moscow lost the luxury of seeing its two main adversaries out of touch with each other, America legitimized its presence in the region, Japan and many other allies of the U.S. followed Washington's lead and themselves established diplomatic relations with the PRC, the international position of the Nationalist government on Taiwan began to steadily erode, and trade, cultural exchanges, and tourism resumed between China and the U.S.[63]. Economic indicators showed that unofficial U.S.-China exchanges developed fairly rapidly and trade sky-rocketed, rising to a peak of almost $1 billion in 1972[64]. Moreover, Nixon was able to be elected for the second time by taking 60 percent of the total votes, helping him to continue further relations with China.

Conclusion

This article is based on understanding the dynamics of rapprochement between the U.S. and the PRC by asking one important question of whether it's a matter of time or the importance of leadership. To find a proper answer for this question, the domestic and international atmosphere for both countries have been chronologically examined. One thing has become noticeable that the Sino-American relations came about due to the weakness of both states. Before reaching the rapprochement, both states had already begun to explore new possibilities to transform their foreign policy into pragmatist policy combinations. Especially the end of the Cultural Revolution and a bitter Sino-Soviet rivalry promoted the Nixon-Kissinger diplomacy and it produced a new fluidity toward the new Chinese policy.

61 Seabury, *ibid,* pgs. 67-70

62 Warner, *ibid*

63 Terril, *ibid*

64 Barnett, *ibid,* p. 6

Nixon's objective was therefore to shift the focus of revolutionary regimes around the world from ideology to issues of national interests depending on the dynamics of realpolitik. Such an objective led Nixon abandoned the moralistic consideration dominating American foreign policy since Woodrow Wilson. Following the realpolitik position, which "interests are constant, alliances are not", Kissinger and Nixon reassessed U.S. relationships, abandoning some ties as out-of-date Taiwan and forging new ties with old enemies Russia and China to expand the field of play[65].

Nixon's determination for maintaining his policy toward China is evidently clear-cut. Although domestic constraints at home and his bad reputation in China made the normalization process difficult, he never gave up on his policy. Nixon's determination made him became the first president of America who landed in Beijing. That is to some extent true to hand over lion's share to Nixon. But, neglecting the positive timing and the other player's efforts such as Kissinger, Zhou En Lai and Mao, one can miss the big picture. They also deserve the credit to produce the rapprochement. Even if the timing was in favor of Nixon's policy, he deserved the greatest credit for the rapprochement. He was able to shift American policy and change America's stance over the region by using his wide experience.

65 Times, *ibid*

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