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Behind the Borders and Beyond: Explaining Sino-U.S. Foreign Relations During the Cold War

Wenyan Deng
wdeng@wellesley.edu

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**BEHIND THE BORDERS AND BEYOND:
EXPLAINING SINO-U.S. FOREIGN RELATIONS
DURING THE COLD WAR**

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Prerequisite for Honors in
International Relations-Political Science

Wenyan Deng

Wellesley, Massachusetts

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CONTENTS

Introduction	1
Chapter I. Theoretical Explanations of Sino-U.S. Relations	5
I. “Balance against Threat”	5
II. Historical Sino-Soviet-U.S. Alliance Patterns	6
III. Alternative Explanations	9
III.1 Chinese Domestic Politics	9
III.2 U.S. Domestic Politics	12
III.3 Ideology	14
IV. Hypotheses	15
IV.1 “Balance against Threat” Theory	15
IV.2 Domestic Politics	16
IV.3 Ideology	17
V. Methodology	18
VI. Structure	20
Chapter II. Balancing the Threat?	22
I. The Emerging Chinese Nuclear Threat	23
II. The Sino-Soviet Border Conflict	32
III. Finally, Rapprochement	38
Conclusion	42
Chapter III. Fending off Domestic Enemies?	44
I. The United States: Re-“losing” China?	45
II. The People’s Republic: Waiting to be Courted	52
Conclusion	59
Chapter IV. Do Beliefs Matter?	61
I. Ideology and Threat Perceptions	61
II. Mao’s Ideological Vacillations	71
Conclusion	75
Conclusions: A “Perfect Storm”?	77
Works Cited	87

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Introduction

The relationship between the United States and the People's Republic of China (PRC) is arguably one of the most delicate bilateral relationships in the international arena today.

Historically, Sino-U.S. relations underwent a series of tense standoffs and acrimonious clashes since the suspension of diplomatic relations after the 1949 Communist victory, including fierce battles on the Korean Peninsula from 1950 to 1953, the Taiwan Strait Crises of the 1950s, and the escalation of Sino-U.S. tension over Vietnam in 1964. In December 1969, however, the United States approached the PRC through its Polish diplomatic channel, and in 1972, the Nixon Administration and Mao's Communist China surprised the world with the Shanghai Communiqué, pledging the PRC and the United States to a normalized relationship. Over the next decade, the PRC and the United States established formal diplomatic ties.

The chilly diplomatic relationship between the PRC and the United States from 1949 to 1969 is often taken for granted and regarded as natural. However, an analysis of the strategic position of the two states suggests that there were several points in the decade of the 1960s, particularly in the years after the Sino-Soviet split deepened, at which the PRC and the United States might have been expected to reconcile with each other. Traditional "balance against threat" theories suggest that states tend to join together to balance against the most dangerous common foe.¹ Stephen Walt suggests that this kind of balancing behavior, in which states ally with each other against the greatest threat, is far more common than bandwagoning behavior, in which states join the aggressor.²

In the context of Sino-U.S. relations, Walt's balancing theory would predict that the PRC and the United States, as early as 1964, might have balanced against the state they perceived as

¹ John Mearsheimer, "Structural Realism," in *International Relations Theories*, ed. Tim Dunne, Milja Kurki, and Steve Smith, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 79–85.

² Stephen Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), 5.

their greatest threat, which appeared to be the USSR. The Sino-Soviet split, which surfaced in 1956 with Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev's speech criticizing Stalin and his cult of personality, marked the end of any thought of a monolithic Communist world. The Sino-Soviet split continued to deepen in the 1960s, especially after Khrushchev's humiliating retreat in the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis, with Chinese propaganda denouncing the "Soviet revisionists" for betraying the Communist cause and bowing to U.S. imperialism.³ This widening rift reached a climax between March and September 1969, when rhetorical war escalated into a military conflict at the Sino-Soviet border. Throughout the 1960s, the USSR, with which the PRC shared a lengthy border, posed a massive and looming military threat to the PRC. In contrast, the PRC was separated from the United States by the Pacific Ocean. Although the United States had a strong military presence in Asia, particularly in South Korea, Japan, Indochina, and Taiwan, the newly established PRC was able to fight the United States to a standstill on the Korean Peninsula in 1953 despite the heavy costs to itself. The USSR, therefore, seemed to pose a greater threat to the PRC than the United States did in the 1960s.

Similarly, the USSR was the archenemy of the United States throughout the Cold War, and all the more so after the massive Soviet military buildup in the 1960s. In contrast, the PRC, which was neither geographically proximate to the United States nor militarily capable of reaching the U.S. mainland, did not form a formidable threat to the United States. Given the Soviet threat to both the PRC and the United States, Walt's balancing expectations might predict that the two states would reconcile their differences and balance against the USSR before December 1969.

However, while the rift between the PRC and the USSR started to deepen in as early as

³ Lorenz M. Lüthi, *The Sino-Soviet Split: Cold War in the Communist World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 129.

1962, the PRC did not seek to counter the threat posed by the militarily and economically superior USSR through reconciling its relationship with the United States until December 1969, three months after its military clash with the USSR ended. On the U.S. side, while evidence suggests that U.S. intelligence services were not oblivious to the Sino-Soviet split, no president before Nixon sought to balance the USSR by reconciling with the PRC. The Kennedy Administration even attempted to collude with the USSR in destroying the PRC's nuclear weapons program in the early 1960s.⁴ Why, then, did confrontations and tensions between the PRC and the United States persist throughout the 1960s even when the USSR seemed more threatening to both the PRC and the United States than each was to the other?

A related question is why Sino-U.S. rapprochement started taking place in December 1969 and the early 1970s. While the United States and the PRC may have moved toward each other in the early 1970s because at that moment, both felt weaker vis-à-vis a more threatening USSR, the question remains as to why such moments in the 1960s did not lead to a reconciliation. What was different internationally and domestically in December 1969 that started the process which brought about rapprochement?

This thesis will address the question of why the United States and the PRC did not pursue reconciliation in the 1960s despite the greater threat posed by the USSR to both states. The discrepancies between theory and observation raise the question of whether other factors, such as ideology and domestic politics, were at work in preventing and causing Sino-U.S. rapprochement. I will examine Sino-U.S. diplomatic relations from 1960 to 1970 and test Walt's "balance against threat" theory as well as alternative explanations—such as the role of ideology

⁴ National Security Archive, *John F. Kennedy Library, National Security File, box 403, McGeorge Bundy Correspondence, Chron File 5/16/63–5/31/63*, "McGeorge Bundy, Memorandum of Conversation with Ambassador Dobrynin, at lunch May 17, 1963" (Washington, DC: George Washington University, 2001), 2, <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB38/document7.pdf>.

and domestic politics—in shaping foreign policy.

I argue that a series of contingent events affected the geopolitical calculations, domestic political dynamics, and ideological inclinations of both the PRC and the U.S. leaderships. Shifts in these three factors made Sino-U.S. rapprochement difficult, if not impossible, before 1969, but certain changes in 1969 cleared the way for reconciliation. I suggest that a “perfect storm” of a myriad of events both on the domestic and international scene made Sino-U.S. reconciliation possible. This analysis implies that, perhaps, luck played a not unimportant role in bringing about rapprochement. “Balance against threat” expectations indicate that, strategically, the United States and the PRC would have cooperated as early as the mid-1960s against their number one rival. Empirical observations, however, suggest otherwise. Given the domestic political and ideological odds that seemed to be stacked against rapprochement even in the late 1960s, perhaps, instead of asking why Sino-U.S. rapprochement did not happen sooner, we should be asking why it happened at all.

Chapter I. Theoretical Explanations of Sino-U.S. Relations

Sino-U.S. conflict or cooperation patterns during the Cold War suggests that there were several points during the 1960s at which the PRC and the United States might have been expected to improve their relationship. Traditional balance of power theories suggest that weaker powers are expected to cooperate in balancing against stronger ones.⁵ Refinements on this thinking take factors such as proximity and hostile intent into account. Stephen Walt, in his book *The Origins of Alliances*, suggests that balancing behavior, in which states align against others that are nearby, hostile, as well as powerful, is far more common than bandwagoning behavior, in which states join the side of the stronger.⁶ However, the first nascent step in Sino-U.S. rapprochement happened only in December 1969 and early 1970, after having bypassed many points in the 1960s at which both faced a common threat from the USSR. Why did the United States and the PRC not reconcile with each other in the 1960s, as traditional alliance theories might expect?

I. “Balance against Threat”

The failure of Sino-U.S. rapprochement to take place in the 1960s despite interludes of mutual anxiety both felt toward the USSR suggests a phenomenon that seems contrary to the expectations of Stephen Walt’s “balance against threat” theory. In his book, *The Origins of Alliances*, Stephen Walt takes the traditional balance of power theory one step further by arguing that states align with or against each other to balance against threats rather than power alone. In Walt’s theory, a state may respond to threats either by balancing (joining with other states against the threatening state), which allows it to curb a potential hegemon and to increase its own

⁵ Mearsheimer, “Structural Realism,” 79–85.

⁶ Walt, *The Origins of Alliances*, 5.

influence within an alliance,⁷ or by bandwagoning (joining with the threatening state), which is a form of appeasement that allows a state to share the dominant side's spoils of war.⁸

Walt finds that states balance far more often than they bandwagon. He outlines four factors that contribute to the level of threat a state poses. First, the greater a state's aggregate power or total resources, the greater it is a potential threat. Second, states are more likely to regard proximate states as more threatening rather than those that are far away. Third, states with greater offensive capabilities are more likely to threaten and hence provoke a balancing response. Offensive capabilities are closely related to a state's aggregate power. Fourth, states that are perceived to have hostile intentions are more likely to provoke balancing actions. Walt suggests that this factor may be more important than capabilities, because some states with modest capabilities can provoke others to balance against them if they are seen as particularly aggressive.⁹

Although in the case of Sino-Soviet-U.S. relations, actual alliances were not at issue, Walt's "balance against threat" theory still has important implications. The threat posed by the USSR to the United States (particularly as Soviet defense spending and missile forces increased in the 1960s) and to the PRC (as a geographically proximate rival after the Sino-Soviet split took place in 1956) suggests that the PRC and the United States should have reason to cooperate with each other to balance against the USSR. This observation raises the question of why, despite Soviet threat to both the PRC and the United States, a rapprochement did not take place.

II. Historical Sino-Soviet-U.S. Alliance Patterns

The 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis marked a turning point in the Cold War. Following the

⁷ Ibid., 19.

⁸ Ibid., 21.

⁹ Ibid., 26.

embarrassing Soviet retreat, not only did the PRC's conflict with the USSR burst into the open, but the Soviet leadership also reversed Khrushchev's planned reduction in Soviet military manpower and increased its buildup of Soviet intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs). By mid-1967, the USSR had nearly 700 operational ICBM launchers. By the mid-1970s, the Soviets had 1,371 operational ICBM launchers. Before the Cuban Missile Crisis, estimates by the U.S. intelligence community from 1957 to 1961 grossly exaggerated the Soviet-U.S. missile gap.¹⁰ As one National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) puts it in 1960, "we are entering a very critical twenty-four month period in which the USSR may well sense it has the advantage. The Soviet leaders may press that advantage and offer the US the choice of war or of backing down on an issue heretofore considered vital to our national interests."¹¹ Given the U.S. (mis)perception of threat from the USSR before the missile crisis and the actual Soviet military buildup after the Cuban Missile Crisis, the United States might have been expected to reach out to the PRC, with its widening split from its Communist brethren, to balance against the growing offensive capabilities of the USSR in the early 1960s.

However, although the USSR had greater aggregate power and offensive capabilities than the PRC did, the United States attempted to enlist Soviet support for a joint strike against the PRC's nuclear weapons program in 1963.¹² National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy, in his conversations with Soviet Ambassador to the United States, Dobrynin, actively sought Soviet cooperation against Chinese nuclear facilities and suggested that "the nuclear picture of Communist China must be a matter of real common interest to us [the United States and the

¹⁰ Central Intelligence Agency, *Watching the Bear: Essays on CIA's Analysis of the Soviet Union* (Langley, VA : Center for the Study of Intelligence, Central Intelligence Agency, 2003), 145–153.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 146.

¹² National Security Archive, *John F. Kennedy Library*, "McGeorge Bundy, Memorandum of Conversation with Ambassador Dobrynin, at lunch May 17, 1963," 2, <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB38/document7.pdf>.

USSR].”¹³ When Dobrynin pressed Bundy on the issue of the U.S. multilateral force (MLF) proposal, which would give allies such as West Germany a say on nuclear weapons usage,¹⁴ Kennedy even considered the possibility of “giving up the MLF concept” in exchange for U.S.-Soviet cooperation against Chinese nuclear facilities.¹⁵ So, instead of balancing against a state that already posed a nuclear threat, the United States sought to join with that state to balance against another one that posed no such threat.

Deepening Sino-Soviet grievances throughout the 1960s culminated in the Sino-Soviet border clashes, which lasted from March to September 1969. The period immediately following this clash was an instance when the “balance against threat” theory may have predicted Sino-U.S. reconciliation because of the escalation of Sino-Soviet tensions. However, as rhetorical war escalated into military conflict, the PRC chose to negotiate with the USSR first. The Chinese leadership only responded to U.S. overtures in December 1969, three months after the hot conflict ended and when the most dangerous phase in Sino-Soviet relations had already passed. This observation raises doubt over whether the PRC’s motive in accepting U.S. overtures was primarily to counter Soviet military threats. If it were, the PRC should have accepted U.S. overtures much earlier, perhaps even before the clashes start. This observation suggests that other factors were perhaps at work in holding the Chinese leadership back from reaching out to the United States.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Kennedy, quoted in William Burr and Jeffrey T. Richelson, “Whether to ‘Strangle the Baby in the Cradle’: The United States and the Chinese Nuclear Program, 1960–1964,” *International Security* Vol.25, No.3 (Winter, 2000–2001): 70.

III. Alternative Explanations

III.1 Chinese Domestic Politics

These discrepancies between theory and empirical observation may be signs that statesmen are considering factors other than or on top of threat when making alignment strategies. In the PRC, a single-party state, politics is often more than a consideration of threat—it is often a maneuvering process by top leaders to maintain power within the state and to block rivals from replacing them within the party. The leadership might also mobilize popular nationalist sentiments against adversaries in order to divert popular attention away from domestic economic problems and make the population reliant on it for leadership and protection at a time of external crisis. Lai Hongyi, for instance, argues that Mao's involvement in the Vietnam War in the 1960s was made as much out of his internal political needs as out of the fear of a U.S. invasion of the PRC through Vietnam.¹⁶

Scholars on Chinese domestic politics are divided into two general camps with regard to the question of how domestic politics played into foreign policy decision-making and the emergence of rapprochement, with a gradation of explanations in between the two camps. On one end of the spectrum is the argument that factional struggles prevented rapprochement. John W. Garver, a Sinologist at Georgia Institute of Technology, for instance, argues that foreign policy was used as a tool in the factional struggle within the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) leadership from 1968 until 1971. According to Garver, it was really the intense power struggle between the PRC's defense minister, Lin Biao, who headed the military faction, and the moderate faction led by Zhou Enlai, the PRC's Prime Minister, that delayed Sino-U.S. rapprochement. In this explanation, Zhou supported rapprochement and Lin was against it. Mao's stance on the issue and role in bringing about rapprochement is unclear, and he seemed to

¹⁶ Hongyi Lai, *The Domestic Sources of China's Foreign Policy* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 49.

waver between Zhou and Lin.¹⁷ Accordingly, Lin Biao's dominance in the 1960s made Zhou's later pro-U.S. foreign policy ventures impossible. Therefore, Lin's downfall provided Zhou with the necessary political space to bring pro-U.S. policies to fruition.

On the other end of the spectrum is the argument that rapprochement was fully backed and supported by Mao, the PRC's supreme leader and ultimate decision maker who faced no organized opposition to his power in the foreign policy arena. Xia Yafeng, professor of history at Long Island University, argues that the only domestic political issue Mao had to resolve was how to sell the policy to the party and how to psychologically prepare the Chinese people, to whom the United States had always been the number one enemy, for his foreign policy U-turn.¹⁸ According to this explanation, it was the PRC's escalating conflict with the USSR and Mao's own "balance against threat" concerns that fostered Sino-U.S. rapprochement. This explanation is more in line with Walt's realist theory than the intra-party politics explanations.

However, along similar lines to Garver, Warren Cohen, professor at University of Maryland, argues that Lin Biao and Jiang Qing were opposed to any effort to moderate Chinese policy toward the United States. Zhou and his supporters "lost the argument" of improving Sino-U.S. relations in early 1969.¹⁹ In contrast to Xia's argument that Chinese domestic policymaking was returning to normal after 1969,²⁰ Cohen argues that the continued radicalization of Chinese domestic policy made the United States a necessary enemy. Cohen suggests that, from late 1968 to early 1969, the debate among top-level decision makers was whether to reconcile with the United States or struggle with both superpowers simultaneously. Most Chinese leaders, to the

¹⁷ John W. Garver, *China's Decision for Rapprochement with the United States, 1968–1971* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1982), 124–140.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 14.

¹⁹ Warren I. Cohen. *America's Response to China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 216.

²⁰ Xia Yafeng, "China's Elite Politics and Sino-American Rapprochement, January 1969–February 1972," *Journal of Cold War Studies* Vol. 8, No. 4 (Fall 2006): 6.

dismay of Zhou, voted for the latter.²¹

In the middle of the spectrum is Chen Jian's argument. According to this argument, Mao's own domestic political needs of eliminating party rivals and reinforcing his party leadership made it necessary for him to mobilize the Chinese population for Cultural Revolution, a campaign in which both the United States and the USSR were seen as state enemies. Chen argues that, starting in 1959, with the negative impacts of the Great Leap Forward beginning to be felt by the Chinese economy, Mao's doctrine of continuous revolution was facing serious challenges within the CCP leadership.²² After Khrushchev recalled all Soviet experts from the PRC in July 1960, Mao used the recall as an excuse and blamed the disastrous failure of the Great Leap Forward on the Soviet "revisionists." Domestically, Mao started to purge rivals within the CCP, including Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping.²³ In the Vietnam War, Beijing's support for Hanoi was also critically connected to Mao's desire to utilize the tensions created by the Vietnamese crisis to mobilize the Chinese masses against "U.S. imperialists" and "Soviet revisionists" in the Cultural Revolution.²⁴ In this explanation, Mao's personal need to use foreign policy as a tool to eliminate intra-party rivals, either by mobilizing anti-Western popular sentiments or by eliminating party members who held different foreign policy views, contributed to the PRC's foreign policy decisions. This raises the question of what had changed in the PRC's domestic political scene by December 1969 that moved Mao to completely reverse the PRC's foreign policy and pursue rapprochement with the United States.

The diverse explanations presented above suggest that factional politics, Mao's leadership needs, and the need to justify changes in the PRC's foreign policy might all have

²¹ Cohen, *America's Response*, 216.

²² Chen Jian, *Mao's China and the Cold War* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 83.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid., 236.

played a part in preventing and shaping Sino-U.S. rapprochement. Therefore, when analyzing the rather broad umbrella term of “Chinese domestic politics,” it may be useful to consider the effect of each of these factors in shaping Chinese foreign policy.

III.2 U.S. Domestic Politics

On the American side, the question of why the United States did not pursue rapprochement with the PRC sooner has also been explained in terms of domestic politics. The rationale behind this argument is that foreign policy issues are often domestic political tools for both democracies and authoritarian states. In the United States, a democracy, foreign policy issues can be used as political tools to put blame on opposition parties in order for politicians to gain votes. Miroslav Nincic, for example, argues that electoral politics may affect foreign policy by influencing the timing of foreign policy decisions, which follow an electoral pattern rather than one dictated by international events, and by creating discontinuities in foreign policy decision-making, which also reduces the ability of other states to adjust their foreign policies accordingly.²⁵

Other authors suggest that the influence of the Congress in foreign policy decision-making, especially with regard to the PRC, was strong. Tao Xie, for example, argues that, in the late 1940s to early 1950s, the China bloc in Congress—including influential individuals such as the American magazine magnate and friend of Chiang Kai-shek (Jiang Jieshi), Henry R. Luce—was effective in pressuring the Truman Administration to support Chiang against the CCP in the Chinese civil war. From 1953 to 1971, the Congress also prevented U.S. recognition of the PRC

²⁵ Miroslav Nincic, “Elections and U.S. Foreign Policy,” in *The Domestic Sources of American Foreign Policy*, ed. Eugene R. Wittkopf and James M. McCormick (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2004), 122.

and its seat in the United Nations (UN).²⁶

James C. Thompson argues that U.S. policy-making with regard to Vietnam suffered from the “closed politics” of policymaking—“the more sensitive the issue, and the higher it rises in the bureaucracy, the more completely the experts are excluded while the harassed senior generalists take over.”²⁷ The legacy of the McCarthy era was that, with a thoroughly anti-Communist American voting population and the Congress, any actions of reconciliation toward a Communist state would have meant political suicide. While the USSR was also a Communist state, the showdown over Cuba in 1962 was seen as an American victory that demonstrated Kennedy’s toughness against the USSR.²⁸

In support of this thesis, Warren Cohen argues that the Kennedy Administration’s young specialists on China, such as Chester Bowles and Adlai Stevenson, questioned Kennedy’s pro-Soviet and anti-Chinese policy, but Kennedy rejected their views.²⁹ In light of Mao’s abrasiveness and the intense opposition in the Congress to recognizing the PRC in the UN, Kennedy saw little point in antagonizing the McCarthyists—whom Acheson labeled “primitives”—when prospects of Sino-American reconciliation seemed so diminutive.³⁰

The role of bureaucratic politics and domestic politics is a factor not deeply examined in Walt’s work, but the case of Sino-American alliance pattern from the 1960s to the 1970s suggests that an exploration of how domestic politics shape a state’s alliance choices may be as important as the role of threat and worth further examination.

²⁶ Tao Xie, “Congress and China Policy: An Analysis of China Bills,” *Journal of Contemporary China*, 17, 54 (2008): 142.

²⁷ James C. Thomson, Jr., “How Could Vietnam Happen?,” in *The Domestic Sources of American Foreign Policy*, ed. Eugene R. Wittkopf and James M. McCormick (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2004), 262.

²⁸ John Lewis Gaddis, *Russia, the Soviet Union and the United States: An Interpretive History* (New York: Newbury Award Records, 1978), 230.

²⁹ Cohen, *America’s Response*, 208.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

III.3 Ideology

A third explanation in addition to balancing against threat emphasizes the role of ideology. As Walt explains, ideological solidarity refers to “alliances that result from states sharing political, cultural, or other traits.”³¹ A traditional ideology hypothesis states that, “the more similar the domestic ideology of two or more states, the more likely they are to ally.”³² According to this explanation, top U.S. leaders at the time thought that Communist states, regardless of external rivalries or internal division, would only align with other Communist states because of Communism’s fundamental incompatibility with Western values. They therefore precluded the possibility of a split between the PRC and the USSR serious enough to soften the PRC’s views of the United States because of their perception of and ideology regarding Communism, despite intelligence reports indicating otherwise.

This argument is supported by Robert P. Newman, who argues that, in the Second World War, U.S. support for Chiang Kai-shek was based on ideology,³³ and that McCarthyism in the 1950s was representative of the dangers of ideology’s triumph over reality.³⁴ Indeed, a NIE from June 1964, though explicitly outlining the widening rift between the PRC and the USSR, adds at the end that “regardless of internal quarrels, Communists will retain an underlying enmity toward the West if only because their convictions are in so many respects incompatible with traditional Western concepts of political and economic life.”³⁵

From the PRC’s end, Mao’s increasing ideological radicalization after the Great Leap Forward, as represented by the PRC’s growing rhetoric against American imperialism and Soviet

³¹ Walt, *The Origins of Alliances*, 33.

³² *Ibid.*, 40.

³³ Robert P. Newman, *Invincible Ignorance in American Foreign Policy: The triumph of Ideology over Evidence* (New York: Peter Lang, 2013), 19–33.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 71–89.

³⁵ *Foreign Relations of the United States 1964–1968*, NIE 10-2-64 “Prospects for the International Communist Movement,” June 10, 1964, Document 34, Volume XXX, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v30/d34>.

revisionism in the 1960s, made the United States a necessary enemy. After Mao's persecution of domestic "capitalist roaders" and "revisionists," he could not reconcile with the United States, a capitalist country, abroad. Ideologically, it was self-contradictory to portray the United States as a class enemy while pursuing reconciliation. Whether Mao himself truly believed in this remains unclear, but his actions certainly provided enough ground for the United States to assume this type of logic and Chinese hostility.

What, then, led to the PRC's opening to the United States? Garver argues that, by 1970, Mao had been persuaded by Zhou to use the United States as a counterweight to the Soviets.³⁶ Zhou justified the pro-U.S. tilt to Mao by reasoning along the lines of exploiting superpower differences rather than furthering Chinese economic gains, thereby avoiding "capitalist roader" accusations against Zhou himself.³⁷ Portraying rapprochement with the United States as a "tactical United Front"—not unlike the one Mao had pursued with Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist government during the Second World War—helped to resolve the contradiction brought about by Communist China's reconciliation with the world's leading capitalist state.

IV. Hypotheses

IV.1 "Balance against Threat" Theory

The first hypothesis I will test is based on Stephen Walt's "balance against threat" theory and argues that Chinese and U.S. assessments of the threat posed by each other and by the USSR were important in influencing the states' foreign policies. The political leaders in both countries chose which states to balance with or against in response to their estimations of their rivals' aggregate power, offensive power, geographical proximity, and hostile intentions. Accordingly,

³⁶ Cohen, *America's Response*, 217.

³⁷ Garver, *China's Decision*, 156.

if U.S. leaders thought the PRC posed a greater perceived threat than the USSR, then they would have been ready to balance with the USSR against the PRC, assuming the USSR felt the same way. If Chinese leaders thought the United States posed a greater perceived threat than the USSR, then they would have been more likely to balance with the United States against the USSR, given that the United States felt the same way.

IV.2 Domestic Politics

The second hypothesis argues that Chinese and U.S. domestic political factors were a more powerful source of foreign policy than balances of power, or even threat. The political leaders in both countries chose which states to balance with or against in response to their domestic political needs, even when it goes against *realpolitik* interests. Accordingly, if U.S. leaders needed to win popular support against opposition parties when anti-Communist sentiments are high, then they would have found it impossible to reconcile with either Communist power, even with a weak PRC against a strong USSR. If Chinese leaders faced intense domestic struggles when anti-capitalist sentiments are high, then they would have been more likely to balance against the United States. In order to test this hypothesis, this thesis will look at moments when reconciliation would have been predicted by the “balance against threat” theory, but failed to take place in reality—a failure that may be explained by domestic politics.

As outlined in section III.1, domestic politics can refer both to the high-level political struggle that is happening at the leadership level and to the general political sentiments of the population. General sentiments seem less important in the non-democratic PRC, but still seemed to be harnessed and exploited by Mao to remove his inner-party rivals. If this hypothesis is true, we should expect to see the PRC turning away from the United States at a time when the CCP is

experiencing intense intra-party struggles. We should expect to see the China question become a point of contention in the United States near election seasons.

IV.3 Ideology

Traditional ideological explanations of foreign policy decisions tend to focus on the cultural and political traits of the states involved and the degree of similarity between the domestic ideologies of different states.³⁸ The hypothesis forwarded here, however, in some ways expands upon this traditional view: Chinese and American political leaders decided which states to balance with or against not because of the international or domestic political interests, but instead because of the ideological values they held and their view of the importance of ideology in shaping their adversary's foreign policies. If U.S. leaders believed that Chinese top officials formulated their policies based on the Communist ideology, then the United States would be less likely to cooperate with the PRC. Although the USSR was also a Communist state, we can hypothesize that its leaders were seen as less ideological and more practical. If Chinese leaders believed that capitalism influenced U.S. foreign policy heavily, then they are more likely to balance against the United States.

Walt argues that leaders' belief that ideology determines foreign policy often becomes self-fulfilling prophecies because states perceive those with opposing ideologies as having hostile intentions. If this argument is true, then whether or not a country's ideology appears important to its adversary, in addition to the ideology itself, is significant in shaping their foreign policy decisions. By focusing on the leaders' worldviews, this hypothesis suggests that Chinese and American leaders' decision to pay attention to or ignore the ideology of the adversary, which is linked to and dependent on the rival's actual ideological stance, is also important. One way of

³⁸ Walt, *The Origins of Alliances*, 33.

measuring this hypothesis is an analysis of the China bills that have been passed in Congress.

If this hypothesis is true, then we should expect the United States to align against the PRC and the PRC to close off to the United States when the worldviews of the leaders of both states were more ideologically oriented. Conversely, we should expect warmer relations when the leaders of both countries emphasized less on ideology and more, perhaps, on national interests. Given continued ideological differences between the PRC and the United States in 1972, it would be difficult to explain Mao and Nixon's rapprochement using this hypothesis.

V. Methodology

This study attempts to examine the question of why the United States and the PRC did not reconcile with each other in the 1960s as Walt's "balance against threat" theory might have expected. Since the most important components of threat, as outlined by Walt, are aggregate power, geographic proximity, offensive power, and perceived hostile intent, this thesis will attempt to review each of these factors for the United States, the USSR, and the PRC in order to determine whether the perception of threat was the ultimate cause behind Sino-U.S. rapprochement, or the lack thereof. The three specific junctures I hope to examine in particular are 1963 (following the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis), 1969 (following the Sino-Soviet border clash), and 1970 (around the time of the PRC's decision to respond to U.S. overtures). A measurement of the four factors will also give insight on which factor was the most important in foreign policy decision making processes of U.S. and Chinese leaders.

In terms of aggregate power, measuring total military expenditure would be one indicator of the power of the three states. Total spending and air force gives a measure of offensive capabilities. Of the four, the most difficult to measure is aggressive intentions. Documents on

policy decisions and speeches made by leaders give some sense of how the United States viewed the aggressive intentions of the PRC and the USSR. In addition, meeting notes, referenda, and policy recommendations in *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS)* and National Security Archive from George Washington University would be useful. Memoirs from policy-makers at the time would be valuable in shedding light on their thinking at the time.

Chinese rhetoric by leaders may be helpful in exposing whether the PRC's intentions were aggressive. This should be qualified, however, by the PRC's actions, since rhetoric does not necessarily match up with actual behaviors. Rare Chinese archival records, such as those made available through Cold War International History Project Bulletin by academics such as Chen Jian and the diplomatic activities of Zhou Enlai published by the Chinese Foreign Ministry and the CCP Central Research Office for Documentation, can be used as evidence of the PRC's intentions and Chinese perception of U.S. intent.

Testing the hypothesis on domestic politics' effect on Sino-U.S. relations necessitates some measure of elite opinions among top U.S. policy-makers toward the PRC and the USSR. Here, newspapers and data from congressional votes on the PRC, campaign speeches, and China issues in political campaigns such as presidential elections would be useful. In terms of the PRC's domestic politics, information on top leaders' political struggles for power is available through Mao's struggle and criticism against his subordinates, as well as secondary accounts from other scholars.

Testing the hypothesis of ideology's effect on Sino-U.S. relations would benefit from memoirs. Knowing what went on inside policy-makers' heads helps to determine whether they regarded ideology as an important factor in the making of China policy. On China's side, Mao's

speeches and Chinese primary sources³⁹ would be useful for determining the importance of ideology to the CCP's decision-making process.

VI. Structure

In order to answer the question of why patterns of Sino-U.S. diplomatic relations seem to contradict the “balance against threat” theory, the thesis will examine each hypothesis in turn. The second chapter will test the “balance against threat” hypothesis in the context of Sino-U.S. relations at three junctures: 1963, 1969, and 1970. Answering this question will elucidate whether U.S. leaders and Chinese leaders decided to reach out to each other in the late 1960s and early 1970s because of their perception of a growing Soviet threat.

The third chapter will test the “domestic politics” hypothesis in the context of Sino-U.S. relations during the decade between 1960 and 1970. This chapter will use primary documents, such as *FRUS* documents, NIEs, documents made available by the National Security Archive, and Chinese records, to illustrate the domestic political inclinations of the PRC and the United States. From here, the chapter will examine the role of foreign policy as an instrument in Sino-U.S. domestic politics, and whether, as the hypothesis outlines, the PRC and the United States turned away from each other when domestic political struggles reached a peak. Chinese factional struggles and American domestic politics may provide an explanation of why, given that the USSR had much greater aggregate power and offensive capabilities than the PRC did and was a much greater U.S. threat, the United States still decided against reconciling with the PRC, especially when it was attempting to contain Soviet influence worldwide.

The fourth chapter will test the ideology hypothesis in Sino-American relations from

³⁹ “The Cold War in Asia,” *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, Woodrow Wilson International Center, Issues 6–7 (Winter 1995/1996).

1962 to 1971. It is necessary to start in 1962 because that was a point at which the Sino-Soviet split became more apparent. The PRC's decision, after alienating the Soviets, to not reconcile with the United States suggests that ideology may have played a role in the making of the PRC's U.S. policy. This chapter will examine, using the memoirs of former presidents, top foreign policy decision-makers, and Chinese records, the importance of ideology to Chinese and American leaders from the mid-1950s to the early 1970s.

The final concluding chapter will attempt to analyze how the different hypotheses worked together to produce the Sino-U.S. alliance patterns that we observe in the Cold War. None of the hypotheses is likely to be completely true or false. Analyzing how each factor contributed to Sino-U.S. alliance decisions, therefore, will shed light on future Sino-U.S. relations.

Chapter II. Balancing the Threat?

In his book, *The Origins of Alliances*, Stephen Walt argues that, rather than only considering balance of power, states' alignment decisions are made based on perceptions of threat. These alignment decisions may fall into the category of either balancing—aligning with other states against the source of threat⁴⁰—or bandwagoning—aligning with the threatening state to appease that state. Balancing happens far more often than bandwagoning.⁴¹

Walt argues that the perception of threat depends on four factors. First, states with greater aggregate power or total resources pose a greater threat. Second, states tend to see geographically proximate neighbors as a bigger threat than states that are further away. Third, states that have greater offensive capabilities are more likely to be seen as threatening and are more likely to spark an alignment response. Offensive capabilities are closely associated with a state's aggregate power.⁴² Fourth, states tend to balance against other states that are perceived to have hostile intentions. Walt suggests that this factor may be more important than the capabilities factor, because some states with modest capabilities can provoke others to balance against them if they are seen as particularly aggressive.⁴³

In the context of Sino-U.S. relations, the “balance against threat” theory suggests that, when the USSR appeared to have posed a greater threat to both the PRC and the United States than each did to the other, we would expect a balancing action from the PRC and the United States against the USSR. This chapter will test the “balance against threat” hypothesis in the context of Sino-U.S. relations at three points in time: first, in 1963, after the Cuban Missile Crisis; second, in September 1969, right after the USSR and the PRC clashed in a border conflict;

⁴⁰ Walt, *The Origins of Alliances*, 19.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 22–26.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 26.

third, in 1970, after the PRC had begun to respond to U.S. overtures in December 1969.

Analyzing the threat posed by the USSR relative to the threat the PRC and the United States posed to each other at these three junctures will shed light on whether U.S. leaders and PRC leaders decided to reach out to each other in the late 1960s and early 1970s because of their perception of a growing Soviet threat.

I. The Emerging Chinese Nuclear Threat

The Cuban Missile Crisis was one of the most critical turning points in the Cold War. It not only demonstrated a weak Soviet capacity to project power into America's hemisphere, but also exposed the extent of the Sino-Soviet split. This section argues that, although the United States recognized the USSR's comparatively weaker offensive capabilities vis-à-vis its own, the USSR's significantly stronger military strength vis-à-vis the PRC, as well as Chinese leaders' claims of the defensive nature of the PRC's nuclear weapons program, suggest that the PRC was less threatening than the USSR in the early 1960s and that the United States should be expected to align with the USSR against the PRC. This calls for alternative explanations of why the United States made the decision in 1963 to seek Soviet cooperation against the PRC's nuclear weapons program.

In the 1960s, Soviet military capabilities significantly lagged behind U.S. capabilities. Countering the growing U.S. strategic missiles supremacy was arguably one of the most important reasons behind Khrushchev's attempt to place missiles in Cuba, which would allow Soviet medium and intermediate-range ballistic missiles (MRBMs and IRBMs) to reach the 48 contiguous states of the U.S. homeland.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Graham Allison and Philip Zelikow, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis* (New York: Addison Wesley Longman, 1999), 94–95.

Before mid-1961, however, the United States had come to the exact opposite conclusion about Soviet military power. For example, NIE 11-4-59 in February 1960, while recognizing that the USSR would not build an ICBM force sufficient for the purpose of a general war, argues that the USSR would “almost certainly wish to have a high degree of deterrence, and beyond this, should deterrence fail, a force offering as much promise of success for a pre-emptive attack, or indeed for a retaliatory attack.” Based on this analysis, the report estimated that, by mid-1961, the USSR’s ICBM program would have produced between 140 to 200 missiles on launcher, and that Soviet ICBMs on launcher are likely to number from 250 to 350 in mid-1962 and 350 to 450 in mid-1963.⁴⁵ In fact, in 1962, the USSR had only around 20, and definitely not more than 44, ICBMs.⁴⁶ Soviet leaders at the time were waiting for a second generation of more reliable ICBMs that were expected in 1965. For purposes of comparison, the United States had 172 ICBMs by October 1962.⁴⁷

By mid-1961, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) finally concluded that the “missile gap” was a sham. A September 1961 NIE acknowledged the inflated previous estimates and made a “sharp downward revision” to 10 to 25 ICBMs that were unlikely to increase in “the months immediately ahead.”⁴⁸ This realization may have been one of the reasons behind Kennedy’s strong position in his handling of the Cuban situation in 1962.

As the perceived Soviet threat dissipated with better information of Soviet offensive

⁴⁵ Central Intelligence Agency, Freedom of Information Act Electronic Reading Room, NIE 11-4-59, “Main Trends in Soviet Capabilities and Policies, 1959–1964,” 9 February 1960, 4–5, http://www.foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/document_conversions/89801/DOC_0000267657.pdf.

⁴⁶ Raymond L. Garthoff, *Reflections on the Cuban Missile Crisis* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 1989), 206; Aleksandr Fursenko and Timothy Naftali, *Khrushchev’s Cold War: The Inside Story of an American Adversary* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2006), 440. Garthoff quotes Soviet Gen. Dmitri Volkogonov, who in 1989 said that in October 1962 there were “about twenty” Soviet ICBM launchers.

⁴⁷ Garthoff, *Reflections on the Cuban Missile Crisis*, 208.

⁴⁸ *Foreign Relations of the United States 1961–1963*. NIE 11-8/1-61, “Strength and Deployment of Soviet Long Range Ballistic Missile Forces,” September 21, 1961, Document 45, Volume VIII, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v08/d45>.

capabilities, the United States chose, from a position of strength following the Missile Crisis, to pursue détente with the USSR. Both Kennedy and Khrushchev seemed to have grasped the danger and deadliness of nuclear wars. In July 1963, a year after the near-catastrophe over Cuba, the United Kingdom, the United States, and the USSR signed the Limited Test Ban Treaty (LTBT), which banned the testing of nuclear weapons in the atmosphere, the outer space, and under water environments. One of the reasons the United States pursued the LTBT was its concern about the PRC. In August 1962, the United States was worried that “a spread of nuclear weapons would devalue its [U.S.] own stockpile,” and that “Chinese possession of nuclear weapons would render the American defense of its Asian allies unfeasible.”⁴⁹ Kennedy even indicated to the National Security Council that “the Chinese nuclear program was a principle driving force behind his quest for a test ban,” which designed “to halt or delay the development of an atomic capability by the Chinese Communists.”⁵⁰ The administration saw the LTBT as “a necessary, but not a sufficient condition” to prevent the PRC from possessing nuclear weapons.⁵¹ A report prepared by the Joint Chiefs of Staff for the Secretary of Defense explored the direct actions of “infiltration, subversion, and sabotage” in order to induce the PRC to sign the test ban.⁵² However, the report concluded that this should be done “in joint US/Soviet measures.”⁵³

The U.S. attempt to garner Soviet support against the Chinese nuclear program intensified when it became apparent that the PRC would not sign the treaty. In April 1963, the

⁴⁹ “Tape No. 6, 8/3/1962,” JFK, President’s Office Files, Presidential Recordings, recorded in Lüthi, *Sino-Soviet Split*, 249.

⁵⁰ Glenn Seaborg, *Kennedy, Khrushchev, and the Test Ban* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 181.

⁵¹ “Tape No. 2, 7/30/1962,” JFK, President’s Office Files, Presidential Recordings, recorded in Lüthi, *Sino-Soviet Split*, 249.

⁵² National Security Archive, *RG 59, Records of Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs, Office of the Country Director for the Republic of China, Top Secret Files Relating to the Republic of China, 1954–65, box 4, 1963*, General Curtis E. LeMay, Acting Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, to Secretary of Defense “Study of Chinese Communist Vulnerability,” with 31-page appendix attached, 29 April, 1963, (Washington, DC: George Washington University, 2001), p. 16 of attachment, <http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB38/document6.pdf>.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 3 of the document.

U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff prepared a study on measures it considered could be taken to “persuade or coerce” the PRC to accept a test ban, including delivering “a tactical nuclear weapon on a selected CHICOM target.”⁵⁴ More importantly, the Joint Chiefs of Staff believed that “the best means” of effectively bringing the Chinese to adhere to a nuclear test ban treaty lies in “joint US/Soviet measures.”⁵⁵ Less than a month after this report was published, the United States explored the possibility of Soviet support for joint actions against the PRC’s nuclear weapons program.⁵⁶ As mentioned in the previous chapter, National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy, in his conversations with Soviet Ambassador to the United States Anatoly Dobrynin, actively sought Soviet cooperation against Chinese nuclear facilities and suggested that “the nuclear picture of Communist China must be a matter of real common interest to us [the United States and the USSR].”⁵⁷ When Dobrynin pressed Bundy on the issue of U.S. plans for MLF, which would give allies such as West Germany a say on nuclear weapons usage,⁵⁸ Kennedy even considered the possibility of “giving up the MLF concept,”⁵⁹ which would deeply affect the interests of America’s important European allies, in exchange for U.S.-Soviet cooperation against Chinese nuclear facilities.

By mid-September of 1964, President Johnson’s advisors were opposed to unprovoked unilateral U.S. military action, but believed that “there are many possibilities for joint action with the Soviet Government,” including “a possible agreement to cooperate in preventive military

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 2–3 of document.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 3 of document.

⁵⁶ National Security Archive, *John F. Kennedy Library*, “McGeorge Bundy, Memorandum of Conversation with Ambassador Dobrynin, at lunch May 17, 1963,” 2, <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB38/document7.pdf>.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Kennedy, quoted in Burr and Richelson, “Whether to ‘Strangle the Baby in the Cradle,’” 70.

action.”⁶⁰ A September 15 meeting memorandum suggested that Secretary of State Dean Rusk should “explore this matter very privately with Ambassador Dobrynin as soon as possible.”⁶¹ Although Rusk did not seem to have met with Dobrynin, McGeorge Bundy met with Dobrynin over lunch a week later and, according to the National Security Advisor himself, made a “principal effort to direct the Ambassador’s attention to the problem of Communist Chinese nuclear weapons,” assuring Dobrynin that the MLF should not be considered nuclear dissemination while the Chinese program should be. Bundy even “made it plain that we [the U.S.] would be ready for private and serious talk on what to do about this problem if there were any interest in the Soviet Government.” Dobrynin, however, passed over this issue by arguing that “Chinese nuclear weapons had no importance against the USSR or against the U.S., and that therefore they had only a psychological impact in Asia,” an impact that “had no importance” for the Soviet government.⁶²

The U.S. decision to align with the USSR against the PRC appears to be in accord with the “balance against threat” theory considering the reduction in the perceived threat posed by the USSR. In other words, when the United States called Khrushchev’s ICBM bluff, it recognized that there was little reason for the United States to fear Soviet offensive power.

However, in a balance against threat scenario, a state would be comparing the relative threat posed by its various adversaries, and not only the offensive capabilities of the adversaries compared to those of oneself. Here, the viability of the “balance against threat” theory in explaining the U.S. pro-Soviet tilt is not immediately apparent. Among the four factors of threat,

⁶⁰ National Security Archive, *Lyndon B. Johnson Library, National Security File, McGeorge Bundy, Memos to the President, Vol. 6*, McGeorge Bundy, “Memorandum for the Record,” September 15, 1964 (Washington, DC: George Washington University, 2001), <http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB38/document16.pdf>.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *Foreign Relations of the United States 1964–1968*. Memorandum of Conversation, “*Memorandum of Conversation with Ambassador Dobrynin, Friday, September 25, 1964, 1:00–3:30p.m.*,” Document 54, Volume XXX, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v30/d54>.

the USSR surpassed the PRC both in terms of aggregate power and offensive capabilities. As for geographic proximity, while both countries are almost equally distant to the United States, the USSR's (very) few ICBMs would bring its offensive capabilities much closer to the U.S. homeland than a country without any ICBMs (or nuclear warheads) ever could.

Therefore, the only threat factor on which the PRC seemed to surpass the USSR in 1963 was hostile intentions. Mao's rhetoric against "U.S. imperialists" and "Soviet revisionists" tuned up after the Cuban Missile Crisis, while Khrushchev was willing to negotiate the LTBT with Kennedy. Given this, the U.S. decision to align against the PRC suggests that the role of hostile intent might be greater than the other three factors.

However, there are at least two reasons to doubt the importance of perceived hostile intentions in motivating U.S. actions against the PRC's nuclear weapons program. First, there were debates and contentions among U.S. analysts and policymakers concerning the PRC's true intentions. This is exemplified by the argument made by Policy Planning Council staffer Robert Johnson, who had established himself as the national security bureaucracy's chief analyst on the PRC's nuclear problem by the fall of 1963.⁶³ In October 1963, Johnson had tried to make the argument that a nuclear China would act cautiously and use its nuclear weapons for deterrence purposes only. He made the argument that the PRC would use its nuclear weapons primarily to "instill fear of its power," to emphasize "its peaceful and protective intentions," and to attempt to demonstrate that U.S. nuclear power is the true danger for Asia.⁶⁴ Though not widely shared, the existence of this view shows that the PRC's hostile intentions were not immediately assumed by

⁶³ National Security Archive, *The United States and the Chinese Nuclear Program, 1960–1964*, Introduction to Document 10, <http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB38/>.

⁶⁴ National Security Archive, *Policy Planning Council Records, 1963–64, box 275, S/P Papers Chicom Nuclear Detonation and Nuclear Capability, Policy Planning Statement, 10/15/63*, Robert H. Johnson, Statement Department Policy Planning Council, "A Chinese Communist Nuclear Detonation and Nuclear Capability: Major Conclusions and Key Issues," 15 October 1963 (Washington, DC: George Washington University, 2001), <http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB38/document10.pdf>.

all U.S. analysts.

Second, Chinese hostile intents against the United States did not seem to exist, and the United States did receive information about defensive nature of the PRC's nuclear program. The hard stance of Chinese officials such as Chen Yi and Zhou Enlai on U.S. imperialists and Soviet collaborationists was mainly for rhetorical purposes. Chen Jian has also argued that Mao's anti-Western rhetoric was primarily for domestic mobilization and domestic political purposes.⁶⁵ All Chinese leaders expressed the view that the PRC's nuclear capabilities will be used for defensive purposes only. In July 1964, two months before the Bundy-Dobrynin lunch meeting, a Department of State Airgram sent to U.S. embassies throughout Asia detailed a PRC government statement made in August 1963. The PRC government stated that it had lost hope in Soviet assistance, and was "developing its own nuclear strength to resist the U.S. nuclear threats,"⁶⁶ implying that nuclear weapons were for defense purposes only.

Similarly, in a late 1963 interview with Australian journalist John Dixon, published in the *Washington Post*, Chen Yi was asked "why Peking is developing its own atomic weapons" even when the Soviets had given "assurances about the defense of China against foreign aggressors." Chen Yi replied with an analogy, "If tomorrow we say to you Australians that we will make ourselves responsible for the defense of Australia, what value would you place upon it? ... This sort of promise is...worthless... Atomic weapons are in use by other powers, so, therefore, we need atomic weapons for our defense."⁶⁷

Mao himself even declared to a French delegation that, "We too shall have our own

⁶⁵ Chen, *Mao's China*, 14–20.

⁶⁶ National Security Archive, *RG 59, Subject-Numeric Files, 1964-66, DEF 12-1 Chicom*, Department of State Circular Airgram CA-43 to U.S. Embassy in Thailand et al., "Status of Program to Influence World Opinion with Respect to a Chinese Communist Nuclear Detonation," 20 July 1964, (Washington, DC: George Washington University, 2001), 9, <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB38/document14.pdf>.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

bomb. *That doesn't mean we're going to use it.* But there are two large countries that intend to lead the world without consulting anyone else... Those two countries must not come and shit on our heads.”⁶⁸ U.S. intelligence, therefore, had already received signals from top Chinese leadership that a nuclear China would not behave aggressively. Instead of conveying aggression, the PRC seemed to be portraying itself as the receiving end of nuclear coercion. The United States, therefore, was aware of Chinese leaders' view that the PRC's nuclear program was for defensive purposes. Why, then, did the United States balance against the PRC?

An alternative explanation to why the United States sought to balance against the PRC nuclear weapons program may be Mao's rather unconventional view of nuclear weapons. In contrast to Khrushchev's concern about nuclear warfare, Mao had the peculiar belief that nuclear weapons were “paper tigers the U.S. reactionaries use to scare the people.”⁶⁹ In response to a foreign ambassador's comment that the PRC would be wiped out by “several hydrogen bombs,” Mao said, “the very greatest harm would merely be that a hole would be blown clean through the earth, and, if there was a hole blown through the earth, and one entered from China, the other side would be none other than the United States.”⁷⁰ While this does not necessarily suggest the PRC would use any warheads it might develop against the United States, it does suggest that Mao did not regard nuclear war with the same fear that Khrushchev and Kennedy did and might be more likely to use them in a case of conflict without thinking carefully. Compared to balancing against threat, this explanation has more to do with the Maoist worldview and Mao's domestic political needs for anti-Western rhetoric.

Another explanation that expands upon the “balance against threat” theory focuses on the

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Lüthi, *Sino-Soviet Split*, 254.

⁷⁰ The Wilson Center Digital Archive, “Address by Zhou Enlai at the Plenary Session of the Fourth Meeting of the State Council,” January 31, 1955, <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/114333>.

strategic nature of nuclear weapons. Walt mentions that nuclear weapons may make ideology more important because nuclear deterrence makes it “difficult for great powers to threaten weaker states,”⁷¹ but does not elaborate on how this observation impacts the “balance against threat” theory. The PRC’s nuclear program was a step toward a significant increase in the PRC’s offensive capabilities. While this does not mean that the PRC posed a greater threat than the USSR did, the nature of nuclear weapons means that countries with nuclear capability are likely to try to block aspiring nuclear powers seeking to join the club, even by cooperating with another nuclear power that is more threatening than the aspiring one.

An important characteristic of nuclear weaponry is that only a few are necessary for deterrence purposes, and its extreme destructiveness means that, in the case of nuclear war, 500 or 800 warheads makes very little difference. Furthermore, once acquired by a state, nuclear weapons (especially hardened arsenals) are difficult to destroy because the state’s adversaries can never be sure of the number or the locations of the arsenals. Therefore, once the PRC became a nuclear power, it probably would never cease being a nuclear power. These characteristics of nuclear weapons give nuclear powers the incentive to keep the club small. Even though the USSR turned down the U.S. suggestion of taking actions against the PRC’s nuclear program, it was also reluctant to see the PRC gaining nuclear status, and this became one of the key sources of friction between the two Communist giants.⁷² Soviet reluctance is demonstrated by the fact that, between July and August 1960, the USSR withdrew all its advisors from the PRC, including nuclear specialists, and had stopped providing technology and

⁷¹ Walt, *The Origins of Alliances*, 38–39.

⁷² National Security Archive, Central Intelligence Bulletin, article on “Communist China Nuclear Weapons Capability,” October 14, 1961 (Washington, DC: George Washington University, 2014), 1–2, <http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/nukevault/ebb488/docs/Doc%203%2010-14-61%20cib.pdf>.

equipment to the PRC.⁷³ In other words, once the United States and the USSR both had nuclear weapons, they had a common interest in stopping other states from achieving nuclear capability.

Therefore, in the nuclear dimension, the “balance against threat” theory fails to take into account the special nature of nuclear weapons and the implications of this on state behaviors. The U.S. decision to align against the PRC might have been made partially because of America’s realization of Soviet military weakness, but the Soviet relative military strength vis-à-vis the PRC and the PRC’s emphasis on the defensive nature of its nuclear weapons program show that none of the four factors of threat can sufficiently explain the U.S. decision to align with the USSR against the PRC. The alternative explanation of the strategic nature of nuclear weapons, which incentivize nuclear powers to keep the club small, and Mao’s unusual views about the destructiveness of nuclear weapons provides a more coherent explanation of the U.S. decision to align against China.

II. The Sino-Soviet Border Conflict

By 1969, U.S.-Sino-Soviet alliance patterns had changed drastically. In March, the rhetorical battle that had been going on between the PRC and the USSR since the late 1950s escalated into an actual military clash near Zhenbao (Damansky) Island on the Sino-Soviet border. The conflict, lasting from March to September, marked the height of the Sino-Soviet split. The section below argues that, by March 1969, the USSR posed a greater threat to the PRC than the United States did. According to the “balance against threat” theory, this means that, by September 1969 at the latest, we should expect to see the PRC reaching out to the United States

⁷³ Shen, Zhihua and Xia Yafeng, “Between Aid and Restriction: Changing Soviet Policies toward China’s Nuclear Weapons Program: 1954–1960,” *Nuclear Proliferation International History Program*, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, (May 2012): 4, http://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/soviet_policies_twrds_chinas_nuclear_weapons_prgm_1.pdf.

in order to balance against the Soviet threat. Instead, we saw the United States first reaching out to the PRC, and the PRC vacillating between the two superpowers. In order to explain this vacillation, alternative, or supplementary, explanations are necessary.

The Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962 exposed the extent to which the USSR lagged behind the United States in terms of offensive capabilities, particularly in ICBM forces. The USSR subsequently began a massive military buildup. By mid-1967, the USSR had nearly 700 operational ICBM launchers.⁷⁴ By 1969, Soviet ICBMs grew to 858, and by mid-1970, 1,371 ICBM launchers were operational.⁷⁵ However, in contrast to the gross overestimations and alleged “missile gap” between 1957 and mid-1961, the United States seemed to have assumed that the USSR only wanted a “satisfactory deterrent” without any more ambitious strategic military purposes. Consequently, the NIEs after mid-1961 and in the 1970s consistently underestimated Soviet military capabilities. SNIE 11-14-61 suggested that Soviet ICBM forces would reach “several hundred” by 1967.⁷⁶ NIE 11-8-63 in October 1963 estimated from 400 to 700 ICBMs in 1969,⁷⁷ and NIE 11-8-65 in October 1965 estimated between 500 and 800 ICBMs by mid-1970.⁷⁸ Even by September 1969, NIE 11-8-69 only gave a lower estimation of 1,300 Soviet ICBMs by 1978,⁷⁹ while the actual figure by mid-1976 had already reached 1,601.⁸⁰ Table 1 summarizes this data.

⁷⁴ Central Intelligence Agency, *Watching the Bear*, 152.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 153.

⁷⁶ Central Intelligence Agency, Freedom of Information Act Electronic Reading Room, SNIE 11-14-61, “The Soviet Strategic Military Posture, 1961–1967,” 21 November 1961, 7, http://www.foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/document_conversions/89801/DOC_0000652286.pdf.

⁷⁷ *Foreign Relations of the United States 1961–1963*. NIE 11-8-63, “Soviet Capabilities for Strategic Attack,” October 18, 1963, Document 144, Volume VIII, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v08/d144>.

⁷⁸ Central Intelligence Agency, Freedom of Information Act Electronic Reading Room, NIE 11-8-65, “Soviet Capabilities for Strategic Attack,” 7 October 1965, 11-13, http://www.foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/document_conversions/89801/DOC_0000267912.pdf.

⁷⁹ Central Intelligence Agency, Freedom of Information Act Electronic Reading Room, NIE 11-8-69, “Soviet Strategic Attack Forces,” 9 September 1969, 4 and 9–11, http://www.foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/document_conversions/89801/DOC_0000268007.pdf.

⁸⁰ Central Intelligence Agency, *Watching the Bear*, 153.

Table 1. Estimated and actual numbers of Soviet operational ICBMs⁸¹

Projected year	Estimated (year estimation was made)	Actual
1967	“Several hundred” (Nov. 1961)	700
1969	400–700 (Oct. 1963)	858
1970	500–800 (Oct. 1965)	1,371
1978	1,300 (Sept. 1969)	1,601 (by mid-1976)

U.S. underestimation of Soviet ICBM forces suggests that the perceived Soviet threat in U.S. eyes had decreased by 1969. This decreased level of perceived threat may be part of the reason behind the Soviet-U.S. détente, which started to take shape in 1969. After Nixon came into office, talks began between the two superpowers in November 1969 and led to the signing of SALT I and the concluding of the Biological Weapons Convention and the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty in 1972, with discussions on SALT II underway. Considering the fact that the United States did not reach out to the PRC when it overestimated the threat posed by Soviet ICBM forces, there seems to be little reason that the United States would reach out to the PRC in 1969, when, in U.S. eyes, the Soviet threat was receding and superpower relations were ameliorating.

On the other side of the Pacific Ocean, the PRC must have held a very different view of the Soviet threat in late 1969. In March, Chinese and Soviet forces clashed on Zhenbao (Damansky) Island on the Ussuri River. In the next six months, the security situation had deteriorated so much so that, in August, the Second Secretary of the Soviet Embassy approached the United States and asked, point blank, “What would the U.S. do if Peking called for U.S.

⁸¹ Actual numbers come from *Watching the Bear*, 153. Estimated figures come from the above-referenced NIEs made in 1961 until 1969.

assistance in the event Chinese nuclear installations were attacked by us [the USSR]?”⁸²

In the context of the border conflict, the USSR certainly posed a greater threat to the PRC than the United States did. Although Soviet aggregate power and offensive capabilities lagged behind the United States, it is much more geographically proximate to the PRC and certainly harbored more aggressive intentions than the United States, whose power in the Pacific was “ebbing”⁸³ with its failure to prevail in Vietnam. Two weeks after Sino-Soviet fighting stopped on September 11, Chinese defense minister Lin Biao ordered the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) to be on full alert in anticipation of Soviet attacks on October 1, the PRC’s National Day. When the Soviets did not attack, war preparations still continued. On October 20, top Chinese leaders left Beijing for different locations throughout the PRC for purposes of avoiding potential Soviet capture and being at the right places to lead guerilla warfare after Soviet invasion. There was simultaneously a mass campaign to build air-raid shelters in urban areas.⁸⁴ According to the “balance against threat” theory, the PRC should be expected to reach out to the United States from March 1969 onward in order to balance against the growing Soviet threat.

But the PRC made no overtures. Instead, it was the United States—in a middle of a thawing out with the USSR that was going quite well—that decided to extend an olive branch to the PRC in July. The U.S. overture is unexpected for two reasons. First, compared to the pre-détente era in, say 1963, U.S.-Soviet détente already reduced the threat posed by the USSR. On the other hand, compared to the 1963 PRC, which did not yet have a single nuclear weapon, the PRC in 1969 was already a nuclear power. If the United States did not reach out to the PRC to balance a threatening USSR in 1963, it would almost certainly not reach out to the PRC in 1969,

⁸² National Security Archive, U.S. State Department Memorandum of Conversation, “U.S. Reaction to Soviet Destruction of Chinese People’s Republic Nuclear Capability,” August 18, 1969 (Washington, DC: George Washington University, 2001), 2, <http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB49/sino.sov.10.pdf>.

⁸³ Cohen, *America’s Response*, 217.

⁸⁴ Lüthi, *The Sino-Soviet Split*, 344.

when the perceived Soviet threat lowered, as consistent U.S. underestimation of Soviet ICBM power shows.

Second, instead of the United States reaching out to the PRC, the PRC should be expected to reach out to the United States first. With an impending war on the Sino-Soviet border and an ongoing détente with the United States, the USSR was more threatening to the PRC than to the United States. In other words, the PRC needed the United States more than the United States needed the PRC. Yet, we saw the United States more proactively courting the PRC than the other way around. The PRC seemed to be holding back.

The United States started its courtship by reducing, in July 1969, travel and trade restrictions that had existed since the Korean War. Nixon ceased the patrols of the Seventh Fleet in the Taiwan Strait. To all these gestures, Beijing made no response.⁸⁵ Worth mentioning is that all of this happened after February 1969, when, two days before the resumption of the Warsaw meetings, the Chinese canceled them, effectively rejecting a peace offer on the eve of its clash with the USSR.⁸⁶ In September, Kissinger and Nixon had ordered the U.S. Ambassador to Poland to contact the Chinese for a meeting, but the ambassador's pursuit of his Chinese counterparts came to no avail for three months, which, without purposeful Chinese evasion, is hard to imagine. Only in December did China finally say "Yes."⁸⁷

Political historians such as Xia Yafeng have argued that it was "the perception of an extremely grave threat from the Soviet Union" that "pushed Mao Zedong to break with the existing conceptual framework of Chinese policy."⁸⁸ This argument is sound, but limited. The Soviet threat did provide a motivation for Mao to form a "tactical United Front" with the United

⁸⁵ Cohen, *America's Response*, 217.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 216.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 217.

⁸⁸ Xia, "China's Elite Politics," 21.

States, not unlike the one he had pursued with the Nationalist government during the Second World War. A secret study group formed by four key Chinese marshals under Mao's instruction also recommended that, given that Moscow was intending to "wage war against China," perhaps China should resume the Sino-American ambassadorial talks.⁸⁹

However, instead of reaching out to the United States for the ambassadorial talks, the PRC agreed to talk with the USSR in order to deescalate tensions. On September 11, 1969, Zhou Enlai met with Soviet Prime Minister Aleksei Kosygin at the Beijing airport. The location itself suggested the iciness in Sino-Soviet relations. Xia argues that Mao may have ordered this meeting in order to reduce chances of U.S.-Soviet collusion on top of mitigating Sino-Soviet tensions to avoid a two-front war against both superpowers. But reaching out to the United States and balancing against a Sino-U.S. common enemy would almost certainly be a surer way for the PRC to reduce U.S.-Soviet collusion than talking to the adversary with whom the PRC was still in a conflict. Reducing Sino-Soviet tensions required the PRC to negotiate with the USSR, but it would be far easier to avoid a two-front war by mitigating tensions with the superpower that had already shown friendly gestures. Something was holding the PRC back from balancing the Soviet threat by reaching out to the United States.

It has been argued that, during the Kosygin-Zhou talk, Zhou tried to "avoid 'closeness' and 'friendliness' with Kosygin, lest he send the wrong signals to Washington."⁹⁰ In other words, Zhou was playing a careful balancing act. On the one hand, he had to be civil enough to Kosygin in order to mitigate Sino-Soviet tensions and to make the United States nervous enough that it would attempt to contact the PRC. On the other hand, Zhou did not want to buddy up too much with the USSR lest he scare the United States away. This is a sound explanation, but why did the

⁸⁹ Xiong Xianghui, *Wo de Qingbao yu Waijiao Shengya* [My Life in Intelligence and Diplomacy] (Beijing: Zhongyang Dangxiao Chubanshe, 1999), 184–186.

⁹⁰ Xia, "China's Elite Politics," 9.

PRC bother to perform this careful act instead of simply responding to the United States, which did not happen until December? Again, something seemed to have held the PRC back from responding to U.S. courting.

One possible explanation is that the PRC did not trust the United States enough to reach out or respond to its friendly gestures. But if this were true, then why did the PRC trust the USSR enough right after six months of military conflict and the threat of nuclear war? Was it because they shared more similar ideologies? Or was it because Sino-Soviet diplomatic relations throughout history had not been blighted the way Sino-U.S. relations were?

Another explanation is that the PRC did not reach out or respond to U.S. overtures between February and September 1969 because of the inability of Zhou Enlai and his protégés to influence national policy and because of ultra-leftists, such as Lin Biao and Jiang Qing. A third explanation is that, in 1969, at the height of the Cultural Revolution, Mao would essentially be contradicting his own rhetoric by undertaking an overture with the United States. He could not justify this to either the party or the Chinese people, for whom the United States had always been the number one imperialist enemy. These are explanations that have much to do with domestic politics and will be expanded upon in the next chapter.

III. Finally, Rapprochement

On December 3, the U.S. Ambassador to Poland, Walter Stoessel, spotted Chinese diplomats at a Yugoslav fashion show and followed them outside Warsaw's Palace of Culture afterward. The Chinese diplomats fled, not knowing what to do. Stoessel chased after them, and catching the Chinese interpreter, told him in "broken Polish" that he "had an important message for the Chinese embassy." The Chinese embassy sent a report to Zhou Enlai, and on December 4,

Zhou, with Mao's support, released two Americans who had been held in China since mid-February 1969, when their yacht strayed into the PRC's territorial waters in Guangdong.⁹¹ Sino-U.S. relations seemed to have finally started defrosting.

The Stoessel Incident raises the question of why the PRC responded at the particular moment after the Stoessel encounter and not to any previous U.S. moves. The timing of the Chinese response seems inexplicable considering the balance of threat between the PRC, the United States, and the USSR. By December 1969, though still tense, Sino-Soviet relations had ameliorated from the conditions in September 1969. Even after the Sino-Soviet border talks failed on December 11, there were no signs of re-escalations of conflict. As a friendly gesture, Mao received the Soviet border negotiation delegation on Tiananmen in May 1970 and announced that, "We should negotiate well, should have good-neighborly relations, should be patient, and only fight with words."⁹²

The Stoessel Incident and the PRC's positive response, therefore, happened at a moment when Sino-Soviet relations were showing a favorable upturn. In September 1969, the PRC might have been afraid that reconciling with the United States immediately after the border conflict would scare the USSR into another attack out of the fear of Sino-U.S. collusion, contributing to its decision to defer reconciliation with the United States until later. However, the PRC's war preparations show that it was expecting Soviet invasion even without proactively seeking rapprochement. Under these circumstances, it seemed to make more sense for the PRC to immediately balance against its greatest threat—the USSR. Furthermore, it is hard to see how three months would have reduced Soviet fears about Sino-U.S. collusion.

⁹¹ Ibid., 10–11.

⁹² Zhang Baojun, "1969nian Qianhou Dang dui Waijiao Zhanlüe de Zhongda Tiaozheng" ["The Party's Foreign Policy Strategic Adjustments around 1969"], *Zhonggong Dangshi Yanjiu* [*Research of CCP Party History*], 1996/1, 63.

Another explanation of the PRC's decision to respond in December is that Zhou and Mao might have deemed the opportunity right when Stoessel approached the PRC in December. The Stoessel Incident did indeed provide an opportunity for Mao and Zhou to tell their Chinese colleagues that "it is the Americans who need something from us, not the other way around."⁹³ However, this line of thinking suggests that intra-party politics—rather than simply geopolitical consideration of balancing the Soviet threat—was the key to the PRC's positive response in December 1969. Gao Wenqian, former researcher-writer at the secretive CCP Central Research Office for Documentation, has argued that the PRC, "out of domestic political needs," attempted "to portray itself as the domineering victor, and the United States as the one begging for peace." Gao suggests that, only by doing this can the PRC "find a way out of its anti-American roadmap and convince both those within and outside the CCP to accept the new pro-American policy. This was particularly important in an ultra-leftist age such as the one during the Cultural Revolution."⁹⁴

The timing of the PRC's decision to respond positively to the United States suggests that, while balancing against the Soviet threat was an important reason behind the decision, the delay between the height of the conflict and the PRC's ginger response to U.S. initiatives suggest that some factor other than considerations of threat was at work.

A similar pattern of U.S. pro-activeness and delayed Chinese response was also observed in 1970. In late April, Nixon ordered U.S. troops in South Vietnam to invade Cambodia and destroy Vietnamese Communist bases there. In response, on May 16, Zhou suggested to Mao that China should postpone the Sino-U.S. ambassadorial meetings scheduled for May 20 in

⁹³ Xia, "China's Elite Politics," 11.

⁹⁴ Gao Wenqian, *Wannian Zhou Enlai [Zhou Enlai in His Late Years]* (Hong Kong: Mirror Books, 2003), 426. "只有这样，才能为中国以往在外交上的反美路线找台阶下，说服党内外接受新的对美政策。这在文革这种极左的年代尤其重要。"

Warsaw. Mao agreed.⁹⁵

Although the United States certainly had greater aggregate power and offensive capabilities than the USSR, the USSR seemed more threatening to the PRC in terms of both geographic proximity and hostile intentions. April 1970 was less than a year after the Sino-Soviet border conflict, and Soviet forces were much closer to the PRC's capital and heartland than U.S. troops in Cambodia. In contrast, Nixon, a few days after invading Cambodia, assured the PRC that the United States was prepared to "open a direct channel of communication from the White House to Beijing."⁹⁶ In other words, U.S. invasion of Cambodia did not pose a direct threat to the PRC (the United States seemed to be aiming at Vietnam and the other of Vietnam's patrons, the USSR, but not the PRC), while the Sino-Soviet border clashes were a much more recent and imminent danger.

Therefore, the Chinese decision to slow down its communications with Washington in summer 1970 did not seem to have stemmed solely from "balance against threat" considerations. An alternative explanation is that the PRC felt ideologically compelled to support its allies—Vietnam and Cambodia. A day after Beijing announced the postponement of the Warsaw talks, Mao issued a declaration titled "The Peoples of the World Unite and Defeat the American Invaders and All Their Running Dogs." On May 21, between 500 thousand to a million Chinese held an "Anti-American Struggle Rally" on Tiananmen Square.⁹⁷ The renewal of Chinese anti-American propaganda seems very much ideologically oriented, and it certainly was not in China's best interest to revert to anti-American sentiments less than a year after a fierce border clash with the other superpower. In response, Nixon ordered "every element of the Seventh Fleet

⁹⁵ *Zhou Enlai Nianpu, 1949–1976* [*A Chronological Record of Zhou Enlai, 1949–1976*] (Beijing: Zhongyang Wenxian Chubanshe [Central Committee of the Communist Party of China Party Literature Research Office], 1998) 3:367.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 3:356.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 3:367–370; Chen Jian, 252.

not needed for Vietnam [to be] moved into the Taiwan Strait,” effectively linking Indochina to the PRC’s security, and only thought better of the order after Kissinger’s persuasion.⁹⁸

Another explanation, advocated by historian and Sinologist Chen Jian, is that a storm was brewing between “two of China’s most powerful men, Mao Zedong and Lin Biao.”⁹⁹ According to this explanation, Mao was so preoccupied by his struggle with Lin in the summer of 1970 at the Party Conference in Lushan that he had to defer the process of resuming communications with Washington. Both of these explanations have much to do with ideology and intra-party politics. I will defer further elaboration until later chapters.

Conclusion

This section argued that in moments before, during, and after the PRC responded to U.S. overtures, Chinese and American responses deviated from “balance against threat” explanations to a certain extent. In 1963, the United States chose to balance with a more threatening, nuclear-armed adversary against another adversary that had less offensive capabilities and little hostile intention. In September 1969, although the Sino-Soviet border conflict gave Mao an incentive to reach out to the United States, we saw the PRC waiting for U.S. overtures instead of proactively balancing against its main source of threat. On the other hand, the United States, which did not balance with the PRC against its Cold War archenemy in 1963 when the PRC had yet to gain nuclear capabilities, chose to reconcile with a nuclear China in 1969 at the risk of damaging its thawing out with the USSR.

In 1969, the PRC’s favorable response to the Stoessel Incident seemed to be delayed and happened only after the most dangerous phase in Sino-Soviet relations mitigated. The PRC’s

⁹⁸ Henry Kissinger, *White House Years* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1979), 696.

⁹⁹ Chen, *Mao’s China*, 253.

reversal back to anti-American propaganda following the U.S. invasion of Cambodia in summer 1970 also seemed to be motivated by ideological concerns rather than *realpolitik* ones. The following chapters attempt to address these inconsistencies between theory and observation.

Chapter III. Fending off Domestic Enemies?

The previous chapter argues that, in the decade from 1960 to 1970, the PRC and the United States both deviated from “balance against threat” expectations. In 1963, the U.S. attempt to balance against nascent Chinese nuclear power by aligning with the USSR—its archenemy in the Cold War—suggests that the “balance against threat” theory could be expanded to take the nuclear dimension into account. Other factors, such as Mao’s anti-American rhetoric and the pressure exerted on Kennedy by the “China lobby,” also had a role to play. In particular, this raises the question of why the PRC’s message of the defensive nature of its nuclear program seemed to be lost on U.S. leaders.

Similarly, after the 1969 Sino-Soviet border conflict, the PRC did not respond to U.S. overtures until December 1969, three months after the clash ended, despite several occasions on which the United States reached out to the PRC. This raises the question of what was holding the PRC back from responding to active U.S. courting.

Finally, the PRC’s reversal to rather strong anti-American sentiments in May 1970, just as Sino-American relations started to improve, deserves explanation. “Balance against threat” considerations suggest that the PRC should not alienate the United States when it had recently concluded an armed conflict with the other superpower. The PRC’s behavior to the contrary suggests that other factors, such as domestic politics and intra-party rivalry, were at work.

This chapter will test the domestic and intra-party politics hypothesis in the context of Sino-U.S. Cold War relations. Accordingly, if this hypothesis were true, the PRC and the United States should be expected to turn away from each other when domestic political struggles reached a peak. The section argues that domestic politics explains the actions of U.S. leaders such as Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon and why these leaders might have lacked the ability to

pursue rapprochement before December 1969. However, it does not provide a complete explanation of the lack of willingness on the part of these leaders to do so. On the PRC's side, Mao's failure in the Cultural Revolution and the rising power of Lin Biao provided a domestic reason for Mao to seek a foreign policy "victory" by having the United States court the PRC rather than reaching out to the United States first.

I. The United States: Re-"losing" China?

The Kennedy Administration entered office in a political atmosphere that reflected the legacies of McCarthyism, and the set of China policies Kennedy inherited was certainly quite hostile. Under Eisenhower and Dulles, many of the most competent and knowledgeable Chinese specialists were purged from the State Department, including John Carter Vincent and John Paton Davies. Although McCarthyist tides started to subside in the late 1950s, the Kennedy Administration proved reluctant to change its China policy in part because of its fear of Republican charges on the "who lost China" question.

Furthermore, Kennedy's electoral victory margin in 1960 was very narrow, and his political standing rather insecure. This meant that Kennedy tread with caution on any policy area that might excite public opinion. China was one of these policy areas. During his campaign against Richard Nixon, Kennedy had suggested that American commitment to Taiwan should not be extended to the offshore islands of Quemoy and Matsu. After Nixon argued that giving up Quemoy and Matsu would amount to appeasement of Chinese aggression, Kennedy backtracked on his stance and remained vague on any question that may be politically risky.¹⁰⁰

Importantly, active lobbyists demanded the administration to "stay loyal" to Chiang Kai-

¹⁰⁰ James Fetzer, "Clinging to Containment: China Policy," in *Kennedy's Quest for Victory*, ed. Thomas G. Paterson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 180.

shek, and the support for this policy crossed partisan lines. The Committee of One Million, for example, gained bi-partisan support in opposing recognition of the PRC and in admitting the PRC into the UN as one of the “big fives” on the Security Council. Its efforts were successful. In July 1961, a Senate resolution opposing the PRC’s admission to the UN—which would imply the expulsion of the Republic of China (ROC) government in Taiwan—and diplomatic recognition of the PRC passed by a vote of 76 to 0 and was approved in the House of Representatives by a vote of 395 to 0.¹⁰¹

The lobby also demonstrated a certain degree of political power in Kennedy’s campaign. After Kennedy took his unfavorable Quemoy-Matsu stance, the Committee of One Million abandoned its neutral position and supported Walter H. Judd, former missionary in China and a congressman in the House of Representatives known for his conservative position on China and complete support for Chiang Kai-shek, as Secretary of State.¹⁰² In 1960, Democratic congressional candidates also lost in all of the places where the committee electioneered.¹⁰³ Even by the mid-1960s, the lobby’s influence was still very strong. In 1966, there were at least 334 members of Congress enrolled on the list of the Committee of One Million.¹⁰⁴ Therefore, it is not surprising that, as one analyst put it later, Kennedy “felt his hands were tied.”¹⁰⁵ With the insecure political position he was in, Kennedy could not risk adopting new approaches on a still sensitive and explosive issue.

Despite the political atmosphere and Kennedy’s sensitivity to Republican accusations of weakness and appeasement toward China, however, some members of the administration thought

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 185.

¹⁰² Noam Kochavi, *A Conflict Perpetuated: China Policy During the Kennedy Years* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Publishers, 2002), 57.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 57.

¹⁰⁴ Foster Rhea Dulles, *American Foreign Policy Toward Communist China 1959–1969* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1972), 89.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 191.

the United States should be more flexible toward the PRC, including James C. Thomson, Robert Komer, Edward Rice, Adlai Stevenson, and Chester Bowles. At times, Kennedy appeared receptive to their views, as demonstrated by his support for sending food to the PRC in 1961, which the State Department and Rusk staunchly opposed.¹⁰⁶ However, the aforementioned revisionists also faced Kennedy's refusal to reopen the question of policy toward the PRC. For example, Kennedy, worried that Bowles's views might ring political alarms, asked Bowles to play down his disagreements with the existing China policy.¹⁰⁷ Pressure from the "China lobby" also meant that Kennedy had to maintain the position that there is only one China, and the ROC was the legitimate government of China.¹⁰⁸ Assigning the role of pariah to the PRC effectively retarded any possibility of improving Sino-U.S. relations.

The importance of domestic political considerations is also reflected in the emphasis U.S. leaders placed on secrecy. While the PRC remained hostile to the United States, some PRC leaders did not seem to endorse the hardline position. PRC Foreign Minister Chen Yi, for example, invited the American delegation to attend his reception at the Laos negotiations in Geneva in 1961. Wang Bingnan, Chen's aide, invited U.S. Ambassador to Poland to an informal conversation and took a particularly conciliatory position with regard to Laos. W. Averell Harriman, a Soviet specialist and ambassador-at-large appointed by Kennedy, saw this as a golden opportunity. However, when he tried to arrange a meeting with Chen Yi, Harriman was blocked by Rusk, who worried that information on the meeting would leak. Harriman was told to "maintain a correct attitude" toward the Chinese. In contrast to this staunch position, however, Rusk expressed a willingness to engage in "hidden-hand" diplomacy with regard to the PRC

¹⁰⁶ Fetzer, "Clinging to Containment," 191–192.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 185.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 183–185.

under total confidentiality.¹⁰⁹

Rusk's emphasis on confidentiality demonstrates the domestic political explosiveness of the China question. Although Rusk showed willingness to test the PRC's motives, his concerns about potential leaks—and the effects of that on the political careers of everyone involved—prevented him from reciprocating the Chinese gesture. Given the domestic political climate, reconciliation without total diplomatic confidentiality seemed impossible.

A similar concern about domestic political backlash was seen in the Kennedy Administration's handling of Vietnam. Rusk rejected neutralization of Vietnam and believed that loyal American commitment to Ngo Dinh Diem would eventually ensure victory. While warning against sending in combat troops lest Vietnamese nationalistic sentiments would turn against the United States, Rusk suggested that U.S. doubts over Chiang contributed to Chiang's defeat and the CCP's victory.¹¹⁰ This analogy between Chiang and Diem reflects Rusk's unease over the domestic political consequences of not upholding Diem.

The Vietnam question similarly plagued the Johnson regime. In 1964, in a phone conversation with Senator Richard Russell, Johnson outlined three stances he could take with regard to Vietnam. "One is to run and let the dominoes start falling over. And God Almighty, what they said about us leaving China would just be warming up compared to what they'd say now. I see Nixon's raising hell about it today." Another option was to "fight, as we [the United States] are doing," and a third was to neutralize North Vietnam, which he deemed "totally impractical."¹¹¹ Johnson's decision of "getting in" Vietnam rather than "getting out" reflected the concern he had about appearing too soft on Communism, especially after Nixon warned the

¹⁰⁹ Kochavi, *A Conflict Perpetuated*, 80–81.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 173.

¹¹¹ *Lyndon B. Johnson: The Presidential Recordings, Volume Four, February 1, 1964–March 8, 1964*, ed. Kent B. Germany, Robert David Johnson et al. (New York: W.W. Norton, 2007), 98.

administration not to “pussyfoot” around with the neutralization of Vietnam in a speech at Pfeiffer College.¹¹² Ironically, Johnson’s concern of criticism from Nixon, who would eventually be responsible for Sino-U.S. rapprochement, led the United States into Vietnam and resulted in continued rigidities in Sino-U.S. relations, but subsequent U.S. entanglement in Vietnam was at least one consideration behind Nixon’s strategy of ameliorating relations with the PRC.

Domestic political factors also played a part in the question of recognition. After French recognition of the PRC in 1964, Johnson and Richard Russell raised the question of U.S. recognition of the PRC. When Johnson responded affirmatively to Russell’s suggestion that “the time’s going to come when *we’re* [the United States] going to have to recognize them,” Russell argued “politically, right now it’s [the recognition of the PRC] poison.”¹¹³

Why, then, was Nixon able to reconcile with the PRC and not commit political suicide when Kennedy, Rusk, and Johnson found domestic obstacles insurmountable? This question is worth exploring especially considering the fact that Rusk was also staunchly anti-Communist after 1949 and had been accused of having stopped Kennedy from changing the old China policies.¹¹⁴ Indeed, Rusk’s 1951 description of the PRC as a “Slavic Manchukuo,” or puppet state of the USSR, was arguably one of the most scathing and least informed American statements with regard to the PRC in the century.

One answer to the question is the clandestine decision-making process in the Nixon Administration. Kissinger describes Nixon’s administrative style as being able to lend itself to the “secretive, solitary tactics” that a change in China policy required. As someone who

¹¹² “Warning by Nixon.” *The Nevada Daily Mail*, February 3, 1964. Accessed through Google News April 5, 2015, <https://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=1908&dat=19640129&id=SpYfAAAAIIBAJ&sjid=U9QEAAAAIIBAJ&pg=4372,1367918&hl=en>.

¹¹³ *Lyndon B. Johnson: The Presidential Recordings, Volume Three, November 1963–January 1964*, ed. Kent B. Germany, Robert David Johnson et al. (New York: W.W. Norton, 2005), 508.

¹¹⁴ John Kenneth Galbraith, *A Life in Our Times: Memoirs* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1981), 404–406; James C. Thomson, Jr., “On the Making of U.S. China Policy, 1961-1969: A Study in Bureaucratic Politics,” in *China Quarterly* (April/June 1972), 221–222.

distrusted the bureaucracy, Nixon used the National Security Council primarily to provide information on internal political views and to camouflage his true intentions.¹¹⁵ Indeed, the importance of the secretiveness in China diplomacy was reflected by Kissinger and Nixon's decision to move its control to the White House. The difficulty of controlling enormous bureaucratic communications in the State Department meant that leaks—which might give some parties the opportunity to sabotage nascent steps toward reconciliation by appealing to a domestic political audience—were inevitable if not moved to the highest level. Nixon and Kissinger considered state's bureaucracy both “an impediment to fresh diplomatic initiatives” and a player that would take credit away from the administration in cases of foreign policy successes.¹¹⁶

Another reason that Nixon was able bring Sino-U.S. rapprochement to fruition was that, unlike Kennedy and Rusk, who were members of the Democratic Party often targeted by the “China lobby” for “losing” China, Nixon “had the political base on the right,” which, Kissinger argued, protected him from accusations of being “soft on Communism.”¹¹⁷ Indeed, in the 1950s, Nixon was willing to take every risk to support French repression of Communist expansion in Indochina. The aforementioned position he took with regard to Quemoy-Matsu also showed his resoluteness in protecting Taiwan. Nixon had never been accused of being soft on Communism.¹¹⁸ Thus, he had more space to pursue a more flexible China policy without ruining his career.

An interesting observation is that, Nixon, who had been staunchly anti-Communist during the Kennedy and Johnson years, was a key driver of Sino-U.S. rapprochement. This

¹¹⁵ Kissinger, *White House Years*, 163.

¹¹⁶ Robert Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007), 110–112.

¹¹⁷ Kissinger, *White House Years*, 163.

¹¹⁸ Dulles, *American Foreign Policy*, 238.

demonstrates the impact of electoral politics on foreign policy. A key group among Nixon's traditional supporters was the "China lobby." During election season, Nixon might have felt the need to preserve the support of this group in his campaign against Kennedy. Once Nixon was installed as President, his concerns for maintaining the support of the "China lobby," though still present,¹¹⁹ lessened somewhat, and other considerations, such as ending the Vietnam quagmire, prevailed.¹²⁰ Indeed, since the beginning of their times in office, Nixon and Kissinger gave priority to ending the war in Vietnam, to reducing tensions with the USSR, and to improving relations with the PRC.¹²¹ For Nixon and Kissinger, political and strategic goals, it seemed, figured much more prominently than ideological considerations in foreign policy, a point to be discussed in the following chapter.

On the U.S. side, then, domestic political atmosphere provides an explanation of why Democrat presidents such as Kennedy and Johnson found it difficult to pursue a different set of policy toward the PRC, even when both had a certain degree of willingness to be more flexible. It also presents a reason why a Republican president on the political right had better political strengths to do so. However, the contrast between Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon does not end at their *ability* to influence U.S. China policy. There are also differences between the extent of Kennedy and Nixon's *willingness* to improve relations. Kennedy seemed to waver between supporting a more flexible approach—as demonstrated by his willingness to send food to the PRC in 1961—and supporting a more hardline approach—as demonstrated by his concern of the PRC's nuclear program and his characterization of the PRC as an expansionist aggressor.¹²² For the most part, Kennedy chose to maintain the basics of the hostile policy he inherited from the

¹¹⁹ Kissinger argues that Nixon still "had to take account of domestic realities, not the least of which was...the conservative 'China lobby.'" (Kissinger, *White House Years*, 167.)

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 164.

¹²¹ Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger*, 111.

¹²² Fetzer, "Clinging to Containment," 179-181.

Eisenhower Administration and was focused on containing the PRC. Compared to the Kennedy, Nixon, though formerly a staunch anti-Communist, “had the general intention of making a fresh start.”¹²³

This analysis suggests that in addition to a president’s ability to influence U.S. China policy, his willingness also matters. Indeed, the collegial style and *ad hoc* task forces of the Kennedy Administration made it difficult for any group of advisors to block a presidential decision to change policy.¹²⁴ The Kennedy Administration’s relative lack of willingness to change U.S. China policy, in turn, was rooted in Kennedy and many of his advisors’ perception of a Communist China with nearly 700 million people, bent on spreading Communism throughout Southeast Asia and with the potential of being nuclear-armed. This perception led to the policy of continuing the isolation and containment of the PRC. On the other hand, Nixon focused primarily on *realpolitik* interests and strategy, paying less attention to ideology. Similarly, Kissinger regarded the existing China policy as having “excessive emphasis on China’s ideology.”¹²⁵ This explanation of the differences between Kennedy and Nixon’s China policies has much to do with the importance they placed on ideology, and will be discussed in the chapter that follows. In the meantime, we turn our attention to the Chinese side of the story.

II. The People’s Republic: Waiting to be Courted

It is certainly unfair to place the blame of the delay in Sino-U.S. rapprochement predominantly on U.S. administrations. At the height of the Sino-Soviet split, it was the United States, rather than the PRC, that proactively reached out a hand across the Pacific Ocean and started the reconciliation process. The answer to the question raised in the previous chapter—

¹²³ Kissinger, *White House Years*, 167.

¹²⁴ Fetzer, “Clinging to Containment,” 181.

¹²⁵ Kissinger, *White House Years*, 178.

what was holding the PRC back from balancing the USSR by aligning with the United States—seems to lie at least partly in the intra-party politics in the PRC.

The courting relationship between the PRC and the United States is perhaps best encapsulated in the photograph shown on the February 22, 1972 edition of the *People's Daily*, the PRC's state newspaper, published a day after the historical meeting between Nixon and Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai at Beijing Airport. On the photograph, Zhou stood still, smiled, and waited as Nixon descended down the gangway, stepping forward and eagerly reaching out his hand.¹²⁶ Zhou's choice to show this particular photograph, taken just before the handshake, also demonstrates the importance of intra-party politics in the minds of Chinese leaders at the time.

On the Chinese side of the equation, Zhou had always been the most proactive pusher for an amelioration of Sino-U.S. relations. Scholars such as Xia Yafeng have argued that it was ultimately Mao's decision to pursue Sino-U.S. rapprochement—no one could challenge Mao's authority, and without Mao's permission, no other member of the CCP could give the political green light to reconcile with the PRC's number one Western imperialist enemy. However, without constant prodding from Zhou, it is unlikely that Mao would have come to the decision.

More important was the huge domestic political risk Zhou was taking in adopting a proactive attitude toward the United States. Being the chief negotiator with the United States could make Zhou vulnerable to “capitalist roader” accusations at any moment. And it did. In late 1973, with Mao's support, the Central Politburo of the CCP criticized Zhou for his “rightist capitulationism” based on his diplomatic ties with the United States. According to Gao Wenqian, researcher and writer at the CCP Central Research Office for Documentation, Mao's wife, ultra-

¹²⁶ *People's Daily* Front Page, February 22, 1972 edition. Accessed April 5, 2015, http://en.people.cn/200202/21/image20020221_7496.html.

leftist leader Jiang Qing, even accused Zhou of hoping to “eagerly replace Chairman Mao.”¹²⁷

Although Zhou barely escaped the purge by criticizing himself, this vehement struggle campaign against him in his old age and poor health troubled him for the remainder of his life. Gao suggests that Zhou chose the aforementioned photograph to increase his immunity from political accusations in the future.¹²⁸

If Zhou was the active motivator of Sino-U.S. rapprochement, then Mao’s position seemed more ambiguous. For Sino-American rapprochement to happen, Mao needed to at least have tolerated, if not supported, that idea. What factors, then, contributed to the change in Mao’s stance toward the United States from one of hostility to one of conciliation? After all, unlike in the United States, a change of leadership had not taken place in the PRC on the same scale. The growing Soviet threat certainly played a role in changing Mao’s stance. Cohen, for instance, argues that, by 1970, Mao had been persuaded by Zhou to use the United States as a counterweight to the Soviets.¹²⁹ However, intra-party political dynamics is also crucial in explaining the PRC’s reluctance to reach out to the United States even as Soviet threat mounted.

Although the worsening Sino-Soviet relations in the 1960s provided an important motivation for Sino-U.S. rapprochement, another equally, if not more, important factor prevented it. As the PRC plunged into the depth of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution and Mao hoped to rid his society of what he considered excessive bureaucratization, the PRC turned inward and shut out most of its external relations. All the ambassadors were recalled from 1966 to 1967 except for the one in Egypt. During this period, Chinese Foreign Minister Chen Yi lost

¹²⁷ Gao, *Wannian Zhou Enlai [Zhou Enlai in His Late Years]*, 397. “江青甚至提出这是‘第十一次路线斗争’，指周想‘迫不及待地取代主席。”

¹²⁸ *Ibid.* “周这样做，是为了刻意体现对尼克松访华‘不卑不亢，不冷不热’的接待方针。这种姿态，与其说是作给国外看的，不如说是给国内看的，以免在政治上落下把柄。”

¹²⁹ Cohen, *America’s Response*, 217.

control of the Foreign Ministry,¹³⁰ and Zhou himself was confined in his office by Red Guards for two days.¹³¹ When Johnson gave signals for Sino-U.S. reconciliation in mid-1966, therefore, the Chinese had no ears for foreign affairs.¹³²

The worst phase of the Cultural Revolution was over by April 1969; the ambassadors have been sent back one by one.¹³³ However, the PRC did not respond to U.S. overtures until December 1969. What eventually made Mao receptive in 1969 to Sino-U.S. rapprochement was not only Zhou's argument that China could exploit superpower differences to preserve itself,¹³⁴ but also Mao's need for a groundbreaking success after the Cultural Revolution—his brainchild—got out of hand, throwing the whole country into chaos, and after his heir apparent—Defense Minister Lin Biao—grew in power and started to differ with him in terms of domestic economic policies.¹³⁵ In other words, after the Cultural Revolution damaged Mao's myth of “eternal correctness,” the chairman became more eager than ever to make significant diplomatic headway to save his receding intra-party prestige and authority.¹³⁶ Even Xia, for whom Mao was the supreme decision maker in the foreign policy arena, agrees that Mao was “eager to have a major breakthrough in China's foreign relations to offset the domestic political crisis.”¹³⁷

The best opportunity in 1969 for this breakthrough rested in the foreign policy arena. Improving Sino-U.S. relationship was not enough. Mao needed the United States to come to China, literally and figuratively, instead of the other way around. Doing so would place Mao in a position from which he could claim that he won a decisive foreign policy battle against the

¹³⁰ Ibid., 213.

¹³¹ Kissinger, *White House Years*, 750.

¹³² Cohen, *America's Response*, 213.

¹³³ Xia, “China's Elite Politics,” 6.

¹³⁴ Garver, *China's Decision*, 156.

¹³⁵ Gao, *Wannian Zhou Enlai [Zhou Enlai in His Late Years]*, 360. “问题还不在于此……同时也和毛、林两人在政治上的想法不同有关，毛不能容忍林彪授意陈伯达在九大政治报告中提出搞‘唯生产力论’的那一套。”

¹³⁶ Ibid., 372, “……随着毛发现周在林彪事件后党内的威望大增而他自己一落千丈时。”

¹³⁷ Xia, “China's Elite Politics,” 22.

number one imperialist country in the world, which came to him, begging for peace. This was why Mao and Zhou, instead of seeking U.S. support against the much graver Soviet threat, performed a careful balancing act to induce the United States to come to China. Mao had to portray the PRC as a demure lady ardently courted by a proactive pursuer—the United States.

As mentioned above, authors such as Xia Yafeng have argued that the making of Chinese foreign policy was left to a small group of political elites—the five-man CCP Secretariat—headed by Mao, and that pursuing rapprochement was ultimately Mao’s decision.¹³⁸ Xia argues that Lin Biao was absent from all politburo meetings concerning Sino-U.S. relations and played a nearly non-existent role in policymaking vis-à-vis the United States.¹³⁹ Mao had been on Zhou’s side with regard to China’s U.S. policy decisions since early 1969.¹⁴⁰ The ultra-leftists, headed by Lin Biao and followed by people later known as the “Gang of Four,” (including Mao’s wife, Jiang Qing) depended on the support and patronage of Mao, and were therefore loyal to Mao.¹⁴¹

This analysis contrasts with the argument presented by Garver and Kissinger himself, who hypothesized that there seemed to be a policy clash among top leaders in Beijing. In June 1970, for example, when the United States reached out to the PRC to establish a more confidential channel of communication, from the PRC came no response. From his visits, Kissinger attained the impression that in Beijing, “various, sometimes clashing, policy views were being pursued simultaneously, with the military, headed by Lin Piao [Lin Biao] favoring a hard line,”¹⁴² while Zhou Enlai took a much more mild position. On July 2, the PRC also sent two MiG-19s in an attempt to intercept and perhaps shoot down a C-130 plane on an intelligence mission 100 miles off the Chinese coast. Kissinger recalls writing in a memo to Nixon that

¹³⁸ Ibid., 4–6.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 27.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 6.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 27.

¹⁴² Kissinger, *White House Years*, 696.

Perhaps the most plausible hypothesis is that somebody in the power structure did want to wreck Sino-US relations. ...the Chinese for some two years have been cautiously feeling us out to see what we might...do to improve relations. This policy is usually associated with Chou En-lai [Zhou Enlai] and the moderate grouping... In the past couple of weeks, there has been evidence of an upsurge of the zealots... The Air Force during the Cultural Revolution was the most radical of the armed services... The attempted shutdown may have been related to a policy/power struggle and been intended to stop the moderate drift of foreign policy.¹⁴³

Similarly, Garver argues that, in the intense power struggle between Lin's military faction and the moderate faction led by Zhou Enlai, the military faction—the PLA—had greater strength and maintained that U.S. imperialism remained the PRC's greatest enemy as late as the fall of 1969.¹⁴⁴ Consequently, Zhou felt compelled to first reconcile with the USSR, so that he could “avoid putting himself in an unfavorable ‘pro-U.S.’ position.”¹⁴⁵ Warren Cohen also argues that Zhou and his protégés could not control national policy, and that Lin Biao and Jiang Qing, Mao's wife, opposed any effort to moderate China's U.S. policy.¹⁴⁶ Bureaucratic struggle over policy control explains the PRC's decision to reach out to the USSR first and to delay reconciliation with the United States. In this explanation, Zhou supported rapprochement and Lin was against it. Mao's stance on the issue and role in bringing about reconciliation is unclear. He seemed to waver between Zhou and Lin.¹⁴⁷

The lack of credible Chinese primary sources does not help to dissipate the mystery

¹⁴³ Ibid., 697.

¹⁴⁴ Garver, *China's Decision*, 110.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 134.

¹⁴⁶ Cohen, *America's Reponse*, 215.

¹⁴⁷ Garver, *America's Response*, 124–140.

surrounding Mao's relationship with Lin, Lin's role in the making of Chinese U.S. policy, and the circumstances of Lin's eventual downfall (literally and figuratively). However, in both Xia and Garver's arguments and in Kissinger's recollection, Chinese intra-party politics had an important role to play in delaying Sino-U.S. rapprochement. If, as Xia argues, Mao were in control of China's U.S. policy and fully backed rapprochement since early 1969,¹⁴⁸ then the fact that he waited for the United States to take the first step instead of reaching out first (despite the PRC's greater need to balance the USSR) shows that Mao wanted, after the failure of the Cultural Revolution, to demonstrate to his subordinates (and possibly also to his Communist brethren worldwide) that he was still capable of a glorious victory. Gao Wenqian argues—perhaps cynically—that Mao's 1973 decision to struggle against Zhou for “rightist capitulationism” is because of his fear that Zhou would get too much credit for Sino-U.S. rapprochement and would damage Mao's “intra-party influence and prestige.”¹⁴⁹ If true, this suggests Mao's desire to be credited with the successful amelioration in Sino-U.S. relations. As Kennedy famously said, success has many fathers; failure is always an orphan. Indeed, it was the dead Lin Biao (who died in a plane crash en route to Mongolia in 1971) who eventually became the whipping boy for the failed Cultural Revolution.

If Mao was not in total control of PRC's U.S. policy, or if he was wavering between Lin's position and Zhou's position, then the power struggle between Lin and Zhou was, as Kissinger hypothesized in 1970, the most likely factor that delayed rapprochement. According to this line of argument, Mao got rid of Lin as he grew in power and, possibly, attempted a coup. By early 1970, the military faction called for Lin to assume the long-empty post of state

¹⁴⁸ Xia, “China's Elite Politics,” 6.

¹⁴⁹ Gao, *Wannian Zhou Enlai [Zhou Enlai in His Late Years]*, 372. “……随着毛发现周在林彪事件后党内外的威望大增而他自己一落千丈时。”

chairman, which would allow him to become the figurehead of the government bureaucracy.¹⁵⁰ Mao's suspicion of Lin's ambitions became clear in March 1970, when Mao specified that "there should be no post of State Chairman" in a revision of the State Constitution.¹⁵¹ According to this thesis, then, Mao's fear that Lin's power was getting out of hand drove his conflict with Lin and his decision to grant Zhou his patronage, providing Zhou with the political space to maneuver his pro-U.S. foreign policy. Lin's eventual downfall in September 1971 might also have cleared the way for Nixon's visit to the PRC. Indeed, even Xia agrees that Zhou had to "spend much time and energy to surmount obstacles posed by the ultra-leftists on the home front."¹⁵²

Conclusion

On China's end of the story, the failure of the Cultural Revolution provided Mao with a key reason to win this foreign policy battle. His need to portray the United States as the one coming to and asking for something from the PRC delayed Sino-U.S. rapprochement in 1969 as the PRC fought in a fierce border conflict with the USSR, which significantly escalated the Soviet threat. Although some authors disagree, intra-party struggles between ultra-leftists headed by Lin and the moderates headed by Zhou seemed also an important factor that delayed Sino-U.S. rapprochement, as suggested by Kissinger, Garver, and Cohen.¹⁵³ While Mao's position in this struggle remains unclear, with some, such as Garver,¹⁵⁴ arguing that Lin was able to challenge Mao's power while others, such as Xia, disagreeing,¹⁵⁵ Lin's growing power would almost certainly make Mao anxious and seek to lower Lin's influence, as suggested by Gao.¹⁵⁶ If

¹⁵⁰ Garver, *America's Response*, 134.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 135.

¹⁵² Xia, "China's Elite Politics," 12.

¹⁵³ Kissinger, *White House Years*, 696–697; Garver, *China's Decision*, 124–140; Cohen, *America's Response*, 215.

¹⁵⁴ Garver, *China's Decision*, 134–135.

¹⁵⁵ Xia, "China's Elite Politics," 3–28.

¹⁵⁶ Gao, *Wannian Zhou Enlai [Zhou Enlai in His Late Years]*, 360. "……毛担忧林彪的权势日益膨胀……"

so, then Mao's worry about Lin toward late 1969 and early 1970 might also have contributed to his endorsement of Zhou's pro-U.S. policy line.

On the U.S. end, the role of U.S. domestic politics provides an explanation of why the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations found it difficult to make a significant revision in U.S. China policy. The domestic political atmosphere—a decade after the height of McCarthyism—was certainly not conducive for two Democrat presidents to reach out a hand to the Communist regime that displaced Chiang Kai-shek, the longtime friend of the “China lobby.” Although the USSR was also a Communist power, the Democrats had more to worry about appearing soft on Chinese Communism because they were blamed for “losing China,” not Russia, to Communism, and the most significant political force against reconciling with the PRC, the “China lobby,” targeted any reconciliatory steps toward the PRC, not the USSR.

However, as explained above, the lack of ability to change U.S. China policy due to domestic circumstances is only one factor. Another is the level of the presidents' willingness. Why did Nixon appear more willing than Kennedy to reconcile with the PRC? One answer is that Kennedy regarded the PRC more as a threat and with greater hostile intentions. However, as will be explained in the next chapter, this threat perception and perception of hostile intentions was very much influenced by the importance Kennedy and Rusk placed on Mao's ideology and worldview. On the Chinese side of the equation, the “evil ideology” of capitalism and imperialism—tightly associated with the United States—seemed to be of primary importance in rhetoric and mobilization of the Chinese public rather than in policy-making, although top Chinese leaders very possibly sincerely believed in such rhetoric at one point in their career. This argument will be elaborated in more detail in the next chapter.

Chapter IV. Do Beliefs Matter?

As the previous chapter explains, domestic or intra-party politics provides an explanation of what might have impeded the ability of U.S. and Chinese leaders to pursue rapprochement. On the U.S. side, Kennedy's thin margin of electoral victory, pressure from the "China lobby," and the emotions surrounding the China issue made him unwilling to risk fresh diplomatic initiatives. On the Chinese side, intra-party struggles between Zhou and Lin might have provided one reason for the vacillation in China's policy toward the United States. Mao's concern about the failure of the Cultural Revolution and his declining intra-party prestige and influence is another reason that he needed the United States to come to the PRC, although the PRC needed to balance against the USSR more direly than the United States did. In other words, although geopolitical factors and the Soviet threat to the PRC provided an important reason for Beijing to ameliorate its relations with Washington, the timing and manner in which this amelioration should be carried out was dictated by intra-party politics.

Ability and political space to pursue change, however, was only one factor. Equally important was the willingness of leaders to risk novel diplomatic ventures. This chapter argues that, on the U.S. side, the answer to the question of why Nixon seemed more willing than Kennedy, and perhaps also Johnson, to reconcile with the PRC lies partially in the importance of ideology for the two leaders. On the Chinese side, ideology played only a supplementary role in both preventing and driving Sino-U.S. rapprochement, but the relative pullback of ideologically charged propaganda in the late 1960s nonetheless provided more space for reconciliation.

I. Ideology and Threat Perceptions

There is indeed evidence to suggest that Kennedy favored making fresh ventures in U.S.

China policy before taking office. Kennedy regarded American policy toward the PRC in the 1950s and early 1960s as “exaggeratedly military” and “probably too rigid,” and he argued that the United States “must be careful not to straight-jacket our policy as a result of ignorance and fail to detect a change in the objective situation when it comes.”¹⁵⁷ Despite his views, Kennedy “hewed to the old line.”¹⁵⁸ Part of the reason for this, as explained in the previous chapter, is that the President felt his hands were tied politically and it was impossible to make any changes. However, another reason had to do with the importance of ideology for Kennedy and other top members of his administration, such as Secretary of State Dean Rusk. For instance, although Kennedy initially favored abandoning Quemoy and Matsu during his presidential campaign, his anti-Communist rhetoric was no less bellicose than Nixon’s.¹⁵⁹ In the same speech in which he advocated for the abandonment of Quemoy and Matsu, he also reminded his audience that “[t]he Red Chinese...are going through a dangerous, aggressive, Stalinist phase. We are not going to let them dominate the Far East—we are not going to appease or retreat under pressure.”¹⁶⁰

Kennedy certainly viewed the PRC as a serious threat, and this threat perception was based at least in part on the PRC’s ideology.¹⁶¹ According to the “balance against threat” theory, this could mean that Kennedy viewed the PRC as a more serious threat than the USSR and, therefore, chose to balance against the PRC with America’s Cold War archenemy. However, Kennedy’s threat perception seemed to have stemmed not only from the four factors outlined by Walt, but also from his assessment of the PRC’s Communist ideology. Kennedy repeatedly argued that the PRC was in a “Stalinist” phase and that the Chinese Communists were

¹⁵⁷ Dulles, *American Foreign Policy*, 189.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 191.

¹⁵⁹ Larry J. Sabato, *The Kennedy Half-Century* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 71.

¹⁶⁰ “Speech of Senator John F. Kennedy Prepared for a Dinner Held by the Democratic National and State Committees, Waldorf-Astoria Hotel, New York, NY, October 12, 1960,” Accessed through The American Presidency Project on April 5, 2015, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=25782>.

¹⁶¹ Fetzer, “Clinging to Containment,” 180.

determined to expand Chinese influence abroad. Furthermore, although many of Kennedy's advisors have recognized, by the early 1960s, that a split was developing between the PRC and the USSR, the dominant perception was that the split was rooted in the PRC's insistence that the USSR take a more aggressive stance toward U.S. imperialism. The PRC, therefore, seemed to be less responsible and more reckless than the USSR in U.S. eyes. For U.S. analysts, the PRC and the USSR were fundamentally competing over how best to achieve Communist gains. "A dispute over how to bury the West," Kennedy asserted, "is no grounds for Western rejoicing."¹⁶² As long as the PRC maintained its expansionist Communist ideology, it would remain a menace to the United States and a disruptor of peace.

In Walt's "balance against threat" theory, ideology is seen as only having modest association to alignment.¹⁶³ Many ostensibly ideological alignments are really examples of balancing behavior. While Walt was certainly right that the use of ideology in determining foreign policies tends to give rise to self-fulfilling prophecies,¹⁶⁴ he might have underestimated the importance of ideology in the formation of leaders' threat perceptions. In the case of Sino-U.S. Cold War relations, Kennedy's perception of the PRC's expansionist Communist ideology contributed to his perception of Beijing's hostile intentions. Although the USSR was also Communist, Kennedy believed that it had already moved out of its expansionist "Stalinist" phase of the 1940s.¹⁶⁵ Thus, for Kennedy, no overture could happen until the PRC had been rid of its aggressive, Stalinist ideology. In other words, while Kennedy was worried about Communism in general, the PRC's aggressively expansionist Communist ideology seemed a greater concern than Khrushchev, whose coexistence policy the Chinese regarded as intolerable revisionism and

¹⁶² Dulles, *American Foreign Policy*, 206.

¹⁶³ Walt, *The Origins of Alliances*, 181.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 184.

¹⁶⁵ Fetzer, "Clinging to Containment," 180.

a major ideological error. Even with a split between the PRC and the USSR, the PRC's rhetoric targeting the USSR had been primarily focused on presenting itself as the true interpreter and champion of Marxism-Leninism. A PRC separated from the Soviet bloc, therefore, only meant greater dangers of Communist expansion in Asia.

Similarly, Kennedy's key advisor, Secretary of State Dean Rusk, also viewed the PRC as a grave threat. No evidence suggests that Rusk, by 1961, had revised his view in the early 1950s that the PRC was a puppet of the USSR. Both Foster Rhea Dulles and John Kenneth Galbraith have argued that Rusk maintained the hardline approach in dealing with Communist China that he adopted when working for the Truman Administration. Both authors argue that Rusk saw the conflict between "Communism and the free world" through the lens of a "fundamental moral principle: no compromise should be made with the forces of evil."¹⁶⁶ This perception of the PRC as a source of threat seemed to have come both from Rusk's own anti-Communist stance and his view of the danger of the PRC's ideology, the former having a certain degree of influence on the latter. Rusk's "strongly dichotomous view of the world"¹⁶⁷ with the free nations on the one hand and the Communist regimes on the other meant that, even after he recognized the differences developing between Beijing and Moscow in 1962, he continued to believe that the basic unity of the Communist world was not easily destructible.¹⁶⁸

This perception changed little during the Johnson Administration. In 1965, the PRC's Defense Minister, Lin Biao, issued a belligerent declaration titled "Long Live the Victory of the People's War." Building on Leninist theory, Lin argued that the underdeveloped regions of the world, namely Asia, Africa, and Latin America, were in irreconcilable conflict with the Western world and capitalist imperialism. At the helm of Western reactionary forces was the United

¹⁶⁶ Dulles, *American Foreign Policy*, 192.

¹⁶⁷ Galbraith, *A Life in Our Times*, 404.

¹⁶⁸ Dulles, *American Foreign Policy*, 204; Fetzer, "Clinging to Containment," 182.

States, which “like a mad bull dashing from place to place, will finally be burnt to ashes in the blazing fires of the people’s wars it has provoked by its own actions.”¹⁶⁹

The ideologically charged Chinese statements fed into U.S. leaders’ perception of the belligerent nature of the PRC’s expansionist Communist ideology, and consequently, no softening of American attitude toward the Chinese Communists was considered. Walter Whitman Rostow, Kennedy’s Deputy National Security Advisor and Johnson’s National Security Advisor, supported Kennedy’s view that while “the Soviet Union could be contained within the framework of mutual awareness of the impossibility of achieving any gains through war,” in the case of the PRC, “this restraint would not be effective because the Chinese would be perfectly prepared, because of the lower value they attach to human life, to sacrifice hundreds of millions of their own lives, if this were necessary in order to carry out their militant and aggressive policies.”¹⁷⁰ The Johnson Administration largely inherited Kennedy’s views, and Johnson’s top foreign policy advisors, such as Rostow, maintained the view that the PRC’s belligerence and lack of reason made reconciliation impossible and undesirable.

During the Johnson years, virtually no declassified NIE between 1964 and 1968 concluded that the PRC was bluffing in its belligerence. Although most NIEs recognized the PRC’s industrial and economic weaknesses, nearly all took the PRC’s threats seriously and analyzed the threats from an ideological viewpoint. The United States did not think the Chinese would change their foreign policy from one of hostility to amicability any time soon. This shows that the U.S. perception of continued Chinese hostility, stemming from the PRC’s Communist ideology and expansionist worldview, was an important reason in limiting U.S. leaders’

¹⁶⁹ Lin Biao, “Long Live the Victory of People’s War!” in *Commemoration of the 20th Anniversary of Victory in the Chinese People’s War of Resistance Against Japan* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1966), 58.

¹⁷⁰ Walter LaFeber, *America, Russia, and the Cold War 1945–1980 Fourth Ed.* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1980), 233; Walter Whitman Rostow, *The Diffusion of Power: An Essay in Recent History* (New York: Macmillan, 1972), 29.

willingness to pursue fresh diplomatic overtures.

For example, a 1965 NIE dealt specifically with the concept of a protracted “people’s war,” which was an important component of “Mao Zedong Thought.” The NIE pointed out several aspects of Mao’s doctrine that were worrying, including the focus on “self reliance” and the “dominance of men and politics over weaponry.” The “people’s war” doctrine, the NIE concluded, is

...deemed applicable to “wars of national liberation” [and] is also applied to a potential conflict with the US. Communist China is apprehensive regarding the possibility of a US nuclear attack followed by a large-scale invasion, but holds that in such a case China could accept nuclear devastation and still overwhelm the invaders in a protracted “people’s war.”¹⁷¹

This suggested that the PRC was willing to use the “people’s war” doctrine to spread Communism in other countries under the name of “wars of national liberation.” Similarly, another 1965 NIE also concluded, “for both ideological and nationalistic reasons, China regards the US as its primary enemy.” Importantly, the NIE also suggested that, “Peiping [Beijing] tries...to build up recognition of China as a major power and to weaken the US position of leadership.”¹⁷² This shows that U.S. intelligence community, by 1965, was convinced that the United States, rather than the USSR, was the main target of the PRC for ideological reasons.

By 1966, U.S. estimations of Chinese policy in Vietnam presented the PRC’s support for Vietnam in ideological terms. A December 1966 NIE concluded that the Chinese

¹⁷¹ *Foreign Relations of the United States 1964–1968*, NIE 13-3-65, “Communist China’s Military Establishment,” March 10, 1965, Document 80, Volume XXX, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v30/d80>.

¹⁷² *Foreign Relations of the United States 1964–1968*, NIE 13-9-65, “Communist China’s Foreign Policy,” May 5, 1965, Document 85, Volume XXX, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v30/d85>.

...apparently wish for the present to see the Vietnam struggle continue. They see it as a prime example of a “people’s war” waged against their main enemy, US imperialism. They hope for an outcome which would support their claim that this Maoist strategy is essential to revolutionary advance and at the same time diminish Soviet claims to give authoritative guidance to the revolutionary struggle.¹⁷³

Not only is the struggle still portrayed in ideological terms, but the principle of “people’s war” is applied to a war between the U.S. and another country—Vietnam, demonstrating what is regarded by the United States as the spread of Maoist ideology. This could be seen as an example of the emphasis the United States placed on the PRC’s ideology. Not until 1968 did a NIE differentiate between ideologically-charged rhetoric and actual actions, “In the main, the Cultural Revolution has not altered the general line of Chinese policy abroad; it still remains revolutionary in tone but cautious and prudent in deeds.”¹⁷⁴ While these NIEs do not necessarily reflect what top leaders thought, they almost certainly contributed to the policymaking process. The emphasis on what the U.S. perceived to be a belligerent, expansionist Chinese ideology, therefore, fed into the U.S. perception of a weak but aggressive China.

In contrast to the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations, the Nixon Administration placed less importance on ideology. In his 1968 article, “Asia After Viet Nam,” Nixon urges a broader view of Asia and a shift of focus away from Vietnam by suggesting that there was “a gathering disaffection with all the old isms that have so long imprisoned so many minds and so

¹⁷³ *Foreign Relations of the United States 1964–1968*, NIE 11-12-66, “The Outlook for Sino-Soviet Relations,” December 1, 1966, Document 223, Volume XXX, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v30/d223>.

¹⁷⁴ *Foreign Relations of the United States 1964–1968*, NIE 13-9-68, “The Short-Term Outlook in Communist China,” May 23, 1968, Document 312, Volume XXX, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v30/d312>.

many governments.”¹⁷⁵ For example, in an apparent departure from his previous scathing attacks on Communism, Nixon had intended, as early as January 1969, to restart secret meetings with the Chinese in Warsaw and instructed Kissinger to privately encourage Chinese perception that the Nixon Administration is “exploring possibilities of rapprochement with the Chinese.”¹⁷⁶

Nixon and Kissinger’s focus on politics rather than ideology is also apparent from the explanation the two men gave about the U.S. decision to stay in Vietnam. During a trip to Europe in 1969, French President Charles de Gaulle advised Nixon and Kissinger to end the war in Vietnam quickly. Nixon, however, replied that the United States must end the war “in a responsible way” in order to maintain American credibility. Later, de Gaulle questioned Kissinger more directly on why the United States was not “get[ting] out of Vietnam.” Kissinger replied, “Because a sudden withdrawal might give us a credibility problem.”¹⁷⁷ Interestingly, neither leader touched on the Domino Theory and the fear that a Communist victory in Vietnam would spread the ideology across other Southeast Asian countries, a fear so prevalent in the previous two decades. For Nixon and Kissinger, U.S. presence in Vietnam, it seemed, was tied more closely to American national security and credibility abroad. The issue was presented from a strategic perspective, with little focus on ideology.

The Nixon Doctrine is another manifestation of the reduced focus on ideology. For Nixon and Kissinger, U.S. national interest is best served by a broad détente policy, with improved relations with both the PRC and the USSR. In the words of Kissinger, “Our relations to possible opponents [Beijing and Moscow] should be such...that our options toward both of them were

¹⁷⁵ Richard M. Nixon, “Asia After Viet Nam,” in *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 46, No. 1 (Oct., 1967): 111.

¹⁷⁶ *Foreign Relations of the United States 1969–1976*, “Memorandum From President Nixon to his Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger),” February 1, 1969, Document 3, Volume XVII, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v17/d3>.

¹⁷⁷ Kissinger, *White House Years*, 110.

always greater than their options toward each other.”¹⁷⁸ In order to achieve this broad policy goal, the United States needed to scale back on containment as its basic strategy.

Vietnamization and U.S. withdrawal from Vietnam not only aimed to pull the United States out of the Southeast Asia quagmire, but also fit into the broader Nixon Doctrine. While emphasizing U.S. adherence to “all its treaty commitments” and provision of “a shield if a nuclear power threatens the freedom” of an ally, Nixon also said that the United States would “look to the nation directly threatened to assume the primary responsibility of providing the manpower for its defense.”¹⁷⁹ In essence, Vietnamization and the Nixon Doctrine represented a shift away from the American-led containment strategy. Because ideology mattered less in the Nixon Doctrine than in containment, Nixon was willing to work with Communist China, as one of North Vietnam’s patrons, as a possible way to get the United States out of Vietnam honorably. During Kissinger’s 1971 secret visit to Beijing, Kissinger tried to enlist Beijing’s support in helping the United States end the Vietnam War gracefully by telling his Chinese interlocutors that, although the United States was willing to withdraw troops from Taiwan, the withdrawal was linked to the end of the Vietnam War.¹⁸⁰

Nixon’s shift away from U.S.-led containment on the Asian mainland suggests that ideology no longer played as large a role in the making of U.S. China policy, allowing for greater flexibility in dealing with the PRC. Kissinger recalls in his memoir that, in May 1969, he had “challenged what seemed to [him] excessive emphasis on China’s ideology and alleged militancy.” His concern was with whether “the right questions were being asked.” The Kennedy

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 165.

¹⁷⁹ “President Richard Nixon’s Address to the Nation on the War in Vietnam,” November 3, 1969, Accessed through The American Presidency Project on April 5, 2015. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=2303>.

¹⁸⁰ National Security Archive, “Memorandum of Conversation, Kissinger and Zhou,” *Box 1033, China HAK Memcons July 1971*, July 9, 1971, 4:35-11:20 PM (Washington, DC: George Washington University, 2001), 20, 25, <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB66/ch-34.pdf>.

and Johnson Administrations had functioned from the premise that, to foster a cooperative Sino-U.S. relationship, the United States must psychologically transform the minds of the Chinese leadership, “to turn Chinese minds from militancy toward conciliation.” In contrast, Kissinger argued that “a nation of 800 millions surrounded by weaker states was a geopolitical problem no matter who governed it.”¹⁸¹ The key question was not how to convert the Chinese leadership ideologically, but how to influence that leadership’s decisions strategically.

For the Kennedy Administration, which decided to become involved in Vietnam partly out of the hope to contain the spread of Communism,¹⁸² the primary source of threat was exactly that—the spread of Communism. In contrast, for the Nixon Administration, the goal was no longer containment, but to end U.S. over-commitment overseas and, in Kissinger’s words, to reconstruct “the structure of international relations.”¹⁸³ For Kennedy and Rusk, an expansionist, Communist China was a great threat. For Nixon and Kissinger, an isolated China, regardless of ideology, was the threat. For Kennedy, containing the spread of Communism called for continued isolation and containment of the PRC. For Nixon, flexibility in dealing with the PRC could make that country a foreign policy asset with regard to Vietnam and the USSR. Kennedy got the United States into Vietnam to contain Communism; Nixon tried to extract the United States out of Vietnam by abandoning the fixation with Communism as an ideology.

This comparison suggests that the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations’ unwillingness to change existing China policy was caused in part by the perception among top leaders and analysts that the PRC’s ideology made reconciliation impossible. To a certain extent, such perception was a reflection of these leaders’ own ideologies and anti-Communist stance.

¹⁸¹ Kissinger, *White House Years*, 178.

¹⁸² U.S. Department of State Office of the Historian, “Milestones: 1961–1968: The Presidencies of John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson.” Accessed April 5, 2015, <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1961-1968/foreword>.

¹⁸³ Kissinger, *White House Years*, 164.

Although the PRC was a geographically distant, militarily weak country with little aggregate power, its ideology, which appeared extremely aggressive and militant to the United States, heightened its hostility in U.S. eyes. The Nixon Administration, by focusing less on ideology and more on the strategic importance China possessed for a new set of U.S. goals, was able to pursue a more flexible policy toward the PRC and encourage the PRC toward rapprochement. This analysis suggests that, while the “balance against threat” theory was not incorrect, ideology had a greater influence on leaders’ perceptions of hostility than one might expect.

II. Mao’s Ideological Vacillations

On China’s side, the primary factor that delayed rapprochement seemed to be intra-party politics. However, while intra-party politics explains Mao’s decision to induce the United States to court the PRC rather than reaching out first, it does not explain Mao’s sudden ideological outburst following the U.S. invasion in Cambodia.

As the reader might recall from the second chapter, after Nixon ordered U.S. troops in South Vietnam to invade Cambodia in April 1970, Mao approved Zhou’s proposal that China should postpone the Sino-U.S. ambassadorial meetings scheduled for May 20 despite assurances from Nixon that the United States was still prepared to “open a direct channel of communication from the White House to Beijing.” On May 17, Mao issued a declaration titled “The Peoples of the World Unite and Defeat the American Invaders and All Their Running Dogs.” On May 21, some 500 thousand to a million Chinese held an “Anti-American Struggle Rally” on Tiananmen Square.¹⁸⁴

Authors such as Gao have argued that Mao’s decision to delay Sino-U.S. talks were not

¹⁸⁴ *Zhou Enlai Nianpu, 1949–1976* [*A Chronological Record of Zhou Enlai, 1949–1976*], 3:367–370; Chen, *Mao’s China*, 252.

made out of strategic considerations. U.S. troops in Vietnam and Cambodia hardly posed the type of threat the USSR did to the PRC. Gao explains Mao's decision as "a deviation from the strategic goal [of pursuing rapprochement with the United States]." However, this deviation "did not reflect a wavering of the basic strategy, but was a brief interlude caused by an outburst of Mao's revolutionary zeal and subsequent miscalculation of the situation." According to Gao, Mao, who had prided himself for his whole life on being the champion of anti-imperialism, always sought after "revolutionary upsurges."¹⁸⁵ With the American invasion of Cambodia and the subsequent protests within the United States, Mao believed, in May 1970, that an anti-American imperialism upsurge had come, and that the PRC, as the champion of anti-imperialism, should not stand idly by. According to this argument, the short interruption to rapprochement in mid-1970 was the result of the resurfacing of Mao's ideological fervor.¹⁸⁶

Mao's foreign policy decisions during the 1960s also seemed to have corresponded to an ideological shift. In early 1962, for example, Wang Jiexiang, head of the International Liaison Department of the Central Committee of the CCP, submitted several reports and wrote a letter to Zhou Enlai, Deng Xiaoping, and Chen Yi advocating changes in China's foreign policy.¹⁸⁷ In the letter, Wang repeated the argument he had made back in 1955. He argued that anti-imperialist propaganda should be balanced with propaganda upholding the banner of peace. In addition, the PRC should not push itself forward at meetings of international Communist parties and should avoid provoking disputes with the USSR. With regard to the United States, Wang proposed that the PRC should abide by the principle of peaceful coexistence.¹⁸⁸ Wang's letter was an upfront

¹⁸⁵ Gao, *Wannian Zhou Enlai [Zhou Enlai in His Late Years]*, 421. "一生以'反帝旗手'自居, 总是在期盼革命高潮到来的毛, 这时显露出革命家的本色, 认为当前世界范围内正出现一个反对美帝国主义的高潮……"

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 417. "当然, 这不是根本指导思想上的动摇, 而是毛一时革命激情发作, 误判形势而造成的一段短暂的插曲。"

¹⁸⁷ Chen, *Mao's China*, 83.

¹⁸⁸ Wang Jiexiang, "Zai Zhongyang Guoji Huodong Gongzuo Huiyi shang de Kaimuci" ["Open Speech at a

criticism of Mao and Mao's foreign policy strategy.

For Mao, the letter stank of revisionism. Typical of the dramaturgy of the CCP, Mao came up with a description of Wang's letter as the "three moderations and one reduction" (*san he yi shao*) and, to counter Wang, invented his own numeral-studded slogan—"three struggles and one more," (*san dou yi duo*) namely, the PRC must struggle against imperialists, revisionists, and reactionaries worldwide, and should give more assistance to anti-imperialists, revolutionaries, and Marxist-Leninists.¹⁸⁹ Furthermore, Mao made a connection between the "three moderations and one reduction" and the domestic revisionist tendency of "three selfs and one contract," (*san zi yi bao*) which indicated more private farms for peasants, more free markets, more enterprises, and farms contracted to households.¹⁹⁰ Together, the "three selfs and one contract" and "three moderations and one reduction" were labeled the revisionist line as ultra-leftist views of foreign affairs dominated policymaking,¹⁹¹ making a Sino-U.S. rapprochement impossible from the ideological standpoint.

While Mao's attack on revisionism in the early 1960s was almost certainly a measure to salvage his declining intra-party power and prestige after the failed Great Leap Forward and the ensuing mass famine, Mao's own ideology also had a role to play, even just as a supplementary motive. Sinologists and Mao-scholars Pantsov and Levine got it just right when they wrote, "Mao always adjusted his conclusions to fit his radical views. The result was that it was not practice that served as the criterion of truth but rather leftist ideas that were the criterion of

Working Conference of International Activities of the Central Committee of the CCP"], April 4, 1955, in *Wang Jiaxiang Xuanji* [*Selected Works of Wang Jiaxiang*], ed. Editorial Team of *The Selected Works of Wang Jiaxiang* (Beijing: Renmin Chubanshe [Renmin Publisher], 1989), 418, 450.

¹⁸⁹ Bo Yibo, *Ruogan Zhongda Juece yu Shijian de Huigu* [*Recollections of Several Important Decisions and Events*], Volume 2 (Beijing: Zhonggong Zhongyang Dangxiao Chubanshe [CCP Party History Research Office Publisher], 1993), 1154.

¹⁹⁰ Li Mingjiang, *Mao's China and the Sino-Soviet Split* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 116, 126, 138.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 126.

reality.”¹⁹² Hence Mao’s failure to learn from the Great Leap Forward, and, instead, launching the crusade of the Cultural Revolution.

By 1962, although part of the decision-making power had fallen to the hands of Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping,¹⁹³ Liu and Deng’s influence remained primarily in economic policies, and Mao still had enough weight, especially in politics, that his attack on the Party leadership could encourage foreign policy rigidity. Mao’s response to the failure of the Great Leap Forward, it seemed, was a harsher, more leftist, anti-revisionist drive on both the domestic and international front. Domestically, in fall 1962, at the party’s Beidaihe conference, Mao changed the agenda from discussing agricultural, financial, trading, and urban work questions to discussing the contradictions between classes. At the Tenth Plenary Session of the Eighth Central Committee in September, Mao emphasized that “in the entire historical era of transition from capitalism to Communism, there exists...the struggle between the socialist road and the capitalist road,” and that Chinese “right deviationists” should be called “Chinese revisionists.”¹⁹⁴

Internationally, Mao’s actions against domestic revisionism were reflected in the PRC’s increasingly anti-Soviet polemics, with the warning that “all revisionism abroad or domestic has illicit relations with foreign states.”¹⁹⁵ Mao’s pursuit of the twin strategy of combating international revisionism and preventing domestic revisionism reflects the greater emphasis the Chinese helmsman placed on ideology in the early 1960s.

If ideology, in addition to intra-party politics, contributed to the PRC’s unwillingness in

¹⁹² Alexander V. Pantsov and Steven I. Levine, *Mao: The Real Story* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2007), 238.

¹⁹³ Gao, *Wannian Zhou Enlai [Zhou Enlai in His Late Years]*, 88. “但没想到的是，此举却弄巧成拙，出现‘一国二公’的局面，刘少奇利用收拾困局的机会，培植个人势力，树自己的旗子，在中央形成了另一个司令部，与他分庭抗礼。”

¹⁹⁴ Bo Yibo, *Ruogan Zhongda Juece yu Shijian de Huigu [Recollections of Several Important Decisions and Events]*, 1051–1052 and 1100.

¹⁹⁵ “Mao’s Speech at the Beidaihe Conference,” quoted in *Mao Zedong Da Cidian [Mao Zedong Dictionary]*, ed. Wang Jin et al. (Nanning: Guangxi Renmin Chubanshe and Lijiang Chubanshe, 1992), 1212.

the early 1960s to pursue Sino-U.S. rapprochement, then what made it possible for the PRC to do so in 1969? The Soviet threat was certainly one factor. Ideologically, however, Mao issued, after 1969, many orders criticizing ultra-leftist language as the Cultural Revolution got out of hand. In December 1970, for example, Mao characterized the tendency to impose one's views on others as "great-nation chauvinism at home and abroad, which must be overcome,"¹⁹⁶ reflecting the views of Wang Jiaxiang in 1962, which Mao had earlier bashed as revisionism. Whether Mao himself underwent an ideological shift (as aging men often do) might never be known, but he certainly pulled back on the CCP's leftist propaganda. Given Pantsov and Levine's evaluation of Mao's intransigence, it is more likely that Mao did this because he was trying to induce the United States to court China by 1969. Furthermore, Mao's theory of contradictions states that "principal" and "secondary" contradictions should not be treated as equals, and that the two can "transform into each other."¹⁹⁷ According to this logic, while the PRC's "principal" contradiction was the United States in the 1960s, the Soviet Union became the PRC's new "principal" contradiction as the United States took a secondary role. Thus, the argument can be made that Mao's ideological views provided the space and fluidity necessary to pursue a pragmatic—rather than dogmatic—foreign policy.

Conclusion

While the importance U.S. statesmen placed on ideology played an important role in the

¹⁹⁶ Mao Zedong, "Written Instructions for 'Asking for Instructions for Inviting the Delegation of the Dutch Communist United Movement (Marxist-Leninist) to China,'" Dec. 6, 1970, published as Mao Zedong, "Bu Yaoqiu Waiguoren Chengren Zhongguoren de Sixiang" ["Don't Require Foreigners to Accept Chinese Ideas"], in *Mao Zedong Waijiao Wenxuan* [*Selected Works of Mao Zedong on Diplomacy*], ed. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China and Document Research Office of the CCP Central Committee (Beijing: Zhongyang Wenxian Chubanshe and Shijie Zhishi Chubanshe [Central Committee of the Communist Party of China Party Literature Research Office and World Knowledge Publisher], 1994), 591.

¹⁹⁷ Mao, Zedong, "On Contradiction, August 1937," Marxist.org, *Selected Works of Mao Zedong*, accessed May 22, 2015, https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-1/mswv1_17.htm.

formation of the leaders' threat perception and their unwillingness to pursue rapprochement, on the Chinese side, the role of ideology in preventing and driving rapprochement seems supplementary. Mao certainly appeared a leftist at heart, and many of the policies he pursued, both domestically and internationally, followed his ideological conviction. However, ideology and propaganda in the PRC was often subordinated to Mao's intra-party political needs and his perception of the PRC's national interest overseas. His criticism of Wang Jiaxiang in 1962 was likely a partial result of his weak intra-party position after the Great Leap Forward. His ideological reversal in 1969 of no longer expanding the PRC's views overseas was likely a result of his wish to bring the Cultural Revolution under control and, perhaps, to prepare for the thawing of Sino-U.S. relations.

On the U.S. side, Kennedy and Johnson's emphasis on the nature of the PRC's ideology heightened their threat perception, particularly given the prospect of a nuclear PRC, which was realized in 1964. The perception of the PRC as an expansionist, aggressive Communist nation reduced the willingness of both leaders to make fresh diplomatic ventures and increased the appeal of sticking to the old policy of containment. In contrast, Nixon and Kissinger's focus on geopolitics rather than ideology allowed them to see the PRC as a geopolitically weighty player in the international arena rather than an ideological foe that, by nature, harbored enmity toward the United States. This perception allowed for more flexibility when dealing with the PRC.

This analysis is not to suggest that the three factors—*realpolitik* calculations, domestic or intra-party politics, and ideology—are mutually exclusive. It is precisely the interaction between the three factors that led to the breaking and making of Sino-U.S. rapprochement. The concluding chapter attempts to bring together the three factors and analyze their interactions.

Conclusions: A “Perfect Storm”?

This thesis argues that the “balance against threat” theory does not give a complete explanation of the shifts in Sino-U.S. relations in the 1960s and 1970s. The augmented Soviet threat to the PRC toward the end of 1960s certainly provided a key strategic reason for the PRC to reconcile with the United States. U.S. perception of a hostile PRC was also important in preventing rapprochement from taking place in the 1960s. However, other factors, particularly domestic or intra-party politics and ideology, were also crucial to the timing of policy choices in both the PRC and the United States.

Sino-U.S. relations failed to follow the predictions of the “balance against threat” theory in three important instances. First, in 1963, the United States under the Kennedy Administration chose to balance against the PRC—an aspiring nuclear power—by reaching out to the USSR rather than balancing against the USSR—a nuclear power and the U.S. archrival in the Cold War—even though the Chinese demonstrated an unwillingness to use the weapons offensively.

The second deviation occurred on the PRC’s end. In September 1969, at the height of Sino-Soviet conflict, which had developed into a full-blown military clash, Mao waited for U.S. initiatives rather passively while the United States, which already enjoyed a much better relationship with the USSR, decided to initiate contact with a nuclear China. Third, in December 1969, the PRC’s first positive response to U.S. overtures occurred at a time when Sino-Soviet relations have relaxed, albeit slightly. However, even though the U.S. invasion of Cambodia in summer 1970 posed a much less significant threat to Chinese national security than the Soviets, the PRC reverted to a wave of anti-American propaganda.

Each of the three instances can be addressed by either Chinese intra-party and American domestic politics or by the ideologies of the top leaders of both countries. In 1963, the United

States under the Kennedy Administration had little domestic political space to make fresh diplomatic ventures with regard to foreign policy toward China. The potential explosiveness of the China issue, Kennedy's thin margin of victory, and the strength of the "China lobby" all made it more difficult for Kennedy to pursue a softening in Sino-U.S. relations. A similar story was seen in the mid-1960s during the Johnson Administration. Johnson's decision of engaging the United States more deeply in Vietnam rather than leaving Vietnam was made partially out of the worry that he, a Democrat president, would appear too soft on Communism.

Domestic politics, however, only explains the inability of President Kennedy and President Johnson to pursue rapprochement in the 1960s. Equally important was the fact that Kennedy, Johnson, and their top advisors were also unwilling, apart from being restrained by domestic politics, to reach out to the PRC. This unwillingness stemmed from these top leaders' view that the PRC posed a grave threat to the United States and to peace. Importantly, this perception of threat was based not only on the four factors outlined by Stephen Walt—namely, aggregate power, offensive capabilities, geographical proximity, and hostile intentions—but also on the ideologies of the top leaders themselves, intensified by their views of the PRC's ideology. In other words, while U.S. perception of the PRC as a threat was crucial in preventing a Sino-U.S. rapprochement from taking place in the 1960s, ideology had more than a modest influence on perceived Chinese hostile intentions and on U.S. foreign policy decisions.

To top U.S. foreign policy advisors such as Rostow and Rusk, the world was split dichotomously into the Communist camp and "the free world," with the former representing a force of evil and the latter in need of U.S. protection. Such monolithic and Manichean views toward Communism fed into the view that Communist states were united by their ideology and their ultimate goal of destroying the West, which, in turn, contributed to greater anti-Communist

sentiments. Furthermore, Kennedy and Rusk had the perception that the PRC would be willing to sacrifice any number of human lives for its goal, as was amply demonstrated by Chinese human wave attacks in the Korean War, Mao's fantastical experiments in the Great Leap Forward, and his unusual view on nuclear weapons. The U.S. perception of the PRC's ideology-driven hostility was aggravated, in 1963, by the possibility that the PRC would become a nuclear power. The PRC's perceived unreasonableness, revolutionary fervor, and disregard for human life provided an explanation of why Kennedy wished to pursue joint measures against Chinese nuclear facilities with the USSR in 1963.

Two points are worth noting. First, domestic politics and ideology factors also explain why the United States pursued détente with the USSR while Sino-U.S. relations continued to deteriorate. In terms of domestic politics, while the USSR was also a Communist country, Democrat presidents, such as Kennedy and Johnson, were more vulnerable to accusations of being soft on Chinese Communism because the Democrats were seen as the party responsible for "losing China." In contrast, the Russia was never "lost" by the United States, and there was no "Russia lobby" along the lines of the "China lobby." In addition, by 1963, Kennedy had bested Khrushchev in Cuba, giving him more room to offer détente. In terms of ideology, Khrushchev's coexistence policy exuded far less hostility than what appeared as an aggressively expansionist Communist ideology in the PRC. The PRC's bitter criticism of Khrushchev's coexistence policy as revisionism and ideological deviation from true Marxism-Leninism was, to the United States, a sign of Chinese unreasonableness. The Soviet Premier, in contrast, appeared much easier to work with.

Second, the U.S. decision to reach out to the USSR for joint action against the PRC's nuclear program suggests that nuclear powers have an interest in keeping the club small and

would attempt to do so by aligning with a nuclear rival that is more threatening than the aspiring nuclear power. The traditional understanding of “threat,” therefore, does not give a complete account of state behaviors in the nuclear dimension.

The second deviation of Sino-U.S. relations from “balance against threat” expectations in December 1969 can be explained by Chinese intra-party politics. Although the PRC, with the Soviet threat still in recent memory, had greater needs to balance against the USSR than the United States did, Mao and Zhou held back and waited patiently for the United States to reach out because of certain intra-party political dynamics. The failure of the Cultural Revolution, Mao’s brainchild, meant that Mao needed a brilliant foreign policy victory to salvage his declining intra-party prestige, and what could be more victorious than having China’s number one imperialist enemy come to China, begging for peace? Intra-party struggles between ultra-leftist factions, headed by the Defense Minister Lin Biao, and moderates led by Premier Zhou Enlai might also, as some authors suggest, have contributed to the delay in Sino-U.S. rapprochement at a time when the Soviet threat to the PRC was greatest. Although Mao’s own stance in the Lin-Zhou struggle remains unclear, if the suggestion that Mao was worried about Lin’s burgeoning power is true, then intra-party struggles might also explain why Mao, by 1969, was supportive of Zhou’s pro-U.S. policy.

In this instance, intra-party political dynamics contributed to the PRC’s unwillingness to take the initiative in 1969 despite the Soviet threat. At the same time, Mao’s domestic political needs and the growing Soviet pressure also meant that he was willing to induce the United States to come to the PRC and to accept U.S. overtures when they were made. This explains Zhou’s careful balancing act between quelling Soviet antagonism while not showing too much friendliness to the USSR lest he scared the United States away from wooing China.

Finally, the third deviation of Sino-U.S. relations from “balance against threat” expectations can be explained, at least in part, by ideology. In summer 1970, Mao’s decision to organize a mass anti-U.S. rally and to issue anti-U.S. propaganda on the eve of rapprochement in response to U.S. invasion of Cambodia demonstrates a resurfacing of Mao’s old revolutionary self and ideological convictions as an anti-imperialist zealot.

Intra-party politics and ideology not only provide explanations for the aforementioned deviations from “balance against threat” expectations, but also explain certain foreign policy decisions of top U.S. and Chinese leaders. In the early 1960s, Mao’s anti-U.S. stance was based on his anti-imperialist and anti-revisionist ideological convictions. Mao’s criticism of revisionism domestically in 1962, for example, was linked to his criticism of Soviet revisionism abroad. It remains uncertain whether Mao himself underwent an ideological shift that pushed him in a more pro-U.S. direction. If ideology does not provide a sufficient explanation of Mao’s 1969 decision of Sino-U.S. rapprochement, then geopolitical calculations and domestic politics certainly do. The growing Soviet threat on the PRC’s northern border and Mao’s intra-party political needs after the failure of the Cultural Revolution provided strong motivations for Mao to accept U.S. overture when it came. Thus, it is an interplay between geopolitical calculations, intra-party politics, and ideological convictions that made Sino-U.S. reconciliation impossible in the 1960s but led to the PRC’s decision to respond to U.S. initiatives in December 1969.

On the U.S. side, The Nixon Administration found more political space to reach out to the PRC for domestic political reasons. President Nixon, as a Republican president with a record of being staunchly anti-Communist throughout his career, could afford to worry less about accusations against him on the grounds of being “soft on Communism.” Furthermore, Nixon and Kissinger’s fascination with administrative secretiveness made attempts to sabotage nascent

steps to rapprochement more difficult to succeed. Once Nixon was elected into office, the support of the “China lobby” mattered less, and the President could focus on other considerations, such as geopolitical calculations of how to end the Vietnam War gracefully.

Having the political space to reach out to the PRC did not necessarily mean that a president would also be *willing* to reach out. Nixon’s willingness to reconcile with the PRC stemmed partly from geopolitical calculations of exiting Vietnam. Ending the Vietnam War required the cooperation of the PRC, which, as Vietnam’s patron, could exert pressure on the Southeast Asian country that would allow for an “honorable” extraction of U.S. forces. At the same time, the Nixon’s willingness to make fresh ventures, including secret negotiations with the PRC on the Taiwan issue, also came from his reduced focus on ideology. Vietnamization and the Nixon Doctrine were both examples of a decrease in U.S. fixation on Communism and a shift of focus toward U.S. geopolitical interests in Asia. The argument that the PRC, regardless of ideology, posed a critical geopolitical question to the United States allowed the new administration to focus on how to influence the Chinese leadership rather than hoping for a conversion of the PRC from Communism to capitalism.

Good timing was thus critical to the formation of Sino-U.S. rapprochement. In many ways, the period between December 1969 and 1972 reflected a “perfect storm” of the three factors of *realpolitik* calculation, domestic politics, and ideological inclinations. As the influence of McCarthyism faded in the United States, a Republican president with more political clout to make change and less fixation on ideology came into office.

At the same time, Sino-Soviet relations deteriorated so much that the two Communist giants became embroiled in a border conflict, one that heightened Chinese perceptions of the Soviet threat, making it geopolitically necessary for the PRC to identify the USSR as the primary

enemy rather than the United States. For Mao himself, it was also politically desirable to accept U.S. overtures and take credit for the PRC's foreign policy "victory" against the United States. Furthermore, by 1969, the worst excesses of the Cultural Revolution were over. Mao accomplished nearly nothing in foreign policy from 1966 to 1967—the height of the Cultural Revolution. But by 1969, the recalled ambassadors have been restored, Zhou Enlai and Chen Yi were back in charge in the Foreign Ministry, and the functioning of the Foreign Ministry seemed to have returned to relative normality. In other words, the domestic situation in the PRC was sufficiently stable for a radical policy turn, and the external geopolitical situation was ripe for the PRC to accept change.

This analysis suggests that it is perhaps surprising that rapprochement and President Nixon's icebreaking trip to the PRC happened at all. It was the concurrent occurrence of a series of rather specific events that enabled the success of Sino-U.S. rapprochement, and luck almost certainly played a role in bringing together this series of contingent events and trends. Throughout the 1960s, one or more of the above factors have always been missing. In 1962, it was Mao's strong anti-revisionist and anti-U.S. ideology that stood in the way, causing the lack of a favorable ideological environment. In 1963 and generally throughout the 1960s, U.S. anti-Communist sentiments and the lack of political space for Democrat presidents to make policy changes prohibited rapprochement. In 1966, as Mao plunged China into the Cultural Revolution, the PRC's domestic instability and Mao's hostile anti-U.S. ideology made reconciliation impossible. Even in March 1969, when the Sino-Soviet border conflict first ensued, the PRC could not reach out to the United States because of intra-party struggles and Mao's political need to have the United States court China. But in December, the right mix of domestic politics and geopolitical difficulties led to the PRC's acceptance of U.S. overtures when they were made.

This analysis suggests that in Sino-U.S. relations, factors other than geopolitical calculations, such as domestic politics and ideas, may be equally important in influencing foreign policy decisions. Today, ideological conflicts such as the ones during the Cold War era are unlikely to have as much an influence on bilateral relations as they did in the 1960s. Geopolitical calculations appear to be the primary consideration. However, the decreasing importance of ideology does not invalidate the argument that ideas have an important impact on how leaders formulate policies. For instance, the PRC's emphasis on national sovereignty and self-determination reflects not only the CCP's strategic interests in retaining Tibet and Xinjiang within its national jurisdiction, but also some of the criticism the PRC made against "big power chauvinism" in the late 1960s.

Similarly, China's historical experience with imperialism likely contributed to its antagonism toward Western intervention and to its interest in bringing new perspectives to the peacekeeping architecture.¹⁹⁸ At the same time, the PRC's rapid economic growth in the past two decades means that the nominally Communist giant may be buying into the Western-originated ideas buttressing the Washington Consensus, including open markets. If so, then this could mean that China would be likely to continue playing a supportive, rather than subversive, role in maintaining the existing set of great power conventions and practices.¹⁹⁹

The same is also true for domestic politics. Although the PRC's domestic political system remains centralized and mass politics does not exist in China the way it does in the United States, the CCP's legitimacy has been challenged more frequently after Mao's death. The argument could be made that China's assertiveness in recent years in the South China Sea is linked to the CCP's domestic need to maintain legitimacy, which is dependent primarily on two pillars—the

¹⁹⁸ Oliver P. Richmond and Ioannis Tellidis, "The BRICS and International Peacebuilding and Statebuilding," *NOREF Report*, Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource: January 2013, 2.

¹⁹⁹ Dan Drezner, *The System Worked* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 139.

CCP's role as the provider of economic prosperity and the defender of Chinese sovereignty. For instance, the two basic components of President Xi Jinping's "Chinese Dream" are "to build a moderately prosperous society and realize national rejuvenation,"²⁰⁰ the latter of which is often interpreted as an increase in the PRC's international influence.

These two pillars of legitimacy means that, economically, in order to sustain its growth, the PRC needs more natural resources, particularly oil and natural gas. China's claims on the resource-rich South China Sea, therefore, may be a result of its increasing domestic needs for natural resources. Politically, after China's economy showed signs of slowing down in 2014, the party may deem it necessary to bolster its nationalist credentials as a pillar of its legitimacy and act as the defender of national sovereignty and territorial integrity, a role manifested by increasing its assertiveness in foreign policy. Intra-party politics are more difficult to grasp for party-outsiders and foreign analysts, especially in light of Xi's recent anti-graft campaign and the campaign's targets in the military.

The influence of ideas and domestic or intra-party politics on foreign policy means that a good understanding of the PRC's internal political dynamics and of the historical and ideological underpinnings of the CCP is indispensable to having a productive relationship with the PRC. Similarly, a better understanding of U.S. political processes and historical experiences would allow the Chinese leadership to formulate more constructive U.S. policies. To quote a 500 BCE classic Chinese saying in *The Art of War* by military strategist Sun Tzu, translated by U.S. General Tommy Franks, "Precise knowledge of self and precise knowledge of the threat leads to victory." (*Zhiji zhibi, baizhan budai.*) While China and the United States are becoming increasingly interdependent on each other in many fields, each could also be perceived as a

²⁰⁰ "Chinese Dream," *China Daily*, last modified March 26, 2014, accessed April 8, 2015, <http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/Chinese-dream.html>.

geopolitical threat to the other. In this context, better mutual understanding between the two countries—onetime rivals halfway across the globe—would allow for greater space to guard against uncertainties and induce cooperation.

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