

SUPERPOWER RELATIONS WITH CHINA (1950 – 1979)

SINO-AMERICAN RELATIONS

1. Overview
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3. Causes leading to Deterioration of Sino-American Relations (1949 – 1969)
4. Causes leading to improvement of Sino-American Relations: Détente & Era of Rapprochement (1970-1972)
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Learning outcomes:

- Evaluate the development of superpower relations with China during the Cold War.
- Analyse the factors contributing to the involvement of external powers in Southeast Asia during the Cold War and their impact.

1. Overall Analysis & Evaluation

Irreconcilable ideological orientations initially wrecked problems and **hostility in the US-Sino relations**, but it proved insufficient in the long run to prevent the PRC and the US to gradually form amicable ties with one another from **1969 to 1979** in search of **common interests** against their common foe, the USSR, due to **growing security concerns**. Hence, causing them to shelve their traditional ideological differences and accept the reality to work together for mutual benefits against the USSR and to boost their own national economy. Hence, this caused the Cold War to become a tripolar triangular power play amongst the 3 superpowers as they sought to outdo and outrival the other through the manipulation of one against the other.

On the surface, both seemed to have benefitted equally in terms of security, strategic and economic gains. However, in reality, it is arguable that the PRC gained more because the strategically encircled PRC (US containment & USSR border threat) could thus improve its security and be in good terms with its ideological rival (USA), which then allowed it to make further political concessions in its favour of key issues like Taiwan and its UN membership.

2. Possible Questions

- To what extent was the Korean War a turning point in Sino-American relations from 1950 to 1970? (ASRJC Prelim 2021)
- ‘More similar than dissimilar.’ How accurate is this description of the development of Sino Soviet relations as compared with that of Sino-American relations from 1950 to 1979? (SAJC Prelim 2021)
- “Sino-Soviet relations between 1950 and 1979 were primarily influenced by Sino-American ties.” How far do you agree with this? (TJC Prelim 2021)

3. Causes leading to Deterioration of Sino-American Relations (1949 – 1969)

Prior to the Korean War

- **Roots of Sino-US hostility before the Korean War (1945-1949)**
US' support for the Kuomintang (KMT) in WW2 and Chinese Civil War
 - During the Asia Pacific War in WW2, the US had some direct contact with the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and gave it some material assistance in the fight against Japan. However, most US aid went to Chiang Kai-Shek and the Nationalist Kuomintang Party (KMT).
 - After the Japanese surrendered and withdrew from China at the end of the war, the CCP and KMT fought each other in a civil war.
 - Despite over \$3 billion of US assistance and advice to Chiang's 'anti-communist' forces, this did not bring about the Nationalist victory the US had hoped for. Mao subsequently established the People's Republic of China (PRC)
 - The US **refused to recognise** the Communist-controlled People's Republic of China (PRC) as a **legitimate state**. Instead, they **backed Chiang Kai-Shek and the Chinese Nationalists** who had fled to the island of Taiwan, about 100 miles off the coast of mainland China.
 - Soon, **Taiwan** quickly became the **key area of dispute** between the USA and the PRC. And the US ensured that it was the **anti-Communists in Taiwan** and not the PRC that were given **China's seat at the United Nations**.

*Significance to the USA:

- This perceived 'loss of China' to communism The fall of China to Communism **alarmed** the USA as it was perceived as the fusion of a **monolithic Communist bloc bent on spreading Communism in Asia**.
- One month before the PRC declared victory, it was announced that Soviet Union had successfully tested the **atomic bomb**. This took the US military by surprise as it had expected the Soviets to take a few more years to produce a nuclear device.
- Hence, whilst Stalin greeted Mao's victory with a mixture of distrust and grudging respect, the **USA's threat perception was greatly heightened** at the prospect of an enormous country (with a population estimated at about 550 million) had just joined the communist camp, upstaging the strategic advantage that the USA previously had.
- The communist victory in China in October 1949, coupled with the successful testing of the atomic bomb by the USSR in August 1949, **spooked the Americans badly**. American foreign policy elites had expected their monopoly of atomic weapons to last longer than four years just as they had regarded China as their special protégé in Asia. With the **atomic monopoly broken**, and the spectre of an expanding monolithic communist front, **public confidence** in the Truman Administration was severely shaken.
- Moreover, the communist victory in China came at a time when **economic recovery seemed to falter in Western Europe and Japan**, and the US experienced its first **postwar economic downturn**.

- There was also a fear that other Third World countries may experience a similar revolution in China. The '**Domino Theory**' became a popular analogy during this period of the Cold War to illustrate how countries would fall like dominoes, succumbing to communism one after another.
- The reaction was far-reaching as American public opinion set out to look for those who had misled—or worse, betrayed—the country. In the **next few years**, it was **impossible** for any **American political leader** to appear to be 'soft on communist', and thus repeated the mistakes allegedly made in China.
- A new document **NSC 68**, advocating the **adoption of more trenchant policies** towards the apparent **increasing prospect of a global communist threat**, gained dominance, **replacing** the more cautious containment policies inspired by George Kennan. (**change**)
- Domestically, America would to experience a period (1950-4) of vociferous campaigning against alleged communist in the US government and other institutions, otherwise known as McCarthyism. Hence, the USA was **refused to recognise the PRC**,

***Significance to China:**

- Mao already **distrusted** the Americans due to its immense support to the KMT during the civil war. Thus, he always had a fear that China was in **constant danger** of a **strike against them by Western forces**.

○ **Sino-Soviet Threat of Friendship and Alliance (February 1950)**

- On February 14, 1950, Mao, after weeks of contentious discussions with Soviet leader Joseph Stalin in Moscow, signed the Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship and Alliance.
- In **response**, the Chiefs of Staff (JCS) began to reconsider its position regarding Taiwan, lobbying Truman and Acheson to adopt a policy of **defending Taiwan** and providing **military and economic aid to it**.

***Significance to US:** Containment policy changed to one more aggressive to 'roll back communism'

NSC-68 Background

- In face of the Soviet atomic bomb and the Chinese communist victory, the National Security Council undertook a review of American interests, dangers and options and produced a long memorandum, known as NSC-68 (dated 14 April 1950).
- This document, which was only declassified in the 1970s, became known as NSC-68, had a formative influence on the way America waged the Cold War. It drew from the writings of George F. Kennan, specifically the "Long Telegram" in 1946 and the X Article.
- Although Kennan's theory of containment articulated a multifaceted approach for American Foreign Policy to respond to a perceived Soviet threat, **NSC-68 drew policies** that **emphasised military action over diplomatic or otherwise**.
- Kennan's influential telegram advocated a policy of containment towards the Soviet Union. In contrast, in **NSC-68**, it can be defined as **"a policy of calculated and gradual coercion."**
- Seeing the world as bipolar—the Soviet-Chinese communist versus the American bloc—the **NSC-68** called for **significant peacetime military spending**, in which the US possessed "superior overall power."

- Having outlined the threat, NSC-68 spelled out the solution: America was to take the lead in fashioning a viable political and economic system throughout the non-communist world, in the terms of the document, throughout the free world. **Limited wars were justified** if they achieved America's objectives.

* Significance of NSC 68 to US foreign policy towards Communism

- The **official mood** in the USA had **changed dramatically** after the receiving news of the Sino-Soviet alliance. Instead of advocating Containment—accepting that the communists only needed to be contained as they were not a long-term threat to American—now the policy recommendation was that the communist power had to be **confronted and rolled back**.
- President Truman did not reject the recommendations made in the NSC-68 memorandum out of hand, instead returning it to circulation and asking for an estimate of the costs involved. In the ensuing two months, little progress was made on the report.
- Yet, with the **outbreak of the Korean War in June 1950**, this document took new importance, prompting Truman to sign it in September 1950, by which time events in Korea given it a new significance.
- The **Korean War** led most Americans to **conclude that communist China and its ally, the Soviet Union, were bent on world domination, and spurred the mobilization of significant resources to counter the perceived threat. *Turning point***

The Korean War (1950 – 1953): Turning point in Sino-USA relations – Open conflict & unremitting hostility

***This conflict was an open conflict between the USA and China, which built unremitting hostility into the Sino-American confrontation that continued until the early 1970s. (Turning point) Traditionally, the US had supported the “existence of a strong, independent China”, but after the Korean War began, the US changed its stance and embarked on “an unprecedented campaign of opposition to the development of a strong, modern China”.**

Background

- On **June 25, 1950**, the Korean War began when some 75,000 soldiers from the North Korean People's Army poured across the 38th parallel, the boundary between the Soviet-backed Democratic People's Republic of Korea to the north and the pro-Western Republic of Korea to the south.
- By **July**, **American troops** had entered the war on South Korea's behalf while China and USSR aided the North Koreans in the Korean War by providing military weapons and aid.
- In **October 1950**, American troops crossed the boundary and headed **north toward the Yalu River, the border between North Korea and Communist China**, the **Chinese started to worry** about **protecting** themselves from what they called “armed aggression against Chinese territory.
- Consequently, when the US-led UN forces approached the Yalu River, the Chinese forces had entered North Korea.
- From **November 1950** till the end of the Korean War, **approximately 3 million Chinese troops** took part in the war, and an estimated **400,000 to 1,000,000 Chinese were killed in the conflict**, including Mao's son.
- As the war entered a stalemate, armistice talks began in July 1951, but was stretched over two years mainly due to the disagreement over the repatriation of prisoners-of-war (POWs) from both sides.

***Significance on Sino-USA relations**

- **US Perception of a monolithic Sino-Soviet bloc**
 - China's participation in the Korean War **reinforced USA's perception** that communist China was **hostile** to the US and its interests.
 - There was a view that the Chinese intervention served only Soviet interests and so showed that China controlled by the Soviets as the two countries clearly had parallel objectives and so would work together in the future.
 - US officials therefore perceived Soviet Union and China as a **monolithic bloc**, and that the accretion of power to one of them aided the other.
- Ultimately, the **Korean War changed US foreign policy** in several ways.
 - Increasing its **defensive commitment to Taiwan**.
 - US economic and military aid to Taiwan.**
 - As early as **26 June 1950**, on the second day of the Korean War, the US President Truman order the US 7th fleet to **patrol the Taiwan Strait**, fearing that a war between the Chinese communists and nationalists might complicate the US plan to intervene in the Korean War.
 - By January 1951, the Truman administration had delivered to Taiwan **\$29 million in military assistance**. The United States also helped **the Taiwanese military** reorganizing its armed forces to twenty-one army divisions from **thirty-one divisions**, as well as **modernising its small aircraft and navy**. To weaken communist China, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) trained Chiang Kai-Shek's forces on how to **conduct guerrilla-style commando raids** against mainland from the KMT-controlled offshore islands.

US non-military aid & programmes to Taiwan

- After the passing of the **Foreign Assistant Act in 1961**, the United States Agency for International Development administer **non-military aid and programmes to Taiwan**, including the facilitation of **US private investment** to the Taiwanese economy.
- Taken together, **US economic and military aid** between 1949 to 1965 amounted to approximately **\$3,700 million, of which \$2,300 million were military assistance administered by the US Defense Department**.

○ **1st Taiwan Straits Crisis (1954)**

Background:

- Shortly after taking office in January 1953, President Dwight Eisenhower, in response to the end of the Korean War, lifted the U.S. naval blockade of Taiwan, meant to prevent an outbreak of hostilities between the Nationalists and mainland China. With the removal of an American military presence in the Taiwan Straits, Chiang Kai-shek remained free to intensify his efforts to regain control of China. During **August 1954**, he **authorized the movement of troops to the Nationalist stronghold islands of Quemoy (Kinmen) and Matsu (Mazu)**.

- Despite Washington's stern warnings to the communists against any retaliatory measures, **Mao** viewed the blockade removal and subsequent increased activity of the Nationalists as an **opportunity to "liberate Taiwan."**
- Hoping to use Taiwan as a way to unite his people against potential foreign threats like the United States, **Mao ordered the bombing of the occupied offshore islands beginning in September 1954.**
- The crisis only ended only after the **US threatened to use the atomic bomb.** Indirect negotiations between the US and China effectively ended the crisis in May 1955.

***Significance:**

○ **American Taiwan Mutual Defense Treaty (1955-1979)**

- Three months later, the US signed a Mutual Defense Treaty with Taiwan.
- The treaty **prolonged and assisted the Republic of China in maintaining legitimacy** as the sole government of the whole of mainland China until the **early 1970s.**
- Effectively, the treaty **prevented the PRC from taking over ROC-controlled Taiwan** from 1955 to 1979 (*The US-ROC Mutual Defense Treaty was terminated in 1979 after the US normalised relations with mainland China. Nevertheless, some of its content was carried over to the Taiwan Relations Act of 1979*).
- The terms of the treaty **committed the U.S. government** to deploy land, sea, and air forces in and around Taiwan as required for its defense.
- The treaty also stipulated that the **ROC and the United States would aid each other** to increase their capacity to resist an armed attack or communist subversive activities directed against either country's territorial integrity.
- In total, the **US assistance to Taiwan** from 1949 to 1967 amounted to \$4.2 billion, amounting to **more than 43% of its economy.**
- **Politically**, the US continued to support for the Republic of China [Taiwan] as a representative of the whole of China in the UN, **led to a 20-year period of Sino-American hostility while using its veto to prevent Communist China from joining the UN.**

○ **Establishing Japan as its anti-communist ally**

- Establishing **Japan** as its anti-communist ally by agreeing to restore Japan's sovereignty & its future armament. (*as long as Japan promises not to trade with PRC and allow US troops to remain in Japan indefinitely.*)
- U.S. efforts to save South Korea from Communist invasion accelerated Department of State attempts to **restore Japan to a respected international position**, and make that country a **prosperous ally** of the United States.
- The Treaty of San Francisco ended the state of war between Japan and 47 of the Allies (most nations allied with the Soviet Union, including Communist China, refused to sign), concluded the American Occupation, and excused the Japanese from reparations for the war.
- The San Francisco Treaty was signed on September 8, 1951, the same day the US and Japanese government signed the Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security.
- **The treaty allowed the United States to station troops in Japan, and made the Japanese islands into an important facet of America's global containment structure.**

- To American leaders, Japan was henceforth transformed from World War II enemy to vital ally while Korea went from a peripheral region to a key battle ground in the Cold War between US, China and USSR.
- **The US government strengthened its system of alliances by building a network of regional alliances.**
- To combat the threat of Communist China and Soviet Union, **three regional security alliances** were instituted during and after the Korean War. The US maintained military bases in the countries that signed treaty alliances, including Thailand, Philippines, Australia, South Vietnam and South Korea.

ANZUS (1951)

- The ANZUS treaty was a mutual defence pact signed between Australia, New Zealand, and the United States. It was an alliance to counter the spread of communism in the Asia and Pacific region.

SEATO (1954)

- In light of the military victory won by the **communist-led Vietminh** in their war to expel French power from Vietnam, SEATO's declared purpose was to **organise collective security to deter or defeat Chinese communist aggression in the region**
- The South-East Asia Treaty Organisation (SEATO) grew out of the Manila Pact signed in September 1954, following the end of the Korean War and France's defeat in and withdrawal from Indochina.
- The defence pact was designed to block further communist advances in the region. Its signatories were Australia, Britain, France, New Zealand, Pakistan, the Philippines, Thailand and the United States.
- South Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia were offered protection under the treaty without being formally included.

THE BAGHDAD PACT (1955) and CENTRAL TREATY ORGANISATION (CENTO)

- The Baghdad Pact was a defensive organization for promoting shared political, military and economic goals founded in 1955 by Turkey, Iraq, Great Britain, Pakistan and Iran.
- Similar to the NATO and the SEATO, the main purpose of the Baghdad Pact was to prevent communist incursions particularly from the Soviet Union, and potentially from China's Western region of Xinjiang.
- It was renamed the Central Treaty Organization, or CENTO, in 1959 after Iraq pulled out of the Pact.

○ **Increasing US commitment in Indochina**

- Like the Korean Peninsula, US feared that the Communists in Indochina would take over the entire region.
- By 1954, the US government was financing eighty percent of the French war effort against the Viet Minh. On the other side, Vietnam received diplomatic support from USSR, and strong logistical, military and ideological support from China.
- After France lost the battle of Dien Bien Phu in May 1954, France signed the 1954 Geneva Accords, which led to its withdrawal from French Indochina and the separation of Vietnam at the 17th parallel into North

and South, the US began more involved in supporting the anti-communist government in South Vietnam militarily and economically (See notes on the Second Indochina War)

***Significance: Impact of the Korean War on China's foreign policy**

- **Positioning itself as a leader of the third world against Western imperialism**
 - During the Korean War, China was able to fight the coalition of Western forces, led by the US, to a standstill, thus 'saving' North Korea and emerging as the leading Communist power in Asia, as well as the revolutionary leader of the Third World who stood up to Western imperialism.
 - This new found confidence motivated Mao and the Chinese leaders to position themselves as world leaders in helping liberate people worldwide from the US imperialists.
- **Supporting the Viet Minh**
 - While the US supported French war effort against the Viet Minh, China strove to match this support by sending large amounts of military weapons.
 - PLA troops provided logistical support and ran a special artillery school for Viet Minh soldiers.
 - In addition to other training camps, the PRC maintained three hospitals in China to treat wounded Viet Minh fighters.
 - Chinese assistance allowed the Viet Minh to overwhelm the French forces at the battle of Dien Bien Phu.
- **Playing a central role at the Geneva conference (April-July 1954)**
 - With its newly acquired international stand, China played an important role at the Geneva Conference to seek a resolution of Indochina crisis and the settlement in Korea.
 - While the negotiation over the status of Korea ended in a stalemate, China, together with the USSR, managed to persuade the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (the Viet Minh government) to accept a resolution that would temporarily divide Vietnam at the 17th parallel, pending elections within two years to choose a president and reunite the country.
- **Playing a central role at the Bandung Conference (April 1955)**
 - China aimed to further elevate its reputation as the leader of the anti-imperialist struggle in April 1955 at the Bandung Conference, a large scale Afro-Asian Conference attended by newly independent countries that were former colonies.
 - The Chinese delegates, led by Premier Zhou Enlai, exploited its participation to project cooperation and cordiality between China and the other participants, thereby discrediting US characterisation of Communist China as evil and predatory.
 - At the conference, China became a model of collaboration, winning respect, admiration, and gratitude from all other delegates.
 - Zhou Enlai propounded the "Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence" and encouraged the creation of the non-aligned areas of peace around that world to balance the major powers, notably the United States.
 - This display of moderation and conciliation helped China win trust and friendship among the developing countries which would in the 1960s form the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM).

- **2nd Taiwan Straits Crisis (1958)**

- On 23 Aug 1958, Mao began shelling Quemoy and Matsu again during the time when there was a build-up of the People's Liberation Army in the area, and the US navy vessels were fired on in the Straits.
- The USA prepared for war with the PRC, and built up its military presence, including an aircraft carrier in the Taiwan Strait. US President Eisenhower and US Secretary of State Dulles announced that the US regarded the Taiwan Strait as within its defence area.
- The crisis abated when US forces helped to break the Chinese blockade (an act of war) of the islands and Beijing announced that it would suspend its bombardment.

* Significance:

- The US believed that the PRC was an **expansionist state and provided leadership for other revolutionary countries**. Furthermore, with the **fear of the domino effect theory** and the **traditional ideological split** between China and the US, the **US saw China's foreign policies as a threat to their own security**.
- **Escalating Tension & Suspicions in 1960s**

*Significance: The **policy of 'containment and isolation' of China adopted** by the Eisenhower administration was **continued** even under the apparently more liberal administration of John F. Kennedy.

- **Taiwan**

- Throughout the 1960s, the PRC persisted in its demands for the reunification of Taiwan with the mainland.
- Although there was **no return to the brink of war** that had occurred between the US and the PRC in the 1958 Second Taiwan Straits Crisis, the issue remained of fundamental importance to China due to its overriding preoccupation and unwillingness to compromise with "two Chinas".
- In **1961**, the US Congress passed the **Foreign Assistance Act**, creating the US Agency for International Development (USAID) and entrenching foreign aid as a key element in the US foreign policy to Taiwan.
- Under the Act, Washington provided ROC with the biggest amount of financial aid (\$2.5billion in military & economic aid), grants and technological expertise to help the Taiwan economy's recovery. It financed almost 40% of gross domestic capital formation. From 1961 to 1964, Taiwan exports averaged a growth rate of 31% per year.

*Significance: The above suggests that though the hostility between both countries were not as direct and tense as in the 1950s, there **remained high interests and tension over the political influence of Taiwan**.

- **Vietnam War (1955 -1975)**

- 1948: French re-colonised Vietnam

- 1954: Failure of French recolonization (Battle of Dien Bien Phu)
- 1955: American troops officially entered the Vietnam war
- 1965: America troops directly aided South Vietnam till 1975.
- The Vietnam War seriously heightened tensions between the US and the Asia-Pacific region. **China condemned American** involvement in Vietnam as “imperialism” and cited Taiwan as another key example of its expansionism in the region.

*Significance: Mao’s open criticism of US involvement in Vietnam **displayed the continual tensions** between the US and China since the 1950s.

● Decolonisation*

- China’s interest in supporting revolutionary/decolonisation movements in the developing world was not simply a pursuit of limited ideological goals in those specific countries, rather it was **aiming to ultimately replace the USSR as the world leader of international revolution, and to end Western imperialism by supporting anti-colonial movements.**
- At the **Bandung Conference in 1955** that was held in response to US’ involvement in setting up SEATO, which was an anti-communist alliance, the PRC Premier Zhou asserted that the US was the key danger to world peace. And at this conference, 29 Asian and African states asserted their neutrality.
- In **1966**, US Secretary of State Dean Rusk outlined the US foreign policy towards China to the US Congress, stating that the US does not seek to overthrow the PRC and the **US objects to the PRC involvement in the affairs of other countries** through the encouragement of revolutionary forces worldwide by providing training.
- However, despite the rhetoric and the PRC’s propaganda in support of ‘revolutionary’ movements, such as the ‘Shining Path’ in Peru, **in reality, China did not have the resources** to make a definitive difference in the developing world. Even when China had developed its own nuclear weapons, it did not have the delivery systems to use them in wars of decolonisation.

*Significance: Hence, this suggests that the **threat perceived by the US** and outlined by Dean Rusk in 1966, was **probably exaggerated due to the fears and mistrust that they had over China**, caused by the underlying and enduring Cold War ideological differences.

● Great Leap Forward & Cultural Revolution

- From the view of the US, the failure of the GLF and the Cultural Revolution demonstrated the **unruly fanaticism of the Maoist leadership**, which seemed to lack both stability and coherency.

*Significance: Hence, **the PRC was seen as a danger** to the region, and a **perpetual threat** to the delicate balance envisaged by the American State Department that prevented the ‘dominoes’ from tipping over.

- During the Cultural Revolution, the Chinese increased the ferocity of their attacks on the United States and its allies by calling them ‘capitalist running dogs’. However, the **China** was also **incredibly nervous and afraid** of an American attack during the revolution.

4. Causes leading to improvement of Sino-American Relations: Détente & Era of Rapprochement (1970-1972)

*Reasons why the USA wanted détente with PRC:

1. Change in ideological concerns: The emergence of the Nixon administration and realpolitik in US foreign policy making

Richard Nixon won the presidential election and became the US President in 1969. Strongly influenced by his National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger, the policy of Realpolitik was introduced to the Nixon administration. In this context, realpolitik meant dealing with other major powers in a practical manner rather than basing US foreign relations on ideological beliefs and morality. Henceforth, despite the doctrine of containment and US fundamental opposition to communism, President Nixon was **willing to engage Communist China if it meant gaining strategic advantages in the Cold War.**

Nixon believed that allowing ideology to dominate foreign policy was a great and unrealistic error. He concluded in 1968 that the Cold War dynamics had changed and it was no longer a bipolar world, hence the US had to adjust its foreign policy to view the Communist movements as no longer “monolithic” but rather to deal with countries based on their actions and **not past ideological animosities.**

2. Ending the Vietnam War on US terms:

President Nixon enunciated his ‘Nixon Doctrine’. The policy direction of the Nixon administration was to pursue the ‘Vietnamisation of the Vietnam War’ by increasing the combat role of the **South Vietnamese** forces while **reducing the number of US combat troops** in Vietnam.

The escalating war in Vietnam and the anti-war movements in the US led US officials to look for ways to improve relations with Communist governments in Asia in the hopes that such a policy might lessen future conflict, undermine alliances between Communist countries, diplomatically isolate North Vietnam, and increase US leverage against the Soviet Union.

Specifically, US officials hoped China could encourage North Vietnam to make a deal with the US to end the war in Vietnam in US terms. Nixon saw that **containment of communism in the Vietnam War** was no longer possible, and hence **needed China’s assistance in its exit strategy.** He hoped that he could persuade China to put pressure on the Vietcong to **negotiate a peaceful settlement in Vietnam.** Nixon and his National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger calculated that winning the Chinese over would mean that North Vietnam would lose its support from China, and in turn its fighting capabilities. Such a strategic move would prevent the North from taking over South Vietnam after the impending US withdrawal from Vietnam.

Additionally, the Vietnam War had demonstrated that the US military power was not as effective as had been hoped due to the **relative decline caused by budgetary problems.** He also wanted to reduce the nuclear arms race with the USSR. He saw the need to make up for US failures through new strategic alliances.

1. Nuclear Security concerns:

China had developed by now Inter-Continental Ballistic Missiles (ICBM) capability, which posed a **threat to the security** of the US should there be an increase in miscommunications and isolation from China. Hence, with the Sino-American alliance, the US hoped for more effective communications between China, and thus **prevent any nuclear wars**.

The USA also wanted to **increase pressure on the USSR** to compromise with the West (Tripolar Diplomacy): The USA wanted to **take advantage of the Sino-Soviet rivalry**, between USSR and China, **to control talks following the deadlock of the Strategic Arms Limitations Talks (SALT I)** negotiations in **November 1969**, and work towards **détente with USSR**. This is because the exacerbation of the Sino-Soviet tensions might force USSR to seek opportunities to explore diplomatic relations with the USSR and hence compromise more with the West.

2. China's Economic potential:

Increased competition from Japan and the European economic community in the 1960s had eaten into America's share of the world market for manufactured goods, the expensive cost of the Indochina war, and domestic expenditure for social programmes under former President Johnson's 'Great Society', made the **lure of the large Chinese market** to be very strong as China comprised a quarter of the world's population. US exports to China increased from \$5 million in 1969 to \$700 million in 1973. By the second half 1980, China had become the sixteenth largest trading partner of the US, and the US was China's third largest. In addition over 140 American firms had invested in China.

***Reasons why the China wanted détente with USA:**

Domestic politics in China: The death of Mao Zedong and the rise of Deng Xiaoping

1. The death of Mao Zedong (1976)

- China was willing to pursue rapprochement with the US in the early 1970s because Chairman Mao saw the strategic alliance as a mean to counter the threat from Soviet Union.
- Mao, a committed Marxist, nevertheless saw this as merely a temporary alliance with the lesser evil to deal with greater evil.
- The ultimate aim was still to defeat the United States and the capitalist West.
- Mao's aim of defeating Soviet Union was however short-lived once US pursued détente with the Soviets.
- Because of this development, Mao was never keen on pursuing full normalisation with the US and had on one occasion instead reprimanded Premier Zhou for not promptly rejecting the US proposal of sharing military intelligence on Soviet troops.

The rise of Deng Xiaoping's and the desire to pursue the 'Four Modernisation'

- Following Mao's death in 1976, and after two years of political struggle between the conservatives and reformists, Deng Xiaoping, a progressive and reformist, gradually emerged as the de-facto leader by the middle of 1978.
- Like his predecessors, Deng wanted to continue the strategic alliance against the Soviet Union, and the growing threat of the Soviet-Vietnamese nexus.
- But a stronger motivation factor was Deng's ambition of ending Mao's 'continuous revolution' so that China could pursue Deng's vision of the 'Four Modernisation' (strengthening the fields of agriculture, industry, national defence, and science and technology in China).
- China could modernise its economy by seeking economic and technological cooperation and peace with the Capitalist West, and the formalisation of ties with the US could signal the dawn of cooperation.

2. Security concerns:

In the 1960s and 1970s, China saw the USSR as its main rivals. Hence **Mao saw that improved relations with the USA would allow China to confront the USSR** and force it to accept an expansion of Chinese borders. This would also allow China to **gain concessions on key foreign policy issues such as China's permanent membership in the UN**.

Furthermore, China was worried about a resurgent Japan and wanted to keep its power limited.

1. Economic potential with USA:

Increased trade with the USA and its ally, Japan, was **more attractive as an alternative to the unequal Friendship Treaty with the USSR in the 1950s**. China's enthusiasm to isolate the USSR's economy could also be seen in Zhou Enlai publicly dissuading Japan from buying Siberian oil and raw materials, and **did not want the USSR to acquire Japanese technology**. China also urged the European Common Market to resist Soviet overtures for more intimate commercial and financial relations.

3. Compelling the US to drop its pro-Taiwan policies

Mao and Zhou were also hopeful that a Sino-US rapprochement would compel **USA to recognise the People's Republic of China as the sole legitimate government of China**, and that the US armed forces would withdraw from Taiwan and the Taiwan Straits area.

This would pave the way for the eventual 'liberation' of Taiwan and its incorporation into PRC.

Mao and Zhou further believed that a rapprochement would lead to China **replacing Taiwan** in the UN and the UN Security Council with the support of the US and its allies.

4. Worsening state of Sino-Soviet relations caused China to seek détente with USA

External events:

Soviet's Crushing of Prague Uprising, 1968.

In 1968, the Soviet Union invaded Czechoslovakia after the Czechoslovakians attempted to break free from Soviet sphere of influence. This intervention **shook the leaders in China** who felt that the Soviet Union had become **‘social-imperialist’ and would threaten China’s security**.

Border clashes with Soviet Union

Several, China and the USSR were embroiled in a border conflict that lasted seven months. During those months, the Soviets moved thousands of troops to its far east and **prepared missiles armed with nuclear warheads**. Aware of the Soviet Union's nuclear threat, China built large-scale underground shelters and military bomb shelters throughout China.

As a result of the Sino-Soviet split and increasing Sino-Soviet tensions, **China became increasingly isolated as it was threatened by both the Soviet and capitalist blocs**.

Soviet Union’s policy of ‘peaceful co-existence’ with the West.

The **sense of isolation** was worsened by the Soviet policies of peaceful coexistence with the West. Chairman Mao and Premier Zhou Enlai wanted to **avoid a war on both fronts** between the US and USSR and reduce the chance of a US-Soviet collusion against China.

As a result, Mao began advocating a more pragmatic and less ideological strategy of ‘utilising contradictions and crushing enemies one by one’.

In other words, it was **aimed at cooperating temporarily with the lesser evil** to deal with the greater evil and defeat both of them eventually.

Mao hoped that **Sino-US rapprochement** would engender a **global anti-Soviet alliance** while allowing China to assume communist leadership in the world.

Initial US Overtures (1969)

- The White House made the first conciliatory gesture in the form of a relaxation of certain trade restrictions that dated from the Korean War.
- China reciprocated in 1970 by opening the informal Sino-American talks in Warsaw.
(China actually suspended these talks in early 1968 because of the American bombing in Vietnam.)
- In **April 1971**, the Chinese government invited an **American table tennis team** competing in Japan to try its skills against the championship Chinese team. Much to the surprise of the American officials, the **US teams subsequently received an invitation to play in Beijing** and were granted visas to China. This trip, also known as the “**Ping-pong Diplomacy**”, was a **public relations success after 20 years of Sino-Soviet hostility and anger.**
- In **July 1971**, **President Nixon** announced that he would **personally travel** to China to “seek the normalization of relations” between the 2 governments.
- In **October 1971**, the **USA did not use its diplomatic clout** to prevent the United Nations from expelling Taiwan from the UN Security Council permanent membership, and was **willing to have the seat transferred to China.**
- In **December 1971**, Washington also publicly sided with **Pakistan against India**, China’s archenemy, in their war that led to the creation of a new state of Bangladesh out of the former East Pakistan.

Sino-US rapprochement (1971-72)

Nixon’s visit to China (February 1972)

- **US President Nixon was the first American president in history to set foot on Chinese soil**, though the trip was a risk because there was no guarantee that Mao would agree to see the US president. However, Mao was genuinely excited about meeting a world leader, and the 2 men were able to establish good diplomatic relations during the trip.
- After several days of intensive negotiations, the 2 governments issued a joint communique in Shanghai, also known as the “**Shanghai Communique**”, on **28 February 1972.**

Sino – American Joint Communique / Shanghai Communique, 1972

- The communique pledged that it was in the interest of all nations for the US and China to **work towards the normalization of their relations**, although this **would not occur** until the **Joint Communiqué on the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations in 1979.**
- The US and China also agreed that neither they nor any other power should “seek hegemony in the Asia-Pacific region”. This was of particular importance to China, which had a border war with USSR.
- Regarding the political status of Taiwan, in the communiqué the United States acknowledged the One-China policy (but **did not endorse the PRC’s position that that the PRC represented all of China, including Taiwan**) and agreed to ‘slowly’ cut back military installations on Taiwan.
- Normalisation of Sino-US relations was not at that point possible as the PRC declared that it would not being diplomatic relations with the US until the latter cut its diplomatic ties to Taiwan.

*Significance: However, the **change** was in the **respectful and almost deferential behaviour** exhibited by each delegation towards the other during the public ceremonies. It **contrasted sharply to the mutual distrust and ideological disparity and hostility** that had characterised Sino- American relations since 1950.

5. Effects of normalisation of the Sino-US rapprochement of 1972

Paving the way for eventual Sino-US normalisation of relations and the recognition of China

- After Nixon's visit, both countries began exploring the possibility of establishing formal diplomatic relations by establishing the United States Liaison Office in May 1973 in both Beijing and Washington.
- After Nixon resigned, his successor, President Gerald Ford and later on President Jimmy Carter both expressed some interest in normalisation relations with the PRC.

Weakening Sino-Vietnam relations

- The Sino-US accommodation appalled North Vietnam, which had regarded China as a staunch supporter for more than twenty years, during which time Beijing had given generous military and economic aid.
- When North Vietnamese authorities told Premier Zhou Enlai as early as July 1971 that they were opposed to President Nixon's visit to China as they felt that it was against Vietnam's interests. They even asked the Chinese to cancel Nixon's visit but the Chinese refused.
- Vietnamese General Vo Ngyuen Giap alleged that the Chinese government promised the US it would not intervene if the US bombed Vietnam during the meetings between the American and Chinese governments.
- It was believed that President Nixon, emboldened by the Sino-US rapprochement, ordered the US army to carry out an intensive bombing campaign of North Vietnam.
- The PRC's diplomatic protest to the US bombing was noticeably more restrained than usual though the Chinese did continue to provide military and economic assistance to North Vietnam.
- China was also wary of the détente between US and USSR and feared that its recent rapprochement with the US could be jeopardised.
- To maintain its relations with the US, China urged North Vietnam to withdraw from South Vietnam so that a peace settlement with the US could be reached.
- The North Vietnamese refused and fighting ensued until peace teams were finally agreed at the Paris Conference in January 1973. This time the North Vietnamese was allowed to keep its troops in the south after the US forced had withdrawn.
- The **North Vietnamese felt particularly betrayed that China** was hindering the reunification of the two Vietnams after the Sino-US rapprochement.
- However, the 1972 rapprochement did not immediately lead to the souring of Sino-Vietnamese ties as the Soviet Union also reconciled with the US.

US-Soviet détente

- The United State successfully played the 'China card'. Fearing that it could be strategically sandwiched by its two rivals, the Soviets quickly organised their own summit with President Nixon.
- Thus, **three months after Nixon's visit to China, President Nixon visited Moscow in May 1972.**

- He and Brezhnev signed the signed seven agreements covering the prevention of accidental military clashes; arms control, as recommended by the recent Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT); cooperative research in a variety of areas, including space exploration; and expanded commerce.
- This was followed **by Brezhnev's visit to the US the following year**, in 1973
- US-Soviet detente paved the way to creating a triangular relationship between Washington, Beijing and Moscow.
- At the **height of the détente in 1975**, the US, USSR, and all European states from the two blocs signed the **Helsinki Accords to reduce the Cold War tensions in Europe**.
- The Accords recognised Soviet influence over Eastern Europe, but USSR also pledged to respect human rights and fundamental freedoms of individuals.
- Both the Eastern and Western bloc also agreed to engage in economic cooperation and scientific exchanges.

Improvement of China's regional and global diplomatic relations

- The Sino-US rapprochement prompted many countries in the **non-communist bloc** to consider **switching diplomatic relations**.
- China was by then a permanent member of the UN Security Council and the most populous country with the world with **tremendous economic potential**.
- By the **end of 1972, 23 countries had switched diplomatic recognition from Taipei to Beijing**. Additionally, Beijing concluded 75 joint communiques with foreign countries concerning the improvement of diplomatic relations.

Normalisation of Sino-Japan relations (September 1972)

- In July 1971, the Japanese government was caught by surprise when US President Nixon told that he was seeking rapprochement with China.
- Japan, the wartime enemy of China and a close Cold War ally of the United States after signing the Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security in 1951, **feared that the US would abandon Japan once it had leaned towards China**.
- Thus, **seven months after Nixon visited China, in September 1972, Japan's Prime Minister Kakuei Tanaka visited Beijing and signed a joint communique to mark the normalisation of their relations**.
- As part of the agreement, **Japan officially recognised the PRC, and no longer the ROC**, as the sole legal government of China.
- Like the US, Japan supported China's anti-Soviet stance by declaring that it was opposed to any country that sought hegemony in the Asia-Pacific region.

Recognitions by ASEAN member countries

- Following China's rapprochement, China's support for communist insurgencies were gradually scaled down.
- Southeast Asia countries that were threatened by communist insurgencies became **less suspicious of China were now keen on engaging China**.
- In 1974, Malaysia became the first Southeast Asia country to establish full diplomatic relations with the PRC.

- Malaysia Prime Minister Tun Abdul Razak announced that Premier Zhou and Chairman Mao had categorically assured him that they were of the view that the rebels, the Communist Party of Malaya, were Malaysia's internal problem and that **China would no longer support the CPM.**
- Mao and Zhou further assured Prime Minister Abdul Razak that they recognised Malaysia as a multiracial society and would not regard the people of Chinese residing in Malaysia as mainland Chinese.
- Following the formalisation of relations between the two countries, the other ASEAN members— **Thailand, the Philippines, Singapore and Indonesia** — **also expressed a cautious interest** in following the Malaysian precedent.
- Philippines and Thailand went out to establish diplomatic relations in 1975, while Singapore and Indonesia forged closer informal ties with China (as diplomatic ties were only formalised between them in 1990).

Diplomatic isolation of Taiwan

- The Taiwanese government was strongly critical of President Nixon's to China but could do little to stop the turn of the tide.
- From 1972 to 1979, US remained ties to the formalities of a deteriorating relations with the Republic of China.
- US officials only provided grudging compliance with its trade commitment and arms sale to Taiwan, but sought to minimise provoking the PRC lest the latter renounce rapprochement.
- By the end of 1973, the two Chinas essentially changed places in the hearts and minds of minds of American leaders and the public.
- The US and the People's Republic of China were doing business through liaison offices that became more important than the US and Republic of China embassies, and the State Department had placed an informal ban on meetings between Taiwan officials and the President, Secretary of State, and other high-level executives.

The Normalisation of Sino-US relations (The Joint Communiqué on the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations) 1978

- On December 15, 1978, after two years of negotiation, particularly over the Taiwan issue, a joint communique was jointly announced by the Chinese and American governments. Otherwise known as the **Joint Communiqué on the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations, the US and the People's Republic of China would begin official relations 1 January 1979.**
- In so doing, the US government recognised that the government of the People's Republic of China was **the sole legal government of China** and meant the **ending of the US official recognition of the Republic of China (i.e. Taiwan)** as well as the **termination of the Sino-American Mutual Defence Treaty that was signed with the ROC in 1955.**
- In addition, both sides reaffirmed their wish to reduce the risk of international conflict as well as avoidance of hegemony (referring to the USSR) of any nation in the Asia-Pacific region.

Effects of the Sino-American Normalisation (December 1978)

Strengthening Sino-American military cooperation against the USSR, 1979

- In **December 1979**, the Soviet Union intervened militarily in Afghanistan by sending its troops in support of the Afghan communist government in its conflict with anti-Communist Mujahideen. This immediately halted the US-Soviet détente when President Carter asked the Senate to postpone action on the SALT II nuclear weapons treaty and recalled the US ambassador to Moscow.
- Fearing that the **Soviet presence in Afghanistan would open a doorway to China's controlled Xinjiang**, China **"vigorously" condemned the hegemonistic action of the Soviet Union** and firmly demanded **"the cessation of this aggression and intervention in Afghanistan and the withdrawal of all Soviet armed forces"**.
- **China and the United States** formed a strategic alliance to support the Mujahideen rebels against the USSR. China, on its own, provided US\$200 million military supplies annually to support the Mujahideen and acquire military equipment from the US to defend itself from a possible Soviet attack from Afghanistan.
- China also agreed to provide the US with listening posts to monitor Soviet Central Asia through secret stations through Xinjiang.
- After the Soviet invasion, **US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), Pakistan's Inter Services Intelligence (ISI), and the Chinese Intelligence services developed a close collaborative relationship** to counter the Soviet forces in Afghanistan.
- **In 1980, China's Olympic Committee joined the United States' call to boycott the Moscow Olympics.**

Widening Sino-Vietnam rivalry

- Emboldened by the normalisation with the US, Deng Xiaoping informed President Carter in January 1979 of **China's intention to attack Vietnam** in response to that country's invasion of Cambodia.
- Carter was unable to dissuade Deng for planning the invasion, and in March 1979, the People's Liberation Army launched an incursion into the northern border of Vietnam in March 1979 'to teach Hanoi a lesson' but withdrew a few weeks later after both sides sustained heavy losses.
- **Supported by the USSR, Vietnam was able to halt the Chinese attack, but this episode further heightened the tensions between China and the USSR.**

Global diplomatic recognition of the PRC and the One-China principle

- After the normalisation with the US, most countries switched diplomatic recognition to the PRC and subscribe to the One-China principle as the basis of the relations with the PRC.
- **In 1980, the Taipei government was simultaneously expelled from the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the International Finance Corporation, and the International Development Association in favour of PRC.**
- By the late 1980s, Taiwan lost most of its diplomatic allies and having been ousted from the bulk of international organizations.
- Taiwan also had to **contort its name to 'Chinese Taipei'** just to participate in events and institutions like the Olympics Games and the World Trade Organisation.

Strengthening economic cooperation between China and the United States

- China and the US were able to strengthen their economic relations since the 1980s once normalisation was achieved.
- Immediately after establishing diplomatic ties, Vice Premier Deng Xiaoping visited Washington in **January 1979** to initiate a series of **bilateral exchanges in the scientific, cultural and technological fields, as well as trade relations.**
- Then in **1980**, the US Congress passed a trade agreement conferring the **Most Favoured Nation (MFN) status on China, which exempted Chinese exports to the US from high tariff rates.**
- Thereafter, between 1980 and 2004, U.S.-China trade rose from \$5 billion to \$231 billion
- US investment to China also began in 1980 and the investment value increased by more than ten-fold from US\$ 118.68 million to US\$2063 million between 1982 to 1993.

US employment of 'Strategic Ambiguity' to defend Taiwan

- Although the US abrogated the US-ROC Mutual Defence Treaty after signing the Joint Communiqué, the **US inserted a caveat that it would “maintain cultural, commercial, and other unofficial relations with the people of Taiwan”**
- Upset with Carter for abandoning Taiwan, pro-Taiwanese lobbied the US Congress to pass the Taiwan Relations Act (TRA) in April 1979.
- The TRA stated that the US was “to provide Taiwan with arms of a defensive character; and to maintain the capacity of the United States to resist any resort to force or other forms of coercion that would jeopardize the security, or the social or economic system, of the people on Taiwan.”
- The TRA was signed by the President Carter whose administration defended that the TRA was still consistent with the Joint Communiqué that permitted the maintenance of ‘unofficial’ relations with Taiwan.
- The **TRA provided for the creation of an American Institute on Taiwan that acted as the de-facto US embassy and was staffed by either ‘retired’ or ‘on leave’ officials from the US State Department.**
- The TRA, coupled with the Joint Communiqué of normalisation, marked the beginning of the **US policy of ‘Strategic Ambiguity’ in which the United States expresses a strong interest in Taiwan’s security while avoiding an outright promise to defend it in wars so as not to contradict the One-China principle.**
- This strategic provided the diplomatic pretext for the United States government to establish close economic relations with Taiwan and to provide Taiwan with “arms of defensive characters.”
- After 1979, China continued to be critical of the US arms sale to Taiwan and saw it as an infringement of the China’s sovereignty and a contravention of the One-China Principle reflected in the 1972 and 1979 Communiques (and in a third Communiqué that was signed in 1982).

***Overall Analysis and Evaluation:**

- **Irreconcilable ideological orientations initially** wrecked problems and hostility in the US-Sino relations, but it proved insufficient in **the long run to prevent the PRC and the US to gradually form amicable ties** with one another from **1969 to 1979 in search of common interests against their common foe, the USSR, due to growing security concerns.** Hence, causing them to shelve their traditional ideological differences and accept the reality to work together for mutual benefits against the USSR and to boost their own national economy.

This caused the Cold War to become a **tripolar** triangular power play amongst the 3 superpowers as they sought to outdo and outrival the other through the manipulation of one against the other.

- **On the surface, both seemed to have benefitted equally** in terms of security, strategic and economic gains. However, **in reality**, it is arguable that the **PRC gained more** because the strategically encircled PRC (US containment & USSR border threat) could improve its security and be in good terms with its ideological rival (USA), which then allowed it to make further political concessions in its favour (Taiwan and UN membership).

○

- How did the Korean War impact Sino-American relations?
 - Foreign policies and Cold War relations with allies
 - Military impact
 - Political impact

- What contributed to the change in Sino-American relations by 1972?
 - External vs. Internal factors (pull and push factors)
 - Strategic interests/Geopolitics (Sino-Soviet split, Vietnam War, Taiwanese issue)
 - Economics (opening up of China, economic costs of US involvement in Vietnam War)
 - Ideological shift (Nixon Doctrine)
 - Personalities (Nixon, Kissinger, Death of Mao, Rise of Deng)