

# Road to Rapprochement: Establishment of the 1972 United States' Visit to the People's Republic of China through the Pakistani Channel

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**ABSTRACT:** This short paper examines President Nixon's approach to the People's Republic of China (PRC) using Pakistan as the channel of communication during Nixon's early years of presidency. The paper first explores the Eisenhower, Kennedy and Johnson administrations' attitudes towards the PRC then discusses Pakistan's relationship and position between the United States and the PRC between the first and second Indo-Pakistani War. With the introduction of Nixon's "grand objective" to bring Communist China inwards, Nixon's efforts to establish formal relations with the PRC is highlighted. This effort later contributed to the US-PRC normalization on January 1, 1979, through the Joint Communiqué.

**Keywords:** rapprochement, Nixon, normalization, Pakistan, communication channel, grand objective.

## Introduction

On February 21, 1972, Richard Nixon became the first president of the United States to visit the People's Republic of China (PRC)<sup>1</sup>. During this weeklong<sup>2</sup> visit, Nixon met with PRC Chairman Mao Zedong, and Premier Zhou Enlai. Both sides clarified and understood each nation's interest, and these discussion points later became the Shanghai Communiqué.

There were several significant details that the PRC and the United States indicated during the discussion. The Chinese leadership assured the United States that "China will never be a superpower and [that] it opposes hegemony and power politics of any kind."<sup>3</sup> This clear message expressed that China was not seeking any aggression to overtake the leadership of world power. This statement could also be understood as a reference to the

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1 "China" will be referred to as the "People's Republic of China (PRC)" in this research paper to specify China since the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party (Period after Oct. 1, 1949 when Mao proclaimed and renamed Beiping to Beijing as the capital of the PRC as a victorious outcome from the Chinese Civil War).

2 The visit was from February 21- 28, 1972.

3 "203. Joint Statement Following Discussions With Leaders of the People's Republic of China." (Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume XVII, China, 1969-1972).

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Soviet Union; China was not seeking a hegemonic contest with the United States, unlike the Soviet Union.<sup>4</sup> In addition, China expressed its firm support of those nations under oppression for freedom and liberation while emphasizing that foreign troops “should be withdrawn to their own countries.”<sup>5</sup> Although it is likely that this was a reference to the United States’ presence in Taiwan, in a different context, it can also insinuate China’s acknowledgment of the Nixon Doctrine.<sup>6</sup> In turn, the United States showed a clear understanding that “Taiwan is a part of China” and that the United States “affirms the ultimate objective of the withdrawal of all US forces and military installations from Taiwan.”<sup>7</sup> In other words, this visit affirmed the absence of the Chinese intention to become the second Communist hegemonic state at the time. Furthermore, the United States also affirmed its willingness to cooperate with the PRC by stating that the US recognized China as a single nation and confirmed its goal to completely withdraw from Taiwan in time.

Although China and the US continued to discuss the “Taiwan Question” for another ten years,<sup>8</sup> the two nations were able to see eye to eye on several terms that later became the stepping stone for the official normalization on January 1, 1979, during Deng Xiaoping and Jimmy Carter’s leaderships. Without this establishment, normalization in 1979 may have been at a later date.<sup>9</sup>

This momentous visit took at least three years of meticulous planning. Before the visit in 1972, as the previous Vice President under Eisenhower and the Republican presidential nominee against John F. Kennedy, Nixon studied China and the implications of China’s strength in the future. When he became the President of the United States on January 20, 1969, he immediately put his plans into action and initiated sending signals to China with the assistance of Henry Kissinger, the National Security Advisor. Nixon considered two close friends of China - Romania and Pakistan - as the communication channel. Ultimately, Pakistan, under the leadership of Yahya Khan, became the main bridge between the United States and China.

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4 In today’s context, some scholars may find China’s intentions have changed.

5 “203. Joint Statement Following Discussions With Leaders of the People’s Republic of China.”

6 In sum, the Nixon Doctrine, along with Nixon’s plan of “Vietnamization,” stated that it will not “undertake all the defense of the free nations of the world” even if it would assist in the defense and developments of allies and friends under the nuclear umbrella. “The Nixon Doctrine Is Announced - Jul 25, 1969,” History.com, accessed June 08, 2016, <http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/the-nixon-doctrine-is-announced>.

7 “203. Joint Statement Following Discussions With Leaders of the People’s Republic of China.”

8 The Taiwan question has been continuously discussed in the US Congress even after US-China normalization in 1979. The Taiwan question is still referred to in the 21<sup>st</sup> century when the topic of US weapon aid is discussed.

9 If Nixon’s visit and the Sino-Soviet split had not happened, the PRC may have taken over the Soviet Union’s position of the Cold War after the Soviet collapse.

## The US Presidents' Foreign Policy Towards China before Nixon

The United States presidents before Nixon maintained some distance with the Chinese Communist Party.<sup>10</sup> In the Eisenhower years (1953-1961), the Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles strongly advised Eisenhower's foreign policy decisions. As a "staunch anti-communist,"<sup>11</sup> Dulles divided the world into two parts: the "free world" and the Soviet bloc.<sup>12</sup> The PRC was indubitably categorized under the "Soviet bloc of Asia" and as a result, the containment policy extended to Communist China.<sup>13</sup> In fact, Dulles was also "mistrustful"<sup>14</sup> of Chiang Kai-Shek. Since 1949, Chiang was keen on regaining control of the mainland, while Eisenhower and Dulles did not want to get the United States involved in another warfare in Asia after the Korean War.<sup>15</sup> As a strategic way to delay the US involvement, Dulles stalled the US response on the mutual defense agreement with Taiwan. Until the end of his presidency, Eisenhower maintained an aloof foreign policy towards both the PRC and Taiwan.

Similarly, Kennedy and Johnson (1961-1969) also did not make special efforts to mend the distant relations with China. Kennedy's administration was rather short-lived due to the assassination on November 22, 1963. Yet, Kennedy may have had a closer relationship to Taiwan than Eisenhower and Dulles. When the question of Communist China's potential seat in the United Nations Security Council was raised in December 1961,<sup>16</sup> "Kennedy secretly promised Chiang that he would use the veto if the United Nations voted to seat Mao's China in the Security Council."<sup>17</sup> This was an unofficial commitment made by Kennedy. Nevertheless, it could be suspected that Kennedy supported Taiwan behind the scenes while keeping the PRC distant. However, the Kennedy administration's hands were full with other foreign policy problems. The United States was under "brinkmanship" against the Soviet Union and the tension of the Cold War had reached its peak due to the failed Bay of Pigs operation and the Cuban Missile Crisis. Evidently, abridging the distance between the US and the PRC was not the utmost priority of Kennedy.

Johnson's foreign policy was more relevant to China as he started out his administration when the French recognition of the PRC in January 1964 and the PRC's successful nuclear test in October of the same year took place. The United States and its allies called for

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10 This section will only examine the leadership years of President Eisenhower, Kennedy and Johnson.

11 "Foreign Policy Under President Eisenhower - Short History - Department History," Office of Historian, accessed June 08, 2016, <https://history.state.gov/departmenthistory/short-history/eisenhower>.

12 "For this Secretary of State there was no grey area—nations were either part of the "Free World" or part of the Soviet bloc; he had little time for neutralism or non-alignment." In *ibid*.

13 *Ibid*.

14 "The United States and China during the Cold War," The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, accessed June 01, 2016, <http://www.gilderlehrman.org/history-by-era/seventies/essays/united-states-and-china-during-cold-war>.

15 *Ibid*.

16 Michael Lumbers, "The Irony Of Vietnam: The Johnson Administration's Tentative Bridge Building To China, 1965–1966" *Journal Of Cold War Studies* 6 (2004): 68-114.

17 "The United States and China during the Cold War."

“urgency of reaching an accommodation with the region’s ascendant power,”<sup>18</sup> and were immediately conscious about Communist China’s diplomatic growth and technological advancement. The PRC’s admission to the United Nations Security Council was also an ongoing, heated debate. Dean Rusk was one of Johnson’s most influential<sup>19</sup> foreign policy advisors and he was the Secretary of State under both Kennedy and Johnson. He warned Johnson that, “Such actions as the recognition of China by France or its future admission into the UN would be very bad... it would persuade the Chinese that they were being successful. Unless other things demonstrate to the Chinese that they are not on the right track, we will be faced with much greater danger in the future.”<sup>20</sup> Concurring with Rusk and other advisors’ caution against Communist China, Johnson proclaimed his decision to maintain the previous hardline approach towards the PRC in April 1964: “So long as the Communist Chinese pursue aggression . . . [and] preach violence, there can be and will be no easing of relationships... It is not we who must re-examine our view of China. It is the Chinese Communists who must reexamine their view of the world.”<sup>21</sup> Consequently, the tension between the United States and China was not eased during Johnson’s presidency. When Johnson committed to the Vietnam War in August 1964 after the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, the justification stated for the US involvement was “in part to contain the Chinese expansionism.”<sup>22</sup> When Johnson spoke at Johns Hopkins University on April 7, 1965, he insisted, “The rulers in Hanoi are urged on by Peiping<sup>23</sup>...the contest in Vietnam was part of wider pattern of aggressive purposes.”<sup>24</sup> Johnson was especially determined not to lose the Vietnam War against the communist forces, including the PRC, although the war itself did not involve any direct territorial claims of the US or China.<sup>25</sup> Throughout his presidency, Johnson maintained this hardline approach towards China and left the office with no effort to communicate with the leaders of the PRC.

These seventeen years of inflexible approach towards China took a different form on July 15, 1971. On this date, President Nixon made an official statement on national television that he would “become the first president ever to visit the People’s Republic of China, the nation which had remained isolated from the West since the Communist revolution in 1949.”<sup>26</sup>

18 Lumbers, “The Irony of Vietnam,” 70.

19 “Johnson’s most influential foreign policy advisers—Rusk, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, and National Security Adviser McGeorge Bundy —...” in *ibid*, 73.

20 *Ibid*, 74.

21 Remarks on Foreign Affairs at the Associated Press Luncheon in New York City. Public Papers of the Presidents: Lyndon B. Johnson, 1963–1964, Vol. 1, p. 499, 20 April 1964.

22 Lumbers, “The Irony Of Vietnam” 68.

23 Peiping was the Nationalist Chinese name for Peking; this usage was considered as an insult to the Chinese Communist Party. Henry Kissinger and Clare Boothe Luce, *White House Years* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1979): 168.

24 *Ibid*, 167-168.

25 China and the US also combated against each other during the Korean War without any territorial claims.

26 “PBS: General Article: Foreign Affairs of Nixon,” American Experience: TV’s Most-watched History

### **Pakistan's Search for Aid in the Second Indo-Pakistani War of 1965**

As a result of the Indian Independence Act of 1947 on July 18<sup>th</sup>, Great Britain left colonial India in the hands of two incompatible religious groups. On October 22, 1947, the first Indo-Pakistani War, also known as the First Kashmir War, broke out between India and Pakistan. This was a territorial conflict concerning the land between Northern India and Western Pakistan – Kashmir and Jammu. Although this first war was inconclusive,<sup>27</sup> by 1948, India had occupied about two-thirds of Kashmir and Jammu.<sup>28</sup>

In 1965 the second edition of this conflict occurred under the leadership of Ayub Khan. He was the first military dictator and the second president of Pakistan as the result of 1958 Pakistani coup d'état.<sup>29</sup> In August 1965, Khan launched "Operation Gibraltar," an infiltration plan on Jammu and Kashmir against India. The operation ordered Pakistani troops to cross over the ceasefire line between Indian and Pakistan by the Kashmir Valley and launch guerrilla attacks and to destroy bridges, tunnels, and highways.<sup>30</sup> Unfortunately, this operation quickly fell apart. "Operation Gibraltar" was seen as "a clumsy attempt"<sup>31</sup> and a miscalculation of the people of Kashmir. The Pakistani Army initially expected that Kashmiri people resented Indian leadership. Thus, before the Operation, Pakistan had informed Kashmiris about the infiltration plan anticipating Kashmiris to support the plan by revolting against the Indian Army simultaneously. However, Indian leadership was well informed of the plan by Kashmiri people and was able to quickly fight back.<sup>32</sup> This combat soon escalated into the second Indo-Pakistani War of 1965.

This second clash also terminated as neither a loss nor a victory on both sides. The United States had been supporting Pakistan and India with military aids with the hopes of democratization on both sides. However, the second war left Pakistan with five hundred million losses of US military aid, a severe economic depression, and mentally and physically wounded people on both Pakistan and India. As a response to this elongated conflict and the uncertainty of compromise between the two states, the United States enforced a military aid embargo at the end of 1965 on both sides. Dean Rusk expressed opposition on further aid quite clearly, "Well if you are going to fight, go ahead and fight, but we are not going to pay for it."<sup>33</sup>

Nevertheless, Ayub Khan did not give up so easily. In 1966, Pakistan turned to the PRC for aid. China and Pakistan had established official diplomatic relations on May 21,

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Series, accessed June 02, 2016, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/general-article/nixon-foreign/>.

27 There were a total of four Indo-Pakistani Wars. 1<sup>st</sup>: 1947, 2<sup>nd</sup>: 1965, 3<sup>rd</sup>: 1971, and 4<sup>th</sup>: 1999.

28 Hoontrakul Pongsak, Christopher Balding, and Reena Marwah, *The Global Rise Of Asian Transformation* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 37.

29 "Profile of Ayub Khan," Pakistanherald.com, accessed June 08, 2016, <http://www.pakistanherald.com/newprofile.aspx?hofid=1180>.

30 Pervaiz Iqbal Cheema, *The Armed Forces Of Pakistan* (New York: New York University Press, 2002).

31 Devin T Hagerty, *South Asia in World Politics* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005).

32 Dinker Rao Mankekar, *Twentytwo Fateful Days: Pakistan Cut To Size* (Bombay: Manaktalas, 1967).

33 Nikhat Ekbal, *Great Muslims of Undivided India* (Delhi: Kalpaz Publications, 2009), 122-23.

1951 when Pakistan recognized the PRC instead of the Republic of China hoping that the PRC would align with Pakistan against India.<sup>34</sup> Although Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru had recognized China in 1950, earlier than Pakistan, the border between China and India developed into a territorial tension.<sup>35</sup> Using this period of Sino-Indian tension as an opportunity to solidify the relationship between China, on October 13, 1962, Khan proposed the Sino-Pakistani Frontier Agreement and ceded “over 13,000 square miles of territory”<sup>36</sup> known as the Trans-Karakoram Tract, an area of Jammu and Kashmir that had been occupied by Pakistan at the time. Khan did not consider Trans-Karakoram Tract as significant because it is one of the most inhospitable mountains in the region covered by glaciers.<sup>37</sup> Instead, he chose to use it as a diplomatic strategy to improve the Sino-Pakistani relationship.

Khan’s strategic diplomatic choice did provide Pakistan with much economic and military aid from China over the years. After the US embargo on military aid, Khan received military equipment for “two divisions of the army and MIG aircrafts for the air force”<sup>38</sup> immediately. Throughout 1966, China aided Pakistan with much military aid until the end of the Second Indo-Pakistani War.

Ayub Khan’s health quickly started to deteriorate and by the end of 1968 he decided to resign from the presidency. Khan wrote to his General, Yahya Khan asking him to take over the leadership of the country. On March 26, 1969, Army Commander Yahya Khan declared martial law and became the third President of Pakistan and announced this news on national television. He claimed, “I will not tolerate disorder. Let everyone remain at his post.”<sup>39</sup> He marked his intention to uphold the continuation of the leadership and structure that Ayub Khan had established and continued the intimate relationship with China as a committed ally.

### Nixon’s Grand Objective

Richard Nixon had carefully considered the dangers and implications behind Communist China’s isolation before his presidency. However, Nixon was not questioned during the Red Scare, widely known as the period of “McCarthyism.” Nixon had maintained a strong reputation as an anti-Communist since his term as the Senator of California during the Korean War. This strong rightist identification “protected him from the charge of being ‘soft on communism.’”<sup>40</sup> Therefore, when he wrote a piece for *Foreign Affairs* magazine

34 Jamal Afridi, and Jayshree Bajoria, “China-Pakistan Relations,” *Council On Foreign Relations* (2010).

35 This tension later results in the Sino-India War in 1962.

36 Formal statement of Jawaharlal Nehru in the Parliament of India on March 5, 1963.

37 Hagerty, *South Asia in World Politics*.

38 “Pak-China Defense Collaboration since 1947 till 2014,” Pakistan-China Institute, accessed April 11, 2016, <http://www.pakistan-china.com/article-detail.php?id=MjA>.

39 Peter R. Blood, *Pakistan* (Washington, D.C.: Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, 1995).

40 “He had the political base on the right, which protected him from the charge of being ‘soft on Communism’,” in Kissinger and Luce, *White House Years*, 163.

in 1967, Nixon unrestrictedly expressed that “we simply cannot afford to leave China outside the family of nations” as a presidential candidate.<sup>41</sup>

Nixon’s article, “Asia after Viet Nam”<sup>42</sup> discussed the financial, physical and emotional atrocities of the Vietnam War and the problem with the foreign policy strategy of “containment.” Nixon underlined the importance of establishing inclusive diplomatic relations with China and claimed that containing China would “not only place an unconscionable burden on our own country, but it would heighten the chances of nuclear war while undercutting the independent development of the nations of Asia.”<sup>43</sup> He believed that containing China would create another Soviet Union and wanted to bring China “inwards.” The time was also running out according to him – “In this race we cannot afford to wait for others to act, and then merely react. And the race in Asia is already under way.”<sup>44</sup> Nixon felt the urgency to act upon China’s growth and to reach out to Communist China promptly.

However, bringing China inwards was not the end goal. Nixon had a much larger plan in mind. He envisioned a “future in which more cordial relations among the major world powers – the United States, the Soviet Union, China, Western Europe and Japan – would allow for ventures profitable to all.”<sup>45</sup> Nixon was convinced that this consortium of cooperative regions would be the solution to “reduce revenue-draining defense expenditures”<sup>46</sup> and the way to prevent a costly, potential Third World War. In line with his “Vietnamization,” Nixon visualized putting an end to these ongoing world conflicts through multinational cooperation – and pursuing relations with the PRC was the first step towards this grand objective.

### **Communication with Romania**

When Nixon took office as the President of the United States on January 20, 1969, he immediately acted towards his goal of building relations with China. In February 1969, the Secretary of State, William Rogers, publicly announced the United States’ interest in increasing cultural and scientific exchanges with the PRC. Then, Nixon started to send underhanded signals to China through two third-party players – Romania and Pakistan.

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41 “Although Nixon had publicly condemned the Chinese Communists, he had proposed a more relaxed attitude toward the People’s Republic as early as 1954. In 1967, as a presidential candidate, he had written in the magazine *Foreign Affairs*, ‘We simply cannot afford to leave China outside the family of nations.’ Nixon envisioned a future in which more cordial relations among the major world powers -- the United States, the Soviet Union, China, Western Europe, and Japan -- would allow for ventures profitable to all. Through international cooperation, these nations might reduce revenue-draining defense expenditures and prevent the occurrence of costly Third World conflicts such as the Vietnam War.” in “WGBH American Experience. Nixon | PBS,” accessed June 01, 2016, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/general-article/nixon-foreign/>.

42 Richard M. Nixon, “Asia After Viet Nam,” *Foreign Affairs* 46 (1967): 111.

43 Ibid.

44 Ibid.

45 Ibid.

46 Ibid.

Nixon started his world trip on July 21, 1969, to visit friends and potential friends of the United States. From August 2-3, he visited Romania. Nixon met with the Romanian Communist Party's Secretary General, Nicolae Ceaușescu during this visit. Romania was a state that had established an official diplomatic relationship with China as early as October 5, 1949 – only a few days after Mao proclaimed Beijing as the capital of the People's Republic of China.<sup>47</sup> Ceaușescu became the leader of Romania on March 22, 1965, sixteen years after the establishment of the PRC. By this time, Ceaușescu had already visited China, North Korea, Mongolia and North Vietnam. As a fervent Communist, Ceaușescu took an interest in North Korea's *juche* system as well as China's Cultural Revolution. He admired Mao and Kim Il-sung's leadership as they used "totalitarian methods coupled with generous shots of ultra-nationalism mixed in with communist ideologies to make both China and North Korea into major world powers."<sup>48</sup> Ceaușescu had studied the two East Asian leaderships very carefully from its establishment to "success"<sup>49</sup> and had maintained a positive relationship and respectful outlook towards China and North Korea.

Nixon was aware of Ceaușescu's dedicated relationship with China and Romania's status as an independent state from Moscow since 1968.<sup>50</sup> Accordingly, Nixon had thought that "the Chinese might prefer to deal with the United States through Communist intermediaries," such as Romania,<sup>51</sup> a fellow Communist state. During his first meeting with Ceaușescu in Bucharest, Nixon indicated that "the United States could do little to establish effective communications with China until the Vietnam war was ended,"<sup>52</sup> hinting that the US was in a difficult position to pursue relations with China. Then, Nixon added that there is a strong necessity to bring China out of isolation and into the international community for the sake of stability in an increasingly multipolar world. He argued that "In twenty-five years, China would have a billion people...if isolated by others, it might turn into an explosive force."<sup>53</sup> Nixon insinuated that Romania should become the "messenger" between the United States and China, and Ceaușescu accepted.

However, the Romanian channel "turned out to be one-way" due to the suspicion of the Chinese. The Chinese were "fearful of Soviet penetration of even a country as fiercely independent as Romania."<sup>54</sup> Nixon accepted this existing obstacle and quickly moved on to his other passage of communication – Pakistan.

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47 Mao proclaimed Beijing as the capital of the People's Republic of China on October 1, 1949.

48 Edward Behr, *Kiss The Hand You Cannot Bite*, (New York: Villard Books, 1991).

49 To Ceaușescu, China and North Korea had achieved a successful form of Communism. Behr, *Kiss The Hand You Cannot Bite*.

50 Kissinger and Luce, *White House Years*, 181.

51 Ibid.

52 "Nixon's Opening to China: The Misleading Apotheosis of Triangular Diplomacy," International Relations, accessed June 02, 2016, <http://www.e-ir.info/2013/06/28/nixons-opening-to-china-the-misleading-apotheosis-of-triangular-diplomacy/>.

53 Kissinger and Luce, *White House Years*, 181.

54 Ibid.



### **Pakistan as the Communication Channel**

On August 1 of 1969, President Nixon flew to Lahore, Pakistan to visit the newly elected President Khan<sup>55</sup> and to re-establish relations with Pakistan. Nixon was “well aware of Pakistan’s unique historical position *vis-à-vis* China.”<sup>56</sup> He understood that Pakistan felt abandoned by the United States due to Dean Rusk’s military embargo in the Second Indo-Pakistani War, yet Pakistan was an excellent strategic partner to link the United States with the PRC. Nixon had visited Pakistan several times when he was serving as Eisenhower’s vice president. Hence, Nixon’s visit to Lahore was welcomed by Pakistan.<sup>57</sup>

In Lahore, Nixon and Khan held a confidential<sup>58</sup> meeting with only a few people present in the room other than the two. Nixon quite straightforwardly suggested that, “the US will welcome accommodations with Communist China and would appreciate it if President Yahya would let Zhou Enlai know this.”<sup>59</sup> Khan and Nixon thoroughly discussed China’s position in Asia. Khan expressed that China felt “surrounded by hostile forces – India, Soviet Union, and the United States in Southeast Asia.” China was concerned with strong countries surrounding the mainland with no particular strong allies. Nixon and Khan both agreed, “Asia can not move forward if a nation as large as China remained isolated,”<sup>60</sup> and Khan decided to become the bridge between the United States and the People’s Republic of China.

The 1969 Lahore visit was a clear affirmation for Nixon that Pakistan was on the same page in terms of bringing China into the circle of trust of the international realm. However, building relations with Communist China, putting Nationalist China (Republic of China; Taiwan) aside, was very difficult to negotiate in American domestic politics. Nevertheless, Nixon did not give up on building relations with the PRC.<sup>61</sup> More than a year later, Nixon approached Khan’s administration again on October 25, 1970.

Khan had visited the United States on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the United Nations. Nixon invited Khan to the Oval Office and asked Henry Kissinger to

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55 From here on, reference to “Khan” will be Yahya Khan.

56 Yukinori Komine, *Secrecy in US Foreign Policy: Nixon, Kissinger and the Rapprochement with China* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate Pub., 2008), 95-100.

57 Ibid, 95.

58 Even Kissinger was not present at this talk. However, the former Foreign Secretary of Pakistan, Sultan Mohammed Khan, and the US Ambassador to Pakistan, Agha Hilaly, were present in this meeting.

M.M. Ali, “Former Pakistani Foreign Secretary Sultan Mohammed Khan’s Colorful Life Parallels His Country’s History,” WRMEA, accessed April 11, 2016. <http://www.robinsonlibrary.com/history/asia/pakistan/history/yahyakhan.htm>.

59 Komine, *Secrecy in US Foreign Policy: Nixon, Kissinger and the Rapprochement with China*, 95.

60 Nixon does not go in depth in his own memoir, *The Memoirs of Nixon*, of this 1969 secret meeting with Khan. However, the two other present members of the United States meeting were Agha Hilaly and Harold M. Saunders. Hilaly was the US Ambassador to Pakistan at the time and Saunders was a National Security Council staff to the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs. These quotes were taken from the memorandum of conversations of Hilaly and Saunders in Komine, *Secrecy in US Foreign Policy: Nixon, Kissinger and the Rapprochement with China*.

61 Domestic political debate on the “Taiwan Question” is omitted for the purpose of the paper’s focus on Nixon’s foreign policy goal of rapprochement.

also be present at the meeting. Nixon asked Yahya Khan's next date of visit to Beijing<sup>62</sup> and added that he is "willing to send a representative to some third party capital to open communications with Beijing,"<sup>63</sup> expressing his fervent desire to establish US relations with China.

Khan, in his most recent visit to Beijing, had discussed with Mao about the meaning engraved in China's new revolution and China's perspective of the United States. Khan assumed that "the Chinese are going to change with affluence,"<sup>64</sup> once they would hear about Nixon's aspiration to establish US relations with China. According to Khan, Mao had said, "the Americans hope we will die out, but no, I will teach every child from the day he is born to be a revolutionary."<sup>65</sup> Khan then added that Mao did keep his word in the Cultural Revolution by showing that the PRC will survive and maintain Mainland China as the ruling regime.

Khan noted that there is an unclear notion between the United States and China. Mao's China considered the United States as a nation that longed for the PRC's fall.<sup>66</sup> Nixon clarified this misunderstanding, and once again, emphasized that he was willing to send ambassadors and establish high-level contact with China. Nixon also added that even Kissinger, who was present in the room, could go.<sup>67</sup> In the end, Khan assured Nixon that he would clarify and explain Nixon's intentions to the Chinese counterpart.

On December 10, 1970, Nixon's office made concrete steps to establish a rapprochement with China. Henry Kissinger was asked to submit the "Chinese Communist Initiative"<sup>68</sup> on this date. This report was a summary of the trilateral conversations of the United States, Pakistan and the PRC in regards to prospective rapprochement.<sup>69</sup> The report also included extracted comments from Zhou Enlai, the Premier of the PRC, through President Yahya Khan.

The Initiative included Zhou's comments such as, "the United States knows that Pakistan is a great friend of China and therefore we attach importance to the message."<sup>70</sup> Zhou had made this remark after hearing about the United States' hope to build relations with the PRC through Khan. This important piece of information affirmed Nixon's decision to utilize Pakistan as the main communication channel. The report also included a small section regarding the Taiwan question – the question that later became one of

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62 "Getting to Beijing: Henry Kissinger's Secret 1971 Trip," US-China Institute, accessed June 06, 2016, <http://china.usc.edu/getting-beijing-henry-kissingers-secret-1971-trip>.

63 Memorandum of Conversation. Meeting between the President with Pakistan President Yahya, October 25, 1970, The Oval Office, E012958, 1-3/3, 05-09-01.

64 Ibid.

65 Ibid.

66 Komine, *Secrecy in US Foreign Policy: Nixon, Kissinger and the Rapprochement with China*, 98-99.

67 Memorandum of Conversation. Meeting between the President with Pakistan President Yahya, October 25, 1970.

68 Chinese Communist Initiative. October 25, 1970, E012958, 1-4/4, 01-03-02.

69 Kissinger and Luce, *White House Years*, 168.

70 Chinese Communist Initiative. October 25, 1970.

the main obstacles of US-PRC relations after rapprochement. Zhou indicated to Khan in this report that the “Taiwan question is central and there has been no progress made in resolving it. The Chinese leaders welcome Nixon’s envoy to Beijing to discuss the removal of US troops from Taiwan,”<sup>71</sup> showing a strong opposition against the US troops presence in Taiwan.

Following Kissinger’s submission of this initiative, on the same day, Nixon spoke at a press conference. Nixon claimed, “We are going to continue the initiative that I have begun, an initiative of relaxing trade and travel restrictions while attempting to open channels of communication with Communist China, having in mind the fact that looking long toward the future we must have some communication and eventually relations with Communist China.”<sup>72</sup> Like Zhou, Nixon showed strong means to continue building relations with China regardless of some opposition at home due to the “Taiwan Question.”

On April 14, 1971, an American table tennis team was sent to China and Nixon announced that Chinese nationals could obtain visas to visit the United States. However, Nixon still had not heard back from both Pakistan and China regarding to the details of the US visit to China. During a phone call with Kissinger, also dated April 1971, Nixon reminded himself and Kissinger that “the American public’s opinion is still against Communist China.”<sup>73</sup> The two continued to discuss the reactions in Taiwan and at home about the announcement of the Communist China Initiative. As a response to Nixon’s momentary reality check, Kissinger stood firm and said, “It is a tragedy that it has to happen to Chiang at the end of his life but we have to be cold about it.”<sup>74</sup> In turn, Nixon responded, “We have to do what’s best for us.” He confirmed Kissinger’s comment on continuing the plan of Communist China Initiative regardless of the opposition and absence of definite response from China regarding the visit.

### **A Handwritten Message to Nixon**

On April 29,<sup>75</sup> 1971, two weeks after the abovementioned phone conversation between Nixon and Kissinger, the Pakistani Ambassador to the United States brought in a handwritten message to Henry Kissinger.<sup>76</sup> This message, addressed to President Nixon, was written by Zhou Enlai on April 2.

Zhou first conveyed a deep gratefulness towards President Yahya Khan for bridging the two countries together. He then vaguely explained the long silence of China by briefly

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71 Chinese Communist Initiative. October 25, 1970.

72 “Getting to Beijing: Henry Kissinger’s Secret 1971 Trip.”

73 The President/Mr.Kissinger. Telcon(tape), April 14<sup>th</sup>, 1971.

74 Ibid.

75 In the national archives transcript, which was classified until January 8 2002, the date that Kissinger received the message was noted as April 27, 1971 at 6:15 PM. However, in Kissinger’s *On China*, the date that he received the message was noted as April 29, 1971 in Henry Kissinger, *On China* (New York: Penguin Press, 2011).

76 Henry Kissinger, *On China* (New York: Penguin Press, 2011): 233.

stating, “Owing to the situation of the time it has not been possible to reply earlier to the message from the President of the USA to the Premier of People’s Republic of China,”<sup>77</sup> without explaining what “the situation” had been for China. According to Sultan Mohammed Khan, the former Foreign Secretary of Pakistan, the delay could have been due to “the cultural revolution and Zhou’s own position, which was under a serious threat by a faction of the Red Guards.”<sup>78</sup>

After giving an unspecified reason for the delay, Zhou went straight to the point by conveying China’s willingness to receive envoys from the United States. He stated, “The Chinese Government reaffirms its willingness to receive publically in Peking a special envoy of the President of the US, for instance, Mr. Kissinger, or the US Secretary of State or even the President of the US himself for direct meeting and discussions. Of course, if the US President considers that the time is not yet right the matter may be deferred to a later date... it is believed that it is entirely possible for public arrangements to be made through the good offices of President Yahya Khan.”<sup>79</sup> With this green light from Zhou, Nixon and Kissinger proceeded to organize a visit to China.

### **First Envoy to the People’s Republic of China**

As his name was specifically mentioned in the note that had been written by Zhou, Kissinger was the first envoy sent to China by Nixon. Nixon told Kissinger to be strong and “not to indicate a willingness to abandon much of our support for Taiwan until it was necessary to do so...discussions with the Chinese cannot look like a sellout of Taiwan.”<sup>80</sup> Nixon also warned Kissinger that it should be made clear to the Chinese that “they should not meet with other US political figures before meeting with Nixon”<sup>81</sup> besides Kissinger, who was scheduled to meet with the Chinese leaders on July 10.

Kissinger first flew to Islamabad, Pakistan on July 9. He met with Yahya Khan and extensively asked Khan “how to handle the Chinese in the toast, how to treat them, and how to respond to them.”<sup>82</sup> Kissinger wanted to understand “the Chinese technique of talking to foreigners, and how much one should withhold” when talking to the Chinese leaders.<sup>83</sup> Kissinger left Islamabad the following day and flew to Beijing.

Kissinger was not able to meet with Mao, but meeting with Zhou had not disappointed Kissinger at all. In 2011, Kissinger noted that he had never seen a “more compelling

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77 Message from Premier Chou Enlai (delivered to Mr. Kissinger – 6:15 PM). April 2, 1971.

78 “PBS: General Article: Foreign Affairs of Nixon,” American Experience: TV’s Most-watched History Series, accessed June 02, 2016, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/general-article/nixon-foreign/>.

79 Message from Premier Chou Enlai.

80 The President’s Files. Meeting between President, Dr. Kissinger and General Haig, Thursday, July 1, 1971, The Oval Office, National Archives, E01295, 06-08-09.

81 “Getting To Beijing: Henry Kissinger’s Secret 1971 Trip | US-China Institute.”

82 Khan, “On: Dr. Kissinger’s Journey to China.”

83 Ibid.

figure than Zhou Enlai”<sup>84</sup> in about sixty years of his public life. During his visit, Kissinger discussed two main topics with Zhou – Vietnam and Taiwan.<sup>85</sup> And most importantly, they agreed to establish Nixon’s visit to China and describe it as an “extended invitation” along with Mao’s presence. Nixon accepted this invitation “with pleasure.”<sup>86</sup>

Kissinger returned with Islamabad after two days of visit to Beijing on the 11. According to Mohammed Khan, as soon as he landed in Pakistan, Kissinger showed extreme excitement “and said what a wonderful visit he had. He discussed in general terms about Zhou Enlai: What a great statesman he is and how different from other world leaders he was – kind, hospitable, and willing to listen to the other point of view.”<sup>87</sup> This positive first contact with China was a reassuring indication to both Pakistan and Nixon that the United States will be able to further advance in having discussions with China.

### Concluding Words

Several days after Kissinger’s return to the United States, on July 15, Nixon publicly announced that he had sent Kissinger to China and that an agreement for the US presidential trip to China had been established. Nixon explained his objective of rapprochement with China in this announcement. He claimed, “I have taken this action because of my profound conviction that all nations will gain from a reduction of tensions and a better relationship between the United States and the People’s Republic of China.”<sup>88</sup> Months after this announcement, Nixon marked the historical visit to the PRC from February 21-28, 1972.

Nixon understood the importance of opening up to China and to include it in the existing international system. He had learned this lesson earlier after having analyzed the outcomes and failures of the United States’ involvement in the continuous warfare in Asia against the Communist powers. With three years of unceasing effort, Nixon shrewdly befriended Pakistan as the main communication channel to China. After the last meeting with Kissinger during his visit to China, Zhou asked Kissinger to take a stroll outside with him and commented, “Let us not forget the bridge which made this meeting possible, Pakistan has played a crucial role...it is a bridge between us and we should never forget it.”<sup>89</sup> If it had not been Pakistan that played this important role of linking China and the US, the outcome of Nixon’s plan may have been different.

With careful planning and sharp analysis of every move that the Chinese took, Nixon was able to establish relations with the PRC for the first time in the United States’ history. This effort would later become the building blocks of the official US-China normalization

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84 Henry Kissinger, *On China*, 241.

85 For the focus of this paper, the bridging of US-China rapprochement, the details of Vietnam and Taiwan dialogue is omitted.

86 Henry Kissinger, *On China*, 254-255.

87 Khan, “On: Dr. Kissinger’s Journey to China.”

88 “Getting to Beijing: Henry Kissinger’s Secret 1971 Trip.”

89 Khan, “On: Dr. Kissinger’s Journey to China.”

on January 1, 1979, through the US-China Joint Communiqué.

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