MAO'S CHINA AND THE COLD WAR

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CHAPTER 9 THE SINO-AMERICAN RAPPROCHEMENT, 1969–1972

He said he was not a complicated man, but really very simple. He was, he said, only a lone monk walking the world with a leaky umbrella.
—Edgar Snow after interviewing Mao Zedong (18 December 1970)

Early in 1969, it seemed that the conflict between the People's Republic of China and the United States had reached the worst in two decades. When the newly elected U.S. president Richard Nixon delivered his inaugural address on 20 January, Beijing's propaganda machine immediately fiercely attacked the "jittery chieftain of U.S. imperialism." *Renmin ribao* (People's Daily) and *Hongqi* (The Red Flag), the Chinese Communist Party's mouthpieces, jointly published an editorial essay characterizing Nixon's address as nothing but "a confession in an impasse," which demonstrated that "the U.S. imperialists . . . are beset with profound crises both at home and abroad."[1] Indeed, the wording of the essay appeared quite similar to the anti-American rhetoric prevailing in the Chinese media during the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. There appeared nothing new or unusual in it. Yet this was not one of the many ordinary anti-American propaganda pieces that the Chinese media churned out during the Cultural Revolution years. What made it unique was that it was published alongside Nixon's address in its entirety. More interestingly, major newspapers all over China, although following the general practice during the Cultural Revolution of reprinting the commentator's essay, also reprinted Nixon's address. This was unprecedented in the history of the People's Republic.

Not until the late 1980s did we learn through newly released Chinese documents that it was Mao Zedong who personally ordered the publication of Nixon's address.[2] The likely reason behind the chairman's order was a point the U.S. president made in his speech: the United States was willing to develop relations with *all* countries in the world.[3] The Chinese chairman, who had been paying attention both to the U.S. presidential election and to Nixon

as a presidential candidate, immediately caught the subtext of Nixon's statement.[4] Perhaps he ordered the publication of the U.S. president's address to reveal that he had noticed Nixon's message.[5]

This was the beginning of a dramatic process that would lead to Nixon's visit to China in February 1972, during which the U.S. president met face-to-face with the Chinese chairman in Beijing. Toward the end of the "week that changed the world" Nixon and Chinese premier Zhou Enlai signed the historic Shanghai communiqué symbolizing the end of an era of intense conflict between China and the United States that had lasted for over two decades.

The conventional interpretation of Beijing's rapprochement with the United States emphasizes the role strategic/geopolitical considerations played. Scholars favoring this interpretation usually argue that when the Soviet Union had emerged as the most serious threat to the PRC's security interests, especially to China's border safety in the north and northeast, it was impossible for Beijing's leader to maintain simultaneously the same level of discord with the United States. By achieving a rapprochement with Washington, Beijing's leaders drastically improved China's strategic position vis-à-vis the Soviet threat, thus serving China's security interests.[6]

Indeed, Beijing's rapprochement with Washington yielded considerable improvements in China's strategic position, as well as its international status. The simple fact that the PRC, after being excluded from the United Nations for over two decades, gained its position at the UN in October 1971 proves the enormous strategic value of the Sino-American rapprochement to Beijing. This chapter, however, argues that the geopolitics-centered interpretation alone does not fully reveal the complicated reasons behind Mao's decision to improve relations with the United States. In order to achieve a better understanding of the issue, this chapter places the Sino-American rapprochement in the context of the fading status of Mao's continuous revolution. It is important to note that the Sino-American rapprochement came at a time when the Cultural Revolution and the more general enterprise of Mao's continuous revolution had been declining. This chapter argues that a profound connection existed between these two phenomena and that the interpretation emphasizing the strategic/geopolitical element will make better sense if its link to the end of Mao's continuous revolution is properly comprehended.

China in 1968–1969: Deteriorating Security, Fading Revolution

Undoubtedly China in 1968–69 was facing a rapidly worsening security situation. The contention between China and the United States, which began at the very moment of the PRC's establishment, seemed more intense than

ever before. In response to the escalation of the Vietnam War and increas-ing American military involvement in it, Beijing dispatched large numbers of engineering and antiaircraft artillery forces to North Vietnam while provid-ing the Vietnamese Communists with substantial military and other support.[7] Beijing and Washington thus were in danger of repeating their Korean War experience—when they were both dragged into a direct military confronta-tion. Such security threats from China's southern borders were made worse with the sustained military standoff between the CCP and the GMD across the Taiwan Strait, as well as by Japan's and South Korea's hostile attitudes toward the PRC. Consequently, Beijing perceived that, from Bohai Bay to the Gulf of Tonkin, all of China's coastal borders were under siege.[8]

The security situation along China's long western border with India was no better. Since the Chinese-Indian border war of 1962, Beijing and New Delhi each regarded the other as a dangerous enemy. Although India, in the wake of its humiliating defeat in the 1962 clash, was not in a position to threaten Chi-nese border safety militarily, it was more than capable of damaging Beijing's reputation as a self-proclaimed "peace-loving country" among Third World nations. It was also likely to pin down Beijing's valuable resources and strategic attention in China's remote western areas.[9]

The worst threat to China's border security existed in the north, from a former ally—the Soviet Union. Since the late 1950s, significant differences be-tween Chinese and Soviet leaders had begun to develop in the wake of the Soviet leader Khrushchev's de-Stalinization campaign. Starting in the early 1960s, along with the escalation of the great Sino-Soviet polemic debate, the disputes between Beijing and Moscow quickly spread from the ideological field to state-to-state relations.[10] The hostility between the two Communist giants flared into hatred when the Cultural Revolution swept across China, with Bei-jing and Moscow each regarding the other as a "traitor" to true communism. Since 1965, both countries had continuously increased their military deploy-ments along their shared borders. By 1968–69, each side had amassed several hundred thousand troops along the border areas that, only less than a decade ago, had been boasted as a region characterized by "peace and eternal safety."[11]

China's already extremely tense security situation dramatically worsened in March 1969, when two bloody conflicts erupted between Chinese and Soviet border garrison forces on Zhenbao Island (Damansky Island in Russian), lo-cated near the Chinese bank of the Ussuri River. This incident immediately brought China and the Soviet Union to the brink of a general war, and, re-portedly, the Soviet leaders even considered conducting a preemptive nuclear strike against their former Communist ally.[12]

Chinese soldiers patrolling at Zhenbao Island, March 1969. Xinhua News Agency.

Given the dramatic deterioration of China's security situation in 1968–69, it is not surprising that Beijing's leaders had to improve their nation's security environment by making major changes in China's foreign policy and security strategy. The scholars who have argued that the Sino-American rapprochement represented a calculated effort by Beijing to counter the grave Soviet threat have the support of strong historical evidence. However, although this interpretation makes good sense in explaining why in 1968–69 it was *necessary* for Beijing to make major changes in Chinese foreign policy and security strategy, it does not explain how and why it became *possible* for Beijing's leaders to achieve such changes in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Historically, how to deal with the United States was for Beijing not just a foreign policy issue but rather an issue concerning the very essence of the Chinese revolution. From the moment that the "new China" came into being, Beijing's leaders regarded the United States as China's primary enemy. They consistently declared that a fundamental aim of the Chinese revolution was to destroy the "old" world order dominated by the U.S. imperialists. Through endless propaganda campaigns and constant indoctrination efforts, Beijing had portrayed the United States as the "bastion of all reactionary forces in the world," as responsible for sinking China into the abyss of national humiliation in modern times, and as keeping China divided after the "libera-

tion" of the Chinese mainland by supporting the GMD in Taiwan after 19.
For almost two decades, the United States had been thoroughly demonized
the Chinese popular image. As a result, the theme of "struggling against U
imperialism" had occupied a central position in Mao's efforts to legitim
his continuous revolution and was frequently invoked by the CCP to mobil
hundreds of millions of ordinary Chinese to participate in Mao's revoluti
ary movements—most recently, the Cultural Revolution.[13] Beijing's pursui
fundamental changes in Chinese policy toward the United States therefore w
fraught with political hazards, not least of which was possible detriment to t
legitimacy of the Chinese Communist revolution. It seemed that unless Be
jing's leaders were willing to make basic compromises in their commitmen
to the anti-imperialist Communist ideology, it would be impossible for the
to pursue a rapprochement with the United States.

In explaining why Beijing was able to achieve such comprises, scholars
voring the geopolitics-centered interpretation have argued that for polic
makers in *any* country, ultimately, ideological beliefs do not matter if they a
in conflict with vital "national security interests." In the case of Mao's Chi
these scholars believe that despite Mao and his comrades' strong commitme
to Marxist-Leninist ideology, they were willing to sacrifice this ideolog
faith if it was in conflict with China's "national security interests." Theref
according to these scholars, ideological beliefs as essential agents in fore
policymaking are only of secondary importance compared to geopolitics a
security concerns.[14]

These arguments, however, have ignored two important factors. First, B
jing's leaders were pursuing a rapprochement with the United States wit
the context of radically redefining their concept of imperialism by ident
ing the Soviet Union as a "social-imperialist country" and arguing that M
cow had replaced Washington as the "bastion of reactionary forces in
world." Second, in terms of the relations between ideology and security c
cerns the Sino-American rapprochement was less a case in which ideolog
beliefs yielded to the security interests than one in which ideology, as an ess
tial element shaping foreign policy decisions, experienced subtle struct
changes as the result of the fading status of Mao's continuous revolution.

In Leninist vocabulary, "imperialism" represented the "highest stage"
the development of capitalism. Therefore, an imperialist country had t
capitalist in the first place; thus, few would ever call the Soviet Union "cap
ist" given its overwhelmingly socialist/Communist-dominated economic
political structures. However, in the wake of the great Sino-Soviet polemic
bate, Beijing claimed that capitalism had been "restored" in the Soviet Un

with the emerging dominance of a new "privileged bureaucratic capitalist class."[15] During the height of the Cultural Revolution, and especially after the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968, Beijing charged that the Soviet Union had become a "social-imperialist country." Consequently, both in the Chinese Communist definition of the "main contradiction" in the world and in Chinese propaganda, "Soviet social-imperialism" gradually replaced "U.S. imperialism" to become the primary and most dangerous enemy of the world proletarian revolution.[16] Within this new theoretical framework, U.S. imperialism remained China's enemy but no longer the primary one.

Such basic changes in Beijing's definition of "imperialism" did not take place simply as a justification of Chinese efforts to counter the escalating Soviet threat to China's security interests, they were determined by the essence of the Cultural Revolution. Indeed, according to Mao, the fundamental reason that he initiated the Cultural Revolution was to prevent a Soviet-style "capitalist restoration" from taking place in China.[17] Beijing thus would have to identify the Soviet Union as an imperialist/capitalist country. In addition, excluding the Soviet Union completely from the revolutionary camp would help guarantee China's central position in the world proletarian revolution.

All of these changes had provided the much needed ideological space for Beijing to justify a rapprochement with the United States. In Maoist political philosophy, which had been heavily influenced by the traditional Chinese political culture emphasizing the necessity of "borrowing the strength of the barbarians to check the barbarians," it was always legitimate to pursue a "united front" with a less dangerous enemy in order to focus on the contest against the primary enemy.[18] Since Beijing identified the "social-imperialist" Soviet Union as the most dangerous among all imperialist countries in the world, a rapprochement with the imperialist United States, an enemy now less dangerous in comparison, became feasible and justifiable for Beijing's leaders even in ideological terms.

In a deeper sense, Beijing was also able to pursue a rapprochement with Washington because, for the first time in the PRC's history, Mao's continuous revolution was losing momentum due to the chairman's *own* reasons. A belated socialization phenomenon finally was taking its bite to reduce the vigor of Mao's revolution.

From a historical perspective, the Cultural Revolution represented the climax of Mao's efforts to transform China's "old" state and society through extensive mass mobilization. Mao initiated the Cultural Revolution for two purposes. First, he hoped that it would allow him to discover new means to promote the transformation of China's party, state, and society in accordance

with his ideals—that China should be transformed into a land of prospe and universal justice and equality. Second, he desired to use it to enhance much weakened authority and reputation in the wake of the disastrous G Leap Forward. In the chairman's mind, his strengthened leadership role w best guarantee the success of his revolution.[19]

By carrying out the Cultural Revolution, Mao easily achieved the sec goal, making his power and authority absolute. But he failed to get any cl to achieving his first goal. Although the power of the mass movement rele by the Cultural Revolution destroyed both Mao's opponents and the party-state control system, it was unable to create the new form of state po Mao desired so much for building a new society in China.[20] Despite all of t however, Mao was ready to halt the revolution in 1968–69.

In summer 1968, Mao dispatched the "Workers' Mao Zedong Thou Propaganda Team" to various universities in Beijing to reestablish the or that had been undermined by the "revolutionary masses." At the Qinghua U versity, the Red Guards, who were once Mao's main instrument for initia and carrying out the Cultural Revolution, responded by opening fire on team. It was at this point that Mao decided it was time to dismantle the R Guards movement, thus leading his continuous revolution to a crucial tur point.[21] For almost two decades, "mobilizing the masses" had been the key Mao to maintain and enhance the momentum of his revolution; but now chairman openly stood in opposition to the masses in an upside-down effo reestablish the Communist state's control over society. It was against this b ground that, with the chairman's repeated pushes, the notion of China b "the center of the world revolution," which had been prevailing since the ginning of the Cultural Revolution, began to disappear in Maoist discour In the meantime, Mao completely stopped talking about the role "tens could play in stirring up revolutionary spirit and creating a revolutionary vironment. Instead, he frequently emphasized the importance of "consol ing" the achievements of the Cultural Revolution—which, in reality, m no more than strengthening his own authority and political power.[23] Th were critical signs that Mao's China as a revolutionary state, after bein uncompromising challenger to the "old world" (and attempting to trans China's "old" state and society) for two decades, was now beginning to dem strate a willingness to live with the yet-to-be-transformed "old" world or In other words, a "socialization" process—to borrow a critical concept fr David Armstrong—had been eroding the Maoist revolution.[24] It was wit this context that, when the security threat from the Soviet Union escal

dramatically in 1969, Mao began to consider adopting a new policy toward the United States.

The First Probe: Reports by the Marshals

Since the 1950s, Mao's main source for information about the outside world had been *Cakao ziliao*, an internally circulated journal edited by the Xinhua News Agency.[25] Late in 1967, he noticed an article written by Richard Nixon, in which the former U.S. vice president claimed: "Taking the long view, we simply cannot afford to leave China forever outside the family of nations, there to nurture its fantasies, cherish its hates and threaten its neighbors. There is no place on this small planet for a billion of its potentially most able people to live in angry isolation."[26] Reportedly, Mao not only read the article himself but also recommended it to Zhou Enlai, commenting that if Nixon was to become the next president, U.S. policy toward China might possibly change.[27] Yet this was a time that both the Cultural Revolution and American intervention in Vietnam were peaking. For the moment, neither Beijing nor Washington did anything to reduce the hostility between them.[28]

The first sign of change appeared in November 1968, when the United States proposed to resume the stagnant Sino-American ambassadorial talks in Warsaw. China responded positively and with "unprecedented speed."[29] Then, in January 1969, Mao ordered the publication of Nixon's inaugural address. One month later, however, because Washington provided asylum to Liao Heshu, a Chinese chargé d'affaires in the Netherlands who defected to the West in February 1969, Beijing canceled the ambassadorial talks that had been scheduled to resume on 20 February.[30]

Although we cannot know exactly what Mao was thinking when he showed some interest in dealing with the United States, one thing is certain: the chairman now was turning more of his attention to international issues, trying to understand the orientation of Moscow's and Washington's global strategies in the wake of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968. Late in 1968 and early in 1969, in a series of conversations with foreign visitors to China, the chairman revealed his deep concern about the expansionist nature of Soviet foreign policy. Indeed, he tried hard to comprehend the significance of Soviet behavior, wondering aloud if the Soviet invasion should be interpreted as the prelude to a more general war. In the chairman's view, now "all under the heaven is in great chaos."[31]

It was against this background that Mao asked four veteran military commanders, Marshals Chen Yi, Ye Jianying, Xu Xiangqian, and Nie Rongzhen,

all of whom had been excluded from the decision-making inner circle during the Cultural Revolution and were then "conducting investigation and study" at four factories in Beijing, to "pay attention to" international affairs. In late February, Zhou Enlai, following Mao's instructions, told Chen Yi and the other three marshals to meet "once a week" to discuss "important international issues" in order to provide the party Central Committee with their opinions.[32] The four marshals began to meet on 1 March, and, by late March, they had held four meetings. The first meeting was a general discussion. The next three were held after the Sino-Soviet border clash at Zhenbao Island, so the discussion focused on assessing the implications of the clash and analyzing Soviet strategy toward China. On 18 March, the marshals finished their first report, "An Analysis of War Situation in the World"; eleven days later they had completed their second report, "The Zhenbao Island as a Tree in the Forest of the Whole World." In both reports, the marshals cast doubt on the notion that the Soviet Union was ready to wage a major war against China, since this would "require the mobilization of at least three million troops." They also pointed out that the focus of the American-Soviet global dispute was "the competition over oil resources in the Middle East" and that before the situation there had been resolved, the Soviet Union could not easily turn its main strategic attention to China. Their main policy suggestions focused on upgrading the troops' training level, strengthening the militia forces, and further developing China's national defense industry. Nowhere in the reports did the marshals refer to the sensitive question of adjusting Chinese policy toward the United States.[33]

We do not know whether Mao had read the two reports. At the CCP's Ninth National Congress held from 1 to 24 April, the party leadership, while emphasizing the danger of a major war with "social-imperialists" and "imperialists," continued harsh attacks on the United States. In the main political report delivered by Lin Biao, then China's second in command and Mao's designated successor, there was nothing to indicate that Beijing had changed its attitude toward the United States.[34]

Lin's report, however, was prepared for a public audience. When Mao wanted a more sophisticated understanding of the changing world situation, he again turned to the four marshals. Right after the conclusion of the Ninth Congress, Mao instructed the marshals to resume regular meetings to "study the international situation."[35] The marshals were reluctant to accept the mission since the party congress had already defined China's foreign policies. If they simply repeated the official statement, the "study" would be meaningless

but if they presented something new, they risked being charged with "challenging" the party's established policy. In order to dispel the marshals' doubts, Zhou Enlai told them in mid-May that Mao assigned them this task because the international situation was "too complicated" to fit the Ninth Congress's conclusions. Zhou also asked the marshals not to be "restricted by any established framework" in their thinking and to try to help Mao to "gain command of the new tendency in the strategic development" in the world. Zhou stressed that Mao decided to assign them the task because they were marshals and had much experience and superb strategic visions.[36] The premier also appointed Xiong Xianghui and Yao Guang, two experienced high-ranking diplomats, to assist the marshals in conducting discussions and drafting reports.[37]

The marshals began to meet on 7 June 1969. On 11 July they submitted a comprehensive report, "A Preliminary Evaluation of the War Situation," to Mao and the Central Committee. They argued that the United States and the Soviet Union were "two 'brands' of representatives of the international bourgeoisie class." While taking China as their enemy, they took "each other as the enemy" too. For them, "the real threat is the one existing between themselves." Since both the United States and the Soviet Union were facing many difficulties at home and abroad, and since the focus of the strategic confrontation between them existed in Europe, stressed the marshals, "it is unlikely that U.S. imperialists and Soviet revisionists will launch a large-scale war against China, either jointly or separately."[38] Because the marshals focused their attention on whether China was facing a serious war threat, they did not further probe into the question of adjusting Chinese foreign policy.

After the marshals adjourned on 11 July, several signs indicated that subtle changes were taking place in Washington's attitude toward China. On 21 July, the U.S. State Department announced that it was relaxing restrictions on American citizens traveling to China; five days later, Prince Norodom Sihanouk, Cambodia's chief of state, conveyed a letter by Senator Mike Mansfield to Zhou Enlai, in which the veteran American politician expressed the desire to visit China to seek solutions to the "twenty-year confrontation" between the two countries. Moscow also proposed a meeting between top Chinese and Soviet leaders around the same time.[39]

To better understand these new developments, the marshals resumed their discussions on 29 July. In addition to contemplating the possibility of "intentionally utilizing the contradictions between the United States and the Soviet Union," they believed that not only should border negotiations with the Soviet Union be held in order to strengthen "our position in the struggle against

Zhou Enlai (right) *and Aleksei Kosygin at the Beijing airport, 11 September 1969. Xinhua News Agency.*

America" but other policy options should also be considered. However, they did not believe that the time was right to accept Mansfield's request to visit China and proposed to "let him wait for a while."[40]

Before the marshals could put these opinions into writing, another major border clash, one larger than the two clashes at Zhenbao Island in March, occurred between Chinese and Soviet garrisons in Xinjiang on 13 August, in which an entire Chinese brigade was eliminated.[41] Beijing reacted immediately to this incident, and to other signs indicating that Moscow probably was preparing to start a major war against China. On 28 August, the CCP Central Committee ordered Chinese provinces and regions bordering the Soviet Union and Outer Mongolia to enter a status of general mobilization.[42] The marshals, meanwhile, still believed it unlikely for the Soviet Union to wage a large-scale war against China, but, at the same time, they emphasized the need for Beijing to be prepared for a worst-case scenario. Within this context, Chen Yi and Ye Jianying mentioned that in order for China to be ready for a major confrontation with the Soviet Union, "the card of the United States" should be played. In another written report, "Our Views about the Current Situation," completed on 17 September, they pointed out that although Mos-

cow indeed was intending to "wage a war against China" and had made "war deployments," the Soviet leaders were unable "to reach a final decision because of political considerations." They proposed that in addition to waging "a tit-for-tat struggle against both the United States and the Soviet Union," China should use "negotiation as a means to struggle against them," and then perhaps the Sino-American ambassadorial talks should be resumed "when the timing is proper."[43] After submitting the report, Chen Yi confided some of his "unconventional thoughts" to Zhou Enlai, proposing that in addition to resuming the ambassadorial talks in Warsaw, China should "take the initiative in proposing to hold Sino-American talks at the ministerial or even higher levels, so that basic and related problems in Sino-American relations can be solved."[44]

We do not know exactly how Mao responded to these reports. Yet the fact that the chairman, through Zhou Enlai, encouraged the marshals to present ideas that were not necessarily consistent with the general foreign policy line set up by the party's Ninth Congress is revealing enough. Apparently, what the chairman wanted to get was exactly such "unconventional thoughts." According to Mao's doctor, Li Zhisui, the chairman said in August 1969: "Think about this. We have the Soviet Union to the north and the west, India to the south, and Japan to the east. If all our enemies were to unite, attacking us from the north, south, east, and west, what do you think we should do? . . . Think again. Beyond Japan is the United States. Didn't our ancestors counsel negotiating with faraway countries while fighting with those that are near?"[45]

With these "unconventional thoughts" in mind, apparently the chairman was determined to explore the possibility of opening relations with the United States. Now the main question facing him was: through what channel could Beijing establish communication with the Americans? Not just by coincidence, Nixon was eager to find the answer to the same question.

Opening Moves

In fall 1969, there existed no channel of communication between China and the United States. The last meeting of the Sino-American ambassadorial talks was held in Warsaw in January 1968, which since had been indefinitely suspended. Therefore, when President Nixon intended to let the Chinese know of his "readiness to open communication with Peking [Beijing],"[46] he had to travel a circuitous path. During an around-the-world trip beginning in late July 1969, the U.S. president talked to Pakistani president Mohammad Yahya Khan and Romanian leader Nicolae Ceauşescu, both of whom had good relations with Beijing, asking them to convey to the Chinese leaders his belief that "Asia could not 'move forward' if a nation as large as China remained iso-

lated."[47] When Zhou Enlai received the message from Yahya Khan via Zhang Tong, Chinese ambassador to Pakistan, he commented in a report to Mao on 16 November 1969: "The direction of movement of Nixon and [Henry] Kissinger is noteworthy."[48] But Beijing made no immediate response to the message.

Washington took the first substantial move toward reopening channels of communication with Beijing on 3 December 1969, when the American ambassador to Poland, Walter Stoessel, following Nixon's instructions, approached a Chinese diplomat at a Yugoslavian fashion exhibition in Warsaw. The diplomat, caught off guard, quickly fled from the exhibition site. However, Stoessel was able to catch the Chinese interpreter, telling him in "broken Polish" that he had an important message for the Chinese embassy.[49]

This time Beijing's response was swift. After receiving the Chinese embassy's report on the American ambassador's "unusual behavior," Zhou Enlai immediately reported it to Mao, commenting that "the opportunity now is coming; we now have a brick in our hands to knock the door [of the Americans]."[50] The premier acted at once to let the Americans know of Beijing's interest in reopening communication with Washington.

In mid-October, the U.S. consulate in Hong Kong had inquired with Guangdong provincial authorities about the conditions of two Americans who had been held in China since mid-February, when their yacht had strayed into China's territorial water off Guangdong. Early in November, the Chinese Foreign Ministry, regarding the American inquiry as an "intentional probe designed to see how China would respond," proposed that the two Americans be released "at a suitable time," and that the American embassy in Warsaw be informed of the release. The proposal had sat on Zhou's desk for almost one month until 4 December, when the premier decided to approve the Foreign Ministry's proposal. Two days later, after Mao approved Zhou's decision, the two Americans were freed.[51]

In the meantime, the Chinese embassy in Warsaw followed Beijing's instructions to inform the American embassy by telephone that Lei Yang, Chinese chargé d'affaires, was willing to meet Ambassador Stoessel. On 11 December 1969, Lei and Stoessel held an "informal meeting" at the Chinese embassy, at which the American ambassador, in addition to proposing a resumption of the ambassadorial talks, asked the Chinese to "pay attention to a series of positive measures the American side has taken in recent months."[52] The next day, after receiving Lei's three reports detailing the discussions, Zhou, while proposing to Mao to "hold off" resuming formal talks with the Americans "for a while" so as to "watch reactions from various sides," immedi-

ately met with K. M. Kaiser, the Pakistani ambassador to China. Through him, he asked Yahya Khan to inform Washington that "if President Nixon intends to resume contacts with China," he should first try to use the "official channel of communication in Warsaw."[53] One week later, Zhou's message was delivered by Agha Hilaly, Pakistani ambassador to the United States, in Washington.[54]

On 8 January, Lei and Stoessel held another informal meeting at the American embassy in Warsaw. The two sides agreed to resume the ambassadorial talks on 20 January, which would be held in turn at the Chinese and American embassies.[55] When the Sino-American ambassadorial talks formally resumed on 20 January at the Chinese embassy, Stoessel expressed Washington's intention to improve relations with China, stating that, in order to have a "more thorough discussion" on "any question" related to Sino-American relations, Washington was willing to dispatch an envoy to Beijing or accept one from the Chinese government in Washington. Lei Yang, already having received detailed instructions from Beijing concerning how to deal with different scenarios, replied that if Washington was interested in "holding meetings at higher levels or through other channels," the Americans might present more specific proposals "for discussion in future ambassadorial talks."[56]

The second formal meeting between Lei and Stoessel was scheduled to be held at the American embassy on 20 February 1970. Top leaders in Beijing carefully prepared for it. On 12 February, Zhou Enlai chaired a politburo meeting to draft instructions and prepare speech notes for Lei Yang. The politburo decided that Lei should inform the American side that "if the U.S. government is willing to dispatch a minister-level official or a special envoy representing the president to visit Beijing to explore further solutions to the fundamental questions in Sino-American relations, the Chinese government will receive him." The decision was approved by Mao on the same day.[57] When Lei met with Stoessel on 20 February, he highlighted the Taiwan issue, emphasizing that Taiwan was part of Chinese territory and that "withdrawal of all U.S. armed forces from the Taiwan Strait area" and the "solution of the Taiwan issue" were the preconditions for "fundamentally improving Sino-American relations." The Chinese chargé d'affaires, though, also mentioned that China was willing to "consider and discuss whatever ideas and suggestions" the American side would present to "reduce tensions between China and the United States and fundamentally improve the relations between them in accordance with the five principles of peaceful coexistence." In particular, he informed the American ambassador that the Chinese government "will be willing to receive" a high-ranking American representative in Beijing.[58]

This meeting turned out to be the last one of the decade-long Sino-Ameri-

can ambassadorial talks. After the meeting, President Nixon, eager to bring contact with Beijing to a higher and more substantial level, conveyed (again through Yahya Khan) the following message to Beijing: "We prepare to open a direct channel of communication from the White House to Beijing. If Beijing agrees [to establish such a channel], its existence will not be known by anyone outside the White House, and we guarantee that [we have] the complete freedom to make decisions." Zhou Enlai received the message on 21 March and commented: "Nixon intends to adopt the method of the [American-Vietnamese] negotiation in Paris and let Kissinger make the contact."[59]

But Nixon's message arrived at a bad time. Just a few days before, Prince Norodom Sihanouk, while on an annual vacation abroad, was removed by the National Assembly as Cambodia's chief of state, and the pro-American general Lon Nol became the head of the new government. Sihanouk went to Beijing and established an exile resistance government. In the meantime, the Khmer Rouge, now a Sihanouk ally, dramatically increased military activities in Cambodia with the cooperation of North Vietnamese troops. These new developments in Indochina complicated Washington's and Beijing's efforts to move forward with communications. On 24 March, in a report to Mao and Lin Biao, Zhou Enlai proposed to postpone the next Sino-American ambassadorial meeting until after mid-April; Mao approved.[60] In April, because Taiwan's vice premier Jiang Jingguo (Jiang Jieshi's son) was to visit the United States, the State Department found it "unwise to schedule talks with Peking [Beijing] in Warsaw within two weeks before or ten days after the trip," and thus the meeting date again was postponed to 20 May.[61]

Early in May, Nixon ordered American troops in South Vietnam to conduct a large-scale cross-border operation aimed at destroying Vietnamese Communist bases inside Cambodia. On 16 May, Zhou Enlai chaired a politburo meeting to discuss the situation in Indochina. The participants decided that the Sino-American ambassadorial meeting scheduled for 20 May in Warsaw should be postponed, that a statement would be issued in Mao's name to support the anti-American imperialist struggle throughout the world, and that anti-American protests and rallies would be held in major Chinese cities.[62] On 18 May, Beijing announced the postponement of the Sino-American talks in Warsaw. Two days later, when a million Chinese held a protest rally at Tiananmen Square, Mao issued a statement written in tough anti-American language, calling for "the people of the world to unite and defeat the U.S. aggressors and all their running dogs."[63]

Despite Beijing's renewed anti-American propaganda, the Nixon adminis-

tration decided not to give up its effort to open channels of communication with China. In analyzing Mao's statement for Nixon, Kissinger found that "in substance . . . it is remarkably bland. . . . [I]t makes no threats, offers no commitments, is not personally abusive toward you [Nixon], and avoids positions on contentious bilateral issues."[64] On 15 June, Vernon Walters, military attaché at the American embassy in Paris, followed Washington's instructions to approach Fang Wen, the Chinese military attaché there, asking the Chinese to open another "confidential channel of communication" since the "Warsaw forum was too public and too formalistic."[65] But Beijing was not ready to come back to the table at the moment. On 16 June, at a politburo meeting chaired by Zhou Enlai, CCP leaders decided that, "given the current international situation," the ambassadorial talks in Warsaw "will be postponed further" and that only the Chinese liaison personnel would continue to maintain contacts with the Americans.[66] But Beijing did not want to allow the process toward opening relations with Washington to lose momentum completely. On 10 July, Beijing released Bishop James Walsh, an American citizen who had been imprisoned in China since 1958 on espionage charges.[67]

Beijing slowed the pace of opening communications with Washington in summer of 1970 not just because Nixon had ordered the invasion of Cambodia. A potential storm was brewing between two of China's most powerful men, Mao Zedong and Lin Biao, which forced the chairman to turn his main attention to domestic, and especially inner-party, affairs. After the party's Ninth Congress in April 1969 Lin's relations with the chairman turned sour, and they deteriorated rapidly during the summer of 1970. In designing China's new state structure reflecting "the achievements of the Cultural Revolution," Lin, as Mao's designated successor and China's second in command, argued that Mao should reclaim the position as chairman of the state, which, in Mao's eyes, reflected Lin's own ambition to occupy the position himself.[68] The struggle between Mao and Lin escalated significantly in the summer of 1970, leading to a de facto showdown between Mao and several of Lin's main supporters at a party Central Committee plenary session held from 23 August to 6 September at Lushan, the mountain summer resort for top party leaders. At one point, it seemed that Lin and his followers gained the support of most Central Committee members and that only after Mao personally addressed the plenary session did he control the situation.[69] This major power struggle at the Lushan conference occupied much of Mao's time and energy, making it difficult for him to take new steps in pursuing contacts with the Americans. Consequently, the process of opening relations with the United States was again deferred.