

Advanced Institute, Spring 2020
NIXON IN CHINA: DID WE GET CHINA WRONG?
Instructor: Daniel Blumenthal
Washington, DC

President Richard Nixon entered office with a grand plan to reshuffle the geopolitical deck. China had top billing in his designs, and an opening to Beijing was within reach.

Nixon's strategic opening to Beijing in 1972 marked a momentous change in US foreign policy. It realigned China from a Communist revolutionary adversary to a "normal" authoritarian partner in the Cold War. Today, many in the US believe that strategic bet has failed. China has become much richer, but it has not become freer. If anything, its increased wealth has equipped the Chinese Communist Party to devote even more resources to maintaining its authoritarian rule and monopoly on power.

This Weekend Seminar, led by Asia expert Dan Blumenthal, will explore the historic circumstances and strategic conditions that led to rapprochement between the US and China. Did we get China wrong in 1972? Is it fair to judge a policy from the height of the Cold War by today's circumstances? And in light of that question, how should we think about the US-China relationship today?

Friday, March 27, 2020

4 pm to 6 pm

The Strategic Context: The Geopolitical Context of the Nixon Presidency / Mao's China in the Late 1960s

Readings:

- Chen Jian, Introduction, Ch. 8, *Mao's China and the Cold War* (2001)
- Margaret MacMillan, Ch. 9, *Nixon and Mao: The Week that Changed the World* (2007)
- Richard Nixon, "Asia After Viet Nam," *Foreign Affairs*, October 1967
- Evan Thomas, Ch. 12, *Being Nixon: A Man Divided* (2015)

Discussion Questions:

1. What was the geopolitical situation in the late 1960s? In the global Cold War, who had the strategic upper hand—the US or the Soviet Union?
2. What was President Nixon's initial approach to China upon taking office in January 1969? What was the Soviet approach? How did each relate its China strategy to its Cold War strategy?
3. Describe China's strategic situation during this period. How did Mao understand the Cold War and China's role in the conflict? Why did China enter the Vietnam War, and how did the war alter the strategic environment?
4. How did domestic political concerns shape each country's strategy or decision-making? What role did ideology play?

Saturday, March 28, 2020

8:30 am to 9 am

Group Breakfast

9 am to Noon

US and Chinese Goals and Objectives During a Major Geopolitical Shift

Readings:

- Chen Jian, Ch. 9, *Mao's China and the Cold War* (2001)
- Margaret MacMillan, Ch. 16, *Nixon and Mao: The Week that Changed the World* (2007)
- Henry Kissinger, Memorandum for the President, November 11, 1972, pp.2-5
- Henry Kissinger, Memorandum for the President's Files, July 18, 1971

Discussion Questions:

1. With what objectives did the US and China enter into negotiations -- especially as they concerned Vietnam (Indochina), Taiwan, the Soviet Union, Korea, South Asia, and normalizing relations? What were the underlying strategic assumptions of each side?

Noon to 1:30 pm

Lunch and Discussion

1:30 pm to 4 pm

The Opening: The High Diplomacy of Rapprochement

Readings:

- Margaret MacMillan, Chs. 5, 18-19, *Nixon and Mao: The Week that Changed the World* (2007)
- Chou En-lai and President Henry Kissinger, Memorandum of Conversation, October 21, 1972
- Joint Statement Following Discussions with Leaders of the People's Republic of China, February 27, 1972
- *Nixon in China: The Film*, Part II (from 20:06 onwards), <https://youtu.be/4cfsI4ZjTbU?t=1206>

Discussion Questions:

1. Why did Mao invite Nixon to China? What was his rationale in accepting? What was Nixon's strategy going into the negotiations? What was Mao's?
2. How did the Soviet Union respond to Nixon's visit? US allies, like Japan and Taiwan?
3. What was the Shanghai Communiqué, and what did it achieve? How does it compare to the objectives of the key players at the beginning of US-China negotiations?
4. Who emerged as the winners and losers post-negotiations? How do you judge the performance of the key decision-makers in Washington and Beijing?

Sunday, March 29, 2020

8:30 am to 9 am

Group Breakfast

9 am to Noon

The Road to 1979: Normalization and Quasi-Alliance

Readings:

- Ezra Vogel, Ch. 9, *Deng Xiaoping and the Transformation of China* (2011)
- James C. Hsiung, "Reagan's China Policy and the Sino-Soviet Détente," *Asian Affairs* Vol 11 (2) 1984:1-11
- Dan Blumenthal, Introduction, Chs. 3, 8, *The China Nightmare: The Grand Ambitions of a Decaying State* (forthcoming)

Discussion Questions:

1. How did the geopolitical situation change following US-China rapprochement? Did any country emerge with the strategic upper hand?
2. Did Deng's strategy represent a break with Mao? Why or why not?
3. How did Nixon's visit shape US policy toward China in the years to come? In what ways was "engagement" a success; in what ways, a failure?
4. What different decisions might the US and China have made over the past 30 years that would have produced a better outcome in Sino-American relations today?