

US-CHINESE RAPPROCHEMENT: The Impact of the South Asian Crisis

Reuben Francis

This paper examines the rapprochement between China and the United States, which signaled a turning point in Cold War diplomacy. It considers some of the potential instigators put forth by scholars, such as the Vietnam War or capitalist incentives, and then builds upon these factors by proposing another instigator: the South Asian Crisis of 1971. It demonstrates, through transcripts, telegrams, and other key primary sources, that the effects of this crisis, namely the solidification of the Sino-Soviet split, the emergence of shared US-Chinese strategic interests, as well as the motivation for Pakistani assistance, provided the impetus for the United States and China to enter into a strategic alliance focused against the Soviets.

Introduction

President Richard Nixon's 1972 visit to China, which signaled a rapprochement between the United States and the People's Republic, has long been hailed as a turning point in the Cold War and the Nixon administration's greatest achievement. To this day, historians question what motivated Nixon, previously known for his staunch anti-communist credentials, to seek an improvement of relations with the Chinese communists. The Vietnam War, capitalist influences, and the Sino-Soviet split are some of the factors that have frequently been put forward by scholars as potential instigators of the US-Chinese rapprochement. One factor that has not received much attention is the South Asian Crisis of 1971. Contrary to popular perceptions, the impact of this crisis rippled far beyond the Indian subcontinent.

The Crisis, which refers to the 1971 Bangladeshi War of Liberation as well as the ensuing Third Indo-Pakistani War, was not simply its own isolated issue that just happened to occur during the Cold War era. In fact, it was much more connected to Cold War global concerns than we might initially expect. Along with various other countries, the United States, the People's Republic of China, and the Soviet Union were all paying attention to and interfering with the South Asian Crisis. Previously adversarial relations between the United States and China would begin to improve due to their mutual ally Pakistan, as well as the emergence of common enemies in India and the Soviet Union. The topic of US-Chinese relations continues to be imperative even today, so an understanding of the origins of the rapprochement between the two countries should prove insightful. This paper will consider the following research question: "What was the impact of the South Asian Crisis of 1971 on US-Chinese relations?"

Within the historiography of the rapprochement between the United States and China, scholars have devoted significant of attention to the impact of the Vietnam

War.¹ This is understandable, especially coming from American scholars, for whom the Vietnam War holds an integral and controversial position within American history. However, by focusing instead on the impact of the South Asian Crisis on US-Chinese relations, this paper will explore an often-overlooked (at least in the West) instigator of the rapprochement between the United States and China. Since recent events have brought US-Chinese relations to the forefront once again, it is imperative that we get a better understanding of what shapes this diplomatic relationship. After all, despite President Nixon's intentions, China continued to support the North Vietnamese long after Nixon's famous trip to China.² If the Vietnam War was truly the United States' only concern regarding China, the rapprochement should have fallen apart instead of giving way to further US-Chinese strategic cooperation in Asia and Africa.³

This paper will contribute to the ongoing historiographical debate surrounding the origins of the rapprochement to propose an overlooked perspective: that the South Asian Crisis of 1971 was instrumental towards the rapprochement between the United States and China. To do so, it will argue that the South Asian Crisis solidified the Sino-Soviet split, highlighted shared strategic interests between the Americans and the Chinese, and motivated Pakistani leadership to play a greater role in facilitating the rapprochement. Existing scholarship has considered this rapprochement primarily through the lens of the larger Cold War conflict, an understandable approach since it has had an enormous impact upon, and is so crucially interwoven with, the events of the Cold War. However, only considering the perspectives of the major Cold War powers can cause us to overlook other crucial instigators. The results of this paper will demonstrate that even incidents that did not directly involve the major belligerents of the Cold War can nonetheless have a significant impact upon them.⁴ Furthermore, even though there is an assumption that it was the Cold War powers that shaped the actions of the Third World during this era, this paper's results will demonstrate that such influences can flow both ways.

This article makes use of a range of vital primary and secondary sources. Key findings are evidenced by transcripts, memorandums, telegrams, treaties and other primary documents. These resources are preserved in prominent historical archives, such as the State Department's Foreign Relations Archive, the Richard Nixon Presidential Library's National Security Council Archive, and the Wilson Center Digital Archive. The use of these primary sources, which originate directly from the individuals responsible for facilitating the rapprochement, is critical for deciphering the true impact of the South Asian Crisis upon decision-makers in China and the United States. Instrumental secondary sources will also receive due consideration, like Mahmud Ali's *US-China Cold War Collaboration* and J.P. Jain's *China, Pakistan and Bangladesh*. These books helped provide a foundation for this paper's research through their discussion of South Asia and the US-Chinese rapprochement.

So as to better situate its argument, this article will first consider the historical background regarding US-Chinese relations, the India-Pakistan conflict and US-Chinese interests in the Indian subcontinent. Subsequent sections will examine the

¹ Chris Connolly, "The American Factor: Sino-American Rapprochement and Chinese Attitudes to the Vietnam War, 1968-72," *Cold War History* 5, no. 4 (2006): 501-527; Chen Jian, "China's Involvement in the Vietnam War, 1964-69," *The China Quarterly* 142, (1995): 356-387.

² Li Ke and Hao Shengzhang, *Wenhua dageming zhong de jiefangjun* (Beijing: Zhonggong dangshi ziliao chubanshe, 1989), 416.

³ Mahmud Ali, *US-China Cold War Collaboration, 1971-1989* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005).

⁴ Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Piero Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions: Havana, Washington, and Africa, 1959-1976*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

course of the South Asian Crisis, including the role played by American, Chinese, and Soviet intervention. Additionally, perspectives commonly proposed by scholars researching US-Chinese relations will be examined. The final section will consider how these existing perspectives tie into the paper's thesis regarding the impact of the South Asian Crisis on the rapprochement between the United States and China.

Historical Background: US-Chinese Relations

The modern relationship between the United States and China can be traced back to the Chinese Civil War. Although the nationalist, Kuomintang-led Republic of China and the Communist Party had formed a temporary united front against Japanese forces during World War II, fighting between the two resumed following the defeat of Imperial Japan. Despite immense American support for Chiang Kai-Shek, his nationalist forces were militarily defeated by the Communists and forced to retreat to the island of Taiwan in 1949. With Communist control over mainland China solidified, the party's chairman Mao Zedong established the People's Republic of China (PRC). American leaders, already worried by the Soviet Union's domination of Eastern Europe, greatly overestimated the Cominform's influence over the new communist regime in China, believing the Chinese communists to be little more than Stalin's puppets. Consequently, American policymakers interpreted the 'loss of China' as a disastrous defeat for the United States and a great victory for the Soviet Union. Terrified of falling behind the communist enemy, the United States became entangled in a Second Red Scare, refusing to recognize the new Chinese government and insisting that the exiled government in Taiwan was the legitimate representative of the Chinese people.⁵ Even at the onset of the South Asian Crisis, official diplomatic relations between the United States and the PRC were yet to be established.

The strained relationship between the two countries continued when the Chinese desire to spread Communism and the American policy of containment clashed in Korea.⁶ The American-led forces of the United Nations repelled the North Korean invasion of South Korea that started the Korean War, pushing the North Korean forces deep into their own territory in an attempt to unify the Korean peninsula under capitalist principles. As the allied forces got closer to the Chinese-North Korean border, the Chinese launched a counterattack to push the UN forces back. The war finally ended in a stalemate, with little territorial changes and the solidification of a divided Korea.⁷ Korea became an important component of US-Chinese relations going forward.

The next Asian conflict to pit the two powers against each other was the Vietnam War. Vietnam, much like Korea, was liberated from Japanese control at the end of World War II. Although the French, with American support, initially attempted to regain control over Indochina, this endeavor proved unsuccessful. Following the French withdrawal, Vietnam was divided into a communist North Vietnam, supported by the Chinese and the Soviets, and a capitalist South Vietnam, supported by the United States.⁸ China had previously helped the Communist Vietnamese face the French, and it continued provide them with financial and military aid as they clashed with South Vietnam and the United States.⁹ The Vietnam War severely damaged the already tense relations between the United States and China.

⁵ William Stueck, *The Road to Confrontation: American Policy Towards China and Korea, 1947–1950* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1981).

⁶ Carter Malkasian, *The Korean War: Essential Histories* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2001).

⁷ Eliot Cohen, *Military Misfortunes: The Anatomy of Failure in War* (New York: Free Press, 2005), 165.

⁸ Zhai Qiang, *China and the Vietnam Wars, 1950–1975* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

⁹ *Ibid.*

This relationship remained tense until 1968, when President Johnson decided to wind down the war in Vietnam. To the Chinese, it appeared as though the Americans were slowing their expansionism in Asia. On the other hand, the Soviets, who had just engaged in a border conflict with the PRC, seemed like a more serious threat.¹⁰ Although Chairman Mao Zedong had looked up to the Soviet Union as a friend and teacher for most of his life, the land of Lenin and Stalin became his “number one enemy” in later years.¹¹ As such, Chinese leaders believed that the diplomatically-isolated PRC could use a strategic alliance with the United States as a counterbalance against Soviet aggression.¹² Therefore Chairman Mao, who once said “the day is bound to come when [the United States] will be hanged by the people of the whole world,” changed his country’s foreign policy.¹³ He entrusted Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai with coordinating an improvement of US-Chinese relations.¹⁴ Many in the United States considered similar options regarding an anti-Soviet Union strategic alliance between the United States and China. Scholars, such as John K. Fairbank and Arthur Doak Barnett, and organizations, like the National Committee on United States-China Relations, called for opening discussions and improving American relations with the People’s Republic.¹⁵

Beijing was not initially receptive to Richard Nixon’s election as president in 1968, with the *People’s Daily* condemning him as “a chieftain whom the capitalist world had turned to out of desperation.”¹⁶ This was a result of Nixon’s strong credentials as an ardent anti-communist.¹⁷ However, in his 1969 inaugural address, Nixon stated that the United States and China were “entering an era of negotiation.”¹⁸ He and National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger thought it in the United States’ best interest to overcome the immense differences between the two countries and to work together to counter Indian and Soviet ambitions.¹⁹ Furthermore, they hoped to secure China’s support in bringing the Vietnam War to end.²⁰ And so, at the eve of the 1971 South Asian crisis, the United States and China officially proclaimed animosity while clandestinely desiring a rapprochement. The events that followed during the crisis provided the means and final impetus for this rapprochement to take place.

Historical Background: India & Pakistan

To understand the South Asian Crisis of 1971, it is crucial to briefly consider the modern history of the Indian subcontinent. The situation in South Asia had been tense since British India was divided into India and Pakistan in 1947. India was meant to be

¹⁰ John Young and John Kent, *International Relations Since 1945* (London: Longman, 1996), 255.

¹¹ He Di, “The Most Respected Enemy: Mao Zedong’s Perception of the United States,” *The China Quarterly* 137, (1994): 144.

¹² Evelyn Goh, “Nixon, Kissinger, and the ‘Soviet Card’ in the U.S. Opening to China, 1971–1974,” *Diplomatic History* 29, no. 3 (2005): 475.

¹³ Mao Zedong, *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-tung* (Beijing: People’s Press, 1964).

¹⁴ Yafeng Xia, “China’s Elite Politics and Sino-American Rapprochement,” *Journal of Cold War Studies* 8, no. 4 (2006): 3.

¹⁵ Norton Wheeler, *The Role of American NGOs in China’s Modernization: Invited Influence* (New York: Routledge, 2012).

¹⁶ Melvyn Leffler, *The Cambridge History of the Cold War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 373.

¹⁷ Marta Rzepecka, “Richard Nixon’s Campaign Rhetoric of Anti-Communism,” *Polish Journal for American Studies* 6, (2012): 59.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Clayton Dube, “Getting to Beijing: Kissinger’s Secret 1971 Trip,” *USC US-China Institute*, July 21, 2011.

²⁰ Frederick Brown, “Rapprochement Between Vietnam and the United States,” *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 32, no. 3 (2010): 318.

a country for Hindus. The Dominion of Pakistan, split into two geographically and culturally distinct halves to the east and west of India, was meant to be a country for Muslims. In the sectarian chaos that followed this hastily prepared partition, 14 million people were displaced and 2 million were killed.²¹ Relations between India and Pakistan were stained with blood from the very beginning.

Relations between the two halves of Pakistan, then known as West Pakistan and East Pakistan, were not pleasant either. The task of administrating two separate halves of one country, separated by around 1500 km of a larger rival's territory, was a daunting task.²² Rising political discontent and Bengali nationalism in East Pakistan made things even harder for West Pakistan. Political discontent arose from the concentration of political power in West Pakistan, even though the size of the population in both regions was nearly equal. Further, the western half of the country received more money from the common budget.²³ This made things worse in an already economically disadvantaged East Pakistan, where the West Pakistani economic policy of urban industrial development failed to translate to the primarily agrarian East.²⁴ Bengali nationalism also increased in response to attempts by West Pakistan to suppress Bengali culture and language, and to replace it with a homogenous, religiously-informed Pakistani identity (including the Urdu language commonly spoken in West Pakistan). The Islamic vision that formed the basis of the East Pakistani identity in the 1940s asserted that the country's residents were "Muslims first and Bengalis next."²⁵ However, East Pakistanis claimed instead that they were "Bengalis first and Muslims next," and that their form of nationalism was defined by the Western principles of "democracy, socialism and secularism."²⁶ Soon thereafter, a political party known as the Awami League championed these ideals and push for greater Bengali autonomy through mass civil disobedience campaigns.

In 1970, after West Pakistan showed callous indifference to East Pakistan's suffering from the devastating Bhola cyclone, the results of the first (and ultimately only) general election in both halves of the country surprised authorities.²⁷ The Awami League won in a landslide, sowing the seeds for the 1971 crisis to erupt.

Historical Background: US-Chinese Interests in the Indian Subcontinent

During the decades leading up to the South Asian Crisis, global powers like the United States, China and the Soviet Union were paying close attention to the Indian subcontinent. During World War II, President Franklin Roosevelt called for Indian independence and the end of British colonialism in the subcontinent. When the end of the war actualized this proposal, President Truman's administration hoped to secure both India and Pakistan as allies against the "Communist Menace." In light of the tension between the two nascent countries, the United States initially favored India, believing the country to be "far the more valuable diplomatic prize."²⁸ However, the US did not appreciate Indian Prime Minister Nehru's policy of neutrality. It wanted India to align more closely with the Western world, as evidenced by then-US

²¹ Ian Talbot and Gurharpal Singh, *The Partition of India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 2.

²² Willem Van Schendel, *A History of Bangladesh* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 107.

²³ Planning Commission of Pakistan, *Reports of the Advisory Panels for the Fourth Five Year Plan 1970-75, Vol. I*, 1970.

²⁴ Van Schendel, *History of Bangladesh*, 136.

²⁵ Ibid, 183.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Sydney Schanberg, "People Still Dying Because of Inadequate Relief Job," *New York Times*, November 29, 1970.

²⁸ Robert McMahon, *The Cold War on the Periphery: The United States, India and Pakistan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 11.

Ambassador Henry Grady's comments to Nehru: "This is a question that cannot be straddled," and so, "India should get on the democratic side immediately."²⁹ Nonetheless, India refused to align itself entirely with the West and even began strengthening their relationship with the Soviet Union.³⁰ Like India, Pakistan also attempted a policy of neutrality, in which friendly relations with both the Soviets and Americans could be maintained. However, unlike India, Pakistan had abandoned this policy by 1950 in response to increasing cooperation between the Soviet Union and India, as well as the potential for more military and economic aid from the United States. Pakistan became firmly aligned with the Western camp, a member of both the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) and the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO).

Even though India maintained its policy of neutrality and Pakistan became the closer ally, the United States decided not to give up on India entirely. In the first twelve years following its independence, the United States provided \$1.7 billion in aid to India.³¹ Furthermore, India sent Medical Corps to aid the United States in the Korean War. And the United States openly supported India during the 1962 Sino-Indian War, with President Kennedy proclaiming that "we *should* defend India, and therefore we *will* defend India."³²

Relations between the United States and India did not truly deteriorate until after President Kennedy's assassination. President Johnson tried once again to cultivate strong relations with both India and Pakistan and bring peace to the subcontinent. Despite his good intentions, his even-handedness only served to instill doubt about American friendship in both countries, pushing Pakistan closer to China and India closer to the Soviet Union.³³ Once President Nixon was elected, he shifted away from his predecessor's even-handed approach and established stronger ties with Pakistan. This was partially motivated by his tense relationship with then-Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, whom he considered to be too friendly with the Soviets.³⁴ He also hoped to exploit the fact that Pakistan had grown closer to China. And so, in the months preceding the crisis, the United States found itself moving closer to Pakistan and farther from to India.

The People's Republic of China found itself in a similar position, although for different reasons. When the PRC was created in 1949, both India and Pakistan hoped to cultivate strong relations with their transformed neighbor. In 1950, India was the first non-communist country to establish diplomatic relations with the PRC. However, disagreements regarding Kashmir and Tibet proved detrimental to Sino-Indian relations. In regard to Kashmir, both China and India claimed the Kashmiri region of Aksai Chin as part of their territory.³⁵ In regard to Tibet, Prime Minister Nehru hoped that Tibet would serve as a buffer zone between the two powers and was disappointed by Chinese control over the region. The situation worsened when, following a failed Tibetan uprising in 1959, India permitted the fourteenth Dalai Lama to seek refuge there and form a Tibetan government in the Indian city of

²⁹ Ibid, 40.

³⁰ Vojtech Mastny, "The Soviet Union's Partnership with India," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 12, no. 3 (2010): 50.

³¹ Richard Stebbins, *The United States in World Affairs 1959* (New York: Vintage Books, 1960), 297.

³² Anand Giridharadas, "JFK faced India-China dilemma," *New York Times*, August 26, 2005.

³³ Anita Singh, "The Limits of 'Super Power': The United States and South Asia," *International History Review* 14, no. 1 (1992): 98-108.

³⁴ "Nixon's dislike of 'witch' Indira," *BBC News*, June 29, 2005.

³⁵ Neville Maxwell, "China, India and the fruits of Nehru's folly," *DNA India*, June 6, 2007.

Dharamshala.³⁶ These tensions eventually led to the 1962 Sino-Indian War, as well as post-war border conflicts preceding the Bangladeshi Liberation War. Due to all of this, Indian relations with China, like Indian relations with the United States, were at an all-time low just before the South Asian Crisis erupted.

Pakistan was much more successful in its attempts to befriend the PRC. As tensions between India and China became more apparent, Pakistan hoped to capitalize on the situation and secure China as an ally against India. Although the United States and Soviet Union both condemned China's 1962 attack on India, Pakistan (which had its own border disputes with India) was supportive.³⁷ In the aftermath of the Sino-Indian War, Pakistan and China peacefully settled their border disputes, with Pakistan even ceding the Kashmiri territory of Shaksgam to China. They also signed various trade and commercial treaties.³⁸ Therefore, Chinese-Pakistani relations were better than ever before at the onset of the South Asian Crisis. With a mutual ally in Pakistan and mutual enemies in India and the Soviet Union, China and the United States found themselves embracing similar strategic aims. These shared strategic interests were further highlighted once the crisis began in earnest.

The Crisis

Despite the results of the 1970 Pakistani election, President Yahya Khan and the ruling military junta refused to allow the East Pakistani Awami League to form their new government. They annulled the results of the election and arrested the Prime Minister-elect, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. The crisis itself began when the Pakistani military government decided to go even further, launching "Operation Searchlight" against the people of East Pakistan to curb the rising Bengali nationalist and self-determination movement.³⁹ West Pakistan believed that they could eliminate all Bengali resistance in one swift and ruthless operation; President Khan proclaimed that West Pakistani forces needed only to "kill three million of them [Bengalis] and the rest will eat out of our hands."⁴⁰ Thus Operation Searchlight marked the beginning of the 1971 Bangladesh genocide, which claimed three million lives.⁴¹ The Jamaat-e-Islami, an Islamic East Pakistani political party allied with West Pakistan, declared that Bengali women were now *gonimoter maal* (Bengali for "public property"), inciting a ruthless campaign of genocidal rape.⁴² Around 10 million Bengali refugees fled to India, with another 30 million facing internal displacement.⁴³ Instead of eliminating Bengali resistance as expected, this systematic violence actually inspired the Bengalis to declare independence from Pakistan and form the new country of Bangladesh. Forming the Mukti Bahini, a national liberation army comprised of military, paramilitary and civilian forces, the Bengalis instigated a campaign of guerrilla warfare against the Pakistani Armed Forces despite facing heavy casualties.

The suffering of millions of war-weary Bengali civilians caused alarm throughout the world. A group of Indian, British, and American musicians, including George Harrison, Ravi Shankar, Ringo Starr, Bob Dylan and Eric Clapton, organized

³⁶ Chen Jian, "The Tibetan Rebellion of 1959 and China's Changing Relations with India and the Soviet Union," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 8, no. 3 (2006): 54-101.

³⁷ W.M. Dobell, "Ramifications of the China-Pakistan Border Treaty," *Pacific Affairs* 37, no. 3 (1964): 283-295.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Ian Talbot, *India and Pakistan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 258.

⁴⁰ Robert Payne, *Massacre: The Tragedy at Bangladesh* (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1972), 50.

⁴¹ Simon Payaslian, *20th Century Genocides* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); "Bangladesh sets up war crimes court," *Al Jazeera*, March 25, 2010.

⁴² Bina D'Costa, *Nationbuilding, Gender and War Crimes in South Asia* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011), 108.

⁴³ Samuel Totten, *Dictionary of Genocide: A-L* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2008), 34.

the world's first major benefit concert in New York City to help raise awareness and fund relief for refugees in East Pakistan.⁴⁴ Many in the United States Congress also began voicing concern regarding the situation in the Indian subcontinent. Senator Ted Kennedy, whose *Crisis in South Asia* report to the Senate Judiciary Committee on Refugees, denounced the West Pakistani "systematic campaign of terror and its genocidal consequences."⁴⁵ Furthermore, the staff at the United States consulate in Dhaka expressed their horror at the ongoing violence through the infamous Blood Telegram.⁴⁶ This telegram, widely considered to be the most strongly worded expression of dissent in the history of the United States Foreign Service, decried American inaction in response to West Pakistani atrocities.⁴⁷ It stated that the US government was "bending over backwards to placate the West Pak[istan] dominated government" and "has evidenced what many will consider moral bankruptcy."⁴⁸ In spite of all this, Nixon and Kissinger decided that West Pakistan's role in a rapprochement between China and the United States was too valuable to be dismissed.

China was similarly supportive of West Pakistan and remained wary of potential Indian involvement in the conflict. The PRC believed that India was secretly behind the rebellion and responsible for supporting and arming the Bengali rebels.⁴⁹ And though the Chinese were concerned about an Indian invasion of Pakistan and a Pakistani-controlled Kashmir, they ignored Nixon's encouragement to mobilize against the Indian border. This was because Prime Minister Indira Gandhi deployed eight mountain divisions to India's northern border to defend against a potential Chinese advance.⁵⁰ Consequently, China continued to label India's actions imperialistic, but did not go so far as to risk military confrontation.⁵¹

Soon after the Awami League (which had formed a government-in-exile in India) proclaimed the independence of Bangladesh, India began to support the nationalists by means of "diplomacy, military training, hospitality, refugee care, propaganda and artillery support."⁵² Although India claimed to be motivated by fostering democracy and self-determination, it is much more likely that the Indian government simply jumped on an opportunity to weaken their regional rival. The two countries had already gone to war before in 1948 and 1965, and Indian involvement in what Pakistan considered to be its internal affairs soon provoked a third Indo-Pakistani war.

The third Indo-Pakistani war began when Pakistan launched "Operation Chengiz Khan," a series of preemptive air strikes on Indian air stations. Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi interpreted the air strikes as a declaration of war, launching retaliatory offensives aimed at West and East Pakistan. Within thirteen days, the war ended with an Indian victory and the official declaration of an independent Bangladesh.

The complex regional alliances of the Cold War elevated the South Asian Crisis to a level of global concern. The shake-up of the South Asian power balance attracted the attention of various world powers, such as the United States, People's

⁴⁴ Robert Rodriguez, *Fab Four FAQ 2.0: The Beatles' Solo Years, 1970–1980* (Milwaukee: Backbeat Books, 2010).

⁴⁵ S. Rep. No. 70-083, (1971).

⁴⁶ Consulate General in Dacca to the Department of State, telegram, April 6, 1971, *Historical Documents: Foreign Relations of the United States*, Office of the Historian, U.S. Department of State.

⁴⁷ Christopher Hitchens, *The Trial of Henry Kissinger* (New York: Verso Books, 2002).

⁴⁸ Consulate General in Dacca to the Department of State, telegram, April 6, 1971, Office of the Historian.

⁴⁹ Swaran Singh, *China-Pakistan Strategic Cooperation: Indian Perspectives* (New Delhi: Manohar Books, 2007), 61.

⁵⁰ "India and Pakistan: Over the Edge," *Time*, December 13, 1971.

⁵¹ N. Jayapalan, *India and Her Neighbours* (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers, 2000), 19.

⁵² Van Schendel, *History of Bangladesh*, 169.

Republic of China, Soviet Union, and United Kingdom. The Soviet Union supported its ally India and, therefore, the liberation movement in Bangladesh. In contrast, the United States feared that Indian (and, by extension, Soviet) domination of South Asia would undermine its global position, as well as the regional position of their potential ally, China. Therefore, the crisis served as the first major incident in which the US and China allied together against the Soviet Union. Ironically, the United States, the world's strongest democracy, supported Pakistan, a military dictatorship, against India, the world's largest democracy. Similarly, the Soviet Union, the world's strongest authoritarian state, supported India and Bangladesh against Pakistan. This serves as yet another example of how, in foreign policy, core ideological differences are overlooked in favor of immediate strategic advantages. Ideological differences were similarly overlooked when the strategic advantages of a US-Chinese rapprochement made themselves visible.

Rapprochement: Perspectives So Far

Within the existing literature, various theories have been put forward regarding the cause of the US-Chinese rapprochement. The rapprochement is commonly attributed to the Vietnam War, capitalism, and the Sino-Soviet split. While there is certainly some truth to these explanations, they overlook the importance of the situation in South Asia, and therefore do not tell the entire story. An examination of these perspectives will prove useful.

The most common interpretation appears to be that the worsening American situation in Vietnam motivated Nixon to seek a rapprochement with China.⁵³ There is no question that Nixon hoped rapprochement would improve the United States' hand in Vietnam. He stated in his post-presidential book regarding the Vietnam War that he had "long believed that an indispensable element of any successful peace initiative in Vietnam was to enlist, if possible, the help of the Soviets and the Chinese,"⁵⁴ and that rapprochement could be a "possible means to hasten the end of the war."⁵⁵

In spite of the alleged importance of the Vietnam War, it is important to note that Nixon did not get what he wanted in the Indochinese Peninsula. China not only continued but increased the massive amounts of military and economic aid going to the North Vietnamese.⁵⁶ If the Vietnam War was truly the United States' only concern with respect to China, then logically the rapprochement should have fallen apart. However, formal diplomatic ties between the two countries strengthened, paving the way for strategic cooperation in Asia and Africa.⁵⁷ This suggests that the Vietnam War by itself cannot account for the rapprochement. Although it contributed to the first considerations of a rapprochement, other factors account for why Sino-American relations continued to improve even as the situation in Vietnam deteriorated.

Another interpretation is that American capitalists, attracted to the large number of consumers available to them in the Chinese market, encouraged Nixon to seek a policy of rapprochement.⁵⁸ This explanation claims that American businesses not only hoped to access the Chinese market, but also considered themselves to be unofficial US ambassadors, developing Sino-American trade networks to improve

⁵³ Connolly, "The American Factor.,"; Jeremi Suri, *Power and Protest: Global Revolution and the Rise of Détente*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003).

⁵⁴ Richard Nixon, *No More Vietnams* (Westminster: Arbor House, 1985), 105.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ke and Shengzhang, *Wenhua dageming*, 416; Jian, "China's Involvement in the Vietnam War."

⁵⁷ Jim Mann, *About Face: A History of America's Curious Relationship with China* (New York: Vintage Books, 1999).

⁵⁸ Evelyn Goh, *Constructing the US Rapprochement with China, 1961–1974: From 'Red Menace' to 'Tacit Ally'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

relations between the two countries. They hoped such trade development would convert China into a market-oriented economy, eventually changing the Chinese regime's political orientation.⁵⁹ However, not all who supported the expansion of capitalism supported rapprochement with China. Senator Barry Goldwater and future president Ronald Reagan, despite their capitalist credentials, were some of the prominent critics of Nixon's China policy.⁶⁰ This suggests that, in some circles, hostility towards communism remained strong enough not to be overcome by financial incentives. Nonetheless, the boom in trade between the United States and China that followed rapprochement hints towards the merits of such an explanation.⁶¹

Another important interpretation is that tensions between the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China were responsible for the rapprochement.⁶² This paper completely agrees with this interpretation. It is clear that the Chinese were becoming increasingly concerned about the Soviet Union, and that an anti-Soviet strategic alliance with the United States became progressively more appealing.⁶³ It is also clear that Nixon and Kissinger hoped to exploit the Sino-Soviet split for their own benefit.⁶⁴

However, tense relations between the two communist powers was not a recent state of affairs.⁶⁵ China and the Soviet Union had an uneasy relationship from the very beginning.⁶⁶ Therefore, we must question why it is that the Chinese did not try to abandon the Soviets earlier. Although the foundations were already in place for China to move from an anti-American alliance with the Soviets to an anti-Soviet alliance with the Americans, it took the deterioration of the situation in South Asia for this to take place.

None of the aforementioned instigators of rapprochement were influential enough to be effective on their own, as monocausal theories are seldom useful in historical analysis. With that in mind, it should be noted that the South Asian Crisis was similarly not influential enough to cause the rapprochement between the United States and China on its own. Instead, the South Asian Crisis was an instrumental part of many factors that initiated the rapprochement. The Vietnam War, capitalist incentives, and the Sino-Soviet split all played crucial roles in creating the environment in which rapprochement could take place, yet it was the war in South Asia that provided the final impetus for a change in policy.

Rapprochement: Impact of the South Asian Crisis

Although tensions already existed between China and the Soviet Union, the South Asian Crisis provided impetus for the relationship to worsen enough for a Sino-

⁵⁹ Mao Lin, "Traders as Diplomats: Trade and Sino-American Rapprochement," *International Journal of Social Science Studies* 5, no. 10 (2017): 52-66.

⁶⁰ Guangqiu Xu, *Congress and the U.S.-China Relationship 1949-1979* (Akron: University of Akron Press, 2007).

⁶¹ Eben Kaplan, "The Uneasy U.S.-Chinese Trade Relationship," *Council on Foreign Relations*, April 19, 2006.

⁶² Robert Scalapino, "Sino-Soviet Competition in Africa," *Foreign Affairs* 42, no. 4 (July 1964): 640.

⁶³ CSSR Embassy Peking to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, telegram, September 7, 1968, *Sino-Soviet Relations Collection*, Wilson Center Digital Archive.

⁶⁴ Harold Ford, "Calling the Sino-Soviet Split," *Central Intelligence Agency: Studies in Intelligence* 43, (1999).

⁶⁵ Murray Rothbard, "The Myth of Monolithic Communism," *Libertarian Review* 8, no. 1 (1979): 32.

⁶⁶ "Record of Conversation between Soviet Ambassador in China Apollon Petrov and Mao Zedong, Zhou Enlai and Wang Ruofei," October 10, 1945, *Sino-Soviet Relations Collection*, Wilson Center Digital Archive; Yuri Peskov, "Sixty Years of the Treaty of Friendship, Alliance and Mutual Assistance Between the U.S.S.R. and the PRC," *Far Eastern Affairs* 38, no. 1 (2010): 100-115; Lorenz Lüthi, *The Sino-Soviet Split: Cold War in the Communist World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 62.

American strategic alliance to be conceivable.⁶⁷ As already mentioned, Nixon and Kissinger desired to exploit the Sino-Soviet split to the United States' advantage, potentially securing Chinese support in bringing an end to the disastrous American intervention in Vietnam.⁶⁸ However, Kissinger believed that recent actions by the PRC "didn't in any way prove to Americans that Beijing leaders were ready to carry out a more peaceful policy towards the USA."⁶⁹ As such, Nixon's initial advances towards China were cautious.

Aware of members of the State Department (and other sections of the bureaucracy) that opposed a normalization of relations with China, Nixon used secret backchannels to enact his policy. During a 1969 state visit to Pakistan, Nixon asked its military dictator, Yahya Khan, to take a confidential message to the Chinese that expressed American desires to improve relations.⁷⁰ Khan agreed to do so, and this further cemented American support for Pakistan's ruling regime. And while Nixon spoke with General Khan, Kissinger deliberated with Pakistani Air Marshall Nur Khan. Nur Khan, who had recently spoke with Zhou Enlai in Beijing, confirmed Chinese anxieties regarding a potential Soviet attack and demonstrated that Zhou was "prepared to negotiate with (the) United States if US forces were withdrawn from Taiwan."⁷¹

Nixon's request to Yahya Khan began to bear fruit two months later, when Kissinger committed to withdraw two American destroyers from the Taiwan Strait as an act of goodwill.⁷² Yahya Khan called the Chinese ambassador and vouched for Nixon, stating that his conversations with the American president conveyed to him that Nixon truly desired better relations.⁷³ Beijing later informed Pakistan that they were supportive of American intentions and released two American yachtsmen arrested for entering Chinese waters without permission.⁷⁴ Pleased with the Chinese response, Kissinger told the Pakistani ambassador to Washington that "the Pakistanis could tell the Chinese now that the US appreciates this communication," and that if the Chinese desired "to have these conversations in a more secure manner than Warsaw or in channels that are less widely disseminated within the bureaucracy, the President would be prepared to do so."⁷⁵ This invitation secured Pakistan's role as a secret intermediary between the United States and China. Although the South Asian Crisis soon diverted Yahya Khan's attention to domestic concerns and not international affairs, he continued to facilitate US-Chinese proxy exchanges.

Relations between the United States, China, and Pakistan continued to improve as the crisis raged on, much to the alarm of India and the Soviet Union.

⁶⁷ John Garver, "The Indian Factor in Recent Sino-Soviet Relations," *The China Quarterly*, no. 125 (1991): 55–85; J.P. Jain, *China, Pakistan and Bangladesh* (New Delhi: Radiant Publishers, 1974).

⁶⁸ "Memorandum from President Nixon to his Assistant for National Security Affairs," February 1, 1969, *Historical Documents: Foreign Relations of the United States*, Office of the Historian, U.S. Department of State; "Memorandum of Conversation between Romanian Deputy Premier Gheorghe Radulescu and Zhou Enlai during a Visit to China between 20-26 November 1970," December 12, 1970, *Sino-Soviet Relations Collection*, Wilson Center Digital Archive.

⁶⁹ Anatoly Dobrynin, "Memcon of Ambassador of the USSR to the USA, A.F. Dobrynin with Kissinger, Aide to President Nixon," 12 July, 1969, *China/Vietnam Series*, National Security Council Files, Richard Nixon Presidential Library.

⁷⁰ Ali, *US-China Cold War Collaboration*, 9.

⁷¹ US Embassy in Rawalpindi to the Secretary of State, "Nur Khan's Meeting with Zhou En-lai," telegram, August 2, 1969.

⁷² Ali, *US-China Cold War Collaboration*, 12.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Harold Saunders, "Memorandum of Conversation between Agha Hilaly, Henry Kissinger, and Harold Saunders," December 22, 1969, *Historical Documents: Foreign Relations of the United States*, Office of the Historian, U.S. Department of State.

Pakistan's membership in SEATO and CENTO already elicited concern for both powers. Now, increasing American interest in Pakistan revealed a common security threat faced by both the Soviets and the Indians.⁷⁶ Millions of Bengali refugees poured into overcrowded and underfunded camps along the East Pakistani-Indian border, straining India's already overburdened economy, and the international community failed to provide support.⁷⁷ Indira Gandhi believed it would be economical to go to war with Pakistan to bring an end to the refugee crisis, but remained apprehensive due to Yahya Khan's close relationship with Nixon and Mao's China. However, Gandhi hoped to deter American or Chinese countermeasures for an Indian attack on Pakistan with Soviet support. In addition to the situation in Pakistan, the Soviet Union hoped to increase their influence over the rest of the Post-Colonial World by using India's status as a leader of the Non-Aligned Movement.⁷⁸ And so, the Indo-Soviet Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation was signed in August 1971, proclaiming that "enduring peace and friendship shall prevail between the two countries."⁷⁹

The Indo-Soviet Treaty inspired further cooperation between the United States and China. Believing the Soviets to be the secret "backstage manager of the Indian expansionists," the Chinese condemned their "joint conspiracy" directed towards Pakistan.⁸⁰ Since 1959, when Soviet General Secretary Nikita Khrushchev favored India (over China) in a border dispute in Aksai Chin, China had been concerned about cooperation between India and the Soviet Union. In a conversation with Kissinger that took place during the South Asian Crisis, Zhou Enlai stated that Khrushchev's denouncement of China in support of India "was the first such anti-China statement from the USSR."⁸¹ And this statement, to the Chinese, marked the beginning of a shift in Soviet policy, so as to coordinate an anti-China alliance with India. With the Indo-Soviet treaty in place, the Chinese believed that their fears had been realized. Now that their primary enemy had secured an alliance with another of their neighboring enemies, the Chinese had additional incentives for seeking an improvement in relations with the United States

Held back by American public opinion, Nixon was not as openly critical of India as the Chinese were, even after India's alliance with the Soviet Union. Nonetheless, utilizing communication channels established by Pakistan, Nixon assured the Chinese that he personally did not support India's actions, citing China and the United States' shared friendship with Yahya Khan's regime.⁸² Further, the war in South Asia did not slow down Yahya Khan's support for a rapprochement. In fact, the war made American and Chinese support even more crucial for Khan, so he did what he could to please both sides. Another meeting between Khan and Zhao Enlai culminated in an invitation to Beijing for "a special envoy of President Nixon's."⁸³

⁷⁶ Syed Shah, "Russo-India Military-Technical Cooperation," *Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad*, March 14, 2007.

⁷⁷ "East Pakistan: Even the Skies Weep," *Time*, October 25, 1971.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ "Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation between the Government of India and the Government of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics," August 9, 1971, *Bilateral and Multilateral Documents Collection*, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India.

⁸⁰ Jain, *China, Pakistan and Bangladesh*, 183.

⁸¹ "Memorandum of Conversation between Chou En-lai, Henry Kissinger, Huang Hua, *et al.*," July 10, 1971, *Historical Documents: Foreign Relations of the United States*, Office of the Historian, U.S. Department of State.

⁸² Ali, *US-China Cold War Collaboration*, 36.

⁸³ Henry Kissinger, "Memorandum for the President: Chinese Communist Initiative," December 10, 1970, *Historical Documents: Foreign Relations of the United States*, Office of the Historian, U.S. Department of State.

Khan also provided useful insights of his own to help Nixon formulate his response.⁸⁴ Khan even convinced the Chinese to not discuss matters with any other American politician, resolving Nixon's concerns of domestic criticism.⁸⁵

Once Nixon decided that Kissinger would be his special envoy to China, Pakistan played an even greater role in the US- Chinese rapprochement, helping to facilitate a clandestine exchange between Zhou and Kissinger. Initially, the location for this meeting was going to be either Pakistan or a southern part of China accessible through northern Pakistan. However, Beijing itself became the eventual destination.⁸⁶ This progress elevated Pakistan's position within American foreign policy and entangled its domestic concerns in superpower complexities. To ensure that the Pakistani channel of communication remained open, the American Ambassador to Pakistan, Joseph Farland, suggested a \$250 million loan to Pakistan to help with the South Asian Crisis.⁸⁷ Furthermore, Farland suggested that the US inform Germany, the United Kingdom, and Japan of its determination to save Pakistan, so that these foreign powers would readjust their policies to align with the American position.⁸⁸

Although the Chinese soon suggested a potential visit to Beijing by Nixon himself, the American president preferred that the Zhou-Kissinger meeting go ahead first. And so, during a routine visit to Pakistan, Kissinger feigned illness near the end of a banquet hosted by President Khan and claimed to return to Islamabad for recuperation. In reality, he went to the nearby Chaklala airbase and boarded a Pakistani airliner to fly to Beijing.⁸⁹ In the meeting, Zhou and Kissinger discussed a myriad of topics, including the South Asian Crisis.⁹⁰ Crucially, this meeting laid the foundations for Nixon's visit to China the following year. Even though this visit marked a turning point in relations between China and the United States, leading to the acceptance of public communication, Zhou recommended that Yahya Khan and Pakistan continue to serve as a channel of communication between the two powers. "We have a saying in China," he stated, "that one shouldn't break the bridge after crossing."⁹¹

The Americans and Chinese became increasingly concerned as the situation in South Asia intensified. Once India officially joined the war (following a Pakistani preemptive attack), Pakistani defeat seemed imminent. Although the Indo-Soviet treaty deterred the Chinese from being directly involved, the Americans still tried to support Pakistan's military government, which, due to its role in the rapprochement, was a key ally of the United States. Nixon was also motivated by a desire to convince Beijing that the United States could be a reliable ally.⁹² Ignoring the concerns of the State Department,⁹³ Congress,⁹⁴ the Democratic Party,⁹⁵ and others who sympathized with the Bengali people, the Nixon administration violated Congress' imposed sanctions upon Pakistan and supplied them with military supplies routed through

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ "Memorandum of Conversation between Alexander Haig and Agha Hilaly," May 5, 1971, *Historical Documents: Foreign Relations of the United States*, Office of the Historian, U.S. Department of State.

⁸⁶ Ali, *US-China Cold War Collaboration*, 25.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid, 28.

⁹⁰ "Memorandum of Conversation between Chou En-lai, Henry Kissinger, Huang Hua, *et al.*," July 9, 1971, *Historical Documents: Foreign Relations of the United States*, Office of the Historian, U.S. Department of State.

⁹¹ Henry Kissinger, *White House Years* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1979).

⁹² Ali, *US-China Cold War Collaboration*, 46.

⁹³ Consulate General in Dacca to the Department of State, telegram, April 6, 1971, Office of the Historian.

⁹⁴ Ali, *US-China Cold War Collaboration*, 46

⁹⁵ Ibid.

Jordan, Iran, Saudi Arabia and Turkey.⁹⁶ In the war's closing chapter, Nixon even deployed the nuclear-armed USS *Enterprise*, later supported by the British aircraft carrier HMS *Eagle*, to the Bay of Bengal.⁹⁷ When the Soviet Union responded by deploying nuclear-armed ships and submarines into the Indian Ocean, the Western powers retreated and allowed India to complete its subjugation of Pakistani forces.⁹⁸

Although the United States and China were ultimately unable to secure a conclusion to the South Asian Crisis that was favorable to their interests, the incident nonetheless brought the two countries closer together.⁹⁹ First, the crisis helped solidify the Sino-Soviet split that was already growing more and more apparent. The Chinese were convinced that the Soviets had made India their puppet, claiming the Soviets orchestrated (or at least permitted) the crisis. The Chinese also perceived the Indo-Soviet Treaty of Friendship as an attempt towards their encirclement.¹⁰⁰ With this animosity towards the Soviet Union solidified, the People's Republic was much more inclined to pursue better relations with the Soviet Union's other enemy, the United States.

Additionally, the South Asian Crisis highlighted shared strategic interests between the United States and China, suggesting that there could be a potential for future collaboration. The defeat of the American-Chinese-Pakistani coalition at the hands of the Bengali-Indian-Soviet coalition presented the great threat posed by the Soviet Union and its allies, emphasizing the urgency of Nixon's groundbreaking trip to China.¹⁰¹ With the Americans and Chinese both fearing the revival of Soviet expansionism, they believed that strategically cooperating together would be beneficial for both countries. Indeed, the two countries continued their strategic cooperation for the rest of the Cold War, battling Soviet influences in Asia and Africa.

It also important to note that the experience of supporting a common ally, Pakistan, against common enemies, India and the Soviet Union, facilitated bonds of cooperation between China and the United States. As the age-old proverb suggests, the enemy of my enemy is my friend. Thus, even their mutual defeat served to bring them closer together. We see evidence of this in the communication between Nixon and Zhou following the conclusion of the South Asian Crisis. Nixon stated that he believed Pakistan was being "punished because it is a friend of China and because it is a friend of the United States" and that he retained "particular affection for Pakistan because we feel they helped to reestablish contact between the People's Republic and the United States."¹⁰² Zhou similarly praised Yahya Khan for his help in building links between China and the United States.¹⁰³

Truly, the rapprochement (at least as we know it) would not have occurred without the support of Yahya Khan and Pakistan. Since American and Chinese leaders

⁹⁶ Stephen Shalom, "The Men Behind Yahya in the Indo-Pak War of 1971," *Press for Conversion* 47, (2002).

⁹⁷ Paul Scott, "Naval 'Show of Force' By Nixon Meant as Blunt Warning to India," *Bangor Daily News*, December 21, 1971; "British aircraft carrier 'HMS Eagle' tried to intervene in 1971 India-Pakistan war," *Frontier India New*, December 18, 2010.

⁹⁸ Anna Orton, *India's Borderland Disputes: China, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Nepal* (New Delhi: Epitome Books, 2010), 116.

⁹⁹ "Memorandum of Conversation between Chou En-lai, Henry Kissinger, Ch'iao Kuan-hua, et al.," February 23, 1972, *Historical Documents: Foreign Relations of the United States*, Office of the Historian, U.S. Department of State.

¹⁰⁰ Jain, *China, Pakistan and Bangladesh*, 183.

¹⁰¹ Ali, *US-China Cold War Collaboration*, 47.

¹⁰² "Telephone Conversation between Alexander Haig and Richard Nixon," June 13, 1971, *China/Vietnam Series*, National Security Council Files, Richard Nixon Presidential Library.

¹⁰³ "Memcon between Chou En-lai, Henry Kissinger, Ch'iao Kuan-hua, et al.," *Historical Documents: Foreign Relations of the United States*, Office of the Historian.

were both hesitant to carry out diplomacy through normal diplomatic channels, Pakistan's crucial role as a mediator, facilitator and common ally cannot be overlooked. All these roles, as well as the overall utility of the Pakistani channel, were maximized by the South Asian Crisis. The war made American and Chinese support so crucial for Yahya Khan that he willingly engaged as an intermediary. Further, resolving tensions between the two powers and uniting them behind support for Pakistan aligned with Khan's own strategic interests. Since Indian armed forces were militarily and numerically superior to Pakistan, Yahya Khan hoped that alliances with China and the United States would act as crucial counterweights to such a disadvantage. The war also provided crucial cover for Kissinger's secret visit to China.

As previously mentioned, other incidents also impacted the normalization of relations between the US and China. While those incidents were crucial towards the motivations behind *why* the US-Chinese rapprochement occurred, the analysis presented in this section demonstrates that the South Asian Crisis was instrumental towards *how* the rapprochement occurred. The crisis intensified already-existing fears in China regarding the Soviet Union. It urged strategic cooperation between the United States and the People's Republic, and the situation that Pakistan found itself in forced the country to play a greater, and eventually crucial, role in US-Chinese rapprochement. These factors ultimately led to Nixon's groundbreaking 1972 trip to China, signaling a turning point in Cold War diplomacy.

Conclusion

The rapprochement between China and the United States was instigated by, amongst other factors, the South Asian Crisis of 1971. The impact of this crisis rippled far beyond the Indian subcontinent. Complex regional alliances ensured that this crisis was deeply entrenched in global Cold War tensions between the United States, Soviet Union and People's Republic of China.

Until the crisis, tense and adversarial relations existed between the US and China. Although friction with the Soviet Union led each side to consider the benefits of closer cooperation with the other, the various differences between them proved too large to be overcome. However, the effects of the South Asian Crisis – namely the solidification of the Sino-Soviet split, the emergence of shared US-Chinese strategic interests, and the motivation for Pakistani assistance – provided the impetus for the United States and China to enter into a strategic alliance focused against the Soviets.

Although the historiography of the rapprochement between the United States and China has focused on various potential instigators of this normalization of relations, little attention has been paid to the South Asian Crisis. By focusing on the impact of this mostly forgotten crisis on US-Chinese relations, this paper considered an often-overlooked cause of the rapprochement between the United States and China. That is not to say that all other considerations had no effect, but rather that the South Asian Crisis was an integral part of a combination of factors. For example, the South Asian Crisis itself would not have provoked the reactions it did if the Sino-Soviet split had not already been initiated. On the other hand, the split was not yet wide enough to inspire a strategic alliance between China and the United States in early 1971; it took the opportunity presented by the South Asian Crisis for such a result to occur.

The implications of this paper's assertions are plentiful. For one, it alters our understanding of a crucial historical event that Nixon himself and many others refer to as having "changed the world."¹⁰⁴ Existing scholarship has considered this event

¹⁰⁴ Allen McDuffee, "How secret talks between the U.S and China led to the week that changed the world," *Timeline*, December 7, 2017.

primarily through the lens of the larger Cold War conflict. This is understandable since the rapprochement had an enormous impact upon and was so crucially interwoven with the events of the Cold War. This paper, however, demonstrates that incidents not directly involving the major belligerents of the Cold War still had a significant impact upon them. Furthermore, though there is an assumption that it was the Cold War powers that shaped the Third World during this era, this paper demonstrates that influences can flow both ways. This, in turn, has implications for the study of bilateral relations more generally. Although obvious attention should be devoted to the stated bilateral priorities of the two states in question, it is also important to consider the role played by crucial third parties, even if the connection is not apparent at first glance.

This study is especially significant today due to contemporary events in international and US-Chinese relations. In recent years, the Trump administration has entered into a trade war with China,¹⁰⁵ barred American companies from working with Huawei,¹⁰⁶ increased visa restrictions on Chinese students,¹⁰⁷ and designated the Chinese government as a “currency manipulator.”¹⁰⁸ However, both countries have taken steps to improve their relationship, evident by the United States’ removal of its “currency manipulator” designation for China and by the US-China Phase 1 trade deal.¹⁰⁹ It is clear that the relationship between the United States and China today remains as tumultuous and complicated as ever. And since the United States and China are (arguably) the world’s two strongest powers today, their relationship between has an enormous impact on the rest of the globe. An understanding of the origins of the relationship between the United States and People’s Republic of China, as conducted in this paper, will help us better comprehend the complicated present-day relationship between these two global powers.

¹⁰⁵ Dorcas Wong, and Alexander Koty, “The US-China Trade War: A Timeline,” *China Briefing*, May 13, 2019.

¹⁰⁶ Jacob Kastrenakes, “Trump signs bill banning government use of Huawei and ZTE tech,” *The Verge*, August 12, 2018.

¹⁰⁷ Alexandra Yoon-Hendricks, “Visa Restrictions for Chinese Students Alarm Academia,” *New York Times*, July 25, 2018.

¹⁰⁸ Sam Meredith, “China responds to US after Treasury designates Beijing a ‘currency manipulator,’” *CNBC*, August 6, 2019.

¹⁰⁹ Andrea Shalal, “U.S. Treasury drops China currency manipulator label ahead of trade deal signing,” *Reuters*, January 13, 2020.

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