**Sino-American relations, rapprochement and restoring relations regarding Taiwan**

*“Many factors produced the change in U.S. policy toward China and Taiwan in the 1970s, some tactical, some strategic. The timing of the initial step was unquestionably related to the Vietnam War and the Sino-Soviet dispute. The second and third steps were facilitated by and partly a response to the Soviet expansion. But these were transitory considerations. From a longer-term perspective, America’s China policy of the 1950s and 1960s could not be sustained. It was based on American acknowledgment of an absurd claim. Taiwan was not, as it asserted, the government of mainland China. At the same time, China’s position was unrealistic. The People’s Republic was not the government of Taiwan. In fact, the two governments ruled different parts of Chinese territory, each asserting that it was the rightful authority for all of China, each denying the legitimacy of the other.”*

Jonathan Spence, The Search for Modern China (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1990)

**Fundamental steps were taken in the lead up to Nixon’s visit to China in 1972 in redefining the Sino-American relationship. One key sticking point, however, was Taiwan.**

* In not recognizing the PRC’s claim over Taiwan nor Taiwan as a sovereign state, U.S. policy has considered Taiwan’s status as ‘unsettled’.
* Since a declaration by President Truman on 27 June 1950, during the Korean War, the United States has supported a future determination of the island’s status in a peaceful manner.
* The United States did not state a stance on the sovereign status of Taiwan in the three U.S.-PRC Joint Communiqués of 1972, 1979, and 1982.
* The United States simply “acknowledged” the “one China” position of both sides of the Taiwan Strait.
* Washington has not promised to end arms sales to Taiwan for its self defence, although the Mutual Defense Treaty of 1954 terminated on 31 December, 1979.
* U.S. policy left the Taiwan question to be resolved by the people on both sides of the strait: a “peaceful resolution,” with the assent of Taiwan’s people in a democratic manner, and without unilateral changes.
* In short, U.S. policy focused on the process of resolution of the Taiwan question, not any set outcome.

**There was, however, positive progress which is reflected in the Shanghai Communiqué of 1972:**

“The two sides reviewed the long-standing serious disputes between China and the United States. The Chinese side reaffirmed its position: The Taiwan question is the crucial question obstructing the normalization of relations between China and the United States; the Government of the People’s Republic of China is the sole legal government of China; Taiwan is a province of China which has long been returned to the motherland; the liberation of Taiwan is China’s internal affair in which no other country has the right to interfere; and all U.S. forces and military installations must be withdrawn from Taiwan. The Chinese Government firmly opposes any activities which aim at the creation of “one China, one Taiwan,” “one China, two governments,” “two Chinas,” and “independent Taiwan” or advocate that “the status of Taiwan remains to be determined.” (<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v17/d203>)

**There was productive movement regarding the PRC’s admittance to the United Nations:**

* On 25 October, 1971, the United Nations General Assembly voted to admit the People’s Republic of China (mainland China) and to expel the Republic of China (Taiwan). The Communist P.R.C. therefore assumed the R.O.C.’s place in the General Assembly as well as its place as one of the five permanent members of the U.N. Security Council.
* By 1971, the People’s Republic had gained enough international support for the U.N. General Assembly to pass the resolution declaring that it, and not the R.O.C., was the rightful representative of China. The resolution specified that it was a “restoration of the lawful rights” to the P.R.C., indicating that the country had been denied its rightful seat since 1949.
* The United States, the most significant opponent of the resolution, then argued for the P.R.C. to be admitted separately from the R.O.C., which would have allowed the R.O.C. to retain its spot. The proposal was defeated.

**Why then, were full relations not achieved until 1979?**

1. Watergate and its aftermath lessened the focus of the US government
2. Mao and Zhou die in 1976, causing leadership struggle.
3. Not until 1978 did negotiations between US President Jimmy Carter and new Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping lead to formal relations becoming a reality.
* Mao’s successor from 1976 was Den Xiaoping. He emphasised the centrality, in terms of China’s interests, of economics over revolutionary theory.
* Carter, strongly influenced by Brzezinski (Zbigniew Brzezinski was President Jimmy Carter's National Security Advisor from 1977 to 1981) took the view that China must be a central element of the USA’s global strategy.
* A similar view, from China’s perspective, was taken by Deng.
* A potential obstacle to the normalisation was Taiwan.
* For China, the USA’s lasting support for Taiwan was a blatant interference in China’s internal affairs.
* In December 1978, China and the USA reached an agreement on Taiwan. Deng assured the USA that the Taiwan issue would be resolved peacefully. Formal diplomatic relations between China and the USA were agreed and would take effect from 1 January 1979.

**Full relations are achieved!**

* The United States maintained a non-diplomatic relationship with Taiwan after recognition of the PRC in 1979.
* Between 29 January and 4 February 1969, Deng visited the USA.
* The establishment of a positive Sino-American relation gave China access to the US-dominated global markets.
* For Carter, the relationship strengthened the USA’s ability to manage the development of the USSR as a growing threat to US interests (particularly regarding the events in Angola and Ethiopia, which were seen as increasing the pressure of US vital strategic interests).