CHAPTER II

SINO-AMERICAN DETENTE AND ITS IMPACT
ON VIETNAM QUESTION
Sino-American Détente And Its Impact on Vietnam Question

In general, the western approach to détente stands for relaxation of tension between the erstwhile rivals for ensuring peace in the world. This was true of the Soviet-American détente, since the 1960s and was practically also true of Sino-U.S. détente after 1970. But the Chinese approach to détente is rather complex. China is not against the concept of détente as such, but accepts it with certain reservations. For the Chinese, détente is all right in the relationship among some specific countries only, and not as a universal phenomenon. They rejected Soviet-American détente, condemning both the super powers for "colluding" with each other, and did their best to obstruct the process of Soviet-American détente.¹ Sino-American détente however was a different matter. Mao's views on strategy and tactics were cited to convince the rest of the world why Sino-American détente was a good thing, and quite unlike the Soviet-American

¹ M.S. Agwani, Detente Perspective and Repercussions (Delhi 1975), p.2.
détente. The former supposedly would bring peace to the Asia-Pacific region and thereby to the whole world. What the Chinese left unsaid was that their quest for détente with the Americans was not part of any effort towards a "universal détente," but was designed specifically to help Beijing's struggle against Moscow. Détente in the relations of other countries with the Soviet Union was anathema to Beijing. ²

**Sino-U.S. Rapprochement**

A reassessment of the United States' China policy had begun during the Kennedy and Johnson administration itself. But China did not pay much attention to the new postures of the United States, although it was not totally indifferent to them. Both Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai had expressed their desire albeit implicitly, for a solution of Sino-American problems on the basis of the doctrine of "peaceful coexistence." In a discussion with Edgar Snow, Zhou Enlai had in

1961 called for prolonged efforts to settle disputes between China and the United States through peaceful negotiations. Although Zhou Enlai reiterated his earlier stand that the United States must agree to withdraw its armed forces from Taiwan, he said optimistically: "There is no conflict of basic interest between the peoples of China and the United States and friendship will eventually prevail." These developments taking place in 1961 reveal that following the Sino-Soviet split in 1959-60, China had started thinking in terms of improving relations with the United States, though concrete moves in this direction were taken only in 1971-72.

In the mid-1960s, in testimony before the House Foreign Affairs Committee on 1 February 1966, Roger Hilsman indicated that there was on the U.S. side a trend towards reassessment of U.S. policy on China. Hilsman called for a policy of firmness, flexibility and dispassion combined together.

toward China. He also suggested that such a policy should be implemented through various measures like inviting the Chinese to the arms control talks in Geneva, lifting U.S. travel restrictions and re-examining the U.S. trade policies. This the Administration later did, in order to create a favourable atmosphere for Sino-American détente.

The Chinese, however, were unresponsive. The Cultural Revolution followed soon after, which demanded the adoption of an isolationist and bellicose posture towards both the super powers. This was a period when the Chinese were convinced that Washington and Moscow were "colluding in a Holy Alliance to encircle China with hostile countries." 5

The rapprochement in Sino-U.S. relations came about in two major phases. In the first phase, beginning early 1966, there was a gradual decline of mutual suspicion and hostility. Victory eluded


the United States in Vietnam, and the U.S. public was disenchanted with the war. The Senate debated the Vietnam and China policies of the U.S. Administration and found that the premises on which they were based were no longer valid. The American public also was increasingly calling for rapprochement with China. The second phase of the rapprochement began in late 1968 and lasted till the end of 1970. During this phase the United States took several concrete steps towards improving its relations with China, which less suspicious than before, reciprocated, though in a subtle manner.

A. Doak Barnett, a senior China specialist, observed that the U.S. policy of isolating China in order to contain it had failed. He, therefore, suggested a policy of containment without isolation, a policy that would aim, on the one hand, at checking military and subversive threats and pressures emanating from Peking and, on the other, at bringing about "maximum contacts with and maximum involvement of the Chinese communists in
the international community. He did not rule out the possibility of U.S. efforts at increasing contacts with China being rebuffed, but said that the United States should nevertheless pursue the long-term goal of moderating the Chinese stand.

John K. Fairbank gave his own analysis of Chinese history, and said that the Maoist model had similarities with that of his predecessors in Beijing. Dealing with the specific problem of the Vietnam war, he argued that as the United States was neither winning nor losing in Vietnam, the alternative to war would be to underwrite a non-communist model of nation building in Asia on the one hand and dampening Beijing's militancy by increased contacts with it on the other.

Donald S. Zagoria pleaded for policy changes on the lines suggested by Doak Barnett and Fairbank.

7. Ibid., pp.4-5.
8. Ibid., pp.98-107.
9. Ibid., p.106.
He argued that although China had isolated itself by its own actions and had met with failure, it had retained sufficient flexibility to change the policies which had brought about its isolation.\textsuperscript{10}

Most experts were agreed that the China policy needed to be changed. Communist China was no passing phenomenon, they said, and it had a government with which the United States would be bound to do business sooner or later.\textsuperscript{11} The economic situation in China was recovering, which showed that the Communist regime was stable. It was, therefore, necessary that the United States should prepare itself to deal with it. One expert said that the trade embargo on China should be lifted as it had proved unavailing and China had been able to obtain the goods it needed from other countries.\textsuperscript{12}

\textsuperscript{10} Ibid., pp.368-73.

\textsuperscript{11} A Doak Barnett argued: "... the regime is not a passing phenomenon. In time, it may change its character, but it will continue to exist, as we will continue to have to deal with it, for the predictable future." (\textit{Ibid.}, p.8).

\textsuperscript{12} \textit{Ibid.}, pp.330-35. As regards the lifting of the embargo, Eckstein said: "Removal of embargo may be peculiarly well suited to serve as the first step on the road to normalization between the United States and China. It can be initiated internally without resort to negotiations, and it can be implemented without any economic cost." (\textit{Ibid.}, p.337)
John M.H. Lindbeck believed that the Chinese leaders were preoccupied with domestic issues, and it could not be said that China was spending much of its time in promoting revolutions around the world. 13

China's military capability was also analysed in the Senate debate. While most Americans believed that China was aggressive and expansionist, General Samuel B. Griffith II felt that Lin Piao's concept of "people's war" needed re-examination in the light of the military constraints on China. 14 According to Morton H. Halperin, the American bombing of North Vietnam had led the Chinese to believe in the substantial probability of an American attack on China growing out of the Vietnam war. Halperin added that the Chinese feared the damage that the United States could cause to their nuclear installations and they were, therefore, careful not to provoke the United States. He suggested that the United States should prevent the Vietcong from winning a military victory while at the same time assuring China


14. Though he had necessarily to be speculative, he held that the People's Liberation Army could not move beyond immediately peripheral areas. China emphasized the air defence aspect. Nuclear power was still in an embryonic form (*Ibid.*, pp.272-73.)
that it was not looking for an opportunity to destroy China's nuclear capability. \textsuperscript{15}

Some other experts however disagreed on the need for policy change. H. Walter Judd declared that the Chinese Communist regime did not represent the will of the people of China and was advocating violence. He was, therefore, convinced that the United States would lose rather than gain by changing its policy of isolating China. \textsuperscript{16} Though slightly less forthright in criticizing China, George E. Taylor too held that the Communist regime was in trouble and that the United States should do nothing that might make it easier for China to become a great power. \textsuperscript{17} Professor David N. Rowe criticized all the main arguments advanced during the earlier Senate hearings in favour of a soft approach toward China. \textsuperscript{18}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{15} Ibid., pp. 284-87.
\item \textsuperscript{16} Ibid., pp. 437-47.
\item \textsuperscript{17} Ibid., pp. 452-59.
\item \textsuperscript{18} Ibid., pp. 496-507
\end{itemize}
In light of these testimonies there was further debate in the Senate. Most Senators said that the United States should soften its China policy somewhat, but without giving the impression of doing so from weakness or timidity. Others believed that the United States' China policy was based on a number of misconceptions regarding China. Senator Joseph S. Clark (Democrat, Philadelphia, Pa.) argued that as China was preoccupied with domestic problems, it had "no real stomach for military adventures abroad". In Senator Edward Kennedy's (Democrat, Massachusetts) view China did not pose a military threat of the traditional type. It was the United States' isolation of China which had made that country resort to political insurgency and act as a disruptive influence in the economic and political development of its neighbours. U.S. obsession with anti-communism, according to others, had acted as

19. See, for example, Senator Stephen M. Young's argument, Congressional Record, vol.112, pt. 8, 5 May 1966, p.9895
a "blinding light" and had aggravated Chinese belligerence.22

Most Senators argued in support of a moderate stand on the part of the United States. They also made a number of suggestions on the lines made by the China experts. Stephen M. Young (Democrat, Ohio) suggested even recognition of China to make it less intransigent and more cooperative.23 A few Senators, including Frank E. Moss (Democrat, Utah) suggested that China should be allowed representation at the United Nations though they recognized that it was too controversial an issue to admit of easy disposal. Other Senators held that a peaceful solution of Asian affairs had become difficult because of the denial of representation to China at the United Nations.24 And yet others suggested lifting of the trade embargo on China and increased contacts through exchange of scholars and journalists between China and the United States.

Though there were also champions of the status quo these were in a minority. Senator Thruston B.
Morton (Republican, Kentucky) said in a speech at the University of Louisville on 18 April 1966 that any recognition of Communist China by the United States would do great damage to the best interests of the United States. In his view, a change of policy by the United States could be a costly mistake. 25 Senator Jack Richard (Republican, Iowa) argued that China's admission into the United Nations would not serve the interest of the United States. 26

There were thus great differences among the Senators, as among experts, regarding the China policy of the United States. Yet it was widely recognized that the Vietnam and China policies of the United States were based on wrong assumptions and they needed to be changed.

Unrest on the university campuses around the country highlighted the nationwide dissatisfaction with the U.S. Administration's Vietnam and China policies. The use of highly destructive weapons like the napalm bomb in Vietnam and the failure

25. Ibid., pt. 7, 20 April 1966, p.8601
to achieve victory on the ground gradually led the youth to rebel. There was protest also against the exorbitant cost of the war and the unconscionable destruction of man and property. Gradually, the folly of the Administration's policy in Vietnam was exposed. Student unrest and the increasing dissatisfaction in intellectual circles regarding the Vietnam war were contributory factors in the Administration's decision to change its policy with regard to Vietnam and China.

During the Cultural Revolution in China, the United States made many overtures to that country for improving relations, but these went unnoticed for obvious reasons. China became aware of the U.S. willingness to improve relations only in early 1968 after it had attained control of the domestic situation. China's concern over the war in Vietnam had markedly declined with the launching of the Cultural Revolution, and it stopped playing up the threat to its own security as a result of the American actions. Such criticism as it made of the United States was more for propaganda than by way of an honest articulation of anticipated
danger to Chinese security.27 Among such propaganda declarations was China's characterization of the U.S. appeal for "peace talks" as a fraud,28 reiterating that the crux of the issue in Vietnam was not resumption or cessation of U.S. bombing but complete withdrawal of the United States to enable the people of Vietnam to settle their affairs as they deemed best.29 A Jen-min Jib-pao editorial on 23 July 1967 held that there was no question of de-escalation in Vietnam so long as the United States was in Vietnam. It asked the United States to withdraw from Vietnam totally and unconditionally.

Sino-American Détente

On 21 August 1968 the Soviet Union intervened in Czechoslovakia. The Soviet action in Czechoslovakia, which Brezhnev justified on the basis of his doctrine of "limited sovereignty", sent alarm

27. See for example, the Hsinhua correspondent's report dated 23 March 1967, in Hsinhua Selected News Items (Hongkong), No.14, 3 April 1967, pp.22-26. Also the editorial of 8 August 1967. Ibid., No.34, 21 August 1967, p.3.


29. Ibid.
signals in China. The Sino-Soviet clash on Chenpao island in the Ussuri river really met Mao Zedong rethinking on international relations. China could no longer wallow in splendid isolation without damaging its own interest especially because close relationship between the United States and the Soviet Union seemed to raise the spectre of U.S.-USSR axis against China.  

Although China now began to trumpet its opposition to both the super powers, in practice its moves were directed more against the Soviet Union than the United States. 31 On 20 November 1968, China called upon President-elect Richard Nixon to resume the Warsaw talks and proposed an agreement on the basis of the five principles of peaceful co-existence between China and the United States. 32 When Nixon assumed office, Washington initiated an examination of possible new moves in

30. For details cf. Gargi Dutt, n. 2, pp. 35-62.

31. Beijing Review, 14 March 1969, p. 30. Here the Chinese had pointed out that the Soviet "revisionist renegade clique" was the consistent enemy of the Chinese people.

policy towards China. Undeterred by the postponement of the Warsaw talks scheduled for 20 February 1969, Nixon communicated to the Chinese Communists through French President De Gaulle that Washington wished to open a dialogue with them.

In July 1969, President Nixon articulated at Guam his "Nixon Doctrine," calling for reduced American military presence in Asia. This doctrine largely manifested the U.S. desire to placate a rising domestic revulsion against excessive U.S. military involvement in the world in general and in East Asia in particular, and was intended to indicate to the Chinese that the United States was seriously reassessing its earlier policy on containment of China, in light of the Sino-Soviet split and Brezhnev's proposal for a system of collective security in Asia, declared at the international Communists' conference in Moscow on 2 March 1969.

In July 1969 and later on in December the same year, the United States relaxed travel and trade restrictions affecting China. Taken unilaterally, these decisions indicated Washington's genuine desire to adjust its China policy. This was followed by the most important decision ever taken by the United States after two decades of hostility toward China, which curbed the patrolling by U.S. ships in the Taiwan Strait. This decision was taken on 7 November 1969.

The Sino-American talks began at Warsaw on 20 January 1970, when China responded to the U.S. proposal to that effect. But Beijing cancelled the talks scheduled for May 1970, as a protest against U.S. intervention in Kampuchea. Simultaneously, Mao expressed his reservations about the genuineness of the U.S. desire to change its Asian policy and called upon the people of the world to defeat U.S. imperialism. Mao, however, did not make any reference, in an interview with Edgar Snow in December 1970, to the U.S. bombing of Kampuchea.

He even extended an invitation to President Nixon to visit China. This invitation encouraged Nixon to secretly explore the possibility of an early visit to China.

In February 1971, when the South Vietnamese troops with the American logistic and air support struck into southern Laos, China protested this action as aggression. But this protest was made only for the record and without any serious implications, since the U.S. had assured the Chinese that the Laos affair would be a strictly limited affair.

In his foreign policy message to the Congress on 25 February 1971, President Nixon expressed the U.S. desire to see that China played a "constructive role in the comity of nations." 35 He also expressed his hope that the 1954 Defence Treaty between Taiwan and the United States would not pose an

obstacle to Sino-U.S. rapprochement. In April, the Chinese invited an American ping pong team to China, which was then visiting Japan. Premier Zhou Enlai met the team and hailed their visit as opening a "new page" in the history of Sino-American relations. 36

In the following months many important steps were taken by both sides to pave the way for the normalization of relations. A dramatic breakthrough in the process came about on 6 July 1971, when President Nixon, in a speech in Kansas City, recognized China as one of the four other economic super powers in the world. 37 The Chinese interpreted this speech as signifying the U.S. willingness to acknowledge the fact that China was or would be playing an important role in international affairs.

37. Ibid, 7 July 1971, p.16. In the course of his speech Nixon observed that he had moved to end the isolation of China because that country had become "creative" and "productive". At one point of his speech he also observed that the United States was reaching the period of "deacidence" that brought down Greece and Rome.
relations. In July 1971, Henry Kissinger, Nixon's Assistant for National Security Affairs, paid a secret visit to Beijing. This was followed by simultaneous announcements both in Beijing and Washington on 15 July 1971, about President Nixon's proposed "journey for peace" to China before May 1972. 38

On 25 October 1971, the People's Republic of China was admitted into the United Nations as a result of profound diplomatic manoeuvres by Kissinger and others in the Nixon Administration. While the Secretary State, William Rogers, was in favour of China's entry into the United Nations and against the ouster of Taiwan, persistent diplomatic negotiations between Kissinger and the Chinese leaders led the United States to abandon the "two Chinas policy." In China, the new approach to the United States was opposed by a radical faction led by Lin Biao. In the debate over a new line in foreign policy, Mao and Zhou Enlai ultimately prevailed over Lin Biao, who presumably fell from power in September 1971, when

a decision was made on this matter. The culmination of this new approach to each other in both countries was that President Nixon, accompanied by his Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger, arrived in Beijing in February 1972 on the epoch-making visit, which changed the contours of Sino-American relations. He discussed several bilateral and strategic issues with Mao and other leaders. Later on he worked out with Zhou Enlai the historic Shanghai Communique, with which dawned the era of Sino-American détente.

Why did China opt to end its isolationism? Mao was quite frank about it. He said: "The opening to the United States was intended to serve the limited purpose of ending China's self-imposed isolation and creating an uncertainty in the minds of Soviet policy-makers regarding the American role, in case a major armed conflict broke out between their country and the Soviet Union. 39


Obviously, in light of the U.S. decision to "disengage from Vietnam and elsewhere in Asia," the threat from the U.S. had, in the eyes of the Chinese, decreased. The other factors which led to this change of attitude were:

First, the Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia, its justification on the basis of the Brezhnev Doctrine of "limited sovereignty," followed by major Sino-Soviet border clashes in 1969 over Chenpao island in Ussuri river, increased the Chinese apprehension of a major attack from the Soviet Union. It was wiser to improve the relationship with the United States, if only because it could serve as a counterweight to Moscow and thereby prevent a "collusion" between the two super powers.

Second, Japan posed a potential threat to China in light of the signing of the Nixon-Sato communique in 1969, which referred to the security of Taiwan and South Korea as factors influencing the security of Japan. The Chinese were against remilitarization of Japan since a militarily strong Japan was seen as a potential threat to China's security. An improvement of Sino-American
relations might enable the Chinese leaders to
influence U.S. policy decision on remilitarization
of Japan and Taiwan.

Third, China's growing need for scientific
knowledge and technology from the West also nece-
ssitated a normalization with the United States.
China also expected that after normalization of
relations, trade and commerce with the United
States would increase.

Fourth, the announcement of "Nixon Doctrine"
of 1969, followed by the U.S. decision to abolish
trade and travel restriction on China, led the
Chinese leaders to reassess their policy towards
the United States. They interpreted this flexi-

dility on the part of the United States as a
decrease in the U.S. influence in Asia. In a con-
fidential briefing in December 1971, Zhou Enali
advanced the major reason for Nixon's interest in
coming to China in the following manner: "When
the United States got stuck in Vietnam, the Soviet
revisionists embraced the opportunity to extend
vigorously their sphere of influence in Europe
and the Middle East. The U.S. imperialists cannot
but improve relations with China to combat the
Soviet revisionists." The Chinese decided that this was an advantageous opportunity.

Finally, China's desire to become a modern and powerful socialist state also induced it to normalize relations with the United States. In the Chinese tradition of "playing off one barbarian against another," the Chinese leaders thought that rapprochement with the United States would "promote the contradiction between the two super powers and help China in realizing its own national interests." The settlement of relations with the first super power would open the way for China's full international involvement and promised a favourable solution of the disputed territorial question.

The change in the U.S. perception about the desirability of giving up the policy of "containment of China" may be ascribed to the following


First, by the end of sixties, public opinion had become an important determinant of U.S. policy on China. Americans held the view that their leaders had gone too far in their hostility towards the Chinese people. They wanted a change in this approach.

Second, the U.S. policy-makers attitude coincided with this evolving public opinion. The Sino-Soviet rift had made the concept of a threat from a monolithic communist camp obsolete. The Sino-Soviet rift was something to be exploited for drawing concessions from the Soviet Union in arms control agreements.

Third, the excessive involvement of the United States on Vietnam in particular and Indochina in general had become very unpopular within that country and outside. In Vietnam the United States had incurred huge losses in terms of men and money. Nixon and Kissinger therefore sought an opening with China "partly in the hope that this would enable them to wind up the Vietnam war on honourable terms and partly in the calculation that it would give them an additional leverage".
in dealing with the Soviet Union." 

Fourth, the changes in the world situation in general also compelled the Nixon Administration to reconsider its China policy. In the twenty-fifth session of the General Assembly of the United Nations, even the allies of the United States called for a change in the U.S. policy on China's entry into the United Nations. In 1970 Canada decided to break its relationship with the Nationalist regime and made her own arrangements with Beijing. This led the U.S. decision-makers to acknowledge the reality in East Asia.

Finally, the U.S. business community also wanted an improvement of Sino-American relations, for China provided the largest inaccessible market for trade in non-strategic commodities. 

The Shanghai Communique

The Shanghai Communique, issued on 28 February 1972 at the end of Nixon's visit to Beijing was


the culmination of the inclination of both sides to come closer together. The two countries, while still disagreeing on many issues, expressed the view that "progress towards normalization of relations between China and U.S. (was) in the interest of all countries." In other words, Nixon's visit, despite all the attendant publicity and fanfare, was primarily no more than a diplomatic gesture. It was long on rhetoric but short on specifics.

In the first part of the communique the United States observed that countries with different ideologies (read the United States and China) should have increasing contact among themselves and should show mutual respect and compete peacefully among themselves. A negotiated settlement in Indochina was the U.S. desire, but in the absence of such a settlement, the United States would withdraw all American forces from the region. The Chinese leaders on their part emphasized the "sovereign

equality" of all nations and stressed the right of each nation to choose its own social and political system and its socio-economic development "without outside interference or subversion." Bullying by big nations (read the Soviet Union) was condemned in the communique by China, which stated its opposition to "hegemony and power politics of any kind." The Chinese also emphasized their opposition to Japanese militarization and endorsed "Japanese people's desire to build an independent, democratic, peaceful and neutral Japan." 48

China and the United States agreed in the communique to begin a process of normalization in their bilateral relations and called for scientific, cultural and trade exchanges. They agreed to conduct their relations on the basis of the five principles of "peaceful co-existence." Both the sides pledged not to seek hegemony in the Asia-

Pacific region and declared their opposition to the efforts of any other country or group of countries to do so. They further agreed not to enter into agreements or understanding directed against other states. This agreement in a way consisted an American promise not to collude with Moscow against Beijing. It could also be interpreted as an assurance by the United States to Moscow that "it should not fear U.S.--China collusion," not wanting to wreck its existing relations with Moscow.

The problem of Taiwan, however, proved to be more intractable. China has always held that Taiwan is China's internal problem in which outsiders by intervening had undermined China's sovereignty over the island; and secondly, the U.S. presence in Taiwan was part of "imperialist designs on their country." The Shanghai Communique expressed the Chinese view that Taiwan was a province of China and its liberation was China's internal affair, in which no other country

had the right to interfere. Withdrawal of all American forces from Taiwan was called for. The communique however bypassed the issue of the American defence treaty with Taiwan or its diplomatic relations with the Nationalists.

The United States although it did not accept the claims made by Beijing, moved closer to its stand in that it implicitly acknowledged that Taiwan was a part of China. The United States' interest in a peaceful settlement of the Taiwan issue by the Chinese themselves was reaffirmed, with a promise that in the meanwhile American forces and military installations in Taiwan would be progressively reduced "as the tension in the area diminished." The term "area" apparently meant Vietnam, Taiwan, and possibly the rest of East Asia. The communique, however, made no mention of a definite timetable for this military withdrawal, which was linked to a reduction of tension in "the area" and the prospect of a "peaceful settlement of the Taiwan question by the Chinese themselves." The compromise could not have been fully satisfactory to either side, as the United States did not explicitly recognize Beijing's claim to Taiwan or promise to disengage
fully from the island as Beijing wished, and Beijing did not renounce the use of force as Washington wished. On the other hand, in "exceedingly delicate exercise in deliberate ambiguity" the United States made a valuable concession when it implicitly recognized Taiwan as a part of China and thereby ruled out any support for an independent Taiwan. China similarly was conciliatory in agreeing not to incorporate in the communique the phrase "the use of force" to liberate Taiwan."51

The Shanghai Communique concluded with specifying what the first steps towards normalization of relations would be. The two sides agreed to facilitate the further development of contacts and exchanges in such fields as science, technology, culture, sports and journalism. They also agreed to facilitate the progressive development of trade and stressed the need to stay in contact through various channels, including exchange of senior leaders.

There was thus no doubting a warming-up in Sino-American relations. This thaw, even in the

absence of a solution of the Taiwan problem was a significant advance on the Chinese view because with the U.S. decision to withdraw from Asia under the "Guam Doctrine," the Chinese expected that the Taiwan problem could be solved in future, if not immediately. For the time being, getting this formal recognition of Taiwan as part of China was itself a breakthrough.

Even otherwise, China could not have rushed Taiwan's unification with itself. For one thing, the breakway regime with its modernized army could resist even a US-sanctioned unification move, and such an armed resistance might turn out costly for China. Besides, next in line after Taiwan would would be Hong Kong and Macao which had to be liberated from alien rule. To ignore its own claims on these two territories would be a loss of face for China; but disturbing the status quo at the time would have meant destabilizing a very convenient economic set-up, under which China derived considerable economic benefits from its trade links with these territories. And in the final reckoning, were the United States to withdraw immediately from Taiwan, in the power vacuum
that would be created the Soviet Union might feel encouraged to step in.

A Cooling-off Period

A period of euphoria followed the signing of the Shanghai Communique, marked by a rapid development of Sino-American relations in various fields including trade, exchange of visitors and journalists. Sino-American trade developed so rapidly that by 1973 the United States had become the second largest trading partner of China. In the political sphere, the two sides agreed on 15 February 1973 to establish diplomatic "liaison officers" in each other's capital. China had until then taken the stand that it would not establish diplomatic relations with the United States so long as Taiwan had its embassy in Washington, and therefore this meant a major policy change for China.

But then followed a prolonged lull in Sino-American relations. While the Nixon administration devoted most of its energies to extricate itself from the Watergate tangle, in China a power struggle was raging because of which many internal issues were sidetracked. Diplomatic negotiations
between the United States and China on an "assets and claims" agreement also entered into a deadlock. Except those journalists who covered official visits, others were not allowed to visit China during this period. And it was found in the latter half of 1974 that Beijing was beginning to cut back on imports from the United States.

To elaborate, the following may be cited as factors that led to this cooling down in Sino-American relationship:

The turbulent domestic politics in both countries: Nixon, carrying the burden of the Watergate scandal, did not expect to remain President for long and let things drift; and in China the radical faction of the Chinese Communist Party called for an assessment of the benefits for China that had accrued from its new policy towards the United States. The conclusion was that the United States had not lived up to the spirit of the Shanghai Communique and the progress towards normalization had been too slow. 52

The Chinese had expected the Shanghai Commu-

nique to become the foundation stone for the normalization of Sino-American relations, but they found that the United States still carried on with its earlier policy of détente with the Soviet Union. The United States' "policy of appeasement" towards the Soviet Union was repeatedly criticized, and to curb this proclivity, China now reaffirmed its earlier precondition for complete normalization of relations, which was none other than that the Taiwan problem should be solved in toto.

American businessmen had also realized by now that the huge trade opportunities they had hoped for were nothing but illusion. They were getting increasingly dissatisfied with the strictly "guided tours" arranged by the Communists for trade talks with Chinese businessmen.

The period 1972-74 was also marked by Mao's theory of "Three Worlds" and its active implementation. In its so-called struggle against both the super powers, China now wanted to form a

"united front" with the developing countries. At the tenth party Congress in August 1973, Zhou Enlai stressed the awakening of the "Third World," which included the developing countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America and its role in the struggle against the "hegemonism" and power politics of the two super powers. This was followed by Vice-Premier Deng Xiaoping's speech in April 1974 at the United Nations in which he observed that the socialist camp no longer existed and that the world now consisted of "Three Worlds," with China belonging to the "Third World."\(^{54}\) China's emphasis veered on to cultivating state-to-state relations with the developing countries and simultaneously fostering contact with non-official groups in these countries through what they called "people's diplomacy." Development of relations with the countries of the "Second World," namely Japan, Australia, Canada and a few European countries, which could fulfil China's need for capital goods, advanced technology and food grains were also given a new thrust. In 1975, Beijing

\(^{54}\) Beijing Review, 19 April 1974, p.11.
established diplomatic relations with the European Common Market. The main consideration for China's policy of cultivating the countries of the Third World and the "Second World" however was its desire to utilize these countries in its drive against "Soviet hegemonism."

This cooling-off in Sino-U.S. relations had to be reversed, and with this aim in view, the Ford Administration announced in late 1974 that President Ford would visit China the following year. The announcement led to speculation and arguments on either side about the completion of the normalization process during the year itself. But the spring of 1975 brought about a major change in the perception of both sides. With the collapse of non-communist regimes in Indochina, serious doubts were expressed in the United States about the desirability of further disengaging U.S. interests from Taiwan until greater stability emerged in East Asia. Jiang Jieshi's death, shortly afterwards, further stimulated demands by leaders of the Republican party leaders for halting any compromise that might weaken the Nationalist regime.
In the United States, as the 1976 presidential elections approached, President Ford declared that there would be no major U.S. moves in 1975. The Chinese leaders also thought it more prudent not to pressurize the United States for immediate disengagement from East Asia as they apprehended that the Soviet Union might exploit the situation. But they did not cease to condemn the United States for its increasing efforts to promote détente with the Soviet Union, particularly in light of the Helsinki Conference on European problems.

In these circumstances of considerably divided loyalties and policies President Ford's visit to China in December 1975 proved to be an "exercise in summity without great substance." It had by now become amply clear that the future of Sino-American relations would depend upon the priority attached to the President of the United States.

The Impact of Sino-American Détente on Vietnam

In October 1972, there was a sudden change in

the position of North Vietnam (DRV) on the issue of the Paris peace negotiations. It presented a plan in Paris which was close to the American position, separating military questions from the main political issues. Of special significance in the latest DRV position was its dropping of the demand for President Thieu's resignation as a first step towards a settlement.\textsuperscript{56}

On 23 January 1973 Dr. Kissinger and Le Duc Tho, representing the United States and North Vietnam respectively with the concurrence of the government in Saigon and of the NLF initialled the Agreement on Ending the War and Restoring Peace in Vietnam and formally signed it four days later.\textsuperscript{57} This was followed, a few weeks later, by a major international conference in Paris designed to ensure international approval for the agreement. Representatives of twelve governments attended this conference. These were: Canada, the People's Republic of China, the United States, France, the

\textsuperscript{56} J. Davidson, Indochina Signposts in the Storm (Malaysia 1979), p.177.

\textsuperscript{57} Justus M. Vander Kroef, Communism in South East Asia (London 1981), p.44.
Provisional Revolutionary Government of South Vietnam (the Vietcong), the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (Hanoi), the Republic of Vietnam (Saigon), Hungary, Poland, the Soviet Union and Britain. On 2 March 1973 this conference issued an Agreed Declaration, the most important aspect of which was its provision for the withdrawal of U.S. and all other foreign forces from Vietnam within 60 days.

The Paris Agreement, however, came to naught as its provisions such as those dealing with ceasefire, the prohibition against the introduction of any foreign military force into South Vietnam, the procedures of establishing South Vietnamese self-determination, were either ignored or not seriously implemented. Both sides broke the ceasefire and both sides sought to gain as much territory as possible. The prohibition on the use of the territory of Laos and Kampuchea for infiltrating into Vietnam, and the requirement

58. J. Davidson, n.55, p.187.
that foreign troops (including those of the DRV and South Vietnam) should be entirely withdrawn from Laos and Kampuchea was also not implemented. The North Vietnamese continued assisting the Communist forces in Kampuchea and Laos until the final Communist victory in all three Indo-Chinese states in 1975.60 While it lasted, the war took its toll in millions, including the Vietnamese, Kampucheans and Loatians on both sides. The Americans lost more than 56,000 killed and more than 300,000 wounded.61

The end of the war brought about a short period of respite to Indochina. The Vietnamese looked forward to the unification of their country and an immediate reconstruction of the economy. More than a hundred nations established diplomatic relations with Vietnam, and many western countries, notably Sweden and Australia gave generous aid in addition to the Soviet Union and China for the construction of the country. The United States was the only major nation to withhold diplo-

60. n.56, p.44.
61. n.55, pp.197-98.
Vietnam made its first diplomatic move in 1975. Prime Minister Pham Van Dong announced that Vietnam was ready to establish normal relations with the United States on the basis of the Paris Agreement drawn up in 1973. For the Vietnamese this entailed the fulfilment of promises made by President Richard Nixon in a letter to Dong on 1 February 1973, which offered aid to the value of 3,250 million dollars for postwar reconstruction without any political conditions, in addition to other forms of aid to be agreed on between the two parties. On 26 March 1976, Kissinger stated the U.S. terms as being (i) accounting for servicemen missing in action (MIAs); (ii) the need for assurance of Hanoi's peaceful intentions towards neighbouring countries in South East Asia. He said that the Vietnamese could raise any issue they liked including their demand for oil, although he "would not hold out much prospect for that." Unofficial contacts had been made some months earlier in Paris between Vietnamese officials and American oil companies over

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the resumption of offshore oil exploration in South China Sea, a move that would have gone against the embargo on trade and business with Vietnam imposed by the U.S. Government following the fall of Saigon. The Americans Missing in Action issue was obviously an excuse on the part of the United States to delay normalization of relations with Vietnam. Even with all possible good will and effort the Vietnamese could not have accounted for all Americans listed as still missing in action. The Vietnamese expressed their willingness to help solve this issue but they stated that they could not be responsible for all MIAs in Vietnam. The MIA issue was for the United States a convenient demonstration to the Chinese of their concern for nurturing Sino-American relations. In November 1976 the United States issued the MIA issue to veto Vietnam's application for United Nations membership. Two months earlier, the United States was the only nation to vote against Vietnam's application to occupy the seat of the

64. Ibid.

The installation of Jimmy Carter as President in the United States in 1977 did not significantly alter U.S. relations with Vietnam. Carter however made a major departure in lifting the veto against Vietnam's application for membership to the United Nations. Accordingly the Socialist Republic of Vietnam was admitted to the United Nations on 20 September 1977. The prospect for normalization appeared to improve in 1978 when Hanoi formally dropped the demand for the reconstruction assistance of 3.2 billion dollars promised by Nixon in 1973. By September 1978, the United States and Vietnam seemed to be close to agreement. But the course of events overshadowed the efforts of Hanoi and Washington to come to a meeting point. Increased tension along the Kampuchean border, the issue of the "boat people", and Vietnam's signing of a Treaty of Friendship with Moscow in 1978, caused the Carter Administration to back out. 67

66. Evans and Kelvin, n.64, p.63.

67. William J. Duiker, Vietnam since the Fall of Saigon (Ohio 1980), p.54.
In December 1978, Washington warned Vietnam that increased involvement on its part in Kampuchea would result in a setback for diplomatic relations. The invasion of Kampuchea by Vietnam, coupled with the Sino-Vietnamese war in 1979 brought about at least temporary halt to American interest in improving relations with Vietnam. 68

Could the Carter Administration's Vietnam policy have been more statesmanlike? Several observers have contended that the Administration should have pursued its strategy of normalizing relations with Hanoi even in the face of the refugee issue, the threat perception towards Soviet-Vietnamese relations, and the invasion of Kampuchea, on the assumption that a conciliatory policy in Washington might have encouraged moderate forces within the Vietnamese party leadership. They base their criticism on the idea that Vietnam could have been less pro-Soviet if the United States had provided a diplomatic counterpoise against China. 69


69. Criticism of American policy can be found in Bruce Grant, The Boat People, p. 200 and FEER, 2 February 1979.
Meanwhile Hanoi’s criticism of American foreign policy in South East Asia with regard to the American military bases in Thailand and the Philippines has continued. Hanoi’s attitude towards recognition of the South East Asian region as a "zone of peace, freedom and neutrality" has made it clear that the socialist Republic of Vietnam seemed to link ASEAN to the aggressive and interventionist policy of the United States and said that only total withdrawal of American forces could open the door to genuine peace and neutrality in the region. 70

Normalization of diplomatic and economic relations between the United States and Vietnam might serve to reduce the long legacy of hostility between the two countries. But it would not deter the party leadership from undertaking policies that are considered vital to Vietnam’s national interests. The ability of the United States to influence the course of events in the region declined seriously after the withdrawal of American military forces from Vietnam. But the American

70. n. 56, p.236.
withdrawal had some positive aspects also. It resulted in the reduction of sources of tension and conflict in South East Asia. This has been beneficial to the national interest, not only of the United States, but of Vietnam and the other states in the region, and the world as a whole.