



WITNESS HISTORY AUDIO

A New Era Begins

When Richard Nixon visited the People's Republic of China in February of 1972, Premier Zhou Enlai greeted the President as he landed in Beijing. Once on the wind-swept tarmac, Nixon walked toward his host with his arm outstretched. Recalling John Foster Dulles's refusal to shake Zhou's hand at the Geneva Conference in 1954, Nixon made certain not to repeat the insult to the Chinese leader. Nixon remembered the occasion in his memoir:

“When I reached the bottom step, therefore, I made a point of extending my hand as I walked toward him. When our hands met, one era ended and another began.”

—Richard Nixon

▲ Nixon and Zhou shake hands in China in 1972.

Nixon and the Cold War

Objectives

- Explain the thinking behind Richard Nixon's foreign policy.
- Define Nixon's foreign policy toward China and the Soviet Union.

Terms and People

Henry Kissinger
realpolitik
Zhou Enlai

Strategic Arms
Limitation Treaty
détente

NoteTaking

Reading Skill: Categorize As you read, describe Nixon's Cold War foreign policies in dealing with China and the Soviet Union.

Nixon's Cold War Policies	
China	Soviet Union
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Normalization of relations will drive wedge between China and Soviet Union. • • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diplomacy with China will create Soviet fear of isolation. • •

Why It Matters As a presidential candidate, Richard Nixon had promised to end U.S. military involvement in the Vietnam War. Recognizing the potency of Soviet power and the increasing unwillingness of many Americans to pay the costs of containing communism everywhere, Nixon developed a new approach to the Cold War. His bold program redefined America's relations with the two titans of global communism, China and the Soviet Union. **Section Focus Question:** How did Richard Nixon change Cold War diplomacy during his presidency?

Nixon Redefines American Foreign Policy

During his years in office, Richard Nixon fundamentally reshaped the way the United States approached the world. Before Nixon took office, most American leaders shared a common Cold War ideology. They stressed that there existed a basic conflict between democratic, capitalist countries and totalitarian, communist ones. They divided the world into “us” and “them,” and they established policies based on an assumption commonly held that “the enemy of my enemy is my friend.” Therefore, a country opposed to communism was, by this definition, a friend of the United States. Nixon and **Henry Kissinger**, his leading adviser on national security and international affairs, altered this Cold War policy approach.

At first glance, Richard Nixon's partnership with Henry Kissinger seemed improbable. Nixon was a conservative California Republican, suspicious of the more liberal East Coast Republicans and exhausted with the political and strategic theories of Ivy League intellectuals. Kissinger was a Harvard-educated Jewish émigré from Germany and

a prominent figure in East Coast intellectual circles. In several prior presidential campaigns, Kissinger had actually worked against Nixon. However, both men were outsiders, equipped with an outsider's readiness to question accepted orthodoxy.

In foreign affairs, Nixon and Kissinger embraced the idea of **realpolitik**, a German word meaning "real politics." According to realpolitik, political goals should be defined by concrete national interests instead of abstract ideologies. The two statesmen argued that if Americans would put aside their Cold War biases and look at the world with fresh eyes, U.S. global interests could be surveyed not in black and white but in shades of gray. For example, China and the Soviet Union—America's ideological enemies—could actually become excellent trading partners. At the same time, West Germany and Japan—America's ideological friends—were fast developing into economic rivals.

Nixon and Kissinger also questioned some lingering Cold War assumptions. For instance, they concluded that there was no united worldwide communist movement, as Lyndon Johnson and other Presidents had believed. There were important differences between the unique ideologies of the Soviet Union and China and other communist countries, such as Yugoslavia, North Korea, and North Vietnam, which often behaved quite independently. As President, Nixon insisted on a flexible, pragmatic foreign policy that avoided ideological absolutes.



Checkpoint How did Nixon and Kissinger reshape America's approach to foreign affairs?

Vocabulary Builder

pragmatic—(prag MAT ihk) *adj.*
practical; having to do with real actions and results rather than ideas and theories

Playing the China Card

From his first days in office, Nixon seemed determined to leave his mark on the nation's international affairs. Lyndon Johnson focused primarily on domestic affairs—the nuts and bolts of legislation and political deal-making. Nixon was more a man of the world, fascinated by global politics and shifting alliances. Johnson believed his Great Society would solidify his reputation as a great President. In stark contrast, Nixon thought his reorientation of American foreign policy would cement his legacy in the annals of United States history.

Reasons for Reaching Out to China "You're not going to believe this," a Nixon aide told a journalist in 1969, "but Nixon wants to recognize China." It was an odd, almost unbelievable, statement. At the time, the communist People's Republic of China was the most populous country in the world, but it was not officially recognized by the United States. Nor had it been admitted to the United Nations. The China that the United States recognized as the official representative body of the Chinese people was the Nationalist Chinese government exiled on the island of Taiwan. Nixon built his impressive career as a hard-line "Cold Warrior," a vigilant opponent of communism. He was the last politician Americans could imagine to extend the olive branch of recognition—and thus peace—to the communists.

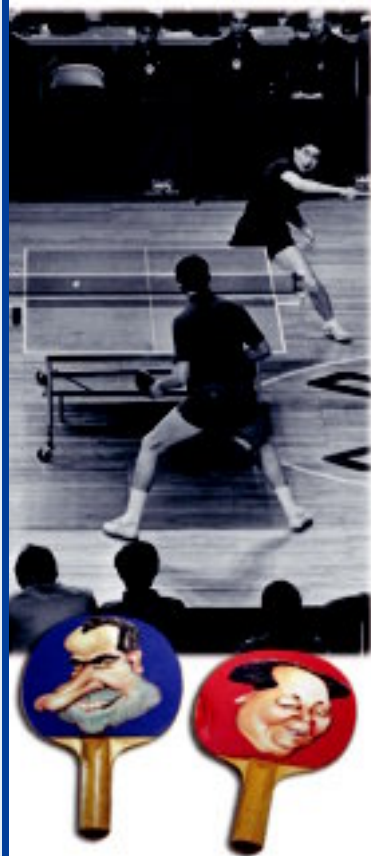
Ever the political realist, Nixon knew that the People's Republic of China could not be ignored forever. He recognized that establishing diplomatic relations with the Chinese communists would benefit the United States. From an economic standpoint, improved relations would

HISTORY MAKERS

Henry Kissinger (b. 1923)

Born in Germany, Henry Kissinger came to the United States in 1938 when his family decided to flee the Nazis' growing persecution of Jews. After serving in the United States Army during World War II, he went to college. A brilliant student, Kissinger earned his bachelor's degree with highest honors and gained a Ph.D. at Harvard in just four years. Kissinger became a noted expert on national security and defense issues and soon impressed Richard Nixon with his foreign-policy analysis. When Nixon became President, he named Kissinger as his top national security adviser. The two worked closely together to end the Vietnam War, open relations with communist China, and shape the new diplomacy of détente with the Soviet Union. Nixon eventually named Kissinger his Secretary of State in 1973.





Ping-Pong Diplomacy

Nine American table-tennis players journeyed to China in 1971 to play matches against Chinese competitors. Americans commemorated the event with special ping-pong paddles fashioned after Nixon and Chinese leader Mao Zedong.

bring significant trade agreements, especially benefiting California and the Pacific Coast. Politically, U.S. normalization would drive a wedge between China and the Soviet Union, who had strayed from their traditional alliance and become rivals for territory and diplomatic influence. Finally, if the United States forged stronger relations with the Chinese, they might pressure North Vietnam to accept a negotiated peace to end the conflict still raging at the time.

Nixon Normalizes Relations With China With so much to gain and so little to lose, Nixon quietly pushed ahead with his plans. In public, the Chinese made symbolic overtures toward a meeting. In April 1971, China invited an American table-tennis team to play against its athletes. This small action demonstrated China's willingness to talk. Henry Kissinger worked behind the scenes, talking with Chinese leaders and ironing out sensitive issues with Premier **Zhou Enlai**. Then, in July 1971, Nixon announced that he would make an official state visit to China.

In February 1972, the President made the trip and toured the Great Wall, the Imperial Palace, and other historic sites. Nixon sat down for lengthy talks with Zhou Enlai and Communist Party Chairman Mao Zedong. He even learned enough Chinese to make a toast in the language of his host country. The visit was a great success and an important step toward normalizing diplomatic relations with China. The following year, American tourists started visiting and American companies set up a thriving trade with China. Nixon's China trip was the high point of his presidency. It bridged, as Zhou Enlai said, "the vastest ocean in the world, twenty-five years of no communication." In 1979, the United States and China established full diplomatic relations.



Checkpoint Why did Nixon reach out to China?

Détente With the Soviet Union

Nixon's trip to the People's Republic of China prompted an immediate reaction from the Soviet Union, which had strained relations with both countries. Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev feared that improved U.S.-Chinese relations would isolate Russia. Therefore, he invited Nixon to visit Moscow. Nixon made the trip in May 1972. Afterward, the President reported to Congress that he and Brezhnev had reached agreements in a wide variety of areas:

Primary Source

"Recognizing the responsibility of the advanced industrial nations to set an example in combating mankind's common enemies, the United States and the Soviet Union have agreed to cooperate in efforts to reduce pollution and enhance environmental quality. We have agreed to work together in the . . . conquest of cancer and heart disease."

—Richard Nixon, speech to Congress, June 1, 1972

Nixon also announced plans to conduct a joint U.S.-Soviet space mission.

However, by far the high point of the summit was the signing of the first **Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty**. Otherwise known as SALT I, the treaty froze the deployment of intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) and placed limits on antiballistic missiles (ABMs), but it did not alter the stockpiling of the more dangerous multiple independent reentry vehicles (MIRVs). SALT I did not end the arms race between the United States and the Soviet Union. But it was a giant step toward that goal.

The importance of SALT I stemmed first and foremost from U.S. and Soviet efforts to reduce tensions between them. A policy aimed at easing Cold War tensions, **détente** had replaced previous diplomatic efforts based on suspicion and



distrust. With his visits to China and the Soviet Union, coming within six months of each other, Richard Nixon dramatically altered America's global strategy. He relaxed the nation's inflexible stance toward communism and applied a more pragmatic approach to foreign policy. In the short term, the new relationships he forged helped the United States to end the Vietnam War. In the long term, Nixon's foreign-policy breakthroughs moved the world a step closer to the end of the Cold War.

Nuclear Arms Treaty

As Leonid Brezhnev (seated, right) looks on, President Nixon signs the SALT I treaty during his historic visit to Moscow.

- ✓ **Checkpoint** How did SALT I support Nixon's new policy for dealing with the Soviet Union?

SECTION

5 Assessment

Progress Monitoring Online

For: Self-test with vocabulary practice
Web Code: nea-1611

Comprehension

- Terms and People** For each item below, write a sentence explaining its significance.
 - Henry Kissinger
 - realpolitik
 - Zhou Enlai
 - détente
- NoteTaking Reading Skill: Categorize** Use your table to answer the Section Focus Question: How did Richard Nixon change Cold War diplomacy during his presidency?

Writing About History

- Quick Write: Write the Essay Body** Choose a topic from the section on which you might write a persuasive essay. For example, you might discuss whether Nixon was a better Cold War President than his predecessors. Write the body of your essay, using a list of points you have made to guide you. Remember to open and close the body of the essay with strong arguments.

Critical Thinking

- Apply Information** How did Nixon's policy toward China reflect the philosophy of realpolitik?
- Draw Conclusions** Why did Nixon and Kissinger believe détente was a beneficial foreign policy?
- Predict Consequences** Did Richard Nixon position the United States to win the Cold War? Why or why not?