

# From Irreconcilable Momentum to Establishment of Diplomatic Relations and Cooperation: On the Different Stages of Relationship Transformation between China and the United States after World War II

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**Abstract.** After experiencing the brutal and arduous Second World War, China and the United States, who fought alongside their allies during World War II, shifted their relationship from alliance to hostility due to their own interests, and continued to deteriorate after the Korean War in the 1950s, experiencing more than 20 years of complex international confrontation. During this period of more than 20 years, China and the United States continued to confront and conflict due to the Cold War and their own interests. However, in the end, due to their respective interests and considerations of national strategic planning, they shook hands and made peace, eventually moving towards normalization and peaceful establishment of diplomatic relations.

**Keywords:** China; United States; Cold War; Diplomacy; National Interests.

## 1. Introduction

The relationship between China and the United States has undergone complex changes and developments in history, and it was not until the 20th century that the world situation underwent significant changes. World War I and World War II led to the disintegration and reorganization of the world political landscape; The relationship between China and the United States is also constantly changing with international factors. By the end of World War II, the world had gradually formed a bipolar confrontation led by the two superpowers of the United States and the Soviet Union. Both sides hoped to expand their overseas spheres of influence as much as possible to gain an advantage in the Cold War confrontation and international struggles. As a strategically important power in Asia and directly bordering the Soviet Union, China has naturally attracted high attention and attention from the United States. The diplomatic relationship between the United States and China has a significant impact on the United States' Asia Pacific and Cold War strategic layout. Therefore, after the end of World War II, the diplomatic relationship between the United States and China has been constantly changing due to its own interests and international political factors, Ultimately, it shifted from a bad relationship to a normal development of diplomatic relations.

## 2. Result

### 2.1. At the Beginning of Sino-US Relations after the End of World War II

#### 2.1.1. China US Relations Reached a Low Point after World War II

In the Second World War, China, as the first country to engage in local wars, fired the first shot in the anti-fascist camp's resistance and ultimately achieved victory after the arduous fourteen years of resistance. In the early stages of the Anti-Japanese War, the United States, as a neutral country, did not have much interaction or contact with China. However, after the Japanese joint fleet attacked Pearl Harbor, the United States announced its participation in the war and joined the anti-fascist camp to declare war on Japan. China and the United States began to stand in the same camp, receiving weapons and equipment assistance from the United States, as well as armed personnel such as the American Volunteer Air Force, also known as the Flying Tigers, led by General Chennault, directly participating in the battlefield battles in China; Many American pilots sacrificed themselves on the

Chinese battlefield and made significant contributions to the Anti-Japanese War. At that time, China and the United States were both allies, and there were common enemy targets between China and the United States, Nazi Germany and Japan. Therefore, during the wartime period of World War II, the relationship between China and the United States was extremely close and good. But at that time, the Kuomintang government led by Chiang Kai shek, not the CPC, went to the international community on behalf of the legitimate Chinese government to negotiate with the United States and accept military assistance. As a result, after the victory of World War II, the Kuomintang, which had close contact with the United States and was also a capitalist camp, continued to receive support from the United States. The CPC, because of its differences in ideology and social system from the United States, and because the CPC and the Soviet Union belong to the same ideology, is very likely to become a major help for the Soviet Union in Asia in the future, and will greatly promote the development and expansion of communism, this is a negative signal for the United States. After the end of World War II, the United States realized the strategic and ideological differences with the Soviet Union, and the relationship between the two sides in Europe became increasingly tense. The United States has regarded Europe as a frontline stronghold against the Soviet Union in the Cold War and has begun to provide planned and limited economic aid to Europe, To assist Europe in orderly economic recovery and social stability, in order for the United States to establish its Bretton Woods system, promote and promote the integration of European economy, promote a united and stable Western Europe, and effectively restrain the Soviet Union. In terms of the Cold War confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union, the main areas of competition were two regions. One was the main confrontation between East and West Europe in Europe, and the other was the competition in the Asia Pacific region; The United States is also promoting its strategic layout in Europe to compete with the Soviet Union in the Asia Pacific region. China, which faced the Soviet Union directly in the Asian region, became the strategic focus of the United States in Asia. In order to maintain its long-term economic interests in China, the United States needed a force controlled by the United States to serve as an agent for the United States. Therefore, the Chinese Nationalist government, which had a common foundation of cooperation and interaction, became the agent of the United States in Asia, but in fact, the United States has a clear understanding of the corruption and low capacity of the Kuomintang government. It made accurate judgments long before the outbreak of the civil war. Once the civil war broke out between the CPC and the Kuomintang, the Kuomintang would certainly lose; Therefore, the United States vigorously promoted peace negotiations between the Kuomintang and the Communist Party, but the leader of the Kuomintang, Chiang Kai Shek, ultimately launched a civil war due to his ambition. The mediation plan of the US envoy to China, Marshall, ultimately failed, and the United States was also greatly disappointed with the Kuomintang. But in Asia at that time, the power of the United States was not strong, and countries such as Japan and South Korea were in the post-war reconstruction stage, which was of no help to the situation in China. In order to maintain its interests in China and the Asia Pacific Far East, it can only choose to provide assistance to the Kuomintang, allowing it to play the same role as Western Europe in the Cold War battlefield in Europe, that is, to contain the Soviet Union and its common forces. During the Liberation War, the United States used its own naval forces to assist the National Revolutionary Army in relocating and seizing the opportunity of war; And provide a large amount of American military equipment to the National Revolutionary Army, so that it can assemble a large number of well-equipped American divisions, among which the reorganized 74th Division led by Zhang Ling fu is the representative of the American division. Causing significant damage to the Chinese People's Liberation Army during the Liberation War; The CPC had a bad impression of the United States, which foreshadowed the future hostility of New China towards the United States. Therefore, after the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the United States immediately lost its economic interests in the Chinese region and the repayment of loans borrowed from the Nationalist government through the Lend Lease Act during World War II. The strategic layout of the United States in China also officially failed, and the United States immediately declared that it did not recognize the legitimacy of the Communist Party led New China government and imposed economic blockade and sanctions on New China.

Starting from this stage, the relationship between China and the United States has deteriorated due to the change of Chinese political leadership.

### **2.1.2. The Taiwan Issue and the Korean War Influence the Relationship**

In the early 1950s, North Korea launched a unification war against South Korea with the support and instigation of Soviet Stalin, and within a few days, it crossed the 38th parallel and attacked the city of Jianshi. The news of the Korean War caused a sensation around the world, marking the first collision between the agents of Western capitalism and Eastern socialism after World War II. According to the analysis of the Truman administration, North Korea was directly ordered by Moscow as a military pathfinder for the Soviet communist satellite states to implement the global strategy of Soviet international communism, while South Korea was only the beginning, and they judged that after the outbreak of the Korean War, Taiwan could also become the next target of the Soviet Union, and if Taiwan was also occupied and recovered by Moscow at the behest of China, this will cause the United States to lose an extremely important bridgehead in the Asia Pacific region that can closely restrain the communist camp. This will lead to the complete disruption or even collapse of the long-term strategic goals and expected layout of the United States in the Asia Pacific region, and the United States will lose its strategic position in the Asia Pacific region as a result. On June 26th, the second day after the outbreak of the Korean War. Bradley first raised the issue of Taiwan, not the North Korean issue, but the Taiwan issue, and he read out MacArthur's "Opinion on Defending Taiwan," in which he pointed out that we must urgently defend Taiwan. At this meeting, Acheson also changed his original opinion and put forward a proposal to send the Seventh Fleet to Taiwan. Truman convened senior officials from the State Department and the Ministry of Defense at the Blair Building to discuss the North Korean issue. Truman adopted their views and issued a statement on the 27th, stating: "The attack on North Korea clearly shows that communism has surpassed the boundaries of using ideological power to overthrow and conquer independent countries. Communism uses armed aggression and war to achieve its goals. In this situation, the Communist army has launched an attack on Formosa (i.e. Taiwan)." The occupation directly endangers the security of the Pacific and the legitimate and necessary functions of the United States in the region. The occupation of Taiwan by Communist forces would directly threaten the security of the Pacific region and the U.S. forces performing their legitimate and necessary duties in the region. He also declared that "the determination of Taiwan's future status must await the restoration of security in the Pacific, a peaceful settlement of Japan, or the review of the United Nations." Truman then ordered the U.S. Seventh Fleet to sail into the Taiwan Strait to stop the Chinese People's Liberation Army from attacking Taiwan and ensure Taiwan's neutrality. Immediately, the US Seventh Fleet sailed into the Taiwan Strait to prevent the PLA from carrying out operations to liberate Taiwan [1]. On June 28, 1950, Mao Zedong delivered a speech calling on the people of the whole country and the world to unite, make full preparations, and defeat any provocation from American imperialism [2]. On the same day, Zhou Enlai issued a statement on behalf of the Chinese government, strongly condemning the crimes of US aggression against North Korea, Taiwan, and interference in Asian affairs. From then on, China and the United States officially became hostile, and their relationship immediately fell to a freezing point. On September 15th of the same year, the US military landed in Incheon and officially intervened in the Korean Peninsula civil war; On September 30th, Zhou Enlai delivered a speech warning the United States: "The Chinese people cannot tolerate foreign aggression, nor can they allow imperialists to invade their neighbors recklessly and ignore them." However, MacArthur believed that China did not dare to send troops to confront the United States, so the United States disregarded multiple warnings from the Chinese government. On October 1st, the US military crossed the 38th parallel north, occupied Pyongyang on the 19th, and attempted to quickly occupy the entire North Korea, and openly claimed, "In history, the Yalu River was not an insurmountable obstacle that China and North Korea were divided into." At the same time, American planes repeatedly invaded Chinese airspace, bombing the Dandong region, and the flames of war were about to reach the Yalu River [2]. At this point, China and the United States have officially entered into war, and the United States has seriously threatened China's national interests. Chairman Mao pointed out at the expanded meeting of the

Central Political Bureau, "If we do not send troops and let the enemy suppress the Yalu River, the domestic and international reactionary momentum will increase, which will be detrimental to all parties; first of all, it will be detrimental to Northeast China. The entire Northeast border defense army in Jiang Bei will be controlled, and the South Manchuria power will be controlled... In short, sending troops has great benefits, and not sending troops will cause great harm!" In response to the request of the North Korean government, the Chinese Volunteer Army went to Korea and ultimately achieved an overall victory over the United Nations led by the US military after two years and nine months of arduous fighting. The failure of the Korean War further undermined the reputation and strategic position of the United States in the Asia Pacific region. In the face of the Chinese government that caused this result, in order to curb China's development and further expansion of communism, the United States adopted stricter economic blockade and sanctions measures against China. From the end of World War II to the beginning of the Korean War, China and the United States, due to the alternation of Chinese regimes, resulting in a setback in the strategic layout of the United States in the Asia Pacific region and a loss of vested interests, coupled with its ideological differences, ultimately leading to the severance of diplomatic relations and the beginning of hostility between the two sides.

## **2.2. China and The Soviet Union Went from Friendship to Enmity**

### **2.2.1. The Basic Relationship of Historical Friendship between China and the Soviet Union**

The relationship between China and the Soviet Union has a long history. As early as 1917, the successful October Revolution of the Soviet Union became the mentor of the Chinese proletarian revolution; As Mao Zedong once said, "The sound of the October Revolution brought us Marxism." The successful experience of the Soviet Union brought new hope to the dark and chaotic China at that time, like a guiding light on the path of suffering and confusion for the Chinese people. Li Da Zhao also excitedly mentioned, "Looking at the future of the world, it will surely be a world of red flags!". After the founding of the CPC in 1921, the Kuomintang under the leadership of Sun Yat Sen at its first Kuomintang National Congress also proposed the policy of joining Russia and the Communist Party to help farmers and workers. The Communist International led by the Soviet Union will provide assistance and guidance. After the establishment of the People's Republic of China, facing the fierce gaze of Western capitalism and severe economic blockade, in order to seek a way out, the new China implemented a "one-sided" diplomatic strategy and decided to fight side by side with the Soviet Union, which was also a socialist camp. So the Soviet Union took the lead in extending a hand of friendship and was the first to establish diplomatic relations with New China, recognizing its legitimate government status. Under the influence of the Soviet Union's call, in the following three months, 11 socialist countries including Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary, and North Korea established diplomatic relations with New China. To pave the way for China to enter the world stage. Afterwards, with the unremitting efforts of Chairman Mao, Premier Zhou Enlai's visit to the Soviet Union, and the assistance of Stalin, China and the Soviet Union signed the Treaty of Friendship, Alliance, and Mutual Assistance in Moscow on February 14, 1950; This treaty enabled New China to receive strong assistance from various aspects of the Soviet Union, which made New China feel like a sweet dew after a long drought. The military aid from the Soviet Union was immediately deployed to the battlefield of the Korean War; In terms of domestic industry, a large number of experts and engineers assisted by the Soviet Union injected strong impetus into the First Five Year Plan, and China and the Soviet Union worked together to create the brilliant "156 Plan"; To lay a solid foundation for China's recovery.

### **2.2.2. The Disagreement between China and the Soviet Union Worsened The Relationship**

But there were unexpected circumstances, and on March 5, 1953, Stalin passed away; His successor, Khrushchev, not only did not continue to implement the Stalin model and its development policies, but instead, at the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in February 1956, he sharply exposed Stalin through a "secret report" using Khrushchev's ultimate goal of "opposing personal worship" [3]. He criticized Stalin's serious mistakes in leading the socialist

construction of the Soviet Union and the serious consequences of his personal worship. Once this incident was exposed, it caused a violent shock and chaos to the entire socialist camp; The CPC opposed and doubted Khrushchev on this incident, and did not approve of the overall negation and criticism of Stalin's period, and believed that it was necessary to treat it objectively and recognize its positive role. Starting from the late 1950s, the contradictions and conflicts between China and the Soviet Union have gradually intensified. These contradictions and conflicts manifest in two aspects: on the one hand, ideological differences; On the other hand, the Soviet Party claimed to be the "Lao Tze Party" and required the CPC to obey its strategy of Soviet American cooperation dominating the world militarily and diplomatically [4]. In terms of ideology, there were huge differences between China and the Soviet Union. On the occasion of commemorating the 90th anniversary of Lenin's birth in April 1960, the CPC published three articles, including Long Live Leninism, which focused on clarifying the views of the CPC on a series of major issues, such as the era, war and peace, proletarian dictatorship, and opposition to modern revisionism, naming and criticizing Yugoslavia's "modern revisionism", in fact, it made anonymous criticisms of some of Khrushchev's views. In June, Khrushchev launched a fierce attack on the CPC at the third congress of the Romanian Workers' Party held in Bucharest. The CPC did not yield to this pressure. After the meeting, the Soviet government suddenly notified China in July and unilaterally decided to immediately recall all Soviet experts working in our country and abolish all agreements on economic and technological cooperation between the two countries. This series of deliberate actions that worsened Sino Soviet relations resulted in huge economic losses for China, increased the serious economic difficulties at the time, and greatly damaged the emotions of the Chinese people, causing irreparable trauma to the relationship between the two countries [5]. In 1963-64, the Sino Soviet Debate reached its climax, and China published nine articles, collectively known as the "Debate on the General Line of the International Communist Movement," targeting the Soviet Communist Party, known as the "Nine Commentaries," which sharply criticized Soviet revisionism. The Sino Soviet debate led to a complete ideological division between China and the Soviet Union, and the ideological foundation on which it relied to maintain was completely destroyed. In terms of military affairs, due to the Sino Soviet debate, both sides have completely torn off the mask of peace, which has led to an escalation of tension in the border situation. In 1968, the Soviet Union deployed millions of troops on the Xinjiang border, which could potentially invade China at any time. The outbreak of the Zhen Bao Island and Tie Ling battles on the northeast border further pushed the Sino Soviet military conflict to its peak. Khrushchev's successor, Brezhnev, claimed that he would drop nuclear bombs on China when necessary, carrying out a "surgical knife like devastating blow" to China. Faced with the enormous threat from both the United States and the Soviet Union, a nationwide movement called "Digging Deep, Accumulating Grain, Preparing for War, and Arming the Whole People" emerged at that time. In the 1960s, the People's Liberation Army had a special cavalry unit mainly stationed on the border between China and Mongolia. Soldiers and horses both carry heavy gas masks. Its true function is to assume that after the first round of nuclear strikes by the Soviet Union against China, it can still survive for as long as possible to kill the Soviet army. Behind the figure of this special type of cavalry, we can also see the depth of the Sino Soviet conflict and the tense relationship back then. At this point, the relationship between China and the Soviet Union was completely broken due to differences in the direction and strategic intentions of the socialist road development, resulting in disputes of interest between the two sides.

### **2.3. Relaxation of Sino-US Relations**

#### **2.3.1. The United States is Facing Multiple Difficulties, Leading to a Shift in its Attitude Towards China**

At a time when China and the Soviet Union were at odds, the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union continued and escalated. However, in the early 1960s, the military and economic strength of the Soviet Union increased, and Western Europe also established the European Coal and Steel Community, the predecessor of the European Union, in an attempt to break free from American hegemony. Japan and South Korea in the Asia Pacific region also experienced rapid economic

recovery after the war. This series of phenomena put great pressure on the United States. In addition, the United States was deeply mired in the Vietnam War, with high military spending and a continuous increase in the congressional fiscal deficit. Domestic anti-war sentiment was rising, and in the face of domestic and foreign troubles, the United States gradually showed a sense of unbearable fatigue. At this time, the Sino Soviet conflict allowed the United States to keenly seize the opportunity to reverse this unfavorable situation while facing dual pressure from the two major social camps, and saw hope for improvement in Sino US relations. After September 1966, American officials stopped mentioning the "conspiracy" of the CPC in Asia at the bilateral talks in Warsaw. This new approach to China policy is referred to by the US government as a "containment but not isolation" policy [6]. By 1967, American intelligence officials concluded that "China's main enemy was the Soviet Union rather than the United States.". And this phenomenon precisely reveals that the United States is gradually weakening its hostility towards China and is beginning to adopt a relaxed attitude towards China. In fact, as early as 1967, Nixon published an article titled "Asia after Vietnam" in the Foreign Affairs Journal. He emphasized that "the role of the United States as a global police force may be very limited in the future," and that the United States should not "permanently exclude China from the international community." [7]. From this, it can be fully seen that the Nixon administration of the United States was under tremendous pressure from the Cold War against the Soviet Union, including the arms race and the Cuban crisis; And the huge financial and economic crisis caused by the inability to escape from the Vietnam War quagmire, as well as the growing public discontent domestically. To shift domestic contradictions and seek new development opportunities for oneself under the Cold War; The policy of completely blocking and imposing sanctions on China by the previous leadership has shifted towards attempting to turn hostility into jade, seeking active contact and goodwill. In an attempt to establish friendly diplomatic relations with China and make both sides friendly and mutually supportive partners, the Soviet Union began to face common pressure from both the United States and China, and had no time to focus on the Cold War against the United States. This would allow the United States to ease its breathing process from the shadow of the Vietnam War, gain space for military development and expand its economic advantages, and gain the upper hand in the Cold War [8].

### **2.3.2. China Chooses to Establish Diplomatic Relations with the United States based on International Considerations**

On the Chinese side, due to the enormous military pressure from the Soviet Union, national defense and security were greatly threatened; At this time, facing the olive branch of the United States, Mao Zedong made an important diplomatic decision to engage with the United States and try to make good relations in order to avoid facing strategic pressure from two superpowers at the same time. On April 10, 1971, the American table tennis team officially visited China, opening the door to a 22 year long friendly diplomacy between China and the United States. The ping-pong diplomacy of turning a big ball from a small ball has taken a big step forward in the history of China and the United States. On February 28, 1972, China and the United States signed the famous "Three Joint Communiques between China and the United States" (also known as the "Shanghai Communique") in Shanghai. The United States recognizes that there is only one China and that Taiwan is a part of China, and confirms the ultimate goal of withdrawing all US armed forces and military installations from the Taiwan region. [9] At this point, China and the United States officially broke the ice, and after several years of tortuous negotiations, on December 16, 1978, the Sino US Joint Communique on the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations was issued, in which the United States recognized the Central People's Government of the People's Republic of China as the only legitimate government of China [10]. Its publication marks the end of the isolation between China and the United States and the beginning of the normalization process of relations.

## **3. Conclusion**

After the end of World War II, due to differences in political views, ideologies, and conflicts of interest, the relationship between China and the United States deteriorated. Later, due to factors such

as the Korean War, they completely became hostile. After more than 20 years of confrontation, due to the strategic intention of jointly targeting the Soviet Union and considering their own interests, they finally shook hands and reconciled, and their relationship improved and normalized, opening a new chapter of peaceful diplomatic relations and common development. The United States achieved its Cold War expectations from it, while China avoided dual line confrontation while escaping the enormous pressure crisis on the Soviet Union. As a result, it began to engage with more countries and gain opportunities and assistance, occupying an increasingly important leading position in the international community. Played an indispensable role.

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