

**VACILLATING BETWEEN REVOLUTION AND DÉTENTE:  
MAO'S CHANGING PSYCHE AND POLICY TOWARD  
THE UNITED STATES,  
1969–1976**

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# MAIN ARGUMENT

- **Mao was not a consistent strategic planner**
- Mao was constantly vacillating between promoting world revolution and seeking a détente with U.S. “imperialists”
- Mao was psychologically uncomfortable and hesitant when he switched from his hard-line anti-American policy to a more appeasing approach
- As soon as he sensed the hope of an immediate revolutionary build-up, Mao changed his mind and reverted to his revolutionary tendency

# THE ZIGZAGS OF THE SINO-AMERICAN RELATIONS

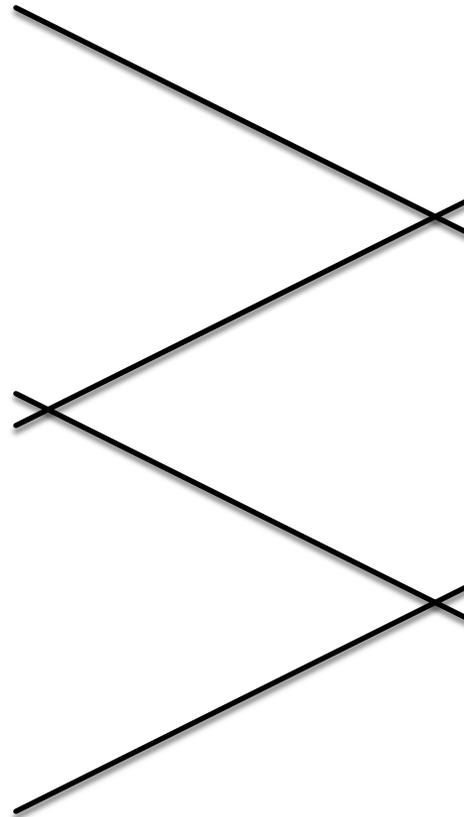
US as the *deadly enemy*

Contradiction between Mao's  
revolutionary thoughts and  
alignment with the US

Mao's theory of the three worlds  
→ *anti-two-superpowers*  
(US and Soviet Union)

Sino-American rapprochement  
to deter the Soviet Union

Sino-American common concern  
over Soviet expansionism



## APPROACHING THE ENEMY

- China as “the center of world revolution”
- US as the deadly enemy
- 1966: Great Cultural Revolution → pushes radicalization to its peak
- campaigning for war against imperialists, revisionists and reactionaries of all countries
- 1969: Sino-Soviet border clashes → Mao was preparing for a war (against the Soviets)
- Premier Zhou Enlai’s proposal:
  - promoting high-level Sino-American contact in order to enlarge American-Soviet contradiction



<https://foreignpolicy.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/nixon-mao-china-1972-GettyImages-2667916.jpg?w=1500>

Mao Zedong and Richard Nixon



<https://thechinaproject.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Dr.-Henry-Kissinger-then-Presidential-National-Security-Adviser-with-Chinese-Premier-Zhou-Enlai-AP.jpg>

Henry Kissinger and Zhou Enlai

## SINO-AMERICAN NEGOTIATIONS

- 1970: Nixon signalled that he wanted to improve the relation with China
- 1971: Chinese side received U.S. presidential envoy Henry Kissinger
- ➔ Taiwan issue: Zhou and Kissinger came to terms that the US was about to disengage from Taiwan
- ➔ 1972: Nixon's visit to China
- 1973: Mao proposed the plan of a "strategic line" to Kissinger
- ➔ establish a geopolitical complex of countries by utilizing Sino-American common concern over Soviet expansionism
- ➔ U.S.—Japan—China—Pakistan—Iran—Turkey — Europe
- 1973: Kissinger assured Mao that the US will protect China if the Soviets attack
- ➔ Mao was offended as being characterized as defensive

# THE THEORY OF THE THREE WORLDS

- Core idea: alliance with various nations against the Soviet Union and, to a lesser extent, against the United States
  1. World: USA and Soviet Union
  2. World: Japan, Europe & Canada
  3. World: all Asia (except Japan), all Africa, all Latin America
- Vice Premier Deng Xiaoping elaborated Mao's theory of "three worlds"

“It is not the two superpowers who are really powerful;  
rather it is those people from the third world countries who unite  
and dare to fight and win”

Deng Xiaoping, speech at the UN General Assembly 1974

## MAO'S CONTRADICTING POLICIES

- Mao's revolutionary thoughts were conflicting with alignment with the US
  - Criticism by revolutionary parties
  - Still adheres to his ideology, but first aim was to expose Soviet revisionism
- Mao's new policy toward the United States was indeed a blunder
  - U.S.-Soviet relations improved in spite of his efforts to the contrary
  - Mao therefore criticised the Foreign Ministry & Zhou because of the apparent failed policies
  - Turn back to his revolutionary tendency
    - Theory of the Three Worlds

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“Generally speaking, [Zhou] forgot about the *principle of preventing “rightism”* while allying with [the United States].

This is mainly because [he] *forgot about the Chairman’s instructions*. [He] over-estimated the power of the enemy and devaluated the power of the people.”

Politburo 1973

## DO I AGREE WITH THE AUTHOR'S ARGUMENT?

- Explains Mao's puzzling policy shifts by putting a special emphasis on Mao's changing psyche
  - Arguments are supported by evidence
- Many side stories and quotes to get an insight into Mao's erratic behavior
- Presented in a clear and consistent way
  - Could have given more examples for the way he was criticized



**THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION!**

