

***Nixon and Kissinger: Partners in Powers***  
***Nixon and Mao: The Week that Changed the World***  
**Roundtable Review**



Reviewed Works:

**Robert Dallek.** *Nixon and Kissinger: Partners in Power.* New York: Harper Collins, 2007. 740 pp. \$32.50. ISBN-13: 978-0060722302 (hardcover).

**Margaret MacMillan.** *Nixon and Mao: The Week that Changed the World.* New York: Random House, 2007. 404 pp. \$27.95. ISBN-13: 978-1-4000-6127-3 (hardcover). [Previously published in Canada as *Nixon in China: The Week that Changed the World* and in the UK as *Seize the Hour: When Nixon Met Mao.*].

Roundtable Editor: David A. Welch

Reviewers: Jussi M. Hanhimäki, Jeffrey Kimball, Lorenz Lüthi, Yafeng Xia

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## ROUNDTABLE *Review*

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Roundtable Editor: David A. Welch

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**Introduction by David A. Welch, University of Toronto**

**What Makes for Good Political Biography?**

When asked to edit this roundtable for H-DIPLO, I balked. To begin with, I do not claim to be a professional historian. I do not even claim to be a professional political ‘scientist,’ though that is what my business card says I am (like Nathan Pusey, I have doubts about how scientific we can be). I am merely a student of international politics who has a particular fascination with human error—or, as I prefer to put it, ‘why smart people screw up.’ History provides a lot of the grist for my mill, but I can claim no particular insight into Nixon, Kissinger, or Mao. Besides, Margaret MacMillan is a good friend and was until recently my colleague at the University of Toronto. Robert Dallek very kindly blurbed my first book. I am a huge admirer of both. How could I possibly be objective even if I were qualified?

*David Welch is Professor of Political Science at the University of Toronto and Director of the Trudeau Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies. He is author of Painful Choices: A Theory of Foreign Policy Change (2005), inaugural winner of the International Studies Association ISSS book prize, and co-author of The Cuban Missile Crisis: A Concise History (2007).*

I persuaded myself, however, that it was not my job to review the books, merely to recruit the reviewers, and I found the subject matter irresistible. As a connoisseur of human foibles, how could I pass up the opportunity to participate in a roundtable devoted to some of the most intriguingly problematic characters in history? Richard Nixon, the only president of the United States ever to resign, undone by an utterly unnecessary act of burglary; Henry Kissinger, the sycophantic professor-turned-courtier ersatz Metternich; and Mao Zedong, the man probably responsible for more deaths than anyone else on the planet. There is more to each than this, of course, but they are characters with dark sides that would slake even the most prurient thirst. They are also men who managed to pull off one of the greatest diplomatic coups of modern times. For all of their faults, they were in their own ways men of genuine talent and ability. What they did with that talent and ability, on both the plus and minus sides of the score sheet, makes for absolutely fascinating reading.

Robert Dallek and Margaret MacMillan, talented storytellers both, have at them, and at a host of lesser figures to boot, some no less important in certain respects than these three—Zhou Enlai, for instance, a rare example of a pragmatic conservative revolutionary and one of the greatest survivors of all time. To evaluate the stories they tell, we have four enormously well-qualified reviewers. Jussi Hanhimäki and Yafeng Xia share their reactions to both books; Jeffrey Kimball reports on Dallek; and Lorenz Lüthi reports on MacMillan. I confess that I am as much a fan of the work of these four gentlemen as I am of Dallek’s and MacMillan’s.

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The reviews speak for themselves. Most of them are mixed. Taken as a whole, they strike me as on balance rather more critical than favorable. As a biased and unqualified reader, I confess this made me sad, but I also confess that I was not entirely surprised -- for my initial reaction when I saw the titles was to wonder what more there could possibly be to say. Nixon, Kissinger, and Mao are, I suspect, probably as well understood as they can possibly be. They have been the focus of an enormous amount of attention precisely because they are such fascinating figures.<sup>1</sup> It would be astonishing if anyone could tell us something important about any of them that we didn't already know.

Reflecting on this, I realized that I was assuming that the measure of a good political biography is whether it tells us something new and important. A short journey aboard that particular train of thought led me to wonder whether this is so. What is it, exactly, that makes a book of this kind good? I have no definitive answer to that question, but I am now officially open-minded about it.

Reflecting on my own prior reading of political biography, I quickly realized that there are several books I have enjoyed and appreciated that did not necessarily say much of anything new. Jean Edward Smith's *Grant*,<sup>2</sup> for example, broke no major new ground as far as I can tell, but was a story well told, and, while a tad hagiographic, useful as a corrective to much of the early ill treatment Grant received at the hands of Southern conservative historians. I admired Martin Gilbert's *Churchill: A Life*<sup>3</sup> for its sheer dogged comprehensiveness alone, though I found its endless string of quotations monotonous and grating. I consider Alan Bullock's *Hitler: A Study in Tyranny*<sup>4</sup> a masterful work, but less for being path breaking than for its compelling portrait of a man who is at best asymptotically fathomable. I appreciate any work that changes my understanding or makes me look at something in a new light, as long as the light is remotely plausible even if downright peculiar (my favorites here are Alexander and Juliette George's *Woodrow Wilson and Colonel House*<sup>5</sup> and Fritz Redlich's *Hitler: Diagnosis of a Destructive Prophet*<sup>6</sup>). I also admire effective popularizers, as long as they meet certain standards of scholarship. Anything that makes the public more interested in history is a good thing, to my mind, so long as it does not bring historians into ill repute.

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<sup>1</sup> A quick search of my university library turned up 75 books on Nixon, 25 on Kissinger, and more than 600 on Mao.

<sup>2</sup> Jean Edward Smith, *Grant* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001).

<sup>3</sup> Martin Gilbert, *Churchill: A Life* (New York: Henry Holt & Co, 1991).

<sup>4</sup> Alan Bullock, *Hitler: A Study in Tyranny* (London: Odhams Press, 1952).

<sup>5</sup> Alexander L. George and Juliette L. George, *Woodrow Wilson and Colonel House: A Personality Study* (New York: John Day, 1956).

<sup>6</sup> Fredrick C. Redlich, *Hitler: Diagnosis of a Destructive Prophet* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

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I doubt there would be much disagreement on what makes for bad political biography. Almost anything I have read that was written about the Kennedy brothers falls into this category. For some reason, it is hard for people to write about Camelot without an agenda, and I am as put off by myth making as I am by character assassination. Something that gets basic facts wrong, fails to engage the existing literature, or (this should go without saying) misappropriates it, clearly deserves our scorn as well.<sup>7</sup>

So what makes for good political biography? And do these two books count? The reviews in this roundtable do not explicitly address the former question, but in every case the operative criteria are not difficult to divine. I expect differences of opinion on this explain much of the variation we see in the reviews. Not being a professional historian, I cannot say whether it would be possible to articulate a broadly accepted hierarchy of criteria. But I am, as always, keen to learn.

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<sup>7</sup> My greatest disappointment in this regard is probably William Manchester, *American Caesar* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1978). When I read it I thought it fresh, insightful, and beautifully written; but shortly thereafter I read Forrest Pogue, 'The Military in a Democracy: A Review,' *International Security*, Vol. 3, No. 4 (1979), pp. 58-80.

### Nixon, Kissinger, and the Years that Shook the World

“History,” Henry Kissinger told Richard Nixon on the eve of the president’s resignation in August 1974, “will treat you more kindly than your contemporaries have.” He has been proven correct. When Nixon died in 1994, his achievements, particularly in the field of foreign policy, dominated the historical assessments of the only president in the nation’s history to have resigned.

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The opposite seems to have been the case with Kissinger. Journalists fawned on him when he was in office. In 1973—as Nixon was squirming in the purgatory of Watergate—Kissinger had even been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for negotiating the imperfect end to the Vietnam War. But over time ‘Super-K’ became a favorite, perhaps fashionable, target for a number of historians and journalists. Relentlessly attacked in the writings of Christopher Hitchens and others, ‘Kissinger the war criminal’ came to replace, by the late 1990s, the image of a globetrotting super diplomat.

Since both men have been subjected to intense scrutiny by journalists and historians, their stories are so familiar as to beg a simple question: what new could there possibly be to say about Nixon and Kissinger or the policies they pushed? Both have written massive memoirs (Kissinger’s amounting to over 3,500 pages in three volumes).<sup>1</sup> Over the years Stephen Ambrose, Herbert Parmet, Anthony Summers, Marvin and Bernard Kalb, Jussi Hanhimäki, Robert Schulzinger, Seymour Hersh, and Walter Isaacson, among others, have written lengthy biographies of the two<sup>2</sup>. And while no one has previously written a 600+ page book focusing on the relationship between the two men, in-depth and insightful analysis of their complex bond can be found in any and all of these works.

Thus, it may seem pointless for Robert Dallek, the best-selling author of a sympathetic biography of John F. Kennedy and other major studies of twentieth century presidents, to retell the story of the Opening to China, the end of the Vietnam War, the unfolding of Soviet-

<sup>1</sup> Henry Kissinger, *White House Years* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1979); *Years of Upheaval* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1982); *Years of Renewal* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999).

<sup>2</sup> Stephen E. Ambrose, *Nixon: The Triumph of a Politician, 1962-1972* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989); *Nixon: Ruin and Recovery* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992). Herbert S. Parmet, *Richard Nixon and his America* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1990). Anthony Summers, *The Arrogance of Power: The Secret World of Richard Nixon* (New York: Viking, 2000). Marvin Kalb and Bernard Kalb, *Kissinger* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1974). Jussi Hanhimäki, *Flawed Architect: Henry Kissinger and American Foreign Policy* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2004). Robert D. Schulzinger, *Henry Kissinger: Doctor of Diplomacy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989). Seymour Hersh, *The Price of Power: Kissinger in the Nixon White House* (New York: Summit Books, 1983). Walter Isaacson, *Kissinger* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992).

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American détente, and the Middle East peace process of the 1970s. Nor does it seem likely that there is much new to be learned about the Nixon administration's role in the Chilean coup that ousted Salvador Allende in 1973. What could we possibly gain from a replay of the machinations inside the Byzantine Nixon White House or, even, its self-destruction in the process that we call Watergate?

Nor does it seem that we are likely to learn new exciting revelations—save some peculiar anecdotal vignettes—from the recounting of Nixon's (and Kissinger's) 1972 trip to China. Yet, another best-selling author—Margaret MacMillan of *Paris 1919* fame—devotes over three hundred pages to this episode in the Nixon Administration's foreign policy.

Indeed, anyone already familiar with the main outline of this often sordid history should not expect to find smoking guns on the pages of *Nixon and Kissinger* or *Nixon and Mao*. Dallek, for example, writes at the outset: "We know almost all of what they did during their five and a half years in the White House; their major initiatives were and remain landmarks in the history of American foreign policy." What he is truly interested in, Dallek argues, are the 'why' and 'how' questions; he wants to know more about the motivations and modus operandi of Nixon and Kissinger's foreign policy initiatives. Or, as he puts it, the bulk of the book is an effort to "cast fresh light on who they [Nixon and Kissinger] were and how they collaborated in their use and abuse of power." (x)

MacMillan, in contrast, has a far more contemporary rationale. To her, studying the opening to China is important because the Sino-American relationship promises to be (to a large extent already is) one of the key global relationships of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. She wishes to bring past events to life in order to improve our understanding of the present and improve our handling of future challenges. For, as MacMillan ominously writes, "there will be no peace for Asia and the world unless... the United States and China find ways to work with each other. To understand their relationship we need to go back to 1972, to the moment when it started anew." (xxii)

What flows from these premises are, in essence, two well written and competently researched narratives. Both books are a joy to read and easy to follow. They deliver what they promise, offering an endless litany of interesting citations and anecdotes. In a sense, they also offer antidotes to each other. Reading Dallek's book makes one inevitably recoil with the pettiness that the 'good and the great' of the Nixon White House embarked upon. MacMillan's Kissinger and Nixon are, in contrast, much closer to the popular imagination of great statesmen. She appears quite convinced that only Nixon, as Nixon would like us believe, could have gone to China.

Except on the margins they do not, however, offer anything approaching a new interpretation on the Nixon-Kissinger relationship or the American president's trip to China in February 1972.

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Dallek, for example, projects fresh light into the odd couple's relationship through the use of masses of newly released documents and recordings. In addition to the millions of pages of National Security Council files, *Nixon and Kissinger* makes good use of the White House Tapes, the recordings of Nixon's conversations while president that, in 1974, did produce the smoking gun that drove him to resign. Then there are the Kissinger transcripts, the accounts of Kissinger's telephone conversations.

Dallek's use of these records makes this book a worthwhile and entertaining read. What emerges is a disturbing portrait of how pettiness—in the form of personal ambition or a sheer desire for public praise—was as, if not more, important in driving policy than grand geopolitical stratagems or sophisticated analyses of international relations. One is reminded, repeatedly, that Nixon and Kissinger—despite the façade they tried to build—were but two men vying for personal glory, a desire that often made them not only partners but competitors.

The trouble is: we knew this already. For anyone even somewhat familiar with the Nixon-Kissinger saga, there is not much new or surprising in what Dallek tells us. He provides examples of backbiting, sniping, courting, and lying. Dallek then concludes that "Nixon's imperial rule created a degree of distrust about executive authority that has made it more difficult for his successors to govern effectively," while Kissinger "was as much the partisan supporter of a highly imperfect administration as he was its foreign policy expert." If that is not bland enough, Dallek then sagely adds that "no one has a monopoly on wisdom." (622) I think most students of history had a vague notion that this might indeed be the case.

Margaret MacMillan's engaging narrative is equally short on new interpretation. Although she ably surveys the background to the famous February 1972 trip and provides perhaps the fullest account of the day-to-day unfolding of the high-level visit. But the conclusions that she draws are no more breathtaking than those found in Dallek's book. There were losses and gains to both sides, she confidently asserts, listing the usual litany from triangular diplomacy to lack of impact on Vietnam, and from Beijing's agreement to wait on Taiwan (not that there is much evidence that Mao was about to order a bold offensive against the island) to the end of its long isolation. "Individuals," she further judges, "ultimately made this happen" and points to the particularly pivotal role of Mao, Zhou Enlai, Nixon and Kissinger.(p. 338) True, or at least supportable by evidence. But hardly new.

Thus, it is difficult not to be slightly cynical and wonder whether other considerations than the desire to make a path-breaking contribution to the emerging scholarship on the Nixon-Kissinger era foreign policy lie behind the publication of these two books. For with the depth of their knowledge on the history American politics and diplomacy (in case of Dallek) and the history of international relations (MacMillan), both books ultimately promise much more than they can deliver. While they will undoubtedly prove commercial successes, they do not, however, mark a significant shift in the arguments regarding their subject matter. That remains the work of others.

**Nixon, Mao, Kissinger and Zhou—The Tale of Four Historical Giants**

**A**fter nearly three years of contemplation and secret diplomacy, Richard Nixon finally went to China. Toasting his Chinese hosts at the banquet on his last night in China on 27 February 1972, Nixon said, “We have been here a week. This is the week that changed the world.” This is the subtitle of the book by Margaret MacMillan, formerly a professor of history at the University of Toronto, and now the warden of St. Antony’s College, Oxford. Making use of primary sources from American and British archives, secondary sources including translated Chinese books and articles, interviews with diplomats from the United States, the People’s Republic of China (PRC), Britain, and Canada, this is the first fully documented history of U.S.-Chinese rapprochement in the early 1970s.

*Yafeng Xia is an assistant professor of East Asian and Diplomatic history at Long Island University, Brooklyn. He is the author of Negotiating with the Enemy: U.S.-China Talks during the Cold War, 1949-72 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006). He has also published articles in journals such as Diplomacy & Statecraft and the Journal of Cold War Studies. He is currently working on a monograph on the PRC’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, tentatively titled Burying the Diplomacy of Humiliation: New China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1949-1956. From 1995 to 1998, he was second secretary at the Chinese Embassy in Washington D.C.*

Nixon’s road to China was tortuous. It took almost two and half years in office before the Nixon White House was able to receive a secret message via the Pakistani channel in late May 1971 that the Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai invited Henry Kissinger, Nixon’s National Security Adviser, to visit Beijing for high-level talks. What had Washington done to prompt such an invitation from Beijing? What persuaded Beijing, still in the midst of the Cultural Revolution, to take a leap toward opening up to the United States, still cursed as the number one imperialist power in Chinese propaganda? To answer these questions, it is essential to examine how the two antagonists had communicated with each other since 1969; what moved the PRC and the United States to engage in secret diplomacy; and how and why Richard Nixon, a cold warrior, and Mao Zedong, a staunch revolutionary, would decide to undertake such a historically significant course of action.

The election of Richard Nixon as president in 1968 marked a new era in U.S. Cold War strategy--the coming of “détente.” Departing from the old bipolar system, the Nixon administration expected to reconfigure the great power structure by pushing for a five-part global order involving the United States, the Soviet Union, Europe, China, and Japan. By the late 1960s, the U.S. power position was declining. In Asia, the Vietnam quagmire evidentially showed that the American empire was on the retreat.

Comparatively, the Chinese leaders now felt more confident in dealing with the United States as they acquired nuclear weaponry, a much aspired strategic asset, in 1964. They

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were more confident of resolving the Taiwan issue without worrying too much that they would be coerced to make unwanted and unpopular concessions. On the other hand, Washington not only urgently needed to engage China in a constructive dialogue (to end the war in Vietnam), but also came to realize that to normalize relations with China would serve long-term U.S. interests (to contain Soviet challenges).

To reduce external threats and improve their security situations seemed to be a common goal Washington and Beijing shared when they sought high-level dialogue. As a foreign policy president, Nixon was determined to restore and enhance the American position in world affairs. To get the United States out of Vietnam was Nixon's top priority. To that end, Nixon attached enormous importance to improving relations with China. For Chinese leaders, the Soviet Union gradually but surely turned into China's number one enemy in the late 1960s and early 1970s, while the United States became less threatening. Thus the mounting threat from China's northern neighbor—the USSR—galvanized Mao's determination to seek rapprochement with Washington.

The domestic political atmosphere in both countries was also favorable for a better U.S.-China relationship. In the United States, the public was becoming more interested in "Red China" and dissenting voices from the old China lobby were weak. Although there was still strong support for Jiang Jieshi's regime in Taiwan, more and more congressional and public opinion leaders advocated recognizing the PRC. Also, the American business community was impatient to have trade and travel restrictions lifted.

China's domestic politics played out into the U.S.-China rapprochement process as well. The political situation was slowly improving as the radical phase of the Cultural Revolution came to end after April 1969. Mao and Zhou Enlai, who favored improving relations with the United States, were in control of China's foreign policymaking. However, the "ultra-leftists," who were strong supporters of the Cultural Revolution, were not supportive of improving relations with the United States. They clung to the letter of Mao's revolutionary line and were resistant to changes in Chinese foreign policy. In March 1971, they did not support sending the Chinese ping-pong team to Japan. They resisted inviting the U.S. ping-pong team to visit China in April. They also voiced their concerns about Kissinger's secret visit to China at the Politburo meeting in May. Mao had to overrule their policy suggestions and launch propaganda campaign to prepare the whole nation theoretically and psychologically for a radical change in China's U.S. policy.<sup>1</sup>

Neither country's allies stood in the way of U.S.-China rapprochement. Washington's allies in Western Europe and Japan had been supportive of an improved Sino-American relationship and were pleased at Nixon's vision and courage in integrating China into the international community. Meanwhile, as the United States was reducing its footprint in Asia, the concerns of smaller allies such as Taiwan and South Korea weighed less heavily in

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<sup>1</sup> For a discussion of Chinese elite politics during U.S.-China rapprochement, see Yafeng Xia, "China's Elite Politics and Sino-American Rapprochement, January 1969-February 1972," *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 4 (Fall 2006), pp. 3-28.

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Washington's policymaking calculations. As for Beijing's allies in Asia, Pakistan was more than enthusiastic about facilitating secret Chinese-American contacts. Although suspicious of Beijing's "softened" attitude toward Washington, Hanoi did not have much leverage as long as China did not sell it out, and the Vietnamese would retain their partnership with Beijing long after Nixon's trip. North Korea did not have much to say on this issue, and Enver Hoxha, the Albanian dictator and China's close ally in Eastern Europe, could only vent his anger in his diary, accusing America of being "the center of fascism and barbarous imperialism!" (MacMillan, p. 158)

Decade-long talks between American and Chinese ambassadors finally yielded substantive results. When Nixon took office, there was no direct high-level communication channel between Washington and Beijing. With difficulty they managed to reopen ambassadorial-level talks, which had been suspended for more than two years. Through the last two sessions of these talks, the Chinese side was assured that the Nixon administration was willing to send a high-level official to Beijing for direct talks with the Chinese leaders. This was an important breakthrough as the Chinese had been proposing higher-level talks since the beginning of the ambassadorial talks in 1955. To seek a more effective and more secure way to communicate with the Chinese leaders, even before the collapse of the Warsaw channel, the Nixon White House had been trying to establish communications with Beijing through various back channels, one of which--the Pakistani channel--turned out to be instrumental in setting up agenda for direct talks between Kissinger and Zhou Enlai. Secret diplomacy seemed to have facilitated the delicate exchanges between Washington and Beijing, and thus expedited the rapprochement process (pp. 181-184).

Mutual signaling promoted the communication process. Mao and Nixon each gave a personal push to overcome difficulties, Mao by meeting with Edgar Snow in October 1970, and Nixon by means of an interview with *Time* magazine the same month (pp. 174-175). Zhou Enlai made artful use of ping-pong diplomacy, which dramatically changed the political atmosphere between the two countries. Personal diplomacy seemed to work well and carry the day. In formulating its new U.S. policy in May 1971, the Chinese Politburo did not insist that Washington should openly sever diplomatic relations with Taiwan as a precondition for opening higher-level meetings. While continuing to claim that liberating Taiwan was a Chinese internal affair, China stressed its interest in resolving the Taiwan issue through peaceful means (pp. 187-188). China's flexible and constructive negotiating position was instrumental in moving things forward. The Chinese leaders, especially Zhou, made every effort to make sure that the first high-level talk between Beijing and Washington would be a successful one.

Nixon's splendid summit meetings with top Chinese leaders, in effect, replicated Kissinger's earlier visits to Beijing. Determined to move ahead but firm on principal issues, the leaders of both sides proved worthy negotiation opponents. Friendly in gesturing but candid in negotiating, they covered a wide array of issues, philosophical and practical alike, came away gratified. Although optimistic about the prospect of final U.S.-China normalization, both sides agreed to play slow and safe.

At the core of the U.S.-China summit diplomacy was their common concern over the Soviet threat. Nixon and Kissinger sought to utilize China to balance the Soviet threat; Mao and Zhou sought likewise to make use of the United States. Without concluding an anti-Soviet alliance, American and Chinese leaders reached a tacit agreement on “opposing international [i.e., Soviet] hegemony.” With such an understanding, Nixon believed that Chinese leaders would not make excessive demands regarding Taiwan and might be willing to help the United States resolve the Vietnam conflict. For their part, Mao and Zhou seemed keenly aware of exactly what China would want over Taiwan and could offer in Vietnam.

On both issues, outcomes were mixed. Nixon and Kissinger did repeatedly make efforts to link U.S. troop withdrawal from Taiwan with Chinese direct help to end the war in Vietnam. Zhou, however, rejected the linkage, was firm on “total U.S. withdrawal from Indochina,” and reiterated China’s support to Vietnam. When China declined to arrange a meeting between Kissinger and Le Duc Tho on Chinese soil, Nixon was not at all disappointed (pp. 266-267). To get China’s direct help to a settlement in Vietnam might be Nixon’s operational strategy, but it was certainly not his first priority. Still, Nixon’s successful trip to China indirectly put pressure on North Vietnam. China did encourage the North Vietnamese to reach a settlement with the United States in the coming year.

Coming to China, Nixon and Kissinger knew that they had to state clearly to Zhou the U.S. position regarding Taiwan. The end-result was Nixon’s five private assurances (p. 259).<sup>2</sup> I agree with MacMillan, Gong Li, and Robert Accinelli that these were substantial concessions the Nixon administration had to make to the Chinese.<sup>3</sup> In response, the Chinese leaders backed down from their long-held position when they stopped asking the United States to sever relations with Taiwan immediately and stopped pressing for a time limit for troop withdrawal (pp. 256-260). Although the Taiwan issue remained unresolved, Zhou assured Nixon that “we are not rushing to make use of the opponents of your present visit and attempt to solve all the questions and place you in an embarrassing position.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> At their first private meeting on the afternoon of 22 February 1972, Nixon made five assurances to Zhou Enlai: (1) That there is one China, of which Taiwan is a part; (2) That the United States would not support Taiwanese independence; (3) That the United States would restrain Japan from moving into Taiwan; (4) That the United States would support any peaceful resolution of the Taiwan issue; and (5) That the United States would seek to normalize relations with the PRC.

<sup>3</sup> See Yafeng Xia, *Negotiating with the Enemy: U.S.-China Talks during the Cold War, 1949-1972* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), pp. 187, 199-200; Robert Accinelli, “In Pursuit of a Modus Vivendi: The Taiwan Issue and Sino-American Rapprochement, 1969-1972”; Rosemary Foot, “Prizes Won, Opportunities Lost: The U.S. Normalization of Relations with China, 1972-1979”; Gong Li, “The Difficult Path to Diplomatic Relations: China’s U.S. Policy, 1972-1978,” in William C. Kirby, Robert S. Ross, and Gong Li, eds., *Normalization of U.S.-China Relations: An International History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2006), pp. 9-55, 90-115, 116-146; Nancy B. Tucker, “Taiwan Expendable? Nixon and Kissinger Go to China,” *Journal of American History* (June 2005), pp. 109-135. Rosemary Foot and Nancy B. Tucker contend that “there might have been more flexibility” in the U.S. position than “U.S. officials believed at the time.”

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Indeed, Nixon and Kissinger needed more time to prepare both at home and abroad for U.S.-PRC normalization and were in no position to promise when they could withdraw U.S. troops from Taiwan and switch recognition from the Republic of China in Taiwan to the PRC. They succeeded in persuading Mao and Zhou to accept their concerns. Chinese pragmatism here prevailed over ideological rigidity.

Nixon's China trip did accomplish its strategic as well as political goals. Nixon broke a 22-year taboo against dealing with the People's Republic of China. Without any apology, he engaged Mao in a discussion that ended the isolation of the PRC from the West, and America's isolation from China. There is no doubt that Nixon's opening to China served American national interests and helped the Republican president win reelection.

Nixon was not the only winner. The historic Nixon-Mao handshake stood as a great diplomatic victory for Beijing. A Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Central Committee document hailed the summit for its success in "utilizing [others'] contradictions, dividing up enemies, and enhancing ourselves," and credited this to Mao's "brilliant decision" to invite the U.S. President. Chinese leaders could now focus their attention on the Soviet threat and avoid fighting a possible two-front war. In addition, Beijing gained U.S. and world recognition of its legitimacy, the validity of its national interests, and its status as a major regional power with a role to play in shaping current and future international policies. Moreover, China gained access to and enlisted the badly needed economic and technological resources of the United States in the build-up of Chinese industry and defense capability.<sup>5</sup> Although no one gave much thought to this aspect of the relationship, China's phenomenal development in the last two decades has much to do with Nixon's opening.

While MacMillan's book is a well-written general history, full of interesting tidbits, the author is evidently unfamiliar with Chinese culture, history, and politics. Her inability to read Chinese sources directly hampers her interpretations. Accordingly, I differ with MacMillan's interpretations on numerous issues and events.

Regarding the Truman administration's policy toward the Chinese Communist regime, MacMillan writes, "In 1949, when the Truman administration considered trying to establish relations with the new Communist regime, the Chinese Communists were not prepared to negotiate" (p. 110). The real story is much more complicated. In May and June 1949, U.S. Ambassador to Nationalist China John L. Stuart met and held a series of talks in Nanjing with Huang Hua, a high-level CCP foreign affairs official. On 8 June, Philip Fugh, ambassador Stuart's personal secretary, came to visit Huang Hua and told him that a new American policy would require Stuart's further efforts after his return to the United States. He mentioned to Huang that Under Secretary of State James E. Webb recently cabled Stuart,

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<sup>4</sup> Nixon-Chou Talks (Indochina, 28 February 1972), p. 9, folder 6, box 848, NSCF, *Nixon Presidential Materials Project*, National Archives (NPMP).

<sup>5</sup> Xia, *Negotiating with the Enemy*, p. 211.

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hoping that Stuart could make a trip to Peiping and meet with Zhou Enlai before his return to the United States. He mentioned that he could also stop by Yenching University for a visit during the trip. In this way, he could get to know the views of the top CCP's leadership and thus strengthen his argument in America upon his return. Fugh asked Huang to help with the arrangement. When Huang called on Stuart on 28 June and informed him that he could visit Peiping and might meet top CCP leaders, Stuart was very pleased. However, he could not decide what to do without receiving explicit approval from the State Department. The whole issue was taken, according to Dean Acheson, to the "highest level" and it was decided that the trip could not be made, mainly because of the likelihood of an unfavorable domestic reaction. Fearful of a negative outcry on Capitol Hill and in the press, President Truman vetoed Stuart's proposed trip to Peiping.<sup>6</sup>

Regarding Stalin's relations with the Chinese Revolution in the late 1940s, MacMillan writes, "In the spring of 1949, when Chinese Communist forces stood on the banks of the Yangtze, ready to continue their advance southward, Stalin told Mao he should be content to control the northern part of China" (p. 127). New scholarship shows that Stalin's attitude toward the Chinese revolution became more positive during this period. He was not actively mediating the GMD (Guomindong, the Chinese Nationalist Party)-CCP conflict. The reason why Stalin demanded that the CCP negotiate with the GMD was primarily tactical. The allegation that Stalin advocated the "division of China" between the GMD and CCP cannot be proved. It seems that the allegation was irrelevant to Stalin's actual policy toward China at that time,<sup>7</sup> and more likely a reflection of the CCP leaders' suspicion of the Soviet policy.

Regarding Dulles' snub of Zhou Enlai, MacMillan writes, "In 1954, at the Geneva conference ... the strongly anti-Communist American secretary of state, John Foster Dulles, had publicly brushed past Chou Enlai's proffered hand" (p. 30). This is not yet a conclusive issue, and may never be. The story that Dulles refused to shake Zhou Enlai's extended hand at the Geneva Conference in 1954 has been widely told. Nevertheless, Ambassador Wang Bingnan claimed in his memoirs that the handshaking incident never happened.<sup>8</sup> Xu Jingli, vice director of the PRC's Foreign Ministry Archives, notes that he has checked all the newly declassified Chinese diplomatic files, and concludes that this is a purely fabricated story.<sup>9</sup> But according to Chinese scholar Jia Qingguo's interview with Ambassador U. Alexis

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<sup>6</sup> See Xia, *Negotiating with the Enemy*, pp. 30-34. Interestingly, Huang Hua dismissed the idea that a Stuart visit to Beijing might have opened the way to improved relations. He argued that Mao and Zhou were not interested in anything more than forestalling a major American intervention to save the Guomindang.

<sup>7</sup> See Yafeng Xia, "New Scholarship and Directions in the Study of the Diplomatic History of the People's Republic of China," *Chinese Historical Review*, Vol. 14, No. 2 (Spring 2007), p. 127.

<sup>8</sup> Wang Bingnan, *Zhongmei huitan jiu nian huigu* [Nine Years of Sino-American Talks in Retrospect] (Beijing: Shijie Zhishi Chubanshe, 1985), pp. 21-22.

<sup>9</sup> Xu Jingli, *Jiemi Zhongguo waijiao dangan* [Declassifying Chinese Diplomatic Files] (Beijing: Zhongguo Dangan Chubanshe, 2005), pp. 276-279.

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Johnson on 31 July 1986, Johnson said he personally witnessed the incident.<sup>10</sup> Johnson's memoirs also recorded that during a break in the first session, Dulles entered the lounge and Zhou, who was already there, walked across the room "with a broad smile and his usual air of urbane familiarity." Zhou extended his arm. Dulles, noting the "press photographers poised" for a story, quickly turned his back.<sup>11</sup> The Chinese government made use of this story to arouse Chinese people's nationalism and indignation against U.S. imperialism. Later, when President Nixon arrived at Beijing airport for his historic trip, he made a point of extending his hand as he walked toward Zhou Enlai. Nixon wanted his gesture to symbolize the beginning of a new relationship between the two countries, just as Dulles's insult to Zhou Enlai marked the era of animosity toward the People's Republic of China.

MacMillan's narration of Sino-American ambassadorial talks is also confused. From August 1955 to February 1970, the Chinese and American ambassadors held 136 de facto diplomatic talks, first in Geneva (to the 73<sup>rd</sup> meeting on 12 December 1957) and then in Warsaw (from the 74<sup>th</sup> meeting on 16 September 1958 to the 136<sup>th</sup> meeting on 20 February 1970). MacMillan seems to be unaware of the talks at Geneva (pp. 108, 162). During the Nixon administration, U.S. ambassador to Poland Walter Stoessel met with Chinese charge d'affaires Lei Yang for two formal meetings: the 135<sup>th</sup> meeting on 20 January 1970 and the 136<sup>th</sup> meeting on 20 February 1970.<sup>12</sup> The Stoessel-Lei meeting on 20 January 1970 was not informal. (p.170)

Regarding the Kennedy administration's China policy, MacMillan writes, "At the end of 1961, the existence of two Chinas was accepted when what were called 'mainland China affairs' began to dealt with separately from those of Taiwan" (p. 111). MacMillan also claims that "At the start of the 1960s, . . . the Kennedy administration had looked at the possibility of having both Chinas in the U.N." (p. 215). The Kennedy administration in some contexts was willing to accept that the Communist government on the mainland was a government, but in other contexts--notably in its rejection of proposals for a two-China policy at the UN General Assembly in 1961--it was not willing even to do that. The change of policy began in the fall of 1970 when the Nixon administration decided to shift its position toward China's membership at the UN from unconditional exclusion of the PRC to advocating dual membership for both Taipei and Beijing.

Regarding the secret Paris channel, MacMillan writes, "Over time Walters himself became very friendly with Fang [Wen], also a retired general. They conducted much detailed business about the arrangements for Nixon's trip and compared notes about the Soviets ..."

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<sup>10</sup> Robert Ross and Jiang Changbin, eds. *Re-examining the Cold War: U.S.-China Diplomacy, 1954-1973* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), p. 427, n. 6.

<sup>11</sup> U. Alexis Johnson with Jef Olivarius McAllister, *The Right Hand of Power* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1984), p. 204.

<sup>12</sup> Xia, *Negotiating with the Enemy*, pp. 89-103, 113-132, 144-149.

(p. 173). Here MacMillan mixes up facts. Fang Wen, the Chinese military attaché to France, played no part in Sino-American secret contacts in Paris beyond his brief encounter with General Vernon Walters and declining his letter after a reception at the Polish Embassy in July 1970. During his secret mission to Beijing in July 1971, Kissinger secured Zhou Enlai's agreement that in the future the contact point between China and the United States would be Paris, with Chinese Ambassador Huang Zhen (a retired general) and the U.S. military Attaché, General Walters, as point-persons. The two sides soon began to use the secret Paris channel. Walters would visit Ambassador Huang Zhen in his residence 45 times before the United States and China decided to utilize Paris as the open point of contact, which occurred only after Nixon's trip to China in February 1972. Kissinger also flew to Paris to talk secretly with Ambassador Huang three times in 1971.<sup>13</sup>

MacMillan's reliance on *The Private Life of Chairman Mao* by Li Zhisui is troublesome and problematic. When Li completed his initial manuscript in November 1989, he had had a hard time finding a Chinese publisher. The situation changed dramatically when the powerful chief editor at Random House, Jason Epstein, saw great potential in a book based on Li's manuscript. Random House made an offer of \$500,000 on the condition that Li would submit an English version of the work in ten months and would no longer have anything to say on production of the book. Li then hired Dai Hongchao, a political science professor at the University of Detroit, to translate the manuscript into English. After the English version was submitted to Random in February 1991, Epstein made two complaints. His first complaint was that the manuscript lacked analysis and commentary and too strongly resembled a simple record of events. His second was that it read too much like a biography of Mao Zedong and not enough like the memoirs of Li Zhisui. Two U.S. China scholars, Andrew Nathan and Ann Thurston, were hired to lead the process of manufacturing a book of "value" by weaving into the original manuscript Li's own life experience, his views and comments on Mao, and various footnotes and additions. It took them more than two years to create a biographical literature out of whatever materials Li could offer, "edit" the English translation of Li's original Chinese manuscript, and add footnotes to give the book the trappings of an academic work. The final product was significantly different from the original, not only in style but also in substance.<sup>14</sup> Because of this, the historical value of the book is seriously compromised. It is very difficult for scholars to distinguish in it fact from fiction.

MacMillan cites Li's book on numerous occasions, and her echoing of Li about his role in the Nixon-Mao meeting is troubling. For example, MacMillan writes, "The Nixon Party walked into a hallway" and "Mao's doctor motioned them toward his study" (p. 70). This is a transparent fabrication, for it was against protocol for a doctor to perform such a role.

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<sup>13</sup> Xia, *Negotiating with the Enemy*, pp. 174-175. Vernon Walters, *Silent Missions* (Garden City: N.Y.: Doubleday, 1978), pp. 526-547.

<sup>14</sup> Dai Hongchao, "The Publication Process of Li Zhisui's Memoirs," in Jin Zhong, *Fanpan de Yuyi: Mao Zedong siren yisheng Li Zhisui he ta wei wancheng de huiyilu* [Rebellious Palace Physician: Mao Zedong's Private Doctor Li Zhisui and his Unfinished Memoirs] (Taipei: Yiqiao Chubanshe, 1997), pp. 154-162.

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According to the Chinese record, Wang Dongxing, director of the general office of the CCP Central Committee, and his deputy, Zhang Yaoci, were waiting at the front gate of Mao's quarters, and Zhou Enlai walked Nixon's party into Mao's study.

MacMillan also writes that Li "listened to everything from his post outside the door" (p. 73). It was impossible for Li to listen to Mao's conversation with Nixon because his doctors were awaiting orders near Mao's swimming pool 5-6 meters (18-20 feet) from Mao's study and separated by a thick concrete wall and door.

Third, MacMillan writes: "Once Nixon left, Mao changed out of his new suit and into his dressing gown and chatted happily with his doctor" (p. 74). As Mao had been sick for a very long time before his meeting with Nixon, he was extremely tired after Nixon left. With the assistance of his nurses Wu Xujun and Zhang Yufeng, Mao recuperated on a sofa for about 30 minutes and then moved to bed. He had neither the energy nor the intention to "chat happily" with anybody.<sup>15</sup>

MacMillan could have avoided numerous factual mistakes with more careful editing. The Cultural Revolution did not end until 1976, after Mao Zedong's death, not in 1969 as MacMillan suggests (p. 25). Deng Pufang, Deng Xiaoping's son, jumped out of a window and "became a paraplegic" at Beijing University during the early years of the Cultural Revolution when he was under house arrest; he was not "thrown out a window" (p. 26). In November 1971, the PRC delegation headed by Qiao Guanhua arrived at JFK airport via Air France; it was not La Guardia on a Chinese plane as MacMillan suggests (p. 218). At the time, China's national airline was not allowed to fly to the United States. Although Nixon made numerous trips to China after leaving office, his visit in February 1976 and meeting with Mao was his second (p. 329). The marriage between Qiao Guanhua and Zhang Hanzhi did not produce any children. Hong Huang, Zhang Hanzhi's daughter from her previous marriage, went to Vassar (p. 332).

I concur with other reviewers that MacMillan's book also suffers from a structural dislocation. Her attempts to flash back to the origins of Sino-American reconciliation within the critical week itself--to explain the history of Chinese Communism (Chapter 2), Zhou Enlai's early experience in Paris in the early 1920s (Chapter 3), and Kissinger's career at Harvard (Chapter 4)--are out of proportion with the main story line. While the description of Nixon's arrival in Beijing for the historic visit in February 1972 is in chapter 2, the account of Kissinger's secret visit to the city in July 1971 in order to prepare for the presidential visit is in chapter 12, about 150 pages later. This makes it hard for ordinary readers to appreciate the importance of the negotiation process.

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<sup>15</sup> See Lin Ke, Xu Tao and Wu Xujun, *Lishi de zhenshi--Mao Zedong shenbian gongzuo ren yuan de zhengyan* [Let Historical Truth Be Told--Eyewitness Account of Mao's Staff] (Hong Kong: Liwen Chubanshe, 1995), pp. 215-226.

While MacMillan's focus is Nixon's historic meeting with Mao in 1972, involving four main figures -- Nixon, Mao, Kissinger, and Zhou -- Robert Dallek explores the stormy relationship between Nixon and Kissinger during the turbulent years from 1969 to 1974 in his massive new book, *Nixon and Kissinger: Partners in Power*. Dallek, a noted American presidential historian and author of several important books about American presidents, sets out to answer larger and more serious questions: Why did the Nixon administration fail so miserably after achieving great successes in foreign policy? Contrary to the popular belief that Watergate caused Nixon's presidency to collapse, Dallek argues that the pathology ran far deeper. According to Dallek, Nixon was brought down by a pattern of deception, manipulation and double-dealing that was endemic to his administration. All of these began with the Nixon-Kissinger relationship.

Making extensive use of recently declassified material--millions of pages of national security documents, 2,800 hours of Nixon's secret tape recordings, and 20,000 pages of transcriptions of Kissinger's phone calls -- Dallek has succeeded in drawing a compelling portrait of the two men, and especially of how their personal traits -- their drive, their paranoia, and their hunger for power and control -- affected their foreign policy decision making and its consequences. Here is a list of what we learn from this revelation:

- The Nixon administration continued the war in Vietnam when it had ample evidence that the war was unwinnable. The Paris accord to end U.S. involvement in Vietnam in 1973 was not fundamentally different from one that could have been achieved four years earlier--and came at a cost of thousands more American lives, countless Vietnamese deaths, the expansion of the war into Cambodia and Laos, and an increasingly divided nation at home. As Dallek observes, "Nixon was reluctant to see an end to the war in the three months before the election" (p. 407). Nixon and Kissinger waited until after Nixon's reelection in 1972.
- Although they were in constant collaboration until Nixon's resignation, Nixon and Kissinger were never close friends. Kissinger engaged in a painful rivalry with Nixon. Kissinger frequently referred to Nixon as "the meatball mind," "our drunken friend," and "That madman." Nixon returned the favor, demeaning Kissinger as his "Jew boy" and calling him "psychopathic." At one point, he recommended (through John Ehrlichman) that Kissinger needed psychiatric therapy and should obtain it (p. 352).
- At one point prior to his second term, Nixon was inclined to rid himself both of William Rogers and Kissinger. As he told Admiral Elmo Zumwalt, "I'm going to fire the son-of-a bitch" (p. 437). But when they were together, Kissinger would flatter Nixon. "The thing that's so interesting about your style of leadership is that you never make little news, it always big news... You are a man of tremendous moves." This was the kind of thing Kissinger frequently said to buck up and ingratiate himself with Nixon. "Mr. President," Kissinger told him, "without you this country would be dead" (p. 318). During the Watergate investigation, Kissinger told Nixon, your "resignation would be a national

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catastrophe ... You can go down in history as a man who brought about the greatest revolution in foreign policy ever" (p. 487).

According to Dallek, "Nixon's use of foreign affairs to overcome impeachment threats in 1973-1974 is a disturbing part of the administration's history. Its impact on policy deserves particular consideration, as does the more extensive use of international relations to serve domestic political goals throughout Nixon's presidency. Nixon's competence to lead the country during his impeachment crisis also requires the closest possible scrutiny" (p. xii). Dallek makes the case that Kissinger knew that Nixon was so badly incapacitated as the Watergate scandal unfolded that he should have considered having him removed from power under the aegis of the 25<sup>th</sup> Amendment. Kissinger failed to inform Congress that Nixon was incapable of running the country at that point.

Another appalling revelation is Nixon's penchant for using vulgar words to describe foreign leaders. Previous studies show that Nixon changed his perception of Communist China after the ping-pong diplomacy in April 1971 and was eager to fly to Beijing to shake Mao's and Zhou's hands; Dallek shows that Nixon spent almost two hours with Kissinger on 1 July 1971, a few days before Kissinger's secret mission to Beijing, instructing Kissinger what he should say to Chou En-lai [Zhou Enlai]. Nixon told Kissinger that his success in talking to Communist leaders was because "I don't fart around ... I'm very nice to them -- then I come right in with the cold steel ... They're bastards; he [Chou]'s a bastard" (p. 292). Nixon called Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi a "bitch" and much worse (p. 340). On Vietnam, Nixon repeatedly told Kissinger, "We are not going to let this country be defeated by this little shit-ass country" (p. 372). Kissinger would blast Nguyen Van Thieu as "a complete SOB" and referred to the South Vietnamese as "SOBs, maniacs, and so on" (p. 447).

What can we learn from this historical revelation? The public spin reminds me of a similar effort to cover up historical truth in the official party history in Communist countries. After the end of the Cultural Revolution, an official *CCP Resolution on Party History* during the PRC years was issued on the CCP's sixtieth anniversary (on 1 July 1981). Mao Zedong emerged from the *Resolution* as a tragic hero whose leftist error, "comprehensive in magnitude and protracted in duration," was that of "a great proletarian revolutionary." Why did the CCP try to certify and protect the legacy of Mao, whose Cultural Revolution had caused such great disaster to the nation? As Roderick MacFarquhar and Michael Schoenhals have observed, "The legitimacy of the party still rested heavily on Mao's revolutionary achievements. Unlike the Soviets, the Chinese had no Lenin to fall back on, Mao was both Lenin and Stalin."<sup>16</sup> As Deng Xiaoping pointed out, "discrediting Comrade Mao Zedong ... would mean discrediting our Party and state."<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> For a discussion of the Resolution on Party History in English, see Roderick MacFarquhar and Michael Schoenhals, *Mao's Last Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press/Harvard University Press, 2006), pp. 456-458.

<sup>17</sup> *Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping (1975-1982)*, (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1994), p. 287.

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Thus, an official line of interpretation of the PRC during the Cultural Revolution emerged. Although Mao Zedong made serious mistakes in launching the Cultural Revolution, his foreign policy in the 1970s was nevertheless a great and brilliant success, especially his decision to seek rapprochement with the United States.<sup>18</sup> We now know that this is a one-sided interpretation. In examining China's policy toward the United States from early 1969 to late 1976, a more rational and plausible interpretation should look at Mao's career as a revolutionary, China's domestic political environment in the 1970s, pressure from China's revolutionary allies, and Mao's dilemma in maintaining his position as a world revolutionary leader and in seeking a new ally to counterbalance the security threat from the Soviet Union. As a ruthless dictator, Mao would do everything to secure his power and prestige. And he couldn't be wrong! His subordinates -- high-ranking associates such as Zhou Enlai, who was so loyal to Mao and the Chinese revolution -- would have to bear responsibility for all the negative consequences and possible failure of this new diplomacy. What I like most about the book is Dallek's skill in disclosing the complicated and delicate relationship between two important political leaders. This is something which we rarely see in Chinese Communist historiography.

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<sup>18</sup> See, e.g., works by official party historians such as Gong Li, Li Jie, and related chapters in Pang Xianzhi and Jin Chongji, chief eds., *Mao Zedong zhuan, 1949-1976* [A Biography of Mao Zedong, 1949-1976], 2 vols. (Beijing: Zhongyang Wenxian Chubanshe, 2003); and Liu Wusheng, *Zhou Enlai wannian sui Yue* [Zhou Enlai's Last Years] (Beijing: Renmin Chubanshe, 2006).

### Robert Dallek's Partial Synthesis of Nixon-Kissinger Scholarship

The dust jacket summary of *Nixon and Kissinger: Partners in Power* identifies Robert Dallek as “one of the greatest historians of our time” and describes this, his latest book, as an “epic joint biography” in which the author “offers a provocative, groundbreaking portrait of a pair of outside leaders whose unlikely partnership dominated the world stage and changed the course of history. . . . Tapping into a wealth of recently declassified archives, . . . Dallek uncovers fascinating details about Nixon and Kissinger’s tumultuous personal relationship . . . [and] also brilliantly analyzes their dealings with power brokers at home and abroad.” In his preface and acknowledgments, the author more modestly expresses his “hope” that his “recounting” of Nixon’s and Kissinger’s lives in this “political biography . . . will cast fresh light on who they were and why and how they collaborated.” His plumbing of the archives has helped him provide “authoritative answers to a number of enduring questions” about Nixon’s psychology, the Vietnam War, rapprochement with China, détente with the Soviet Union, the Indo-Pakistan War, the Yom Kippur War, the army coup in Chile and accompanying murders of General Rene Schneider and President Salvador Allende, the Watergate scandal, and the relevance of this history for the present. Similar comments were part of a pre- and post-publication advertising blitz in print, radio, and television venues. On PBS’s 21 May 2007 *NewsHour*, for example, Dallek particularly stressed his use of the newly declassified textual and audio documentation, as though other historians had not previously used this trove to provide “authoritative answers.”<sup>1</sup>

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Few books fully live up to their trumpeting publicity, but the claims made for *Nixon and Kissinger: Partners in Power* are unusually extravagant, especially for a book by an academic historian who embraces his credentials. What is startling in this respect is the stark disconnect between hype and substance and the disconcerting failure by the author to cite the rich literature on his subject and especially the seminal works of other scholars, upon which he has built his partial and flawed recounting of some of the history of the Nixon-Kissinger partnership. Because of this, I am reluctantly and regrettably compelled to explain what I think is wrong with the book before I comment on what is right with it.

To begin with, Dallek’s synthesis is not a true political biography, which normally describes an account of the life, deeds, and times of a mover and shaker set in the context of political

<sup>1</sup> [Ed. Note] Streaming video of this interview may be viewed via a keyword search for “Dallek” on the *NewsHour* Web site, video section, at <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/video/>.

motives, events, and forces. *Nixon and Kissinger* is primarily a diplomatic history of Nixinger foreign policies vis-à-vis selected topics, in which the author explains Nixon's and Kissinger's goals, tactics, and strategies mostly in terms of their political considerations and to a lesser extent in terms of their peculiar psychologies. If it were a true political biography, the book would cover not only foreign affairs but also--and primarily--domestic affairs. Nixon's other "partners in power" would then include H. R. Haldeman, John Ehrlichman, John Connally, and possibly a few others. Furthermore, although the Nixon-Kissinger partnership is a valid subject and theme in and of itself, Dallek does not squarely confront the core questions about that relationship: Who of the two directed U.S. foreign policy? Who determined its prime objectives? Who was the grand-strategist? Dallek does not formally explicate what he appears to imply through his quotes and storytelling narrative that Kissinger was the dominant figure. If this is what he thinks, it is a view with which I disagree, except perhaps for the 1973-1974 period; other historians no doubt agree with him (or he with them). But in order to have made an authoritative statement on the subject, Dallek should have explained and justified his position more forthrightly. Perhaps then he could have convinced me.

Even as a diplomatic history and not a political biography, and despite its 740 pages of text and endnotes, Dallek pays too little attention to other figures who--even if not "partners in power" in the sense Dallek means this phrase--played critically influential roles in shaping Nixinger foreign policy: Haldeman, Melvin Laird, and even William Rogers. Dallek's joint-biographical approach to the subject and his focus on political causation leads him to omit a viable account or analysis of significant legislative, ideological, bureaucratic, advisory, military, international, and socio-cultural influences on Nixinger foreign policy -- for example, Congress; the State, Defense, Treasury, and Commerce Departments; Kissinger's NSC staffers; the antiwar movement; the military-political conditions on the ground in Vietnam; the globally overstretched military and economic power of the United States; the erosion of the Cold War paradigm; and, last but not least, the ideologies or world-views of Nixon and Kissinger themselves. It was, after all, their particular world-views about international relations, *realpolitik*, the Cold War, the Vietnamese revolution, Third-World peoples, and hegemony that more often than not trumped politics, or at least meshed with their political considerations and psyches.

Nor does Dallek make any serious attempt to discuss the "mainsprings" of U.S. policy or to place Nixinger policies in the context of the continuities and discontinuities of the history of American foreign relations -- for example, such things as *realpolitik*, Wilsonianism, idealism v. self-interest, hegemonism, open-door imperialism, militarism, racism, machismo, and the reasons for their and others' fixation on particular ways of maintaining U.S. global credibility. There are other critical omissions of this kind. The author, for instance, often nonchalantly states that Nixon and Kissinger's foreign policy motives included "national security" concerns and a desire for "peace," yet he neglects to tell readers how these men understood these concepts. After all, their understandings were quite different that those of other Americans, whether among the elite or the hoi polloi--not to mention the views of foreign allies and adversaries.

Dallek's coverage of his chosen topic for this big book--foreign policy--is often superficial in other ways. Important contextual facts and issues are missing. There is too little, for example, on a long list of important topics: *Ostpolitik* in relation to U.S.-Soviet détente; the real meaning of détente (as explained, e.g., by Raymond Garthoff); the role of Mao Zedong, State Department planners, and liberals in launching rapprochement between the United States and China; the relationship between Nixon's détente/rapprochement policies and their effort to resolve their Vietnam problem; the impact upon the SALT talks of Nixon and Kissinger's desire to maintain U.S. nuclear advantages; their use of nuclear threats in foreign policy crises; Nixon's madman theory; the origin and purpose of the public relations policy illusorily known as the Nixon Doctrine. Diplomatic and military stalemates are poorly explained: rarely does the reader find a clear, coherent description of the specific core issues that divided warring parties, such as those separating Washington and Hanoi or Israel and the Palestinians. Key foreign policy topics are missing almost altogether: Africa, Japan, and, except for the coup against Allende, Latin America. Also missing is anything on economic foreign policy, which, as historian Allen J. Matusow has demonstrated, was one of Nixon's main concerns. The international monetary system that Nixon willy-nilly helped to bring about transformed international trade balances and finance.

Even Dallek's psychological interpretation of Nixon's behavior--a focus of this joint biography--is lacking, both in his diagnosis and in the author's failure to cite previous works on the subject. His not-very-new analysis of Nixon's psyche, for example, boils down to popular layman's observations: low self-esteem, search for validation, mood swings, alcoholism, and paranoia (which in professional psychological circles is a highly technical term requiring careful explication). Regarding Kissinger, there is even less of a diagnosis. Of course, no professional psychologist would seriously attempt to diagnose a patient from a distance, without having the patient "on a couch," so to speak. But Dallek could at least have attempted to compare what we have known and what little he has since learned about Nixon's and Kissinger's minds and behaviors with the diagnostic criteria of the non-Freudian American Psychiatric Association. This would have provided him with a more authoritative basis on which to speculate.

As for other publicity claims for the book, Dallek writes in a clear but not an "epic" style. His narrative consists mainly of myriad cherry-picked documentary quotations of Nixon and Kissinger and a few other persons that are strung together in sentence after sentence without a sustained and consistent analytic context. Dallek's writing resembles what we often regard as journalism--that is, a story told in quotations taken from the *dramatis personae*, usually without accompanying and logically legitimate analysis by a knowledgeable narrator, with occasional references to "experts" in order to convey a "balanced" perspective and a focus on personality by way of explaining events. Oddly, too, Dallek repeatedly refers to Kissinger throughout the book as "Henry"--not in the sarcastic or condescending way Nixon, Haldeman, and Haig sometimes seemed to do, but in the informal way that Kissinger's aides and colleagues sometimes did. If he did not want to refer to Nixon as "Dick" or Haig as "Al" or Brezhnev as "Leonid," and so on, and since the

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book is not entitled *Dick and Henry*, what is the point of calling Kissinger “Henry” throughout the narrative? It is an odd stylistic habit that distracts readers and also detracts and from the epic aspirations of this joint biography. (Where were the copy editors on this one?)

In any case, previous biographies have come much closer to eloquent, epic styles, more penetrating insights, and thematic plot lines that match the tragedy, comedy, pathos, and hubris of Nixon’s and Kissinger’s public and private lives, not to mention their impact on the nation, the world, and history. Much of what there is of analysis in this book takes the form of normative judgments on the moral goodness or badness of Nixinger policies as opposed to the historical examination, explanation, and elucidation of key issues in historiography. At times, too, the author is maddeningly inconsistent--criticizing Nixon or Kissinger on one failing but equivocating on another but similar failing.

One of the best examples for me of the absence of sustained, integrated analysis is Dallek’s treatment of the “decent-interval” exit strategy regarding the Vietnam War. To his credit, he draws on some of the latest declassified evidence in support of the thesis that Nixinger sought a sufficient time interval between a negotiated agreement and the fall of Saigon, the pursuit of which resulted in a prolonged war. But Dallek never incorporates his evidence (or others’ evidence and explanation) into an argument demonstrating that the decent-interval option was indeed one of Nixon and Kissinger’s strategy options--that is, an option that organically shaped their policies vis-à-vis the negotiations and the war. Vietnamization, which Dallek conventionally identifies as the central Nixinger war strategy, was--as the new evidence reveals--the byproduct of the decent-interval exit option. The casual or nonprofessional reader could easily miss the point, as Dallek seems to do.

The book does not live up to its promise of being provocative and groundbreaking--at least for fellow and sister professionals. Dallek’s thesis (such as it is and to the extent it can be extrapolated from his storytelling narrative) more or less restates some of the past and much of the current historiographic conventional wisdom about the Nixon-Kissinger relationship and selected Nixinger foreign policies. Dallek has not himself uncovered all of the fascinating details he relates. Nor has he plumbed all of the important, relevant U.S. documents. He does not draw on available Soviet, Chinese, and Vietnamese documents. He relies too frequently on Kissinger’s and other Americans’ characterizations of Soviet, Chinese, Vietnamese, and Palestinian attitudes and positions.

Although Dallek rightly claims that the history he has recounted has great relevance for the present, he does not develop this argument. He could, for example, have briefly explained how the vaulted claims Nixon and Kissinger made about their foreign policy successes, their scapegoating of others for the Vietnam debacle, and the lessons they drew from the Vietnam War adversely influenced and embittered American policy and politics to this day. He could have discussed how the opportunities Nixon and Kissinger willfully and selfishly missed in resolving Israeli-Arab differences compounded the difficulties we all faced in the

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decades that followed. He could have discussed the profound impact that Nixon's international monetary policy has had on the U.S. economy and the course of globalization.

It is not uncommon to find one or two minor factual errors and copyediting lapses in even the most carefully written and edited books, but there are some doozies in this one. Among them are a photograph identifying an unknown Soviet official as Dobrynin (who it is plainly not); Dallek's misunderstanding of Nixon's and Kissinger's reaction to the Moratorium and New Mobilization of October-November 1969 and of the provenance of the 3 November 1969 "silent majority" speech; the author's repetition of Kissinger's demonstrably false claim that it was Le Duc Tho and not Kissinger who first suggested the 15 October 1972 target date for a negotiated settlement; his implication that Moscow and Beijing caused Hanoi to make its (minor) compromise in the negotiations; and other errors of this kind.

Well, what is right with the book? If we ignore the disconnect between hype and substance, put aside concerns that Dallek does not properly cite the work of his professional peers from whom he has borrowed, disregard the difficulties caused by his nonstandard citation method, and allow that he has a perfect right to write about the Nixon-Kissinger relationship and ignore some significant and relevant context, then it can then be said that this is a good read. It is also a book that approaches the status of a popular synthesis of much of what is known about the Nixon-Kissinger relationship and selected topics in U.S. foreign policy for the period. It is a good read especially for non-specialist professionals and the non-academic public, for whom the book was mainly written. For me, the most important interpretive contribution Dallek makes is to develop the thesis -- which is not new or groundbreaking -- that contrary to the Nixon-Kissinger claim, the Watergate scandal did not adversely affect Nixinger foreign policy. Indeed, the scandal spurred Nixon and Kissinger to make greater efforts to achieve foreign policy successes. When they failed--for example, in failing to save the Saigon regime--it was because of objective circumstances beyond their control or because of their own flawed policies. Dallek gets that right.

### A Western View

Richard Nixon's visit to the People's Republic of China undoubtedly is among the most captivating events in the Cold War. In February 1972 the red-baiting congressman-turned-visionary president journeyed to Mao's crumbling and internationally isolated communist utopia in one of the great turnarounds during the Cold War. In Margaret MacMillan's well-written page-turner the actual visit takes up a relatively small amount of the book; the preceding years attract much of the attention. The book is roughly organized in chronological chapters from Nixon's departure to China on February 17 to his return to the United States ten days later. Most chapters contain wide-ranging flashbacks exploring various historical aspects of the story: China, Sino-American relations, Taiwan, the Soviet Union, Indochina, the Pakistani back channel, the preparations for the visit, and, of course, the main protagonists: Mao Zedong, Zhou Enlai, Richard Nixon, and Henry Kissinger. This departure from a conventional, linear narrative works surprisingly well, especially given that the book is intended for the general readership.

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MacMillan used an admirably wide range of sources from American and British primary materials, interviews with Western and Chinese participants and observers, memoirs from the U.S. side, a good sampling of the English-language secondary literature, and even a limited number of Chinese-language secondary sources in translation. As a result, the book offers a tasty *mélange* of official meetings, personal encounters, and entertaining anecdotes. MacMillan is at her best when she leads the reader through the infighting in the Nixon administration, the preparations to the President's seminal trip, and the sometimes improvised nature of what was supposed to be a carefully staged visit.

*Nixon and Mao* nevertheless offers a traditional interpretation of Sino-American relations. The focus is on the primary actors and on the endeavor of both countries to accomplish their respective strategic goals, that is, shoring up international standing (in the case of the United States) or establishing it in the first place (in the case of China). Given the preponderance of American sources and the obvious centrality of Nixon journeying to Mao (and not the reverse), the stronger emphasis on the U.S. side of the story is understandable.

However, this approach harbors the danger of obscuring some important aspects. Why did the United States and China seek rapprochement in the first place? Why exactly at that very point in time? MacMillan sees it as a strategic necessity -- "For

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each the other was a card to play against the common enemy, the Soviet Union" (p. 5, also p. 123) -- and as the consequence of the isolation of the PRC (as a result of the Cultural Revolution) and of the United States (as result of the Vietnam War; pp. 115-122). While the international positions of both countries certainly were a reason for rapprochement, it was only the United States that subscribed to the idea of a Sino-Soviet-American strategic triangle in which the two weaker members ally against the stronger. No evidence has surfaced that Mao and his fellow leaders thought along these lines; Chinese strategic thinking in the early 1970s was shifting away from Mao's theory of the intermediate zone (p. 113), describing a Soviet-American struggle over much of the world (the intermediate zone), to the three world theory in which the United States and the Soviet Union formed the first, industrialized Europe, Australia, Canada, and Japan formed the second, and the rest the third world, including China.<sup>1</sup> In early January 1972, Mao and Zhou explicitly forbade Nixon's Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs, Alexander Haig, from seeing Sino-American rapprochement in the light of the Sino-Soviet-American relationship.<sup>2</sup>

In that vein, MacMillan suggests that the Sino-Soviet border war in early 1969 changed Mao's thinking on international affairs (pp. 131-144). Although I agree that the border clashes (which were provoked by the Chinese) were an important catalyst, they seem to have been only one moment in China's fundamental foreign policy evaluation. After the sudden withdrawal of the Soviet specialists in mid-1960, the PRC quickly established economic and trade relations with many non-socialist countries; it even imported U.S. grain, as long as it was brought in via France and Albania. In 1968, Mao dropped the claim that China was the center of world revolution.<sup>3</sup> The PRC sought contacts with the outside world before seeking rapprochement with the United States. From the summer of 1969 to Nixon's visit, for example, China had re-sent ambassadors to the forty or so countries that had recognized the PRC before the start of the Cultural Revolution, established full diplomatic relations with at least another twenty, and had become a member of the United Nations.<sup>4</sup> At the turn of the decade, China was in the full process of opening up toward the whole world, of which the United States was only one -- albeit an important -- part. The reasons for this drastic diplomatic turnaround derived from

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<sup>1</sup> King C. Chen, ed., *China and the Three Worlds* (Broadway: M.E. Sharpe, 1979).

<sup>2</sup> "Haig to Kissinger," 1/3/1971, *Foreign Relations of the United States 1969-1976*, XVII, 650. Also: Li Danhui, "ZhongMei huanhe yu yuanYe kangMei: Zhongguo waijiao zhanlüe tiaozheng zhong de Yuanan yinsu" ["Sino-American Detente and the Vietnam War: the Vietnamese factor in the adjustment of China's foreign policy strategy"], <http://www.shenzhijia.net/muluyuenan.htm>, accessed on November 16, 2004.

<sup>3</sup> Ma Jisen, *The Cultural Revolution in the Foreign Ministry of China* (Honk Kong: Chinese University Press, 2004), 308-313.

<sup>4</sup> Ma Jisen, *Cultural Revolution*, 320-321.

the end of the radical phase of the Cultural Revolution in 1968, the need for increased trade for modernization purposes, and the resulting overall de-emphasis of ideology in foreign policy. The Nixon visit fell into this phase; it had not “taken three years to arrange,” as MacMillan claims (p. 5), but roughly one (spring 1971 to February 1972). After some pleasantries and a show of Chinese willingness to allow a high-ranking American official to come to Beijing to talk about Taiwan in the informal ambassadorial meetings in Warsaw at the turn of 1969/1970 (167-168), American military actions in Cambodia had sent all contacts back into the deep freezer for almost one year.

While MacMillan successfully and subtly explores the risks (and eventual domestic rewards) of the visit for President Nixon, readers will not find much information about how the Chinese leadership explained the sudden turnaround internally. MacMillan simply asserts that “public opinion did not matter in China” (p. 11). But Mao and his fellow leaders were keenly aware about their image within and outside of the party. The economic disasters of the Great Leap Forward and the human tragedies of the Cultural Revolution (which MacMillan does acknowledge on pp. 72, 79-80, 111) had discredited their leadership and had led to widespread disillusionment among the Chinese. Zhou Enlai spent much intellectual energy constructing explanations for why China was inviting the head of the class enemy, especially after the country’s media had spent so much ink over the previous two decades painting the United States as the greatest foe of the world’s people. In the new -- and, of course, again distorted -- version of historical reality, Mao ‘acceded’ to Nixon’s pleading for a visit -- a version that intentionally downgraded the President’s trip from a seminal visit to a beggar’s pilgrimage to a sage.<sup>5</sup> Much of Zhou’s rhetoric was designed to prove Mao’s past policies correct, thereby shoring up support for the policy of the contemporaneous Chinese leadership.

Finally, I would have liked to see an assessment of the greater meaning of Nixon’s visit to the Cold War. How much did it change the world, as the subtitle of the book suggest? MacMillan acknowledges that it was more symbolic than substantial (p. 1) and that Sino-American relations did not develop after February 1972 (pp. 313-314). Despite Nixon’s 1967 claim that China’s isolation in the world should not last much longer for the greater good (p. 10), the president’s goals during his visit were rather myopic. In the talks with Zhou, he expected to get Chinese assistance in bringing about a negotiated end to the Vietnam War (which he did not receive); on a global scale, he hoped to exploit Sino-American rapprochement as a tool against the Soviet Union (which he did achieve). Given this largely instrumental view of Sino-American rapprochement, it was no wonder that the president pursued Soviet-American détente once the Soviets reacted to Nixon’s affair with Mao. Only the collapse of Soviet-American détente and Vietnam’s great power aspirations in

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<sup>5</sup> See for example: “Why did our country accede to Nixon’s request for a Visit? Chou Enlai’s Internal Report to the Part on the International Situation, December 1971 (Excerpts),” Chen, *China and the Three Worlds*, 133-142.

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Indochina at the end of the 1970s brought a resumption of Sino-American rapprochement. Although Deng Xiaoping's visit to Jimmy Carter's White House in early 1979 was less symbolic, it was much more substantial than Nixon's trip to Beijing seven years earlier.

Despite this criticism, MacMillan's book is a great addition to the literature. Her extensive use of primary and secondary material in two languages provides many insights into a fascinating story. For both the general audience and the specialist, the book is an important starting point in our understanding of this complex and occasionally still emotive event of the Cold War.

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