

# Henry Kissinger's secret trips to China

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Henry Kissinger's Secret Trips to China Henry Kissinger was a significant figure in many affairs that occurred during Richard Nixon's and Gerald Ford's terms in office. He was a reliable negotiator for, the often shy, Nixon. Perhaps, one of his greatest feats was his involvement in the Asian détente. This involved many negotiations with several Nations including Vietnam, Russia and, the subject of my project, China. Nixon is often credited with the accomplishment of opening China to the Western world and Kissinger's name is sometimes forgotten in the history books. Nixon went on a much publicised trip to Beijing in 1972, but it was Kissinger's string of under-the-radar trips before this which made this landmark visit possible. Originally, Pakistan and Romania were to be used to channel Sino-American negotiations due to the fact that they were believed to have contact with China. It was indeed through Pakistan that contact was received from Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai. A message had been sent to China by Kissinger in the winter of 1971 and he was left waiting for a reply. A huge factor taken into consideration was the Taiwan issue. If the USA was to openly begin negotiations with China, US relations with Taiwan may have been tarnished. Rumours were strenuously denied, by Nixon's administration, that the Americans' only interest in Chinese negotiations was to exploit Sino-Russian clashes. They had "no intention of taking sides", Kissinger stated in his memoirs. Meetings were held with Chinese representatives in the Chinese embassy in Warsaw. After numerous meetings, They were taken by surprise by an "extraordinary conciliatory statement," as Kissinger put it, - a proposal was accepted to send an emissary to Beijing, China. This was a huge breakthrough. The Pakistani channel, as mentioned, was to be the main

route of communication. Kissinger's friend, who resided in Paris, occasionally seen, Huang Cheng, the Chinese ambassador to France, socially. Kissinger urged him to mention the US government's desire for direct contact with the Chinese. This message was answered by a very oblique response from the Chinese. On China's National Day of that year Edgar Snow, an American Writer, and his wife were invited to stand at Mao Zedong's side on Tian An Men. They would be photographed with Mao spectating the annual parade. No American had been honoured like this before. It was Edgar Snow who later stated " nothing China's leaders do publicly is without purpose. " Kissinger states in his memoirs that it was " purely an academic insight" by the time he'd realised that Mao was symbolising that American relations had come to his attention. The overwhelming amount of subtlety had caused a communication breakdown. The US were a lot less subtle in their signal. Nixon stated " if there is anything I want to do before I die, it is to go to China. If I don't, I want my children to. " A message, sent through Pakistan, arrived late. " As the relations between China and the USA are to be restored fundamentally, a solution to this crucial question can be found only through direct discussions between high-level responsible persons of the two countries. " Originally, Nixon was reluctant to send Kissinger to Beijing. Kissinger badly wanted the assignment. According to Robert Dallek, Nixon " seemed to take some perverse pleasure in raising other names with him. " Kissinger was quite adamant that he was the only one suited for the job. He dismissed other names Nixon mentioned, such as Nelson Rockefeller and George H. W. Bush. He suggested that if they were to get this done sooner, rather than later, the Vietnam war would possibly be over within a year. This

was one of the main aims of the Chinese negotiations and Kissinger outlining this was enough to convince Nixon to send him. Robert Dallek noted that Nixon wanted Kissinger to meet with Chinese officials just in Pakistan, followed by a Presidential visit to Beijing the next year. Polls suggested that the American public was happy for Communist China to enter the UN. This meant Nixon's cabinet would not lose support or receive (much) criticism for opening discussions with the Chinese. Nixon emphasized the point that Kissinger's trip was to be secret. This could possibly be Nixon's greatest triumph during his presidency, he did not want Kissinger stealing the spotlight. In June 1971, Kissinger was left ecstatic with the Chinese reply. They were willing to comply with the trip. One reason why Kissinger was so happy with this was the fact that the Chinese agreed to discuss global issues, not just issues regarding the situation surrounding Taiwan. Kissinger arrived on July 9, 1971. The Chinese were very curious about the US' insistence on secrecy. The Chinese wondered whether the American government were willing to acknowledge the fact that they were in discussions with Communist China. They felt it may have been déjà vu, regarding the incident in 1954 when John Foster Dulles, the US Secretary of State at the time, refused to shake Zhou Enlai's hand at the Geneva Conference. The Chinese were clear that unhealed wounds were left after that humiliation. Kissinger and his delegation were taken to a secluded, "comfortable" guest house next to a lake. They were spoiled with tea and Chinese delicacies. When Zhou Enlai arrived, discussions went on for almost seven hours. The fact that Zhou, the Premier of the People's Republic of China, was present at the first meeting showed that the Chinese were indeed interested

in ending years of hostility between the two nations. Kissinger stated that he "talked to Zhou for twenty hours, more than all the western ambassadors put together have talked with him." He went on to say that "the Chinese talk when they have something to say. They don't talk for talking's sake." Zhou, who was second in command to Mao, was one of the "three most impressive men" Kissinger had ever met. Zhou had been well schooled on American events and Kissinger's background. There was not really any specific issues to discuss, excluding Taiwan, so the trip was mainly about establishing trust before Nixon's visit. Also, groundwork had to be laid for discussions with the formidable Mao Zedong. Kissinger also used the meeting to let the Chinese know that no Soviet-American collusion was in progress. The Chinese were wary that this is what the whole trip may have been about but they were convinced by Kissinger's sweet talking. He also added that America would never collude with any other countries against China. Nixon allowed Kissinger to inform them that the US would not take any major steps affecting Chinese interest without consulting them first. Throughout the whole trip, the Chinese' primary issue was Taiwan. Kissinger was more focused on an Asian détente and the Vietnam war. The Chinese were vocal in their interest of American troops clearing out of all of Asia. They strongly supported self-determination. Kissinger had to convince Zhou that America had no intentions of any long-term occupations anywhere. The second day of talks took a much different tone. Zhou was aggressive in outlining Chinese suspicions of America, Russia and Japan. Zhou stated that he supported the North Vietnamese struggle for power and that Taiwan was part of the People's Republic of China. He also went on to point the finger at

India for Indo-Pakistani difficulties. Bizarrely, Zhou suggested that a conspiracy between America, Russia and Japan to occupy and divide China up was being planned. All Kissinger could do was urge patience and he said "we should not destroy what is possible by forcing events beyond what the circumstances will allow." Kissinger was also clever enough not to let the Chinese be too patient. A Presidential visit during his administration would look better on him. He stated that Nixon was "the only President who could do" what Kissinger was discussing with them. The strange behaviour of Zhou Enlai continued later that day. He took a sudden turn to the friendly image of himself that had been portrayed the previous day and recommended a Presidential visit in Summer 1972. Kissinger said he would have preferred a Spring visit, before the US election got into full swing. For the rest of that evening and, subsequently, the next morning, Kissinger was subjected to several Communist tactics, including repeatedly postponing talks and later conversations going until early morning discussing nothing of importance. Kissinger sent one word to Nixon to confirm the trip was indeed a success and a Presidential trip was accepted; "Eureka." Nixon was still adamant not to be eclipsed by Kissinger in the Chinese negotiations. A report was asked for, by Nixon, from Kissinger. Nixon wanted to know exactly what occurred in Kissinger's trip. This highlighted Nixon's untrustworthiness. Kissinger's secret trip was a success. He had opened a gateway that many Western people thought they may never see open in their lives. Although Nixon did all he could to take the credit for opening up China to the Western world, events towards the end and following his Presidency would lead to Kissinger getting the credit he, like Nixon, ached for and deserved.