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Mao's Role in the Sino-Soviet Conflict

Donald S. Zagoria

THE VOLUMINOUS LITERATURE on Sino-Soviet relations that has appeared in recent years reflects many diverse interpretations of the origins and the root causes of conflict.* Some analysts point to allegedly deep-seated clashes of national interests that revolve around unresolved territorial issues. Some stress ideological factors such as different Russian and Chinese interpretations of Marxism-Leninism. Others point to conflicts of power and ambition within the international communist movement and the Third World. Finally there are interpretations that stress the role and personalities of particular Russian and Chinese leaders.

Undoubtedly all of these interpretations, and others, have some value. There is no one single cause of any great historical event. Moreover, one has to distinguish between long and short-range elements in the Sino-Soviet conflict. In the former category, for example, one would have to place high priority on the intensity of Chinese nationalism in the 20th century, a nationalism that has reacted against the humiliation of China by the great powers in the 19th century. Viewed in this perspective, any Chinese government of whatever ideological bent would have been a prickly ally for any European power, especially Russia which actively participated in the expansion that took place at China's expense. Among the more proximate causes of conflict, the most important would probably be Mao's dissatisfaction in 1958-59 with a wide range of Khrushchevian policies on such key issues as nuclear sharing, aid to China, and détente with the United States.

Moreover, it seems likely that once the Chinese Communists came to power in 1949, their own interests and those of the Russians were bound to come into some degree of conflict. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, for example, Moscow and Peking were bound to differ on such crucial questions as the desirability of nuclear proliferation and the degree of risk to run in confronting American power. Some degree of conflict was also likely over spheres of influence within the international communist movement and the Third World. But while elements of conflict were inevitable, the crucial question was whether the two governments could agree to disagree on some issues while retaining an effective alliance.

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That the answer to this question proved to be negative is not in itself proof that such a "live and let live" arrangement between Moscow and Peking was then or is now impossible. Just as many observers in the 1950s argued mistakenly that Sino-Soviet unity was inevitable because of a common ideology†, so many contemporary analysts too often now assume that Sino-Soviet conflict is inevitable because of differences in "national interest." Ideology has been both a unifying and a divisive element in the Sino-Soviet relationship and Chinese and Russian interests overlap in some areas and diverge in others. There is no unilinear relationship between ideology or interests on the one hand and Sino-Soviet relations on the other.

Moreover, throughout the past two decades, the Chinese leadership itself has been divided on questions concerning China's "interests" and China's "ideology." The Soviet leadership has shown similar divisions. For this reason, any serious effort to analyze Sino-Soviet relations in the past, or to project those relations into the future, must take into account differences of view within the Chinese and Soviet leadership.

The first part of this article argues that throughout most of the history of the Chinese Communist Party, it has been divided into "internationalist" and "nativist" factions which have been more or less sympathetic to Moscow and that Mao Tse-tung had been rather consistently ranged on the "nativist" side. This is not to say that the history of factionalism within the CCP can be neatly compartmentalized into pro- and anti-Soviet tendencies, but rather that at different periods the Party has been divided on basic questions of domestic and international policy affecting its relationship with Moscow and that at all or most of these crucial turning points, Mao has opted for a more independent policy. There has been, in short, an impressive consistency in Mao's "Titoism." The second part of the article tries to assess the factional conflicts now at work within the CCP in an effort to under-

† Ideology has been *both* a unifying and a divisive element in Sino-Soviet relations, as it has been in church history. A common scriptural inheritance provides a certain unity of outlook but differing interpretations of the same scripture provide the raw material for conflict. Thus, it is simply illogical to predict the development of Sino-Soviet relations *only* on the basis of the ideological dimension. This is not to argue that ideology does not play an important, even a crucial, role in determining the outlook of the Chinese leaders. It is merely to argue that the ideological factor is not decisive in determining whether Sino-Soviet relations will be friendly or hostile. This is one of the issues that John Spanier has not understood when he takes me to task for underestimating the role of ideology on the Chinese Communists in the 1940's. See our two essays in Charles Gati (ed.), *Caging the Bear: Containment and the Cold War* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1974). My argument is not that ideology is unimportant, but that it was not decisive in determining Mao's alliance with Stalin in 1950; there were other factors, including ideological ones, that strained Mao's relations with Stalin. In retrospect, and also on the basis of some new documents, it seems to me that the elements of strain in Mao's relations with Stalin in 1949 were greater than the elements of unity. On this basis, I have argued that a more flexible American policy at the time might well have led to an earlier rupture in Sino-Soviet relations. This argument may be wrong but it certainly cannot be refuted, as Spanier seeks to do, by merely asserting that ideology plays an important role in influencing Chinese conduct.

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stand how these different factions may view relations with the Soviet Union after Mao's death. In sum, it rejects the deterministic interpretations of Sino-Soviet relations which assert that Russia and China are bound either to be united or to be in conflict because of some "deep" historical, cultural, ideological, or geographic factors. These elements provide the background to Sino-Soviet relations but are not decisive. The decisive elements are political, and to understand these, it is necessary to probe into the numerous controversies at crucial junctures of CCP history over the past four decades.

The Consistency of Mao's "Titoism"

As Stuart Schram has pointed out in a perceptive review of the historical background to the Cultural Revolution, the controversy over the Li Li-san line in 1929-30 was the "first instance of an open clash between Moscow and a leadership of the Chinese Communist Party determined to put China first."[1] The clash was marked not only by intense debate but "by the first direct organizational confrontation between the Comintern and the majority of its Chinese section."[2] Basically, the issue was whether the Chinese Communists should mount a "revolutionary upsurge," including attacks on Wuhan and Changsha, despite the risks of provoking Japanese and other imperialist intervention in Northeastern China that might then have drawn the Soviet Union into a "world revolutionary war." The majority of the Chinese section of the Comintern, like both Mao and Li Li-san, favored such an attack but the Comintern refused to sanction the plans, evidently because of Stalin's anxiety over becoming involved in a war with Japan. The attack was carried out despite the Comintern's reservations and led to a major defeat and to the disgrace of Li Li-san. But, as Schram notes, this incident, and Mao's statements at the time, suggest that Mao was already in 1930 putting Chinese interests above those of Moscow. Some of his statements at the time pointed already to a firm conviction on his part that foreigners, i.e. Russians, could not understand the situation in China as well as Chinese could. In sum, the essential ingredients of Mao's "Titoism"—putting Chinese interests before those of Moscow and deprecating the ability of the Russians to understand China—were already present in 1930.

Immediately after the failure of the Li Li-san episode, Stalin took steps to ensure that the CCP would be brought under tighter Soviet control. A group of Moscow-trained "Returned Students" (the so-called 28 Bolsheviks) were installed as leaders of the CCP at a plenum in January, 1931, presided over and controlled by Paval Mif, a Comintern functionary. These "28 Bolsheviks" were headed by Wang Ming, one of Mif's proteges. Wang (Ch'en Shao-yu) assumed the post of general secretary of the CCP during

[1] Stuart R. Schram (ed.), *Authority, Participation and Cultural Change in China* (Cambridge University Press, 1973, p. 14).

[2] *Ibid.*

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the first half of 1931 and immediately came into conflict with Mao Tse-tung. By 1932, Mao's influence over both Party and Army had been curtailed by the "28 Bolsheviks" and by the middle of 1934 he was merely the ceremonial head of the Chinese Soviet Republic in Kiangsi. As John Rue has written, on the eve of the Long March, which began in the winter of 1934:

> Mao had every reason to feel a deep repugnance for Stalinist methods of controlling non-Soviet parties. In 1931, when Mao was at the height of his power . . . the 28 Bolsheviks had begun their struggle against his ideas on political and military strategy. By 1934, with the support of the Comintern, they had removed him and his most active supporters from all influential positions in the party, army, and government. They had rejected and condemned his agrarian and military policies and replaced them with policies modeled after the practice of the Soviet government and the CPSU. In implementing their 'further bolshevization of the CCP' they had adopted the terroristic policies of the Soviet political police and anticipated in the small Soviet districts of South China the great purges in the Soviet Union.[3]

Despite the conflict between Mao and Stalin in the early 1930's, when Mao assumed the leadership of the CCP at the Tsunyi Conference in 1935, in the middle of the Long March, Moscow endorsed the change. Stalin probably calculated that he had little alternative and Mao was not in a position to reject assistance from Moscow at a time when he was struggling for power in China against overwhelming odds. That mutual suspicions still rankled, however, is evident from the fact that Mao rejected Stalin's advice to settle the Long March guerrilla army in Sinkiang Province bordering on Soviet Central Asia. In such a location, Mao's army would have been easy for Stalin to control. Instead, Mao chose a more exposed site in Yenan, unsuited for easy communication with the Soviet Union.[4]

Throughout the late 1930's, Mao pursued his struggle against the Comintern-oriented faction inside the CCP. In his theoretical pronouncements, such as one made in October 1938, he rejected what he called "abstract Marxism" and demanded instead the adaptation of Marxism to Chinese conditions.[5] In 1937, Wang Ming returned to China from Moscow with a directive from Stalin intended to enable Wang to replace Mao at the head of the CCP. But the directive gave rise to internal conflicts within the Comintern faction, enabling Mao to play the "28 Bolsheviks" off against one another and ultimately to eliminate them all from the centers of power.[6] The final purge of the "28 Bolsheviks" and their followers was one of the principal motives of the "Rectification Campaign" of 1942-43 fought under the slogan of "Sinification of Marxism."

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[3] John Rue, *Mao Tse-tung in Opposition* (Stanford University Press, 1966, p. 265).

[4] On this episode, see Warren Kuo, *Analytical History of the Chinese Communist Party* (Taipei: Institute of International Relations, 1970, Vol. III, p. 200).

[5] Schram, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

[6] *Ibid.*, p. 17.

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Although Mao had defeated the "28 Bolsheviks" by 1942, other "internationalist" or pro-Soviet tendencies within the CCP were strengthened by the course of events in the 1940's, most notably the confrontation between the Communists and the Nationalists that led to all-out civil war between 1946 and 1949. From 1944 through the spring of 1946, the Chinese Communists still hoped for a friendly relationship with the United States that would enable them to neutralize the Nationalists and maintain independence of Moscow. Throughout 1945 and early 1946, the CCP leaders made extraordinary bids for better relations with the United States. In several conversations with American foreign service officers in Yenan, Mao personally indicated that postwar China would be dependent on U. S. aid for reconstruction and that the United States was the only country able to provide such assistance.[7] In early 1945, Mao and Chou asked for a meeting with President Roosevelt.[8] Throughout 1944-46, the Chinese Communists in Yenan sought close relations with the American Observer Group (the Dixie Mission) that had arrived there in the summer of 1944 to coordinate military strategy against Japan. All of these events must have given Stalin's intelligence agents in Yenan much food for thought.[9]

In the event, the United States began in mid-1946 to side openly with the Nationalists. This U. S. policy accelerated the rise of a new "internationalist" faction within the CCP which saw no alternative to reliance on the Soviet Union. Still, the issue of how closely to rely on Moscow now became a matter of considerable intra-party dispute. The first clash between the new "internationalists" and the "nativists" came in Manchuria in 1946. The issues centered first on the proper military strategy to be used in the Civil War and second on the relationship between the CCP and the military officers and administrators from the Soviet Union who had moved into Manchuria in the closing days of World War Two. In later years, Moscow revealed that P'eng Chen and Lin Feng had led an anti-Soviet faction in 1946 which "intentionally distorted the role of the Soviet Army (in Manchuria) and disseminated slanders against the USSR." Moreover, said the Russians, in-

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[7] John Paton Davies, Jr., *Dragon by the Tail* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1972, pp. 321, 404). Mao told John Stewart Service: "China's greatest postwar need is economic development. She lacks the capitalistic foundation necessary to carry this out alone. Her own living standards are so low they cannot be further depressed to provide the needed capital. America and China complement each other economically . . . America needs an export market for heavy industry and specific manufactures. She also needs an outlet for capital investment. China needs to build up light industries to supply her own market and raise living standards . . . America is not only the most suitable country to assist this economic development of China, she is also the only country fully able to participate." (Cited by Allen Whiting in Testimony to House Foreign Relations Committee in 1970, printed in "China and U. S. Foreign Policy," *Congressional Quarterly*, Washington, D. C., 1973, p. 68.)

[8] Barbara Tuchman, "If Mao had Come to Washington: An Essay in Alternatives," *Foreign Affairs*, October, 1972.

[9] For a review of Sino-Soviet relations in the 1940s, see my article "Containment and China," in Charles Gati (ed.), *Caging the Bear, op. cit.*

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stances of "anti-Soviet statements" in the "higher echelons" of the CCP became "so open" by 1949 that the Chinese Central Committee, apparently as a result of Soviet pressure, was forced to condemn the "mistakes" of the P'eng-Lin group. But even then, according to the Russians, there were only "formalistic condemnations" of these "anti-Soviet tendencies.[10]

Despite these strong criticisms by the Russians, both P'eng Chen and Lin Feng were promoted by Mao after 1949 to positions of considerable prominence (though both were later to become victims of the Cultural Revolution). P'eng in particular played a key role at Mao's side in the early stages of the conflict with Moscow that erupted into the open in 1960. By contrast, their "internationalist" opponents in Manchuria during that period, most notably Kao Kang, were purged by Mao in 1954-55 on charges of having developed an "independent kingdom" in the northeast. As Klein has suggested, all of this lends credence to the widely held view that Kao sided with the USSR against the P'eng-Lin group. It seems likely, moreover, that Li Li-san was then allied with Kao Kang in a pro-Soviet faction in Manchuria. Li entered Manchuria with Soviet forces in the closing days of World War II, having been in exile in Moscow for nearly 15 years. He was evidently intended by Stalin to play a key role in the affairs of the CCP at a time when Stalin's suspicions of Mao's Titoist tendencies were rising. Both the American Consul in Mukden and the *New York Times* concluded at the time that Li was one of the leaders of a Moscow-oriented clique in Manchuria. American government officials even speculated that the Maoists, then concentrated in North China, exercised "little if any control over Manchuria" which was, they said, governed by "Kremlin stooges."[11]

Although the United States initially supported the Chinese Nationalists in the civil war on the mainland which began in 1946, by late 1948 it had begun to disengage from the war and to write them off militarily. Toward the end of 1948 the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff affirmed that overt American military action to deny Taiwan to the Communists would not be justified. By early 1949, the U.S. was reconciling itself to a Communist victory on the mainland. Thus, when the Communists captured the Nationalist capital of Nanking in April 1949, the American ambassador to China, Leighton Stuart, deliberately remained behind to carry on conversations with the Communists. These conversations (over a period of two months) and other evidence, suggest that once again there developed a dispute within the CCP between "internationalist" and "nativist" factions on postwar relations with the Soviet Union and the United States. Basically, the issue was whether China should

[10] For more details, see the biographies of Kao Kang, Lin Feng, and P'eng Chen in Donald W. Klein and Anne B. Clarke, *Biographic Dictionary of Chinese Communism, 1921-1965* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1971).

[11] See *New York Times*, October 11, 1946, p. 10; also *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1948, Vol. VII* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1973, pp. 341 and 383).

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ally itself exclusively with the Soviet Union or seek to balance an alliance with Moscow with a new relationship with the United States.

As Tillman Durdin reported, a serious debate on this issue raged within the CCP throughout the spring and summer of 1949.[12] On the one side, Mao and Chou En-lai, while favoring some collaboration with Russia, nevertheless wanted to pursue a more independent line. They particularly desired a new relationship with the United States in order to obtain American economic aid and, probably, to avoid lopsided dependence on Stalin. In 1946, Chou En-lai bluntly told General Marshall: "Of course we will lean to one side. But how far depends on you."[12a] Another more pro-Soviet group of leaders, led at this time by Liu Shao-ch'i, were, according to Durdin, urging an exclusive alliance with Moscow. In the fall of 1948, Liu had been the author of a very important document on the importance of "internationalism"—a document that appears to have set off subsequent debate.

The debate between the two factions was undoubtedly accelerated, if not prompted, by Stalin's expulsion of Tito from the Cominform in June 1948. As American representatives in China in 1948 reported to Washington, CCP support for the Cominform action against Yugoslavia was couched in very general terms and "comments by Chinese Communist-spokesmen in Hong Kong were notable mostly for their lack of enthusiasm."[13] Some Communists openly voiced reservations about the wisdom of CCP approval of the purge of Tito. The Cominform action must have greatly enhanced Mao's fears that any collaboration with Stalin could only be on an unequal basis. And it is almost certain that this was one of the main reasons why in the spring and summer of 1949, Mao tentatively began to explore with the Americans the terms of a new relationship that might give him some leverage on Stalin.

Unfortunately, until the State Department documents on Chinese-U.S. relations in 1949 are released, we cannot fully evaluate the terms of these Chinese moves. But a recently released study by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee (including some of the relevant 1949 documents) shows that a number of conversations took place between Huang Hua—a man whose career has been closely tied to Chou En-lai—and the Ambassador Stuart between May 13 and June 28, 1949.[14] These conversations took place before Mao made his famous "lean to one side" speech of July 1, 1949, that seemed to line China up on the side of the Soviet Union in the Cold War. The Senate study concludes that there were in the spring of 1949 "at least certain elements within the Chinese Communist Party [who] were trying

[12] *New York Times,* September 17 and 18, 1949.

[12a] Cited by A. Whiting in testimony referred to in note 7 above.

[13] *Foreign Relations of the United States 1948,* Vol. VII, *op. cit.* p. 378.

[14] *The United States and Communist China in 1949 and 1950: The Question of Rapprochement and Recognition* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1973).

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to develop closer relations with the West and avoid falling into the Soviet orbit." This group was led by Mao and Chou. The blow that evidently signaled the victory of the "internationalist" point of view at this time was President Truman's veto of a trip to Peking by Leighton Stuart late in June 1949. Truman was evidently fearful of antagonizing the "China Lobby" in Congress and so an opportunity to test Mao's mood at the time was lost. Relations between the U.S. and China deteriorated by early 1950, and by mid-1950 the two countries were embroiled in the war in Korea. By then the Chinese Communists had little choice but to move into a lopsided alliance with Stalin.

Thus, it is scarcely surprising that, as Mao himself has testified, Stalin regarded him as a "Tito" right up to the Chinese intervention in the Korean War. Mao said this in a speech in September 1962 to the 10th Plenum of the Central Committee while explaining the origins of the conflict with Russia. After complaining that "Stalin blocked the Chinese revolution, saying that we must not fight a civil war but must collaborate with Chiang Kai-shek," Mao said that even after the victory of the revolution, Stalin "again suspected that China would be like Yugoslavia and I would turn into a Tito."[15]

Developments Since 1949

Since the Chinese Communists took power in 1949, there have been several major purges of CCP leaders: first, that of Kao Kang and his followers in 1954-55; second, that of Marshal P'eng Teh-huai, the Defense Minister in 1959; third, during the early stages of the Cultural Revolution, Chief-of-Staff Lo Jui ch'ing and top Party leaders such as Lui Shao-ch'i and Teng Hsiao-p'ing; fourth and most recent, Defense Minister Lin Piao and many of his followers. All these purges were carried out by Mao and groups loyal to him and each was surrounded by controversy over issues relating to China's relationship with the Soviet Union. This is not to say that foreign policy or relations with the Soviet Union were the only issues, but certainly the Soviet connection, and whether to try to repair it, were major, if not decisive, factors in the last three purges.

Enough has already been said about Kao Kang and the likelihood that he led an "internationalist" factor in Manchuria between 1946 and 1954. The accusations made by the Chinese against Marshal P'eng Teh-huai make it evident that P'eng opposed the split with Moscow on military-strategic grounds; he and the "professionals" within the Army wanted to modernize and regularize the armed forces with Soviet assistance and to continue benefitting from the Soviet nuclear shield. They disparaged

[15] For translation of this speech, see *Chinese Law and Government,* Vol. I, No. 4, Winter, 1968-69, pp. 88-89.

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the "guerrilla" techniques favored by the Maoists and strongly resented the interference by Mao in the work of the armed forces. The following quotations from accusations made against P'eng in 1967 give some idea of the direction of P'eng's thinking. Moreover, the fact that such charges were revived in 1967 suggests that the views represented by P'eng in 1959 were still prominent at the outset of the Cultural Revolution.

He opposed the policy advanced by Chairman Mao of creating an independent and complete network of modern national defense industries by relying on our own efforts. . . . He depended entirely on the Khrushchev revisionist clique for the improvement of our army's equipment and the development of up-to-date military science and technology, in a futile attempt to turn our army into a dependency of that clique.[16] He placed military technique in the first place and denied that political and ideological work is the primary factor in building up our army's combat strength.[17]

P'eng Teh-huai opposes Chairman Mao's policy of self-reliance and building an independent and complete and modern system of national defense industries in order to make the improvement of our army's equipment and development of advanced science and technology dependent entirely on the Khrushchev revisionist clique—in a futile attempt to make our army an appendage to the Khrushchev revisionist clique.[18]

He [P'eng] was highly dissatisfied with the fact that all the power was held by the Military Commission of the Central Committee headed by Chairman Mao, and for this he often complained: 'What kind of a Defense Minister I am! I just welcome and send people off, I am neither like the Soviet Defense Minister who is in charge of command nor like the U.S. Defense Secretary who controls the budget.'[19]

P'eng said: 'China has a hugh population. If war should break out in the future, we should contribute troops and the Soviet Union, atom bombs.'[20]

From such clues, and from the timing of P'eng's purge in 1959, it is possible to surmise that he opposed the break with Moscow on strategic grounds and wanted to manipulate the threat from the U.S. so as to modernize the armed forces with Soviet assistance. It is also quite likely that P'eng wanted to continue the nuclear collaboration arrangement which he had helped work out in Moscow in November 1957 and which was abruptly broken off, probably by Mao, in 1959 on the grounds that the Soviet Union had reneged on the agreement.[21] P'eng like many other military professionals, must also have been alarmed at Mao's decision to break with Moscow at a time when China would be vulnerable to the nuclear blackmail of the United States.

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16 *The Case of P'eng Teh-huai 1959-68* (Kowloon, Hong Kong: Union Research Institute, 1968, p. 165).

17 *Ibid*, p. 164.

18 *Ibid.*, pp. 174-75.

19 *Ibid.*, p. 176.

20 *Ibid*. p. 175.

21 See my book, *The Sino-Soviet Conflict* (Princeton University Press, 1962).

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The purges of Lo Jui-ch'ing, Liu Shao Ch'i and Teng Hsiao P'ing during the early stages of the Cultural Revolution have been described and analyzed by several students of Chinese politics.[22] Without going into detail, the relevant facts are that sometime after American bombers carried out the first raids on North Vietnam in February 1965, Moscow used the American threat to North Vietnam and China to try to get Peking's agreement to a policy of so-called united action which would have meant among other things the establishment of Soviet military bases in, and transit rights through, China, thus establishing a more or less permanent presence in China.[23] This offer in turn provoked a split in the Chinese leadership between those (such as Liu) who wanted to accept some degree of cooperation with the Soviet Union, probably on the assumption that the U.S. was headed for war with China, and Mao, who minimized the possibility of an American attack and argued that the Soviets were unreliable allies. By November 1965, Lo Jui-ch'ing had dropped from sight and the Soviet offer of united action was denounced as a ruse to sell out Vietnam to the imperialists and to gain domination over China. By late 1966, the top Party leaders also came under fire.

Perhaps the most significant point about the purge of Lo was that it was the second case within six years of a high ranking Chinese military leader who opposed Mao out of a desire to make some compromise with Moscow. Whether the motivation was to protect China against the United States, to obtain Soviet military assistance to modernize the armed forces, or some combination of these and other reasons, the fact remains that there were strong pressures from within the armed forces for a normalization of relations with the Soviet Union.

These pressures were also evident in the circumstances surrounding the alleged coup attempt of Lin Piao in 1971. Lin and a number of top military professionals, including the commander of the Air Force and a deputy commander of the Navy, probably did participate in a plot to overthrow Mao.[24] A number of sources have suggested that Lin's group was reluctant to withdraw the Army from the positions of power it obtained during the Cultural Revolution and that it opposed the détente with the United States. In recent months, the Chinese press, in its attacks on the Lin clique, have ac-

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[22] See, for example, Maury Lisann, "Moscow and the Chinese Power Struggle" (*Problems of Communism,* December 1969, pp. 32-41), Uri Ra'anan, "Peking's Foreign Policy Debate, 1965-66," and Donald Zagoria, "The Strategic Debate in Peking," in Tang Tsou, ed., *China in Crisis,* Vol. 2 (University of Chicago Press, 1968); See also Ra'anan "Chinese Factionalism and Sino-Soviet Relations," *Current History,* No. 59, September 1970, pp. 134-141; Michael Yahuda, "Kremlinology and the Chinese Strategic Debate, 1965-66," *China Quarterly,* January-March, 1972; and responses to Yahuda by Zagoria and Ra'anan in *China Quarterly,* April-June, 1972; "On Kremlinology: A Reply to Michael Yahuda." See also the chapter on China in my book, *Vietnam Triangle* (New York: Pegasus, 1968).

[23] See Maury Lisann, *op. cit.*

[24] See Philip Bridgham, "The Fall of Lin Piao," *China Quarterly,* July-September 1973.

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cused him of planning to "capitulate to Soviet revisionism outside of China and to become a puppet king under Soviet nuclear protection."[25] It is not entirely clear what Lin's policy towards the Soviet Union would have been if the plot had succeeded but it seems likely that he, like P'eng and Lo, wanted better relations with Moscow.

It is also clear that both Liu Shao-ch'i and Teng Hsiao-p'ing wanted to mend fences with Moscow in 1966-67. As Lisan and Ra'anan have pointed out, Liu and Teng "supported Moscow's calls for unity of action in Vietnam and became conspicuously uncritical of the Soviet Union in general."[26] Their motivation is somewhat less clear than that of the military; perhaps they hoped for Soviet economic aid or they genuinely feared an American attack. But there did emerge in 1965-67 a powerful coalition of military and Party leaders who wanted a partial rapprochement with Moscow. Moreover, there is some evidence, as Lisann argues, that "the Soviet leaders hoped to encourage men like Lin Shao Ch'i and Teng Hsiao-p'ing to organize a sizeable and cohesive opposition to Mao within the party, and that hints were dropped that the Red Army would be available, on invitation, to protect base areas in the provinces, from which the opposition could operate."[27] One of the principal functions of the Cultural Revolution—one which has not been sufficiently stressed in much of the literature on the subject—was to enable Mao to eliminate from positions of influence anyone suspected of being "soft" on Moscow at a time when Soviet intervention in China seemed to be a real possibility.[28] Maoist fears of Soviet intervention, already existent in 1965-67, must have been greatly heightened by the Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia in 1968. They were the decisive factor in Mao's turn toward rapproachement with Washington. The question is to what extent Mao succeeded in eliminating this "pro-Soviet" opposition during the Cultural Revolution, and this requires an assessment of the new balance of forces in China since the 9th and 10th Party Congresses.

Divisions Within the Chinese Leadership

Given the fact that as long ago as the 1930's Mao developed a "Titoist" position and that once the Sino-Soviet conflict broke into the open, he consistently vetoed any and all efforts by his colleagues to repair relations with

[25] Peking Radio, Domestic Service, January 29, 1974 (FBIS, January 31, 1974, p. B.6); see also *People's Daily* editorial, February 2, 1974, "Carry the Struggle to Criticize Lin Piao and Confucius Through to the End," for an alleged link between Lin and the Soviet Union (FBIS, February 4, 1974, p. B.2).

[26] Lisann, *op. cit.*

[27] *Ibid.*

[28] Mao did in fact lump together all of his enemies during the Cultural Revolution as "pro-Soviet." See *Red Flag,* No. 1, 1974, which says: "Since the founding of the People's Republic of China, the party's struggles with the four anti-party cliques—the Kao Kang-Jao Shu-shih, Peng Te-huai, Liu Shao-chi and Lin Piao cliques—have all been struggles against revisionism." (FBIS, January 7, 1974, p. B6).

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Moscow, there is a certain consistency about the anti-Soviet attitudes that he has so clearly manifested in recent years. It seems as if the Sino-Soviet "honeymoon" in the 1950s was more of an artificial alliance forced on Mao by international circumstances, rather than any expression of genuine ideological fraternity. Had the United States been willing to recognize the new regime in China in 1949 when Peking was putting out feelers to Washington, the Sino-Soviet split might well have erupted earlier.[29]

The basis for Mao's anti-Sovietism can only be surmised. Initially, it was undoubtedly based on a simple impulse to put Chinese interests above those of Moscow's, an impulse that many foreign communist leaders had but were unable to put into practice because of Stalin's purges. Mao was always beyond Stalin's reach. In the 1940's, Mao was resentful at insufficient backing by Stalin in the civil war with the Nationalists; indeed it is possible to make the case that Stalin preferred a weak Nationalist government to a strong independent Communist government. In the early 1950's, Stalin imposed an unequal treaty on China which had many exploitative aspects. After Stalin died, the Soviet Union was ruled by men who probably did not command Mao's respect and who, in any case, seemed to neglect China's interests. In recent years, Mao may well have believed that the revolution in the Soviet Union has been betrayed by "revisionists" and that this must not happen in China. In sum, Mao's critical attitude towards Moscow has a long history and diverse motivations. The question now is whether his death will open the way for compromise with Moscow.

In recent months, the Chinese have launched a campaign against Confucius and Lin Piao that has aroused much speculation in the West. Is it another "rectification" campaign designed to educate party cadres against "revisionism" or is it related to a new struggle for power connected to policy issues dividing the present leadership? If it is the latter, are foreign policy issues involved?

For several reasons it seems likely that foreign policy is once again an issue dividing the Chinese leadership. First, as I have sought to demonstrate, both in this article and elsewhere, policy towards the United States and the Soviet Union has been an issue throughout most of the past two decades of Chinese Communist rule. In the late 40's, the issue was not *whether* Communist China would lean towards one side but rather, as Chou En-lai put it to General Marshall, *how far* it would lean. American policy at the time offered little incentive to those leaders in China who wished to maneuver between Moscow and Washington out of a basic mistrust of Stalin and a felt need for economic assistance that only the United States could provide. In the late 50's, the question was whether China should relinquish some of its freedom of action in world affairs in order to gain the protection of the Soviet nuclear umbrella. In the mid to late 60's, the problem was whether

[29] See my paper in Gati (ed.), *Caging the Bear, op. cit.*

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Soviet "revisionism" or American "imperialism" posed the greater danger to China. More recently, there have been differences about the wisdom of the détente with the United States. Against this background, it seems highly unlikely that foreign policy is no longer a contentious issue in Peking.

Second, there is some evidence to suggest that foreign policy remains an issue at the present juncture. In his policy statement to the 10th Party Congress last August, Chou En-lai went out of his way to argue that there was an important difference between the Soviet détente with the United States, which was a compromise of principle, and the Chinese détente with the United States, which was not. It seems logical to infer from this that the détente with Washington has come under fire within China from revolutionary "purists" who consider it a betrayal of principle.

The present foreign policy debate, as I read the evidence, is between one group which wishes to engage actively in international relations, maneuvering between Russia and the United States, and another which wants to return to revolutionary isolationism. The main spokesman for the first "engagement" group is Chou En-lai; the main spokesman for the "revolutionary isolationists" is Wang Hung-wen. Certainly Chou En-lai's formulations about Chinese relations with Moscow and Washington are notably different from Wang's. At the 10th Congress Chou did not mention the possibility of an imminent attack by the Soviet Union, stressing instead the reassuring note that the Russians were "making a feint to the east while attacking in the west." Wang, on the other hand, specifically warned of the need to "without fail, prepare well against any war of aggression and guard against surprise attack by imperialism and social-imperialism."[30]

That these different formulations are of political significance is evident from the fact that they have since been repeated. Chou's formula has been reiterated by Chou himself, by Chiao Kuan-hua (the vice Foreign Minister), a man very close to Chou, and by Teng Hsiao-ping, a pre-Cultural Revolution leader who has made a spectacular comeback within the past two years and recently led China's delegation to the U.N. General Assembly.[31] From a variety of evidence, Teng, too, seems very close to Chou En-lai. Wang repeated his formula in April 1974, with a slight variation, warning of the need to maintain "high vigilance" and to prepare "against a surprise attack by social-imperialism and against any trouble-making by the superpowers in the world at large."[32]

Chou's wording suggests that the Soviet threat is not imminent, is shared with the West, and therefore provides the basis for continuing to develop Chinese ties with the West. Wang's, on the other hand, suggests that the

[30] *Peking Review*, 35-36, September 7, 1973.
[31] *Ibid.*, October 5, 1973, and Supplement to *Peking Review*, April 12, 1974.
[32] *Peking Review*, April 12, 1974.

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Soviet (and possibly the American) threat is imminent and therefore that China can trust neither of the two superpowers; it implies a return to the Cultural Revolution isolationist foreign policy of encouraging revolutions and opposing both superpowers.

Quite apart from such speculative exercises in "Pekingology," some more general points can be made about the future of Sino-Soviet relations and the considerations that will influence *any* post-Mao leadership. Whatever the composition of such a leadership, a return to an alliance with Moscow is inconceivable for several reasons. First, the history of the past two decades has filled both sides with suspicions and fears that are unlikely to disappear in the foreseeable future. Second, an alliance between Russia and China could never be a relationship between equals so long as China remains militarily so inferior. Third, the military race between the two powers will almost certainly continue and take on a life of its own. Moscow will fear the day when China gains a secure second-strike capability and China will fear Moscow's efforts to obtain a decisive strategic superiority. Fourth, China is unlikely ever again to put itself into a situation of one-sided dependence on any power. Fifth, a new Sino-Soviet alliance would jeopardize China's new economic relations with the United States, Japan and Western Europe, and it would revive the pressures in Japan for strengthening the alliance with the United States and/or going nuclear. Last but not least, it seems in retrospect that the Soviet-Soviet alliance of the 1950's was in many ways an artificial alliance brought about by a shortsighted U.S. policy which offered China little alternative to a Soviet connection.

But although any post-Mao Chinese leadership will not want a new alliance with Moscow, it should want a reduction of tensions. The present triangular relationship between Moscow, Peking and Washington, in which only Washington has normal relations with the other two, is unbalanced. This robs Peking of flexibility and enables Washington to exploit Peking's unfriendly relations with Moscow. It was this imbalance (to Washington's disadvantage) that led the United States in the early 1970's to change its policy towards China. Peking, like Washington, will find advantage in a policy of maneuver between its two adversaries, a policy that Chou now seems to be advocating, but that policy can only be pursued if Peking moves to normalize its state-to-state relations with the Russians. At the 10th Party Congress, Chou in fact held out the possibility of such a normalization of diplomatic relations.

Moreover, it seems likely that were it not for Mao, the Chinese leaders might well have already gone much further than they have towards compromise with Moscow. In 1965-66, Mao virtually alone in the Politburo ruled out acceptance of the Soviet offer for united action in Vietnam. In recent years, the Russians have made a number of bids to conclude treaties renouncing the use of force, both conventional and nuclear, but these bids have

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either been ignored or rebuffed by Mao. This intransigent attitude on Mao's part can only be understood against the historical background that I have tried to sketch here. Once Mao departs the scene, a crucial barrier to a normalization of relations between Peking and Moscow will be removed. Then, it will be a question of whether the advocates of "engagement" will win out over these demanding a return to a more isolationist and revolutionary line.

Although a normalization of relations between Peking and Moscow is thus likely after Mao's demise, the precise terms of this normalization will be dependent upon the state of Chinese-American relations at that time. If these relations do not develop further, or if they deteriorate, the Chinese leaders will be under great pressure to lean towards Moscow. If, on the other hand, Sino-American relations improve, Peking will still want to normalize relations with Moscow for reasons cited earlier, but it will be under much less pressure to do so. Thus, in the future, as in the past, American policy towards China will have a critical influence on Sino-Soviet relations. The American decision to pull out combat aircraft from Taiwan and further reduce the number of U.S. servicemen on the island,[33] will undoubtedly provide a much-needed impetus to a relationship that in recent months seemed to have reached a plateau.

Hunter College and Graduate Center, CUNY, New York, March, 1974

[33] *New York Times*, May 19, 1974, p. 8.

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