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The Sino-Soviet split

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By 1962, the once robust Sino-Soviet alliance had cracked up, revealing serious conflicts beneath the façade of Communist solidarity. This split was a remarkable development in a Cold War context. It was not the first time that the Soviets had fallen out with their allies: the Yugoslavs were thrown out of the "camp" in 1948; Hungary had tried but failed to leave in 1956; Albania quarreled with Moscow in 1961. But, in spite of their intrinsic importance, these issues were small compared to the red banner of Sino-Soviet unity, the symbol of the power and appeal of socialism worldwide. The demise of the alliance represented the broken promise of Marxism. Ideological unity and conformity were so essential to the Soviet-led socialist world that a quarrel between its two principal protagonists – the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China – undermined the legitimacy of the socialist camp as a whole, and of the intellectual notions that underpinned its existence.

So inexplicable did the split appear from a Marxist perspective that both Chinese and Soviet historians in retrospect would blame the debacle on the other side's betrayal of Marxism.[1] But from a realist perspective, Marxism had nothing to do with the rift: the Soviet Union and China were great powers with divergent national interests. No amount of Communist propaganda could have reconciled these competing interests, so it was not surprising, indeed it had been predictable, that the Soviets and the Chinese would fall out and the alliance would crumble.[2] The realist perspective is simple and convenient; yet it does not fully explain the extremely intricate process of the Sino-Soviet split: how it was influenced by key personalities, how it related to the domestic environments of the Soviet Union and China, and how it was affected by cultural contexts of policymaking. These complex matters

1 For example, Oleg Borisov and Boris Koloskov, *Soviet-Chinese Relations, 1945–1970* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1975).

2 For example, David Floyd, *Mao against Khrushchev: A Short History of the Sino-Soviet Conflict* (New York and London: Frederick Praeger, 1963).

are addressed in this chapter – not to refute but rather to refine the realist paradigm, and to do justice to the twists and turns of the road, which, from 1962 to 1969, took the Soviet Union and China from a troubled alliance to a violent military confrontation.

The end of the alliance

On October 13, 1962, Nikita Khrushchev had told the departing Chinese ambassador, Liu Xiao, that "our most cherished dream is to get rid of the cold current which is separating us, and to return to the close and intimate relations we had before 1958."[3] But if Khrushchev had anyone to blame for the "cold current," he could well blame himself, although he was too narrow-minded ever to admit that he had played a significant role in the decline of the Sino-Soviet alliance. Since the historian Shu Guang Zhang has addressed Khrushchev's misguided policies in volume I, we shall not spend too much time on the Soviet leader's blunders here, except in the way of a short summary.

Between 1958 and 1962, Khrushchev's disastrous handling of the Soviet relationship with China had seriously exacerbated the tensions in the alliance. He had angered Mao Zedong with his inconsiderate proposition to build a joint submarine flotilla and a military radio station on China's soil. He had tacitly supported India in the 1959 Sino-Indian border war. In 1960, he had hastily withdrawn Soviet experts from China in a fit of rage. He had rallied his allies in Europe to criticize China in international forums. He had pulled out of a deal to deliver a prototype atomic bomb to the Chinese, and had desperately tried to stall the Chinese nuclear weapons program. From the Chinese perspective, these policies consistently spoke of Khrushchev's high-handed arrogance and his chauvinistic disdain for China.

In late 1962, Khrushchev was portrayed in internal Chinese assessments as "a traitor, not a proletarian."[4] His loyalty to China was no longer taken for granted. "Who knows toward whom he will fire rockets one day? You never can tell," said Deputy Foreign Minister Zhang Hanfu to one audience in November 1962 – and such sentiments prevailed throughout the Chinese

3 Conversation between Nikita Khrushchev and Liu Xiao, October 13, 1962, Arkhiv vneshnei politiki Rossiiskoi Federatsii [Archive of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation], Moscow (hereafter, AVPRF): fond 0100, opis 55, papka 480, delo 4, list 34.

4 Cited in Wang Dong, *The Quarrelling Brothers: New Chinese Archives and a Reappraisal of the Sino-Soviet Split, 1959–1962*, Cold War International History Project (CWIHP) Working Paper No. 49 (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center, 2006), 65.

foreign-policy establishment.[5] But this did not mean that the Sino-Soviet alliance was a dead letter in Beijing. Rather, Chinese policymakers believed that the realities of a bipolar world order and the intensity of the Soviet–US confrontation made continued Sino-Soviet cooperation indispensable to both their country and to Moscow. For all of Khrushchev's blunders, he was still considered to be on the same side of the barricades as the Chinese.

On October 16, 1962, President John F. Kennedy learned that the Soviet Union had secretly stationed nuclear missiles in Cuba. Whatever Khrushchev's intentions, sending missiles to Cuba had been his personal decision; he had barely consulted with his colleagues in the Party Presidium, as James G. Hershberg explains.[6] Khrushchev did not ask the Chinese for their opinion on the issue, nor did he inform them that a secret operation was underway. When Kennedy declared the naval quarantine of Cuba and demanded withdrawal of the missiles, the Soviet leader first wavered and then agreed to pull them out. Castro was not consulted, while the Chinese were once again completely out of the loop. Khrushchev bent over backwards to show how his handling of the Cuban missile crisis was a great triumph of Soviet foreign policy. But the Chinese accused him of capitulating and betraying the cause of the Cuban revolution.

Khrushchev resented the accusation. After all, he had pulled back from the brink to save the world from a nuclear catastrophe. He had avoided a world war. Would Mao not have done the same? In fact, Khrushchev believed that Mao was "afraid of war like the devil is of holy water."[7] If so, the barrage of propaganda about Khrushchev's "capitulationism" was only a smoke screen for a sinister Chinese plot, which he could not quite decipher. Khrushchev explained his uncertainties in a meeting with the new Chinese ambassador, Pan Zili, shortly after New Year's Day of 1963: "We find the policy of the Chinese Communist Party somewhat hard to understand."[8] Later he voiced his frustration at a party gathering: "On what question do we have disagreements with China? Ask me! I don't know, don't know!"[9] Unable to fully make

5 *Ibid*. 6 On this matter, see James G. Hershberg's chapter in this volume.

7 Conversation between John Gollan and Nikita Khrushchev, January 2, 1963, CP/CENT/INT/02/04, Archives of the Communist Party of Great Britain, Labour History Archive and Study Centre, Manchester, UK.

8 Conversation between Nikita Khrushchev and Pan Zili, January 3, 1963, AVPRF: fond 0100, opis 55, papka 480, delo 4, list 13.

9 Nikita Khrushchev's speech to a Party Plenum, December 13, 1963, Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv noveishei istorii [Russian State Archive for Contemporary History], Moscow (hereafter, RGANI): fond 2, opis 1, delo 679, list 118.

sense of the hostile propaganda coming from Beijing, Khrushchev concluded that "the Chinese are dimwits."[10]

Khrushchev's difficulties had their root in a curious intellectual handicap. Soviet policymakers, Khrushchev among them, believed Marxism to be a scientific truth based on immutable and self-evident principles. As a Marxist, Khrushchev struggled against imperialism, aided national liberation movements, and strengthened the unity of the socialist camp. By definition, his policies could not be opportunistic, adventurist, or chauvinistic. By claiming a monopoly on absolute truth in politics, he overlooked the possibility that someone else might challenge his views using the same all-embracing and yet ambiguous Marxist banner.

In the fall of 1962, Mao's perceptions exerted a decisive impact on China's foreign-policy rhetoric. Nationwide statistics for 1962 indicated that China was well on its way to economic recovery after three years of chaos and famine caused by the "Great Leap Forward." Mao had observed this reversal from the sidelines. He had distanced himself from economic policymaking after the traumatic debacle of his radical vision for China's "Great Leap" into Communism. Having eyed the waves created by the headwinds of his ideological tirades, Mao had graciously permitted his comrades-in-leadership to steer the boat to the nearest shore. To increase productivity, Mao's second-in-command, Liu Shaoqi, and Chinese Communist Party (CCP) general secretary, Deng Xiaoping, had pragmatically endorsed new practices in the countryside under the banner of "farming as household responsibility." Premier Zhou Enlai and Foreign Minister Chen Yi had reached out to China's wary intellectuals, silenced by the anti-rightist campaign, and had once again called for a united front with the national bourgeoisie. Sober voices in the foreign-policy establishment called for a less confrontational foreign policy and a rapprochement with the Soviet Union.[11] Mao was upset by these "revisionist" tendencies of his party comrades. He resented that his colleagues failed to consult with him on important issues, content with his semi-retirement.

In August 1962, Mao came back with force. At a party conference at Beidaihe, he drew attention to the importance of class struggle. Khrushchev had earlier put forward the notion that class struggle did not apply to an

10 Aleksandr Fursenko (ed.), *Prezidium TsK KPSS: 1954–1964* [Presidium of the CC CPSU: 1954–1964] (Moscow: Rosspen, 2003), 696.

11 Roderick MacFarquhar, *The Origins of the Cultural Revolution: The Coming of the Cataclysm, 1961–1966* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), chs. 11–12.

25. Mao Zedong and the man he purged twice, but who lived to succeed him, Deng Xiaoping.

advanced socialist society, where the party and people lived in harmony. Finding this view thoroughly fallacious, Mao announced that the Soviet retreat from class struggle amounted to revisionism and to the restoration of capitalism in the USSR. He feared that the same fate might befall China one day if the rightist policies peddled under the banner of "adjustment" after the Great Leap were allowed to continue. The following month, at the 10th Party Plenum, Mao made his views clear: "We must acknowledge that classes will continue to exist for a long time. We must also acknowledge the existence of a struggle of class against class, and admit the possibility of the restoration of reactionary classes."[12] Mao's radical pronouncements stemmed the tide of policy pragmatism. He wanted to assure the continuation of the Chinese

12 Cited in *Ibid*., 283.

revolution at home and of a revolutionary outlook on relations with foreign countries – first and foremost the "revisionist" USSR.

Chinese criticism of Khrushchev's performance in Cuba in November–December 1962 touched a sensitive chord. Khrushchev, no less than Mao, aspired to greatness and loathed public criticism. He used the occasions offered by party congresses in Eastern Europe to counter Chinese allegations in ways reminiscent of Stalin's handling of the dispute with Yugoslavia. The Soviets clearly commanded the support of the Eastern Europeans; each congress was choreographed to isolate the Chinese delegate and praise the wisdom of Khrushchev's foreign policy. Officials in Beijing resented the hard-handed Soviet tactics, which so clearly undermined Khrushchev's claims of goodwill toward China.

In the fall of 1962, China and India went to war over their disputed mountain frontier. The borderline was less of an issue in the conflict, perhaps, than Beijing's determination to show India who was the greater power in Asia. The war came at a bad time for Khrushchev who had just negotiated a deal to sell India MiG-21 jet fighters. He had also supplied India with helicopters and transport planes, and the Chinese sighted those Soviet planes on the border. The Soviet premier initially claimed that he wanted to keep India away from the US embrace but hurriedly cancelled the MiG deal when he learned of Chinese anger.[13] Departing from previous neutrality in the conflict, the Soviet press then condemned India. Khrushchev wanted to convey the impression that he would go out on a limb for China: "In relations between us," he stressed, "there is no place for neutrality … We shall always be in one camp and share joys and sorrows."[14] These statements failed to impress Chinese policymakers who concluded that Khrushchev had "betrayed [an] ally."[15]

Betrayal of Chinese interests, as Mao viewed it, was only a short distance from betrayal of Marxism. Was Soviet great power arrogance a cause or a symptom of Soviet revisionism? On the one hand, Khrushchev's high-handed and reckless foreign-policy moves provided solid evidence for Mao's theoretical denunciation of Soviet revisionism. If Khrushchev was a Russian chauvinist, he could not be a real Marxist, Mao thought, because Marxism and chauvinism were not compatible. On the other hand, ideology constrained the scope of permissible Chinese interpretations of Soviet behavior, so that Khrushchev's

13 Conversation between Stepan Chervonenko and Zhou Enlai, October 8, 1962, AVPRF: fond 0100, opis 55, papka 480, delo 7, list 69.

14 Conversation between Nikita Khrushchev and Liu Xiao, October 13, 1962, AVPRF: fond 0100, opis 55, papka 480, delo 4, list 37.

15 Wang Dong, *The Quarrelling Brothers*, 64.

genuine gestures of goodwill toward China invariably encountered suspicions. If Khrushchev was not a real Marxist, the Chinese leaders thought, his claims of acting on the basis of Marxist solidarity with China could only be a fake pretension, a cover for Khrushchev's real, un-Marxist nature. The mutually reinforcing relationship between ideology and power in Sino-Soviet relations paralleled Chinese domestic developments in late summer of 1962 when the increasingly insecure Mao unleashed his struggle against the "revisionist" policies of his unduly self-confident colleagues. In both cases, Mao resorted to radical ideology to shape power relationships; yet, unquestionably, his radical ideas had their own dynamic and were not just a smoke screen for a brutal power struggle.

Fidel Castro's visit to the Soviet Union in April–May 1963 gave Khrushchev the opportunity to polish his revolutionary credentials, badly stained since the Cuban missile crisis. Castro agreed to mend fences and received assurances of further Soviet economic aid. In repeated discussions of China, Khrushchev went out of his way to convince Castro that the Soviets were better than the Chinese in struggling against imperialism, and he sensed that Castro agreed with his point of view. Khrushchev told Castro that he knew what the Sino-Soviet quarrel was really about: it was "a question of nationalism, a question of egoism. This is the main thing. They want to play the first fiddle."[16] And then, he made a remarkable admission:

> Even, say, among friends, 5–10 people are friends and one of them is the chief; they do not elect him, they simply recognize him for some sort of qualities … [T]here will be different colours and different characters, and different mental capabilities among people, there will be inequality as in all species of nature.[17]

The Soviet Union was the birthplace of the socialist revolution; it had defeated Nazism; it had launched satellites into space. The Chinese could never match Soviet greatness, and Mao could never hope to wrestle the mantle of leadership from Khrushchev personally. Khrushchev was the chief. He played the "first fiddle."

In July 1963, a high-level Chinese party delegation arrived in Moscow for talks with Soviet leaders. None of the outstanding issues in Sino-Soviet relations were resolved, or even profitably discussed. The delegations talked past each other. The Chinese – Deng Xiaoping, Beijing mayor Peng Zhen, and Politburo member Kang Sheng – defended Mao's ideological position: Khrushchev wronged Iosif Stalin who had been a great "sword" for socialism;

16 Fursenko (ed.), *Prezidium TsK KPSS*, 720. 17 *Ibid.*

he substituted peaceful coexistence with the West for resolute struggle against imperialism; he abandoned national liberation movements and gave up on class struggle inside the Soviet Union. Peng Zhen voiced grievances about Soviet "great power chauvinism" and "bourgeois nationalism," and blamed Moscow for ordering other parties about with the "arrogance of the father party" and even for trying to be the "god of the international communist movement."[18] The talks were suspended on July 20, 1963, and the Chinese delegation returned to Beijing. It was a turning point in Sino-Soviet relations. Mao used the failure of the talks to show that he had been correct all along about Khrushchev's irreparable revisionism. Khrushchev, for his part, had to show that his efforts to find a compromise with the United States could be successful in spite of the Chinese criticism. After the failed talks with the Chinese, he hurried to sign the Limited Test-Ban Treaty with US and British representatives, inaugurating détente in Soviet–American relations.

From conflict to confrontation

As Khrushchev pursued détente with the West with some success, Sino-Soviet relations went from bad to worse. In September 1963, the Chinese began publishing a series of polemical articles detailing Soviet violations of Marxism. The Soviets responded in kind. The battle lines were drawn and the two sides exchanged long-range ideological salvos. Many Western observers imagined that Sino-Soviet relations could not get any worse. But over the next few months they did.

On July 10, 1964, Mao told a visiting Japanese delegation that he appreciated Japan's territorial claims against the Soviet Union. China, too, had suffered at the hands of Russian expansionism: "About a hundred years ago the area east of Baikal became Russian territory, and since then Vladivostok, Khabarovsk, Kamchatka and other points have become territories of the Soviet Union. We have not yet presented the bill for this list."[19] Mao Zedong probably had no intention of "reclaiming" Siberia and the Soviet Far East. As he explained to one foreign visitor, "this is called firing empty cannons to make him [Khrushchev] nervous."[20]

18 Peng Zhen's speech at the July 1963 Sino-Soviet talks in Moscow, July 15, 1963, National Security Archive, Washington DC, REEADD, October 26, 1962–64.

19 *Pravda,* September 2, 1964, 2–3.

20 Cited in Sergei Goncharov and Li Danhui, "EZhong Guanxi Zhong de 'Lingtu Yaoqiu' he '"Bu Pingdeng Tiaoyue,"' [The "Territorial Demands" and "Unequal Treaties" in Sino-Russian Relations] *Ershiyi Shiji*, No. 10 (2004), 110; the author's conversations with Chen Jian.

Mao's comments were, of course, leaked to the press and in August reached Khrushchev, who was not inclined to interpret these claims philosophically. On August 19, the Soviet leader addressed his colleagues in the Presidium: "have you read [this] hideous document about borders? … I read [it] yesterday and became indignant." In a passionate speech he condemned Mao's irredentism:

> Let us look at these things. The Russian Tsar grabbed some territories. [Today] there is no tsar, and there are no Chinese feudal lords, there is no Chinese emperor. They [the Chinese] also grabbed territories, just like the Russian Tsar. It is not the Chinese who live there, but the Kyrgyz, the Uighurs, the Kazakhs. How did it happen that they ended up in China? It is a clear thing. Mao Zedong knows that the Chinese emperor conquered these territories.[21]

Mao's "unsettled bill" touched a sensitive chord. The Soviet Union inherited the vast territorial expanse of the Russian Empire. Stalin resorted to brutal piecemeal annexation of neighboring countries in a restless pursuit of territorial security. But in place of security the Soviet leadership grappled with a profound sense of insecurity, aggravated by collective Soviet memories of the Western intervention in the Civil War and the traumatic experience of the German invasion. Any hint of change to postwar borders aroused Moscow's ire and bitter resentment. This was the case for European borders, especially in the postwar context of the division of Germany. In Asia, the Soviets had felt reasonably secure since Japan's defeat in World War II – until Mao's unprecedented demarche. The specter of Chinese territorial claims to the underpopulated and yet strategically essential Siberia and Far East shocked Soviet leaders. Khrushchev likened Mao to Adolf Hitler for his expansionist views.[22]

In October 1964, Khrushchev was overthrown by his Kremlin comrades, who were fed up with his erratic leadership and unnerving bureaucratic shakeups. The split with China was low on the list of the ousted premier's sins, though he was not spared criticism on that account. The new thinking among the party heavyweights was that if Khrushchev had ordered about his own colleagues, and failed to consult with them on issues of importance, then one could not blame the Chinese for hating his arrogance. The key figures in the new leadership arrangement – First Secretary Leonid Brezhnev and Prime Minister Aleksei Kosygin – both had very little experience in foreign affairs. Facing a complex international situation, Khrushchev's successors looked for guidance in ideological prescriptions and tried to rebuild Soviet relations with

21 Fursenko (ed.), *Prezidium TsK KPSS*, 849–50. 22 *Pravda,* September 20, 1964, 1.

foreign countries on a solid Marxist basis, which, they claimed, Khrushchev had opportunistically abandoned.

Brezhnev summarized the Soviet challenge in a speech in November 1964:

> As far as the socialist system is concerned, our main task remains the strengthening of its unity, and of the cooperation and mutual help among fraternal countries, accepting the necessary conditions of respecting equal rights, independence and sovereignty. It is well known that in the past precisely these conditions were frequently not fulfilled. Let us honestly admit that up to now we have not fully freed ourselves from these kinds of problems. Not only pressure and unceremoniousness, but any posture of superiority, "fatherly" teaching, untactful questions or forgetting to consult in time on questions of common interest – all this must be resolutely eliminated from relations with fraternal countries and parties. Only on such a basis can a real friendship be strengthened, [and the] voluntary cooperation of the socialist countries be developed.[23]

Brezhnev's and Kosygin's rediscovered enthusiasm for China was not shared by the wider foreign-policy community, certainly not by the experienced diplomats and China specialists in the Foreign Ministry who tended to be far more reserved about the prospect of a rapprochement with their eastern neighbour. But the skeptical voices from below were not heard at the top when in October–November 1964 the new Soviet leadership set out once again to heal the Sino-Soviet rift. It was thus with high hopes that Brezhnev and Kosygin welcomed a Chinese delegation, headed by Zhou Enlai, for talks in Moscow in early November 1964.

Mao made no secret of his disdain for the toppled Khrushchev, but the fall of the Soviet leader did not change the equation of power between the two states. The alliance was intrinsically unequal, a partnership of a superpower, endowed with military, economic, and technological advantages, and a junior partner haplessly limping along. In China, the news of Khrushchev's downfall was published alongside the announcement of the successful test of China's first atomic bomb. But one bomb did not compensate for the development gap. As before, the relationship between Moscow and Beijing was, to borrow Mao's own words, that of a father and son. Beijing and Moscow operated in the same system of coordinates, defined by both sides' proclaimed adherence to Marxism. Their economic performance served to bolster their respective ideological postures.

23 Leonid Brezhnev's speech to a Party Plenum, November 14, 1964, RGANI: fond 2, opis 1, delo 758, list 19.

In this system of coordinates, Mao aspired but never matched Soviet achievements. To build the relationship with Moscow on the basis of equality, China needed either to outperform the USSR or to abandon the ideological system of coordinates. Mao hopelessly failed the first option but could not bring himself to consider the second. His ideological commitment to combating Soviet revisionism immensely constrained China's foreign-policy options and prevented an early Sino-Soviet rapprochement. Yet Mao agreed to send a delegation to Moscow to probe the intentions of the new Soviet leaders, and perhaps at the same time probe the intentions of his own comrades, some of whom, he may have suspected, shared neither his delusions of grandeur nor his leftist beliefs and would have not shrunk from pragmatically mending fences with the USSR, for all their shared resentment of Soviet arrogance.

By sending Zhou Enlai to Moscow in November 1964, Mao tested his loyalty. When Mao required it, Zhou was always able to put aside his pragmatism and embrace the chairman's radical ideas. He came to the talks prepared to struggle against revisionism. But before the premier had a chance to fire his guns at the negotiating table, an embarrassing incident ruined any prospects for an agreement. At a Kremlin reception on November 7, 1964, the Soviet defense minister, Rodion Malinovskii, evidently intoxicated, proposed to a member of the Chinese delegation, Marshal He Long, that they get rid of Mao Zedong just as the Soviets had thrown out Khrushchev. Then, he said, Sino-Soviet relations would necessarily improve.[24] He Long complained to Zhou Enlai who, in turn, protested to the Soviets. The Soviets tried to persuade the Chinese that Malinovskii did not represent the views of the Soviet leadership, while Zhou Enlai insisted that the defense minister's drunken remarks showed what the Soviets really thought about China and Mao Zedong.

The Malinovskii incident revealed the Soviets at their undiplomatic worst. No foreign delegation could tolerate such insults, especially a Chinese delegation keenly sensitive to any hint of Soviet disrespect. The Soviet leaders, judging from Brezhnev's subsequent explanations, never grasped how outrageous Malinovskii's behavior appeared to the Chinese. Brezhnev expressed "c[omrade] Malinovskii's apologies for the incorrectly formulated thought," but Malinovskii was not punished in any obvious way.[25] Insulting as Malinovskii's remarks were, their real importance can only be understood in the context of Chinese domestic politics. He Long and, in particular, Zhou

24 Andrei Aleksandrov-Agentov, *Ot Kollontai do Gorbacheva* [From Kollontai to Gorbachev] (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia, 1994), 169.

25 Leonid Brezhnev's speech to a Party Plenum, November 14, 1964, RGANI: fond 2, opis 1, delo 758, list 16.

Enlai could not do anything less than vigorously defend Mao Zedong against the Soviet accusations. The chairman did not tolerate disloyalty.

Mao's demand for class struggle at the 10th CCP Plenum in September 1962 spurred a political campaign to save China from revisionism. The campaign entailed a series of initiatives, initially in the countryside, and, from early 1963 on, also in the cities, to eradicate grassroots corruption and suppress capitalist tendencies, which, Mao perceived, were on the rise throughout China and threatened her revolution. Yet the so-called Socialist Education Movement did not give the chairman any peace of mind. In early 1964, Mao became increasingly concerned that revisionism had already found its way into the party, and that the Socialist Education Movement, by focusing on low-level problems, overlooked the more fundamental danger of revisionism very close to the levers of power. In February 1964, he claimed that "there are some people who do not make a sound, but wait for the opportunity; therefore, one must heighten one's vigilance." If people like the ousted defense minister, Peng Dehuai, were allowed "like Khrushchev, to control the party, the army and the political power – well, today … we could be done away with."[26]

Mao thought that Marshall Peng, whom he had purged in 1959 for Peng's outspoken criticism of the Great Leap policies, was Khrushchev's ally inside the Chinese leadership. But Peng Dehuai's downfall had not made Mao feel more secure. In April 1964, he lamented that "Khrushchev has comrades inside the Chinese [Communist] Party," who aimed at removing Mao from the CCP leadership.[27] Mao's apprehension of this scenario probably became more pronounced after Khrushchev's fall from power. After having taken China through the disaster of the Great Leap Forward, he may have suspected that he could not count on unswerving loyalty from his comrades in power; what if they had been secretly plotting to overthrow him? Malinovskii's drunken remarks touched on a sensitive subject. Mao, after years at the apex of political power in China, after repeated rectification campaigns, and after removing his real and imagined opponents, was still not sure that he exercised absolute authority in his own party. He worried that one day he would find himself sidelined by a Soviet-style collective leadership with un-Maoist pluralism and intraparty democracy, and that his revolutionary legacy would be abandoned for the Soviet model of socialist development.

26 Li Danhui, "1964 nian: ZhongSu guanxi yu Mao Zedong waihuan neiyou silu de zhuanbian" [1964: Sino-Soviet Relations and Mao Zedong's Turn towards the "Trouble Within, Problems Without" Mentality], in Luan Jinghe (ed.), *ZhongSu guanxi de lishi yu xianshi* [History and Reality of Sino-Soviet Relations] (Kaifeng: Henan Daxue, 2004), 557–74.

27 *Ibid*.

In December 1964, Deng Xiaoping, concerned that Mao had been ill, suggested to the chairman that he not attend a routine conference to discuss the progress of the Socialist Education Movement. Mao took this as further evidence that his Politburo colleagues had decided to push him aside. He made a point of attending the conference, which began in mid-December and lasted until January 1965. During the sessions, Mao criticized Liu Shaoqi for limiting the purges to the corrupt cadres in the countryside. Mao believed the campaigns should target the higher ranks of the party bureaucracy – the "people in positions of authority within the party who take the capitalist road." Though Liu usually deferred to Mao in such matters, this time the chairman's chief deputy was more forceful in support of his own propositions. It appeared to the participants of the conference that Mao and Liu were at odds.[28] But what was at stake in this debate – Mao's ideological convictions or simple power calculations? Mao identified himself with the revolution. He had made it possible. He sustained its momentum throughout the years. He saw any challenge to his personal power as a challenge to the revolution itself. Mao regarded the dispute with Liu Shaoqi as one aspect of a revolutionary struggle that he had to intensify. The Sino-Soviet split was another aspect that needed to be looked after.

The new Soviet leaders had no idea about these dramatic developments in China. After the November 1964 meeting failed miserably, they spent months debating the merits of a new approach to China. Premier Aleksei Kosygin still wanted to mend fences. Dismissing Brezhnev's growing skepticism, Kosygin argued that the Soviet Union and China had no fundamental disagreements because both countries adhered to Marxist policies. Whatever disagreements they did have, these had to be put aside now, at a time when Washington was dramatically escalating its involvement in the Vietnam War: the two countries had to act together to oppose "US imperialism." Cold War imperatives must prevent Sino-Soviet rupture at this time of danger, or so Kosygin thought. Perhaps, the prime minister was also keeping an eye on considerations of his own prestige. If he were to repair the Sino-Soviet alliance, Kosygin's political standing in the Soviet leadership would certainly improve, and this was important in the context of a subtle competition for influence between himself and Brezhnev. For these reasons, Kosygin went to China in February 1965 to meet with Mao Zedong to work out their differences.

On February 11, Kosygin had his chance. In a long meeting with Mao he argued that "the most important thing to us is the union of forces. As a result

28 MacFarquhar, *Origins of the Cultural Revolution*, 428.

of this, they [our forces] will be ten times bigger. … [I]deology is stronger than any weapon."[29] Kosygin reportedly told Mao: "we are both Marxist–Leninists. Why can't we have a good talk?"[30] But the good talk went nowhere. Soviet participants in the conversation recalled that Mao was "emphatically sarcastic," at times even "insulting."[31] In response to Kosygin's pleas for unity, Mao promised that his struggle against revisionism would continue for ten thousand years. Downplaying Cold War constraints, Mao confidently placed the Soviet Union on the other side of the barricades, next to the United States:

> The US and the USSR are now deciding the world's destiny. Well, go ahead and decide. But within the next 10–15 years you will not be able to decide the world's destiny. It is in the hands of the nations of the world, and not in the hands of the imperialists, exploiters or revisionists.

World destiny, Mao thought, was in the hands of China, in his own hands. His struggle against revisionism was at the same time a struggle for recognition, a struggle for greatness, against Soviet efforts to keep China down and out.

Disappointed, Kosygin returned to Moscow to face growing skepticism about China. But remarkably, even after the failed meeting with Mao, Soviet leaders continued to initiate proposals for practical Sino-Soviet cooperation, such as provision aid to North Vietnam. On February 16, 1965, the Soviets probed China on the desirability of arranging another peace conference on Vietnam.[32] On April 3, Brezhnev and Kosygin signed a letter to the Chinese and the Vietnamese with a proposal to meet at the highest level to discuss joint actions to oppose the escalatory actions of the United States. In the meantime, Soviet leaders peddled ideas for military cooperation with the Chinese despite the sorry state of Sino-Soviet relations. On February 27, 1965, Moscow requested Chinese permission to send forty-five transport planes via China to Vietnam with weapons and advisers.[33] Another Soviet proposal (on February 25) entailed the establishment of a Soviet air force base in Kunming in southern China with twelve MiG-21 aircraft to protect the Sino-Vietnamese

29 Conversation between Aleksei Kosygin and Mao Zedong, February 11, 1965, Archiwum Akt Novych (Modern Records Archive), Warsaw, Poland, KC PZPR, XI A/10; obtained by Douglas Selvage; translation by Malgorzata Gnoinska.

30 Wu Lengxi, *Shinian lunzhan, 1956–1966: ZhongSu guanxi huiyilu* [Ten Years of Polemics, 1956–1966: Memoir of Sino-Soviet Relations] (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian, 1999), 915.

31 Oleg Troianovskii, *Cherez gody i rasstoianiia: istoriia odnoi sem'i* [Through Years and Distances: One Family's History] (Moscow: Vagrius, 1997), 352.

32 Conversation between Stepan Chervonenko and Liu Xiao, February 16, 1965, AVPRF: fond 0100, opis 58, papka 516, delo 5, list 29.

33 Conversation between Stepan Chervonenko and Zhou Enlai, April 13, 1965, AVPRF: opis 0100, fond 58, papka 516, delo 5, list 114.

border.[34] The idea behind these approaches, besides the obvious Soviet concern with the military situation in Vietnam, was to show the Chinese that they were not selling out to US imperialism.

Nearly all Soviet approaches regarding Vietnam encountered determined Chinese resistance. A new conference on Indochina did not get off the ground because, in Chinese opinion, the time was not ripe for Hanoi to negotiate – the US had to be defeated on the battlefield first. The Sino-Soviet-Vietnamese summit did not take place, Zhou Enlai explained, because the Chinese had their own channel of communication with Hanoi to discuss whatever concerns they had.[35] A Soviet request to permit passage of military transport planes through their airspace, moreover, angered the Chinese. Zhou Enlai said that the plan amounted to a military operation, and the Chinese had not been consulted in advance.[36] Soviet shipments of arms by rail was grudgingly allowed, but bureaucratic obstacles kept Soviet weapons at the border crossings for weeks. The Chinese feared that the massive flow of Soviet weapons into Vietnam would weaken Hanoi's dependence on China.

The Soviet proposal for an air force base in Kunming triggered a storm of indignation. Chinese leaders claimed that the real purpose of the twelve planes was not to cover the Sino-Vietnamese border against US incursions but to put China under Soviet military control. As absurd as this idea sounded to puzzled Kremlin policymakers, it indicated Chinese apprehension of a foreign military presence on Chinese soil, an apprehension rooted in the turbulent history of the late Qing and Republican China, when the country was overrun time and again by foreign troops. It also stemmed from more recent memories of Soviet meddling in Xinjiang and Manchuria since the 1920s. In fact, if Brezhnev and Kosygin had recalled the problems Khrushchev had in 1958, when the Soviet Union had put forward proposals for a joint submarine fleet and a Soviet-manned military radio station in China, they would have thought twice before proposing ambitious plans for military cooperation. But considerations of class solidarity at the time of the Vietnam War prevented the Kremlin from drawing proper conclusions from past Soviet experiences. Deng Xiaoping later smirked that "the Soviets forgot that we had a certain experience in this respect." Kang Sheng drove the point home: "the Soviets do not respect the sovereignty of our country; … they look upon our country as a province of the Soviet Union."[37]

34 *Ibid*., list 141. 35 *Ibid*., list 110. 36 *Ibid*., list 114.

37 Conversation between Nicolae Ceauşescu and a Chinese delegation, July 26, 1965, Materials of Conference on European Evidence on the Cold War in Asia, Budapest, Hungary, October 30–November 1, 2003.

Mao's resistance to a united front with the Soviets in spite of the Vietnam War reveals his strategic calculations. US involvement in Vietnam posed a potential security threat to China. In 1965, Chinese leaders repeatedly signalled to Washington through various channels their interest in containing the war in Southeast Asia, promising to stay out of the conflict as long as the Americans did not violate China's borders. Of course, no one in Beijing could be confident that the United States would heed these signals, but Mao felt reasonably sure that China itself would not come under American attack.[38] But Soviet military plans were another matter.

Since 1963, Mao had become increasingly concerned with a potential Soviet threat to Chinese security. He may have received intelligence of a military buildup along the Sino-Soviet border, or perhaps learned of Khrushchev's awkward attempts to bring Mongolia into the Warsaw Pact in the summer of 1963. Moscow's improving relations with the West at the time of its worsening quarrel with Beijing would not have appeared particularly reassuring to Chinese policymakers – it looked to Mao as if the Soviets and the Americans were ganging up on his revolution. In February 1964, he told Kim Il Sung sarcastically that all of the measures the Soviet Union took to pressure China into submission had failed, "but there is still one – going to war." By July, his sarcasm disappeared. He felt that "we cannot only pay attention to the East, and not to the North, only pay attention to imperialism and not revisionism, we must prepare for war on both sides." In October 1964, Mao was clearly worried: "Can Khrushchev invade us or not," "can [he] send troops to occupy Xinjiang, Manchuria, and even Inner Mongolia"?[39] To prepare for war, Mao called for the construction of a "third line" of defense – a massive effort to relocate crucial Chinese industries in the interior, faraway from all borders, including the border with the USSR. Indeed, by 1965, Mao was probably as much concerned with the Soviet threat in the north as with the American threat in the south. If so, it should not be surprising that he opted out of joint actions with the Soviet Union in Vietnam; if he did not, he might have been going to bed with an enemy.

38 James G. Hershberg and Chen Jian, "Informing the Enemy: Sino-American 'Signaling' and the Vietnam War, 1965," in Priscilla Roberts (ed.), *Behind the Bamboo Curtain: China, Vietnam, and the World beyond Asia* (Washington, DC, and Stanford, CA: Woodrow Wilson Center Press and Stanford University Press, 2006).

39 Li Danhui, "1964 nian: ZhongSu guanxi yu Mao Zedong waihuan neiyou silu de zhuanbian," 557–74.

The Cultural Revolution and Sino-Soviet military clashes

After his confrontation with Liu Shaoqi over the direction of the Socialist Education Movement, Mao began to prepare the ground for a showdown with his perceived enemies in China. These enemies were to be found in all positions of authority – among senior party officials, and among Mao's long-time revolutionary comrades. Mao chose a circuitous way of achieving his objectives. He encouraged a radical attack on the party bureaucracy under the pretext of a struggle with revisionism in the ruling circles. The campaign had been in planning since at least February 1965, though the opening shots were fired in November when Shanghai-based radicals, incited by Mao's wife, Jiang Qing (who was acting on Mao's instructions), criticized Wu Han, a prominent historian and deputy mayor of Beijing, for revisionism. In the struggle that followed, the mayor of Beijing, Peng Zhen, tried to protect Wu Han but lost the battle to Mao whose real target was the party leadership. Peng Zhen was the first to find that nobody was safe when Mao orchestrated a full-scale purge of the Beijing Party Committee (including Peng) in May 1966. But as the movement, now called the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, gained momentum, Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping also felt the heat. Liu was branded "China's Khrushchev" and deposed; he was to die from medical neglect in a prison in Kaifeng in 1969. Deng lost his position, but not his life. Countless officials were publicly humiliated, tortured, imprisoned, and sometimes killed. The party center disintegrated by late 1966. The radical "Cultural Revolution Group" assumed unprecedented powers with Mao's blessing, and the country descended into chaos as millions of youths took to the streets to worship Chairman Mao and carry through their struggle against revisionism. Was the Cultural Revolution a struggle of ideas or a struggle for power? It was probably both: a complex interplay of Mao's concern for the fate of the Chinese revolution and for his own political power. The Cultural Revolution was born of the same ingredients that fueled Mao's previous anti-revisionist exploits in 1962 and 1964. Now the stakes were higher, and heads rolled on a far grander scale.

From the beginning, there was a clear anti-Soviet angle to the Cultural Revolution, since Mao made an explicit connection between Soviet "capitalist restoration" and Chinese revisionism. Radicals singled out Soviet-style revisionists in China as Moscow's allies who tried to help the USSR "climb on China's back" so as to again make China a "colony or semi-colony."[40] But Moscow

40 *Renmin Ribao*, July 1, 1966, 3.

did not play any practical role in the power struggle; Soviet leaders, in fact, did not know what to make of events in China nor with whom to sympathize. By late 1965, the Chinese problem had lost its urgency for Moscow: rapprochement was nowhere in sight, but a turn for the worse was also not expected. The Soviet leaders eyed China with a new sense of confidence, in part because of their advances elsewhere in Asia. Soviet relations with Hanoi had improved substantially compared with those of the Khrushchev era (thanks, no doubt, to the persuasive power of Soviet aid). North Korea was not to be left behind: Kim Il Sung's visit to Vladivostok for talks with Brezhnev in the spring of 1966 laid the groundwork for better relations between Moscow and Pyongyang. In January 1966, the Soviet Union and Mongolia signed a treaty, permitting the stationing of Soviet military forces in that country. The same month Kosygin mediated the Indo-Pakistani conflict in a bid to gain influence with both countries. These foreign-policy achievements compensated for the Soviet failure to mend fences with China.

The Cultural Revolution dealt a major blow to Soviet complacency. The most visible aspect of the chaos – massive rallies of the Red Guards – projected an image of aggressive xenophobia. The revolutionary mobs besieged the Soviet embassy for days at a time. Plans were in the making to burn it down, but in August 1967, Zhou Enlai personally persuaded the leader of the Red Guards besieging the embassy, a pig-tailed girl of sixteen, to call off the attack.[41] To the Soviets, it was not clear whether they faced unsanctioned mob violence or state policy. Moreover, reports were trickling in to Moscow about the buildup of Chinese forces along the Sino-Soviet frontier, the construction of roads leading to the border, and militant propaganda among the troops.

Faced with these threatening developments, the Soviet Politburo decided to upgrade defense capabilities in the East. A resolution was passed on February 4, 1967, to station troops in Mongolia, strengthen the Soviet forces in the Far East, Zabaikal′e, and Eastern Kazakhstan, and build protected command centers.[42] The timing of these decisions is telling: they came in the immediate aftermath of Red Guard violence around the Soviet Embassy. Xenophobic demonstrations agitated Soviet leaders, though otherwise Moscow exercised patience. For example, the request to station troops in Mongolia had first been made in 1965 by the Mongolian government, which was even more

41 Ma Jisen, *The Cultural Revolution in the Foreign Ministry of China* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2005), 189.

42 On the stationing of the Soviet forces on the territory of the MPR, February 4, 1967, RGANI: fond 2, opis 3, delo 67, list 149.

apprehensive of Chinese intentions than the Soviets.[43] This request had been shelved for more than a year until the chaos of the Cultural Revolution made Soviet policymakers rethink their strategy toward China in the direction of more active military containment. Brezhnev summarized this strategy in one sentence: "we assume that the stronger the defense of our borders, the less danger there is of a really serious military confrontation on our eastern frontiers."[44]

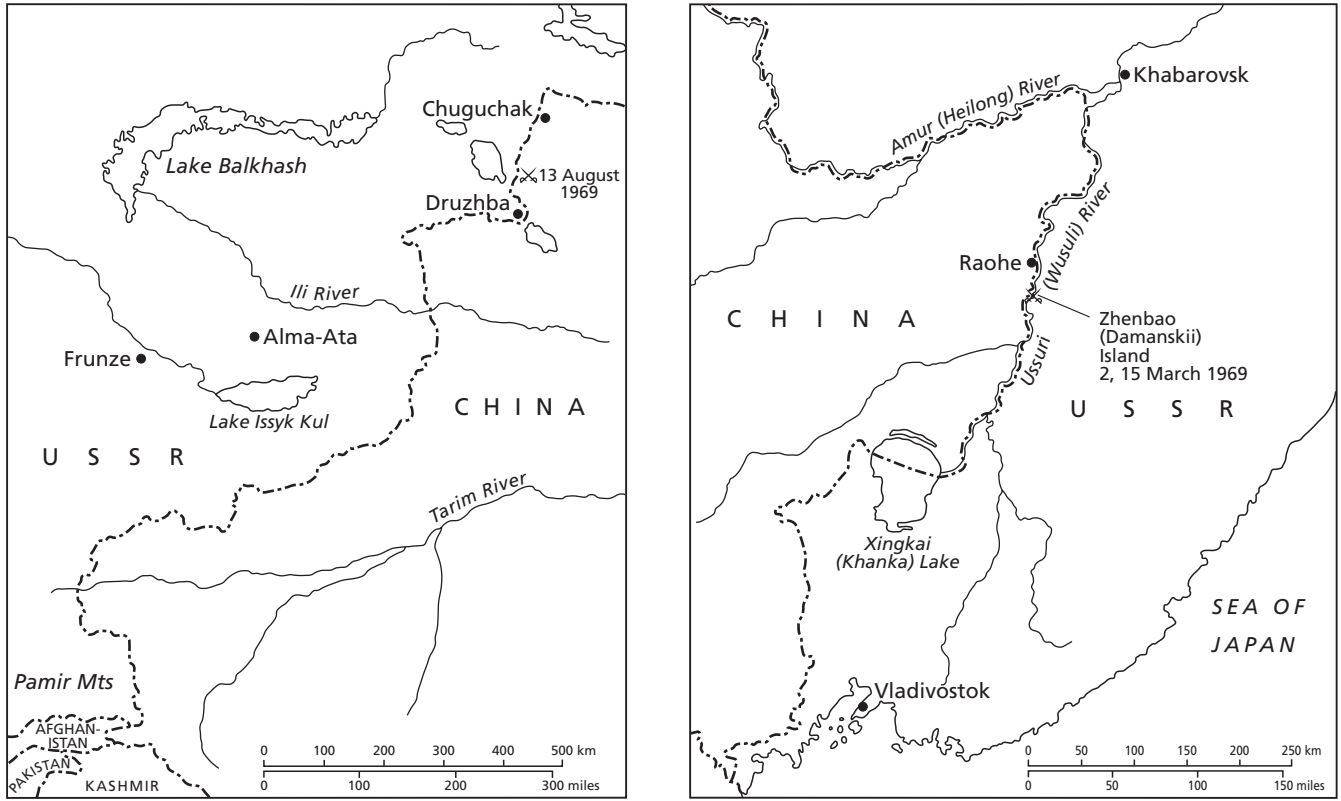
This assumption worked against Moscow. The more forces the Soviet Union stationed along the frontier with China, the more Chinese leaders became convinced of aggressive Soviet intentions. The Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968 deepened Beijing's concerns. In response to the perceived Soviet threat, the Chinese military adopted the strategy of "active defense" that entailed a show of force to dissuade the opponent from hostile action. Active defense also helped Mao mobilize the Chinese population for his domestic agenda – revamping the power structure in the aftermath of the chaos of the Cultural Revolution. In the winter of 1968–69, the Central Military Commission approved a plan to create a border incident; in this context, on March 2, 1969, Chinese troops ambushed a Soviet border patrol near Zhenbao Island. The Soviets retaliated with force some days later; scores were killed on both sides. On August 13, 1969, another armed incident occurred on the Sino-Soviet border in Xinjiang, and a few days later Moscow made veiled threats of a preemptive nuclear strike against China.

In a tense atmosphere, Kosygin and Zhou Enlai met in Beijing airport on September 11 and assured each other that neither side wanted to go to war. They also agreed to reopen border talks in Beijing. But Mao was not convinced by the Soviet assurances and suspected that Moscow might launch a first strike on China, perhaps under the cover of the forthcoming border talks. In September–October, amid war fever, the People's Liberation Army prepared for a Soviet invasion.[45] The attack did not come, and it is unlikely that plans for it were ever seriously entertained by the Soviet leadership. But the experience of 1969 left Mao intensely insecure. In an effort to counterbalance the Soviet threat, Mao turned to China's former enemy, the United

43 Resolution of the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party Politburo, December 1, 1965, Mongol Ardyn Khuvsgalt Namyn Arkhiv [Archive of the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party]. Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia: fond 4, dans 28, kh/n 173b, khuu. 35–37.

44 Leonid Brezhnev's speech to a Party Plenum, June 26, 1969, RGANI, fond 2, opis 3, delo 159, list 37.

45 John Wilson Lewis and Xue Litai, *Imagined Enemies: China Prepares for Uncertain War* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006), 59–65.



5. Sino-Soviet border clashes on the eastern and western sectors of the frontier, March and August 1969

States. The two countries mended fences in the early 1970s.[46] In the meantime, border talks failed to bring about any substantial improvement in Sino-Soviet relations, which by 1970 had attained a degree of icy stability.

The Sino-Soviet split and new international scenarios

By the end of the 1960s, the Sino-Soviet split transformed international politics. Fear of facing conflict on both the Western and Eastern fronts prompted Soviet leaders to choose the lesser of two evils, and by the turn of the decade the United States was seen as a more limited threat. Many factors shaped Soviet thinking. Moscow interpreted American setbacks in Vietnam and the US economic recession as sure signs of Washington's decline. Meanwhile, China's military buildup and displays of nuclear power served as constant reminders to Moscow of the Soviet Union's vulnerabilities in Siberia and the Far East. Despite their differences, Moscow and Washington could reach agreement on many issues of importance; for example, substantial progress was achieved in strategic arms-limitation talks. Negotiations with China proved more difficult; China was unpredictable and unstable. The lack of progress in the Sino-Soviet border talks suggested to Soviet leaders that China was not genuinely interested in a compromise. A Soviet reassessment of external threats underpinned Brezhnev's efforts – first subtle, and then increasingly blatant – to recruit the United States as an ally, or at least a fellow traveller, in the struggle against China. Similar developments occurred on the Chinese side. After the 1969 war scare, internal assessments in Beijing concluded that the USSR was China's greatest external threat. Mao moved swiftly toward a rapprochement with Washington, seeking improved relations with the United States as a measure of security against perceived Soviet expansionism.

These policy changes involved more than a simple change of threat perception. Since the early years of the Cold War, the United States had not only been the USSR's primary strategic opponent but its ideological adversary. The Cold War had been a struggle of ideas, not merely a confrontation of great powers. Previously, the Soviet Union had allied itself with ideological adversaries to counter a more immediate danger – during World War II, for example, the Kremlin embraced its capitalist foes to withstand the assault from Nazi Germany. In times of crisis Soviet policymakers were capable of

46 Yang Kuisong, "The Sino-Soviet Border Clash of 1969: From Zhenbao Island to Sino-American Rapprochement," *Cold War History*, 1, 1 (August 2000), 21–52.

26. Soviet border guards at the Chinese border on the Ussuri river, May 1969. Skirmishes with China encouraged Soviet leaders to opt for détente with the United States.

shelving ideological prescriptions and acting on the basis of strictly realist calculations. The Sino-Soviet conflict created that kind of crisis. Ironically, Moscow played power politics against a former comrade in arms still bound to the Soviet Union by a treaty of alliance. The Chinese now also placed considerations of national interest above the revolutionary dimensions of their foreign policy. Devaluation of a common ideology as a meaningful point of reference in Beijing and Moscow marked a turning point for the Cold War and, as Chen Jian argues, possibly the beginning of its end.[47]

47 See Chen Jian's chapter in volume III.

The forces that brought about this remarkable transformation had deep roots. The Sino-Soviet alliance contained the seeds of its own destruction. Shared Marxist ideology – the strength of the alliance – proved insufficient to hold it together. The principles of equality and fraternity that the alliance stood for were in practice difficult to achieve. Pretense of equality did not compensate for staggering inequalities: China was of course the underdog in the alliance. But whereas the Soviet leadership considered this state of affairs entirely natural, the Chinese resented bitterly such a state of perpetual subordination. Moreover, in place of fraternity, Chinese leaders too often encountered Soviet arrogance and great power pressure. It did not take a leap of imagination to connect Soviet blunders with Russia's historical record of expansion and imperialism in Asia. Meanwhile, Soviet leaders blamed the Chinese for monstrous ingratitude.

The importance of these fundamentals was not immediately apparent when Sino-Soviet relations turned sharply for the worse in the early 1960s. The larger problems were buried beneath a barrage of ideologically charged polemics. In retrospect, Deng Xiaoping, who had passionately defended Mao's revolutionary ideals in the polemical clashes with Moscow, characterized the rhetoric of the 1960s as "konghua" (empty words). As he told Mikhail Gorbachev on May 16, 1989, when the Soviet leader visited him in Beijing to mend fences: "From the mid-1960s, our relations deteriorated; they were practically broken off. It was not because of the ideological disputes; we do not think now that everything we said at that time was right. The basic problem was that the Chinese were not treated as equals and felt humiliated."[48] Deng thus pointed to what was the most important reason for the collapse of the Sino-Soviet alliance – its inequality.

The problems created by the inequality in the relationship were exacerbated by the cultural sensibilities of policymakers in both Beijing and Moscow. Soviet leaders occasionally made blatantly racist remarks about China. Khrushchev and Brezhnev cited the writings of early Russian explorers of China to illustrate how the Chinese had always been "sly" and "perfidious."[49] The impact of these stereotypes on policymakers in Moscow cannot be

48 Deng Xiaoping's Remarks to Mikhail Gorbachev, May 16, 1989, Leng Rong *et al.* (eds.), *Deng Xiaoping nianpu, 1975–1997* [Deng Xiaoping Chronology], vol. II (xia) (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian, 2004), 1275.

49 For instance, conversation between Richard Nixon and Leonid Brezhnev, June 23, 1973, Brezhnev visit, June 18–25, 1973, Memoranda of conversations, Nixon Presidential Materials Project, National Security Council Files, Henry A. Kissinger Office Files, Country Files: Europe–USSR, box 75, National Archives, College Park, Maryland. (Materials will be moving to Nixon Presidential Library, Yorba Linda, California.)

quantified with precision, but their recurrence in Politburo discussions and memoranda of conversations between the Soviet leaders and foreign dignitaries suggests that subtle racism was a factor in policy formulation. Chinese stereotypes of Russia as aggressive and arrogant, though probably confirmed by Soviet actions in some instances, on other occasions precluded clear understanding of Soviet motives and policies.

Finally, the Sino-Soviet split was intrinsically related to the domestic context of policymaking in Beijing and Moscow. China was a factor in the Soviet power struggle, just as the Soviet Union was a factor in the Chinese power struggle. Mao's campaign against Soviet leaders and against Liu Shaoqi were closely connected. Soviet policymakers did not have the same dilemmas, but they, too, played the China card in internal political maneuvers; after Khrushchev's fall, a rapprochement with China briefly promised untold political dividends to anyone who could bring it about. The Sino-Soviet split also made it necessary for the Soviets to distinguish with greater precision genuine (or Soviet) socialism from a Chinese "perversion." Mao, for his part, employed his struggle against "Soviet revisionism" to effect a revolutionary transformation at home. In turn, upheavals in China made Sino-Soviet reconciliation very unlikely so long as Mao remained in control.

But this is not the same as to say that domestic politics drove foreign-policy decisions. Mao's revolution was only a means to an end, not an end in itself. The end was to bring to a close the Chinese "century of humiliation," to make China a great power in its own right. The Sino-Soviet alliance initially helped, but eventually hindered progress toward this goal. Over time, both Chinese and Soviet leaders came to realize that a true great power cannot have allies of equal rank.