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# Sino-Soviet Relations Since the Death of Mao Zedong

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*Territorial and ideological disputes are not new phenomena in the relations of China and the U.S.S.R. nor of China and Russia. Cultural differences and personality conflicts also have made their negative contribution. Now new economic and political realities are bound to aggravate the disputes and differences.*

## **SINO-SOVIET RELATIONS**

### **SINCE THE DEATH OF MAO ZEDONG**

by

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**Introduction.** The death of Mao Zedong (Mao-Tse-tung) on 9 September 1976, at the age of 82, raised many questions about the future of Sino-Soviet relationships, and the effect of those relationships on world peace. This paper examines the nature of the direct competition between these two countries from the time of Mao's death to the present. The preponderance of evidence will reflect the polemics and activity of the Chinese side for obvious reasons. First, the most dramatic change in leadership during the period covered occurred in China. Mao Zedong was absolute ruler of the People's Republic of China (PRC) for the first 27 years of its existence, while leadership in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (U.S.S.R.) is in its fourth generation, having in more recent times passed relatively peacefully from one leader to the next. Second, the Soviet Union is an acknowledged superpower, industrially and militarily, with remarkably consistent foreign and domestic policies.

China, on the other hand, is a bona fide enigma, having experienced major foreign and domestic policy changes both before and after Mao's death, but within the usual cloak of secrecy that generally shrouds such activities. Finally, as a modern superpower with extensive worldwide interests and concerns, the Soviet Union focuses relatively less media attention on China than does China on the Soviet Union, at least in the sense of the direct competition between them. Therefore, Sino-Soviet relationships during the period are best viewed in the context of China's internal political activities and external initiatives.

**Background.** The Sino-Soviet split that ultimately destroyed Western perceptions of monolithic communism began in 1956 when Mao challenged Moscow's preeminence in world communism in the wake of de-Stalinization.<sup>1</sup> The origins of this great schism can be traced to a combination of

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cultural, territorial, nationalistic, ideological, and even personality factors, some of them centuries old.

China, with its spiritual heritage of Confucianism and Buddhism, general indifference to the fate of others, and lack of a Messianic tradition, is a purely Asian country not easily adaptable to communism over the short run.<sup>2</sup> Russia, to the contrary, is predominantly European in outlook, passionately and sacrificially Christian in heritage, and psychologically inclined to the Messianic, brotherly concern and supreme power concepts so akin to communism's secular doctrine of salvation.<sup>3</sup> The result of this cultural difference between East and West is manifested in the ability to understand the other's motives and aspirations when such emotional issues as territorial disputes, nationalism, and personality factors are introduced.

The territorial dispute, born of nationalism and ethnocentrism, is at the heart of the Sino-Soviet conflict. The first known confrontation between Russian and Chinese troops occurred in the Amur River valley during the period 1680 to 1689.<sup>4</sup> Between 1858 and 1860 the Russians took advantage of Chinese weakness to impose territorial cessions involving areas north of the Amur River, east of the Ussuri River, and significant portions of the Ili region of Chinese Turkestan, some 600,000 square miles in all.<sup>5</sup> In 1911, with Russian assistance, Outer Mongolia (now the Mongolian People's Republic) declared itself autonomous, becoming by 1921 a *de facto* satellite of the Soviet Union.<sup>6</sup> It may be said that Russia's historic aim has been to break China into separate autonomous parts, facilitating the quest for a warm-water port on the Pacific Ocean, and ensuring its own security through the proliferation of relatively weak states along its border. Similarly, the historic Chinese aim has been to keep nationalist/geographic segments of the Greater Russian State separated, with the ancient Duchy

of Moscow as small as possible.<sup>7</sup> To a large extent then, the lineage of modern territorial military confrontation, diplomatic maneuver, and invective can be traced back into almost three centuries of Chinese-Russian history.

If territorial disagreement is truly the heart of the Sino-Soviet split, ideology is the lifeblood of the dispute. Although the great tomes and millions of words written and spoken in the name of one interpretation of ideological correctness or another cannot be easily distilled, opposing Soviet and Chinese positions are necessary to understanding the polemics of their differences. Soviet ideology is essentially Leninist. More precisely, it is an adaptation of Marxism to the Russian social, economic, and political setting—pragmatism as a reflection of ideologically conscious policy, coupled with centralism in relationship to other country communist parties.<sup>8</sup> Chinese Communist political concepts reflect Mao's considerably more dogmatic interpretation of Marxism-Leninism. Specifically, the Chinese position calls for undeviating support of all who struggle for revolutionary change in the strict Marxist-Leninist-Maoist sense, and acceptance of nationalistic communism, the very antithesis of centralism.<sup>9</sup> In practical terms the ideological Sino-Soviet dispute is a fight for leadership of international communism and for influence among Third World nations.

Conflicts of personality, on top of cultural differences, territorial disputes, and ideological disagreement, have certainly exacerbated the situation. The contempt of Stalin and Khrushchev for Mao, and of Mao for Khrushchev and Brezhnev, are fairly well documented. But the degree to which such feelings contributed to hostility, or at the very least prevented rapprochement, is neither insignificant nor susceptible to quantification. Suffice it to say that the personality factor did, in fact, adversely affect Sino-Soviet relations.

The factors just discussed, and specific incidents ranging from disagreement over tactics in the Chinese Civil War to the nature of Soviet military aid to the PRC, led to withdrawal of Soviet advisers from China in 1960. After 1960 there occurred frequent exchanges of harsh polemics, and few political, economic, and cultural contacts. Interspersed were behavioral extremes ranging from grudging cooperation in support of North Vietnam against South Vietnam and the United States to serious clashes along the Sino-Soviet border. From 1969 until Mao's death in 1976, party-to-party invective continued unabated, while state-to-state relationships attained a degree of normalization through border negotiations and a very modest resumption of trade. Globally, furious competition for support from and influence upon national communist parties ensued.<sup>10</sup>

On the eve of Mao Zedong's death, the disputatious atmosphere permeating Sino-Soviet relations was expressed by the domestic PRC press as follows:

Chairman Mao Zedong points out: "the soviet union [sic] today is under the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, . . . a dictatorship of the hitler type . . . khrushchev, brezhnev [sic] and company have grown from counterrevolutionary revisionists into social-imperialists . . . the soviet bureaucrat-monopoly bourgeoisie is a decaying, declining, parasitic and moribund capitalist class . . ."<sup>11</sup>

And by the foreign PRC press:

To oppress the non-Russian nationalities at home and contend for world domination, the Soviet revisionist renegade clique is feverishly preaching big-Russian chauvinism . . . all national chauvinists take "racial superiority" as their theoretical basis. Hitler's great Germanism was based on the allegation that the Germanic race was superior to all others. This is

also the case with Brezhnev and company.<sup>12</sup>

During this same period, the domestic press in the U.S.S.R. commented on Chinese unrest following the spring 1976 purge of Deng Xiaoping (Teng Hsiao-ping), Vice Chairman of the PRC Communist Party following the death of Zhou Enlai (Chou En-lai):

It is safe to say that Mao has persecuted no fewer communists than the Kuomintang and the Japanese occupation forces combined. He removes not only those he sees as real or imagined rivals but even rank-and-file members of the organization suspected of less than blind loyalty to Maoism . . .<sup>13</sup>

And in a foreign broadcast:

The present stage of Maoist subversive activity in the world communist movement is characterized by continued attempts from the Chinese leaders to make Maoism an international trend and to weaken the international solidarity of the brother parties . . . Pro-Maoist elements hide behind tolerance of the ideology of the Chinese leaders in order to wedge views, that are alien to Marxism-Leninism, into the midst of the communists.<sup>14</sup>

But despite the harsh words and the competition in ideological spheres of influence, solid contacts between the PRC and the U.S.S.R. continued in other areas. For example, the 1976 Soviet-China trade agreement called for a 40 percent increase in exchange of goods over that of 1975, and protocols were signed for continued trade in 1977.<sup>15</sup> Significantly, the 1950 Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, Alliance, and Mutual Assistance, though moribund since 1966, remained in effect until China announced in April 1979 that it would allow the pact to expire one year hence.<sup>16</sup> And finally, diplomatic relations between China and the

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Soviet Union, at the ambassadorial level, remain intact despite minimal contact.

Against this background of bitter utterances, border skirmishes, intense competition abroad, and continued trade and diplomatic liaison, Sino-Soviet relationships since the death of Mao Zedong may now be explored.

**Post-Mao Sino-Soviet Relations.** *Diplomacy.* Immediately following Mao's death on 9 September 1976, the PRC Communist Party Central Committee announced its decision not to invite foreign governments, fraternal parties, or friendly personages to send delegations or representatives to take part in the mourning in China.<sup>17</sup> This may have been a ploy to avoid embarrassment in the presence of foreign diplomats and media representatives should a power struggle or popular unrest publicly manifest themselves. Or the decision may have reflected a combination of factors ranging from ethnic chauvinism to practical concerns for the ability to lodge, feed, and transport visiting diplomats.

In a rather transparent attempt to place the attitude of the U.S.S.R. toward Mao in proper perspective, and perhaps even to set the stage for future relationships with his successor, the Soviet Union significantly downplayed Mao's death. Only brief articles announcing Mao's death appeared in the Soviet domestic press on 10 September 1976. Just four lines appeared on page two of *Pravda* and page three of *Izvestia*. On the same day, five-line articles expressing condolences from the Communist Party Central Committee of the U.S.S.R. to the Communist Party Central Committee of the PRC appeared on page two of both *Pravda* and *Izvestia*. On 14 September 1976, page four of *Pravda* reported visits by Soviet Minister of Foreign Affairs A.A. Gromyko and a host of lesser lights to the Chinese Embassy in Moscow to sign the book of condolences on the occasion of Mao's

death. If faint praise is damning, Mao Zedong was ignominiously buried by the Soviet leadership and press. A further slight may have been perpetrated by the Kremlin. Prominent press attention was given by the Chinese to those governments that provided wreaths and had their diplomats in China attend the mourning ceremony for Mao. As reported by the *Peking Review*, wreaths were sent by Albania, Yugoslavia, and most other nations of the world including the United States and its allies, but no mention is made of wreaths, if sent, by the U.S.S.R. or members of the Warsaw Pact. Similarly, embassy officials of the U.S.S.R. and the Warsaw Pact countries either did not send diplomatic representatives to the special mourning ceremony held for Mao, or their attendance was ignored in the Chinese press.<sup>18</sup> That inferences can be inaccurately drawn, given the Soviet press reports of a condolence message, and the absence of the U.S.S.R. from the long list of countries sending such messages that appeared in the Chinese foreign and domestic press, is readily apparent. For according to the latter, only Albania, Yugoslavia, and significantly, Rumania, of the East European and Soviet bloc countries, sent condolence messages.<sup>19</sup>

Noteworthy diplomatic exchanges outside those associated with propaganda initiatives and negotiation of the border dispute have been desultory since Mao's death. On 27 October 1976, *Pravda* and *Izvestia* reported on page one that Moscow sent Peking a friendly message commemorating the 27th Anniversary of the People's Republic of China, and calling for normalization of relations between the PRC and the U.S.S.R. The Chinese press, characteristically, did not acknowledge receipt of such a message. On 27 August 1977, *Pravda* carried a very brief article on page five concerning presentation of credentials by the new Chinese Ambassador to the U.S.S.R., Wang Yu-ping.<sup>4</sup>

His departure from Peking was broadcast by the New China News Agency on 24 August 1977.<sup>20</sup> In July 1978 a new Soviet Ambassador to the PRC, I.S. Shcherbakov, was named,<sup>21</sup> apparently without announcement in the Chinese press. On page one of the 11 October 1977 edition of *Izvestia*, a 10 October 1977 meeting of Chairman of the U.S.S.R. Council of Ministers A. Kosygin, with the new Chinese Ambassador Wang Yu-ping, was announced, but no results of the talk were printed. In any event, little has been reported in either the Soviet or Chinese press concerning the activities of these ambassadors or their respective embassies.

In sum, diplomatic contact between the U.S.S.R. and the PRC immediately following Mao's death was minimally correct on the part of the former, virtually unreported by the latter, and almost nonexistent outside border negotiations and exchanges of propaganda-oriented messages in the name of diplomacy.

*Propaganda.* The war of words between the PRC and the U.S.S.R. is undoubtedly the salient feature of Sino-Soviet relations since Mao's death. Anti-Chinese propaganda is reasonably well balanced between the foreign and domestic press in the U.S.S.R., and the content of each is similar, if not identical. The balance of anti-Soviet propaganda in the foreign and domestic Chinese press is more difficult to assess as much of the domestic material is available only through *New China News Agency* English broadcasts of previously published commentaries. But a definite disparity exists between the content of anti-Soviet propaganda published by the Chinese for foreign consumption, and that generated for domestic audiences.

Mao's death brought about a hiatus in Soviet anti-Chinese propaganda, both foreign and domestic, that lasted until late spring 1977. The pejorative terms, "maoism" and "maoist," disappeared

from the journalistic lexicon during this period, first reappearing on page three of a *Pravda* article of 25 April 1977 concerning China's economic difficulties. In the interim, most of the Chinese-oriented Soviet propaganda focused on calls to the new PRC leadership for improved relations. The various articles and speeches generally adhered to a format expressing Soviet bewilderment about Chinese behavior, followed by disclaimers of Soviet blame, recitation of the many initiatives taken by the U.S.S.R. to normalize relations, and a call for talks without any preconditions (referring to the territorial dispute). Some articles written in this vein first discuss the history of the formation of the PRC and the friendship and help provided by the Soviet people early on. All are friendly and supportive in tone. The first of these articles, and a fairly representative example of subsequent commentary, appeared on page four of *Pravda* on 1 October 1976. Entitled "Twenty-Seven Years of the CPR" it was written by I. Aleksandrov, long the pseudonym for a high-ranking state spokesman with an important message. After a long review of PRC history and association with the U.S.S.R., Aleksandrov says:

Through no fault of the Soviet side, in the early 1960s relations between our countries and parties began to deteriorate. The Soviet Union and the CPSU did everything in their power to stave off this process . . . .

The article goes on to cite all the initiatives taken by the U.S.S.R. to resolve issues between them, including a draft nonaggression treaty proposed in 1973, before continuing:

Our country is prepared to conduct businesslike and concrete talks . . . we are prepared to normalize relations with China on the principles of peaceful coexistence . . . there are no problems in the relations between our states

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that cannot be solved if there is a mutual desire to do so in a spirit of good neighborliness, mutual advantage and consideration for each other's interests.

Soviet patience with this unreciprocated conciliatory propaganda thrust finally wore thin in an article written by M. Georgiyev and published on page five of *Pravda* on 19 March 1977. The text scored Chinese media attempts to link the recently purged "gang of four" with the Soviet Union, and criticized continued anti-Soviet propaganda emanating from China. Although the term "maoism" was not used, the tone of the piece indicated Soviet realization that China's policy was not likely to change, despite new leadership. By mid-1977, the Soviet media had renewed its "no holds barred" propaganda campaign against the PRC, accusing the Chinese of war hysteria in its attitude toward the U.S.S.R.,<sup>22</sup> preparing for war against the U.S.S.R.,<sup>23</sup> involvement in all sorts of human rights violations,<sup>24</sup> and development of chemical and biological warfare capabilities.<sup>25</sup> Not surprisingly, though, the domestic and foreign Soviet press continue to intersperse their anti-PRC commentaries with periodic calls for normalization of relations in the apparent hope of ameliorating a tense situation. Such an appeal most recently appeared in a Moscow to China broadcast in Mandarin on 25 January 1979.<sup>26</sup>

Anti-Soviet propaganda abroad continued unabated by the PRC despite Mao's passing. On 13 September 1976 the following was written for foreign consumption, using the appropriate code words (in my italics), in reference to the U.S.S.R.:

... he [Mao] initiated ... the great struggle to criticize *modern revisionism* with the Soviet *revisionist renegade clique* at the core ... promoted the ... cause of the people of all countries against imperialism and *hegemonism*, and pushed the history

of mankind forward . . . We must carry the struggle against imperialism, *social-imperialism* and *modern revisionism* through to the end. We will never seek *hegemony* and will never be *superpower*.<sup>27</sup>

Domestically, the Chinese were so preoccupied with mourning the death of Mao, paying him tribute, and attempting to avoid a messy power struggle, that little anti-Soviet material appeared in the local press until late October 1976. Then it was business as usual, as exemplified by these comments appearing in the *People's Daily* and broadcast in Mandarin on 28 October 1976:

... The programme reflects the foreign economic and trade policy of Soviet social-imperialism and is an important part of the Soviet revisionists' counterrevolutionary global strategy for world domination . . . Everything must be subordinated to the Soviet revisionists' need, everything must be at the dictate of the new tsars . . . By pushing hegemonism the Soviet social-imperialists are only accelerating their own destruction.<sup>28</sup>

By late 1976, the anti-Soviet Chinese line focused on internal problems of the U.S.S.R., oppression of the Russian people by their leaders, eventual collapse of Soviet society, etc., etc. In 1977 the thrust of Chinese propaganda ranged from references to the U.S.S.R. as "taking on Hitler's manners"<sup>29</sup> to articles such as the one entitled, "Soviet Social-Imperialism—Most Dangerous Source of World War."<sup>30</sup> In late 1977 Soviet Communist Party Secretary L. Brezhnev was identified in the 5 December edition of *Red Flag* as a "fascist." On 3 March 1978, an article in *Peking Review* accused the U.S.S.R. of stepping up research and development efforts in biological and chemical warfare, despite signing the 1965 international con-

vention banning the use, production, and possession of biological weapons. Another piece in mid-1978 identified the U.S.S.R. as China's "number one" enemy,<sup>31</sup> raising the vehement pitch of anti-Soviet propaganda another notch. The crescendo to date was reached in a 1 November 1978 article in *Red Flag*, that said:

... Soviet social-imperialism... is also energetically trying to encircle Japan and China... following in Hitler's footsteps. It has a great hunger for power... It is intensifying its expansionist offensive everywhere and thus putting its head in the noose everywhere... The plotter of a siege will find himself besieged and ultimately defeated. This is the inevitable fate of Soviet social-imperialism.<sup>32</sup>

Clearly, from the preceding samples of propaganda exchanges between the U.S.S.R. and the PRC, the latter's pronouncements are considerably more trenchant and pejorative than those of the former. There also appears to be an increasing stridency in the Chinese propaganda efforts toward the Soviet Union, that makes it difficult to accurately evaluate in terms of seriousness and meaning. In terms of propaganda exchanges, the Sino-Soviet split appears quite real, deep, a threat to world peace, and not very susceptible to quick-fix or short-term cure.

*Leadership.* Perhaps the most interesting facet of Sino-Soviet relations, immediate past, present, and future, involves the leadership of both parties and their respective governments. On the Soviet side, the very top leadership has remained intact for a number of years. But because it is a bona fide gerontocracy, there is much speculation in the Western press about the identification of Brezhnev's and Kosygin's successors, their attitudes, and the effects of a potentially tumultuous change in

Soviet leadership on internal stability, East-West relations, and Sino-Soviet tension.

Chinese leadership has undulated and shifted fascinatingly for years, but perhaps never more so than after the death of Premier Zhou Enlai in January 1976. There are many indications in Soviet and Western writings that the Russian leadership preferred the more pragmatic Zhou Enlai to Mao Zedong and, in fact, fully expected Zhou to survive Mao and assume leadership of a potentially more rational, if not tractable, Chinese Government. While this may only have been a propaganda ploy by the Soviet media to defame Mao, it nevertheless helped to focus attention on the power struggle that ensued. The jockeying for position that occurred in China following Zhou's death and the increasing infirmity of Mao, involved four main actors: Deng Xiaoping, Hua Guofeng, (Hua Kuofeng), Chiang Ching, and Mao himself.

Deng Xiaoping, now a wily 74-year old veteran of Chinese politics, has risen to prominence three times since 1966, and has been purged twice, though significantly, never expelled from the Communist Party in China. After Zhou Enlai's death, Deng was the odds-on favorite to succeed him as premier of the PRC, but was himself supplanted by the less well-known Hua Guofeng, now 57 years old. Shortly thereafter, Deng was purged again from his leadership positions following a series of violent incidents in Peking's Tien An Men Square during a wreath laying in honor of Zhou Enlai in early April 1976. Deng's political demise, and Hua Guofeng's appointment as premier to succeed Zhou Enlai, was seen by Soviet sinologists as a power struggle in which the radical wing of the Chinese Communist Party, led by Mao's wife Chiang Ching, emerged triumphant over the pragmatic wing of the Party, led by Deng Xiaoping.

After his fall from power, the foreign and domestic Chinese media was



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absolutely dominated by the vilification of Deng who was blamed for everything wrong in China from the economy to correct political thought to the fact that certain trains didn't run on time! Following Mao's death, Hua Guofeng was elevated to the position of Chairman of the Central Committee of the PRC Communist Party, succeeding Mao. Meanwhile, criticism of Deng Xiaoping remained furiously indignant, particularly in the domestic press. All these events were followed in the Soviet media, though in a very low key, cursory fashion.

On 14 October 1976, a page five article in *Pravda* reported the arrest of the Chinese "gang of four" or "Shanghai group," who were identified as: Chiang Ching (Mao's wife), Wang Hung-wen, Chang Chun-chiao, and Yao Wen-yuan, on charges of attempt to overthrow the state. Some 40 other middle-level officials including Mao's nephew, and high-level employees of the paper *Jenmin Jihpao* and the state radio network, were also arrested. The Chinese domestic press reported seizure of the "gang of four" via the *New China News Agency* in an English broadcast of 21 October 1976 and in a *Jenmin Jihpao* article in Peking on 24 October 1976.<sup>33</sup>

From this point on things moved quickly in the Chinese power struggle. A *Peking Review* article of 5 November 1976 called for readers to "continue to criticize Deng Xiaoping and repulse the right deviationist attempt to reverse correct decisions."<sup>34</sup> Although criticism of Deng continued to appear regularly, it began to soften noticeably not long thereafter. In fact, as early as 19 November 1976 an editorial in the newspaper *Jiefangjun Bao* reportedly stated:

During the struggle to criticize Teng Hsiao-ping... Chairman Mao fully affirmed and approved the plan and policies formulated by Comrade Hua Kuo-feng in accordance with Chairman Mao's

consistent thoughts, which were *diametrically opposed to the "Gang of Fours" practice of ferreting out Teng's agents at every level.*<sup>35</sup> (author's italics).

This was the first step in the ultimate rehabilitation of the irrepressible Deng Xiaoping.

By January 1977 the "gang of four" was said to have "acted on their own in criticizing Deng Xiaoping in an attempt to overthrow... the government."<sup>36</sup> Deng's name then virtually disappeared from the Chinese press until a Communiqué of the Third Plenary Session of the Tenth Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, adopted on 21 July 1977, identified him as Vice Chairman of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, among other titles.<sup>37</sup> In a related move, the "gang of four" were expelled from the party, and from all posts in or out of the party.

Interestingly, a page five article in the 15 January 1977 edition of *Pravda* mentions large crowds gathering near Tien An Men Square demanding the rehabilitation of Deng 6 months before it became a reality. As might be expected, there was no mention of the incident in the Chinese foreign or domestic media. The *Peking Review* of 29 July 1977 did report on page five, after the fact, that the formal decision to politically revive Deng was the result of a suggestion made by Chairman Hua Guofeng in March 1977.

The saga of Deng Xiaoping continues to fascinate observers. During the period 15-30 November 1978 a remarkable display of Chinese-style "freedom" occurred in Peking. Rallies and wall posters first demanded exoneraton of the hundreds of thousands of Chinese driven from the party and public life since 1957 by Mao Zedong's "campaign against right wing elements."<sup>38</sup> Then attacks on Mao and, by implication, on his successor Hua Guofeng occurred, in conjunction with a public demand for

Deng Xiaoping to replace Hua. The criticism continued to escalate into late November, as more charges were leveled against Mao and Hua. Demands for "democracy" and "freedom" were heard, and Deng was praised as China's strongest leader.<sup>39</sup>

Deng successfully appealed for a formal reversal of the resolution dismissing him after the Tien An Men Square incident in 1976, and his return to ascendancy seemed complete.<sup>40</sup> Yet indications of a continuing power struggle persist. Orders were issued in late November 1978 to halt the rallies and anti-Mao, anti-Hua poster displays forthwith, thus dampening public enthusiasm for human rights activism on a large scale.<sup>41</sup> However, small rallies were still tolerated, and posters critical of the government's crackdown on China's democratic movement continued to appear<sup>42</sup> amid press reports of high-level Communist Party meetings during April 1979 to "reassess" the liberalization drive.<sup>43</sup> The on again, off again criticism of Mao was officially off again, as the leadership attempted to define his proper historical niche once and for all.<sup>44</sup> As late as 11 March 1979 a front-page article in *People's Daily* blamed all of China's political and economic troubles on the disastrous "Great Leap Forward" of 1958-59, though Mao's name was not specifically mentioned.<sup>45</sup> Interestingly, the names of China's current "whipping boys," Lin Biao and the "Gang of Four" were also conspicuously absent from the article, leaving no doubt that Mao was to blame. To date, Mao's official historical status is still uncertain. His mausoleum, closed to the public in December 1978 for "repairs" (it had been completed in September 1977), was reopened on 3 May 1979, indicating a reprieve for Mao, but without a return to his godlike status.<sup>46</sup>

Six months after the great Peking freedom rallies, many questions remain about who really wields power in the

People's Republic of China and what the political tenor of the government will be. Prominent leaders such as Korean war hero Marshal Peng Dehuai (Peng Te-huai), purged by Mao, are being politically restored,<sup>42</sup> while others, who were proteges of Mao, have been stripped of their posts or detained.<sup>48</sup> Critical posters continue to appear on "freedom wall" in Beijing (Peking), but political activists and dissidents are being openly arrested.<sup>49</sup> These events are a clear indication of the presence of at least two power blocs of nearly equal strength pulling and tugging at the fabric of China's post-Mao political realities, in a bid for supremacy.

Deng Xiaoping's disclaimers that at 74 he is too old to carry the primary leadership role for the long term are probably true. However, for the time being, he appears to be China's strongest leader in fact if not in titled position. For it is Deng's economic program that China has apparently adopted. And it is Deng who is sufficiently confident of his political position to travel extensively abroad. Media reports, conversations with Western journalists, and announcements of new economic initiatives are further indications of Deng's ascendancy. Perhaps the most compelling evidence of his predominance in Chinese affairs was his trip to the United States following establishment of diplomatic relations on 1 January 1979, leaving little doubt that he was the initiator of this sudden rapprochement. On the other hand, Hua Guofeng has previously demonstrated the ability to pick the winning side, and he does in fact command the traditionally all-powerful position of Chairman of the Chinese Communist Party Central Committee. And he did appear to consolidate his influence in that position before initiating, or at least acquiescing in, Deng's political revival. So it may be that Deng and Hua need each other, and that while Deng is

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currently in charge, Hua is the designated heir apparent, charged with carrying Deng's pragmatic policies on over the long term. It is also possible that Hua lacks the political power to override Deng, and must carefully protect his position while waiting for the latter to misstep.

For the Soviet Union, leadership of the PRC could be crucial in this time of great tension along the Sino-Soviet border and competition throughout the world. The Soviet leadership would perhaps prefer a continuing power struggle to ensure continued Chinese weakness. However, they must also look for openings that might spell the opportunity for some degree of rapprochement with a more pragmatic Chinese leadership, while preparing for a more hostile and threatening posture signaled by Chinese overtures to the West.

*Military Confrontation.* The element of Sino-Soviet relations with the greatest potential for open warfare between the two is the dispute along their 4,500-mile border. The implications of this quite serious disagreement relative to a possible world war were of sufficient import to stimulate a day-long nuclear war conference on 7 December 1978 in Washington, D.C. that specifically focused on the threat of a Sino-Soviet nuclear exchange along their border.<sup>50</sup>

The border dispute revolves around the PRC territorial claims discussed earlier and there are, in fact, meetings in progress to attempt to resolve the issue. The U.S.S.R. has a delegation headed by a deputy minister of foreign affairs that has been periodically meeting in Beijing to discuss the problem.<sup>51</sup> On a lower level there is a "Mixed Soviet-Chinese Commission on Navigation" working to adopt new rules for control of shipping on border sections of rivers.<sup>52</sup> Unfortunately, little progress has been made on the border issue because neither party is willing to budge from its respective positions.

Press reports from both sides lay the blame for poor relations squarely on the recalcitrance of the other. The U.S.S.R. position declares that relations should be based on principles of "peaceful coexistence," which basically means maintenance of the status quo with no preconditions for agreement to discuss "minor adjustments" acceptable to the Soviet Union.<sup>53</sup> The PRC position requires that improved relations be based on preconditions calling for:

1. A signed agreement maintaining the status quo on the borders (as a prelude to negotiation only).
2. Averting armed clashes and disengaging forces on both sides of the disputed border areas.
3. Formal negotiations on resolving the border question.
4. Withdrawal of Soviet forces from the Mongolian People's Republic and from all Sino-Soviet borders.<sup>54</sup>

Since neither party will bend, the military buildup on each side of the border continues apace. For the present at least, invective instead of ammunition is being hurled back and forth, keeping the pot stirred and boiling without overturning it.

In terms of military preparedness, the supremacy of the U.S.S.R. in virtually every respect save manpower is widely recognized.

Though comparatively little is known of the details of Soviet forces on the border, it is considered likely that most of the Soviet formations are concentrated in the Far Eastern Military District opposite Manchuria, the heartland of Chinese industrial capacity.<sup>55</sup> There are thought to be 44 Soviet divisions guarding the entire 7,500-mile border, including three divisions in the Mongolian People's Republic. Six of the

divisions are armored, and five of those are in readiness category I (substantially ready).<sup>5,6</sup> Of the 38 mechanized infantry divisions on the border, 19 are category I, 10 are category II (marginally ready), and nine are category III (not ready). The number of KGB border troops deployed opposite China is unknown. Approximately 10,000 tanks and 10,000 armored personnel carriers are available for service on the border, although large numbers are probably stockpiled in depots, rather than in an operational status. More than 2,000 combat aircraft of all types are dispersed on airfields within striking distance of the border. The standard complement of artillery, mobile missiles, antiaircraft weapons, and nuclear/chemical munitions are available in support. Certain ICBMs, IRBMs, and MRBMs are more than likely targeted for use against China, but the numbers so deployed are not available from unclassified sources. The Soviet Pacific Fleet, generally consisting of some 70 submarines (excluding strategic SLBM subs) and 65 major surface combatants, is capable of operating in virtually all Chinese coastal waters.

Across the border, China can counter with the People's Liberation Army (PLA), a formidable adversary. The size of the PLA, though a well kept secret, is variously estimated at between 3.9 and 4.2 million men.<sup>5,7</sup> Approximately 3.5 million men are concentrated in the ground forces because of China's poor strategic and tactical mobility assets.<sup>5,8</sup> Undoubtedly the largest land army in the world, it is backed by paramilitary forces consisting of a 7-million man Armed Militia; an Urban Militia of several million; the 4-million man Civilian Production and Construction Corps; and the basically trained, but generally unarmed Ordinary and Basic Militia of 75-100 million persons.<sup>5,9</sup> The ground forces are organized as follows:<sup>6,0</sup>

#### Main Forces

- 121 infantry divisions
- 11 armored divisions
- 3 airborne divisions
- 150 independent regiments
- 40 artillery divisions including anti-aircraft units
- 15 railway and construction divisions

#### Local Forces

- 70 infantry divisions
- 130 independent regiments

Weapons, though somewhat outdated, include 10,000 Soviet and Chinese-made tanks; 3,500 armored personnel carriers; 18,000 artillery pieces; and 20,000 assorted mortars, recoilless rifles, rocket launchers, attack guns, and antiaircraft weapons.<sup>6,1</sup> The PLA Air Force has some 4,500 fighter aircraft of MIG-15-MIG-19 vintage, about 1,000 bombers and transports, and approximately 350 helicopters. All are obsolete.<sup>6,2</sup> The Chinese Navy possesses 23 major surface combatants, one nuclear-powered submarine, 74 fleet submarines and 1,200 assorted destroyers, missile patrol boats, landing craft and small coastal defense vessels. In addition, the navy owns 700 shore-based aircraft consisting of bombers, fighters and a few helicopters.<sup>6,3</sup>

Deployment of Chinese forces along the Sino-Soviet border is thought to be heaviest in the north and northeast, with some 55 Main Force and 25 Local Force divisions concentrated to protect Manchuria and Beijing.<sup>6,4</sup> Farther west are another 15 Main Force divisions and eight Local Force divisions. Fully half of the PLA aircraft assets are dispersed to defend against any Soviet ground-air assault, particularly in the northeast.<sup>6,5</sup>

Behind these conventional forces lies the menace of China's increasing nuclear strength. By mid-1978 China had conducted 23 nuclear tests, and possessed a stockpile of several hundred atomic warheads with yields ranging from 20

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kilotons to three megatons.<sup>66</sup> There is much speculation about China's delivery systems, but most authors seem to agree on the data in Table I.<sup>67</sup> Uncorroborated reports variously describe tests of an 8,000-mile range ICBM, SLBMs for China's one nuclear submarine, 10-25 missiles in the 4,000-6,000-mile range, 400 guns of 203mm with five KT warheads, and 700 guns of 152mm with one KT warhead.<sup>68</sup>

Lacking sufficient strength to challenge seriously the Soviet Union, China has resorted to invective, accusation, bluff, and overtures to the West in an attempt to buy time while redressing her precarious military balance. Domestic Chinese propaganda features such articles as the one entitled, "Heighten Vigilance, Be Ready to Fight," that identifies the U.S.S.R. as the number one enemy, discusses Soviet aggression and expansionism, and laments the inevitability of war.<sup>69</sup> Similar reports appear in the foreign Chinese media. For example, a commentary entitled, "Heighten Our Vigilance and Get Prepared to Fight a War," admitted that the Russians were better armed but predicted the Chinese people would prevail.<sup>70</sup> The article continued to say that China must prepare for a surprise attack from Russia, but that the PRC would "never attack first."

On the Soviet side, a published article accused the PRC of preparing for war, launching an arms race with the U.S.S.R., and opposing disarmament.<sup>71</sup> Another piece reported an attack on China for expansionism and endangering

peace that emanated from a Crimean meeting of the Secretaries of the Communist Party Central Committees of the Warsaw Pact countries.<sup>72</sup>

Very often, particularly in the Chinese press, a sort of code is used to discuss the danger of war between the PRC and the U.S.S.R. Specifically, the jargon refers to the inevitability of a war between the United States and the U.S.S.R. into which the Chinese will be irresistibly drawn, ostensibly against the Soviet Union. The latter, in pursuit of a peace-loving image, becomes visibly irritated by such attacks, and regularly publishes material to refute them.

The most recently reported armed border clash between the U.S.S.R. and the PRC occurred on 11 May 1978 along the Amur River in China's Heilongjiang (Heilungkiang) Province. The PRC, in a diplomatic protest, claimed a Soviet helicopter and 18 boats purposely crossed the river, wounding several Chinese before being driven off.<sup>73</sup> The U.S.S.R. replied to the PRC protest with a note expressing regret for what the Soviets called an accidental incursion that resulted in harm to no one.<sup>74</sup>

On the question of armaments, the state of affairs can best be described as deteriorating. Soviet perceptions grow more and more pessimistic as China pursues arms assistance from the West and hints at seeking possible alliances that would tend to isolate the Soviet Union. Arms sales negotiations between Great Britain, France, and Italy on one side, and the PRC on the other have

TABLE I

	System	Range	
80	TU-16 bombers	2,000	miles
30-40	MRBMs	600-700	miles
30-40	IRBMs	1,500-1,750	miles
?	ICBMs	3,000-3,500	miles

been underway since early November 1978 with antitank weapons, anti-aircraft missiles, AV-8 Harrier VSTOL aircraft (100), naval diesel engines for coastal patrol craft, and military helicopters prominently mentioned.<sup>75</sup>

Soviet fears of a progressively more modern Chinese military capability and its ultimate purposes are reflected in this recent Moscow broadcast in English:

Some Western newspapers . . . say there is nothing wrong with a sovereign country wishing to purchase arms . . . It is really irresponsible, to say the least, to sell advanced weapons to a country which has a record of aggression and whose leaders say openly that they prepare for a world war which they think is inevitable . . . There is really no telling when, or where, will Peking use its legions when they are equipped with modern arms. The entire adult population of China is now working 12 to 14 hours a day . . . to support the program of China's militarization and . . . hegemonistic adventures . . . This is also the ultimate goal of China's attempts to secure advanced arms and military technology from the NATO countries.<sup>76</sup>

According to *Pravda*, the Chinese are openly threatening the Soviet Union with war when PRC Minister of Defense Xu Xiangqian calls for an international united front against the U.S.S.R. while promising, "China will help all who wage a resolute struggle against the USSR."<sup>77</sup>

The result of all this may be Soviet agitation in other parts of the world to offset Western arms sales to the PRC. No doubt there will be considerable diplomatic pressure applied by the U.S.S.R. to limit or forestall such sales. Of more concern is the possibility of a Soviet preemptive strike against the

PRC, if the U.S.S.R. perceives Chinese military modernization initiatives as changing the balance of power along the border. From any point of view, Chinese rearmament with modern weapons creates greater risks of Sino-Soviet confrontation as well as increased chances of general East-West conflagration.

*Economic Activity.* On 31 July 1977 an article by Vladimir Bolshakov, on page four of *Pravda*, announced the rehabilitation of Deng Xiaoping, and revival of his "economic program." The article went on to provide a pessimistic analysis of Deng's political revival as a clear signal to the West that Beijing was prepared to develop extensive ties, and would continue its anti-Soviet course, thus aggravating international tension. Although some months passed before Bolshakov's analysis could be corroborated in Chinese media sources, he was obviously correct for on 24 March 1978, in a speech at the National Science Conference in Beijing, Hua Guofeng admitted China's backwardness and called for learning from foreign countries.<sup>78</sup> Previously, all China's economic woes were blamed on the "gang of four." An article did appear in mid-1977 in the foreign Chinese press that declared the necessity for making "foreign things serve China." But the thrust of this and subsequent articles was to extol the virtues of self-reliance, while accusing the "gang of four" and other enemies of the state of sabotaging economic and technical growth and exchange with other countries.<sup>79</sup>

It would appear that from the time of Deng Xiaoping's return to political power in July 1977 until early November 1978, the ground was being carefully prepared in China for a rather startling departure from a longstanding PRC tradition of autarky. Given the power struggle in China in the years before and after Mao Zedong's death, and the incredibly detailed vilification of Deng and his ilk as "capitalist-

readers, modern revisionists, and right-wing deviationists" for their views on bringing economic progress to China, it is not surprising that considerable time was required. Literally millions of words had been written and spoken throughout the PRC to "educate" the Chinese people about the dangers of anything remotely smacking of free enterprise, or capitalism, or assistance from another country. A full year was apparently required to reverse direction, reeducate the masses (and most of their leaders), prepare a course of action, and weed out the recalcitrants (such as the radical "gang of four clique"), before the dramatic overtures to "open windows to the West" for technology and economic assistance could be initiated.

Western press reports began to appear in early November 1978 that the Chinese were thinking of introducing a limited market economy, and entering into negotiations with a large number of foreign multinational corporations to help the PRC develop natural resources, open joint-venture factories, and build hotels.<sup>80</sup> For several months daily announcements relative to Chinese economic initiatives were made as Deng and his allies launched the "four modernizations": farming, industry, science and technology, and the military. The blueprint for this economic miracle was to take place in three phases:

1. Within two years, mechanize agriculture nationwide, and consolidate and restructure all existing industry.

2. During the next five years, achieve a quantum improvement in factory and agricultural production. During this phase, seen as the most important of the three, China would either build or import as many as 120 new plants.

3. In the final stage, from 1985 to the year 2000, expand production to include more sophisticated

consumer goods and such high technology items as advanced electronics and computers.<sup>81</sup>

Euphoria was rampant in the industrialized nations at the prospect of a Chinese market of one billion people. Japan rushed in with announcements of a 50 percent trade increase with China, construction of a billion dollar steel mill, and an exchange of businessmen and offices in Tokyo and Beijing.<sup>82</sup> France negotiated a trade pact calling for development of commodity/technology transfers ranging from atomic industry to hotel management to sugar production.<sup>83</sup> Not to be outdone, U.S. business and government representatives offered coal mine development, design of an atom smasher, a dam on the Yangtze River, offshore oil drilling assistance, and introduction of Coca Cola and McDonald's franchises, to name just a few.<sup>84</sup>

As the stampede for economic advantage in the Chinese marketplace proceeded, there arose a number of unanswered questions. The most important question addressed payment for and the effect of modernization and increased contact with Western nations and Japan on the political stability of China.

Some of the answers were not long in coming. Early in March 1979 Beijing announced that 30 contracts previously signed to buy \$2 million worth of heavy machinery from Japan would be renegotiated, and pending U.S. deals put on hold.<sup>85</sup> Clearly, the Chinese were worried about how to pay for the required technology and how to absorb it into an agrarian economy with a low-skill labor base. On 6 May 1979 China's Minister of Foreign Trade announced a shift of emphasis from heavy industrial projects to development of agriculture and light industry. The code word "readjustment" is now being used to describe the prudent reappraisal of China's financial, technological, and managerial capabilities to successfully

pursue the "four modernizations."<sup>6</sup> Readjustment of economic goals may also reflect a conservative reaction to the prospect of excessive social strain and political dissent that could result from rapid industrialization of a developing country.

Modernization of China will be a long, involved, and perhaps unsuccessful process. The goal of the PRC to "surpass the world's advanced levels by the year 2000" is probably unrealistic. However, the Chinese people are capable of tremendous sacrifice and great technological achievement when unfettered by programs such as the "Great Leap Forward" and the "Cultural Revolution." The ability of China to become a nuclear power and to launch and recover satellites is adequate testimony to PRC capabilities in particular areas of concentration. But carryover to achievement of 20th-century levels of technical and industrial maturity may not be possible owing to the magnitude of the task. Whatever the prospects for reaching established goals, one must consider the potential military capability of a modern, industrialized China before rejoicing.

The Soviet Union is already a modern, industrialized nation, though with an economy heavily oriented toward production of military hardware and heavy industrial goods rather than consumer products. But the U.S.S.R. is deficient in the technology associated with computers and their application to industry, the military, and weapons systems; and in other areas such as offshore and arctic oil drilling operations. As in the case of China, the U.S.S.R. must look to the West and Japan for relief.

**Conclusion.** The period between the death of Mao Zedong in September 1976 and the present must be viewed as a time of restabilization and course setting for China. The death of the architect of Chinese communism

produced the inevitable power struggle associated with the passing of the dominant leader of a totalitarian state. As the leadership begins to settle on new directions for China, the implications for future Sino-Soviet relations are unclear but worthy of consideration.

*Diplomacy.* Prospects for any sort of diplomatic rapprochement between China and the Soviet Union depend heavily on settlement of the territorial question. Given traditional Soviet sensitivity to the sanctity of purposely accrued border areas for defense of the motherland, little help can be expected from the U.S.S.R. China is perhaps even less likely to yield on territorial claims considering the pervasiveness of historic "middle kingdom" ethnocentrism.

Of almost equal importance to improved relations is amelioration of the ideological quarrel. China appears determined to carve out an exclusive sphere of influence among Third World countries, particularly in Asia. Soviet attempts for Third World hegemony and insistence on Marxist centralism are very much resented by China, and must be viewed as major stumbling blocks to improved Sino-Soviet relations.

There are indications that high-level talks between the U.S.S.R. and the PRC will soon occur. On 17 April 1979 the Soviet Foreign Ministry delivered a note to the Chinese Ambassador proposing talks aimed at a general easing of tension between the two countries.<sup>7</sup> On 10 May 1979 China announced tentative acceptance of the Soviet proposal.<sup>8</sup> However, unless substantive progress is made on the disputed territorial and ideological issues, the practical result will be maintenance of diplomatically correct but relatively poor relations for the foreseeable future.

*Propaganda.* As long as there is substantial disagreement between rival border states, there will exist massive efforts to propagandize one's own point



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of view at the expense of the other side. In the case of China and the Soviet Union, propaganda has been the major weapon in their confrontation, and can be expected to continue with little change in intensity. Compared to the alternatives, the Sino-Soviet propaganda war is a healthy outlet for the frustrations of power politics.

*Leadership.* The effect of leadership changes on Sino-Soviet relations will probably be indirect. The Chinese leadership, despite signs of an internal power struggle, is apparently in agreement about its foreign policy towards the Soviet Union. No change in policy is likely to occur when Deng Xiaoping passes from the scene. Leonid Brezhnev's age and questionable health indicate the likelihood of a change in Kremlin leadership in the near term as well. But again, the transfer of power, however messy, will probably have little effect on relations with China, except temporarily to focus attention on domestic matters to the exclusion of foreign policy.

*Military Confrontation.* Sino-Soviet recognition of a prevailing balance of power along their common border appears to be a reality. The most compelling evidence was Soviet military restraint during the spring 1979 Chinese punitive expedition against Vietnam. It may be forcefully argued that the reason for Soviet restraint was a combination of uncertainty about U.S. support for China, interest in concluding a SALT agreement with the United States, and the continuing relative weakness of Chinese military strength along the Soviet border. Whatever the case, current prospects for other than low-level conflict along the Sino-Soviet frontier seem remote. However, chances of serious conflict may increase significantly as China attempts to modernize the PLA. The key to future military confrontation may well be the extent to which the Soviet Union feels threatened

by a more capable and better armed PLA.

*Economic Activity.* Except as previously noted, there is relatively little direct economic exchange between the U.S.S.R. and the PRC. Though some increase is possible, the dispute between them will probably preclude significant economic ties compared to those sought with the West and Japan. And while China and the Soviet Union do not need each other as trading partners, they may compete extensively for Western technology and agricultural production.

Based on past performance, the Soviet Union can be expected to resolve the potentially difficult manpower and energy shortages predicted for the next 20 years and maintain an impressive economic advantage over China. But the dramatic expansion plans of the PRC, however modified by economic reality and political expediency, are no doubt viewed in the Kremlin with great concern. For through economic development comes modernization, and a modern, industrialized China could pose many future problems for the U.S.S.R. Of equal concern are the contacts that might be developed through economic cooperation, which under certain circumstances could serve to isolate the U.S.S.R. and further exacerbate Sino-Soviet relations.

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### BIOGRAPHIC SUMMARY



Lieutenant Colonel Landes, who was educated at Graceland College, Washburn University, and The George Washington University, entered the Marine Corps in 1960. He has served in various line and staff billets in the United States and overseas, was an associate professor at the U.S. Naval Academy, graduated with highest distinction from the Naval War College in 1979, and is now serving on the staff of CINCSNAVEUR.

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