

# A New China, the Old Politics

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An occurrence in 1968 far from China's borders may have contributed substantially to bringing about a change in Peking's foreign policy. On August 20-21, there was the startling intervention in Czechoslovakia by the USSR and four other Warsaw Pact powers. A warning letter the five had sent previously to the Czechoslovak Communist Party set forth a significant rationale: ". . . we cannot agree to have hostile forces push your country away from the road of socialism and create the danger of Czechoslovakia being severed from the socialist community. . . . The frontiers of the socialist world have moved . . . to the Elbe and the Bohemian Forest. We shall never agree to these historic gains of socialism . . . being placed in jeopardy."<sup>1</sup> The Brezhnev Doctrine of "limited sovereignty" had been born, and if it were judged warrant for taking action against unorthodoxy in Czechoslovakia, it was in logic equally applicable to China. In any event, Moscow's military action against the deviant Communist state was by itself an indication that, in some circumstances, the Soviet Union might be prepared to employ its armed forces elsewhere outside its borders.

China and Albania joined in condemning what Tirana termed the "barbarous aggression of the Soviet revisionists and their valets against the Czechoslovak Government and people." But Soviet economic strength and massive military power were hard facts which would figure in any realistic geopolitical calculation. And when, on November 25, *Pravda* is-

sued a call to arms against the external and internal enemies of communism, defined respectively as the imperialists and "right-wing and left-wing opportunists and splitters who are undermining the Communist and workers' movement," the reference to China was unmistakable. The long C.C.P. Central Committee plenum held in latter October can be taken as marking the beginning of Peking's return to the Bandung policy of "peaceful co-existence" and "economic cooperation." But the next year, 1969, proved decisive. In the spring and summer there were dangerous clashes on the Sino-Soviet frontier, and by August the Soviet Union had constructed a system of new missile sites along the border and deployed heavy military forces. There was talk of war. Also in the summer there came President Nixon's enunciation of the "Guam [Nixon] Doctrine," built around the concept that the United States was a West Pacific power and determined to remain in Asia.

And there was the Nixon Doctrine corollary calling for "Vietnamization" of the Indochina war—with the implied proposition that, over the longer term, there should be the "Asianization" of America's Asian wars. The device of using others to fight one's wars is not unknown to the Asians, and particularly the Chinese. Chiang Kai-shek, during his mainland rule, regularly endeavored to maneuver one great power against another for China's gain,\* and in the postwar period looked to the United States for aid against his domestic enemies, the Communists. The rulers at Peking

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\* There is a piquant interest in the fact that the fledgling Communist regime in Kiangsi, in its 1932 "declaration of war" on Japan, charged that the Nationalist regime hoped to foment world war in order to gain, in a clash of the great imperialist powers, a solution for China's problem of division. See Wang Chien-min, *Chung-kuo kung-ch'an-tang shih-kao* [Draft History of the Chinese Communist Party] (Taipei: 1965), Vol. III, pp. 24-25, for text.

are quite as faithful followers of the Chinese imperial adage "use barbarians to control barbarians" as have been the Nationalists at Nanking and Taipei; and Moscow, for one, has charged that the Mao regime seeks to embroil others—and particularly the USSR—in war for its own anticipated profit.

From 1960 onward, it became ever clearer that Peking, under Mao Tse-tung's leadership, had decided to wage protracted political warfare simultaneously against both the United States, as the last of the Occidental sea powers present, and the Soviet Union, as an alien ("non-Asian") intruder into the Far East, with the aim of establishing a dominant position for China in Asia. Two important assumptions seemingly entered into the strategic decision: first, that the confrontation between the United States and the USSR would continue, and that they would cancel each other out—perhaps annihilate each other in a nuclear collision; second, that Japan was not a prime mover in the power complex, and that China could either win it or overcome it.

But by 1969 the trend in American-Soviet relations was toward a relaxation instead of a heightening of tensions, whereas the confrontation between China and the United States remained; meanwhile, the danger of a hard punitive strike by the Soviet Union against China appeared to be growing. In a meeting of the C.C.P. Politburo at Peking on May 18, according to a later (October 28) report by the *Tokyo Shimbun*, Lin Piao warned that "if natural disasters or war occur or Chairman Mao dies, there will be political crises and 700 million people might be thrown into confusion." One element of his warning was more pointed: "If a war breaks out, people will take the side of the counterrevolutionaries and may point their guns at us." That hypothetical eventuality would appear to have been Lin's chief concern.

The USSR had dealt Chinese military forces a sharp blow in the second of a pair of "incidents" that had occurred in March on the frozen Ussuri River, dividing Manchuria and the Soviet Far East, and border tensions had mounted in the months that followed. The Soviet deployment of heavy forces facing China, and the increasing severity of the Soviet military responses to Chinese provocations, viewed against the background of the Czechoslovak episode, could only have convinced Peking that the limits of safety had been reached, and that one of its basic premises was incorrect. The Sino-Soviet quarrel was *nominally* only between the two Communist parties; normal state-to-state relations, by official Peking acknowledgment, were in theory entirely feasible. In September, one month after another serious clash had occurred on the Sino-Soviet border in Central Asia, Premiers Alexei I. Kosygin and Chou En-lai met at the Peking airport for an hour-long exchange of views, and diplomatic negotiations regarding matters of common interest began in October. Border clashes ceased.

Mao Tse-tung's personal prestige was involved in the Sino-Soviet dispute; the campaign against Soviet "revisionism" was, after all, his own brainchild; the "contradiction" in the relationship continued. The ancient Chinese theoretician Sun Tzu, in discussing offensive strategy, held that "what is of supreme importance in war is to attack the enemy's strategy"; and "next best is to disrupt his alliances." Peking still damned both "U.S. imperialism" and "Soviet revisionist social imperialism" (as the alleged Soviet heterodoxy was designated after the Czechoslovak affair), and professed to see revolutionary promise on the horizon. The *People's Daily* and *Red Flag*, in a joint 1970 New Year's Day editorial, held that "The old world shakes under the tempest, volcanos erupt one after the other, and crowns fall one by one. One finds no longer a single 'peaceful oasis' on earth for imperialism." The editors held that "Soviet revisionist social imperialism can neither redress the debacle of the entire imperialist system nor save itself from the ruin. The pretended 'Brezhnev doctrine' is basically no more than a variant of dying neo-colonialism."

But Peking was at the same time, in line with its changed policy, presenting an amiable countenance toward almost everyone else. Its ambassadors resumed their posts, and the fence-mending process began. North Korea's relations with Peking had seriously deteriorated during the Cultural Revolution (GPCR); in early April, Premier Chou En-lai made a personal visit to Pyongyang, and the breach was healed.<sup>2</sup> At a banquet tendered the visitor on that occasion, Premier Chou and Premier Kim Il Sung pledged their unity, "sealed by blood," in the common struggle against the United States and Japan.<sup>3</sup>

Relations between Peking and Hanoi had shown signs of strain because of Chinese interference with Soviet arms shipments through China to North Vietnam, and because of Peking's displeasure at Hanoi's agreement in 1968 to engage in peace talks with the United States at Paris. Beginning in late 1969, however, Peking had started to depict Hanoi as an ideological comrade in arms,<sup>4</sup> and the American-South Vietnamese incursion into Cambodia at the end of April, 1970, drove the two Communist neighbors into a close embrace.

There was rapprochement with other than close neighbors. Yugoslavia, which recognized the Chinese Communist regime in October, 1949, had been viewed by the "orthodox" Peking leadership as so impossibly "revisionist" that there was no exchange of ambassadors until 1955—and then they were withdrawn in 1958. For a decade, Peking reviled Yugoslavia as a "running dog of imperialism." However, the Soviet incursion of August, 1968, into Czechoslovakia made a difference. In April, 1970, after twelve years of bitter dispute, China and Yugoslavia agreed

to once again exchange ambassadors.

In Burma, in the first eight months of 1969, the army had suffered 380 casualties fighting the White Flag Communists that Peking had proposed should overthrow the "fascist" Ne Win regime. But General Ne Win in November publicly acknowledged Burmese error with respect to the anti-Chinese riots of 1967 and indicated a readiness to resume relations with Peking. The process was slow, and was attended by the waging of successful Burmese military campaigns against the Communists and the Karen rebels in 1970, with the result that the rebels "were reduced from thousands operating efficiently under the direction of the clandestine Burmese Communist Party to hundreds hardly daring to come out of hiding in the jungle."<sup>5</sup> In October of that year, Rangoon named a new ambassador to Peking; and on August 8, 1971, General Ne Win arrived in Peking by the invitation of the Chinese government and was greeted by Premier Chou En-lai, who declared at a banquet given in honor of the distinguished visitor that Sino-Burmese relations had "returned to normal" over the course of the past two years.<sup>6</sup>

Nor were Peking's efforts limited to patching up old relationships. Prime Minister Trudeau's May, 1968, suggestion of Canada's readiness to establish diplomatic relations with China had been a straw in the wind. With Peking's return to the Bandung line in foreign policy, it won diplomatic recognition from fourteen other countries between October, 1970 (Canada) and October, 1971. This striking achievement within the confines of conventional diplomacy was in good measure responsible for Peking's victory of October, 1971, in the United Nations: In the voting on the Chinese representation issue, Peking was overwhelmingly accepted as the legitimate ruler of China, and the clients of Washington, the Nationalists, were forced to vacate the China seat.

Even before this, there had been a development which had led other countries, of East and West, and especially China's neighbors, to undertake reappraisals of their Asia policies. Introduced by the quaint and unforgettable Ping-Pong gambit in Peking's "people-to-people diplomacy," and by Washington's lifting of its twenty-one-year embargo on the China trade, President Nixon on July 15 had announced his forthcoming visit to Peking; a measure of détente was immediately introduced into what had previously been consistently viewed, in Washington's jargon, as an "adversary relationship." However, the détente was still strictly limited: the major issues dividing the two countries remained.

The Sino-American relationship, moreover, was not to be viewed as strictly bilateral: two other major powers were in the play—Japan and the USSR. An original aim of the 1950 Sino-Soviet alliance had been to pry Japan loose from the American embrace. The alliance was evidently viewed by Moscow, at

any rate, as being more political and economic than military. The relationship between the United States and Japan, in contrast, had, since 1951 in particular, been determined basically by the military provisions of the governing agreement and by the important trade between the two countries. Following the announcement of the Nixon Doctrine in the summer of 1969, the American-Japanese relationship had been given an even more martial interpretation. On the occasion of the visit of Premier Sato Eisaku to Washington in November, he and President Nixon issued a joint communiqué, proposing in essence that Japan would collaborate with the United States for the maintenance of peace and order in Asia.

Japan, already a major economic power, was rearming at an increasing pace. This was a matter of major concern to China, which had suffered devastating defeats at Japan's hands upon memorable occasions. The second of China's strategic premises had been proved wrong: Japan had taken on the character of a prime antagonist. Peking now included "Japanese militarism" together with "U.S. imperialism" and "Soviet revisionist social imperialism" in the "enemy" camp.

There was a vital weakness in the American-Japanese combine posed against China and the Soviet Union. For all of the treaty and communiqué, there was no evidence that the United States and Japan, victor and vanquished, had become close *political* allies, sympathetic to each other's purposes. It was suggestive of the American interpretation of the spirit of the relationship that Washington made its July *démarche* toward Peking without prior consultation with Tokyo and then, just a month later, again without advance notice, took strong action in the foreign-trade field that adversely affected Japan's position. These moves were made in circumstances where, (1) while the United States had still been asserting regularly that it would in all circumstances respect its alliance with the Nationalists on Formosa, strong political forces in Japan were pressing for a basic reorientation of the country's China/Formosa policy; and (2) Japan enjoyed certain alternate opportunities for economic endeavor, with respect to both the China trade and the expansion of economic ties with the Soviet Union. Insofar as Washington alienated Japan, it was contributing to the achievement of the Sino-Soviet alliance's prime aim.

Tokyo was in fact now looking with enhanced interest on Soviet proposals for enlisting Japanese capital and industrial power for the development of Siberia. In September, 1971, a Tokyo periodical reported that Japanese economic ties with the USSR were expanding, with the joint activities centered on the natural resources and economic development of Siberia and Sakhalin. The article disclosed the urge underlying this development: "The reason behind Japan's eagerness for rapid expansion of economic interchanges with the Soviet Union is the fact that

Japan must secure stable supplies of natural resources for further growth of the Japanese economy." And it was stated that Japanese financial leaders expected "an almost unlimited expansion of economic cooperation between the two countries, depending on the attitude of the Soviet side."<sup>7</sup> On September 22, at Tokyo, the two sides signed an agreement projecting a two-way trade of \$5.2 billion in the five-year period 1971-75—up from a trade that in 1958 had amounted to \$40 million.

Japan's power position has a direct relevance to both the Sino-Soviet and the Sino-American relationships. One of Mao Tse-tung's oft-cited axioms has it that men, not weapons, are decisive in war; as regards any military confrontation, China is professedly prepared to wage and win a "people's war," in which it would rely chiefly on the hundreds of millions in its human "masses"—hence the militia. Japan, on the other hand, is now engaged in constructing a *quality* military establishment, suitable for waging a highly mechanized war. Peking's apprehensions, as expressed with increasing frequency during 1971, would seem to indicate that it is not assured in its own mind that simple reliance on "the masses" would achieve victory in a war with the country it terms "militarist" and the "running dog of American imperialism." In the evolving Sino-American relationship, therefore, Peking has prominent in the back of its mind the Soviet Union—and Japan.

**B**oth ideological and political factors come into the Sino-American picture. Peking ideologically views "U.S. imperialism" as the foremost enemy of world socialism; although there might be dealings with the enemy for tactical reasons (as the C.C.P. collaborated upon occasion with the Nationalists), there can in theory be no ultimate reconciliation. If Peking now professes that friendship exists between the Chinese and American *peoples*, there is no profession that such sentiment exists between the Chinese and American *states*; here the Chinese antagonism remains.

Nor has Washington as yet proceeded any great distance along the way toward satisfaction of Peking's fundamental desires. The major factor in the Sino-American relationship is the United States strategy of containing China by a ring of political alliances and American-manned military bases, with Formosa constituting an important link in its "West Pacific island defense chain."

The Chinese position with respect to the matter has been reiterated time and again by Premier Chou-En-lai and Foreign Minister Ch'en, and is crystal-clear: Formosa is an integral part of China, and the United States should cease its interference in Chinese internal affairs and withdraw its political and military support from the Nationalists. President Nixon and other American official representatives have been as categorical in their assertions that the United States

will stand by its treaty commitments to the Nationalists. Since the end of World War II, the United States has given \$2.7 billion in *military* aid alone to the Nationalists, and as late as 1969 turned over to them, gratis, \$157 million in "surplus" military material, including supersonic fighter planes and destroyers.<sup>8</sup> The American "commitment" to the Nationalist faction on Formosa is solidly imbedded in Washington's Asia policy.

Peking challenges the United States not only on the Formosan issue but on the American Asia policy as a whole. In August, 1971, in an interview with a Yugoslav newsman, Premier Chou En-lai stated that U.S. withdrawal of its armed forces from Indochina was of first priority: it took precedence, in fact, over the Taiwan issue.<sup>9</sup> Chou En-lai also voiced the demand that the United States withdraw its troops from South Korea, Japan, the Philippines, Thailand, and Taiwan and the Formosa Strait. And Chief of General Staff Huang Yung-sheng, speaking about the same time, extended the demand to cover withdrawals as well from "all other countries and regions which it has occupied," and demanded that the United States "stop its interference in the internal affairs of the peoples of the Middle East and the Arab people as well as the peoples of Asia, Africa and Latin America."<sup>10</sup>

Peking doubtless views the Indochina war as a manifestation of Washington's determination to contain China and to suppress Asian revolutionary movements. The Nixon Doctrine, and the Nixon-Sato communiqué, could well be taken as evidence that this is still the strategy, that only tactics have changed. Certain official American statements would lend support to that interpretation. Defense Secretary Laird, speaking in mid-1971, stated that U.S. *security* forces would remain behind in South Vietnam after the projected withdrawal of the main U.S. *ground* forces; the United States, he said, had to take into consideration the "strategic realities" of the USSR—and of China.

In Southeast Asia, the United States is in the position depicted in the Chinese proverb: "Riding a tiger, it is difficult to dismount." With the overthrow of the Sihanouk government of Cambodia by a right-wing coup in March, 1970, the revolutionary forces of the three Indochina countries organized a united front under the auspices of Peking; with the invasion of Cambodia by a joint South Vietnamese-U.S. force at the end of April, the Chinese went on to bring North Korea into support. The revolutionary purpose was only strengthened by the American-supported South Vietnamese intrusion into Laos in February, 1971, for this was the conclusive bit of evidence that the United States proposed to create a solid anti-Communist zone comprising South Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia and Thailand, counterpoised against the Communist position on the north. The revolutionary front, including the two supporting allies, now con-

fronts the encircling United States positions from Southeast Asia to Northeast Asia. But there is a notable feature in the situation: Whereas the various revolutionary segments are joined in one united front, there is no similar union of the counterrevolutionary sectors; it is only the United States that provides some relationship between the several parts.

An article published in *Red Flag* in September, 1971, was suggestive of Peking's strategy. The present world situation, it held, was characterized by four contradictions: between the oppressed nations and imperialism and social imperialism; between proletariat and bourgeoisie in the capitalist and revisionist countries; between imperialist countries and the USSR; and, finally, between socialist countries and imperialism and social imperialism. Said the journal: "The points of view according to which all enemies are identical are not in conformity with reality. . . . Our proletariat and our political party must know how to analyse the evolution of the class struggle inside as well as outside the country and to seize the occasion in order to profit from all these quarrels, openings and contradictions in order to utilize them against our principal enemy of the moment."

China was thus seen aligned with the Third (revolutionary) World, and would stand against the other three great powers present in Asia; however, in line with the Leninist revolutionary tactic of uniting with the secondary enemy to attack the primary enemy, it proposed to exploit "contradictions" between those several powers against its "principal enemy of the moment." Peking, charging "collusion" between the United States and the Soviet Union, and actual "conspiracy" between the United States and Japan, is found prepared to show a certain accommodation on its own part—if "collusion" might promise to serve China's aims with respect to the designated prime enemy. That the "imperial" will sometimes prevail over the "revolutionary" element in China's foreign policy was incontrovertibly established by Peking's support in December, 1971, of the autocratic, militarist West Pakistan regime against the Bangla Desh revolutionaries of East Pakistan.

A labelling of any country as China's "principal enemy" in a distant future would be a fruitless exercise, since not even Peking is prepared to do that, but an analysis of the near-future probabilities is reasonably feasible. There are two fundamental weaknesses in China's grand strategy of aligning itself with the world "proletariat" against the United States, the Soviet Union, and Japan at one and the same time: (1) China cannot draw upon the impoverished of the world to make itself strong, but only upon industrialized states—all of which have close relations with the three great powers viewed by China as "enemies"; (2) one of its critical premises respecting the future position of the U.S. in Asia may prove to be wrong.

Insofar as Peking would employ the Bandung concept of "economic cooperation" for the double purpose of building up its strength at home and extending its influence abroad, it operates at a disadvantage. China's trade-and-aid capacity is only that of a second-rate power. In 1966, the year the GPCR began, its two-way foreign trade was valued at \$4,205 billion, the highest total since the record year 1959. After slumping during the GPCR, foreign trade picked up in 1969, and in 1970 it again reached the level of about \$4.2 billion. The low level of economic exchanges reflected the backward state of China's industrial sector. The significance of this is clear: China cannot for the time being undertake large-scale purchases in the world market for the desired rapid industrial development—unless it can enter upon such close relations with certain industrialized countries as to obtain large long-term credits.

Here a comparison is illuminating. The USSR in 1968 had a foreign-trade turnover of \$16,272 billion—four times as big as China's trade. In 1971, while its exchanges with Japan were growing, it was also engaged in exploiting its "opening to the West" by building up its trade relations with West Germany. In October, France and the Soviet Union signed a ten-year economic agreement that the two sides hoped would double their trade over the next five years. Trade with the United States had been limited, over the postwar decades, to less than \$200 million per annum; beginning in the summer of 1971, however, Washington began to relax the rigid position which had for the most part kept the Soviet Union from purchasing American goods it might desire and, after Secretary of Commerce Maurice H. Stans made an official visit to Moscow in November, talk began that American-Soviet trade might reach \$5 billion by 1975.

The USSR is basing its strategy toward Third World countries on the premise that trade-and-aid programs can be made to influence political developments in the course of those countries' transition from their present condition to the stage of socialism. Since the industrialized USSR bids fair to strengthen its economic sinews more rapidly than, by present policies, does China, the latter stands to lose out in the competition between the two, and in competition with Japan and the United States as well—if Moscow is right in its estimate of the world political situation and Peking is wrong.

Peking's return to the Bandung line in its foreign policy suggests that it may be ready to approach the issue in a "pragmatic" way. The afore-quoted *Red Flag* article of October, 1969, stated that China's adherence to a policy of self-reliance did not mean that it had stopped learning from other countries: it should study the experiences, good and bad, of others. And the inference was permitted that, within the framework of that policy, foreign aid was acceptable—if based upon respect for

the recipient country's "national sovereignty and independence."

Critical to Peking's weighting of the time element in the formulation of its strategy is the question of whether it may have miscalculated American strategic intent (or capacity). Edgar Snow, after a six-month visit to China in 1970-71, reported that he was informed "enigmatically" by a senior Chinese diplomat that "Nixon is getting out of Vietnam."<sup>11</sup> This Chinese belief may derive in part from President Nixon's statement of 1969 to General De Gaulle that he planned to end the American involvement in Vietnam and gradually to regularize relations with China, which information De Gaulle conveyed to the Chinese.<sup>12</sup> But there is also the more profound article of Maoist faith that the people of the United States will force their government to change its strategy in any event, and that the rising tide of world revolution is visibly moving toward the destruction of imperialism. Both assumptions may be disproved; and for so long as the United States continues to mount a strategy of "containing" China, it will logically remain that country's "principal enemy of the moment."

In the longer term, some of Mao's apocalyptic expectations may indeed be realized; but in the intermediate range, the assumption that world war, or world revolution, will intervene to further the accomplishment of particular Chinese foreign-policy goals will probably be disappointed. In that case, Peking before long may confront a situation where, in the national interest, it would be caused to seek a substantially larger measure of accommodation with either "imperialists," "social imperialists," or "militarists"—or perhaps all three of them. The pragmatists' return to power after the end of the GPCR

suggests that this will in fact be the trend. The rest of the world has already accommodated itself to China; China's rulers are beginning to accommodate to the realities of the complex world of which that nation, for the first time in its long history, now finds itself an integral part.

1. *Keesings Contemporary Archives*, p. 22887.
2. For the process see Tillman Durdin, *New York Times* (March 4, April 5, 1970), and Takashi Oka, *New York Times* (April 8, 1970).
3. *Le Monde* (April 7, 1970).
4. Charles Mohr, *New York Times* (December 28, 1969); for earlier signs of warning see Tillman Durdin, *New York Times* (September 29, 1969).
5. Henry Kamm, *New York Times* (August 31, 1970).
6. *Le Monde* (August 8-9, 1971).
7. "Japan-USSR Economic Ties Expanding; Financial Circles Seek Interchanges," *The Japan Economic Review* (September 15, 1971), p. 11.
8. John Finney, *New York Times* (March 29, 1970).
9. *New York Times* (October 21, 1971). See also Chou, to the same effect, when talking to a group of visiting American graduate students, *New York Times* (July 21, 1971).
10. James Reston, *New York Times* (August 2, 1971).
11. Edgar Snow, "A Conversation With Mao-Tse-tung," *Life* (April 30, 1971), pp. 46-48.
12. Ross Terrill, "The 800,000,000," *The Atlantic*, (Part III, January, 1972), p. 43; for Chou En-lai's observations to this point see his interview with writer Neville Maxwell, "Midnight Thoughts of Premier Chou," *Sunday Times* of London (December 5, 1971).