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The Failure of Maoist Ideology in Foreign Policy

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THE FAILURE OF MAOIST IDEOLOGY IN FOREIGN POLICY

MEMORANDUM FOR RECIPIENTS

This study examines the causes and course of the fairly dismal attempt of China, during the height of its Cultural Revolution, to export Maoist radicalism abroad. The study concludes that this advance found its source in domestic conflict, its retreat in foreign affairs concerns -- especially the rising Soviet threat. The study also finds that radical Maoism has won its greatest support not, as anticipated by Peking, as a guide to the practical problems of various underdeveloped societies, but as simply one article of mystical faith among certain revolutionary extremists in the world's advanced industrial states.

The study has met general agreement among China specialists within the Directorate of Intelligence. The study's author is Mr. Philip L. Bridgham of this Staff.

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Summary

If Maoist ideology is defined loosely as a body of ideas derived from Marxist-Leninist doctrines and shaped by half a century's experience of the Chinese Communist revolution, it is the international impact of the more extreme version of Maoism which culminated in the Cultural Revolution with which this paper is primarily concerned. Although the international impact of this appeal to continue the revolution both at home and abroad provides the central theme, this paper also discusses the reciprocal impact of developments abroad upon Maoist ideology.

It is a thesis of this paper that the more extreme Maoism which began to appear in the fall of 1962 was intended primarily to justify and legitimize Mao's rule in the face of domestic opposition within China. But while this particular variant of Mao's ideology and the claims made for it as the acme of Marxism-Leninism in the present era may have performed a positive function in enhancing the authority of Mao within China, the increasingly radical character of this ideology and its claims resulted externally in (1) affronting foreign Communist Parties intent upon following their own "national roads" to socialism; (2) alarming national bourgeois governments of Asia, Africa and Latin America; and (3) reducing China's international prestige to its lowest point in two decades.

The strategy employed in the first stage of this swing to the Left (1963-1964) was, in retrospect, relatively flexible and pragmatic. Mao's revolutionary doctrines appealed, moreover, to the leadership of a number of Communist Parties who, viewing the Soviet emphasis on "peaceful coexistence" as harmful to their own revolutionary interests, were attracted by the anti-colonial, anti-imperialist and anti-American core of Maoist strategy.

Mao's decision in the winter of 1964-1965 to intensify the struggle against Khrushchev's successors, however, had profound consequences. It dictated the adamant refusal to join the Soviet Union in any form of "united action" in aid of North Vietnam, a refusal justified by the unconvincing and paradoxical argument that in order to oppose successfully "United States imperialism," it was first necessary to oppose "modern revisionism." Reflecting an unrealistic and distorted view of the outside world, this was a policy of opposing simultaneously and with equally acute antagonism both the United States and the Soviet Union, a policy so extreme that within a matter of months China's only ally in what Peking described as "the broadest possible united front" was mighty Albania.

If the primary purpose of the Cultural Revolution (formally initiated in May of 1966) was to restore Mao's political and ideological authority within China, an important means to this end was a concerted effort to demonstrate that Mao's thought, as the highest form of contemporary Marxism-Leninism, was held in high esteem throughout the rest of the world. This undertaking to transform the Cultural Revolution into "a revolution of an international order" embroiled China in controversy with nearly every important government in the world. Within two years time, the extremism, violence and utopianism of the Cultural Revolution left China almost completely isolated, dependent for visible signs of support from the outside world on Albania, an

ill-assorted group of "Marxist-Leninist" splinter parties, and student revolutionaries of the New Left.

The issue of the exportability of Mao's thought lay at the very heart of the struggle between the "revolutionary Left" and the professional diplomats within the Foreign Ministry throughout the Cultural Revolution. With the Left firmly in command, China's foreign relations in the spring and summer of 1967 were characterized by a series of developments repeated with little variation in a number of countries: the transformation of the Embassy and New China News Agency into centers for the propagation of Mao's thought, and the distribution of badges and other symbols of Mao's personality cult; an ensuing clash when local government authorities moved to curtail or prohibit these practices; various forms of retaliation by Peking ranging from sponsorship of Communist armed revolt (as in Burma) to, more commonly, Red Guard harassment of, and physical attacks against, the embassies and diplomats of the offending governments; and, in some cases, suspension of diplomatic relations. Reflecting the claim of universal validity for Mao's thought, this missionary effort encompassed hostile, neutral and friendly countries alike, the latter exemplified by North Korea and North Vietnam, both of which protested in Party publications against this attempt to impose Maoist ideology on their own national movements.

One of the many ironies of the Cultural Revolution is that the effort to propagate Mao's thought and thus promote revolution abroad should have its greatest impact not in the countries of the Third World (developing the national liberation movement), nor in the countries of the socialist camp (strengthening the "Marxist-Leninist" forces) as predicted, but rather in many advanced industrialized countries of the world where the Chinese Communists had seen little or no chance for revolutionary uprisings. Attracted by the elements of

utopianism, anarchism and student elitism in Mao's Cultural Revolution, the rebellious students of the New Left in France and Japan who rose up to seize control over their university campuses as a first step toward "revolutionizing" society were protesting what they considered to be serious defects in the organization and functioning of their highly complex societies.

It is easy to exaggerate the influence of Maoist ideology on the student revolutionaries of the New Left. In searching examinations of the intellectual roots of the New Left, Richard Lowenthal and other knowledgeable observers have traced the principal characteristics of this new type of revolutionary movement (a faith in utopia and a cult of violent action) as much to the writings of Che Guevara and Regis Debray (the theorists of "Castroism"), and of Herbert Marcuse (the American ideological critic), as to those of Mao Tse-tung.

If the turn to the Left in Maoist ideology which began in 1962 was basically a response to domestic political pressures, the turn to the Right which began hesitantly in the fall of 1967 and has proceeded through several fairly well-defined stages up to the present appears to have been stimulated to a significant extent by external pressures, specifically the growing military threat to China posed by the Soviet Union. The realization that, as a result of the provocative and self-defeating foreign policy of the Cultural Revolution, China stood isolated in the face of a major threat to its national security has had a particularly sobering effect on the Chinese leadership.

The emergence in Peking of a "nationalist model" approach to foreign policy in the past two years constitutes a sharp turn away from the "revolutionary model" which had dominated China's

foreign relations during the Cultural Revolution. Instead of a policy proclaiming the need to promote revolution abroad in imitation of the Chinese model of armed struggle, Peking now poses as the champion of national sovereignty. Instead of a policy directed at a largely fictitious constituency of "revolutionary Leftists" throughout the world committed to the Maoist goal of violent revolution, Peking has now reverted to the pre-Cultural Revolution Maoist concept of developing a broad international united front composed of governments and peoples against what it likes to call the "superpower hegemony" of the United States and the Soviet Union. Instead of a policy relying heavily on ideology (the export of Mao's thought) to promote China's revolutionary objectives, Peking now relies on the more conventional weapons of great-power diplomacy, including such material incentives as economic aid and trade, to project its influence abroad.

The shift to the Right in domestic and foreign policy had become so pronounced by the fall of 1970 that it was necessary to explain to both domestic and foreign audiences why this shift had taken place. In time-honored fashion, it was decided, apparently at the Second Plenum of the new Central Committee held in late August and early September, to explain the excesses and violence and attendant policy failures of the Cultural Revolution as the work of an "ultra-Leftist group" headed by the leading Chinese Communist ideologue and longtime confidant of Mao, Chen Po-ta.

It was symbolic that Chen Po-ta (the ideologue exemplifying the forces of the "revolutionary Left") was now replaced by Chou En-lai (regarded as the foremost exponent of pragmatism and moderation within the top Chinese leadership). It was also indicative of the extent to which Maoist

ideology, having veered sharply to the Left during the Cultural Revolution in an attempt to revolutionize Chinese society and in time the world, has once again (as it had a decade earlier) been forced to swing back sharply to the Right in adjusting to reality.

The basic cause for the failure of the Leftist ideological offensive which Mao had initiated in 1962 was the complexity and intractability of the real world. Although all the returns are not yet in, the end result of Mao's attempt to revolutionize his own society by intimidation and coercion appears to be, as one observer has put it, a "utopia... run by the army." Although again all the returns are not yet in, the end result of the concurrent attempt during the Cultural Revolution to revolutionize the world appears to be that the outside world, by exerting a moderating influence on that ideology, has triumphed over the utopian version of Maoism.

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Introduction

Actually the situation within the socialist camp is quite simple. The sole question is one of class struggle -- a question of struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, a question of struggle between Marxism-Leninism and anti-Marxism-Leninism, a question of struggle between Marxism-Leninism and revisionism.
-- Mao Tse-tung, Speech at Central Committee Plenum, 24 September 1962.

The question of class struggle in [China] is [also] a question of struggle between Marxism and revisionism... It seems that it is better to rename Right opportunism as revisionism in China.
-- Mao Tse-tung, Speech at Central Committee Plenum, 24 September 1962.

If Maoist ideology is defined loosely as a body of ideas derived from Marxist-Leninist doctrines and shaped by half a century's experience of the Chinese Communist revolution, it is the international impact of