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# The Influence of China's Domestic Policy on Its Foreign Policy

LEV DELIUSIN

In 1956 a Chinese physicist working in the Joint Institute for Nuclear Research in Dubna told me, "One can split an atom, but nobody can split our friendship." These words expressed the firm belief in the viability of the Soviet-Chinese union that was typical of the period. Of course, even then there were some frictions in the many-sided relations between the two countries; but on the whole the future, as well as the forward movement of the Soviet and the Chinese people along the common road of socialism, seemed clear and bright. Much was said and written in China about the necessity to study and adopt the Soviet experience, and in the Soviet Union many spoke and wrote about the peculiarities of building a new life in China; moreover, they noted that the aims and tasks of the Communist parties leading both countries had much in common and there were no principal differences between them.

When relations between the two "fraternal" parties and countries became cool at the end of the 1950s and the beginning of the 1960s, and no attempts to stop this process of estrangement could restore friendship and collaboration, a search naturally began for the reasons for such a dramatic change in the development of Soviet-Chinese relations. The Soviet and Chinese press resorted to polemics — first gradually and later more and more openly, even vehemently — about the difference in opinions of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) on the character of the current epoch, whether the nature of imperialism had changed, and the main moving force of the world revolutionary process. The questions were whether relations between socialist and capitalist countries could be built on the principles of peaceful coexistence and how profitable world socialism's struggle to eliminate wars would be. Now an examination of Chinese and Soviet newspapers and magazines that discussed the problem indicates how much effort was wasted on this fierce ideological fight, which did not seem to have anything to do with the difficult eco-

facing. China tried to "attain communism ahead of time" with the establishment of the people's communes in the country and the Great Leap Forward. The propaganda of the accelerated transition to the reign of communism was followed by criticism of the Soviet Union, which was marking time at the socialist stage, as Mao Zedong thought. At the Special Twenty-first Party Congress, Nikita S. Khrushchev called for the acceleration of Communist construction in the Soviet Union, though there were no conditions for this acceleration. Later in a talk with the leader of one of the Communist parties in Asia, he acknowledged that in fact there were no important differences between the Soviet and Chinese Communists in their views on international affairs, and the problem in question was about the people's communes, i.e., the ways and methods of building Communist society. And later Mao Zedong himself suggested that the CPSU leaders should have abandoned the decisions of the Twentieth and the Twenty-second Party Congresses as a preliminary condition for the restoration of friendly relations between the Soviet Union and China.

While the polemics between the CPSU and the CCP were deepening and widening, it became clear that these disagreements on domestic policy and ideological problems were leading to the termination of the friendly union between the USSR and China. That does not mean that differences in their estimation of the international situation and different approaches to the principles of relations with capitalist countries were of no importance. Disagreements in foreign-policy problems did play a rather important role but were not the main factors in the dramatic events of those years. The decisive, determinative factor was a different approach to the methods of socialist construction.

The CCP leaders blamed Khrushchev for revising the principles of Marxism-Leninism, for digressing from the dictatorship of the proletariat and the principle of class struggle, and for paying too much attention to economics and not enough to politics. According to the Chinese leaders, these steps meant the backsliding of the Soviet Union into capitalism, turning socialism into a kind of bourgeois socialism and Soviet society into a society of bourgeois philistines.

According to the Chinese protectors of Marxism, Khrushchev's revisionist policy perfectly met the requirements of world imperialism, conducting a policy of "peaceful evolution" toward the Soviet Union and other socialist countries. The Chinese leadership reacted with great hostility to the exposure of Joseph Stalin's personality cult that began at the Twentieth Party Congress and continued to the Twenty-second Party Congress. Mao Zedong and his comrades-in-arms called Stalin a great Marxist-Leninist. Defending the Stalin personality cult, Mao protected his own prestige that had been shaken by the failure of the Great Leap Forward and of the people's communes. It was then that Mao insisted on strengthening the class struggle in China and the world. He frankly confessed his interest in the support and aggravation of international tension, in "great disorder" in Asia as well as in Europe, because it created the possibility to unite all the social strata of China and to mobilize the nation. That is why tension has many advantages for China, although the West gains nothing by it. Thus Mao Zedong

and other Chinese authorities looked at the struggle against détente and the release of international tension in the light of their domestic policy.

Mao Zedong's outlook on détente was traditional. Ancient Chinese thinkers suggested that the presence of an external danger, an enemy, or a disturbance helped to unite the people and to strengthen state power. Mao also repeatedly announced his desire to arrange constant "earthquakes" outside China; he was sure that tension and a war threat favored successive mobilization of the people for the fulfillment of his Great Leap Forward. People intimidated with a war threat were easily disciplined and could be made to obey. For this purpose, the propaganda of "the threat from the North" was also used during the years of the Cultural Revolution. A crisis atmosphere was caused, first of all, by domestic-policy factors. Before the break with the Soviet Union, propaganda declared the United States to be a permanent enemy that was planning aggression against China. Later, "American imperialism" was replaced by Soviet "social imperialism." Official propaganda on the inevitability of World War III was successfully inculcated into the minds of the Chinese people over many years and helped to support the inner social tension.

One needs to turn to the policy of the past, not to throw another stone at Mao Zedong but to understand and estimate its true worth and the cardinal changes in the relations between domestic-policy factors and Chinese foreign policy after Mao's death, especially after the Third Plenum of the Central Committee of the CCP in December 1978. China's views on the character of the modern international situation and its policy toward the Soviet Union were changing step by step. China's leaders realized rather quickly that it was necessary to give up Mao's social, political, and economic aims, because his policy brought China to the brink of economic disaster. Fatal consequences of his foreign policy and economic ties were not realized immediately. Normalization of United States relations that had begun under Mao was an important step toward changing the foreign policy, but its ideological basis was to use the United States in the struggle against the Soviet Union and consequently to maintain military-political tension in the world arena. The Chinese leaders modified Mao's theory about the three worlds, trying to use it for propaganda in the idea of founding a united front against Soviet "social imperialism," or "hegemonism." China gave up the opportunity to normalize relations with the Soviet Union and to resume political and economic cooperation. As a rule, the Soviet government's attempts to enter negotiations were unsuccessful. The Chinese propaganda continued to blame the Soviet Union for attempts to institute hegemony all over the world and predicted an inevitable war with the United States.

It is necessary to say that the Soviet Union's attitude toward the changes in China was not unbiased. From time to time the CPSU leaders made statements considering China as a socialist country, but the mass media continued to spread the idea that Mao's direction in China still existed or even intensified after his death. The Soviet press widely used the expression "Maoism without Mao." Those in the top echelons of the country, who could make decisions and who expressed

the official position, wrote that the possibility of dismantling Maoism was nothing but an invention of bourgeois propaganda. Some Soviet authors overlooked the fact that the process of de-Maoization had begun in China and reproached the new Chinese leadership for its right-wing opportunism based on Mao Zedong's ideas. According to these authors, the new economic policy was to intensify the war economy potential; it was the way of achieving hegemonic aims. Such writers did not notice any positive changes in either China's domestic or foreign policy. For example, the open-door policy enunciated by the new Chinese leadership was classified as a slogan meeting the interests of world imperialism, because it allegedly prepared conditions for the establishment of imperialist control over the national economy and for spreading imperialist influence into the social and political life of China. In contrast to the past, when Chinese propaganda blamed the Soviet Union for collusion with American imperialism, China itself began to be blamed for it, because China was allegedly cooperating with the United States with the aim of establishing Chinese hegemony over the world.

This striving for an evil interpretation of every domestic or foreign policy in China was followed by a mistaken opinion about the social and economic importance of the changes that were begun at the Third Plenum of the Central Committee of the CPC. In turn, this prevented the Soviet Union from working out new approaches to the Chinese problem and to normalizing relations with China. The argument that China might turn to capitalist development served to ground theoretically and to corroborate the widespread Soviet view that it was impossible to bridge the gap between the two countries; this split was allegedly permanent. One becomes accustomed to a quarrel as well as to a friendship — one can even make a profit out of it — and therefore some people were not interested in resolving differences but in rousing them to new heights.

To be just, some Soviet and Chinese authorities stood against normalization and improvement of Soviet-Chinese relations. Nevertheless, the direction of Chinese domestic policy was revised, and this promoted the formation of new opinions about China's role in the world and in the system of international relations. To state briefly the main idea and importance of the new policy rightly connected with Deng Xiaoping, one must note that it is based on realism, on a more or less objective approach to the events taking place within the country and abroad, and on a realistic estimation of the potentialities of the Chinese society. Of course this realistic approach cannot be seen always and everywhere; it is nevertheless a typical feature of Chinese domestic and foreign policy.

Because of the decisions of the Third Plenum of the Central Committee of the CPC, the Chinese people managed to turn sharply from their move toward an economic, social, and political disaster that could have resulted from the policies of the 1960s and early 1970s conducted by the former leftist leaders of the party and of the country. The Third Plenum (for all its compromises made toward the old directions) decided to depart from the ideology of the Cultural Revolution and its political slogans. It may be said that the Third Plenum ended the utopian approach to the problems of socialist construction in China and started the search

for some realistic ways and methods for the social and economic development of the country.

The troubles and mishaps in Chinese society, which was subjected to the tragedy of the Cultural Revolution and earlier the Great Leap Forward and the establishment of the people's communes, arose from erroneous views on the ideals and nature of socialism and on the methods of its construction. Since they were far from the reality of the Chinese society, those mistakes were reactionary. As a result, though slogans about the best type of democracy were proclaimed, a feudal-fascist regime was being established. The "class struggle" was declared a panacea that could settle any social, political, and economic problem; but it turned out to be only self-torture, a kind of persecution of those who had an honest, unbiased attitude toward the country's situation even at the time of the personality cult. The great achievement of the Third Plenum of the CPC Central Committee was to call for a realistic approach to the problems of Chinese development and for the search for rational, effective methods to solve these problems.

For all Chinese Communists and for the people of China, the decisions made in December 1978 meant the transference of the aims of their efforts to economic construction and the modernization of the whole national economy. It was announced at the Third Plenum that the mass political campaigns that had been conducted under the slogans of class struggle should end. Stability and order were named the indispensable conditions of the forward movement of China toward socialism. In the economic sphere the necessity of developing the market and different forms of property and of permitting free, individual, and private enterprise was confirmed. In the political sphere the necessity of stopping the excessive concentration of power by conducting a radical reorganization of the political and administrative framework was stressed.

The economic and political reforms in China are being realized in an atmosphere of political and ideological struggle. The reforms are being attacked from the left and the right. Despite skidding and being sometimes too slow, the changes have already resulted in the transformation of the activity and conscience of millions of Chinese, and thus reforms can be considered irreversible.

How did all these changes in China's life influence the foreign-policy conceptions of its leaders and its concrete foreign actions? How did they influence the improvement of relations between China and the Soviet Union?

The philosophy of struggle and violence that had been widely propagandized during the years of the Cultural Revolution and which characterized both Chinese domestic and foreign policy has changed into a philosophy of peace and development. This fact had to be followed by a new way of solving domestic social and political problems and a new attitude toward international events. Encouraging class struggle had been based on Mao's idea of the advantages gained by supporting and strengthening international tension and on his principle that strengthened order and stability at home is incompatible with the policy of aggravating the international situation.

The global situation was no longer depicted in black and white.

seen as multicolored. In the past, international relations seemed to be clear and simple; they were characterized by the antagonism of the two different social systems, and the countries outside a socialist or a capitalist association were classified as intermediate forces and in turn were divided into "friendly" ones and "strangers." In all the structures and organizations of social and economic life within the country, the uniformity was widespread, and it was becoming the aim in the international arena as well. The mass media stressed that it was the Chinese policy (as it had been the Soviet policy) that expressed the interests of mankind, whose bright future would be ensured only when the bulwarks of imperialism and hegemonism were combatted. According to this theory, the struggle between the United States and the Soviet Union was considered advantageous for China and consequently for the whole world.

A new domestic policy aimed at the variety of forms of social and economic life was being developed parallel to the formation of a new conception of the international situation, which became characterized as multipolar. Not two but many forces were of importance; in some cases, their interests were different, and in others they were the same. According to the new approach, the contradictions between countries with different social systems can and should be settled peacefully. Nothing will be gained, even by those who are not directly involved in the conflicts, by aggravating the international situation or by using military means to settle disputes.

China now understood that armed conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union, which the former leaders had hoped for, promised nothing good. The authorities were interested in the support of peace at home and abroad, and that made them question the necessity to keep their own country in constant fear of World War III.

The argument that war is inevitable was removed from Chinese propaganda. At the same time, China gave up the slogan of "world revolution," though for a long period its realization had been one of the main tasks of the Chinese leadership's foreign policy inherited from Stalin. In the past, any call to struggle for peace was declared false and deceptive for the people, the majority of whom, according to Mao Zedong, supported the revolution. But now the Chinese leaders stressed their vital interest in safeguarding and strengthening global peace, in preventing a thermonuclear catastrophe, and in achieving universal disarmament as a way to maintain peace and stability. The thesis of class struggle in the country and abroad as the preferable way to solve all kinds of problems has been removed from the propaganda vocabulary. At present, the idea of peace and development as the main aims of the Chinese people is promoted everywhere.

It may be too early to speak of the absolute deideologizing of China's foreign policy, but it can be said that this process has already begun. Of major importance now are China's economic needs and the political changes that will ensure order and security in the world, overcome the backwardness of the country, and fulfill its plans for modernization.

The necessity to create favorable external conditions in order to realize its

program of economic growth made the Chinese leadership change its view of Soviet-American relations. In the past it was thought that China would gain nothing at all by the normalization of these relations and China should therefore favor the cold war. Today, China welcomes actions aimed at the establishment of mutual understanding and agreement between the USSR and the United States, since it is confident that such actions further its domestic and foreign-policy interests.

Social and economic reforms in China, ignoring the leftist ideas about the form and methods of socialist construction, have also created certain prerequisites for normalizing Soviet-Chinese relations. Normalization was greatly promoted by the new political thinking developed by the Soviet leadership. The idea of a permanent enemy that had been typical of some Soviet political leaders could no longer be accepted. The Soviet Union's practice of adopting some concrete policies because China was the primary enemy had no basis, either.

Reforms in China and perestroika in the Soviet Union laid the foundation for improving Soviet-Chinese relations, without the help of ping-pong players. In contrast to the United States, the Soviet Union and China – even during the most critical periods of their hostility and debates that sometimes developed into an exchange of fire – maintained diplomatic relations, and negotiations on some problems of mutual interest continued to be held. Formally, these persistent contacts made the problem of resuming the principal dialogue between the two countries easier, helping to overcome the “three obstacles” that Deng Xiaoping and other Chinese leaders identified, partly as a means to postpone the beginning of negotiations at a high level.

Many China specialists in other countries did not think that it was possible to overcome the Soviet-Chinese antagonism and were afraid of a full restoration of the relations that had existed in the 1950s. Others thought that even if the two neighbors became friends for a time, the relationship would prove to be unstable and would not lead to any radical changes. Besides, great concern was expressed about the effect that such a rapprochement would have on China's and the Soviet Union's relations with their partners in the world.

But the restoration of good-neighbor relations between the Soviet Union and China proceeded in circumstances unlike those that existed in the 1950s. The world had changed, as had the people in power in both countries. They had different outlooks on life and different aims. The slogans on the necessity of unity to repel imperialist aggression were forgotten, the calls for helping national liberation movements in Third World countries grew weaker, and the movements themselves gradually came to naught. American and other imperialists who were scornfully called “paper tigers” in China are now treated with respect as the owners of the scientific and technical means that can help China to overcome its backwardness. The common enemy has turned into a common helper in the cause of the modernization and renewal of both countries.

During Mikhail S. Gorbachev's visit to China in 1989, fruitful talks took place. These talks were not about the restoration of allied relations in the military or



political sphere but about a new type of thinking—of cooperation, first of all, in the economic and cultural spheres. Revolutionary romanticism, which in the past was combined with political ignorance and resulted in the restriction of relations between the two countries, was replaced by sensible views, by an understanding of mutual interests in economic cooperation, by a striving for the development of commercial and economic relations, and by scientific and cultural exchanges—in spite of a difference of opinion on ideological questions and foreign policy issues. Such disagreements do exist, and leaders of both countries realize it. But today they do not strain Soviet-Chinese relations or weaken their mutual interests in cooperation. The influence of ideological factors on the character of bilateral relations has weakened greatly. And it benefits both countries.

The experience in recent years is conclusive proof of that. In Beijing and in Moscow a lot of domestic-policy problems are treated and settled in different ways. The understanding of the processes in Eastern Europe also differs significantly. Chinese propaganda has begun to mention the attempts of the forces hostile to communism and socialism to prepare a "peaceful evolution" in the socialist countries, including China, and to direct their development along the capitalist way. In the Chinese press, some articles directly connect "bourgeois liberals" who call for the spread of private property and for the establishment of the parliamentary system to the increased activity of foreign anti-Communist forces. These forces have a "peaceful evolution" of the socialist countries as their aim. To some extent the Soviet leaders are also blamed, because they are "surrendering their positions against the class enemy" and are thus helping this enemy to fulfill its insidious plans.

Indeed, some (but not all) articles by Soviet theorists argue that the peculiarities of relations between socialism and capitalism now have much in common with the theses put forward by the so-called bourgeois liberals before they were deprived of the freedom to express their opinions. They also had similar approaches to the problem of establishing a multiparty system, of the forms of transition to democracy, and of the role Marxism plays in the process of socialist reorganization of society.

When speaking about the struggle against "bourgeois liberalism," one should keep in mind that criticism of "liberal" views does not mean turning back to the "revolutionary" ideas of Mao Zedong. Nor does blaming the supporters of "total Westernization" mean giving up studying and using the cultural and political experience of Western civilization. The question is: What can and cannot be adopted from the West? This question has not been answered.

The Chinese press has given much attention to the propaganda that socialism will inevitably replace capitalism all over the world, though the difficult and indirect character of bringing this "great tendency" to life has also been noted. As for the Soviet press, it hardly mentions this argument today.

Thus, there are noticeable disagreements on a number of ideological and political problems. Clearly, the Chinese have a right to criticize some aspects of the Soviet Union's domestic or foreign policy, just as Soviet scholars and journalists

have a right to express their personal opinions about events in China. That is in the interest of both peoples, but such criticism must not influence state-to-state relations. In the past, the existence of such differences resulted in breaking off both party and state relations, in the failure of economic cooperation, and in a cold war between the USSR and China.

Now the Soviet Union and China have a more sensible view of their differences. The ideological basis for Soviet-Chinese cooperation remains, but its influence on the development of relations has become considerably weaker. It has become possible to have different views on the same issue. This tolerance broadens the spheres of cooperation and reduces the possibility that ideological disputes will develop into political conflicts, as happened in the 1960s. It can guarantee the stability of Soviet-Chinese relations. Also, talks on the inevitable end of the capitalist system do not prevent China from doing everything in its power to develop commercial and economic relations with the United States, Japan, and other capitalist countries.

The slogan that China relies on its own strength will not – and should not – be given up. But this slogan goes together with the growing understanding that today it is impossible to attain economic, scientific, and technical progress without making use of international experience, primarily the experience of the highly developed countries – the United States, Japan, and Germany. China does not choose its partners according to ideological factors, proletarian friendship, or solidarity but according to the principles of advantage and interest, and that makes foreign economic ties very stable. China realizes that the economic sanctions used against it after the events in Tiananmen Square caused a certain damage to the national economy.

Divergence in views did not influence the state of Soviet-Chinese relations. They continue developing in a line of ascent. Difficulties sometimes arise as a result of technical problems or bureaucratic disputes, not because of any ideological or political differences. Economic and social development has become important in both countries, and all other tasks are subordinate to that. It does not mean, of course, that the principles of Marxism-Leninism or of socialism have been replaced by the values that are common to all mankind. In the Soviet Union, this process is developing in different forms and at different rates from those in China. But it is taking place there also, in spite of temporary deviations. China is looking for the national way to socialism. Sometimes in Chinese society the following questions are heard: Is the country seeking a way that does not exist to house its people? What kind of socialism will China have in fifty or one hundred years? It is obvious that socialism then will differ from that of yesterday or today. But how it will differ from any form of human association is a question that has not been answered.

Some scientists in China are inclined to think that the two civilizations – socialist and capitalist – are being drawn together, and thus the world will enter an epoch of great unity. Time will show whether that is realistic or utopian. Everyone must hope that the era of solving difficult problems of social and

economic development and improving a country's financial and cultural position by means of conflicts and confrontations has already passed. The further China goes along the way of reforms and the Soviet Union along the way of perestroika, the more lasting the friendship and collaboration between the two countries will be.

