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Marxist ideology, revolutionary legacy and their impact on China’s security policy

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When one thinks of China, a binary image usually emerges. On the one hand, China is viewed as a nation of rich historical heritage and tradition, with a civilizational bloc of its own in East Asia that centers on an integral set of Confucian values and moral codes, an imperial management system supported and sustained by a mature and sophisticated civil service selection and maintenance scheme, and a self-awareness of Sino-centralism that best manifests itself in the tributary system. On the other hand, China is also a modern, socialist country of twentieth-century political and ideological ethos, with a communist party that is the direct product of Marxism-Leninism, whose historical mission is to reject traditional—or, in Marxist parlance, feudal—traits that have molded the Chinese culture, in order to create a socialist new nation based upon the basic designs mapped out by the Communist Party’s various ideological ancestors, from Marx and Lenin to Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping.

Such binary, often contradictory, strands of China are also reflected in the accumulative body of Chinese security studies, with one school of thought stressing the historical China while the other sees a symbiosis between contemporary China and its avowed ideological commitment to communism. But frequently, these two stands are not mutually exclusive. This is partly because China’s past does provide the communist government in Beijing a practical utility, i.e. an order of imperial grandeur and geopolitical hegemony that China’s leaders would like to restore. Much of today’s political agenda under the Communist Party’s General Secretary Xi Jinping rests on the grand objective of realizing a “Chinese Dream” that is basically a historic revival of the nation’s past greatness, albeit under the firm leadership of a Marxist-Leninist political party. In fact, many of today’s leading security experts in China often draw their intellectual inspirations from Chinese traditional texts and political tenets to interpret and articulate China’s contemporary national security strategies and approaches. Yet, the core of China’s security considerations, strategic orientations and modus operandi is undoubtedly guided by the modern ethos of a revolutionary China, fundamentally affected by the nation’s founding principles of Marxism, Leninism, and China’s own revised or adapted versions of these principles. While the impact of China’s traditional culture on today’s Chinese security is explored in greater detail in Chapter 1, this chapter will focus on the evolution of China’s revolutionary legacy and its ideological impact upon the formulation and development of China’s security policies and practices that are reshaping today’s global security environment.
Normatively speaking, security is intrinsically related to a nation state, which is perhaps why both the words “nation” and “state” are often coupled with “security” to produce the formulaic phrases “national security” or “state security.” In the context of today’s China, the two phrases are in fact interchangeable, both serving to define a primary motivation of security policy as a nation’s parochial self-interest. A good national security policy is therefore a contribution to patriotism.

But historically, that has not always been the case in communist China, because for decades security policy has not been primarily motivated by “patriotism” in the normal sense. It is highly ideological and reflective of the basic tenets of its founding philosophy of Marxism, Leninism, and Mao’s communist theories that go far beyond the realm of a Chinese patriotism. The PRC security policy, as guided by communist ideology, also has a distinctive operational method that makes the traditional modus operandi of conceptualizing and practicing “national security” often irrelevant.

Understanding this ideological strand of PRC diplomacy is of significant contemporary relevance. For many years, the belief that the PRC leadership conducts its diplomacy and security matters just like everybody else, with a nationalistic world view and a quest for the commonly defined national security, has been prevalent in the capitals of the non-Chinese world. While this understanding of the PRC national security may have been normatively useful, it has been proven practically insufficient.

The ideological origins of Chinese security

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) was founded in 1921 as an Asian branch of the Third Communist Internationale, or the Comintern, which was founded by Vladimir Lenin in 1919 as an organizational hub of global communist revolution. From the very beginning, the CCP regarded its mission as part of the worldwide communist takeover. Mao Zedong concisely stated in the 1920s that “the Chinese revolution is an integral part of the world proletarian revolution.” In the late 1930s and early 1940s, Mao believed that the Chinese revolution had entered the more advanced stage of the so-called “new democratic revolution,” which of course remained “a part of the worldwide proletarian socialist revolution.” According to Mao, the main target of this Chinese revolution had now become imperialism, also known as “international capitalism.”

Yet the prerequisite for a national security policy is the existence of an internationally recognized government. Before the proclamation of the PRC in October 1949, the CCP had only foreign policy but not much security policy. As the Communist troops swept across China and the Nationalist government retreated to Taiwan, the CCP leaders began to formulate the foundations of a national security doctrine and diplomatic policy for the soon-to-be-established regime. In the spring of 1949, Mao Zedong put his theory of “the new democratic revolution” in practice by formulating three basic principles of security and strategic orientations for the new Communist government. These strategic principles matched closely the foremost mission of the communist revolution at the time: the resolute struggle against imperialism led by the United States.

First, as Mao laid out in his writings and orders, the new regime would not recognize the diplomatic legitimacy of any countries that had maintained diplomatic relations with the Nationalist government, a “running dog” of the American global hegemony. As such, all foreign diplomats still in China would be treated not as diplomats but as expatriates; all treaties reached between all previous Chinese governments and other countries would be void. Mao called this policy “building a brand new stove,” meaning a complete break with “the Old China.”

Secondly, the new Communist regime would “purify” China of all traces of “imperialist countries” and would not tolerate any official or non-governmental ties any Western countries
had left after the Communist takeover. This was called “the house cleansing” policy. In late January and early February of 1949, Anastas Mikoyan, Stalin’s special envoy, was sent to the CCP headquarters on a secret mission. Mao elaborated on his house cleansing policy, calling imperialist influences in China “trash, dirt, lice, bedbugs, and fleas” that needed to be purified.5

Thirdly, Mao announced the policy of “Leaning to One Side” [yibiandao]. As early as 1947, Mao had fully accepted the “Two Camps Theory” that originated with Stalin’s ideological czar Andrei Zhdanov in 1946. Guided by the Zhdanov Doctrine, Mao believed that the Soviet Union and the United States led two ideologically opposite—socialist and capitalist, respectively—camps of nations. These two camps were mutually exclusive and intended to destroy each other. Mao further pointed out that with the CCP-led Communist Revolution China had thus become a solid member of the Soviet-centered camp of socialism and communist revolution,6 and that any hope of maintaining a neutral position between the two camps had become fantasy and should in fact be seriously purged from within the CCP. In the article “On People’s Democratic Dictatorship,” written on the occasion of the 28th anniversary of the founding of the CCP, Mao finalized the policy of completely leaning toward the Soviet Union against international capitalism led by the United States.

These three principles of the PRC’s strategic and security outlook have a symbiotic relationship with the proletarian revolutionary ideology. Once the party calls, the government immediately follows. The General Program [gongtong gangling], the de facto constitution of the new regime, adopted them in toto and made them the statutory foreign policy and national security foundations. Article Eleven of Part One of the General Program states that “The People’s Republic of China is united with all the peace-loving, freedom-loving nations and peoples. But first and foremost, the PRC stands resolutely on the side of the international camp of peace and democracy composed of the Soviet Union, and all other people’s democratic countries and oppressed peoples. We together struggle against invasions of imperialism, for a long lasting world peace.” Article 55 of the General Program reaffirms the policy of “building a brand new stove.” Article 56 incorporates Mao’s “house cleansing” policy.

After openly joining the camp as a governmental entity, the PRC was immediately embraced by all the “happy campers” of the Soviet-led communist bloc. On October 3, 1949, the USSR became the first country to recognize and establish diplomatic relationship with the PRC, followed by Bulgaria, Romania, Yugoslavia, Hungary, North Korea, Czechoslovakia, Mongolia, East Germany, and Albania. The only non-communist country that established diplomatic relationship with the PRC in the immediate aftermath of the proclamation of the PRC was Burma.

The ideological practice of Chinese security in the first decade

The three ideologically driven principles of PRC security and diplomacy, especially “Leaning to One Side” diplomatic principle, were carried out with revolutionary vigor, and dominated the security practice of the new communist nation. First targeted were the diplomatic officials of “imperialist countries” still in China. When the CCP troops were sweeping across China proper and seemed militarily unstoppable, some Western governments, notably the Truman Administration of the United States, still remained hopeful of maintaining certain kinds of governmental ties with the Communists, who, during Roosevelt’s presidency, had been painted by many influential US military and security officials as “agrarian reformers” in straw hats. Witnessing the imminent Communist victory, the Truman Administration decided to stay in China until repelled by force. In accord with the principle of “Two Camps,” American officials in China were handled with resolute harshness. The US Consul General at Peiping (Peking) sent a letter to the newly created CCP diplomatic agency to seek official relationship of engagement. His letter was returned
Marxist ideology, revolutionary legacy

unopened by the Communists, who refused to recognize his official status as a diplomat. The US Consul General at Shenyang was arrested for espionage.7

The new regime also moved quickly to control foreign owned companies in China. By 1952, virtually all American operated enterprises and financial firms in China, including Texaco and American Standard, were either confiscated, frozen or destroyed by the new regime. The British did not fare any better either, although they officially recognized China in January 1950. In 1952, London decided that the 40 airplanes previously operated by the Central Airline, stationed in Hong Kong at the time, should be given back to the company under the World War II air force legend Clair Chennault. This enraged Beijing because the Communist underground and intelligence agents had already gained operational control of these planes in Hong Kong. In retaliation, the CCP confiscated all assets of major British firms left in Shanghai, Tianjin and Wuhan. Similarly, all foreign operated news agencies, hospitals, schools, relief and charitable organizations were forced to close their offices in China. All religious activities, often a major conduit of foreign connections, were put under strict CCP control.8

By far the most important principle of PRC security strategy and diplomacy was “Leaning to One Side.” Mao was eager to form the strongest alliance with the Soviet Union for reasons primarily of ideological symbiosis. For three months, from December 16, 1949 to February 17, 1950, Mao Zedong visited Moscow for the first time. The big entourage led by Mao concluded various treaties with the Soviet Union, cementing the prevailing image of two communist giants joining hands in a worldwide communist expansion. But Mao’s trip to Moscow was mostly a journey in search of ideological unity between Stalin and him.

For years, Stalin and Mao were rivals for Marxist ideological correctness. Stalin had grown profoundly distrustful of Mao’s version of communism and had been doubtful of Mao’s judgment in the prior Stalin-Trotsky controversy over the nature and strategies of the Chinese revolution. While Stalin wanted a CCP-KMT United Front against Japan, Mao doubted the utility and ideological correctness of forming an alliance with the reactionary KMT under Chiang Kai-shek, a view that closely echoed that of Leon Trotsky. Mao had long felt Stalin’s distrust and was eager to straighten out any remaining differences while he was in Moscow. The timing couldn’t be better now that Mao appeared in Moscow as the ultimate winner of the revolution in China, vindicated by his uncompromising ferocity against and victory over Chiang Kai-shek’s Chinese Nationalist Party. He badly needed Stalin’s recognition of his ideological correctness. This recognition was important because Mao was determined to convince Stalin that Mao himself was a genuine communist and that the two great leaders of communist countries should now forget internal ideological bickering and forge ahead to face the common enemy, the imperialism headed by the United States.9

Yet Mao’s thirst for ideological recognition was not entirely quenched by Stalin. Upon the initial welcoming meeting, Stalin praised Mao’s phenomenal victory in China but avoided directly offering a mea culpa for the past distrust of Mao’s ideological purity. Mao was instantly annoyed and opined with awkward seriousness, “No, no. I have been the target of a prolonged attack and an isolation campaign. I have had nowhere to register my complaints,” thus explicitly demanding recognition of his ideological correctness from Stalin, who never obliged wholeheartedly. Throughout Mao’s visit to Moscow, Stalin addressed him as “Mister” Mao instead of the more proletarian title of “comrade.”10

This episode epitomizes the drive behind the PRC’s many international behaviors. It indicates the importance of being seen to be pure believers in communism within the Soviet-led socialist camp. The success or failure of the PRC lay in its ability to find tangible ways to prove its own faith in the cause in order 1) to dissipate Stalin’s remaining suspicion that Mao might be another Tito, and thus 2) to prove the CCP’s worthiness to be an integral member of the camp, and 3),
perhaps more importantly, to eliminate any misunderstandings among all communist parties and to enhance the grand alliance of the worldwide communist movement. It is imperative for us to keep this in mind because the CCP’s security moves and international behavior have often been directed by such motives. To Mao, the first chance to present tangible proof of his ideological correctness came in June 1950 when the Korean War broke out.

It would be incorrect to assume that Mao actively pursued the outbreak of the Korean War, as old and new evidence seems to have confirmed. Mao and the CCP had a much larger scheme of revolution for East Asia. Among many things discussed with Stalin while in Moscow during Mao’s long stay in the USSR was the bigger role the CCP could now play in East Asia. Stalin was of the opinion that the center of world revolution was moving to China after the Chinese Communist takeover and that China would play a central role in promoting revolutions in Asia. Accordingly Stalin offered China a large amount of WWII surplus weapons that the Soviets no longer needed.  

To beef up this new Chinese role in promoting communist revolutions in Asia, Ho Chi Minh of Vietnam was invited to Moscow to join the Mao-Stalin talks. At the meeting, several issues were settled. First, China would use part of the surplus Soviet military equipment Stalin had generously promised to help the Vietnamese communists in their fight against the French. Second, China would send a military advisory mission to Ho’s headquarters. And in April and May 1950—before the outbreak of the Korean War—a Chinese military mission entered Vietnam to fulfill “the duty of the proletarian internationalism.”

In its overall strategy, however, the CCP regarded “the liberation of Taiwan” as its top priority. The CCP therefore saw the outbreak of the Korean War as both a surprise, for it could serve as a diversion from “the liberation of Taiwan,” and a piece of good news, since this was indeed a good opportunity to provide tangible proof of China’s ideological correctness. Chen Jian’s path-breaking work indicates that Mao was indeed eager to enter the war in Korea once it broke out to fulfill its own revolutionary vision of an uncompromising struggle against the US-led international imperialism and that “there is little possibility that China’s entrance into the Korean War could have been averted,” regardless of whether MacArthur decided to stop at the 38th parallel or to push toward the bank of the Yalu River. In other words, China’s entrance into the Korean War was not motivated by a traditional security concern caused by the UN troops’ military advance toward the Yalu River but by a communist ideological commitment to deal a blow to international capitalism.

When Stalin refused to provide air force to accompany the 300,000 Chinese People’s Volunteers in Korea, Mao looked at this as a slap in the face of proletarian internationalism and as a sign of Stalin’s lack of determination to fight against the top imperial nation. Mao confidently ordered his troops into Korea to prove his ideological fidelity. This function of the Korean War was well summed up by Zhou Enlai: “Stalin is ready to change his view on things when reality proves he is wrong. For example, he used to doubt whether we (the CCP) were real Marxists, whether we dare fight imperialism. But when we started the Resist Americans and Assist the Koreans Campaign [the PRC’s name for China’s military involvement in the Korean War], such views of his on us changed. So, Stalin was open minded after all.”

Much has been said about the tension between the CPSU and the CCP. While there is certainly truth in this assumption, one ought to remember also that in the first decade of the PRC regime, the relationship between the CPSU and the CCP was for the most part close. As late as 1959, Zhou Enlai said the following in a speech delivered in Moscow: “The Soviet Union and China are brotherly countries of socialist nature. Marxism and Leninism tightly unite our two countries and all other socialist countries. Our two nations are closest comrades-in-arms and our comradery has experienced enduring tests. Our destiny is the same and our interests are
Marxist ideology, revolutionary legacy

inseparable{. . . }the Soviet Union and the People’s Republic of China and all other socialist
countries will forever be united as one entity, striding forward in heroic steps, marching along
a wide road toward communism!” 15 Even on issues such as the Soviet suppression of the 1956
Poland and Hungary uprisings, the CCP and the CPSU were in agreement. Liu Shaoqi and Deng
Xiaoping led a CCP delegation to Moscow most directly voicing Beijing’s unwavering support
for the Soviet military actions in Poland and Hungary. 16

In November 1957, Mao Zedong visited Moscow for the second time, on the occasion of the
global communist camp’s celebration of the fortieth anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution.
Ideologically intoxicated, Mao delivered his passionate speeches in the Soviet Union to com-
munist leaders from all over the world. In these speeches, Mao claimed that the international balance
of power between the socialist camp and the capitalist camp had fundamentally shifted in the
communists’ favor. Mao announced that imperialists and all other reactionaries were mere paper
tigers and that “the east wind has overpowered the west wind.” 17 At a rally of Chinese students
in Moscow, Mao radiated boundless enthusiasm for the cause of communism and declared that
“there must be a leader for the socialist camp. That leader is the Soviet Union. Communist and
workers’ parties of all countries should have a leader. That leader is the Communist Party of the
Soviet Union (CPSU)!” 18 The problem was whether the Soviet Union and Khrushchev would
take on that leadership role heroically and smash international capitalism with gallantry and
nuclear blasts, as Mao had expressed a desire for, and vociferously urged, in his open speeches in
Moscow.

The limits of ideology

The escalation of communist ideological fervor in CCP diplomacy and international relations,
and the perpetual search for proof of Mao’s ideological correctness in international military and
political arenas, could also be dangerous to the communist cause itself. At the twentieth CPSU
Congress, convened in February 1956, Khrushchev did two things that caused the beginning of
the Sino-Soviet tension. First, Khrushchev proposed a new Soviet policy of “three peacefuls”
on world revolution. It included peaceful co-existence with the capitalist countries, peaceful
competition with the capitalist countries, and peaceful transition from capitalism to socialism
through parliamentary elections. Second, Khrushchev delivered a scathing secret report on the
crimes Stalin had committed.

Deeply shaken by Khrushchev’s moves, a month later the CCP convened a Politburo meeting
responding to Khrushchev’s extraordinary new policy and his de-Stalinization. The CCP came
to the conclusion that Khrushchev’s new policy of “three peacefuls” constituted a denial of the
legacy of the Bolshevik October Revolution that emphasized violent takeover of the capitalist
governments; that Stalin was still a “great Marxist,” despite his mistakes; and that to denounce
Stalin was to deny the “Dictatorship of the Proletariat,” the cornerstone of Marxist-Leninist state
theory and doctrine. Subsequently, Mao ordered the People’s Daily to run an editorial entitled
“Our the Historical Lessons of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat,” which began a long series of
articles attacking the CPSU positions on war, peace, and Marxist theories.

To counter the CPSU’s ideological heresy of peaceful co-existence with world capitalism, Mao
showed his defiance by going further in the dangerous game of escalating belligerence against
“the decaying imperialism.” On August 23, 1958, in order to rebuke Khrushchev’s “capitulation-
ism” to the capitalist camp, in a display of the CCP’s proletarian internationalism Mao seized
on the opportunity of the US Marines’ landing in Lebanon to order the sudden shelling of the
KMT-occupied off-shore islands of Quemoy and Matsu. This was meant as a retaliation against
the US military move in the Middle East and to embarrass Moscow. 19 Mao’s private doctor, who
was with Mao when he made the decision, commented, “It was Mao’s challenge to Khrushchev’s bid to reduce tensions between the Soviet Union and the United States{. . .}. For Mao, the shelling of Quemoy and Matsu was pure show, a game to demonstrate to both Khrushchev and Eisenhower that he could not be controlled and to undermine Khrushchev in his new quest for peace. The game was a terrible gamble, threatening the world with atomic war and risking the lives of tens of millions of ordinary Chinese.”

To Khrushchev, Mao’s adventurism was indeed dangerous. In June 1959, Khrushchev decided to rescind an earlier agreement to provide China with prototype atomic bombs and the related technical data. While Khrushchev was preparing for his trip to the United States to meet with Eisenhower, China and India clashed on their shared border in August 1959. Khrushchev regarded this as Mao’s deliberate effort to create international tension to dampen his peace effort with the United States. Weeks later, the Soviet Union agreed to provide India with a $375 million loan. Mao was outraged. In late September, Khrushchev went to Beijing to join the fanfare of the tenth anniversary celebration of the founding of the PRC. But Khrushchev went to Tiananmen Square by way of Camp David and carried straightforward messages pressuring Mao to give up the idea of an imminent armed struggle with international capitalism.

China’s view on the world situation remained Leninistic when the 1960s began. It believed that monopoly capitalism was structured in such a way that a new round of world war was imminent and inevitable. As such, true communists should not be afraid of new world war. Rather, they should take advantage of the world war to bury the capitalist system altogether. In February 1960, the Warsaw Pact member countries met and issued a declaration stating that a new world war would be catastrophic to the lives of hundreds of millions of people and should be avoided at any cost. China was invited as an observer, but the Chinese delegation at the meeting dissented on such ideological deviation from Lenin’s strident stress on the necessity of a violent worldwide communist revolution. Two months later, the Red Flag journal and the People’s Daily, both official organs of the CCP, carried an editorial entitled “Long Live Leninism!” It was a rehash of Mao’s repeated theory of all imperialists being paper tigers. But it had more astonishing statements such as “although an imperialist war could bring people of all nations great sacrifice, the people who survive this war shall create a civilization and a bright, beautiful future upon the debris of shattered imperialism that will be thousands of times better.”

By the end of 1960, the bitter quarrel between the Soviet bloc and the CCP on ideological issues had escalated to such a degree that the Soviet Union decided to pull all of its expert advisers out of China in retaliation. Yet it was over the issue of Soviet-American negotiations on nuclear arms control that finally split up the Sino-Soviet alliance. Mao’s strategic view on the world situation was to a large degree based upon the Soviet Union’s advancement in nuclear and space technologies, especially the satellite advantage of the socialist camp since the launch of Sputnik. When the Soviets and the Americans joined hands in Washington to limit or ban nuclear tests in various areas (excluding underground), Mao believed Khrushchev had given up the communist advantage in key nuclear strike powers, thus betraying the cause of communism and indeed becoming a “revisionist.” Mao vowed to develop China’s own nuclear program.

By 1963, the CCP’s ultra-radical views could no longer be regarded by the Soviets as reasonable and Mao had been categorized as a madman and warmonger. To sum up the CCP’s differing ideological view at the time, the Central Committee in Beijing delivered to Moscow what it considered to be the “right” path for the communist camp to follow: “The proletarians of the world, unite; the proletariat and all the oppressed peoples and nations, unite against imperialism and reactionaries in all countries, struggling for world peace, national liberation, people’s democracy and socialism. Let us safeguard and expand the socialist camp, gradually reach the
complete victory of world revolution; establish a new world without imperialism, without capitalism, and without exploitative systems.” This is indeed ideological intoxication.

The two middle areas: Mao’s new doctrine of international security and strategy

With the Sino-Soviet ideological split, the PRC had opted out of the Soviet camp and could find only one small “socialist beacon” to ally with in all of Europe: Albania. The overwhelming majority of communist countries took the side of the CPSU. Only a handful of them tried to remain neutral. Ho Chi Minh was the heartbroken comrade who tried to mediate the quarrels between the two big brothers. He even developed a charming theory of the origin of the Sino-Soviet split. According to Ho, it had much to do with a personal style of expression, or something of a cultural misunderstanding between an Asian party and a European party, and he earnestly told Mao so on his special patch-up trip to see him in August 1960.

To Mao, however, the tide was irreversible. He now saw not only ideological deviation in the CPSU but gradually came to feel the imposing presence of an imperialist Russia along the extended borders between the two countries. So now there were two kinds of imperialisms to the CCP: the capitalist imperialism led by the United States, and the socialist imperialism led by the Soviet Union. And only socialist China could save the world from a capitalist victory in the epic global ideological battle.

Around 1963, Mao Zedong developed a new strategic philosophy of the world revolutions. This is the theory of “Two Middle Areas [lianggan zhongjian didai].” According to this theory, Mao believed that between the two super powers were two vast middle areas. The first middle area would include those countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America that were either already independent or were fighting for independence. The second middle area included the developed countries of Western Europe, Canada and so on. However, Mao believed that the first middle area was the area of fierce contention and of “concentrated contradictions.” This area was also the source of the global revolutionary whirlwind. Accordingly, the national liberation movements in this area constituted the most important strike against the forces of imperialism.

Guided by this theory of world revolution, PRC diplomacy emerged out of the much exalted Soviet-centered “socialist camp” of the 1950s and began to wage a war on imperialism on its own, a war based upon Mao’s new revolutionary ideology. Mao’s deputy and Defense Minister Lin Biao went even further and creatively applied Mao’s strategy of “Encirclement of the Cities through the Countryside” to the international struggle against imperialism. In his famous article September 3, 1965, “Long Live the Victory of the People’s War,” Lin Biao stated that the center of world revolution had shifted to China; that as long as China did not deviate from the right course of Marxism, there was hope for the world; that Europe and North America were the world’s cities, and Asia, Africa, and Latin America were the world’s countryside; and that it was now the time to utilize Mao’s tested strategy to stage a worldwide revolution by encircling imperialism (the cities) from the world’s countryside.

Therefore, starting from 1964, the PRC invested heavily in the first middle area. Mao sent extensive military aid to many countries in the first middle area to stage revolutions against imperialism. Until 1964, the PRC had been providing military hardware to some revolutionary countries, especially North Korea and North Vietnam. But there was a great jump in military hardware outflow from 1964. Between 1964 and 1968, the number of countries receiving military aid from the PRC increased from a dozen to more than 60. From December 1963 to January 1964, Zhou Enlai visited 14 Asian and African countries considered to be in Mao’s first middle area. During this trip, Zhou announced a most generous, no-strings-attached policy of
giving out military aid and providing military training to these countries. Within one year, nine countries, including Pakistan, Tanzania, Mali, Burundi, Guinea-Bissau, and Congo, requested and received the PLA’s free military hardware. By the end of 1978, over 60 countries, including Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Egypt, Zimbabwe, Gabon, Sudan, Uganda, Zambia, and Somalia, had received PRC military aid. Between 1964 and 1978, China provided the following to boost revolutions in countries of the first middle area: 4.20 million guns of various types, 90,000 cannons, 3,620 tanks and armored carriers, 1,430 war planes, 352 war ships, 15 sets of guided missile systems, 449 missiles, 4.3 billion units of ammunition, and 51.3 million shells.

The first significant investment of Mao’s revolutionary cause was in Vietnam, where the US troops were fighting the Vietnamese communist insurgents in the south and the Hanoi government in the north was staunchly organizing and supporting the insurgents in the south. According to a senior Hanoi official, between October 1965 and July 1970 the PRC dispatched to North Vietnam over 300,000 troops, whose specialties ranged from anti-aircraft artillery force, military engineering, and railroad construction to military logistics and signal intelligence. Many American war planes were shot down by the Chinese troops.

North Vietnam received the most generous PRC assistance of all countries helped thus. This aid included heavy and light weapons, ammunition and other military gear, enough to equip two million soldiers of the North Vietnamese army, navy, air force and militia. It also included hundreds of factories and repair shops, 300 million meters of cloth, 30,000 trucks, 5 million tons of food, 2 million tons of gasoline, hundreds of millions of cash in US dollars, and a 3,000 mile long oil pipeline that extended Chinese supply of gasoline to South Vietnam. During the same period, 4,300 PLA officers and soldiers were wounded and nearly 1,100 PLA officers and soldiers were killed and buried in Vietnam. To ship the vast amount of war materials to Viet Cong in South Vietnam, the Chinese created a secret coastal shipping line connecting Chinese Hainan Island, where the cargo ships disembarked, with several islands off the coast of Central Vietnam, where goods were picked up by Viet Cong in South Vietnam.

Throughout the Vietnam War, China’s military engagement with the US forces, mainly in the area of anti-aircraft artillery support, and its consequences were substantial. Official Chinese documents have revealed that between 1965 and 1969, the period covering the peak of military actions in Vietnam, the PLA’s AAA batteries inside Vietnam engaged the US combat aircraft 2,153 times, shooting down 1,707 US war planes and damaging a further 1,608 American military aircraft.

The second largest single sum of military aid to one country was given to Albania, China’s only hope of a Maoist revolution in Europe and Mao’s “countryside stronghold” closest to “the cities.” Due to Mao’s ideological obsession with war and revolutions, there was no limit to the assistance given to meet Albania’s needs. In the 18 years between 1961 and 1978, a staggering amount of military aid, worth 1.5 billion Chinese yuan, was provided to Albania. This included 752,000 guns, 11,000 cannons, 890 tanks and armored carriers, 180 war planes, 46 war ships, 2 complete sets of surface to air missile systems, 224 missiles, 196 torpedoes, 4,230 military trucks, 1.56 billion bullets, 8.22 million shells and various other military items.

In addition to Vietnam, China also provided a massive amount of military aid to communist forces in Laos. In Africa, the country at the top of Mao’s revolutionary priority was Tanzania (and Zanzibar before the two united in 1967). From 1964, Mao provided the Tanzanian government with a generous package of military aid, including large sums of light weapons, tanks, war planes, and a complete air force security system. Military training for the countries in the first middle area was also important in Mao’s revolutionary strategy. Between 1964 and 1978, the PLA trained military personnel for over 40 countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America. Over 6,400
Marxist ideology, revolutionary legacy

Chinese military experts were dispatched abroad and they trained over 8,000 trainees from these countries, including such well known figures as Laurent Kabila of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Abu Nidal of the Palestinian Liberation Organization.33

It is important to point out that while the tumultuous Cultural Revolution created a paralyzing interregnum in the PRC’s domestic operations, the PRC’s revolutionary warfare and ideological diplomacy in the first middle area never was seriously affected. On the contrary, it enjoyed a remarkable constancy. Comparatively speaking, the PRC’s international security practices suffered far less interruption from the chaotic Cultural Revolution.34 China’s massive military aid programs for the first middle area countries remained very steady in the 14 years between 1964 and 1978.

Throughout the entire history of the PRC, Taiwan has remained a focal point of China’s international security and military strategy considerations. While it would be inaccurate to say that the Taiwan issue is not one of national reunification, it would definitely be wrong to argue that national reunification is the PRC’s only consideration in the matter. Since its founding in 1949, the Chinese Communist government has on numerous occasions been willing to negotiate territorial issues with governments or nations deemed friendly and ideologically acceptable. These have led to land cessions to those nations, most of which belonged to the “socialist camp,” such as Mongolia, Burma and Kazakhstan. The sizes of these cessions were many times bigger than Taiwan.

On the contrary, the core of the Taiwan issue has always been ideological. To “liberate Taiwan” fits perfectly well with CCP’s proletarian sanctimony of being the ultimate savior of the entire Chinese population. To get rid of the KMT regime in Taiwan was, in the eyes of Mao, essentially a matter of wiping out “reactionary forces,” not necessarily only for national reunification. The reactionary nature of the KMT regime to Mao was made most obvious when the Americans became heavily involved, which also testified to the ideological correctness of Mao’s theory of the imperialist domination of the Chinese through its “running dogs” such as Chiang Kai-shek.

If national reunification and maintaining nationalistic pride was the primary driving force of China’s foreign policy and security practice, Hong Kong, an almost perfect case to shore up nationalism, would have been easily taken over by the PLA in late 1949 and early 1950. Nevertheless, the CCP’s policy toward Hong Kong remained uncharacteristically conciliatory. The momentous PLA military offensive suddenly stopped just 25 miles from Hong Kong in 1949. In this regard, a nationalist interpretation of the PRC’s security motivation would not suffice. It has even been reported that the CCP and the British did strike a nine-point secret deal as early as August 1945 on the future of Hong Kong. Under this deal, the Communists promised not to try to re-take Hong Kong in exchange for the rights of legal presence of the CCP representatives and propaganda in Hong Kong. A result of the mutual secret communications, some historians note, was Britain’s recognition of the PRC in 1950.35

Despite constant claims by the PRC over the decades, Taiwan may not even be the key issue between the United States and the PRC. It may well be just a footnote in Mao’s overall ideological scheme of world revolution and his obsessive campaign against communist revisionists for perpetual ideological correctness. As Mao explained to his personal physician in 1958 regarding why he decided to bombard the islands of Quemoy and Matsu but not to launch an invasion, “If we take them over, we lose our link.” Mao reasoned, “Doesn’t everyone have two hands? If we lose our two hands, then Taiwan is no longer in our grip. We let it slip away. The islands are two batons that keep Khrushchev and Eisenhower dancing, scurrying this way and that way. Don’t you see how wonderful they are?”36 The instrumental value of maintaining Taiwan as a problem
between the US and the PRC but not attempting to have it solved can also be great. As Mao intimated to his personal physician in 1958:

Khrushchev just doesn’t know what he’s talking about. He wants to improve relations with the United States? Good, we’ll congratulate him with our guns. { . . . } Let’s get the United States involved, too. Maybe we can get the United States to drop an atom bomb on Fujian. Maybe ten or twenty million people will be killed. Chiang Kai-shek wants the United States to use the bomb against us. Let them use it (to prove their imperialist nature of aggression). Let’s see what Khrushchev says then. { . . . } Some of our comrades don’t understand the situation. They want us to cross the sea and take over Taiwan. I don’t agree. Let’s leave Taiwan alone. Taiwan keeps the pressure on us. It helps maintain our internal unity. Once the pressure is off, internal disputes might break out.37

The legacies of ideological commitment affecting China’s security: 1979–2014

Mao’s ideological fanaticism did not begin to fade until 1978 when Deng Xiaoping began to re-evaluate Mao’s obsession with war and revolution. While still a die-hard communist as a lifelong commissar and party secretary, Deng Xiaoping was more pragmatic and less of a romantic ideologue intoxicated with revolutionary ferment. Deng believed that international strategy and security based solely upon ideological obsession were no longer practical because the world had entered a new age. Instead, he advocated a policy of “Beyond Ideology and Social Systems” as the new guideline for the PRC’s diplomacy worldwide.38

But Deng by no means intended to jettison communist ideology. He only meant to scale down Mao’s ideological and military romanticism in order to save the world’s only true socialist country—in Deng’s view—from total economic and social collapse as a result of Mao’s ruinous policies. That is to say, unlike Mao, Deng now believed that world war was not inevitable; that factors for world peace at that moment outweighed the factors for war; and that it was possible to achieve a relatively long-lasting world peace. As for China, Deng believed that the CCP ought to take full advantage of this long-lasting peace to concentrate on building China’s economy and defense: by the time international peace collapsed, which Deng believed it surely would, China would be in a winning position.39

But we should not overestimate the degree to which Deng Xiaoping changed China’s ideological commitment. Fundamentally, the PRC since Deng Xiaoping has remained a communist regime. Many basic tenets and practices of Mao’s era still dominate China’s basic understanding of national and international security and strategy in the post-Cold-War world. One example is China’s understanding of international alignment, which is still based on the old Maoist concept of imperialist conspiracy to undermine the superior socialist system of China. The vocabulary may have changed, but the language is still communistic, which explains why Deng Xiaoping believed that the momentous Tiananmen pro-democracy movement of 1989 took place precisely because of an international plot to change China’s socialism and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat through a sinister, well-planned “Peaceful Evolution.” After the crackdown, Deng spoke of the mysterious interplay of an “international mega-climate” [guoji da qihou] and a hidden “domestic minor climate” [guonei xiao qihou].

The legacy of Mao’s ideological diplomacy is also easily found in today’s PRC exercise in “enemy politics,” which embodies the constant vigilance against omnipresent international enemies, real or imagined. This prevalent method of ideological consciousness-raising at home and abroad is best illustrated in the Sino-US relationship since the Tiananmen Massacre. Despite the
Marxist ideology, revolutionary legacy

outrage of the American people toward the massacre, the overwhelming majority of US govern-
ment agencies, from the administrations of George H.W. Bush to Barack Obama, have strongly
advocated a policy of “constructive engagement” with the PRC. In terms of politics and rights,
China may not be right, but it is huge and the market is tempting. The preponderance of such
a sentiment toward post-Tiananmen PRC is not difficult to find if one stays in Washington for
only a few days.

Yet to sustain a communist system such as the PRC’s and to enhance internal unity under the
CCP, Chinese supreme leaders after Mao Zedong, from Deng Xiaoping and Jiang Zemin to Hu
Jintao and Xi Jinping, have all diligently campaigned to create an image of the US government
as the monstrous superpower determined to “contain” China in each and every way, despite the
White House’s continuous hobnobbing with Zhongnanhai. There is a remarkable consistency
among Chinese supreme leaders in the use of this theory of a US-led capitalist conspiracy to
destroy socialist China as the most potent justification for, under Mao, the maintenance of a
draconian totalitarian social order, and an increasingly technologically sophisticated, authoritar-
ian and omnipotent national security state under Deng Xiaoping, Hu Jintao and Xi Jinping.
In 1949, Mao claimed that “for a very long period, US imperialism laid greater stress than other
imperialist countries on activities in the sphere of spiritual aggression, extending from religious
to ‘philanthropic’ and cultural undertakings{ . . . }and [has organized] a US fifth column{ . . . }[to]
overthrow the people’s government led by the Communist Party of China.”

In 1990, Deng Xiaoping got more specific: “There is a proposal in the United States now:
to fight a world war without gun smoke.{ . . . }Capitalism hopes to declare a final victory
over socialism. In the past, it used weapons, including atomic bombs, hydrogen bombs, which
was opposed by people of the world. But now it is engaged in the peaceful evolution.”

In 1993, “the United States will still be our main opponent in diplomatic dealings.{ . . . }US
policy toward China has always had two sides. A peaceful evolution against China is the long-
term strategic goal of some people in the United States.”

Hu Jintao, Jiang Zemin’s successor, echoed his predecessors closely. “The ideological field has always been the important battle front, fiercely fought over between our enemies and us,” Mr. Hu was quoted in the PLA-produced documentary
Silent Struggle as saying. “If trouble appears in this battle front, it may well lead to
social turmoil or even the loss of our political rule. To create chaos in a society, to overthrow a
government, our enemies usually start with piercing a hole in our ideological system, that is, to
first focus on confusing people’s minds.”

Yet it is the current Chinese supreme leader Xi Jinping who has emerged as the most earnest
inheritor of Mao Zedong when it comes to stressing the purity of Marxist-Leninist ideology
and a global ideological and political struggle between the two camps of socialism, now led by
China, and capitalism, now led by the waning but still fierce United States. “Western countries’
strategic calculation to contain our country’s development will never change,” Xi was quoted in
Silent Struggle as saying. “They will never want a socialist country like ours to carry out a smooth
peaceful development.” Since his ascendance to the supreme leadership position in late 2012,
Xi Jinping, who obtained a doctoral degree in scientific socialism from Tsinghua University, has
intensified a nationwide ideological re-indoctrination, re-installing Mao-era heroes such as the good cadre Jiao Yulu, the model communist soldier Lei Feng, and a myriad of other symbols of Maoism.

Much like Mao in the 1950s, 1960s and early 1970s, today’s CCP is in dire need of a hostile enemy like the United States and has deliberately exaggerated the extent to which Americans are anti-China. However, this is not to say that there are no ideological heretics within China’s security policy circles who do not follow exactly the stringent guidelines from the supreme leadership. There are indeed many Chinese scholars who have deviated from the PRC’s ideological constancy in security studies, but there is little, if any, market share of their ideas, let alone career enhancement opportunities for them; they are often regarded by the state security and Party disciplinary apparatchiks as traitors infiltrated and controlled by foreign, mainly US, anti-China forces. 46

Overall, the continuing longevity of China’s communist revolutionary legacy and communist ideological commitment has left indelible imprints in the Chinese security establishment. The only difference, perhaps, is that in the Mao era the ideological rivalry between socialism and capitalism was openly confrontational and boisterous while the post Mao-era ideological contest is equally epic and of equal intensity and lethality but, for the most part, a silent struggle, as the recent Chinese ideologically laden educational documentary aptly phrases it. 47

Notes
1 I would like to thank the Washington Journal of Modern China for allowing me to use some material from an article I authored for its fall 1999 issue.
3 Ibid., p. 647.
8 Ibid., pp. 26–9.
10 Ibid., pp. 43, 63.
12 Ibid., p. 18.
18 Shi Zhifu, op. cit., p. 367.
19 Ibid., pp. 86–7.
Marxist ideology, revolutionary legacy

22 Ibid., p. 159.
23 Ibid., pp. 166–7.
28 Han Huaiizhi, et al., op. cit., p. 557.
30 Han Huaiizhi, et al., op. cit., p. 552.
31 Ibid., pp. 581–2.
32 Ibid., pp. 583–4.
33 Ibid., pp. 585–6.
34 Shi Zhifu, op. cit., p. 194.
36 Li Zhisui, op. cit., p. 270.
37 Ibid., p. 262.
39 Ibid., pp. 1–4.
42 Ibid.
43 Jiang Zemin, “We Must Never Deviate from Maintaining Our Nation and State’s Utmost Interest in Foreign Affairs,” July 12, 1993, in Selected Works of Jiang Zemin, Volume 1, p. 325.
44 Jiaoliang Wushen [较量无声; Silent Struggle], produced by the Chinese National Defense University, the PLA General Political Department, the PLA General Staff, and CASS, June 2013. The entire 90-minute documentary can be viewed on YouTube at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=M_8lSjcoSW8.
45 Ibid.
46 A good example is the recent hunt by the Party establishment for “conspirators and trouble makers” directly controlled by foreign forces among the scholars at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. See “Inspector Questions CASS Ideology,” The Global Times [English], June 16, 2014. Available online at http://epaper.globaltimes.cn/2014–06–16/54796.htm. See note 44.

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