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The Disunited Front

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While communist countries generally banded together behind the Soviet Union (USSR, 1917-1991) during the Cold War (1945-1991), the deteriorating relations between the USSR and People's Republic of China (PRC, 1949-Present) caused a major shift within the communist international in the late 1950's into the 1960's. With the new leadership under Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev (1894-1971), the Soviet Union would try for a "Peaceful Coexistence" with the United States and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO, 1949-present), with the concept being introduced in the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU, Feb 14-25, 1956). The Soviet Union also was the de facto leader of the communist world and was rather coercive towards the rest of the communist world. These became major points of contention between the PRC and the Soviet Union. The USSR's theory of Peaceful Coexistence directly opposed the hardline Chinese Communist Party (CCP)'s idea of permanent revolution against the West. The plans for destalinization were also introduced at the Twentieth Congress, which directly conflicted with Chairman Mao Zedong's (1893-1976) use of Stalinism and its associated usage of a cult of personality, terror, and propaganda. The Sino-Soviet Split was largely caused by differences in communist ideologies, Mao's perception of Soviet paternalism, and the competition over power and influence.

The idea of international communism being monolithic in the post-Second World War world is patently false. While the signs were not seen on the surface beforehand, after the protests in Poland and Hungary in 1956, non-Soviet communists were increasingly alienated.¹ In Poland and Hungary, protests against the Soviet-aligned governments were suppressed harshly by Red Army forces, most memorably with a Soviet tank driving through a building in Budapest. In the CCP Politburo, there was a unanimous disapproval of how the Soviet Union had dealt with its Eastern European satellite states due to the fact that the Soviet Union saw its satellite states as

inferior. This is particularly problematic in Marxism because according to Marxism, all peoples must be treated as equal. While the CCP Politburo did not exactly approve of mass protest and resistance to communist governments, they disapproved more of Moscow's "Big-power Chauvinism."² Moscow, in true Soviet fashion, cracked down hard on the protests in Hungary and Poland, with thousands killed and a dark stain on the Soviet Union's reputation internationally. In the aftermath of the Hungarian and Polish Revolutions (both 1956), the Premier and foreign minister of the PRC, Zhou Enlai (1898-1976), and the Premier of Poland, Józef Cyrankiewicz (1911-1989), both issued a communiqué from Beijing in January of 1957 stating that "They [the communist world] should consistently combat all deviations, whether doctrinaire or revisionist."³

At the root of this split was destalinization. There were two major issues with this. First, Chairman Mao was not terribly far from being a full-blown Stalinist himself. He was a totalitarian leader who collectivized agriculture, though quite unsuccessfully, and created a cult of personality around himself. After Khrushchev denounced cult of personality as being against the ideals of Marxism-Leninism, Beijing and Moscow would start to see a clear divide between their ideologies, though it was not exactly a perfect relationship prior to destalinization. There existed an idea of Beijing being a second-class partner to the Soviet Union especially while the Soviet Union was under Joseph Stalin (1878-1953).⁴ This Soviet paternalism of socialist states is far from a new idea and can be seen in the Soviet response to the Revolutions in Hungary and Poland in 1956, and 1948 with the "suicide" of Jan Masaryk (1886-1948). Masaryk, the Czechoslovak Foreign Minister in the immediate aftermath of the German Occupation, who was defenestrated, according to some, due to his anti-communist stances.⁵ Second, the Soviet Union had not consulted the CCP about their plans to completely discredit Josef Stalin, the former

General Secretary of the Soviet Union, and all the ramifications for the communist world that such an action would entail.⁶ This is also important because it has the CPSU as the de facto leader of the international communist movement. This move to not inform the CCP beforehand shows an idea of superiority to the rest of the communist world, which was quite off-putting in China, especially considering their history with the Century of Humiliation (1839-1949).

An unlikely battleground in this dispute was Albania. In the 1950's, in the wake of Stalin's death, the Albanian Communist Party (1941-1991) under Enver Hoxha (1908-1985) was uneasy about Soviet rapprochement with Yugoslavia (1945-1992) under Marshal Josip Broz Tito (1892-1980) over the issue of national security. When the Soviet Union started a rapprochement with Marshal Tito in the mid-1950's, Albania started looking for other allies, and in 1956, it found one in China.⁷ The alliance with China was twofold: They were far away enough from Albania as to not threaten their security but also were ideologically similar in their defense of Stalinism. After Stalin's Death, there was a massive state funeral in Tirana, the capital of Albania, complete with bowing before Stalin's statue and making an oath to follow Stalin.⁸ Moscow did not, however, want to simply cut Albania loose. By the time that Sino-Albanian relations had grown stronger, in 1959, Khrushchev made a visit to Albania, according to the Soviets, to show that Moscow cared about Albania, but likely for other reasons, like to counter US missiles in Greece and Turkey or to grow agricultural products for the Soviet Union.⁹ In the aftermath of the split in 1960, Khrushchev tried to coerce Hoxha back into line by cutting grain supplies while Albania was experiencing a famine, only to have China come in soon after with wheat for Albania.¹⁰ This competition over allies further damaged the already strained relations between China and the Soviet Union.

The process of destalinization in the Soviet Union also had issues in the greater context of Marxist ideology. In Marxist thought, the party (in this case, the CPSU) is the direct voice and representative of the people and, therefore, could not be incorrect. Stalin was the head of the CPSU, and therefore, saying that he was incorrect in his methods was also saying that the CPSU was incorrect. This led to a Chinese view of Soviet revisionism of history against Stalin, and by extension, the concept of the “Dictatorship of the Proletariat” and the very concept of Marxism-Leninism.¹¹ Another result was the Soviet loss of prestige abroad.

After the Chinese Civil War (1927-1949), the Guomindang (1919-present), or the Chinese Nationalists under Chiang Kai-Shek (1887-1975) escaped to the island of Formosa to set up a government in exile, which became Taiwan. Both countries, to this day, claim the other to be an imposter and claim to be the rightful government of China. In 1958, Mao ordered the bombardment of two Nationalist-controlled islands just off the mainland in the Taiwan Strait, which nearly spiraled into a nuclear war with the United States. This occurred while Zhou Enlai was pushing for peace with the West, like the Soviet Union at the time.¹² This decision by Mao was brash, but it showed Mao’s hardline nature against the Soviet doctrine of Peaceful Coexistence by directly and unabashedly attacking a US ally. In public, Mao also expressed no fear of war in any capacity. He stated in 1957 about the prospect of nuclear war:

We shouldn’t be afraid of nuclear bombs and missiles. No matter what kind of war breaks out—conventional or thermonuclear—we’ll win. As for China, if the imperialists unleash war on us, we may lose more than three hundred million people. So what? War is war. The years will pass, and we’ll get to work producing more babies than ever before.¹³

Former National Security Advisor and Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger (1923-present) stated that “Khrushchev was ‘deeply disturbed,’ and recalled the audience’s strained and nervous

laughter as Mao described nuclear Armageddon in whimsical and earthy language.”¹⁴ Of course, any reasonable person would be “deeply disturbed” after a power-mad autocrat offhandedly mentioned sacrificing half of his country’s population in a war with at least one, likely more, nuclear powers.

The recent Chinese experience with foreign powers in the Century of Humiliation was also a subtle underlying cause of the Sino-Soviet Split. The “Century of Humiliation” is the term given to the 110-year period where China was constantly coerced by the major powers of the world into numerous uneven treaties, horrific wars, rebellions, and other foreign embarrassments. This period of time started in 1839 with the First Opium War (1839-1842) with the British Empire. As the name would imply, the war was over opium, which was Great Britain’s answer to a major trade imbalance between itself and China. Opium importation was shortly banned by the emperor, only to have the British then turn to smuggling.¹⁵ After a Chinese official destroyed the illegal Opium in Canton (present-day Guangzhou), things spiraled out of control and started the war.¹⁶ After the Chinese forces were swept aside by the modernized British forces, Hong Kong was taken by the British, and China was forced to accept British opium shipments. This and numerous other events, like the foreign intervention during the Boxer Rebellion and numerous other unequal treaties, lead to the Century of Humiliation, which in turn caused Chairman Mao to develop a victim complex.

Mao famously stated, “When I say, ‘Learn from the Soviet Union,’ we don’t have to learn how to shit and piss from the Soviet Union, too, do we?”¹⁷ Soviet aid to China was considerable, with aid being in the form of low interest, high principle loans, specialists, and education of Chinese citizens in the Soviet Union.¹⁸ The Chinese had a major objection to this because of the Soviet emphasis on leading the communist world by force and punishing dissent

in other socialist countries. One way to look at the Soviet aid is to see it as foreign investment, or a form of imperialism, like in Budapest. Considering the lingering Chinese psyche from the Century of Humiliation, this was not terribly popular with the Chairman. In 1960, all Soviet specialists were withdrawn from China under orders from Khrushchev, leaving only a handful of Soviet citizens in the country, like diplomats and trade officials.¹⁹ Furthermore, the Soviet Union in 1958 wanted to create a joint Sino-Soviet Submarine force in the Pacific.²⁰ The Soviet Union could have had several reasons for this move, but the two most important potential reasons here are the Soviet Union trying to exert its power over China, and that the Soviet Union was trying to promote unity between the Soviet Union and China. Mao believed the latter and furiously refused.

This sense of inferiority and aid from the Soviet Union did, however, lead to one of the most disastrous decisions in modern history: The Great Leap Forward (1958-1962). The general plan was to make up for China's lack of development with sheer numbers and mass mobilization of the 650 million Chinese citizens.²¹ One of the countless issues with the Great Leap Forward was Mao's lack of any real firm plans for how to execute it, except to catch up to Great Britain in 15 years. Other issues included the killing of sparrows that ate the seeds of crops on farms and having peasants making steel in homemade backyard blast furnaces.²² This is obviously a monumental task, considering the disparity of industrialization between China and Great Britain at this point in time. Great Britain in 1956 had a Gross Domestic Product (GDP, the total value of all goods and services produced in a country in a given year) of about \$119 million when converted from GBP (British Pound) and adjusted for inflation.²³ In the same year, the PRC had a GDP of \$39.6 million, meaning that Mao was planning on more than doubling his economy in 15 years, which is simply absurd.²⁴

Mao's trepidation of his heavy reliance on the Soviet Union's material and intellectual aid was confirmed when, in 1957, the Soviet Union went back on the promise it had made to supply China with nuclear weaponry.²⁵ The reasoning behind this is quite obvious: the rest of the world, especially the United States, would respond very negatively to a country giving a functioning nuclear weapon to another.²⁶ Furthermore, this decision was made under Khrushchev's idea of Peaceful Coexistence with the United States and NATO. This still did not go over well in Beijing, as one would imagine, and only helped to further the divide between the former allies. Much like Don Quijote de la Mancha jousting the windmills, Mao's attempts to modernize China made sense to the Chairman, but not to those in the position of sitting by and being powerless against his delusions like Sancho.²⁷

Ultimately, the Sino-Soviet Split had, and still continues to have impacts on modern geopolitics. It also is an excellent case study of the internal politics, strife and bitter disagreements between the communist states, instead of the monolithic, international communism that the United States Government thought it was facing. This also says something about humanity. Communism, according to Marx, is supposed to be the final evolution of human society, but multiple wars including the use of nuclear weapons were very close to breaking out between the two largest communist countries due to nuanced ideas and pride.

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¹ Jian Chen, *Mao's China and the Cold War*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 145.

² John Gittings, *Survey of the Sino-Soviet Dispute 1963-1968*. (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1968), 63.

³ O. Edmund Clubb, *China & Russia: The "Great Game,"* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971), 416.

⁴ Jian Chen, *Mao's China and the Cold War*, 63.

⁵ Rob Cameron, "Police Close Case on 1948 Death of Jan Masaryk - Murder, Not Suicide," Radio Prague, December 18, 2006, accessed May 08, 2018, <https://www.radio.cz/en/section/curraffrs/police-close-case-on-1948-death-of-jan-masaryk-murder-not-suicide>.

It is important to understand that defenestrations (Being thrown out of a tall window) in Prague have been happening since the 30 Year's War between 1618 and 1648.

⁶ O. Edmund Clubb, *China & Russia: The "Great Game,"* 414.

⁷ Miranda Vickers, *The Albanians: A Modern History* (New York, NY: I.B. Tauris, 1995), 181.

⁸ Ylber Marku, *Sino-Albanian Relations During the Cold War, 1949-1978: An Albanian Perspective*, Doctor's thesis, Lingnan University, Hong Kong, 2017, 36.

⁹ Miranda Vickers, *The Albanians*, 184.

¹⁰ Miranda Vickers, *The Albanians*, 184.

¹¹ John Gittings, *Survey of the Sino-Soviet Dispute*, 146.

¹² Chi-Kwan Mark, *China and the World Since 1945: An International History*, (London: New York: Routledge, 2012), 36.

¹³ Nikita Sergeyevich Khrushchev and Strobe Talbott, *Khrushchev Remembers: The Last Testament* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown, 1974), 255.

¹⁴ Henry Kissinger, *On China*, (New York, NY: Penguin Group, 2012), 167.

¹⁵ Karl E. Meyer, "The Opium War's Secret History," *The New York Times*, June 28, 1997.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Pankaj Mishra, "The Hungry Years," *The New Yorker*, June 19, 2017, accessed May 03, 2018, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2012/12/10/the-hungry-years>.

I am told that this quote is not as vulgar in Chinese

¹⁸ O. Edmund Clubb, *China & Russia: The "Great Game,"* 418.

¹⁹ Mikhail Klochko. "The Sino-Soviet Split: The Withdrawal of the Specialists." *International Journal* 26, no. 3 (1971): 556-66.

²⁰ Chi-Kwan Mark, *China and the World Since 1945*, 46.

²¹ Chi-Kwan Mark, *China and the World Since 1945*, 45.

²² Pankaj Mishra, "The Hungry Years."

²³ Simon Rogers, "UK GDP since 1955," *The Guardian*, March 09, 2009, accessed May 08, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/news/datablog/2009/nov/25/gdp-uk-1948-growth-economy>.

²⁴ "Announcement of the National Bureau of Statistics on Reforming the Accounting Method for Research and Development Expenditure to Revise the Accounting Data of Gross Domestic Product," National Bureau of Statistics, July 05, 2016, accessed September 19, 2018, http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/zxfb/201607/t20160705_1373924.html.

²⁵ O. Edmund Clubb, *China & Russia: The "Great Game,"* 438.

²⁶ John Gittings, *Survey of the Sino-Soviet Dispute 1963-1968*, 105.

²⁷ In this scene from Miguel de Cervantes' great novel, *Don Quijote* and his new squire, Sancho are wandering Spain trying to bring justice to the world but failing due to Don Quijote's delusions.