

**CHANGING PERSPECTIVES OF CHINA'S
FOREIGN POLICY VIS-A-VIS NORTH
KOREA AND VIETNAM (1950-79)**

*Dissertation submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University
in the partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the Award of the Degree of
MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY*

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To

My Grand Father



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PREFACE

After the establishment of the Peoples' Republic of China (PRC), the Chinese foreign policy became important at regional and international level. There was a major and revealing change in China's foreign policy from the Korean to the Vietnam wars. This change was based on a specific and differing definition of China's national interest in both periods.

In my discussion, I have tried to deal with different aspects of Chinese foreign policy from different angles. First Chapter is related to different aspects of China's national interest regarding foreign policy in 1950s and the different arguments for intervention in the Korean war. The second chapter of the dissertation deals with the different views of the Peoples' Liberation Army (PLA) on the intervention of the Korean war. It also deals with the interaction between civilian and military decision-makers in 1950s.

The third chapter discusses the different aspects of China's foreign policy and national interest with

continuity and change in the 1960s and the 1970s. Different perspective of Chinese foreign policy and national interest were debated among Chinese decision-making elites in the 1960s and the 1970s.

The fourth chapter discusses the different aspects of the Sino-Vietnamese war (1979) in the context of changing Chinese priorities of national interest. The Sino-Vietnam war reflects divergent national interests, geo-political perspectives, and historical animosity between the two peoples and is closely intertwined with the Sino-Soviet conflict.

The fifth chapter summarises the China's foreign policy from 1950 to 1979 and the national interest.

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At various stages of preparation, this work was subjected to intellectual scrutiny of my teacher, Dr. Madhu Bhalla. Of course, for her affection I have yet to find words to express my gratitude.

Professor G.P. Deshpande has always been an unfailing source of guidance and inspiration for me. I record most gratefully my debts to him.

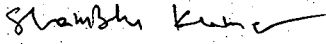
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(SHAMBHU KUMAR)

INTRODUCTION

The focus of this research is the differing perspective of China's foreign policy as it manifested itself in the Korean conflict in the early 1950s on the one hand and in Vietnam in the late 1970s on the other. A major and similar feature in both incidences was China's use of its armed forces in pursuit of its foreign policy vis-a-vis two socialist neighbours. A comprehensive view of China's foreign policy reveals that in the interest of its security and keeping in view the long-term and short term objectives, the Chinese leaders sometimes adopted a rigid and obstinate role, while on the other occasions they were flexible and acted according to the strategic requirements of the case.

Soon after the establishment of the people's Republic, China involved itself in the Korean war in 1950. It decided to intervene in response to the United States' policy to containing communism in Asia. China saw the US aggression in Korea in the light of its own bitter historical experience at the hands of the Japanese during the 1930s and 1940s. By defending socialist North Korea, China explained that it was supporting the emancipation of the poor and destitute Koreans. The ideological factor was

not the sole reason for the Chinese intervention. National interest was very evident in China's decision to send its armies into North Korea. Manchuria was as always vulnerable to attack from the Northeast as China's pre-liberation history had shown.

While ideological commitment was balanced by national interest in Korea, the intervention in Vietnam in 1979 was solely guided by narrow national interest. Vietnam was attacked inspite of being a socialist country with a recent history of having defended itself against U.S. aggression. China's policy was based on the geopolitical and strategic view that a weak and divided Indo-China was conducive to China's security and long-term power interests.

The 19th century Confucian basis of Chinese foreign policy changed after liberation to rest on Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought. From 1950 to 1963 the Chinese Communist leaders saw themselves as securely in the socialist camp. While China adhered generally to the tenets of the Sino-Soviet alliance in the early years. The PRC's membership of the camp was not without its ups & downs. While it sought Soviet aid and hence was clearly a junior partner in the alliance, the PRC from the outset aimed at an equal relationship. Not being able to realise

this it became one of the major ideological critics of the USSR. After 1963 China was as vituperative against the capitalist and imperialist US as it was of the revisionist Soviet Union. By 1963 China's leaders were ready to take an independent stand.

The Nuclear Test Ban Treaty signed among the US, Soviet Union and Britain in Moscow in July 1963 can be regarded as a watershed in the direction of Chinese foreign policy. China reacted not by succumbing to big power pressure but by improving its nuclear capability and staking a claim to autonomy in world affairs and international recognition of the PRC as a great power.

By 1966 the rift with the Soviet Union undermined any attempts for joint actions or programmes in Vietnam. China clearly regarded the Soviet Union not just as revisionist but also in league with imperialist interests in Indo-China.

In the 1970s China's concern became less ideological and more pragmatic. This transition was revealed in its conflict with Vietnam. The Sino-Vietnam war was also an indication of China's aspiration to dominant power status in the area and an effort to usurp Soviet influence and breakthrough the latter's policy of "encircling" China.

In the Korean as well as in the Vietnamese conflict

the Chinese armed forces were used to gain foreign policy objectives. Interestingly the change from a foreign policy based on ideology to one based on pragmatic and power considerations was evident as well in the views held by decision-makers within the People's Liberation Army (PLA). The experience of PLA generals like Peng Dehuai and Lin Biao during the revolutionary campaigns and the civil war and during the early period of the cold war had made them accept a close interaction with the civilian leadership. This acceptance also made them receptive to the emerging position of the political leaders on the PRC national interest and its geo-political view of Southeast Asia.

There was a major and revealing change in China's foreign policy from the Korean to the Vietnam wars. This change was based on a specific and differing definition of China's national interest in both periods. In the 1950s China defined its national interest in ideological terms as well as in terms of its internal developmental needs. By the late 1970s Chinese leaders had succeeded in redefining the country's national interest in terms of its big power aspiration internationally and its dominant status regionally. Both these definitions of national interest were not made in isolation by the Chinese foreign

policy making elite. They were based on perceptions of ideological and power changes in the international arena as well as on powerful domestic political and institutional arguments for a redefinition.

Existing literature in the area has viewed both the Korean war and the Sino-Vietnam war from fairly narrow and limited perspectives. Most studies have confined themselves to either and or the other event and have tended to view them either from strictly military perspective or from the perspective of a western concern with the changing military balance of power.

There are some important studies that provide us with valuable information on the foreign policy of China from the 1950s to 1970s. China Crosses the Yalu (Allen S. Whiting, 1960) ~~the~~ is still the best interpretation of the Chinese decision to intervene in the Korean war. Whiting's main argument is that China became ready to intervene in Vietnam due to its sheer need of security.

Communist China in World Politics (Harold C. Hinton, 1966) deals with the problem of China's security and recognition as a great power in Asia. Hinton says that China's entry into the Korean war was motivated overwhelmingly by concern for its own security and only very secondary by concern for North Korean survival. The

Strained Alliance (1975), Robert R. Simons has shattered much of the accepted notions about the origins of the Korean war, the nature of the triangular inter-relationship among Beijing, Pyongyang and Moscow and the United States' reaction to the conflict. He says that all those Communist countries had their own interests and there were differences among themselves such as there were among members of the UN forces.

Micheal B. Yehuda in the China's Role in World Affairs (1978) provides very good conceptual framework for Chinese foreign policy. He analyses China's role as an ally of the Soviet bloc, an independent critic of the Soviet Union and finally as an ambitious power in the region and to a considerable extent in the world. He argues that Chinese foreign policy reflects a mixture of national interest and socialist ideology. Gerald Segal in Defining China (1985) analyses Chinese foreign policy in the background of China's history, geography, ideology, institutions, objectives, patterns of crises management, military strategy, military tactics, effects of outside powers and domestic policies. His main argument is that China failed to achieve its goals in Korean and Vietnam wars. He analyses the strategic use ~~was~~ the use of military. In the Contests for the South China Sea (1982)

Marwyn S. Samuels deals with the Chinese involvement with other powers to solve the problem of its security and economy and to fulfil its strong desire to make itself a maritime power in Southeast Asia.

Studies dealing with China's intervention in Korea and Vietnam with Chinese foreign policy in an isolated way. None of the studies deal with the two wars in the continuum of China's foreign policy from the 1950s to the 1970s. Hence all these studies, valuable though they are within their own framework, fail to provide any insights into why the China, as a socialist power, reacted differently in these two situations against two separate socialist countries with both of whom the PRC had a proven record of amity and shared socialist objectives. This study in viewing the two episodes together, seeks to interpret the PRC's policy from within the framework of its changing needs and national interests. China's priorities were changing rapidly and the PRC was in a mood to accommodate itself to its national interests. To do this it was forced to leave ideology in the background by 1979.

Chapter 1

THE DEFINITION OF NATIONAL INTEREST IN CHINA'S FOREIGN POLICY IN THE 1950s AND THE ARGUMENTS FOR INTERVENTION IN THE KOREAN WAR

All of the interests of a given nation expressed at any given moment are called the national interest of that nation¹. Keeping this in mind we can say that national security, the restoration of formerly lost Chinese territories and their unification with the mainland, an alliance with the revolutionary socialist camp led by the Soviet Union to form an international front, to attain hegemony in Asia, ideological leadership in Asia and socialist economic construction were the national interests of China in the 1950s.

The National Security

The only aspect of national interest on which the widest agreement exists is that security is the most important element of national interest. Security has been and is, such a great concern of nations that it is often

1. Thomas W. Robinson, "National Interests", In James N. Rosenau, ed; International Politics and Foreign Policy (New York: The Free Press, (1969), p. 184

identified with national interest.²

In fact, security can be both an objective and a goal depending upon whether it is Sought in the long or in the short term. If Sought in the short term, it is an objective, otherwise it is a goal. Whether it is an objective or not, security has always been a goal of every country's foreign policy.³

After the establishment of the PRC People's Republic of China (PRC), the Chinese leaders were determined to defend the security of China at any cost. A primary concern was protecting the country from external aggression and hostile influences. The Communist Chinese leaders have feared aggression from the imperialist Camp led by the United States since the inception the PRC. The United States supported Chiang Kai-Shek's Nationalist Chinese government first on the mainland of China and then in Formosa (Taiwan) and hindered the unification of China. Chiang Kai-shek was seen by the PRC to threaten the mainland from Formosa which was protected by the American seventh fleet. The presence of the U.S navy was the of view became of the possibility of attack with thermo -

2. Ibid, P. 184.

3. Ibid, P. 184.

nuclear weapons by the United States. This fear among the other things, resulted in the Sino - Soviet alliance of 1950. Subsequent they, however the Sino - Soviet alliance was eroded and Soviet strategic protection for the PRC became doubtful. Henceforth, Chinese leaders conducted their external behaviour cautiously by avoiding complications with the United States, and also tried to improve defence capability so that China could rely on its own strength in the event of aggression.

This defensive capacity of the PRC was evident when it subsequently intervened in the Korean War after the when powerful American army endangered the security of the PRC and waves of Chinese volunteers drove back the American troops. It was also to safeguard its borders that China entered into border treaties with neighbouring countries, except India and the Soviet Union. Although India was willing to discuss the Sino-Indian border question in 1951 and 1954, Premier Zhou Enlai thought that the time was not ripe as China wanted to build up, covertly, the strategic Tibet-Sinkiang road across the Aksai-Chin area claimed by India. He also did not agree to negotiate the Sino - Soviet border problem, unless Moscow accepted the old treaties as unequal.

**The restoration of formerly lost Chinese territories
and their unification with China**

The second aspect of Chinese national interest in the 1950s was the restoration of formerly lost Chinese territories and their unification with China. The Chinese leaders made it clear in 1939 that they would like to re-establish the frontiers of the old Chinese Empire to include even non - Chinese territories like Sinkiang and Tibet, and those countries which had at one time or the other paid tribute to the Chinese Empire.⁴ In December 1954 the PRC published maps of China showing considerable parts of Burma, Bhutan, Aksai-Chin, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, parts of Bangladesh (then East Pakistan), Nepal, Mongolia, parts of Russia, Korea, Okinawa, Taiwan, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore, as parts of China, giving rise to apprehension that the PRC might claim all these territories sooner or later.

It is interesting to note that in spite of their differences both the nationalists and the communist

4. Robert C. North, "Peking's pride in the power of a feudal Empire : A New Imperialism:", National Herald, d. 2.12, 1962.

shared similar view on China's territorial aspirations, its traditional superiority and its great power status. In the 1940s the Chinese communists had voiced the right of minority peoples in China to self - determination. But when they Chinese communist Party came to power, it claimed the right to include within the regime all peoples brought into the Empire by the Manchus.⁵ This caused an apprehensions amongst South East Asian nation about communist China's aggressive designs and a desire for an American military pressure in Asia. China has also claimed national interests in the trans-Amur territories, the Soviet Maritime province, the port of Vladivostok and the Sakhalin Islands which territories were lost to Russia during the latter part of the nineteenth century. Their claim has given rise to the Sino-Soviet border dispute. To ally with the revolutionary socialist camp

The third goal in the 1950s was to ally with the revolutionary socialist camp led by the Soviet Union to form an international front to end western domination in China and elsewhere, and also to revolutionarise the

5. Edmund O. Clubb China and Russia : The Great Game (Columbia Univ. Press. New York, 1971), p. 378.

world on the basis of Marxism. This is clear from Liu Shaoqi's speech at the Australian Trade Union Conference at Beijing in which declared that it was through victory in the struggle for liberation and expulsion of imperialism that several countries could achieve a basic solution of the problem of living standards. the principle of non-alignment initiated by India and adopted by several other countries was not consider by Chinese leaders maintained that the post- war world was divided between the two camps there was no third road. As the united States had incurred the intense enmity of the Communist Chinese by aiding the Nationalist Chinese between 1948-1950. Beijing had naturally adopted a strong anti-American and pro-Russian posture. On 14 February 1950 China signed the Sino-Soviet alliance to seek protection in the event of an attack by Japan, the United States or any other nation.⁶ The treaty also laid down the principle of equality of status, mutual benefit and respect for national sovereignty and territorial integrity and non-interference in the internal affairs of the PRC.

6. Harold. Hinton, Communist China in World Politics (Boston :Houghton Mifflin Co., 1966). P. 207

For the first decade of its existence the PRC was seen by its leaders as an integral part of the socialist camp. Such independence of outlook, initiative and action as war undertaken by China's leaders in international affairs during this period was subsumed within the framework of the socialist camp. The PRC's membership of this camp went through many phases during these years. The Chinese relied upon their stronger partner as a major factor in the ultimate deterrence of the United States. Thus the Soviet Union provided the strategic cover under which the defence of the PRC's security interests could be managed by the Chinese themselves. Sino-Soviet alliance was undoubtedly the most important factor in preventing the United State from enlarging its military conflicts with China in the Korean war and the 1954 and 1958 clashes over the offshore islands.

To attain hegemony in Asia

China desired hegemony in Asia somewhat along the lines of the traditional Chinese empire. Traditionally China regarded itself as the centre of the world, or the Middle Kingdom. With its large territory, population,

ethical and social values, cultural and military superiority and above all its ancient civilization the Chinese attributed to their country a great power image.⁷ In fact this image had become a reality by virtue of China's having established around itself a system of tributary states, submissive to the great Chinese Empire, in view of this background, the Chinese play the theme of the great Chinese people to an excessive degree. No other country in the world is so obsessed by its own greatness.⁸ In all their foreign policy drives, the Chinese leaders seem to be strenuously aiming at the acquisition of a great power status for China. They felt that China must be recognised as equal to any great power like the United States, Britain or the erstwhile Soviet Union.

Beijing considered the United States as threatening its national interests particularly in view of the American support to the nationalists in Taiwan and obstructing Taiwan's unification with mainland China. The United States policy of containing Chinese communism, invited Beijing's hostility. The Latter decided to support

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7. Liue Leo Yueh Yuri, China as a Nuclear Power in World Politics (London : Macmillian press, 1972), p.11
 8. V.P. Dutt, China's Foreign Policy 1958-62 (Bombay : Asia Publishing House, 1964) p. 29

revolutionary struggles for national liberation and communist anti - government activities in Asian countries, after Chairman Mao Zedong became suspicious of intentions Moscow's hegemonic in guiding and dominating movements in Asia and the denial of China's hegemonic aspirations in the continent, particularly in South-east Asia, the Schism between the two country widened and the PRC adopted a policy of reducing the influence of the Soviet Union from Asia. Thus the PRC's policy in Asia has been aimed at diminishing both the American and Russian influence in Asia in an effort to maintain its own hegemony over the area.

Ideological leadership

The issue of ideology versus national interests in China has below variously debated expressed by different authors. A Doak Barnett, holds that ideology greatly influenced the Chinese concept of their national interest and that the communist belief in world revolution definitely impelled them to project their influence beyond Chinese borders.⁹ Hans J. Morgenthau, on the other hand,

9. Daok A Barnett, Communist China and Asia: Challenged to American Policy (New York: Harper, 1960), p. 68.

maintains that the fundamental fact in Asia, is not that China has a communist government, but that she has resumed her traditional role as the predominant power in Asia. Communism adds a new dimension to the means by which Chinese policies are to be achieved. Edmund O Clubb states that Mao Zedong and his colleagues were viewed as communists - but first as Chinese.¹⁰ Thus ideology was used by the Chinese as a means of achieving the goals of national policy in a more dynamic forceful way.

The Chinese leaders considered the Russian Socialist Revolution as a model of revolution within the oppressor & imperialist nations. They had distinguished the Chinese revolution as an example of revolution in the oppressed nations, i.e., in the colonial or semi-colonial countries.

Chinese communists maintained that Chairman Mao Zedong's theory of new democratic revolution against imperialism, feudalism and bureaucratic capitalism which is based on Marxism - Leninism Mao Zedong Thought was different from all other revolution. It could be adopted as a guide by other countries in their wars of national

10. Edmund O. Clubb, China and Russia : The Great Game (New York : Columbia Univ. Press, 1971,), p. 376.

liberation. The Chinese Communists advocated this because of their revolutionary experience and assumed that they would play a leading role in guiding revolutionary struggles in Asia, Africa and Latin America.

To achieve these external objectives, the PRC adopted various methods ranging from violent to non-violent means in what were the other methods adopted each case. For example, in October 1950, the PRC entered the Korean War by sending its volunteers as the crossing of the 38th parallel by American troops was considered a serious security risk to China.¹¹ Other methods were also used such as official and non-official diplomacy, trade and aid programme, diplomacy through the communist parties and world-wide communist propaganda.

Chinese Security

The Korean peninsula, about 85,000 square miles in area, occupies a position of great strategic importance in East Asia. Its boundaries with Manchuria, the Rhur of China, run along the Yalu and Tumen rivers for nearly 600 miles and China depends for some of its electric power on facilities located on the Korean side of the frontier. For

11. H.C. Hinton, Communist China in World Politics (Boston Houghton Mifflin Co; 1966), p. 213.

these reasons, the independent existence or destruction of Korea has always been regarded as closely related to China's security.

Being a close neighbour of Korea, China could hardly remain indifferent to what was happening in close proximity to its borders. Devoid of even diplomatic contacts with the West, Beijing could not but view with serious concern the prospects US forces coming close to the Chinese frontier. It is pertinent to recall that Japan was then under US occupation and the Chinese nationalist leader Chiang Kai-Shek had rapport with Washington. Even if China did not face an imminent invasion of Chinese soil by the United Nations troops, the establishment of a United Korea, whose government was likely to be as hostile to China, and as closely bound to the United States, as that of Syngman Rhee, of South Korea, posed a serious threat to Chinese security.

The American decision to protect Taiwan, announced by President Truman on June 27, 1950 threatened to disturb the termination of the Chinese civil war on communist terms. Important though the Taiwan issue seemed to the PRC, the Korea crisis rapidly assumed even more critical proportions. Statements by Ambassador Warren Austin in the

Security Council, on August 10 and 17, seemed to show that the United States government had decided to reunify Korea by force, an act that would bring American troops to the door-step of Manchuria.

When the North Koreans offensive was stopped and general MacArther had expressed the intention to reunite Korea, the PRC had clearly announced its determination to intervene in the Korean war in the interests of its security if and when the United Nations forces would cross the 38th parallel. When the United Nations' forces were crossing the 38th parallel, the PRC demanded the withdrawal of all foreign forces from Korea.

At same time China indicated its willingness to accept a rump North Korea as a buffer, with its southern boundary approximately at 39.30° north latitude, provided the United States would withdraw its recognition from the Republic of Korea.

The PRC had learned to watch general MacArther's actions in the field rather than listen to President Truman's more moderate words in Washington. On October 24, MacArther abolished the last restraining line for American troops and announced his intention of marching to the Yalu. Probably as an indication that this was the direct

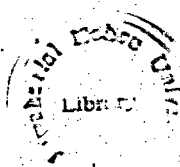
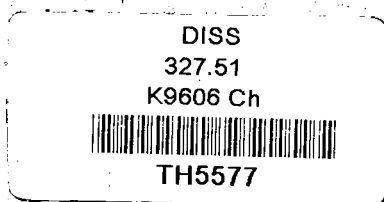
cause of the PRC'S entrance into the war.

China saw danger to its existence and it ordered the CPV (Chinese People's Volunteers) on 26 October, 1950 to launch a vigorous attack against the United Nations invading forces with a view to drive them down to the 38th parallel and even throw them out of Korea. Beijing had already managed to send army units into North Korea and three armies were ready at the Korea Manchuria border. By middle of November the strength of the Chinese army in Manchuria and Korea was estimated at 8,50,000. This makes it clear that the so called volunteers were in reality troops and the PRC's intervention in Korea was motivated overwhelmingly by concern for its security and enhancement of its own power and prestige in East Asia by reducing the American influences. North Korea's survival was only a secondary consideration.¹²

Ideological Commitment

An ideological commitment is often added to an alliance already firmly grounded on specific common or

12. Michael H. Hunt, "Beijing and the Korean Crisis", Political Science Quarterly, Vol.107, No.3, 1992, p.464.



complementary interests. In this case it strengthens alliance. If however, community of interests is absent, an alliances based on ideology alone will be stillborn.

China expressed the view that an aggressive strategy by imperialism can be countered only by a people's revolutionary war. The Chinese leader gave arguments to oppose counter - revolutionary war with revolutionary war. The Chinese people, they announced, would closely unite with the Korean people to fight to the end to defeat US imperialist aggression and war and to realise their common great revolutionary ideals (Socialism). In the August 26, 1950 issue of Shih - Chih Chih-Shih China expressed the view that the Korean people's sorrow and misfortune was Chinese sorrow and misfortune.

Mao's attitude toward China's role in the Korean conflict was complex. He contended that he felt an internationalist duty to rescue the beleaguered Korean revolution and to help maintain revolutionary morale around the world in the face of a counter-offensive

launched by American reactionaries. The dangers of a revival of reactionary sentiment in China and elsewhere in Asia was equally troubling and called for a decisive response. If China meekly acquiesced while the Americans occupied all of Korea and dealt a heavy blow to the Korean revolution, then the American aggressors would run even more wild to the detriment of all of East Asia.

Mao expressed fears of China being thrown on the defensive if it did not deal the American a blow.¹³ An unchecked American advance in Korea would draw wavering countries and classes to the side of the United States, strengthen the resolve of reactionaries at home and abroad, and encourage the United States to send troops to other points along China's border. While giving considerable might overall to the dangers of appeasement and the opportunity for creating an international environment favourable to revolutionary change, Mao also invoked a narrower, more conventional concern with China's security. He had to act, he argued, to preempt a possible American offensive into China itself.

13. Michael H. Hunt, "Beijing and the Korean Crisis", Political Science Quarterly, Vol.107, No.3, 1992, p.464.

After a hot discussion between Mao and other Chinese leaders, the final consensus reached at the meeting of 13 October seemed to conclude that military intervention was necessary above all to prevent the enemy from dominating the Yalu River and thus posing a constant threat to the Northeast. But it was also important to guarantee the North Korean's a secure base of operations and to deny imperialism a victory that would fan counter-revolutionary sentiments in China and internationally.

In an address to the Chinese People's Consultative Congress on 24 October, Zhou Enlai invoked the traditional figure of speech where the two countries were linked in an anatomical metaphor to underline the long accepted importance of the peninsula. China and Korea were next door neighbours.¹⁴ They dependent on each other like lips and teeth and share common weal and woe. The militant friendship between the Chinese and Korean people was central with blood and could stand any test. No force could destroy it. The Chinese people resolutely supported the Korean people in their just struggle to oppose US imperialist aggression.

14. Selected works of Zhou Enlai, Vol.2, Foreign Language Press, Beijing, 1980, p.53.

Encirclement of China

After 26 Nov., 1950, the situation was desperate for the United States' troops in Korea, the United States launched a programme of building a network of military bases mainly in Japan, South Korea and Philippines. It signed bilateral and multilateral alliances like SEATO (South Asia Treaty Organisation) and ANZUS (Australia, Newzealand and United States Treaty) and granted military and economic aid to countries around mainland China with a view to contain any possible expansion of Communist China in Asia. With the outbreak of the Korean war, United State's policy of tolerating the communist regime in Beijing suddenly changed into that of an active hostility towards it. The United States now saw Communist China as a threat to the security of East and Southeast Asia and its own interests in the region. It actively embarked on a policy of containing and isolating the PRC from the rest of Asia and the world.¹⁵ China urged that the US had shifted the main weight of its global strategy to Asia.

15. R.S. Gupte, History of Modern China (New Delhi : Sterling Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1974), p.469.

Immediate Concern

Some immediate issues were responsible for China intervention in the Korean war. In his cable to the United Nations on 20 August, 1950, Premier in Zhou-Enlai expressed his country's concern about the solution of the Korean question. That question, he observed, must be and could be settled peacefully.¹⁶ At the sometime, China began to accuse the Western powers of encroaching upon its territorial waters and violating its airspace. Beijing also lodged a protest with the US government against the alleged bombing at Chinese villages and the slaughter of Chinese people.¹⁷ While announcing the release of battle-trained Koreans from the people's Liberation Army of China on 22 September 1950, the spokesman of the Chinese Foreign Ministry supported them in joining in the defence of their motherland. He condemned the "criminal acts of American imperialist aggressors" against Korea and their plot of extending the war. On 24 September 1950, Zhou Enlai drew attention to the repeated violations of Chinese territory by US armed forces. He warned UN Member States that if they continued to remain deaf and dumb to these aggressive

16. People's China, Beijing, 1 Sept., 1950, p.4.

17. People's China, Beijing, 16 Sep., 1950, p.27.

crimes of the United States, they would not escape responsibility for war in the East. Peace-loving peoples all over the world, he observed, would not accept this passively.¹⁸

This was an indirect reference to China's intention to intervene in the Korean war, hint to Britain and other countries to exert themselves to stop the war and restrain Washington. The clearest warning about the impending Chinese intervention in Korea was given by Zhou Enlai on 30 September 1950 when he stated that the Chinese people would not supinely tolerate seeing their neighbours being savagely invaded by the imperialists.¹⁹

Greater resistance by anti-communist forces at home, the impact of the North Korean defeat on Japan and neutral nations of Asia, the loss of a buffer zone at a highly sensitive point and the prospect of the defeated North Korean army retreating into Manchuria, thereby facilitating Soviet Control over Manchuria all seem to have influenced Beijing's decision to intervene in the Korean war. However, the collapse of the North Korean resistance, the rapid advance of the UN forces under

18. People's China, Peking, 16 Oct., 1950, p.26.

19. People's China, Beijing, 16 Oct., 1950, p.7.

General MacArthur towards the Chinese border and the resulting threat to Chinese security were probably the decisive factors in inducing Beijing to intervene. If the Kremlin succeeded in persuading Beijing to join the war effort, it was only because Chinese interests were so directly involved in the Korean war.²⁰

Zhou Enlai observed :

"In view of painful historical lessons and in consideration of their vital interest, the Chinese people had no choice but to volunteer assistance to Korea, fighting aggression shoulder to shoulder with the Korean people in defence of the security of their motherland. The Chinese people could not permit such a situation in which Korea could be used once again as a spring board of aggression against China."²¹

20. Statement at the Geneva Conference, 11 May, 1954, UK Command Papers, 9186, p.42.

21. Statement at the Geneva Conference, 11 May, 1954. UK Command Papers 9186, p.17.

Chapter 2

THE PLA'S VIEW ON INTERVENTION AND INTERACTION BETWEEN CIVILIAN AND MILITARY DECISION-MAKERS

The military is always in the habit of thinking about national interest in military and strategic terms. While on the other hand, political elites always think about national interest within the totality of socio-economic and political situation along with the international scenario. A complicating factor is that the army is always conscious about its privileges. Peng Dehuai and his associates always tried to keep a strong grip on power within the PCA. They wanted to shape the foreign policy China in the direction of their interests and choices. They wanted to professionalise the army and to keep its identity independent. But Mao and his followers and associates wanted to make the army a tool for socio-economic reconstruction, a political force and a force for the internal and external security of China.

Therefore, differences cropped up among civilian and military elites in the 1950s. At times there was a compromise at times military elites were dominated by political leaders. Both groups were generally in a mood of compromise regarding foreign policy because it was too

sensitive for an area for disagreement.

(I) PLA's view on intervention

Important gaps still exist in our knowledge of China's entry into the Korean War. The most glaring of these are Beijing's relations with Pyongyang and Moscow, because the party history establishment, taking its cue from the top party leadership, regards candid treatment of relations with the Soviet Union and North Korea as inconvenient. Chinese historians generally approach the topic warily and work from limited sources. Virtually all the fresh information on this topic comes from memoirs and histories, not from primary documentation.

How and why the decision was made to enter the Korean War remains subject to speculation, although the primary factor was certainly the desire to maintain North Korea as a buffer zone.¹ Peng Dehuai's memoirs speak explicitly of Mao having been opposed to his decision to enter the war. Indeed Peng himself says he was initially among Mao's opponents but was soon persuaded by the Chairman's logic².

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1. The best analysis of the Chinese Intervention is still Allen S. Whiting, China Crosses the Yalu (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1960).
 2. FBIS (Foreign Broadcast Information Service) - PRC, 16 April 1982, P.K 6.

Other, more esoteric evidence from 1950 indicates that then there was at least some kind of policy disagreement. An article in August 1950 spoke of some people taking a 'fence-sitting attitude'³. Later on in the war Mao seemed to go out of his way to stress that economic reconstruction could not be carried on free from worry unless the US was held at the 38th parallel. Despite Soviet pressure and their own supposed preference for a pre-emptive attack, PLA Commanders did not necessarily favour intervention. Even Peng Dehui personally opposed the decision. It has been argued, notably by John Gittings, that Mao favoured the Korean intervention as a means of condemning Gao Kang's power base in Manchuria by moving in large military formations from other regions.

The Chinese communist Party (CCP) began almost at once to prepare against untoward developments in Korea. On 30 June 1950 Chzhou ordered Chinese military observers to North Korea. On 7 and 10 July the Military Affairs Committee (MAC) met and in sessions chaired by Zhou and attended by the army Commander-in-chief. Zhou De and Nie Rongzhen recommended creating a force to defend the border and if necessary cross the Yalu River to help North Korea.

3. Allen S. Whiting, China Crosses the Yalu (Stanford : Standord University Press, 1961), pp.82-3, 151-2.

Mao at once endorsed the proposal. On 5 August Mao personally instructed Gao Gang to have the border forces ready for combat by early September. Told by Gao of the difficulties in completing the preparations, Mao agreed on 18 August to extend the deadline to the end of the month. On 17 September, in the immediate aftermath of the successful American landing at Inchon, the MAC dispatched Chinese officers to Korea to lay the ground work for possible intervention.

On 2nd October Mao met with Chue, Liu Shaoqi, Zhou, Nie and Gao and he announced that troops had to intervene⁴. On 11-12 October Mao suspended his intervention order and recalled Peng and Gao to Beijing for another round of discussions. There are three reasons for the suspension. Mao was very careful about the US and UN forces and its superiority and the conflict between the declared intentions and activities of the former. He was also very anxious about the lack of Soviet air support. In this situation he wanted to chalk out the best strategy with his generals before going to war. The Political Bureau met on 13 October and stayed in session through the night before coming to a unanimous agreement to send

4. The Case of Peng Dehuai, 1959-1968, (Hongkong : Union Research Institute, 1968). p.154.

troops to Korea despite the lack of Soviet air support. The 13 October Bureau meeting and Mao's discussions with Peng on the 14th produced a consensus in favour of proceeding consciously and avoiding a direct challenge to the United States.

On 15 October, with Kim II Sung calling for haste in the dispatch of support, Mao issued an order for intervention no later than 17 October, a deadline extended thereafter to 18th October. By the 17th Peng's subordinates reported that their forces with anti-aircraft guns and no air cover faced poor odds in battle and proposed delaying action until winter or even the following spring, when they might be better equipped. That same day Mao called Peng and Gao back to Beijing to canvas again the precise time for moving into Korea and to hear Zhou report on the details of Soviet support. With the Americans advancing rapidly and the North Koreans in a panic, Mao thrust aside hesitations and fears and insisted on immediate action. He now set 19th October for the major crossing of the Yalu. As instructed, the first major body of Chinese troops advanced into Korea late that day, setting in motion the events that soon brought war with the United States.

The PRC's entry into the Korean War was motivated

overwhelmingly by concern for its own security and only very secondarily by concern for North Korean survival. Still less important, apparently, was a desire to reduce American and enhance Chinese influence in the Far East, although there was probably some hope that an act of assumed strategic necessity might also yield some political benefits, such as an improved position with respect to Taiwan. The political leadership in Beijing was also apprehensive of the increasing Soviet influence under Gao Gang in Manchuria as well as the Soviet position in North Korea.

The Civilian leadership of China thought that the war also provided an opportunity to mobilize the urban population and integrate intellectuals into the new political order. This process, begun on the eve of liberation, had intensified in July 1950, paralleling China's military preparations at each step of the way. National unity particularly preoccupied Mao as he made the decision in early October to intervene. The Korean crisis also gave an impetus to the land reform movement in the new liberated areas, particularly in the Southeast of the country. After China entered the war, Mao issued orders to accelerate efforts along that vulnerable section of the coast in order to consolidate control and improve defence

capabilities."⁵

Beijing wanted to eliminate counter revolutionary forces. Even before the war began, the PRC had regarded as urgent the suppression of remnant Nationalist forces on the mainland, spies and covert operations sponsored by Taipei and Washington, and banditry. These forces of disorder and anti-communist resistance, concentrated in southeast and southwest China, attacked local government officials and party cadres, blockaded or seized towns and villages disrupted communications, carried out looting and robbery, committed sabotage and assassinations and attacked scattered military units. Beijing's determination to eliminate counter revolutionary forces was reinforced by the fear that Nationalist forces, perhaps backed by the United States, might launch a counterattack on the mainland and link up with residual resistance groups, creating a rallying point against the CCP. This fear predated the Korean War and was intensified by the possibility of amphibious landings on the coast or an American march into the Northeast as the first step in an attempt at over-throwing the CCP.⁶ The

5. Ezra F. Vogel, Canton under Communism : Programmes and Politics in a Provincial Capital, 1949-1968 (Cambridge : Harvard University Press, 1969), pp.98-99.

6. A battle history of the People's Liberation Army of China, Vol.3 (Beijing Junshi Kexue, 1987), pp.395-97.

Chinese military and political elites discussed-widely to thwart internal and external problems of China.

Civil Military relations in the 1950s

As early as April 1951, Peng was complaining bitterly to Zhou Enlai that his logistical support was grossly inadequate.⁷ The PLA had crossed the Yalu with the same hodge-podge of weapons and equipment with which it had ended the civil war, apparently intending to resupply itself off the enemy, as it always had before. Peng knew he needed help and he knew where to get it. By late 1951, significant Soviet aid began to reach the front and Peng was able to some what stabilize his supply situation.⁸

The experience of the Korean war made communist China openly admit the short comings in its army relatively to that of the USA, in the matter of modern weapons.⁹ Beijing set in earnest to transform the Red Army by absorbing the highly advanced military science of the Soviet Union. Many distinctive features of the egalitarian model were

7. Ta P'i-P'an T'ung-hsun [Bih Criticism Bulletin] (Canton), 5 October 1967, trans in SCMP, No.4124, p.3.

8. Robert C. North, Moscow and the Chinese Communists, 2nd ed. (Stanford : Stanford Univ. Press, 1963), p.197.

9. People's China, 16 August 1951, p.8.

discarded or modified and the PLA began to resemble the Soviet Army. With the emergence of a professional officer corps, a step encouraged by the institution of ranks in 1955 and the introduction of strict disciplinary codes in 1953, the links between higher and lower levels in the PLA were considerably weakened. Tan Cheng, a former Deputy Minister of National Defence and Director of the GPD (General political Departments) from late 1956 to 1964 complained in September 1956 of the Army's failure to maintain the traditions of democracy and of unity between the officers and the men.¹⁰

Prior to 1950, during periods of Civil war and defence of the home land, the commissars had greater opportunities for an active role than they subsequently had during the Korean War or thereafter. The creation of an increasingly modernized army seriously restricted their role within the armed forces. Besides, the introduction of conscription, ranks, and a host of technical schools, & the arrival of many Russians advisers, were causing concern to Mao personally and commissars generally, for

10. "Hold High the Great Red Banner of Mao Tse-tung's Thought, Thoroughly Criticize and Repudiate the Bourgeois Military Line", Beijing Review, No.32 (4 Aug.1967), p.44.

these events spelled the increasing isolation of Commanders from the masses. After 1950, the party was able to divest commanders of civil administrative functions, but it permitted them maximum authority within their professional sphere. As a result, the role of the GPD in collective decision-making was apparently reduced to an all-time low by the time Peng Dehuai was dismissed in 1959.

Since the Korean War, the PLA has relied less on Maoist military thought and more on alternative models. In keeping with Mao's own dictum to 'seek truth from practice' and the need to be flexible, the Chinese military adopted mass professional strategies that had less to do with guerrilla war and more with the Soviet model. Some have attributed a new pattern of military thought to Lin Biao or Peng Dehuai, but it is difficult to argue conclusively that their views were anything but realistic reactions to changing military conditions far more in keeping with conventional Soviet military planning and adaptation of Maoist principles.

In September 1956, in his report to the Eighth Party Congress, Peng said, "We must intensify our study of modern military science and technique, the art of

commanding a modernized army in battle, and new military systems.¹¹ Radical Maoists subsequently claimed that Peng's ultimate intention was to create an exact copy of the Soviet Army, and to negate the party's absolute leadership over the army, to eliminate the system of collective leadership by party committees, and to enforce the system of one-man leadership.¹² Clearly, Peng did oppose collective leadership within the PLA. But the Soviet model which Peng was selectively applying, provides for overall party control within a system of one-man command. The Soviet system works very well provided the officer corps is thoroughly communised and co-opted.

It is barely conceivable that by 1955, Mao may have believed that PLA officers had become reliable enough politically to permit the transition away from the commissar system as Lenin and Stalin did in the 1920s. Mao made frequent references to advanced Soviet experience in the 1950s. It is well known that the "Hundred flowers" campaign, which led to a flood of criticism of the party

11. Ellis Joffe, "The Conflict Between Old and New in the Chinese Army", China Quarterly, No.18, April-June 1964, p.121.

12. "Hold High the Great Red Banner of Mao Tsetung's Thought, Thoroughly Criticize and Repudiate the Bourgeois Military Line", Beijing Review, No.32 (4 August, 1967), p.44.

and its ideology, shocked and disillusioned Mao. His decision to launch a counter attack against Peng and the Russianisation of the PLA came at the same time and for the some reasons as the "Anti-Rightist campaign of mid-1957. Mao realised that China was not nearly so unified behind the party and its ideology as he had thought when he had called for "blooming and contending" in 1956. Although the PLA officer corps had not voiced any public criticism, Mao would probably have reconsidered any thoughts he ever had about allowing the commissar system to wither away in favour of one-man command. A purge of junior military officers was conducted in 1957.

While Mao certainly objected to certain manifestations of Soviet influence, he was not opposed to modernisation per se. He supported the development of modern industry and reportedly called for nuclear research as early as 1955. He recognised that nuclear weapons would strengthen his hand in world politics.

In September 1958, another movement was launched for officers to go down to the "companies and soldier" (hsia-lien tang-ping). This movement required every officer to spend one month per year serving as a common soldier and was intended to demonstrate that no military man had an

iron rice bowl. The only difference between officers and enlisted man was their work and to think otherwise was incorrect and non-communist. It has become conventional wisdom, reinforced by Red Guard sources in 1967, that Peng opposed the hsia-lien movement. He no doubt disapproved of its extremism.

Peng was appalled by the disorder and the utopianism of the Great Leap, especially by its disruption of national defence industry. But his grip on the PLA was beginning to slip, and he could not resist the extremes of the hisa-lien movement. He had made bitter enemies among the political commissars, who saw the Great Leap as their chance to regain lost power and prestige.

The same month that saw the launching of hsia-lien (September 1958) also saw the creation of serious doubts about the reliability of the Sino-Soviet military alliance. Substantial US military and political backing for Chiang Kai Shek during the Taiwan straits crisis was in marked contrast to the slow, cautious and grudging Soviet support for Beijing. If there had been any doubts, the straits crisis must have convinced Mao and the Central Committee that they needed an independent nuclear capability. Soviet inaction weakened Peng's political

position considerably, since he had become closely identified with the Soviet alliance. Peng's position was further weakened by the terrible beating his air force took at the hands of Nationalist pilots in 1958.

Finally, at the Lushan plenum of August 1959, Peng was removed. His opposition to the economic policies and disruptions of the Great Leap and to the mass militia had made enemies of Mao and his followers, as had his close identification with the Soviets. In fact, the Soviets may well have administered the coup de grace to Peng by repudiating the nuclear power-sharing agreement in June 1959. That action also confirmed the fears of men like Yeh Chienying. Su yu, Nieh Jung-chen and Liu Po-Cheng who had opposed Peng's heavy reliance on the USSR and had advocated the maintenance of more powerful Chinese forces to guard against surprise attack.

Exactly how and why Lin Biao was chosen to replace Peng will probably remain uncertain. He was quite acceptable to the officers corps since his credentials as a troop commander were impeccable. On the other hand, his redness was unsullied by Peng Dehyai's years since he had been ill and relatively inactive, during the mid-1950s. Given Lin Biao's professional training and career and his

past disagreements with Mao, he was probably as acceptable to Liu as he was to Mao.¹³ In any event, Mao did not simply appoint Lin on his own. It must be recalled that Mao was very much on the defensive at Lushan because of the failures of the Great Leap. It is suggested here that Peng Dehuai was eliminated by Mao and Liu, both as a potential rival and a convenient scapegoat for recent political, economic and military setbacks. Lin was an acceptable replacement because he was red enough to suit Mao and expert enough to suit Liu. Moreover, he could speak to and for the PLA, since he held its confidence.

The dismissal of Peng Dehuai and the appointment of Lin Biao as Defence Minister in September 1959 did not immediately lead to any drastic changes in the existing system. The new team under Lin Biao proceeded consciously and gradually. Lin tried to reach a series of compromises acceptable to all contending functional groups- the party, Mao-its, commissars and commanders. Thus neither the argument over the acquisition of nuclear weapons was dismissed nor did the question of the modernisation of the

13. Thomas W. Robinson, "Lin Piao as an Elite Type", in Elites in the People's Republic of China, ed. Robert A. Scalapino (Seattle : University of Washington Press, 1972), p.154-156.

vigorous drive to promote political consciousness among the soldiers and the army was launched and greater emphasis was laid on exercising more effective party control over the Army.¹⁴

(III) Definition of national interest PLA and civilian leadership

Mao was closely identified with the ideal of the military as a multifunctional tool of the party - a fighting force, a political force and a force for economic production. Closely correlated was the strategy of people's war which was based on the assumption of military weakness vis-a-vis China's enemies. In opposition, men like Zhu-De, Peng Dehuai, Yeh Chien-Ying, Liu Pocheng, Su Yu and Nieh Jung-Chen advocated armed forces devoted primarily to military operations with the most advanced weapons available. This implied the necessity to strive for industrial, scientific and military modernization.

Clearly, different times and circumstances favoured different military policies and the history of the communist movement has been different blendings of these two. Mao's "people's war" ideal dominated during the

14. Ibid., p.156.

anti-Japanese war. During the civil war and especially after 1949, there was a trend toward more conventional and professional military operations and policies. After 1949, there was also a marked tendency toward bureaucratic routinization and professionalization in all segments of the regime and the PLA officer corps emerged as a separate and relatively self-conscious opinion group. It developed routines, career patterns and preferences. One preference was the avoidance of non-military activity rather narrowly construed. Mao opposed this PLA withdrawal from politics. He was interested in using the army as a militant arm of the CCP in the mobilisation and transformation of society -- a role the PLA under Peng Dechai avoided.¹⁵

The irony of the situation was that party control over the PLA was probably stronger in the 1950s than at anytime before or since. This was precisely because the army confined itself to military affairs. Over the years, the PLA has intervened most in non-military activities whenever politics has been in command. That aspect of the Maoist model which requires a multi-functional army tends

15. Jungen Domes, "The Role of the Military in the Formation of Revolutionary Committee, 1967-68, China Quarterly, no.44, (October-December 1970), p.144.

to contradict the other major aspect of party control. Because the party controlled the gun in 1959, Peng could not challenge Mao from a power base in the PLA. It was doubly ironic, that Mao and Lin Biao immediately proceeded to repoliticise the army so that they could use it to overthrow the revisionist party. It is surely no coincidence that Mao first called for "politics in command" of the army of Kufien in 1929) when he was trying to gain control of Li-Li San's Central Committee. Then, as later, the civilians who dominated the CCP wanted to confine the army to purely military work, partly at least so as to prevent a military-based challenge to the political status quo.

Thus, it is clear that military and political elites tried their best to dominant Ehihen foreign policy, foreign policy was related to internal developments in China. The political elites were able to dominant internal developments and foreign affairs. The military could not play the some role due to political structure of China. Therefore, the military elites were dominated by political elites in 1950s.

Chapter 3

CHANGING PERSPECTIVES ON FOREIGN POLICY AND NATIONAL INTEREST WITHIN THE CHINESE DECISION-MAKING ELITES - 1960S AND 1970S

By defending socialist North Korea in 1950. China explained that it was supporting the emancipation of the poor and destitute Koreans and fulfilling an ideological objective. From 1950 to 1963 the Chinese leaders considered the PRC as an integral part of the socialist camp. China's world outlook, initiative and action in the international affairs was subsumed within the socialist framework. The PRC's membership of the camp went through many phases during these years¹. From being a junior ally of the Soviet Union it became an independent and almost equal partner and finally became its major ideological critic. Post - 1963 China's foreign policy was directed as much against socialist imperialism of the Soviet Union as against the imperialism of the United States. Coupled with the ideological factor the question of Chinese national interest was also brought into play. Safeguarding Manchuria from the USA was a policy

1. Michael B. Yahuda, China's Role In World Affairs. (London: China Helm Ltd, 1978). P. 39.

objective.

But it was not until 1963 that China's leaders began to identify a role for the PRC which was more or less freed it from alliance considerations. China viewed the Nuclear test Ban Treaty signed among the US, Soviet Union and Britain in Moscow in July 1963 as an attempt by the powers to snuff out its nuclear programme. China responded by improving its nuclear capability since its nuclear programme symbolized its quest for autonomy in world affairs and recognition as a great power.²

In the 1970s, China's concern became less ideological and more pragmatic. This transition was revealed in its conflict with Vietnam. The Sino-Vietnam war was also an indication of China's aspiration to dominant power status in the area and an effort to usurp Soviet influence and break through the latter's policy of "encircling" China. In the Korean as well as in the Vietnamese conflict the Chinese armed forces were used to gain foreign policy objectives. The transition from an ideologically imbued foreign policy to a pragmatic and power oriented foreign policy was mirrored as well in the

2. Harold, C. Hinton, Communist China in World Politics (Boston : Houghton Mifflin Co., 1966), P. 205.

elite decision - makers within the PLA. The historical anti-foreign and revolutionary experience of the PLA in the 1950s attuned generals like Peng Dehuai and Lin Biao to interact closely with China's political leaders. By the late 1970s the defeat of the "red" to the "expert" school within the PLA attuned the latter to the more national interest and geopolitical view of the civilian leadership as well.

(a) Interaction between military and political elites in 1960s and 1970s

(i) Lin Biao's were

Under Lin, army discipline and morale were rapidly restored. During 1960-61, he initiated an intensive rectification and indoctrination programme glorifying the Thought of Mao that effectively repoliticised the army. Despite his emphasis on Maoist concepts and values, he also sponsored many measures to strengthen the PLA's military capabilities. The priority placed on nuclear development continued and in 1964 China exploded its first nuclear device. By 1963 the entire country was being called upon to learn from the PLA.³ By 1965, on the eve

3. John Gittings, "The learn from the Army campaign", China Quarterly, No. 18 (April - June 1964), p. 153 - 59.

of the Cultural Revolution, a close political alliance between Mao and Lin had been forged and Lin had emerged as the principal spokesman for Mao's ideas.⁴ The army was held up as the embodiment of Mao's revolutionary ideals and military personnel were gradually moving into new and expanded roles in the civilian sector of society, roles that were increasingly competitive with those of party cadres. Lin's position of dominance backed by Mao was for the moment unchallengeable, but as later events were to show, many military leaders disagreed with both Lin and Mao.

As the war in Vietnam escalated and the possibility of conflict with the United States appeared to increase, major differences within the leadership over defence policies China should pursue reached a climax in 1965⁵. Military training and readiness were the responsibility of the General Staff Department and its chief Lo Jui-ch'ing.

Despite all of the political preparations which have been described, the PLA and the militia proved to be a good deal less radical during the Cultural Revolution than

4. A. Doak Barnett, China After Mao, (Princeton University Press, 1967) p. 196.

5. "Basic Differences Between the Proletarian and Bourgeois Military Lines". Beijing Review, Nov. 24, 1967. p. 11-16

might have been expected. One reason for this was undoubtedly the fact that behind the rhetoric and parallel to the political retrenchment, the PLA devoted considerable effort to normal military tasks during the early 60s. As noted earlier, Lin Biao maintained a balance of both military and political work in his refurbishment of the army. Military training and readiness were the responsibility of the General Staff Department and its chief, Lo Jui-ch'ing. Lo's contribution to the strengthening of the PLA was thus quite important, but it left him vulnerable to political attack when he and Lin began to clash over strategic policies and political power.

Lo was actually stripped of his power in November 1965 and was officially purged on 16 May 1966. Public criticism did not begin until the summer of 1967, when Lo was characterized as a jack booted storm trooper pushing the reactionary bourgeois military line. He was specifically accused of opposing political work in the PLA and of saying that to regard Mao's works as the PLA's supreme directive did not conform to the system of the Chinese state. Worse still, he allegedly recommended that officers study Liue Shaoqi's "How to be a Good

Communist"⁶.

The most important cause of Lo's fall from power was a bitter controversy over military security policy that evolved as the Sino-Soviet rift widened and as American involvement in Indo-China assumed threatening proportions. Beijing had to decide upon a response to the American threat and that necessarily begged reconsideration of the Sino-Soviet relationship. If the North Vietnamese were to be given full support including the use of bases in Southern China, then it was imperative to repair the Sino-Soviet alliance to deter US reprisals. China's own nuclear deterrent was still years away from operational status. Lo, therefore, advocated a modus vivendi with the USSR which would put China under the Soviet nuclear umbrella. Whether Lo realized it or not, this strategy had domestic political implications which placed him among Mao's enemies.

(ii) Military Dominance during the Cultural Revolution

The Political role of the military was still a limited one during the early stages of the Cultural Revolution, however in general the PLA remained in the background throughout 1966. Military support was a critical factor enabling Mao and his closest supporters to

6. Beijing Review, No. 32 (4 August 1967). p. 37.

pure key opponents in the Party's Beijing apparatus and the national party hierarchy. The army provided essential logistical and other support to the youths of the Red Guards movement when they started attacking the bureaucratic establishment in China.

The situation changed fundamentally in early 1967. On January 23 of that year, a central directive declared that all past directives concerning the army's non-involvement in the Cultural Revolution were null and void.⁷ The PLA was ordered to intervene directly to support and help the proletarian revolutionary leftists if and when necessary to suppress Mao's opponents. This movement was almost certainly dictated by necessity rather than by prior design. By this time the confused conflict resulting from Red Guard activities and the temporary backdown of civilian authority following Maoist inspired mass power seizures, had created a political vacuum and China's cities were experiencing a dangerous level of social conflict. By early 1967, neither the party nor the government was capable of providing national direction to

7. "Decision of Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party Concerning the Great proletarian Cultural Revolution", in Union Research Institute, CCP Document of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, 1966-1967 (Hongkong : Union Press Limited, 1968), P. 42-54.

society or even of restoring order. The restoration of order was required impuired, however, and the army was now the only national organisational instrument capable of doing this. Mao ordered the army to take charge. The assumption of civilian functions by the PLA during and immediately after the cultural Revolution had been quite unprecedented in Chinese history. Moreover, it was on such a massive scale as never experienced by the Chinese before. According to one estimate as many as 33 government ministries were at one time headed by men transferred from the PLA.

(iii) Foreign Military involvement in the 1960s

Firing Jui-ch'ing did not make the Vietnam war go away. Chinese involvement continued to grow largely in a futile effort to counterbalance the ever expanding influence of the USSR among China's Asian neighbours. Despite the official people's war line, the expansion of foreign military aid began under Lo in about 1963, continued at a modest pace. In 1965 PLA Air Force (PLAAF) commander Liu Ya-lou toured air force facilities in Albania, Pakistan, Cambodia, North Vietnam, Romania and made or renewed aid agreement with all but the last. Chinese aircrafts were the backbone of the north Korean and North Vietnamese air forces until late 1966 when

Soviet aid surpassed China's in both countries.⁸ During the US bombing pause of January 1967, companies of PLAAF fighter planes were rotated between China and Vietnamese air fields. Perhaps these visits were just intended as morale-building gesture, since the PLAAF cleared out as soon as the American raids resumed. Geographical proximity to the American power base made US-Chinese confrontations inevitable and there were sporadic armed clashes for nearly a decade. As early as 1963, there were reported naval confrontations in the South China Sea. Beijing Peking Review claimed that twenty US pilotless reconnaissance drones had been shot down over Chinese territory from 1964 through February 1970. US manned aircraft penetrated Chinese airspace continually in those years, often by accident, but sometimes intentionally⁹. The PLAAF was careful to avoid combat unless it was definitely over Chinese territory and unless conditions otherwise favoured the defence. Most American intrusions were simply protested. There were several useful results—first, the US was given no reasonable pretext to attack

8. Donald Zogoria, Vietnam Triangle (New York: Prager, 1967). P. 122

9. Beijing Review, No. 36 (1 September 1967). P.6

China. Second, the siege mentality was maintained throughout the cultural Revolution with reports of new US provocations. Third, occasional reports of air victories helped buoy up military and civilian morale and reaffirm the invincibility of Chairman Mao's glorious Military Thought.

In March 1969 fighting broke out along the Sino-Soviet border, precipitating a major international crisis. Public reaction by both sides was belligerent, but the Soviets tried to initiate telephone consultation on 21 March. The Chinese refused to talk. In his report to the Ninth Party Congress on 1 April, Lin Biao said that the Chinese position had been consistently that China was willing to negotiate the border disputes on the basis of the status quo and the five principles of co-existence. It was only on 11 September that Zhou Enlai officially conveyed this policy to the Soviets. Negotiations began shortly thereafter and the situation was defused.

(V) Fall of Lin Biao

Mao could not be happy at the spectacle of the emergence of the PLA as the dominant force in Chinese politics after the Cultural Revolution. Throughout his life, he had fought against the principle of the army

commanding the party and had sought to ward off the possibility of a military dictatorship in China. He had not forgotten the chaotic warlord period of the 1920s and the upsurge of professionalism in the PLA in the wake of the Korean War. As soon as the situation in the country stabilised and peace and order was restored, Mao began to give thought to rebuilding the party organisation on a secure basis. At the Ninth Party Congress convened in April 1969, Mao could not succeed in dethroning the military from the dominant position which it had acquired in the wake of the Cultural Revolution. Defence Minister Lin Biao delivered the main address-the Political Report of the CCP central committee - before the Party Congress and the new Party Constitution formally designated him as Mao's successor.

For the economic recovery of the country, the Maoist leadership in which ZHOU Enlai occupied a prominent position, planned a massive programme of mechanization of agriculture in the 4th Five - year plan, which was to be financed by reducing expenditure on the armed forces. This was resented by PLA officers and gave rise to the so called tractor vs. tank controversy in which Chief of Army Staff, Hung - Yung - Sheng, a close associate of Lin Biao sided with the military. Lin Biao was the visible

symbol of military power in the country and the man responsible for opposing or rather reversing Mao's well - known principle about the party commanding the gun. In his attempts to curb the power of the army, Chairman Mao enjoyed the support both of the remnants of the radical wing of Chiang Ching and of the veteran civilian leaders at the centre led Zhou Enlai by who had deep personal and political differences with Lin and were apprehensive about the power of the PLA and the Lin Biao group at the Centre.¹⁰

In so far as the majority of regional military leaders and professionals were concerned, they too had their misgivings about the politicization of the PLA. Lin was criticised for his attempts to pay attention to the demands of radical leaders, for not raising his voice forcefully and frequently enough to protect them.

Mao attempted to begin pulling the main force corps out of politics as early as 1968 by ordering a large scale geographical rotation of units. Harveyt W. Nelson believes that Lin resited the rotation policy in order to keep the corps in domestic politics.¹¹ Franz Mogdis

10. Ellis Joffe, "The Chinese Army After the Cultural Revolution : The Effects of Intervention", China Quarterly (July - September 1973). P. 472.

suggests that Lin's opposition to rapprochement with the US was also related to his power base within the PLA. Rapprochement implied a reorientation away from naval and air power, needed to meet the American threat, towards greater emphasis on ground forces to fight the Soviets in northern and central Asia.

The civilian moderates led by Zhou Enlai found common cause with the military professionals on a number of issues. Both probably shared a certain desire to avenge the excesses of the Cultural Revolution, but "more important was their desire to break the deadlock which prevented the unequivocal enunciation of a moderate national policy".¹²

In these circumstances, a clash between the advocates of party leadership and the main citadel of army leadership represented by Lin was inevitable. Such a showdown occurred towards the middle of 1971 when Lin Biao and Huang Yung-sheng, realising their weak position, reportedly tried to escape from the country and became

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11. Harvey W. Nelson, "Military Bureaucracy in the Cultrual Revolution," Asian Survey, 4, No. 4 (April 1974), P. 379.
 12. Ellis Joffe, "The Chinese Army After the Cultural Revolution: The effects of Intervention," China Quarterly (July - September 1973), P. 470-471.

victims of an aircrash in September 1971 over Outer Mongolia.

(V) **The Perennial Problems : Succession and Revisionism : 1971 - 75**

The fall of Lin Biao in 1971 did not lead to the immediate subordination of the PLA to the Party leadership. It is worth recalling that it was only after the enlarged Politburo meeting of June 1972, when five politburo members were eliminated, that the Mao Zhao group felt confident enough to denounce Lin Biao as a traitor and rebel and openly accuse him of trying to stage a coup and of attempting to assassinate Mao.¹³ The attacks on Lin Biao were by no means aimed at the PLA as a whole. While the power of the military elite in the Politburo had been somewhat weakened as a result of the purge of the army high command, the importance of regional military commanders not only remained undiminished but might even have increased. Therefore, in calling upon the army to display modesty, the Central leadership deemed it necessary not to tamper with the prestige of the army.¹⁴

China experienced a vacuum in its political and military leadership as a result of the Cultural Revolution

13. Thomas W. Robinson, "China in 1973," Asian Survey, 14, No., (January 1974), P. 19

14. Ibid. P. 19

and the dismissal of Lin Biao and his colleagues. Many of the old stalwarts in the party and the army had been criticised, disgraced, purged or killed in the internal upheaval and the anti Lin campaign. In order to fill this vacuum and to establish a stable and centralised Party leadership in the country, it was fully necessary to forge unity among the moderates - the veteran civilian leaders headed by Zhou and the leftists or radical group headed by Chiang Ching-kuo. To that end it was also deemed essential to rehabilitate the old guards who had organisational talent, economic expertise or military experience. It was only then that the Party leadership at the centre could hope to reassert its absolute control over the army, the regional commanders in particular. In order to establish the superiority of the Party in the country, a conscious attempt was made in August 1973 to strengthen the party position and to reduce military representation in the Tenth central committee and its politburo. Army representation was reduced from about 45% in the Ninth Central Committee to a little more than 30% in the Tenth.

Lin Biao was accused of rightist crimes he had never committed while much of his left radicalism was redefined as revisionism. In 1973, China's defensive strategy was shifting away from people's war towards a more

conventional defensive strategy. Both the Chinese and the Soviets beefed up their border forces through 1973 and Chinese nuclear missiles were first targeted on Soviet cities including Moscow.¹⁵ Meanwhile, American forces formally withdrew from Indochina. The reduced US threat helped enable Zhou Enlai and his allies in the central PLA organs and in the State Planning Commission, to press for a reorientation of China's defences towards the Soviet threat.

The three most dramatic trends in China between 1971 and 1975 were the reassertion of moderate politics, the disengagement of the PLA from the civilian sector, and the rehabilitation of virtually all of the "capitalist roaders" who had fallen victim to the Cultural Revolution and its aftermath.¹⁶ These There processes were apparent at provincial and local level as well as in Beijing . The revival of the civilian CCP was dramatically symbolised in May 1973 by the reappearance of Deng Xiaoping - the former CC general secretary who had been second only to Lin Shaogi himself as an archvillain capitalist roader during the Cultural Revolution.¹⁷

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15. Thomas W. Robinson, "China in 1973," Asian Survey, No.1, Jan. 1974, California, p. 19.
 16. Alan P.L. Liu, "The Gang of Four' and the PLA", Asian Survey, 19, No 9. (September 1979), pp. 829-837.
 17. Ibid. P. 831.

(VI) The 4th National People's Congress and After

The convening of the Fourth National People's Congress (NPC) in January 1975 was an important step towards normalcy in China and went a long way in strengthening party control over the state apparatus and the Army. The appointment to ministerial posts indicated the emergence of the so-called moderate group led by Zhou Enlai in the dominant position. Deng Xiaoping with his appointment as the senior most Vice - Premier, Vice - Chairman of the Party Central committee and Chief of Staff of the PCA, acquired the best credentials to succeed to the top leadership post in the country after Zhou Enlai.

The PLA high command reportedly was in conflict with the civilian moderates over the decision to de-emphasize military industry and R and D (Research and Discovery in favour of agriculture and capitalist construction, With the exception of this disagreement over resource allocation, a common phenomenon in virtually any polity, the professional commanders of the PLA and the civilian moderates seemed to share views on most foreign and domestic issues. The rehabilitation of purged revisionist PLA men was virtually completed when on Army Day 1975, Lo reappeared in Beijing.

In September 1973 the national media published calls

to learn from Shanghai in militia building. The movement was very clearly under the auspices of Chiang Ching and the Gang of Four. Model militia units in Shanghai reportedly trained themselves without PLA involvement. They were described as being solely responsible to the local civilian party. The radicals also attempted to create a national militia command directly responsive to themselves¹⁸. Mao's death in September 1976 was swiftly followed by the fall of the Gang of Four in early October. The details are not all known, but all accounts do agree that senior military men played instrumental roles¹⁹. Hua Kuo - feng claimed that in the crisis the "gang" could not call up even a single company of the army to back them.

1977-80 witnessed drastic reversals of incorrect verdicts and a movement to criticise the Gang of Four and remove their followers from the party. Foreign contacts suddenly proliferated. In 1978, the PRC began to solicit foreign loans and joint management enterprises, two procedure that were officially denounced recently as late 1977. Ping Dehua was rehabilitated and both the GLF and

18. "Failure of the Gang of Four's Scheme to Set up a Second Armed Force", Beijing Review No. 13, 25 March 1977, p. 10-12.

19. Alan P.L. Liu, "The Gang of Four and the PLA", Asian Survey (California), No. 9, September 1979 p. 829 - 837.

the Cultural Revolution repudiated²⁰. The status of Mao was now open to debate and Liu Shaoqi was posthumously rehabilitated. There was talk of a "fifth member of the gang of four" presumably Mao himself²¹. Nothing was sacred any more.

On 11 December 1978, the GPD announced that the movement to criticise the "gang of four" would end in most military units at the end of the year and the army's main energies would be devoted to training and modernisation. This preceded, by eleven days, a similar decision by the Third Plenum and might have helped force it. Throughout 1978-79, senior military leaders made statements and advocated policies which sounded Maoist or at least comparatively revolutionary in the traditional sense, thereby going against the revisionist tide.

(VII) The PLA and Sino - Vietnamese relations

The primary PLA objective in late 70s was the modernisation of its forces. Hence the PLA tended to view any conflict with Vietnam as distracting the military from its objective and a waste of precious resources that might otherwise have been spend on new equipment. The

20. New China News Agency (Xinhua), 11 December 1978, trans in Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS) HongKong, No. 238, p. E 15-16.

21. AKTIELT (Copenhagen), 29 Nov. 1978, p. 10-11 extract translated in FBIS, No - 234, p.E 2.

second PLA objective was probably containment of the Vietnamese threat in South-East Asia. This was a goal unlikely to be shared equally by all portions of the PLA. It was probably a paramount concern for the navy which found its ability to defend disputed islands or offshore oil resources under serious new challenge. Another aspect of the containment of threat was related to the Soviet Union rather than to Vietnam. Moscow's growing offshore naval power and bases along the Vietnamese coast were probably primary concerns of the PLA navy.

The third major PLA objective concerned its military aid to the Khmer Rouge in Kampuchea. Beijing's aid prior to the defeat of Pol Pot's forces was significant especially in comparison to the PLA's general level of foreign aid. There was a Chinese attack on Vietnam and there continue to be border skirmishes with vague talk of "teaching Vietnam a second lesson". It seems likely that the central civilian leadership in China managed to gain approval for a harder line towards Vietnam and one that included the use of the military instrument, despite the PLA's lack of enthusiasm. It seems equally likely that the objectives for the invasion of Vietnam were set along political lines.²² The goal of 'teaching a lesson' was blatantly political, the secondary objective of obtaining

Vietnam's transfer of troops from Kampuchea was militarily folly given the limited Chinese incursion and the objective of showing up the weakness of Soviet support was also political. The decision when to withdraw from Vietnam was set by the political goal and not by the obvious military one of engaging and defeating Hanoi's main forces.

(b) **Continuity and Change in Chinese Foreign Policy**

From 1950 to 1963 the Chinese leaders considered the PRC as an integral part of the socialist camp. China's world outlook, initiative and action in international affairs was subsumed within the socialist framework. The after 1963 China opposed imperialism of the Soviet Union and imperialism of the U.S. Chu Liang.

From being a part of the socialist camp in 1950 China moved to a position highly critical of the former USSR. The success of China's nuclear programme set the basis for an independent stand on world affairs. It was not until 1966, however, that the possibility of concerted action by China and the former Soviet Union over issues arising from the Vietnam war was finally dismissed in Beijing. To the charge of revisionism against Khrushchev was now added the

22. 'The Sino - Vietnamese Border War', China Report, Vol. 16, No.1 Jan.-Feb. 1980.

allegation of collusion with the United States against China. During the Cultural Revolution China adopted self-imposed isolationist attitudes toward foreign policy in most cases.

The dominant feature in the evolution of China's foreign policy in the post-cultural revolution period might be said to be a gradual shift of emphasis away from the contradiction between the oppressed nations and people on the one hand and imperialism and social imperialism on the other hand, to that between the two superpowers. The exploitation of the latter contradiction mainly took the shape of tipping the scale against the Soviet Union because it was considered the more dangerous of the two and because Sino-American relations offered greater scope for improvement. The Sino-US power equation in the Asia-Pacific region was conceived largely in the context of Soviet hostility and to a lesser degree from fears of a possibly rivalist and expansionist Japan. However, China had so far not been successful in further developing its relation with the USA and Japan into a triangular axis against the Soviet Union. The US valued China as a regional counterweight to the Soviet Union. But it was not prepared to risk its global politics of detente with the USSR to court China. Even in the regional context, the US

did not find it expedient to fully accommodate China on the Taiwan question. This was because of the uncertainties of Southeast Asian and Pacific politics after the Vietnam phase, as well as due to the fluidity of China's internal polity.

A Sino-American rapprochement, at least on the surface, appeared to be such an abrupt change in Chinese foreign policy that it had aroused grave doubts, if not opposition. In early 1973, great efforts had still to be made to convince the public that Nixon's visit to China, the establishment of diplomatic relations with Japan and Germany etc. were not only necessary but were, in fact, prominent victories of Chairman Mao's revolutionary diplomatic line²³. The Sino-American rapprochement and the tipping of the scale against the Soviet Union, were indeed necessary and successful measures within the present Chinese foreign policy framework.

The price that China paid for this volte face was that it eroded considerably its images as a revolutionary, socialist state internationally and the enthusiastic support of the masses for its foreign policy

23. Naveed Ahmad, "Post - Mao Chinese Foreign Policy". Pakistan Horizon. 32 Jan, 1979; p. 57.

domestically.²⁴

In regard to the intermediate zone of western capitalist countries, China failed to prevent the evolving process of detente with USSR later symbolised in the successful culmination of European Security Conference. However, after Mao's death in 1976, though China never reverted to self-imposed isolation as in the Cultural Revolution, it was more engaged in internal problems and stability. China's first year without Mao and Zhou was devoted mainly to bringing about internal cohesion and stability rather than an active role in world affairs.

But the Chinese emerged from eclusion and isolation and this became most evident when there was a joint annoucement in peking Beijing and Washington an Deng's visit on December 15, 1978. The Chinese leaders made grand tours to China's Asian neighbours and penetrated with their trips into the Soviet sphere of influence in Eastern Europe. They cultivated better and closer relations with NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organistion) countries in Western Europe and tried to win friends and allies among the African nations and among the Soviet Union's southern neighbours such as Iran. Through this re-emergence on the

24. Joseph Y.S. Cheng, "China's foreign policy: Continuity and Change", Asia Quarterly (1); 1977, P. 39.

world stage, China and turning global politics into a "new ball game".²⁵ The top Chinese leaders had visited more than 25 countries scattered over the world in a period of three months - June-August 1978. They were actively cultivating friendship on a global scale, prompted by their fear of and hostility to the Soviet Union and their desire to build up their economic and military strength. As a result, they drastically altered their foreign policy priorities.

In Southeast Asia, China's task was likely to become more complicated with the emergence of Hanoi as a competitive ideological and, to a larger degree, power centre. Beijing Peking was not happy about the growing Moscow-Hanoi, dentente which began after the communist victory in Indochina to which the PRC also contributed. As the war in Vietnam came to an end, the hegemonic aspirations of China surfaced. The Chinese were bent upon preventing the unification of Vietnam and feared that a strong Vietnam would prevent them from exercising hegemony in the region. The Chinese wanted to see the establishment of divided Vietnam, a weak Kampuchia and a weak Laos which would hopefully be dependent on Beijing. When Hanoi threatened the Chinese desing, Beijing's policy

25. Washington Post, August 21, 1978.

towards Vietnam changed from one of friendship to one of hostility. The Chinese stake in this position was obviously high enough for it to fight a war which it did not win, & for which the economic costs were enough high which forced the Chinese leadership to recess the countings economic plans and foreign policy.²⁶

26. South China Morning Post, August 4, 1979.

Chapter 4

THE SINO-VIETNAM WAR (1979) AS THE CRYSTALIZATION OF A NEW DEFINITION OF NATIONAL INTEREST

The most significant development in Southeast Asia after the US-Vietnam War was the estrangement between China and Vietnam and the outbreak of armed conflict between the two former allies. The China-Vietnam war reflected divergent national interests, geo-political perspectives and historical animosity between the two peoples and was closely intertwined with the Sino-Soviet Conflict.

DECISION FOR WAR BY MILITARY AND POLITICAL ELITES

The Chinese had many reasons for the decision to go to war against Vietnam.

Territorial Disputes

Territorial disputes were not a direct cause of the Sino-Vietnamese conflict. They were only a larger source of friction, but could become explosive under adverse political circumstances. China and Vietnam share 700 miles of common border, the boundary of which was delineated by Sino-French treaties (1887) signed during the colonial period.¹ In 1957-58, the CCP and Vietnam

1. "The truth about the Sino-Vietnamese boundary question", Beijing Review, 21 (25), March 1974), p.15.

agreed to respect this boundary line and maintain the status quo at the border, although there were differences over the actual sites of border marking. As the relations between the two countries turned sour, border incidents increased markedly after 1975 and flared up in 1978 at the height of the Sino Vietnam dispute over the treatment of the overseas Chinese in Vietnam.

In addition to the land boundaries, Vietnam and China were at odds over the division of territorial jurisdiction in the Gulf of Tonkin area between the sea-coast of North Vietnam and China's Hainan island.² The problem of the disputed islands was potentially more serious, especially in the context of oil exploration in the South China Sea. But there were actually multi-dimensional factors responsible for conflict between North Vietnam and China regarding the South China Sea. In 1956, Pham Van Dong, in the name of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, recognised Chinese sovereignty over the Spratly and Paracel islands. However, subsequent developments complicated the issue. On 17-20 January 1974 the armed forces of China defeated a Republic of Vietnam naval squadron operating in the Paracel Archipelago some 170 miles south of Hainan island

2. For the Chinese version of the dispute, see Memorandum on Vice-Premier Lie Xiannians's Talks with Premier Pham Van Dong, 10 June 1977", Beijing Review, vol.22, no.13, March 1979.

in the South China Sea.³ Though no attempt was made to pursue the Vietnamese, China quickly reiterated its long-standing claim to both the Paracel and Spratly Archipelagoes and warned that it would not tolerate further infringements on Chinese sovereignty here or, for that matter in any of the four main island atoll all groups in the South China sea.

Was the move into the Paracels and the sweeping claim to much of the South China Sea part of some larger geopolitical or strategic game plan ? North Vietnam and the Philippines were two other participants in the dispute over the islands of the South China sea. Vietnam had claimed both the Paracel and Spratly islands in 1960s. Neither of these claims were as sweeping in historical or geographical scope as that of China and both offered serious legal and practical challenges to China's interests in the region. One important factor contributing to the competition for the region was, no doubt, the actual and potential resource base of the islands and their waters. Although there were many local resources, the single most important potential resource of the area was its abundant offshore oil resources. The Southern sea gateway remained an essential corridor linking China with the outside

3. Marwyn S. Samuels, Contest for the South China Sea (New York : Methuen and Co., 1982), p.100.

world. Excluding direct trade with Japan and North America, more than half of all foreign transactions by value occurred via the South China Sea.⁴ China's growing reliance on distant-water trade underscored one of its most pressing strategic problems. Whatever its position as a continental great power in Asia and the world, the PRC was highly vulnerable at sea and along its maritime frontier. That vulnerability acted as a powerful incentive to a larger and more obvious Chinese naval presence on and beyond the frontier. Such, at least, had been the general trend since the early 1970s.⁵

The need to protect the southern maritime frontier had come, primarily in conjunction with the continued tensions in the relations between China and Vietnam over the past half-decade. Compounded by Hanoi's alignment with Moscow in the Sino-Soviet dispute, those tensions had provided the central context for a more assertive PRC naval presence in the south. They had also provided the most immediate and pressing impetus to conflict in the region, including conflict over the islands and waters of the South China Sea. Indeed, in the process, the South China Sea had become a special zone of contention between

4. Marwyn S. Samuels, Contest for the South China Sea (New York, Methuen and Co., 1982), p.139.

5. Ibid., p.142.

China, Vietnam and the Soviet Union. The Soviet block and the anti-hegemonic front each relished the idea of integrating the islands into its respective spheres of influence.

Unification of Vietnam

As the US-Vietnam war came to an end, the hegemonic aspiration of China in Southeast Asia surfaced. The Chinese were bent upon preventing the unification of Vietnam and found that a strong Vietnam could prevent them from exercising hegemony in the region.⁶ In 1972 China advised Hanoi to reconcile itself to a divided Vietnam and accept the presence of the American troops in South Vietnam. Again in 1975 China endeavoured to persuade North Vietnam not to resort to a military offensive to unite the south. The Chinese wanted to see the establishment of a divided Vietnam, a weak Kampuchea and a weak Laos which would hopefully be dependent on Beijing. When Hanoi rejected the Chinese advice, Beijing's policy towards Vietnam changed from one of friendship to one of hostility.

6. Xinhua, 22 September 1975, pp.15-16.

The Soviet Initiative in Hanoi

With Soviet support, Hanoi undertook a limited offensive to conquer the South. In a short span of fifty-five days and without extensive fighting, North Vietnam completed the conquest of the South. The objective of national liberation had been achieved. The Soviet Union applauded the liberation of the South and strongly criticized Beijing for its complicity with Washington.⁷

The Soviet-Vietnamese Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation (3 Nov, 1978) greatly disturbed Beijing because the power of balance began to seem in favour of Moscow-Hanoi in Southeast Asia. Commenting upon the Soviet-Vietnamese Treaty of Friendship and cooperation, the Xinhua correspondent wrote :

"This Moscow-Hanoi duet shows that a deal has been struck between master and fluney. This is a grave factor in the present situation in Southeast Asia. It proves that people are not overcautious when they consider the Soviet-Vietnam treaty as a military alliance. This will heighten the vigilance of South-east Asian and other Asian people towards the Vietnamese regional hegemonists and the global hegemonists behind them, the men in Kremlin".⁸

7. Pravada, April 4 and 12, 1975, p.11.

8. A commentary by Xinhua Correspondent, Beijing Review, vol.22, no.1, 5 January 1979, P.25.

The Ethnic Problem

For about three years Cholan (twin city of Saigon), which was the heart of all commercial activity in pre-communist South Vietnam, had remained almost untouched by the new communist regime. But suddenly, on 24 March 1978, in a carefully planned and well-executed operation, the Vietnamese Government closed down more than 30,000 private businesses.⁹ About six weeks later, they introduced a new currency to eliminate cash hoarding. These actions severely hit the ethnic Chinese who ran most commercial enterprises in Cholan. To avoid harsh agricultural labour in Vietnam's new economic zones, thousands of ethnic Chinese fled the country in small fishing boats, to stay in refugee camps all over Southeast Asia. Hanoi's actions added another irritant to the deteriorating Sino-Vietnamese relationship and Beijing accused the Vietnamese of persecuting ethnic Chinese estimated at between 12 million and 15 million before the exodus.

Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia

After the the fall of Kampuchea to the Khmer Rouge in April 1975, Radio Phnom Penh declared that Kampuchea's

9. Peter Wientraub, "The Exodus and the Agony," Far Eastern Economic Review, 22 December 1978, p.8.

great victory was a great victory for the Chinese People.¹⁰ This indicated the rise of a Phnom Penh - Beijing axis against Hanoi. The Soviet Union had no relations with the new leadership and the Vietnamese were no longer in the country. Gradually with Chinese support, the new leaders of Kampuchea began to emphasize their independence and their refusal to establish relations with Soviet Union and Vietnam. China provided economic, technical assistance and delivered a few naval vessels to be utilized against the Vietnamese in the conflict over the islands of Phu Quoc and Tho Chu.¹¹ A joint statement by Chinese and Cambodian leaders issued that they would oppose the Vietnamese ambition of incorporating Kampuchea into a new Indochinese empire.¹² From the latter part of 1975 to 1977 there were border clashes between Kampuchea and Vietnam along with allegations and counter-allegations.

By January 1978, the Chinese had begun to openly support Kampuchea against Vietnam. They provided substantial quantities of military hardware to Kampuchea. This brought Hanoi closer to the Soviet Union and gave the

10. Radio Phnom Penh, May 5, 1975.

11. Far Eastern Economic Review, June 13, 1975, pp.22-23.

12. Beijing Review, August 22, 1975, pp.6-8.

latter an opportunity to establish a sphere of influence in Southeast Asia and attempt to encircle China. With the help of the Soviet Union's diplomacy and sophisticated Soviet weapons, Vietnam began to prepare for the final showdown in Kampuchea. On December 3, 1978, a Kampuchean National United Front for National Salvation was formed under the aegis of Vietnam. China denounced Vietnam's military action in Kampuchea and linked it with the Soviet plot to conquer Southeast Asia. At the banquet in honour of Samdech Sihanouk, Vice-Premier Deng Xiaoping pointed out that "Vietnam has become the Cuba of Asia or the agent of Soviet social-imperialism in the Far East".¹³

Other reasons

By the invasion of Vietnam, China probably hoped to divert a number of Vietnamese units from Cambodia towards the Sino-Vietnamese border, which would in turn make it harder to keep the growing Chinese-backed resistance movement in Cambodia under control. A more likely aim the Chinese sought to achieve was not an immediate change in Vietnam's policy in Cambodia, but a long-term check of future Vietnamese ambitions in Southeast Asia. Hanoi would have to think twice before embarking upon an expansionist course in its neighbourhood. It would have to

13. "Resolute support for Kampuchea", Beijing Review, vol.22, no.2, p.3.

weigh any future adventures against the risk of China opposing it by action, not just words.

From 1978 onward, China sought to project an image of moderation in contrast to the tempestuous days which had so alienated it from the international community. Why, then, did Beijing risk isolating itself again by attacking Vietnam? One would argue that Chinese leaders were motivated by a complex of reasons. First, there were bilateral considerations. Vietnamese deepening ties with the Soviet Union did not please Beijing. As Deng candidly put it after he ordered the attack China could live with Vietnam 70% favourable to Soviet Union if it were also 30% well-disposed to China. What it could never tolerate was an unreservedly hostile next-door neighbour.

Secondly, there was regional rivalry.¹⁴ China was unhappy about the extension of Vietnam's sphere of influence to all of Indo-China. Although, to be sure China had not done everything in its power to forestall Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia. Finally, there was the international dimension. For ten years, China had been daily denouncing the Soviet threat to world peace, the

14. Stephen P. Heder, "The Kampuchean-Vietnamese Conflict", Singapore, Southeast Asian Affairs, Vol. 22, No. 3. pp.157-186.

illusions of detente and the 'Munich' like policies of the West. From this perspective, it is clear that the real aim of China's military intervention was to teach European and US leaders, not Vietnam, a lesson-first that resisting Soviet hegemonism was-whatever the cost- worth it, and second, tht the polar bear was really only a paper tiger. Beijing hoped in this way to convince the United States to take a tougher stance against Moscow. Lastly, by dispatching troops abroad and taking on the role of regional gendarme, Beijing could further its superpower pretensions. Within China there was a complex interaction between military and political elites for launching an invasion of Vietnam. It is important to know what were the PLA objectives regarding Sino-Vietnamese relations and whether they were the same as those of the central civilian leadership ? If these objectives were different in principle, what difference did this make to the conduct of Chinse policy towards Vietnam ?

The primary PLA objective in the 1970s was in all probability, the modernisation of its forces. While it was true that this goal was only shared to varying degrees by different parts of the military, it was still pre-eminent for the vast majority of the PLA. The conflict with Vietnam distracted the military from this objective and what was worse, it wasted pricous resources that might

have otherwise been spent on new equipment. The reduction in the PLA's budget following the Sino-Vietnamese war in 1979 again widely illustrated the point.¹⁵ The related PLA objective of professionalisation was also unlikely to be met while conflict with Vietnam continued. The argument that the PLA sought practice by engaging in combat for the first time in many years is only true in the most limited sense. Mobilisation, logistics and communications might have been tested to a certain degree, but in general this was a static war with few exercises that could not have been simulated in large-scale war games.¹⁶ Certainly, the type of combat provided few new conditions to test professional skills previously untried. Thus, at a most basic level the PLA probably wanted a reduction in tension with Vietnam and was unlikely to want to teach it a second lesson.

The third PLA objective was probably containment of the Vietnamese threat in Southeast Asia. This was a goal unlikely to be shared equally by all portions of the PLA. It was probably a paramount concern for the navy which

15. On the budget and the Vietnam war see Daniel Tritiak, "China-Vietnam war and its consequences", The China Quarterly, vol. 22 no.80, Dec.1979.pp.756-57.

16. "For details on the war see Harlan Jencks, "China's punitive war on Vietnam: A military assessment", Asian Survey, vol.19, no.8, Aug, 1979.

found its ability to defend such Chinese objectives as disputed islands or offshore oil resources under serious new challenge.¹⁷ To a certain extent this objective might also be shared by the air force and some regional military units and these elements might consequently be more interested in assuming a forward posture regarding Vietnam.¹⁸ But by and large the PLA with its basic bias towards ground forces would not find that Vietnam posed a threat to China militarily. While it might be a political challenge this did not directly impinge on the concerns of the majority in the PLA. Another aspect of the containment of threat was related more to the Soviet Union than to Vietnam. Moscow's growing offshore naval power and bases along the Vietnamese coast were probably primary concerns of the PLA navy but one for which they were unlikely to pursue a forward and direct challenge. Much like the threat posed by American naval forces during the Vietnam war, the PLA navy might well have felt that there was little it could do realistically to counter this superpower force. Some might in fact have argued that a

17. Marwyn S. Samuels, Contest for the South China Sea (New York : Methuen and Co., 1982), p.142.

18. Harlan Jencks, "China's Punitive War on Vietnam: A Military Assessment," Asian Survey vol.19, no.8, Aug. 1979. P.805

low profile and reduced tension with Vietnam might have removed the cause for the Soviet military presence and therefore served the PLA navy's objectives.¹⁹

The fourth major PLA objective concerned its military aid to the Khmer Rouge in Kampuchea. Beijing's aid prior to the defeat of Pol Pot's forces was significant, especially in comparison to the PLA's general level of foreign aid. It was however, difficult to argue that the Chinese military had pleased with its role in Kampuchea. It appeared obvious that the excesses of the Pol Pot regime did not have Beijing's approval and indeed were a source of displeasure to China and its military advisors. China's prestige as well as that of the PLA was damaged by the resulting defeat of its ally. It was possible that some Chinese military officials might have felt that Pol Pot was merely pursuing a revolutionary military solution to his problems in the spirit of a people's war, but this was unlikely. The cruelties of the Kampuchean regime would have obviously been out of the ordinary and contrary to the objective of building close relations with the popular base. What was more, the dominant professional strain in the PLA would have seen these tactics as the

19. Gerald Segal, "China's Strategic Posture and the Great Power Triangle", Pacific Affairs, Winter, 1980-81, p.690.

counter-productive acts that they in fact were. In sum the PLA probably preferred not to become embroiled in a use of the military instrument against Vietnam. Yet there was a Chinese attack on Vietnam and there continued to be border skirmishes with vague talk of teaching Vietnam a second lesson. It seemed likely that the central civilian leadership in China managed to gain approval for a harder line towards Vietnam and one that included the use of the military instrument, despite the PLA's lack of enthusiasm. It seemed equally likely that the objectives for the invasion of Vietnam were set along political lines. The goal of teaching a lesson was blatantly political, the secondary objective of obtaining Vietnam's transfer of troops from Kampuchea was military folly given the limited Chinese incursion, and a tertiary objective of showing up the weakness of Soviet support was also political. Furthermore, the decision when to withdraw from Vietnam was set by the political goal and not by the most obvious military one of engaging and defeating Hanoi's main forces.

The clear subordination of military interests to civilian political objectives was strikingly apparent when China's action against Vietnam was compared to the Soviet intervention of Afghanistan later in 1979. The Soviet

military was in all probability crucially involved in the key aspects of that action including the ultimate decision to intervene. While the Soviet military might have erred in thinking that a military solution would work for the purposes of this analysis what was relevant was the high level of Soviet military involvement in decision-making in comparison to the relative reluctance of the PLA to use their military instrument. This was also true for battlefield operations and the degree of independence enjoyed by Soviet forces in pursuing military campaigns as compared with the tight political leash attached to the PLA.

Despite the apparent subordination of the objectives of the military to civilian politics in foreign policy decision-making, it would be fallacious to argue that this was yet another case in which the party had defeated the army. In fact there seemed to be no struggle at all and no one was purged even after what was patently a poor military performance. The explanation that follows from the course of this analysis is that no heads rolled, inter alia, because the PLA was not among the crucial heads deciding on the use of the military instrument. While military men might be present in such decision-making tasks, they did not necessarily speak as PLA

representative.²⁰ The decisions taken during the Sino-Vietnamese conflict were seen as political and not military. Therefore, the policy-makers did not require military expertise with all the ensuing control of information and implementation that resulted from such expertise in the Soviet Union. It was also in keeping with the historical Chinese legacy of the use of military power even down to the fact that outside commanders were brought in to take control of the campaign.²¹

This analysis has suggested that while there might be some differences of opinion both between military elements and with civilian authority, there is little evidence to support the view that the PLA is an identifiably important foreign policy decision-maker and that an analysis of the military is useful in discussing the decision to use the Chinese military instrument. This is a different but supporting argument to the one made by these analysts of the Soviet military's role in decision-making who argue that there is at least a division of labour with basic questions settled by the central civilian authorities and questions of expertise deferred to the military, In the

20. Harlan Jencks, "China's punitive war on Vietnam : A military assessment", Asian Survey, vol.19, no.8, Aug. 1979, pp.805-806.

21. Ibid., p.805-806.

In the Chinese case even the level of expertise is reduced and thus the PLA's role is further minimised. Gross-cutting interests and objectives with the PLA further reinforce this trend. China's relative poverty and minimal strength in superpower terms made the PLA's role objectively more restricted than that of the Soviet armed services, even if the Chinese military had the will to become more involved.

Although, the preparations for launching an invasion of Vietnam were underway since 1978, the actual decision to proceed with the invasion plan was made during the conference of the Military Commission of the Central Committee after held during February 9-12, 1979 i.e. immediately after Deng's visit to the United States and Japan. The PLA was involved in decision making in a limited sense due to over-dominance of political leaders. At the same time first hand information is not available because Chinese political system is a close system.

CONSEQUENCES OF THE WAR IN RELATION TO POLITICAL AND MILITARY DECISIONS

Four months after China's punitive war against Vietnam, Li Xiannian, the Chinese Deputy prime minister, admitted that the Chinese invasion did not teach the

Vietnamese enough of a lesson.²² Vietnam itself learned no lesson, it not only continued but even intensified the policies which China's lesson was designed to halt or slow down. It showed China that it had sufficient men and material to deal China a strong reponse in the field. The Chinese army could not advance to Hanoi for military reasons. The Vietnamese had amply proved their ability to hold a strong adversary at bay during the years of struggle against France and the United States. They possessed an impressive, battle-tested, army, an air defence system of surface-to - air missiles as well as squadrons of sophisticated Soviet - built Mig 21s, which were considered more than a match for the out-dated Chinese Mig 19 fighters. Any further advance would have subjected the Chinese invaders to the formidable Hanoi - Haiphong air defence system. Out in the Delta, Vietnamese fighter - bombers, long - range tank guns and anti-tank guided missiles could have been used to full advantage against obsolescent anti-aircraft artilleries and short range fighter planes of the Chinese. Moreover, five elite divisions of the Vietnamese army remained in reserve for the defence of Hanoi.²³ Notwithstanding Deng's claim, the

22. Newsweek, July 16, 1979, P. 12.

23. Far Eastern Economic Review, March 2, 1979, P.10.

Chinese army wisely decided not to test the fire power of the Vietnamese. Failing to teach Vietnam a lesson, the Chinese decided to pull back their troops at an opportune moment. They realized that an extended conflict would deal an injurious blow to Beijing.

Despite Chinese opposition, the Soviet Union was able to penetrate Southeast Asia and establish a significant presence in the southern flank of China. The Soviet purpose coincided largely with Hanoi's desire to crush the Beijing - Phnom Penh axis and to deal a heavy blow to the prestige of China. It also provided the occasion for the formation of a Moscow - Hanoi alliance. This was a victory of the Soviet position in Southern east Asia as well. The Chinese lost a diplomatic advantage because of the embarrassment of the United States and Japan over the Chinese invasion. It seemed that Beijing had obtained prior approval of its invasion plan during Deng's visit to Washington and Tokyo.

The border did not calm down, despite negotiations in Hanoi and Beijing throughout the summer of 1979, tensions remained high with each side claiming that provocations continued almost as if the war had not occurred. Furthermore, the Vietnamese increased their expulsion of overseas Chinese - creating a regional and global outcry

against Hanoi. China could not prevent this, although it did exploit Vietnam's treatment of the overseas Chinese to gain worldwide sympathy for the refugees and condemnation of Vietnam for its discriminatory policies. Vietnam was deterred from maintaining its influence over Cambodia, increasing its hold over Laos and threatening the security of Thailand.

The invasion had also produced an anti-war movement in nearly every important city of China. Anti-war posters appeared in Beijing's "Wall of Democracy" for a brief duration. One poster announced that China had invaded Vietnam and it had violated international law.²⁴ Another poster denounced the Hua-Deng reactionary clique for unleashing war against fraternal Vietnamese people to win the hearts of American imperialism. In Shanghai, a leaflet signed by the Shanghai Action Committee of the Anti-Imperialist Alliance, stated that "before and during the war against imperialism, China was the great rear for Vietnam, now the US has become the great rear for the Beijing clique of traitors in their war against Vietnam."

The war also created a major breach in the Chinese Communist Party leadership and provoked factionalism and

24. Newsweek, March 12, 1979, P. 24.

struggle between rival groups. The Vietnamese claimed that a serious rift within the ruling circles of China had broken out since the launching of the aggressive war. The growing anti-war feeling in China had compelled the Beijing clique to announce the withdrawal of their army. There were also reports that Chen Yun, generally regarded as one of the architects of China's ambitious economic plan, opposed the war.

In sum, China lost a great deal in the 1979 war, whether the balance sheet is measured in lives or political cost. But perhaps the greatest loss was in a more intangible product-China's reputation. If anyone had any illusion prior to 1979 that somehow there was something especially pacific or low risk in China's approach to defence policy, they were surely disabused. China seemed to act like any other power, whether in the way it wielded its military instrument, or the objectives of establishing influence by beyond its frontiers.

Chapter- V

CONCLUSION - CHINA'S FOREIGN POLICY AND THE NATIONAL INTEREST

The two basic factors determining communist China's foreign policy during the past three decades (1950-1980) have been national interest and world revolution - the latter based on Marxism - Leninism - Maoism, always with United Front tactics as a principal component in its strategy. High on the list of national interests are security, territorial integrity, international status and economic development.

Since the establishment of the PRC in 1949 the Chinese people and their leaders have been concerned with the revolution and socialist economic construction at home and with a foreign policy which serves those causes abroad. China had to involve itself in the Korean war in 1950 considering its opposition to United States' anti-Communist intervention in Asia. China saw the US aggression in the light of its own bitter historical experience at the hand of the Japanese during the 1930s and the 1940s. Coupled with the ideological factor the question of Chinese national interest was also brought into play. Safeguarding vulnerable Manchuria was also a policy objective.

From 1950 to 1963 the Chinese leaders considered the PRC as an integral part of the socialist camp. China's world outlook initiative and action in international affairs was subsumed within the socialist framework. The PRC's membership of the camp went through many phases during these years. From being a junior ally of the Soviet Union it became an independent and almost equal partner and finally became its major ideological critic. Post 1963 China's foreign policy was directed as much against the socialist imperialism of the Soviet Union as against the imperialism of the US. China viewed the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty signed among the US, Soviet Union and Britain in Moscow in July 1963 as an attempt by the powers to snuff out its nuclear programme vital for its security and for autonomy in world affairs, and recognition as a great power. During the latter half of the 1960s China's relation with the Soviet Union became more bitter. Khrushchev was charged by the Chinese not just with revisionism but also with collusion with the United States against China.

During the Cultural Revolution China could not participate actively in world affairs. The most singular breakthrough in China's post - cultural Revolution foreign policy was an evolving Sino - US power equation in the

Asia - Pacific region. This was conceived largely in the context of Soviet hostility and to a lesser degree, from fears of a possibly revivalist and expansionist Japan. Though the Sino - American rapprochement and the tipping of the scale against the Soviet Union were indeed necessary and successful measures within the existing Chinese foreign policy framework, a rather high price had to be paid. These measures eroded considerably China's image as a revolutionary, socialist state internationally and the enthusiastic support of the masses for its foreign policy domestically.

In the 1970s China's concern became less ideological and more pragmatic. This was evident by Ping Pong diplomacy. But this was made clearer by the Sino - Vietnam war (1979). It was an indication of China's aspiration to dominant power status in Southeast Asia and an effort to usurp Soviet influence and break through the latter's policy of "encircling" China.

In the Korean as well as in the Vietnamese conflict the Chinese armed forces were used to gain foreign policy objectives. Interestingly the transition from an ideologically imbued foreign policy to a pragmatic and power oriented foreign policy was mirrored as well in the elite decision-makers within the PLA. The historical anti-

foreign and revolutionary experience of the PLA in 1950s attuned generals like Peng Dehuai and Lin Biao to interact closely with China's political leaders. By the late 1970s the defeat of the 'red' to the expert school within the PLA attuned the latter to the more national interest and geo-political view of the civilian leadership as well.

By the late 1970s Chinese leaders had succeeded in redefining the country's national interest in terms of its big power aspiration internationally and its dominant status regionally. To achieve this goal even China invaded North Vietnam in February, 1979. This was the first time a communist country had invaded another communist nation without the pretence of an ideological justification such as an "invitation" by that country's leaders. But China could not achieve its aims. Four months after China's punitive war against Vietnam, Vice-premier, Li Xiannian admitted that Hanoi had not been taught a sufficient lesson. China failed to force a Vietnamese withdrawal from Kampuchea, to end border clashes, to cast doubt on the strength of Soviet power, to dispel the image of China as a Paper tiger and failed to draw the United States into an anti - Soviet coalition. China seemed to act like any other power, whether in the way it wielded its military instrument or the objectives of establishing influence

beyond its frontiers.

There was a major and revealing change in China's foreign policy from the Korean to the Vietnam wars. This change was based on a specific and differing definition of China's national interest in both periods. In the 1950s China defined its national interests in ideological terms as well as in terms of its internal developmental needs. Both these definitions of national interest were not made in isolation by the Chinese foreign policy making elite. They were based on perceptions of ideological and power changes in the international arena as well as on powerful domestic political and institutional arguments for a redefinition.

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