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**THE MIDDLE EAST IN CHINA'S
UNITED FRONT
CALCULATIONS,
1957-58**

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ABSTRACT

The study examines the Chinese leadership's assessment of events in the Middle East in 1957-8, with reference to its line over Socialist Camp support for popular movements in response to US intervention.

Addressing Chinese categorisation of forces in world politics, it argues that this period was crucial in interpreting the changing role of the developing countries from an intermediate zone between two camps into the main progressive force.

Events in the area were seen as a historical turning point, the focus being regional trials of strength in opposition to US intervention. In this connection, different levels of conflict analysis are explored.

The study considers the foreign policy dilemma of uniting 'from above' with regional regimes or 'from below' with mass movements, the theme of historic links with the Arabs as a precursor of 'third world' solidarity, and China's direct contacts with the area, including a detailed study of relations with Yemen as an early instance of 'South-South' co-operation.

While Arab nationalism was applauded, the attitude to Nasserism was cool, and Islam very much downplayed. A survey of articles by Chinese specialists pinpoints differing trends in the analysis of social conditions in Arab states, particularly post-revolutionary Iraq.

Against the background of China's Great Leap Forward, links between radicalism in domestic and foreign policy spheres

are examined, including the nation-wide mass demonstrations, an unprecedented experiment in domestic social mobilisation on an international issue. This provides a context for the decision to bombard Nationalist-held offshore islands.

The study casts light on the issue of periodization in Chinese foreign policy, illustrates the origin of important themes which were to resurface in the Sino-Soviet polemic, and reflects problems confronting a radical actor having to adapt previously-held models to major changes in both domestic and international environments.

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CONVENTIONS:

Pinyin romanisation is employed, except that in works by Chinese authors published in English the name is given in its published form.

In quotations from Chinese papers cited in *Xinhua* bulletins, single quotation marks signify that the passage is taken from *Xinhua's* summary of the article in question (which itself possesses official status), whereas double quotation marks signify a direct quotation.

INTRODUCTION: SOME QUESTIONS IN THE STUDY OF CHINESE FOREIGN POLICY

The object of this research is to examine the Communist Party of China's basic method of analysing the world system in the late 1950s and specifically the different levels at which it sought to promote the formation of relations of solidarity with other actors in the context of this system.

HISTORICAL CHARACTER OF THE INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM

The interest of this period is that it was one of rapid change in the international system and the outcome of that change was not clear to most of the actors involved.

There were many important evolutions which any actor would need to take account of. The upsurge of national movements was making decolonisation appear inevitable in some form. Transition from the old pattern of conflictual great-power relations to a new pattern of coalition under US hegemony was also a feature of this system, and could not be brought about entirely smoothly, as the Suez War showed. An increasing tendency for the USA to be drawn into direct intervention in the developing world had already been anticipated in the Korean War.

Relations between the socialist countries and the rest of the world were also undergoing redefinition to some extent. The partial critique of the Stalin experience had created extraordinary tensions within the socialist bloc, but despite this instability the Soviet Union in particular was beginning to aspire to a new world role. The cold war was in the process of giving way to what was already, at the time of Suez, being spoken of as 'detente'. This implied both a certain common recognition of responsibilities by

the superpowers, especially on the nuclear issue, and at the same time a more active deployment of their power.

The above evolution created strong tendencies to bipolarity in the international system, which did not however develop unopposed. Such tendencies were viewed with some misgivings, especially by the emerging nations, and this sentiment gave rise to the philosophy of non-alignment, already clearly foreshadowed at the Bandung Conference in 1955.

The post-war boom was underway in the Western industrialised countries. This posed considerable problems for the analysis of capitalist crisis, at least in terms of the traditional viewpoint within the official communist movement since the 1930s. At the same time, the application of Keynesian models had moved the industrial economies into uncharted territory, and it was not certain that the growth associated with post-war rehabilitation could find a smooth transition into a period of further sustained expansion. A fairly severe depression in the year 1958 added point to this question. The Soviet system, despite all the internal social problems of its bloc, had apparently achieved a technological advance, revealed in its successes in the space race.

The national movements appeared to be at a crossroads. It was by no means clear at that particular juncture that the industrial powers would find an acceptable solution to the problems of decolonisation and the transition to a new pattern of relations with developing countries.

The type of alignments or groupings between actors which could emerge in this period of change and flux was an important issue which concerned all the major actors. In this context it will be necessary to study how far the Communist Party of China (CPC) was capable of evolving

models encompassing system change, and specifically what type of alignments it would seek to promote, and which it would seek to counter.

CHINA'S ROLE WITHIN THE INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM

The People's Republic of China (PRC) itself, as a nationalist movement of the developing world under communist leadership, embodied some of the major forces for change in the world system, and to some extent owed its existence to the wider trends which they reflected. Not yet well established in the international arena, the PRC's future seemed at that stage to be linked to the survival of these radical forces.

An added particularity of the Chinese situation at that time was that the PRC had only limited scope for international contacts at all, owing to the fact that the USA, as hegemonic power, had made it a major issue of its relations with states that they should refuse to deal with the PRC, and instead maintain links with the Nationalist regime in Taiwan.

An important question is to understand the factors influencing the selection of goals by the CPC leadership. While Chinese decision-makers were influenced by their perception of the international system, this perception was also filtered by important background factors. In the literature on Chinese foreign policy, two important factors which have been taken into account are the influence of China's long-term history, and the more 'ideological' influence of the CPC's communist ideals. Areas of debate include the relationship between history and present in determining Chinese foreign policy, and the relative influence of domestic and external factors. These issues may be linked, although it may be wiser not to assume a priori that they are linked in definite ways.

ISSUES OF DEBATE OVER THE BASIS OF CHINESE FOREIGN POLICY

One issue which has been widely discussed is that of whether Chinese foreign policy is to be seen as 'ideological', or else determined by factors such as national interest.

National interest may be taken on the surface to imply an individualist or 'selfish' orientation on the part of the state. This is in fact not necessarily so in all instances, since it is not altogether illogical to claim, as small and weak states often have done, that their national interest coincides to a considerable extent with the goal of an international system less subject to great-power diktat. Even so, in the case of a large state claiming to be socialist, it would clearly be wrong to take at face value any assertion that, simply because of its political label, it would automatically elevate the interests of the community above its individual interests.

Linked to this there is a separate problem as to whether Chinese policy should be seen as internally inspired or alternatively a response to the external environment. In understanding the linkage between these factors, another level of analysis can be invoked, that of the relation between long-term and immediate goals, or between strategy and tactics.

One school of thought tends to assert that historical, domestic, non-ideological factors are responsible for the long-term orientations. A typical formulation might be the following:

"China's history suggests that domestic pressures and concerns were normally of greater weight than those derived externally; this is probably true of other great societies. There is thus good reason to expect such conditions to apply to contemporary China, and indeed this does seem largely to be the case. It is

almost as though the overall strategic motivation is domestic, whereas external factors have only tactical impact. Whatever the case it is clear that beneath the surface of transient diplomacy there lies the enormous weight of the historical China, which, though affected by developments abroad, exists in many respects in isolation from the world about it. If one discounts such factors as political or ideological motivations, being relatively unimportant and impermanent, one is forced into recognising the dominant role of native socio-economic factors quite distinct from outside pressure."¹

An alternative view likewise perceives the determining factor in long-term goals as domestic, but in this case equates the domestic with ideological factors. This is broadly the view of J.D. Armstrong, who argues that any changes which might take place in China's foreign policy "in response to external developments would be conceived of by Peking as merely tactical adjustments to exploit fresh opportunities or take account of new circumstances, with no alteration of long-term strategic aims."²

With both these approaches, however, it is important not to be one-sided. In response to the notion of the united front strategy as essentially internally generated, it could plausibly be argued that the attempt by Asian-African countries to evolve a new pattern of relations was a logical outcome of the critique of an existing system of international relations unable to accommodate their aspirations for nationhood: it is thus perfectly possible to view strategies of solidarity as a response to the realities of the world environment, and for the same reasons they need not necessarily be viewed as peculiarly Chinese or peculiarly Marxist.

¹ SIMMONDS J.D. *China's World*, New York (Columbia U.P.) 1970 p. 129

² ARMSTRONG J.D. *Revolutionary Diplomacy - China's Foreign Policy and the United Front Doctrine*. Berkeley etc (University of California Press) 1977 p 56

The view which emphasises historical factors also contains some truth but should not be read in an exaggerated or one-sided way. China was indeed a secular empire, whose relations with surrounding nations and peoples had included elements of both domination/hegemony and co-operation/mutual benefit. This whole pattern had however been altered over a long period by the rise of Western influence which had imposed an external web of world-wide economic relations in place of the old patterns of trade and had also converted China from a regional-dominant nation into one subjected to external intervention.

The manner of unfolding of the Chinese revolution had again altered the picture, and as far as internal social structure is concerned there had been major changes. Without in any way denying the forces for a reassertion of some aspects of the old social relations, which were obviously considerable, it is a fact that the revolution and the period which immediately followed it deeply altered important aspects of China's traditional class relations and socio-economic organisation.

All foreign policies must be based on an assessment of conditions in the external world and incorporate feedback from it. The ideological element may come in where we are dealing with choices, such as the issue of whether to continue the strategy of mutual solidarity with other third-world countries once China's own nationhood had successfully been asserted. Even if we accept that there is potentially, opposition between the notions of ideologically generated foreign policy and national interest, it is still possible for the two to co-exist as different tendencies within the same model. 'Line struggles' in foreign policy have occurred in different states in different circumstances, and socialist countries are not unique in this.

As with all foreign policy questions, we are concerned with the way in which a particular system was understood by those charged with the responsibility of creating the policy of a particular actor. This implies assessing the situation in relation to a set of goals espoused by those decision-makers.

ROLE OF NATIONALISM IN CHINESE FOREIGN POLICY

The overall study of policy-making contains a number of important issues: the definition of 'power', milieu goals, the relationship between conflict and co-operation, the role of subjective factors in policy-making and in relation to conflictual behaviour in particular, etc. These are all relevant issues which we will consider in the course of this study.

The emphasis on the crucial importance of national security sometimes associated with the 'realist' position appears to be applicable to the case under consideration. It should just be indicated that the concept cannot simply be transplanted from the analysis of the policies of the great powers to those of Asian-African states. In the latter case, national security is not incompatible with milieu goals, in other words with actions aimed at altering the structure of the system, just because it was actually the great-power system itself which denied the nationhood and security of these countries. Thus self-determination was not just a matter of fitting in with the system, on the contrary their security interest could well lead them to challenge the system itself and put forward new 'rules' as at Bandung.

Particularly significant from our point of view in connection with united front issues, is the fact that in taking a 'realist' position on security goals it is not necessary to assume that these are pursued in an

individualistic way. For third world countries, co-operation could well appear as a prerequisite to making any impact on the system at all.

The definition of nationalism in Asia as "a multi-dimensional search for the most appropriate and workable vehicles for the Asian response to western dominance"³ is broadly acceptable. On the other hand we should recognise the possibility of a different form of nationalism which may arise particularly in a large country once it has managed to make a breakthrough into acceptance by the system: this would have the form of taking advantage of the system's rules in pursuit of at least a regional power position for itself.

This indicates that there may be different possible directions in a country's foreign policy, even within the terms of a model which recognises the central importance of national goals.

The former, essentially defensive type is not in contradiction with a certain reading of Marxism. Such a view would emphasise the common elements in both Marxism and Asian-African nationalism insofar as both could be seen as movements of actors with some interest in promoting system-change. This concordance is well put in Schram's statement that

"Whereas in relations with the Soviet Union nationalist and revolutionary motives may frequently come into conflict, in dealings with the West the visceral reaction of the Asian national and the systematic anti-imperialism of the Leninist revolutionary are in full harmony."⁴

³ HARRISON, Selig S. *The Widening Gulf - Asian nationalism and American Policy*, New York (The Free Press) 1978 p. 422

⁴ SCHRAM S. *The Political Thought of Mao Tse-tung*, p. 76

On the other hand, the historical evolution of Soviet foreign policy shows that the vocabulary of Marxism can well be used to embody a form of national interest which seeks to maximise national goals within a system which naturally favours great powers, rather than seeking to subvert or change it. It could perhaps be argued that one or other line of conduct is not 'authentically' Marxist, but it is not necessary to enter into this discussion here. The point is simply that it is not necessarily helpful to argue along the lines that 'Chinese policy is essentially nationalist and Marxism is only superficial', or indeed the opposite.

However important the distinctions between ideology and nationalism may have been at a certain level, it should be recognised that in the specific historical period we are dealing with, any contradiction between the two was to a certain extent placed in suspension owing to the effects of the US policy of ostracising China. Potentially one of the handful of major actors in the world system, China could not completely be ignored, as the 1954 Geneva conference on Indochina showed. Still the USA was using its very considerable influence to urge upon other states a policy of isolating China. Hence China's opportunities for mainstream diplomatic activity were very restricted, and this had the effect of severely limiting any temptation for that country to relax into a comfortable role of an actor which had 'arrived' in the international system. The closeness of China's own revolutionary experience at that time was undoubtedly an important factor limiting this option as well.

Thus whether from necessity or choice, it is a fact that China was at that time drawn towards the forces tending to destabilize the system. The CPC's overall view of the nature and dynamics of the world system and of China's place within it was a radical one.

PROBLEMS DEMANDING CHOICE OF STRATEGIES

Even though the choice of a radical approach to world affairs may have been relatively clear-cut at that time, this does not mean to say that the specific policy choices facing China within these broad parameters were in any way straightforward. There was a range of problems associated with the relationship between being a member of the socialist camp and being part of the Asian-African movement. If these two forces could be brought into some kind of conjuncture, a major impact on the world system could be expected to result. But such a convergence was by no means automatic. The Soviet Union was not by any means unequivocally an actor seeking radical system-change, since it was a superpower which was considered to have responsibilities for at least maintaining the world system in some condition of stability.

There was also a longer-term historic problem connected with the way the official communist movement had, at least soon after the death of Lenin, started subordinating the anti-colonial movements to a strategy geared primarily to defending the Soviet Union and preventing the rise of fascism in Europe. This had probably contributed to a weak implantation of communism in many parts of the developing world, including the Middle East (Iraq being perhaps an exception) and possibly also to the rise of a form of nationalism which, while opposed to Western domination, was also hostile to communism.

A crucial and very difficult problem was that of how the communist countries were to come to terms with this nationalism, whose classic expression of this at the time was Nasserism. This situation raised difficult choices in foreign policy decision-making. In dealing with the Middle East, China was also approaching the problems of an area where its existing links were quite weak, owing both to the

fragmentation of Asia and Africa in the colonial period and to the more recent US policy of ostracism. The rebuilding of relations among Asian-African nations on a new basis, as projected at Bandung, was only just getting under way.

The concrete problems of coming to terms with such a situation raise important issues, for example, the question of whether the united front which is sought should be one of governments or of popular movements which may in fact suffer at the hands of such governments.

Thus it is essential to view the theoretical issues of Chinese foreign policy in a concrete way in relation to the kind of choices which decision-makers were called upon to make in this specific period. When we take the argument to this level, an important issue arises as to how the characteristics of this particular period were understood by Chinese leaders. The literature on Chinese foreign policy has tended to raise two important interlinked issues, namely the question of how Chinese foreign policy can be periodized, and the question of the link between domestic and foreign policy.

PERIODIZATION OF CHINESE FOREIGN POLICY AND LINKS WITH DOMESTIC POLICIES

It is generally recognised that Chinese domestic policy went through several big shifts in the 1950s, and it is common to distinguish different periods according to whether the prevailing line was 'left' or 'right', 'hard' or 'soft'. So it has to be asked, how far can a periodization be established in foreign policy, what if any is its correlation with the periodization in domestic politics, and how precisely can it be established? In relation to the specific period 1957-8, there are also particular issues, such as that of how optimistic the

Chinese leadership felt about the character of the world system and its likely evolution.

In arriving at concrete policies, Chinese decision makers go through a process of development both with regard to their assessment of the world situation and to their image of their own role in relation to that system. As Yahuda has pointed out both these elements are very important.⁵

A background to understanding the specific period in question is to see it in relation to the overall evolution of Chinese foreign policy, particularly in the preceding period. There is probably a fair amount of agreement on certain broad criteria. Two examples of periodization may be taken. H.C Hinton's main headings for his chronological treatment are:⁶ "Armed struggle" (1948-51); Search for an alternative policy (1951-5); Bandung phase (1955-7); The East Wind prevails over the West Wind (1957-9); The Campaign against Khrushchev (1960-63); "Third World" Policy (1963-). Another author, Van Ness, divides the periods as follows:⁷ Communist internationalism (1949-52); Peaceful co-existence (1953-7); Militant anti-imperialism and the emergence of anti-revisionism (1958-65).

A common point in these categorisations, which other authors seem to share, is that in later 1957-early 1958 Chinese policy underwent a major shift in the direction of an assessment by the leadership that the situation was appropriate for more radical forms of action. This issue is linked to the question of united front work in an

⁵ see YAHUDA M. "Chinese Foreign Policy: A Process of Interaction" in WILSON I (ed) *China and the World Community* Sidney etc (Angus and Robertson) 1973 p. 46

⁶ HINTON H.C. *Communist China in World Politics* London etc (Macmillan) 1966 pp 23-49

⁷ VAN NESS P. *Revolution and Chinese Foreign Policy* Berkeley etc (Univ. of California Press) 1971 pp 10-18

important way, because of the assumption that even if there is consistency of goals, these may be approached in different ways.

An image sometimes employed is that of a 'swing' between different methods, of which the following description could serve as an example:

"Chinese foreign policy since 1949 shows a dichotomous tactical pattern whose phases have alternated every few years with the regularity of the swing of a pendulum. These two sides of tactics, alternately employed, can be seen as direct and indirect approaches to achieving strategic goals."⁸

On this basis a periodization can be put forward involving phases which could be characterised as Militant up to the end of the Korean war, Peaceful (1954-7), Militant (1957-8), Peaceful, (1960-6), Militant (1966-9) etc.⁹

Concretely, the assumption may be that in radical phases, the range of forces to unite with could be different. Such a perspective could lead to a more concrete understanding of the 'swings'. One author, J. Camilleri, has argued that China was

"confronted by the difficult choice of either leading a reformist third world trade union of governments or mobilising and co-ordinating the often weak and scattered forces of revolutionary insurgency throughout the world..."¹⁰

In concrete terms the choice of policy, according to this view, is between a united front from above or a united

⁸ McCRAW D *Chinese Foreign Policy - An Ideological Approach*, Wellington (Price Milburn for New Zealand Inst. of International Affairs), pp. 7, 16

⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁰ CAMILLERI J. *China's Foreign Policy* Oxford, (Martin Robertson) 1980 p. 93

front from below. More specifically, the author sees the change in 1957-8 as one in which the Chinese were tending to try to replace a Bandung-style united front from above (based on governments) by a united front from below (based on peoples).¹¹

A critical issue in understanding the major shifts would thus seem to be that of definition of the united front. This view is close to the analysis put forward by Gittings, who also stresses that the shifts are a response to the external environment, or at least to decision-makers' perception of it. Speaking of the situation in 1953-4 he proposes an argument, which could be of wider applicability, to the effect that Chinese decision-makers saw this as a period of greater relaxation, where broader alignments could be formed:

"when the imperialist heat was on, this analysis implied, and armed struggle was the order of the day, the bourgeoisie was more apt to 'waver', and the anti-imperialist front would be defined more narrowly. This concertina-like analysis would recur in the late 1950s and again during the Cultural Revolution."¹²

Applying this perspective to the period we are directly concerned with, Gittings regards the change in 1957 - which he dates to earlier in that year than many other authors - as one whereby the CPC leadership was

"shifting towards a much cooler view of the anti-imperialist potential of the neutralist countries."¹³

¹¹ *ibid* p. 84

¹² GITTINGS J. *The World and China* London (Eyre Methuen) 1974 p. 210

¹³ *ibid* pp. 212-3

Speaking more specifically in relation to the Middle East in this period, Shichor follows a line of reasoning which appears quite close to that of Gittings in asserting that

"Neutralism, which had been tolerated in peacetime, could no longer be approved in face of persistent western aggression"¹⁴

Hence, from the Chinese angle, the Asian African countries

"were advised to abandon their middle-of-the-road position and co-operate closely with the Soviet Union and the socialist camp."¹⁵

It could be remarked that there is no logical necessity for the anti-imperialist front to be defined more narrowly by a socialist state in a period when the 'heat is on'. A sense of acute threat could in fact lead to a less 'choosy' approach in the search for allies and the definition of the progressive camp. Nor would it necessarily be true that radical phases in domestic and foreign policy would coincide, since it could, for example, be logical to take advantage of a relaxed situation internationally to pursue more radical goals domestically.

The next step will thus be for us to examine concretely how the CPC perceived the international system in the period under consideration, including their perception of forces for change within it, to look at possible linkages with domestic policy, and to examine how 'threatening' the situation was perceived to be from China's own angle, since these are all crucial parameters for united front policies.

¹⁴ SHICHOR Y. *The Middle East in China's Foreign Policy*, Cambridge etc. (Cambridge UP) 1979 p. 79

¹⁵ *ibid.*

CHAPTER 1: ISSUES FOR THE C.P.C.'S ANALYSIS OF THE WORLD SYSTEM IN THE LATER 1950s

SOME FEATURES OF THE MAOIST DIALECTICAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE WORLD SYSTEM

We will now set out to provide a framework for analysing the Chinese leadership's view of the Middle East in this period, and will first establish some of the background factors in terms of the CPC's major policy concerns, as well as some overall characteristics of their world-view.

Our basic understanding is that according to the dialectical viewpoint held by the Chinese leadership at that time, the essential characteristics of a phenomenon - its contradictions, the struggles between different forces which characterised it - also at the same time constituted the factors which served to make it change into something different. The phenomenon we are concerned with here is the international system in a particular period of its history. The system at this period was characterised by a particular pattern of relationships which governed its history during a certain length of time. But this history was also the history of its changing into something else, because the contradictions which gave it its character by their own nature pushed it to a certain resolution which was a change into a system with different characteristics.

The post World War II system was characterised, at least from a political point of view, by three outstanding features: the hegemony of one actor, the USA, within the industrial world; the existence of a fairly coherent bloc of socialist states headed by the USSR; and the growth of

national movements which made the old colonial system untenable in the long term.

None of these elements was stable, each element possessed its own internal dynamic, and also related to other elements in certain ways. There were processes of differentiation within each, as well as change in their position relative to other actors.

It would appear that the CPC considered that the international situation as it existed in 1957-8 was part of the same basic system which had emerged following World War II, but at the same time, it had reached a stage in which forces for of change had built up to a point where major structural shifts were likely.

It is crucial to grasp that from the Maoist point of view, there were *different possible outcomes* to this process of change. History did not move through stages in a linear or predetermined manner. There were thus opportunities for forces in the system to pursue milieu-orientated goals, to seek to alter the structure of the system, rather than simply maximise their interests within it.

This was the most important single parameter for united front policies: the Chinese were aiming to consolidate alignments of forces which shared, at least for a time, common interests in a *particular* structural outcome which would favour them.

A BASIC PARADIGM FOR THE RELATION OF FORCES AT A WORLD LEVEL - MAO ZEDONG'S INTERVIEW WITH A.L. STRONG

It is possible to show that the CPC considered that the basic characteristics of international politics - the type of forces at work and the relations between them - retained

an important degree of continuity as far as their essential characteristics were concerned between the time of the emergence of the post-War system, and the period 1957-8, which directly concern us.

The point of reference for this assertion is the remarkable importance attached by the CPC to one particular statement outlining the structural issues of the international system as it emerged following World War II and the main tendencies within that system.

The statement in question was that delivered by CPC Chairman Mao Zedong in the course of an interview with the US journalist Anna Louise Strong in August 1946. The importance attached to this text in the period under consideration is such that we must first summarise its main points.

In the text in question Mao was asked about the possibility of the United States starting a war against the Soviet Union, and replied as follows:

"There are two aspects to the propaganda about an anti-Soviet war. On the one hand, US imperialism is indeed preparing a war against the Soviet Union; the current propaganda about an anti-Soviet war, as well as other anti-Soviet propaganda, is political preparation for such a war. On the other hand, this propaganda is a smoke-screen put up by the US reactionaries to cover many actual contradictions immediately confronting US imperialism. These are the contradictions between the US reactionaries and the American people and the contradictions of US imperialism with other capitalist countries and with the colonial and semi-colonial countries."

He went on to say:

"The United States and the Soviet Union are separated by a vast zone which includes many capitalist, colonial and semi-colonial countries in Europe, Asia and Africa. Before the US reactionaries have subjugated these countries, an attack on the Soviet Union is out of the question ... Using various pretexts, the United States is making large scale

military arrangements and setting up military bases in many countries. The US reactionaries say that the military bases they have set up and are preparing to set up all over the world are aimed against the Soviet Union. True, these military bases are directed against the Soviet Union. At present, however, it is not the Soviet Union but the countries in which these military bases are located that are the first to suffer US aggression. I believe it won't be long before these countries come to realise who is really oppressing them, the Soviet Union or the United States. The day will come when the US reactionaries find themselves opposed by the people of the whole world."¹

In the same text, Mao described the atomic bomb as a paper tiger, his first published use of the phrase, before going on to develop the view that all "reactionaries" are paper tigers.

The implication is quite striking - that the USA might accept de facto the cold-war division, and, as a corollary of its abandonment of rollback, concentrate on building its positions in the developing world. One of the central themes to emerge from this text is the idea that the main, or at least most immediate focal point of world politics is not the clash between the two superpowers - as many people on both sides of the divide probably believed - but rather the conflict between on the one hand American attempts to establish their interests in the remainder of the world - the "vast zone", sometimes referred to in later formulations as "intermediate" - and on the other the popular movements which were attempting to prevent the realisation of these attempts.

This was the main 'line struggle' over the structural outcome of the conflicts engendered by the basic contradictions of the post-World War II international system, a process which, as we will argue, the CPC considered to be well underway by the period 1957-8 and

¹ MAO Tse-tung *Selected Works* Vol IV Peking (FLP) 1969 pp 97-101

indeed to have entered into a critical phase. In particular, in the period under study it was felt that the day "when the US reactionaries find themselves opposed by the people of the whole world" was starting to come close.

THE A.L. STRONG INTERVIEW AS A POINT OF REFERENCE IN 1957-8

This text remained an explicit point of reference in the latter part of the 1950s.

To begin with, Mao himself was still using and developing the same set of concepts, particularly when major questions of world strategy were being discussed. The beginning of the period under consideration was a critical one from the CPC's point of view, because there took place the Moscow Meeting of ruling communist parties in November 1957, which we will discuss in more detail in the next chapter. On that occasion Mao was given the possibility of addressing the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, and he took the opportunity to emphasise that the United States was "particularly rabid in interfering in the internal affairs of those countries situated in the area between the US and the socialist camp".¹

In his first speech at the Moscow Meeting itself, Mao then outlined what is in effect a summary of the main points in the Anna Louise Strong interview, before proceeding to develop another idea which was not explicitly present in the interview but which immediately came to be associated with the whole cluster of ideas involved in the paper tiger concept. This was the thesis that "strategically we should slight all enemies, and tactically we should take full

¹ MAO Tse-tung "Speech to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR" Nov 6 1957; text in *People's China* Dec 1 1957 p. 7

account of them",³ which was to prove to be one of the central ideas developed by the CPC in discussing world issues during the remainder of the period in question.

Another stage in the elevation of the Anna Louise Strong interview to the status of a central point of reference occurred in September 1958 when Mao Zedong employed the same basic terminology in addressing the Chinese Supreme State Conference, and immediately afterwards the foreign affairs journal *Shijie Zhishi* published extracts from Mao's various speeches on the subject of "Imperialism and All Reactionaries are Paper Tigers". This collection was republished by *Renmin Ribao* and also as a pamphlet, and became the focus of a major mass study campaign.⁴ In a speech to the Propaganda Department of the CPC Central Committee in November of the same year, Zhou Enlai made a statement to the effect that

"'Comrade Mao Tse-tung on Imperialism and All Reactionaries are Paper Tigers' is an extremely important political document which systematically, profoundly, and correctly solves the problem of how to recognise revolutionary forces and reactionary forces."⁵

The "problem" referred to here is one which can be considered a key issue in united front questions.

It is thus reasonable to conclude that the ideas put forward in the Anna Louise Strong interview and their

³ Text in *Peking Review* 1958 Nov 11, p 9; see also *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tsetung* Peking FLP 1968 p. 75

⁴ *Comrade Mao Tse-tung on Imperialism and all Reactionaries are Paper Tigers* Peking FLP 1st ed. 1958. Our references are to 3rd ed, second revised translation, 1966

⁵ *Renmin Ribao*, Nov. 12, 1958, quoted in POLLACK J.D., *Perception and Action in Chinese Foreign Policy - The Quemoy Decision*, University of Michigan Dissertation 1976, p. 254

subsequent development constituted a central theoretical point of reference on major issues of the interrelation of world forces throughout the period in question, whom to unite with and whom to oppose.

DYNAMIC ELEMENTS IN THE MODEL

While it has thus been possible to demonstrate that there was continuity at a basic level in the Chinese leadership's model of the international system, it is equally important to recognise that some of the characteristic contradictions embodied in that model had matured to a point where they were considered to imply the possibility of radical change. The individual elements within the model had in fact all undergone significant modifications, and this in turn implied changes in the relative balance of relations between them.

The text of the A.L. Strong interview reflected the period at which it was written in that the two camps are seen as overwhelmingly the most important active elements. In this respect the CPC's world view was anything but static. Major changes were introduced in their model, the most important being the evolution in the Chinese perception of the Asian-African countries from the status of an amorphous "area between" the two camps - where they were moreover banded together conceptually with the European industrial countries! - into a distinct and active force operating upon and working to change the world system.

Thus while the ingredients may have been the same, their relative importance was seen differently, and this signifies a qualitative shift which in turn necessarily influenced the role played by the other two main forces, the camps headed respectively by the USA and the Soviet Union.

Of crucial significance to the united front aspect of China's foreign policy was the dynamic manner in which the balance of forces was conceived. It has correctly been stated that the Chinese decision-makers had a "predisposition to maintain a continuing calculation of the world balance of power",⁶ although it would be preferable to say 'balance of forces' in order to distinguish the essentially dynamic Chinese view from the static, system-maintaining function of the balance of power as classically defined.

Without giving a detailed account of this evolution, it will be useful to refer to two major watersheds in the process, which were considered of immediate relevance to Chinese policy-makers in the course of the year 1958: firstly the experience of the Bandung Conference, and secondly the set of ideas expressed in the phrase "The East Wind is Prevailing over the West Wind".

THE 'BANDUNG SPIRIT'

The Bandung Conference held in Indonesia in 1955 was a historic point of departure for the formation of an Afro-Asian (later 'third world') standpoint as a distinct current in international affairs. China's leaders played a strong role at that conference, and in turn the experience led to a new understanding on their part. Of particular significance for our purposes is the implication of what Bandung represents for united front policies: firstly a qualitative emergence of a new force in the world system, and secondly the articulation of milieu goals implying a restructuring of the rules according to which international relations were conducted.

⁶ HALPERN A.M. "The foreign policy uses of the Chinese revolutionary model" *China Quarterly* July-Sept 1961 p.4

At the Eighth National Congress of the CPC in September 1956, Foreign Minister Chen Yi delivered a major speech "On the present international situation and our foreign policy" which was still considered topical by the Chinese leadership during the period we are directly concerned with.⁷ In this text, Chen accorded central significance to the Bandung Conference, and remarked, speaking of the colonial countries and the national independence movement, that:

"they no longer form the massive rear of imperialism; on the contrary, they are becoming a positive force in promoting the progress of mankind."⁸

In connection with China's united front strategy, particularly important was the new input into international relations constituted by the so-called Five Principles,⁹ which seek to promulgate a new approach to relations between states:

"To China, these five principles are by no means temporary or a matter of tactics or expediency. They

⁷ It was, for example, included in an important collection of documents on Chinese foreign policy with special reference to the Middle East, CHINESE PEOPLE'S INSTITUTE OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS, *China Supports the Arab People's Struggle for National Independence* Peking (FLP) 1958 (hereafter, *China Supports...*), in preference to later texts such as Zhou Enlai's foreign policy report to the NPC of Feb 8, 1958. Our references are to the translation of Chen Yi's speech which appears in *China Supports...*

⁸ *China Supports* op. cit p. 34

⁹ The Five Principles are: mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, non-aggression, non-intervention in internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit and peaceful co-existence. These principles were originally put forward jointly by China and India, and they were expanded at Bandung into ten principles which formed a fuller code of conduct in international relations. China played a leading role in drafting these. See FARAJALLAH, S. *Le Groupe afro-asiatique dans le Cadre des Nations unies* Geneva (Droz) 1963 pp 102-3

are our basic policy in the conduct of foreign relations."¹⁰

This issue illustrates a point to which we will attach considerable importance in our argument: the idea that, at one level, the struggle of the developing countries tended to subvert the overall logic of the power-system as it existed, and impose a new set of 'rules', to restructure international relations, perhaps in the image of a new pattern of less conflictual relationships which they were initially trying to build among themselves. Thus, in a major foreign policy report on March 5, 1957, Zhou Enlai stated a common principle of some of the developing countries, including China, that "we are against the establishment of antagonistic military blocs, against the theory of the so-called 'vacuum', and against power politics".¹¹

In the context of Bandung, the notion of the awakening of the East is already foreshadowed in the Chinese world view:

"Certain top-ranking leaders of the western countries are not willing to face the reality of the awakening of the East, the awakening of Asia and Africa, and this has led them to commit serious mistakes. If they still do not correct their perverted view, they will make mistakes that are still more serious. It might be of benefit to them if I stress this point here, for the purpose of opening their eyes."¹²

'THE EAST WIND PREVAILS OVER THE WEST WIND'

If the view of the Chinese leadership after Bandung was that the Asian-African countries had developed from an

¹⁰ China Supports op cit p 45

¹¹ CHOU En-lai (ZHOU Enlai), "A Report on Visits to Eleven Countries in Asia and Europe", March 5 1957, *People's China Supplement* April 1

¹² China Supports op cit p. 35

"area between" into a position of "*becoming* a positive force" [our emphasis], a further step was negotiated at the beginning of 1958 when the CPC, in employing the term "the East Wind prevails over the West Wind", clearly stated that these countries had now definitely *become* a separate category in their own right. Thus the Chinese concept of "the East Wind prevailing over the West Wind" is a statement of the 'current balance' of forces in world politics, but also more importantly it refers to the *direction* of change:

"The countries of the world *now* fall into three categories: socialist countries; former colonies which are now independent sovereign states and countries still fighting for independence or full independence; and countries of the imperialist camp." ¹³

This in effect signifies an assessment that an important step had been negotiated. An explicit three-force model is now unambiguously promoted. This can only imply a shift in the dynamic of the other forces as well.

Here we will simply draw attention to a few significant implications of the above statement. To begin with, the European countries are here included in the imperialist camp instead of the intermediate zone. In this formulation they are no longer seen as a potentially favourable force, although there was some debate on this question, and we will return to it in more detail subsequently.

Secondly, by recognising three distinct forces, the Chinese leaders were demarcating themselves from the cold-war dualism which was still prevalent at that time, even though, as we will argue in a moment, this does not mean that they accepted the definition which saw the developing

¹³ LIN Hai, "The East Wind Prevails Over the West Wind" *Peking Review* March 18 1958 pp 6-8, our emphasis.

countries as occupying an intermediate position between two power-blocs vying to dominate them.

Thirdly, the analysis we have referred to brings together, within a single category, the independent, not yet independent and not yet fully independent countries of what would later be thought of as the third world. The Chinese critique of the Soviet tendency to consider countries no longer oppressed once they were decolonised was later to emerge as one of the most significant lines of demarcation between the leaderships of the two parties.¹⁴ During the period under discussion the concept of a third-world movement uniting these disparate elements had not yet crystallised in world opinion, but at the same time it was *in the process of* crystallising, and the Chinese analysis reflects this fact.

A NEW DYNAMIC IN THE WORLD SYSTEM

Given that the Chinese model of the basic forces in the system and their relations with one another was changing, what deductions could be drawn in policy terms? The most important issue in this respect was the relationship between the two forces which China itself spanned, namely the socialist movement and the nationalist movement in the developing countries.

In 1958 the Asian-African movement was viewed as a distinct current in world affairs, not in the sense of being opposed to the socialist camp but nevertheless not to be confused with or subordinated to it. If we look at the dynamic of change between the situation as analysed at the time of the Anna Louise Strong interview and that described in the "East Wind" concept, it would appear that - in the Chinese

¹⁴ see *A Proposal Concerning the General Line of the International Communist Movement* Peking FLP 1963

perception - the Asian-African movement did not simply 'emerge' purely under its own steam as a distinct current. Rather, it emerged under the conditions of the system as it then was, a system in which the socialist camp constituted the leading progressive force. What was described as the socialist and peace forces were considered to exercise an important influence over the world system. A typical article of the period refers to the growing superiority of these forces, and goes on to say:

"Under these new circumstances the independence movement of the oppressed peoples of the world had greatly developed, so as to constitute one of the most important characteristics of the contemporary era." ¹⁵

There is thus, firstly recognition of the historical role of the socialist camp in creating conditions for the emergence of this trend, and secondly a statement that the new movement was *now* perceived to be standing on its own feet. This did not necessarily mean that the Socialist Camp was now considered redundant. The dynamics of the model would imply this as at least a possible outcome. However, in late 1957 and early 1958 this was not yet the conclusion drawn. On the contrary, emphasis was placed rather on the fact that the socialist system had also changed and developed in ways which gave it favourable openings.

In order to establish the overall context of Chinese foreign policy it will be necessary for us to devote some attention to how the CPC viewed the possibilities for socialist construction in this period. In an important sense, such construction was conceived as influencing the whole course of development of the world system. But we must first address a very important issue raised in the Anna Louise Strong interview, namely the crucial

¹⁵ *Shijie Zhishi* 1958 IV, p. 6 (editorial)

distinction between a threat to the socialist countries themselves, and threat to a wider revolutionary process.

This is an extremely important parameter for united front policies, because, for example, some commentators have drawn attention to the question of whether the 'heat is on' as a factor influencing them. The Strong interview precisely implies that the focus of conflict lay in the area which was not part of either 'camp'. It might thus appear that the CPC did not consider itself and the socialist camp to be an object of immediate threat at the time.

Was the radical line, then, a product of a feeling that the 'heat' was not so much on, and that China was thus relatively more free to act in the international arena?

THE TAIWAN STRAITS CRISIS - WAS CHINA UNDER DIRECT THREAT?

There was one particular event which focused this question at the time, the Taiwan Straits crisis of 1958. As the event with the strongest international implications for which China was *directly* responsible during the period in question, it will be useful to discuss the issue briefly at this point.

In August 1958 the CPC took the decision to launch a bombardment of small offshore islands which were in the hands of Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist regime entrenched in Taiwan. Intense shelling began on August 23 and continued for two weeks, whereupon the USA stepped in with a strong commitment of armed force. The issue remained acute for another month, after which it was defused; the CPC initiated a ceasefire, although a token bombardment was subsequently resumed.

This crisis has been discussed by a number of authors. To begin with, it is a fact that the USA maintained, up to and including the period under consideration, a posture with regard to China which could be regarded as threatening. Gittings has given considerable evidence to show that China's overall anti-imperialist line was a response to a genuine threat from the United States, particularly in the earlier '50s when even nuclear attacks were considered.¹⁶ In the later 1950s, although the policy of rollback had abated somewhat, the American leadership was still adopting a threatening posture, at least verbally. And on June 28 1957 Secretary of State Dulles delivered a statement that the United States would contribute to the process of the dissolution of the Communist regime in China.¹⁷

Following this, Taiwan began to be used increasingly as a centre for activities of Guomindang agents in various areas, including Tibet, as well as serving as a base for actions in support of US objectives in other parts of Asia, notably for air support for forces combatting the radical nationalist regime of President Sukarno in Indonesia. There was talk of installing missiles in south Korea. The study by Gurtov and Hwang asserts that

"... had it not been for American actions - in Taiwan, elsewhere in Asia, and in the Middle East - Mao would have had no reason to order the bombardment of the offshore islands on August 23, 1958." ¹⁸

¹⁶ GITTINGS op. cit. p. 20 note, lists a series of warnings implying a nuclear threat issued by the USA to China in the period 1953-4 in connection with events in Korea, the offshore islands, and Indochina.

¹⁷ GURTOV M and HWANG B-M, *China Under Threat*, Baltimore etc. (Johns Hopkins UP) 1980 pp 76-7

¹⁸ *ibid.* p 63

In particular, events in the Middle East, specifically the US military intervention in Lebanon

"may have convinced Mao and his colleagues that the GMD's [Guomindang's] activities in the Taiwan Straits and elsewhere in Asia, far from being isolated events, were part of a pattern of anticommunist pressure engineered from Washington." ¹⁹

The strength of Gurtov and Hwang's study is that the Chinese leadership did indeed take a global view of the struggle with the USA and did conceive of China's own policy against the background of world trends. The subsequent development of our own analysis will confirm this point. The problem in the above statement is however, that it weakens the distinction between US threat to the socialist camp, on the one hand, and to the national movements on the other, which was one of the most important distinctions the CPC maintained.

The overall mood of Chinese foreign policy at the time scarcely indicated a fear of impending American attack on China itself. Gittings' analysis clearly implies that the Chinese leadership made an optimistic assessment of the situation in 1958, based on Mao's conviction that the USA did not want war at that time.²⁰

This provides a context in which to interpret the Chinese leadership's motives in starting the shelling. Pollack has proposed five possible levels of analysis: as a 'probe' to test both US and Soviet responses; as a reaction to a real threat from the Chiang forces; in connection with domestic mobilisation; as a means of testing the Sino-Soviet alliance; and finally as part of a struggle in the sphere

¹⁹ *ibid.* p. 84

²⁰ GITTINGS, *op. cit.* p. 226

of military policy-making, at a time when there were significant shifts in military line.²¹

It is worth remarking that these levels are not necessarily mutually exclusive. It is probable that countries usually frame their policies with a view to maximising advantage accross a number of different spheres. However, in practice, Pollack would seem to regard the explanation of a real US-Chiang threat as the least likely.²²

The possibility would still be open to argue that Beijing was taking advantage of a particular set of international circumstances in order to maximise its interests over Taiwan. This is the view expressed by Stolper, who stresses that the United States was quite isolated over the China recognition issue at that time. Arguing that it was Taiwan which was at stake, and not the offshore islands themselves, he sees the crisis as being initiated by Beijing, but not in response to a threat from the USA.²³

While it is probably correct to see the crisis as being initiated by the CPC, we will argue that it is still necessary to place the analysis in a wider context.

The issue is referred to on a number of occasions in the material attributed to Mao which was published during the Cultural Revolution under the title *Mao Zedong Sixiang Wansui*. However, the imprecision of the texts makes their interpretation far from straightforward. There has been some controversy, for example, between Gittings, who argued

²¹ POLLACK, J.D. *Perception and Action in Chinese Foreign Policy - The Quemoy Decision*, University of Michigan Dissertation, 1976; Chapter 2.

²² *ibid.*, pp. 274 ff.

²³ STOLPER, Thomas E., *China, Taiwan and the Offshore Islands*, Armonk N.Y. (M.E. Sharpe) 1985, Ch. VIII.

that Mao Zedong was expressing a satisfied verdict on having proved that it was easy to stir up a crisis and perturb the Americans; and Whiting, who argued that there were significant miscalculations, in that the United States did not back down, and Mao thereby left himself open to some domestic criticism.²⁴

It does at least appear from the material published in that source that direct threat to China was not perceived as so much of an issue. Towards the end of 1958 Mao seems to have argued that NATO was mainly defensive with regard to the socialist camp, while being offensive with regard to the nationalist movements, and to domestic communism.²⁵ Such an assessment obviously fits in with the overall model put forward in the A.L. Strong Interview, a text whose topicality was reaffirmed strongly in the Chinese media at exactly the time of the bombardment of the offshore islands.

This, however, raises the possibility of a further hypothesis which deserves to be taken into consideration, namely that the decision was a response to a perceived threat from the USA, but not a threat directly against China or the Socialist Camp. The logic of the A.L. Strong interview would in fact be that if the intermediate zone had to be subjugated *before* a direct attack on the socialist countries was possible, it would be in the interests of the latter to defend it, if necessary by opening up a new 'front' against the West.

The idea that there was a perceived threat from the USA, but not directly a threat to China, is an important point and we will examine this hypothesis later when discussing the CPC's global view at the time of the critical events in

²⁴ see *China Quarterly*, 1974 p. 755; 1975, pp. 263 ff.

²⁵ *Miscellany of Mao Tse-tung Thought* Vol. I pp 135-6

Iraq and Lebanon in the summer of 1958. However there is another relevant issue, which is the question of *response* to threat. The "paper tiger" concept in fact carries the implication that even if there is a real threat, the solution is to "despise" it, or in other words that threats are meant to be resisted.

A previous phase of heightened tension in the Taiwan Straits as early as 1954 had led the Chinese press to criticise "some people" who held that attempts to liberate Taiwan would create tension,²⁶ and in the summer of 1958 the CPC went further, in a mood which anticipates something of the flavour of the later Sino-Soviet polemic, or even the Cultural Revolution:

"All the US antics can only cow those opportunists who are ready to yield at any time to the blackmail of the atomic and hydrogen bombs, wheat and dollars of the US, but in the eyes of the indomitable people, the creators of new history, this is purely stinking rubbish to be swept away on the road of human progress."²⁷

This stress on the people as creators of history clearly points to a connection between a way of viewing world politics and the domestic policy of the Great Leap Forward. By uniting progressive forces, threats can be surmounted. In both areas it was necessary to 'seize the time'. In the minds of the Chinese leadership, particularly Mao, there was a dialectical connection between on the one hand threat and on the other hand possibilities for decisive advance. Threat can thus be viewed as a kind of penalty for failing to grasp the opportunities offered. In Mao's words, "Lenin

²⁶ GITTINGS op cit. p 199

²⁷ [CHINA Government] *Oppose US Military Provocation in Taiwan Straits Area* Peking (FLP) 1958 p. 49

constantly said: 'A nation always has two possibilities: success or destruction.'" ²⁸

During the ultra-radical phase of the summer of 1958 there was an evident one-sidedness in the treatment of the paper tiger idea, in the sense that most of the emphasis was on despising the enemy strategically and little on taking the enemy seriously from a tactical point of view. This may be related to the overall climate of voluntarism which affected domestic policy as well during the period, and it was possibly in order to redress this problem that Mao further developed the paper tiger idea in a speech to the Political Bureau of the CPC in December of the same year, when he gave considerable attention to questions of tactics.²⁹

We will return to this issue in examining the Chinese view of the crisis in the Middle East in the summer of 1958. The main issue at this stage is that the point of the model embodied in the A.L. Strong interview was not to see everything being played out in terms of a direct confrontation between the two camps.

DOMESTIC-FOREIGN POLICY LINKAGES - THE DECISION TO LAUNCH THE GREAT LEAP FORWARD

A corollary of the fact that the 'heat' was not so much directly on the socialist countries at that time was that they had the possibility to make important advances in their own construction. This possibility was also seen as a responsibility or necessity, because in Mao's perception, if you failed to 'seize' favourable opportunities you would not simply mark time, you would degenerate. This point

²⁸ Miscellany of Mao Tse-Tung Thought, op. cit.

²⁹ MAO Tse-tung, speech of Dec 1 1958 quoted in footnote to MAO Tse-tung Sel Works Vol IV pp 98-9

could be considered applicable to the Socialist world as a whole, but we will first examine the specific case of China's construction before looking into the wider Socialist Camp context of Chinese foreign policy in the following chapter.

The relevant issue from the united front point of view is that the Chinese leadership was seeking to advance domestic construction on the basis of certain social alignments, and was also looking to promote an international environment which would provide a favourable context for such a goal, while conversely socialist construction was also envisaged as a factor feeding back into the international environment, by promoting the strength of the 'forces' with which China identified. The question of domestic-foreign linkage is clearly particularly relevant when we are discussing such a period, in which major policy shifts in both fields coincided.

From a social angle, it is likely that one of the key aspects of seizing favourable circumstances was - from the CPC's perspective - to engineer the appropriate alignments of social forces, to bring about popular mobilisation. This view underlies the idea behind the Great Leap Forward, itself an expression of the East Wind model in terms of China's domestic policy.

The Great Leap Forward launched at the beginning of 1958 was one of the most extraordinary experiments ever attempted at development strategy. We will deal subsequently with certain specific links with policy in the Middle East, notably in relation to the mass demonstrations in China in the summer of 1958, but at this point it will be useful to concentrate upon two aspects which may be considered directly relevant to foreign policy issues: arguments about how to assess the potentialities of a given situation, and domestic united front issues.

The decision to launch the Leap Forward was a controversial one. One of the issues central to the leadership debate was that of balance, and as Zagoria has argued, sectoral balance within the economy was an important aspect of this. But there were wider implications as well, because the manner in which the dialectical concept of balance was discussed by Mao Zedong could be considered applicable also to wider issues of the assessment of the balance of forces as a context for building unity between certain of them.

In fact, the notion of balance is an important one in any form of systems-theory because it is relevant to how stable the system can be considered to be, and the strength of the forces of change within it. In one of the most influential texts of the period, Mao Zedong's *On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People*, the issue is discussed as follows:

"Balance is nothing but a temporary, relative unity of opposites; by the end of each year, this balance, taken as a whole, is upset by the struggle of opposites. The unity undergoes a change, balance becomes imbalance, unity becomes disunity, and once again it is necessary to work out a balance and unity for the next year"³⁰

The launching of the Leap Forward was predicated on an assumption that one could not be nostalgic about preserving a certain mode of operation of the system, but had to move on to recognise the potentialities in new alignments. The fundamental orientation is towards change rather than system-preservation.

This basic philosophical attitude to systems was certainly applied to both domestic and foreign policy fields. In both fields there was a sense that there was an opportunity to make decisive advances if only it could be seized. In

³⁰ MAO Tse-tung (MAO Zedong) *Four Essays on Philosophy* op. cit p. 95

both fields the role of the masses was stressed, particularly their consciousness, as a material force. This does not mean that an understanding of the specificities of the two fields was necessarily lost sight of, but in practice the Leap Forward generated a definite 'mood' of "going all out and aiming high" from which it would have been hard to insulate foreign policy entirely.

It is interesting that one of the important *Renmin Ribao* editorials which ushered in the radical phase of the Leap Forward is entitled, "Away with the Old Balance, On to a New Balance.". In that article it is argued that during 1956, "Many people....erroneously raised the slogan 'oppose too hasty progress', which threw cold water on the enthusiasm of the masses."³¹ The official view in the Leap Forward period was that circumstances had been right for an upsurge in 1956 but this had not materialised. At the time, in 1956, the CPC Central Committee already argued that the criticism of rightist, conservative ideas carried out at its 6th plenary session had created conditions for a development in socialist transformation.³² This perspective, which we also find in Mao's comments on the co-operative movement,³³ already anticipates the view put forward in 1958 that the role of ideology is critical.

In November 1957, when the left line had probably won out, Liu Shaoqi put forward the analysis that the real possibility for a Leap Forward had been frustrated in 1956 because of "vague doubt and rejection".³⁴ Later, he argued

³¹ *Renmin Ribao* Editorial Feb. 28 1958; PR 1958, 2, p 9.

³² CHINA State Statistical Bureau, *Report on the Fulfilment of the National Economic Plan of the PRC in 1955*, Peking (FLP) 1956 p. 5

³³ see *Socialist Upsurge in China's Countryside* Peking (FLP) 1957.

³⁴ LIU Shao-ch'i, "Speech at the Peking Rally in Celebration of the 40th Anniversary of the October Socialist Revolution (Nov. 6 1957"; Xinhua Supplement No. 3 Nov 11 1957 p. 8

that China's development had shown a U-shaped curve during this period, with growth in 1956 and 1958 punctuated by a downturn in 1957.³⁵

These discussions were highly specific to the domestic field, but at the same time the general overall approach of 'seizing' upon favourable circumstances - including a certain popular 'mood' which communists had a responsibility to give leadership to in order to realise a decisive advance - was prevalent in the foreign policy sphere as well. Moreover, the domestic debate was not economistic, it centred on the contrary on the assessment of social forces - how to recognise the possibilities which existed for uniting radical elements in order to push the system decisively in a certain direction.

This is not to deny that the CPC preserved some sense of the distinctness of the two spheres, but this takes us to another very important level of analysis: domestic and foreign affairs were indeed regarded as two distinct spheres, but ones which *interacted with one another in a historically specific manner*. In assessing the characteristics of a given situation and the tasks it required, the CPC took account of both domestic and internal factors. The relationship could be understood in terms of Mao Zedong's proposition that internal causes are the basis of change and external causes the condition of change. The decision to launch the Leap Forward was thus taken against the background of a particular set of international circumstances.

The conception of an international balance of forces serving as a *background* to construction in China was

³⁵ LIU Shao-ch'i "Report to the Second Plenary Session of the VIII Party Congress of the CPC", May 5th 1958, *Collected Works of Liu Shao-ch'i*, Hong Kong (Union Res. Inst.) 1968, p. 18

clearly established. Speaking at the Eighth Party Congress in September 1956, Mao Zedong said: "At present, developments in the international situation have become even more favourable to the work of construction in our country."³⁶ Particularly interesting for our purposes is the existence of an optic in which in a certain sense international and domestic united front forces are seen as being intertwined. This emerges strongly from the following official statement published in the early part of 1957:

"The general international situation is tending toward ease and toward progress. Inside the country, our socialist construction has already been attended by gigantic achievements, our socialist revolution has won decisive victory, and class relations have undergone basic changes. The people of our country must utilize this favourable situation and all favourable factors to unite with all forces inside and outside the country that may be united with, struggle assiduously to build the country into a socialist industrial nation."³⁷

However, it is equally important to note that the process was, in the CPC's perception - a two-way one. The Great Leap could in turn have been expected to exercise an influence upon the international environment, if it proved a successful experiment. Via socialist construction, the Leap Forward was designed to strengthen the progressive camp in the world balance of forces, possibly to cement links between socialism and the developing world by demonstrating in a striking manner the applicability of socialist models to the latter. Thus it could influence

³⁶ MAO Tse-tung, "Address to the Eighth Congress of the CPC" in China Supports op. cit. pp. 20-1

³⁷ CPC, Political Resolution Adopted by the third session of the Second Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, National Committee, March 20 1957; *Renmin Ribao* March 21. Text in Current Background No 450 April 15 1957 p 1.

alignments and create new possibilities for united fronts. It is probable that in the course of the year 1958 this aspect became increasingly important as criticisms of the Soviet Union made the CPC feel it had a responsibility to make a decisive impact upon the world system by regenerating communism.

Zagoria has pointed out that

"Once the left gained the ascendancy, there was persistent criticism of Right-wing economic views, but virtually no criticism of Right-wing views on foreign policy. It is therefore possible that intra-party dispute was confined to domestic policy."³⁸

It can be hypothesised that the grounds of agreement were that the international situation was such that China had both the possibility and the responsibility to push ahead with its domestic construction. This still left the internal debate over how to do this, and how far one should for example neglect factors like the balance of different sectors in the economy in doing so. As we will argue in the body of this research, although the left-right line struggle on international questions may have been muted within China, it did occur at a different level, in the form of more or less veiled criticisms of the Soviet line.

SOCIAL ALIGNMENTS WITHIN CHINA IN AN INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

The identification of goals can be considered an important element in united front policies, because how goals are defined at each stage influences the assessment of which social forces can be united and around which lines.

³⁸ ZAGORIA D.S. *The Sino-Soviet Conflict 1956-61*, Princeton N.J. (Princeton UP) 1962 p 72

One of the themes which strongly characterised the Leap Forward period was a picture of a revolution boldly advancing by continually identifying and attaining new goals. However, there was a very strong trend to replace social analysis with stereotyped political labels. Increasingly, with the predominance of the strongly 'left' line, the term 'bourgeois' was used as a negative point of reference.

This issue became implicated in debates within the international communist movement, at least once Mao started stressing the class dimension of such conflicts. This can be seen in a passage from the Moscow Declaration of 1957, which clearly bears the imprint not just of the Chinese delegation, but of Mao himself:

"The existence of bourgeois influence is an internal source of revisionism, while surrender to imperialist pressure is its external source."³⁹

There was a real problem for the CPC, once the goal was formulated unambiguously in terms of socialism, to conceive of the domestic united front as a real unity of disparate forces. The tendency to homogenisation in practice became extremely strong. It was thus frequently emphasised that the current goal was that of socialism, and only those who supported this could be classified as progressives. One interesting point which was often made is that in these circumstances there was no room for a middle or neutral position:

"During the period of the democratic revolution, anyone who opposed imperialism, feudalism and bureaucrat-capitalism was revolutionary. But today, during the socialist revolution, anyone who wants to be a revolutionary must oppose capitalism and go the socialist way. If you want to go the capitalist way

³⁹ Survey of China Mainland Press No 1801 p.2

you are a reactionary. The choice lies between the two: there is no middle way."⁴⁰

One issue which served to crystallise the debate about the 'middle of the road' position was that of the democratic parties - political groupings distinct from the communist party which had broadly supported the goals of the revolution in the early period. In what was at least nominally a multi-party system there was obviously a risk that these entities would recruit a new following, which was a problem for the Communist Party leadership. Hence the emphasis on the non-viability of a 'middle road'. It was argued that in the course of the year 1957 "rightists" had sought to "usurp the leadership" of these organisations,⁴¹ and had suffered defeat. Withering criticisms were made of "super-political neutralist third persons".⁴² The process was one whereby it was hoped that most of the "neutralists" would choose to move towards the left:

"The national bourgeoisie, the bourgeois intellectuals and the members of the various democratic parties, who stand in the middle of the road and are half-hearted about socialism, have changed or are changing to a greater or lesser degree, their old political outlooks.....Most of these people, sensing 'the compelling force of circumstances,' now feel that they

⁴⁰ CHOU Yang (ZHOU Yang) "The Great Debate on the Literary Front" (Feb 28 1958), *Peking Review* March 18 1958

⁴¹ KUO Mo-jo (GUO Moruo), Speech at a rally of democratic personages, Peking, in *Peking Review* March 25 1958 p. 10

⁴² CHANG Chi-yi, "The nature, function and political position of the democratic parties", *Guangming Ribao* 15-20 March 1958 in JPRS DC 366. The sense of the original would probably be "supra-political".

must make further progress and must not remain in their middle-of-the-road position as before..."⁴³

If we are considering the significance of the above ideas for foreign policy, an immediate response might be that there was a clear sense of difference between the way the united front was assessed in the two fields. At a state-to-state level, Chinese decision-makers strongly affirmed the Bandung spirit, with its implications of neutralism, even though neutralism was a major target of attack domestically.

However, the significance of this latter distinction should not be over-emphasised. The Chinese interpretation of the Asian-African movement was not as a middle force between the two camps, on the contrary they saw that movement as standing on the front lines in opposing the main enemy, imperialism. At the time of Yugoslavia's expulsion from Cominform the Chinese had condemned Tito in violent terms for suggesting such an idea.⁴⁴ This was one issue on which their line remained unchanged from the 1940s to the period under consideration, and they spared no pains to resist any Soviet tendency to revise the verdict over Yugoslavia.⁴⁵

Another aspect of the domestic situation where the Chinese leadership was concerned with assessing the balance of forces in this period was in the field of nationalities policy. Here the forces concerned were national rather

⁴³ LIU Shao-ch'i, Report to Second Plenary Session, Eighth Party Congress, *Coll. Works* op cit. p. 6

⁴⁴ see LIU Shao-ch'i (LIU Shaoqi), *Nationalism and Internationalism* Peking FLP, ND, p. 21

⁴⁵ see CH'EN Po-ta's (CHEN Boda's) article in *Hongqi* June 1 1958 trans. in *Peking Review* June 17 1958 p. 10

than class ones, and in this field the linkage with foreign policy would be particularly interesting.

The nationality question was a very important one for the Chinese leadership, in their quest to unite the state as an actor within the world environment. Even though minority nationalities made up only about 6% of the population, areas predominantly inhabited by them made up as much as 60% of the country's surface area. From a foreign policy point of view, it is interesting to note that, as a developing country, China had a breadth of experience spanning different conditions and even different historical eras of socio-economic structure.⁴⁶ It could thus be argued that China had direct experience of practically every different problem faced by developing countries.⁴⁷

In general, the line followed on this question during the Leap Forward period appears to be analogous with that pursued with relation to social forces - one was either with socialism or against it.

A political movement was thus initiated particularly in the minority areas, entitled "giving hearts to the Party".⁴⁸ More specifically there was a strongly anti-religious tendency during this period. The attack on religion was presented as part of the general stress on a daring and emancipated mental outlook, and in this sense it appears

⁴⁶ see JUNYRO N "China's Cultural Revolution and Technical Reforms", Chugoken Shiryo Geppo Nov. 1958 in JPRS 673 D

⁴⁷ see for example WANG Chia-hsiang (WANG Jiaxiang), "The International significance of the Chinese people's victory" in *Ten Glorious Years Peking* (FLP) 1960 p. 272

⁴⁸ see the articles from the paper directed towards Muslims, Zhongguo Musilin translated in JPRS 1453 N, particularly the issue of August 10, 1958

simply as a particular expression of the overall ideological policy prevalent during the Leap Forward period. In rationalistic terms, it was argued, for example that land given over to burial-places could advantageously be turned over to productive uses.⁴⁹ But this line, applied to minority nationalities, actually carries particular, and quite threatening, implications of denial of national particularity and attempted cultural homogenisation within the majority Chinese entity which was being built as a powerful world actor.

Particularly relevant in our context was the line pursued with regard to the Moslem nationalities:

"After the removal of feudal superstitions and the supernatural outlook, there remained many old customs which created contradictions with the new economic fundamentals and which tended to hinder the immediate expansion of productive potentials. With this problem before us, it was the general desire of the great people speedily to increase production towards the immediate establishment of socialism.... Confronted with this essential and common matter, it was necessary that traditions which had impeded productive expansion be extraced from their very roots."⁵⁰

However, this homogenizing trend, threatening though it was, does not provide the whole truth about nationalities policy during the period. It would be a mistake to see the Maoist line on social development, which formed the basis of the experiment of the Leap Forward, as a line of ironing out differences. On the contrary it was a position which stressed that those conventionally considered the most backward or primitive, because they were poor and marginalised, had a great potential for changing the world

⁴⁹ CHEN Chung-li, "Brilliant victory of Chairman Mao's theory of Atheism", *Guangming Ribao* Aug. 17 1958 in JPRS 681 D p 47

⁵⁰ *Zhongguo Musilin* Aug. 10 1958 in JPRS 1453 N pp 15-16. The English text should be taken with some reserve because the standard of translation in this source was poor at the time.

because they needed change the most, and could thus leap directly into the forefront of the revolutionary process. For example, with respect to Inner Mongolia, it was argued:

"...Those who exaggerate its backwardness regard backwardness as a liability and feel inferior to others, no matter where they are or what they do. They always follow in the path of others, having no courage to think ahead, to do much or to create anything....

"The remnants of self-abasement characteristic of semi-colonial states that beset many of us have clouded accurate assessment of Inner Mongolia. We have suffered from imperialist insults and aggressions for over one hundred years. When the imperialists robbed our economic resources and ruined our culture, they also did all they could to inculcate in us many servile ideologies to help safeguard their reactionary rule...[which]....produced corrosive and damaging effects on our own racial self-esteem. These made us too timid to stand on our own feet."⁵¹

These remarks have a very clear relevance to the Chinese perception of the role of the Asian-African peoples within the overall context of system-change at a world level.

METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES IN DOMESTIC-FOREIGN POLICY LINKAGES

The question of the relationship between domestic and foreign policy during this period is certainly one which would repay more detailed study, but this would be beyond our scope here. All that can be done here is to make some points which will be worth retaining when looking at the Chinese analysis of events in the Middle East.

The first aspect of interaction appears to be at the level of methodology: The Chinese leadership applied a similar overall approach to analysing both domestic and foreign affairs. They applied the dialectical view of the

⁵¹ PAI Chih-pin, "On the talk about the backwardness of Inner Mongolia", *Neimengge Ribao* June 19 1958, in JPRS 681 D p. 27

transformation of opposites, of the backward becoming advanced, and of development through qualitative leaps.

In particular, the CPC stressed the importance of ideas in influencing material reality. At one level, they gave particular weight, in assessing a situation - domestic or international - to a factor like the state of consciousness of the masses, which might be accorded much less importance in other analytical frames of reference, including those widely employed in the West or even in the Soviet Union.

At another level, the Chinese leaders also stressed the ideological dimension in connection with decision-making. They considered that decision-makers had a responsibility correctly to appraise and thus to 'grasp' the opportunities presented by a particular set of favourable circumstances.

The second form of interaction can be seen in terms of the practical interrelationship between domestic and foreign environments, as part of a two-way process. On the one hand a certain international situation provided conditions, favourable or otherwise, for the unfolding of particular domestic policies. On the other hand, the success of those policies would materially influence the world system at large.

Another specific level of this direct interaction would be in connection with national minorities which share characteristics (cultural etc) with other nations; in the case we are concerned with, Moslems would be the most important example, although in a different context the question of the overseas Chinese would have to be considered.

Thirdly, there is the question of certain specific methods which would have a common applicability to different situations, domestic or foreign. This is the level at which united front strategies are most directly relevant.

Fourthly, the Chinese leadership was conscious that despite all these levels of interaction, the domestic and foreign environments were specific, and different conditions might prevail in the two departments. A concrete example of this point is that there was apparently a greater consensus in the Chinese leadership on foreign policy issues than on domestic ones. Moreover, the united front, for example, could be defined differently in the two spheres. Having said this, though, it seems probable that during the Leap Forward a certain 'mood' took hold of the Chinese leadership - the need for favourable circumstances to be taken advantage of, for opportunities to be 'grasped', the image of risk, with 'threat' materialising as the penalty for failure to seize favourable chances. This percolated between the domestic and foreign policy spheres and may have rendered it difficult to maintain the detachment necessary in order to assess the two in the sense in which they were separate and distinct.

The next stage of our enquiry into the parameters of China's international line necessitates an examination of the wider context in which China was seeking to contribute to the building of socialism as a component in the international alignment of forces - that is China's role within the grouping then known as the Socialist Camp.

CHAPTER 2: CHINA'S ROLE IN THE INTERNATIONAL SOCIALIST MOVEMENT AS A CONTEXT FOR UNITED FRONT POLICIES

A demonstration of the vitality of socialism was considered an important aspect of the East Wind trend, and more specifically, China's membership of a socialist grouping provided a major focus for the action which the CPC was seeking to deploy in order to influence the world balance of forces. As we will argue, one of the most important changes to the overall model espoused by the Chinese leadership during this period concerned the role of the Socialist Camp, so it will be necessary to broaden the discussion to embrace this dimension here.

There is a significant sense in which the CPC was first and foremost not putting forward simply a Chinese foreign policy, but a policy for the Socialist Camp as a whole. The importance of this dimension is reinforced by a number of other levels of relationship: in terms of state-to-state relations, China's post-1949 policy of leaning to one side was only reinforced by the American blockade at that time, and the economic relationship with the Soviet Union was a major influence - positive or negative - upon models employed in domestic economic construction. The socialist camp constituted an international subsystem, and was in fact a significant forum for united front relations in its own right. It is also to be noted that a number of Chinese sources can be read as an expression of veiled critiques with respect to Soviet policy, and these provide an important context where the CPC was most conscious of questions of 'line'. In the remainder of this chapter we will refer to a few of these issues from the point of view of establishing the overall context of Chinese foreign policy during the period.

Issues relevant to united front policies include both internal relations within the Camp, and the question of its relations as a body with other forces. The two are in fact interconnected, because the question of strategy or 'line' vis-a-vis other actors in the world system was precisely one of the the major issues around which the CPC sought to unite forces *within* the Camp.

It may appear that 'united front' concepts could not directly be applied within the communist movement, for the reason that this movement was supposed to reflect a homogeneous social or class orientation. The Third International had indeed adopted norms very similar to the democratic centralism which prevailed within individual communist parties. After World War II, there was no such formal structure. The Communist Information Bureau, set up in 1947, was a purely European body, and even that was wound up in 1956. Perhaps from the angle of the traditional Soviet view, an organ for ironing out differences should have been superfluous if there was unity of class stance, but practice had shown this to be quite untrue, with the events of 1956 in Hungary and Poland, which in turn had repercussions throughout the bloc.

Thus it must have appeared an urgent question to hammer out some unity of line, particularly in a context where, despite problems at the time of the Suez War, the capitalist world enjoyed a fairly significant degree of co-ordination in their foreign policy, under US auspices. However, even in terms of bilateral relations between China and the USSR it seems that there was a shortage of functioning mechanisms for resolving differences through discussion. This may indeed help to explain why the Chinese relied to a considerable extent upon innuendo contained in their public policy statements to make their points.

In order to repair this anomaly somewhat, the ruling communist parties held a summit conference, known as the Moscow Meeting, in November 1957. Our period runs between this important landmark and another summit, bilateral this time, between the Chinese and Soviet leaderships in the summer of 1958.

The only actor other than the USSR which could possibly aspire to contribute significant initiatives in terms of the guiding orientation of the Socialist Camp was obviously China, and in fact the CPC invested very heavily in the Moscow meeting.

Even though China's independence of action was unique, the existence of an independent Chinese role in itself also exercised a certain influence over the other actors. China had been influential in preventing the USSR invading Poland in 1956, for example. Although from the beginning of the 'sixties the CPSU was to be quite successful in isolating China, this was not yet the case in 1957-8, and it is important to remember the specificities of that period. At this point in time polycentrism within what was still a single socialist grouping provided a possible basis for a measure of independence for other actors within it. Mao Zedong was officially regarded as a great Marxist-Leninist at this time, and he held a status and prestige within the international communist movement which no-one in the Soviet Union could begin to match - certainly not Khrushchev who had only begun to consolidate his leadership after a struggle with the Molotov-Malenkov group as recently as June 1957.

DYNAMICS OF THE ALIGNMENT OF FORCES - SOCIALISM TRIUMPHANT OVER CAPITALISM

A significant theme for the Chinese Party was to restore confidence in socialism and stress that, despite the

problems of 1956, it was a triumphant force at a world level because it constituted a more successful socio-economic system than capitalism. The Soviet line at that time was one which stressed peaceful economic competition between the two camps. The CPC agreed that "The socialist camp is confident that it does not have to rely on missiles, rockets and nuclear weapons to defeat the imperialist camp. Its victory will be achieved through peaceful economic competition."¹ Despite later Soviet allegations, it does not appear that the Chinese leadership cheerfully contemplated, still less advocated, military conflict between socialist and capitalist states. They believed that the superiority of socialism would demonstrate itself in developmental terms.

This process of socialism demonstrating its superiority was seen as part of the shifting balance of world forces away from the imperialist camp which characterised, from the Chinese angle, the newly favourable circumstances around late 1957. This was seen as a major shift in the world system influencing all other forces. An article published following the Moscow meeting of November 1957 put it this way:

"The socialist system plus a certain level of material strength gives us superiority in the entire balance of forces."²

Because of the dynamic character of the analysis, what was being discussed was not just a balance - in a static sense - but a *trend*. Everything was in motion and the important point was to grasp not just who was stronger at a particular time, but above all the *direction* of change.

¹ *Da-gong Bao* editorial, May 25 1958 in *Peking Review* 1958 14 p 26

² *People's China* Dec 16 1957, quoted in GITTINGS op cit p 218

Thus developments in the time-span immediately succeeding the Moscow Meeting were read as confirming a trend towards accentuated superiority of socialist forces. This constituted a very important parameter for Chinese policy overall in the period.

One specific event which, through deliberate timing, made a massive international impact on the eve of the Moscow Meeting was the Soviet launching of the first artificial satellite on October 4th 1957.³ The Chinese press gave this enormous coverage, implying that it demonstrated a clear technological superiority over capitalism.

In early 1958 the western industrial countries began to experience a cyclical slump due to a sharp downturn in the business cycle which interrupted - temporarily as it turned out - the progress of the post-war boom. Chinese policy-makers jumped to the conclusion that this represented a long-term weakening of capitalist growth. A major editorial written in May 1958 referred to a point six months previously when the situation took an important turn for the better, linked together the beginnings of the Leap Forward in China, the Moscow Meeting, and the launching of the Soviet artificial satellite, and added that in the succeeding half year

"there have been new developments in the international situation in favour of the socialist camp. Of special significance are the opposite trends in the economic developments."⁴

So a point in time around November 1957 was identified as a major turning point, with favourable developments in the

³ It was immediately followed by the launch of a second satellite on November 3, just before the 40th Anniversary of the October Revolution (November 6) which was the focal point of the Moscow Meeting.

⁴ *Rein Ribao* editorial May 16 1958; Peking Review 1958 12 p 19

socialist world constituting an important parameter for the development of other social and national forces of a progressive nature. In this context, international economics, socialist bloc relations, and Chinese domestic trends were all considered to interact with one another. While the Chinese gave considerable play to the superiority of the socialist system, it is important to note that they avoided an economistic interpretation, emphasising instead how economic progress was affected by, and in turn its effects were mediated through, political and ideological factors. Economic superiority did not *by itself* cause favourable changes in the international system, it only created conditions in which such changes could be brought about politically, and this in turn implied the need for a high degree of unity, of organisation.

INTERNAL SOCIALIST CAMP UNITY

A unified strategy would have obvious advantages in such a context, for socialism to be able to demonstrate its superiority, and maximise its influence.⁵ For the CPC the primary question was that of 'line'. However the cultivation of unity *around* this line was seen as an important technique in its own right. Rather than simply assuming unity as emanating automatically from a common class position, the CPC viewed it rather as something to be worked for - or, to use their terminology, struggled for.

From the CPC's angle it would thus not be correct to view inter-communist relations as occupying an entirely different sphere from united front relations. The CPC, under Mao's influence, espoused a fundamentally different conception of relations, even within a communist party itself, to that which prevailed in the Soviet conception,

⁵ We will examine later, in the context of the Middle East, how far the Chinese believed the other two world 'forces' to be capable of arriving at a unified position

one which accepted the existence of differing views and aimed to solve them, proceeding from the desire for unity. Unity was the major theme of the CPC in connection with the Moscow Meeting, and was reiterated, perhaps less convincingly, following the hastily-arranged Sino-Soviet summit in the summer of 1958.⁶

The form of unity which the CPC had in mind was thus not a monolithic conception which denied differences, but one arrived at through recognising the existence of contradictions, and seeking to resolve them. This approach, spelled out in general terms in Mao's *On the Correct Handling of Contradictions among the People*, was explicitly applied by him to socialist-camp affairs in a passage from one of his speeches at the Moscow Meeting, not published until twenty years later.⁷ In it, he uses the example of the drafting of the Moscow declaration to illustrate the process of give and take in arriving at a unified position. This provides an interesting case study in collective decision-making, in the sense that the Declaration embodied certain key ideas which were basically in conformity with Chinese theses, even though the number of parties which openly supported the Chinese line was probably quite small.⁸ This may be because the pragmatic approach of the Soviet leadership at the time was such that they found it difficult to advance coherent lines to rival with the CPC.

This whole area is interesting in relation to united front policies. Unity sought with relation to the Socialist Camp

⁶ see the summit communique in Xinhua August 3 1958

⁷ "The Dialectical Approach to Inner-Party Unity" in MAO Tsetung Sel Works Vol V, Peking (FLP) 1977

⁸ A similar point could even to some extent be made in relation to the Statement of the 1960 Moscow Meeting.

was relatively more 'monolithic' than anything which could be contemplated with nationalist countries, but even here there is recognition of diversity and give-and-take: "At each tactical stage, it is necessary to be good at making compromises as well as at waging struggles."⁹

It is thus surely justifiable, while taking account of the specificities of relations within the Socialist Camp, to consider that they were not considered by the CPC to be conducted according to a fundamentally different set of principles to other aspects of united front work. The CPC did not in fact see monolithic unity in this field as attainable, or even desirable.

RELATIONS BETWEEN SOCIALIST CAMP AND OTHER WORLD FORCES

What the CPC sought, and this seems to be a fairly general orientation of their united front work in other fields, was a *working* unity determined by a common struggle around key goals, in other words the starting point in the struggle for unity was that of line. In practice - at least in terms of the international issues which are our main concern - the most important single issue in determining the line around which unity could be built was the correct identification of the adversary *against* whom this working unity was to operate.

The struggle on international line in the Socialist Camp thus centred, from the Chinese point of view, around the issue of firmness with respect to imperialism. In this context, the leadership style of the Soviet Union during the Khrushchev period was indecisive, and different writers have referred to his "gambling instinct",¹⁰ or on the other

⁹ MAO Tse-tung, *Selected Works, Volume V* Peking (FLP) 1977 p. 515

¹⁰ e.g. ULAM A.B. *Expansionism and Coexistence* London 1965 p 615

hand to his preference for a low-risk approach.¹¹ From the CPC's point of view these judgements would not be mutually exclusive. In the open polemic of the early '60s they were later to accuse the Soviet leader of both adventurism and capitulationism at the moment of the Cuba missile crisis. Both these errors, as they saw it, would run counter to the CPCs ideal approach: a bold, consistent and scientifically worked-out overall line, realised through flexible policies. In another part of Mao's Moscow speech which in this case was published contemporaneously, he argued that "with regard to the whole we must despise the enemy, but with regard to each specific problem we must take him seriously."¹²

Once this fundamental issue was determined, the next logical question to consider would be that of relations between the socialist camp and the Asian-African movement. Lenin had characterised the question of links with the "Peoples of the East" as the most important issue in Soviet international relations, but this strategy was eventually abandoned under Stalin in favour of a Eurocentric approach geared to neutralising threats against the USSR. As late as 1952 Stalin had produced a survey of the international situation which failed to pay serious attention to the non-European nationalist current.¹³ This clearly had to be rectified in the interests of a realistic assessment of world forces. Post-Stalin leadership changes in the USSR coincided with an accentuation of the nationalist movement,

¹¹ e.g. TRISKA J.F. and FINLAY D.D. *Soviet Foreign Policy* New York (Macmillan) 1968.

¹² see Comrade Mao Tse-tung on Imperialism...op cit pp 24-5; later published under the title "All Reactionaries are Paper Tigers" in MAO Sel Works Vol V op. cit.

¹³ see STALIN's *Economic Problems of Socialism in the USSR* (first published 1952)

leading up to and beyond Bandung. On the diplomatic front, Khrushchev and Bulganin toured India, Burma and Afghanistan in 1955. On the ideological front there was a revision of the earlier negative judgements on nationalist policies, and the delayed impact of destalinisation was beginning to express itself, for example, in the publication of somewhat favourable articles on Indian economic development in the course of the year 1958.¹⁴ However, in terms of their appreciation of the focus of the main forces in the world system, the Soviet Union was still at this period concentrating to a considerable degree on the situation in Europe, "where the armed forces of the two military groupings are in contact and where local conflicts can most easily grow into major ones."¹⁵

While the CPC did not neglect the importance of Europe, and indeed played a significant role in Eastern Europe in the context of the conflicts of 1956, they were clearly moving towards a different view of the main focus. The idea later set out in the open polemic that "the various types of contradictions in the contemporary world are concentrated in the vast areas of Asia, Africa and Latin America..."¹⁶ is foreshadowed in many of the positions in the period we are considering.

As the CPC saw it, it was a major goal of US policy to attempt "by all means to obstruct the joining of the

¹⁴ see CLARKSON, S. *The Soviet Theory of Development*, London (Macmillan) 1979

¹⁵ USSR Government "Reply to the Government of Poland concerning the Rapacki Plan" (March 3 1958) in Royal Institute of International Affairs, *Documents on International Affairs* 1958 p 132

¹⁶ *A Proposal Concerning the General Line of the International Communist Movement* Peking FLP 1963 p. 12

socialist, anti-colonialist and anti-war forces".¹⁷ The convergence of these forces could certainly have a dynamic effect upon the world system.

This was the biggest single united front issue, and at least at the outset of the period under consideration it was regarded not primarily as an issue for Chinese foreign policy but as an issue for China to urge as a priority for *joint* Socialist Camp policy.

Of crucial importance in terms of China's position is the fact that she was in a sense part of both groupings and sought to make unity with both forces - the Soviet Union and the socialist camp and movement on the one hand, and the colonial and former colonial countries on the other - the cornerstone of her foreign policy. As Mao said in 1957, "United with these two forces, we shall not stand alone".¹⁸ The process of seeking unity with both would also imply a bridging role between them. A key instance which we will examine subsequently is the relationship with Egypt from the time of the Bandung conference. But the general implications of this question are worth looking into more closely at this point. Clearly, the Chinese, because of their historical position, could make a major contribution on the issue, but presumably in return would have some justification for demanding an input into collective decision-making.

What China aimed for was a situation where "The forces of socialism and the forces of national revolution are converging to become an irresistible historical current that is violently shaking the last bastions of imperialist

¹⁷ *Reumin Ribao* Editorial August 8, 1958

¹⁸ MAO Tse-tung, *Four Essays on Philosophy*, Peking (FLP) 1968 p. 131

reactionary rule" ¹⁹, and became increasingly critical of the Soviet stance in general terms, as we will argue later in discussing the crisis in the Middle East in the summer of 1958.

THE QUESTION OF 'SPHERES' WITHIN THE COMMUNIST MOVEMENT

One interesting question which arises in connection with the hypothesis of a 'bridging' role, is that of a possible division of spheres of influence within the communist movement, with China perhaps concentrating on the third world.

The Soviet leadership did to a certain extent exploit the potential of the Chinese example for building links with the third world, and Mao's theory of the New Democratic revolution was affirmed as a contribution to the national liberation movement. ²⁰ On the other hand the overall goal of Soviet policy at the time seems to have been to contain violent revolution so as not to destabilise the world system. ²¹ In this context, the idea of containing Chinese influence to a given geographical zone may possibly have been attractive as an exercise in damage-limitation.

As we mentioned above, there was no formal structure in the communist movement at that time. There are accounts of a plan to give a few of the major parties responsibility for co-ordinating policy on a regional basis, with the USSR responsible for Europe (including north Korea and

¹⁹ *Renmin Ribao* editorial, Nov. 12 1958, in PR Nov 18 pp 11-12

²⁰ see the article by Y. ZHUKOV in *World Marxist Review* Vol I No. 3, quoted and discussed in DAWISHA K. *Soviet Foreign Policy Towards Egypt* London (Macmillan) 1979 p 126

²¹ see the argument in GIRLING J.L.S. *People's War* London (Allen and Unwin) 1969

Mongolia), China for East and South-East Asia, and the Communist Party of Italy for North Africa. ²² It is argued that this plan influenced policy to some extent, and indeed we do find evidence of a special role played by the CPI in promoting the formation of a single communist party in Egypt. ²³ If such a division of spheres did in fact exist, then China's intense interest in the Middle East in 1957-8 would be interesting as a signal of refusal to accept it. In terms of economic development as well, there is some evidence of a policy of regional specialisation: "It must be assumed that the European Socialist countries, united into one Economic Council of Mutual Assistance [CMEA], will build a special economic zone and will be the first to enter communism. The socialist countries of Asia, which have much in common in their economic and cultural developments, will constitute another regional zone and will also jointly enter Communism" ²⁴

However from China's point of view, there is no evidence that the CPC ever did recognise any such limitation. Nor could it be said that the Soviet Union, for its part, ever exercised any restraint characteristic of a recognition of a Chinese 'sphere' in East Asia. In Burma, for example, the CPSU intervened directly to create a communist grouping loyal to it, something which provoked a split even as early as the period under consideration. ²⁵

²² DALLIN D.J. *Soviet Foreign Policy After Stalin* Philadelphia 1961 p. 463

²³ LACQUEUR W.Z. *The Middle East and Soviet Foreign Policy* London 1969 p. 170. Immediately following this, there was a setback with the formation of the UAR.

²⁴ *Voprosi Filosofii* Oct 1958 quoted in DALLIN op. cit p. 492

²⁵ HINTON H.C. *China's Relations with Burma and Vietnam* New York (Institute of Pacific Relations) 1958 p. 42

There was also at this point some evidence of Soviet factional manoeuvring in East Asia in the attempt to build up a loyal faction in north Korea.²⁶ This reached its height around the time of the Moscow meeting, although in fact a pro-Soviet trend never did manage to become dominant there.²⁷

During this period, the CPC was not, for its part, apparently manoeuvring to create pro-Chinese groupings. But their particular standpoint on encouraging revolution could well lead them to pay more attention to the potential of 'unfashionable' areas of the third world than the Soviet leadership did. This practice was, however, in no way confined to any special region of East Asia. For example, the CPSU paid little attention to the revolutionary potential of Latin America at the time, and delegates from that continent to the CPSU's XX Congress in 1956 were not even received by any member of the CPSU Central Committee. Immediately afterwards, however, they were invited to China and had a long meeting with Mao himself.

In the period of the Moscow Meeting and again in the course of the year 1958 some of the Latin American CP leaders, even including a personality like the Chilean Luis Corvalan who for most of his career was pro-Soviet, held a discourse similar to that of the Chinese, making explicit references to the East Wind and Paper Tiger concepts.²⁸ This point is interesting, in that there was an important evolution in the Chinese model from an 'Afro-Asian' view of

²⁶ DALLIN op. cit. p. 461

²⁷ see CHO M.Y. *Die Entwicklung der Beziehungen zwischen Peking und P'yongyang* Wiesbaden (Otto Harassowitz Verlag -Institut für Asienkunde) 1967

²⁸ RICHIER P *La Chine et le Tiers Monde 1949-69* Paris, Payot, 1971 pp 94-5.

the united front of developing countries, into a more generalised view anticipating the image of the 'third world' - an evolution which occurred just in the period we are studying.

A significant facet of the period under consideration is that this was a transitional period in the emergence of clear alternative Chinese and Soviet 'lines'. At this point they were not regarded as mutually exclusive. Hence the possibility of the influence of the Chinese line 'percolating' to unexpected areas of the movement. On the other hand, differences were in the process of crystallising to a point where they would be difficult to reconcile.

THE CPC AS GUARDIANS OF LINE

The importance of the Socialist Camp and socialist construction in influencing the world balance of forces overall has already been referred to. But this begs the question of the nature of the system within the socialist states - would it remain on the correct course? This is precisely what concerned the CPC and Mao himself, especially since the XX Congress of the CPSU in 1956. This was to be a major issue in determining the *line* around which to promote the unity of forces, both within individual socialist countries, and between them.

In fact, far from accepting any limitation of their sphere of action, either geographically to East Asia or functionally as proponents of the "Chinese road" or the New Democratic revolution, the tendency of the Chinese leadership in this period was to take an up-front position on all questions of revolutionary theory. What is sometimes thought of as the 'Chinese' line was conceived by the Chinese leadership itself not so much as something peculiarly Chinese, but just as much as a true

interpretation of the Soviet experience. They saw themselves as guardians of this - if necessary in contradiction to the Soviet leaders themselves.

Already, after the XX CPSU Congress Mao had remarked to the CPC Central Committee: "Is the October Revolution still valid? Can it still be the example for all countries? Khrushchev's report at the 20th Congress of the CPSU says.....it is no longer necessary for all countries to learn from the October Revolution. Once this gate is opened, Leninism by and large is thrown out." ²⁹ He did not put the point quite so bluntly in public, but he did make an interesting statement in his major public speech at Moscow in November 1957 to the effect that "... after the October Revolution, if a proletarian revolutionary of any country should overlook or not seriously study the experience of the Russian revolution.... He would either commit doctrinaire or revisionist mistakes. We must oppose both these deviations simultaneously, but at present to oppose revisionism is a particularly urgent task." ³⁰ Certainly at one level this statement can be seen as an affirmation of the need to learn flexibly from Soviet experience; but at another level it functions also as an assertion that Soviet experience is common property of the movement, and not the prerogative or monopoly of the Soviet leaders themselves. If the balance of forces between socialism and capitalism influenced the rest of the world system, it would clearly be of crucial importance for the forces of socialism to be united on the correct lines.

²⁹ MAO Tse-tung "Speech at the Second Plenary Session of the Eighth Central Committee of the CPC" November 15 1956; *Peking Review* 1970, 17, p. 6

³⁰ MAO Tse-tung "Speech at a Joint Meeting of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR" Nov 6 1957; *People's China* Dec 1, p 6

In these circumstances, the point made above about a Soviet desire to contain the influence of the Chinese line in order to contain violent revolution probably does not go far enough. At stake was also the CPSU's ideological leadership within its own bloc, and even its guardianship of the Soviet historical experience itself.

CHINESE AND SOVIET ECONOMIC GROWTH AND ITS IMPACT ON THE WORLD SYSTEM

A specific illustration is provided by the line on economic construction. If the socialist community were able jointly to sustain a period of rapid and impressive growth, this would undoubtedly change the world balance of forces. It could serve firstly to withdraw a larger proportion of world economic activity from the US-dominated area, secondly to provide a model for the nationalist movements and, thirdly to aid developing countries concretely in breaking their ties with the opposing system. This would be of critical significance to the overall alignment of forces, and provide a material basis for the anti-imperialist united front.

Thus the stake was considerable. The Soviets and the Chinese both spoke of the importance of economic development during this period. But in using the same vocabulary they were not necessarily talking about the same thing.

The main point is that whereas the Soviet leadership thought successful economic construction would replace the need for violent revolution in the third world, the Chinese thought it would provide favourable conditions for a policy in support of violent revolution. For the CPC the era was a major historical turning-point which confronted the Socialist Camp with both immense opportunities and immense responsibilities. Decisive advances both could and had to

be made. Hence the argument for forcing the pace of economic construction. The Soviet leadership looked at the question essentially in pragmatic terms, relative to the domestic economy. Indeed it is likely that they actually resisted the excesses of Chinese emphasis on the achievements of the Soviet economy in comparison to the West, pointing out that the latter was still superior in productive terms.³¹ In some instances, China's emphasis on Soviet economic strength can thus actually be read as one of the indicators of line differences.

Given the importance of divergent economic trends between the two social systems, capitalist and socialist, what did this concretely mean for the policies of the socialist states themselves? In the context of a dynamic conception of the world balance of forces, characterised by opposite motion of rising and declining forces, it is not surprising that developmental goals were conceived in terms of *outstripping* the opposition. Sino-Soviet co-operation was thus, at one level, defined in terms of the similarity of the line they were pursuing:

"The two socialist countries now find themselves in a great period when their economies are leaping forward. To help these forward leaps and to ensure that they will fulfill ahead of time their historical task of defeating the principal capitalist countries in peaceful competitions, it is necessary for them to develop economic co-operation further."³²

The Soviet Union was following a plan designed to overtake the USA in steel production, while China pursued its own target of overtaking Britain, within fifteen years.³³ The specific form of the Leap Forward follows from this, something which formed overwhelmingly the most important

³¹ see FEJTO F *Chine-URSS - Le Conflit* Paris (Plon) 1966

³² Renmin Ribao April 24 1958 in Peking Review 1958 9 p 18

³³ see for example Peking Review 1958 1, editorial

domestic parameter for Chinese foreign policy during the period in question. During the Leap Forward the goal of overtaking Britain was made a day-to-day issue of propaganda, being evidently considered to have a significant mobilising role, and also to be realisable. It is extensively discussed in Mao Zedong's report "Sixty Points on Working Methods",³⁴ while Mao had also already put forward a goal of overtaking the USA by the end of the century.³⁵

The degree of emphasis on steel production as an index of development could perhaps appear as a reflection of the somewhat one-sided way in which development was generally defined at that time, and could have the effect of making development appear a quantitative process. At times during the Leap Forward, the debate crystallised around a quantitative issue which seems in contradiction with what would normally be thought of as a more qualitative 'Chinese' approach, namely that of speed. Liu Shaoqi put the issue very clearly in May 1958 when he said, "The speed of construction has been the most important question confronting us since the victory of the socialist revolution."³⁶

This perspective was not necessarily as economistic as it might appear, because the commanding role of ideology was stressed in realising such development. As Liu again put it, Marxism can produce grain and steel.³⁷ But it was an

³⁴ CH'EN J *Mao Papers* London (Oxford UP) 1970 pp 57 ff

³⁵ MAO Zedong *Xuanji* Vol V Peking (Renmin Chubanshe) 1977 pp 193f

³⁶ ZAGORIA op. cit. p. 70

³⁷ LIU Shao-ch'i Speech to the second session of the Eighth Party Congress of the CPC, May 5 1958 in Peking Review 1958 14

emphasis which may have contributed to divert attention away from concrete development models.

Despite this, it is possible to discern something identifiable as a more distinctive Chinese line in terms of content. In fact, even at that time the Chinese did clearly grasp, in certain respects very far-sightedly, the fact that development is a qualitative and not simply a quantitative process. The main points of the qualitative difference relate to the overall issue of the respective role of industry and agriculture, as set out in Mao's work on "The Ten Major Relationships". It is quite probable that Mao himself, as the main proponent of that model, urged more caution on the question of speed,³⁸ and to some extent resisted the voluntarist tendencies of Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping during this specific period.³⁹

THE LEAP FORWARD AS MODEL FOR OTHER SOCIALIST COUNTRIES

A realistic line on economic development and planning was clearly of crucial significance in the world balance of forces, and had important implications with regard to the developing countries. The significant point is that, just as the CPC was seeking to put itself forward as a guardian of orthodoxy in the political sphere, so its line on economic construction was conceived as embodying principles of universal applicability, and not merely as a line appropriate to China's own particular conditions.

At the high point of the cold war the USSR rigidly imposed its own economic model upon other socialist countries.

³⁸ "What does it matter if it takes a year longer? It may even be a bit better". MAO Zedong, "Talk at the Chengdu Conference, March 10 1958" in SHRAM S. (ed) *Mao Tse-tung Unrehearsed*, Harmondsworth (Penguin) 1974 p. 105

³⁹ ZAGORIA op. cit. p. 70

With the beginning of destalinisation the demand for a more flexible, nationally specific approach resurfaced, as for example with the return to power of Wladislaw Gomulka in Poland. The CPC exerted its influence in Gomulka's favour in 1956. It has been a fairly consistent theme of CPC policy from the 1920s onwards to stress the right of each party to determine a line appropriate to its own conditions, so long as this was within the general framework of Marxism-Leninism, so it would be tempting to see the Leap Forward as an assertion of this right to a nationally-specific line on China's own behalf - a right which would by implication apply to other actors as well.

The issue of simply affirming plurality, the right of countries to determine their own developmental options, could be a significant point in relation to united front questions, insofar as a genuine recognition of plurality would seem to be an important basis for building meaningful unity with other forces. Such an interpretation of Chinese policy would, however, probably be one-sided. In fact, as Zagoria has pointed out, with the victory of the Left line in China in the late fifties, a different strand in policy came to the fore. With revisionism identified as the main danger, the Chinese became more concerned with stressing Marxist orthodoxy within the socialist camp as a whole than they were with pluralism.

Thus the 'Leap Forward' philosophy was put forward not only in the name of China's approach to its own concrete conditions, but also more importantly as a more orthodox line than that of the Soviet leaders who had "let part of Leninism go by the boards".⁴⁰ It was thus potentially applicable to other socialist countries as well, rather than being seen as something explicitly Chinese.

⁴⁰ MAO Zedong, "Talk at Chengdu" op. cit. p. 105

Eventually, when the line on the People's Communes moved further and further to the left, Khrushchev was obliged to gird himself up for an ideological counter-attack, but until this happened it was still official policy to refer to the CPC as a creative source of Marxism. In June 1958, for example, Khrushchev told the Bulgarian Party Congress,

"what an enormous contribution to the theory and practice of the socialist revolution is being made by the Communist Party of China, which is masterfully combining the universal truth of Marxism-Leninism with the concrete practice of revolution and of building socialism in its country." ⁴¹

The existence of an alternative Chinese line, however much it sought to impose itself as a new orthodoxy, was nevertheless a factor which could potentially have worked in favour of greater independence of socialist countries. It is an interesting fact that the concept of the Leap Forward was actually taken up with some enthusiasm by sections of the leadership in other parts of the socialist camp and its example influenced policy for a while in some countries, notably Bulgaria and East Germany.⁴² This was the beginning of a polycentrist trend which could have allowed more leeway to states previously under Soviet dominance, and the Soviet leadership was soon to clamp down on it.

PROBLEMS OF SINO-SOVIET ECONOMIC CO-OPERATION

In discussing the specificity of the Chinese line on development, an important point of reference - from a negative angle - was provided by the Sino-Soviet connection as an example of a dependency relationship.

⁴¹ quoted in ZAGORIA op. cit.

⁴² see GRIFFITH W.E. (ed) *Communism in Europe* Cambridge Mass. (MIT) 1964, Vol I esp. pp. 43-154

The Sino-Soviet relationship was a factor in everything to do with China's strategy of economic development. On the one hand, the Soviet experience, both positive and negative, was a constant point of reference in the articulation of China's own path to development; on the other hand there was also a web of actual economic ties between the two states. China's development projects were intimately linked with Soviet assistance at many levels, and there were tendencies toward a co-ordinated development of the socialist camp as an economic subsystem.

Inherent in Sino-Soviet co-operation were two divergent tendencies. On the one hand it could create conditions for increased self-reliance. Mao had said in 1956 that the aim was "to mobilise all positive factors, both inside and outside the Party, both at home and abroad, both direct and indirect, and make China a powerful socialist country." ⁴³ On the other hand there was also a dependance-inducing aspect, and the two were in conflict throughout the long-drawn-out process of attempting to arrive at a second five-year-plan.

China's degree of dependance on the Soviet Union was necessarily quite close in the early post-1949 period, given the fact that there was no other country China could turn to. One way of presenting the issue is that a certain degree of dependance at an initial stage could create the conditions for more independence later - a familiar argument in the development debate, but it did make some sense in this case. The paying-off of Soviet loans from the Stalin period by 1955 could create conditions for more self-reliance in the coming period.⁴⁴ By the time of the

⁴³ MAO Tse-tung (MAO Zedong) *Selected Works* Vol. V Peking FLP 1977 p 306

⁴⁴ BECHTOLDT H *Der Allianz mit der Armut* Freiburg (Rombach Verlag) 1967 p. 57

Great Leap Forward, such conditions had been created. The Sino-Soviet agreement on co-operation in the field of heavy industry concluded in August 1958 provided for most of the projects to be carried out by the Chinese themselves.⁴⁵ It was stated that "With the unstinted and decisive aid of the Soviet Union we have completed our first Five Year Plan. This is an important victory, the magnitude of which can be judged by the fact that, for our second Five Year Plan about to begin, we ourselves can supply most of our industrial needs."⁴⁶

This view has a certain superficial consistency, but to depict the historical process as a smooth and logical progression would in reality be quite false.

Certainly, the official idea was, as Mao argued in his "On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People" that China was learning from the USSR in such a way as to promote "China's path to industrialisation,"⁴⁷

But this implied a process of criticism, in other words, the constant theme of learning from the Soviet Union meant not just 'learning selectively' in the sense of picking out what was useful to China, but '*learning critically*' in the sense of summing up from what was wrong.

This carried major implications for how the Chinese leadership perceived the development process worldwide. In a sense we can see the political debates of this period as part of a process which generated certain ideas expressed in the documents of the Sino-Soviet polemic of the

⁴⁵ *Asian Recorder* 1958 p. 2197

⁴⁶ SOONG Ching-ling (Song Qingling), article in *Renmin Ribao* January 1 1958 in *Survey of Mainland China* Press 1684

⁴⁷ MAO *Four Essays...* op. cit p. 131

sixties....Whether the critique of dependent relationships in "Apologists of Neo-colonialism" or the discussion of the model of socialism itself in "On Khrushchev's Phoney Communism".

It is important to bear in mind that Sino-Soviet co-operation during the period was intense. Perhaps just because of this closeness China had to assert its individuality, simply to avoid the trap of dependency. In doing this, the Chinese were creating the domestic basis for a more independent foreign policy, as well as shaping a new model of development which would have implications in the foreign policy sphere as well. The longer-term implications of the relationship could be seen as posing certain severe constraints which would tend to run counter to the self-reliant orientation. These two trends confronted one another in the Leap Forward period. They can be summed up under two aspects, the imposition of the Soviet model, and actual integration.

In terms of the critique of the Soviet model, the period of the Great Leap Forward had some rather peculiar characteristics. Although the problem of excessive accumulation was one of the areas of Soviet policy which the CPC was to examine critically, the desire in the Leap Forward period to make rapid and decisive advances led to an accumulation rate which was itself by any definition excessive.⁴⁸ The notion of sectoral balance, which played an important role in "On the Ten Major Relationships" tended to be pushed aside. On the other hand, in terms of the grass-roots approach to construction many new ideas were generated.

There was for example the question of the scale of projects, the emphasis on local initiative and what would

⁴⁸ see BETTELHEIM C., et al, *La Construction du Socialisme en Chine*, Paris, Maspero, 1971

be described in today's terminology as 'appropriate' technology. This relates to a certain developmental philosophy geared to the transformation of internal conditions in under-developed countries. Even the slogan of steel production, one-sided though it may have been, and even the "backyard furnace" movement, whatever its errors, show that the aim was not simply to produce more steel, but to spread the necessary technology beyond an elite. The field of water conservancy, important in terms of the Chinese tradition, is one where there had been a considerable level of Soviet aid, which was essentially concentrated upon large scale installations ⁴⁹. The Leap Forward developed a radically different approach, to the effect that "Concentrated on small and medium projects, the collective efforts of China's five hundred million peasants will give bigger results faster than if they are concentrated on the building of a few large projects." ⁵⁰

There was a mass campaign during this period to spread the understanding of technology as widely as possible and encourage the masses to invent new techniques. ⁵¹ This approach implied also a shift from the existing model of education, which was again strongly influenced by the Soviet one, via Sino-Soviet co-operation, ⁵² and new, more radical lines were put forward. ⁵³ The type of state machine implied by a network of small-scale projects is one where it might be possible to limit the problems of

⁴⁹ CHI Wen-shun "Water Conservancy in Communist China", *China Quarterly* 1965 p. 23

⁵⁰ LI Chiang, article in *Peking Review* 1958 15 p. 12

⁵¹ see e.g. "The People Invent" in *PR* 1958 16 p 15

⁵² see e.g. ORLEANS L.A. *Professional Manpower and Education in Communist China*, 1962

⁵³ FRASER S (ed) *Chinese Communist Education* Nashville (Vanderbilt U.P.) 1965

bureaucracy associated with the top-down development models adopted by many developing countries, capitalist and socialist alike. This would seem to be a fairly far-reaching implication in terms of the overall philosophy of economic development, whatever the opposite tendencies implied in the policy of shifting to public ownership of the land in the most extreme phase of the Leap Forward, which would presumably have increased the problem of bureaucracy, had it been implemented.

One of the most original aspects of the Chinese model lay in its critical approach to the Soviet style of industrialisation which involved squeezing the peasantry to create a massive accumulation in order to permit the rapid growth of industrial centres. This, for the Chinese, created an industry with feet of clay because there was no basis in terms of mass demand for the products of light industry, while at the same time, politically speaking, it served to weaken the worker-peasant alliance, which the CPC saw as the main foundation of socialism. The ideas set out particularly in Mao's article "On the Ten Major Relationships" have far-reaching implications with respect to the debates around economic development in different parts of the world. ⁵⁴

CO-OPERATION WITH DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

These new elements in the Chinese model would potentially constitute important elements in the basis upon which economic and other relations with other developing countries could be built, and it would be interesting to consider how far this specifically Chinese line influenced co-operation with developing countries, even in this very early period. This is an area which can be viewed not just as a very concrete form of the embodiment of united front

⁵⁴ see AMIN S. *L'Avenir du Maoïsme* Paris (Eds du Minuit) 1981

policies between the socialist and nationalist currents, but also as a factor of considerable interest in the context of the view of socialism and capitalism as two competing socio-economic systems, and the likely impact of that competition upon the world balance of forces overall.

Addressing the VIII Congress of the CPC in 1956, Politburo member Chen Yi stated that "To develop an independent national economy and raise the living standards of their people [the Asian African states] need not now go hat in hand to their former oppressors; they can look forward to assistance from the socialist states in both modern equipment and technical experience with no strings attached." ⁵⁵

It has however been argued that in practice the CPC harboured some reservations regarding existing forms of socialist economic co-operation with the third world,⁵⁶ perhaps in terms of this approach being too business-oriented.⁵⁷ Clearly, this question could provide an insight into China's own philosophy of economic co-operation, particularly once China began its own programme of co-operation, which was just getting underway in the period under discussion.

At the time of the Bandung conference China's economy was severely weakened, particularly by natural disasters

⁵⁵ CHEN Yi in *China Supports...* op. cit. p. 37

⁵⁶ HINTON H. *Communist China* op. cit, esp p. 47 states that China objected to some aspects of the Soviet switch from trade in goods to technical co-operation in 1955.

⁵⁷ see SCHATTEN F., "Africa: Nationalism and Communism" in LACQUEUR W. and LABEDZ L. *Polycentrism* New York (Praeger) 1962

suffered the previous year⁵⁸. Hence there was not much to be done but promote relations with the Soviet Union, as China did in the case of Egypt.

However soon afterwards China initiated its own aid programme, a precocious example of South-South co-operation which was to lead in only a couple of decades to a net disbursement of aid outstripping that of the USSR ⁵⁹. Several development projects were financed in 1956. ⁶⁰ Even though these were not yet of significance in absolute terms, it can still be interesting for our purposes to consider the qualitative aspect of development philosophy as reflected in the Chinese approach to economic co-operation with developing countries, itself an aspect of united front policy. There may indeed be differences in style between Chinese and Soviet approaches at the period in question.

In Afghanistan, where the West, the Soviet Union and China were all involved in aid projects, it has been argued that Soviet projects covered very similar ground to Western ones, whereas China was more concerned with a smaller-scale and possibly more grass-roots approach to development.⁶¹ It could be the case that this was simply a division of labour, in that China did not have the capacity to go in

⁵⁸ see CHINA State Statistical Bureau, *Report on National Economic Development...* Peking FLP 1956 p. 11

⁵⁹ see BARTKE, W. *The Economic Aid of the People's Republic of China to Developing and Socialist Countries* Revised ed. Munchen (Saur) 1989

⁶⁰ The main instances in 1956 were loans granted to finance development projects: \$22.9 million to Cambodia, \$12.6 Million to Nepal and \$16.2 million to Indonesia. See GONZALO (RUBIO) J., *Politica exterior de China* popular Madrid (Edicion Nacional) 1973 p. 265

⁶¹ See FRANCK P.G. *Afghanistan between East and West* Washington (National Planning Association) 1960

for the large-scale projects anyway, but we should see this in the context of what we know about China's own specific approach to economic construction, in contrast to the Soviet model. In the case of Burma, both the Soviet Union and China simultaneously negotiated aid agreements on January 1, 1958. It is reported that Soviet experts, looking at a plough designed by a Burmese college, pointed out that it was half a century out of date, and a Soviet one would do the job twice as well.⁶² There would seem to be a contrast here with what we know of the Chinese approach, with its stress on self-reliance and indigenous techniques.

It would hardly be surprising if qualitative differences between Chinese and Soviet approaches to economic construction were reflected in development philosophy with regard to the third world. We will return to this question below in discussing relations between China and the Arab world, notably Yemen. However, if it is true that two 'lines' on economic construction may have existed, this does not necessarily imply competition. At least at this stage, there was scope for a combination of large and small-scale projects, and for the combination of indigenous and modern technique.

TREND TOWARDS SINO-SOVIET INTEGRATION AS A PARAMETER FOR CHINESE POLICIES

There was in fact a clear assumption of specialisation and even integration within the socialist community's overall economic structure. Themes of economic integration - specialisation, the division of labour etc. - , which had scarcely been broached in the Stalin era, began to be seriously considered from about 1955 onwards with regard to

⁶² The Nation (Rangoon) Jan 9 1958; *Asian Recorder* 1958 p 1845

Europe.⁶³ In 1956 China participated in a meeting of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance with observer status, the only occasion on which she has done so.⁶⁴ Subsequently, at least according to later revelations from the Chinese side, China was (together with North Korea) invited to join CMEA in 1958 and develop its economy with a primarily agrarian orientation.⁶⁵

Certain ideas of integration also influenced the Sino-Soviet relationship, and if Chinese decision-makers placed a high value or priority on building the socialist camp as an actor in world politics and the world economy, they might have to accept certain constraints which could run counter to an autocentric developmental model, so that a compromise between an autocentric and an integrated model would have to be arrived at. The integrated model might imply a persistence of some of the features of the prevailing division of labour between industrial and developing countries (e.g. export of raw materials and cash crops) which would be at variance with a strictly autocentric model. Such a view is implied in Zhou Enlai's report on the proposed Second Five Year Plan in September 1956:

"As a member of the socialist camp, our country assumes its own share of the obligation; we must fulfill this share of obligations. We have the duty towards all the brother nations to supply them with quantities of agricultural products, animal products, mineral resources and certain machine equipment and industrial commodities required in building socialism.

⁶³ see MEISSNER B. *Das Ostpakt-System* Frankfurt am Main (Alf. Metzner Verlag) 1955

⁶⁴ AMUNSEN G *Le Conseil d'Entr'aide economique* Strasburg (Universite des Sciences humaines) 1971 p 77

⁶⁵ Interview with Geng Biao, Beijing November 25, 1978 quoted in FREEDMAN, E. "On Maoist Conceptualisations of the Capitalist World System", *China Quarterly* 1979, p. 818.

We must strive to increase production or adequately reduce domestic consumption to guarantee the supply of these commodities." ⁶⁶

There was in fact a distinct geo-political implication in Sino-Soviet integration. Over the post-revolutionary period as a whole China has not, in its economic relations, broken with its primary orientation towards the Pacific region, which in turn is essentially part of the world economy led by the OECD industrial powers. This assessment should not, however, obscure the fact that in the 'fifties an alternative orientation was in fact possible, and seemed even to be in the process of realisation. Early in that decade, one specialist described the Sino-Soviet economic relationship as implying

"a right-angled turn away from the coast, the seaports and international oceanic trade and towards Siberia, Central Asia, and eventual integration into an industrialised Eurasia." ⁶⁷

Even in the later 1950s this same historic re-orientation seemed to be a distinct possibility, for instance if one studies lines of communications:

"Except for the incomplete Paochi-Chengtu line for linking North-West and South-West China, the general transportation system would become a line of drift re-orienting the Chinese economy towards the Soviet Union and the satellites. Should the Paochi-Chengtu line be completed, Szechuan, the proverbial rice-bowl

⁶⁶ CHOU En-lai, "Report on the Proposals for the Second Five Year Plan", *Renmin Ribao* Sept. 19 1956 quoted in CHIN C.S.K. *A Study of Chinese Dependence upon the Soviet Union for Economic Development as a Factor in Communist China's Foreign Policy* Hong Kong (Union Res. Inst) 1959 p. 43

⁶⁷ LATTIMORE, O. "Inner Asia - Sino Soviet Bridge" *The Nation* Dec 6, 1952.

would also be effectively integrated into the Soviet Orbit." ⁶⁸

Friedman has drawn attention to an interesting discussion in the Chinese press in 1957 and early 1958 about whether a distinct socialist international market system could be considered to exist.⁶⁹ There was lack of agreement on this, but it would at least appear as a possibility that a new regional subsystem could be in the making.

SINO-SOVIET MILITARY RELATIONS

The above issues in the economic sphere form a background to one of the most interesting parameters influencing Chinese policy in the period, namely the Sino-Soviet military relationship.

Certain ideas characteristic of the debate on economic development were carried through in a very similar form into the field of military organisation, as for example the stress on self-reliance and popular inventiveness in developing new techniques. As late as February 1958, Marshall Peng Dehuai delivered a speech praising the Soviet military model, but as the Leap Forward gathered momentum, a definite critique of this line began to appear. In the summer of that year, we find an argument to the effect that "'Revolutionization' is the substance of the armed forces whereas 'modernisation' is the characteristic", and a criticism made of "certain people" who overemphasise modern equipment; the problem is essentially political, it is

⁶⁸ CHIN, op. cit., p. 92. The completion of this line was in fact announced on January 1st, 1958 (*Xinhua* January 3rd)

⁶⁹ FRIEDMAN op. cit., p. 820 ff.

argued, and the people can be relied upon to invent the necessary new techniques.⁷⁰

However, the field of military relations also had its own specific character, and indeed the evidence in this area suggests that the problems in Sino-Soviet relations were already such that the Chinese were not merely stressing self-reliance as a balancing mechanism, but were tending to view the relationship itself as a threat.

The immediate background relevant to the situation in the second half of the 1950s was the existence of a very close military relationship which had implications for the whole world alignment of forces. In 1955 for example, Mao had said,

"It is plain for all to see that with the great co-operation between China and the Soviet Union, there are no imperialist plans for aggression which cannot be smashed. They will undoubtedly all be smashed. Should the imperialists start a war of aggression, we will, together with the people of the whole world, certainly wipe them off the face of the earth."⁷¹

This statement was again given prominence in 1958, so the sentiment was apparently still considered to be topical.

The highest point of Sino-Soviet military co-operation was reached in October 1957 with an agreement to share defence technology, which was presumably part of a package designed to cement greater unity in the socialist grouping around the time of the Moscow Meeting. However, severe strains

⁷⁰ *Jiefangjun Bao* editorial, "Against one-sided emphasis on modernisation", Aug. 17 1958, in JPRS 1357-N

⁷¹ MAO Zedong, Speech at a reception in the Soviet embassy marking the fifth anniversary of the Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, alliance and Mutual Assistance, February 14 1955, text in *Comrade Mao Tse-tung on Imperialism...* op. cit.

began to develop very soon. The specific background to this shift, in terms of military relations, was a growing determination by the Soviet Union to use its military muscle to control its bloc more tightly. This was already apparent from Soviet positions during the 1957-8 period,⁷² and was later confirmed from the Chinese side in the documents of the Sino-Soviet polemic, particularly a document concerning *The Origins and Development of the Difference between the Leadership of the CPSU and Ourselves*, in which the Soviet line is characterised as one of "'being friendly to enemies and tough with friends'".⁷³

It has already been remarked that the Chinese view of socialist camp superiority in the world balance of forces was not primarily military. Nevertheless, it was a point of key importance to the CPC throughout the period in question that, in order to deter imperialism, it was necessary to show that one was not afraid of war, that the imperialists must be brought to realise "that peaceful coexistence is the only way out", otherwise 'they are really inviting destruction'.⁷⁴ And further,

"The Soviet Union is superior to the United States both in technology and military power. It has the power and confidence to retaliate with fatal blows against any aggressor. If Washington goes so far as to stir up a nuclear war, it will immediately invite destructive retaliation. Such a war will be the last war, the whole capitalist system will be wiped off the face of the earth."⁷⁵

⁷² see HSIEH A.L. *The Significance of Chinese Communist Treatment of Khrushchev's January 14 Speech on Strategy*, Santa Monica (RAND Corp for US Air Force) 1960

⁷³ *The Polemic on the General Line of the International Communist Movement* Peking (FLP) 1965 p. 77

⁷⁴ *Da Gong Bao* May 28, 1958 in SCMP 1782 p. 57

⁷⁵ *Da Gong Bao* April 20 1958; Peking Review 1958, 9, p 19

In these circumstances, the Soviet leadership probably came to the conclusion that if it didn't want to be precipitated into such a clash with the United States, it would have to be 'tough with friends'. This is the background to the developments later described from the Chinese side in the following terms:

"In 1958 the leadership of the CPSU put forward unreasonable demands designed to bring China under Soviet military control. These unreasonable demands were rightly and firmly rejected by the Chinese government. Not long afterwards, in June 1959, the Soviet government unilaterally tore up the agreement on new technology for national defence concluded between China and the Soviet Union in October 1957, and refused to provide China with a sample of an atomic bomb and technical data concerning its manufacture." ⁷⁶

Chinese sources later amplified on these "demands": the permanent stationing of Soviet forces in Luda ⁷⁷; a joint Pacific fleet under Soviet command; the establishment of Soviet zones of influence for the development of resources in the north-east of China and in Xinjiang; the establishment of a long-wave radio station for naval communications under Soviet control; and a division of labour with China exchanging agricultural products for Soviet industrial goods. ⁷⁸

The specifically nuclear dimension of Chinese policy during this period is interesting, because it constitutes a

⁷⁶ *The Polemic on the General Line* op cit p. 77

⁷⁷ Part of the Liaodong Peninsula, Luda includes the former concession of Port Arthur, occupied by Russia 1898-1905. The Sino-Soviet friendship treaty signed after 1949 gave the USSR a right to station troops there, but they were withdrawn in 1955.

⁷⁸ Based on a talk by Geng Biao in Washington, May 29 1980, quoted in HSUEH Chun-tu (ed) *China's Foreign Relations*, New York (Praeger) 1982 p. 3

striking example of double standards. In terms of united front work, it was a major goal to rally opinion against nuclear weapons. Publicly, the authorities expressed support for regional demilitarisation schemes in different parts of the world,⁷⁹ and more specifically in Asia. They advocated the denuclearisation of Southeast Asia,⁸⁰ and also argued for that of Asia as a whole.⁸¹ On the other hand, even while they were putting forward such demands, there was an active scheme underway to develop China's own nuclear capability, both peaceful and military; this programme, co-ordinated by vice-premier Nie Rongzhen is thought to have been inaugurated as part of a "March on Science" in 1956.⁸² In the same year, Mao Zedong said "If we are not to be bullied in the present-day world, we cannot do without the bomb."⁸³ This statement was not made public until much later, but in the course of 1958, following the nuclear sharing agreement with the Soviet Union concluded in October 1957, a number of public hints were dropped by Chinese leaders. In May 1958, General Liu Yalu, head of the Chinese air force, predicted that the Chinese working class would soon produce atomic bombs, and

⁷⁹ For example a plan for the demilitarisation of Europe put forward by Polish Foreign Minister Rapacki in October 1957 was widely publicised in China.

⁸⁰ see CHINA Government, "Statement on the forthcoming meeting of SEATO" March 10 1958; ROYAL INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS *Documents on International Affairs 1958* p. 482

⁸¹ Kuo Mo-jo (GUO Moruo) "Asia without Nuclear Weapons", *Shijie Zhishi* July 1958; PR 1958, 7, pp 8-9

⁸² see RYAN W.L. and SUMMERLIN S *The China Cloud - A Study of China's Growth to Nuclear Power*, London (Hutchinson) 1969.

⁸³ MAO Zedong, *Selected Works* Vol V, op. cit, pp 288-9

that this would lead to a turning point.⁸⁴ At the beginning of June 1958 Foreign Minister Chen Yi reportedly stated that China would "soon" have nuclear capability.⁸⁵

On June 13 the opening of China's first civil nuclear reactor, supplied by the USSR, was announced.⁸⁶ But apparently the implementation of the sharing agreement ran into some difficulties from early on.⁸⁷ These differences were reflected obliquely. A *Renmin Ribao* article at about the same time remarked scathingly upon how the United States was reneging on its commitment to share nuclear technology with Britain,⁸⁸ and this carries more than a hint of a veiled criticism directed at the USSR. In the same month the Soviet Union announced its unilateral cessation of nuclear testing, an overture towards the West which the Chinese did not particularly approve of.

Soon afterwards, at the end of July 1958 Khrushchev visited Beijing for a hastily-arranged summit. The reason for this meeting was, according to Mao, that "From the second half of 1958 he wanted to blockade the Chinese coastline."⁸⁹ The military agenda of that meeting is confirmed from other sources.⁹⁰

⁸⁴ Survey of China Mainland Press 1900 pp 5-10, quoted in NORTH R.C. *Moscow and the Chinese Communists* Stanford 1963, p. 280

⁸⁵ quoted in an article by ANDERSON G in *Combat* (Paris) Aug 4 1958; see also his reference to a speech by GUO Maituo (President of the Chinese Academy of Sciences), May 16, 1958.

⁸⁶ *Asian Recorder* 1958 p 2131

⁸⁷ see CLEMENS, *Arms Control and Sino-Soviet Relations* Soon

⁸⁸ *Renmin Ribao* June 30 1958; SCMP 1802 p. 42

⁸⁹ MAO Zedong, "Speech at the Tenth Plenum of the Eighth Central Committee" (1962) in SHRAM (ed) *Mao Tse-tung Unrehearsed* op cit. p. 190

⁹⁰ SNICHOR op cit p. 95

If Sino-Soviet relations had rapidly degenerated to such a point in the crucial military field, it can be assumed that this would have been an important stimulus for the Chinese to develop a more self-reliant policy in all other policy fields, both domestic and foreign.

In conclusion we can say that the sense of being part of a communist movement which was asserting its supremacy over capitalism was an important parameter of Chinese foreign policy. This issue expressed itself at one level in the Chinese domestic strategy of construction, which in the period in question was more or less subsumed in the Great Leap Forward. It also expressed itself partially in the context of membership of the Socialist Camp and in the context of the bilateral relationship with the Soviet Union. The latter relationship was however coming under severe strain in the course of the year 1958. The above points will all prove interesting as a background to a detailed study of the crisis in the Middle East where we will see how the Chinese media and decision-makers assessed the influence of the rising national movement upon the socialist-capitalist equation. There was a crisis brewing in Sino-Soviet relations, and this involved a web of different issues all of which have a serious implication for the world alignment of forces. Despite the overwhelmingly military orientation of the Mao-Khrushchev summit, differences were already considerable on a wide range of issues relative to the analysis of the world system, as we will argue in the presentation which follows.

CHAPTER 3: THE MIDDLE EAST IN INTERNATIONAL POLITICS, 1957-8

The Middle East in the period in question was an important focus for the tide of nationalism which affected many areas of Asia and Africa. While most of the states in the region enjoyed formal independence, it was underdeveloped in the sense that the modern economy - where it existed - was subordinated to a world economy serving the interests of the industrial powers, while the traditional structures which survived only served to accentuate economic stagnation. There was a certain feeling that a more effective national independence needed to be built as a precondition for a kind of economic development which could serve indigenous interests.

There was a widespread sense of a single Arab nation. Historically, the region had, however, been disputed from very early times between rival centres of power, and the ending of Ottoman rule implicitly brought back to the surface the issue of where the leading focus in the area would lie. Existing state boundaries basically reflected the comparatively short period of direct European control, but they nevertheless formed the immediate context of local politics.

Islam was potentially a unifying force, but here the picture was complicated by the existence of different Islamic currents which had clashed in the past, as well as the problem of Islam's relations with other confessional groups, and in particular also the very complex issue of how the secular national movements related to it.

The Israeli/Palestinian issue was to be a major focal issue in its own right, but during the period in question world

opinion scarcely perceived it as such. However, defeat for the Arabs in the 1947-8 conflict attendant on the ending of the Palestine mandate and the setting up of the state of Israel had made a major impact on local public opinion, and starkly exposed the weakness of the existing Arab regimes. This added impetus to the cause of forces aiming to supercede the old regimes, the most important landmark in this process being the Free Officers' coup in Egypt in 1952 which heralded the emergence of Nasserism.

Always a pivotal area from the point of view of communications routes, the 'Middle East'¹ came to acquire a geopolitical significance with the emergence of the modern great-power system. This was only accentuated with the construction of the Suez Canal and the emergence of petroleum as the main energy resource of industrial economies. A major object of contention in both World Wars, the Middle East took on a somewhat different, but no less important role in the context of the 'containment' policy which was pursued by the United States during the Cold War.

This policy, expressed in general terms in the Truman Doctrine of 1947, was concretised in relation to the Middle East in the form of a scheme for a Northern Tier of states surrounding the Soviet Union (1953). The setting up of a treaty organisation in the region was a major core interest of the USA in the mid 1950s.²

Despite American claims to combat Soviet expansionism, a more realistic analysis would probably show that prior to

¹ The origin or at least popularisation of the term is sometimes attributed to the American A.T. Mahan (see for example, LEWIS B. *The Middle East and the West*, London (Weidenfeld and Nicholson) 1964 p.9). See below for reference to the Chinese discussion.

² see FINER H. *Dulles Over Suez* Chicago (Quadrangle) 1964 Chapter 2.

the mid 1950s the USSR did not pay the area much attention (apart from an early involvement in Iran), and it can be argued that the USA overplayed its hand in alleging a serious Soviet threat in 1955.³ Thus at least on this particular issue, Mao's assertion in his interview with Anna Louise Strong that a direct US-Soviet clash was not the main issue has some foundation in fact.

When eventually a treaty organisation was set up in the shape of the Baghdad Pact in October 1955, the USA did not itself participate as a full member, leaving Britain to handle the difficulties. Considerable pressure was placed upon the local states to become part of it, and the issue of whether or not to do so became a focal point not only of regional politics, but also of domestic politics within each state. In early 1955 the Arab states resolved that they had their own regional system, and that "This policy does not approve of concluding other alliances." Syria and Egypt also issued a joint communique saying that they would not join the Pact.⁴ One of the first instances of Soviet interest in the area was an official warning issued by the USSR concerning the Pact.⁵ This marked an important point where Soviet foreign policy and the concerns of the Arab nationalist movements coincided.

At the same time, China's contacts with Egypt at the Bandung Conference were instrumental in the conclusion of economic and military agreements with the Eastern bloc,

³ see e.g. BECKER A.S. and HORELICK A.L *Soviet Policy in the Middle East*, Santa Monica (RAND Corp) 1970

⁴ KHALIL, Mohammed, *The Arab States and the Arab League*, Beirut, (Khayats) 1962, Vol II, Documents 144, 145 (pp. 238-9)

⁵ ROYAL INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS, *Documents on International Affairs 1955* p. 300

including the financing of the major prestige project of the Aswan Dam.

Despite the beginnings of superpower involvement, the most obvious immediate goal of the national movement was to liquidate what remained of the informal dominance of Britain and France, and in the Suez War of 1956 the USA allowed these powers to experience the limits of what they could achieve as independent actors in the Post-World War II environment. In early 1957 the USA now announced its own direct stake in the area with the promulgation of the Eisenhower Doctrine which, unlike the Baghdad Pact, was now explicitly anti-communist. It provided for the employment of the armed forces of the United States to secure and protect the territorial integrity and political independence of countries "requesting such aid against overt armed aggression from any nation controlled by international communism". This again gave rise to considerable concern among nationalists:⁶ It was widely perceived as an attempt to force the politics of the area into a cold-war mould. The USSR again responded, this time with the announcement of a 'Shepilov Doctrine' calling for an end to military blocs and foreign armed forces in the region.

The issue of dependence on outside interests continued to manifest itself in political ferment within the different Arab states in the period after the Egyptian revolution, which itself exercised a widespread influence throughout the Arab world. Syria, which on many occasions played a pivotal role in regional power struggles, was the next focal point of conflict.

The Arab defeat of 1948 inaugurated a period of intense instability in Syria, punctuated by the military

⁶ see COLOMBE, Marcel, *Orient arabe et Non-engagement*, Paris (Publications orientalistes de France) 1973, Tome II, pp. 65ff.

dictatorship of Adib Shishakli which was itself overthrown in 1954. Thereafter, a ferment of debate concerning economic orientation gave rise to widespread criticism of the dependent economic structures created under the former regime. The concern with independent development as a cultural and not merely an economic question interestingly corresponds with some of the issues being raised in China during the late 1950s.⁷ During this period, the Ba'ath Party, a socialist-orientated Arab nationalist party, emerged as a significant force. Shishakli, during his attempted comebacks in the period we are directly concerned with, was widely perceived as being manipulated by the West, in the role of an 'acceptable form' of Arab nationalism.⁸

Key among the issues of domestic debate was the Baghdad Pact, and it is hard to escape the conclusion that Western policy helped create the very united fronts it feared most, namely on the one hand the coalescence of local leftist and nationalist forces, and on the other a situation where Soviet involvement was solicited. In the course of 1956 Syria and the USSR exchanged top-level visits and signed cultural and arms agreements and in July of that year Syria extended diplomatic recognition to the People's Republic of China. During the Suez War, the Syrian army blew up the pipeline of the Iraq Petroleum Co., thus raising the spectre of using oil as a weapon.

The greatest upheaval initially caused by the scheme for the Baghdad Pact occurred in Jordan. The announcement that the regime was going to join the Pact occasioned a popular uprising of practically insurrectionary proportions at the

⁷ see HILAN Rizkallah, *Culture et Développement en Syrie et dans les Pays retardés*, Paris (Anthropos) 1969

⁸ see SEALE P. *The Struggle for Syria* London (OUP) 1965 especially p.128

end of 1955 and early 1956. The monarchy - realising that some concessions were needed if it was to remain in power - dismissed J.B. Glubb, British commander of the Arab legion. Around the time of the Suez War in October 1956, a left-wing government including communists held power in Jordan for a while and there was a brief upsurge of democratic political life. A visiting labour delegation from China received an enthusiastic popular welcome and was invited to a meeting with Prime Minister Nabulsi.⁹

In these circumstances, the announcement of the Eisenhower Doctrine in 1957 appeared to mark a further step in America's assimilation of nationalism to communism, and, together with the Baghdad Pact, was widely interpreted as a tactic for smothering the rising nationalist trend through the ruse of depicting it as a communist threat. The danger of military intervention seemed real, and friendship with the eastern bloc a possible means of countering this.

The United States for its part was manoeuvring in such a way as to give the impression that intervention was likely. At the beginning of 1957 an American special envoy, James P. Richards, visited all the states in the area with the exception of Egypt, Syria and Jordan. Syria then issued a strong denunciation of the Eisenhower Doctrine and concluded an economic co-operation agreement with the USSR. The first move in what appeared to be a concerted counter-attack against the radical nationalist regimes came in April 1957 when King Hussein of Jordan dismissed the leftist government and called for American backing in the face of a wave of demonstrations against the Eisenhower Doctrine. Secretary of State Dulles responded by announcing that the integrity of Jordan was viewed as a vital interest of the USA. The US Sixth Fleet was sent from

⁹. 1. ENCZOWSKI G. *The Middle East in World Affairs*, Ithaca NY etc. (Cornell UP) 4th ed. 1980 p. 485

Italy to the eastern Mediterranean in a show of strength, and the American government took over paying Hussein a subsidy which had originally been paid by the British and then temporarily (during the radical period) taken over jointly by Egypt, Syria and Saudi Arabia.

It soon became clear that this move was not just designed to shore up Jordan internally, but to bring pressure on Syria. Another US envoy, Loy W. Henderson, joined in talks with the leaders of Jordan, Iraq and Turkey. Turkey, a key member bridging NATO and the Baghdad Pact, massed its troops on Syria's borders and "a few land and air incursions into Syria and skirmishes followed."¹⁰ The international community did little to oppose this evident intimidation apart from some strong protest Notes from the Soviet Union. It is, however, worth remarking that Soviet policy was on the whole pro-Turkey during the period in question.¹¹

Besides the external threat, a trial held in Damascus in December 1957 revealed the alleged existence of an internally-based plan to overthrow the Syrian nationalist regime, with the support of the US embassy and intelligence agencies. It appeared, then, that a thrust to smash Arab nationalism was underway, and this may well have been one of the motives for the Syrian regime deciding on an extraordinary course of action, namely to join with Egypt into a single state, the United Arab Republic (UAR), in February 1958. In practical terms this signified the

¹⁰. KARPAT, Kemal H et al, *Turkey's Foreign Policy in Transition 1950-74* (Social Economic and Political Studies of the Middle East Vol. XVII) Leiden (E.J. Brill) 1975 p. 120.

¹¹ In 1953 the USSR had renounced territorial claims and offered Turkey economic aid. Even the stationing of nuclear weapons in Turkey in 1958 did not alter the objective. In early 1960 an exchange of diplomatic visits between Khrushchev and Adnan Menderes was arranged (see KARPAT op. cit. p. 86) but the latter was overthrown a few weeks later.

dissolution of Syria as an entity, since effective leadership in the new body was in the hands of Egypt.

However, besides the imminent threat of western intervention, there was another perhaps more important motive for the Syrian leadership to take such an extreme step as to dissolve their own state: the fear inspired by the growth of domestic communist forces against the background of increasing radicalism and anti-imperialism, aided as well by the USSR's espousal of the Syrian cause against Turkey. The Ba'athists thus saw salvation in union with the anti-communist and authoritarian Nasser regime. The UAR was therefore created in accordance with Nasser's stipulation that all political parties should be abolished, and the local Communists, who had always had problems deciding on their attitude to the nationalist current, paid the price by suffering a long period of repression. The lesson for the future was that the West did not have to rely upon puppets like Shishakli to suppress the left, because there was a domestic basis for this course of action among the nationalist forces themselves.

This episode undoubtedly carries important implications for the United Front policy of a state like China, bearing in mind that assessment of nationalist regimes had always been one of the most critical and difficult issues in the foreign policy of Communist states.

In response to the formation of the UAR, the pro-Western regimes, Iraq and Jordan, formed their own federation. Clearly the position at the beginning of the year 1958 was highly volatile. Pro-Western forces were seeking to co-ordinate their efforts against the radical trend, but in doing so risked undermining their own stability.

The focus now moved to Lebanon, where a constitutional crisis in the late spring and early summer of 1958 briefly crystallised the area's major conflicts.

Lebanon was characterised by a complex social composition, with the main Christian and Moslem communities being further divided into a number of subgroups, and these community divisions being cross-cut with class and clan affiliations. The problem was probably not so much with the social and cultural heterogeneity itself, as with the opportunities for manipulation from outside which this situation presented. When still part of the Ottoman empire it had been an area of special French influence well into the nineteenth century, the Christians being accorded special privileges as part of a classic divide and rule policy.

This helped to create a situation where to some extent Lebanese Moslems looked to the Arab world and Christians to the West. On the basis of community and clan divisions, the major political currents of the Middle East and the world in general asserted themselves, and it was difficult to engineer a consensus giving primacy to Lebanon's own interests. These characteristics also made Lebanon serve as a bridge-head of western economic influence in the Arab world, with a fairly wealthy indigenous class playing an intermediary role in this. One current in the Arab nationalist movement of the '50s considered Lebanon as part of Syria; this included the communists, because there was a single Communist Party for the two states. This issue became important in the conflict situation of early 1958.

According to the Lebanese National Pact the president had to be a Christian. The incumbent at the time, Camille Chamoun, was leader of one of the right-wing clans and strongly pro-Western, to the extent that Lebanon was the only Arab country explicitly to accept the Eisenhower

Doctrine. Having taken this step, Chamoun then announced his intention of changing the constitution to prolong his tenure in office: concretely this was taken to mean using American support to disturb the delicate balance between the communities. The political crisis which ensued provides an example of how the general currents in Arab and world politics could manifest themselves in the affairs of a particular country at a particular time, turning it into a focus of wider conflicts.

The murder of an anti-Chamounist newspaper editor in early May 1958 sparked off a civil war, in which rebels seized and exercised political and military authority over much of the country. The movement grouped together several disparate forces: firstly those who considered it necessary to link up more closely with the nationalist current in the rest of the Arab world, as a defence against American policy; secondly those who feared that Chamoun was preparing to sacrifice the inter-communal balance - the guarantee of Lebanon's very existence - in order to further his followers' sectional interests; and thirdly Christian rivals of the clans which backed Chamoun. Confessionally, the rebels included Sunni and Shia Moslems and Druzes as well as Christians elements - notably the Franjieh clan - and the patriarch of the Maronite Church. The official armed forces refused to back Chamoun, so he relied for military power primarily upon the extreme right-wing Christian Falangists led by the Jumayel clan, arch-enemies of the Franjies.

US intervention was obviously a possibility in these circumstances. Even in the terms of Eisenhower's own Doctrine it would be hard to argue that the UAR was "controlled by international communism", but at least it might be argued that there was "overt armed aggression". To provide an argument for increased US backing, Chamoun therefore appealed to the UN Security Council, which set up

an observation group, UNOGIL, to see if it was true that UAR troops were pouring in from Syria. Unfortunately for the USA the Group's first report, submitted early in July, found it impossible "to establish if any of the armed men observed had infiltrated from outside; there is little doubt, however, that the vast majority were, in any case, Lebanese."¹²

But events were now moving very fast. The eye of the storm, which had moved successively from Suez to Jordan to Syria and to Lebanon within the space of a year and a half, now shifted suddenly to Iraq, the capital of the Baghdad Pact. The Iraqi army was deployed as part of the concerted action of pro-Western forces against the radical Arabist trend, and on July 14 1958 the troops of Gen. Kassem, on their way to Jordan, launched a successful military coup. Nationalist and neutralist, the new regime promised a foreign policy in conformity with the principles of the Bandung Conference; at the same time the local Communist Party, which had built a strong base through years of clandestine activity, played an extremely active role.

This was a serious blow to the West. Without waiting any further, the USA immediately sent marines into Lebanon and built these up to the strength of 10,000, while Britain, in a co-ordinated move, sent troops into Jordan.

The mighty confrontation between the West and nationalist forces, which appeared to be brewing, did not materialise. By and large the nationalist movement consolidated its gains, without making fresh ones (for instance the Jordanian monarchy did not topple, which seemed a possibility at one stage). American troops were not directly implicated in military action. Although it may be

¹². see ZINZANI, Abdul Wahed Aziz, *Arab Politics in the United Nations*, Sana'a, Yemeni Arab Republic (Sana'a University Publications) 1977, p. 171.

argued that their presence prevented a clear rebel victory, Lebanon did nevertheless find a 'Lebanese' solution 'without victors or vanquished'. The army commander, Gen. Chehab, was elected President with one of the leading Moslem rebels as Prime Minister. The insurrectionary forces gained their two most significant demands with the destitution of Camille Chamoun and the repudiation of the Eisenhower Doctrine. The Iraqi revolution continued its course in a heady atmosphere of popular mobilisation; land reform was enacted and former political leaders were placed on trial for trying to subvert Syria in 1957. The various threats against Syria itself did not materialise.

Although there remained pro- and anti-Western forces, the polarisation was not altogether clear-cut. Indeed the Arab states were even able to salvage some show of unity when on August 20 Sudan presented a single resolution (albeit an anodyne one) to the UN General Assembly on behalf of all of them. Saudi Arabia had had a foot in both camps at different times; a country like the Kingdom of Yemen which was pursuing a strongly anti-Western line at the time and which joined with the UAR on a federal basis in the course of 1958, obviously represented something totally different from, say, the Ba'athist conception of Arab nationalism. More interesting, although this fact only surfaced towards the end of the year 1958, was the difference in orientation between Iraq and the UAR. Nasser moved close to the USSR internationally and the corollary was a highly authoritarian policy domestically in which communists were repressed and popular mass activity was tightly channelled and controlled. The Iraqi model was for a while more left-wing, with wider scope for grass-roots mobilisation.

Overall, then, the picture is quite a complex one. It could not be accommodated by simplistic schemas, and it will be one of our tasks to investigate how far Chinese sources of the period were able to construct sufficiently

sophisticated models to enable them meaningfully to describe the different social forces in the area, and determine the possibilities of united front building with and among them.

CHAPTER 4: CHINA, THE MIDDLE EAST AND IMPERIALISM IN THE BUILDUP TO THE SYRIAN CRISIS, 1957

THE MIDDLE EAST AS FOCAL POINT OF INTERNATIONAL POLITICS

We have already remarked upon the key change in the CPC's analysis of the world system expressed in the view that the developing nations had emerged as a distinct force. As early as the spring of 1957, in returning from a major world tour, Zhou Enlai had stated that "We are now in an era which is marked, among others [sic], by the salient feature that the Asian and African peoples have taken their destiny into their own hands".

During the period under consideration this phenomenon was particularly concentrated in the Middle East. Zhou remarked that during the time of his tour, "The Near and Middle East was all along the focal point of the international situation."¹ This focal role was only to increase in importance, in the Chinese perception, through the remainder of 1957 and into the summer of 1958.

The CPC used its published discussions of the situation in the Middle East to put forward important new formulations about processes in the world system in general. The most significant instance of this, prior to the Syrian crisis of October 1957, was the publication of an authoritative *Renmin Ribao* editorial on September 10 1957. The programmatic tone of this text shows that it was intended as a systematic and comprehensive statement of official line. It is argued in this article that

¹ CHOU En-lai (ZHOU Enlai), "A Report on visits to eleven countries in Asia and Europe", March 5 1957, *People's China* Supplement April 1 1957

"The struggle between the United States, which is working for aggression in the Middle East, and the Middle Eastern people, who are fighting for and upholding their independence, is an important part of the struggle between the war forces and the peace forces. In its deliberate attempt to bring the Middle East under its control, the United States not only wants to turn the area into its colony, but also intends to make use of it to prepare for further aggression. Following the Second World War, there appeared in the world a number of nationalist countries, in addition to the socialist and imperialist countries. Most of the nationalist countries are following a policy of peace and neutrality. They have formed a tremendous power for peace and created great difficulties for the imperialist policy of expansion and aggression. To carry out its aggressive policy smoothly, the United States wants, first and foremost, to suppress and eliminate in the Middle East the nationalist countries adhering to peace and neutrality and the national independence movements there. The Middle East is of great strategic significance in the American plan of aggression.

"If the people of the Middle East obtain independence, it will be impossible for the imperialists to maintain their remnant colonies not only in Asia but also in Africa. Under this influence, the national independence movement of the Latin American people will also grow. It is therefore crystal clear that the United States evaluates the Middle East as a key position for it to establish a world colonial empire."

²

There are a number of important ideas contained in this text to which we will return at different points in the course of our study. The following issues could briefly be noted here: the concept of neo-colonialism is anticipated, in the sense that the goal is seen as "independence" even though most of the area was legally independent already. The US drive for spheres of influence is repeatedly characterised as a trend leading to war, and thus nationalist *struggles* are seen as a force preventing war; this argumentation is implicitly counterposed to the Soviet tendency to dampen violent national movements, lest they

² *Renmin Ribao* Editorial September 10 1958; *Xinhua* same date.

touch off a conflagration which could lead to war. The focal significance of the area is seen as arising *initially* from its place in *American* strategy, but if this strategy can be made to fail, the area will become of central significance from the opposite point of view, that is a stimulus to the independence will irradiate outwards from it in the direction of geographically contiguous areas (Asia and Africa) and by force of moral example (Latin America). This was to be a very important theme in the Chinese treatment of the subject in the succeeding period. The reference to Latin America is particularly interesting, in that it anticipates a 'third-world' image of the national current reaching beyond the Asian-African dimension implied in the Bandung movement.

The issue of the conflict between the West and the national movements was to be the central theme throughout the period under discussion, so it is unnecessary to amplify on it further at this point. But this theme was by no means the only element which the CPC took into consideration in determining the centrality of this area at the time. In fact, they also perceived another very important dimension, namely the issue of relations *among* the Western powers.

INTER IMPERIALIST CONTENTION - THE BACKGROUND

The question of relations between capitalist powers was one on which traditional Communist theory had a considerable amount to say, in the form of the concept of 'inter-imperialist' contention which had been accorded great importance since the appearance of Lenin's *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*. This phenomenon was treated as an integral part of the systematic development of the basic image of the world system in the inter-war period, notably in Stalin's speech to the XVI Congress of the CPSU

in 1930,³ and Stalin also devoted a lengthy section of his last systematic work dealing with the world situation to proving that this contradiction was still in force in the early '50s despite the strength of US hegemony.⁴ His formulations were in turn to serve as a basis for the CPCs later presentation in the course of the Sino-Soviet polemic, to the effect that there were four basic 'contradictions' in the world system, the contradiction between the socialist camp and the imperialist camp; between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie in the capitalist countries; between the oppressed nations and imperialism; and the contradiction among imperialist countries and among monopoly capitalist groups.⁵

This background could be something of a mixed blessing. It is at the very least clear that such traditional theories could not be applied unchanged to the far more complex conditions following World War II. The challenge facing the CPC was whether it would be able to bring about the radical adaptation necessary, to use the old analytical approach critically and not be imprisoned by it. It will be interesting to examine in the course of this study how successful they were. At this point we will briefly refer to the position in the early part of the period under consideration.

The question of how one understood the enemy camp and its internal dynamics was clearly a crucial one in united front policies. In fact the CPC's assessment of this question went through many changes in the late 1950s, and such

³ See *Marxism, Nationality and War*, London (Lawrence and Wishart) 1940, Vol. I, pp. 62-3

⁴ STALIN, J.V. *Economic Problems of Socialism in the USSR*, Peking (FLP) 1972, p. 32 ff.

⁵ *The Polemic on the General Line of the International Communist Movement*, op. cit., p. 7

changes can be viewed as indicating a shift to a new overall image of the world system.

DIFFERENT FORMULATIONS ON RELATIONS AMONG INDUSTRIAL POWERS

A consistent element in the Chinese approach was a strong conviction that the Western 'camp' was not a unified or homogeneous entity. Among reactionaries, it would seem, united-front type international relations of a non-antagonistic nature were not possible.

However, there are several different ways in which antagonistic relations among Western powers could be modelled, as different statements by the Chinese leadership show.

The first of these is one reasonably close to the classical Leninist standpoint, reflected, for example, in Mao Zedong's opinion after Suez, that

"the imperialist countries are now contending with each other for the control of different areas in the name of opposing communism....At present their contention converges on the Middle East, an area of great strategic significance."⁶

But several other ways of analysing this question can also be found in the immediately succeeding period. A second possible approach would be one which, while also emphasising antagonism, does so in a framework of increasing *unevenness*. Thus American expansion, notably in the Middle East, could be seen as serving the purpose of asserting its dominance not only of that area itself, but also of Europe. A third possible image was one whereby this process of differentiation could be seen as having advanced to a point where a qualitative difference could exist between the USA

⁶ MAO Tse-tung, *Selected Works Vol V*, Peking, FLP, 1977 pp 361-2

and the other powers, and the latter might learn from experience and perhaps make a break with their own imperial past, thus playing a positive role in opposing US schemes; could even they be potential members of the united front, in the broadest definition? A fourth possible position would, however, make an opposite deduction from the situation of US hegemony, and assume that the process of expansion into the spheres of influence of the former dominant powers was in essence a collaboratory process implying greater solidarity among the capitalist states.

In fact, elements of all these different images can be detected in various Chinese articles or statements. It must be said, of course, that they are not necessarily mutually exclusive, and in reality the policies of different European powers could indeed contain elements of conflicting responses to the problems posed by US global authority. However, Chinese policy during 1957-8 did tend to shift back and forth between the different paradigms, indicating that there was uncertainty as to which was the principal aspect.

The theme that the European powers were themselves oppressed by the USA dates back, as we saw earlier, to the interview with Anna Louise Strong.... perhaps surprisingly in that in 1946 the colonial empires were still basically intact, although from another angle it could be argued that economic subservience to the USA was far greater at that time than it was even by the late 1950s.

The view that the lesser-ranking capitalist states might be able to be won over as part of a broad array of forces directed against the main enemy was to resurface later around the time of the first enunciation of the "Three Worlds" theory in 1974. In retrospect, De Gaulle's accession to power in France in May 1958 would probably have been seen by the Chinese as an example of this trend,

although at the time it was depicted by them as a reactionary phenomenon.

Zhou Enlai seems to have been an advocate of the approach of winning or at least neutralising the European powers. In his major March 1957 speech he stressed the economic dimension of imperialism, supported by a quotation from a letter by Rockefeller to Eisenhower, and his argument implies that economic constraints were forcing the USA to embark on a more expansionist phase of policy, and that the impact of this would be felt by other countries, both industrial and developing:

"The 'Eisenhower Doctrine' which openly announces the intention of seizing the colonial interests of Britain and France is a useful lesson to countries participating in American military blocsIf such major allies as Britain and France could be abandoned by the United States, what other so-called allies are there that the United States cannot abandon?"⁷

He then went on to make a specific plea to Britain and France to abandon colonialism and assert their independence of the USA.

Zhou returned to this subject in another important speech nearly a year later, arguing that the deepening capitalist crisis around the middle of 1957 had caused the USA to attempt further to increase its grip over the various allied states using the idea of the "so-called 'Communist threat'" for this purpose.⁸

It is interesting that Zhou emphasised this point even though according to his own analysis many of the new developments in the independence movement over the past

⁷ ZHOU Enlai, Report, March 5 1957 op. cit.

⁸ ZHOU Enlai, "The Current international situation and China's foreign policy", February 2 1958, in Xinhua Banyuekan p. 37

year - in Yemen, Algeria, Ifni⁹ and Oman - were directed precisely against the traditional colonial powers. The logic would appear to be that these struggles might convince the European states that it was futile for them to dream of an independent power-political role in the old sense; which in turn might bring about an evolution in their policy. This could be seen as an illustration of how shifts in the balance of forces at one level could alter the possible scope of the united front at another.

Other sources were, however, apparently sceptical about whether the colonial powers would in fact learn such a lesson. An authoritative editorial published in the international affairs journal, *Shijie Zhishi* in the summer of the same year makes the point, specifically in relation to Oman, that the British colonialists "have obviously not absorbed a profitable lesson from the grievous defeat of their aggression against Egypt" and calls upon them to withdraw from the South Arabian area as soon as possible, while the Omani people are at the same time warned, in struggling against Britain, not to allow the USA in to fill the "vacuum".¹⁰

It would appear that some specialists did not agree with the view that it was a politically realistic scenario that Britain and France would distance themselves from the practice of imperialism. One fairly extensive study written in the summer of 1957 devoted considerable attention to clashes between US and British strategy, but in this case more in terms of classic inter-imperialist contention. The author contrasts on the one hand Britain's

⁹ 1957 saw a significant independence movement in the Spanish colonial territory of Ifni, later absorbed by Morocco.

¹⁰ *Shijie Zhishi Editorial*, "Aman renmin di wuzhuang qiyi", 1957, XV (August) pp 3-4

attempt to control the Indian Ocean, the Persian Gulf and the Arabian peninsula via its bases in Kenya and on the other the US plans for an Indian Ocean joint command under its own leadership. American plans to expand the Baghdad Pact into an anti-communist league spanning North Africa and West Asia are here directly ascribed to a strategy of absorbing British and French spheres of influence.¹¹ The article sees a dual nature to the importance of the area for the United States: to assert its control over western Europe, because of the latter's heavy dependency on oil imports, and as a base for expansion into North and East Africa. In carrying out the latter goal, according to the author, the USA faces two contradictions: against France, in its attempt to gain control over the oil interests in the Sahara and Morocco, and, more important, against Britain. The Middle East is described as Britain's "lifeline", not only because of oil, but also, more important, because its positions in that area

"are indispensable as the communications line protecting the dominions and colonies in Asia, as well as a cover for the advance into the colonies in East Africa".¹²

A meeting of the Council of the Baghdad Pact held in Karachi in June 1957 was seen as indicating an acceleration of inter-imperialist contention, with the USA mobilising its supporters to defeat Britain's plan for a joint military command, and thus seizing effective control over the organisation from Britain.¹³

¹¹ JIANG Yuanchun, "Lun zui jin Zhong Dong xingshi", *Shijie Zhishi* 1957, XII (June 6)

¹² *ibid.*

¹³ *Renmin Ribao* June 8 1957; *Xinhua* same date

Another interesting article from the same period argues that Britain feared that defeat in Oman would "lead to a chain reaction" threatening her other strategic interests, and sees Britain as attempting to intensify control over Aden, Cyprus and Kenya.¹⁴ However a new element also enters in. While referring to a persisting conflict of economic interests between Britain and the USA, expressed for example in the dispute over the Buraimi Oasis,¹⁵ from a political angle the author clearly tends towards the view that the expansion of US interests involved an element of collaboration or co-ordination with Britain, and was thus not purely a matter of contention. Surveying the British press of the period, he argues that British decision-making circles were on the whole hostile to the United States tendency to develop a behind-the-scenes role in Jordan, but that recently this hostility had been disappearing because they sensed an underlying support from America. This collaborationist interpretation was, as we will see later, to replace other perspectives as the predominant one in the Chinese analysis in the course of the year 1958.

In late 1957 however the predominant view was still one of an expansion of US control *imposed* by the USA. This is clear from the manner in which the subject was treated in the important *Renmin Ribao* editorial of September 10. 1957:

"The conclusion of the Suez war was seen by the United States as a good opportunity for its expansion in the Middle East and Africa....[The United States] has tightened its control over the Baghdad Pact bloc and included Jordan and Lebanon into the aggressive system of the 'Eisenhower Doctrine'. United States forces

¹⁴ DU Song, "Meiguo dui Xuliya di qinlue yinmou", *Shijie Zhishi* 1957, 19 October 1957)

¹⁵ an area claimed by both Muscat (backed by Britain) and Saudi Arabia (where the main petroleum concessions were in US hands)

are infiltrating into the Persian Gulf and all Africa."

The article then asserts that "There are many signs that if the US were to gain ground in Syria and Egypt, its next step would be to seize British and French interests in the Middle East and North Africa", before going on to stress the crucial importance of the region not just in general strategic terms but also in terms of raw materials. If the USA successfully asserted its control over petroleum resources it would be able to use this "to manipulate [Britain and France] to force them to follow its example of arms expansion and war preparation." Britain and France for their part

"are trying to put up a defence line along the Persian Gulf and North Africa to stop the advance of the 'Eisenhower Doctrine'. The conspiracies and inter-imperialist life-and-death struggle add to the acuteness and complexity of the Middle East situation."

This model clearly downplays the aspect of collaboration between the traditional colonial powers and America, while on the other hand, it does not lend its support to the view that there was a serious chance of the former coming to play a positive anti-American role. It is, thus, probably fair to say (given the authoritative tone of this editorial) that the dominant view in late 1957 was still a very orthodox interpretation of inter-imperialist contention.

However even here, the manner in which inter-imperialist rivalry is treated is such as to leave no doubt that the importance of this theme was secondary to that of the clash between imperialism and the peoples of the region. There is a clear impression that the expansion of the US into the spheres of influence of the old colonial powers was seen as clearing the decks for the main agenda, the battle against American imperialism.

Given, then, that the area was considered to be of central significance in world politics at the time, it is necessary to examine what were the prospects for China herself to build direct links with the countries of the Middle East.

CHINA'S RELATIONS WITH THE MIDDLE EAST

At a popular level it may be true that there was mutual ignorance between China and the Middle East, as Nasser-Eddine, for example has argued concerning relations between China and Egypt.¹⁶ But this was certainly not true at the level of Chinese decision-makers. In fact the Middle East had long been an area of central concern for the CPC, dating back even to the pre-1949 period. Not only is there evidence that the CPC was well informed on world affairs in general during the Yenan period,¹⁷ but Shichor has proved that this was true in relation to the Middle East in particular. Even in 1941, when the German-Soviet pact was still in force, Chinese Communist publications were closely concerned with the strategic implications of German expansion in that area.¹⁸

After 1949, it was not easy for the new Chinese regime to build diplomatic and commercial relations with developing countries, but the Middle East played a fairly significant role in helping China make an initial breach in the cold-war blockade. In 1950 twenty-five countries recognised the PRC,¹⁹ but it was very hard in the immediately succeeding period for Beijing to add to that list; of those states which extended recognition to the PRC between that year and

¹⁶ NASSER-EDDINE, M., *Arab-Chinese Relations* (With Special Emphasis on Egyptian-Chinese Relations) 1950-71, Beirut (Arab Institute for Research and Publishing) ND, p. 33

¹⁷ see YAHUDA, M. in WILSON (ed) op. cit, p. 46

¹⁸ SHICHOR op. cit., p. 10

¹⁹ WANG Gungwu op. cit. p. 52

1958, most were Arab/Islamic.²⁰ In addition, it is also important that China was able to develop commercial links, notably with Lebanon, even in the absence of diplomatic relations.

The Bandung Conference was a significant turning point in this process, because of the development of close links with Egypt. Recognition of China was only a small part of the general challenge to the West which Nasser launched in 1956, but it is probable that some of the more spectacular aspects of that challenge - the arms deal with the Eastern bloc and Soviet financing for the Aswan Dam project - were themselves a spinoff of relations with China. According to Salah Salim, a member of the Egyptian leadership at the time, both these arrangements were initiated through the Nasser-Zhou discussions at Bandung.²¹ A substantially similar account is given by Mohammed Heikal.²²

The expansion of relations with the Arab countries in 1955-6 was also influenced by the CPC's theoretical analysis of the world system and the alignment of forces within it. We have already referred to the fundamental concept that the developing countries, and the Middle East in particular, were the main *initial* targets of Western strategy, and thus served in a certain sense to shield the socialist camp. This view had obvious implications for practical policy. According to Mohammed Heikal, after meeting Abdel Nasser at Bandung, Zhou Enlai wrote a memorandum to Mao Zedong, the text of which was afterwards shown to the Egyptian

²⁰ The states which did so were: Nepal (1955), Egypt, Syria and Yemen (1956), Iraq, Morocco and Cambodia (1958), as well as the Algerian FLN (1958)

²¹ Interview with Patrick Seale, April 13, 1960, text in SEALE P., *The Struggle for Syria* London (Oxford UP) 1965, pp. 235-6

²² HEIKAL M., *The Sphinx and the Commissar - The Rise and Fall of Soviet Influence in the Middle East*, New York (Harper Row) 1978, Ch. 3.

leadership at the time of the Sino-Soviet split. Part of the text as reproduced by Heikal reads as follows:

"It is impossible for the socialist camp to adopt the role of a spectator in the inevitable battle in the Middle East. As I see it, our position obliges us to assist the nationalist forces in this battle for two reasons - because their victory would be in the interest of the socialist camp, and because it would thwart all attempts of the western imperialists to complete the encirclement of the eastern camp. My conclusion is that the logic of history points to the nationalist movement as the coming force in the Middle East, and that we should make our approach to it as friendly as we can. There is a great difference between approaching it early in the day, when we can help it to achieve its objectives, and adopting a policy of wait and see, thus leaving its leaders to fight their battles alone and only approaching them after their victory has been won. The advantages likely to accrue to the socialist camp from an immediate approach should not be underestimated."²³

Thus the logic of imperialist policy described in the Anna Louise Strong interview (attacking the intermediate zone before the Socialist Camp) created its own counter-logic in terms of China's policy and its practical united front priorities. This was moreover, not simply seen as a Chinese policy but first and foremost a Socialist Camp policy, an approach which was still, as we have argued, very much in force in the late 1950s.

One specific area of policy which was quite important for China's relations with the Arabs was the Palestinian question. Unlike the Soviet Union, China had not recognised the state of Israel, but this did not prevent discreet contacts between China and Israel on a number of occasions. On the basis of Israeli sources, Shichor argues

²³ HEIKAL M., op cit., p. 59

that it was mainly Israel which resisted a number of Chinese overtures in the period prior to about 1955.²⁴

At the Bandung Conference, Arab representatives made an effort to canvass their line on the Palestinian issue. The deputy head of the Syrian Delegation was Ahmad Shuqayri, who subsequently became Chairman of the PLO and negotiated China's recognition of the PLO in 1965.²⁵ He held an important discussion with Zhou Enlai at Bandung,²⁶ and Zhou's sympathetic attitude on the Palestinian question is thought to have favourably impressed the Arabs, who were disappointed by the lack of comprehension of other prominent statesmen like Nehru and U Nu.²⁷ However it is fair to say that during the period under consideration, the Palestinian/Israeli issue was scarcely regarded by the Chinese as a central issue in its own right.

The importance of Egypt as a focal point in the growing nationalist current was reflected in the summoning of a new Asian-African conference in Cairo in December 1957, known as the Afro-Asian Solidarity Conference. This was regarded in a somewhat ill-defined way as a sequel to Bandung. Both China and the Soviet Union worked to promote it, and it apparently developed from an initiative at an Asian Writers' conference held in Tashkent in December 1956, followed by a visit to Abdel Nasser paid by delegates from China, the USSR, India and Japan in February 1957.²⁸

²⁴ SHICHOR Y., *The Middle East in China's Foreign Policy* op. cit. pp. 21-7

²⁵ BARON, X.: *Les Palestiniens* Paris (Sycomore) 1977 p. 136

²⁶ SHICHOR Y., "The Palestinians and China's Foreign Policy" in HSUEH op. cit. p. 162

²⁷ HEBBEHANI H.S.H. *China's Foreign Policy in the Arab World - Three Case Studies*, London (Kegan Paul International) 1981, pp. 21-2

²⁸ NEUHAUSER C. *Third World Politics*, Cambridge Mass (Harvard UP) 1970 p. 11

The Cairo Conference, unlike Bandung, was not a meeting of top leaders; rather it assembled delegations, many of them non-governmental, from radical movements, including for example African liberation movements. It resulted in the formation of the Afro-Asian People's Solidarity Organisation, which later became the object of a fierce struggle at the time of the Sino-Soviet split and was virtually taken over by Moscow by the late 1960s. This was not yet the situation, however, at the time of the original conference. Its Chairman was Nasser's close associate and eventual successor, Anwar al-Sadat, and his influence was used to counteract that of the Soviet Union and to promote nationalist trends.

Despite this, the Chinese delegation, for its part, received a very warm welcome and was in turn favourably impressed. The Chinese media devoted extensive coverage to the conference. We will discuss their interpretation of its overall significance later but for now this event should be noted as a positive milestone in the CPC's campaign to build its united front relationships in the third world in general and the Middle East in particular. A measure of the credit China enjoyed at the time is that a Chinese was elected to sit on a seven-man, predominantly Moslem, subcommittee to prepare a draft resolution on the Palestine question.²⁹

At the same time, trade relations with Egypt had developed to a point where China made a really significant contribution to the Nasser regime's ability to hold out following the blockade imposed by Western powers in July 1956. The critical year was 1957 during which China was the main purchaser of Egypt's cotton, overwhelmingly that

²⁹ *Egyptian Gazette* December 29 1957 quoted in BEHBEHANI op. cit. pp. 24-5

country's most important export commodity.³⁰ It is also interesting to note that the Suez Canal played a fairly significant role in China's overall foreign trade at the time.³¹

These close economic ties coincided with the high point of political relations as well. Sources suggest real popular sympathy for China as a fellow developing nation, in contrast to the relationship with the USSR which was more seen as a matter of expediency. A pamphlet on the Chinese revolution published in Egypt sold out within a week, while a Chinese publication of Nasser's *Philosophy of the Revolution* was also much in demand.³² It should be stressed that as far as Egypt specifically was concerned 1957 was a high point, and relations had definitely cooled by 1959. In this sense, the year 1958 was transitional, although meanwhile China's relations with other Arab states were improving.

THE EGYPTIAN 'PATH'

The relevance of the Middle East to Chinese united front considerations was not confined to the building of direct links with countries in the area, because CPC analysis of politics in that region was employed as a key context in which to propound major ideas about the world system and to examine, in the light of events, how successful these analyses were. It was a laboratory for the CPC's overall view of the alignment of forces.

In the intervening period of about a year between the Suez War and the Syrian crisis of October 1957, Chinese interest in the area did not slacken. It was continuously perceived

³⁰ NASSER-EDDINE op. cit. pp. 121-2, and sources cited on p. 139.

³¹ see SHICHOR, *The Middle East* p. 64

³² NASSER-EDDINE op. cit. pp. 127, 130

as the focus of international relations, and two high-level analytical articles were published in the form of *Renmin Ribao* editorials,³³ as well as numerous lower-level commentaries. In these sources, the main issues, problems and targets of struggle were referred to, and also especially how the Western threat should be responded to. We have already mentioned how the clash with the West was presented in general terms, but even more interesting in the context of united front questions is the assessment of different policy trends of states *within* the region, particularly in terms of their relations with one another.

In approaching this question, the Chinese media employed a procedure much favoured by them, namely the propagation of positive and exemplary models. Initially, the most important of these was Egypt.

Nasserism stands out as unquestionably the most influential aspect of the new nationalist trend in the area, and it was a phenomenon which posed real problems of analysis not only to the socialist countries, but to the West as well.

Egypt could potentially serve as a pole of attraction around which other nationalist forces could cohere - this is certainly what Nasser himself, and his admirers in other parts of the Arab world, intended to happen. Egypt was thus potentially a dominant actor in regional terms. This is, however, not the aspect which the Chinese chose to emphasise. Instead, their emphasis fell mainly on the weakness of Egypt in relation to imperialism.

One of the most important themes in the CPC's dialectical world view was the possibility of converting weakness into strength via correct policies - including policies of international solidarity and ones which could provide a

³³ July 26 and September 10, 1957

focus for the unity of domestic social forces. An official telegram at the time of the Suez War thus stated that "Although Britain and France are militarily superior to Egypt for the time being, they are opposed by the peoples of the whole world and the overwhelming majority of the countries, and are thus utterly isolated and morally bankrupt", and called upon the Egyptians to "strengthen their solidarity" as a guarantee of victory.³⁴

The approval which Chinese leaders expressed for the Egyptian 'path' in this period pinpoints an interesting theme - the link between united front strategies in the domestic and international spheres. Thus we find a *Renmin Ribao* editorial from the summer of 1957 stating that "the anti-imperialist struggle of any small and weak nation is not isolated at all", and continuing with references to Egypt's policies of peace, independence and neutrality, to assert that

"Precisely because of this policy, Egypt has been able to unite all patriotic forces at home; has earned the international support of all peace-loving peoples; and has thus victoriously withstood the grave test presented by the struggle against imperialist aggression."³⁵

In other words, neutralist strategies internationally are seen as a focus of domestic cohesion, which in turn provides a basis for strength in the international sphere.

The same editorial went on to predict that, as a result of this policy, "A rich and powerful new Egypt will rise and stand majestically on the African continent." It should be

³⁴ ZHOU Enlai, Telegram addressed to President Nasser, November 10 1956; Text in *China Supports* pp. 116-7

³⁵ *Renmin Ribao* Editorial, July 26 1957; *China Supports* op. cit p. 127

noted however that the logic of this analysis does not imply that Egypt would necessarily *remain* in the vanguard of the anti-imperialist struggle. The more "rich and powerful" it became, the more likely the USA would concentrate on attacking weaker links in the anti-imperialist coalition, perhaps in a manner analogous to the way in which the USA was thought to be concentrating its strategy on the intermediate zone, rather than on the Socialist Camp directly. Thus in the subsequent period the spotlight moved first to Jordan, then to Syria and then to Lebanon.

None of this, however, alters the importance attached to the exemplary role of Egyptian and Syrian foreign policy in the concrete context of late 1957. This was spelt out again in the most systematic official statement of the period, the *Renmin Ribao* editorial of September 10 1957 where it was argued that Egypt and Syria, by pursuing a policy of peace and non-participation in military blocks and opposition to imperialist aggression, "have grown in strength and in *internal unity* and also developed economically."³⁶ Here the link between domestic and international united fronts is clearly spelled out. Assuming its most didactic tone, *Renmin Ribao* proceeded to argue that "This path that Egypt and Syria are following conforms to the interests of their people and peace for the Middle East and the rest of the world. This is the correct path." A positive example implied a negative one:

"The other path is one opposed to national interests and is inimical to peace. The ruling cliques of some Middle Eastern countries have followed the war policy of the imperialists and accepted the 'Eisenhower Doctrine'. They supply the United States with military bases and manpower. Politically, economically and militarily they are now manipulated and controlled by foreign powers. This will not only

³⁶ *Renmin Ribao* Editorial, September 10, 1957; *Xinhua* same date. Our emphasis.

increase the burden on their people but also create suspicion and split among the Arab countries, giving the Western colonialists, the United States especially, an opportunity to attack Arab nationalism."³⁷

Thus politics in the area was seen in the form of a sort of 'two-line' struggle. An important point in relation to united front issues is however that it was not implied that the two trends should fight it out between them. On the contrary, "suspicion and split" were considered a bad thing in themselves because they served the enemy.

We will return to this point subsequently. But the emphasis in late 1957 and the beginning of 1958 was upon unity in a very concrete form, one which unambiguously took Egypt and Syria as its point of reference. A study of the Arab nationalist movement published in early 1958 thus described these states as its "nucleus"³⁸, while according to *Renmin Ribao* "Egypt and Syria have become the core of Arab nationalism and the bulwark of the anti-colonial struggle in the Middle East."³⁹ Those regimes which were criticised in the summer of 1957 were ones which "obstinately persist in remaining cut off from Egypt and Syria."⁴⁰

In analysing the strategy of imperialism which the united front strategy was intended to negate, it is argued that

"the United States is playing on the fear of the people harboured by the feudal rulers of certain Arab states and by a section of the bourgeois and feudal forces, using the myth of a so-called 'Communist

³⁷ *ibid.*

³⁸ Mu Zhi, "Alabo Minzu yu Alabo minzuzhuyi", *Shijie Zhishi* 1958, 4, 15

³⁹ *Renmin Ribao* September 10 1957, *Xinhua* September 12, p. 7

⁴⁰ JIANG Yuanchun, article in *Shijie Zhishi* June 1957, p.11

threat' to worsen the relations of those Arab states with Egypt and Syria, destroy Arab unity and isolate Egypt and Syria."⁴¹

A point here which is well worth noting is that the anti-communist slogan is seen not just as a general ideological justification for US deployment into the spheres of the former colonial powers (as in the model set out in the Anna Louise Strong interview), but also more specifically as a way of appealing to *indigenous* ruling strata.

It is now possible to have a clearer view of the logic whereby, according to the CPC, one particular part of the Arab world became the focal point in the overall conflict. Basically, Egypt and Syria were seen as the main positive forces, but Egypt was comparatively difficult to attack directly. Hence, the immediate goal in US strategy was to establish positions in other parts of the area by aiming at the weak links. The CPC's analysis was apparently that US policy entered into a new phase in the period immediately following the Suez war, characterised by a shift to tactics of undercover activity as opposed to open military intervention. Thus an official Chinese statement expressed support for the Soviet Union's diplomatic initiatives in February 1957, but where the USSR stressed joint actions of the great powers to prevent the outbreak of open conflict, the Chinese argued that "The United States is stepping up its machinations to undermine the unity of the Arab states and to subvert certain Arab countries from within."⁴²

But weakness could be transformed into strength through the implementation of domestic and external united front strategies. There was thus a possibility for those states

⁴¹ *ibid*

⁴² CHINA Government, "Statement Supporting the Proposal of the Government of the Soviet Union...", February 17 1957, text in *China Supports* p. 134

which were selected as targets of US pressure themselves stepping into a vanguard role. It is important that the focal significance of Egypt was presented in such a way that solidarity with Egypt was depicted as a natural corollary of the fact that this country was the strategic target of the West; it does not imply acceptance of the assumption that Egypt would necessarily play a leading or dominant role in the alignment of local anti-imperialist forces.

JORDAN AS NEGATIVE EXAMPLE

Concretely, it was considered that the main focus of US policy was to undermine the weaker of the two main anti-imperialist actors, Syria, and in order to do this it was necessary for the Americans to begin by concentrating their forces in politically more marginal areas so as to bring pressure to bear upon Syria. Hence the importance attached to Jordan, which in the early part of 1957 was seen as

"one of the major targets of the aggression carried out by the US imperialists in the Arab region" ⁴³

The clearest touchstone in determining which 'path' a state was following would be key indicators such as acceptance of the Eisenhower Doctrine and membership of the Baghdad Pact. But only Iraq and to a lesser degree Chamoun in Lebanon would qualify under this criterion. So another way of looking at it was in terms of the actual lineup of forces in the area. Egypt and Syria, together with Saudi Arabia had stepped in to reinforce Jordan at the beginning of 1957 in resistance to British pressure. This was viewed as a positive new lineup,⁴⁴ but by July of the same year Jordan was seen to be moving away from Egypt and Syria, and

⁴³ QUN Li, "Cong lishishang kan Alabo dongfang ge guo renmin di jiefang douzheng", *Lishi Yanjiu* 1958, 7, p. viii

⁴⁴ QUN Li, article in *Lishi Yanjiu* 1958, op. cit.

drawing closer instead to Iraq⁴⁵ - joined also by Saudi Arabia, which we find on both sides of the divide, a phenomenon which none of the Chinese sources seems to have been very comfortable with.

The ambiguous role played by Saudi Arabia is an interesting case. King Saud visited Lebanon at the beginning of September 1957, and the CPC apparently considered that he was acting as a US agent in promoting its policies, because Lebanon was immediately added to the list of hostile countries surrounding Syria. However, within the next few days the Chinese analysis changed. Without necessarily ceasing to regard Saudi Arabia as a basically pro-American actor, the Chinese seem to have concluded that in this case Saud was acting as an instrument in the development of regional solidarity. When Saud visited Syria itself later in the same month, *Renmin Ribao* welcomed this, saying that

'Solidarity among the Arab states was the most important guarantee for their independence....Consolidation of this solidarity would deal a fatal blow to imperialist aggression.'⁴⁶

This complex role would obviously challenge some of the more simplistic assumptions of the two different 'paths', and this raises an important issue with regard to united front policies. As we have seen it was an extremely important element in the Chinese approach to identify progressive and reactionary state actors, and within definite limits they could be said to be supporting the former against the latter, insofar as the immediate task was to thwart US tactics for consolidating its forces in a positional sense. However the important point is that from a longer-term point of view, *such division in itself was considered to be a bad thing*, because it provided the

⁴⁵ JIANG Yuanchun in *Shijie Zhishi* July 1957 op. cit.

⁴⁶ *Renmin Ribao* Sept 29 1957; *Xinhua* Sept 30.

context for outside intervention. Chinese policy was thus never altogether happy in a context of supporting one set of developing states against another, and the preferred goal was always to aim for the broadest unity. Thus in the concrete context united front policies could be considered to exist at two levels: the attempt of the radical actors to maintain unity among themselves, and the broader process of working to surmount the limitations imposed by a regional two-camp division:

'The United States government want to force Arabs to fight Arabs for its own colonialist expansion....But the Arab people were increasingly aware that imperialism was their deadly enemy.'⁴⁷

Particularly interesting is the context in which, in the middle of October 1957, further official visits were paid to Syria not only by King Saud but also by Iraqi Premier Nuri es-Said, the latter being viewed in general by the Chinese as an archetype of an imperialist puppet. However, in the context the Chinese press interpreted even this action as an expression of Arab nationalism coming to terms with the fact that, whatever its differences, there was a mutual interest in Arabs running their own regional affairs. "All this shows that the relations among the Arab states are gradually being clarified" was the comment; and further,

'The United States should see from the growth of Arab nationalism that its efforts to set one section of the Arabs to fight another and the schemes for Turkish and Iraqi invasions of Syria were bound to fail.'⁴⁸

The interesting point is however that Jordan was seen as a negative example in terms of the process of surrounding and subduing nationalist actors, as a *successful* instance

⁴⁷ *Renmin Ribao* Sept 6 1957; *Xinhua* same date

⁴⁸ *Guangming Ribao* Oct 15 1957; *Xinhua* Oct 16.

of American action in opposition to the national-independent current and an example which the US wished to duplicate in the case of Syria.

The struggle in Jordan was seen in a broad historical context. One historical study points to a long-term continuity, both at the level of imperialist strategy of dominance (initially on the part of Britain) and at the level of popular struggle, dating back to the first Anglo-Jordanian treaty in 1928. This, it is argued, touched off a wave of popular struggle which continued into the 1930s linked to resistance against British rule in Palestine. The Anglo-Jordanian treaty of 1948, according to this article, "in substance made Jordan into a British colony."⁴⁹ But this in turn produced a further wave of struggle, particularly from 1955 when Britain tried to pressure Jordan to join the Baghdad Pact. There followed the temporary shift to the left including the dismissal of General Glubb, at which point "the Jordanian people's victory was the victory of the Arab anti-colonialist movement".

However afterwards US policy was viewed as being at least for the time being successful, and in September-November 1957 the aim of the West was to "turn Syria into a second Jordan."⁵⁰

The above can be seen as an essentially historical level of analysis, whose basic image is of an unceasing dialectic of struggle between popular and interventionist forces.

However, there was also another level of analysis which interested the Chinese in relation to the case of Jordan: this is the spatial or geopolitical dimension, reflecting

⁴⁹ *ibid*

⁵⁰ QUN Li, *op. cit.*

the fact that conflicts were won not just by understanding general historical trends, but by concrete strategies applied on the ground. Hence the importance of Jordan's physical location "between Egypt and Syria".⁵¹

This positional dimension is very important, because however much the revolutionary forces were thought to partake of a kind of superior historical logic - which might in the long term tend to overturn the rules of the system altogether - it was an essential principle of the Maoist approach that the left could only get to this point if they mastered the science of conflict sufficiently well to win trials of strength *within* the rules of the game. This distinction between the two levels can to some extent be seen as a reflection of Mao's view that "strategically we should slight all enemies, and tactically we should take full account of them."⁵²

Discussion of this spatial dimension in the Chinese press brings to mind a model drawn from the game of *weiqi*, in which a territory can be captured if it is completely surrounded. This model had been used illustratively by Mao concerning military strategy in the pre-1949 period, as for example in the section entitled "Forms in which We and the Enemy Encircle One Another" in his "Problems of Strategy in Guerrilla War Against Japan" (1938).⁵³ At least one study of Communist military methods during this early period has used *weiqi* as the main explanatory model.⁵⁴

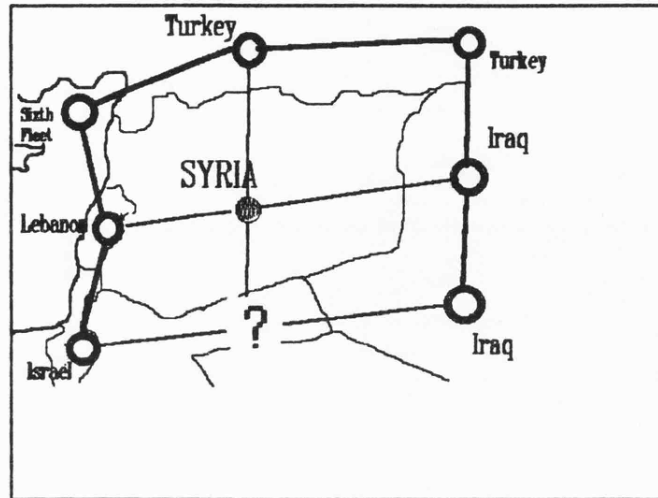
⁵¹ DU Song, in *Shijie Zhishi* 1957, op. cit.

⁵² *Peking Review* Nov. 11, 1958, p. 9.

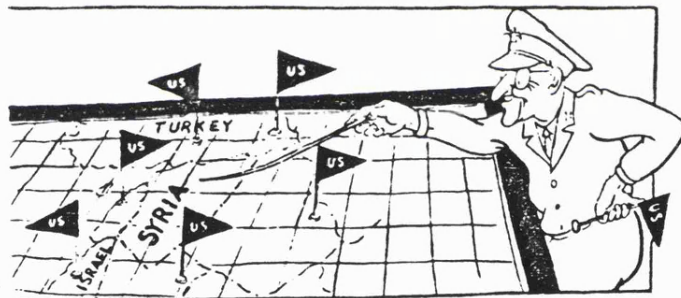
⁵³ MAO Tse-tung *Selected Works* Vol. II, Peking (FLP) 1965, pp. 101 ff.

⁵⁴ For discussion of the use of the *weiqi* model in the earlier period see BOORMAN S.A., *The Protracted Game*, New York (Oxford UP) 1969, although in our opinion the author overestimates the importance of the spatial dimension, which was only one among several levels of analysis employed by the Chinese leadership.

Applying this model to the case under consideration, if the West could move a piece into Jordan, Syria would be surrounded completely and would hence move into the other camp.



Moreover, as in the game of weiqi, what happens in a 'subregion' can be put into a wholly different perspective by developments over the board as a whole:



"Encircled" by
Yu Yu-fan,
from People's
China, 1957,
23 (December)

Note that at
this time,
Jordan is
already
considered
pro-Western

We will further argue in a moment, in discussing the Syrian crisis, that much of the Chinese treatment of Western 'rapid deployment' calls to mind such a game model. But the essential point in seeking an all-round grasp of the models employed by the Chinese leadership is the interaction between *different* levels of analysis. The image - at least when the model is extended out of a purely military framework into terms of international relations - is not that you simply 'capture' territories by the act of surrounding them, but that the fact of surrounding them increases the pressure which can be applied in order to influence the development of *internal* forces. A link can be drawn here with Mao's view of internal contradictions as the basis of change and external contradictions as the condition for change.

If Chinese statements sometimes make it seem as though a particular country can change 'camp' overnight, this is because their perspective was one which attached very great significance to the role of the state as a political entity. There was a pronounced tendency to make unequivocal distinctions concerning which 'camp' a country was in, progressive or reactionary, at a particular time. Viewed as a process of change, this shift would reflect the dialectical view of quantity passing into quality. An article on the dialectics of the international situation published in the summer of 1958 when the CPC was heavily promoting the study of dialectics included King Hussein among a list of outstanding negative examples in recent history.⁵⁵

This does not, however, deny that domestic social struggle, as the basis for change, was continuing. In certain circumstances, it could call into question the legitimacy of the existing state apparatus. This was certainly the

⁵⁵ BIN Fu, "Guoji douzheng zhong di bianzhengfa", *Shijie Zhishi* 1958, XXII.

case with the Lebanon in 1958, as we will see, and some of this is foreshadowed in the case of Jordan. In fact the popular movement there was regarded as one of the most important manifestations of that anti-imperialist current in 1957 which gave rise to some fundamental political shifts in the Middle East, even though it failed to gain a lasting influence over state power in Jordan itself, and we find one author, writing just after the ending of the democratic episode in Jordan, of the opinion that the people have "sufficient strength" to reverse the trend, while he refers to the Hussein regime as "the authorities",⁵⁶ a term which appears to question their legitimacy to some extent.

The historical model of a ceaseless dialectic of struggle was reinforced at the beginning of 1958 by that of the East Wind prevailing over the West Wind, an assessment which implies in its spatial aspect - although this was not the only dimension of the East Wind model - that conditions over the wider 'board' (the world system as a whole) were now unfavourable to the pro-imperialist forces. Together these two factors could be expected to create conditions propitious for a swing to the left in Jordan.

The underlying sense of the popular forces as the basis of legitimacy meant that people-based united front work could continue despite the reactionary nature of the regime in question ... or perhaps because of the reactionary character of the regime, in that the latter would provide a focus for the resistance of popular forces. It was certainly easier to support the popular forces openly in situations where the regime could unambiguously be considered reactionary. The CPC thus maintained a strong interest in the radical opposition in Jordan. The Cairo AAPSO Conference which ended in January 1958 was, unlike

⁵⁶ JIANG Yuanchun, op. cit

Bandung, a radical, non-governmental meeting. Jordan was represented by the left opposition, and the Chinese delegate Zhao Puchu, writing on his return, devoted a disproportionate amount of space to covering the contributions of these Jordanian delegates.⁵⁷

A clear causal link can be seen in terms of the Chinese analysis between the state as an actor playing a reactionary role, on the one hand, and the growth of the popular opposition movement on the other. This link is to be found in the idea that the more the regime pursues a sell-out policy, the stronger the popular resistance will become. This could be seen later in the Chinese analysis of developments in Lebanon, and even more obviously in Iraq where the regime actually allowed itself to be overthrown by diverting its forces in support of Western policy objectives. An obvious possibility existed of the same thing happening in Jordan, and this was accentuated with the revolutionary overthrow of the regime in Iraq in the summer of 1958. One article dealing mainly with economic factors described the Jordanian regime as "tottering as if about to fall" under the influence of events in Iraq,⁵⁸ and two Chinese correspondents were despatched to Syria to interview the exiled Jordanian radical leader Dr. Shuqair. He compared his country to a volcano, saying that "the victory of the Iraqi revolution is having a direct effect on Jordan, because Jordan and Iraq are linked in very many respects", and inviting the Chinese correspondents to visit him in Amman soon.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ ZHAO Puchu, "Chuxi Ya Fei Renmin Tuanjie Dahui zaji" *Shijie Zhishi* 1958, III, pp. 13-14

⁵⁸ WU Cheng, "Mei Ying longduan ziben zai Zhong Dong di xiongtu molu", *Jingji Yanjiu* 1958, VIII, p. 53

⁵⁹ LI Fanzhen and CHENG Lianping, "Yuedan, you yizuo kuai yao baofa di huoshan", *Shijie Zhishi* 1958, VIII

The CPC's emphasis on the role of popular movements was a noteworthy characteristic of the Chinese world view at that time, and perhaps fills in an element which other ways of looking at the world system might neglect. It implies an approach to united front work taking as its point of reference the identity of interests of a broad popular mass. However, this approach carries with it a significant risk, that of seeing the negative trend, in the words of the major *Renmin Ribao* editorial of September 10, 1957, simply in terms of "subversive activities" carried out by Western "agents and national traitors".⁶⁰

Such an approach could serve as an excuse for neglecting a serious socio-economic analysis of these societies, and could thus provide a weak basis for evaluating either the pro- or anti-Western trends in policy in the long term. The subsequent unfolding of this study will indicate that there was indeed a significant tendency for Chinese authors of the period to fall into this trap. At this point, however, we must take up the discussion of events in Syria towards the end of 1957.

THE SYRIAN CRISIS

During the weeks of heightened tension from late August 1957 the Chinese press described a projected Western move against Syria, based on the success of the same strategy in the case of Jordan, which could now itself be used as an enemy counter in the strategic game. The spatial logic of American strategy was depicted as one of seeking to "suppress and eliminate" ⁶¹ key states adhering to the nationalist trend by bringing pressure to bear upon them from other places in the area which were within the American orbit. This terminology calls to mind the

⁶⁰ ZHAO Puchu op. cit.

⁶¹ *Renmin Ribao* Editorial Sept 10 1957 op cit.

strategy of "encirclement and suppression" employed by the Nationalists against the CPC in the Chinese civil war and tends to confirm the validity of the *weiqi* model, at least within the limits of the spatial level of analysis. Egypt and Syria, according to a *Renmin Ribao* editorial of the period, 'had become the major obstacle to the "Eisenhower Doctrine"', so that the USA was putting all its energy into overthrowing them:

'If it succeeded, the United States could then concentrate all its energy on Egypt and attain its ambition of enslaving the people of the Middle East'.
62

There is a clear 'domino' line of thought here. Again, according to Commentator,

"Obviously, the United States is attempting to utilise Turkey, Iraq and Jordan to encircle Syria and work in co-ordination with them in the event of aggression." 63

Two days later it was remarked that the US Sixth Fleet was heading towards the Eastern Mediterranean, thus bringing another element of pressure to bear. 64 In early September Israel and Lebanon were mentioned as actors in the encirclement strategy. 65 Considerable attention was given to the manoeuvres of the Sixth fleet off Latakia, as well as the airlift of arms to Jordan. 66 Some analyses referred to this rapid deployment of forces in Jordan as an instance of how, once imperialism had successfully established its position in a country, it could fairly quickly convert this

62 *Renmin Ribao* Editorial Sept 4 1957; *Xinhua* same date

63 *Renmin Ribao* August 22 1957 op cit.

64 *Renmin Ribao* August 24 1957; *Xinhua* same date

65 *Guangming Ribao* Sept 8 1957; *Xinhua* same date

66 *Renmin Ribao* Sept 11 1957; *Xinhua* same date

into a pressure point serving its strategy against other countries.⁶⁷ A coup by Syrian exiles based in Turkey was considered to be a likely immediate tactic.⁶⁸

One of the major deductions which can be made for our purposes is that this situation of the West seeking to combine or marshall its forces provided a context where united front policies were very important as a counter-factor. The *weiqi* model only goes so far, because the united front, in the Chinese conception, provided a mechanism for binding-together progressive forces at a level different from what could be encompassed in a simple gaming model.

Thus, while at one level it is true that pro-Western actors had to be met and defeated within the rules of the regional power-game as it existed, at another the united front could be envisaged as a mechanism to *counter the very logic* of the divisions implied in this power-struggle. It is probably valid to speak of two distinct levels of united front activity in a situation such as this. On the one hand, it was necessary to consolidate the grouping of 'progressive' states which, as we have seen, took as its point of reference solidarity with Egypt and Syria. On the other, unity strategies could operate at a wider, more all-encompassing level, in order to assert the common interests of all countries in the region and oppose the logic which consisted in dividing actors into pro- or anti-Western.

There was thus a strong theme of stressing overall Arab unity. As we have seen, US strategy was viewed as one of first picking off one target, then using this as a pawn against the next, and so on. In these circumstances solidarity among the countries in the region, it is argued

⁶⁷ DU Song article in *Shijie Zhishi* op. cit

⁶⁸ *Renmin Ribao* September 11 op. cit.

'would help prevent attacks on the Arab states one by one.'⁶⁹ Overall Arab unity was an important theme, because

"The Arabs know from their own experience that the imperialists always take advantage of any weakening of Arab unity to undermine the independence and sovereignty of the Arab countries."⁷⁰

Unity of this kind, in the Chinese conception, implied as perhaps its main prerequisite a clear conception of what one needed to unite *against*. It is interesting that the CPC apparently did not consider that Western imperialism would be altogether adequate as a negative point of reference to cement unity at this particular, pan-Arab level: hence we find Turkey drafted into the picture as an important element. The sense of unity between the Arab peoples during the Syrian crisis was thus considered not only to have "dealt a powerful blow to the United States plot to 'use Arabs to fight Arabs'" but also to have "isolated Turkey which acts as a lackey of the United States aggressors."⁷¹

Without using the term, the Chinese seem to have viewed Turkey as a kind of regional sub-imperialism, and the Chinese press did not shrink at hyperbole in describing the Turkish menace:

'Once the Turks unsheathed their swords, their objectives of attack would not be limited to Damascus or some other Syrian cities. The Turkish troops would very possibly push into Iraq, Lebanon, Jordan or even the whole of the Arab peninsula and North Africa. By that time..."the Arab people will encounter not only the rebirth of the tyrannical rule of the Ottoman

⁶⁹ *Guangming Ribao* Sept 29 1957; *Xinhua* same date

⁷⁰ *Dagong Bao* Oct 21 1957; *Xinhua* Oct 22

⁷¹ *Renmin Ribao* Oct 22 1957; *Xinhua* same date.

Empire, but the more dangerous and savage, colonial rule of the American imperialists as well".⁷²

THREAT OF ESCALATION AND THE ROLE OF THE SOCIALIST CAMP

It may appear strange that official media were prepared to exaggerate to such a degree and indeed to create anxiety in domestic public opinion about the seriousness of the situation. However, the important underlying theme behind both the progressive struggle of Syria and the reactionary policy of Turkey was considered to be the danger of a local conflict escalating into a global one, and in making this point what the CPC was really doing was to employ the regional conflict as an illustrative example in an oblique discussion of the issues involved in the strategic debate within the Socialist Camp.

Already at the beginning of September it was argued that 'there was the danger of armed conflict started in this area by the United States spreading to other places...',⁷³ and as the situation deteriorated at the end that month, the Chinese press remarked that 'the United States was talking about surprise attacks with atomic weapons.'⁷⁴ A little later, it was warned that

"Action should be taken by all people in the world to check the outbreak of war. Both the two previous world wars started with local military action."⁷⁵

The language about local conflicts escalating to a global or nuclear level is not different from that employed by the Soviet leadership at the time, but the deduction the

⁷² *Dagong Bao* Oct 21 1957; *Xinhua* Oct 22

⁷³ *Renmin Ribao* Sept 4 op. cit.

⁷⁴ *Renmin Ribao* Sept 29 1957; *Xinhua* Sept 30

⁷⁵ *Dagong Bao* Oct 25 1957; *Xinhua* same date

Chinese made from these premises was the opposite one - the necessity to take bold and decisive action in defeating local US policies. If it were true that the conflict was taking place in the intermediate zone before the USA could come to grips directly with the Socialist Camp, the implication would be that if the US were allowed to succeed, conflict with the Soviet Union would be a possibility. This scenario envisages not just a 'broadening' of conflict but its stepping-up to a different level. The issue of US pressure on Syria thus clearly served an illustrative or didactic purpose in terms of the big issues in the Communist movement.

One element in this was to stress that international tension was caused by imperialism. 'Since the Suez War, tension in the Middle East has never been relaxed,' noted the authoritative *Renmin Ribao* Commentator in August 1957, going on to say that during the past six months the Eisenhower Doctrine had increasingly been used against Egypt and Syria.⁷⁶ This was precisely the period which had elapsed since the Soviet diplomatic Note of February 1957. At the beginning of September the USSR issued another Note, which the Chinese press referred to as "a great contribution", but only to add:

'but the Western countries' rejection of this proposal proved that what they wanted was tension, not peace.'

One level of response which the CPC seemed to be urging upon the socialist camp was that of agitating the spectre of nuclear deterrence in order to make US decision-makers properly appraise the risks, and indeed frightening US allies in the region as well. One *Renmin Ribao* editorial spelled out the consequences in the following way:

⁷⁶ *Renmin Ribao* August 22 1957; *Xinhua* same date

⁷⁷ *Dagong Bao* Sept 8 1957; *Xinhua* same date

"After the failure of its 'policy of strength', the United States is risking the danger of starting a war in the Middle East in an attempt to hold its toppling position in that area and in the whole capitalist world. It is that which is responsible for the explosive situation in the Middle East and has created a grave menace to world peace.

"The Soviet warning should have made the United States understand that in the era of inter-continental ballistic missiles, should it dare instigate a war, it would not escape heavy blows as it did during the last two world wars.

"This is a question which must be seriously considered not only by the United States but by the participants in the United States-led NATO and Bagdad^(sic) Pact blocs because of possible involvement of these countries in war due to their membership of these blocs. As to Turkey, the country selected by Washington as the spearhead of aggression against Syria, it should take a particularly serious attitude toward the warnings from the Soviet Union and the Arab states and immediately halt its stupid action of pulling the chestnuts out of the fire for the US." ⁷⁸

The nuclear issue was thus considered to fulfill a potentially disaggregating role with respect to unity within the pro-Western front.

If Turkey's actions carried the threat of an escalation to world war, Syrian defence equally carried the promise of preventing this:

"The Syrian struggle against United States aggression involves the question not only of Syria's interests. This is a struggle between peace and war. If the United States adventurist plan becomes a reality, it will be difficult to confine the armed conflict to a limited scope." ⁷⁹

CHINA'S DEMONSTRATION OF SOLIDARITY WITH SYRIA

One deduction which could be drawn from the above assessment was the need for solidarity with Syria. Chinese

⁷⁸ *Renmin Ribao* Oct 18 1957; *Xinhua* same date

⁷⁹ *Renmin Ribao* Oct 22 1957; *Xinhua* same date

Premier Zhou Enlai thus sent a letter to his Syrian opposite number on September 15 1957; it was delivered by the Chinese Ambassador and talks were held. The ambassador also held talks with the Syrian foreign minister, who told him that Syria "valued China's support, both official and non-official."⁸⁰ Xinhua News quoted many articles from the Syrian press expressing satisfaction at this support.⁸¹

The talks at Damascus were said to concern "the situation in West Asia".⁸² As we will argue subsequently, the term "West Asia" seems to have been used in preference to "Middle East" when the Chinese leadership wanted to emphasise the interconnectedness of their own struggles with those of the Arabs, and to show that the two were simply separate fronts of the same broadly-defined battlefield. Zhou Enlai himself received a Syrian students' delegation, stating that the Syrian people stood "in the front line of the struggle against colonialism",⁸³ and the connection was still more clearly made by a Chinese student leader addressing the same delegation, who

'compared the United States plots against Syria to United States aggression in Taiwan. "So we are fighting on a common front against imperialism."⁸⁴

These arguments anticipate in a very interesting way some of the ideas which were to emerge in the following year around the period immediately preceding the launching of the Taiwan Straits crisis.

⁸⁰ Xinhua Damascus Sept 15 1957; Xinhua London Sept 16 1957; *The Times* Sept 17.

⁸¹ e.g. Xinhua Damascus Sept 16-17 1957

⁸² Xinhua Damascus, September 15, 1957

⁸³ *Le Monde* Sept 8 1957

⁸⁴ Xinhua Sept 27 1957

Following the September 1957 discussions, in October of the same year Mao Zedong sent a message to Syrian President Quwatli where he stressed the parallel development of Syria's struggle "against colonialism" and friendly relations with China.⁸⁵ Once again, favourable comments in the Syrian press were quoted by the Chinese.

The policy of solidarity with Syria was not just seen as something for China itself, but even more as a policy urged upon the socialist camp as a whole. This is very clear in the context of Mao's interventions at the Moscow meeting. No sooner had he set foot upon the tarmac of Moscow airport than he remarked:

"The socialist camp headed by the great Soviet Union is a strong bulwark ensuring world peace and a faithful friend of all the peoples who refuse to suffer imperialist oppression and enslavement. At present, the US imperialist are directing their spearhead of aggression and war at the Arab nations [sic], at independent Syria."⁸⁶

Mao followed this up with his speech to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, where he referred to the intermediate zone theory in such a way as to emphasise that the spearhead of aggression and war was directed in the first instance against the national-independent countries, and went on to say that

"The United States is still planning to invade independent Syria through Turkey or Israel, it is still conspiring to subvert the anti-colonialist Egyptian government. This maniac aggressive policy of the United States has not only precipitated a crisis in the Middle East but has also created the danger of

⁸⁵ quoted in *Le Monde* Oct 19 1957

⁸⁶ MAO Tse-tung, "Speech at Moscow Airport" Nov 2 1957; text in *China Supports...* op. cit p 147.

a new world war. All people in the world who love peace and freedom stand by Syria."⁸⁷

Although shortly after this the Syrian crisis abated somewhat, the Chinese leadership were at pains to emphasise that the threat of a step-by-step realisation of American geopolitical goals had in no way been removed. Writing towards the end of November, Commentator referred to recent troop manoeuvres by Israel in the following terms:

"The desperate efforts of the United States imperialists to overturn Syria is [sic] due to the fact that Syria and Egypt are the central force of the Arab movement of national independence. Moreover, Syria is in the most important strategic position in the Middle East. In the eyes of the American aggressive clique, once a break-through in Syria takes place, Egypt will be isolated. In that case, efforts will be made easily to step up the attacks on and finish off the national independence movement throughout the Arab world. This would carry out the entire colonial plan outlined in the Dulles-Eisenhower Doctrine."⁸⁸

Our study so far thus suggests that there were several levels of analysis employed by Chinese official and semi-official analyses: the regional spatial analysis, in which the *weiqi* model appears appropriate; the interaction with domestic socio-economic factors, including the popular struggle both within individual states and over the region as a whole (Arab unity); the perceived role of Turkey as a regional power; the link with international politics at a wider level, both in terms of the expansion of US aims outside the Middle East, and conversely in terms of the influence of encouragement to other anti-imperialist forces; and finally the question of escalation in the direction of possible superpower conflict. These elements

⁸⁷ MAO Tse-tung, "Speech at a Joint Meeting of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR", Nov 6 1957; *People's China* Dec 1 1957 p. 7

⁸⁸ *Renmin Ribao* Commentator Nov 27 1957; *Xinhua* same date

were not separated from one another, and it is precisely their interconnection which determines the essence of the Chinese standpoint at that time.

It is against the background of this composite model that subsequent changes in the Chinese analysis can be assessed.

CHAPTER 5: IMPORTANT CHANGES IN THE CPC'S ASSESSMENT AT THE BEGINNING OF 1958

It will now be relevant to examine what were the new elements in the picture of the world system which the CPC drew out of the experience of the Syrian crisis, in order to see how this influenced the concrete strategies which they advocated and attempted to implement.

The overall balance of forces was not just conceived as an external factor influencing local situations, rather the image of the world system emerged *from* an analysis of local conflicts. The Syrian crisis was thus viewed as a trial of strength, whose outcome could reveal important facts about the functioning of the system. Understanding the CPC's approach in this way will give a more concrete perspective on the emergence of the East Wind theory.

One possible result of a shift to more favourable circumstances could be a reversal of trends, i.e. the spatial logic which we have just illustrated could begin to work for the progressive forces. The West's tactic of surrounding territories in order to 'capture' them could thus also work the other way round (not necessarily through invasions, but through influence on domestic social forces). An illustration of how this *might* operate is the following: at the time of the Syrian crisis it was stated that

"The United States plans to use this provocation to distract the attention of the Syrian authorities, forcing Syrian troops to concentrate on the frontier to the advantage of conspiring elements within the country."¹

A similar description could apply very closely to the manner in which the coup in Iraq occurred in the following

¹ DU Song (1957) op. cit.

year, in circumstances where the Iraqi authorities were preoccupied with military operations on the frontier 'to the advantage of conspiring elements within the country'.

Another possible result of a global shift to more favourable circumstances is implied in the way the original conflict was conceptualised, in the sense that even though the threat was considered serious in 1957, the obverse of this is that the West *needed* to win that particular confrontation:

"If the people of the Middle East obtain independence, it will be impossible for the imperialists to maintain their remnant colonies not only in Asia but also in Africa."¹

Thus a new, more favourable set of circumstances for an enlargement of the geographical scope of the front of independence forces could come into existence. Eventually, in the summer of 1958, these different implications were indeed followed up by the CPC analysis, notably on the question of the spread of the nationalist current to Africa.

These were all possible deductions from the favourable outcome of the Syrian crisis, but they were not the issues which the CPC mainly focussed upon at the turn of the year 1957-8. At that time, the single most important issue emphasised in assessing the new circumstances was probably the role of the Socialist Camp.

This emphasis should not necessarily be taken as an indicator of satisfaction, on the contrary, it could well have reflected a certain degree of anxiety about whether the Socialist Camp would in fact fulfill the historical role which was opening up for it. In practice, Beijing's

¹ *Renmin Ribao* Sept 10 op. cit.

increasing stress on the Asian-African peoples' movement later in the year 1958 was, when it occurred, not just a reflection of the intrinsic strength of that movement, but also a response to a feeling that these fears about the Socialist Camp were perhaps justified.

In fact, when the East Wind analysis was originally proposed, one of its most important functions was a didactic one with respect to the socialist countries. The main lesson was that the balance had shifted, so it was possible to be more bold in policy terms. This emerges quite clearly in the initial formulation of the concept in the January 1 editorial published by *Renmin Ribao*:

"The east wind prevails over the west wind, the forces of socialism are stronger than the forces of imperialism, and the peace forces are stronger than the forces of war. If there was still some dispute on this not so long ago, even among communists, now the fact is common knowledge even in the western world."³

The image was that the socialist countries had surmounted a difficult period, leading to better prospects for unity within and between them, and that consolidation had occurred around definite political principles. When the Chinese leadership looked back at the negative experience of the immediate past, an interesting link developed between their perception of events in the Middle East and in the socialist countries. This was partly a link by analogy, but was also seen as a causal connection. Thus Zhou Enlai, in a major foreign policy report of February 1958:

"In 1957 the imperialist aggressive clique, taking advantage of errors in the work of rectification in the socialist countries and relying on the opportunity created by difficulties we had in moving forward, stirred up a wild anti-Soviet, anti-Communist and anti-popular counter-current on a world scale."

³ *Renmin Ribao*, January 1st 1958; *Xinhua* same date.

This in turn, Zhou considered, exerted an influence upon internal developments, for example in China's own case:

"The anti-Soviet, anti-Communist, anti-popular counter-current stirred up by imperialism created among the bourgeois rightists in our country the false impression that there was an opportunity to be taken advantage of."⁴

This image parallels the manner in which external pressure was considered to influence the alignment of domestic forces in the case of Syria and Jordan. Such a linkage is made quite explicit in one article written in June 1957 which not only argues that the USA, losing confidence in armed force since the experience of Suez, was pursuing a general policy of subversion aimed at making bourgeois and feudal forces "raise their heads again", but also refers to US tactics of pressurising Syria, including a blockade on cotton exports, saying that these provide favourable circumstances for "bourgeois rightist elements" within Syria.⁵

This strikingly illustrates that there was a certain process of osmosis between domestic and international political concerns even before the inauguration of the Great Leap Forward.

The feeling was, then, that socialist and national forces had faced a common test in the negative circumstances of 1957 - and had surmounted it respectively in the Moscow Meeting and the favourable outcome of the Syrian crisis. The different forces had come through it and united amongst themselves. In this respect the Cairo Conference

⁴ ZHOU Enlai, "Muqian guoji xingshi he wo guo waijiao zhengce", *Xinhua Banyue Kan*, op. cit., p. 35

⁵ JIANG Yuanchun, "Lun zui jin Zhong Dong xingshi", *Shijie Zhishi* XII (June 6)

duplicated the Moscow Meeting, its outstanding lesson being that

"What imperialism dreads most is the people's firm unity"⁶

It may be assumed that this would in turn create favourable circumstances for the two forces to unite with one another. In fact the crucial issue, and the most important single concern in united front terms was, for the Chinese, the correct approach for the socialist countries to adopt with respect to nationalist struggles in the intermediate zone.

It is thus important to understand the parameters in which socialist camp action was expected to be expressed. One of the most important themes in Chinese material from this period was in fact the notion that an incremental growth of US gains in local conflict situations would create a logic leading not just to an expansion of the area under US control but to a possible escalation of the level of conflict. Thus one of the major lessons of the Syrian crisis was seen as the need for action on the part of socialist countries in support of national struggles in order to prevent this escalation occurring.

The implication was that, so long as the conflict remained focussed in the intermediate zone, not only did this serve to shield the Socialist Camp (as mentioned in the Anna Louise Strong interview), but it also served to maintain the conflict at a level *below* that of direct superpower confrontation, with its attendant risk of nuclear war. Hence, to continue to tie the adversary down at this level was an important contribution to maintaining peace at the highest - global - level. Thus relations on a correct basis with the nationalist forces which were fulfilling

⁶ *Renmin Ribao* editorial, marking the conclusion of the Cairo Conference, January 4th 1958; *Xinhua* same date.

this function became a major task of united front policies from the socialist point of view.

This helps to explain why some of the formulations put forward at the time of that crisis sounded quite a dire or pessimistic note in terms of the possible outcomes envisaged. Such ideas implicitly contradict the Soviet view that the Socialist Camp should play a responsible role in alleviating tension; for the CPC on the contrary international tension was viewed as a necessary product of imperialist policy, and larger-scale wars were considered most likely to arise as a penalty for not giving whole-hearted support to anti-imperialist movements.

Realising the favourable potential implied in the East Wind assessment of the world balance of forces was by no means something which would come about automatically. The crucial condition, from the Chinese point of view, was the subjective one. A latent, objectively favourable shift in the world system could only be translated into real gains by means of correct policies, which in turn implied progressive actors uniting around correct principles or lines.

The condition for fulfilling this duty was thus placed at the level of policies adopted by socialist countries, in other words in the subjective sphere. Accordingly, a crucial area of the Chinese critique of socialist policy was the question of perception, an issue which can be understood concretely in terms of the interpretation of certain specific features of the system. None was more important, in the CPC's vocabulary, than the notion of positions of strength.

POSITIONS OF STRENGTH

The phrase "positions of strength" recurs with considerable frequency in the Chinese analysis of US strategy. It was

seen as having two important aspects: firstly a physical process of concentrating forces regionally and secondly a psychological dimension, an attempt by the adversary to appear stronger than he really was, thus making gains partly by bluff.

From the point of view of the first of these aspects, that of the physical concentration of forces, a crucial issue would appear to be the relationship between distribution of power at a global level (reflected in the 'East Wind' idea) and within a regional subsystem.

The relative strength of forces would not necessarily be the same at these two levels. In a situation where imperialism was well entrenched globally it could still have local 'weak links'. However the interpretation which appears to have been espoused in the early part of 1958 was rather the opposite, i.e. one where imperialism was weak in terms of the global balance of forces, but could still prevail in a particular local conflict by concentrating its forces, provided that the progressive forces could not bring their latent overall superiority to bear. This is the concrete strategic context for united front policies - they would serve to allow anti-imperialist forces to express their global superiority in an effective local form.

As far as the psychological aspect is concerned, what matters in international relations is not just the objective distribution of forces - however this is defined - but how it is *perceived* by decision makers. There are a number of points of concordance between Chinese approaches and issues referred to in Western International Relations theory, not just on the role of perception in general, but in terms of the element of bluff involved in certain gaming models.

Some of these ideas can be illustrated with reference to Chinese treatment of the Syrian crisis. In the period around October of 1957, the Chinese believed Syria to be actually weaker than the forces ranged against her *locally*. One article from this period gives figures showing the disparity between Syria and Turkey, in the latter's favour. At the same time the article effectively warns American decision-makers that in contemplating an aggressive course of action it is necessary to take into consideration not only the local but also the overall global balance: they should

"properly appraise the strength of the world's anti-aggressive forces."⁷

An interesting illustration of the concentration of strength, or what later came to be known as 'rapid deployment', can be seen in the Chinese analysis of the role of Western naval forces. Anticipating the importance attached to the Mediterranean in the context of western reaction to the coup in Iraq in the summer of 1958,⁸ the press referred in October 1957 to joint US, British and Turkish manoeuvres in the Mediterranean and Gulf areas as being intended by the western powers to "demonstrate their 'enormous strength'"⁹ During the crisis in Jordan it was remarked how, at short notice, the Sixth Fleet could be brought in to carry out threatening manoeuvres, in co-ordination with pro-Western palace and feudal forces within that country.¹⁰ The Chinese considered that the West had had some success in the case of Jordan, thus being able to

⁷ *Dagong Bao*, October 19 1957; *Xinhua* October 21.

⁸ for example, LI Jin, "Mei diguozhuyi bazhan Libanun di yinmou biran shibai", *Shijie Zhishi*, 1958, XV (August 1)

⁹ *Renmin Ribao* Editorial October 18, 1957. *China Supports* p. 150.

¹⁰ JIANG Yuanchun, *Shijie Zhishi* 1957 op. cit.

use that country, provisionally at least, as a basis for carrying out expansionist activities in other parts of the Middle East. Thus at the height of the 1957 crisis the Chinese press remarked upon the unloading - throughout the night, by floodlight - of western arms in Jordan,¹¹ another example of a rapid concentration of forces facilitated by western presence in the Mediterranean.

However, this local power, it is argued, is not so terrible if it is seen in a global context, particularly if one makes a sober and accurate analysis. Thus:

"The United States Sixth Fleet may have the effect of frightening weak-nerved people, but it would be too fantastic for the United States to use it to challenge the whole world's anti-aggressive forces."¹²

The element of perception, of understanding, comes in at this point: the crucial thing was to grasp the potentialities for a convergence of popular forces at a wider level, and not be misled by the apparent local superiority of the other side.

A basic element in the Chinese leadership's view was in fact the notion that Western 'positions of strength' were also potentially a source of weakness. This was so because the political regimes in pro-Western state actors would by definition be anti-popular, and would thus themselves become targets of struggle. An example is provided by British bases in Cyprus which were seen as another significant element in rapid deployment of western forces. Plans to devise a constitutional settlement which could enable Britain to retain its forces in Cyprus were seen as a source of weakness, because they would stir up popular

¹¹. DU Song, *Shijie Zhishi* 1957, op. cit.

¹² *Dagong Bao*, October 19 1957; *Xinhua* October 21.

feeling against Britain.¹³ In Jordan, the "kind of situation in which the government relies upon military terror to maintain itself cannot last long."¹⁴ Thus even the 'positions of strength' themselves were viewed as stimuli to the formation of anti-Western united fronts of popular forces.

While arguing that Western strategy had to be defeated in positional terms, the CPC nevertheless resisted the view that its own camp was simply beating the other side at their own game. There was a different kind of logic at work. In the spring of 1958 Chinese leaders like Soong Ching-ling (Song Qingling) and Guo Moruo conducted a campaign to mobilise public opinion against US positions-of-strength tactics, both conventional and nuclear.¹⁵ Simultaneously, another major ideological campaign was being carried out against Yugoslavia, one of the key issues being criticism of the view that the socialist camp could be considered to be pursuing a policy of "'positions of strength and struggle for hegemony.'"¹⁶ On this there was agreement with the Soviet leadership who also attacked Yugoslavia's position in that "they attribute to the USSR a position of strength policy."¹⁷

At the same time, while the Socialist countries were not expected to practice hegemonic positions-of-strength policies, it was certainly felt that they had in some sense

¹³ GE Ping, "Saipulusi zen yang le?", *Shijie Zhishi* 1958, July 5, p. 20

¹⁴ JIANG Yuanchun, *Shijie Zhishi* 1957 op. cit.

¹⁵ see the interview with KUO Mo-jo in *Peking Review* May 20 1958 and the article by SOONG Ching-ling in *Peking Review* April 8 1958.

¹⁶ *Renmin Ribao* editorial, May 5 1958; text in *Peking Review* May 13

¹⁷ see *Pravda* of May 9 1958 quoted in BASS and MARBURY eds *The Soviet-Yugoslav Controversy - A Documentary Record* New York 1959.

a responsibility to puncture the appearance of strength cultivated by the USA, in the context of the power relationship between imperialism on the one hand and the two progressive groupings - the socialist camp and the Asian-African movement - on the other.

In terms of the key united front issue, that of building the relationship between the forces of socialism and of national independence, the issue of making a correct appraisal of the enemy was, from the Chinese point of view, crucial. The danger was perceived to be that the Soviet leadership would be discouraged from aiding the independence movements by the risk of nuclear escalation, and this would embolden the USA to a point where the local conflict might get out of hand and a global confrontation would in fact be more likely.

THE ROLE OF TREATY ORGANISATIONS

This issue can be studied in more detail in the context of what was seen as the most important mechanism for concentrating enemy forces, namely the use of military bases and pacts. On this question, the CPC continued to 'take the enemy seriously tactically' even in the newly favourable circumstances defined by the East Wind analysis. Such an assessment of tactical risk was in no way excluded by the favourable assessment of the overall balance of forces.

We can distinguish different themes in the Chinese treatment of bases and blocs: (a) the use of these means to consolidate Western control over the specific countries in which they are implanted, (b) their use in concentrating forces with the aim of winning regional gains at the expense of national-independent regimes, (c) their function in subduing the intermediate area as part of a geopolitical strategy for surrounding the Socialist Camp, (d)

their actual military threat against the USSR. Within this multi-level analysis, the aspect on which the CPC placed the greatest emphasis was that the countries of the intermediate zone suffer more directly from imperialism, and it is their direct struggle - in which the fate of imperialism's wider strategy is bound up - which assumes the greatest immediate significance.

The most concentrated Chinese discussion of Western policy with regard to bases and treaty organisations within our period falls during the early part of 1958, and illustrates well the complicated relationship between the different themes which we have mentioned.

In the summer of 1957 the US goal had been described as one of turning the Baghdad Pact into "a North African and West Asian anti-communist league."¹⁸ The formation of the Baghdad Pact's military organisation at the same time was seen both in terms of its local role in facilitating Western dominance in the area in that it "once more exposes America's aggressive intentions in the Middle East," and in terms of a broader strategic role as part of plans to encircle the Soviet Union and eastern Europe and thus constitute a menace to world peace.¹⁹ The link with other treaty organisations was also considered important:

"The US-plotted Bagdad/^(sic)bloc with Turkey on the West and Pakistan on the East, plus the NATO and SEATO blocs constitute an encirclement of the Socialist Camp."²⁰

In January 1958 at the time when the shift to a more favourable analysis of the world situation was being made, a Baghdad Pact summit was held, to which the Chinese media

¹⁸ JIANG Yuanchun (June, 1957) op. cit, p. 10

¹⁹ *Guangming Ribao*, June 8 1958; *Xinhua* same date

²⁰ *Renmin Ribao* September 10 1957; *Xinhua* same date.

devoted considerable attention, arguing that the USA was using this occasion to increase its influence in the Pact generally, and to draw Lebanon (which had accepted the Eisenhower Doctrine) and Jordan into it; at the same time, it was argued that the USA was planning to establish nuclear bases not only in Pakistan, but also in Iraq and possibly in Iran.²¹ In terms of the links between the Baghdad Pact and NATO, attention was drawn to the key role of 'Washington's loyal flunkey', the Turkish leader Adnan Menderes.²²

Besides its use in encircling the Socialist Camp, the Pact was seen as a means of breaking the unity of forces with the region. The January meeting was attended by Secretary of State Dulles, his purpose, according to the Chinese press, being to boost the '"morale"' of the Pact members²³ and offer the sinister 'bait' of '"new economic aid"',²⁴ while US goals were also said to include that of dividing regional states against each other in order to further its goal of penetrating the area economically; the main target of attack being the national-independent stance of Syria.²⁵

However the Chinese leadership came to the conclusion, expressed in a *Renmin Ribao* article of February 1, that Dulles had failed in his intrigues. In this, the interaction of local forces with Soviet initiatives was considered to have played a significant role. The failure was attributed not only to contradictions within the Pact and to the fact that 'The Moslem countries which

²¹. summary of the Chinese press on Jan 24 1958, in *Xinhua News*, same date.

²². *Dagong Bao* Jan. 28 1958; *Xinhua* same date.

²³. summary of Jan. 27; *Xinhua*, same date.

²⁴. *Dagong Bao*, Jan. 28 1958.

²⁵. *ibid*.

participated in the Bagdad/^(sic)Pact suffered serious financial difficulties by following the United States policy of arms expansion and war preparations',²⁶ but also to the issuing of a *Tass* warning by the Moscow.²⁷ Thus,

'The struggle for peace and against imperialism waged by the people of the Asian and African countries had developed to unprecedented dimensions and the Soviet Union had made a timely exposure of the United States intrigues and a warning to the United States.'²⁸

Among the different functions of US bases referred to in the Chinese analysis at this time, the nuclear level received considerable attention:

'The United States wanted to turn Turkey into a base to launch rockets at Soviet territoryBut the mighty deterrent strength of the Soviet Union prevented war being unleashed against it by the United States. It was evident, too, that the building up of Turkish military strength by the United States was directed against the national independence movement in the Arab countries.'²⁹

But the argument that the Soviet Union was strong enough to neutralise the nuclear dimension did not prevent the CPC from continuing to make considerable play of the fact that if nuclear conflict did break out, the states which were part of the Western strategic structure would inevitably become embroiled in it, the clear implication being that US bases can only expect to become targets of pre-emptive Soviet strikes:

²⁶. *Renmin Ribao* Feb. 1 1958; *Xinhua* Feb. 3.

²⁷. *Dagong Bao* Jan. 23 1958; *Xinhua* same date. The Soviet warning was issued on Jan. 21.

²⁸. *Dagong Bao* Feb.1 1958; *Xinhua* Feb. 3.

²⁹ *Renmin Ribao* Dec 8 1957; *Xinhua* same date

'The Bagdad^(sic)/Pact countries would share the fate of the NATO powers to suffer the menace of rockets and nuclear weapons in the event of war.'³⁰

In general, during the early part of 1958 the Chinese leadership was to launch a propaganda assault on Western bases and treaty organisations in different parts of the world, arguing that their formation conformed with the "strategic framework of atomic war".³¹ In the case of Southeast Asia, too, it was argued that

"The setting up of such bases in more countries not only will tighten US control over these countries and increase the danger of war, but will bring incalculable disaster upon these countries first of all should war be started by the United States."³²

NEW ANALYSIS OF INTER-IMPERIALIST RELATIONS

In fact in the early months of 1958, Chinese emphasis on the importance of the Soviet role only seems to have increased. A plausible explanation would link this to a very important change which occurred in another aspect of the CPC's analysis of the world balance of forces - the question of relations between the major Western powers.

Thus, over the space of a few months from the autumn of 1957 to the spring of 1958 a major shift occurred in the Chinese analysis whereby the theme of inter-imperialist contention - previously a very important element - was strongly downgraded, at least in its political aspect.

At the time of Suez Mao had said "Did Britain direct its spearhead chiefly at Egypt? No. Britain's moves were

³⁰ *Guangming Ribao*, January 24, 1958; *Xinhua* same date

³¹ *Peking Review* May 13 1958

³² ROYAL INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS, *Documents on International Affairs*, 1958, p. 484

against the United States, much as the moves of the United States were against Britain" ³³. Since then the CPC's image had already altered radically. Even by late 1957 British military deployment in Jordan had been seen as complementary to, rather than a rival to, US deployment in Turkey. However at that time the theoretical framework still stressed the role of inter-imperialist rivalry. In the context of US political manoeuvrings over the Baghdad Pact at the beginning of 1958, the Chinese still saw things in terms of a process whereby America "will continue its efforts to seize power from Britain and bind every member of the bloc to the American war chariot", ³⁴ and Britain was even accused by the authoritative *Renmin Ribao* Observer of "challenging the United States for leadership of the western camp." ³⁵

Very soon afterwards, however, a new model was developed reflecting the fact that, while there would be continuing struggle over economic interests, the Western powers could also realise their overriding interest in co-operation at a political level. Thus, in the case of Africa,

"In the economic field, US monopoly capital is trying gradually to oust British and French capital in South Africa, the Congo, Rhodesia and Morocco, so as to bring these regions under its exclusive control. In the political field, to hoodwink the African people, the US imperialists make a show of opposing the British and French ways of running their colonies but actually they give military and financial support to the Anglo-French colonialists and openly take their side in the United Nations." ³⁶

³³ MAO Zedong *Selected Works* Vol V, Peking (FLP) 1977 p 361

³⁴ *Guangming Ribao* Feb 1 1958; *Xinhua* Feb 3

³⁵ *Renmin Ribao* Observer, February 9, 1958; *Xinhua* February 10.

³⁶ JIN Chunhua, article in *Shijie Zhishi*, quoted in *Peking Review* May 6 1958

This implies a degree of co-ordinated logic in imperialist policy-making which would seem to clash with some earlier Chinese formulations.

In the context of the Lebanese crisis in May 1958 this implied shift was made quite explicit, the Chinese media referring to the USA, Britain and France "working in close collaboration to undermine peace in the Middle East".³⁷ And shortly afterwards Liu Shaoqi in his Political Report to the VIII CPC Congress gave an official and high-level appraisal of this change, arguing that for the moment contradictions between the capitalist powers had been patched up through NATO, the Baghdad Pact and SEATO; the treaty organisations are thus seen as a vehicle for inter-imperialist co-operation, as opposed to rivalry as they had been seen before, such co-operation being "for the objective of opposing communism, the people and the national liberation movement."³⁸

This marked a very significant shift. While the CPC perceived opposite trends in the two camps, reflected in the concept of the East Wind prevailing over the West Wind, they apparently no longer considered that the growing unity of one camp was reflected in the *disunity* of the other, as had somewhat simplistically been assumed in the January 1 Editorial, for example.³⁹ Was there then a possibility that imperialist countries could respond to the less favourable circumstances by pulling together? Whatever the case, it is certain that the question of how united the *opposition* was would have an important bearing on the response of the progressive camp in united front terms.

³⁷ *Dagong Bao* May 21 1958; *Xinhua* May 22

³⁸ LIU Shaoqi, "Report..." op. cit, *Peking Review* June 3 1958 p. 7

³⁹ *Renmin Ribao* January 1, op. cit.

HEIGHTENED EMPHASIS ON ROLE OF SOCIALIST CAMP

The CPC clearly felt that the imperialists were pursuing a coherent strategy, and if it was true that they were to some extent successful in overcoming their divisions, this strategy might even become increasingly coherent. This realisation was at least initially manifested in the sentiment that the role of the Socialist Camp would be increasingly important, presumably in terms of putting forward a coherent strategy counter to this. China's capacity to act as an individual state was strictly limited, but it would be a different matter if Chinese policy could successfully be urged upon the Socialist Camp as a whole. At least in the early part of 1958, while the Chinese press was paying considerable attention to Western diplomatic activity over the treaty organisations, the emphasis placed upon the Soviet role was also extremely strong. There was a feeling that a testing-time in international politics was approaching, with its storm centre in the Middle East, and that the Socialist Camp, together with other world-political forces, would be severely tried in this process. The Chinese certainly did not see the Socialist Camp's role as that of a proletarian *leading core* within the overall progressive movement, whose leadership other forces had to accept, but they may well have seen it as filling a necessary role as a kind of *vanguard force*. In conformity with the general mood in internal affairs during the Leap Forward, when a mass revolutionary upsurge existed it could be seen as a dangerous and abnormal situation if the vanguard were to lag behind or get out of phase with it. For this reason the Chinese selectively praised what they saw as the positive trends in Soviet policy.

In terms of Soviet peace initiatives or proposals for negotiations with the West, the Chinese covered them from the point of view of implying that they were useful mainly

in exposing imperialist aggressiveness. When the Soviet government on September 3 1957 proposed to the USA an agreement on non-intervention in the Middle East, the Chinese argued that the Americans' real reply was a Baghdad Pact meeting in London on September 23 which discussed plans for a concerted attack against Syria.⁴⁰ In his systematic treatment of the world situation put forward on February 10, 1958, Zhou Enlai drew together the threads of recent Soviet diplomacy in the two-month period since the close of the Moscow meeting, including firstly a plan for calling a summit conference of peaceful states which were not members of any bloc, such as India, Afghanistan, Egypt, Yugoslavia, Sweden and Austria, secondly, the proposal for ending nuclear tests, thirdly, the Rapacki Plan for a nuclear-free Europe, fourthly, a proposal for a non-aggression pact to be signed by members of NATO and the Warsaw Pact, and fifthly, a proposal to guarantee the peace and neutrality of the states in the Middle East. Zhou contented himself with saying that this fully demonstrates the peaceful stance of the Soviet Union,⁴¹ without implying that there was any likelihood that such initiatives would modify the conduct of imperialism.

However, it was an entirely different matter when the Chinese were discussing Soviet *warnings* to the West or militant expressions of solidarity with the national movements. In this case great importance was attached to the Soviet role. The Soviet diplomatic warning of September 1957 had for example been described by *Renmin Ribao* as 'a great inspiration to Arab nationalism'⁴², and in the early part of 1958 such solidarity was still considered a major condition for the national movements'

⁴⁰. *Renmin Ribao* Sept 26 1957; *Xinhua* same date.

⁴¹. ZHOU Enlai, "Muqian guoji xingshi he wo guo waijiao zhengce" *Xinhua Banyue Kan* op. cit. p. 35.

⁴² *Renmin Ribao* Sept 6 1957; *Xinhua* same date

success. In the speech just quoted, Zhou Enlai thus stated that:

"A strong socialist-camp presence and its powerful support for national independence movements has inspired all people striving for or safeguarding their freedom and independence and has formed an increasingly advantageous factor in their valiantly-progressing struggle against imperialism and colonialism."⁴³

It is particularly interesting that we find this same sentence quoted in full in another authoritative article, published in April under the signature Dong Feng (East Wind).⁴⁴ The significant point is that the article in question is on the topic of the ongoing character of the Bandung spirit. Bandung was the epitome of an authentic Asian-African initiative, yet the article goes out of its way to affirm the influence of the Socialist Camp upon that trend. Dong Feng thus argues that "The ties of friendly co-operation between the socialist countries and the Asian-African nationalist countries are getting constantly stronger", that "the Socialist Camp support all national independence movements," and that those who wish to commit aggression must be prepared to reckon with the "just indignation" of the socialist countries, which "strengthens the morale" of the national independence forces.

As usual during this period, events in the Middle East are used to illustrate general conclusions: imperialism had planned, according to Dong Feng's argument, to subvert the Egyptian and Syrian governments and restore colonialism...

"but owing to the Soviet Union's severe warning, owing to the unanimous censure of the peaceloving nations and peoples, and also to the united resistance of the

⁴³. ZHOU Enlai, speech of Feb 10, 1958, op. cit.

⁴⁴. DONG Feng "Wanlong jingshen po lang qian jin" *Shijie Zhishi*, 1958, VIII.

Egyptian and Syrian peoples, the imperialists' plots could not come to fruition. It must be pointed out that the spirit of resolution exhibited by the USSR in restraining the aggressive adventurism of the imperialists played an exceedingly important part in this."⁴⁵

This was the assessment in the early part of 1958, and the strength of a statement like this will serve to measure the abruptness of the change which was to follow shortly.

ROLE OF THE NATIONALIST COUNTRIES

The importance of Socialist Camp solidarity in no way implied however that the Chinese were less interested in the strengths of the national movements at this point in time. In a climate in which enormous emphasis was placed upon the ability to stand up to imperialism and puncture its apparent strength, the Arab nationalist movement also came in for considerable praise.

As we have just argued, the experience of the 'counter-current' of 1957 was something where the nationalist countries of the Middle East and the socialist countries were considered by the Chinese to have faced similar threats, a similar interaction between external pressure and the activity of 'reactionary' social strata internally. By the early part of 1958 it was thought that this counter current had basically been reversed - hence the idea of the East Wind prevailing over the West. The parallels between the two situations were evident not only in the threats faced, but also in the methods used to overcome these, in other words building closer unity through a process of discussion aimed at arriving at a common position. This is illustrated in references to the Moscow and Cairo conferences in a similar context. Discussions like these were considered important in the process of building united

⁴⁵. *ib.* p. 7.

fronts in a principled way, and similar trends in the Socialist and nationalist movements would also tend to reinforce one another.

It would appear that an occasion such as this reveals the CPC - as in the case of the reference to 'bourgeois rightists' in Syria quoted above - scrutinising the Middle East through spectacles tinted by their own experience and policy demands, rather than the concrete reality of the region.

In the circumstances of late 1957, Egypt's action in hosting the Cairo Conference was an act of defiance, and this aspect was strongly emphasised in an account written by a member of China's delegation to that Conference, Zhao Puchu. He refers in detail to a speech made by Abdel Nasser at a mass rally, where Nasser symbolically handed over to the state a sum of money which had been intended as a bribe to buy certain people over into the service of the West, describing this as a form of nationalisation, similar to that employed over the Suez Canal. Referring to this unsuccessful Western strategy, Zhao Puchu says that

"this calculation has very obviously proved a losing bet, and has led to a great loss of face."

If handled in this way, he argues, the imperialists are helpless - they become a laughing stock. Even so, they will fail to draw the lessons from their defeat, but will continue to make similar attempts in the future, and thus prove the cause of their own undoing....

"until they end by being consumed in the fire which they themselves unleashed. The case with Nasser just

mentioned only marks the end of an episode in the introductory chapter." ⁴⁶

The above assessment is interesting in relation to the importance attached to defeating the psychological aspects of the adversary's local deployment of power. It does, however, also show that the Chinese were clearly selecting those aspects of the movement which happened to conform to their own overall picture of the tasks of the moment. It still needs to be asked how far their model was able to accomodate the intrinsic complexity of a phenomenon such as Arab nationalism, as a basis for a realistic assessment of united front possibilities.

The CPC did have some tools in its body of theory which could potentially be advantageous in making such a concrete analysis. In comparison to some other parts of the Communist movement China had the advantage of being a developing country itself, with direct experience of semi-colonialism in the past. This is evident in the fact that there were interesting innovations in Chinese theory. The CPC broke with the image of stagnancy and other negative stereotypes in relation to China's own culture and traditions. What it had done in relation to its own society could potentially be done in analysing others. Thus for example, in the article by Zhao Puchu cited above, we find an interesting positive account of the early civilisations of Egypt.⁴⁷

SPECIFICITIES OF THE ARAB REGION

Some of the strengths of the CPC's stance could be seen in looking at international links between developing countries. The Chinese took a long historical view on

⁴⁶ ZHAO Puchu, "Chu Ya-Fei renmin tuan jie dahui zaji", *Shijie Zhishi* 1958 III (February) pp 12-15

⁴⁷ ZHAO Puchu, op. cit.

international relations, not seeing the European states-system as the point of reference but rather looking back to a pattern of relations which had existed in the pre-colonial period. This in turn implies a very interesting dimension of united-front building, in that this process is seen in one sense as a reassertion of an earlier pattern of relations, though in a changed form. This dimension could easily be neglected if one were to interpret the role of the united front in Chinese policy purely in terms of political inputs deriving from modern political ideas.

One article presenting a historical study of the relations between China and the Arabs could serve as an illustration of this interpretation of the historical dynamic of Afro-Asian unity in a wider sense. It sets out an argument which can be summarized as follows: the exchange of relations between different continents, cultures and peoples has played a vital role in the advance of civilisation; the importance of this factor has, however, been minimised by Western scholarship because of its class stand; this process of interchange was cut short owing to the action of imperialism; but it could not be suppressed for long, and is now reasserting itself through the current movement, in a changed form, since politically it now has an anti-imperialist character.⁴⁸ Specifically, the authors argue that the past history of exchanges between China and the Arab nation

"not only enriched the cultures of the two nations concerned, but also furthered the progress of world civilisation."

Although these relations were interrupted by imperialism, nothing could prevent their being renewed; and after the

⁴⁸ ZHU Chengcai, MA Shuhua and ZHANG Peide, "Zhongguo shi Alabo ge guo renmin di zhengcheng pengyou", *Jiaoxue yu Yanjiu* 1958, VIII (August) pp 9-11

Bandung conference, "they have developed speedily on a new basis."⁴⁹

Noteworthy in the above is the view of the Arab nation as a single entity. The CPC did thus have a theoretical apparatus which could potentially be valuable in examining the historical dynamic of relations *within* the Arab world.

A certain specificity of politics in the Arab area was recognised, insofar as popular forces expressed themselves partly at a state-centric level, and partly at wider regional levels of solidarity. This duality is reflected in statements such as the following:

"Jordan's affairs should be managed by the people of Jordan themselves, and the affairs of the Arab countries should be managed by the Arab people themselves, in which no foreign intervention is allowed."⁵⁰

It is interesting to note that the point of reference at both levels is the people, thus confirming the impression that regimes were viewed mainly as intermediaries in united front building.

The problem of such formulations is however that they implicitly reflect a view of Arab nationalism essentially as a regional form taken by anti-imperialist solidarity. This is not inappropriate if it is taken as *one aspect* of a complex and multifaceted phenomenon. The CPC's tendency was however to reduce practically everything to this single dimension, and this posed problems in all departments of their analysis of the Middle East.

⁴⁹ *ibid.*

⁵⁰ CHINA Government "Protest to the Government of Great Britain" July 18 1958 in *China Supports...* op. cit p. 185

While official Chinese policy statements tended to treat the Arab phenomenon mainly as an example of regional co-operation, specialists did in fact make some effort to grapple with the specificities of the situation. Important among these being the existence of several states within a single nation.

Thus a study of "The Arab Nation and Arab Nationalism" written by Mu Zhi takes the view that the different Arab states are entities "formed out of the Arab nation."⁵¹

ROLE OF ISLAM

But what of the role of Islam, which is undoubtedly the really the big issue? The USSR, having originally condemned Pan-Islamism as a trend, was moving painfully towards a reassessment of Arab Nationalism in this period.⁵² What would the CPC's attitude be? We have referred to certain aspects of the Chinese Communist tradition which could potentially prove helpful in making a creative analysis, but there were also other, more negative aspects of the CPC's specific brand of socialism. Particularly important in this was the homogenising approach which was manifested in relation to China's own minorities, the concrete expression of an attitude of mind in which cultural specificities - particularly religion - were viewed as mere historical relics whose contemporary significance was diminishing practically to zero. In practice, it was largely this aspect which was to predominate in Chinese approaches to Islam. Thus the overall conceptual approach which in China's internal situation was manifested in the

⁵¹ MU Zhi, "Alabo minzu yu Alabo minzuzhuyi", *Shijie Zhishi* 1958 IV pp. 15-16

⁵² See BOLTON A.R.C., *Soviet Middle East Studies*, Oxford (OUP for RIIA) 1959

tendency to homogenisation, was expressed in terms of international analysis by a reductionist tendency to force the local reality into a mould dictated by the CPC's *global* analysis, rather than critically examining the latter in the light of concrete cases.

Thus, to pursue our examination of the Mu Zhi article, in substance Islam is seen merely as a *historical* factor contributing to the *original* process of nation-building. He argues that the decisive factor in the Arabs' becoming a mighty nation was Mohamed's leadership and success in producing a unifying religion. The author gives a clearly modernist interpretation of Islam, stressing its social conscience and concern for the poor. Also significant - in connection with united front issues in general, and with the specific line on promoting unity among Arab states as a major aim - is the stress placed on Mohamed's condemnation of inter-tribal strife.

The impression is of a historical framework in which an early impulse was provided by social ideas which expressed themselves in a religious form, while in the contemporary situation the local people are moving in the direction of a 'truer consciousness' ... their ideas are shedding the religious shell to become directly political, leaving the religious element as an obsolescent remnant.

Crucial in this process was considered to be the clash with imperialism, which provides a directly political focus to the unity of the Arab nation. Thus Mu Zhi quotes a memorandum sent from John Foster Dulles to Eisenhower in 1956 to the effect that after the Suez War Arab nationalism constitutes "a major threat to the West", and explicitly depicts Arab national unity as the principal target of US strategy, arguing that

"the spearhead of American aggression is not directed against one or the other Arab state, it points toward

the entire Arab nation; and the purpose is to open up breaches in Arab nationalism, to smash it from a point internal to the Arab people themselves." ⁵³

Quoting Abdel Nasser to the effect that "Arab nationalism will not fade away, because it is a belief and thus an indestructible object", the author argues that in trying to disintegrate Arab nationalism, Dulles simply "fails to understand history, and also fails to understand the present era." Events during the Syrian crisis only confirms the fact that

"....rather than being weakened [Arab nationalism] has been increasingly consolidated.....This is because Arab nationalism is the result of historical development; by now it embodies the common hopes and interests of the entire Arab people".⁵⁴

This approach which takes a single Arab nation as its basic point of reference presents some significant originality in comparison with the more conventional state-centric view of the official Party media. Despite this, even this author gives a strong impression of working within a fairly rigid framework where ideas derived from the CPC's overall international, and even domestic, policies become the operative criteria for a blatantly selective approach to the experience of the area in question.

Recognition of the positive aspects of non-Western societies was important, but what of elements of conflict within them? Interestingly, there was a polemic in Chinese historiography at the time about the importance and nature of class conflict in the period before the advent of strong

⁵³ MU Zhi op. cit. p. 15

⁵⁴ *ibid.*

Western influence.⁵⁵ The existence of this debate is important, but there is a strong impression that instead of attempting to establish the historical facts as the starting point, the debate was much more a question of contemporary line struggles being projected into the past. This was in fact a clear tendency of Chinese Communist historiography throughout the Maoist period.⁵⁶

SOCIAL DIFFERENTIATION IN ARAB COUNTRIES

In the case of analysing other developing societies, the impression is that the needs of contemporary united front policy were the dominant consideration, leading to an interpretation which minimised social differentiation.

In historical terms this is perhaps understandable, but an understanding of social differentiation within *contemporary* Arab nationalism would be indispensable for the formulation of realistic policies, including ones geared to promoting unity. The overwhelming impression of the material in this particular period is that the Chinese used general references to 'the people' as a substitute for deeper social analysis.

In the course of the year 1958, however much attention the Chinese devoted to developing diplomatic relations with the nationalist regimes, the most important aspect of international contacts was definitely at the people-to-people level, which was seen as the core of the revolutionary movement.

⁵⁵ See FEUERWERKER A. *History in Communist China*, Cambridge Mass (MIT) 1968.

⁵⁶ This tendency was later taken to a high point in the campaign to criticise Lin Biao and Confucius in the early 1970s.

Chinese treatment of the Cairo Conference is extremely interesting in this context, because it illustrates a particular way of conceiving of people-based united fronts which some commentators seem to miss. The literature exhibits a certain tendency to contrast on the one hand a united front 'from above' between governments and on the other one 'from below' which is implicitly more revolutionary. This is not necessarily how the CPC itself viewed things, at least in this period. The people-based united front is people-based because it is conceived in a manner which downplays the state-centric dimension, not because it is necessarily more narrow or 'leftist' than one between governments.

As Zhou Enlai put it in a major speech shortly after the founding conference of the AAPSO,

"The representation at the Cairo Conference exhibited an extremely wide range of social strata, and shows that the movement to grasp national independence and safeguard world peace is already increasingly becoming a movement of the peoples of all the countries of Asia and Africa."⁵⁷

Another interesting formulation was put forward at the Conference itself by delegation head Guo Moruo, himself a significant figure in united front work. He remarked that this meeting was better than Bandung because it was on a non-governmental basis and thus

"we can express our people's aspirations and demands more freely and work together to realise them."⁵⁸

⁵⁷ ZHOU Enlai, "Muqian guoji xingshi he wo guo waijiao zhengce", *Xinhua Ban Yue Kan* February 1958

⁵⁸ KUO Mo-jo, Address to the Cairo Conference, *Xinhua* (Cairo) Dec 31 1957; *Survey of China Mainland Press* No 1685 p. 40

Although the implication is thus clearly of a united front 'from below', this does not necessarily mean a more narrow or 'revolutionary' orientation. Such a conclusion is suggested by the fact that the Chinese delegation was composed of non-Party members. They were Guo Moruo, then an unaffiliated 'democrat',⁵⁹ Chu Tunan, a leading member of the China Democratic League and Zhao Puchu, a well-known Buddhist. All three were active in united front work at the broadest level, including international links with religious groups, and in particular peace and anti-nuclear campaigning.

The other side of this idea of the people as a very broad mass was the manner of treating 'reactionaries'. In practice, pro-imperialist strata were seen as 'cliques' and though they may at times have been labelled 'bourgeois' or 'feudal' this seems to have signified a generally pejorative reference to their reactionary character, more than any attempt at a precise socio-economic categorisation. Even the key *Renmin Ribao* editorial of September 10, 1957, which marked the strongest official attempt at categorising regimes in terms of their political stance, dealt with the 'reactionaries' in the following terms, which are typical of many other articles of the period:

"The ruling cliques of some Middle Eastern countries have followed the war policy of the imperialistsPolitically, economically and militarily they are now manipulated and controlled by foreign powers."⁶⁰

This effectively denies the existence of any domestic social basis.

⁵⁹ He had been a member of the CPC for a time in the 1920s, and rejoined later in the year 1958 under the influence of the line of increasing alignment with the Party during the Leap Forward.

⁶⁰ *Renmin Ribao* Editorial, September 10 1957, op. cit.

The fact is that the CPC was attempting to promote people-based united fronts, and to a large extent, the manner in which they depicted social conditions in the developing world was conditioned by this *political* option. This effectively deprived the united front of any meaning in terms of the coalescence of *disparate* forces.

There was, however, not a total absence of attempts at categorisation of the Arab world in terms of more analytical socio-economic criteria. One article which makes such an attempt, seeks to establish a categorisation of the Arab states according to the degree of the development of capitalism there. Its author, Peng Shuzhi, refers to two groups. The first of these consists of countries with almost no native industry (save a little in the hands of foreign monopolies), almost no proletariat or national bourgeoisie: this group comprises Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Jordan, Libya and the Gulf states. The remainder of the Arab countries fall into a second group which has some industrial development and some proletariat. This industry and proletariat may be small, but compared with the first group the economic level of the second group is fairly high, capitalist relations (including banking) have appeared, and the proletariat and its organisations are constantly growing.⁶¹

The implication of this is that the level of left-wing political activity is linked with the development of the productive forces and thus capitalist development is a good thing. And Peng Shuzhi actually explains the success of the 'Egyptian path' from this standpoint. Following the anti-imperialist and anti-feudal revolution of 1952, he says, Egypt began to take the road of national capitalist

⁶¹ PENG Shuzhi , "Lue lun Alabo minzu douzheng di xin jieduan", *Renwen Zazhi* 1958, 4 (Aug 25) pp 23-31.

development, and underwent a striking change with respect to industry and agriculture.⁶²

Such a line of argument was apparently controversial, and this need not be surprising, bearing in mind the ideological climate in China in the summer of 1958, which stressed the 'leaping forward' of the backward, of the 'poor and blank' to overtake the advanced. Another author, Guo Yingde, develops an argument from the standpoint of the living conditions of the basic masses in the Arab countries.⁶³ Using statistical data from the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation to describe their poverty, he concentrates particularly upon those countries where capitalism was more advanced, including for example Lebanon. However the main focal point of his argument falls precisely upon Egypt. Far from discerning any "striking" economic development, he describes the working people existing on very low wages, drinking muddy water, never getting to eat any meat and only owning one set of clothes, a prey to joint exploitation by foreign companies, landlords and capitalists. This is clearly a counter-argument to the view which saw capitalist development as a factor for progress.

There is evidence here that certain critical questions were being asked, and even that a 'line-struggle' existed, at least in specialist circles.

REACTION TO FORMATION OF THE U.A.R.

Overall, official sources paid practically no public attention to such issues. Decision-makers must however

⁶² *ibid*

⁶³ GUO Yingde, "Diguo zhuyi qinlue Zhong Jin Dong Alabo guojia xuexing shi", *Beijing Daxue Xuebao* (Social Sciences section) 1958, 3 (August) pp. 5-12

have had such considerations forced upon them by events, and none could have been more significant in this respect than the formation of the UAR. Viewed from the point of view of the Nasserist trend, this step was a rallying-call for a new stage in the Arab movement. But it was at the same time repressive in its domestic implications. There must have been some concern about the role of communists as an important element in anti-imperialist struggle. This rarely penetrates into official sources, but a historical study of the Egyptian national movement emphasises not only the impetus which it received from the Russian October Revolution but also the important role played by communists in the period 1922-3, and again in the course of World War II⁶⁴. The need for united fronts to be handled in such a way that communists do not lose out was probably the central issue in the CPC's discussion of the issue, in relation to their domestic situation, in the pre-1949 period. So the formation of the UAR raised a whole series of crucial issues.

In terms of their overall model for the unity of the anti-imperialist forces, the CPC had already described Egypt and Syria as "the core of Arab nationalism"⁶⁵, and now this core had acquired an organisational form. But it was a form which raised definite problems for Chinese policy-makers, and eventually led them to place less emphasis upon the exemplary significance of the Egyptian-Syrian 'path', even in spite of the positive assessment of Egypt's role in the Cairo conference.

In practice Chinese sources depicted the formation of the UAR as a logical result of a history of co-operation against imperialist threats, from the defence treaty

⁶⁴ QUN Li, "Cong lishi shang Alabo dongfang ge guo renmin di jiefang douzheng" in *Lishi Yanjiu* 1958, 7.

⁶⁵ *Renmin Ribao* Sept 10 1957; *Xinhua* Sept 12, p 7

between the two states signed in 1955, through spontaneous acts of sabotage by Syrians against the oil pipeline at the time of the Suez War, through economic union and mutual military assistance in 1957, and emphasised the aspect of mutual assistance and co-operation in economic construction via the pooling of resources and manpower.

In welcoming the formation of the UAR, *Renmin Ribao* thus betrayed some ambiguity. The event was assessed positively at both the people-to-people and state-to-state levels: from the former aspect, it "will fortify the unity of the Egyptian and Syrian people and aid in their common struggle against colonialism"; from the latter aspect it would also "promote the solidarity among Arab states and help to consolidate peace in the Near and Middle East". The two-path analysis was also reaffirmed, in that

'Arab states now must choose whether to follow the path of peace and neutrality, of defending their national independence and sovereignty and of strengthening Arab unity and co-operation; or whether to join US military blocs to the detriment of their own sovereignty and national interests and causing discord among the Arab states.'⁶⁶

The above does not however signify that the UAR was viewed as creating a totally new entity, a pole of attraction for a homogenisation of the Arab movement. The standpoint of united action between distinct entities still appears to be primary, and the same editorial tends in fact to view the UAR as a special form of co-operation between two entities and not as the beginning of a reconstruction of the Arab nation under the auspices of a single political body. Thus

'Further mutual assistance and co-operation between Egypt and Syria would tighten the economic contacts

⁶⁶ *Renmin Ribao* Editorial, February 24, 1958; *Xinhua* same date.

between the two countries and co-ordinated resources and manpower would favour economic construction.⁶⁷

The event was also a source of problems for Soviet foreign policy. However, after an initial coolness the Soviet Union decided to welcome Nasser in the most fraternal possible way when he paid an official visit shortly afterwards, in May 1958.⁶⁸ Egypt was to be the major case study around which subsequent theories of the 'non-capitalist road' were developed. Nasser's visit was favourably commented upon in the Chinese press at the time - including his statement there that the Soviet Union was the true friend of the Arabs⁶⁹ - in the context of emphasising the Soviet Union's role in the area. But in China's case, it is noteworthy that from now on there was much less enthusiasm for the Egyptian-Syrian 'path', and instead more emphasis was placed on the small and weak nations like Yemen and Lebanon, who dared to take full advantage of the favourable world balance and defy imperialism.

Clearly the issues involved in assessing the nature of Arab political and social forces, as a basis for uniting with them, were very complex. It will be interesting to see how they arose in different forms regarding the analysis of the specific problems presented by events in different areas, in particular the Lebanese civil war, and the coup in Iraq. First, however, we will move to a case study of a very instructive instance in the context of what was in some respects China's most intense bilateral connection during 1958, namely the link with Yemen.

⁶⁷ *ibid*

⁶⁸ see DAWISHA K. *Soviet Foreign Policy towards Egypt* pp. 19-20. Nasser paid a second visit to the USSR a few months later, following the coup in Iraq.

⁶⁹. *Tass* quoted in *Renmin Ribao* May 6 1958 and *Xinhua*, same date.

CHAPTER 6. CHINA'S RELATIONS WITH YEMEN — A CASE STUDY

During the period in question, the Chinese leadership viewed the Middle East as the focal point of world politics, yet China's direct contacts and influence in the area were limited. Such contacts, if they could be built, would serve what was identified as the crucial united front goal of linking the socialist countries and the developing world.

The question of China's relations with Yemen thus stands out as an important case in its own right. It also carries special interest with respect to the long-standing communist problem of the appraisal of conservative regimes which apparently adopt an anti-imperialist stance; finally, the Sino-Yemeni relationship constitutes an interesting early example of 'South-South' co-operation among developing countries.

Yemen was a legendarily rich and fertile area of the Arab world whose prosperous character was reflected in the Roman name Arabia felix. The scene of successive great civilisations reaching back at least to the thirteenth century BC, the country had preserved its traditional social structure to a remarkable degree. Under Ottoman suzerainty its boundaries were not demarcated. However, in 1902-4 Britain negotiated with the Ottoman empire a delineation of the frontier between Yemen and the British colony of Aden. The Yemeni monarchy did not recognise this and following the breakup of the Ottoman empire at the end of World War I, armed conflict broke out between Yemen and Britain. Eventually Yemen was obliged to sign a treaty recognising the status quo in 1934.¹ The Yemeni entity as

¹ For more details of the dispute with Britain see MACRO E. *Yemen and the Western World*, London (C. Hurst and co.) 1968 pp 99 ff; ZABARAH M.A. *Yemen* New York (Praeger) 1982, p. 57.

it existed up to the period under examination, was thus the Kingdom of the Yemen, with its capital at Sana'a.¹

Under the rule of Imam Yayha (1904-48), Yemen was one of the least Westernised countries in the world, and anything 'modern' was eschewed practically as a matter of principle. Very interestingly, though, the country's enmity with Britain incited Yayha to make Yemen the first Arab state to enter into friendly relations with the Soviet Union, an early agreement in 1928 being followed by a friendship treaty in 1931.

In the mid 1950s Britain's activity in the region increased, with plans to consolidate British interests by federating the protectorates with Aden. Active hostilities with Yemen were renewed from 1956 onwards, and these led the country to attempt again to play the card of relations with the Socialist states. Though eclipsed by the Czech arms deal with Egypt and the Suez War, the conflict in South Arabia was not without international significance.

In April 1956 a summit meeting was held between Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Yemen, whereby Abdel Nasser arranged a Saudi credit to enable Yemen to buy arms from the USSR. Following this, Crown Prince Mohamed al-Badr, as foreign minister of the Yemen and effective head of government, established diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China, toured the Soviet Union, and concluded various agreements with the Russians. From about 1956 the royal government increasingly took Afro-Asian and anti-western positions in the UN and elsewhere. In March of that year, a trade agreement was signed with the Soviet Union, and

¹ The country became the Arab Republic of Yemen when a republican regime took power in the capital and was recognised by the UN in 1963, although a civil war with the royalists continued until 1970. It was often referred to as North Yemen in distinction to the People's Democratic Republic of South Yemen, which existed after the independence of Aden in 1967 through to the recent unification of the two states.

shortly afterwards an official visit was made to the USSR, Poland and East Germany. Soviet arms began to arrive in November of that year, and in January 1957 a Soviet mission was established.

After this, Yemen launched armed attacks upon certain border areas of Aden, and in June its government addressed the United Nations, laying claim to the whole of Aden.³ China supported the territorial claim with respect to Aden.⁴ It is not difficult to see how positively China would have appraised the opening of a new front at a time when the USA and Britain were considered to be trying hard to contain and smother the nationalist movement in a completely different corner of the Arab world (Jordan and Syria).

The royal regime in Yemen could thus perhaps be considered to form part of that broad united front including "even certain kings, princes and aristocrats who are patriotic" to which the CPC was later to allude in the course of the Sino-Soviet polemic,⁵ and it was at the end of a further tour which took in Rumania, Poland and Yugoslavia⁶ that Crown Prince Mohamed al-Badr, was officially invited to China. His visit, which lasted from December 1957 to January 1958, culminated in the signing of a trade and co-operation agreement between the two countries.

³. Certain parts of Saudi Arabia were also claimed.

⁴. More strongly, it has been argued, than the Soviet Union did (see WENNER op. cit. p. 184). During the same period, it should be noted, China was conducting a forceful campaign in favour of Indonesia's claim to West Irian, which was probably perceived as a similar type of claim.

⁵ *A Proposal Concerning the General Line of the International Communist Movement*, Peking (FLP) 1963, p. 15

⁶. *Xinhua News* Belgrade, December 28 1957. *Survey of China Mainland Press* No. 1683 p. 41.

It is an interesting point that the close relationship with China developed at a time when Soviet relations with Yemen were already cooling. That the Soviet arms were envisaged as some form of bargaining counter can be seen in the fact that they were not deployed and were apparently more or less left to rust away, sometimes not even unpacked; this experience caused the Soviet Union to terminate its military agreement with Yemen in August 1957.⁷

At a time when high-level visits by national leaders to China were rare, the official visit in question received considerable publicity in the Chinese press, coming as it did from the Arab world which the Chinese considered the focal point in international politics at the time. In saying that the type of foreign policy adopted by Yemen "has become increasingly important to peace and security in the Middle East and to world peace"⁸, the Chinese press used this case to emphasise some key concepts of wider significance.

It has already been remarked that the concern of the CPC was to study not just a particular country individually, but also the general significance of the "road" which it follows. We will thus consider both the general and the particular, bearing in mind that in stressing the exemplary significance of a particular event the Chinese tended to present it in a somewhat idealised manner.

As we have seen earlier, Yemen was grouped among those states in the region with the least developed capitalist relations.⁹ This is certainly accurate. Accordingly, descriptions of the country in the Chinese media placed

⁷. O'BALANCE, E. *The War in the Yemen*, London (Faber and Faber) 1971, pp. 54-6

⁸ *Guangming Ribao* Jan. 13 1958; *Xinhua* same date.

⁹ according to the categorisation adopted by PENG Shuzhi, op. cit.

considerable emphasis upon the degree to which the traditional way of life was preserved there. From the CPC's perspective this was not necessarily pejorative since they did not on the whole espouse the evolutionist aspects of the 'modernization' theory of development, and hence did not equate 'traditional' with 'backward' per se - their own attempt to integrate traditional techniques into the development model testifies to this.

The country was depicted as a distinct entity within the Arab world, possessing its own particular character as a population group, and traits which supposedly characterised the local people included those of readiness to work hard and valiance in fighting.¹⁰ Yemen was also described as a politically and religiously united country.¹¹ Yet it was at the same time seen as typical of a wider current existing throughout the Arab world, its foreign policy as reflecting the "awakening" of the Arabs as a whole,¹² and its relations with China as something which "fully expressed" the friendship of all the Arab states towards China.¹³

The basis for the CPC's positive assessment of the foreign policy of Yemen, and hence its status as a good candidate for united front work, was undoubtedly the criterion of opposition to domination and imperialism. The Chinese praised Yemen for a long history of resistance to foreign

¹⁰. PEI Min, "Fan dui zhimin qinlue di Yemen", *Shijie Zhishi* 1957, 3 (February)

¹¹ *ibid.*

¹². ZHOU EnLai, Speech at the banquet attended by Crown Prince Badr and the Syrian ambassador to China, Jan, 12 1958. *Renmin Ribao* Jan. 13.

¹³. ZHOU Yiliang, "Zhongguo renmin he Alabo renmin di shen qing hou yi", *Beijing Daxue Xue Bao*, Humanities section, 1958, III; p.4.

domination, dating back to the struggle against Turkey.¹⁴ Since the early nineteenth century, it is argued, Yemen had fallen within the British sphere of influence¹⁵, only to become an area of co-operation and at the same time of contention with the USA after World War II. Chinese statements of support for Yemen were frequently linked with ones of opposition to the British occupation of Aden.

It is important that Yemen's opposition to imperialism was presented not just as the action of an individual country, but on the contrary emphasis was placed particularly upon the forms of *interaction* through which Yemen's anti-imperialism was articulated. Such interaction was discussed at a number of levels of operation, which may also be viewed as different levels of analysis of the type of alignments which make up the raw material of united front policy. They could be viewed as mutually-reinforcing levels of united action which would help to cement the 'force' represented by the developing countries as an entity.

We can speak of five different levels (though these divisions are not of course rigid, and they shade off into one another in certain instances - we are proposing this scheme just as a rough guide to the framework employed by Chinas). First there is the immediate area in which a country is to be found, in this case the Arab world; secondly there is a wider region, in this case Asia, or more specifically West Asia, a term which was of considerable significance to the Chinese; thirdly, the aspect of Asian-African solidarity, to a certain extent a geographical notion (the Chinese sometimes referred to the Middle East as the junction-point between Asia and Africa),

¹⁴. PEI Min *op. cit.* p. 17

¹⁵. LU Ying, "Yemen renmin weihu heping yu duli di lichang", *Renmin Ribao*, Jan. 13, 1958

but at this time also increasingly coming to anticipate a more general concept of third-world solidarity; fourthly, the aspect of activity direction toward influencing the overall global system; and finally the question of relations with the Socialist Camp as a subsystem.

We will examine how the Chinese analysed Yemen's international links at each of these levels, before applying this framework to a discussion of the specific bilateral relationship with China.

CHINA'S PERCEPTION OF YEMENI FOREIGN POLICY - LEVELS OF ANALYSIS

The first level may be considered to apply to the immediate locality, i.e. the Arab world. In this respect the Chinese clearly downplayed the Islamic aspect, and in practice the overwhelming emphasis was placed on the role of a common experience of imperialism:

"Owing to the long period during which they have suffered from colonialist oppression and plunder, Yemen and the great majority of Middle East states have an ingrained loathing for colonialism."¹⁶

More specifically, this common experience of exploitation was linked, in the Chinese discourse, to a positive attitude on the key concrete international-political issues which the CPC considered to be the most important ones affecting the region, in other words opposition to the kind of Western tactics which have already been described. These elements were considered to provide a focus for the unity of positive forces.

Thus Yemeni foreign policy was favourably assessed for standing in opposition to attempts to divide and infiltrate

¹⁶. PEI Min *op. cit.*

the states in the region and to increase tension in the area.¹⁷ It was pointed out that Yemen had persistently refused to join the Baghdad Pact since 1955,¹⁸ and that its government had, in September 1957, rebuffed an American delegation proffering aid in connection with the Eisenhower Doctrine.¹⁹ We hear further that

"The Yemeni government is completely loyal to the policy of non-participation in aggressive blocs, and also exerts all efforts toward the security of the Arab League and the strengthening of the unity of all Arab states."²⁰

Apart from the Arab League, other forms of Arab unity mentioned include a number of agreements with particular Arab countries such as the pact with Egypt and Saudi Arabia, "on the basis of" which mutual support at the time of the Suez war was organised, at which time it is also mentioned that Yemen had a large amount of volunteers ready to aid Egypt.²¹

Moving on from the regional level, a broader level of unity of forces can be found within the sphere of Asia as a whole. The following statement from one of Mohamed al-Badr's main speeches in Beijing is interesting in this context:

"Despite the fact that imperialism extended its domination to Asia and left us no corner without detrimental encroachment, we maintained our spiritual legacy and we fulfilled our mission regarding fraternity, co-operation and peaceful co-existence

17. *Renmin Ribao* editorial, "Zhong-Ye you hao hezuo di xin jieduan" January 12, 1958

18. PEI Min, *Shijie Zhishi* 1957, III, op. cit.

19. LU Ying, *Renmin Ribao* Jan 13 1958, op. cit.

20. PEI Min op.cit.

21. *ibid.*

among individuals and peoples, regard less of racial, ideological, religious and other considerations."²²

He further argued that the way ahead consisted in a "resurrection of our old friendship and the strengthening of our economic, cultural and technical co-operation."²³

This shows that, even if al-Badr was an opportunist as later developments would tend to suggest, he was good at telling his hosts what they wanted to hear. The correspondence with China's views in certain respects is striking. We will return to this point in a moment.

A third level of analysis can be seen in references not just to Asia in a regional sense but to Asia and Africa, here implying a wider form of what would later be known as 'third world' solidarity. It is thus argued that final victory in the Yemeni people's struggle against imperialism will come about through the support of the people of all countries, but especially those of Asia and Africa.²⁴

A link between the Asian-African sphere of operation and the intermediate zone concept derived from the ideas set out in Mao's interview with Anna Louise Strong is clearly implied in some formulations, such as the following:

"The Yemeni people's struggle against British aggression has not only protected national independence, but has also produced a beneficial contribution toward Asian and world peace." [The Yemeni people] "know that their anti-colonialist struggle is inseparable from a movement to defend peace. The USA is carrying out aggressive plans in the whole world, especially in the Asian-African area,

²². Mohamed al-BADR, Speech delivered at Peking, Decmber 31 1957. *Xinhua News* report in *Survey of Mainland China Press* No. 1684 p. 47.

²³. *ibid* p. 48.

²⁴. PEI Min, *Shijie Zhishi* 1957, III, op. cit.

endangering world peace and threatening the national independence of the Asian and African nations."²⁵

Throughout the discussion of these different levels of solidarity, it is important that they were understood first and foremost as a *popular* current. This was the point of reference, rather than any attempt to 'cultivate' a particular regime. The regime was appraised favourably insofar as it gave expression to the popular movement. So noticeable is this stress on the people that it would serve as a reminder against ascribing to the Chinese leadership too rigid a conception of a distinction between a 'united front from below' and a 'united front from above'.

A favourable coincidence upon which the Chinese press remarked was the fact that the Crown Prince's visit coincided with the Cairo conference,²⁶ and the aspect of growing solidarity among developing countries is reflected in the description of the government of Yemen as being entirely "loyal to the spirit and principles of Bandung".²⁷

A fourth level could be considered to encompass actions designed to influence the international milieu as a whole. At this level, it is interesting that Yemen's dispute with Britain raised issues of international law which corresponded to a considerable degree with those which Chinese international lawyers put forward in the context of the Damascus conference, as we have already mentioned. Thus, we find al-Badr stating that

"This international law, following the profound development of the resurgence of vitality among the

²⁵. LU Ying, *Renmin Ribao* Jan 13 1958, op. cit.

²⁶. see an article in *Renmin Ribao* Jan 13 1958, p.4.

²⁷. LU Ying, op. cit.

people of all nations, especially of the Asian-African nations, is ready to be adjusted."²⁸

Finally, at a level of relations with the Socialist Camp, it was argued that this relationship had a solid basis, being based on "knowledge derived from intimate experience" to the effect that the Socialist Camp was a reliable ally.²⁹ But the striking point is rather that the relationship with the Soviet Union was downplayed in Chinese sources, even despite the intrinsic historical interest of that relationship, stretching as it did over three decades and constituting one of the longest-standing alliances between communism and the national movements. Chinese emphasis in fact fell mainly on the common experience of Asian-African countries, and the Soviet Union tended to get left out of this picture.

YEMEN'S RELATIONS SPECIFICALLY WITH CHINA - LEVELS OF ANALYSIS

We will now look in more detail at Sino-Yemeni relations, still using the five-fold division which we have just proposed in a general way.

Taking the first of these levels, Arab nationalism, Yemen's relations with China were seen as one manifestation of a general pattern of increasing links with the area, as "a landmark in the improvement of the friendship between the people of China and the people of all Arab states"³⁰ Once again, the emphasis on the people is to be noted.

²⁸. Mohamed al-BADR, Speech at a mass rally held in Beijing, January 12, 1958. Chinese translation in *Renmin Ribao* Jan. 13 p. 4.

²⁹. LU Ying op. cit. The historical facts about Soviet-Yemeni relations are also cited in this article.

³⁰. *Renmin Ribao* Editorial, January 12 1958.

However, apart from this aspect of China's relations with Arab nationalism, there is another side to the picture, in that while China could not participate directly in the Arab (regional) aspect, it could in the Moslem aspect of solidarity. In the period after the Bandung conference several visits and pilgrimages were conducted by groups of Chinese Moslems. By that time the Chinese had founded their own institute of Islamic Theology, and new premises for this institute were opened in Beijing to coincide with Mohamed al-Badr's visit.³¹ Later in the year, to mark the Corban Festival (July 1), the Yemeni leader Imam Ahmed sent a letter to Burhan Shahidi, a leading Chinese Moslem, wishing that: "Allah will bestow blessings on the Arab and Islamic peoples each year."³²

As we have argued, China's tendency at the time was to downplay the role of Islam, or if they accepted it at all, to view it as a cultural or social phenomenon rather than as a belief. They paid no attention to the issues posed by different historic currents within Islam, and on the issue of the differences between 'modernising' and traditional strands within contemporary Islam, merely appear to have assumed that the trend which emphasised 'social' issues was axiomatically the one which would come to predominate.

On the whole the Moslem dimension was not given a big place in Sino-Yemeni relations. There are reports of various Chinese groups visiting that country including diplomats, doctors, technicians³³, but not specifically of Moslems. As mentioned earlier, the Chinese leadership was at this time pressing for the social and economic transformation of

³¹. *New York Times*, January 13 1958; despatch from Hong Kong dated January 12.

³². *Xinhua* July 1 1958 (release published in the *Xinhua* bulletin dated July 2).

³³. See for instance report of *Xinhua* News Agency Cairo, April 16 1958 (*Xinhua* bulletin April 17).

the minority areas, and this fact is bound to have influenced the role played by Chinese Moslems in international affairs. It has been argued that statesmen from Moslem countries visiting China were usually kept in an atmosphere of meeting many Moslem personalities, attending Moslem activities etc.³⁴ However, a study of Mohamed al-Badr's visit does not show that such a policy was still being applied on that occasion.

We could perhaps say that the 'division of labour' within the Yemeni leadership at that time was such that Imam Ahmed viewed himself as a guardian of the fundamentals of Islam - he was even later to attempt to project himself in this role to a wider audience in the Arab world by the publication of a poem attacking Nasserism as contrary to Islam;³⁵ his son, on the other hand, took on the role of making very radical political statements. Later in the year 1958 on the occasion of Yemen's National Day (November 13), Mao Zedong sent a conventional diplomatic greeting to Ahmed, while Premier Zhou signed a much more political message addressed to Mohamed al-Badr.³⁶

At the level of links with fellow Asian countries, on the other hand, the Chinese were on firmer ground, and in terms of the image given to the bilateral relationship, it is overwhelmingly on this aspect that the emphasis was placed.

The Chinese side thus strongly responded to al-Badr's ideas about the historical basis of their collaboration, and China's emphasis upon the dimension of historical links between different parts of Asia in the pre-colonial period

³⁴. See e.g. JOYAUX F., "Les Musulmans de Chine et la diplomatie de Pékin" in *L'Afrique et l'Asie*. No. 77, 1967, pp. 17-24.

³⁵. The text can be found in El-ATTAR, *Le Sous-developpement du Yemen* (1964).

³⁶. Texts of these messages in *Xinhua News* November 14 1958.

can in a way be viewed as constituting what was seen as an objective historical basis for the united front relationship. It was thus seen as having deep historical roots, rather than simply being a contingent reaction to a particular political context provided by US and British initiatives in the Middle East, however important the CPC considered these to be at another level.

A fact of considerable significance is the existence of a pattern of bilateral relations between China and Yemen reaching back several centuries. Chinese historical studies mention the existence of relations from very early times, and these were particularly developed from the fifteenth century onwards.³⁷ The existence of these historic links is confirmed by other sources, and they can indeed be considered a significant aspect of early Yemeni international relations.³⁸ It has been a long-standing tendency of the CPC to stress the contemporary relevance of such a history of relations where it exists.³⁹ This historical relationship was interrupted, it is argued, at the time of colonial incursions,

"But today, when the people of our two countries have now embarked on the road of independence, when we have now established new friendly relations, there is no power on earth which can prevent the daily development of our friendship."⁴⁰

³⁷. ZHOU Yiliang, in *Beijing Daxue Xuebao* 1958, III op. cit.

³⁸. see for instance the interesting discussion in M. W. WENNER, *Modern Yemen*, Baltimore (Johns Hopkins Press) 1967.

³⁹. See for instance the spate of *Renmin Ribao* editorials published in 1970-71 when a large number of countries concluded diplomatic relations with China.

⁴⁰. *Renmin Ribao* Editorial January 12, op. cit.

The agreements signed between the two countries on the occasion of this visit could thus be said to constitute a strengthening of "already existing" friendly ties.⁴¹

Apart from direct links between the two countries, reference is also made to similarity of experiences in terms of what is viewed as the positive aspect of traditional society. For example, both countries had traditionally been competent in the field of water-conservancy and terracing of agricultural land.⁴²

Moving into the more recent period, common experience was again an important theme. For example, we find the Anglo-Yemeni treaty of 1934 interpreted as an unequal treaty of the kind which China too suffered from. The way in which the Aden protectorate is described suggests an obvious analogy with the problem of Taiwan. Reference is made to Yemen suffering from attempted subversion, from intrusion into national airspace, just at a time when the Chinese were protesting about similar problems in their own case.⁴³

Both parties attached considerable weight to the fact of their both being Asian countries as a context for their bilateral links. Mohamed al-Badr spoke of the area extending from China in the east to the Arab peninsula in the west (and including North Africa) as having constituted "a mighty and wonderful municipality" possessing a "natural unity".⁴⁴ His perspective could appear conservative, in that his prescription for the present was to "restore the

⁴¹. *Renmin Ribao* Editorial, January 12 1958 op. cit.

⁴². These aspects of Yemeni history, described in studies of the country (e.g. El-ATTAR op. cit.) are discussed from the point of view of their similarity to the Chinese experience in PEI Min op.cit.

⁴³. These various points are made in the article by PEI Min op.cit.

⁴⁴. Mohamed al-BADR, Speech of January 12 1958, op. cit.

original conditions" and "resume the legacy of their ancestors",⁴⁵ but we can consider that this is probably no more than a partial contradiction with the Chinese view, in that the CPC considered that there were progressive aspects in the pre-colonial system of relations which could be built upon. And it is noteworthy that he explicitly employed the term 'united front' in his image of the future pattern of relations among Asian states:

"We can bring forward the realisation of this aspiration: our method is to organise our united front, to strengthen the co-operation between the peoples of all nations in all respects and in all areas; if we do not strengthen our co-operation in the fields of economics, culture, art and science, we surely cannot realise this goal of ours."⁴⁶

In response to this, it is also interesting, however, that the Chinese took up a distinctly geopolitical frame of reference in stressing the significance of China and the Middle East as different sides of the same Asian continent, in a particular strategic context. Thus Zhou Enlai took the opportunity of an official banquet to float some ideas, the full impact of which would be revealed only later:

"The Arab people are not only awakening, but at the same time they are stationed on the western outpost of the anti-colonialist struggle [zai fanzhiminzhu yi douzheng di xifang zui qianxian]. In this valiant anti-colonialist struggle, Yemen, Egypt and Syria show especial resolution. This valiant struggle calls forth the deepest respect of the Chinese people and the people of all Asian countries."

And in reply to a speaker who praised China's support for the Arabs he continued: "I think that compared with the responsibility borne by the people of the Arab countries on the western outpost of anti-colonialism, this is completely

⁴⁵ *ibid.*

⁴⁶ Mohamed al-BADR, Speech of January 12 *op.cit.*

insignificant. We Chinese, and the anti-colonialist people of Asia, have extraordinary admiration for your positive support. Unfortunately our support is still not very great, from now on we further intend to support you still more and in this way return our thanks to you."⁴⁷

It will be important to bear in mind these themes of viewing the Middle East as West Asia, and the notion of Chinese support in the context of East Asia, to which we will return in discussing the Taiwan Straits crisis.

Moving up to the next level of analysis, that of the incipient third-world movement as a whole, Bandung was treated as a historical point of reference. It was pointed out that "at the time of the Bandung Conference, friendly contacts made by our delegation with the Yemeni delegation" led to a progressive development and consolidation of links between the two countries,⁴⁸ and the negotiations between China and Yemen are described as a continuation of the Bandung and Cairo conferences.

This level of analysis links in with the level which identifies the 'milieu goals' of co-operation in relation to the mode of operation of the system at a world level. Thus bilateral relations were characterised as "a new contribution on the question of world peace through the cause of friendship of all the world's people",⁴⁹ and the two countries adopted an official position which took the Five Principles as a point of reference together with the UN Charter, arguing that these texts "must have universal acceptance, so that the people of all nations can enjoy the rights of independence and democracy, and have the

⁴⁷. Zhou Enlai, Speech at Banquet attended by Crown Prince Badr and the Syrian ambassador, January 12 1958. *Renmin Ribao* January 13.

⁴⁸. LU Ying, article in *Renmin Ribao* January 13, 1958.

⁴⁹. *Renmin Ribao* Editorial, January 12, 1958.

opportunity for peaceful co-existence and friendly co-operation."⁵⁰

It seems likely that China was trying increasingly to formalise the Five Principles as a basis for its relations with other states, which would imply the interesting hypothesis that the consolidation of the United Fronts, with the new system of relations among states which it implied, would have a positive effect on the ground-rules of the international relations system in general.

Finally, it is striking that China's relations with Yemen were practically not discussed in the context of the fifth level analysis which we outlined, namely that of relations between the developing world and the Socialist Camp, even though the visit occurred at a time when the CPC was in general still strongly emphasising the role of the Socialist Camp in the world system. Bandung and pre-colonial history were the points of reference, rather than the history of socialist foreign policy.

YEMEN'S INTERNAL STRUCTURE

The depiction of Yemen's internal structure by the Chinese media was strongly idealised, to a point where it would seem hard to make it serve as a basis for a serious understanding of the actual situation. The point is not that it was problematical in principle to stress the positive aspect of traditional society. One current in Marxism had always held that traditional structures could potentially serve as the basis for a new progressive development, and in the case of Yemen there was at the time a still-functioning communal structure in village life characterised by a concept of "solidarity" (al-ta'ouen) which created the idea of a collective responsibility for

⁵⁰. CHINA People's Republic and YEMEN Kingdom, Joint Communiqué, January 12 1958. *Renmin Ribao*, January 13.

taxes and misdemeanours. The point is however that the structure was at that point in time no longer the functioning and dynamic system which had made Yemen a prosperous part of the ancient world. The social system had instead become a condition for stagnancy. Indebtedness of the peasantry to absentee landlords deprived the rural sector of dynamism. A specific parallel with China's historical experience was the fact that a considerable proportion of the population was forced to emigrate in search of employment - about 20% at that time.⁵¹ The significant fact, however, is that such parallels were not drawn by the Chinese media.

In such a context, recent rulers had put forward axioms such as Imam Yahya's to the effect that they "would rather live in poverty and eat grass" than see their riches in the hands of foreigners, and Ahmed's "If it is a question of choosing between liberty in poverty and dependence in abundance, I have chosen independence".⁵² At one level this ideology seems anti-imperialist, but at another it can simply be viewed as a mechanism for perpetuating stagnancy.

It is not surprising then that there was a body of opinion which held that stagnancy should not necessarily be accepted as the price for independence. Hence an opposition movement had been formed which was to make Yemen one of the most turbulent parts of the Arab world in the '60s. In 1948 a coup attempt probably involving 'modernising' elements including the subsequent republican

⁵¹. For this background see principally El ATTAR, *Le Sous-developement du Yemen* op. cit.; also STATISTISCHES BUNDESAMT, *allgemeine Statistik des Auslandes: Jemen, Sudjemen*, Stuttgart (W. Kolhammer) 1970.

⁵². quoted in El ATTAR, *Le Sous-developement du Yemen* op. cit. p. 36; p. 73

leader, Abdullah as-Sallal, had succeeded in assassinating Imam Yahya, but not in overturning the monarchy.

In the period under consideration a Free Yemen movement had already been constituted, and was also already enjoying the support of Nasser's regime in Egypt, for example via the provision of broadcasting facilities. At this point the situation was interesting, however, in that their political leadership refrained from personal criticism of the heir apparent, Mohamed al-Badr, hoping to capitalise on his apparently radical ideas.

But the economic situation in Yemen was in fact deteriorating rapidly. Food production was declining and had reached a disastrous level in 1957 (there was a further 25% decrease in 1958), at a time when (despite poor health conditions and high infant mortality rate) population was on the increase. The country had been genuinely self-reliant over a very long period but during recent years this traditional independence had ended, and the country became dependent upon imports of food in 1957.⁵³ In these circumstances the 'independence with poverty' rhetoric probably sounded increasingly hollow.

Now it is noteworthy that none of this background was reflected in the Chinese media, and even the existence of opposition was not discussed. The most we find is that in a 'general knowlege' type of article about Yemen published in 1956, before China became directly interested in the country, the earlier disturbances of 1948 are briefly mentioned. They are, however, attributed to the machinations of Britain.⁵⁴ And by the time of the royal

⁵³. El ATTAR, *Le sous-developpement*..op. cit., pp. 162, 171; Statistisches Bundesamt, *Jemen*...op. cit. p. 7

⁵⁴. MA Jian, "Yemen wangguo", *Shijie zhishi*, 1956, XV, pp. 15-16.

visit even this earlier incident had been 'written out' of history.

This neglect presumably reflects a view that to raise the question of domestic contradictions in a country would be harmful to united front work. But such an approach does point to the important issue of whether the particular case had not been swallowed up in the idealised generality. This in turn would create a difficult environment for specialists, let alone public opinion, to appreciate future developments. As it happened, domestic conflicts came to a head quite rapidly. Although Yemen briefly federated with the UAR in 1958, soon afterwards Abdel Nasser threw in his lot with the republicans and a prolonged period of instability resulted, especially following the accession of al-Badr to the throne in 1962.

It remains true, however, that the explicit Chinese orientation was to promote the independence of 'a people', however loosely defined, and it is in this context that it is necessary to examine the concrete facts of economic co-operation negotiated in the course of the official visit.

CO-OPERATION AGREEMENTS BETWEEN CHINA AND YEMEN

Three distinct documents were signed on this occasion: a Treaty of Friendship, an Agreement on Scientific, Technical and Cultural Co-operation, and a Treaty of Commerce.⁵⁵ What is interesting is that these agreements constitute an early attempt to formulate a new co-operation policy for China, which can probably be seen as intended to represent both a socialist 'aid' strategy - cementing this crucial united front relationship in a concrete form - and at the same time a blueprint for what later came to be termed

⁵⁵. CHINA, People's Republic and YEMEN, Mutawakilyah Kingdom: Treaty of Friendship; Agreement on Scientific, Technical and Cultural Co-operation: Treaty of Commerce.

south-south co-operation. The CPC was quite explicit that they were mapping out principles which would have a wider applicability:

"There is no doubt that the treaties and agreement concluded between China and the Yemen will stand as examples for the development of friendly and co-operative relations between China and other Arab states."⁵⁶

By extension, it would seem that the same could apply to relations with other developing countries outside the Arab world.

Yemen chose to play the socialist card at this time not only for political reasons implied in the dispute with Britain, but also because the deterioration of the domestic economy had reached a point where it undermined any realistic basis for the rhetoric of independence. This provided the context for the signature of a treaty of commerce with the USSR in 1955, and among other things Soviet economic co-operation provided for the construction of the port of Hodeida which served to reduce Yemen's dependance upon Aden.

Chinese aid thus arrived against the background of an already-existing pattern of co-operation with the USSR, but at the same time the Chinese immediately demarcated themselves from the Soviet approach in some significant respects. Thus Soviet loans were charged at an interest rate of 2.5%, whereas the Chinese loans were interest free. This agreement with Yemen inaugurated a policy of interest-free loans which was followed by China in the succeeding period.⁵⁷ The Soviet union was at the time presenting

⁵⁶. *Dagong Bao*, January 13 1958; Xinhua, same date.

⁵⁷. see BARTKE, Wolfgang, *China's Economic Aid*, Hamburg (Institut fur Asienkunde) 1975.

itself as an unselfish ally of the emerging nations,⁵⁸ but China showed directly that it was possible to go further in this direction.

The Agreement on co-operation provided for Chinese aid in one project of considerable significance - the construction of a highway linking the Soviet-built port of Hodeida to the capital, Sana'a; the road also connected with another built with aid from the United States. Other projects were designed to permit Yemen to process some of its own raw materials and to diversify exports away from coffee. There were to be factories for cigarettes, glass, aluminium ware and canned fish, a sugar refinery, a textile mill and a tannery. The projects were to be financed by an interest-free loan of 70 million Swiss Francs. Specialist workers from Yemen were to be trained in China, each country was to give special facilities to students from the other country in educational institutions, and publications and documents were to be exchanged.⁵⁹

It is clear that the ideas embodied in this agreement constitute an early working-out of what were intended as a set of principles of far-reaching significance, and which were later to be summed up in a systematic manner by Premier Zhou Enlai in a speech January 15 1964 setting out a series of principles: among these were the idea of projects requiring little investment and thus allowing for quick accumulation, of projects aimed at building self-reliance, and the idea of enabling local people to master

⁵⁸. see the discussion of the Cairo conference in NEUHAUSER C., *Third World Politics- China and the A.A.P.S.O*, Cambridge Mass. (Harvard University Press) 1968.

⁵⁹. Such exchanges would certainly have been one-sided in this particular case since apparently the printing press was banned in Yemen at that time and no publications existed.

techniques.⁶⁰ These can be viewed as a programme for an alternative approach to development, concretely embodied in south-south co-operation which could serve as a material basis for the more political aspect of south-south relations reflected in united fronts.

Policies embodied in the provisions of the treaties and agreement with Yemen include an undertaking that Chinese experts should not interfere in Yemen's internal affairs and should respect the laws and religious and social customs of the country. The Treaty of Commerce included a clause stating that the value of imports and exports should be balanced as far as possible, and an exception to the provision of most-favoured nation treatment is that it should not affect any rights or privileges which "have been or may be granted to any neighbouring country", nor to any rights which Yemen might grant to any Arab country. These all reflect certain principles which could be considered of more general relevance, including in the case of the last of these, the notion of a regional basis for South-South co-operation.

The main project, the road from Sana'a to Hodeida, was something of a landmark in its own right. Construction began in August 1958⁶¹, and was completed in January 1960. 227 km long, the road begins at sea level and climbs 3,500 metres, crossing peaks and valleys on its way to the capital.⁶² An extremely difficult proposition technically, the road made a considerable impact once completed. A comparison with China's later role in the Tanzam railway in Africa suggests itself, not least because in the case of

⁶⁰. The text of these principles together with other relevant source material can be found in COPPER J. F., *China's Foreign Aid*, Lexington Mass. (D. C. Heath & Co.) 1976; p. 155

⁶¹ *Le Monde*, August 24, 1958

⁶². These details are taken from El ATTAR, *Le sous-developpement du Yemen*, op. cit., p. 54.

the Sana'a-Hodeida highway it appears that other foreign aid missions had pronounced this work impossible to undertake in the past. This was partly because of the working conditions, an issue to which the Chinese themselves were not insensitive, in that it was stipulated that the Yemeni government should "ensure so far as possible that they [the Chinese] have a decent living condition in the territory of the Yemen."⁶³ But the main point is that the CPC was prepared to make the kind of commitment necessary to realise a project of this nature, because of the wider issues involved. As with other aspects of China's policy towards the Middle East during this period, so also in the field of economic co-operation, we find that the Chinese leadership was using specific cases to work out general principles, and the significance of Sino-Yemeni economic co-operation cannot be measured in terms of its impact upon Yemen alone.

CHINA'S RELATIONSHIP WITH YEMEN IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The impact in question could be assessed at different levels of analysis. One level is expressed in the element of south-south co-operation to which we have just referred. Another would, however, be the strategic dimension. Chinese sources remarked upon Yemen's "immensely important strategic position, dominating the mouth of the Red Sea".⁶⁴

Linked with this, there was the question of the country's economic potential. The Chinese press had already, in 1956, remarked upon Yemen's "extremely rich" resources, hitherto undeveloped.⁶⁵ The country had supported a thriving agriculture in the past, and was considered

⁶³. CHINA and YEMEN, *Agreement op. cit.* *Xinhua*, January 13, 1958.

⁶⁴. PEI Min, *op. cit.*

⁶⁵. MA Chien, *op. cit.*

potentially to be one of the most fertile parts of the Middle East.⁶⁶ Particularly significant is the official view that Yemen was rich in oil resources. This view was supported by the Chinese, both in 1957⁶⁷ and again during Mohamed al-Badr's visit.⁶⁸

In April 1958 there were further co-operation negotiations held at Sanaa between Mohamed al-Badr and the influential figure in Chinese diplomacy, Chen Jiakang, ambassador to Egypt who was also accredited to Yemen.⁶⁹ Further discussions took place in August of the same year⁷⁰, and a speedy announcement made that China was to begin work in constructing the highway immediately.⁷¹ In announcing this co-operation a Yemeni source in Cairo specifically linked it with the news that oil had been struck at Hodeida.⁷²

Were the Yemeni leaders hinting that they would develop oil resources with Chinese or Soviet help, and did they do this with the thought of getting better terms out of the latter, or with the thought of scaring the West into making concessions? It is difficult to say. As the next few years were to show, al-Badr had his own aims and was prepared to ditch the Chinese when it suited him. No sooner was the road completed at the beginning of 1962 than the Chinese team was hurriedly ejected from the country, and the Yemen government refused to pay for the work.⁷³

⁶⁶. se El ATTAR op. cit., pp 46, 171 ff.

⁶⁷. P'EI Min op. cit.

⁶⁸. LU Ying op. cit.

⁶⁹. *Xinhua* Tazet April 27 1958; *Xinhua* Cairo April 15.

⁷⁰. *Egyptian Gazette* August 1 1958.

⁷¹. *Le Monde* August 24 1958.

⁷². *Egyptian Mail* August 23, 1958.

⁷³. LITTLE T. *South Arabia*, London (Pall Mall Press) 1968, p. 89

Soviet experts were also expelled soon afterwards.⁷⁴ All this occurred around the time of al-Badr's succession to the throne and the outbreak of open hostilities with the Republicans.

Despite this setback, China's relations with Yemen turned out to be fairly long-lasting. The Chinese-built road proved of a much higher standard than the US-built one which soon began to deteriorate, and this made a favourable impact on public opinion.⁷⁵ The Chinese were instrumental in launching a project which had the effect of introducing wage-labour into the country almost for the first time - with everything this could imply in sociological terms. El Attar is clear on the fact that this project heralded the first emergence of a proletariat in the country.⁷⁶ During the civil war from the early 1960s onwards, Chinese technicians were again present in the country and played a certain role in support of the republicans. Although Abdel Nasser succeeded in insisting that Soviet aid be channeled through him, and in using it as an instrument of his influence in the area, China managed to a considerable extent to prevent their own aid being manipulated by the UAR in this way.⁷⁷

Thus while it certainly appears that al-Badr thought he was 'using' China, it was not necessarily he who had the last laugh. The CPC's understanding of the relationship in no way implied that they were 'cultivating' a particular regime or banking on its survival. They probably

⁷⁴. O'BALLANCE E. *The War in the Yemen*, London (Faber and Faber) 1971, p. 57.

⁷⁵. O'BALLANCE op. cit. p. 164.

⁷⁶. According to El ATTAR (*Le sous-developpement...*, op. cit.), "nous assistons, la, a la creation d'un proletariat". (p. 118)

⁷⁷. see O'BALLANCE op. cit. p. 175, where it is also argued that the Chinese gave crucial logistic support to the republicans in raising the siege of Sanaa, by building roads and bridges at high speed.

understood quite well that the monarchy was playing the communist 'card' for purely tactical reasons, and were ready to take up the opportunity which this presented. As we have shown, the CPC was fairly open about the fact that they were building relations via a particular regime, but *with* a popular current of struggle for national independence.

CHAPTER 7. GLOBAL ISSUES AS REFLECTED IN THE LEBANESE CIVIL WAR, 1958.

An estimation of the balance of forces in the world system such as the statement that "The East Wind Prevails over the West Wind" signified for the Chinese leadership that the summation of strength on one side of the balance was greater than that on the other; but it also meant more than this, it implied something about the ability of forces to knit together, making the whole more than the sum of its parts. This is where the qualitative importance of united front building came in.

Moreover, there is an interesting link between united fronts as alignments between countries, and as alignments of social forces *within* each country. The latter would provide a condition for the former to exist, and both aspects were implied in the world-systems perspective which the Chinese leadership espoused in early 1958.

However, such an approach, placing as it does so much emphasis upon major themes such as 'eras' and 'forces', inevitably carried with it the risk of cutting the individual case to suit a Procrustean bed dictated by the overall assessment of the global trend. Events in Lebanon during this period provide a useful case permitting an assessment of how far this risk was in fact avoided.

A SMALL NATION DEFEATING A BIG

In the CPC's world view during the period of Mao's leadership, there is one issue which constitutes a useful barometer of how the relative strength of forces in the world system was assessed. This was the question of how successful a small and weak country could be in waging a struggle of national independence.

On this question the Chinese leadership's position evolved over time, and in this developmental process the period we are studying can be seen as something of a watershed.

Mao Zedong consistently viewed people's war as the main method whereby radical forces could reveal themselves in a position to win trials of strength with the adversary. In 'Problems of Strategy in Guerilla war against Japan' (May 1938) he asserted that the vastness of China's territory (together with enemy shortage of troops) was decisive: "This is an important, even a primary condition, as far as the possibility of waging guerilla warfare is concerned, and small countries like Belgium which lack this condition have few or no such possibilities."¹ By 1970 on the other hand, his assessment had changed: "A weak nation can defeat a strong, a small nation can defeat a big. The people of a small country can certainly defeat aggression by a big country, if only they dare to rise in struggle, dare to take up arms and grasp in their own hands the destiny of their country."²

The difference between these two statements concerning the prospects for struggle in a particular country lay essentially in the assessment of the characteristics of the era, or to put it in another way, the global balance of forces (including the assessment of the ideological motivation and coherence of the popular element, worldwide). There was thus considered to be an important relationship between the current of popular forces at a world level and the concrete case.

The world system which served as a background to the concrete case was itself seen as dynamic and constantly

¹ MAO Tse-tung *Selected Works* Vol. II Peking (FLP) 1965 p.99

². *Peking Review* 1970 No. 22 p. 5

changing. In "On Protracted War" written in the same period as "Problems of Strategy...", Mao discussed the reasons for Abyssinia's (Ethiopia's) defeat by the Italians, among these being the fact that "she was not only weak but also small". This whole passage is relevant, but particularly striking is the statement that "there is still quite extensive guerrilla warfare in Abyssinia, which, if persisted in, will enable the Abyssinians to recover their country *when the world situation changes.*" (our emphasis)³.

From what we know about Mao's way of thinking it can be assumed that the particular concrete struggle was not seen as passively dependent upon changes in the "world situation". An overall assessment of the global (dynamic) balance was not an abstract statement but a generalisation itself based upon concrete cases. Its main expression was in the concrete, so the overall trend would also be revealed in the study of concrete cases. Moreover we can assume that each particular struggle, besides being *symptomatic* of the general trend would also be able to influence the overall system, to nudge its development in a certain direction. Hence the importance of winning local trials of strength.

The period which we are studying can be regarded as critical in the evolution from the model employed by Mao Zedong in 1938 to that employed in 1970. It is interesting that in the edition of his *Selected Works* published in 1960, the text of "Problems of Strategy..." which we have just quoted was supplied with a footnote stating that "in the new historical circumstances guerilla warfare can be victoriously waged in a country which is not large in territory..."⁴ It may be assumed that the struggles in the

³. MAO Tse-tung *Selected Works* Vol. II op. cit. p. 127.

⁴ MAO Tse-tung, *Selected Works* Vol II op. cit. p 112

Middle East in the late 'fifties were one of the examples which the Chinese had studied in arriving at this new assessment. It is certainly in the period under consideration that the idea of small and weak nations defeating imperialism begins to appear, hand in hand with the notion of a new overall balance of forces which makes this possible, expressed at that time in the notion of the east wind prevailing over the west wind.

A large-scale international trend like that represented in the concept of the 'East Wind' did not just 'exist' as a thing-in-itself in isolation from the human actors involved. Because it was seen more than anything as a movement of *peoples*, the element of consciousness was clearly implied in it. This consciousness required a focus, and the CPC identified certain key issues which were expected to provide this.

Among the most important of such issues was the defence of national sovereignty. The Lebanese case was considered so important because it encapsulated the sovereignty issue while at the same time also reflecting the struggle of a small entity against a major power.

The sovereignty issue was indeed one which played a significant role in that movement of developing countries, receiving its impetus from Bandung, a movement which could be viewed at one level as a form of joint action directed towards milieu goals, towards changes in the overall functioning of the international system.

Concretely, one aspect of the post-Bandung movement aimed at influencing the legal superstructure of the international system, and the Chinese gave considerable attention to this dimension during the period in question.

PRINCIPLES OF INTERNATIONAL LAW

In addition to the AAPSO Conference held at Cairo, the other main anti-imperialist capital in the Arab world, Damascus, also hosted an important international gathering in late 1957, an Asian-African Lawyers' Conference which took place on November 7-11 of that year. It coincided with the Moscow Meeting, a point which was emphasised by the Chinese in stressing that the two elements in the progressive forces were mutually strengthening one another. It was the second such conference, the first having been held in Jakarta in 1955, so the link with Bandung was evident.

Demands for change in the legal superstructure were in fact perceived at the time of the Damascus Conference as an expression of the new assertiveness of the nationalist forces, and also as a concrete orientation towards translating this assertion into a degree of re-ordering of the international system. Writing in connection with the Damascus Conference, Chinese legal experts insisted that the Bandung principles were becoming the legal basis for a new code of international relations. The Five Principles are described as "a charter of peace of the Asian and African nations", as being in contradiction to "all kinds of imperialist behaviour", as the "basis of peaceful coexistence" and, it is argued, they

"already constitute publicly recognised new principles of International Law and are a very important weapon against any aggression." ⁵

The above statements are interesting because they reflect a conception of peaceful co-existence which contrasts with

⁵ TAO Xijin, "Wei heping yu zhengyi er douzheng di Ya Fei falu gongzuo" (Jan 2 1958) in *Zheng Fa Yanjiu* 1958 I pp 4-9

the Soviet view in two major respects: firstly its source is collective action of the Asian-African countries rather than the balance of forces between the Socialist Camp and the West; and secondly, peace is defined as a negation of imperialist aggression in the developing world. It is surely justifiable to view this definition of peaceful co-existence as one important source for the type of relations China was seeking to promote via the united front, which thus appears not simply as a purely Chinese or purely communist phenomenon; it draws as its source upon an actually-existing trend in the conduct of Asian-African countries, and also appears as a macro-level, milieu-orientated sphere of activity, rather than a contingent policy dependent upon the tactical exigencies of particular conflict situation.

The following description of the significance of the Damascus Conference gives a good illustration of how the general world trend or 'situation' was seen as being realised through particular forms of organisation, which in turn exercise an influence upon the world system. The Conference, it is argued,

"is both a product of the new development in the international situation leading on from the basis of the Bandung Conference, and at the same time coincides with the present-day common aspirations of the Asian-African peoples, since it is also evidently the concrete carrying-through of the principles of the Bandung Conference, as well as being, from the legal point of view, a progressive clarification of these principles."⁶

Some of the positions adopted at Damascus can indeed be viewed as a radicalisation of the Bandung principles, in particular a gloss on the third of those principles to the effect that "It is legal for any state to give support to

⁶ *ibid*

a state which is the victim of aggression." This received considerable attention from the Chinese.

The Conference dealt with a number of contemporary issues of international law, including those relating to Yemen, Algeria, Oman, Cyprus and the Cameroons. However, the Chinese delegation concentrated on exposing their view of the Eisenhower Doctrine. This was necessary because "Certain people at the Conference did not yet perceive the aggressive substance of the 'Eisenhower Doctrine', mistaking it for a mere theory." By their own admission the Chinese helped swing the Conference to the position that this Doctrine

"is not only a threat to the Arab states and the national independence of all countries in the Near and Middle East, but is also a threat to the peace of the Near and Middle East and to that of the whole world."

This point is extremely interesting, because it provides a glimpse of the actual mechanics of China's united front policies, the manner in which their representatives struggled for unity around definite principles. It may be assumed that similar struggles were conducted in other international arenas such as the Cairo conference, as well as in bilateral meetings.

Thus in a sense the Chinese identified a kind of 'line' struggle in the sphere of international law, and worked to unite the progressive forces around a correct line: on the one hand, according to this image, there was the Eisenhower Doctrine as the concentrated expression of the old power politics, with the USA for example trying to "create...a 'legal' basis" for intervention in Lebanon;⁸ and on the

⁷ TAO Xijin op cit

⁸ DU Song, "Libanun Renmin di nu huo", *Shijie Zhishi* 1958, 11.

other the anti-aggressive demands of the Asian-African nations, expressed particularly in the Bandung Principles and their subsequent development.

This 'line' struggle was however viewed not merely as a clash in the realm of ideas, but as a debate which took its point of reference from concrete international conflicts. In a sense the CPC saw the Lebanese crisis as an embodiment of this clash of opposing principles. Articles by international lawyers published later in the summer of 1958 drew connections between the different Middle Eastern conflicts in terms of "usual imperialist conduct of illegal aggression against small and weak states", ⁹ and this theme was used to link the Lebanese struggle with the revolution in Iraq. ¹⁰ As a response, Chinese legal experts expressed support for struggles by peoples to protect their territory from foreign intervention.¹¹

Interesting parallels were drawn with China's own experience, both historical and contemporary, reflecting a common struggle to adopt new international norms designed to counter the interventionist norms of imperialism. One legal expert develops a parallel between the American argument about protecting US nationals in the Lebanon and a similar excuse put forward in relation to US intervention in Shanghai in 1927. Bringing the analogy up to date, the author refers to the Sino-US ambassadorial talks in Geneva where the USA brought up the demand for a right of

⁹ LI Haobei, "Zhichi Alabo renmin di zheng qu duli douzheng", *Zheng Fa Yanjiu* 1958 IV pp 4-5.

¹⁰ ZHOU Gengsheng, "Bu rongxu Mei Ying qinlue zhe ganshe ta guo nei zheng", *Zheng Fa Yanjiu* 1958 IV

¹¹ *Zhengfa Yanjiu* editorial, "Jianjue zhichi Alabo renmin zhengqu minzu duli di douzheng", 1958 IV pp 1-2 (Aug 5)

self-defence in relation to Taiwan, which is again seen as a parallel with the arguments used over Lebanon.¹²

When it occurred, the Lebanese conflict was thus greeted as an example highlighting the issue of national sovereignty in its role as a focus for the rallying of popular forces:

"The Lebanese people's courageous uprising proclaims the fundamental bankruptcy of the Eisenhower Doctrine in the Lebanon; and it has also shown again that in the circumstances of the East Wind prevailing over the West Wind, the unprecedented high tide of the Middle Eastern people cannot be stemmed by imperialism."¹³

The Revolution in Iraq was, in turn, seen as further confirmation, and writing in the summer of 1958, one of the participants in the Damascus Conference stated:

"At that time we recognised that the awakened Arab people were not likely to remain in slavery to imperialism; the setting-up of certain independent democratic Arab regimes, the fundamental failure of the Eisenhower Doctrine and the all-round collapse of the imperialist colonial system in the Middle East, these events would not be long in coming. Now, just as we predicted, the Lebanese people have begun to undertake struggle, the Iraqi Republic has been founded."¹⁴

ASSERTION OF EFFECTIVE NATIONAL INDEPENDENCE

In the case of Yemen the Chinese supported what was considered an anti-imperialist action by a government, even a very conservative one. In Lebanon on the other hand they supported what was seen as a popular movement directed against the government in place. These differences reflect

¹² SHAO Tianren, "Qianze qinluezhe di zuixing", *Zhengfa Yanjiu* 1958, 4, p. 7

¹³ DU Song (1958) op cit.

¹⁴ LI Haobei op cit.

something of the broadness of scope of the forces which the CPC was seeking to unite. But the common characteristic these phenomena were perceived as sharing was an orientation towards creating the basis for a real rather than a formal, national independence. This served as an important overarching criterion for the sort of forces China envisaged drawing into the united front. The support for a struggle against informal means of domination by outside powers is an interesting theme insofar as it anticipates to some extent the criticism of the Soviet leadership in the early '60s for neglecting the problem of "neo-colonialism".¹⁵

The newly developing friendship and co-operation between the Asian-African countries (later to become organised into what was often seen as a distinct force in world politics - the Third World) had, according to the Chinese analysis, two aspects: on the one hand a resumption of ties interrupted by the era of colonialism, on the other - the aspect which interests us here - a common experience acquired in the context of similar and linked struggles in the contemporary environment:

"The people of Asia and Africa, through their intimate experience, increasingly realise that the existence of imperialist powers and privileges is the most serious barrier to independent development; they must remove this barrier so that they can advance smoothly on the road of independent economic development."¹⁶

China's view seems to have been that sovereignty did not simply 'exist' as some abstract, ideal entity, it came into being precisely in the course of struggle against the

¹⁵ There is also a link at one level with the theme of opposition to "hegemonism" in the mid-'70s, at least insofar as this was more than simply a tactic to isolate the USSR.

¹⁶. DONG Feng, *Shijie Zhishi* op. cit.

existing tendency to outside powers to intervene, particularly in the affairs of small and weak states. In this process, the Eisenhower Doctrine came to be seen as a concentrated symbol of what had to be combated, and Lebanon as a test case and focal point in the issue of real versus formal independence:

"Lebanon enjoyed territorial integrity until the U.S. forces invaded it. Lebanon was politically independent, in form at any rate. The Lebanese people were struggling against the Chamoun government in order to change this formal independence into real independence. But the invasion of the U.S. forces has destroyed completely even that formal independence.¹⁷

The fundamental issues later expressed in the concept of neo-colonialism in fact received a fairly 'programmatic' formulation at this time:

"In the case of those countries which have obtained legal independence, wherever this independence is still incomplete or not consolidated, the imperialists have tried hard to maintain a tight grip on them, economically, politically and militarily, or tried to force them back into their old subjection. The *main task* before the people of these countries is, therefore, to struggle to obtain national independence in the fullest sense of the term.¹⁸

A major specific focal point of this question of form versus substance of national independence was considered by the Chinese to be the issue of military blocs (treaty organisations) and military bases, which pinpointed the character of American global strategy (building up spheres of influence under the smokescreen of containing communism.) This was perceived as an issue over which broad sections of the people of many countries and areas could be mobilised. The point to be noted in terms of

¹⁷. *Renmin Ribao*, Editorial, August 3, 1958; text in *China Supports.. op. cit.*, p. 235.

¹⁸. *Renmin Ribao*, Editorial, July 21 1958; *ibid.* p. 218 (our emphasis).

links between local issues and a general trend is that all the particular local struggles against some aspect of US presence were considered objectively to be mutually supporting, while a subjective sense of solidarity would strengthen co-ordination further.

LINKS WITH ISSUES IN ASIA

Emphasis on the question of Western military bases and treaty organisations as a threat to sovereignty was not confined to the Middle East, but was rather part of a global approach which encompassed also Chinese efforts to unite with forces in other areas. Sovereignty was thus also a theme which the Chinese were exploring with regard to Asia in the same period as the conflict in Lebanon.

Referring to the Manila Pact, a statement issued in mid-March argued that the Bandung principles, as well as the policies of the USSR and China were opposed to the existence of blocs and military bases, but the United States "have tried hard to obstruct the development of this mainstream in the international situation."¹⁹

The specific focus of Chinese articles on Asia during the period was Indonesia. The Chinese already supported Indonesia's claim to the territory of West Irian on anti-colonial grounds, but events took a sharper turn at the beginning of 1958 when the American CIA²⁰ backed an attempt, which turned out to be a somewhat embarrassing

¹⁹. CHINA Government, Statement March 10, 1958. Text in ROYAL INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS, *Documents on International Affairs*, 1958, p. 482.

²⁰. The action appears to have caused some recriminations among US decision-making circles which were not consulted. See IDE ANAK AGUNG GDE AGUNG *Twenty Years of Indonesian Foreign Policy*. The Hague (Mouton) 1973 pp. 375-80

failure, to overthrow President Sukarno. Rebellions were launched on the Islands of Sumatra and Sulawesi with American arms. A few days later John Foster Dulles provided effective political backing in a speech condemning Sukarno's Guided Democracy. Among other incidents an American pilot was captured by government forces.

The rebellion was soon crushed and America acted speedily to defuse the situation²¹ - not quickly enough, however, to prevent disillusionment with the United States among Indonesian decision-making circles.²² The CPC took the opportunity to point a general moral regarding the significance of these events both in a regional and a world context:

"Taiwan has become an important stronghold for United States interference in Indonesia..in the past and today, both the Chinese and Indonesian peoples have had common interests in their struggle against colonialism. This is true not only for the two countries; but all Asian countries have had similar common interests. Therefore, the forcible occupation by the United States of China's territory of Taiwan not only encroaches on China's territorial sovereignty but also constitutes a menace to the Asian countries, particularly to the independent nations of Southeast Asia. Similarly the United States interference in Indonesia is also a provocation against peace in all Asia. The people of the Asian countries cannot stand idle under this provocation."²³

There are several levels of analysis employed in this passage. The actual use of Taiwan as a base for American intervention is a specifically local one. On the other hand the "common interests in their struggle against

²¹. LEIFER. M. *Indonesia's Foreign Policy* London (George Allen & Unwin for RIIA) 1983 p. 51.

²². see WEINSTEIN F.B. *Indonesian Foreign Policy - The Dilemma of Dependence* Ithaca etc. (Cornell UP) 1976 pp. 71-2.

²³. *Dagong Bao* March 30 1958, text in Research Backgrounder:Indonesia (no date or place of issue) p. 82

colonialism" was something the Chinese extended not only to the whole of Asia but to Africa and subsequently Latin America as well. A few weeks later, as we will see, Chinese statements were to begin referring to the Middle East increasingly as West Asia thus emphasising a direct regional link with events in the immediate neighbourhood. But even at this earlier stage it was possible to view events in Southeast Asia and the Middle East as part of the same process. In May renewed attention was paid to intervention in Indonesia just when the Lebanese crisis was building up,²⁴ and essential similarities were detected (despite the fact that in one case America was backing rebels against a government and in the other a government against rebels). On the one hand there was a parallel in terms of American strategy, both examples showing a readiness to launch limited wars; on the other, both were part of a wider common struggle: "Like the Indonesian people, the Lebanese people are not alone in their struggle."²⁵

A critical issue was intervention by the West - its causes, the trials of strength to which it gave rise, and the possible outcome. These trials of strength in terms of actual force would determine the success of the global-level milieu-orientated action of the nationalist forces to restructure the world system. The issue at stake was whether the push generated by the anti-colonial movement and expressed at Bandung would succeed in bringing about a restructuring of international relations in such a way as to permit a context for ongoing independent development; or whether the USA would succeed in restructuring the system so as to generate new forms of dominance.

²⁴. *Dagong Bao* May 10 1958 reported in *Peking Review* 1958 No. 11

²⁵. *Renmin Ribao* May 20 1958; *Xinhua* same date.

An important question was how far the US was able or resolute enough to intervene directly in this process. The Lebanese crisis of 1958 marked the first occasion in the post-war world when the USA had carried out a military operation outside its own traditional sphere of influence in Latin America - with the exception of Korea where the USA had not been fighting under its own flag. Shortly afterward Henry Kissinger in his book *The Necessity for Choice*, was to cite the Lebanese conflict as an example of how the USA had failed to demonstrate the ability to translate its power into a capacity to register success in concrete local situations. His assessment of the experience was not dissimilar to that of the Chinese, who viewed that conflict as a major test of the balance of forces in the world. First, the popular struggle in Lebanon had obliged the USA actually to implement the Doctrine and exposed America's inability to win victories by bluff, by a threat of force which did not need to be employed. Having achieved this initial success, the next and more difficult stage in the struggle was obviously to make sure that the American show of strength did not succeed.

For all these reasons, Chinese sources treated Lebanon as a vital test case for international trends - to the point of operating a certain reductionism in treating internal conflicts one-sidedly as a manifestation of wider international forces.

PERSPECTIVES ON THE 1958 CRISIS

The above are some of the predominant global issues which provided the background for the Chinese analysis of events in Lebanon. One of the key problems would necessarily be how far Chinese authors could harmonise their view of the big global issues with a realistic assessment of

specificities of the particular situation of the country in question.

Indisputably, in the Lebanese context, the interaction between domestic and foreign policy issues was an important theme. The basis of Lebanon's existence was the National Pact concluded between the different communities in 1943. Among other provisions, the agreement between the communities stipulated that none was to call in outside support from another country. This was the provision which Chamoun was accused of breaking, and to which the opposition appealed. It can thus be said that a clear link existed between domestic co-existence and non-aligned external policy.²⁶ According to this analysis, the situation in Lebanon presented at least formal points of convergence with the CPC's general view on the relationship between unity of domestic forces and the foreign policy of a state. It has also been argued that opposition to French imperialism was an original basis for willingness to co-operate,²⁷ so it was not an illogical position to expect that internal intervention by the USA would have a similar effect in cementing national unity.

There were however countervailing tendencies. The growth of Nasserism and specifically the formation of the UAR could have been expected to constitute a disruptive element, in the sense of introducing a new pole of attraction for Lebanese Moslems, external to the Lebanese state.²⁸ Some Moslem forces, as well as the local

²⁶ see KEWENIG M., *Die Koexistenz der Religionsgemeinschaften im Libanon*, Berlin, (Walter de Gruyter - Rechtswissenschaftlicher Fakultät der Universität zu Köln) 1965, esp pp 62-3

²⁷ see AGWANI M. *The Lebanese Crisis 1958*, Bombay (Asia Publishing Co.) 1965, Ch. 1.

²⁸ IONIDES M., *Divide and Lose - The Arab Revolt of 1955-8*, London (Geoffrey Bles) 1960, esp. p. 240

Communist Party, did not fully accept Lebanon's existence as an entity independent from Syria.²⁹ In practice, however, a fairly broad unity did emerge in 1958, and it appeared as though a new range of foreign policy issues might have been in the process of arising to supercede the old cleavages.³⁰ It is at least clear that it could not be satisfactory to attempt an analysis of the Lebanese crisis essentially in terms of domestic social and cultural fragmentation³¹ - interaction with world forces was an essential dimension.

However it would be equally wrong to ignore the specificities created by domestic cleavages in Lebanese society, and in particular rapid shifts in the domestic economy against the background of a changing world economy must be seen as an important factor.³² The specificities of the case should not be lost sight of, particularly the problems posed by small size.³³ The wealthiest country per capita in Asia or Africa at the time (excluding Israel and South Africa), Lebanon was also characterised by extreme divisions between rich and poor. Such concentration was expected, according to some development theories, to facilitate accumulation. There was, however, already widespread criticism that this was not happening. A large amount of investment capital was passing through Lebanon, which thus reflected in a concentrated way (all the most

²⁹ see MEO L., *Lebanon, Improbable Nation*, Bloomington Indiana (Indiana U.P.), 1965, esp. p. 130

³⁰ KEWENIG op. cit., p. 116

³¹ for example, HUDSON M.C., *The Precarious Republic - Political Modernisation in Lebanon*, New York (Random House) 1968

³² see HACHEM N., *Libanon: Sozio-okonomische Grundlagen*, Opladen (C.W. Leske) 1969.

³³ KHALAF N.G., *Economic Implications of the Size of Nations, with special reference to Lebanon*, Leiden (E.J. Brill) 1971, pp 169 ff.

concentrated perhaps because of its small size and diversity) many of the socio-economic changes of the region at that particular time.³⁴ There were important conflicts about how these could be harnessed to bring about lasting improvements in the country itself.

The above survey could lead to the following deductions: firstly, the image derived from China's *overall* world-view of nation-building and unity arising in the course of a struggle for effective sovereignty was not by any means *prima facie* inapplicable to the Lebanese case; secondly, however, it is equally clear that there would be a grave risk in neglecting the specificity of the case, and the complexity of socio-economic factors would argue against reductionist arguments or single-cause explanations. These points must be borne in mind in a critical examination of how CPC authors did approach this particular case. But before doing so we must first briefly consider the state of China's own relations with Lebanon.

CHINA'S RELATIONS WITH LEBANON

One interesting feature of the question of Lebanon in Chinese foreign policy at the time is that the regime of Camille Chamoun, which the Chinese condemned as a reactionary clique during the crisis, was one of the third-world regimes which had been most *favourable* to building links with the PRC during the 1950s.

Contacts between the two countries began in 1952 at the time when Chamoun came to office, and these were strengthened at Bandung, when the Lebanese government was favourably impressed by China's stance on the Palestinian issue. The Lebanese government thus rejected an invitation for an official visit to Taiwan, although a similar

³⁴ see KISCHLI M., *Kapitalismus und Linke im Libanon*, Frankfurt am Main (Europaischer Verlagsanstalt) 1970

invitation was accepted by Iraq, for example. The USA was leaning heavily on its Middle Eastern allies not to have anything to do with the PRC; they succeeded at the time for instance with Saudi Arabia. But here too, Lebanon, while it stopped short of concluding full diplomatic relations, resisted this pressure to some extent.³⁵ The historic importance of Lebanon's contribution to building links with the PRC is quite properly reflected in a systematic Chinese study of Sino-Arab relations published at the height of the conflict.³⁶

In late 1955 a trade agreement was concluded between the two countries, incorporating the principle of equality and mutual benefit, and including a Most-favoured Nation clause. China established a trade office in Beirut, which also had the task of promoting friendship between the two countries.³⁷ In early 1958 figures were available which illustrated the effect of the first full year of this trade. Out of about £L7 million exports to China, about £L5 were composed of manufactured goods, thus giving a certain stimulus to Lebanon's manufacturing industry.³⁸ This is also an interesting point, because there was widespread debate in Lebanon at the time about one of the issues which was later to emerge as a central theme of third-world development debate, namely the inability of

³⁵ see MEDZINI op. cit p. 18

³⁶ ZHOU Yiliang, article in *Beijing Daxue Xuebao* (Humanities Section) 1958 III p. 4

³⁷ For the texts of the trade agreement and related correspondence see HERZER R and MOHR W. (eds) *Vertrage der Volksrepublik China mit anderen Staaten Teil 2* (Die Lander des vordern Orients und Afrikas), Frankfurt am Main (Alf. Metzner/Institut fur Asienkunde) 1963 pp 51-7; BENDALY V *Accords commerciaux entre le Liban et les Pays socialistes*, no place of issue, 1968 pp 129-34.

³⁸ *Le Commerce du Levant* (Beirut) Jan 11, 1958

some elites to invest productively in such a way as to stimulate the domestic economy. Apart from a generally unfavourable trade balance, Lebanon's exports were overwhelmingly composed of non-manufactured goods, mainly foodstuffs.³⁹ This was particularly illogical in a country which did not suffer so much from the capital shortage which was considered to afflict other LDCs, and the inability of the regime to do anything to harness capital to productive uses was one of the main points made by its critics at the time.⁴⁰ This particular case is thus important in relation to the discussion of China's economic co-operation policy and its overall philosophy of the structural character of third-world development.

Among the multiple levels of relations developing with the Lebanon, the Chinese press gave very clear pride of place to the aspect of people-to-people contacts. One article argued that the Lebanese people welcomed Chinese imports, but valued even more the support given by the Chinese people. A Chinese art exhibition held in Beirut was viewed by 30,000 people, and many left friendly comments in the visitors' book.⁴¹ Thus when a conflict developed between, as they saw it, the regime and the people, the CPC chose the latter, even at the expense of distancing itself from the regime. This could be seen as 'disloyalty', but on the other hand it would also seem to show that at least in this case China did not see its own particular state-to-state relations as the determinant factor in making political

³⁹ Foodstuffs made up over 70% of total exports in the period 1951-66; see KHALAF N.G. *Economic Implications of the Size of Nations with special reference to Lebanon*, Leiden (E.J. Brill) 1971 pp 182 ff.

⁴⁰ see for example KISCHLI M. *Kapitalismus und Linke im Libanon* Frankfurt am Main (Europaischer Verlagsanstalt) 1970

⁴¹ ZHOU Yiliang, op cit

judgements about which forces could be seen as 'progressive' or 'reactionary'. The Chinese representative in Beirut, Wang Liewang, was recalled, "provisionally" but without explanation, at the beginning of 1958.⁴² The President's 'reactionary' stance over the Eisenhower Doctrine thus presumably outweighed his positive role in relation to China herself. It is, however, also true that the Chinese leadership had hopes of building upon pro-PRC tendencies among anti-Chamounist forces on the question of spreading the PRC's state-to-state relations at the expense of Taiwan, and quoted anti-Chamounist leader Kamal Jumblatt as saying that "nationalist China no longer exists".⁴³

HISTORIC LOGIC OF THE LEBANESE CONFLICT

Reflecting the major overall issues which they perceived in international politics, one of the main questions which concerned Chinese commentators was that of how Lebanese identity as a country was asserted, or even created, in the process of anti-imperialist struggles. The term "national" was often applied in speaking of Lebanon, apparently reflecting a view that the importance of the national independence question outweighed any conceptual difficulties which could arise as part of the 'single Arab nation' issue.

Studies of the historical background are interesting in this context, because the national dimension was emphasised so strongly. One study examines the history of Arab popular movements from the sixteenth century onwards, and during the early stage of these struggles, peasant revolts

⁴² *Le Commerce du Levant* Jan 4 1958

⁴³ *Xinhua* September 18 1958, despatch dated Cairo September 17

in today's Lebanon are accorded particular significance. However, the author argues,

"The point of the seventeenth and eighteenth century uprisings is clearly that uprisings which are not of a national character are generally turned by feudal rulers and foreign opportunists to their own advantage."⁴⁴

Another specialist concentrates upon a further series of revolts in the 1860s, implying that they were now more difficult to defeat.⁴⁵ However, here again foreign interest in the shape of the French were able to divert the movement by accentuating its religious character. A further stage of the independence movement in Lebanon had, it is argued, acquired a national character in the period leading up to World War I.⁴⁶ However this is where a new element entered in: imperialist tactics for deflecting the struggle were also updated, and in the more recent period begin to take the form of using the 'communist threat' as a 'cloak' or 'smokescreen' to conceal imperialist aggression.⁴⁷ This then was the situation at the outset of the post-World War II period.

The picture, then, was one of a continuing historical dialectic of popular struggle, increasingly tending to discover national forms, pitted against imperialist attempts to deflect this process. It was against this background that the movement in 1958 was considered to mark a new, possibly qualitative, step in forming national unity.

⁴⁴ PENG Shuzhih, article in *Renwen Zazhi*, 1958, 4 (August 25), p. 26

⁴⁵ GUO Yingde, article in *Beijing Daxue Xuebao*, 1958, 3 (August 1958), pp. 5-12

⁴⁶ PENG Shuzhih, op. cit., p. 27

⁴⁷ GUO Yingde, op. cit., pp. 6, 11

In opposing Communism, the US was considered to be employing an extension of earlier tactics, those of "a thief calling 'Stop thief!'"⁴⁸ Particularly significant was considered to be the use of the notion of 'communist threat' to divide political forces within the country. This point, which mirrors one already noted earlier in relation to the conflicts in Jordan and Syria, fills in an interesting dimension which the global images set out in the Anna Louise Strong interview leave blank, namely the effect of the US anti-communist crusade upon domestic social alignments within countries of the intermediate zone. The tactic is seen here as serving to divide the forces of independence and deprive the movement of its national focus of unity. This has important implications for united front strategies. Issues had to be found to counteract this, and focus the cohesion of popular forces.

What were the issues which could possibly crystallise a united opposition to imperialism? Despite the large amount of capital passing through the country, Chinese sources drew attention to the lack of real development. Ninety percent of industrial and agricultural capital was in foreign hands, and the country was characterised by low wages and unemployment.⁴⁹ This state of affairs was considered to have a political background, in that Lebanon's acceptance of Truman's Point Four aid in 1949 gave the USA virtual control over the economy, at the same time as it acquired military bases.⁵⁰ These bases were considered to be of particular importance to American

⁴⁸ DU Song, "Libanun Renmin di nu huo", *Shijie Zhishi* 1958, 11, 22-3 (May 28th 1958)

⁴⁹ Guo Yingde, "Diguo zhuyi qinlue zhong jin dong Alabo guojia xiexing shi", *Beijing Daxue Xuebao*, 1958, 3 (August) pp. 7-8

⁵⁰ QUN Li, "Cong lishi shang kan Alabo dong fang ge guo renmin di jiefang douzheng", *Lishi Yanjiu*, 1958, p. iv

strategy,⁵¹ and given our earlier discussion of the issue, it is clear that they were viewed by the Chinese as a focal point for building domestic unity. So it would seem that there was an interlocking of economic and political factors involved in the crystallisation of opposition.

The development of the crisis was such that Chinese sources detected a further polarisation of the two 'lines', one selling out national independence and the other acting as a catalyst to national unity by upholding it. Refusing to heed popular feeling against the Eisenhower Doctrine, the Lebanese leadership was alleged to be bent on giving the USA various new military facilities:

"All this has not only deprived Lebanon of its independence and gone against its national interests, but has threatened the security of the other Arab states and isolated Lebanon from them."⁵²

Such an image of ever-sharpening polarisation could lead logically to the type of view which Mao was to set out two years later in the following formulation:

"Those backed by imperialism are precisely those discarded by the broad masses of the people. Chiang Kai-shek, Syngman Rhee, Kishi, Batista, Said, Menderes and their ilk have either been overthrown or will be overthrown by the people. The risings of the people in these countries against the lackeys of US imperialism are also a fight against the reactionary rule of imperialism itself."⁵³

⁵¹ DENG Tuo, "Muqian zhong dong xingshi", *Xuexi*, July 1958.

⁵² *Guangming Ribao*, May 14 1958 in *Survey of China Mainland Press* 1773, p. 50

⁵³ MAO Zedong, *Chairman Mao Tse-tung's Important Talks with Guests from Asia, Africa and Latin America* Peking (FLP) 4th ed 1966 pp 4-5

This was very much the perspective which Chinese decision-makers were moving towards during 1958, and the experience of the Lebanese conflict was important in this respect. A *Renmin Ribao* article carries a phrase which strikingly anticipates Mao's later statement:

"The Lebanese people's struggle against the Eisenhower doctrine and their struggle against the ruling circles in the service of the United States become one and the same." ⁵⁴

In order to depict Chamoun as an individual 'lackey' of imperialism, isolated from the people, Chinese sources stressed the amount of personal authority over home and foreign policy which the Lebanese constitution gives to the President, so that Chamoun could personally be held to account. ⁵⁵ The implied view is a Rousseau-like one that sovereignty inherently resides in the people, so it comes as no surprise to see Chamoun's regime described as a "tyranny". ⁵⁶

The corollary was that, from the Chinese point of view, the armed uprising created its own legitimate political authority in Lebanon. Du Song's background article goes into some length describing the organisational forms which developed during the uprising: the formation of "people's armed forces", the way the rebels had taken over the administration of certain government organs, the creation in Tripoli of "public committees" and a people's court to try members of Pierre Jumayel's Falangist party who were

⁵⁴ *Renmin Ribao* May 15 1958; *Xinhua* same date

⁵⁵ Du Song, "Libanun renmin di nuhuo", *Shijie Zhishi* 1958, XI pp 22-3

⁵⁶ *Guangming Ribao* May 14 1958; SCMP 1773, p. 50

accused of committing murders. ⁵⁷ There is a flavour, perhaps deliberate, of Marx's *The Civil War in France*.

It is within this overall frame of reference that the most authoritative *Renmin Ribao* editorial on the subject emphasised the extent of the area of the country under effective rebel control - Tripoli, Halba, el Mina and Baalbeck, the north, and "vast areas" of the centre and south.⁵⁸ It argues that whatever threats are made cannot deter the rebels because "they are fighting under the banner of patriotism." The basic cause of the conflict, according to this article, is the fact that contradictions between the imperialists and their agents on the one hand and the Lebanese people on the other "have grown acute over a long period, and inevitably they developed into open conflict." Especially important was Chamoun's acceptance of the Eisenhower Doctrine:

"This is something that has not failed to embitter each and every Lebanese patriot, with the result that the pent-up public hatred burst with explosive force. It is precisely because of this that, in the current patriotic struggle, the chief opposition parties in Lebanon have come together, and that all sections of the population have closed their ranks to unleash a nation-wide, implacable struggle against the imperialists and their agents." ⁵⁹

This is a clear example of how the CPC would have liked domestic united fronts to develop, in the course of struggle over the focal issue of national sovereignty, and tending towards a resolution in which state power itself would change hands and hence the national entity in question would come to play a new role in the *international*

⁵⁷ DU Song op. cit.

⁵⁸ *Renmin Ribao* editorial May 30 1958; *China Supports* pp 194-5

⁵⁹ *Renmin Ribao* May 30, op. cit.

united front. In conjunction with the historical view that class uprisings "which are not of a national character" are likely to be misdirected, and the view of the domestic enemy as a narrow clique with no apparent social basis, official Chinese statements created an amalgam between on the one hand a very strong stress on the primacy of the national contradiction, and on the other a populist view of the masses as the repository of national sovereignty.

This approach was a general one at the time, and was not exclusive to Lebanon. In the case of another pro-Western regime, Turkey, a fairly similar line of reasoning was applied, to the effect that the whole people was demanding a switch to a neutral policy, and the government was trying to change the electoral law to prevent the opposition parties coalescing.⁶⁰

DOMESTIC SOCIAL FORCES IN LEBANON

Official statements such as the above tended to play up the issue of sovereignty to a point where there is almost the impression of 'the people' as an undifferentiated mass. At the same time, it should be noted that background articles did display some recognition of the fact that 'the people' constituted an alignment of different forces.

For example, the current affairs periodical *Shijie Zhishi* carried a reference article giving details of the different Lebanese political parties.⁶¹ Pride of place was given to the Communist Party of Syria and Lebanon, with the remark that it enjoys "very high prestige", but with little description of any actual effective leadership role,

⁶⁰ ZHUANG Chuping, "Diguozhuyi zai Zhong Dong di mao jiaozhao - Tuerqi", *Shijie Zhishi* 1958 15 p. 23

⁶¹ XIN Ping "Libanun di zheng dang" *Shijie Zhishi* 1958 15 p. 30.

leaving the reader perhaps to draw the inference that its practical influence was not that great. This is interesting because Chinese historiography tended to attribute a decisive role to communism in the early phase of the Arab movement. The historical study by Peng Shuzhi, to which we refer on a number of occasions, quoted a document from the Communist Party of Syria and Lebanon to back up this point.⁶² In the 1950s on the other hand China had to accept that except in Iraq the communist element within the popular forces was probably minor.

The *Shijie Zhishi* article recognises the key role of the National Front, founded in April 1957 and which took the leadership in a wave of strikes in May of the same year. Grouping together Sunni and Shia Muslims as well as Maronites, the National Front "in the struggle against the Chamoun government ...is the major leading force." As far as mass base is concerned, the main emphasis is placed upon the organisation led by Kamal Jumblatt, which is described as having great nationalist and anti-imperialist spirit. The article gives quite an interesting analysis of differences between pro- and anti-French sections of the bourgeoisie, and between old and new nationalist groups.

The overall implication of the article is an understanding - perhaps already implicit in official statements about the opposition between the people on the one hand and a few imperialist lackeys on the other - that the nationalist cause is capable of mobilising most of the social strata in the country, even ones which one might at first sight expect to be characterised as reactionary. In discussing the Arab Liberation Party, for example, the author describes it as the representative of the landlords in the northern part of the country; in spite of this, he credits

⁶² PENG Shuzhi, "Lue lun Alabo minzu douzheng di xin jieduan", *Renwen Zazhi* 1958 4 p. 29

it with being the main force in leading the popular anti-Chamounist uprising in Tripoli, and also praises its policies of closer co-operation with the UAR and developing trade relations with the socialist camp.⁶³

What still appears to be missing in this picture is a reference to the socio-economic basis of different social strata - for example sources cited earlier would lead one to a hypothesis that experience of poverty and underdevelopment would be an immediate step influencing popular forces to become conscious of the issue of sovereignty. Such a hypothesis would imply another important step in the argument, namely that such a coalescence of forces would be limited in nature and duration. This would seem to be an issue of crucial significance for united front strategies, and in particular to imply the need to guard against simplistic assumptions of a linear progression to great unity. Such an understanding was largely missing from Chinese discussion of the Lebanon. We will return to this important question in relation to Iraq.

EFFECT OF U.S. INTERVENTION

The manner in which the Lebanese issue was handled was obviously influenced by the intervention of US troops in mid-July. Whereas the USA had wanted to control the situation from behind the scenes, the Chinese now argued, the popular struggle had forced it into the open, and this in turn only increased popular indignation.⁶⁴ Parallel with the line of the Leap Forward within China, there was an increasing stress on the massive material force represented by ideologically motivated masses. The image

⁶³ XIN Ping, op. cit.

⁶⁴ DENG Tuo, op. cit.

of a volcano - also employed with respect to Jordan ⁶⁵ - served to represent the strength of the mass movement where a pro-Western 'clique' was perched in a position of authority.⁶⁶ Lebanon's small population of 1.4 million was emphasised, thus stressing the limitless power which could be generated by the people of even a small country.

However, the other aspect is that US intervention also broadened the scope of the issues involved in the conflict, and the Chinese thus began increasingly to look beyond the specifically Lebanese aspects of the case. Chinese sources in the period after the entry of US ground forces placed increasing emphasis on the country's strategic importance. This perspective can be seen in one of the articles included in a special supplement to *Shijie Zhishi* brought out a few days after the US landings, which depicts Lebanon as "the gateway opening onto the Arab countries". Leaving aside the nuance which one might perhaps expect in relation to a state which had after all resisted the US policy of boycotting trade links with China, the author depicts Lebanon as practically the primary channel of US influence in the area. He describes it as a point of access for dumping Western goods on the Arab market, the first country approached by the USA when the Eisenhower Doctrine was promulgated in an attempt to destroy Arab unity, a base for aggression against Syria both in 1957 and at the time of writing, and sees imperialism employing Lebanon "as a bridgehead for political and economic aggression against

⁶⁵ see for example the article by LI Fanzhen and CHENG Liangping in *Shijie Zhishi* 1958, 17, pp 23-4

⁶⁶ DENG Tuo, "Muqian Zhong Dong xingshi", *Xuexi*, July 1958.

the Arab countries." ⁶⁷ Such an analysis clearly reflects an enlarged perspective upon the issues involved.

Despite the emphasis on the strength of the mass struggle, Chinese sources did not neglect the fact that it was still the overall world configuration of forces which provided a condition for the successful waging of independence struggles in a small nation, and this in turn implied the involvement of other progressive forces in support of the Lebanese movement. At the time the civil war broke out in May it was already argued that US intervention in the internal affairs of Lebanon in its different forms

"seriously threatens the peace of the Middle East and of the world; for this reason it not only encounters the opposition of all the parties and the people of the Lebanon, but also all the peace-loving people of the world have uttered a solemn warning..."⁶⁸

With the widening of scope of the conflict in July, however, the international dimension became of even more central concern to the Chinese, and the question of their responses to this will be the subject of the following chapter.

⁶⁷ YU Lisan, article in, *Shijie Zhishi*, Supplement I, (July 26 1958) p. 9

⁶⁸ DU Song (1958) op cit.

CHAPTER 8. THE C.P.C.'S ASSESSMENT OF THE ALIGNMENT OF FORCES FOLLOWING THE COUP IN IRAQ

The left-wing coup in Iraq on July 14th 1958, and the US military deployment in Lebanon which followed, marked an important change in the area, and introduced some elements which were to be of considerable significance for post-war international politics as a whole. Analysis of the CPC's perception of these events provides a context in which to sum up some key aspects of Chinese strategies for uniting anti-imperialist forces, particularly because certain questions now appear in new or sharper form.

ANALYSIS OF NATURE OF IRAQI COUP

Particularly important as an issue for the future was to be the question of the nature of the regime in Iraq.

Cases examined so far have shown that the united front was conceived functionally in terms of the definition of the target of struggle. Those who were defined as struggling against imperialism for whatever reasons were part of it. So far the spectrum was indeed broad, including, among its main examples, Nasserism with its combination of anti-imperialism and anti-communism; a very conservative nationalism in Yemen; and a movement in Lebanon which itself spanned an extremely broad range of social forces. In Chinese presentations, these differences were downplayed, each movement being treated essentially as a particular manifestation of a general popular current.

To some extent the CPC seems to have reconciled itself to the fact that the role of explicitly left-wing forces was relatively minor. Yet in China's own experience, the role of the Communist Party had been a major factor in

maintaining united fronts, for example against the Japanese, or subsequently the unity of a fairly wide range of forces against Chiang Kai-shek. The experience in the Middle East where the leading role was played by nationalist forces thus raised some difficult issues.

The implicit response to these difficult questions seems to have been that the masses were actually engaged in struggle and the regimes would either lead them in this or be swept out of the way. This may be a plausible assumption in theory, but it runs up against the problem of a particular evolution whereby nationalist forces could ride to power on the basis of the popular struggle and maintain themselves there by repression. With the benefit of hindsight this has indeed been a major characteristic of the area.

Iraq pinpoints the issue in an interesting way, representing as it did a movement which - at least in the period which concerns us - was explicitly left-wing, with the local Communist Party as an important actor, practically the mainstay of the regime for a certain period; CIA head Allen Dulles considered it on the verge of a "complete takeover" in early 1959.¹ A secondary but also significant point is that the role of the Kurds calls into question the simplistic identification of the national movement with Arab nationalism.

In the mid- to late 1940s the Iraqi Communist Party (ICP) had made considerable play of the Chinese model in their domestic propaganda,² but following this had mainly concentrated upon working out a concrete model applicable to their own conditions. On balance it is probably fair to say that at the time of the coup China had little

¹ quoted in HAZELTON F., "Iraq to 1963" in CARDRI, *Saddam's Iraq*, London (Zed) Revised ed. 1989, 26

² GARNAY R. *Communism and Agrarian Reform in Iraq*, London (Croom Helm) 1978, p. 135

involvement with the ICP or any of the other political forces there.³ This did not, however, prevent China's name from being brought into the picture shortly after the period in question. Abdel Nasser was strongly promoting the enlargement of the UAR, and Iraq was the most obvious candidate. He was thus angered when Beijing entertained Khaled Bagdash, the head of the Communist Party of Syria and Lebanon in September 1958, who was strongly opposed to the existence of the UAR, let alone its enlargement. Meanwhile Iraqi politics became polarised over the issue of whether to join the UAR or not, and some elements who favoured joining Nasser in order to contain the influence of the Communists launched a coup attempt in the Iraqi city of Mosul in March 1959. Forces led by the ICP played the main role in defeating this and General Kassem, the military leader of the revolutionary regime, thus found himself temporarily more dependent on the ICP. He in fact also favoured containing the communists, although not at the price of losing Iraq's identity in the UAR. He thus sought an occasion to marginalise them, and this presented itself when some violent clashes occurred in Kirkuk on the first anniversary of the regime, July 14, 1959. Although these were probably mainly clashes between Kurds - who had strong reasons for distrusting the UAR - and local Turcomans,⁴ the incident was presented by Kassem as a massacre carried out by the ICP. Although Kassem, as an Iraqi nationalist, was using the incident primarily against domestic communism, Nasser widened the issue by accusing China of involvement in both the events of Mosul and Kirkuk. Shichor is surely right in considering these accusations baseless.⁵ We might hypothesise that Nasser

³ see for example CALABRESE J., *China's Changing Relations with the Middle East*, London (Pinter) 1991

⁴ see FAROUK-SLUGGETT M and SLUGGETT P. *Iraq Since 1958*, London (I.B. Tauris) 1990

⁵ SHICHOR op. cit. p. 87

was looking for a way to attack communism without creating too many problems with his international ally, the Soviet Union.

Although a direct examination of these events falls outside the compass of our study, they undoubtedly arose on the basis of extremely acute latent contradictions which were already implicit in the formation of the UAR and the coup in Iraq. It is thus legitimate to enquire how far the Chinese analysis exhibited an understanding of the issues involved. Analysis of the Iraqi coup from the point of view of its social composition would thus constitute a critical test for how far the CPC was able to formulate a realistic model to elucidate the world system in the long term, linked as it is to the issue of the alliance of forces within a state, as well as the domestic basis of a state's international alignments.

The overall tendency in official Chinese statements was in fact once again to downplay the particularities and contradictions of the Iraqi situation, and to depict the movement as yet another example of the popular anti-imperialist struggle, in other words to see the case as reinforcing their overall perception of the 'main trend'.

If we turn to more specialist publications we do however find at least some consciousness that there were issues requiring some kind of response.

Notably interesting is the question of a left-wing regime coming to power via a military coup, something which was to become an important issue in different parts of the third world in the future. The Iraqi revolution came like a bolt from the blue. At one level this could be an advantage in catching the enemy unawares. One article, using the analogy with lightning, points out that the unexpected character of the revolution threw America into a panic,

forcing it to intervene openly, which it had been hoping not to do.⁶

However at another level some explanation would seem to be required of how exactly a coup can be an expression of a popular mass movement. Most authors seem to have responded to this challenge by seeking to establish a distinction between form and substance - the military coup is seen as the form, but in essence the change of regime was a product of deeper social factors. However on the question of what this underlying nature really was, there was room for debate, as the literature reveals.

The exigencies of united front politics apparently dictated that public statements of an official nature did not enter into questions of the class nature of regimes considered part of the progressive camp. However, experts might be expected to express a view. An interesting question was thus whether they would take a clear stance on the key issue of whether the movement could be categorised as a bourgeois revolution?

One author who did, Peng Shuzhi, assessed the Iraqi revolution as a "continuation and development" of the Egyptian Free Officers' coup of 1952. Describing it as a "milestone" in the Arab independence movement and as a one-day "'lightning' revolution", he says that it was realised as a military coup, but

"its nature [xingzhi] is that of a bourgeois revolution whose purpose is to establish a national

⁶ see CHI Liao Zhou, "Qi ruan pa ying shi diguozhuyi di xingge", *Xuexi* 1958, 15 pp 7-8

independent state in opposition to the rule of native and foreign reactionaries."

This analysis falls within the compass of the line emphasising the defence of effective national sovereignty which we have already examined in relation to Lebanon, but is a good deal more explicit in making an assessment of the predominant class character of the movement.

An alternative approach also existed, which we find in an interesting article representing the only occasion during the period on which a senior Party figure ventured to publish a serious theoretical analysis of the Middle East situation under his own name. The article in question was one in the theoretical journal *Xuexi* signed by Deng Tuo, head of *Renmin Ribao* and an important figure in Sino-Egyptian solidarity activities dating back to the time of the Suez War. Perhaps significantly, coming from a figure with a public profile, this article was less clear on the class question, tending instead to characterise the movement as a kind of populist trend without a definite (bourgeois) class identity. The article does, however, show evidence of an interest in the particularities of a more explicitly left-wing movement, although the approach is to assess the character of the movement as fluid, and in a sense unstable, - hence a 'wait and see' attitude is adopted. Thus Deng writes:

"This revolution was in practice realised in the form of a military coup; from now on it is still necessary to depend on the new government's continuing to take revolutionary measures of every kind...."

Among these, the author mentions fully mobilising the popular masses and strengthening democratic unity.⁸ The

⁷ PENG Shuzhi, "Lue lun Alabo minzu douzheng di xin jieduan", *Renwen Zazhi* 1958, 4 (August) p. 31

⁸ DENG Tuo, "Muqian Zhong Dong xingshi", *Xuexi*, 1958, 15

domestic united front is thus taken as a criterion of how the regime is assessed overall.

The reference to a deeper essence underlying the apparently sudden change of government would have received confirmation from an article by an Iraqi communist, Anwar Ali, commissioned by the Chinese press. In it, he emphasises very strongly that the movement was a result of thorough clandestine preparatory work by the local Communist Party and other forces. At the same time, in a historical context, Ali argues that the events were not a nine-days' wonder or the work of a small army group, but (quoting General Kassem) a continuation of a long struggle against imperialism and feudal monarchy by the Iraqi people and the Arab and Kurdish people as a whole.⁹ It is worth remarking in this context that Chinese sources were practically silent on the Kurdish question, which is probably another example of the reductionism inherent in their tendency to explain all events in terms of what was perceived as the *main* issue.

In general Chinese authors also stressed the historical background of the movement as evidence for its deeper causes. Deng Tuo refers to the occurrence of uprisings on five separate occasions: 1936, 1948, 1952 and 1956, as well as the present one:

"Because this uprising in Iraq had accumulated experience over such a long period of time and its organisational preparation was comparatively tight, it therefore achieved victory so decisively."

In contrast to Peng Shuzhi's conception of the revolution as a bourgeois one challenging a feudal stratum dependant on imperialism, Deng Tuo - in accordance with his implicit assessment of the revolution as possessing a generally

⁹ ANWAR ALI, "Yilake geming di tedian", *Shijie Zhishi* 1958, 24, p. 14

populist character rather than a definite class identity - states that most of the representatives of the old regime were military men and representatives of the bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie, whereas the new government (in contrast) is in line with progress and national independence. There are certain implications in this which would seem to anticipate the Soviet theory of 'socialist orientation'. Deng gives a catalogue of various progressive initiatives of the new regime using this to demonstrate that the new government

"is indeed certainly able to enjoy the support of the people and attain the victory of the revolution."¹⁰

What is particularly interesting in this analysis is that the author attaches considerable significance to the proletarian class character of the popular movement, and proposes an analysis of Iraqi society which stresses that the balance of class forces in this particular case strongly favoured the proletariat relative to the bourgeoisie:

"Imperialism took control of the petroleum there, and used the cheap local labour force for large-scale extraction. Under the impact of foreign capital, the Iraqi working class and national bourgeoisie appeared one after the other, but in comparison to the national bourgeoisie, the working class was very large. The Iraqi oil workers and other workers number nearly two hundred thousand, and with the addition of their dependents, one and a quarter million. Out of the country's total population, one-fifth are working class, which is very well worth attention."

Without specifically comparing this case to that of other countries in the area, the implication is thus that the movement in Iraq was more radical because the proletariat was proportionally much larger, in relation to the national bourgeoisie, than in other countries.

¹⁰ DENG Tuo op cit

THE COUP IN IRAQ AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR INTERNATIONAL STRATEGIES

The Chinese leadership may have experienced some uncertainty in analysing the revolution in Iraq domestically but in terms of its international implications the analysis was comparatively unambiguous.

The overthrow of the old regime in Iraq was thus immediately greeted in China as important and positive, even as a turning-point: "The victory of the Iraqi revolution has an extremely important, many-sided significance in modern history."¹¹ At the same time, however, it was seen as an opportunity which *needed* to be grasped. The events in Iraq were a 'turning point', leading to a '*possible* great change in the Middle Eastern situation.'¹² [our emphasis]. As implied in the image of a turning point, there were different directions history could move in; hence the importance of 'seizing the hour'. Another element is thus the fact that the penalties for failure were enhanced. The danger was that the USA might mount a successful counter-attack; US leaders had signalled an intention of doing so by the direct involvement of their armed forces in Lebanon.

In describing this risk, the Chinese press rediscovered something of the apocalyptic tone which it had employed nine months earlier in the context of the assumed threat of a Turkish invasion of Syria. Thus it was asserted that "if the United States succeeds this time, its armed intervention will be extended to other Asian and African countries"¹³, and an important *Renmin Ribao* editorial gave

¹¹ *Renmin Ribao*, Editorial, August 3 1958; text in *China Supports...*, p. 235

¹² *Dagong Bao*, July 15 1958; *Xinhua*, same date

¹³ *Dagong Bao*, July 17 1958; *Xinhua*, July 18.

a dire warning of the risks at a global level which were likely to ensue, following the deployment of US troops in the area:

"The United States government is at present taking pains to confuse the world by claiming that these acts are but minor affairs. We must not believe these preposterous claims! The situation is very serious! If the people of the whole world and all governments in favour of peace act in unison, the US will have no alternative but to withdraw its troops, and the independence and freedom of the Middle East countries can be ensured and peace in the Middle East and the world saved. On the other hand, if the US aggressors are given a free hand, the people of the Middle East will be doomed to slavery, and what is more a new world war would be unavoidable."¹⁴

The implications for united front strategies are clear - it was increasingly urgent to consolidate the progressive grouping both at people-to-people and government-to-government levels, so that at both levels there could be action "in unison".

IMPLICATIONS FOR CHINA'S MOBILISATION

From the CPC's point of view, internationally as well as domestically, popular forces needed to be mobilised around some concrete goals or tasks. In examining what kind of action was envisaged in response to the new situation in the Middle East, an interesting perspective is supplied by looking at China's own domestic mobilisation on this international theme; an effort of mobilisation which was in turn seen as a component in an international united front effort.

The period in fact witnessed a kind of foreign-policy equivalent of the mass activity of the Great Leap Forward - so much so that when the CPC said that the 600 million

¹⁴ *Renmin Ribao*, Editorial, July 17, 1958.

Chinese people were expressing their solidarity with the Arabs, one has the impression that they meant this to be taken literally. Thus, during a short period in the middle of July, 1958, a series of demonstrations were organised which anticipate the Cultural Revolution in scope, and it would be hard to find a historical parallel in any other country or period for such massive activity on an international issue not immediately affecting the state in question.

International relations theory recognises that popular commitment to a policy is - alongside more tangible indices such as wealth and military strength - an element in the power of a state, viewed as its capacity to act in the world arena. Generally this is quite a nebulous concept, but the CPC was attempting at this juncture an unprecedented experiment in concretising the dimension of mass commitment.

In this process, there was a definite dimension of interaction with the domestic sphere, in that it would seem that an attempt was being made to channel some of the mass fervour which already existed on domestic issues, in such a way as to reinforce China's international stance. Conversely the international issue was also probably employed as a focus of domestic cohesion. This all serves to throw light upon the interaction between domestic and international environments in the context of united front policies.

During this period, an official spokesman described the Middle East as the 'sole topic of conversation' in China.¹⁵ A series of mass demonstrations were held, one of which, in Beijing, was described as one of the biggest

¹⁵ *Times* July 22 1958

anti-imperialist demonstrations in history¹⁶ - foreign observers estimated there to be in the region of half a million persons present.¹⁷

The CPC did undoubtedly wish the demonstrations to be 'taken seriously' by the West, and one of the reasons for holding them must have been to influence the adversary's perception - an important factor in power politics. This concern probably lay at the root of a somewhat peculiar incident which occurred during the course of the campaign of mass demonstrations, when the CPC became embroiled in a public feud with Reuters News Agency, anticipating the more celebrated conflict which was to develop during the Cultural Revolution. The then Reuters' correspondent, Jack Gee, submitted reports to the effect that the demonstrations had been wildly exaggerated by the Chinese leadership, and *Renmin Ribao* responded by attacking him for

"vainly trying to play down the expression of the people's indignation with his cowardly and disgusting pen."¹⁸

But these activities in the capital were not the only, and perhaps not the most significant aspect of the movement. The campaign also possessed other dimensions which indicate that, in addition to being designed to make an impression abroad, it also had an important domestic focus. One of its main purposes may in fact have been an attempt to arouse all the different regions of China, thus serving as an exercise in the use of communications to further the cohesion of the country behind a centrally-determined line.

¹⁶ *Xinhua* July 17

¹⁷ *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* July 21

¹⁸ *Renmin Ribao* July 24 1958; *Xinhua* same date

Many reports came in of demonstrations in the most remote regions, for example in Heilongjiang

'a county-wide rural meeting was arranged to reached [sic] seven million peasants of Pin County, after the news of the United States and British aggression in Lebanon and Jordan came through. It was organised over the newly constructed wired broadcasting system, which covers the whole county.'¹⁹

Another mass demonstration was organised in Lhasa and addressed by the Dalai Lama, who called upon people 'while opposing imperialist aggression in the Middle East, to be alert and guard against subversive plots and splitting activities in Tibet...'²⁰

One purpose of the demonstrations was apparently to cement the domestic United Front, not only between social strata, but also between nationalities. A number of reports mention the participation of Chinese Moslems. Demonstrations were reported to have assembled 'workers, peasants, students, Moslems, Buddhists, industrialists, businessmen and others in the Sinkiang Uighur Autonomous Region and the Ningsia area.'²¹

Besides bringing closer the different population groups and social strata, another purpose would seem to have been to assert effective national control, in a geographical dimension, over far-flung and sparsely populated (but strategically important) parts of the country. Even 'Geological prospectors from the remote Changpai mountains in North East China, the Altai mountains in the North West and the Tsaidam basin in Chinghai province' were reported to have been mobilised to protest over the situation in the

¹⁹ *Xinhua* July 20

²⁰ *Xinhua* July 23

²¹ *Xinhua* July 30

Middle East.²² At one point during the campaign of demonstrations it was stated that 21 million people had already taken part,²³ and a few days later, country-wide, a figure of 64 million was given.²⁴

Undoubtedly the demonstrations were officially orchestrated and can thus be considered an emanation of leadership policy. In some areas they may well have served as an instrument for asserting control over the local population from the centre. Tibet would be a case in point. Particularly interesting in this respect is the case of two of the areas mentioned above, Xinjiang and Ningxia. In the former, there are reports of violent clashes with Uighur nationalists in the early part of 1958, and even more significant is the fact that Ningxia was implicated in a major leadership split which resulted in the purging of a number of leading Chinese Moslems in August 1958 - one of them, Abdullah Ma Chenwu was accused to attempting to create a Soviet-style autonomous republic in Ningxia.²⁵

It would seem, then, that the conflict in the Middle East coincided with a crisis in relations between the party leadership and leading elements of the Moslem population in China, probably caused by some of the policies we referred to earlier which pushed the domestic united front in a direction where it practically ceased to be a policy of united front at all, and became one of homogenisation. In these circumstances, the solidarity movement with the Arabs

²² *Xinhua* July 30

²³ *New York Times* July 22

²⁴ *Xinhua* July 27

²⁵ see JOYAUX F., "Les Musulmans de Chine et la Diplomatie de Pékin", *L'Afrique et l'Asie* 1967, 77, p. 21, note; see also ADIE W. "The Middle East - Sino-Soviet Discords" in LAQUEUR W and LABEDZ L. (eds), *Polycentrism - the New Factor in International Communism*, New York (Praeger) 1962, p. 321 f

may have been used to channel the militancy of Chinese Moslems in such a way as to reassert central control over it.

However, taking China as a whole, the fact that this was a centrally-orchestrated campaign in no way denies the existence of real anti-imperialist sentiment in the country. The leadership could well have conceived of the demonstrations as an appropriate contemporary form of expression for the mass energies unleashed in movements ranging from the Boxer and May Fourth Movements through to the struggles against the Japanese and Chiang Kai-shek. Certain officially-chosen themes may have served to accentuate the link with past episodes in the Chinese national movement, particularly a strong anti-British government orientation. The Chinese government sent a strongly-worded diplomatic Note to Britain, which was singled out for attack while other Western nations were sometimes more favourably assessed for having 'expressed serious worry and apprehension over the United States-British aggression in the Middle East'.²⁶ In actions which again anticipate the Cultural Revolution, the office of the British chargé d'affaires was plastered with slogans - the official news agency *Xinhua* actually reported this with approval ²⁷ - and there were also demonstrations on the Hong Kong border.²⁸

MILITARY INVOLVEMENT BY CHINA

We have already discussed two levels of analysis of leadership aims: firstly, there was the motive of trying to give a new dimension to the concept of 'a country' 'acting' in the international environment by actually mobilising the

²⁶ *Xinhua* July 22

²⁷ *Xinhua* July 17

²⁸ *Manchester Guardian* July 22

population as a whole; and secondly there was the aim of using the issue as a focus for national unity. A third dimension would also suggest itself in terms of using the mass movement in order to promote international solidarity between China and the Arabs, bearing in mind that in the CPC's view unity had to be built not just between governments but between peoples.

However, the mass mobilisation was by no means confined to an expression of anti-imperialist *sentiment*, it needed action to give it a focus. In this context, the most striking of the new elements introduced at the time of the change of regime in Iraq and the escalation of the conflict in Lebanon, was the idea of military involvement by China.

A suggestion of military participation in the Middle East had already been put forward at the time of Suez, when China had actually proposed the figure of 280,000 volunteers.²⁹ In 1958, when the idea of military commitment returned, a parallel was also explicitly made with the sending of the Chinese Volunteers to Korea, and in the context of the mass demonstrations, many specific protest meetings of Korean War veterans were reported.³⁰

The Chinese leadership did not publish the details of troop mobilisation, but it did leak details to western journalists, apparently to prove its seriousness. On 20th July, one reported, a Chinese official said that China's army was ready to "respond quickly" if called upon to act

²⁹ see KERR M.H., "The Middle East and China - the Scope and Limits of Convergent Interests" in HALPERN A (ed) *Policies Toward China* New York (McGraw Hill for Council for Foreign Relations) 1965 p. 439; ROYAL INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS, *Survey of International Affairs* 1955-6 p. 306

³⁰ see e.g. *Xinhua* July 28

in the Middle East situation.³¹ The operative word would seem to be 'act', which fulfills the terms of the passage quoted earlier to the effect that the people should "act in unison". This is a strong statement of the kind of people-based united front of which the Chinese mobilisation was designed as an example. Another major *Renmin Ribao* Editorial, entitled "We Will Not Look on with Folded Arms", stated that

"The peace- and freedom-loving countries and peoples of the world have begun to act."³²

The following day an even more explicit reference appeared in a remarkable passage in a *Renmin Ribao* Editorial, which draws parallels between the American War of Independence and Lebanon's own modern equivalent. It reads as follows:

"The French and many other peoples of Europe organised and sent volunteers to America to help fight in the war. On the other hand, today both the Lebanese people in their struggle and the Iraqi people in their victory have depended almost exclusively on their own efforts. We may well ask at this point why should they not be entitled to the same international assistance as was given in the American War of Independence?"³³

It is worth recalling in this context the Chinese position on international law, to the effect that it was "legal for any state to give support to a state which is the victim of aggression".³⁴

Details of preparations emerged from leaks to journalists or monitored radio broadcasts. Many army meetings were

³¹ *New York Times* July 22

³² *Renmin Ribao* ed. July 20; *China Supports...* p. 212

³³ *Renmin Ribao* July 21; *Xinhua* same date

³⁴ TAO Xijin, "Wei heping yu zhengyi er douzheng di Ya Fei falu gongzuo zhe huiyi". *Zhengfa Yanjiu* 1958, 1

reported to have been held, where servicemen expressed a resolve not to 'keep their hands off' if the imperialists failed to withdraw. The Beijing garrison was reported to be under alert, and PLA units stationed there expressed a wish to be sent as volunteers to the Middle East.³⁵

MOTIVES OF THE CPC LEADERSHIP IN IMPLYING ARMED INTERVENTION

We can be reasonably sure that the actual capacity of the Chinese to mobilise their forces in a theatre like the Middle East was too weak to make military deployment a serious option. If one were to speak of a full-scale deployment of troops similar to the Korean operation, the logistics alone (in the absence of massive Soviet assistance), let alone political complications, would surely have been insurmountable. True, in foreign policy it can often be effective to give the enemy the *impression* one is going to act in a certain way, even if one does not intend to carry it through. However, it is hard to think that this particular threat could have been taken seriously by the Americans.

Should it be concluded, then, that the official hints of an actual military mobilisation functioned purely at an ideological level? The importance of the ideological dimension in the approach of the Chinese leadership should certainly not be underestimated. At one level, the linkage may be seen as reflecting a desire to educate the population in anti-imperialist consciousness using a direct analogy with China's own experience. In fact in one sense the international situation was being used around this time as an element in a broader campaign to propagate Marxist philosophy. One article dealing with "Dialectics in the International Struggle" used the parallel between US

³⁵ see *Manchester Guardian* July 26; *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* July 21

actions in Taiwan and Lebanon to stress the importance of consciousness as a material force. It is argued that US activity, as illustrated by these two cases,

"is everywhere prompting formerly backward people to accelerate the raising of their consciousness, and is everywhere prompting those who waver in the middle to rise up and struggle against US aggression."³⁶

This argument is interesting in the context of the debate about whether the united front is conceived in a broader or narrower way when the 'heat is on'. The implication would seem to be that when the heat was on it would actually be possible increasingly to win over the middle strata.

The notion that imperialism creates its opposite by accentuating popular consciousness was an important one in the overall Marxist education campaign at the time. A common illustration was Mao's metaphor of a fool lifting a rock only to drop it on his own feet,³⁷ a concept upon which he had expanded when speaking in Moscow in 1957. From this perspective, there follows the assessment that US 'positions of strength' could be turned into positions of weakness.

Bearing in mind the view that history was at a turning-point and that the opportunity was there to be grasped, in other words, that the subjective element in grasping favourable circumstances was critical, we can say that there was probably an important element of ideology in united front building.

³⁶ BIN Fu, "Guoji douzheng zhong di bianzhengfa", *Shijie Zhishi* 1958, 22, p. 11

³⁷ This term was originally used by Mao in his article "On New-democratic Constitutional Government" (1940)

INTERLINKING STRUGGLES IN DIFFERENT PARTS OF THE WORLD

However, such an analysis does not exhaust the issue of China's military involvement. It remains true that it was a basic methodological principle of the CPC leadership to demarcate themselves from the attitude that "problems can be solved merely by influence"³⁸; the USA and Britain were involved at a military level, and it would still appear logical for China to respond at a similar level if at all possible.

In order to take this line of enquiry further, it will be necessary to turn back to some of the geopolitical themes discussed earlier, and see what changes had been brought in by the events of summer 1958.

We have already discussed the campaign against US military bases in late 1957, in the course of which it was stressed that it was the people in areas where such bases are implanted who suffer the direct consequences. This theme remained in force in the summer of 1958:

"Wherever an American military base is established, the people in that area are bound to suffer disasters, they bear the brunt head-on, and directly experience enslavement and persecution. If the people of the Middle Eastern countries do not start to free themselves from the fetters of imperialism, not only will they sink into an abyss of suffering, but they will face the added peril of becoming war-victims at the hands of imperialism."³⁹

However, in accordance with the new stress on dialectics, we find increasing emphasis on the contrary opposite of this process, i.e. on the fact that

³⁸ *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung, Volume IV*, Peking (FLP) 1969, p. 19

³⁹ DENG Tuo "Muqian Zhong Dong xingshi", *Xuexi* 1958, XV

"If only the Middle Eastern people resolutely stand up and carry the national liberation struggle through to the end, they can escape from their hardships and turn the Middle East region into a battle position for peace."⁴⁰

The importance accorded to this type of evolution in the world system by the Chinese was considerable. Thus the connection between the Middle East - particularly Lebanon - and Taiwan came to be seen increasingly not just in terms of historical analogy, or of two peoples with similar experiences learning from one another, but as a direct strategic link, cementing a united front of peoples not just at a level of mutual sympathy, but at one of practical co-ordination.

US strategy was itself presented in such a way as to point up this linkage:

"Not long ago, American imperialism moved a heavy concentration of military forces into the Taiwan Straits to distract the attention of the world from its aggressive actions in the Middle East."⁴¹

Conversely, the mass movements could co-ordinate their activities in such a way as to cause the maximum difficulty for the USA, and in particular hinder it from the concentration of forces which, as we saw in the context of the Syrian crisis in 1957, was conceived of as such an important aspect of the mode of operation of imperialism. This type of co-operation, in response to US strategy, can be viewed as the concretisation of the united front.

⁴⁰ *ibid.*

⁴¹ TU Wei, "American imperialism will soon be buried in its own grave", *Shijie Zhishi* 1958 XXII (Nov 20) in *Joint Publications Research Service* 611-D pp 5-6.

It is in this context that we should reconsider the question of the links between events in Lebanon and Iraq on the one hand, and the bombardment of the offshore islands on the other.

As we have already argued, the weight of evidence seems to suggest that the offshore bombardment was not a response to an immediate threat against China, despite the possible existence of a latent one. Thus it would be appropriate to regard the bombardment as an initiative from Beijing.

One hypothesis would be, as a commentator observed at the time, that "real trouble in the Middle East would give Peking the opportunity, with the West otherwise occupied, to attempt the 'liberation' of Formosa".⁴² However, the possibility of actually taking Taiwan in the face of strong US commitment was probably remote, and a more plausible hypothesis would thus be that the CPC seized upon the Taiwan issue in order to open a second front against the USA, thus giving encouragement to those struggling against the same enemy in the Middle East and cementing unity with them on a more practical basis.

Mao did indeed float the idea of such an interpretation: at least according to one source, he is reported to have told the visiting delegation from the Palestine Liberation Organisation in 1965 that

"Our artillery shelled Quemoy to engage the imperialists during the revolution in Iraq and the American landing in the Lebanon....The enemy should be engaged on all fronts."⁴³

This statement could be viewed as a rationalisation, ex post; but there is ample contemporary evidence of linkage

⁴² ZORZA V. in *Manchester Guardian* July 26 1958

⁴³ quoted in SHICHOR Y. op. cit. p. 73

between the Taiwan issue and the situation in the Middle East.

Later Mao Zedong was to use the image of a man trying to catch ten fleas with ten fingers in order to describe the United States predicament.⁴⁴ This line of reasoning was anticipated during the period in question. Thus Mao's speech to the Supreme State Conference on September 8 1958 contains the following important passage:

"The general trend is that the East wind is prevailing over the West wind. US imperialism invaded China's territory of Taiwan and has occupied it for the past nine years. A short while ago it sent its armed forces to invade and occupy the Lebanon. The United States has set up hundreds of military bases in many countries all over the world. China's territory of Taiwan, the Lebanon, and all the other military bases of the United States on foreign territory are so many nooses around the neck of US imperialism. The nooses have been fashioned by the Americans themselves, and by nobody else, and it is they themselves who put these nooses round their own necks, handing the ends of the ropes to the Chinese people, the peoples of the Arab countries and all the peoples of the world who love peace and oppose aggression."⁴⁵

Hence it may well be that, while there was not in fact a serious attempt to move against the Chiang regime in Taiwan, the aim was to create such an impression, thus taking the pressure off the Arabs. A threat of this nature would presumably be more plausible to the adversary than would the idea of China actually intervening militarily in the Middle East.

It is perhaps from this perspective that during July important official statements, including speeches by senior

⁴⁴ MAO Zedong, talk given in October 1975, quoted in *Chairman Mao's Theory of the Differentiation of the Three Worlds...* Peking (FLP) 1977

⁴⁵ *Comrade Mao-Tse-tung on "Imperialism and All Reactionaries ..."* op cit pp 29-30

leaders such as Zhou Enlai and Peng Zhen increasingly employed the term "West Asia" in place of "Middle East", which had generally been applied to the region before.⁴⁶ This usage can be seen as implying a direct link whereby the adversary is engaged simultaneously on both flanks.

ROLE OF THE SOCIALIST CAMP IN THE UNITED FRONT

While the United States did undertake a serious commitment of naval forces in answer to Beijing's initiative over the offshore islands, it is however by no means clear that this significantly weakened the Americans' ability to operate simultaneously in the Middle East, or even that the CPC leadership actually expected this to be the case. But there is another possible function of the action over the offshore islands, namely to provide an *example* of how a socialist country should act at such a critical juncture in directly engaging imperialism.

At the time of the Syrian crisis of 1957 the Chinese had made great play of the role of the Socialist Camp and the Soviet Union in warning off imperialism. It is interesting that the individual among the Soviet leadership who was most active in threatening the USA at that time was Marshal Zhukov, who had become a key figure following the overthrow of the 'Anti-Party Group' in June, 1957. A few days after his role in the Syrian crisis, however, he was purged (in October 1957), one of the charges against him being that of adventurism in foreign policy.

⁴⁶ see PENG Zhen, speech at a Mass Rally on July 17 1958; ZHOU Enlai, Speech at a Reception at the Cambodian Mission, July 31 1958; both texts were reproduced in the important source *China Supports...* op. cit.

This makes it appropriate for us at this point to make a brief re-examination of how the CPC perceived the role of the socialist camp within the international alignment of forces. This was an issue on which there was particularly rapid change during the period in question leading up to the Mao-Khrushchev summit in Beijing. In fact, as we will now argue, some evidence does exist for Chinese dissatisfaction with the role of the Socialist Camp around this period, and this in turn raises questions about whether the Chinese leadership were having second thoughts about how effective the Socialist Camp could be in fulfilling a pivotal role within the united front of progressive forces at this time.

China's doubts, if they existed, would relate to such questions as the issues of whether Moscow's acceptance of the Western summit proposal was indicative of a generally conciliatory approach towards 'imperialism', whether, as J.R. Thomas has asserted,⁴⁷ there was criticism from the Chinese side of the Soviet handling of both the Lebanon and Taiwan issues by attempting to defuse them via the United Nations. Some more actively threatening posture by the Soviet Union would seem to have been desired by Beijing, and in fact the theme of Soviet support came increasingly to be used not as a way of praising the USSR, but rather as a way of commenting obliquely on the need for socialist countries to participate in the global trial of strength with imperialism. One article from this period even went back to Stalin's time to refer approvingly to Soviet backing for Lebanon's attempts to exclude British and French troops in 1946,⁴⁸ before explicitly making the

⁴⁷ THOMAS J.R. "The Limits of Alliance: the Quemoy Crisis of 1958" in GARTHOFF R.L. (ed) *Sino-Soviet Military Relations*, New York (Praeger) 1966, esp. p. 125.

⁴⁸ YU Lisan, "Meiguo jundui cong Libanun gun chuqu", in *Shijie Zhishi* Supplement I (July 26, 1958), p. 9.

point that once US intervention occurred, it turned the Lebanese affair into an international issue.⁴⁹

To clarify the basic parameters of a possible Chinese critique of the Soviet position, it would be useful to return briefly to some important theoretical issues in the assessment of the world balance of forces, because on certain of these issues changes in the Chinese leadership's position would have a bearing on how the Soviet role was assessed.

As we have already argued, a key question was considered to be the correct response to the adversary's 'positions of strength'. This relates not just to the practical, logistic question of concentrating forces in a particular spot, but also to the cultivation of an *appearance* of strength, which could be practically equivalent to real strength if the United States' bluff was not called. This idea occurs more graphically in the image of the paper tiger - outwardly strong but inwardly weak.

Overall, the CPC tended to follow the method of taking up the issues which were put forward by the Soviet leadership, and turning round the argument so that it proved the opposite of what the CPSU was trying to prove. An example of this is the theme of local wars flaring up into something more dangerous. The CPC first took this argument at face value and then extended the logic one step further - to argue that therefore it was all the more essential to combat imperialism in local conflict situations. However, we will focus here on another issue of considerable importance throughout the debate and polemic between the Chinese and Soviet leaderships: that of the relaxation of international tension - *détente* as it came to be known - and its link with the balance of world forces.

⁴⁹ *ibid.*

Both sides agreed that progressive forces were getting stronger in relation to imperialism, but here the interpretations diverged. The CPSU argued that at least a section of US decision-makers could rationally appraise this fact. They could thus be restrained from military adventure, and meanwhile the growing preponderance of the progressive camp in the distribution of forces would push the world system in an ever more favourable direction. Hence it was necessary to moderate conflict situations which could threaten to disrupt this peaceful evolution.

The Chinese, on the other hand thought that the more the West sensed things slipping away, the more desperate it would be to reverse this trend.

Around the time of the Soviet 20th Party Congress in 1956, Chinese official statements accepted the view that "...within the ruling circles of the United States, there is a section of more sober-minded people..."⁵⁰. But this soon changed. In the spring of 1957, the CPC put forward an authoritative analysis which, while it still employed the vocabulary of "circles", now fundamentally differed from the Soviet interpretation:

"When international tension has reached a certain pitch and when strong pressure has been brought to bear from all sides, the US government is sometimes compelled to accept certain measures for the relaxation of tension. However the US aggressive circles are afraid of a substantial relaxation in the international situation, because they would lose their leading position in the so-called free world, their military blocs would become ever more loose, while the Asian and African peoples would take ever more resolutely to the road of independent development. Therefore, every time there is a substantial relaxation in the international situation, the US aggressive circles will hastily create new tensions in a desperate effort to prevent a further relaxation. This is the root cause why the United States Government wants the international situation to be

⁵⁰ Text in *China Supports...*, p. 42

tense but cannot make it too tense; it is forced to accept a certain relaxation but dare not accept a prolonged relaxation, thus wavering constantly between the two alternatives of relaxation and tension."⁵¹

This can be seen as a fairly thought-out response to the Soviet position, and has quite interesting implications for the united front question. It is argued that the maintenance of the US bloc was conditional upon international tension, otherwise a military grouping could not be maintained. By extension we could draw the inference that a harmonious pattern of relations was only possible within the united front of progressive forces, and then only as a function of struggle against imperialism. It was thus, in the Chinese view, wishful thinking to assume that a 'great harmony' in the present international system could come about to encompass all the actors. The role of imperialism in the process of change to a more peaceful world order could only be negative, i.e. it would bring this change about by focussing *against it* a broad movement of forces which, in their relations with one another, would gradually introduce new approaches for working out differences in a non-antagonistic way, as in the Bandung principles.

The CPC saw themselves as having an educational role to play on this question, as when, at the Damascus Conference they explained to participants the true nature of the Eisenhower Doctrine.⁵²

However in the crisis situation of 1958 they were reasonably confident that the developing countries, because of their daily experience in the reality of the struggle, would perceive the true nature of imperialism:

⁵¹ Text in *China Supports...* op cit pp 16-17

⁵² see above

"It will not be difficult for people now fighting for or defending national independence, particularly for the people in Asian and African countries, to see from history and the present reality that the US is the centre of the most reactionary forces of aggression and the most ferocious colonialist in the world today."⁵³

Bearing in mind the framework of analysis set out in the A.L. Strong interview, it could be deduced that this confidence in the accurate perception of the Asian-African peoples was derived from an assessment that they were involved in the main world struggles *directly*. The same logic might make the CPC *less* sure in relation to the perceptivity of some elements in the socialist world, precisely because they lacked the direct experience from which the struggles in the intermediate zone shielded them.

The reference to US "aggressive circles" oscillating between tension and relaxation implies, in effect, that what is important in understanding imperialism is its objective logic and not the rationale of particular groups of decision-makers, since such groups could simply be seen as reflecting the different sides of the same contradictory logic.

However, further new ingredients were introduced into the Chinese position in response to the increasingly acute conflict of 1958 in the Middle East.

The passage we have just quoted depicts imperialism as somewhat manipulative and scheming. Within the terms of its own logic it is presented as rational. This was still the predominant approach in the early part of 1958 when, for example, we find the the Lebanese conflict treated as

⁵³ *Renmin Ribao* July 17 1958; *Xinhua* same date

a case where certain circles were trying to stir up wars,⁵⁴ and more generally, it was argued at this time that

"There are groups in the United States, which, in addition to their opposition to the relaxation of world tension, are on the look-out for chances to break the peace and launch 'limited wars' in some areas".⁵⁵

An interesting article compared the American leadership to Hitler, who used propaganda to build up a position of strength which deceived even him.⁵⁶ It can be noted in this context that, as A.L. Hsieh has observed, the Soviet leadership tended to avoid comparing US leadership to Hitler.⁵⁷

However, around July 1958 there was a change in the way in which imperialism was presented in the Chinese press, and this was probably linked with certain problems raised by another area of Soviet argumentation which needed to be taken up, namely the assumption of rationality.

RATIONALITY OR IRRATIONALITY OF IMPERIALISM

Internally at least, if the material in *Mao Zedong Sixiang Wansui* can be relied upon, the Chinese leadership may well have retained throughout this period an assessment that the US leadership was aware enough of the risks not to push conflict too far. A problem would arise, however, if the socialist camp signalled too noticeably that it perceived this fact, and felt it had to reciprocate by being

⁵⁴ *Renmin Ribao* May 30 1958; *Peking Review* June 3.

⁵⁵ *Renmin Ribao* May 20 1958; *Xinhua* same date

⁵⁶ *Peking Review* Editorial, April 1 1958

⁵⁷ HSIEH A.L. *The Significance of the Chinese Communist Treatment of Khrushchev's January 14 Speech...* Santa Monica (RAND for US Air Force) 1960.

reasonable in return. Then US decision-makers might take advantage by pushing their luck further. Mao would appear to have believed that it was necessary to step up the struggle and profit from any weakness of imperialism while circumstances were favourable.

What this comes down to is an assessment that the adversary was more likely to understand hard knocks than he was to act rationally upon a sober assessment of the world balance of forces. In fact following Mao's idea of the logic of imperialism as "make trouble, fail, make trouble again, fail again", it can be assumed that such knocks would have to be administered repeatedly. The most important thing the Chinese leadership wanted to avoid was a situation where the progressive forces renounced revolutionary boldness for fear of undermining a certain reasonable group of US leaders and allowing hawks to take over.

This is probably the main explanation for an increasing tendency on the part of the Chinese to stress the irrationality of the Western leadership at this time, and in practice a view began to be propagated in the period leading up to the most acute phase in the Middle East, to the effect that imperialist involvement was an act of desperation, a reflection of the rising struggle against it.

The fact that the US leaders could not rationally hope^{to} win a war did not, it was argued, in any way prevent them from launching one. The expression "rabid", frequently used by Mao and others, was thus more than just an indiscriminate term of abuse. US armed intervention in the Lebanon was said, in an official Chinese statement, to have been carried out "in a sudden rage and panic",⁵⁸ and a *Renmin*

⁵⁸ CHINA Government Statement July 16 1958; *China Supports...* pp 181-2

Ribao editorial published immediately after this Statement, returns to this theme:

"According to a western proverb: whom God would destroy He first sends mad. The combined US-British aggression is an example of these death throes; they are collaborating in digging their own grave..."⁵⁹

Another major *Renmin Ribao* article published immediately afterwards, in affirming that the historical trend was one of victory of the popular forces over imperialism, referred to Eisenhower's "complete ignorance, like an idiot, of such inevitable development",⁶⁰ while the key *Renmin Ribao* editorial of July 21 1958 argued that

"Eisenhower and his like are completely ignorant of the present age. History for them is packed with unexpected events which they are incapable of understanding."⁶¹

One premise of the above arguments is that the nuclear balance could not in itself be relied upon to deter the USA from launching local wars. This is shown in an article in the theoretical journal *Xuexi* which pulls out all the stops in describing the irrationality of American leaders. Referring to their "war mania", "nuclear madness" and "hysteria", the author argues that the combined effect of all these conditions "might lead to a nervous breakdown and suicide", or alternatively to the Americans playing with fire and consequent self-destruction. However, should this happen and the United States initiate a third world war, the author argues,

"The Socialist Camp headed by the Soviet Union and the world's peace-loving nations and peoples have a

⁵⁹ *Renmin Ribao* Editorial July 18 1958; *China Supports...* p. 210

⁶⁰ *Renmin Ribao* Editorial, July 18, 1958; *China Supports...* p 210

⁶¹ *Renmin Ribao* July 21 1958; *Xinhua* same date

sufficiently powerful extinguishing force and striking force".⁶²

The point at issue was that of *how* the grouping of anti-imperialist forces could be considered to influence the world environment. The Chinese were arguing that the actions of the progressive camp could never render the adversary peaceful, and its influence could only be exercised via repeated trials of strength. Despite later Soviet accusations, it is probably hardly fair to say that the Chinese leadership cheerfully contemplated a nuclear war: they did not believe one was inevitable, but were simply arguing that the best way of preventing it was to be bold and punish the USA in local conflicts, so as to break the momentum which might lead to a larger-scale war.

TOWARDS A NEW FORMULATION OF THE ALIGNMENT OF PROGRESSIVE FORCES

In practice the Soviet leadership was increasingly sensed as being ineffectual in this respect. This is the apparent explanation of a very important shift whereby Chinese statements moved towards a subtly different formulation of the united grouping of progressive forces, one which tended to marginalise the Socialist Camp as an organised entity and which took as its point of reference a very warlike definition of the peace struggle. This perhaps served to pre-empt the Soviet Union's identification of its policy with the cause of peace.

The term "peace forces" thus came to be used extensively as a term of reference for the progressive united front. But this in no way signified a 'non-militant' phase in front-building, because the term was used precisely to refer to

⁶² SONG Zhen, "Bei yapo minzu biran zhansheng diguozhuyi", *Xuexi* 1958, 15

those who were resolutely fighting for national independence. In mid-June *Renmin Ribao* stated that

"Peace is indivisible. Any threat to people in Lebanon and the Middle East is a threat to world peace. In that case, the world peace forces will range with the Lebanese people to smash the scheme of the United States and its followers..."⁶³

When the situation grew even more dangerous at the end of June 1958, an official Chinese Foreign Ministry commentary threatened that if the United States "dare to launch a war of aggression in Lebanon and the Arab region, they will certainly meet with the resolute counter-blows from all peace-loving people of the world."⁶⁴

There was also an explicit link with Taiwan in this respect, because PLA men attending the demonstrations on the Middle East

"pledged to be vigilant and strengthen military training in preparation for the liberation of Taiwan at any moment to deal heavy blows in defence of world peace."⁶⁵

The main point from the Chinese angle was probably to show that peace could only be won by resolute resistance to international aggression and that concessions aimed at preventing a conflagration would have the opposite result to the one intended. Taken in conjunction with points already made about the Chinese view of how to deal with the sources of international tension, a very important historical analogy seems to be suggested: that of the period of Appeasement, when an attitude of compromise with aggression caused the abandonment of forces which could

⁶³ *Renmin Ribao* June 18 1958; *Xinhua* same date

⁶⁴ CHINA Government, Foreign Ministry Commentary of June 29, 1958, in *China Supports...* p. 180

⁶⁵ *Xinhua* July 27

have been built into a front permitting the trend to war to be nipped in the bud.

The use of such a theme could only be regarded as a significant step in the Sino-Soviet polemic, and we do indeed find the term explicitly employed in a major *Renmin Ribao* editorial where it is stated that the peace forces must go into action, and "not appease or tolerate the acts of aggression..."⁶⁶

The phrase "peace forces" also probably served another function in the Chinese discourse, that of a *replacement* for the Socialist Camp in describing the balance of forces in the world system.

This evolution was not unilinear. For brief periods, Chinese statements would make sallies in this direction, before retracing their steps for a while, and then doing the same thing again. This shows that the CPC was moving towards an assessment of the world situation where the socialist camp would no longer be present as a positive force, but had not yet arrived at that point. The period in question was actually crucial in this change. Certain highly official and necessarily carefully-worded statements during the crisis in July 1958 omit mention of the socialist camp in discussing the grouping-together of progressive forces in contexts where one would expect it to be obligatory. The following phrase from the Chinese Government Statement of July 16 1958 is a good example:

"Together with the peoples of the Asian and African countries and other peace-loving countries and peoples the world over, the six hundred million Chinese people will give all-out support to the Arab people's just struggle."⁶⁷

⁶⁶ *Renmin Ribao* ed July 17 1958; *China Supports...* p. 205

⁶⁷ CHINA Government, Statement of July 16 1958; *ibid* p 181-2

It is true that the socialist camp was hardly an organised body, but this was perhaps not the main problem. At this particular moment the Soviet leadership actually seemed to have veered away from liberalism in the direction of a more dictatorial approach, if this is how we are to interpret some strong criticisms Khrushchev made of the Yugoslav leadership on June 3, followed by the execution of former Hungarian leader Imre Nagy on June 17.⁶⁸ The issue may mainly have been one of control over the socialist camp, of making it a more organised instrument of the Soviet line. And the problem for the Chinese was precisely the content of that line.

This was a period in which the Chinese decision-makers were in fact experimenting with slightly different models by which to apprehend the key features of the international system.

The definition of that system was not just a theoretical question, but above all a practical one; the nature of the forces at work and their relationship to one another was inseparable from their practice. The general formulation of the East Wind prevailing over the West was not just a statement of faith but rather an estimation of the likely outcome of concrete instances in which the different forces tested strength with one another, and was in turn likely to be modified by the experience of such trials of strength.

The CPC's perception of the different actors was thus modified in the course of the year 1958 according to their behaviour in concrete conflict situations. We have examined the case of their view of relations among the

⁶⁸ On this question see BYRNES R., "Soviet-Chinese Communist Relations and Yugoslavia" in LONDON K. (ed) *Unity and Contradiction*, New York (Praeger) 1962

Western powers, for example. But in no instance were changes of perception so important as in the Chinese appreciation of the role of the Socialist Camp.

Beijing's use of the Korean War as a point of reference has already been mentioned. The probability is that this served another major purpose besides that of domestic mobilisation, namely as an object lesson to the Soviet leadership about what was felt to be one of the major facts about international politics - that international détente could only be brought about by winning repeated trials of strength with imperialism, and certainly not by pinning hopes on the US leadership:

"The Korean armistice was the result of the telling blows inflicted by the Korean people and the Chinese People's Volunteers upon the United States aggressors who could not but concede defeat....[This] was a great victory for the forces of peace in *testing strength* with the forces of war. This victory exposed American imperialism as a paper tiger and greatly inspired the peace-loving people the world over, particularly the fighting will of Asian and African peoples against colonialism. At the same time, it upset the aggressive plan of the United States for world domination and benefited the struggle for the relaxation of tension."⁶⁹

The points made above about the possibilities for China to take advantage of the geographically-overstretched nature of the US world position would apply many times over to the socialist camp as a whole, if only it could co-ordinate its policy. It may even be that the simplistic assumptions of the Cold War would have led some observers in the West to overestimate the degree of homogeneity within the socialist camp, to the advantage of the latter. For example, the following analysis by A.D. Barnett carries such an implication:

⁶⁹ *Renmin Ribao* July 27 1958 (our emphasis)

"During 1958, the skill with which they [the socialist countries] shifted the focus of world tension rapidly from Iraq and Lebanon to Taiwan and then to Berlin, keeping the West off balance, illustrated the advantages which accrue to an alliance of partners facing outward from opposite ends of the Eurasian continent."⁷⁰

In practice, the actual policy co-ordination was not there, but the "advantages" referred to were obvious enough, and could hardly have escaped the Chinese leadership. Struggles in the developing world could obviously not be turned on and off as though their capitals were 'under the control of international communism' (in the words of the Eisenhower Doctrine), but they could be supported by the socialist countries to heighten the problems faced by the West. One article of the period, for example, quotes a leading US decision-maker to the effect that Lebanon, the Middle East as a whole, Algeria and the rest of North Africa, Indonesia and Latin America were points of great danger to the US.⁷¹ The question was simply one of engaging the enemy simultaneously on different fronts, one of the most important objective reasons for the constitution of a united front grouping practical struggles. These potential advantages would in turn create a strong stimulus for socialist-camp unity, based on political principles.

It could be argued that many of these points about how to analyse the enemy etc. may not necessarily have been directed to the Soviet leadership but could just as well reflect 'line-struggle' within China. This dimension was undoubtedly present. The whole campaign of study around Mao's "Imperialism and All Reactionaries are Paper Tigers" served to unite domestic opinion around a certain line, and

⁷⁰ BARNETT A.D. *Communist China and Asia* p. 371

⁷¹ SONG Zhen, *op cit.*

thus implicitly to rectify what was considered erroneous.

In addition to the general issue of domestic opinion, there is the more precise question of possible conflicts of line within the Chinese leadership. While Zagoria is probably correct in saying that differences in line were mainly on domestic issues, it is quite possible that some clashes on strategic issues were being hammered out at this time. In particular, a crucial meeting of the Military Affairs Commission in Beijing closed on July 22 1958, after being in session for about two months;⁷² it is likely that important strategic decisions were taken there, and these might have an impact upon the kind of lines which were being put forward in late July of that year. There were moreover specific debates on questions of military line which have a certain relevance to foreign policy, as we will argue shortly.

However, having said all this, it still appears that the main point of reference was a changing perception of the role of the Soviet Union and the Socialist Camp. This is shown in the fact that at the height of the Middle Eastern crisis the Chinese press began to propagate a new image of the world balance of forces, with very important positional consequences:

"At present, the balance of forces is unfavourable as never before to the US and British imperialists.....Imperialism has lost its superior position, not only politically, but militarily as well. The world domain of imperialism may be broken through at any time or any place. Its front is too long to be defended and its leaks are too numerous to be stopped up....If the imperialist aggressors, *who have lost their senses*, insist on a test of strength, then all those who refuse to be slaves must make the necessary preparations." ⁷³

⁷² see *China Quarterly* 1974, p. 758; POLLACK op. cit. p. 88

⁷³ *Renmin Ribao* ed., July 20 1958; *China Supports...* p. 214-5 [our emphasis].

This new assessment of the balance of forces, which brings together the theme of the irrationality of imperialism with that of testing strength, in fact also involved a new way of defining the forces within the progressive camp.

It has already been remarked that the use of the term "peace forces" tended to serve as a cover for the less frequent use of the term "socialist camp". But the term "peace forces" was itself an umbrella term encompassing what the Chinese had for some time been referring to as two *distinct* forces, namely the forces of socialism and those of national independence. We have already seen that one of the major modifications in the CPC's model of the world system in the period following Mao's talk with Anna Louise Strong was precisely the evolution of such an understanding.

The basic question for united front policies thus became a question of how to build unity between these two forces. This remained the case in the period after US armed intervention in Lebanon, but the crucial difference is that a new terminology now began to be employed, according to which the socialist component in this alignment of forces could be referred to without specifically identifying it with the Socialist Camp as an organised body.

The main new term now used was that of the "socialist revolutionary movement." Thus one of the most important editorials of the period asserts that:

"The advance of the socialist revolutionary movement and the advance of the national independence movement in Asia, Africa and Latin America are the basic ingredients of our age."⁷⁴

⁷⁴ *Renmin Ribao* ed. July 21 1958; *Xinhua* same date.

The implications of such a change are considerable. The "movement" referred to is less clearly identified with any particular institutional framework, and perhaps implies an identification with the actual mobilisation of the masses. It could be hypothesised to include, for example, the hoped-for upsurge of socialist construction in China's Leap Forward, together with the mass mobilisation of the anti-imperialist demonstrations. These phenomena, if they were seen, at one level, as an expression of China's role in the awakening of the Asian-African nations, were also undoubtedly viewed as part of a process of regenerating communism.

The usage in this new phase appears to be systematic, because in the theoretical article by Song Zhen from which we have already quoted, also published in July, we find similar expressions repeatedly used in characterising the new world distribution of forces and also the unity-building process which was occurring on this basis.

"In the era of the international proletarian socialist revolution, the mutual support and aid between the national independence movement and the world socialist revolutionary movement are shaping an increasingly mighty world political force [shijie zhengzhi lilian].....[the situation of the East Wind prevailing over the West Wind] not only shows the aspect of the socialist revolutionary movement's burgeoning development and the continuous advance of the national independence movement, but also the aspect of the daily reinforcement of the unity and friendly co-operation between the socialist revolutionary movement and the national independence movement. This unity and relationship of friendly co-operation is in essence a relationship of revolutionary alliance."

The article stresses that the unity between these two currents can be concretized in actions to check the trend to war:

"It is just because the imperialist camp is in a position of such clear inferiority compared to the

world forces [sic - shijie liliang] that it cannot expect to find a way out in any military adventure, and this points to one extremely important fact - as the unity of the peace forces becomes more consolidated, as the struggle against and exposure of imperialism is carried on with increasing resolution and in greater depth, so the possibility of halting aggression and halting war also grows."⁷⁵

This argument seems to reflect an image of great potential for the forces of socialism, combined with scepticism about its existing institutional form, the Socialist Camp. In fact, the author only refers to the "Socialist Camp headed by the Soviet Union" when speaking of nuclear deterrence, and this may indicate that the CPC, losing faith in the USSR as in incarnation of the progressive trend, was beginning to accept that its role would have to be confined to that specific field. If this were true, it might provide an interesting insight to clarify the reason why the Sino-Soviet summit of July 1958 was almost entirely concerned with military questions, to the exclusion of other international issues.

PERIOD OF THE MAO-KHRUSHCHEV SUMMIT

These issues came to a head in the last few days of the month of July and the beginning of August 1958 after the Soviet leadership surprised the Chinese by accepting a Western plan for a summit put forward by Harold Macmillan, which the CPC had previously described as a "useless counterproposal".⁷⁶ In the period surrounding the Beijing summit, the underlying issue was one of the relationship between local and global conflict, which was viewed in a totally different way by the two parties. Both agreed that there was a risk of escalation. The Soviets drew the

⁷⁵ SONG Zhen op. cit.

⁷⁶ see *Manchester Guardian* July 27 1958

conclusion that it was necessary to act responsibly. In the words of Khrushchev's letter to Macmillan,

"Having broken out at one point, it can easily flare up, like a fire in a strong wind, and grow into a world conflagration. All talk of 'little' or 'local' wars in these conditions is no more than a naive illusion and all hope for a limited nature of military operations is deception or self-deception."⁷⁷

For the Chinese, the opening of another front against the West meant that "the world domain of imperialism can be broken through at any time or any place".⁷⁸ The way to neutralise the risk of global war was to consolidate the anti-imperialist forces via practical struggles.

The summit plan was eventually abandoned on August 1 because of disagreement over terms of reference, but the brief period during which it was being seriously discussed was also that during which the Chinese and Soviet leaders hastily arranged their own summit.

The abandonment of the summit meeting with the West, and the actual holding of the Sino-Soviet summit produced a marked, but somewhat curious, change in the phrasing of Chinese statements about the world situation.

On the one hand there was a sudden switch to restoring the theme of the role of the Socialist Camp - a move so abrupt that it only accentuates the absence of that theme earlier. On the other hand, this move was accompanied by an even sharper development of critical themes which now make Chinese articles read like a full-scale dress rehearsal for the Sino-Soviet polemic.

⁷⁷ ROYAL INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS, Documents on International Affairs 1958 p. 301

⁷⁸ *Renmin Ribao* ed. July 20 1958; *China Supports* p 214

Thus references to the Socialist camp, which had for some time been very sparse, suddenly became a central element in Chinese articles. The core of the united grouping of peace forces, which the CPC consistently saw as an alliance between the socialist and nationalist currents, was now formulated in such a way that the socialist current in this grouping was once again identified in the original form of the Socialist Camp headed by the Soviet Union. *Renmin Ribao* described the Soviet Union as "a loyal friend of the Middle Eastern people and a great pillar of world peace," and the Socialist Camp as 'the bulwark of peace'.⁷⁹ Another major *Renmin Ribao* article published on July 29 gave a historical retrospective of all the recent initiatives of the Soviet Union in support of the national movement and went on to say:

"The imperialists are always slandering the socialist countries' sympathy and active support for the national liberation movement as 'expansion', 'indirect aggression' and 'infiltration'. Being imperialists, they indeed cannot understand why the socialist countries could have consistently extended such help without any selfish aims, and it is not at all strange that, because of their past experience in dealing with imperialism, certain countries and people who have long suffered oppression and aggression, do not at once fully understand the active assistance of the socialist countries."⁸⁰

This implies a renewed emphasis on working to create the mutual confidence necessary to build unity between the existing socialist states and the national movements.

However, this new tone of fulsome praise for the USSR in no way meant China was abandoning those themes concerning the world balance of forces and the need to test strength with imperialism locally, which it had been putting forward hitherto. All that happened is that the central issue of

⁷⁹ *Renmin Ribao* July 25 1958; *Xinhua* same date

⁸⁰ *Renmin Ribao* July 29 1958; *Xinhua* July 30.

the relationship between socialist and nationalist forces was being examined critically under another angle. The same article goes on to say that

'Today in the Middle East another link in the imperialist chain had been broken. Tomorrow yet another link would be broken in East Asia, Africa or Latin America. Now that the East Wind prevailed over the West, colonialism and imperialism would not be able to escape their final ruin.'⁸¹

It seems what the Chinese were really doing was this: while selectively praising those initiatives they did happen to agree with - for example, weighty publicity was given to the fact that the Soviet Union and Bulgaria had held military manoeuvres, with the purpose of discouraging Turkey from an eventual attack on Iraq⁸² - in their more general praise of the Soviet Union and the Socialist Camp they were in reality making a very strong, and implicitly critical, statement about what socialist camp policy *ought* to be.

The fact that the two nations' leaderships were really doing their own thing under the cover of apparent agreement is reflected in the Communiqué issued after the summit which appears as a somewhat uneasy mixture of 'Soviet' lines spliced together with 'Chinese' lines. For example, it combines a statement to the effect that "the primary task at the moment" is to bring about arms reduction and a halt to nuclear testing, as well as elimination of blocs etc, with a statement that if necessary the peace- and freedom-loving peoples will "wipe out clean the imperialist aggressors and so establish an everlasting world peace."⁸³

⁸¹ *Renmin Ribao* July 29 1958, op cit

⁸² *Renmin Ribao* July 29 1958, op cit

⁸³ CHINA Communist Party and SOVIET UNION Communist Party, Joint Communiqué (of the Beijing Summit), text in *Xinhua* August 3 1958

The above analysis is confirmed by a remarkable article published by *Renmin Ribao* a few days later, on August 8, 1958. This article is worth quoting at some length, since it sums up in a concentrated way the lessons the CPC drew from the Middle Eastern crisis of 1957-8, and in so doing strikingly anticipates the style and content of the Sino-Soviet polemic of the early '60s. The central issue is the line around which to build the unity of progressive forces, with its key aspect being unity between the socialist camp and the national movement, and in illustrating this, links are drawn between the experience of the recent conflict in the Middle East and the experience of Korea and Indochina, as a background to developing theses concerning general issues of war and peace.

The article confirms the view that there was a total divergence between the Chinese and Soviet leaderships on how to prevent local conflict becoming global, and that this was seen by the Chinese as a central issue of principle. The question was the line around which the progressive alignment of forces should be built, and what its target should be:

"While advocating peace, we should point out the source of the danger of war, the need to unite the forces of peace to fight against the forces of war, the absolute possibility of victory in the struggle and that the imperialist system will be eliminated if the war maniacs impose war on the world."

This standpoint is applied specifically to the experience of recent international conflicts, including the most recent in the Middle East, in the following terms:

"The imperialists like to frighten the nervous with the choice between submission or war. Their agents frequently spread the nonsensical idea that peace can be achieved only by currying favour and compromising with the aggressors. Some soft-hearted advocates of peace even naively believe that in order to relax

tension at all costs the enemy must not be provoked. They dare not denounce the war provokers, they are unwilling to trace the responsibility of war and war danger and to differentiate between right and wrong on the issue of war and peace. Some groundlessly conclude that peace can be gained only when there is no armed resistance against the attacks of the imperialists and the colonialists and when there is no bitter struggle against them. But countless historical facts have proved that the stand of these peace advocates is useless."

The article then sums up the experience of conflicts from Korea to the immediately preceding crisis over Iraq, only to conclude:

"Had the attitude adopted against the aggressors been one of vacillation and compromise, the US and British aggressors would have been more arrogant, the flames of war might have been spread to the Iraqi Republic and the United Arab Republic and another World War have broken out."⁸⁴

Taking account of the programmatic tone of this editorial, we would perhaps be justified in dating the beginning of the Sino-Soviet polemic to this particular juncture. The overall approach of meeting force with force, growing out of the critique of tendencies to appeasement, lends support to the hypothesis that the move against the offshore islands was intended to demonstrate how a socialist country should work in opening up another front against imperialism.

But above all, what is particularly significant for our purposes are the lessons which the article draws concerning the joining-together between socialist and other progressive forces, in the context of the issue of war and peace. Thus, it is argued, the USA

"tried by all means to obstruct the joining of the socialist, anti-colonialist and anti-war forces.

⁸⁴ *Renmin Ribao* August 8 1958; *Xinhua* same date.

United States imperialism and its agents have been threatening and inducing people to adopt a policy of 'minding their own business and not bothering about others' affairs' on the world issue of peace and war. This is aimed at disbanding the forces of peace as well as oppressing the isolated and helpless countries that fear struggle and oppose the joining of forces."

The above is a strong statement to the effect that resolution in opposition to imperialism constitutes a decisive condition for the unity and cohesion of those forces which were considered to play a positive role in the world system.

It will finally be necessary briefly to examine how the Chinese leadership assessed the changed parameters of the conflict regionally, in the aftermath of the change of regime in Iraq.

NEW SPATIAL LOGIC FOLLOWING THE COUP IN IRAQ

Notwithstanding the strength of Chinese insistence upon the socialist countries' role in warning off the West, the CPC remained true to their basic assessment, expressed in the intermediate zone idea set out in the Anna Louise Strong interview, that the most urgent issue was centred in the developing countries, and pitted them against Western imperialism. Their struggle was assessed as a successful one, which had the concrete effect of taking the heat off the Socialist Camp.

It was thus remarked that alongside the failure of the Eisenhower Doctrine and the Baghdad Pact, the plan to surround the socialist countries with the "chain" of SEATO and NATO had collapsed with the failure of its "link" in the Baghdad Pact.⁸⁵ But this happened because of the struggles of the peoples directly affected, and the CPC continued to affirm that US military pacts were, in the

⁸⁵ PENG Shuzhi op cit

words of *Renmin Ribao* commentator, directed "primarily against those nations in Asia and Africa which are fighting for or defending their independence." ⁸⁶

It was in fact emphasised that the direct threat to the Soviet Union was *less* immediate than it had been in the different configuration of the international system which prevailed at the time of World War II. One article from the period proposes the argument that the USA, like Hitler and the Japanese before it, is using anti-Soviet slogans as a cover for its real ambitions. But the differences are also remarked upon:

"Germany is very close to the Soviet Union, and for this reason the German fascists were able to attack it. Japan is adjacent to the Soviet Union, but because their strength was not as great as Hitler's, the Japanese fascists could only attack China and the Pacific; before they got as far as the Soviet Union they were defeated. The United States is very distant from the Soviet Union and they are separated by an enormous expanse of territory so that, for this and other reasons, the USA would have great difficulty in attacking the Soviet Union. The practical significance of the United States' anti-Soviet war slogans in the post-war period is just to suppress the American people and use the appearance of 'peace' to commit aggression against all countries apart from the USSR." ⁸⁷

Such formulations can be regarded as foreshadowing the concept subsequently advanced in the Sino-Soviet polemic to the effect that world 'contradictions' were focussed in Asia, Africa and Latin America, and it is interesting that they should have been discussed at a time when the Chinese had only recently been experimenting with formulations which omitted reference to the Socialist Camp in the main analysis of the world balance of forces. The underlying logic is that the characteristics of the international

⁸⁶ *Renmin Ribao* Commentator Dec. 6 1958; SWB 827/10

⁸⁷ BIN Fu, "Guoji douzheng zhong di bianzhengfa", *Shijie Zhishi* 1958, 22 (Nov 20) p. 11

system are not solely determined by the state of Soviet-American relations. The greatest significance of events in the Middle East from the Chinese point of view was thus probably the maturing of the 'force' represented by the developing countries, which was ultimately to replace the Socialist Camp in the Chinese analysis as the main anti-imperialist actor.

The united front could at one level be considered the process of formation of this force as a definite entity, at least this was perceived as the objective process which could be promoted by means of policies. How, then, were the events of July 1958 considered to have influenced this process?

At one level there was an overall impression that the general movement of developing countries was gathering strength. Although the term 'third world' was not yet widely used, certain ideas put forward in the context of the East Wind thesis anticipate it. Thus, apart from being part of the Arab people's anti-imperialist movement, the struggles in the Middle East were described as an essential tendency of the Asian, African and Latin American movements, and of the movement of the world's people.⁸⁸ It is interesting to note in this context that it was round about this point in time when a number of Chinese sources began to treat Latin America alongside Asia and Africa as part of a single current in international affairs.

However, at another level of analysis it is important to note that the CPC continued to employ very much of a *spatial* frame of reference in describing the new trend.

It is as if, in the process of struggling to overthrow imperialism's geopolitical strategy, the developing

⁸⁸ SONG Zhen, "Bei yapo minzu biran zhansheng diguozhuyi", *Xuexi* 1958, July

countries could bring to realisation the domino process which the adversary feared. Such an outcome was in fact implied insofar as those concrete struggles which the Chinese defined as forming part of the united front necessarily took place *in contradiction* to a certain spatial logic of imperialist policy which to some extent determined where anti-imperialist struggles would arise, and how they would be related to one another.

In terms of the manner in which the national movements contradicted such already-existing Western strategies, the deductions drawn about likely future trends in the Middle East are not unexpected. Treaty organisations had been viewed as a major means of consolidating links between pro-Western actors and as a way of co-ordinating their collective forces against radical actors. Hence, one obvious result of the Iraqi revolution would be to undermine the Baghdad Pact as an institution for organising US power and co-ordinating those actors favourable to it, in a local context. Iraq was seen as having constituted the "foundation stone" of imperialist influence in the area,⁸⁹ while the former regime was said to have "sullied the name of the Arab states" by its role in the Baghdad Pact.⁹⁰ Hence the great significance of the revolution in removing this important element in imperialist strategy. The Iraqi revolution was considered likely "to destroy the painstakingly managed Baghdad Pact organisation, thoroughly disintegrate the colonialist system and [show] that the Eisenhower doctrine was fundamentally bankrupt."⁹¹ If this key strategy of imperialism were in the process of being negated, the outcome might logically be to facilitate the

⁸⁹ WU Cheng "Mei Ying longduan ziben zai Zhong Dong di qiong tu mo lu", *Jingji Yanjiu* 1958 8 p. 53

⁹⁰ PENG Shuzhi op cit p 31

⁹¹ DENG Tuo op cit.

building of a new international grouping of progressive forces to which China aspired.

A more specific result of the negation of existing imperialist strategies would be in terms of the gaming models discussed earlier. We have already mentioned, in the context of events in Syria and Jordan in 1957, how the Chinese perceived the relationship between adjacent areas, and argued that a 'domino'-type process was considered to occur in both directions: imperialism had its strategy of moving to take one country after another step-by-step, but the independence movements could reverse this process. Following this logic, in the aftermath of the coup in Iraq there was an explicit assumption that the new trend in the world system would give rise to further changes of regime in some states.

Since, according to this reasoning, Jordan and Iraq had been used as pawns against Syria, it is not surprising that following the revolution in Iraq, there was an assumption that Jordan might soon go the same way. The domestic cohesion of pro-Western forces might be shaken. It was stated that "the victory of the Iraqi revolution is having a direct effect on Jordan"⁹², and that under the influence of events in Iraq, Jordan was "tottering as if about to fall".⁹³ *Renmin Ribao* pointedly remarked that the Jordanian people

'know their way out, especially so since the establishment of the United Arab Republic and the Iraqi Republic.'⁹⁴

⁹² LI Fanzhen and CHENG Liangping, "Yuedan, you yi zuo kuai yao baofa di houshan", *Shijie Zhishi* 1958, 17 pp 23-4

⁹³ WU Cheng, op cit

⁹⁴ *Renmin Ribao* July 18 1958; *Xinhua* same date

In this context, Song Zhen's article in *Xuexi* dating from the same period, gives a more detailed account of the Western powers' dilemma:

"If they continue to rely on Beirut and Amman, in that case the Lebanese people and Jordanian people will inevitably unleash an ever-broadening struggle against the foreign interventionists; if they distance themselves from Lebanon and Jordan, in that case the reactionary Chamoun authorities and King Hussein, who rely on the support and provisions of foreign powers, will quickly succumb to the battering of the popular forces."⁹⁵

But the spatial level of analysis is not only applicable within the Arab region as such. Western strategy had a wider aspect which could be seen as one of attempting to manage the transition from the colonial system in such a way that their interests could be maintained. *Renmin Ribao* thus wrote that US intervention in the intermediate zone "applies first of all to the colonies and semi-colonies which the old British and French imperialists no longer find it possible to rule",⁹⁶ and there was a corresponding assumption of increasing collaboration between the Western powers. While this would clearly imply dangers for the national movements, it would also heighten consciousness, because such collaboration 'will greatly add to the awakening of the people of Asia and Africa and throughout the world.'⁹⁷

In this context, we find that one of the most interesting and most concrete predictions the CPC made about the results of the Middle Eastern events of 1958 concerned the idea of a link with Africa, conceptualised in a markedly spatial manner.

⁹⁵ SONG Zhen, op. cit

⁹⁶ *Renmin Ribao* July 29 1958; *China Supports...* p. 232

⁹⁷ *Renmin Ribao* July 18 1958; *Xinhua* same date

THE LINK WITH AFRICA

In fact, increased attention paid to this area in the Chinese media dates to the early months of 1958. At that time, the major assessment of the world situation published under the signature of Dong Feng (the East Wind) asserted strongly that "Africa has already ceased to be a sleeping continent", and that "the whole of Africa is beginning to boil, before arguing in an implicitly spatial dimension that "The tide of the national independence movement has surged from Asia to Africa."⁹⁸ In this process, the Middle East was probably considered to fulfill a crucial intermediary role, both historically and also in a certain sense geographically. Another article explored these spatial aspects in a striking formulation:

"The trend of development of the movement has been to develop [fazhan] from Southeast Asia to the Near and Middle East, then to expand [kuoda] to Africa; within the African continent, first comes North Africa, and afterwards it spreads [kuozhan] to central, west and east Africa."⁹⁹

The logic of the broadening of the range of forces from which the anti-imperialist united front could be built was thus clearly seen not merely in a dimension of mutual encouragement, but also in terms of geographical contiguity.

North Africa, the first area to experience the "spread" from the Near and Middle East, was viewed as a distinct world-political region with its own characteristics; according to a *Renmin Ribao* article published in May 1958, "North Africa's liberation is indivisible", and within this

⁹⁸ DONG Feng, "Wanlong jingshen po lang qian jin, *Shijie Zhishi* 1958, 8, p 7

⁹⁹ JIN Zhonghua, "Ya Fei renmin di da tuanjie", *Shijie Zhishi* 1958, 2, p. 13

Algeria is seen as the "hot-spot".¹⁰⁰ The Dong Feng article also characterised North Africa as the "front line" of the anti-colonial struggle, and Algeria as the "beacon" of Africa.¹⁰¹

Given this historical-geographical dynamic, it is logical that developments in the national movement in the Middle East should be seen as having important repercussions in geographically adjacent areas. Thus the Suez War, according to Dong Feng, already "weakened the imperialists' strategic position in West Asia and North Africa." And in the period following the events of the summer of 1958 in the Middle East, it is not surprising that the Chinese leadership looked to a renewed upsurge of the African independence struggle. In September, China was to become the first socialist country to recognise the Algerian PRG.¹⁰²

November 30 was named as "Imperialists Quit Africa Day", and the Chinese Committee for Afro-Asian Solidarity said in a statement that "Africa, regarded as the 'dark continent' in the past, has now become the forefront against imperialism".¹⁰³

This seems to imply a shifting of the focus of struggle from the Middle East to Africa in the latter part of 1958, but, in terms of the above analysis, it is clear that this shift of focus was seen as taking place under the influence of events in the Middle East.

The rationale for this was set out in an interesting discussion of the meaning and historical significance of

¹⁰⁰ *Renmin Ribao*, "Ba zhiminzhuyi cong Bei Fei lian gen chan diao", May 3 1958

¹⁰¹ DONG Feng op cit

¹⁰² KHALILI J.M. "Sino-Arab Relations" in *Asian Survey* 1958 p. 685

¹⁰³ CHINESE Committee for Afro-Asian Solidarity, "Statement" of November 30 1958; Summary of World Broadcasts 818/13

the term 'Middle East' in the article by Peng Shuzhi, who defines the term as relating to an area which possesses a natural unity, that of South-West Asia and North Africa. This unity is expressed today in political terms:

"the present-day Arab people's national liberation struggle has turned into the forward position of anti-imperialism. It stretches from Morocco and Algeria in North Africa, through Egypt and the Sudan and all the way to Iraq in South-West Asia, and other Arab areas. This anti-imperialist front holds the Afro-Asian peoples' struggle closely bound together."

But the imperialists, Peng argues, used the term "Middle East" in a special way to cover up the true identity of the independence movement and its real boundaries. In the nineteenth century they used the term to refer to Iran, the outer Caucasus and Afghanistan, and the area on the Eastern Mediterranean shore was referred to as "Near East". This reflected England and Russia's ambitions in the area. But in the twentieth century, when oil ambitions became paramount, the term was expanded to include the Near East, Egypt, Sudan, Iran, Libya, and West Pakistan. However in doing so, the powers were acting like a fool lifting a rock to drop it on his own feet:

"if imperialism amalgamates these areas for its own base interests, then - with the Arab people's liberation struggle constituting the centre of the anti-imperialist struggle - it can be predicted that they have not only prepared a grave for imperialism in area of the Middle East, but also that the African area is likely quite soon to become the final battlefield in the anti-imperialist struggle".¹⁰⁴

Concretely, the landmarks in this 'spreading' process were considered to be the defeat of British-French aggression and then of US aggression against the UAR, the success of the people of Iraq in breaking "the chains of the Baghdad Pact", the foundation of the Algerian PRG, the defeat of

¹⁰⁴ PENG Shuzhi op cit. p. 28

US-British aggression in Jordan and Lebanon, and the proclamation of independence by Sudan, Morocco, Tunisia, Ghana and Guinea.¹⁰⁵

This provides some insight into how the united front was considered to operate in concrete terms. It developed *in opposition to* the historical logic of what imperialism was seeking to do at that time, in a definite spatial context. The Chinese were hoping that the process of transition to a post-colonial order would slip out of control from the West's point of view, and they sought to promote the united front in such a manner as to maximise these difficulties. Hence the significance of the emergence of a new 'front' of struggle in the area still under colonial rule.

Even more important, this upsurge in the colonial areas occurred at the same time as the West was still in the grips of a major problem in another dimension. Thus, if one of the West's problems was to retain control over the situation in the colonial empires, another was how to find a form which would maintain Western interests in those areas of the developing world which were *already* independent; this was a particularly crucial issue in the longer term.

FORESHADOWING THE CONCEPT OF 'NEO-COLONIALISM'

It is in this context that we can examine the emergence of a theme which was to have considerable future importance in the articulation of an independent Chinese position at the time of the Sino-Soviet polemic, namely a set of concepts which anticipate what came to be referred to as neo-colonialism.

¹⁰⁵ CHINESE Committee for Afro-Asian Solidarity op cit.

A primary source is a passage bearing every appearance of a carefully-formulated programmatic statement which occurs in a major *Renmin Ribao* editorial entitled "Victory Belongs to the Arab People", published immediately following the most acute phase in the Middle Eastern crisis:

"In the case of those countries which have obtained legal independence, wherever this independence is still incomplete or not consolidated, the imperialists have tried hard to maintain a tight grip on them, economically, politically and militarily, or tried to force them back into their old subjection. The main task before the peoples of these countries is, therefore to struggle to obtain national independence in the fullest sense of the term"¹⁰⁶

These ideas clearly anticipate the issue in the early 1960s, where the CPC demarcated itself from the Soviet leadership over the latter's tendency to depict the independence movement as a struggle nearing completion, and hence a secondary issue. A number of references to the old regime in Iraq, and to other Arab countries, show how the Chinese considered their sovereignty to have been incomplete, and the struggle to change this state of affairs was obviously seen as an ongoing one, and as a major issue in world affairs. Reference to Iraq's dependency on Britain through the unequal treaties from the 1930s onwards is a case in point.¹⁰⁷ But some of the debate actually went further, and even touched upon issues later raised in the more technical debate on the theory of dependency, thus anticipating issues even more far-reaching than those raised in the Polemic.

The article by Peng Shuzhi throws some interesting light on the reasoning behind the later official line on neo-colonialism, in that its author sees indirect rule in the

¹⁰⁶ *Renmin Ribao* Editorial, "Victory Belongs to the Arab People" August 3 1958; *China Supports...* p. 232

¹⁰⁷ DENG Tuo op cit.

Middle East as a distinct phase in the history of imperialism, and also the struggle against this as the necessary task of the current phase.

It was, he reasons, the outbursts of popular struggle in the inter-war period which "forced the imperialists into a position where they had no choice but to change the form of their rule with regard to the Arab states". They thus instituted an incomplete form of independence in which they themselves retained control. "But the net result of this was to open up a new stage in the modern liberation struggle of the Arab people."

This article is particularly interesting, in that without employing the terminology, some of the author's ideas were apparently along the same lines as those expressed in later references by dependency theorists to peripheral social formations being constituted of elements of different modes of production under the auspices of central capital. Anticipating Samir Amin, Peng argues that far from stimulating development, imperialism deliberately maintained feudal structures in a number of areas;¹⁰⁸ and even industrial workers are seen as being faced by a mixture of capitalist and semi-feudal exploitation. He sees imperialism as the main reason for the Arab countries being industrially backward, and their socio-political development unbalanced.¹⁰⁹

AWAKENING OF THE EAST

Thus the advances of the national movement were viewed under the twin aspects of struggle against formal colonialism and against neo-colonialism. These were to

¹⁰⁸ Compare Amin's argument in *Iraq et Syrie, 1960-80*, Paris (Minuit) 1982.

¹⁰⁹ PENG Shuzhi op. cit p. 29

become linked in a current of ideas which was just beginning to emerge, which was the theme of the awakening of the East.

This concept was a latent but significant one, the development of which can be traced through documents such as the report on Cultural Exchange entrusted to the Chinese representative at the Cairo Conference where emphasis was placed upon the great historical contributions the Asiatic people had made to civilisation, and on the fact that now "African and Asian countries have become masters of their own destiny"¹¹⁰. During 1958 it was argued in various sources that in historical terms Arab-Chinese cultural exchanges had "brought about the progress of world civilisation"¹¹¹, and that today this process was being resumed. Analysing the background to the Iraqi revolution, in order to explain its significance, it was argued that

"it is patently obvious that the so-called Western 'civilisation' has involved the Arab people in an untold depth of affliction".¹¹²

but that this dismal era had now come to an end. "Economic bankruptcy and cultural backwardness" were viewed as the legacy of imperialism.¹¹³ But now, the implication was, the historical creativity of the Asian-African peoples could develop freely again.

¹¹⁰ CHU Tu-nan, "Report on Cultural Exchange...", Cairo, December 27 1957, Survey of China Mainland Press 1682 pp 46-8

¹¹¹ ZHU Chengcai, MA Shuhua and ZHANG Peide, "Zhongguo shi Alabo ge guo renmin di zhencheng pengyou", *Jiaoxue yu Yanjiu* 1958, 8.

¹¹² GUO Yingde, "Diguo zhuyi qinlue Zhong Dong Alabo guojia di xing shi", *Beijing Daxue Xuebao* (Social Science section) 1958, 3, p. 12

¹¹³ PENG Shuzhi, op. cit, p. 25

There are clear signs of a shift here in comparison even to the viewpoint set out in the Anna Louise Strong interview, which clearly sees the logic of the struggle in the rest of the world as being determined by that between the two 'camps', and defined as an 'intermediate zone' as a function of this. In comparison, the developing countries are now seen more as an active force determining the overall logic of the system. An interesting link may also exist with the abandonment of the traditional emphasis on inter-imperialist contradiction. Now, imperialism is seen more as a homogeneous entity, pitted in a great struggle against the oppressed nations. Again, the lessening emphasis on the socialist camp as an institution may reflect not just dissatisfaction with concrete Soviet policies, but also a sliding towards a somewhat different model of the world system. This current of ideas was to surface shortly when China became more seriously disillusioned with the prospects of the socialist camp as a world actor, as with the statement on the tenth anniversary of the victory of the Chinese revolution that this event "has given the lie to the old reactionary idea spread by the Western bourgeoisie - that the coloured races are inferior, that the white peoples alone are superior peoples, that the East is backward and the West is advanced and so on and so forth." ¹¹⁴

It was in connection with the campaign around the collection of documents on "Imperialism and all Reactionaries are Paper Tigers" that *Renmin Ribao* published another striking editorial which could be considered to form part of a group of material anticipating the Sino-Soviet polemic. It carries more than a hint of a theme which were to resurface briefly later on in Lin Biao's "Long Live the Victory of People's War" in referring to a leading role for the East in world revolution. This

¹¹⁴ WANG Chia-hsiang, "The International Significance of the Chinese People's Victory" in *Ten Glorious Years*, Peking (FLP) 1959 p. 281

editorial sets out to answer the views of "those who think that the West is advanced while the East is backward", of "people who think that the strength of the West is not to be despised", and of "some people who still think it is best not to nettle the US imperialists, because that will put them into even more of a frenzy and so wouldn't be in the interests of world peace."

In arguing that "the forces of socialism and the forces of national revolution are converging to become an irresistible historical current that is violently shaking the last bastions of imperialist reactionary rule"¹¹⁵, the article thus clearly seems to propose a new image of the parameters for united front policies, possibly with the peoples of the East at the core.

TAKING THE ENEMY SERIOUSLY TACTICALLY

In the latter part of the year, emphasis upon the need for boldness with respect to the overall picture of the international system was to some extent tempered by insistence on taking the enemy seriously in terms of his ability to do harm in concrete conflict situations. This twofold approach was stressed by Mao at the end of the year in a statement which carries interesting implications for the analysis of international conflicts¹¹⁶, to the effect that

"...imperialism and all reactionaries, looked at in essence, from a long-term point of view, from a strategic point of view, must be seen for what they are - paper tigers. On this we should build our strategic thinking. On the other hand, they are also

¹¹⁵ Renmin Ribao Editorial: "Scorn Imperialism and All Reactionaries" Nov 12 1958. Text in PR Nov 18 1958 pp 11-12

¹¹⁶ The passage was probably also of relevance to domestic issues, in terms of correcting tendencies in the Leap Forward to neglect concrete constraints.

living tigers, iron tigers, real tigers which can eat people. On this we should build our tactical thinking."¹¹⁷

In terms of the situation in the Middle East, the feeling was that a fresh round of struggle was in store. Thus it was warned that

'The USA planned to revive the Baghdad Pact, without Baghdad, and tie it up with other blocs under US control. In addition, it was contemplating a new system of aggression more dangerous than the Baghdad Pact. The spearhead of its aggression was now aimed at the Indian Ocean region.'¹¹⁸

More specifically, using the positional images embodied in domino or *weiqi* models which we have already discussed, it was apparently felt that the successes of the radical movement created positions which could themselves now serve as targets for the adversary. Thus it was explicitly argued that the United States was

"organising a counter-offensive against the Arab national independence movement. In order to hit at the backbone of this movement - Iraq and the United Arab Republic - the USA deems it necessary to hold at all costs the strategic kingdom of Jordan which borders on both countries."¹¹⁹

Thus, despite the optimism regarding the tide of anti-imperialism, it was thought necessary to stress that the positional dimension in the conflict had in no way been transcended.

¹¹⁷ MAO Zedong, Address to Meeting of the CPC Political Bureau, Dec 1 1958, quoted in footnote to *Selected Works* Vol IV Peking (FLP) 1969 p 99

¹¹⁸ *Renmin Ribao* Commentator, Dec 6 1958; SWB 827/10

¹¹⁹ *Xinhua* Commentary November 4 1958 in Summary of World Broadcasts 818/13

At the same time, emphasis on the overall weakness of imperialism was in no way diminished. The topic was, however, approached in what was apparently intended to be a more 'scientific' framework, and this involved in particular amplifying upon the military images - reference to 'fronts' etc. - which had been employed in certain of the *Renmin Ribao* editorials in July. An article on "Dialectics in the international struggle", published interestingly a few days before the Soviet Union stepped up international tension in Berlin, gives an explicit characterisation of the international strategic weakness of the United States from such an angle:

"...from a military point of view their weaknesses are fatal ones: their armed forces are scattered, their field of operations is extended, their rear is distant, their combat strength is enfeebled."¹²⁰

While the above can be viewed as a usage which involves importing military terminology into the field of international politics, there was also in the closing months of 1958 a tendency for major issues of international politics to surface within a debate which was ostensibly about directly military issues.

Thus an article in the army paper *Jiefangjun Bao* entitled "The Concept of 'Quick Attacks on Exterior Lines' is not Obsolete" drew upon experience of China's Liberation War to criticise some people who "say that the combat line in modern warfare runs continuously and there are few openings through which we can penetrate, encircle and outmanoeuvre" and those who were confused by "mysterious views...toward American tactics." The article upholds traditional methods of the Chinese armed forces, including the method of

"probing the enemy's strength to feel out the weak links and find an opening where we can split it in two

¹²⁰ BIN Fu op. cit p. 11

or slice it into pieces and then pocket and annihilate it." ¹²¹

Particularly striking in the context of the hypothesis advanced earlier to the effect that the Offshore Islands crisis was designed to set up a front in East Asia while the USA was tied down in West Asia, is another example of traditional Chinese military methods upheld by this article, namely to "'stage a feint attack to the east so as to attack to the west'".

In terms of this level of analysis it would seem that the theme of taking the enemy seriously in concrete struggles could be expressed in such phenomena as the concentration of US forces through military pacts, positions of strength and the 'domino' model of moving against contiguous areas, while the concept of boldness with respect to the balance of forces at a world level could be taken to relate to the adversary's over-extended forces which were open to attack at a number of points. In this sense the united front has a point of contact with 'front' in the military sense.

Bringing together these different themes was the image of a ceaseless dialectic of struggle in which the unity of progressive struggles would continuously have to be built afresh.

The whole dialectical process of history through which this evolution took place was considered to unfold according to the concept which Mao had put forward in his article "Cast Away Illusions, Prepare for Struggle", ¹²² to the effect that imperialism would go through a cycle of make trouble, fail, make trouble, fail, until their defeat, whereas the popular forces would go through a process eventually

¹²¹ LIU Cheng, article in *Jiefangjun Bao* Sept 7 1958; Joint Publications Research Service 1357-N pp 10-13.

¹²² MAO Tse-tung, *Selected Works* Vol IV op. cit., p. 428

resulting in victory. This concept can be considered to be related to the idea of needing to win a series of trials of strength with the adversary. Typical of the way the CPC summed up the lessons of the struggle in the Middle East in 1958 is thus an article published late in the year which stated that the Americans had already sustained four major defeats: Suez, the Syrian crisis of late 1957, the revolution in Iraq and the failure of armed intervention in Lebanon and Jordan. 'The series of new plots carried out recently by the USA shows clearly that there must be no relaxation of vigilance against imperialism'; but, if the USA persisted, 'a fifth, a sixth and even more failures would follow, each more serious than the one before.'¹²³

¹²³ *Dagong Bao* Commentator, Nov 24 1958; *Xinhua* quoted in *SWB* 823/6.

CONCLUSION

To understand how united front tasks were conceived at any particular time, the essential requirement is to see how the CPC apprehended the world system. Their dialectical view could be summed up in the proposition that the contradictions which give the system its essential characteristics are simultaneously the forces which work to make it change into something different. On this basis the CPC conducted an attempt at a quite sophisticated, multi-level analysis of the post-War world system and the forces for change within it.

The model encompassed elements of both stability - of the major rules of the system over a definite period - and change. These elements are reflected respectively in the continuing reference made to the Anna Louise Strong interview - showing that the basic rules of the system still applied - and in the "East Wind" concept, which emphasised the forces for change.

The rationale for united front policies can be understood against this background. Such policies could be defined as a multidimensional strategy seeking to maximise the potential of the forces for radical change existing within a given historical situation, by the specific method of accentuating the factors which could make them cohere.

Persistent reference in Chinese sources to the importance of unity shows that this was viewed as a key, perhaps the key, condition for the radical elements to realise their potential. The Chinese leadership both urged particular strategies of unity on other actors, and sought through China's own policy to show the way. The definition of a 'force' in this sense could perhaps be that the whole was greater than the sum of its parts.

The united front was not just a 'policy' but a process of the identification of forces which objectively shared a common cause, and an attempt to promote this process *through* policies. Armstrong's definition of the importance of the united front as an orientation is thus correct, but this analysis would be strengthened by seeing it not only as a policy, but also as the attempted identification of an existing trend within the system, upon which that policy seeks to build.

The distinction may be clarified with the following example. Analysts of the Balance of Power have pointed out that this term applies both to a set of system-rules which actually operated or were considered to operate, and at the same time to a policy designed to further the operation of that system. A formal analogy could be drawn with the Chinese United Front approach, insofar as it was a conscious policy to promote a set of factors which already existed as an objective tendency within the system itself. The substantive difference with the balance of power - and it is an important one - is that the latter sought to maintain stability, while China's policy sought to promote system-change.

The characterisation of the main 'trend' as an objective process is reinforced by the use of images drawn from natural forces: tides, currents, winds, not to mention volcanoes etc. The concept of the East Wind prevailing over the West Wind idea was both a statement that such a trend to the accentuation of mutually reinforcing popular struggles existed, and at the same time a statement that conditions were such that advances could be won if this trend were to be expressed more formally in united fronts, both within individual states and between them.

In this context, the subjective element was accorded an essential role. An analogy could perhaps be made with the

Marxist distinction between a class-in-itself and a class-for-itself. The 'force' represented by the 'East Wind' was considered to exist in itself, in that various struggles which hit at the dominance of the industrial countries actually existed. The point was to give the trend identity as a trend, both at a conceptual level, in terms of consciousness, and at an organisational level.

The notion of a relationship between the subjective and objective spheres assumes that the two are not identical. Obviously some of the forces with which the CPC sought to unite would not have seen themselves as radicals: conservative regimes could objectively play an anti-imperialist role in certain circumstances. This much was nothing new, because Stalin had expressed similar ideas in his analysis of the role of the Emir of Afghanistan, for example. But the converse is - and here the CPC was much more original - that they also took account of the fact that the subjective was itself a material force. They thus paid attention to how the movement for change was conceptualised by those most closely involved, as for example with the ideology which emerged under the impetus of Bandung.

The basis of any action thus had to be the movement as it really existed, including the way in which it was conceptualised by its own major actors. The particularity of the role which the CPC sought for itself in relation to the actually-existing movement was perhaps - to paraphrase the words of the Communist Manifesto - to have a clearer view of its long-term and global (international) dimensions.

Unity required, in the CPC's conception, a focus. The united front was conceived in quite a concrete manner, and emphasis was thus placed upon organisation. The trend at an objective level was defined particularly in terms of

what actors were *doing* in relation to concrete struggles, and at a political level united fronts aimed to promote solidarity among actors around definite tasks.

China's own domestic policies fell very much within the compass of this model - the attempt to give a radical impetus to building socialism, not just in China but as a world movement, via the Leap Forward. This was envisaged as the concrete focus, a task which could give expression to the general world trend in terms appropriate to the stage which China's own construction had then reached.

The model of the system encompassed change as part of its basic definitions. Hence the framework for united front policies was historical. The CPC's historical view possessed long-term as well as immediate-term dimensions.

The long-term element could be seen in the idea that the growing movement of Asian-African states was a restoration of a pattern of international contacts which had existed in the pre-colonial period. It could also be seen in the ideas for economic co-operation with developing countries, which look beyond the horizons of many of the then-prevalent development models.

According to this definition, united fronts were not just seen as *means* to an end; the type of solidarity which they implied, and the various co-operative mechanisms which embodied it, could even be seen as ends in themselves. They created new patterns or habits of international conduct.

But there was at the same time a very immediate and concrete assessment of the tasks which needed to be carried out, particularly of conflicts which had to be won. Although the views of the CPC do bear similarities to those of Western 'realists' or power-theorists, these

similarities were confined essentially to the dimension of 'taking the enemy seriously tactically'; within the limitations of this dimension, the element of power was of crucial importance.

The particular importance of the Middle East in the history of that period was assessed both against a background of long-term trends, and in connection with the concrete conflicts which needed to be won there, in other words, trials of strength. In a particular situation, the two aspects were closely related - the Western powers were considered to be acting to oppose the longer-term trends with which China identified, and particular local trials of strength grew out of this.

The linkage between long-term trends and particular conflicts could be understood in outline in the following manner. The old order of international relations was coming under threat at Bandung. Nationalism of a type which the West at least perceived to be threatening was sweeping many areas. It was already evident that the colonial system could not be maintained, and by no means clear that it could be transformed in an orderly manner. The US was playing a far from coherent role, permitting the old colonial powers to be defeated at Suez but supporting them in other areas (for example, France in Indochina), and there was indecision within American leading circles about how far and in what form it should intervene directly in local conflicts in pursuit of its overall interests. The Western economic system apparently had problems in structuring itself in such a way as encompass rapid technological development, something which Soviet successes in the space race exposed.

The process of managing the change to the post-colonial era was crucial. There was a tremendous impetus generated by the anti-colonial movement, expressed at Bandung, and the

Chinese were probably correct in saying that the effects were still being felt and the impetus was still present in the 1957-8 period.

This provided an objective context for united front policies. At one level they implied maintaining the impetus of the anti-colonial movement and carrying this through to face new tasks; at this level the CPC sought for example to encourage post-Bandung conferences such as that at Cairo, and the movement to erect a new set of regulatory principles for the system through reforms in international law etc. The other level was that, given the existence and carrying-forward of this anti-colonial current, it had to be deployed in such a way as to maximise the managerial difficulties of the Western camp. It would seem likely that the CPC identified the regional dimension as crucial for this purpose. Overall, the factors for change could be promoted if the developing countries could pull together, in a variety of different ways, ranging from co-operation in their economic construction to military challenges in different areas at the same time. In sum, the role of actors involved in united fronts was understood in two dimensions: firstly, beating the adversary at his own game, and secondly pursuing milieu goals aimed at altering the rules of the system as a whole.

Once the necessary content of the grouping of progressive forces was defined, its actual operation was probably defined more in a functional manner - according to what actors were actually working for or against - than in terms of a priori deductions from the nature of particular regimes. The notion of the 'swing of the pendulum' between 'broad' and 'narrow' approaches to alliance-building would in fact appear somewhat simplistic if applied to this particular period. As we have argued above, China's policy during the period was extremely radical from the point of view of assessing the revolutionary potential of the

situation, but this did not imply a narrowing of the forces with which alliance was sought. On the contrary, the united front policy was applied in a broad way, precisely as a way of maximising the revolutionary potential in the world system.

In terms of concrete conflict situations, the notion of power as capacity to act, the need to mobilise it to win goals, is a familiar theme in Western international relations theory and has been widely used by US writers in discussing their own country's foreign policy. The Chinese employed similar analytical tools in their approach to US foreign policy during the period. This can be seen in the discussion of 'positions of strength', which could be defined on the one hand as an actual way of concentrating forces in order to make gains in regional situations, and on the other as a crucial psychological factor. The negation of this strategy provided a key parameter for united front policies, in terms of defeating US policy initiatives on the ground. In order to win trials of strength it was thought necessary for progressive forces too to concentrate forces, and the united front was a tool in doing this.

At the most basic level, united fronts were viewed as groupings of peoples rather than of regimes. This level could be seen in the Cairo conference which established the Afro-Asian Peoples' Solidarity Organisation, where Chinese representatives explicitly said that it was better than Bandung because they could deal directly with peoples. The state dimension was still accorded enormous importance, but this was primarily because of the Marxist-Leninist view which the Chinese leadership espoused, according to which the state had a unique role as manipulator of power (military, political, economic etc.). As the case of Yemen showed, even relations with regimes were conceptualised primarily as a *channel* for people-to-people relations.

Thus the distinction between united fronts from above and from below was probably not one which was viewed as particularly problematical by the Chinese leadership at this period. They would probably have been seen as two aspects of a whole.

The popular current was regarded at one level as something which permeated state boundaries - as it clearly did in the Middle East at that time - and even regional boundaries, as in the case of the wider current of solidarity with similar movements in other areas of the developing world. At another level, the popular current expressed itself, in an indispensable way, *through* the activities of states at the level of the deployment of power. A crucial aspect of this was the occurrence of trials of strength with the adversary.

But again, the Chinese model accepted that the outcome of such trials of strength would be influenced by the ability of anti-imperialist state actors to mobilise their resources more effectively than those in the opposite camp, precisely because of their popular base. As an actor which looked at the world from a radical point of view, the CPC considered that the basis for a rapid 'spreading' of the independence movement was the existence of popular forces within even states which were part of the 'reactionary' camp. This does not entirely contradict the state-centric view, because state power was still conceived as the focus of contention between rival social forces. But this element did make pro-US regimes less secure. A key deduction from this standpoint is the importance of united fronts grouping social forces *within* developing states.

In the context of the Middle East as a regional system, key issues included the need to counter imperialist strategy in a very concrete context, that is the strategy of subverting radical actors *one by one* - hence the importance of domino

or *weiqi* models. In this context, the primary level of solidarity took as its point of reference the radical actors themselves, in this case Egypt and Syria.

To a certain extent, this logic could also be reversed. The Chinese adhered to a geopolitical view of the clash of forces at a world level. They considered that both their own side and the other side could expand their influence to geographically contiguous areas. In this sense the CPC's views are not entirely dissimilar to the 'domino' theories at that time espoused by American decision-makers.

But this was only one dimension of the Chinese approach. In a larger sense, the logics of the two sides were not considered interchangeable. National independence was in accordance with the aspirations of the masses, and so had an enduring basis, whereas US positions of strength, particularly their military bases, were inherently a source of weakness. Bandung had already shown how foreign bases and the membership of military pacts could serve as a focus for popular discontent.

Solidarity was thus not just conceived at the level of support for those struggling in the front line, i.e. Egypt and Syria. There was a higher level which immediately recognised that the very fact of division into radical and conservative camps served the adversary. So an important focus of unity was the need to overcome even this division and replace it with a broad-based unity. It was not enough just for the radicals to unite amongst themselves.

The wider solidarity inherent in the overall world balance of forces could itself interact with particular local events. An example is the conflict in the Lebanon, where the CPC concluded that because of the overall balance of forces there was a possibility for a small and weak actor to defeat a world power. This could lead to developing new

concepts which in turn were considered to have a general relevance.

Having said this, though, it is important to emphasise that, even moving outside the Middle East region itself, the Chinese analysis still stressed a very important spatial dimension. This is seen in the interesting image of the independence movement 'spreading' from the Middle East, via North Africa to sub-Saharan Africa.

The developing countries were accorded a status as a distinct group and not seen as secondary, still less as subordinate, to socialism. The dignity of this status flowed partly from the intermediate zone theory which asserted that they were the main focus of the world-political contradictions which simultaneously gave the system its character and generated change within it. At the same time, China's definition of the grouping of progressive forces retained a very important place for socialism, which was in no way submerged within it.

The CPC approached its analysis of the world system using the apparatus inherited from the Communist movement of the past, and it is interesting to see how they managed, for example on a question like relations between the industrial powers. To some extent they were able to use old categories to encompass a changed content, to some extent this was more problematical.

In the specific field of united front questions the CPC was breaking newer ground, and this study would suggest that they had some success in giving new content to socialist theory of international relations in this field.

The concept of a convergence between two distinct forces, socialism and national liberation, was a guiding principle from which the Chinese leadership never departed during the

period in question. This was a further major dimension of united front activity. In many formulations, the coming-together of the forces of socialism and national-liberation was identified as the key united front task.

The manner in which this was conceived altered significantly however. At the outset of the period China's role as a socialist country itself possessed an organisational context in the form of the Socialist Camp headed by the Soviet Union. At the end of the period in question this identification was much less clear-cut.

At the outset, the CPC placed almost more emphasis on putting forward its line as a basis for a collective socialist-camp policy than it did on a specifically Chinese policy. This is a fact which is perhaps not adequately reflected in some of the literature on Chinese foreign policy, although our study has also shown, notably in the case of Yemen, that even at this time there was another dimension of Chinese policy in which the links between fellow developing countries received the main emphasis.

Following the Moscow Meeting, a very clear theme was the key role in the world system assigned by the CPC to the Socialist Camp headed by the Soviet Union. Very definite demands and responsibilities were placed upon the Soviet Union for neutralising the West's military, in particular nuclear, threat. The Chinese view of these responsibilities clashed strongly with the manner in which the Soviet leadership conceptualised the responsibilities of a nuclear power.

In no sense did the CPC subscribe to the emerging 'neutralist' view which saw the two power blocs as equally bad, in fact they strongly criticised the Yugoslavs for putting such an idea forward. Had such a model been

adopted, the parameters for united front building would have been very different. At the same time, it is important to realise that the CPC clearly and explicitly regarded the Asian-African movement - it was also during this period that Latin America was beginning to be included in the definition - as a distinct force in the world system which was not expected to submerge itself in the same grouping as the socialist countries. Indeed the material in this study does not really bear out Shichor's assertion that "in the face of persistent western aggression" the developing countries "were advised to abandon their middle-of-the-road position and co-operate closely with the Soviet Union and the socialist camp." However strongly the Socialist Camp's role was emphasised, the distinct character of the Asian-African grouping was equally strongly stressed.

There were important changes in the manner in which the socialist element in the world alignment of forces was formulated. Some Chinese sources began to experiment with new formulations, typically the "world socialist revolutionary movement". At the height of the crisis over Iraq, immediately prior to the Mao-Khrushchev summit, when the CPC was apparently quite angry with some aspects of Soviet policy, particularly in the military field, Chinese sources noticeably downplayed the Soviet role as a world force. This was quite a major change, which shows the CPC facing up to the possibility of having to adjust themselves to a new analysis of the forces in world politics. In the most radical phase in 1958 the CPC made some surprisingly explicit criticisms of the Soviet line, which clearly anticipate points made in the polemic of the early 'sixties.

While developing what was conceived as a correct foreign policy for a socialist state in this period, the Chinese leadership also increasingly explored the dimension of its

role as an Asian country. In this context, the spatial dimension of China's policies has to be seen under two aspects, which are both very important for understanding united front questions.

The first aspect is in terms of the decision to initiate the Taiwan Straits crisis at a time when the USA was deeply involved in West Asia. While it would be inappropriate in the context of a study not essentially focussed on this question - and where alternative hypotheses are not considered in detail - to assert that this was the primary rationale, the evidence we have presented of the CPC's global view at the time does argue that the link with the Middle East should be accorded greater significance in future discussions of the Offshore Islands crisis.

The second aspect relates to the fact that links with the Middle East were viewed from one dimension as a reconstitution of a historical pattern dating to the pre-colonial past. This guides us to a very interesting dimension of united fronts which can easily be missed: just because the policy emanated from a Marxist regime did not mean it had no point of reference other than in modern class or national politics.

The Chinese affirmed the historical experience of international relations as it existed in the pre-colonial period, when widespread links existed between Asian-African states. This could be considered to imply a dialectic whereby the period of European dominance negated this set of relationships and they would be restored in a changed form through the negation of the negation (using Hegel's term), of which the precursor was the Bandung spirit. In a sense the pattern of relations *among* the Asian-African states can be seen under two aspects: both as a trend within the current system - operating within it while also tending to subvert its basic rules of great power dominance

- and at the same time as a harbinger of a new system of international relations which would come into being through the decline of the present one.

This gives the united front in international terms an altogether different basis from the dimension in which it is perceived simply as a tactical approach in response to imperialism. The promotion of indigenous agricultural or medical techniques as the Chinese have done via South-South co-operation is situated in a long time-scale - not just in terms of its positive attitude to the past but with respect to the future as well, bearing in mind criticisms of growth models and inappropriate technology in the development experience, which have become much more prevalent since.

The Chinese approach was thus not without some originality or contemporary relevance. At the same time, a critical assessment would have to address the fact that the CPC's prognostications for the international system have turned out to be inaccurate in many respects.

An interesting feature of the Maoist model is that it allowed for unfavourable outcomes. This makes it appear far more realistic, with hindsight, than many Soviet models. Both the 'general crisis' theory put forward in the USSR in the inter-war period and Khrushchev's theory of the gradual triumph of socialism through peaceful economic competition were inherently unlinear. The Maoist standpoint in contrast placed great emphasis on subjective factors. What the 'East Wind' theory said was not so much that one side of the balance would inexorably rise and the other decline, more that there was a great *opportunity* for the anti-systemic forces, if they could grasp it. "Seize the day, seize the hour" was applied as much to international affairs as it was to domestic in the Leap Forward period.

It is logically consistent to attempt to realise the favourable possibilities in a given situation.

Having said this, there does appear to have been a tendency to overestimate forces for change. This was very evident in the context of the Leap Forward in domestic policy. If it is a reproach which could be made of other forms of systems-theory that they neglected elements of change and stressed stability, the CPC which was at that time an inherently subversive actor within the world system, may have been well placed to identify factors for change which other observers neglected. On the other hand, the evidence suggests that in the atmosphere of the Leap Forward, the CPC actually overestimated the factors for change in the international system and underestimated factors maintaining continuity. The outcome in the Middle East was far less decisive - for one side or the other - than the analysis implied.

A persistent emphasis on the mass movement became stronger during the year 1958 until it came to be considered practically the only significant element to be taken into account in assessing the characteristics of the period in question. Individual cases were studied as a basis for understanding the general world trend, in which it was believed the role of the masses could reverse more conventional definitions of stronger and weaker. This tendency became notably more marked as the Leap Forward progressed, which would seem to be an example of how domestic factors could influence, negatively in this case, the realism of foreign policy.

However from our point of view, a particularly important weakness of the overwhelming emphasis on the masses was the lack of analysis of social differentiation. Some of the most important questions of international united fronts in fact hinge on how social relations within a country are

understood. The CPC had real problems in understanding social relations within other developing societies, and their own internal experience during the period perhaps provides some clues.

The Soviet approach, only incompletely criticised under Khrushchev, was one which regarded social contradictions as an inconvenience, and monolithic society as a preferable state. Mao departed from this at a conceptual level in viewing contradiction as the life-blood of any social phenomenon.

However, the CPC was far from faithful to this approach in practice. 'Uniting' presupposes difference. It could be defined as a bringing-together of disparate entities, and a united grouping no longer exists as such if the difference of its components disappears. But homogenising tendencies became dominant during the Leap forward - particularly on the nationalities question, but also in spheres such as the imposition of organisational models in rural development. This called into question the whole commitment of the CPC to a model encompassing difference, and practically deprived the domestic united front of any real meaning.

Some of these weaknesses were apparently transplanted into the field of studies of other developing societies.

In terms of domestic politics Mao had expressed a view that objectively the category of 'the people' differed according to each stage, and what was needed was to formulate appropriate united front *policies*.

The Lebanese case illustrates the Chinese view not just that sovereignty was important as an issue around which united fronts could be formed, but that sovereignty itself could be constituted through the coalescence of popular

forces (in a manner perhaps reminiscent of eighteenth century ideas of the General Will). Despite the basically state-centric view of the Chinese it was felt that, in a revolutionary situation, one arrived at a polarization with 'the people' on one side and isolated pro-imperialist 'tyrants' on the other.

This approach carries significant dangers. The use of the term 'the people' implies the exclusion of those defined as the class enemy from the category 'people', and this had unfortunate implications from the human rights angle, as seen, for example, in the Anti-Rightist movement. As the source of an effective interpretation of *international* events the concept also had its weaknesses. At a certain level it is tautological. The CPC assumed for itself the position of determining what the main lines of demarcation were, and then evaluated various forces according to how they identified their attitude to this issue.

Such a procedure serves as an alibi for failure to conduct an independent evaluation of the *actual* role of those forces.

Yemen illustrates a phenomenon which was to become much more common from the time China was able to develop relations with a large number of states in the early '70s, namely a regime winning support from the Chinese leadership by saying what they wanted to hear. If the CPC had adhered strictly to the approach of "seeking truth from facts" the main point of reference should have been the actual socio-economic role of different forces in the third world, thus moving outside the framework of tautology and accepting the - necessary - risk of revealing that the main contradiction was analysed wrongly.

True, there were to some extent two distinct levels at which discourse was conducted. Public statements including *Renmin Ribao* articles, and even to a considerable extent

the widely circulated periodical *Shijie Zhishi* heavily emphasised the political approach to united fronts as including all forces which identified themselves for or against the main positive or negative trends as identified by the CPC leadership. Specialist academic publications did on the other hand, to a limited extent, attempt an analysis of socio-economic trends in developing countries against the background of the world system.

It would be a limitation in itself if this important area of debate was insulated within a narrow circle and excluded from public discussion, but it would not be without a certain limited value if the academic sphere were used as a 'think-tank' and its research treated as the bedrock upon which subsequent policy changes could be made. However, the two levels - the level of enquiry and the level of official orthodoxy - were vastly unequal: the official level overwhelmingly dominated, and in many ways the academic articles appear to be burdened with a role of feeding arguments in to reinforce the official conceptions, rather than generating genuinely challenging perspectives. This is of course a problem which affects other foreign-policy decision-making systems. The point is simply that the Chinese system was supposed to be revolutionary, and mechanisms for revolutionising dominant ideas seem to have been very weak. Moreover, the system was defined as a *mass-based* revolutionary one, and it is hard to see how informed debate could occur when there was no mechanism to present conflicting points of view.

Concretely, the two main holes in the Chinese analysis would appear to be the following: firstly the neglect of a new and sizeable social stratum within developing countries which could serve as an intermediary to foreign economic domination in the post-World War II situation; and secondly a failure to appreciate the depth of contradictions which did exist within and between developing countries and which

could be manipulated in such a way as to divide peoples along lines of sectional interests, particularly national, ethno-linguistic etc. The later history of the Middle East illustrates these points all too well, but the Chinese analysis at the time hardly provides a framework which anticipated them in any way. To make this point in no way implies the invalidity of united front policies as an approach, just that such policies could only succeed if problems like these were understood and faced up to.

On the question of the analysis of social forces in the Middle East, the CPC was careful not to identify itself with Nasserism to the exclusion of other progressive forces - principally popular forces, but including even monarchic forces like Yemen - which might exist separate from or even in opposition to Nasser. The CPC tended to hold a people-centred view of development strategies, in contrast to the view which stressed grandiose projects for their own sake. In this sense the weaknesses subsequently exposed in the Nasserist model, or specifically in the Aswan dam project, would by no means be unexpected in terms of the Chinese view in the period in question.

Although it is not stated in such explicit terms, it is probably fair to say that Chinese authors did not regard nationalism as specifically bourgeois, as the Soviet tradition had often done in the past. They considered that the assertion of nationhood in Africa and Asia, and also the new pattern of relations between states in a particular area, was part of an ongoing dynamic of those societies, which had been interrupted by the colonial era. This was quite an important new element in communist theory. The process of contemporary nation-building was also seen as an essentially mass or popular phenomenon, as in the case of Lebanon.

The CPC frequently described the struggles in the Middle East as struggles against colonialism. This may appear puzzling because formal colonialism was not the dominant form of great-power influence in the Middle East. However, the term 'neo-colonialism' was not yet in general use at the time, and what the Chinese were really saying is that there was a form of relationship which was in substance equivalent to colonialism.

This usage is in a sense far-sighted in that it reflects an understanding that the attainment of formal sovereignty was not in itself a solution for the third world, and thus to a certain extent anticipates the later debate about neo-colonialism. A very significant aspect of Chinese formulations in this period is that they grouped together countries at different stages of the independence movement, each fulfilling tasks appropriate to the stage it was at. The united front was defined in a sufficiently broad manner as to encompass not only colonies but also independent states striving for the substance of independence - defending it not just physically against outside intervention, but through economic construction as well. Some concepts later included in definitions of 'neo-colonialism' and 'dependency' are anticipated here. There was a major impetus to independence which had been frustrated for a long time, and thus constituted a real tide in international affairs. Having built up for such a long time, this movement would not be content with stopping short at some stage of attainment of formal independence. The demand was to realise this in the form of a qualitative shift in the direction of new principles of international relations - as anticipated at Bandung.

At the same time, the Chinese analysis on this question can also be considered oversimplified and inadequate. It did not reflect the differences inherent in the switch to neo-colonial relationships, mainly the change in class

relations in the countries concerned, relations which are themselves conditioned by the form of that country's insertion in the international division of labour. Judging by the material analysed in this study, Chinese authors scarcely anticipated the ideas introduced into the debate about "dependency". Hence they found it difficult to see that new social strata could come into being in the third world which combine elements of dependency with elements of real decision-making power. They tended to adopt a fairly simplistic analysis of imperialist influence, regarding pro-Western strata as narrow "cliques" without any coherent social basis.

This analysis could yield a superficially coherent view of events in the particular period under consideration, such as the Lebanese crisis in 1958, but it would not hold water in the longer term. The traditional Maoist analysis of classes put forward in the early stage of the Chinese revolution was considerably more sophisticated in comparison to the tendency of the Communist international during that period, which had tended to swing between two one-sided poles of analysis, either to stress the class aspect, or to stress nationalism and equate this with the bourgeoisie. But in the post World War II era, the Maoist model would certainly need further refinements if it was to make sense of the new types of emerging class relations in the third world. The material suggests that it was difficult for Chinese theorists to make the necessary breakthroughs. This is probably to be attributed partly to the atmosphere created by the anti-rightist movement of 1957, which promoted dogmatism and discouraged people, to put it mildly, from sticking their neck out or questioning established patterns of thought. Thus on many occasions the specialist articles, which should have been breaking new ground theoretically, instead tended to stick to 'safe' areas and flesh out the official line.

This can be considered an unfortunate lost opportunity, in that Chinese policies did contain a number of interesting and promising lines of thought which had potential for further development, but in many cases did not receive it. In international relations or world-political terms, one can consider a state 'revolutionary' if the guiding principles of its line seek to provide an alternative to the established pattern of power relations. In this respect the Chinese position had limitations: the CPC decision-makers were limited by the 'power-theory' framework, at least to the extent that it was difficult for their model to accommodate issues such as the ecological perspective, the particular role of women in the world system, the contributions of indigenous peoples, and (to some extent) the qualitative approach to development. Still, given these limitations, Chinese foreign policy did during the period in question set itself against the whole structure of great-power dominance of the world system and attempt to promote a more plural approach to international relations which opposed intervention and plunder by the powers and upheld the rights of small nations to determine their own options and exercise an effective decision-making power within the world system.

The material surveyed in this study does present a picture of a comparatively rich and varied system of ideas aiming at an 'alternative' approach to international affairs. From today's standpoint, in a system where elements of solidarity are very much pushed into the background, the united front ideas highlighted by China at that time are still worth studying. The CPC was not wrong in referring to the possibility of a major restructuring in the direction of new structures of dominance, a process which has involved very complex struggles, in the course of which the dominant actors appeared on a number of occasions to be quite uncertain and on the defensive. Was the CPC then wrong in saying that this outcome could have been

prevented? It is clearly impossible to say, but at least it can be argued that for an actor with the radical commitment of the CPC at that time, it was logical to try.

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