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43 Maoism Goes Global (1959–64; age 65–70)

IN February 1959, Russia signed an agreement to provide China with the means to make nuclear submarines. This marked the high point of the Kremlin's cooperation on technology transfers. But even while the deal was being signed, Khrushchev was having second thoughts about endowing Mao with such enormous military power.

One incident in particular had prompted Khrushchev to rethink. In September 1958 a US air-to-air Sidewinder missile had come down over China unexploded from a Taiwanese plane. Urgent requests from Khrushchev to let the Russians examine this state-of-the-art windfall went unanswered. The Chinese then claimed they could not find it. Khrushchev's son Sergei, a leading rocket scientist, recalled:

For the first time, Father sensed the deep fissures that had appeared in our 'fraternal friendship'. For the first time he wondered whether it made sense to transfer the newest military technology and teach the Chinese how to build missiles and nuclear warheads.

... in February [1959], he decided to exert pressure for the first time ... he held up transfer of instructions for the R-12 [missile]. It did the trick. The [Sidewinder] missile was immediately found.

The Chinese had dismantled the missile and the critical guidance system was missing. 'This was offensive and insulting to us,' Khrushchev senior wrote in his memoirs. 'Anybody in our place would have felt pain. We held no secrets back from China. We gave them everything ... Yet when they got a trophy they refused to share it.' Khrushchev reached the conclusion that Mao was just using Russia for his own goals, and did not care about the interests of the Communist camp as a whole. Mao, he felt, 'was bursting with an impatient desire to

rule the world'. Khrushchev gave orders to go slow on transferring nuclear know-how, and on 20 June 1959 he suspended assistance on the Bomb.

This was not a fatal blow, as by now China had the basic know-how, and the key equipment, for a Bomb. But Mao could see that from here on it was going to be hard to tap Khrushchev for more.

In September, Khrushchev went to America on the first-ever visit by a Soviet leader. He believed there was a real possibility of peaceful coexistence with the West. Afterwards he went on to Peking for the tenth anniversary of Mao's regime. Khrushchev urged Mao to be conciliatory towards the West, 'to avoid anything that could be exploited ... to drive the world back into the cold war "rut"', as Russia's chief ideologist put it.

Mao saw Khrushchev's rapprochement with the West as a historic opportunity to put himself forward as the champion of all those around the world who saw peaceful coexistence as favouring – and possibly freezing – the status quo. The timing seemed particularly good, with decolonisation in full swing. There were numerous anti-colonial movements in Africa that were keen on guerrilla war, of which Mao was perceived to be the advocate and expert in a way that Khrushchev was not. Communist parties, too, seemed soft targets, as they had little hope of getting into power except through violence. Mao envisaged a situation where 'Communist parties all over the world will not believe in [Russia] but believe in us'. He saw a chance to establish his own 'centre for world revolution'.

To have his own camp, and not have to play second fiddle to Khrushchev, had long been Mao's dream. As Khrushchev had begun to dry up as a source of military hardware, Mao felt less concerned about annoying him. But nor did he want a split from him either, as Russia was still handing over a wealth of military technology, with no fewer than 1,010 blueprints transferred in 1960 alone – more even than in 1958. So Mao formulated a policy of 'not to denounce' the Russians 'for the time being', and sought to milk them of everything he could as fast as he could. 'China will become powerful in eight years,' he told his top echelon, and Khrushchev 'will be completely bankrupt'.

The goal for now, he told his inner circle at the beginning of 1960, was 'to propagate Mao Tse-tung Thought' round the world. At first, the drive should not be too aggressive, in order, as he put it, not to be seen to be trying to 'export our fragrant intestines' (to which Mao compared his 'Thought'). The resulting propaganda campaign brought the world 'Maoism'.

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The idea of promoting China's experience as a model when the Chinese were dying of starvation in their millions might seem a tall order, but Mao was not perturbed: he had watertight filters on what foreigners could see and hear. As of February 1959, the CIA's 'preliminary judgement' about Chinese food output was that there were 'remarkable increases in production'. Mao could easily pull the wool over most visitors' eyes. When the French writer Simone de Beauvoir visited in 1955, even the French-speaking Chinese woman assigned to accompany her had to get special permission to speak to her directly without going through the interpreter. After her short visit, de Beauvoir pontificated that 'the power he [Mao] exercises is no more dictatorial than, for example, Roosevelt's was. New China's Constitution renders impossible the concentration of authority in one man's hands.' She wrote a lengthy book about the trip, titled *The Long March*. Its index has one entry for the word 'violence', which reads: '[Mao] on violence, avoidance of'.

Mao made sure that no Chinese except a very carefully vetted elite could get out of the country. Among the few who could were diplomats, who became notorious for their leaden performances. They worked under straitjacket rules about exactly what they could say, the strictest orders to report every conversation, and permanent surveillance by each other. Communist China's first ambassadors were mostly army generals. Before sending them off, Mao told them, only half-jokingly: 'You don't know any foreign language, and you are not [professional] diplomats; but I want you to be my diplomats – because in my view you won't be able to flee.' And over half of these men were going to other Communist countries.

The only people who got out and would talk were a small number of daring ordinary citizens who risked their lives and swam to Hong Kong. They broke the wall of silence round Mao's famine and the dark realities of Red China in general. But their voices won little credence in the West.

Instead, when Mao told barefaced lies to France's Socialist leader (and future president) François Mitterrand during the famine in 1961 ('I repeat it, in order to be heard: there is no famine in China'), he was widely believed. The future Canadian prime minister Pierre Trudeau came in 1960 and co-wrote a starry-eyed book, *Two Innocents in Red China*, which did not say a word about famine. Even the former chief of the UN's Food and Agricultural Organisation, Lord Boyd-Orr, was duped. In May 1959, after a trip to China, he opined that food production had risen 50–100 per cent over 1955–8 and that China 'seems capable of feeding [its population] well'. Britain's Field Marshal Montgomery, a much more gullible figure, asserted after visits in 1960

and 1961 that there had been 'no large-scale famine, only shortages in certain areas', and he certainly did not regard the 'shortages' as Mao's fault, as he urged Mao to hang on to power: 'China . . . needs the chairman. You mustn't abandon this ship.'

Mao had no problem covering up the famine, and was confident he could promote himself as a credible international leader. For this job he brought in three dependable writer-journalists: Edgar Snow, the half-Chinese Han Suyin, and Felix Greene, who did an interview with Chou on BBC TV during which Chou simply read out his answers from sheets of paper.

Mao's self-promotion abroad was fuelled by vastly increased handouts of his usual trio: arms, money and food. On 21 January 1960 a new body called the Foreign Economic Liaison Bureau was formed, ranking on a par with the Foreign Trade Ministry and the Foreign Ministry, to handle the rise in foreign aid. Aid figures soared immediately. This spree of gifts by Mao coincided with the worst years of the greatest famine in world history. Over 22 million people died of starvation in 1960 alone.

China was not only the poorest country in the world to provide aid, but its aid was the highest ever given as a percentage of the donor country's per capita income – and, moreover, often went to countries with a standard of living much higher than itself, like Hungary. And the cost of these handouts was not just the standard of living, but Chinese *lives*. Moreover, they were literally handouts, as Peking constantly said that loans should be treated as gifts, or that repayment should be deferred indefinitely. As for arms, the regime liked to say 'We are not arms merchants'; but this did not mean it did not export arms, only that the arms did not have to be paid for.

Mao saw that his best chance was where there was a war, so the main donee on his list was Indochina, on which he lavished more than US\$20 billion during his reign. In Africa he tried to latch on to the decolonisation movement: there he showered cash, goods and arms on the Algerians, who were fighting the biggest anti-colonial war on the continent, against the French.*

In Latin America, Peking made a beeline for Cuba after Fidel Castro took power in January 1959. When Castro's colleague Che Guevara came to China in November 1960, Mao doled out US\$60m as a 'loan', which Chou told Guevara 'does not have to be repaid'.

In the Communist bloc itself, Mao worked on trying to acquire

* Algeria showed how dependent Mao was on there being an armed conflict. Once Algeria gained its independence, in 1962, his influence evaporated.

influence in every country, but only managed to detach one client from Russia's sphere of influence: tiny poverty-stricken Albania. As early as 1958, its dictator, Enver Hoxha, had scrounged 50m roubles out of a willing Mao – a considerable sum for a country of fewer than 3 million people. Then, in January 1961, as the Peking–Moscow rift sharpened and Hoxha showed he could be relied on to spout venom against Khrushchev, Peking decupled this amount, lending Tirana 500 million roubles, and sent 2.2 million bushels of wheat, which China had bought from Canada for hard currency. Thanks to food donated by China, the Albanians did not even know what rationing was, while the Chinese were dying in their tens of millions. Albania's chief negotiator with Peking, Pupo Shyti, told us that in China 'you could see the famine'. But 'the Chinese gave us everything'. 'When we needed anything, we just asked the Chinese . . . I felt ashamed . . .' When Mao's colleagues flinched he told them off.

Mao spent money trying to split Communist parties and to set up Maoist parties all over the world – a task he entrusted to his old intelligence chief, Kang Sheng. Spotting Peking's crude criteria for allegiance, freeloaders jumped aboard the gravy train. Albanian archives reveal a tetchy Kang in Tirana griping about Venezuelan leftists walking off with US\$300,000 of China's money funnelled through Albania. Dutch intelligence set up a bogus Maoist party, which was funded and fêted by the Chinese. The CIA's top China hand, James Lilley, told us they were delighted to discover how easy it was to infiltrate China: simply get a few people to chant hosannas to Mao and set up a Maoist party, which Peking would then rush to fund – and invite to China. (These spies, however, were useless, as all foreigners were rigidly segregated from the Chinese.)*

To launch 'Maoism' on the world, Mao chose the ninetieth anniversary of Lenin's birth, in April 1960, in the form of a manifesto entitled *Long Live Leninism!*, which said that advocating a peaceful road to socialism was unacceptable – 'revisionism', Peking called it – and

* At least one Chinese noticed how easily huge sums of money flooded into projects to do with promotion abroad and tried to take advantage. In March 1960 a clerk at the Foreign Trade Ministry walked off with the astronomical sum of 200,000 yuan, in the biggest known cash swindle to date, which he accomplished by forging just one letter, and faking one signature: Chou En-lai's. The one-page letter claimed a telephone call had come from Mao's staff to Chou's office asking for cash to be allotted to repair a temple in Tibet so that some foreign journalists could take photographs of it. The clerk had four hungry children, and wanted to buy them some extra food, which special state shops sold outside the rationing network at exorbitant prices for those with the money, mainly people with relatives abroad. Needless to say, this enterprising bureaucrat was easily discovered.

that if Communists were to take power they would have to resort to violence. It did not attack Khrushchev by name, using Yugoslavia's Tito as its whipping-boy instead. Mao's calculation was that this way Khrushchev would have less excuse to punish him by withholding military know-how.

Simultaneously, Mao tried to move himself centre-stage by inviting more than 700 sympathisers from the Third World for May Day. This was intended to be the founding moment of the Maoist camp. He received several groups of them himself, and the foreigners were reported 'expressing adulation' for him and singing the Maoist anthem, 'The East Is Red'. He ordered maximum publicity for these audiences, tinkering over the press reports himself phrase by phrase.

These encounters were timed to take place just before a major world event from which Mao was excluded – a summit of the Big Four (US, UK, France, Russia), which was due to open in Paris on 16 May, at which Khrushchev hoped to enshrine peaceful coexistence. Mao intended his to be a rival show, and for the world to see him as the champion of the disadvantaged. But his venture went virtually unnoticed, partly because his foreign followers were marginal figures. Mao did not inspire passionate faith, either, and acquired few fervent disciples. He was perceived as patronising. A group of Africans heard him say that, to Westerners, 'our race seems no better than you Africans'.

Mao's hopes that Khrushchev would be seen as an appeaser, and himself as the antithesis, also received a blow from an unexpected quarter. Two weeks before the Paris summit, an American U-2 spy plane was shot down over Russia. When President Eisenhower refused to apologise, Khrushchev walked out and the summit collapsed. Peking had to praise Khrushchev for taking a tough stance.

Khrushchev's bellicosity towards America risked taking the wind out of Mao's sails, but he blasted ahead nonetheless, and a convenient occasion was to hand: a meeting of the World Federation of Trade Unions which opened in Peking on 5 June 1960. This was the most important international meeting to be held in China since Mao had taken power, with participants from some sixty countries combining delegates from ruling Communist parties and militant trade unionists from all five continents, some not subservient to Moscow. Mao mobilised all his top colleagues to lobby hard against Moscow, arguing that peaceful coexistence was a deception, and that 'as long as capitalism exists, war cannot be avoided'. The French and the Italians, who were close to Khrushchev's position, were singled out and called servants of imperialism. An Italian delegate, Vittorio Foa, told us that the hostility from the Chinese was so nerve-racking that the Italians feared for their

physical safety and tried not to leave each other unaccompanied. The aggressiveness of the Chinese shocked even Albania's delegate Gogo Nushi, who described them, in private, as 'bandits'.*

The Chinese were 'spitting in our face', remarked Khrushchev. Moscow perceived this event as the beginning of the Sino-Soviet split. So did the CIA. Its Acting Director, Charles Cabell, told the National Security Council two weeks later that Chinese behaviour at the meeting had been 'a challenge to USSR leadership of such a magnitude that Khrushchev has been compelled to meet it head-on'. Up to now, differences between Moscow and Peking had been tightly concealed by Communist secrecy, and many had doubted that there really was a Sino-Soviet rift.

On 21 June Khrushchev addressed Communist leaders from fifty-one countries gathered in Bucharest. He refuted Mao's contention that war was needed to bring about socialism: 'No world war is needed for the triumph of socialist ideas throughout the world,' he declared. 'Only madmen and maniacs can now call for another world war', in which, he said, using apocalyptic language, 'millions of people might burn in the conflagration'. In contrast, 'people of sound mind' were 'in the majority even among the most deadly enemies of communism'. This was tantamount to saying that Mao was crazy, and suggesting that co-existence with the West was a better bet than continuing an alliance with Mao. 'You want to dominate everyone, you want to dominate the world,' Khrushchev told Mao's delegate, Peng Zhen, in private. Khrushchev also said to the Chinese: 'Since you love Stalin so much, why don't you take his corpse to Peking?' He told his colleagues: 'When I look at Mao I see Stalin, a perfect copy.'

When Peng Zhen persisted with Mao's line, he found himself alone. 'We were isolated in Bucharest,' Mao noted. 'There was not a single party that supported China. Not even . . . Albania.' This isolation, and the sharpness of Khrushchev's attack, took Mao by surprise. A split under these circumstances was counterproductive, as he still needed Russian military technology. When Khrushchev refused to accept one word of Mao's views for the communiqué, Mao backed down and told Peng Zhen to sign.

By now the scales had completely fallen from Khrushchev's eyes. On his return from Bucharest, he immediately ordered the withdrawal of all the 1,000-plus Soviet advisers in China and halted assistance on the 155 industrial projects that were furthest from completion.

* An Albanian Politburo member, Liri Belishova, was in China at this time, and let the Russians know what was happening, for which she suffered thirty years in Hoxha's gulag – not 'strangled' or 'eliminated', as Khrushchev wrote in his memoirs. She emerged with remarkable bounce, as we saw in 1996.

Mao had miscalculated. Russian retaliation came at a highly disadvantageous time. Although his scientists had secured the technology to make a Bomb, the Russians had not finished imparting their expertise in building the delivery system: the missiles. The Chinese scrambled, telling their scientists to seize every minute to dig things out of the Russians before they left, by hook or by crook. Song-and-dance girls were brought in to get Soviet minders drunk and detain them on the dance floor, while Russian scientists' notebooks were photographed. Even so, the missile programme, and indeed the entire Superpower Programme, was thrown into disarray. Mao's impatience to promote himself as a world leader, and rival to Khrushchev, had led him to shoot himself in the foot.

Mao had to backtrack. When eighty-one Communist parties met in Moscow in November, the Chinese appeared conciliatory. Mao himself showed up at the Soviet embassy in Peking for the anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution, and sent Khrushchev fulsome personal greetings for New Year 1961. There was a reconciliation of sorts. In the end, the Russians continued to provide assistance to keep construction work going on 66 of the 155 unfinished industrial projects. But Mao did not get what he coveted most – renewed collaboration on high-end military technology transfers.

Scores of large-scale projects were cancelled. Mao later blamed the famine that he himself had created on their cancellation, which he alleged had damaged China's economy, and his claim is believed in China to this day. In fact, the cancellations should have eased the famine: China could now export less food.

But instead of allowing the Chinese population to benefit from a respite, Mao found a new way to spend the food. He insisted on continuing to export it to repay Russian loans *ahead of schedule* – in the space of five years, instead of the sixteen that the agreements allowed. He did this because he knew Russia needed food, and Chinese food made up two-thirds of Russia's food imports. By continuing to supply the same large amounts as before, he was encouraging Russia's dependence on Chinese food, in the hope that Khrushchev would sell him more of what he wanted. Mao later fabricated the myth that Khrushchev had pressured China to pay back its debts during the famine, and that this was one major reason why the Chinese starved. In fact, as a briefing for China's post-Mao leaders stated categorically, Russia 'did not ask for the debt to be repaid' then, let alone try to 'force' China to do so. It was Mao who insisted on repaying far ahead of schedule.

Russia's ambassador to Peking at the time, Chervonenko, told us that Moscow instructed him to try to refuse Chinese food exports, and that Russia had sometimes declined to accept shipments of grain. The Russians knew only too well about the famine. 'You didn't have

to do any investigation,' Chervonenko said. 'It was enough just to drive in from the airport. You could see there were no leaves on the trees.' On one occasion, when the Chinese said they were going to increase meat shipments, the Russians asked how. The answer was: 'None of your business!'

Far from demanding accelerated repayment, Khrushchev was extraordinarily obliging, even revaluing the yuan:rouble exchange rate in China's favour. According to a Russian source, this reduced China's indebtedness to Russia by 77.5 per cent. In February 1961, Khrushchev offered Mao one million tons of grain and half a million tons of Cuban sugar. Mao bought the sugar but rejected the grain. This was not out of pride. He had just grabbed at an offer from Khrushchev of technology and experts to manufacture MiG-21 fighters.

For the next two years Mao's tactic was to keep one foot in the Kremlin door, in the hope of maintaining access to military technology, while taking a swipe at Khrushchev on every possible occasion – even over the Berlin Wall, the ultimate symbol of the Cold War. An East German diplomat then in Peking told us that when the Wall went up on 17 August 1961, Chou En-lai made it clear to the East Germans that Mao saw this as a sign of Khrushchev 'capitulating to the US imperialists'.

With Mao showing himself to be such a tricky customer, Khrushchev had to cover his back when he made any important move. In October 1962, Khrushchev was secretly deploying nuclear missiles in Cuba, the most adventurous act he undertook in his decade in power, and the peak of his 'anti-imperialism'. Given the danger of a confrontation with the USA, he wanted to ensure that Mao would not stab him in the back. He decided to throw him a bone, a big one: the Kremlin's blessing for China to attack India, even though this meant Russia betraying the interests of India, a major friendly state that Khrushchev had long been wooing.

Mao had been planning war with India on the border issue for some time. China had refused to recognise the boundary that had been delineated by the British in colonial times, and insisted it be renegotiated, or at least formalised by the two now sovereign states. India regarded the border as settled, and not negotiable, and the two sides were deadlocked. As border clashes worsened, Peking quietly prepared for war during May–June 1962. Chou later told the Americans that 'Nehru was getting very cocky . . . and we tried to keep down his cockiness'. But Mao was chary of starting a war, as he was worried about the security of the nuclear test site at Lop Nor in northwest China, which was

beyond the range of American U-2 spy planes flying from Taiwan, but lay within range from India. Part of the fallout from the war was that India allowed U-2s to fly from a base at Charbatia, from where they were able to photograph China's first A-bomb test in 1964.

Mao was also concerned that he might have to fight on two fronts. Chiang Kai-shek was making his most active preparations since 1949 to invade the Mainland, fired by the hope that the population would rise up and welcome him because of the famine. Mao took the prospect of a Nationalist invasion seriously, moving large forces to the south-east coast opposite Taiwan, while he himself hunkered down in his secret shelter in the Western Hills outside Peking.

The Chinese had been holding regular ambassador-level talks with America in Warsaw since 1955. Mao now used this channel to sound out whether Washington would support an invasion by Chiang. And he got a very reassuring and direct answer. The Americans said they would not back Chiang to go to war against the Mainland, and that Chiang had promised not to attack without Washington's consent.

But Mao still hesitated. The paramount factor was Russia, on which China was heavily dependent for oil. In China's previous border clashes with India, Khrushchev had ostentatiously declined to back Peking. He had then agreed to sell India planes that could fly at high altitudes, and in summer 1962 signed an agreement not only to sell India MiGs, but for India to manufacture MiG-21s.

By early October, the Himalayan winter was approaching, and the window of opportunity narrowing. Mao sent out a feeler to the Russian ambassador about how Moscow would react if China attacked India. Khrushchev seized this chance to make a startling *démarche*. On the 14th he laid on a four-hour farewell banquet for the outgoing Chinese ambassador, at which the Soviet leader pledged that Moscow would stand by Peking if China got into a border war with India, and would delay the sale of MiG-21s to India. He revealed that he had been secretly installing nuclear missiles in Cuba and said he hoped the Chinese would give him their support.

This was a hefty horse-trade, one well concealed from the world.* On the morning of 20 October, just as the Cuba crisis was about to break, Mao gave the go-ahead for crack troops to storm Indian positions along two widely separated sectors of the border. Five days later, with the Cuba crisis at fever pitch, Khrushchev came through with his support for Mao in the form of a statement in *Pravda* that mortified Nehru.

* When one participant (Thomas Kuchel) in Oval Office discussions on 22 October asked whether there was any indication that Russia's move in Cuba was 'associated with the Chinese operation against India', CIA chief John McCone answered: 'No, we have no information whatsoever with respect to that at all.'