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**Changes in Mao Zedong's Attitude
toward the Indochina War, 1949-1973**

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Introduction

During the Cold War, the United States became involved in a series of wars in Indochina¹ in order to prevent Communist expansion there. It first assisted France and then directly intervened in the internal conflicts in Vietnam,² Laos, and Cambodia from the 1950s to the 1970s. Because these countries were so close to China geographically, and because the United States had become Beijing's number one enemy, Chinese leaders viewed the American intervention and expansion in Indochina as a serious threat to their country's security. They chose to counter the American threat by providing active support to the Communist parties in Indochina and by courting nationalist governments in other Southeast Asian countries. China's attitude toward the Indochina war, like its foreign policy in general, was heavily influenced by Mao Zedong's increasingly radical revolutionary ideology and by the Sino-Soviet dispute. National security and ideology were two major determinants of China's approach to the Indochina conflict. Because Mao placed different emphasis on them at different times, China's policy toward Indochina became inconsistent and at times even self-contradictory.

Scholars have investigated China's role in the Vietnam War,³ but most of their writings have focused on the first half of the 1950s and the second part of the 1960s. Because of limitation of sources, these writings have not been able to present a clear picture of changes in Mao's attitude toward the Indochina war.⁴ In fact, Mao occupied a

¹ Indochina was once a French colony. Before the French occupation, there were three countries in Indochina: Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. In Taiwan, Indochina used to be called the South Central Peninsula.

² After 1954, Vietnam was divided into North and South Vietnam.

³ The most notable works include Qiang Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars, 1950-1975* (Chapel Hill-NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Chen Jian, "China and the First Indo-China War, 1950-54," *China Quarterly* 133 (March 1993), pp. 85-110; Chen Jian, "China's Involvement in the Vietnam War, 1964-69," *China Quarterly* 142 (June 1995), pp. 356-387; Li Danhui, "ZhongSu guanxi yu Zhongguo de yuanYue kangMei" [Sino-Soviet Relations and China's Assistance to the DRV against the United States], *Dangdai Zhongguoshi yanjiu*, No. 3 (1998).

⁴ In their writings, scholars have used such primary sources as the CCP Central Documentary Research Department, ed., *Jianguo yilai Mao Zedong wengao* [Mao Zedong's Manuscripts since the Founding of the PRC], 13 vols. (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1987-98) and such secondary sources as *Zhou Enlai waijiao huodong dashiji, 1949-1975* [A Chronicle of Zhou Enlai's Diplomatic Activities, 1949-1975] (Beijing: Shijie zhishi chubanshe, 1993); Guo Ming ed., *ZhongYue guanxi yanbian sishinian* [The Evolution of Sino-Vietnamese Relations over the Last Forty Years], (Nanning: Guangxi renmin chubanshe, 1991); the Editorial Team on the History of the CMAG, ed., *Zhongguo junshi guwentuan yuanYue kangFa*

central and unique position in the formation of China's foreign policy in this period. Without an understanding of the changes in Mao's attitude toward the Indochina war and the causes for those changes, it would be very difficult to make sense of the changes in China's policy toward the Vietnam War. Drawing on recently released documents from China, Vietnam, and Russia, this article explains the changes in Mao's attitude toward the Vietnam War in order to deepen our understanding of the changes in China's policy toward the Indochina conflict.

From Supporting Wars Of Liberation in Indochina to Advocating Peace in Southeast Asia

During the Chinese Civil War, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), under the guidance of Mao's revolutionary theory, sought to seize power through armed struggle and revolutionary warfare. It surrounded cities from the countryside and established the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949. From the Yanan period to the creation of the PRC, Mao had always adhered to the view that "the central task and the highest form of revolution is to seize power through armed struggle and to solve problems through war. This is a revolutionary principle of Marxism-Leninism, and it is universally applicable both in China and in the rest of the world."⁵ In the meantime, as revolutionary Communists, CCP leaders believed in class struggle. Class interest and class struggle constituted their basic worldview. They had always believed that a "world revolution" was in progress and that only when the bourgeois class was eliminated everywhere could the victory of socialism be consolidated. Therefore, they argued that "when you are making revolution, you need foreign aid; after you have achieved victory, you ought to support foreign revolution." And they believed that this should be the CCP's unshakable principle of internationalism.⁶

douzheng shishi [Historical Facts about the Role of the Chinese Military Advisory Group in the Struggle of Aiding Vietnam and Resisting France], (Beijing: Jiefangjun chubanshe, 1990); Li Lianqing, *Da waijiaojia Zhou Enlai* [Master Diplomat Zhou Enlai], 2 vols. (Hong Kong: Tiandi tushu, 1994-1995). Among the existing publications, only Qiang Zhai's *China and the Vietnam Wars* draws directly on the recently available Chinese archival materials.

⁵ *Selected Works of Mao Zedong* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1964), p. 529.

⁶ Mao's concluding speech at the CCP's Seventh Congress 31, May 1945.

Because of its advocacy of using armed struggle to seize power and its belief in internationalism, the CCP, immediately after achieving victory in China, began to display sympathy for and provided support to the Communist parties in Asia that were undergoing revolutions. The decision to provide such aid reflected to some extent the CCP's geopolitical interests, but ideological considerations were predominant. The desire to promote revolution in Asia was very clear in the PRC's early period. CCP leaders told other Asian Communist parties that the methods of organizing a united front under the Communist party leadership, creating revolutionary base areas, and seizing power through armed struggle had succeeded in the Chinese revolution and should become "the basic approach for national liberation struggle in all other colonial and semi-colonial countries" with conditions comparable to China's.⁷ It was in line with this tendency to support Asian revolution that the CCP offered assistance to the anti-French war led by the Vietnamese Communists.

In August 1945, the Vietnamese Communist Party (Viet Minh) under the leadership of Ho Chi Minh took advantage of Japan's sudden defeat to establish the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV), which was a temporary government based on united front principles. However, after World War II ended, France sought to return to Indochina to restore its colonial rule, and Chinese Nationalist forces entered northern Vietnam to supervise Japan's surrender. These developments threatened the DRV. To preserve his political achievement, Ho Chi Minh downplayed the role of the Vietnamese Communist Party and declared that the DRV was a neutral country. But these moves did not dispel French hostility, and the Franco-Vietminh war broke out in December 1946.

Ho Chi Minh's conciliatory approach to preserve his forces before December 1946 clearly differed from that adopted by Mao in China after World War II. Within the CCP leadership, there was criticism of Ho Chi Minh's practice. But when the Franco-Vietminh War broke out, Mao and other CCP leaders changed their view. In December 1949, Ho Chi Minh sent envoys to Beijing, requesting that the CCP provide military advisers, weapons that could equip three divisions, and financial aid of \$10 million. At

⁷ Liu Shaoqi's opening remarks at the Trade Union Conference of Asian and Australasian Countries, 16 November 1949, in the CCP Central Documentary Research Department, ed., *Jianguo yilai Liu Shaoqi wengao* [Liu Shaoqi's Manuscripts since the Founding of the PRC] (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1998), pp. 134-135.

the time, the CCP did not completely satisfy Ho Chi Minh's demands because it was still engaged in the war to unify China and because it had limited financial resources. But the CCP leadership did instruct its military units in southern China to provide as much assistance to the Vietminh as they could. Mao, who was visiting Moscow at the time, paid serious attention to Ho Chi Minh's struggle and to his request for Chinese aid. After learning that his colleagues in Beijing did not completely meet Ho Chi Minh's demands, Mao sent a cable to the CCP CC, instructing the leadership to inform Ho's envoys that China would provide a certain amount of weapons, munitions, and medical supplies for the moment, and that the PRC would increase its aid in the future, and that in this way the Vietminh could become familiar with Chinese materials. Mao also told Liu Shaoqi to adopt a friendly and cooperative attitude toward the Vietnamese Communists, to encourage their struggle, and not to criticize them. Mao insisted that "we might raise the issue of the Vietnamese Communist Party's weaknesses when high-level cadres sent by Ho Chi Minh arrive in Beijing." Referring to Ho Chi Minh's conciliatory approach during 1945-1946, Mao said: "Ho Chi Minh once disguised his party and declared that the DRV remained neutral. It is too early to say that these two policies were mistakes in principle because the Vietnamese struggle did not suffer as a result of their implementation."⁸

In mid-January 1950, the PRC and the DRV established diplomatic relations. Ho Chi Minh paid a secret visit to Beijing and then went on to Moscow to meet with Stalin and Mao. In Moscow, Ho discussed with Stalin and Mao such issues as the development of the Vietnamese Communist Party, the national united front, military affairs, and foreign relations. Both Mao and Stalin expressed their willingness to support the DRV's struggle against the French. In accordance with the Sino-Soviet agreement concluded in 1949 when Liu Shaoqi visited the Soviet Union, the CCP would be primarily responsible for providing support for the Vietminh.⁹ Shortly after the Moscow meeting, China began

⁸ Cable, CCP Central Military Commission to Lin Biao, 12 December 1949; Liu Shaoqi's cable to Mao, 24 December 1949; Mao's cables to Liu Shaoqi, 27 and 31 January 1950, in *ibid.*, pp. 165, 186-188, 347.

⁹ In June 1949, Liu Shaoqi led a CCP delegation to Moscow, where he concluded an agreement with Stalin. According to the agreement, except for North Korea, where the Soviet Union once dispatched an occupation force after WWII, the CCP was responsible for contacting, advising, and supporting Communist organizations in Asia. See Shi Zhe, *Zai Lishi juren shenbian: Shi Zhe huiyilu* [At the Side of Historical Giants: Shi Zhe Memoirs] (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1991), p. 412.

to send military advisers, weapons, munitions, and equipment to Ho's forces in Vietnam. The CCP also equipped and trained the People's Army of Vietnam's (PAVN's) 308th Division, 209th Regiment, 174th Regiment within China. In the next three years, China not only continued to provide weapons and munitions to the Vietminh, but also helped the Vietminh organize a series of important military campaigns. Mao often directly reviewed battle plans and provided specific directions. To better fight the French and to win victory throughout Indochina, the Chinese leadership even proposed to expand the war to Laos and Cambodia in order to liberate those two countries. To achieve that goal, Chinese advisers entered Laos to help direct military operations.¹⁰

The anti-French war in Vietnam (1946-54) coincided with the Korean War (1950-53). The Korean conflict revealed the huge gap between China and the United States in terms of equipment, firepower, and naval and air forces. China had to rely on Soviet weapons to fight the Americans. This alerted many CCP leaders to the necessity and urgency of accelerating China's industrialization and modernizing its national defense. But the Korean War seriously undermined their efforts to concentrate the country's primary resources on economic reconstruction.¹¹ After the Korean War ended inconclusively with an armistice in July 1953, the United States began to pay more attention to the Indochina conflict even as the Soviet government sought a general reduction of tensions in the world. In 1953, China began to implement its First Five-Year Plan and carry out its program of socialist transformation of the economy. Given these domestic needs, Zhou Enlai and many other CCP leaders favored the promotion of a peaceful international environment. These international and domestic constraints

¹⁰ Mao's cables to Chen Geng, 23, 26, and 28 July, 24 August, and 6 and 10 October, 1950; Qian Jiang, *Zai shenmi de zhanzheng zhong: Zhongguo junshi guwentuan fu Yuenan zhengzhan ji* [In the Secret War: A Record of the Chinese Military Advisory Team in Vietnam] (Zhengzhou: Henan renmin chubanshe, 1992), pp. 72-74, 96-97; the Editorial Team on the History of the CMAG, ed. *Zhongguo junshi guwentuan yuanYue kangFa douzheng shishi* [Historical Facts about the Role of the Chinese Military Advisory Group in the Struggle of Aiding Vietnam and Resisting France] (Beijing: Jiefangjun chubanshe, 1990), pp. 21-22, 56, 60, 88-89; Wang Xiangan, *YuanYue kangMei shilu* [A Factual Record of Assistance to Vietnam against the United States] (Beijing: Guoji wenhua chubanshe, 1990), p. 42.

¹¹ In 1950, China allocated 52 percent of its total annual financial budget on military spending; 60 percent of this military spending went to supporting the war in Korea. In 1952, when the war was in a stalemate, military spending still constituted 33 percent of the total national budget; again, the bulk of this military spending was devoted to the Korean War. China spent a total of \$10 billion on the Korean War. See Li Ping, *Kaiguo zongli Zhou Enlai* [First Premier Zhou Enlai] (Beijing: Zhonggong zhongyang dangxiao chubanshe, 1994), 261; Yao Xu, "KangMei yuanChao de yingming juece" [The Wise Decision to Aid Korea and Resist the United States], *Dangshi yanjiu* (Studies on Party History), No. 5, 1980.

moderated the impulse of international mission in Mao's thinking. As a result, Mao began to show more concern with advancing national interests than spreading revolution.

Shortly after the Korean War's end, the Chinese government set out to cooperate with the Soviet Union in calling for a reduction of international tensions. Realization of peace in Indochina became a common propaganda slogan for the Soviet Union, China and the DRV. In February 1954, a foreign ministers' conference was held in Berlin attended by the United States, the Soviet Union, France, and Britain. At Soviet initiative, the conference declared on 19 February that in two months a conference of major powers, including China, would be held in Geneva to discuss the Korean and Indochina conflicts. China and the DRV voiced support for this declaration. What was Mao's attitude? Although he approved negotiations, he still felt that military victory was crucial. This was because at the time the French forces were still quite strong in Indochina. Moreover, France had just deployed over ten thousand troops at the strategic location of Dien Bien Phu, posing a serious threat to the Vietnamese Communist headquarters in Viet Bac and the transit route to Laos. Mao doubted that the Geneva Conference alone could achieve peace in Indochina. Therefore, as the conference approached, Mao began to urge the Vietnamese Communists to fight harder. "Using war to promote peace" became a basic principle in the CCP's approach to the settlement of the Indochina issue at this time.¹² Zhou Enlai, a strong advocate of peace, also shared Mao's desire to approach the peace negotiations from a strong military position. He wanted the Vietminh to achieve several military victories before the discussion on Indochina started at the Geneva Conference. Accordingly, in a cable to the Chinese military advisory team shortly after the CCP firmed up its plan to attend the Geneva Conference, Zhou Enlai suggested that "in order to win diplomatic initiative, can we organize several successful campaigns in Vietnam as we had done in Korea before the conclusion of the Korean armistice?"¹³

The Dien Bien Phu campaign thus became an urgent matter. At this time, Mao was still pessimistic about the Geneva Conference. While Zhou Enlai, together with Ho

¹² Xu Yan, "Shilun jianguo hou Mao Zedong de zhanbei sixiang" [A Tentative Examination of Mao Zedong's Thinking on War Preparation after the Founding of the PRC], in *Huanqiu tongci liangre: yidai lingxiumen de guoji zhanlue sixiang* [Everything Is the Same in the World: The International Strategic Thinking of This Generation of Leaders] (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1993), pp. 243-244.

Chi Minh and other Vietnamese leaders, went to Moscow in early April to discuss with the Russians on how to achieve success at the Geneva Conference, Mao, on 3 April, urged the Chinese military advisory team to wrap up the Dien Bien Phu campaign. He instructed that the PAVN should occupy Dien Bien Phu quickly and then attack Luang Prabang in Laos so as to prepare the way for taking Hanoi, attacking Saigon, and unifying all Vietnam. It is clear that although Mao had approved negotiations, he had not given up on military preparations. He specifically instructed that China should help the PAVN organize four additional artillery regiments and two engineering regiments; that all instructors and advisers for these regiments should be recruited from the Chinese artillery units, which had fought in the Korean War; that artillery pieces could be drawn from Chinese artillery units; and that training could be conducted either in northern Vietnam or in Guangxi, China.¹⁴

A few days later, however, Mao changed his policy of expanding the war in Indochina. There were two reasons behind Mao's change of views. The first reason was the American threat to intervene in Indochina. On 29 March and 5 April, U.S. Secretary of State John Foster Dulles twice declared that the United States would organize a united action to intervene in Indochina as it had done in Korea in order to prevent "Communist Russia and its ally, the Chinese Communist Party, from imposing their political system on Southeast Asia." The second reason had to do with the decisions made at the trilateral party meeting among Soviet, Chinese and Vietnamese representation in Moscow in early April, at which the three parties agreed that they would do their best to make the negotiations at Geneva a success. Considering the danger of another direct confrontation with the United States and taking into account the consensus on Indochinese peace achieved at the Moscow meeting, Mao had to abandon his thought of expanding the war in Indochina. On 17 April, he told his generals that given the possibility of a cease-fire in Vietnam, the previous policy of expanding the war in Indochina should be suspended and that it was no longer appropriate to train Vietnamese artillery regiments in China. Later,

¹³ Editorial Team on the History of the CMAG, ed. *Zhongguo junshi guwentuan yuan Yue kangFa douzheng shishi*, pp. 88-99; CCP Central Documentary Research Department, ed., *Zhou Enlai nianpu, 1949-1976* [A Chronicle of Zhou Enlai's Life, 1949-1976] (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1997), vol. 1, p. 358.

¹⁴ Mao's letter to Peng Dehuai, 3 April 1954, in CCP Central Documentary Research Department, ed., *Jianguo yilai Mao Zedong wengao*, vol. 4, pp. 474-475.

when the Vietminh defeated the French at Dien Bien Phu, thus opening the way to attacking Laos and Hanoi, Mao still urged the Vietnamese to restrain the scale of the war at the front and not to expand it in order to ensure the success of the Geneva negotiations.¹⁵ Clearly Mao now favored seeking a cease-fire and peace in Indochina through negotiations and compromises.

The United States was not enthusiastic about attaining peace in Indochina through the Geneva Conference. It even tried to prevent the conclusion of a peace agreement. Therefore, for China to make peace in Indochina, its most important task was to isolate the United States. To achieve that goal, Zhou Enlai did a tremendous amount of work in winning the sympathy and understanding of the delegates from Britain, France, Laos, and Cambodia. Another obstacle to an agreement during the Geneva negotiations was the attitude of the Vietnamese. Especially after the 7 May victory at Dien Bien Phu, where 16,000 French troops were wiped out and General de Castries, the French commander, was captured, the Vietnamese delegates at Geneva even more belligerently supported Mao's previous military plan, insisting that either the French withdraw completely from Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia or the DRV achieve unification by force in about three years. They contended that Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia were one entity in Indochina and that the problems of the three countries should be resolved all at the same time. Insisting that the PAVN units in Laos and Cambodia were not foreign troops, the Vietnamese representatives resisted the demand of the royal governments of Laos and Cambodia that both France and the DRV withdraw troops from their countries.

At the time of the Moscow meeting in early April, China had little knowledge about Laos and Cambodia. Influenced by the view of the Vietnamese Communists, the Chinese leaders thought that the three countries of Indochina all belonged to French colonies, that Laotians and Cambodians were actually minorities of Vietnam, and that therefore, the issues of the three countries should be settled together as a group. After arriving in Geneva and after exchanging views with other delegates, the Chinese negotiators realized that the DRV's policy of including the three Indochinese countries into one settlement would not lead to an agreement. Zhou Enlai quickly adjusted his

¹⁵ Mao's telegram to Huang Kecheng and Su Yu, 17 April 1954; CCP CC to Zhou Enlai, 20 June 1954, *ibid.*, pp. 480, 509.

position. He argued that the problems of Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia should be settled separately. As to Vietnam, he believed that even if the United States did not intervene, the war there would continue for several years. Given the fact that the Communist forces in Laos and Cambodia were still very weak, Zhou Enlai asserted that continuation of war in those two countries would only lead the royal governments there to fall into the arms of the United States and would push Washington and London further toward the organization of the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO). He believed that it was very likely that the United States would intervene and that once it intervened, it would become even more difficult to settle the Indochina problem. Therefore, on these tactical grounds, Zhou Enlai preferred peace to continuing the fighting. As to the settlement of the Vietnam question, he contended that as a first step, a cease-fire agreement should be reached by dividing the country into two parts and then “reunification could be pursued through elections.” Given the prestige of the Vietnamese Communist Party among the population, Zhou Enlai believed that it was possible for the party to achieve peaceful reunification through this method. Regarding the issues of Laos and Cambodia, Zhou Enlai argued that the resistance forces should make necessary concessions to achieve either an on-the-spot cease-fire or a cease-fire by regrouping. The resistance forces, Zhou continued, should join the royal governments according to democratic principles and promote neutrality in the two countries. In order to persuade the Vietnamese delegates, Zhou Enlai exchanged numerous telegrams with Mao, who clearly agreed with his views. Mao stated that the Indochina issue was different from the Korean issue and that Indochina could affect all Southeast Asia (including Burma, Thailand, Malaya, Indonesia, and the Philippines), Pakistan, India, Australia, New Zealand, and Ceylon. “If we are not careful,” Mao went on, “we will affect 600 million people in ten countries. We should make necessary concessions. We should adhere to the positions that cannot be compromised. In this way, we can isolate the minority (the United States), win over the majority,” and reach a final agreement.¹⁶

With Mao’s support, Zhou Enlai was able to persuade Ho Chi Minh and the Vietnamese party leadership to sign the Geneva Agreement in July 1954. The agreement

¹⁶ The records of the Sino-Vietnamese meetings in Liuzhou, 3 and 5 July 1954, in *Zhou Enlai zhuan* [Biography of Zhou Enlai] (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1998), vol. 3, pp. 1131-1132.

allowed the DRV to control Vietnam north of the Seventeenth Parallel with a population of 12 million. But within the Vietnamese leadership there were still officials who doubted whether the agreement benefited or more harmed the DRV. Disagreement remained. Some leaders felt that the party already controlled a population of no less than 12 million before the cease-fire and that neither the French forces nor the royal governments' troops could halt the PAVN attack in Laos and Cambodia. The leaders who were regrouped to the north from the southern bases in particular complained the most because they doubted whether Vietnamese reunification could be achieved through elections in two years in accordance with the Geneva Agreement. Once the party withdrew from Laos and Cambodia they believed, it handed the two country's fates to the control of the landlord and bourgeois class. Mao was undoubtedly aware of these sentiments. Throughout his life, he had hated people who refused to permit him to advance revolution. He had always resented the fact that after the victory of the Anti-Japanese War in 1945, Stalin did not allow him to wage revolution and forced him to negotiate with Jiang Jieshi [Chiang Kai Shek]. Given Mao's penchant for making revolution and considering the fact that in the years after the Geneva Conference he repeatedly criticized himself in front of the Vietnamese party for having urged it to make concessions there, it is plausible to argue that when he prodded the DRV to compromise at Geneva, he was not acting out of his real conviction.

From Preferring Peaceful Coexistence to Advocating Cold War Coexistence

Influenced by the doctrines of world revolution, Mao always found satisfaction in waging class struggle. Taking pride in the triumph of the Chinese revolution, he did not confine the goal of his lifetime struggle merely to the consolidation of the revolution in China. A primary concern in his mind was how to inherit the cause of Marx and Lenin and use the Chinese example to help the oppressed classes in the world, including the oppressed countries and nations in Asia, to achieve liberation.

Then, why did Mao agree to make concessions to colonialism and imperialism in Indochina? On this question, Mao in later years cited Lenin several times to defend himself. He quoted Lenin as saying that when you encountered a robber, you either

allowed yourself to be killed by him or you gave him your money and car. Lenin suggested that you give the robber your money and car and that when you have an opportunity later, you kill the robber and recover your money and car.¹⁷ In other words, Mao believed that the concessions made at Geneva were temporary and tactical because at the time his own regime had not been consolidated and the DRV was unable to pursue a complete victory. This instance demonstrated that Mao's concern with China's own security needs for domestic reconstruction undermined to some extent his efforts to implement his revolutionary ideals and plans. In mid-1949, Mao made the leaning to the Soviet Union and the opposition to imperialism the basic principles of Chinese foreign policy. After a military confrontation with the United States between 1950-1953, Mao came to agree with other CCP leaders that building national power should receive the highest priority.¹⁸ In 1953, China began to implement its First Five-Year Plan, which emphasized the development of heavy industry. The implementation of this plan required a relatively peaceful international environment. In addition to relying on Soviet aid, China also needed to win sympathy and support from nationalist countries in Asia, which stood between the socialist and capitalist camps. China even needed to develop relations with capitalist countries. It would be a relationship based on mutual concessions between states, and conducive to making peace, not revolution. China's conciliatory approach at the Geneva Conference and its embrace of the "Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence" demonstrated a change in Mao's attitude toward peace and revolution. (The Five Principles included mutual respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty, nonaggression, noninterference in each other's internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence.)

Following the Geneva Conference, the United States organized SEATO, a military alliance designed to prevent "Communist aggression." In defiance of the Geneva Agreement, which stipulated that Laos and Cambodia should remain neutral, the SEATO

¹⁷ Mao's talk with Pham Van Dong, 15 June 1961; Mao's talk with Zhang Chunqiao and Wang Hongwen, 4 July 1973. Unless otherwise noted, all of Mao's talks in this article are cited from an internally-circulated collection of documents compiled between 1975-1976.

¹⁸ In the middle and second half of the 1950s, Mao made repeated references to China's backwardness, attributing it to the weakness of the country's industrialization. He believed that to solve this problem, China needed to narrow its gap with the United States in terms of steel production. Therefore, he launched the Great Leap Forward, primarily to catch up with the United States and Great Britain in steel production in the shortest possible time and to realize China's industrialization.

openly treated South Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia as its “protected areas.” It was no secret that SEATO was aimed primarily at China.¹⁹ SEATO was a big blow to both the DRV and China, which were committed to realizing peace in Indochina through compromises. Despite this development, Mao did not change his attitude with regard to seeking peace in Indochina. In Geneva’s aftermath, he even publicly advocated peaceful coexistence among countries with different social systems, saying repeatedly that “it is good to have no war” and “it is better not to fight.” He declared that war would only harm capitalism and imperialism because it would trigger revolution and produce more Soviet Unions and Chinas. It is almost impossible to imagine that these words could be uttered by Mao, a revolutionary who had always called for the overthrow of imperialist rule. But Mao did openly state that because China was engaged in industrial development, which was a long-term process, it needed a peaceful environment and friends, and that if war broke out, China’s economic and cultural plans would be suspended and its industrialization delayed.²⁰ Due to this concern with domestic development, Mao publicly pledged that he would not support anti-government armed struggles waged by Communist parties in Southeast Asia, a policy that applied not only to Laos and Cambodia but also to Burma, Thailand, and Malaya.

During the Geneva Conference in 1954, Zhou Enlai had visited Burma and issued a joint declaration with Prime Minister U Nu, which stated that the relationship between the two countries would be based on the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, that China would not export revolution, and that each country had its right to choose its own system of government and its own way of life without the interference of foreign countries. Several reasons lay behind China’s decision to make such promises. In Burma there was resistance against the government by the Communists and minority groups. Because Burma shared a border with China, some rebels had been using Chinese territory as their shelter. At the time of Zhou Enlai’s visit to Burma, there were over a hundred armed rebels and Communists from Burma operating in China. Zhou Enlai’s declaration was a reassurance to the Burmese government.

¹⁹ See, e.g., *New York Herald Tribune*, 8 August 1954.

²⁰ Mao’s talk with a British Labor Party delegation, 24 August 1954; Mao’s talks with Nehru, 19 and 23 October 1954.

A few months later, U Nu again raised the issue of anti-government activities during a visit to China. Mao told him explicitly that the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence included noninterference in each other's internal affairs. Internal disputes within a country, Mao continued, should be dealt with by that country alone, and other countries should neither intervene nor exploit those disputes. A government chosen by its own people should be recognized by other countries. Burma had recognized the PRC, and China had recognized U Nu's government. Because China and Burma shared a long border, it was very possible that opponents of government would cross the border in both directions. China would neither use Burmese dissidents on its territory to harm the interests of the Burmese government nor launch a military invasion against Burma. China also would not instigate anti-government activities within Burma. As to the radical elements among overseas Chinese in Burma, Mao pledged, China would advise them to stay away from the internal affairs of Burma, to abide by Burmese laws, and to make no contact with the political parties that used violence against the government. Communist organizations among the overseas Chinese had been disbanded. Regarding the Burmese Communist Party, Mao asked U Nu to open informal negotiations with them. If the negotiations could reach an agreement, Mao said, it would be ideal. If not, the negotiations should be suspended for the moment and be reopened when an opportunity arose. Mao used China's treatment of Tibet as an example. He explained: China was prepared to negotiate with the local government in Tibet for a long time; on certain issues China would not insist on doing things according to its policy; China would first talk with the Tibetans; if they agreed, China would carry out its policy; if they did not agree, China would hold back its policy. In this way, Mao concluded, it was easier to reach compromises.²¹

Of the countries in Southeast Asia, Burma was one of the first to establish diplomatic relations with the PRC. Thailand, on the other hand, was one of the few Southeast Asian countries that had not established diplomatic ties with Beijing. Because Thailand, a member of SEATO, was the primary partner of the United States in Southeast Asia. Mao clearly hoped that he could persuade Thailand to change its policy toward China, or to remain neutral, at least, between China and the United States. He stated

²¹ Mao's talk with U Nu, 1 and 11 December 1954.

several times that although Thailand was not very friendly to China, he wished to establish relations with Thailand. On several occasions, he asked leaders from Burma and other countries to help convey his message to Bangkok that China would not interfere with Thailand's internal affairs. When a Thai delegation visited China in December 1955, Mao met with them and made the following pledges: China would not propagate communism in Thailand; China stood for peaceful coexistence and friendship; China wanted to conduct trade with Thailand; China would not instigate other people to oppose the Thai government; China would not encourage the Thai Communist Party to oppose the Thai government; China would disband Communist organizations among overseas Chinese in order to dispel the suspicion by the governments of those countries in which they lived; China was willing to make friends with all countries in the world, especially with countries that opposed imperialism; China would support its friends who opposed imperialism; if Thailand found it difficult to choose China's side because of its relationship with the United States, it could follow the Indian example of remaining neutral.²²

Mao's peace offensive also influenced the Malayan Communist Party (MCP). During the Second World War, the MCP had organized a guerrilla war against Japan. When the war was over, it had ceased its armed struggle and had been under the suppression of the authorities. Some members had been executed. In 1948, the MCP resumed military resistance, and by 1954 it had a guerrilla force of several hundred people. It sent envoys to China to request aid. After the 1954 Geneva Conference, Chinese and Soviet officials held a special meeting in Moscow to discuss the MCP's future development. The meeting produced a resolution stating that because Malaya did not share a border with a socialist country, it was difficult for the MCP to wage armed struggle and that it should change its tactics by adopting a peaceful and democratic approach to develop its strength. Accepting the Chinese and Soviet suggestion, the MCP quickly stopped its guerrilla operations, laid down its arms, and entered into negotiations with the Malayan government.²³

²² *Ibid.*; Mao's talk with a Thai delegation, 21 December 1955.

²³ In 1967, Mao had a conversation with Chin Peng, Secretary General of the Malayan Communist Party. During the meeting, Chin Peng referred to the history of his party during this period. See Mao's talk with Chin Peng, 17 January 1967.

Between 1954 and 1957, the Chinese government also conducted extensive diplomatic work to court countries in Asia, Africa, and Europe. China attended the April 1955 Bandung Conference that founded the nonaligned movement, and Foreign Minister Zhou Enlai visited the DRV, Cambodia, India, Burma, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Nepal, and Ceylon. Mao clearly supported these activities. The opening of the Sino-American ambassadorial talks in August 1955 also benefited from Mao's enthusiasm during this time toward reducing tensions between China and the United States.²⁴

Mao's conciliatory attitude, however, was neither a logical result of his ideological beliefs nor a product of his revolutionary experiences. It was, rather a diplomatic tactic determined by realistic policy needs. In fact, upon closer examination, one finds that even though Mao emphasized compromise and peace, he did not change his basic views on revolution and war. For instance, at the time of the 1954 Geneva Conference, Harry Pollitt, the British Communist Party (BCP) secretary general, wrote a letter to the CCP, claiming that in his party's translation of the second volume of the *Selected Works of Mao Zedong*, it intended to delete the sentence: "the central task and highest form of revolution is to seize power by armed struggle and to resolve problems by war." Pollitt explained that this sentence could bring a lot of trouble for his party and that it did not fit the program the BCP had adopted in 1951, which stated that the method of violent revolution that the Soviet Communist Party used in seizing power did not apply to Great Britain. In its draft response, CCP CC's Propaganda Department agreed with the BCP's position. But when Mao learned about this, he criticized the Propaganda Department. In later conversations with foreign Communist leaders, Mao referred to this incident several times, stressing that his statement on using armed struggle to seize power was relevant not only to China but also to foreign countries and was correct not only in the past but also in the present.²⁵ Given Mao's strong conviction in the correctness of his theory on war and revolution, it is not surprising to find that his endorsement of

²⁴After the Bandung Conference, Mao approved Zhou Enlai's proposal to open negotiations with the United States, which effectively marked the end of the first Taiwan Straits Crisis (1954-1955). See Mao's talk with the Pakistani ambassador, 27 April 1955.

²⁵CCP Central Documentary Research Department, ed., *Jianguo yilai Mao Zedong wengao*, vol. 4, pp. 530-532; Mao's talk with Truong Chinh, secretary general of the Vietnamese Workers' Party (VWP), and Dipa Nusantara Aidit, secretary general of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI), 14 March 1956; Mao's talk with the BCP delegation headed by Harry Pollitt, 14 September 1956.

compromise and peace in Southeast Asia would begin to waver once the international situation changed.

What triggered Mao to reemphasize the issue of war and revolution was Nikita Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin at the February 1956, 20th CPSU Party Congress, and his claim that capitalism could develop into socialism through "peaceful transition." After he heard about Khrushchev's report, Mao expressed doubts at the Soviet leader's practice and theory.²⁶ The Hungarian Incident in 1956 and the Anti-Rightist Campaign in China in 1957 further alerted Mao to the importance of class and class struggle.²⁷ At the Moscow Conference of Communist and Labor Parties in November 1957, Mao and Khrushchev quarreled over the issue of war and revolution. Although they reached a compromise in the final resolution of the conference, Mao was undoubtedly more determined than ever to press the issue of war and revolution. In 1958, Mao used the Middle East crisis as an occasion to launch a bombardment of Jinmen and Mazu.²⁸ The next year, China had a border clash with India after the rebellion in Tibet. In both instances, Mao's militancy contrasted with Khrushchev's advocacy of détente with the United States. In October 1959, a heated debate broke out between the Chinese and Soviet leaders over whether to intensify or to reduce tensions in the world.²⁹ Spurred by the Sino-Soviet dispute, Mao switched to defend vigorously the orthodoxy of Marxism-Leninism, to call for anti-imperialist struggle, and to reemphasize the importance of war and revolution.

At the Supreme State Conference in September 1958, against the backdrop of the renewed shelling of the offshore islands, Mao made a speech on the issue of whether it was better to reduce rather than intensify international tensions. He claimed that he did not believe that tensions were harmful to China. Although tensions had negative aspects, Mao said, they could be used to mobilize people, especially social groups reluctant to join

²⁶ For a detailed discussion of Mao's reaction to Khrushchev's report at the Twentieth Congress of the Soviet Communist Party, see Yang Kuisong, *Zouxiang polie: Mao Zedong yu Mosike de enen yuanyuan* [The Path to the Split: Mao's Relations with Moscow] (Hong Kong: Sanlian shudian, 1999), chap. 13; Wu Lengxi, *Shinian lunzhan, 1956-1966: ZhongSu guanxi huiyilu* [Ten Years of Polemics, 1956-1966: Recollections on Sino-Soviet Relations] (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1999), p. 5.

²⁷ Chen Jian, *Mao's China and the Cold War* (Chapel Hill, NC: UNCP, 2000).

²⁸ *Ibid.*; and *CWIHP Bulletin* 6/7 (Winter 1995/96).

²⁹ See *CWIHP Bulletin* 12/13 (Fall/Winter 2001), pp. 263-271; and David Wolff, 'One Finger's Worth of Historical Events': *New Russian and Chinese Evidence on the Sino-Soviet Alliance and Split, 1948-1959*, CWIHP Working Paper 30 (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson International Center For Scholars, 2000).

the revolution. China's shelling of Jinmen and Mazu in the Taiwan Straits had created international tensions, Mao continued, but people blamed the United States for creating trouble throughout the world. Therefore, tensions were more harmful to imperialism. Mao urged the CCP not to fear international tensions. Otherwise, he warned, cadres and masses would be discouraged; and if that happened, it would be a dangerous situation.³⁰ Mao's reemphasis on anti-imperialism, however, did not immediately translate into an active support for revolution in Southeast Asia. Driven by his concern for China's national security, he remained cautious as far as Indochina and Southeast Asia were concerned. In his talks with foreign Communist parties, he tried to avoid the impression that China was supporting anti-government struggles in Southeast Asia.

Mao's caution was clearly demonstrated in his conversations with the leaders of the Lao People's Party (LPP) in October 1959. At the 1954 Geneva Conference, the Pathet Lao forces had been regrouped to the northern provinces of Sam Neua and Phong Saly. In November 1957, the Pathet Lao participated in the royal government by turning over its two provinces and integrating its forces into the royal army. In February 1959, however, the United States announced that it would establish a military advisory mission in Laos. As a result, the influence of the right-wing forces in Laos began to grow. Some LPP leaders were put under house arrest or imprisoned while some other party officials were forced to retreat into the mountains or North Vietnam. Of the two Pathet Lao battalions that had been integrated into the royal army, one was disarmed, and the other escaped into North Vietnam. Both China and the DRV publicly condemned the policy of the Laotian royal government. In his meeting with LPP Chairman Kaysone Phomvihane, who visited China secretly in October 1959, Mao expressed support for the LPP's efforts to renew armed struggle. Praising the Lao leaders for adopting a correct policy, Mao advised them to conduct a protracted struggle. He suggested that at the present stage the LPP should not over-expand its forces and should keep its activities on a moderate scale. Otherwise, Mao warned that the LPP might trigger an excessive reaction from the enemy. At the moment, Mao continued, the United States was spreading the rumor that China and the DRV were helping the Pathet Lao in its fighting. The United Nations had sent an

³⁰ Mao's speech on international affairs at the Supreme State Conference, 5 September 1958, *Mao Zedong waijiao wenxun* [Selected Diplomatic Works of Mao Zedong] (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1994), pp. 341-347; see translation in *CWIHP Bulletin* 6/7 (Winter 1995/1996), pp. 216-218.

investigative team into Laos to look for evidence of outside support for the Pathet Lao. Mao asked the LPP not to let the West obtain such evidence.³¹ Likewise, when the DRV decided in 1959 to renew armed struggle in South Vietnam, the Chinese leadership initially took a similarly cautious view. They advised that since it was impossible to realize revolutionary changes in the south at the moment, the DRV should “conduct long-term underground work, accumulate strength, establish contact with the masses, and wait for opportunities” and that when situations changed, “South Vietnam can be liberated in one form or another.”³²

By the end of the 1950s, the Sino-Soviet dispute had intensified.³³ Although a number of causes were responsible for this dispute, including historical grievances, nationalist sentiments, and conflict of national interests, what irritated Mao the most was Soviet unwillingness to carry on revolution. For Mao, revolution, whether it was the class struggle or the anti-imperialist variety, was not only the focal point of his life experience but also the key to the success of the Chinese revolution. In his mind, the negation of revolution, particularly violent revolution, meant the negation of the universal applicability of the Chinese revolutionary model and the rejection of the “unique contribution” that he had made to Marxism-Leninism. That was why in 1958 Mao ordered the distribution among high-level party cadres of quotations on continuous revolution by Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Stalin. He wanted these cadres to comprehend the nature of the Sino-Soviet dispute. In 1959 he said on several occasions that Marxists should know that, without war, class struggle could not solve problems completely and that this had been true throughout history. The party did sometimes advocate peaceful means, Mao continued, but that was because the consciousness of the masses had not been awakened. Since the bourgeoisie used war to frighten the masses, the party had to mention peaceful methods in order to approach them. A state was an institution of violence, and this was true in slave countries, in feudal countries, and in capitalist countries. Without violence, there was no state. Without resorting to war, the institution of violence controlled by the exploiting class could not be smashed. Back at the

³¹ Mao’s talk with Kaysone Phomvihane, 4 October 1959.

³² Guo Ming, ed., *ZhongYue guanxi yanbian sishinian* [The Evolution of Sino-Vietnamese Relations over the Last Forty Years] (Nanning: Guangxi renmin chubanshe, 1991), p. 66.

celebration of the 40th anniversary of the October Revolution in Moscow in November 1957, Mao had approved the slogan of “peaceful coexistence” and “peaceful competition,” proposing that “the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence be adopted by socialist and capitalist countries.”³⁴ But by 1960 Mao rejected the principles of “peaceful coexistence.” Announcing that peaceful coexistence was no longer in practice, he pointed to guerrilla wars in Cuba, Algeria, the Philippines, and Paraguay. Between socialist and capitalist countries, he declared, there was Cold War coexistence, not peaceful coexistence. It was utter nonsense to believe that socialist countries could coexist and compete with capitalist countries peacefully for a long time. Cold War coexistence, Mao concluded, was characterized by international and domestic struggle.³⁵

The ideological conflict with the Soviet Union led the Chinese leaders to criticize the Vietnamese Workers’ Party (VWP). On 21 May 1960, Mao and Zhou Enlai had a conversation with North Korean leader Kim Il Sung. Zhou said that: “the DRV has a clear policy in terms of anti-imperialism, but it is equivocal on some other issues.” By “on some other issues,” Zhou was alluding to the VWP’s attitude toward the Soviet Union as well as some tendencies in its policy, including its reluctance to copy the Chinese model of completing revolution. Mao clearly shared Zhou’s view. He had discovered a few years ago that the VWP’s attitude toward class struggle was ambivalent and that it was unwilling to follow the Chinese example of carrying out thorough land reform. After the emergence of the Sino-Soviet dispute over the issue of war and revolution, Ho Chi Minh had attempted to play the role of mediator. Mao told Ho Chi Minh on 10 August 1960 that although the VWP had been correct in conducting anti-imperialist struggle, it must realize the importance of following proper theories, policies, and tactics in opposing the United States and the reactionary forces in other countries and be able to distinguish who was the most reactionary enemy. He asked Ho Chi Minh to make clear distinctions among reactionary forces in Laos, Thailand, Burma, India, and Indonesia and to treat them accordingly. A gap existed between Ho Chi Minh’s and

³³ See *Brothers-in-Arms. The Rise and Fall of the Sino-Soviet Alliance*, ed. Odd Arne Westad (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1999)

³⁴ *Renmin ribao* [People’s Daily], 7 November 1957.

³⁵ Mao’s talk with Lance Louis Sharkey, secretary general of the Australian Communist Party, 26 October 1959; Mao’s talk with Kim Il Sung, 21 May 1960; Mao’s talk with Antonio Delgado Lozano, chairman of the Venezuelan Leftist Revolutionary Movement, 3 April 1961.

Mao's thinking on this issue. A conversation between Mao and Ho Chi Minh on 2 November 1960 typically reflected the difference between the two leaders regarding the treatment of reactionaries. During the meeting, Mao and other CCP leaders displayed strong enthusiasm toward the armed struggle in Laos and South Vietnam, stressing that the VWP had done an excellent job in conducting armed struggle in Laos and South Vietnam and had promoted revolution in all of Southeast Asia. Mao commented that it was a good thing that the reactionaries had used violence and killed people and that when Jiang Jieshi killed people, he was actually helping the Chinese revolution. Ho Chi Minh disagreed with Mao's analysis, contending that it was inhumane to kill people. Mao retorted that if reactionaries could massacre revolutionaries, then revolutionaries could kill reactionaries and that there was nothing inhumane in this exchange. Liu Shaoqi added that revolutionaries did not talk about humanitarianism in treating bourgeois reactionaries. Because humanitarianism rejected class struggle, Liu continued, it contradicted Marxism. Communist parties could not rely on President Dwight Eisenhower's rationality to defend peace because his rationality differed from that of Communists.³⁶

On the issue of the future development of the conflict in Laos and South Vietnam, different views existed among CCP leaders in the early 1960s. A conversation between Ho Chi Minh, Mao and other CCP officials on 14 November 1961 revealed this divergence. While the Chinese leaders agreed on the necessity of fighting in Laos and South Vietnam, they disagreed on the scale of that fighting and the wisdom of establishing coalition governments. Deng Xiaoping and Zhou Enlai preferred to limit the scope of the war. Deng said that guerrilla warfare should be conducted and that it should be maintained at a low level. Small-scale fighting, Deng went on, would not trigger an American intervention, while a large-scale war aimed at occupying big cities such as Saigon and overthrowing the Ngo Dinh Diem regime would quite likely provoke an American intervention. Zhou Enlai pointed out that there were three options in Indochina, namely, small-scale fighting (guerrilla war), medium-level fighting (larger-size war within Laos and South Vietnam), and big war (war with American troops). Of the three

³⁶ Mao's talk with Kim Il Sung, 21 May 1960; Mao's talks with Ho Chi Minh, 10 August and 2 November 1960.

choices, Zhou recommended the second one. But Mao had different opinions. Declaring that there was nothing to fear, Mao asserted that even if a coalition government was established, it would be a temporary solution and that war would break out sooner or later. With the ongoing Geneva Conference on Laos in mind, Ho Chi Minh asked whether the war would expand if the fighting in Laos continued and if the PAVN troops continued engagement there. Mao replied without hesitation that the PAVN troops should continue fighting in Laos and that the DRV should continue to pretend that it had no soldiers in that country.³⁷

During 1961 and the first half of 1962, different views on Chinese foreign policy were voiced within the CCP leadership, leading eventually to an inner-party dispute over Mao's increasingly radical statements and practices since the emergence of the Sino-Soviet quarrel. In the first part of 1962, Wang Jiaxiang, director of the CCP CC's International Liaison Department, and some other officials wrote a letter to Zhou Enlai expressing concern over Mao's radical attitude. They conveyed a similar sentiment in their foreign policy proposals. Insisting on the continued adherence to the diplomatic principle of peaceful coexistence, they argued that war was avoidable and that China should adopt a policy that would reduce, rather than intensify, international tensions. On Indochina, they contended that China should forestall a Korea-style war and prevent the United States from focusing its attention on China. Regarding the dispute with the Soviet Union, they recommended a policy of reconciliation to prevent the conflict from escalating. As to the Sino-Indian border issue, they asked the party leadership to adopt new political, diplomatic, and propaganda measures in order to break the deadlock.³⁸

Wang Jiaxiang had worried about the sharp increase in China's foreign aid since 1960. By 1960, China had provided \$6.7 billion in foreign aid, of which \$2.5 billion were grants and \$3.2 billion were loans. One third of China's foreign aid totaling \$1.9 billion went to the DRV while \$133 million went to Cambodia, and \$670,000 to Laos. In general, between 1950 and 1960 China on average allocated 1.18 percent of its total

³⁷ Mao's talk with Ho Chi Minh, 14 November 1961.

³⁸ Letter from Wang Jiaxiang, Liu Ningyi, Wu Xiuquan to Zhou Enlai, Deng Xiaoping, and Chen Yi, 27 February 1962; Wang Jiaxiang's proposal on foreign affairs, 23 June 1962, in *Wang Jiaxiang xuanji* [Selected Works of Wang Jiaxiang] (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1989), pp. 446-460.

annual financial spending to foreign aid. This was a modest percentage.³⁹ At the end of 1960, Mao promised Ho Chi Minh that China would send food and weapons to Laos and South Vietnam via the DRV. After the American introduction of “special warfare” in South Vietnam the following year, the CCP decided to provide the DRV free of charge, with weapons which could equip 230 battalions.⁴⁰ Thus, China had greatly expanded its foreign assistance. Considering the country’s extremely difficult economic situation, as a result of the disaster of the Great Leap Forward, Wang Jiaxiang and his associates suggested that under the current circumstances, Beijing should exercise caution in providing foreign aid and should not make commitments that would strain China’s resources.⁴¹ Influenced by Wang Jiaxiang and his supporters, Liu Shaoqi and Zhou Enlai, who directed the CC’s daily work, supported the peaceful settlement of the Laotian question at the Geneva Conference.⁴²

Wang Jiaxiang’s ideas, however, quickly elicited sharp criticism from Mao. In August 1962, the CCP held a Central Work Conference at Beidaihe, where the chairman dwelt on the issues of class struggle and capitalist restoration under the condition of socialism, connecting the struggle against international revisionism with domestic problems. At the Tenth Plenum of the CCP CC in September, Mao discussed both international and domestic class struggles, declaring that so long as imperialism, reactionary nationalism, and revisionism existed, the task of waging class struggle would never end. Urging the party to hold high the banner of anti-imperialism, he insisted that China must support the armed struggles in South Vietnam and Laos without conditions because they were “excellent armed struggles.” At Mao’s urging, the meeting’s participants all advocated radical revolution and criticized international and domestic revisionism. Even Zhou Enlai claimed that “the struggle against revisionism has entered a new stage” and that “class struggle has become a fundamental issue in our relations with fraternal parties.” “The truth of Marxism-Leninism and the center of the world

³⁹ The Foreign Economic Liaison Bureau’s report on foreign assistance and future tasks, 1 September 1961.

⁴⁰ Han Nianlong, ed., *Dangdai Zhongguo waijiao* [Contemporary Chinese Diplomacy] (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1988), p. 159.

⁴¹ *Wang Jiaxiang xuanji*, pp. 444-445.

⁴² On 21 July 1962, the Geneva Conference reached an agreement on Laotian neutrality, whereby the royal government of Laos would adopt a policy of peace and neutrality, not to enter into any military alliances, and not to receive the protection of the SEATO.

revolution,” Zhou continued, “has moved from Moscow to Beijing. We should be brave and not shrink from our responsibilities.”⁴³

The CCP claim that China occupied the center of the world revolution pushed the Sino-Soviet dispute to an open break. The escalation of the Sino-Soviet dispute put the Vietnamese Communist leaders in a dilemma because they needed the support from both China and the Soviet Union to realize their goal of unification. They were puzzled, disconcerted, and mystified by the Sino-Soviet dispute. The CCP leaders, however, were unhappy with the attitude of their Vietnamese colleagues. This was a time when the Soviet Union was secretly encouraging Communist parties in Europe to write open articles or letters to criticize the CCP. Mao was now treating the Sino-Soviet difference as a fundamental issue of whether to carry on the world revolution, whether to carry out continuous revolution, and whether to liberate humanity from the oppression of the bourgeoisie. He believed that the result of the Sino-Soviet dispute would determine the future of the entire world revolution, the future of humanity, and the future of China. He was convinced that the Chinese and Soviet parties differed on the issue of basic doctrines and would soon break in terms of political and organizational ties.⁴⁴

In the escalating Sino-Soviet dispute, Mao and other CCP leaders wanted the VWP to stand on their side; but when it showed ambivalence, they began to register their displeasure. At the CCP Central Work Conference in early 1963, Liu Shaoqi criticized the VWP for not standing up to Khrushchev. Since the Twenty-Second Congress of the Soviet Communist Party, (17-31 October 1961), Liu pointed out, Khrushchev had openly condemned Albania and Stalin, and in doing so he was actually aiming at China. By advocating all-people countries and all-people parties, Liu continued, Khrushchev was actually rejecting class struggle. Genuine Communist parties had not followed Khrushchev’s line, Liu contended. The Korean Communist Party was most firm in adhering to true Marxism-Leninism. Also firm were the Communist parties of Indonesia, New Zealand, Cuba, Venezuela, Malaya, Burma, Thailand, and Japan. As to the VWP, Liu said that Ho Chi Minh had been wavering in the struggle against revisionism and that

⁴³ Mao’s speech at the Tenth Plenum, 24 September 1962; Zhou Enlai’s speech at the Tenth Plenum, 26 September 1962.

⁴⁴ CCP Central Documentary Research Department, ed., *Jianguo yilai Mao Zedong wengao*, vol. 10, pp. 247-248.

he had always been a rightist. When China urged him to conduct land reform, Liu recalled, Ho Chi Minh at first refused to do it. Ho Chi Minh even did not want to be the VWP's chairman, Liu went on, because he wanted to remain outside the party so that he could become the leader of all Vietnamese. Liu then recalled how he persuaded Stalin during a meeting in Moscow to pressure Ho Chi Minh to carry out land reform. Under Stalin's prodding, Liu said, Ho Chi Minh finally agreed to implement a land reform program. When the First Indochina War ended, Liu continued, Ho Chi Minh could not decide whether to establish a bourgeois or proletarian republic in Vietnam. At China's urging, Liu claimed, Ho Chi Minh finally decided to establish a socialist republic. During the current Sino-Soviet dispute, Liu complained, the DRV published both Chinese and Soviet articles in its newspapers. When the VWP received over 60,000 letters from the Vietnamese public, expressing their wish to read Chinese articles, Liu said, Ho Chi Minh instead ordered that they no longer be published.⁴⁵

China's discontent with the VWP was further indicated by the publication in *Renmin ribao* (People's Daily) on 12 March 1963 of several Vietnamese documents which urged the DRV to take a neutral stand in the Sino-Soviet split. With Mao's approval, *Renmin ribao* published these documents without comment. Although in a subsequent instruction to party members, the CCP leadership insisted that the VWP should be treated differently from revisionist parties, Mao was irritated by the publication of a joint declaration between the VWP and the Czechoslovak Communist Party calling for unity in the Communist camp. At this time, Mao was preparing the release of an important article on the Sino-Soviet dispute, entitled, "A Proposal on the General Line of the International Communist Movement." In May, Mao invited Kim Il Sung to China to discuss the document. In their conversations, Mao complained that the joint Vietnamese-Czechoslovakian declaration was directed against China. The VWP, Mao continued, accused China of excessively criticizing Khrushchev's revisionism and suggested that the CCP use more sugar instead of pepper in treating the Soviet Communist Party. Mao then told Kim Il Sung that, contrary to what the Vietnamese had said, China had actually put too much sugar in relations with the Soviet Union in the past and that it now should add more pepper to the relationship. Mao concluded that he did not want China to be

⁴⁵ Liu's speech on anti-revisionism, 25 February 1963.

spineless.⁴⁶ It is clear that given Mao's increasingly strong conviction about the crucial significance of the Sino-Soviet dispute, he was exasperated and irritated by the VWP's efforts to mediate the conflict.

From Opposing DRV-U.S. Peace Talks to Aligning with the U.S. against Moscow

There were both intellectual and pragmatic reasons behind the VWP's efforts to prevent the breakdown of Sino-Soviet relations. Some VWP leaders had long been influenced by European ideas because of their extensive French education. Therefore they were inclined to accept Soviet analysis on certain issues. More importantly, the VWP wanted Sino-Soviet unity to advance its goal of national unification. Encouraged by the tensions over the German issue and the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962, a majority of the VWP leaders believed that the Soviet Union was returning to the policy of confronting the United States. They feared that the Sino-Soviet split would greatly weaken the socialist bloc's support for their struggle against the Americans. After all, they believed that of all the countries in the international Communist world, only the Soviet Union had the capability to challenge the United States. Furthermore, they reasoned, the Soviet Union had the support of many Communist countries and parties in Europe. They feared that if the DRV alienated the Soviet Union and relied solely on China, it would only put itself in a very unfavorable position to resist the United States. But to the great disappointment of Ho Chi Minh and his colleagues, Khrushchev did not act as they had hoped and instead chose to pursue improved ties with the United States. In accordance with its policy of reducing international tensions, the Soviet Union had not been very enthusiastic in supporting the DRV. After the Cuban Missile Crisis, Khrushchev became even more interested in compromising with Washington. He now not only refused to support publicly the armed struggle in South Vietnam and Laos but also strictly limited Soviet military aid to the DRV. As a result, VWP resentment against the Soviet Union began to rise rapidly. About two weeks after Mao criticized the VWP during his 29 May 1963 talk with Kim Il Sung, the VWP began to lean toward the CCP.

⁴⁶ *Renmin ribao*, 12 March 1963; "The CCP Central Committee's Instruction on How to Handle Questions Concerning Vietnam during Contact with Foreigners," 19 March 1963; Mao's talk with Kim Il Sung, 29 May 1963.

In June 1963, Le Duan, the VWP secretary general, led a party and government delegation to China. He unequivocally endorsed the CCP's plan to publish the article "A Proposal on the General Line of the International Communist Movement" and registered his strong complaint against the Soviet policy of discouraging armed struggle in South Vietnam and Laos. Satisfied with Le Duan's statements, Mao promised that if the Soviet Union created difficulties for the DRV, China would stand behind Hanoi. The DRV was carrying a heavy responsibility, Mao continued. It not only shouldered the task of building North Vietnam but also the obligation to support the struggle in South Vietnam and Laos. There was no reason for China not to share some responsibilities with the DRV, Mao said. In supporting the struggle in South Vietnam and Laos, Mao continued, China was merely providing weapons while the DRV was sacrificing lives, and standing at the forefront of the struggle. Mao told Le Duan that the DRV's support to China was primary and China's assistance to the DRV was secondary.⁴⁷

During this period, China, in accordance with Mao's ideas, began to establish schools and bases to provide secret military training to Communist personnel from Asia, Africa, and Latin America and to prepare them to wage armed struggle in their countries. Mao held frequent meetings with young trainees from foreign Communist parties to encourage them to return to their countries to conduct armed struggle. Mao also introduced to them the Chinese revolutionary experience of surrounding cities from the countryside and even agreed to supply funds and weapons to them. Mao paid particular attention to the armed struggle waged by Southeast Asian Communist parties, including the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI), which had over a million members and exercised crucial influence in Indonesian domestic politics. He urged the PKI on several occasions that it should prepare for armed struggle. He claimed: "It is the duty of Marxists and Leninists to make revolution. If you are not making revolution, you are not a Communist party. In the eyes of the people, a Communist party that is not making revolution is indistinguishable from bourgeois parties, and there is no need for such a party to exist." Mao now even believed that his own position on Indochina in the second part of 1950s was wrong. He told VWP leaders several times during this period that China had

⁴⁷ Mao's talk with the DRV party and government delegation, 4 June 1963; Mao's talk with Choi Yong Kun, Vice Chairman of the Central Committee of the Korean Workers' Party, 16 June 1966.

committed errors on the Indochina question. At the Geneva Conference in 1954, Mao said, China had advised the VWP to conduct political struggle only and not to engage in armed struggle; but when the VWP withdrew troops from South Vietnam, Ngo Dinh Diem began to kill Communists. Later, Mao said, China adjusted its policy by urging the VWP to combine political and military struggles but to limit military operations to a small scale. Mao admitted that that advice was also wrong. Claiming that American imperialists and Ngo Dinh Diem had educated him, Mao stated that he now realized that the 1954 Geneva Agreement was a failure and that both the CCP and the VWP had made mistakes, which cost 160,000 lives in South Vietnam.⁴⁸

During 1963-1964, the United States expanded its military involvement and intervention in Vietnam through a gradual escalation. Both the DRV and the guerrilla warfare in South Vietnam came under increasingly heavy military and economic pressure. Given the Soviet Union's reluctance to aid the DRV, the VWP had to rely on China's support. In the meantime, Mao was considering how to unite the Southeast Asian Communist parties more closely in order to promote revolution in the entire Southeast Asian region. For this purpose, China organized joint meetings between the CCP, and the VWP and LPP. During this period, the VWP and the LPP echoed China's views in the Sino-Soviet dispute. On 30 January 1964, a VWP delegation led by Le Duan stopped in Beijing on its way to the Soviet Union. Mao asked Le Duan whether he believed his trip to Moscow would produce results. Le Duan replied that he did not expect the visit to reach much agreement. The DRV-Soviet relationship, Le Duan predicted, would not change a great deal in the future; it might change for the better or for the worse. Le Duan told Mao that the DRV hoped to maintain the status quo in relations with the Soviet Union, but Mao said that it would be better if DRV-Soviet relations would change for the worse. The Chinese leader, citing the Chinese example to emphasize the importance of self-reliance, explained that if the Soviet Union had not withdrawn its experts, China would not have adopted the policy of self-reliance and that it was more reliable to depend on oneself. Le Duan told Mao that the VWP CC plenum had concluded that if the CCP

⁴⁸ Mao's talk with the DRV party and government delegation, 4 June 1963; Mao's talk with the Brazilian Communist Party (New Party) delegation, 6 March 1963; Mao's talk with the delegation of the Colombian "Workers Learn from Farmers Movement," 5 December 1963; Mao's talk with representatives of the Peruvian Communist Party (Leftist), 12 December 1963; Mao's talk with Ho Chi Minh, 10 June 1966.

had not resisted revisionism, it might have caused greater damage to the international Communist movement and that the VWP members as well as the Vietnamese masses fully grasped of the importance of this issue. Mao said that Albania had a population of just over a million people, but it stood up to the encirclement by the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, and capitalist countries. In terms of population, Mao went on, the DRV had ten times of people than Albania, and therefore it was well positioned to resist the Soviet Union. Mao told Le Duan that he had spoken to comrades from North Korean, Japan, and Indonesia that one must exercise independent thinking and not follow the wind.⁴⁹ As it turned out, Le Duan's journey to the Soviet Union did not yield any results. In fact, because Le Duan, during his talks with the Russians, criticized the Soviet Union for pursuing peaceful coexistence with the United States, for failing to support national liberation movements, and for favoring India in the Sino-Indian border conflict, the two sides quarreled with each other.

Mao was encouraged by the ideological support he received from the VWP and other Southeast Asian Communist parties. In 1963, Chinese and North Vietnamese military leaders began to discuss how to coordinate their military operations in case the United States invaded the DRV. Mao told DRV visitors on several occasions in 1964 that "ineffective and indecisive skirmishes will not solve problems, and only large and decisive battles can solve problems." If the Vietminh had not annihilated the main French forces, Mao asked, would France have been so willing to give up Vietnam? He urged the DRV to send more troops to South Vietnam and dispatch at least several thousand soldiers to Laos. Speaking of Laos, Mao said that this country had a population of over two million people and had been at war for several years, but the fighting had been inconclusive. A new approach must be developed for the fighting in Laos, he went on. One method might be to recruit three to four thousand soldiers, group them into six or seven battalions, and train them to be combat-ready fighters instead of believers in Buddhism. Otherwise, Mao contended, the war in Laos would never end. He asked the VWP not to fear American intervention. The worse scenario, Mao said, would be another Korea-type war. The Chinese armed forces were ready, and if the United States invaded North Vietnam, Chinese troops would enter the DRV. Chinese soldiers wanted to fight,

⁴⁹ Mao's talk with the VWP delegation, 30 January 1964.

and the Americans must think about this. The Chinese had legs, Mao warned, and if the United States could send troops to North Vietnam, why could not the Chinese? It would take just one step for the Chinese to cross into the DRV. Mao pledged that China would participate in the struggle against the common enemies without conditions.⁵⁰ With Mao's support, China and the DRV signed a military agreement in December 1964, whereby China would send 300,000 troops (five infantry divisions and five anti-aircraft artillery divisions) to the northern provinces of the DRV so that the PAVN could dispatch additional regiments to South Vietnam to fight the Americans.⁵¹ Thus, China began its direct involvement in the Vietnam War.

In early August 1964, North Vietnamese naval torpedo boats clashed with American destroyers in the Gulf of Tonkin. The incident provided the United States with a pretext to escalate the war in Vietnam, and in retaliation, Washington launched bombing raids against the DRV. China and the Soviet Union had very different reactions to the Gulf of Tonkin Incident. The Soviet Union kept a low profile in treating the incident.⁵² In China, however, mass demonstrations were held around the country, involving about 20 million people. Mao told Le Duan, who visited China shortly after the Gulf of Tonkin Incident, that China supported the VWP's decision not to provoke the Americans, but was prepared for an American landing in North Vietnam. China planned to deploy 300,000 to 500,000 troops in southern China, Mao continued, and to build one or two large airfields in the Mengzi region, Yunnan Province. These airfields, Mao explained, would be used by Chinese aircraft fighting in Vietnam in case the DRV came under attack. He informed Le Duan that one North Vietnamese air regiment equipped with 36 aircraft had returned to the DRV after receiving training in China. Mao said that he planned to send another air division to Nanning, half an air division to Kunming and Simao, and two anti-aircraft artillery divisions to Nanning and Kunming. Le Duan proposed that if war broke out, a revolution might be launched throughout Southeast Asia. If war occurred in Southeast Asia, he explained, great changes would take place

⁵⁰ Mao's talk with the VWP delegation, 30 January 1964; Mao's talk with Van Tien Dung, 24 June 1964; Mao's talk with Tran Tu Binh, 27 July 1964.

⁵¹ Ilya V. Gaiduk, *The Soviet Union and the Vietnam War* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1996), p. 16.

⁵² In its August 3 issue, *Pravda* only carried a brief report on the Gulf of Tonkin Incident. The next day, Khrushchev sounded moderate in his statement on the incident. See *Foreign Relations of the United States*, vol. 1, Vietnam, 1964 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1992), p. 637.

because the Communist parties in the region had all built grass-root foundations and the revolution could surely be successful. Mao had a different estimate, however. He believed that if a revolution started, it could be successful in South Vietnam and Laos. As for revolution in Thailand and Burma, he was not sure. Without a change in the entire situation, Mao reasoned, it would be difficult for revolution to succeed in Thailand and Burma because revolutionary developments in different Southeast Asian countries had been uneven. Mao paid particular attention to the revolutionary situation in Thailand. He pointed out that Thailand was the key in Southeast Asia and that without the help from Thailand, the United States would find it difficult to conduct the war. The United States, Mao went on, not only relied on bases in Thailand, but also wanted to use the Thai army in the war. Suggesting that the DRV help the Communist Party of Thailand develop its military forces, Mao hoped that in five or ten years a Thai revolution would be launched.⁵³

To Mao's surprise, Khrushchev was overthrown in October. The new leadership in the Kremlin headed by Leonid Brezhnev took a totally different view of the Indochina War. In November 1964, the Soviet Communist Party publicly announced that it would provide all necessary support to the DRV. In February 1965, Soviet Premier Alexei Kosygin visited Hanoi, where he promised that the Soviet Union would supply free of charge artillery pieces, tanks, and missiles to the DRV, a decision reinforced by the simultaneous U.S. bombing of North Vietnam in response to attacks on U.S. barracks in Pleiku and Qui Nhon. Subsequently, the Soviet embassy conveyed an oral request to the Chinese government that it allow the Soviet Union to use its territory to transport personnel and weapons to North Vietnam. On 30 March, the Chinese and Soviet governments signed an agreement, whereby China would help the Soviet Union transport materials to the DRV. After the conclusion of the agreement, Soviet weapons, including anti-aircraft guns and fighter planes, began to be transported to North Vietnam through China.⁵⁴

⁵³ Mao's talk with Le Duan, 13 August 1964.

⁵⁴ Wang Taiping, chief ed., *Zhonghua renmin gongheguo waijiaoshi* [Diplomatic History of the People's Republic of China] (Beijing: Shijie zhishi chubanshe, 1998), vol. 2, pp. 265, 267.

The Soviet decision to provide military aid to the DRV, especially the transit of Soviet supplies through China, put Beijing in a dilemma.⁵⁵ On the one hand, given the tensions in Sino-Soviet relations, the transit of Soviet equipment and personnel would pose a threat to China's national security. Because the Soviet Union had more advanced weaponry than China, the increase of Soviet aid to the DRV would only lead to further Vietnamese reliance on Moscow. On the other hand, if China refused to allow the Soviet Union to transport weapons through its territory, such a refusal would complicate China's relations with the DRV and also contradict its policy of supporting national liberation struggle. Furthermore, even if Beijing did not permit Soviet weapons and personnel to transit China, they could reach the DRV by sea. The result would be Hanoi's alienation from China and a tightening of DRV-Soviet relations. For the sake of preserving Sino-DRV friendship and upholding his policy of supporting national liberation war, Mao agreed to allow the Soviet Union to transport weapons through China. He informed Kosygin of his decision in February 1965, when the Soviet premier visited Beijing.⁵⁶

But in fact, since the CCP leaders had concluded that the Soviet Communist Party opposed revolution ideologically, they had deep suspicions about the Soviet motives in assisting the DRV. As a result, even the slightest technical dispute over the shipment of Soviet materials for the DRV through China would cause a serious suspicion between Beijing and Moscow regarding each other's motives. Disputes and conflicts between the Chinese and Soviet governments frequently erupted over the shipment of Russian weapons through China.⁵⁷ Since the DRV relied on sophisticated Soviet weaponry to fight the United States, no matter how hard Beijing tried to preserve Sino-DRV friendship, the North Vietnamese drew closer to the Russians. The more often disputes broke out between Beijing and Moscow over the transportation of Soviet weapons through China, the more puzzled the North Vietnamese became. The more criticisms China leveled at the Russians and the more demands it made to the VWP that it stay away from the Soviet Union, the more estranged the Vietnamese became from China.

⁵⁵ When the Sino-Soviet relationship began to deteriorate, China had notified the DRV that it did not want to see Hanoi accept Soviet aid. Gaiduk, *The Soviet Union and the Vietnam War*, p. 16.

⁵⁶ Mao's talk with Kosygin, 11 February 1965.

⁵⁷ Li Danhui, "ZhongSu zai yuanYue kangMei wenti shang de maodun yu chongtu, 1965-1972) [Sino-Soviet Dispute over Aid to North Vietnam's Anti-U.S. War, 1965-1972], unpublished paper.

They even suspected that China wanted to control the DRV. As a result, the DRV moved increasingly closer to the Soviet Union.

On the issue of the Soviet involvement in the Indochina War, what disturbed Mao the most was what he perceived to be the Soviet “peace plot.” On 16 February 1965, the second day after Kosygin’s return from his DRV trip, the Soviet government issued to the DRV and China a proposal to convene an international conference on the Indochina problem. Shortly after that, at the initiative of Yugoslavia, a country that China viewed as the number one revisionist state, seventeen non-aligned countries issued an appeal calling for a peaceful settlement of the Indochina conflict. In March, the Soviet Union sponsored an international meeting in Moscow attended by nineteen Communist parties, which declared support for the revolutionary struggle in Indochina and called for unity in supporting revolution and opposing imperialism. These developments puzzled Mao. The Soviet Union had turned revisionist, Mao reasoned. How could it now champion revolution? There must be a conspiracy. Considering the then extensive US bombing of North Vietnam and the American threat to attack Vietnamese sanctuaries, Mao even suspected that the United States and the Soviet Union were conspiring to launch a “joint attack on China” from the North and the South. He eventually concluded that since the Soviet Union had failed to prevent revolution in Indochina in the past, it now changed tactics by using peace talks as bait to lure the DRV into the Soviet-American trap.⁵⁸

To smash what they perceived as the Soviet “conspiracy,” the Chinese leaders did their utmost to oppose DRV-American peace talks.⁵⁹ To strengthen the VWP’s determination to carry the war to the end, Mao approved a series of plans to provide extensive aid to the DRV. China sent support troops to North Vietnam. They helped the DRV resist American air attack, build and repair railways, roads, airfields,

⁵⁸ Mao’s talk with the leaders of the Malayan Communist Party, 19 March 1965.

⁵⁹ See the Chinese government’s reply on 10 March 1965 to the Soviet government’s February 16 proposal regarding the convening of an international conference on Indochina, in Wang, *Zhonghua renmin gongheguo waijiaoshi*, vol. 2, pp. 265-266; Zhou Enlai’s talk with Algerian President Ben Bella, 30 March 1965; Zhou’s talk with Pakistani President Ayub Khan, 2 April 1965, in the Diplomatic History Research Office of the PRC Foreign Ministry, ed., *Zhou Enlai waijiao huodong dashiji, 1949-1975* [A Chronicle of Zhou Enlai’s Diplomatic Activities, 1949-1975] (Beijing: Shijie zhishi chubanshe, 1993), pp. 444, 445; for an English translation of the 2 April 1965 Zhou-Khan talk, see *77 Conversations Between Chinese and Foreign Leaders on the Wars in Indochina, 1964-77*, CWIHP Working Paper 22, ed. by Odd Arne Westad, Chen Jian, Stein Tonnesson, Nguyen Vu Tung, and James G. Hershberg (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 1998), pp. 79-85.

communication installations, defense works, and sweep mines off the coast. Beijing instructed Yunnan, Guangdong, Guangxi and Hunan provinces to help seven provinces in North Vietnam develop their economic construction. Between 1962 and 1966, China provided the DRV with 270,000 guns, 540 cannons, 200 million bullets, 900,000 artillery shells, 700 tons of explosives, 200,000 sets of uniforms, 4 million meters of cloth as well as large quantities of mosquito nets, rain boots, food, communication materials. In April 1965, Le Duan led a DRV party and government delegation to China, requesting the dispatch of Chinese support troops to North Vietnam. The two sides signed an agreement on this issue. Beginning in June 1965, the first group of China's "support troops" entered the DRV. From that time until March 1968, 320,000 Chinese troops, including anti-aircraft artillery units, railway units, defense work engineering units, and road building units, operated in North Vietnam.⁶⁰

Under the heavy pressure of massive American bombing of the DRV ("Rolling Thunder"), the VWP began to show interest in the Soviet peace talk proposal. Noticing the change in Hanoi's policy, Mao said to DRV leaders on several occasions that he opposed peace talks. For instance, Mao made clear his objection to negotiations during his talk with Ho Chi Minh on 5 June 1965. When Ho Chi Minh said that if the DRV did not indicate its willingness to talk, the United States might increase its troop deployment in South Vietnam to 100,000 soldiers, bomb DRV factories, Haiphong, and even Hanoi, Mao asked Ho not to fear. After reminding him that the Americans had claimed that they would bomb China, Mao declared that it would be a good thing if the United States bombed Guangzhou, Nanning, Kunming, and Hainan Island and that it would be even better if the United States bombed China's atomic bomb facility in Xinjiang.⁶¹ In his meeting with the DRV party and government delegation on 20 October, Mao said that he had not paid attention to the issue of DRV-American negotiations and that he was only interested in how the DRV fought the United States and how it could drive the United States out of Vietnam. Turning to the negotiations with the Americans at the Geneva

⁶⁰ Wang, *Zhonghua renmin gongheguo waijiaoshi*, vol. 2, p. 35; Han Huaizhi and Tan Jingqiao, chief eds., *Dangdai Zhongguo jundui de junshi gongzuo* [Contemporary Military Work of the Chinese Armed Forces] (Beijing, Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1989), vol. 2, p. 514; Historical Research Department of the Military Science Academy, ed., *Zhongguo renmin jiefangjun liushinian dashiji* [A Chronicle of the Sixty Years of the People's Liberation Army] (Beijing: Junshi kexue chubanshe, 1988), p. 616.

⁶¹ Mao's talk with Ho Chi Minh, 5 June 1965.

Conference in 1954, Mao reminded the Vietnamese visitors that the Americans did not keep their words after the Geneva negotiations. The DRV adhered to the Geneva Agreement by withdrawing its armed forces from South Vietnam, Mao continued; but once that happened, the enemy began to kill people, and the DRV had to reopen military struggle. Claiming that he did not reject negotiations per se, Mao insisted that the time was not ripe for negotiations and that the final solution of the problem depended on the DRV's fighting.⁶² In 1966, Mao went so far as to ask fraternal parties to take a position on the issue of the Soviet "peace talk plot."

In March 1966, a Japanese Communist Party (JCP) delegation led by Kenji Miyamoto visited China, and in their discussions with CCP leaders, the two sides agreed to issue a joint communiqué. In preparing the communiqué draft, the two sides agreed to include a condemnation of revisionism. Given the new Soviet leadership's positive attitude toward supporting the Vietnamese struggle against the United States, the JCP suggested that when condemning revisionism, the communiqué not mention the Soviet Union by name. After reading the draft, Mao wanted to revise it. He insisted that the communiqué should not only mention the Soviet Union by name in its condemnation of revisionism but also point out that the Soviet Union was using its assistance to the DRV to disguise its actual policy of betraying the Vietnamese people. Mao told Kenji Miyamoto that "in my view, my revision was beneficial to both you and us. We should not show flexibility in front of traitors and scabs. I am not comfortable with the communiqué draft that you and my comrades in Beijing have made because it is not sharp enough. When it mentions revisionism, it does not indicate who is practicing revisionism. The draft lacks courage. I have to criticize you for showing lack of courage and fear of isolation and war." Kenji Miyamoto explained that the JCP in the past had criticized "Soviet revisionism" several times and that it also believed that the Soviet Union had ulterior motives in aiding the DRV. But the Soviet Union did provide large quantities of weapons to help the DRV fight the Americans, the JCP leader went on, and Soviet-American contradictions should be exploited for the sake of promoting an anti-American united front. He concluded his remarks by saying that one should not ignore the Soviet assistance to the DRV. Clearly unhappy with Kenji Miyamoto's words, Mao

⁶² Mao's talk with the DRV party and government delegation, 20 October 1965.

said that he did not agree with the JCP's view and that the Soviet Union would welcome such a view.⁶³ In the end, the JCP-CCP communiqué was scrapped and the two parties became estranged.

Mao's attitude inevitably affected CCP-VWP relations. During this period, direct quarrels occurred between Chinese and North Vietnamese leaders.⁶⁴ The Chinese leaders insisted that one must oppose both imperialism and revisionism and that anti-imperialism and anti-revisionism could not be separated. The DRV officials disagreed with the argument that the Soviet Union was betraying North Vietnam. Upon failing to convince the Vietnamese, Zhou Enlai insisted that from now on the DRV should not mention Soviet and Chinese assistance at the same time because doing so constituted an insult to China. He also told the North Vietnamese that if they suspected that China was trying to control the DRV, then China could immediately withdraw its troops from their country and pull its military units stationed along the Vietnamese border back to its interior areas.⁶⁵

Mao's intransigence was closely related to his worldview. He always approached international affairs from the perspective of Lenin's theory of imperialism. According to Lenin, imperialism was the highest stage of capitalism. In the stage of imperialism, war was inevitable, and war would unavoidably lead to revolution. In Mao's mind, the creation of the Soviet Union after World War I, the victory of the CCP in China after World War II, the formation of the socialist camp, and the rise of national independence movement had provided the most powerful testimony to the correctness of Lenin's prediction. Mao strongly condemned Khrushchev and called him a revisionist largely because he pursued détente with the United States, the leader of imperialism, and because the Soviet leader claimed that he could establish, together with the Americans, "a world where there is no weapons, no army, and no war." In Mao's mind, Khrushchev's policy posed the danger of numbing the will of revolutionary people and preventing world

⁶³ Mao's talk with Kenji Miyamoto, 28-29 March 1966.

⁶⁴ See *77 Conversations Between Chinese and Foreign Leaders on the Wars in Indochina, 1964-77*, CWIHP Working Paper 22, ed. by Odd Arne Westad, Chen Jian, Stein Tonnesson, Nguyen Vu Tung, and James G. Hershberg. (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 1998).

⁶⁵ Zhou Enlai and Deng Xiaoping's meeting with Le Duan and Nguyen Duy Trinh, 23 March and 13 April 1966.

revolution.⁶⁶ Mao saw the Indochina war as the best opportunity to expose the deception of Soviet revisionism and to prove that Leninism was not out of date. That was why Mao feared that the Soviet intervention in Indochina would lead to a peaceful settlement between the DRV and the United States. His insistence that the VWP and other fraternal parties publicly draw an ideological line between themselves and the Soviet Union actually reflected his extreme fear of the expansion of Soviet revisionism.

Mao, however, found it very difficult to force other Communist parties to separate themselves from the Soviet Union ideologically when Moscow was actively assisting the DRV. In May 1968, the VWP began peace talks with the United States in Paris despite China's strong criticism. In Mao's calculation, to achieve the goal of laying bare the deception of Soviet aid to the DRV and exposing the true nature of Moscow's policy of seeking compromise with imperialism, revolution and war on an even larger scale was necessary. But since the mid-1960s, as Mao aged and his health declined, he became increasingly impatient and disappointed at the absence of a new world war and the global revolution that he had predicted. He often said that "this situation of neither war nor revolution will not last long." But he was gradually comprehending that because of the possession of nuclear weapons by the United States and the Soviet Union, the outbreak of a world war had become not as easy as it used to be. In a meeting with E.F. Hill, chairman of the Australian Communist Party (Marxist-Leninist), on 11 November 1968, Mao explained why a new world war had not occurred. He began by asking whether it was likely that the United States and the Soviet Union would launch a nuclear war to eliminate most of the people on the globe so that they could dominate the world. He then went on to say that it was not likely because given the limited population in the two countries, they were afraid that instead of eliminating people in other countries, they would end up wiping out their own populations. Furthermore, the CCP leader added, countries in the intermediate zone such as Great Britain, France, West Germany, Japan, and Italy also opposed war. Mao concluded that "eventually people in various countries will return to the path of Marxism by making their own revolutions and then getting united among themselves."⁶⁷

⁶⁶ *Jianguo yilai zhongyao wenxian xuanbian* [Selected Important Documents since the Founding the PRC] (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1997), pp. 450-481.

⁶⁷ Mao's talk with Hill, 28 November 1968. See *CWIHP Bulletin* 11 (Winter 1998), pp. 157-161.

Mao had placed his hope of making revolution on Communist parties in different countries, but he was disappointed with the actual revolutionary situation. He said several times that Asia, Africa, and Latin America were supposed to be cauldrons of revolution, but revolution had not occurred in countries such as Thailand. In other countries such as Malaya, Indonesia, the Philippines, and South Korea, he continued, revolution had not developed to a high level. On 30 September 1965 a coup took place in Indonesia, in the course of which the PKI was suppressed. Mao saw the coup (in which hundreds of thousands of alleged Communists were killed and a pro-Western military government took power) as a good development because he believed that it would force the PKI to conduct armed struggle. In a meeting with an LPP delegation on 11 December 1965, Mao asked the Lao Communists not to regard the Indonesian revolution as a disaster. He said that he was very pleased to see that the PKI CC had taken his advise and “has gone to the mountains” to carry out revolution.⁶⁸ In order to promote revolution in Southeast Asia, Mao actively urged the Communist parties in Thailand, Burma, and Malaya to establish their military forces.

During this period, Mao was especially interested in promoting revolution in Thailand, where American military bases were located. He asked the LPP on several occasions to help the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) carry out armed struggle. He said that it was very important to develop guerrilla warfare in Thailand and that it would be best if the LLP liberated areas could be expanded to Thailand because the primary area behind the enemy line lay in Thailand not Laos. If the LPP turned Thailand into a communist country, Mao continued, the United States would be trapped there. Advising the LPP to send troops to Thailand, Mao declared: “You should carry the war to Thailand.” Since American aircraft took off from bases in Thailand to attack the Lao liberated areas, Mao explained, the LPP had every right to spread the war to Thailand. When he learned that with China’s help, the CPT had established some guerrilla zones and pockets of base areas, he was elated. He told CPT leaders that the growth of the Thai

⁶⁸ Aidit was later captured and executed by the Indonesian military when he left his mountain base to hold talks with President Sukarno. When that happened, Mao criticized the PKI for not having taken a sufficient stand in continuing armed struggle. See Mao’s talk with the LPP delegation, 11 December 1965.

revolution was a big event because it had connected the revolutions in Burma, Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia, and Malaya.⁶⁹

In November 1967, Mao told Thakin Ba Thein Tin, vice chairman of Communist Party of Burma (CPB) CC, that the CPT had done a good job and had a bright future and a great potential. After the outbreak of anti-Chinese riots in Burma that year, Mao permitted the CPB to operate openly in China and assisted a large group of CPB members, who had been in China for the past seventeen years, and Burmese minority militants to return to their country to wage armed struggle and establish base areas. Mao even suggested to LPP and CPB leaders that they go to Chinese southern provinces near Laos and Burma to recruit minority groups. To help the revolutions in Laos and Burma, Mao explained, was the international duty of Chinese minorities, and China's border regions could serve as rear areas for the LPP and the CPB. To ensure that the CPB members, who had just completed training in China, would return to Burma safely, People's Liberation Army (PLA) units escorted them to Burma. On some occasions, the PLA units even clashed with Burmese government forces.⁷⁰

For a time, Mao was very pleased with the continuation of the war in Indochina and the unfolding of armed struggle in other Southeast Asian countries. He said: "In my opinion, people in many countries have been awakened, including people in imperialist countries. Some people are promoting peace movements, some are carrying out guerrilla war, and others are thinking about their countries' future. There are also many people who have not been awakened. When people in different countries rise up against imperialism, we call their uprisings revolution. Can you believe that revolution can only happen in Russia, China, Vietnam, and Laos but not in other places? No. If revolution fails to take place in other countries, then Marxism-Leninism will be out of date."⁷¹

In August 1968, the Soviet Union invaded Czechoslovakia. The outbreak of Sino-Soviet border clashes the next year led to Moscow's threat to launch a preemptive nuclear strike against China. Mao began to feel the danger of an imminent Soviet invasion. The most important lesson he had learned during his long revolutionary career was that in

⁶⁹ Mao's talk with the LPP delegation, November 30, 1967; Mao's talk with Kaysone Phomvihane, 7 July 1970; Mao's talk with the leaders of the CPT, 9 November 1967.

⁷⁰ Mao's talk with Thakin Ba Thein Tin, 26 November 1967.

⁷¹ Mao's talk with Kaysone Phomvihane, 7 July 1970.

making revolution, one also had to know how to preserve one's revolutionary home base. In 1927, Mao had defied the CCP CC's order to attack the city of Changsha and instead took his soldiers to the Jinggangshan Mountains to set up a revolutionary base area and to preserve his forces. In the early 1930s, Mao had conducted guerrilla war in the Jiangxi Soviet instead of following the party leadership's instruction to launch attacks on the Nationalist forces. He was thus branded a "rightist." During the Long March, he insisted that the best way to preserve the Red Army was to go to northern China in order to receive assistance from Mongolia and the Soviet Union. Because of this, Mao was criticized for practicing "escapism." During the anti-Japanese war, Mao incurred the suspicion of the Soviet Union, the Guomindang, and even cadres within the CCP because he refused to wage positional war against the Japanese and instead conducted guerrilla war. These examples showed that Mao could be pragmatic and flexible if he believed that his basic revolutionary force was in danger. The Soviet threat forced Mao to begin war preparation at home. He instructed the party and the people to "dig deep tunnels, store food, and prepare for war." As a result, he began to show less interest in promoting world revolution.⁷²

In order to protect China's security, Mao approved high-level secret contacts with the United States.⁷³ He was determined to align with the Americans to resist the Soviet Union. China's opening to the United States, however, strained its relations with North Vietnam. Unhappy with Sino-American rapprochement, the Vietnamese Communists criticized China for sacrificing DRV interests. From 1970 on, Mao began to drop his criticism of the DRV-US peace talks. The American invasion of Cambodia in April 1970 slowed down Mao's opening to the United States for a while. In his meetings with Henry Kissinger and Richard Nixon during 1971-1972, Mao and Zhou urged the United States to withdraw from Vietnam and forcefully rejected the American request that China put pressure on the North Vietnamese. But in his talks with his Vietnamese comrades, Mao asked them to conclude the war at a proper time and produce results in their negotiations

⁷² On Mao's war preparation in the wake of the Sino-Soviet border clash in 1969, see Yang Kuisong, *Zouxiang polie*, chap. 18; Yang Kuisong., "The Sino-Soviet Border Clash of 1969: From Zhenbao Island to Sino-American Rapprochement," *Cold War History 1:1 (August 2000)*, pp. 21-52.

with the Americans.⁷⁴ Mao told DRV leaders that if the Paris talks succeeded, then both the National Liberation Front and North Vietnam could normalize relations with the United States. Mao and Zhou Enlai even apologized to the Vietnamese for having criticized their negotiations with the Americans in the past. They said: “your policy of fighting and talking since 1968 is correct. At first, when you began negotiations, some of our comrades thought that you had made an error. Now we can see that you have made a correct decision.”⁷⁵

On 27 January 1973, the DRV-US Paris talks reached a peace agreement. Mao lauded the settlement, but his praise failed to improve China’s relations with the DRV. Furthermore, Mao’s endorsement of the Vietnamese-American peace talks alienated Albania, which had been China’s staunchest ally in the fight against revisionism. The Labor Party of Albania had consistently opposed the DRV-US peace negotiations and any efforts that would allow the United States to disengage from Indochina. It was very unhappy with Mao’s change of position on the issue of the Vietnam peace talks. It not only objected to the compromise between the DRV and the United States but also criticized China’s rapprochement with Washington. The Albanians represented the view of a group of extremist Communist parties. But given the Soviet threat to China, Mao could not afford to accommodate their views. To justify his current policy toward the United States, Mao cited Lenin’s theory of how to deal with robbers again. He said that the United States wanted to withdraw from Vietnam, but Albania did not want it to do that, claiming that the center of world revolution was in Asia and the center of the Asian revolution was in Vietnam. Turning to the Albanian accusation of people who opposed war in Vietnam as rightist opportunists, Mao declared that he would not care if he were

⁷³ See Chen Jian and David L. Wilson, ed., “‘All Under the Heaven is great Chaos,’ Beijing, the Sino-Soviet border Clashes and the Turn toward Sino-American Rapprochement, 1968-69,” *CWIHP Bulletin* 11 (Winter 1998), pp. 155-175.

⁷⁴ William Burr, ed. *The Kissinger Transcripts: The Top Secret Talks with Beijing and Moscow* (New York: The New Press, 1999), pp. 30-31, 102-106.

⁷⁵ Mao’s talk with Nguyen Thi Binh, 19 December 1972; Zhou Enlai’s talk with Le Duc Tho, 12 July 1972, translated version in *See 77 Conversations Between Chinese and Foreign Leaders on the Wars in Indochina, 1964-77*, CWIHP Working Paper 22, ed. by Odd Arne Westad, Chen Jian, Stein Tonnesson, Nguyen Vu Tung, and James G. Hershberg. (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 1998), pp. 182-184; and Mao’s talk with Le Duc Tho, 2 February 1973, translated in *77 Conversations Between Chinese and Foreign Leaders on the Wars in Indochina, 1964-77*, p. 186.

branded a rightist opportunist. He insisted that Marxism never dictated that in making revolution one could not make compromises.⁷⁶

Conclusion

The evolution of Mao's attitude toward the Indochina war can be divided into four stages. During the first stage (1949-1953), Mao supported the Vietnamese resistance against France and opposed compromises. During the second stage (1954-1957), he endorsed peace and democracy and favored suspending armed struggle in Vietnam. In the third stage (1958-1969), he supported the DRV's anti-American war and opposed peace talks between Hanoi and Washington. In the fourth stage (1970-1973), he approved the DRV-US peace talks and supported ending the war in Vietnam.

During the first stage, Mao's backing of the Vietminh's war was heavily influenced by his ideological beliefs and his own revolutionary experiences. In terms of ideology, he believed that it was the international obligation of those proletarians who had achieved victory to support world revolution. In terms of his own revolutionary experiences, Mao was convinced that the victorious path of the Chinese armed struggle provided the only correct method to achieve liberation for the VWP as well as other Asian Communist parties. Mao's support for revolution in Vietnam also served the strategic purpose of diverting some American attention away from the Korean War. But since the French were the main enemy in the Indochina battlefield, the consideration of reducing American pressure in Korea was not the primary reason behind Mao's decision to support the Vietnamese struggle.

In 1954, Mao changed his attitude toward the Indochina conflict for both international and domestic reasons. After Stalin's death, the Soviet Union urged a cease-fire in Korea and promoted a policy of peace. In China, the policymaking process within the CCP was still relatively democratic. This had been demonstrated in the internal party debate over China's entry into the Korean War in 1950.⁷⁷ Because of the existence of this relatively democratic policymaking mechanism, the views of pragmatic CCP leaders

⁷⁶ Mao's talk with Zhang Chunqiao, Wang Hongwen, 4 July 1973.

⁷⁷ Yang Kuisong, *Zouxiang polie*, Chapter 11.

became influential. They paid more attention to the implementation of China's First Five-Year Plan and called for adjustments in the country's strategic priorities. Influenced by the views of these officials, Mao at this time was able to view China's international position realistically. He realized that after the Korean War the United States had shifted its military focus in Asia southward to Indochina and that there were many unfavorable factors against China if it decided to fight the United States in Vietnam. Therefore, Mao favored the creation of a peaceful international environment for China by ensuring the security of North Korea and North Vietnam and by avoiding war with the United States in Southeast Asia.

What turned Mao toward supporting armed struggle in Vietnam again was the development of his nationalist sentiments of humiliation. During the one hundred years since the mid-19th Century, China had been victimized by imperialist aggression. With the PRC's founding in 1949, China had become fully independent. It had elevated its position in Asia by successfully resisting the United States in Korea and by achieving political stability and economic development at home. But the United States continued to be hostile toward the PRC on the issues of United Nations representation and Taiwan while the Soviet Union treated China arrogantly because it had economic and scientific superiority. All this triggered the rapid growth of Mao's nationalist sentiments. The Soviet Communist Party's ambivalence toward the issue of war and peace irritated Mao the most because it directly contradicted what he perceived to be his most important contribution to Marxism-Leninism, that is, the theory of "using the countryside to surround cities and seizing power through armed struggle." To validate the international significance of the Chinese way of making revolution, Mao launched the intellectual struggle against revisionism. He regarded the serious setbacks of the peace approach in Vietnam and the revival of armed struggle in the south as the best proof of the correctness of his theory on war and revolution. It was very natural that Mao chose war over peace after 1958.

What caused Mao to return to the foreign policy of flexibility in 1969 was undoubtedly the imperatives of national interests and national security. The border clashes between China and the Soviet Union that year pushed their relationship to the brink of a nuclear war. Mao again had to pay attention to the issue of power disparity.

Pressured by the international isolation China faced as a result of the Sino-Soviet confrontation and frustrated by the lack of results in his efforts to export revolution over the years, Mao again employed the united front tactic to exploit international contradictions and to improve China's international position. He sought to align with the United States against the Soviet Union. Of course, the United States at this time was responsive to Mao's change of attitude because it needed China's help to extricate itself from the quagmire of the Vietnam War and to counter the Soviet Union.

In conclusion, as the leader of a revolutionary party Mao maintained his revolutionary impulse even after his party had seized power. With the progress in national unification, the restoration and reconstruction of the economy, and the stabilization of society, Mao no longer had the sense of vulnerability and crisis that he used to feel during the war years. China had a vast territory and abundant resources. All this greatly spurred Mao's sense of political obligation and nationalist pride. His strong belief in the correctness of his revolutionary experiences, his determination to defend revolutionary ideas, and his desire to fulfil his revolutionary mission all contributed to the radicalization of his attitude toward the Indochina war. For most of the time between 1949 and 1973, Mao was willing to place support for revolution in Indochina above the needs of national security, economic development, and the improvement of living conditions in China. For the sake of defending the correctness of his ideology, he was prepared to alienate all of his "fraternal friends." Of course, under certain conditions Mao could be sober and capable of paying attention to the realities of power politics. This happened twice, first during 1954-1957 when Mao was eager to build China into a strong power, and then after the Sino-Soviet border war in 1969 when he discovered that the danger of war threatened the survival of his regime.

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