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SPECIAL REPORT

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PARTY PRIMACY IN PEIPING'S ARMED FORCES

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Approved For Release 2006/08/30 : CIA-RDP79-00927A004000120002-5

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Approved For Release 2006/08/30 : CIA-RDP79-00927A004000120002-5

Approved For Release 2006/08/30 : CIA-RDP79-00927A004000120002-5

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PARTY PRIMACY IN PEIPING'S ARMED FORCES

The question of party supremacy over the armed forces is still being described--as it has since the formation of the Red Army in 1927--as the "most fundamental" military question in Communist China. Despite intensive indoctrination and new control mechanisms set up since 1959, when the minister of defense apparently spearheaded a move to emphasize professionalism at the expense of political orthodoxy, the morale and ideological dedication of both officers and men are still a matter of party concern. Some military officers appear to believe that political controls hamper their effectiveness in meeting the demands of modern warfare. Dissatisfaction apparently also exists, particularly in the air force, over the slow pace of military modernization.

Past Party-Military Relations

Ever since the army's formative days, Mao Tse-tung has insisted that "the party directs the guns." Efforts to enforce this dictum, particularly since the Chinese Communists achieved power, have led to persistent party-army strains. These deepened following the Korean War, when a program of modernizing the army stimulated the development of a professional officer class more inclined than the officers of the revolutionary past to resent party interference in military affairs. At the same time, political reliability in the rank and file was diluted by the steady demobilization of old revolutionary veterans and the mobilization of young recruits who had not been steeled in revolutionary struggle.

The strains apparently reached serious proportions during 1958. A marathon conference of high-level military leaders from May to July was followed by a series of articles in the official army newspaper strongly critical of the growth of "purely military views" in the armed forces. These articles, for the first time, charged that some officers "openly advocated liquidation" of party leadership in the armed forces. In October, General Su Yu was replaced as chief of the General Staff by General Huang Ko-cheng, in a move probably designed to underline the party's point that it was in complete control of the armed forces. At the same time the officer corps probably was reshuffled to increase its responsiveness to party will.

Military Affairs Committee

Even more serious troubles were developing within the ranks of the Military Affairs Committee, the party organ which formulates military policy subject only to assent by Mao Tse-tung and the Standing Committee of the Politburo.

Approved For Release 2006/08/30 : CIA-RDP79-00927A004000120002-5

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On it sit Mao's trusted old-line military leaders, including most, if not all, of the ten heroes of the revolution who have been honored for their outstanding contributions by being made marshals of the armed forces.

This group scored many military victories over the years while accepting Maoist precepts of party supremacy. Nevertheless, one of its leading members, Minister of Defense Peng Te-huai, apparently spearheaded an attempt in 1959 to "regularize" the armed forces by emphasizing professionalism in the officer corps at the expense of political orthodoxy.

This challenge to party hegemony was beaten back by Mao and the other top leaders. The general and his supporters--including the new chief of staff Huang Kocheng--were removed from their jobs. Direction of the committee was turned over to Marshal Lin Piao, who stood higher in party rank and considerably closer to Mao than his predecessor. Lin was also named minister of Defense.

LIN PIAO

At the same time the Military Affairs Committee took steps to bring activities of lower echelons under more direct review. Committee members were charged with the specific direction of military programs which the party regarded as especially important.

Faced with the prospect that natural attrition will soon begin to remove these old-time revolutionary zealots from the committee, Peiping has done what it can to expand and perpetuate their influence. Officers at all levels are given to understand that they should model themselves and pattern their careers on the example of the present committee members --who, along with all other senior generals, have been specifically excluded from mandatory retirement regulations.

General Political Department

Following the Peng Te-huai purge in 1959, the party also attempted to bolster the armed forces' General Political Department, the only military organization specifically mentioned in the party constitution. The constitution entrusts it with taking charge of the party ideological and organizational work in the army and stipulates that it will operate under the direct leadership of the central committee. In fulfilling this role,

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the department runs the military propaganda and educational apparatus. It has an important say in military personnel matters.

Since mid-1960, the direction of the General Political Department has been in the hands of Lo Jung-huan, an army marshal with extensive experience as a political officer and much closer to Mao than his predecessor. His number-two man, and the department's leading public spokesman, has been General Hsiao Hua, a younger officer with a background in political work within the armed forces.

Under this new leadership, the department has worked hard to reinforce the political indoctrination program throughout the military forces. This campaign was pressed primarily through the system of the political officers or commissars which the General Political Department assigns to all military units down through the company level. These officers take their direction only from the General Political Department and their powers extend far beyond political indoctrination. For example, they must approve operational orders before they can be carried out, except in the most extreme combat conditions.

Party Committees

The political officer is only one of the instrumentalities through which the party operates in the armed forces. Party committees in all military units maintain close relations with the equivalent civilian

LO JUNG-HUAN

party committees in their area. The party committee in a military district headquarters, for instance, receives guidance from the local provincial party committee. This gives the party a degree of horizontal control over the military to supplement the vertical control provided by the political officer arrangements.

At the regimental level and above, both the military commander of the unit and the political commissar are generally members of the unit's party committee. When difficulties arise in implementing an order, the committee is called together to discuss the problem and recommend a solution.

New Party Controls

Despite this dual system of political control, Peiping apparently considers its apparatus inadequate in the upper military echelons. Recently

Approved For Release 2006/08/30 : CIA-RDP79-00927A004000120002-5

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regulations covering political work in the armed forces were revised and codified. The texts of the new regulations have not been received in the West, but press treatment of them suggests the party is creating still another control mechanism. "Political work organs" are being established in all military units down through the regiment. These organs, it is intimated, will work with the unit political commissars and party committees to direct ideological and political work.

The new regulations provide for a continuation of Peiping's efforts to strengthen party leadership in the company--China's basic "combat unit." There have even been suggestions that regular party units be extended down to the platoon level.

Political Training

Political indoctrination sessions in the armed forces have received particular emphasis since the Peng Te-huai purge. Today nearly half of the total time used for military training is devoted to political subjects.

Not content with its system of day-to-day ideological indoctrination and control, the party has been trying to strengthen and expand its political indoctrination schools in the armed forces. The premier institution in the system is the People's Liberation Army Political Academy in Peiping. This establishment trains senior political and military officers, including some general officers, in advanced ideological subjects.

Strains Persist

Despite vigorous efforts by the party to tighten its control apparatus in the military establishment during the recent past, Peiping has apparently not achieved its goal. Since last October, representatives of various military bodies have been summoned to an unusual number of "political work" conferences in Peiping. In part, these meetings were devoted to discussions of the new political work regulations. Subsequent propaganda has held political education to be the "foremost" task at present in the armed forces. The military is repeatedly urged to see that party directives are "truly implemented."

Some of the ideas of the purged Peng Te-huai seems still to be harassing the orthodox party leaders. Officers apparently continue to argue that the "suddenness and complexity" of modern warfare renders the party committee system in the armed forces dangerously cumbersome and inefficient. The party responds that officers holding such views "estrange themselves from politics...and regard the army as a thing above class and above politics." Even in the present era of military dependence on technology, the party declares, it is possible for all military plans to be fulfilled by depending on the traditional Communist officer's "courage, self-confidence,

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fighting ability, and esprit de corps." Today's Chinese officer, it concludes, must still be a "militant revolutionary" who subordinates himself to the party and relies for inspiration and practical guidance on the military doctrines expounded in the works of Mao Tse-tung. A speech by General Hsiao Hua in February was heavily larded with exhortations to the military to "arm itself" with Mao's thinking and "look up" to the party's central committee.

Slow Pace of Modernization

Beyond resentment over the party's many-sided control mechanism, there appears to be dissatisfaction in high military circles over the slow pace in modernizing the armed forces. Although these feelings probably are not uncommon among senior officers, they have apparently gained greatest currency in the air force, which has been particularly hard hit by the curtailment of Soviet help. Some air force elements have been reported to favor a political accommodation with Moscow to gain a resumption of Soviet military aid. Two of the recent political work conferences were convened specifically for air force representatives.

Little hope is held out by Peiping for an early speed-up in armed forces modernization. It was made clear at the recent military conferences that modernization could not be put on a crash basis. Officers and men in the armed forces were urged to be "patient in anticipation of further improvement." Thus the military organization has in effect been told by the party leaders that the weapons presently available will have to suffice until China's own resources can provide it with nuclear and other advanced weapons.

Outlook

In the near future, party-army strains in China may be intensified by differences over the pace of military modernization. Resentment among professional military officers will probably also continue to be stirred by the party's determination to strengthen political controls and ideological training in the military forces. Over the long pull, the balance of party versus military influence in the army may well depend on the nature of the demands levied on the military to support the party's foreign and domestic policy. Greater participation by the armed forces could result in a larger role for military leaders in top policy-making and a growing measure of independence from party interference. 25X1

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