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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Directorate of Intelligence

23 December 1976

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM: China After the Purge

The arrest on 6 October of what the Chinese have come to call the "gang of four"--the leading leftists on the Politburo--was a widely popular move that has dramatically changed the face of Chinese politics. In the wake of this decisive act--and of another watershed, the death of Mao Tse-tung a month earlier--the new Chinese leadership is consolidating its grip on power, examining many ongoing policies, and seeking to work out new relationships among its leading members. This process is likely to take some time. Already some of the momentum imparted by the initial blow against the leftist chieftains has been dissipated. The regime has, moreover, been surprisingly slow in coming to grips with a number of pressing personnel problems, and it has appeared to be in a dither over some re-emerging political problems that had been submerged in the euphoria of early October.

Legitimacy

One central problem facing the new leadership is that of its own legitimacy. The new party chairman, Hua Kuo-feng, was elected to that post by the remaining members of the Politburo only after the four leftists had been eliminated, and the document announcing his elevation appears to acknowledge tacitly that merely a

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"rump" Politburo took the action. Despite public claims to the contrary, Hua's promotion has not yet been formally approved by the party Central Committee, and is therefore legally "unconstitutional."

Many of the acts engineered by the party's left wing in the decade since the onset of the Cultural Revolution--in particular the moves against former vice premier Teng Hsiao-ping earlier this year--were widely criticized as "illegal" by more conservative party members. It is ironic, and undoubtedly awkward for the regime, that the central act in a development that has been billed as a restoration of party order and proper procedure should itself be "illegal." There are no indications that a plenum of the party Central Committee will be held any time soon to endorse Hua's promotion, and in fact his authority at this juncture rests only on two supports. The first is an ambiguous remark attributed to Mao--"with you in charge I am at ease"--which makes no explicit reference to the chairmanship of the party; the second is raw military power.

Hua as Chairman

Currently, Hua holds three major posts: chairman of the party Central Committee, chairman of the party's Military Affairs Commission, and premier. Nominally, this gives Hua a wider range of authority than Mao ever held--the late leader was never premier. But Hua's retention of the premiership in addition to his newly acquired posts may be a sign of weakness rather than strength. Hua has been on the national stage for only five years; he was brought to Peking from a provincial post in November 1971. For much of those five years he was more of a bit player than a leading actor; he was appointed acting premier only in early February of this year. Hua consequently lacks the long-standing personal and professional ties to secondary military and civilian leaders which Chou En-lai and Teng Hsiao-ping--or for that matter the fallen "successors" Liu

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Shao-chi and Lin Piao--had forged through years of civil war and national administration.

The modest beginnings of a "personality cult" around Hua are already apparent--adulation of the new leader was particularly noticeable at a recent meeting of the National People's Congress Standing Committee and at a national conference on agricultural affairs--but much of the praise of the new chairman seems somewhat defensive, designed to respond to unspoken questions as to Hua's qualifications for his high position. Contrary to some Western news accounts, there has been little overt opposition to Hua [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] in fact much of the popularity of the move against the left seems to have rubbed off on the new chairman. But it is nevertheless true that Hua remains an unknown quantity to much of the population and even to many officials.

Much of the "personality cult" propaganda seeks to portray Hua as a conciliator in the mold of Chou En-lai; the first "quotations" attributed to the new chairman emphasize caution and sober assessment. Indeed, Hua showed great adroitness in forging an alliance with much of the military establishment in the months immediately preceding Mao's death, and the decisiveness of the move against the left in October surprised many Chinese as well as foreign observers. Curiously, however, the semi-official account of the events leading up to the arrests on 6 October attribute much of this decisiveness to Defense Minister Yeh Chien-ying rather than to Hua; in this account Hua is said to have temporized while Yeh pressed for action.

Hua's caution in this as in other matters may stem in part from his uncertainty as to the personalities and ultimate loyalty of many second- and third-echelon officials; Hua's lack of long-standing

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ties to these officials is probably an inhibiting factor in his own calculations.

Hua was apparently surprised and disturbed to discover in the weeks after Mao's death that the leftist quartet were planning to hold a plenum of the party Central Committee, presumably to strengthen their position. Leftists are a minority--a significant minority--in that body; the evidence that the "gang of four" was prepared to place its confidence in the Central Committee, however, may well have convinced Hua that they had made some headway in "winning over" additional members of the committee to their side. Until he and his closest allies can fully identify and weed out convinced leftist sympathizers among its members, they are unlikely to convene a Central Committee plenum to ratify the actions of 6-7 October. Indeed, as time passes the odds rise that rather than hold a plenum, the regime may convene a party congress to elect a new central committee, thus obviating the problem.

The Leftists

In fact, the arrest of the "gang of four"--Mao's widow Chiang Ching, former party vice chairman Wang Hung-wen, former vice premier Chang Chun-chiao, and chief propagandist Yao Wen-yuan--has eliminated the left wing of the party as a threat to its current leaders, but it has not eliminated the leftist movement as a problem for the regime. At least a fourth of the 30-million-strong party retains leftist sympathies; this proportion is probably higher at the lower levels of the party machine and among the young people who make up the bulk of recent inductees into the party. Even a widespread and fairly indiscriminate purge would remove only a fraction of this huge mass of leftist sympathizers.

The weeding-out process, however, is well under way, both in Peking and in the provinces. Easily

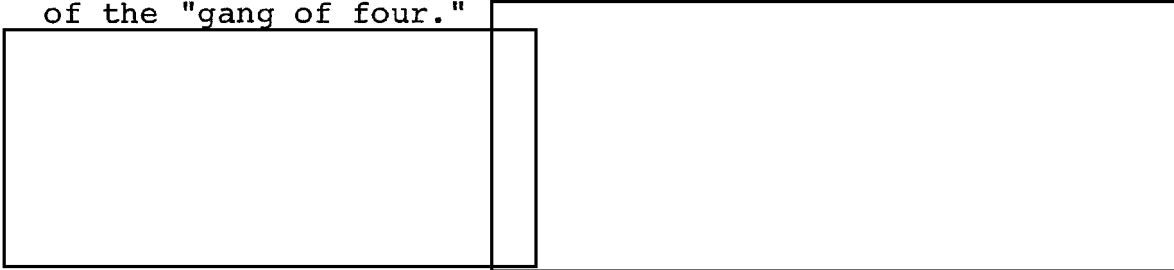
identified second-echelon leftist leaders have probably already been eliminated, and in recent weeks provincial party leaders, newspapers, and radio broadcasts have begun to echo military propaganda organs in calling for a widespread and uninhibited purge of the "agents" of the "gang of four." There has been no large-scale resistance to the actions against the leftists, although in the immediate aftermath of the arrest of the "gang of four" the situation was tense in Shanghai, the home base of three of the leftist quartet, and perhaps in Paoting, Hupeh Province, 100 miles from Peking.

While the initial strike against the leftist leaders was accomplished with relative ease, factionalism does persist in many provinces. In almost all cases the factional alignments date back to the chaotic days of the Cultural Revolution when fights over power and position at the provincial and lower levels were at their height. As provincial leaders, almost all of whom are veteran cadre who were "rehabilitated" in the early 1970s, are endorsed and gradually given greater local authority by the central leaders, old scores are bound to be paid off as veteran aparachiks deal roughly with their leftist tormenters who managed temporarily to purge them at the height of the Cultural Revolution.

The beginning of this process accounts for the strident tone already observable in the provincial media. But however brutal the repression, the provincial leaders are unlikely to eliminate the leftist factions entirely. Rather, they are likely merely to drive the leftist groupings into a largely inactive, semi-clandestine status analogous to the situation which existed in the 1970-73 period, when the reaction to the excesses of the Cultural Revolution was at its height.

Indeed, the factional problem in the provinces-- that is, conflict among two or more relatively powerful

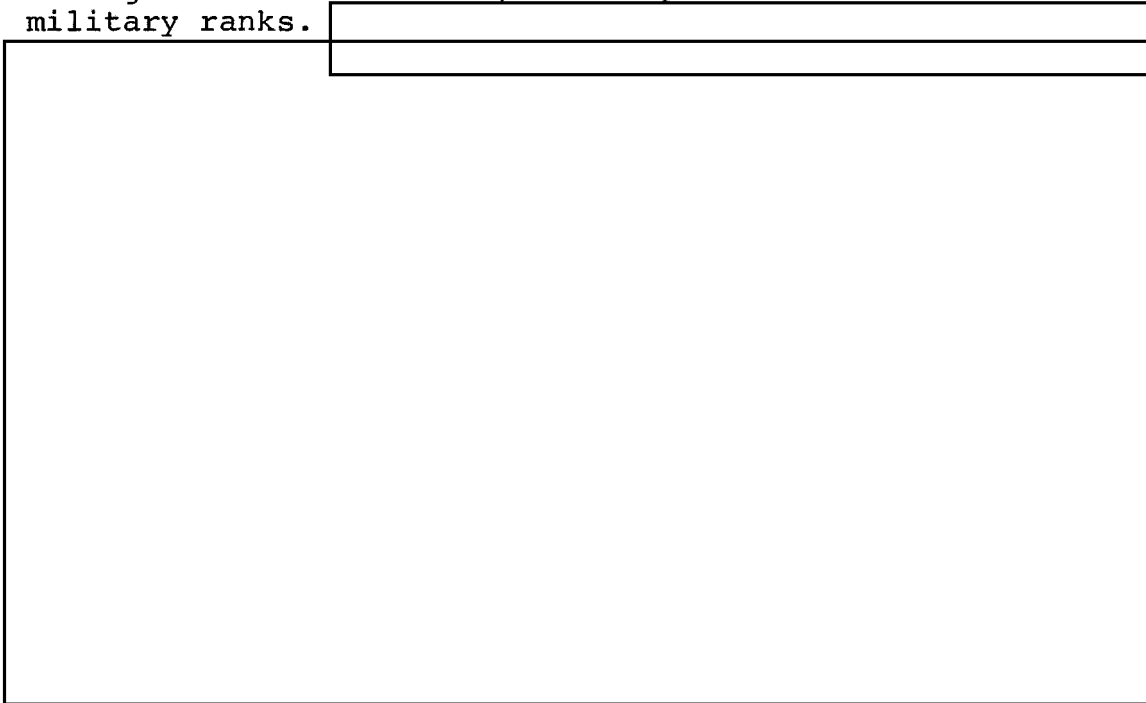
groupings as distinguished from the use of unbridled political power to suppress dissident cliques--is probably already in the decline. Most of the references to factional troubles which have recently appeared in the provincial media and have been replayed in the Western press describe the situation which obtained last summer--before Mao's death and the arrest of the "gang of four."



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A more delicate problem for the new leaders in Peking is that of rooting out suspected leftists from military ranks.



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Hua in fact almost certainly sees a danger in allowing the purge of the left to get out of hand. His cautious, temporizing style suggests that he was responsible for an authoritative editorial in the *People's Daily* last month which called for limiting the purge of the leftists to ringleaders who were deeply involved with the "gang of four"--and which contrasted sharply with much more bloodthirsty calls to actions which were then appearing in military-controlled publications. Given the long-standing, deep-seated political passions which have been unslaked since the Cultural Revolution, however, it is unlikely that the purge can easily be controlled. Indeed, the most recent issue of the party's theoretical journal, *Red Flag*, contains an article which in its unbridled and indiscriminate attack on the left closely parallels those which have been appearing in the military journals.

Hua's aim--and that of other like-minded leaders in Peking--seems to be to reduce the possibility that a wholesale and indiscriminate purge of suspected leftists will build up such resentment among the numerous "losers" in the political readjustment now under way that new factional trouble, in the provinces and in Peking, would be all but inevitable. China's political history over the past 15 years strongly suggests that this fear is a very sensible one. The current emphasis on experience and on tested leaders which has been particularly apparent in military publications, for example, has almost certainly alienated considerable sections of China's youth, who see their hopes for succeeding to positions of real political responsibility fading into the distant future.

In fact, the new leaders in Peking seem quite defensive about some aspects of the current political evolution. They appear to recognize that the outright elimination of the leftist leaders on the Politburo coupled with the strong emphasis on order, production, discipline, and experience leaves them vulnerable to

the charge that "revisionism" has triumphed in China

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In mid-November in particular the central media went to some lengths to issue reassurances--presumably meant for the large numbers of lower level cadres whose sympathies are vaguely leftist but who have no close and direct ties to the "gang of four"--that the country has not taken a sharp turn to the right and that the Cultural Revolution has not been repudiated wholesale.

Policy Review

Despite these reassurances, however, major changes have already occurred in areas where the leftists were particularly strong in the past decade--for example, in the fields of propaganda, culture, and education. The rigid cultural orthodoxy imposed by Chiang Ching has been somewhat relaxed, and writers and artists who had been criticized by the "empress" are now being praised for the correctness of their political outlook. Wholesale changes have been made in the upper levels of the propaganda machine, and the purge is now probably extending down into the lower reaches of this bureaucratic sector. A new emphasis on discipline and "book learning" in the classroom seems to be under way, and preparations are being made for greater reliance on examinations as a means of selecting candidates for university-level education. Moreover, apart from the drumfire against the "gang of four," which is likely to go on for some time, the new authorities seem anxious to avoid--at least for the time being--a new series of the incessant campaigns that have roiled China's political waters for more than a decade.

Even more striking is the great emphasis which the central authorities are placing on economic construction, industrial production, and orderly planning.

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They claim with considerable justification that the leftist quartet undermined and dissipated efforts along these lines in the first nine months of 1976.

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They have cited the destruction caused by the earthquakes of last summer, balance of payments problems, and the competing pressures of foreign exports against domestic consumption as difficulties which cannot easily be assessed or resolved. A major review of China's economic situation is apparently under way; a new five-year plan which was to begin this year is being revised and will be introduced only next year.

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Many of the difficulties now being mentioned by the economic experts were precisely the points raised by the leftist leaders to buttress their attacks on "revisionist" policies earlier this year. The persistence of these problems even in changed political circumstances underlines the basic structural problems China faces in building a modern economy as well as the relatively narrow economic margin within which any leadership group in Peking must work in achieving this end. Nevertheless, the context in which these basic problems are being viewed has changed remarkably. Lip service is still paid to the notion that "politics are in command," but actual emphasis is being placed on pragmatism, discipline, and expertise. An ambitious program of agricultural mechanization, with which

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both Hua Kuo-feng and Teng Hsiao-ping are personally identified, is again being pressed. The idea of "self-reliance" has not been abandoned, but renewed emphasis has been placed on the importation of foreign technology as a means of speeding the transition to a modern economy. This approach, which was stressed with even greater vigor in 1975 than it is at present, languished following the fall of Teng last spring.

In fact, despite a somewhat greater emphasis on realism and caution, the entire economic program of Peking's current leaders is hardly distinguishable from that of Teng, who was being attacked viciously for his "capitalist-road" mentality by the leftists before they were purged. The attacks on Teng have now been narrowed to his alleged inability to recognize the importance of "class struggle"--a criticism attributed directly to Mao--and he has not been mentioned in any context by China's top leaders or by the central media since the end of November.

The Teng Problem

In fact, there is strong sentiment within the party apparatus and among some elements of the military leadership to "rehabilitate" Teng once again--he was returned to prominence in 1973 after an initial purge in the early stages of the Cultural Revolution--on the ground that the charges against him were trumped up or distorted by the leftist quartet, that Mao had intended to criticize but not to purge him, and that his removal from office in April was "illegal." Teng is widely admired for his opposition to and contempt for the leftist leaders, whose political power he attempted to circumscribe, with some success, in 1975.

An investigation into the origins of the riot in Tienanmen Square in early April--the occasion of Teng's downfall--is now under way under the auspices of Defense Minister Yeh Chien-ying. This investigation will almost certainly clear Teng of any responsibility for the riot, placing the blame on the

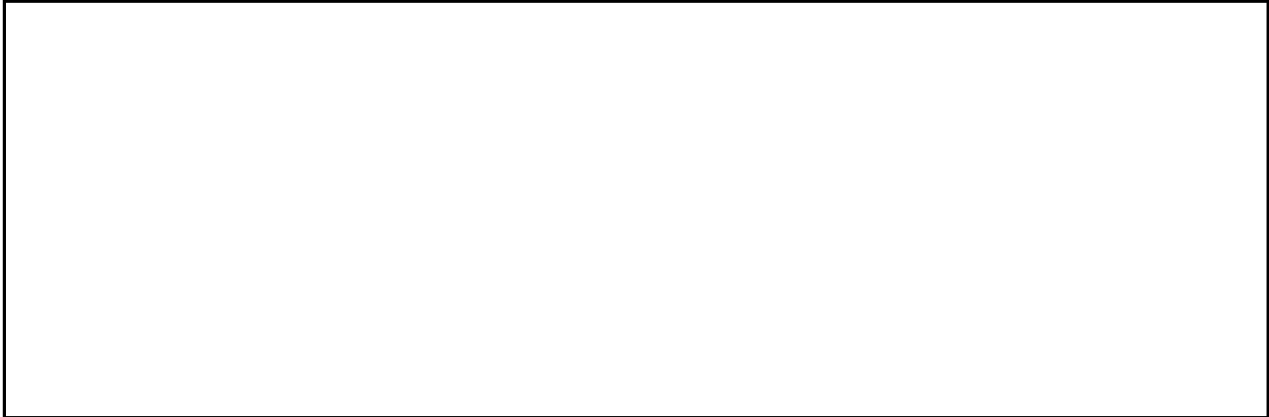
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"gang of four." Since the announcement of Teng's removal from office explicitly linked his fall with instigation of the riot, his second "rehabilitation" is probably inevitable. He is already rumored to be an "adviser" to Hua Kuo-feng.

Teng's "rehabilitation," however, presents a number of problems for the new leadership in Peking and for Hua Kuo-feng in particular. If Teng's removal from office is declared to have been illegal, then it would seem to follow that a determination to this effect would automatically restore him to the posts he held before his latest fall--first vice premier, member of the Politburo Standing Committee, and chief of staff of the PLA. These are positions of great power, and it might be easy to make the argument that in them Teng would once more give free rein to his well-known tendency toward abrasiveness and autocratic decision-making.

Still more important are the direct consequences to Hua Kuo-feng of Teng's return to power. Hua has in effect stepped into Teng's shoes as party and government leader in succession to Mao and Chou En-lai. Teng's return to office would underline that fact as well as provide a constant reminder that Teng, not Hua, was Chou En-lai's choice for the top posts in party and state. In short, a resurgent Teng would be a natural rival to Hua, who might additionally hope to avoid the impression that he was a captive of the right wing of the party, where Teng's greatest support seems to lie.

Hua Kuo-feng is not the only Chinese leader who may well have qualms about the restoration of Teng Hsiao-ping to positions of real authority. Continuing criticism of Teng in at least a few provinces suggests that several provincial leaders may have doubts about the wisdom of entrusting considerable power to the abrasive Teng.



Additionally, Peking party boss Wu Te, who was nominally in charge of the suppression of the Tienanmen riot, might suspect that a complete clearing of Teng would involve him in political difficulties. Above all Vice Premier Li Hsien-nien, formerly a strong supporter of Teng, may now have reservations about the return of the former leader to high office, since Li himself is now the obvious candidate for the premier's job in succession to Hua. None of these leaders is likely to oppose a nominal "rehabilitation" of Teng Hsiao-ping; it is his restoration to high office that might be troubling to them.

On the other hand, Teng retains formidable assets. Most second- and third-echelon party leaders have long-standing ties to Teng, and they would probably feel more secure in their own posts if Teng were again an official of consequence. Hsu Shih-yu, a Politburo member and the powerful commander of the Canton Military Region, appears to be an uncompromising supporter of the former vice premier. Most importantly, Defense Minister Yeh Chien-ying seems to be firmly in Teng's corner, as he has been all year. Indeed, Yeh's well-known devotion to the memory of his close friend and colleague Chou En-lai might impel him to demand that

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Teng not only be restored to office, but that he be made premier in accordance with Chou's wishes. It is possible--although the evidence is scanty--that some such demand is the principal reason Li Hsien-nien has not formally been named premier despite frequent rumors that this move was about to be made. In fact, the longer the regime delays taking this step the greater the odds that Teng becomes a viable candidate for the premier's post.

Musical Chairs

The Teng Hsiao-ping problem and the issue of the premiership is the most intractable but certainly not the only major personnel problem facing the new leadership. The post of chairman of the National People's Congress--China's equivalent to head of state--has been vacant since the death of Chu Te last summer. In October wall posters [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] claimed that Yeh Chien-ying would assume this post, with Peking Military Region Commander Chen Hsi-lien succeeding him as defense minister and Li Hsien-nien taking the premier's portfolio. This scenario was quickly denied by Foreign Ministry spokesmen in Peking, and the posters seemed to be a trial balloon floated on behalf of the ambitious Chen Hsi-lien.

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A more recent and persistent rumor claims that the chairmanship of the National People's Congress will be assigned to Peking party boss Wu Te, an obvious and leading candidate for the job, while Chen would be consoled with the post of minister of security--yet another job now nominally filled by Hua Kuo-feng. In this reading Yeh would remain in place as defense minister, Li Hsien-nien would become premier, and Teng Hsiao-ping would become "adviser" to Hua Kuo-feng, presumably as a first step to eventual resumption of his duties as first vice premier. This in fact is a logical and likely scenario, but bargaining over the various posts involved is probably still under way.

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The Military Problem

In fact the relationship between leading military and civilian authorities will be the central factor in the Chinese political equation for some time to come. Hua Kuo-feng's personal relationship

with leading military figures may well shape the immediate course of the political evolution now under way, but the issue certainly transcends purely personal considerations of this sort.

As Mao's health began rapidly to fail last summer, Hua recognized that he would need military support in the almost inevitable showdown with the "gang of four." Adroitly, he strongly praised the army for its efforts in relief work following last summer's earthquakes. Hua himself was deeply involved in the relief effort, and by simultaneously stressing the army's "devotion to duty" and identifying himself with its fortunes he formed a tacit alliance that was probably no less important than Adolf Hitler's more explicit pact with the German General Staff just before the death of President Hindenberg. Implicit in this alliance was the thought that neither party could afford to see the "gang of four" triumph.

The military establishment, for its part, had been to a greater or lesser degree in the political doghouse since former defense minister Lin Piao's attempted "coup" in late 1971. Hua's words of praise were the strongest endorsement of the military establishment since that event. Most top military leaders, moreover, distrusted and in many cases strongly disliked the leftist quartet--a mutual antipathy that dated back to the Cultural Revolution. Many--and Yeh Chien-ying in particular--apparently believed that Hua, as premier and party first vice chairman, was the logical centerpiece in any move to block a leftist grab for power after Mao's death--and even more importantly, the source of legitimacy for any pre-emptive move against the "gang of four."

The action taken against the leading leftists was almost certainly pre-emptive. The military not

only supplied the muscle that ensured its success but also appears to have had a major voice in urging that the action be taken. As a result of its central role in the events of early October, the military establishment is once again at the center of the political stage. It is likely to demand political and institutional rewards for its "loyalty" in a period of crisis.

Signs that the military will not be shy in making such demands are already evident. Major announcements and decisions are being made in the name of the party's Military Affairs Commission as well as those of the highest party and government organs. Provincial and central media continue to be unstinting in their praise of the army. And military-controlled journals are not only speaking with great authority but have taken the lead in demanding a wide and thorough-going purge of leftists wherever found, in calling for greater discipline, and in urging an increase in industrial production.

Most extraordinary of all is the special attention being accorded Yeh Chien-ying. Adulation and a "cult of personality" are still being reserved for Hua Kuo-feng alone (and for the deceased Mao and Chou En-lai), but Yeh is being treated with a deference--even a reverence--that actually rivals that accorded to Hua. Yeh's picture is frequently coupled with that of Hua and on public occasions he receives almost equal billing with Hua. This special treatment was never accorded to Chou En-lai; it is reminiscent of that given to Lin Piao in his heyday as Mao's "successor."

At least at this point, however, the military does not seem to be playing a "usurper's" role. The military journals have been adamant in stressing the primacy of the party in all matters and in

calling for military subordination to the highest party organs; this is in sharp contrast to the period of army ascendancy in the late 1960s, when the role of the party was all but ignored. Moreover, the military journals themselves have taken the lead in promoting Hua Kuo-feng's "cult of personality." Until recently they alone were lavish in their praise of Hua as an individual.

It is of course possible that all this merely represents an attempt on the part of the military establishment to promote Hua--and through him the party he heads--as a "front" for virtual military rule.

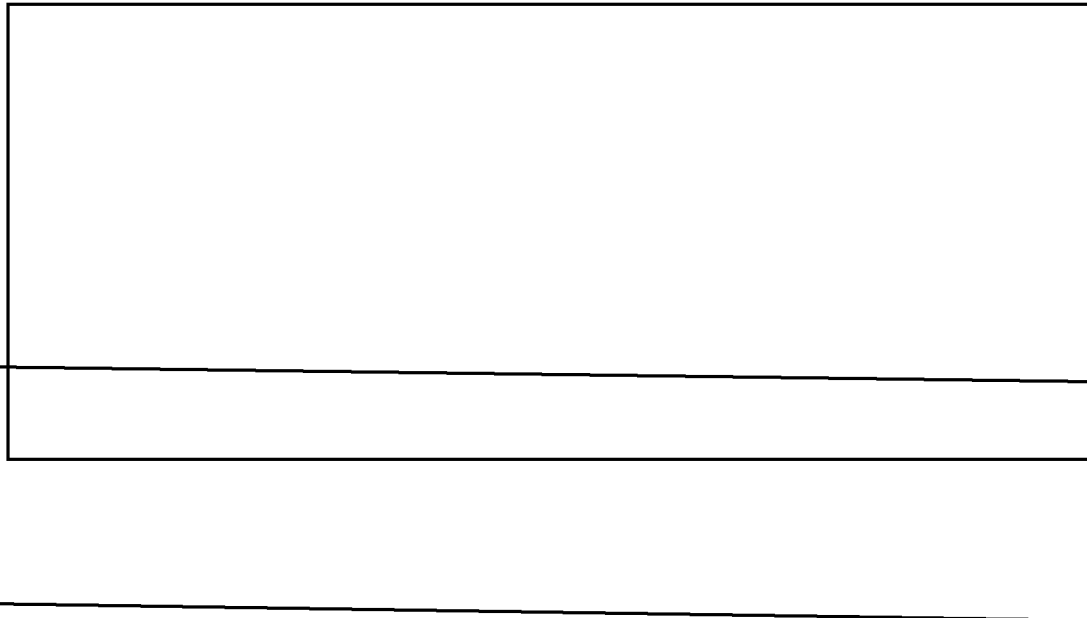
On the contrary, it is far more likely that the current military stress on the primacy of the party and on the individual importance of Hua Kuo-feng can be attributed to Yeh Chien-ying's sense of what is necessary in China's present political circumstances. By dint of his long service at the upper levels of the party as well as the military bureaucracy, Yeh appears to possess a "statesmanlike" view of political necessity and a loyalty to party shiboleths rather than a parochial and narrowly military outlook.

Indeed, there is some evidence that rather than simply dictating to the party--and to Hua--the military establishment has not always found it easy to get its own way even on matters of considerable importance to it. Last month's *People's Daily* editorial which called for a narrow and limited purge of leftists contrasted sharply with the much more strident calls for a broad purge then being trumpeted by the military journals. If Hua himself was primarily responsible for the editorial, which seems likely, he is certainly not an



army puppet. Nevertheless, it is probably true that at this juncture he needs the military establishment even more than it needs him.

This point can hardly have been lost on civilian party cadre, and it is probably worrying to them. The civilian--and particularly the party--bureaucracy has spent much of the past five years wresting political power away from the military, which inherited administrative responsibility for running the country from the shattered party apparatus during the Cultural Revolution. It will almost certainly be unwilling to see its political authority eroded again, and its concerns on this score coupled with increasing military assertiveness are likely to lead to renewed tensions between the civilian authorities and the military establishment.



Although in present circumstances potential civilian-military political rivalry in the provinces can probably be contained, a different set



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of tensions is likely to persist at the national level. Not only is the military establishment likely to press its political views forcefully on the civilians, but the PLA is also almost certain to demand a greater slice of China's limited budget to build up its partially obsolescent military arsenal. Arguments on this score have persisted at least since the fall of Lin Piao, and they are unlikely to die away now that the military's political clout has obviously increased. Military journals are already claiming that the "gang of four" sabotaged Teng Hsiao-ping's plans for a leaner but better equipped military force. Many of the civilians in Peking's current leadership, however, are economic administrators who advocate balanced economic growth without undue emphasis on military hardware.

The emphasis these economic officials are currently placing on the weakness of the Chinese economy and on the limitations of China's resources could be related to pressures from the PLA for greater military spending.

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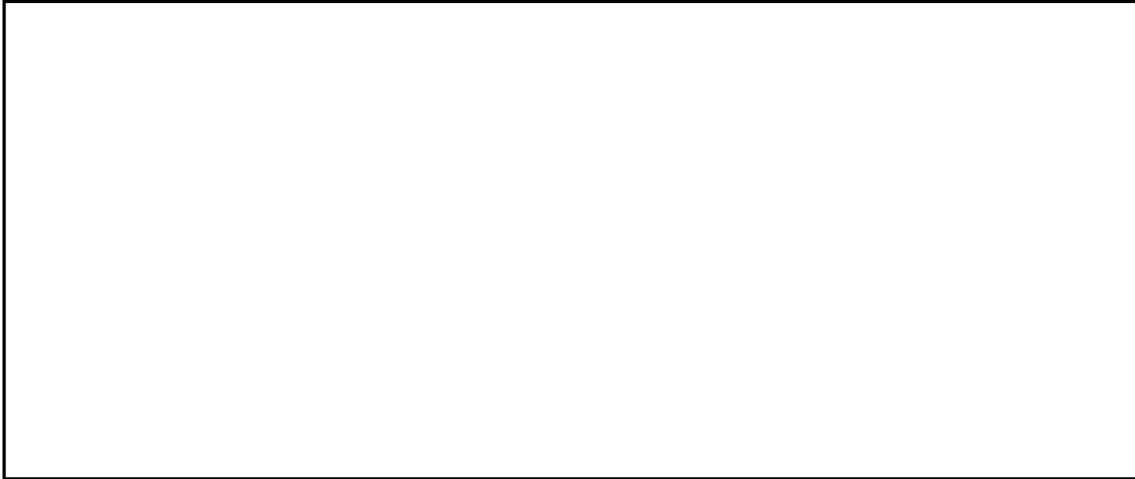
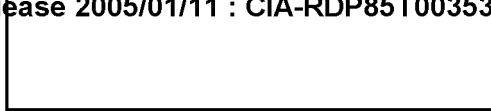
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That establishment, however, is not a monolith, and this fact probably gives Hua Kuo-feng and other top civilian leaders some room for maneuver as well as cause for additional concern. Rivalries have long persisted among military leaders, and these rivalries are not likely to vanish overnight.

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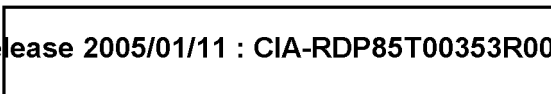
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In any event, Hua is likely to play off various groupings within the military against each other, thereby hoping to keep the army under control. This is a potentially fruitful but somewhat dangerous game. Teng Hsiao-ping appeared to play it in 1975, but his machinations may have cost him the support of Chen Hsi-lien at the crucial moment when succession to the premiership was at stake.

An Uncertain Future

This amalgam of troubling problems and unfinished business will not be mastered easily. With the elimination of the leftist quartet from the Politburo the potential for leadership instability has diminished dramatically but has not disappeared. Those towering figures Mao Tse-tung and Chou En-lai are gone, and Hua Kuo-feng's staying power is still untested. Low-level leftist resentment against the turn of political events persists, and rightist pressures to go further in the direction of "rationalization" than is politically expedient remain strong. Potentially destabilizing rivalry between Hua Kuo-feng and Teng Hsiao-ping or, more importantly, between the civilian and military bureaucracies looms in the background. The new leaders have not



yet apportioned power among themselves and antagonisms among military leaders remain a possibility. Underlying economic and demographic problems persist, and although they are likely to be tackled energetically, they cannot be easily solved. Moreover, the regime has not yet addressed such potentially troublesome problems of foreign policy as the relationship with the US and the USSR; either or both could be the source of bitter dispute.

From the point of view of the Chinese leadership, the current situation is probably more hopeful than any in the recent past. The present lack of momentum in domestic affairs, however, suggests that as old problems are fading, new ones are coming to the fore. Indeed, Chinese politics seem to be a perfect demonstration of the Hegelian dialectic: the solution to each major crisis bears within it the seeds of new, and perhaps equally complex, disputes.

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