

NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

SECRET

INFORMATION

March 3, 1976

MEMORANDUM FOR BRENT SCOWCROFT

FROM: Richard H. Solomon *RHS*

SUBJECT: Peking's Current Political Instability and Its
Import for U.S. - PRC Relations

Recent developments in the Peking political scene -- the unexpected announcement that a relatively unknown leader, Hua Kuo-feng (rather than Vice Premier Teng Hsiao-p'ing), has been appointed as acting Premier; the release in December of a long-detained Soviet helicopter crew; and the February visit to China of former President Nixon -- reflect some interesting developments in the tensions within the leadership of the People's Republic of China which have been evident in a general way since 1970. The following analysis places the political turmoil now apparent in the Chinese capital, and signs of some uncertainty in Peking's foreign policy orientation, in the context of these longer term trends. It also suggests some implications of these recent developments for the course of U.S. - PRC relations in the year ahead.

The study reaches the following major conclusions:

-- Teng Hsiao-p'ing, groomed for the Premiership since 1973 by Mao and Chou but under continuing criticism from Party radicals, was blocked in gaining the Premiership in January because he had alienated key military leaders who have become temporary allies of the Party's radical faction.

-- The outcome of the current conflict in Peking is indeterminate, but the most likely developments are either, (a) once the radicals have brought about Teng Hsiao-p'ing's demise they will draw back and work within the coalition leadership which Chou En-lai built up over the past several years, or (b) the radicals will overplay their attack on Teng and other rehabilitated leaders, alienate their temporary allies,

ON-FILE NSC RELEASE INSTRUCTIONS APPLY

MORI/CDF C03420811

SECRET

SECRET

2

and produce a counterattack that will lead to their own fall. It seems doubtful that the Party's leftist faction can dominate the Peking political scene for a sustained period.

-- Mao Tse-tung's role in the current leadership dispute is ambiguous, probably because the Chairman is not in full control of the situation. He has been aloof from various radical leaders in recent years, and thus far has not given overt support for their attack on Teng. He probably withdrew his backing from the Vice Premier when he was unable to command sufficient support from the Politburo for the Premiership, and he appears to have given at least tentative support to Hua Kuo-feng. Mao, however, has his differences with the leftist faction and the military and may be playing a rather passive role in the current conflict. His physical frailty, difficulty in speaking, and personal isolation (heightened by the death of his longtime associate Chou En-lai) increasingly weaken him as an active leadership force. Mao's death in the next year or two could compound the present instability in the leadership.

-- The release of the Soviet helicopter crew last December, and the recent visit to China of former President Nixon, are indicators of political cross-currents on foreign policy issues. The military and some others in Peking may be urging a less hostile orientation toward the Soviets and greater aloofness from the U.S. Mao, however, remains determined to keep the Russians at a distance and strengthen relations with a U.S. that will actively counterweight the Soviets abroad.

-- There is very little the U.S. can do to influence the PRC as the current leadership feud plays itself out. We are passive observers of that situation, as were the Chinese as they watched the unfolding of Watergate. We are most likely to hold the Chinese to their foreign policy course of dealing with us if we can reassert a more active foreign policy that combines efforts to reach agreements that serve our interests with both Moscow and Peking, and at the same time demonstrate a willingness to stand up to Soviet pressures. Completion of normalization of U.S.- PRC relations might make the relationship less vulnerable to criticism in China, but such a move would invite contempt rather than respect if taken from a position of weakness in foreign affairs, and with an attitude of beseeching China to hold to its "American tilt."

SECRET

SECRET

3

Has a Coalition of Party Radicals and Military Leaders Upset
Chou En-lai's Succession Plans?

By all evidence available to the USG, Chairman Mao and Premier Chou En-lai personally led the process of rehabilitating Teng Hsiao-p'ing -- who had been purged in the spring of 1967 during the Cultural Revolution -- and then gradually prepared him to assume the Premiership. Teng first reappeared in April of 1973, not long after the Chinese leadership had knowledge of Chou En-lai's illness with cancer. Teng's rehabilitation was not only part of a purposeful effort to prepare a smooth succession to Chou's leadership position, but more generally to accelerate the pace of rebuilding orderly processes of political and economic administration within the PRC.

The Chinese Communist Party, and the organs of governmental administration, had been destroyed during the Cultural Revolution of the late 1960s when Chairman Mao, using a coalition of Party radicals and military leaders headed by Defense Minister Lin Piao, removed from power Party and state leaders opposed to his policies. By late 1968, however, Mao and other leaders who had weathered the Cultural Revolution purge came to feel that the chaos of the preceding three years had produced too much domestic social turmoil and economic stagnation. They were concerned, moreover, that China was vulnerable to a number of developments on the international scene -- particularly the growing aggressiveness of the Soviet Union, as had been demonstrated by Moscow's invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 and the deployment of a major military force on China's northern frontier. Senior PRC leaders also feared that in view of their advanced age, a disorderly succession crisis in Peking would hold serious temptations for the Russians, who have a long record of seeking to manipulate China's internal politics to their own advantage.

In this context, Mao and Chou En-lai initiated in 1969 what has proven to be a protracted and unstable process of realigning China's foreign policy, rebuilding a Party and governmental system capable of giving the PRC coherent political leadership, heightening the pace of economic growth, and strengthening China's national security against pressures from the Soviet Union. Resistance to this policy trend has come primarily from the two groups who acquired power during the Cultural Revolution: the military; and Party radicals, symbolically led by Mao's own wife, Chiang Ch'ing.

SECRET

SECRET

4

The initial breakthrough in this process for Mao and Chou came in the summer of 1970 when the Chairman and Premier succeeded in purging one of the major leaders of the Cultural Revolution's radical faction, Ch'en Po-ta. This was the first real weakening of the radical-military political coalition which had grown beyond the Chairman's control. A second major development occurred in the same period (the summer of 1970) when Defense Minister Lin Piao was blocked in his effort to establish himself as Chief of State of the PRC. Mao had been trying to get Lin and the military out of politics and back into defense activities well before the spring and summer of 1969, when several serious border clashes with the Soviet Union transformed the Sino-Soviet political feud into a military confrontation. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Mao might well have provoked them in order to heighten attention both worldwide and within China to the Soviet menace, and to create pressure on the Chinese army for a return to purely military pursuits.

After the purge of the summer of 1970, Mao and Chou moved to establish contact with the Nixon administration, which had been signalling its interest in an authoritative dialogue with the PRC since 1969. They also kept political pressure on Lin Piao, which stimulated the Defense Minister to plot a coup against the Chairman. It was the discovery of this plotting which led to Lin Piao's surprise flight to Mongolia in September, 1971, a "defection" which was aborted when Lin's plane ran out of fuel and crashed, killing all aboard.

Subsequent to the Lin affair -- throughout 1972 and during the first half of 1973 -- Mao and Chou pressed their domestic and foreign policy lines without much opposition. President Nixon's visit to Peking in February, 1972, and China's normalization of relations with Japan in September, "tilted" Peking's international orientation toward the West.

Domestically, the Chairman and Premier proceeded to rebuild the Party organization and restaff governmental positions which had been inactive since the late 1960s. This effort at institutionalization was symbolized by the convening of the Tenth Party Congress in the late summer of 1973, and the subsequent holding of a National People's Congress (in January, 1975).

SECRET

SECRET

5

In the month preceding the 1973 Party Congress, however, signs of overt opposition to the "centrist" political coalition around Premier Chou became evident in China's national media. There were attacks on Chou's rationalized educational policy; and certain military leaders seemed to side with the Party's leftist faction. There was veiled criticism of the policy of bringing back to office officials purged during the Cultural Revolution (such as Teng Hsiao-p'ing, who had reappeared in public several months earlier). It appeared that Party radicals and military leaders might be making common cause in a behind-the-scenes effort to prevent Mao and Chou from further eroding their positions.

In foreign affairs, the summer of 1973 also saw the first signs of pressure against our new relationship with the PRC: Chinese cultural and scientific delegations which had visited the U.S. were criticized upon their return for being too favorably impressed with what they had seen in America. The Foreign Ministry expressed opposition to the Marine guards at our Liaison Office (ultimately expelling them in April, 1974). In the wake of the Congressional cut-off of funds for the Cambodian bombing operation, the Chinese reneged on their offer to assist us in working out a negotiated resolution of the Cambodian conflict; and they forced a postponement of Secretary Kissinger's planned August, 1973 trip to Peking. [redacted]

25X1

[redacted] the Nixon Administration's detente negotiations with the Soviets -- particularly the treaty on prevention of nuclear war -- was generating growing concern within the Chinese leadership (as we knew privately from protests which Peking passed to us through secret diplomatic contacts).

25X1

In short, during the second half of 1973 signs of dissent in China's political debate on both domestic and foreign policy issues began to surface. These indications of contention within the top leadership have grown in intensity over the subsequent three years in the context of a series of campaigns of criticism of "Lin Piao and Confucius," attacks on one of Mao's favorite novels and on Chou En-lai's educational policy, and in organizational preparations for the Tenth Party Congress and the National People's Congress. The basic dynamic of this situation seems to have been that the two groups within the constellation of political forces around the Premier which were being deprived of political power -- the Party radicals, and the military -- were invoking various domestic and foreign policy issues to defend their positions:

SECRET

SECRET

6

-- The radical faction attacked educational policy, the liberalization of culture and the arts, and heightened interaction between the PRC and the outside world in the areas of human contact and trade. They criticized a de-politicized program of economic development and abandonment of the policy of "self-reliance" for the PRC in economic and defense matters. They criticized the Mao/Chou policy of rehabilitating senior officials purged during the Cultural Revolution.

-- The military (along with some leaders within the Foreign Ministry) began to criticize Mao's policy of tilting toward the U.S., particularly as the various Soviet/American negotiations associated with "detente" made it appear that the U.S. might be "colluding" rather than "contending" with China's major security threat, and as Congress rendered the Administration increasingly passive in foreign affairs.

At certain points in time it appeared that the Party radicals and military might successfully challenge the Mao/Chou policy line by re-allying themselves to prevent the further erosion of their power positions. In the summer of 1973, just before the Tenth Party Congress, Shenyang Military Region Commander Chen Hsi-lien seemed to support radical attacks on education policy; and in the wake of China's military action against the Paracel Islands in early 1974, Mao's wife seemed to bid for support from the military. These two groups are not "natural" allies by general political orientation, however, and each time they appeared to move toward each other to protect their respective positions the moderate coalition apparently prevented their coalescence.

In late 1973 the Military Region Commanders were reshuffled to new territorial commands in a move -- brokered by Teng Hsiao-p'ing -- which cut off these powerful men from long-held organizational bases. Teng seemed to have the respect of the military, although his active role in reshuffling the territorial commanders may have generated some grievances against him.

In late 1974 Teng was made Chief of Staff of the Army, and Party official Chang Ch'un-ch'iao was appointed political commissar, further strengthening civilian control over the military (although perhaps reinforcing

SECRET

SECRET

7

a political tension between Teng and Chang). Both Teng and Chang delivered major speeches to the National People's Congress in January, 1975. Teng's statement contained a thinly veiled criticism of the Cultural Revolution, while Chang defended the "newborn things of socialism" which had grown from the purge of the 1960s. Teng probably laid some of the groundwork for his current political vulnerability in his critical remarks to the Congress. In contrast, Chang's defense of the radicals' position may have been evidence of some political strain between himself and Teng that has worked to the Vice Premier's detriment in the current conflict.

In the summer of 1975 Teng and Defense Minister Yeh Chien-ying convened a two-month long session of the Party's Military Affairs Commission which produced decisions to streamline and heighten the modernization of China's military services -- developments designed to further professionalize the army, and perhaps "buy" their support through the infusion of higher levels of funding for modern weapons systems. Moreover, in the fall of 1975 Teng moved a long-time colleague from Szechuan Province to assume the role of commander of the Peking Military Region and thus assure the security of "his" capital (although in the process displacing Chen Hsi-lien, who had held that position since the command shuffle of late 1973).

In sum, by late 1975 all evidence was that Teng Hsiao-p'ing was moving successfully to consolidate his political position, and was seeking to back it up with support from China's military. At the same time, there was continuing if muted evidence of opposition to this trend of events from Party radicals. In late August they provoked a short-lived polemic on the issue of granting "amnesty" to renegade officials (apparently another indirect attack on Teng and others who the Vice Premier was restoring to positions of responsibility, such as former Chief of Staff Lo Jui-ch'ing -- also a purge victim of the Cultural Revolution -- who reappeared in early August). Yet each time the political left tried to build pressure against Teng through a public criticism campaign, the Chou-Teng coalition was able to contain the attack.

This pattern began to repeat itself in November, 1975 with renewed criticism in the universities of a moderate education policy. A debate surfaced, but then seemed to recede as the target of the attack, Chou En-lai's Minister of Education, made a pro-forma self-criticism. At the turn of the

SECRET

SECRET

8

year, however, the new year's day editorial launched a sharply worded defense of the Cultural Revolution and attacked those who might seek revenge for the purges of the late 1960s. And then on January 8 Chou En-lai died, creating a fundamentally changed decision-making problem for the Chinese leadership. Not only did they have to choose a replacement for the Premier, but as well fill three major positions on the Politburo Standing Committee vacated by the deaths of Chou and two other senior leaders in 1975. As the Politburo met in the second half of January to vote on these positions, Teng Hsiao-p'ing -- by all evidence in a strong, but challenged position for the Premiership -- was blocked.

What happened? Our best estimate is that the Party's radical faction, a constant source of resistance to Teng's rehabilitation over the preceding three or four years, finally gained allies in its effort to prevent the man they had purged in 1967 from consolidating his position -- and thus establishing himself in a role where eventually he might wreak vengeance on them for their treatment of him during the Cultural Revolution. We believe Teng may have given the radicals temporary allies by alienating key people in the senior military establishment -- particularly Chen Hsi-lien (now rumored to be acting Defense Minister in place of the elderly and infirm Yeh Chien-ying). In addition, Party leader Chang Ch'un-ch'iao may have withdrawn support from Teng (if he ever backed him) -- particularly in a situation where there was no longer the ameliorating presence of Chou En-lai, who had overseen Teng's rehabilitation and constructed before his death a loose coalition of leaders composed of rehabilitated and Cultural Revolution Party officials, senior military commanders, and senior government cadre.

The relatively youthful (mid-fifties) Hunan official Hua Kuo-feng -- Politburo member, Minister of Security and of Agriculture -- seems to have been chosen as a compromise candidate for the Premiership. He is not, however, a clear favorite of the radicals, having been attacked in Peking wallposters during 1974 for having suppressed leftist factions in Hunan Province during his tenure there as Chairman of the Provincial Revolutionary Committee. More importantly, the senior leadership has as yet been unable to agree on appointments to the three vacancies on the Politburo Standing Committee (or four, if Teng Hsiao-p'ing has now lost this position).

SECRET

SECRET

9

Teng's fate remains uncertain. He is under increasing attack in the national media and has been vilified by name in some campus wall posters, but we have no evidence at this time that the Vice Premier has lost his key Party, government, or military positions. I believe that it is now most unlikely that Teng can regain the Premiership or even retain his State or military responsibilities. The key question is whether the radicals will rest content with Teng's demise, or whether they will press their attack against numerous other officials rehabilitated since 1973 by Chou En-lai.

Peking in a Period of Political Turmoil

The evolution of Peking's immediate political situation is indeterminate. A February 17 People's Daily article explicitly stated that the Central Committee has been split by the issue of naming a successor to Premier Chou and filling the vacant Politburo Standing Committee positions. It is unlikely that Teng Hsiao-p'ing will go down without a fight, and we believe there are many people in the central leadership who will be most reluctant to see the attacking radicals gain the upper hand. Moreover, their temporary allies in the military or Party apparatus are unlikely to be firm supporters over an extended period of time.

I believe there are two likely patterns of evolution of the present situation:

-- Restabilization of the "Chou" Coalition. The radicals may limit their current attack to Teng, but then pull back and accept a restabilization of the loose coalition of rehabilitated and Cultural Revolution cadre, State officials, and military which Chou En-lai put together after 1970 and which presided uneasily over Peking's politics until the Premier's death. This pattern would be evidenced by Teng's demotion or demise, appointment of a mixture of leftist and moderate leaders to the Politburo Standing Committee, and the emergence of several new faces in the military hierarchy -- perhaps Chen Hsi-lien and his supporters in the military. There must be strong pressures on the leadership to prevent a serious blood-letting, and thus I believe there is a substantial likelihood that even if Teng falls the coalition leadership will be reconsolidated under Hua Kuo-feng.

SECRET

SECRET

10

-- The Moderates Take Revenge. The radicals could overplay their attack on Teng by seeking to purge other rehabilitated leaders, however, and alienate their temporary allies in the military and Party. This could stimulate a moderate counterattack against the left that would see the demise of a number of radical leaders -- Mme. Mao, ideologue Yao Wen-yuan, and young Wang Hung-wen.

We have firm evidence of Chairman Mao's displeasure with his wife's political activities; and the radicals, who have now unleashed much personal bitterness and the spectre of the country in renewed chaos, are rather weak as an organized political force. They have access to the national media through control of the propaganda ministry, and can generate a voice in campus wall poster debates, but they control no troops and face Party and state bureaucracies now rebuilt with many cadre who had been purged during the Cultural Revolution.

The left is continuing to press its attack on Teng Hsiao-p'ing at this time; but despite their effort to evoke the spirit of the Cultural Revolution in media polemics and campus wall posters, I am impressed with the tentativeness of their attack. It is now a month since public attacks on the "unrepentant capitalist roader" began, and Teng is still not mentioned by name in the national media, and the indirect attacks on him still do not explicitly call for his ouster -- suggesting significant limits on the power of the attackers. A continuing period of uncertainty on the personnel issues which have now split the leadership will indicate that the radicals are unable to build support for their cause; and over time immobilism in Peking's political process resulting from the current situation is likely to work against their effort to build a new leadership coalition that will "defend the fruits of the Cultural Revolution."

China's military, in particular, seems to be seriously divided by the current political in-fighting. If the leadership conflict deepens, the army will play an increasingly important role as factional alignments evolve. In this situation, the possibility of coup attempts cannot be ruled out, although there is no evidence of such a development at this time.

-- The Radicals Reshape the Succession. The least likely development of the current situation would be that the Chinese Communist Party's leftist faction will consolidate its position, presumably with Chairman Mao's

SECRET

SECRET

11

blessing and on the basis of a coalition that includes key military leaders. Chang Ch'un-ch'iao would probably be their candidate for the Premiership. Such an evolution would very likely see the demise of many of the state, military, and Party officials recently rehabilitated by the late Premier Chou, and a heightened politicization of all aspects of life in China. In such circumstances the country would likely draw back from the active level of involvement with the world which characterized the PRC's foreign policy under Chou En-lai.

We doubt that this is a likely future for Peking's political scene, however, because Chiang Ch'ing and other radical leaders seem to lack either the firm support of the Chairman or the ability to construct a leadership coalition which will sustain a dominant position for themselves.

The Current Ambiguity of Chairman Mao's Position

Where does Chairman Mao stand in this current situation? The radicals have clearly tried to make it appear that he is behind their attack on Teng, yet the signs of unambiguous support for their position -- the Chairman's personal and public identification with leftist leaders, or support for a radical candidate for the Premiership and other posts on the Politburo Standing Committee -- are not evident. We believe Mao has lost considerable influence over the current situation, for he lacks the physical capability to project himself in leadership debates and has lost -- with the passing of Chou En-lai -- a close colleague who linked him to the larger process of Peking's politics.

Some of the current uncertainty in Mao's position seems related to signs of disagreement between the Chairman and other elements in the leadership which have been evident in muted form over the past several years. The Lin Piao affair generated considerable strain between Mao and the People's Liberation Army (PLA). Lin's coup attempt made the Chairman highly distrustful of the military, and Mao sought to sharply limit their political influence through the campaign of criticism of the dead Lin Piao which was promoted throughout China in 1973-74. For their part, the military blamed Mao for having personally selected Lin to play the key role which he did during the Cultural Revolution, and for having let him acquire such power.

SECRET

SECRET

12

This personal aspect of dispute between the Chairman and PLA was reinforced by disagreement over national security issues. At least some of the military leadership seems to have taken the view that Mao's policy of maintaining a high level of tension with the Soviets while at the same time tilting toward the U.S. was unnecessarily provocative to Moscow. As SALT negotiations and Congressional constraints on the Administration's foreign policy were enhanced after 1973, this argument probably acquired greater force in internal leadership debates and made the American connection increasingly controversial.

Mao's uncertain role in the leadership was emphasized by his long absence from Peking between June of 1974 and April, 1975. The Chairman remained off in the provinces (although he continued to receive a flow of foreign visitors during this period) and played almost no visible role in the National People's Congress of January, 1975. Mao's aloofness from the leadership scene may have been a reflection, in part, of his disagreement with the conservative economic program which was promulgated by the Congress. The fact that Chou En-lai and Teng Hsiao-p'ing were so clearly behind the law-and-order approach to accelerating the pace of China's economic growth at the National People's Congress (and given that Mao's only personal identification with the event was to urge that workers be given the right to strike) has suggested to some analysts that the Chairman had significant differences with the Premier and with Teng. This may have been true to some degree (and there is good reason to believe that Mao's support for Teng's rehabilitation was not the result of any personal affection between the two, but out of a recognition of political necessity);

25X1

[redacted] Mao gave visible support to Teng's rehabilitation, and that he has remained aloof from leftist leaders.

The Chairman seemed to give more open support to the left in the second half of 1973 when he received foreign visitors with young Wang Hung-wen at the door of his residence; yet by 1974 Wang ceased to play his role as "doorkeeper" when Mao received foreigners, and at this same time we began to receive a stream of indications that Mao was quite displeased with his wife's efforts to build a national leadership role for herself through promotion of her revolutionized Peking operas, appeals for support from the military, and occasional public promotion activities -- such as giving her life's story to an American woman historian and playing an active role in hosting Imelda Marcos when she visited China in September, 1974.

SECRET

SECRET

13

In sum, we believe that Mao's role in the current leadership situation may be rather passive. The Chairman probably withdrew his support from Teng Hsiao-p'ing when it became evident in late January that the rehabilitated Vice Premier was unable to muster a substantial margin of support within the Politburo for the Premiership. Mao has been reported as supporting the selection of Hua Kuo-feng, although in a somewhat tentative way. As with the case of Lin Piao, Mao is in a difficult position on the issue of Teng's future, for over the past three years he has been publicly identified with Teng's return to a position of national leadership. [redacted] Party cadre are grumbling about Mao's disruptive influence on the political process: the left for his past backing of Chou's rehabilitation program; and the right for his current failure to give active support to all that Chou had built before he died.

25X1

Despite these indications of unhappiness with the Chairman, however, we doubt that Mao is in danger of being repudiated by a leadership which still needs him as a symbol of legitimacy. Mao continues to exercise a commanding role over foreign policy issues, and can probably still carry the day on domestic matters of critical importance to him. We doubt that the Chairman will throw his weight fully behind the Party radicals, for he is sensitive to the need to prepare for his own succession by building a stable leadership coalition, albeit one which will support foreign and domestic programs which reflect his own policy preferences.

In the present situation we can only watch for signs of the direction in which Mao chooses to cast his influence, although one must add that the Chairman's death within the next year or two would seriously compound the possibility of a major blood-letting within the Chinese leadership. His passing, however, would probably be to the ultimate disadvantage of the radicals, and give the military even greater influence over the evolution of the leadership lineup.

Impact of the Present Situation on Peking's Foreign Policy Orientation

Foreign policy issues have not been at the core of the political instability now evident in Peking, although the continuing conflict among senior leaders appears to be having some influence on the conduct of foreign

SECRET

SECRET

14

policy. As noted above, Mao appears to have been under some pressure from elements within the military to lower the level of tension in the Sino-Soviet dispute. It is from this perspective that the December 27 surprise release of three Russian helicopter crewmen who had been held by PRC authorities for more than 18 months on charges of spying appears to reflect the influence of those in Peking who want to lower China's vulnerabilities to Soviet pressure. Given the recent evidence of a significant military clash on the Sino-Soviet frontier in mid-October, it appears that a very specific irritant stimulated the leadership in Peking to make a conciliatory gesture to Moscow -- if not to throw the Soviets off balance politically as they prepared for the 25th Party Congress.

(Two more speculative aspects of the border clash/helicopter crew release situation are worthy of parenthetical comment: It is interesting that neither the Soviets nor the Chinese have given any publicity to the border clash. Indeed, the Russians have vociferously denied the existence of any problems on the border in recent propaganda, partly in reaction to Chinese press articles emphasizing the need for heightened preparedness by their militia in border areas far to the west of the October clash. Presumably neither Moscow nor Peking wanted to create a situation where the U.S. would feel it had heightened influence over its position because of a deteriorating situation with respect to its primary adversary.

Secondly, given the indication that it was Chinese troops which were "over the line" in the October clash, one can speculate that Mao -- as in 1969 -- anxious to ensure that China remains on an anti-Soviet course, directed more provocative border patrolling procedures in order to provoke an incident which would sustain the confrontation with the Soviets. If this was the case, then the evident fact of pressure for a conciliatory gesture toward Moscow, and of Mao having to back down by releasing the helicopter crew, acquires heightened significance.)

Of related interest is the visit to China of Julie and David Eisenhower at the time of the helicopter crew release, and the recent visit of former President Nixon at the time of the fourth anniversary of the signing of the Shanghai Communique and the Soviet's 25th Party Congress. I believe that Chairman Mao, who is the only one who could have initiated the idea of a second Nixon visit, had three motives in mind in arranging for the trip of the former President (something which had its origins in the late summer and fall of last year):

SECRET

SECRET

15

-- Mao wanted to highlight to a domestic audience the continuing commitment of the PRC to the Shanghai Communique and a tilt toward the U.S. -- perhaps in the face of some pressure for a modification of China's foreign policy orientation to one less provocatively hostile to the Soviets.

-- Mao may also have wanted to provoke the Russians into a reciprocally hostile posture (to mirror his own) at the time of their 25th Party Congress, and thus again undercut the argument of those within China who might call for a more flexible orientation toward Moscow.

-- The Chairman was also probably trying to signal to the U.S. his desire for a strong anti-Soviet foreign policy in Washington (one which he associates with Mr. Nixon in the years 1972-73) and for completion of the normalization process (which Mr. Nixon had indicated, prior to his resignation, that he intended to do before 1976).

In short, I believe that the Soviet helicopter crew release and the Nixon visit can be seen as indicators of countercurrents in Peking's debate on foreign policy issues: There is some pressure, very likely from elements within the military (although Mao hinted to the President in December that this pressure was also coming from officials in the Foreign Ministry and other "young people" critical of Huang Chen and Foreign Minister Ch'iao Kuan-hua -- leaders identified with the American connection) for an easing of tensions with the Soviets, and perhaps for less of a tilt toward the U.S. Mao, however, is trying to lock the country into an irreversible and inflexible anti-Soviet stand. In view of what some in China may characterize as an increasingly passive American role in foreign affairs, however, and with concern about a U.S. orientation to the Soviets that is less overtly hostile than would serve China's interests, and with heightened doubts about the U.S. commitment to complete normalization, the Chairman may be having trouble sustaining his position.

If there is one aspect of the current situation which is helpful to Mao it is Soviet behavior in the wake of Chou En-lai's death. Moscow has taken a clear position in propaganda directed against China of trying to turn the positive sentiment for the "reasonable" and "pragmatic" Chou against "madman Mao," even to the degree of fabricating a last will and testament of the Premier (floated in Japan) which hinted at the

SECRET

SECRET

need for renewed good relations with the Soviet Union. The Russians have also suggested that Hua Kuo-feng is a man they might be able to talk to. At the same time, Party Secretary Brezhnev took an inflexible line on China in his 25th Congress speech, asserting the need for sustaining an uncompromising struggle against Maoism as a political position basically hostile to Marxism and the socialist camp. Brezhnev concluded that if there is to be an improvement in Sino-Soviet relations, "the ball is in China's court."

Thus, Mao is likely to be able to point to recent Soviet actions as a reaffirmation of his view that the Russians will inevitably try to manipulate China's internal politics to their own advantage -- and thus they must be kept at a distance -- and that Moscow is giving no indication of changing its "revisionist" policies. Hence, the Chairman can argue, any flexibility on Peking's part will only be read by the Russians as a sign of weakness, or give Moscow an opening which will be used to try to influence Peking's currently troubled political scene.

Implications for U.S. Policy

From the perspective of recent history, the period from late 1971 through the first half of 1973 was the time of maximum coordination in the growth of our re-opened political dialogue with Peking. Unified leaderships in both countries pursued common political and security objectives -- and they each had the authority to act. This quality of tacit coordination was lacking on the Chinese side in the years 1969-70, until Mao and Chou gained the upper hand over internal opponents in the summer of 1970; and it gradually weakened in the U.S. beginning in the summer of 1973 as Watergate took hold of our domestic political debate and Congress exercised an ever more inhibiting influence over the Administration's conduct of foreign policy.

The tragedy of the current leadership conflict in China is that just as the U.S. is moving to a renewed consensus on foreign affairs, and backing it with strengthened executive authority, the Chinese are themselves dissipating their political consensus through an increasingly disruptive succession crisis.

SECRET

SECRET

17

Just as Peking could only passively watch the U.S. as the Watergate crisis played itself out, we are now in a period where we can only watch the evolution of the Chinese leadership struggle and hope that it does not totally immobilize Peking's decision-making process -- or (if Mao were to die) generate a significantly modified foreign policy orientation.

The prospects do not seem great that the Chinese will turn back toward the Russians even with Mao gone, or that the Soviets will overtly involve themselves in Peking's current leadership crisis; but it does seem likely that the Chinese have entered a period where they will find it difficult to take major political initiatives, or reach a consensus on contentious foreign policy choices. The most likely problem we will have to face in our still fragile relationship with the PRC is the Chinese withdrawing in upon themselves in a leadership blood-letting with an accompanying dissipation of the Peking-Washington political dialogue.

What can the U.S. do in this situation? Some might argue that if we were to resolve the Taiwan issue and complete normalization we could hold the Chinese to the relationship built over the past five years. While such a move might, indeed, make the U.S. connection less of a point of controversy in Peking's current leadership turmoil, it would only invite contempt from the Chinese if taken with an attitude of concern about holding them to their "American tilt" and from a general posture of passivity in foreign affairs due to continuing Congressional constraints. The most important thing the U.S. can do to regain the initiative in its China policy is to reactivate a more assertive and coherent foreign policy. The active search for positive agreements with both Moscow and Peking, in combination with firm action to oppose aggressive Soviet behavior (as in Angola), can revitalize the dynamic in our foreign policy which was most evident in 1972-73. In such a context, the Chinese will both fear being isolated as we establish positive agreements with Moscow, yet draw confidence from our ability to oppose the Russians' outward thrusts. Such a posture on our part would renew Chinese perceptions of the legitimacy of the Mao/Chou foreign policy initiative toward the U.S.; and in such a context normalization would be seen by Peking as a sign of American strength and not weakness. (For their part, the Soviets can probably be counted on to misplay their dealings with Peking, and thus sustain Chinese distrust of Russian intentions, which remains the driving force in Peking's foreign policy in any event.)

SECRET

SECRET

18

Chairman Mao's invitation to Mr. Nixon, while galling for its impact on our domestic political debate and degrading of public support for a relationship with the PRC, was basically a sign that China still looks to the U.S. for an active, anti-Soviet foreign policy, and wants completion of the normalization process. If Mao does not die within the next two years, and if we are able to pursue more forcefully our own interests abroad, the U.S.- PRC relationship can regain some of its previous vitality. Unfortunately, at present the probabilities have greatly increased that China's current political conflict will dissipate the energies and attention of PRC leaders on domestic feuding and the country will become itself an increasingly passive factor on the world scene.

SECRET