

A Sharp Look at SinoSovietology

APPROVED FOR RELEASE
CIA HISTORICAL REVIEW PROGRAM
22 SEPT 93

Dissection shows the ravages of inherited disease.

Perhaps it is a human failing for practitioners of a new science to assume that all problems within its purview become immediately solvable through proper application of its techniques. After long travail, Kremlinologists learned a measure of caution and due modesty. But now we have a new species or subspecies of inquirer into Communist factionalism - the Sinosovietologist - and the lesson must be learned again.

Both the parent science and its offspring must rely basically on the painstaking, and often tedious, study and comparison of official pronouncements representing divergent views or maneuvers of the supposed factions. Such study is often rewarding, but more often it is not, and this is the unhappy fact that the analyst must live with. Dreary hours over monotonous hortations may finally produce what seems to him a gleam of insight; but even this "seems" must be checked and rechecked, and discarded if in the process it suffers a sea-change into "seems not." Most important, theories plainly supported by documentary evidence must be clearly differentiated from theories not supported, and perhaps in part contradicted, by the documents available at the time.

The Sino-sovietologist, afflicted with the youthful brashness of his new methodology and unable to acknowledge that all the answers are not yet available, tends to find answers too readily. At the same time, his science confronts him with two built-in difficulties beyond those faced by the Kremlinologist which make circumspection all the more desirable.

First, though the terminology is in both instances Marxist, Moscow and Peking by no means always convey the same sense by the same words. The terminology, as it comes down to us, has picked up special connotations in its passage through not one but two distinct closed societies, and these subtleties must be understood and taken into account by the analyst.

Second, because the new methodology was born of an obvious rift in Sino-Soviet relations which in recent years has been largely a left-right split between the "radical" Chinese and the "conservative" Soviets, the Sino-sovietologist is tempted to assume that differences will be found strictly along this line of cleavage. But in the history of Communism, and especially in regard to the "colonial question," left and right have often gone hand in hand; leftists have crossed to the right on specific issues and vice versa. Lacking proper documentary evidence, it is unwise to take it for granted that Peking-left, Moscow-right is the inevitable pattern. And it is especially unwise to assume without proof that Peking pursues its generally left strategy to the edge of idiocy in disregard of its own interests.

A good example of overzealous hunting along the left-right cleft, coupled with a less than painstaking sifting of the evidence, appears in a recent issue of the scholarly periodical *Problems of Communism*.¹ It presents, among other things and quite effectively for those without the patience or resources to check the facts—what purports to be documentary evidence of a Sino-Soviet dispute over the handling of the 1958 crisis precipitated by the Iraqi coup on 14 July and the Anglo-American landings in Jordan and Lebanon over the following three days.² The sequence of the ensuing diplomatic moves had been as follows:

19 July Khrushchev's appeal for an emergency summit meeting of the USSR, the United States, Britain, France, and India, with the participation of the U.N. Secretary General.

22 July Macmillan's counterproposal for a summit conference within the framework of a special session of the Security Council.

23 July Khrushchev's qualified acceptance of Macmillan's proposal, and his suggestion of 28 July as the date.

28 July Khrushchev's rejection of the Western proposal for a meeting of the permanent Security Council representatives to

prepare for the special session. From this point on, the proposal for a summit meeting was dead.

30 July Greece's recognition of the new Iraqi regime. Turkey and Iran followed suit the next day, Britain and the United States on 1 and 2 August.

31 July Khrushchev's departure for Peking.

The article's first bit of evidence that Peking disapproved of Khrushchev's soft handling of the situation is negative, and erroneous. It says that the *People's Daily* editorials of 21-22 July did not endorse his emergency appeal for a summit meeting. The fact is that a *People's Daily* editorial of 22 July declared the Soviet proposal of 19 July to be "a new, effective measure of the USSR to support the just struggle of the people in the Middle East and stop the U.S. and British acts of piracy." Still more to the point, in an editorial of 25 July, the Chinese paper welcomed as "a major step for peace" Khrushchev's subsequent acceptance of Macmillan's counterproposal for a summit meeting within the framework of the Security Council, including Nationalist China's representative. Logically (our Western logic), this acceptance should truly have infuriated the Chinese, but there is no scholarly evidence that it did.

As positive evidence that Peking favored a more vigorous military response, the article cites *People's Daily's* intimation on 21 July that it might become necessary to send "volunteer armies" to the Middle East. But the USSR had previously issued a more specific threat in a more official form: a Soviet Government statement of 18 July had warned that Moslems of the Middle East and Central Asia might go to the aid of their coreligionists. The article also backdates Khrushchev's trip to Peking ten days, to 21 July, as though to make room for the possibility that his 28 July backtracking on the Security Council plan was the result of Chinese pressures exerted in personal confrontation. As a clincher, the article quotes the following passage from a *People's Daily* editorial of 8 August, after the crisis was past:

... Some soft-hearted advocates of peace naively believe that in order to relax tension at all costs the enemy must not be provoked.
... Some groundlessly conclude that peace can be gained only where there is no armed resistance against the attacks of the imperialists and colonialists ...

But this passage in the editorial is immediately followed by a direct reference to the Middle East crisis which cites it along with the Korean and Indochinese wars, the attack on Egypt, and the 1957 Syrian crisis as occasions when firm Soviet and Bloc reaction forestalled or defeated Western "aggression." People's Daily was certainly rebuking someone for something, but, even granting a probability that the someone was Khrushchev, this citation and the circumstances of the time make it unlikely that the already resolved Middle East crisis was the subject of dispute.

From any Communist standpoint, whether Moscow's or Peking's, Khrushchev's tactics in July had worked out very well indeed: there was no Western intervention in Iraq, and the U.S. and British troops soon withdrew from Jordan and Lebanon. If the Chinese had opposed Khrushchev's tactics at the time, they were shown by September to have been in error, "objectively" speaking, and what the Sino-sovietologist might then look for in the polemics would be some intimation of a Khrushchev "I told you so."

Sino-sovietology as represented by this article has thus failed to shed light on the question of whether there was a Sino-Soviet dispute over tactics during the 1958 crisis, but it has shown how overeagerness to prove a theory can lead to carelessness and insufficiency of examination. On another subject it makes an even more egregious mistake. Speaking of tactics vis-a-vis colonialism in general, it says:

The Moscow Declaration of December 1960 deferred to the Chinese viewpoint in calling it a Communist "duty" to render the "fullest moral and material assistance" to "peoples fighting to free themselves from imperialist and colonial tyranny." But while the Chinese explicitly interpreted this afterward as a commitment to support not only political but also armed struggles of colonial emancipation, East German Party Secretary Ulbricht, undoubtedly speaking for Moscow, flatly reaffirmed that "we are opposed to colonial wars."

The author surely knows, when he is not carried away by the heat of argument, that a colonial war, in Communist terminology, is one

instigated by the colonialists, and that it would be inconceivable for Ulbricht, or Khrushchev, or Mao, or any other Communist leader, not to be "opposed to colonial wars." What Ulbricht is saying is that the policy of peaceful coexistence does not preclude opposing colonial aggression.

Sino-sovietology, if it is to grow to a healthy maturity, will have to exercise the caution, modesty, and painstaking regard for facts that are essential attributes in every field of scholarly endeavor. It may be unfair to hold up this particular article as an example of the prodigy's current accomplishments. But it would not take very many such productions to cast upon the new science the same discredit that its parent Kremlinology long suffered and even now has not completely outlived.

1 "Sino-Soviet Friction in Underdeveloped Areas," by Donald S. Zagoria, in the March-April 1961 issue.

2 A much earlier article in the same periodical (September-October 1958 issue, by Herbert Ritvo), showing in detail the close coordination between statements on the crisis from Moscow and Peking, had concluded persuasively that there was no propaganda evidence of a rift between the two.

Posted: May 08, 2007 07:37 AM