



THE UNIVERSITY OF
SYDNEY

—
China Studies
Centre

China Studies Working papers

ISSN 2653-4037 (Online)

PRC Foreign and Military Policy, 1977-81:
Shades of Mao, the Imprint of Deng

Frederick C. Teiwes and Warren Sun

China Studies Centre, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences
The University of Sydney

February 2022

PRC FOREIGN AND MILITARY POLICY, 1977-81: SHADES OF MAO, THE IMPRINT OF DENG

Frederick C. Teiwes and Warren Sun

Abstract

This Working Paper is a draft chapter for a book on the poorly understood CCP elite politics of the early post-Mao period, tentatively entitled *Hua Guofeng, Deng Xiaoping, and the Dismantling of Maoism*. Conventional wisdom pictures the period up to the December 1978 Third Plenum as a struggle between Hua and Deng, reflecting neo-Maoist v. reformist tendencies, and won by Deng at the plenum. In fact, there was broad consensus between them, Hua was more proactive in key areas, and there is no evidence of anything approaching a power struggle. This paper, however, deals with an area where elements of accepted views of Deng hold up. In essence, Deng held both the foreign policy and particularly PLA portfolios, notably where they concerned the crucial relationships with the US, Soviet Union, Japan, and Vietnam. In external relations Deng was broadly regarded to have performed brilliantly, while Hua was thought a mere cypher. Overall, Hua was clearly secondary in external relations, but he took the bold step of initiating relations with revisionist Yugoslavia, made the most telling proposal in the high-level negotiations with the US, and deeply impressed dominant European leaders Margaret Thatcher and Helmut Schmidt. Deng's foreign policy outlook was deeply influenced by Mao, he could push Mao's "horizontal line" concept to counterproductive extremes, almost losing the Sino-Japanese Peace Treaty, and rather than brilliantly negotiating US normalization, the Chinese side was slow to grasp the outcome that was always there. Most significant, and revealing of the underlying dynamic of CCP politics, was the war against Vietnam. This was truly Deng's war, opposed by not only Hua, but also by a broad array of senior civilian and PLA officials, including surviving marshals. This was essentially the first time since his return to work in 1977, in contrast to persuading his colleagues through intense effort, that Deng simply asserted his authority. Neither here or elsewhere, was argument decisive as it had generally been under Hua's leadership to that point. What was decisive was Deng's enormous prestige as the most outstanding of the surviving "old revolutionaries" who achieved the success of 1949. It was the same factor that allowed Deng's quiet coup against Hua at the turn of 1979-80, with no significant resistance from Hua or anyone else, and with no explanation being made in any official forum until well after the fact.

Frederick C. Teiwes is Emeritus Professor of Chinese Politics at the University of Sydney.

Warren Sun is retired Reader in Chinese Studies at Monash University.

PRC FOREIGN AND MILITARY POLICY, 1977-81: SHADES OF MAO, THE IMPRINT OF DENG

Frederick C. Teiwes and Warren Sun

In terms of diplomacy, the theory of the three worlds, establishing foreign relations with the United States [and] Japan, and the current diplomatic pattern [of the “horizontal line” opposing the Soviet Union—the authors], all are carried out according to the decisions of Chairman Mao.

—Deng Xiaoping commenting on the draft of Ye Jianying’s speech marking the 30th anniversary of the PRC, September 4, 1979¹

Hua remains something of an enigma. He performed impressively. He was well prepared ..., careful and watchful, and scarcely put a foot wrong. But in virtually a week’s visit, I saw no human moment when he revealed himself, or, perhaps what is more remarkable, no really human exchange between him and any of his entourage. He clearly is at a considerable distance from them.”²

—Percy Cradock, British China specialist and key advisor to Margaret Thatcher, commenting on Hua Guofeng’s October-November 1979 UK visit, November 7, 1979

During discussions [in December 1978 or January 1979] on the possible invasion of Vietnam, all the leading military officials involved including Marshals Xu [Xiangqian], Nie [Rongzhen] and Ye [Jianying] expressed strong reservations since China was unprepared for such a conflict. A consensus emerged that it should not be undertaken lightly. But when Deng entered the room and indicated his

¹ “Deng Xiaoping guanyu qicao guoqing sanshi zhounian jianghua gao” (September 4, 1979).

² “Telegram Number 969 of 7 November [1979],” UK archival document.

intention, everyone conceded. Deng brushed aside the hesitancy of the marshals and generals, and the decision to go to war was made immediately.³

In those days [once the invasion began], Hua Guofeng, Xu Xiangqian, Nie Rongzhen came to the military headquarters every day, Ye Jianying phoned every day to ask about the battlefield situation. Deng Xiaoping came once every two days, he didn't say too much. But [on important developments] he always gave clear and definite directives.⁴

—Contemporary account and later recollections of PLA Deputy Chief-of-Staff Wang Shangrong, who was in charge of the army's warfare department, participated in the late December 1978/January 1979 discussions on wisdom of attacking Vietnam, and played a key role in overseeing the invasion in February and March 1979

Considering all the policy issues facing CCP leaders in the period leading up to the Third Plenum, as well as beyond, the conventional wisdom concerning Deng Xiaoping's role in foreign relations, and thus Hua Guofeng's, while imperfect in important respects, is closer to reality than what is widely believed regarding other areas. As we have documented, Deng was hardly proactive in the reversal of verdicts process, showed little interest in rural affairs, even though he crucially contributed by supporting Zhao Ziyang's efforts in this area from 1980, and on the economy, while sharing Hua's enthusiasm for the Four Modernizations, his role in specific major reforms was considerably less significant. In contrast, in military affairs, as suggested in the quotations above concerning the key external policy initiative to invade Vietnam, Deng's dominance was incontestable, albeit involving

³ Reconstruction, based on interviews in March 1998 and January 2007 with an associate of General Wang Shangrong, of his contemporary account of developments. The interviewee could not recall the precise time of the event, but it definitely occurred before Deng departed for the US on January 29, 1979. According to another account of these discussions by the son of a Politburo member during the period, when General Su Yu attempted to argue against the war, Deng rudely told Su to butt out. Interview, November 2006.

⁴ General Wang's recollections in Luo Yuansheng, *Baizhan jiangxing Wang Shangrong* [Star of a Hundred Battles Wang Shangrong] (Beijing: Jiefangjun wenyi chubanshe, 1999), p. 378.

complexities. In the broader foreign affairs sphere, he was immensely significant in shaping key events, and clearly regarded as having special credentials by his colleagues.

Conventional wisdom essentially treats foreign policy as Deng's sphere, with Hua a peripheral actor at best, sometimes with references to an imagined power struggle between the two,⁵ or an inconsequential and incompetent one at worst. As indicated above, we largely endorse Deng's preeminence in foreign affairs writ large, a preeminence, as we shall see, that was paradoxically enhanced after the Third Plenum even as signs of modest dissent began to surface. In our view, arguably the best overview of Deng's pre-plenum role has been summed up by a senior Party historian with deep personal ties to the foreign affairs sphere: "Deng did not have Mao's unchallengeable power, the extent of his was balanced by other top officials; before making a final decision, he carried out meticulous persuasion to assure acceptance by his colleagues. He put forward important policies, carried out crucial negotiations, and decided [significant matters] on the spot."⁶ As for Hua, he was hardly an incompetent cypher, having a notable impact in the area of restoring relations with foreign communist parties, and in dealing with the PRC's neighboring communist states including Vietnam,⁷ even if the critical decision to

⁵ E.g., see Robert S. Ross, *Negotiating Cooperation: The United States and China, 1969-1989* (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 1995), pp. 98-99, 127-28; and Joshua Eisenman, "China's Vietnam War Revisited: A Domestic Politics Perspective," *Journal of Contemporary China*, no. 119 (2019), *passim*.

⁶ Zhang Baijia, "Biandong de guonei yinsu dui Zhongguo wajiao de yingxiang" [Domestic Factors Affecting Changes in China's Diplomacy], Zhong Mei sanbian guanxi taolunhui [China-US Trilateral Relations Seminar], January 2000, p. 6. Zhang is the son of Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs Zhang Wenjin, who was present during the decisive negotiation between Deng and US Liaison Office head Leonard Woodcock in December 1978 that sealed US-China normalization, and accompanied Deng on his US trip the following month.

⁷ We have speculated about a possible division of labor between Hua and Deng, with Hua assuming special responsibilities for relations with communist parties/states; when this was put to a leading Party historian, he observed this was plausible, but no hard evidence was available. Interview on our behalf by Joseph Torigian, May 2019.

attack its southern neighbor was driven by Deng, and also in fostering relations with West Europe and Japan. In terms of possible conflict between the two leaders, laying aside Hua's reservations concerning the Vietnam invasion, other differences were subtle and restrained, and not limited to Hua. Finally, it should be emphasized that shaping foreign policy was not limited to Deng and Hua, with Ye Jianying and Li Xiannian in particular playing significant roles, and foreign affairs officials having greater input than they did in the late Mao era.⁸

The difficulty of obtaining evidence on, and accurately interpreting, the politics of PRC foreign policy, cannot be overstated. In a system of restricted knowledge overall, the diplomatic-military sphere was especially difficult to penetrate for elite members, Chinese scholars, and foreign diplomats and analysts. Major Party meetings basically dealt with domestic issues. The critical 1978 central work conference is a case in point. Occurring when the policy process was heading toward definitive steps on US normalization and the invasion of Vietnam, neither issue was a topic for conference discussion, although Deng did raise a small range of questions concerning US relations to a small group, urging that they look at the "big picture."⁹ While surely the Standing Committee discussed key issues on an ongoing basis, and there are rare references to Politburo discussion, in neither case

⁸ Li Xiannian had a long involvement in foreign affairs, particularly in foreign economic relations, including aid to Vietnam during the war against the US. After the arrest of the "gang of four," Li was assigned overall responsibility for foreign affairs, a job he in fact shared with Deng, and Deng formally joined Li in overseeing government foreign relations with a new division of labor in March 1978. See *Li Xiannian zhuan*, vol. 2, pp. 913-18, 921-23, 924-25, 928-33, 951-52; and *Deng nianpu*, vol. 1, p. 278. Ye Jianying seemingly had no formal post-Mao foreign affairs role, but was involved in significant developments in the 1970s, both under Mao and after the crushing of the "gang." See Teiwes and Sun, *End of the Maoist Era*, pp. 125-30, 180; and below, p. [16]. As for Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) professionals, they had much greater scope for policy advice than in the late Mao period when they were effectively limited to doing whatever Mao decreed, while engaging in internal disputes as a consequence of the Cultural Revolution that had little to do with substantive policy. See Teiwes and Sun, *End of the Maoist Era*, pp. 10-11, 85-86, 223-25, 412, 427ff, 515-21.

⁹ Zhang Baijia, "Biandong de guonei yinsu dui Zhongguo waijiao de yingxiang," p. 7. The small group of nine people called together by Deng included Li Xiannian, Xu Shiyong and Li Desheng.

is there any real elaboration of what was said that might indicate different views. Party historians have found information in this sphere particularly difficult to access. Material on the Vietnam conflict is especially sensitive, records on Hua's role generally are largely unavailable, and useful information on PRC-North Korean relations in the 1977-81 period is extremely limited for highly accomplished PRC analysts of the relationship, even including one who has been called in for discussions with the very highest leader concerning later developments in Korea.¹⁰ Perhaps most telling, presenting a coherent summing up of PRC of foreign affairs, proved too difficult for inclusion in the 1981 Historical Resolution.¹¹

Leaving aside the question of the larger Hua-Deng relationship, a prominent role for Deng in foreign affairs was a natural fit, although proposals at the outset that he assume responsibility for the sphere was rejected by him as too tiring.¹² Not only had Mao assigned the task to Deng following his return to work in the mid-1970s, and notionally kept him in the position until the Tiananmen incident, Deng had served the late Chairman in some of his most important projects, notably the ideological struggle with the Soviet Union in the 1960s, and picking up negotiations with the US in 1974 as Zhou Enlai's health deteriorated. In his various roles, Deng had significant interactions with key individuals who would again become significant figures in the PRC's foreign policy considerations, such as Kim Il Sung. Of particular note, Deng had engaged in often testy exchanges with Vietnam's highest leaders, going back to Ho Chi Minh and Le Duan, Ho's successor, on the eve of the Cultural Revolution, and picked up again with Le Duan in 1975.¹³

¹⁰ Interviews with a range of senior Party historians, February 2009, September 2009, and May 2019.

¹¹ Interview with senior Party historian, September 2009.

¹² Deng Liqun, *Shierge chungju*, and *Deng nianpu*, vol. 1, p. 160.

¹³ See *77 Conversations Between Chinese and Foreign Leaders on the Wars in Indochina, 1964-1977*, ed. by Odd Arne Westad, Chen Jian, Stein Tonnesson, Nguyen Vu Tungand and James G. Hershberg, Cold War International History Project, Working Paper no. 22, May 1998, pp. 14, 29, 35, 37-38, 41, 57, 60, 85, 91-96, 192-93.

With tensions with Vietnam further escalating even before his new return to work, this was an obvious situation where Deng's experience would be valuable. And even where the cast of leading characters had changed, notably with the Carter Administration assuming power in the US, a large cohort of experienced diplomats and political influentials had experience with, or at least a respectful opinion of, Deng. Moreover, within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) he was well known and respected. Clearly, the case for Deng's foreign policy experience was indisputable.

It is also impossible to deny, as often stated by Chinese and foreign analysts, that in comparison to Deng, Hua lacked such experience, but this undersells to some degree the experience Hua did have. After arriving in Beijing in 1971, Hua sat in on meetings concerning the imminent Nixon visit, and attended subsequent Politburo meetings which dealt with foreign policy.¹⁴ While foreign economic relations were not a central concern during Mao's last period, together with Li Xiannian, Hua oversaw bureaucratic efforts to implement trade relations with the US in 1972, and from 1974 engaged in frequent meetings with foreigners, often on economic issues, but covering a wide range of other matters, and including (undoubtedly limited) experience with very high-ranking foreign leaders, notably Kim Il Sung.¹⁵ But it was only in March-April 1976, that Hua began to meet with ranking foreign leaders as the top PRC representative, and while he performed more than adequately (see below), it was still a far cry from the type and depth of encounters Deng had engaged in with some regularity. While we simply don't know the nature of the interaction between Hua and Deng on foreign policy within

¹⁴ *Li Xiannian nianpu*, vol. 5, (1970-1978), p. 156.

¹⁵ *Li Xiannian zhuan*, vol. 2, p. 920. More broadly, we have compiled from official sources a chronology of Hua's meetings with foreign figures from 1974 to late 1981. From spring 1974 to spring 1976, Hua had a busy schedule, having met over 150 foreigners.

the Standing Committee or privately, the idea that Deng served as a tutor for Hua is a reasonable assumption,¹⁶ although Hua's education had clearly started earlier.

Much of the conventional wisdom concerning the foreign affairs capabilities and performance of Deng and Hua is derived, selectively, from the interaction of foreign leaders and officials with their Chinese counterparts. Regarding Deng, although ignoring some less than impressive performances under Mao,¹⁷ his interlocutors' picture of a self-confident and decisive leader is overwhelming, and surely accurate. Recalling his experiences with Deng in 1979, Jimmy Carter summed up the impressions of many other leaders of a "tough, intelligent, frank and self-assured" figure.¹⁸ Carter's National Security Adviser, Zbigniew Brzezinski, added another widely accepted view of Deng as possessing a "straightforward and lucid sense of strategic direction."¹⁹ This view naturally spread throughout relevant officialdoms, and to broader Western publics.

The situation with Hua, largely unknown to foreigners before 1976, was inevitably more complicated, especially given uncertainty about both his policy preferences and relative authority. While subsequent events can help explain the marginalization of Hua in the memories of those who had some (generally limited) personal contact with him, contemporary reports largely pictured a competent,

¹⁶ A view consistent with Hua's comment to Kin Il Sung on his inexperience and gratitude to old comrades for rendering guidance; see above, p. [31].

¹⁷ Notably his performance at the United Nations in 1974 as he was still finding his feet following Mao recalling him to work, and his December 1975 meeting with US President Ford. On the former case, where Kissinger concluded Deng was not a major figure, see Teiwes and Sun, *End of the Maoist Era*, pp. 184-85. The meeting with Ford, with Mao having provided Deng no instructions for moving forward, was uneventful, and substantively over in half an hour, although it notionally lasted longer for the sake of appearances. John H. Holdridge, *Crossing the Divide: An Insider's Account of the Normalization of U.S.-China Relations* (Lanham MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1997), pp. 165-66; and interview with Richard Solomon, NSC staffer under Kissinger, November 2003.

¹⁸ Carter's address to the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries, December 2007, at <http://chinaelections.org/NewsInfo.asp?NewsID=1377716>.

¹⁹ Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Power and Principle: Memoirs of the National Security Adviser 1977-1981* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1983), p. 25.

very well-prepared leader.²⁰ In retrospect, William Gleysteen, one of the most highly regarded US diplomats who participated in a 1999 gathering of specialists reviewing US-PRC relations that essentially ignored Hua, commented in an interview the same year that “we probably underestimated Hua,” and noted how he had been impressed by Hua’s presence in a significant meeting with a top American official.²¹ Yet in comparison to the intense yet engaging and funny Deng, Hua, often regarded as “not projecting personality,”²² inevitably occupied a lesser status in foreign eyes.

More significant were the contemporary impressions of the most senior foreign leaders who dealt with Hua on important occasions. While more nuanced and tailing off as Hua’s domestic situation became more problematic in 1979,²³ these assessments were again largely positive, with few exceptions. The outstanding exception, which we regard as thoroughly unreliable, was from Singapore’s Lee Kuan Yew, who years later characterized an extended May 1976 meeting with Hua as involving unresponsive turgid revolutionary rhetoric by a tough-looking “thug” who lacked finesse.²⁴ This is totally incompatible with another long meeting between Hua and Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser

²⁰ Of course, this did not exclude doubts about Hua’s overall leadership potential, as expressed by US Liaison Office head Thomas Gates after an April 1976 meeting. See Vogel, *Deng Xiaoping*, p. 184.

²¹ Nancy Bernkopf Tucker, ed., *China Confidential: American Diplomats and Sino-American Relations, 1945-1996* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), e.g., p. 321; interview with Gleysteen, June 1999; and below, p. [106].

²² The lack of personality projection is from Stapleton Roy, US Deputy Head of Mission in the normalization period; interview, June 1999. Of similar assessments, particularly notable is that of Nicholas Platt, who accompanied Defense Secretary Harold Brown to Beijing in January 1980, sitting in on meetings with both Deng (“brisk, blunt, funny”), and Hua (“soft ..., sort of weak and effeminate”). Platt, *China Boys: How U.S. Relations with the PRC Began and Grew, A Personal Memoir* (Washington: ADST-DACOR Diplomats and Diplomacy Book, 2010), pp. 259-61.

²³ Particularly among US policymakers. We leave this for later discussion of US-PRC relations; see below, pp. [95-96, 170-71].

²⁴ Lee Kuan Yew, *From Third World To First, The Singapore Story: 1965-2000* (Singapore: Singapore Press Holdings, 2000), pp. 642-49, 681. For another significant dismissal of Hua, see Richard Holbrooke’s assessment following the August 1977 Hua-Cyrus Vance meeting; below, p. [106].

the following month, which covered similar topics, and for which a full transcript exists. The transcript, and Fraser's memory, suggest a leader in control, very much on top of policy issues and international developments, responsive to his interlocutor, and flexible within the ideological constraints of the time.²⁵ And where information is available, other heads of government shared Fraser's positive view. Such diverse leaders as Yugoslavia's Tito, North Korea's Kim Il Sung, and Japan's Ohira, all saw Hua as a significant figure.²⁶

Most interesting, however, is Hua's October-November 1979 tour of West Europe to further important aspects of the PRC's foreign agenda, while back home Deng was beginning under-the-table maneuvers to oust him. West Europe, although not presenting as critical issues as Sino-US relations, nevertheless had a significant place in the PRC foreign policy vision both strategically and especially economically. During his 22 days in Europe, Hua effectively presented China's anti-Soviet line, notably with more sensitivity to the political sensitivities of his foreign interlocutors than sometimes shown by Deng,²⁷ and advanced prospects of expanding economic ties, with some limited agreements concluded, while conveying that under the then existing readjustment policies this would be restricted by China's ability to pay.²⁸ The general impression of Hua as a pragmatic and flexible leader with great curiosity and detailed knowledge, was strikingly

²⁵ "Record of the Prime Minister's Talks in Peking" (June 20-23, 1976), document available at the National Archives of Australia, Canberra; *Fraser and China* (Sydney: Australia-China Relations Institute, 2007), pp. 58-59; and interview with Fraser, April 2008. When asked about Lee Kuan Yew's assessment of Hua, Fraser observed that "Harry Lee sees things the way he wants to, is not kind to others, and with a double first from Cambridge would look down on Hua."

²⁶ See below, pp. [15, 113-14, 171].

²⁷ Particularly with a softer touch in West Germany which was uniquely exposed to Soviet power, compared to Britain where Prime Minister Thatcher held hard line views on the Soviet Union similar to the PRC's. See Flora Lewis, "Hua Guofeng in West Europe Stressed a New Pragmatism," *NYT*, November 11, 1979.

²⁸ Lewis, "Hua Guofeng in West Europe"; and several UK archival documents, notably "Note of the Secretary of State for Trade's Call on Premier Hua at Claridge's, 30 October 1979."

reflected in the assessments of two of Europe's most formidable politicians, Britain's Margaret Thatcher, and West Germany's Helmut Schmidt. In a conversation with Schmidt, Thatcher, who had been struck by Hua's "command" when she visited China as opposition leader in spring 1977, described his current performance as demonstrating "remarkable self-confidence and ease of manner," where he provided a detailed account of the international scene, including considerable knowledge of relatively obscure places." Schmidt, very taken by a four-hour exchange with Hua, agreed, declaring himself deeply impressed, finding Hua "clever and wise, with the outlook of a much bigger man than [I] expected."²⁹

These views of powerful foreign leaders should be modified, however, as indicated by Percy Cradock's nuanced assessment at the head of this chapter. While considering the UK visit a great success, and Hua's performance virtually flawless, Cradock's observation of the absence of an easy relationship with seasoned foreign affairs officials, something Deng apparently had, suggests that while it might not prevent the competent performance of his duties, it undoubtedly complicated Hua's larger role in this sphere.³⁰ And inevitably, Deng set the standard in foreign and domestic perceptions. A month and a half after Hua's European trip, the relative qualities of the two leaders were addressed during a meeting between Thatcher and Carter in the White House. By this time both countries had concluded that Deng had eclipsed Hua as China's leader, much more strongly in the American case. On this occasion, British Foreign Secretary Peter

²⁹ "Record of a Discussion between the Prime Minister and the Federal Chancellor in the Federal Chancellery, Bonn, October 31, 1979," UK archival document.

³⁰ In addition to Cradock's observation, the distance between Hua and foreign affairs officials was noted elsewhere, e.g., by Leonard Woodcock, and key NSC staffer Michel Oksenberg in their extensive review of US-China relations after the Carter Administration. Woodcock Papers, collection at Wayne State University, file no. 15 (February 10, 1982).

Carington declared Hua “was not of the same quality as Deng, neither as incisive nor as decisive.”³¹

We do not dissent from the view that Deng was more decisive, and ultimately more powerful, in foreign affairs following his return to work, although we also find more than credible that, as Ye Jianying’s nephew put it, Hua never considered himself a puppet.³² Whether Deng’s analysis of the international situation was more incisive is less obvious, as we will examine in specific cases. As intimated above, however, given the limitations on crucial information, this tells us little about discussions within the leadership, and therefore just *how* decisive Deng was in shaping the direction of PRC policy on a case by case basis. This is particularly the case since, on the available evidence, key aspects of this direction were in place both before and after Deng’s return. The place to start is to review these defining policy considerations.

Factors Shaping Early Post-Mao Foreign Policy: Mao’s Strategic Vision, the Taiwan Dilemma, and Consensus on Economic Development

Mao Zedong’s death left successor leaders, Hua Guofeng most prominently, facing dire problems on political, economic and social fronts, but external relations was the outstanding exception. Despite the wrenching ideological reversal imbedded in the rapprochement with the United States, this dramatic turn was received by the elite and broader publics calmly, indeed even widely accepted as “another great victory of Chairman Mao’s revolutionary diplomatic line.”³³ China was emerging as a major player on the international scene, receiving US presidents, among others, who showed the most effusive respect for the Chairman. Thus, unlike virtually all

³¹ “Note of a Meeting Held in the Oval Office, White House, Washington, DC, 17 December 1979,” UK archival document.

³² Interview with Ye Xuanji, October 2009.

³³ See Zhang Baijia, “Biandong de guonei yinsu dui Zhongguo wajiao de yingxiang,” pp. 2-3.

other areas, persisting in Mao's line was not simply something that had to be asserted in the name of regime stability, but a policy orientation with wide support for moving forward. The first quotation from Deng Xiaoping at the head of this chapter, however, only partially captures the PRC's immediate post-Mao major foreign policy agenda. Apart from Mao's essential anti-Soviet policy, accepted widely at the top, but grasped more ruthlessly by Deng than anyone else, the Chairman also left the unresolved Taiwan question that would be the focus of US-China normalization. Also, in this statement, Deng did not mention economic relations with the outside world, a very secondary component of external relations under Mao,³⁴ but one that quickly became a consensus aspect of opening up China's economy, begun under Hua even before Deng's return. Below we review each of these central aspects of PRC foreign policy, all areas of basic agreement at least past the Third Plenum, drawing out nuances of differences where they appear to exist.

Mao's strategic outlook in the 1970s is best conceptualized by the official call for an "international united front" against the Soviet Union, something the late Chairman regarded as overriding all other concerns. The "one horizontal line" approach, a rather fanciful effort to encourage a broad array of states to join in opposing Moscow, most importantly sought to enroll the United States in the project. It appeared in virtual tandem with the convoluted, hardly convincing, "theory of the three worlds," created by Mao and formally introduced by Deng at the UN in April 1974.³⁵ In the early post-Mao period, top leaders expressed support for these concepts, with Hua, who reportedly was impressed with the three worlds

³⁴ A modest development of foreign trade did occur from the early 1970s, with Hua playing a prominent role, but it fundamentally did not impact on Mao's foreign policy objectives. See *ibid.*; Teiwes and Sun, *End of the Maoist Era*, pp. 50-51, 157-58, 199, 330; and above, [p. 6].

³⁵ See Teiwes and Sun, *End of the Maoist Era*, pp. 86-87.

theory, highlighting it in his Political Report to the 11th Congress.³⁶ It was Deng, however, who was most engaged with the theory, directing Hu Qiaomu to form a writing group to produce the most systematic statement of the theory, published shortly after his return to work in the *People's Daily* in November 1977.³⁷ Most strikingly, as we shall elaborate at the end of this chapter, Deng continued to hew to the theory, as well as the anti-Soviet line, even as lower officials and various top leaders began to question it from roughly mid-1979.³⁸

During the final period of Mao's rule, however, the Chairman was hardly predictable or consistent, even in foreign affairs where he provided clearer guidelines and more continuous attention than elsewhere. Although framed by the theoretical assertion that the *two* superpower hegemonists were the basic source of international oppression (see below), Mao's fundamental strategic approach centered on cultivating Sino-US relations as the lynchpin of his "one line" policy. As expressed to Kissinger in February 1973, the Chairman graphically summarized his view: "We should draw a horizontal line [through] the US-Japan-[China]-Pakistan-Iran-Turkey and Europe," but nothing concrete was proposed, Mao's cryptic remark that "we can work together commonly to deal with a bastard" notwithstanding. These exchanges left uncertainty on both sides, with Mao and Zhou Enlai suspicious that the US would collude with Moscow to the disadvantage of China. But looking at it from an American point of view, the "one line" policy

³⁶ Hua Kuo-feng, "Political Report," *PR*, no. 35 (1977), pp. 41-43; and interview with senior Party historian, October 2007.

³⁷ "Chairman Mao's Theory of the Differentiation of the Three Worlds Is a Major Contribution To Marxism-Leninism," *RMRB*, November 1, 1977, in *PR*, no. 45 (1977); He Fang, "Qinli Zhongguo waijiao zhengce de lishi zhuanzhe (xia)" [Personal Experience at the Historical Turning Point of China's Foreign Policy, part 2], at <http://cnki.net>, p. 71; and Wu Xingtang, "Yuan Zhongguwei Li Yimang: Wengehou duiwai zhengce boluan fanzhen de xianxingzhe" [Former Central Advisory Committee Member Li Yizhen: Forerunner of Correcting Foreign Policy Chaos after the Cultural Revolution], at http://www.21ccom.net/articles/history/xiandai/20150320122532_all.html, March 21, 2015.

³⁸ See below, pp. [xx-xx].

could be seen as little more than an attempt to play the American card against the Soviet Union.³⁹

As stated, the theory of the three worlds was more convoluted, and more self-contradictory, than the crude wishful thinking of the “one line” strategy. It is also testimony to the need of communist regimes to justify policy in Marxist-Leninist terms, however strained. In this context, some reference should be made to the emergence and unfolding of the Sino-Soviet schism. Broadly speaking, important additional factors aside, the escalating conflict emerged from differing external interests from about 1958-59, which by the start of the 1960s led Mao to denounce Soviet foreign policy as “modern revisionist,” and by the mid-1960s to see a degenerating Soviet state as also internally “revisionist,” and a threat via possible imitation in the Chinese polity. In the late 1960s, border clashes, plus the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, led to a focus on a strategic threat from “social imperialism.”⁴⁰ While by the early and mid-1970s the strategic threat was thoroughly dominant, the “revisionist” label remained, before fading even more notably in 1979-80. But Deng used the term despite the reservations of his colleagues even then, and in probing his attitudes toward Moscow, we should not only consider his concerns in a strategic sense, but also reflect on his role in

³⁹ See the discussion and documentation in Teiwes and Sun, *End of the Maoist Era*, pp. 86-87.

⁴⁰ For an excellent detailed study of the initial development and international context of the Sino-Soviet dispute, see Donald S. Zagoria, *The Sino-Soviet Conflict, 1956-1961* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1962). For a broader consideration of the dissolution of the alliance, see Odd Arne Westad, ed., *Brothers in Arms: The Rise and Fall of the Sino-Soviet Alliance, 1945-1963* (Washington DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1998), especially Westad’s introduction. A. Doak Barnett’s *China after Mao: With Selected Documents* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1967), included the classic Maoist 1964 denunciation of the “revisionist” degeneration of the Soviet system.” For an account of the PRC’s new strategic response to “social imperialism,” see John W. Garver, *China’s Decision for Rapprochement with the United States, 1968-1971* (Boulder CO: Westview Press, 1982). A concise overview of the various phases of the relationship is Frederick C. Teiwes, “Sino-Soviet Schism,” in David Pong, ed., *Encyclopedia of Modern China* (Farmington MI: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 2009), vol. 3, pp. 411-14. We note here that in post-Mao internal discussions Deng, Hua, and other Chinese leaders routinely referred to the Soviet Union as “Soviet revisionists” (*Suxiu*).

carrying out the ideological struggle against “revisionism” at Mao’s behest. Indeed, in his famous 1980 interview with Italian journalist Oriana Fallaci, Deng spoke of dealing with Khrushchev, “who only did bad things” to China, over a 10-year period, a personal interaction frequently concerning “modern revisionism” that would have ended well before a strategic threat became the primary issue.⁴¹

The theory of the three worlds defined a “first world” limited to the two superpowers, the Soviet Union and the United States, a category not defined by internal social-political organization, but instead by their behavior as the “biggest international exploiters” who sought “hegemonic” control of the world scene, and were engaged in a bitter conflict that would inevitably lead to world war. The “third world” consisted of poor and developing countries, [genuine] socialist states, including the PRC, and oppressed nations at the forefront of the struggle against the two “hegemonists.” The “second world” of developed states, most notably Soviet bloc states in East Europe and the US allies in West Europe and Japan, but also more vaguely East European members of the Soviet bloc, engaged in various forms of oppression of developing states, but were themselves subject to control and bullying by the superpowers. The extended presentation of the theory in 1977, under Deng’s initiative and Hu Qiaomu’s guidance, was largely faithful to the concepts Mao had articulated, steeped in Marxist-Leninist rhetoric and quotations, particularly from Mao. Although in various respects sophisticated in recognizing changes in the international order since World War II, such as the decolonization process,⁴² classification of countries created many theoretical problems. It is no

⁴¹ The version of Fallaci’s interview published in the *Washington Post*, September 1, 1980, under the title, “Deng: A Third World War Is Inevitable”; and interview with senior Party historian, October 2007.

⁴² See “Chairman Mao’s Theory of the Three Worlds,” especially pp. 17, 26-28, 29-31.

wonder that in overseeing the notionally definitive statement, Hu Qiaomu advised that it wasn't necessary to say things too clearly, "be a bit vague about it."⁴³

More important than theoretical conundrums, at root the "three world theory," much like the "one-line policy," was divorced from reality as an effective guideline for foreign policy and, in fact, even less helpful. The clear aim of both Mao creations was to build the widest range of international forces into an anti-Soviet united front. The most obvious disconnect was that the "one line" concept which placed the US at the absolute center of this united front—with Mao repeatedly hectoring the Americans to shed their illusions and realise "the Polar Bear is going to punish you."⁴⁴ The "theory," however, exalted the defeats of US imperialism, notably in Cuba and Vietnam, communist states with increasing tensions with the PRC, both when Mao launched it in 1974, and when Deng pressed it in 1977. More broadly, the 1977 document hailed worldwide class struggle and the historic mission of burying capitalism, something hardly encouraging for leading "second world" powers in the best position to counter Soviet aims.⁴⁵ Of course, much of this was ignored as rhetoric by US and "second world" leaders who had their own worries concerning Moscow, but they were hardly willing to sign up to hard line propositions advanced by Mao and later Deng.

Other aspects of the "three world theory" related to ongoing PRC foreign policy that had more concrete aspects than exchanging views on the bastardry of the Soviet Union. A critical case, which we examine subsequently when discussing the Sino-Vietnamese War, concerned the countries to China's south. The 1977 document, in highlighting revolutionary successes and progressive "third world"

⁴³ Wu Xingtang, "Yuan Zhongguwei Li Yimang."

⁴⁴ The message conveyed to Kissinger in December 1973; quoted in Wang Zhongchun, "The Soviet Factor in Sino-American Normalization, 1969-1979," in William C. Kirby, Robert S. Ross, and Gong Li, eds., *Normalization of U.S.-China Relations, An International History* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2005), p. 163.

⁴⁵ See "Chairman Mao's Theory of the Three Worlds," pp. 11, 24, 38.

developments, hailed the victories of the Vietnamese, Cambodian and Laotian people over the US, and “the deepening of the national democratic movements of Southeast Asia.” This, needless to say, provided no policy guidance for dealing with conflicts among the Indochinese communist states where PRC policy was evolving when the document was issued.⁴⁶

Arguably, the reference to the Southeast Asian “democratic movements” is even more indicative of policy irrelevance, and some incomprehension. The independent Southeast Asian nations had deep concerns over communist activities in their countries that historically had CCP support, and about their ethnic Chinese populations. Diplomatically, the PRC had tried to finesse the issue by separating party-to-party and state-to-state relations. Yet a year after publication of the three worlds theory, while in Singapore attempting to build support for China’s opposition to Vietnam, Deng was shocked when Lee Kuan Yew raised the issue of China continuing to export revolution to the region, together with PRC broadcasts directed to local ethnic Chinese. China did curb its radio broadcasts, but only two years later, the same year Lee again visited Beijing. On that occasion Deng sought to enlist Lee to bolster Southeast Asian support for Khmer Rouge efforts to drive the Vietnamese out of Cambodia, with Lee responding that some regional countries were not troubled by the Vietnamese occupation, believing a strong Vietnam could curb southward Chinese expansion.⁴⁷

Perhaps most telling is the case of a country not mentioned in the 1977 document—Yugoslavia. While the case of a nation with a clear history of resisting Soviet pressure, Mao had never relented on regarding Yugoslavia as “modern revisionist,” a label applied to Moscow in the document, although the late

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 24. Top Cambodian and Vietnamese leaders, Pol Pot and Le Duan, visited Beijing in September-October and November 1977 respectively. Hua apparently was the main leader in conducting these talks; see *PR*, nos. 41 (1977), pp. 9-11, and 48 (1977), pp. 3-8.

⁴⁷ Lee Kuan Yew, *From Third World To First*, pp. 665-67, 672-74; and below, pp. [154-55].

Chairman had indicated openness to Belgrade's inclusion in the broad united front.⁴⁸ Yet two months before the publication of the official statement of the "three world theory," in August 1977 President Josip Broz Tito began a highly publicized state visit to China. In one sense, this was true to the underlying objective of assembling an expansive range of forces opposed to the Soviet Union, but in another it represented an early creative break from Mao with a massive public welcome of the arch "modern revisionist." While there is no evidence of any dissent on Deng's part, Hua was clearly the initiator of this significant departure, as well as the eventual reestablishment of party-to-party relations with the West European communist parties also reviled by Mao as "revisionists." With Yugoslavia in particular, this involved a pragmatic approach that set aside ideological tests, and recognized the sensitive situation faced by states exposed to Soviet power. It also reflected Hua's political approach, as seen in other areas, of proceeding through a careful process. On the one hand, Hua did not press Tito for a strong anti-Moscow stance,⁴⁹ on the other hand, he was careful in responding to Yugoslav wishes for restoring party relations, something completed after investigations in mid-1978. The result was a significant marker that the underlying objective of a broad anti-Soviet united front was being pursued with some subtlety, and the strident aspects of the three worlds theory could be taken with a grain of salt.⁵⁰

Despite the ideological overkill of the three worlds theory and the impracticability of the "one line" policy, these concepts provided the orientation for post-Mao strategic policy that garnered wide leadership support: the main threat was the Soviet Union, and the key focus for seeking international support

⁴⁸ In 1975, Mao praised Tito for defying pressure and being firm like iron; *PR*, no. 36 (1977), p. 9.

⁴⁹ In his formal banquet speech, Hua did cite the theory of the three worlds, and praised Tito's opposition to "imperialism and hegemonism," but without identifying the Soviet Union and framing it terms of Tito's long-standing leading role in the non-aligned movement; *ibid.*, pp. 8-9.

⁵⁰ See Wu Xingtang, "Yuan Zhongguwei Li Yimang."

was the United States. Well before Deng's return to work, Soviet efforts for reconciliation were rebuffed.⁵¹ Yet nuanced differences can be perceived, even if detailed contemporary evidence is missing. According to a very high MFA official's disclosure to a family member, shortly after the arrest of the "gang of four," Ye Jianying came to the Ministry and assertedly indicated that "from now on we will follow Premier Zhou's foreign policy, not Chairman Mao's."⁵² While sceptical that Ye would have spoken in such blunt terms, but we accept an underlying logic: although broad objectives may have been similar, Mao's revolutionary advocacy had an isolating tendency, Zhou's sophisticated diplomacy could be more productive. Indeed, a senior foreign policy official later contrasted Mao's revolutionary inclinations with Zhang Wentian's view that diplomacy should not promote world revolution, observing that the Premier intellectually respected Zhang's position, but always carried out the Chairman's wishes.⁵³ Yet the contrast in the new period was with Deng, described by a Party historian specializing in his career, as having a deeper grasp of Mao's foreign policy than the Premier.⁵⁴ From his return to work Deng was consistently the most outspoken about the Soviet Union, described by the NSC's Michel (Mike) Oksenberg as "always talking about Soviet expansionism."⁵⁵ Yet Deng's aggressive tendencies, while always there, did not decisively determine military action before the invasion of Vietnam, and always avoided direct confrontation with Moscow.

Apart from the broad objectives of Chinese external strategy, Mao left his successor leaders with a linked dilemma—what to do about Taiwan. From Nixon's visit onward, the US stood at the center of Mao's foreign policy as the main counter

⁵¹ For details see Wang Zhongchun, "The Soviet Factor," pp. 165-66.

⁵² Interview, May 2007.

⁵³ He Fang, "Qinli Zhongguo waijiao zhengce de lishi zhuanzhe," p. 73.

⁵⁴ Interview, November 2002.

⁵⁵ Woodcock Papers, file no. 17 (March 2, 1982).

to the Soviet Union. It is clear that he prioritized the international situation over the Taiwan issue, as stated in his November 1973 argument to Kissinger: “[You should] separate the relationship of the US and China from that between China and Taiwan. ... Taiwan is only a small island.... It would be all right for China not to have Taiwan in the [PRC] now. That might take 100 years.”⁵⁶ Yet the issue was inextricably linked to both the larger international setting, and to domestic Chinese politics. From the first, for all the strategic/philosophical exchanges involving Mao, Zhou Enlai, Nixon and Kissinger, the very fact of the US president visiting Beijing was a recognition of China as a great (actually potential) power, and its fundamental (not yet declared “core”) interest in Taiwan would be a key issue not only in the 1972 Shanghai communique, but going forward. After all, China had been poised to attack Taiwan in 1950 before the Korean War and the insertion of US forces in the Taiwan Strait, and in both 1954-55 and 1958 the PRC launched military attacks on Nationalist held offshore islands that drew in the US and posed dangerous threats of escalation.⁵⁷ When Nixon arrived in Beijing, “liberate Taiwan” was a prominently displayed slogan. An empty slogan in terms of China’s existing capabilities, but an issue that had to be addressed if normalization was to be achieved, which in turn was necessary for enhanced strategic cooperation.

Although the dramatic ideological turnaround represented by Nixon’s visit was accepted remarkably easily by the elite and population, coming to terms with the Taiwan question clearly created domestic political issues, in part due to different tendencies within the leadership, unfolding circumstances both in the bilateral context and internal developments, and above all by tensions within and changes of Mao’s views. Clearly never a policy absolutist, in July 1973, a time when

⁵⁶ Gong Li, “The Difficult Path to Diplomatic Relations: China’s U.S. Policy, 1972-1978,” in Kirby, Ross, and Gong, *Normalization*, p. 126.

⁵⁷ On the two offshore islands crises, see Jian Chen, *Mao’s China and the Cold War* (Chapel Hill NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), ch. 7.

Zhou Enlai was already under pressure, the Chairman tellingly advised Zhang Chunqiao and Wang Hongwen that “no compromise under any conditions” is not Marxism.⁵⁸ Yet four months later, when Zhou negotiated with Kissinger, Mao turned on the Premier with the disingenuous charge of “capitulationism,” based in part on the Taiwan issue. Specifically, while aware of his political vulnerability, Zhou sought to hew tightly to Mao’s directions, but in discussions with Kissinger he acknowledged there were two possibilities for solving the issue—peaceful or military, which was consistent with the Shanghai communique, even if the peaceful route was explicitly stated in the US position.⁵⁹

Mao’s irritation may have been a consequence of his frustration over the lack of progress in the overall situation due to Nixon’s Watergate-induced political weakness, his basic belief that the Taiwan question could only be settled by force, and/or his underlying attitude toward Zhou both in the specific period or more broadly. The latter explanation gains force since when Deng, personally more favoured by the Chairman, picked up the negotiations with Kissinger in October 1974, he presented a substantive position little different from what Zhou offered the previous year, but expressed more aggressively, presumably to Mao’s pleasure, with Deng’s effective replacement of Zhou as *de facto* premier soon completed. When Deng fell out of favour with the Chairman in 1975-76 for reasons having nothing to do with foreign policy, radical criticism of him for, *inter alia*, alleged weakness on Taiwan appeared, but it was never a major aspect of the anti-Deng campaign, and not a concern to Mao who formally kept Deng responsible for foreign policy until the 1976 Tiananmen incident.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Gong Li, “The Difficult Path to Diplomatic Relations,” p. 123.

⁵⁹ See Teiwes and Sun, *End of the Maoist Era*, pp. 124-31; and the Shanghai communique, in *PR*, no. 9 (1972), p. 5.

⁶⁰ See Teiwes and Sun, *End of the Maoist Era*, pp. 20, 110, 130-31, 201-202, 427ff.

Both Chinese and foreign analyses sensibly attribute the failure to advance US-China normalization in this period, and thus “solve” the Taiwan problem, to domestic political problems on both sides.⁶¹ On the Chinese side the problem was not inconstant positions on the specific matters at hand, but rather the broader political climate in late 1975-76 and the situation of the relevant leaders in late 1975-76, with Zhou and Deng removed from the scene for different reasons, and Mao’s health in dramatic decline together with his remaining focus on upholding *his* Cultural Revolution. Dramatic political circumstances affected the US side too, with Nixon’s terminal decline undermining any plans he may have had regarding Taiwan. In a real sense, however responsibility for the deadlock lay more on the American side. On the specific normalization-Taiwan conundrum, under Mao the PRC set three conditions for normalization: abrogate the US-Republic of China defense treaty, withdraw troops from Taiwan, and terminate diplomatic relations with Taipei. These were reasserted very early during Hua’s leadership,⁶² and were the key US concessions that during the Carter Administration, with minor tweaking resulted in diplomatic recognition. The Ford Administration had simply been too hamstrung by opposition from conservative forces, and the challenge of Ronald Reagan for the 1976 presidential nomination, to pursue anything like what Nixon promised.⁶³ We will return to this this dynamic in our detailed analysis of the normalization process following Mao’s death, but the larger picture is, rather than negotiating brilliance on Deng’s part, normalization became possible due to movement on the US side.

⁶¹ See Gong Li, “The Difficult Path to Diplomatic Relations,” pp. 130, 133; and Rosemary Foot, “Prises Won, Opportunities Lost: The U.S. Normalization of Relations with China, 1972-1979,” in Kirby, Ross, and Gong, *Normalization*, pp. 94-96.

⁶² Notably by Ambassador [sic] Huang Zhen in a January 1977 meeting with Kissinger and incoming Secretary of State Cyrus Vance; “Memorandum of Conversation,” January 8, 1977, declassified State Department document. Cf. Ross, *Negotiating Cooperation*, p. 109.

⁶³ See James Mann, *About Face: A History of America’s Curious Relationship with China, from Nixon to Clinton* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999), pp. 66, 68ff.

The third broadly consensual aspect of post-Mao foreign policy was using external relations to further China's economic development. This was a clear break from Mao's approach, notwithstanding enhanced foreign trade and economic exchanges following the Chairman's diplomatic opening to the international community.⁶⁴ Fundamentally, there is no evidence of Mao's economic motives in his external moves, or coordination of foreign policy with domestic issues. Yet the ideological shift inherent in Mao's new foreign policy and the exposure, however limited, to foreign methods and experience, together with elite and popular longing for non-radical economic growth, was an essential condition for such growth—once Mao was gone, whether in the form of the “Western leap forward” or “reform and opening.”⁶⁵ The problem with orthodox PRC analyses, again too often recycled by foreign scholars, is to treat the emerging integration of diplomatic activity and economic objectives, as virtually a matter of Deng personally adding “reform and opening” to the foreign policy agenda left by the late Chairman.⁶⁶

The conventional wisdom, in extreme form, simply attempts to write Hua out of the story. An example from a Party historian in a collaborative Central Party School-Harvard project, cites Deng's various comments on China's economic backwardness, the need to catch up, the importance of foreign technology, and the need for cooperation with the West, without a single substantive reference to Hua.⁶⁷ An article, in the quasi-dissident *Yanhuang chunqiu*, seeking to provide a

⁶⁴ On economic involvement with the outside world in the 1972-76 period, see “Hua Guofeng yu duiwai kaifang” [Hua Guofeng and Opening to the Outside], *YHCQ*, no. 4 (2016), pp. 19-21; and Teiwes and Sun, *End of the Maoist Era*, pp. 50-51, 158, 199, 330.

⁶⁵ See Zhang Baijia, “Chinese Politics and Asia-Pacific Policy,” in Ezra F. Vogel, Yuan Ming, and Tanaka Akihiko, eds, *The Golden Age of the U.S.-China-Japan Triangle, 1972-1989* (Cambridge MA: Harvard East Asian Monographs, 2002), pp. 38-42.

⁶⁶ E.g., see Li Jie, “China's Domestic Politics and the Normalization of Sino-U.S. Relations, 1969-1979,” in Kirby, Ross, and Gong, *Normalization*, pp. 78ff.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

corrective to the unbalanced dominant narrative, emphasized Hua's leading role in opening China to the outside world, citing his early steps when Deng had not yet returned to the leadership, and details of his major initiatives over the course of 1976-79, without excising Deng from the account.⁶⁸ Both studies cite their respective protagonist's roles in one of the critical developments in *kaifang* policy, Vice Premier Gu Mu's economic investigation group that visited West Europe in May-June 1978, and came back with recommendations that further advanced opening up. In this episode, Hua was central in organizing the mission, while Deng clearly gave enthusiastic support. In any case, political necessity created the official story: in his memoirs Gu Mu focuses on Deng, only mentioning Hua in passing. In internal interviews with Party historians, Gu later sardonically noted how everything had to be credited to Deng.⁶⁹

Laying orthodox political accounts aside, there can be no doubt that Hua and Deng both deeply understood China's backwardness and the need to open the PRC to outside economic forces. Hua, arguably simply due to finding himself the leader after Mao, quickly began the process.⁷⁰ Deng, as highlighted by the second quotation at the head of this chapter, was determined to address the problem even before he returned to work. There is no evidence of any difference between the two leaders on the urgency of the challenge or the basic policy orientation for dealing with it. Some contrasting inclinations and functions, however, can be noted. Hua, reflecting his activities in Mao's last years, was more deeply into the economic issues themselves. Deng's most telling contribution came in his role as the main negotiator with the US and Japan, the economic

⁶⁸ Fang Mao, "Hua Guofeng yu duiwai kaifang," pp. 21-26.

⁶⁹ *Gu Mu huiyilu*, pp. 297-306; and interview with Gu made available by Party historians. Cf. above, [ch. 3, pp. 43-45], on the circumstances of Gu's and other related foreign assignments in 1978.

⁷⁰ As stated by a significant, balanced foreign affairs official at the time, "opening up began with Hua, it was not first put forward by Deng." He Fang, "Qinli Zhongguo waijiao zhengce de lishi zhuanzhe," p. 71.

powerhouses with so much potential for aiding PRC economic development. Temperamentally, Hua was somewhat more reserved on pursuing foreign technology on financial grounds, while Deng was the most ardent proponent of the “Western leap forward” that so alarmed Chen Yun, but for which Hua would have to take the blame.⁷¹ In terms of responsibilities, clearly Deng was in the forefront with the US as befit his diplomatic role, while Hua, perhaps due to some agreed division of labor, was more involved in seeking support from Western Europe, as well as from Japan, starting very early in his leadership before Deng’s return. Hua had no doubts about the potential benefits of engagement with the US, but from an economic perspective, he believed it was not sufficient for a comprehensive opening to the outside world.⁷²

The role of the domestic economy in normalization of relations with the United States will be covered in more detail in our section on that critical foreign policy development. Here we offer a brief overview concerning Hua and Deng. The question is more difficult with Hua in that he was not the front man in the negotiations, information on his policy involvement is restricted, and the narrative on his leadership here and more generally is distorted. For Deng, however, it is very

⁷¹ See above, [ch. 3, pp. 35, 58-59, 86ff].

⁷² Hua’s initiatives in seeking both concrete support and knowledge of foreign methods were evident in his role in organizing the various missions to West Europe and Japan in 1978 (see above, [ch. 3, pp. 43-45]), as well as his September-October 1979 trip to Europe. Regarding Japan, in early April 1977 Hua met with a Japanese economic delegation, and emphasized that a newly stable PRC sought a long-term trade agreement with Japan, and to conclude the stalled Japan-China Peace Treaty at an early date.

Another example of Hua’s openness to foreign experience concerned Yugoslavia. Inevitably that small country could not play a role anywhere like that of the US, Europe or Japan, but during his August 1978 visit Hua saw lessons in Yugoslav economic policies that could facilitate a break from orthodox PRC practice. During that trip, Hua had numerous talks with Zhao Ziyang who was in the delegation. According to Zhao’s post-trip report, in these talks Hua emphasized China’s 10 to 15-year economic lag behind foreign countries, the lack of knowledge of the modern world, and the need to emancipate thought. Zhao Ziyang, “Jiěfàng sīxiǎng mài kāi dà bù jiāsù shíxiàn sì gè xiàndàihuà—a zài jūnqū ‘sān xué’ xiānjìn dàibiǎo dàhui shàng de jiǎnghuà” [Emancipate the Mind, Take a Big Step, Accelerate the Realization of the Four Modernizations—Speech at the Military Region Advanced “Three Studies” Congress], (October 1, 1978), text provided by Sichuan official.

clear, even if the overarching question of what was more important to him—Mao’s anti-Soviet strategy or China’s economic needs—can only be a matter for speculation. Essentially, Deng saw the US as the *sine qua non* for supporting modernization, on the eve of departing for the US in January 1979, telling Foreign Ministry officials that no country seeking development could afford not to have good relations with the Americans.⁷³ Upon leaving Washington, Deng underlined his conviction by observing to an adviser: “If we look back we find that [Third World countries] that were on the side of the US were successful [in their modernization drive], whereas all of those against the US have not been successful. We shall be on the side of the US.”⁷⁴

In terms of moving normalization forward, both Deng and Hua had to consider specific economic projects, enticing US business interest generally, and placing economic objectives within the larger picture of other requirements of the PRC negotiating position. Deng was prominent on all these counts, indicating interest in offshore oil exploration by American corporations in discussions with the then former US Liaison Office head George H.W. Bush in September 1977, expressing interest in technology in meetings with American officials and political leaders, and generally adopting an expansive tone as in his provocative question to US science adviser Frank Press in July 1978, “why don’t you come over and develop our coal mines?”⁷⁵ But there was a much broader effort than Deng alone, one that surely had the backing and close involvement of Hua. The approaches of PRC businesses to American companies in Hong Kong in spring-summer 1978 that

⁷³ Interview with senior Party historian with good Foreign Ministry contacts, October 2007.

⁷⁴ Cited in Sergey Radchenko, “We’re Very Sexy People’: How the U.S. Miscalculated Its Allure to China,” at <http://www.chinafile.com/reporting-opinion/viewpoint/were-very-sexy-people-how-us-miscalculated-its-allure-china>, February 22, 2019.

⁷⁵ James Lilley with Jeffrey Lilley, *China Hands: Nine Decades of Adventure, Espionage, and Diplomacy in Asia* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004), pp. 203-204; Li Jie, “China’s Domestic Politics and Normalization,” pp. 84-85; Vogel, *Deng Xiaoping*, pp. 322-23; and Woodcock Papers, file no. 15 (February 10, 1982).

we examined in Chapter 3, was a significant bureaucratic project, even if its significance was not grasped by the Liaison Office in Beijing despite Deng's various comments.⁷⁶ As for offshore oil exploration, by fall 1978 Hua and Deng both approved the policy, and in early November Hua's lengthy meeting with US Energy Secretary Schlesinger on a variety of cooperative energy projects, in Schlesinger's account, reportedly capped "a big step forward."⁷⁷

The timing of that meeting is significant, coming days after the US presented a joint draft communique for normalization that led to anticipation in the CCP leadership that diplomatic relations were now clearly within grasp. Deng immediately urged the Politburo that "we should seize the opportunity," a presentation that apparently gave considerable attention economic benefits.⁷⁸ With Deng, and undoubtedly Hua, both engaged in pressing forward, negotiations soon accelerated to their successful conclusion in little more than a month's time. Yet it is important to consider, apart from the obvious interest of the Chinese leadership in the potential economic benefits of normalization, how economic issues played out in the negotiations, and more importantly in the overall PRC approach. In the negotiations *per se* economic considerations never came up, the crucial issue being Taiwan, with some references to the overall strategic situation also involved. In terms of the Chinese strategy, potential economic benefits to the US were an inducement to the Americans, but one that could not be realized by

⁷⁶ See above, [ch. 3, pp. 42n109, 46-47].

⁷⁷ Zhao Ziyang, "Jiěfàng sīxiǎng mài kāi dà bù jiāsù shíxiàn sì gè xiàndàihuà; Lilley, *China Hands*, pp. 205-20; and AFP dispatch via Xinhuanet, Beijing, November 4, 1978, at <http://www.ziliaoku.org/ckxx/1978-11-06-1#194607>. Lilley's account of the meeting with Hua, reflecting his memoir's dismissive attitude of Hua in contrast to its high regard for Deng, ignores any discussion of economic issues. In the AFP report, however, Schlesinger noted a "deep impression" of China's "determination to achieve its modernization goals."

⁷⁸ Li Jie, "China's Domestic Politics and Normalization," p. 86. The relevant timing was the submission of the US draft and Deng's Politburo advocacy on November 2, and Hua's meeting with Schlesinger on the 4th.

the US side without meeting China's bottom line on Taiwan. Both Hua and Deng had indicated consistently, that while China was prepared for mutually beneficial arrangements in the interim, it would only be with the successful conclusion of normalization that expanding US economic engagement would be possible.⁷⁹ And so it turned out.

As China entered 1979, each of the three guiding objectives of post-Mao foreign policy had been met. US normalization provided a platform for enhanced cooperation against the Soviet Union, the Taiwan situation had been dealt with in a manner minimally acceptable, and the PRC's integration into the international economic system had developed apace, involving much more than simply the new PRC-US relationship. Yet the first two achievements, as we shall see later in this chapter, would soon lead to complications, and measured dissent within the leadership and elite.

Deng's Command of the Military

Following his return to work in mid-1977, Deng played a significant role across the board, and in all likelihood the dominant one in foreign policy overall, but his authority in the military was of yet another level from the outset. In his own mind, as indicated in his spring 1977 private comment noted at the head of this chapter, resuming his role as PLA Chief-of-Staff would mean that "naturally I'll be in charge (*yaoguan*) of the military." It was further reflected in the eyes of the army elite broadly when, shortly after his return, at the at the July 31 celebrations marking the 50th anniversary of the founding of the PLA, a portrait of Deng was placed center stage, producing a prolonged standing ovation.⁸⁰ And at the highest level, four

⁷⁹ See, e.g., *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1977-1980: China* (hereafter *çp.* 603-605; and Li Jie, "China's Domestic Politics and Normalization," p. 85.

⁸⁰ Zhang Sheng, *Cong zhanzheng zhong zoulai—liangdai junren de duihua* [Out of the Battlefield: A Dialogue of Two Generations] (Beijing: Zhongguo qingnian chubanshe, 2008), p. 412.

months earlier, at a private gathering to celebrate Ye Jianying's 80th birthday, when Deng respectfully addressed Ye as "old marshal," Ye quickly replied that "you too are an old marshal, you are the *leader* of us old marshals."⁸¹

Deng's prestige and clout within the PLA had several sources. From a strictly military perspective, as implied by Ye Jianying's statement on his 80th birthday, Deng was regarded as a major hero of the armed struggle. While the top *political commissar* of the Second Field Army (known colloquially as the Liu [Bocheng]-Deng army), Deng's prestige was broadly equal to the army's very top *commanders*, thus earning Ye's accolade as "the *leader* of us old marshals." In this respect, it is instructive to compare the regard for Deng to the significantly lower prestige Ye held among the military elite. Ye's revolutionary contribution was as Chief-of-Staff in Mao's revolutionary headquarters, a sharp contrast to Deng's renowned performance *on the battlefield*, most famously during the crucial 1948-49 Huai-Hai campaign, a major turning point in the civil war with the Guomindang. In 1955, when the highest-ranking title of marshal was conferred, Deng was a prime candidate, but ultimately not chosen, apparently because of a desire to underline his by then position as one of the regime's most important civilian officials.⁸² Ye, by contrast, was seemingly regarded by his peers as not quite deserving, the "tenth marshal" who simply made up the numbers. The last of the ten marshals named, and one of the three not given a position on the Politburo the following year, Ye

⁸¹ Fan Shuo *et al.*, *Ye Jianying zhuan* [Biography of Ye Jianying] (Beijing: Dangdai Zhongguo chubanshe, 1995), pp. 661-62 (emphasis added).

⁸² According to a senior Party historian, the original 1955 plan was to name Mao "Generalissimo," thus placing him on the same level as Chiang Kai-shek (and incidentally Stalin), while Zhou Enlai was to be declared a marshal along with Deng, but Mao decided against both steps. Apart from Ye, all of the other marshals were battlefield commanders, except for Luo Ronghuan, who had played a critical role in civil war victories in the Northeast as Lin Biao's political commissar.

did not hold particularly significant positions within the PLA before the Cultural Revolution.⁸³

Yet Deng's huge prestige in the PLA was not simply a matter of his battlefield achievements. It can also be viewed from the perspective that his career reflected both aspects of Mao's famous dictum: "political power grows out of the barrel of a gun, but the Party commands the gun, and the gun must never be allowed to command the Party." Early in the PRC, the Party was reduced to Mao himself, with one civilian assistant—Deng Xiaoping. The CMC was reorganized in 1954, with ranking Party leaders Liu Shaoqi and Zhou Enlai dropped, and Deng the only key civilian leader appointed apart from the Chairman. Deng thus possessed legitimate bureaucratic authority over the PLA in accord with the sacred requirement of Party control, a principle deeply inculcated in the military.⁸⁴ Of course, things changed with the first of Deng's Cultural Revolution removals from power in 1966, yet significantly, when Mao brought Deng back in December 1973 at a critical enlarged CMC meeting, he told the assembled generals that "I'm appointing a marshal for you." And notwithstanding Deng's subsequent ousting in 1976, in the new period much of his authority in this institution marked by intense loyalty to and belief in Mao, derived from the late Chairman. Having earlier received the supreme accolade of "Chairman Mao's close comrade-in-arms," even in Mao's fraught last period his view of Deng as a rare talent in both politics and military affairs was reaffirmed, and well understood. This larger relationship, not the Chairman's rebukes, firmly linked the two leaders in the minds of the PLA elite.⁸⁵

⁸³ On military elite reservations concerning Ye, see Harrison E. Salisbury, *The Long March: The Untold Story* (New York: Harper & Row, 1985), pp. 272-78; and Teiwes and Sun, *Tragedy*, p. 16. Ye's PLA duties after 1955 to the Cultural Revolution included inspection, training and heading the military science academy.

⁸⁴ See Frederick C. Teiwes, "The Chinese State During the Maoist Era," in David Shambaugh, ed., *The Modern Chinese State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 121-22.

⁸⁵ On the continuing Mao-Deng relationship and Deng's post-1973 military role, see Teiwes and Sun, *End of the Maoist Era*, pp. 66ff, 140-44, 180-82, 194-96, 251ff.

The contrast with Hua's military prestige could not have been more glaring: essentially, Hua had none. His history only encompassed a county-level political officer role during the revolutionary period, some militia work and Vietnam war preparedness activities in Hunan after 1949, significant but limited involvement in army affairs following his arrival in Beijing in 1971, and no military designation at the time of Mao's death despite his position as the presumptive successor.⁸⁶ Hua's position as the new national leader following the arrest of the "gang of four," however, saw him not only designated Chairman of the CMC, but also presented to the public and army elite as China's supreme commander. Yet the effort to build a reputation for Hua as a substantial PLA figure could not be sustained. Shortly after he assumed the CMC Chairmanship in fall 1976, proposals emerged that the Academy of Military Science produce an essay recounting undying historical bonds between Hua and the army's commanders. General Su Yu, a former PLA Chief-of-Staff, objected, arguing that "If we put together an essay like that, how will we ever account for our actions to the old comrades? We've suffered enough from not seeking truth from facts." The essay was never published.⁸⁷

Yet as CMC Chairman Hua formally had superior PLA authority, and there was more than formality involved in that as the successor he had in effect been placed in that position by Mao. Thus, *loyalty to the late Chairman* sustained Hua since Mao's prestige in the military dwarfed that of even Deng. Moreover, the principle of stability and unity, so assiduously sought by both Hua and Deng in this

⁸⁶ On the revolutionary period and Hunan, see Oksenberg and Yeung, "Hua Kuo-feng's Pre-Cultural Revolution Hunan Years," pp. 3-5, 47-49. In Beijing, Mao assigned Hua a significant role in cleaning up the Lin Biao affair (see Teiwes and Sun, *End of the Maoist Era*, p. 38), and he subsequently attended high-level military meetings in 1974-75, but he never held military rank or acted on the basis of PLA authority.

⁸⁷ *Su Yu zhuan* [A Biography of Su Yu] (Beijing: Dangdai Zhongguo chubanshe, 2000), p. 1015. This did not, however, end all efforts to create a public military image for Hua, as in the September 1977 issue of *China Reconstructs* that described him as an "excellent tactician in guerrilla warfare." See June Teufel Dreyer, "Deng Xiaoping: The Soldier," *CQ*, no. 135 (1993), p. 543.

early post-Mao period, further bolstered Hua's position. This did not, of course, translate into a situation of Hua controlling key PLA decisions that were implemented by Deng, although Deng framed it that way: "Chairman Hua and the Party Center want me to grasp the army, my role is to assist [him] and Vice Chairman Ye in this regard."⁸⁸ This statement indicates a further complexity since Ye, restored to the role of responsibility for CMC affairs in March 1977,⁸⁹ as well as first vice chairman of the CMC, was directly above Deng in the PLA chain of command. Ye, moreover, did have military prestige, although significantly less than Deng, and had gained further respect due to his role in the purge of the "gang of four."

How did this work in practice? First, it is necessary to review in broad terms the Hua-Deng relationship in army affairs following Deng's return to work in mid-1977 up to late 1979, when Deng began to surreptitiously undermine Hua broadly, and where PLA matters were significantly involved—a process examined in Chapter 8. As in other areas examined in preceding chapters, and despite claims of conflict and indeed power struggle in both PRC and foreign academic sources,⁹⁰ we find no evidence of significant Hua-Deng differences on specific military policy issues, except concerning the Sino-Vietnam war which is examined later in the chapter,

⁸⁸ Deng at a CMC forum shortly after his return, August 23, 1977. Cf. *Ye Jianying nianpu*, vol. 2, p. 1130.

⁸⁹ In February 1976, with Ye going on sick leave as the anti-rightist movement heated up, Chen Xilian was assigned the task that Ye had been performing over the preceding year, but with no formal promotion in rank. There is some evidence suggesting Chen was reluctant to take the post, and sought to maintain good relations with Ye. See Teiwes and Sun, *End of the Maoist Era*, pp. 445-46. In the post-Mao context, it was natural to restore Ye to the position, something readily accepted by Chen, who was assigned to assist Ye.

⁹⁰ In PRC sources, the major example is the largely fabricated case against Su Zhenhua analysed below, one presented as demonstrating Hua's efforts to "seize power" in the PLA. In foreign sources, M. Taylor Fravel, without providing specific information of clashing views, refers to a "power struggle" that prevented the formulation of a new strategic doctrine until Deng had defeated Hua; Fravel, *Active Defense: China's Military Strategy since 1949* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019), pp. 140, 151-56, 181.

where the information is murky. Nor do we find convincing analyses suggesting latent or active conflict based on presumed support for Hua by various generals, particularly Chen Xilian and Su Zhenhua, who are presented as close to the new Chairman.⁹¹ To the extent Hua developed good relations with Chen and Su, they largely derived from the circumstances in 1976 requiring military support for the coup against the “gang of four.” Chen Xilian, as the official then responsible for CMC daily work was in effect the highest-ranking military official as well as commander of the Beijing Military Region, while Su Zhenhua, as navy political commissar controlled the fleet in Shanghai, the “gang’s” base area. Both were deeply opposed to the radicals, and closely involved in their purge.⁹²

While varying degrees of mutual reliance and respect between Hua and Chen and Su can be assumed during these critical days and beyond, they can in no way be regarded as leading them to side with Hua in a struggle against Deng, at most a one-sided struggle which only emerged in late 1979 on Deng’s initiative. We will examine Su’s celebrated but distorted case subsequently, here only offering some observations concerning Chen Xilian. Chen had served in Deng’s Second Field Army, and according to credible sources was one of his two favorite generals. Indeed, when Mao called for nominations for PLA Chief-of-Staff in 1974, the post he then gave to Deng, Deng nominated Chen. Two years later, respecting military seniority, Chen sought to return responsibility for CMC daily work to Ye immediately following the arrest of the “gang of four,” although the transition only occurred the following March. In any case, Chen’s overall political position faded from early 1977, well before he was set aside at the Third Plenum, due largely to

⁹¹ See Joseph Torigian, “Prestige, Manipulation, and Coercion: Elite Power Struggles and the Fate of Three Revolutions,” PhD dissertation, MIT, 2016, pp. 329-30, 359-61, 365, 376-79.

⁹² See Teiwes and Sun, *End of the Maoist Era*, pp. 550, 562, 568, 572, 579, 586; and “Su Zhenhua zai fensui ‘sirenbang’ de qianqian houhou” [Su Zhenhua before and after Smashing the “Gang of Four”], 1994-2007 China Academic Journal Publishing House, <http://www.cnki.net>, pp. 20-24.

excesses committed during the Cultural Revolution in the Northeast when he was political and military leader. There is little evidence to suggest Hua did much to prevent Chen's slide. Nor did Deng, notwithstanding a comforting face-to-face message that Chen's mistakes, although serious, because they were committed in the provinces and not in Beijing, were a lesser concern. All would be fine, Deng told Chen, if he behaved himself in the future.⁹³ From the larger perspective, Chen's fate was not due to siding with either Hua or Deng. As with the top military elite generally, for the two years following Deng's return, the sensible path was to carry out Deng's orders, while showing due deference to Hua as Mao's successor.

The key to understanding authority and process in the PLA lies in the expectations and mettle of the three ranking leaders. Simply put, Hua and Ye fundamentally conceded control of the military to Deng from early on, something he not only quickly seized, but also regarded as his turf. While we lack concrete evidence of the content, or even the extent, of private discussions involving the three on military issues, the ceding of authority is clear. For Ye Jianying, the army situation was an extreme example of the tension in his overall approach to the post-Mao leadership: bolstering Hua's position as the long-term successor, while relying on Deng to provide experience and status in the challenging transitional period. Given their operational responsibilities in the PLA, there undoubtedly was more interaction between Ye and Deng on military policy issues than between Hua and Deng, and some sources suggest more friction.⁹⁴ Yet from the outset, Ye recognized and accommodated the clout of *the leader of the old marshals*,

⁹³ Teiwes and Sun, *End of the Maoist Era*, pp. 203-204, 562-63; *Chen Xilian huiyilu* [Chen Xilian's Memoir] (Beijing: Jiefangjun chubanshe, 2004), pp. 384, 402, cited in Torigian, "Prestige, Manipulation, and Coercion," pp. 359, 360; interview with close relative of a Politburo member during the period, November 2006; and above, note 90.

⁹⁴ According to a very well-connected senior Party historian speaking of relations generally in this early period, the tension between Deng and Ye was much greater than that between Deng and Hua; interview, February 2000.

although apparently not anticipating the intensity of Deng's grip on the army. In August 1977, as the division of labor in the newly selected CMC was considered, and Deng declared he would assist Ye in presiding over daily work, Ye directed that military documents meant for him could be *first* sent to Deng.⁹⁵ More generally, while still exercising certain functions such as signing off on personnel arrangements proposed by Deng, Ye gradually faded from involvement, also exiting as Minister of Defense in March 1978 for the more symbolic position as Chairman of the NPC. As an 80-year old tolerant personality who had never been a particularly forceful leader, Ye was edging toward quasi-retirement, even though he retained a voice and influence in the highest Party bodies.⁹⁶

The nub of the underlying tension between Deng and Ye concerned the role of Hua. One rationale for the return of Deng was to educate Hua for future

⁹⁵ *Ye Jianying nianpu*, vol. 2, p. 1130. Moreover, in addition to Deng there was another leader much more deeply involved in daily work, the new CMC secretary-general, Luo Ruiqing, who served directly under Deng.

Luo was a major figure in military affairs before his death in August 1978. A forceful figure like Deng, he famously clashed with other military leaders before 1966, leading Mao to ask why two marshals (apparently Ye and Nie Rongzhen) were afraid of one general. There clearly was tension between Luo and Ye and their families based on Ye's role, assigned by Mao, to investigate Luo in the start of his purge on the cusp of the Cultural Revolution. We can be confident that Luo was not Ye's choice for the secretary-general post, but beyond that, despite working with Deng in the Party Secretariat before 1966, Luo was not Deng's first choice. He initially offered the position to Zhang Aiping who declined, preferring to work in the military modernization area, but then proposed Luo. Deng apparently had some concern over Luo's health, but the appointment was made. Teiwes and Sun, *Tragedy*, p. 30; Lei Liu, "Dog-beating stick: General Zhang Aiping's contribution to the modernization of China's nuclear force and strategy since 1977," *Cold War History*, no. 4 (2018), p. 5; and interviews with senior Party historian, February and September 2009.

⁹⁶ Leading Party historians describe Ye's retreat. One, while acknowledging that available documents do not indicate conflict or a lack of coordination, reported Ye's disinclination to operate on the first line, and Deng's clearly greater control; interview, February 2009. Another historian was more sweeping, claiming that from mid-1977 Ye, resigned to old age, was hardly active in the military; interview, February 2000. These assessments gain support from comparing the official chronologies of not only Ye and Deng, but also that of Party Standing Committee member Li Xiannian. For the entire period from the 11th Congress in August 1977 to October 1979 when Deng's manoeuvres against Hua began, *Ye Jianying nianpu* devotes only 53 pages to his activities. In contrast, *Deng nianpu*, vol. 1, requires 385 pages to cover his undertakings, and *Li Xiannian nianpu*, vols. 5 and 6, absorb 261 pages.

leadership of the PLA. At the time of his *de facto* assumption of army command in August 1977, Deng intimated a transitional role for himself, declaring that “I am prepared to work for five or five and a half years, working hard with everyone to give Chairman Hua and the Party Center an army that is much better than now.”⁹⁷ Hua’s own behavior, however, despite bogus accusations in the Su Zhenhua case that he was seeking to seize control of the army, did not demonstrate any desire to be deeply involved in military policy. As Chairman, Hua regularly chaired CMC meetings, generally demonstrating a command of the issues, and signed off on PLA proposals as required by procedures. But the substance of policy emerged from the military itself on Deng’s initiative or with his approval.⁹⁸ It was arguably this distance on Hua’s part, whether due his heavy schedule in other areas, an awareness of his lack of military credentials, or a calculation that intruding too deeply into Deng’s realm was not politically wise, that led Ye at the start of 1978 to urge Hua to give more attention to military matters, to go to the troops and learn more that would benefit him for work in the future.⁹⁹ Ye’s advice most likely influenced Hua’s visits to often units in 1978, generally accompanied by high-level military leaders, sometimes including Deng.¹⁰⁰ Apart from the aborted Spring 1978

⁹⁷ Deng speaking at a symposium of the CMC, August 23, 1977.

⁹⁸ For example, an August 30, 1978, PLA General Staff Department (GSD) report to Hua on rectification efforts within the department. The report noted Deng’s familiarity with the General Staff and his important and timely instructions. “Zhonggong zongcanmoubu weiyuanhui guanyu xjianque guanche Zhonggong he Junwei shouzhang zhishi jingshen shenru kaizhan ‘sancha sanzhen’ yundong de qingkuang de baogao” [Report of the General Staff Department Party Committee on Resolutely Implementing the Spirit of the Instructions of the Leaders of the Party Center and CMC on Carrying Out the “Three Investigations and Three Rectifications” Campaign], internal Party document. Hua had already signed off on Deng’s instructions a fortnight earlier before heading overseas.

⁹⁹ “Hua Guofeng tan tasuo zhidao Su Zhenhua” [Hua Guofeng Talks on What he Knows about Su Zhenhua], *Xiang Chao* [Hunan Tide], June 2012, p. 27. Interestingly, Hua claimed the advice came from Ye, with the CMC Standing Committee, which of course included Deng, joining in the recommendation.

¹⁰⁰ For example, visits to the Military Science Academy in March, and to the air force in October. On both occasions Deng was present.

visit to the navy discussed later in this chapter, these were routinely prepared arrangements that both helped Hua increase his understanding of army affairs, and resulted in gratification in the relevant units being honored by the attention of the *Party's* Chairman.¹⁰¹ There is no suggestion of Hua pushing his own agenda on any of these occasions.

More broadly, throughout this period there is no evidence of Hua challenging his senior colleagues—he was clearly aware of his limitations and need for tutelage, nowhere more so than in the military. A striking indication occurred during his May 1978 trip to North Korea. Geng Biao, a member of the delegation, recalled an exchange with Kim Il Sung where Hua spoke of his limited experience in dealing with big issues at the Party Center, and that he was fortunate that old comrades were helping him. Geng interpreted this as referring to Ye and Deng, and on the occasion, he shed tears at hearing these words, being very touched by Hua's modesty in a conversation with a foreign leader.¹⁰²

But what was Deng's understanding and attitude? While we find no credible evidence of Hua attempting to undermine or contest Deng's control in the military, a more plausible view held by Party historians, members of elite families, and active participants in the politics of the period, emphasizes Deng's concern with possible intrusions into his bailiwick. In their assessments, Deng was reluctant to accept any suggestion of limits on this power, annoyed by Hua's visits to the troops and the inscriptions he provided on such occasions, and sensitive to possible slights.¹⁰³ A striking case of the latter occurred during the PLA's political work conference in

¹⁰¹ On the latter point, concerning the aborted plan to visit the navy, the navy leadership, including Commander Xiao Jinguang, was enthusiastic, noting that Mao had never inspected the force. See below, p. [80].

¹⁰² Geng Biao's talk at a 1978-year end meeting, as conveyed in a December 30 report by Su Zhenhua on the Third Plenum in Shanghai.

¹⁰³ E.g., interviews with senior Party historian, September 2009; with close relative of a Politburo member, February 2009; and with official a working with Hu Yaobang at the time, June 1996.

April-June 1978. We examine the broader question at this conference related to the criterion of truth debate, as well as the army's subsequent important role concerning the issue in Chapter 7 on ideology and propaganda. Here we only note Deng's great displeasure when a political work official unsuccessfully sought to replace a phrase in his conference speech with a slogan associated with Hua. There is no reason to believe Hua had any role in the incident, although it is likely the affront influenced Deng's previously unformed attitude toward the criterion question.¹⁰⁴

In strictly formal terms, Deng and the PLA accepted Hua's authority. Before late 1979, Deng did not directly challenge Hua's position; in military gatherings and documents, the leadership order was consistently presented as Hua, Ye and Deng, even at the February 1979 meeting launching the attack on Vietnam, a time when Deng's absolute dominance of the army could not have been clearer. On that occasion, Deng also highlighted Hua's successor role, observing that he himself could not live forever, but noting that Hua was less than sixty, while also emphasizing the importance of stability and unity.¹⁰⁵ Of course, it is not necessary to take Deng's words at face value, either in terms of his own expectation of ongoing command of the military, or concerning a broader view of Hua's future.

While a comprehensive analysis of the evolving Deng-Hua relationship leading to Deng's decisive moves against Hua in 1979-80 will be provided in Chapter 8, a development in early 1978 is revealing in the PLA context. In Deng's subsequent late 1980 account, he claimed to have spoken to Ye Jianying around the time of the February-March 1978 NPC session about cutting down Hua's power. Deng said he had argued in system terms that it was dangerous to

¹⁰⁴ See the analysis in Chapter 7, below, pp. xxx-xx.

¹⁰⁵ Deng's speech to the meeting of Party, government and military cadres of the deputy department level and above convened by the Party Center, February 16, 1979, in *CRDB*.

concentrate too much power, specifically the positions of Party Chairman, CMC Chairman and premier, in the hands of one person. He had not raised any criticism of Hua's performance to date, instead focusing on the potential of the institutional arrangement to push people in a perverse direction: "the Hua in the future might not be the Hua of today."¹⁰⁶ We can hardly take Deng's specific rationale seriously given that, as his regime unfolded in the 1980s, he made perfectly clear that even though holding only one post (the CMC Chairmanship), the Party could only have one mother-in-law (*po-po*), one unchallengeable voice, his own.¹⁰⁷

In making his observations about a future Hua to Ye, the premier's position logically could have been at issue given that various elite figures had suggested it was a post Deng should have been given, and which he himself, while claiming he never wanted it, complained during the 1980-81 orchestrated attacks on Hua that "you should have offered it to me."¹⁰⁸ But Deng's November 1980 account suggests the military was much more on his mind. Although it is unclear precisely when he approached Ye on the excessive power issue, specifically whether before or after Ye advised Hua to be more involved in the army, Deng claimed to have expressed concern with the constitutional requirement that Party Chairman be concurrently CMC Chairman, something acceptable for Mao, even if dangerous then, but not for lesser mortals going forward.¹⁰⁹ Of course, there are layers of

¹⁰⁶ Deng's comment on November 29, 1980, during the nine Politburo meetings attacking Hua; document sighted by one of the authors. At the Sixth Plenum in June 1981, Deng made similar claims, also asserting that he had spoken to Li Xiannian concerning about Hua in the same vein. Deng's comments, June 22 and 23, 1981, in *CRDB*.

¹⁰⁷ Zhao Ziyang commenting on Deng Xiaoping's leadership style, July 5, 1992; Zong Fengming, *Zhao Ziyang ruanjin zhongde tanhua* [Zhao Ziyang: Captive Conversations] (Hong Kong: Kaifang chubanshe, 2007), pp. 49-50.

¹⁰⁸ According to an interview with a senior Party historian, May 2007.

¹⁰⁹ There are some inaccuracies and curiosities in Deng's November 29, 1980 claims (see above, note 107). First, he referenced his objections to the merging of Party and CMC positions to the Party constitution adopted by the 10th Congress in 1973. But no such clause existed in the 1973, or the 1977 Party constitutions. Second, the 1975 state constitution, however, did declare that the Party Chairman commanded the armed forces, a stipulation repeated in the 1978 state constitution

possible meaning in Deng's observations, for which his own account during the onslaught against Hua is the only evidence. One plausible interpretation is that they reflected an anticipation that he would remove Hua from the Party leadership altogether, although we doubt this was Deng's plan in early 1978. In any case, concerning the PLA Deng regarded himself as special: as he put it to Oriana Fallaci, "I am a layman in other fields, but I know something about fighting."¹¹⁰ And while formal arrangements meant showing a certain deference to Hua and Ye, he surely saw himself as the *popo* of the Chinese military.

Issues Facing Deng and the PLA Leadership: Strategic and Structural Decisions, and Dealing with Legacies of the Cultural Revolution. The post-Mao military leadership, with Deng clearly the most influential figure, inherited a vast array questions and problems. We first address professional military concerns, by far the least difficult to resolve. This ultimately involved adopting an overall strategy to catch up with developments in modern warfare, formally adopted in September 1980 as the "active defense" doctrine, replacing the 1964 strategy of "luring the enemy in deep" in a protracted war.¹¹¹ The formal doctrine encompassed a range of issues that had been percolating since not only the start of the post-Mao period, but also earlier following the demise of Lin Biao: force deployments, battlefield tactics, war-fighting relations of service arms, weapons programs, budget allocations, and military training and education. As with all PLA activities, these professional concerns had been interrupted by the Cultural Revolution, and the post-Mao task often encompassed a resumption of earlier

approved about the time Deng claimed to have been raising his concerns to Ye, who clearly was involved in the new constitution. It thus raises the question, if Deng's claims are broadly accurate, did he raise the issue concerning the then current document? If not, why not?

¹¹⁰ Fallaci's interview with Deng published in the *Washington Post*, September 1, 1980.

¹¹¹ See Fravel's valuable study, *Active Defense*, on the successive PRC strategic doctrines: "defending the motherland" (1956); "luring the enemy in deep" (1964); "active defense" (1980); and "local wars under high-technology conditions" (1993).

programs and tendencies. In this “modern” area, however, the process was less contentious or disruptive than concerning other issues. With Mao increasingly concerned with the adequacy of war preparations by 1972-73, formally placing Deng in charge of the project at the start of 1975, and Deng asserting that all the ideas he advanced “are only what Comrade Mao Zedong [has advocated],” a basis for moving forward had been achieved.¹¹² Although disrupted by the events of 1976, after Mao’s death Hua and Ye quickly picked up the thrust of the modernization effort,¹¹³ before turning the project back to Deng. Over the entire period to late 1980, we have found no evidence of opposition by Hua, nor reports of significant divisions within high army circles, concerning the new direction.

Deng’s efforts in implementing Mao’s tasks in 1975 were basically practical and remedial, largely involving matters that undercut military effectiveness, such as reducing a bloated organization and curbing rampant factionalism, which we address shortly. Given the demand for stepped up war preparations, a “fever” of training and exercises unfolded. But at the same time, steps away from traditional notions of “people’s war” and toward the concepts of the active defense doctrine appeared. While often reflecting aspects of pre-1966 PLA practice, these developments were striking given the Cultural Revolution experience. Thus, in noting combined, air and naval operations in contemporary wars, Deng declared, “[we can no longer] follow our old formula of ‘millet plus rifles’.”¹¹⁴ Other important developments in 1975, as well as the immediately preceding years, although often limited, included the revival of military education, seeking advanced foreign equipment, and an extension of naval operations beyond traditional coastal defense, the latter involving decisive action against South Vietnamese forces in the

¹¹² On the Mao-Deng 1975 consolidation effort, see Teiwes and Sun, *End of the Maoist Era*, pp. 251-63. The quotation is at p. 256.

¹¹³ E.g., see Dreyer, “Deng: The Soldier,” p. 543.

¹¹⁴ See Teiwes and Sun, *End of the Maoist Era*, p. 257.

Paracel Islands in 1974, and other activities in the South China Sea.¹¹⁵ Also significant was the return of leading PLA figures as part of Mao's liberation of cadres program, notably two of the pre-Cultural Revolution most significant military modernizers, Zhang Aiping and Su Yu.

Zhang Aiping had been a key figure in nuclear weapons work in the early 1960s, as well as in defense industry and military science and technology generally. Denounced as poison inserted into the PLA by Deng and purged early in the Cultural Revolution, Zhang reappeared publicly in 1974, and was lured back to work by Ye, and especially Deng, to a familiar area as head of the Science and Technology Commission for National Defense. Much of Zhang's efforts, however, were devoted to bringing order back to the military related Seventh Machine Building Ministry which managed China's nuclear weapons program, a national defense "major disaster area." There he received support from not only Deng and Ye, but also from the then lower-ranking Politburo member Hua. When Zhang was caught up in the emerging anti-Deng campaign in fall 1975, Hua attempted to provide relief for Zhang, although it was ineffective as Zhang was pushed aside in 1976, and subjected to struggle sessions where he was forced to disclose his work relations with not only Deng, but also his other "backstage bosses": Ye Jianying and Hua Guofeng. With the "gang of four" arrested, Hua soon indicated in striking fashion his regard for Zhang, who resumed his leadership of the Science and Technology Commission for National Defense.¹¹⁶

In terms of overall military strategy, Su Yu, as the earliest and most prominent advocate in the 1970s, arguably played an even more important role in

¹¹⁵ See *ibid.*, pp. 257, 261; and Jonathan D. Pollack, "The logic of Chinese military strategy," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, January 1979, pp. 29-31.

¹¹⁶ Teiwes and Sun, *End of the Maoist Era*, pp. 255-26, 256n31, 417-19; and Zhang Sheng, *Cong zhanzheng zhong zoulai*, p. 406. Hua's striking gesture was to present Zhang with a collection of poetry he had written in jail during the Cultural Revolution.

military modernization. Regarded as one of the PLA's best generals and Chief-of-Staff from 1954 to 1958, he was removed in 1958 due to arguing for professional concerns at the time of the Great Leap Forward, and placed in a less significant position.¹¹⁷ Su apparently did not suffer greatly in the Cultural Revolution, and returned to active PLA work in 1972 as Party secretary of the Academy of Military Science (AMS), and in this capacity began writing about the requirements of modern warfare. Taylor Fravel has provided an excellent account of Su's efforts which focused not simply on reviving military professionalism, but on how to cope with new developments, particularly as they applied to the threat of the main enemy, the Soviet Union. In a series of reports Su criticized the failure to study how to fight future wars and ignoring foreign technological developments, while emphasizing the inadequacy of luring the enemy in deep. Although difficult to draft in the circumstances, in February 1973 Su submitted a report to Mao, Zhou and Ye; a further report in December 1974 to the top leaders was distributed to the Politburo. In his 1973 report, Su argued that Chinese troops were too dispersed, thus limiting their capacity to maneuver and placing the nation in a passive position. Another argument called for defensive positional operations to protect key cities and strategic points, thus questioning the primacy of mobile warfare.¹¹⁸

Between Su Yu's 1973 and 1974 reports, the Arab-Israeli War of October 1973 provided a lesson in modern military conflict that deeply influenced his views. This was of particular relevance in that the Soviet Union's Arab clients, although ultimately coming off second best, used advanced weapons and new Soviet operational methods that could place China at an even greater disadvantage in

¹¹⁷ After 1958 Su Yu served as Vice Minister of Defense. In October 1979, Su filed a formal complaint requesting the retraction of the false charges against him 21 years earlier, and Ye Jianying instructed a serious study of the errors of the 1958 CMC conference where Su had been attacked. Hua and Deng agreed, although Deng had participated in the criticism of Su at the time. *Ye Jianying nianpu*, vol. 2, p. 1180. There was little follow through, however, apparently due to Deng's role in 1958.

¹¹⁸ See Fravel, *Active Defense*, pp. 145-46.

future conflict with its northern neighbor. By 1975, Su saw a fundamental shift in warfare that traditional PLA methods could not handle; new approaches were necessary to deal with, e.g., the speed of armored assaults, and achieving or denying air superiority.¹¹⁹ Clearly, Su's arguments had the attention of the highest authorities, including Mao,¹²⁰ and while, as indicated above, some inching away from people's war had occurred, overall military doctrine was not frontally addressed during the Chairman's last year. The anti-rightist/anti-Deng campaign in 1976 clearly ruled out any such undertaking, but the more fundamental consideration was the sensitivity of addressing any of Mao's sacred concepts, even when the Chairman himself was open to considering the issues.

Contrary to Fravel's argument that the drawn out four-year period between the Chairman's death and the adoption of the new active defense doctrine was due to an unresolved power struggle between Deng and Hua,¹²¹ movement toward that strategy began quickly; delays in the presentation of the new doctrine reflected the sensitivity surrounding Mao's deeply inculcated views. The dilution of people's war in 1975, done cautiously given the Chairman's concern with combatting revisionism within the PLA at the same time as enhancing its fighting capacity, now could be done more forthrightly, although still with considerable deference to Mao. The process advanced modernization in a context where Mao's distinctive concepts were honored, but increasingly marginalized, a task quickly grasped by Deng, surely with Hua's full support, after he assumed effective leadership of the PLA in mid-1977. At a CMC meeting, Deng noted the army's strategic and tactical principles were formulated by Mao, "but the enemies have changed, and the situation is quite different from the past." Su Yu, continuing his

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 139-40, 146-47.

¹²⁰ Mao's regard for Su Yu was seen not only in Su's 1972 posting to the AMS, but significantly in his February 1975 appointment to the CMC Standing Committee.

¹²¹ See above, note 91.

advocacy, argued that "future anti-invasion war is people's war *under modern conditions*," and the next year Deng instructed the AMS to inherit Mao's Thought and study people's war under those modern conditions.¹²² A bridging of the 1964 and 1980 official doctrines occurred at the CMC conference in December 1977 which called for a strategy of "active defense, luring the enemy in deep," a temporary measure that invoked the late Chairman, while much attention was being devoted to repairing Cultural Revolution's damage to the PLA.¹²³ Tellingly, in this formulation "active defense" had pride of place.

The inexorable shift toward military modernization can be seen in other respects. Jonathan Pollack's review of PRC military and general media and other sources available in 1977-78, found a serious airing of professional military issues not seen since the 1950s. Moreover, the decline in emphasis on people's war that had been developing even before 1975 continued apace, although discussions still appeared intermittently.¹²⁴ The most important developments, however, involved specific policy initiatives. In July and August 1977, Deng arranged two CMC meetings dealing with military education and field training of officers and troops, and research on equipment and strategy, and he proposed a science and technology team to deal with weapons development. In October, this became an initiative for the CMC Science and Technology Equipment Committee, headed by Zhang Aiping. The previous month Zhang had called for a nuclear counterstrike capability, arguing that "according to our strategic principle of active defense," it was essential for securing a stable environment for economic growth, a position accepted by "Deng and other top leaders" within days. It was formally approved at the December CMC plenary conference in a decision on accelerating development

¹²² Lei Liu, "'Dog-beating stick'," pp. 12-13, italics added. See also Ellis Joffe, *The Chinese Army After Mao* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1987), p. 77.

¹²³ See Fravel, *Active Defense*, pp. 147-48.

¹²⁴ Pollack, "The logic of Chinese military strategy," pp. 22, 24-26.

of both conventional weapons and nuclear missiles, with ICBMs identified as top priority. Ten months later, the Navy presented a plan for developing and producing nuclear submarines that would facilitate submarine launched nuclear missiles, another of Zhang's counterstrike projects.¹²⁵ The December conference also addressed reviving military education, and immediately following the conference the academic institutions linked to the three central PLA departments (GSD, GPD and Logistics) resumed—the military, political and logistics academies.¹²⁶

In 1977-79 the discussion of overall strategy continued, with the inadequacy of luring the enemy in prominent, and Su Yu again in the lead. A particularly significant step was a lecture given by Su to the PLA Military Academy and Central Party School in January 1979, which was made required reading for senior PLA officers. By the later part of 1979 Su's views were receiving open support from key military officials, notably Marshal and Defense Minister Xu Xiangqian in an October *Red Flag* article, and Yang Dezhi, the undoubtedly handpicked soon-to-be replacement for Deng as Chief-of-Staff, in an internal military essay in November. Yang noted that the CMC had already determined the PRC's strategic guideline, clearly referring to the 1977 awkward marriage of active defense and luring the enemy in, but questions remained on how to better understand it.¹²⁷

As Chief-of-Staff from March 1980, Yang quickly set out to achieve consensus, "unifying thought" in CCP terminology, holding meetings with senior military officials concerning operational principles in a war with the Soviet Union. On the basis of these discussions, at the start of May Yang proposed, and the CMC accepted, an "unprecedented" seminar for senior officers on operations on the initial stage of a Soviet attack, an undertaking that was to involve raising "strategic

¹²⁵ Lei Liu, "'Dog-beating stick,'" pp. 4-6.

¹²⁶ At the December 12-31 plenary session, followed by the January 5 Central Committee decision.

¹²⁷ See Fravel, *Active Defense*, pp. 148-51.

awareness." Over the following months preparations included the early decision Yang's small organizing group to give priority to formulating a strategic guideline that could "unify the thought of the whole army," visits by Yang and Deputy Chief-of-Staff Yang Yong to inspect frontline areas facing a prospective Soviet invasion, and a series of lectures by Zhang Zhen, Yang Dezhi's deputy in the organizing group, on aspects on modern war including combined operations, with attention to recent international wars.¹²⁸

By August, everything was ready for the September seminar that would approve the new doctrine. In this effort to "unify the thought of the whole army," there was never any doubt over direction. Key concepts of Su Yu's January 1979 lecture (as well as his earlier advocacy) were replicated in the 1980 strategy: the main contemporary task was defense against the threat from a superior modern Soviet force, it was essential to prevent a breakthrough in the initial phase of a Soviet surprise attack, positional warfare was the primary form, mobile warfare would be limited to a supplementary role, layered defenses were required to protect key fortifications, strategic areas and cities, combined operations of different units should be developed, and rapid development of science and technology for military use was essential.¹²⁹ But if there was little uncertainty as to the substance of the new doctrine, there was still the sensitive problem of Mao's reputation. Although Yang Dezhi's small group had identified the need to formulate a new version of the strategic guideline at the outset, and there was clear consensus on the negative influence of "luring the enemy in," it was only in August that the group decided to remove the phrase. They felt the need, however, to seek the opinions of CMC officials, and everyone reportedly agreed. Yet before the

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 156-58.

¹²⁹ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 164.

seminar convened in mid-September, further approval was sought from old marshals and CMC vice chairmen, with Deng affirming his support.¹³⁰

We offer a few additional observations here. First, as before, we argue there is no evidence of opposition on Hua's part to the trend in the strategic discussions, and certainly none concerning the larger development of military modernization. Moreover, although there reportedly was "vigorous discussion" of Su Yu's January 1979 lecture in PLA circles,¹³¹ there is little to suggest resistance among senior army officials from a "Maoist" doctrinal perspective. As we shall discuss, this is definitely not to say that Maoist sentiments within the army more broadly were not significant, only that the types of senior officers engaged in overall assessments of the strategic situation were hardly convinced of the continuing adequacy of revolutionary approaches. The four-year delay before the adoption of the new doctrine was probably due a combination of factors: Mao's unparalleled status in the army, a range of more pressing problems requiring attention in the PLA, the need for a process bringing in the senior military elite to arrive at a major doctrinal change, and, perhaps, the Sino-Vietnamese War.

In raising the war with Vietnam, we might have restricted ourselves to Fravel's insight that Deng's political war (a theme we develop subsequently), had minimal, if any, impact on the move toward the new strategic guideline, which was already gaining support before the attack on Vietnam, and was a strikingly different engagement from the defensive strategy developed for dealing with the Soviet Union.¹³² This perhaps can also be seen at a personal level: Su Yu, a general widely

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 158, 160. Concerning Mao's prestige, Song Shilun, then the AMS head who strongly opposed "luring in" as a strategic guideline, at the decisive September 1980 seminar used Mao's own words to argue that the late Chairman only used the concept in a tactical context, and thus reducing "luring in" to a lesser, non-strategic level was consistent with Maoist policy (p. 161).

¹³¹ See *ibid.*, p. 150.

¹³² While conceding that some of the military shortcomings of the war gave further support to the new direction, Fravel notes that few available sources on adopting the 1980 doctrine contain references to the PLA's poor 1979 performance; *ibid.*, pp. 149, 163-65.

admired for his battlefield talents, turned down Deng's offer to command the invasion, to the latter's displeasure.¹³³ Deng clearly supported PLA modernization, but he was quite prepared to engage in retrograde military actions. And in terms of slowing down the unfolding of the new doctrine, the financial and human costs, and the related diversion of resources, most likely contributed.

A final comment concerns the military backwardness of the PLA throughout the entire period leading to the new strategic guideline.¹³⁴ Deng, and the political and military leadership generally, provided sensible, indeed shrewd, management of the circumstances. The recognition of the comparative deficiency of the military forces can be seen in various aspects. The September 1980 doctrine was an entirely defensive strategy against a technologically superior enemy, a strategy ruling out pre-emption. Deng captured the situation six months earlier in an address to the CMC Standing Committee, commenting that it had been easy to deal with the Vietnamese, and asking if the army would be capable of fighting a more powerful adversary.¹³⁵ Deng was also acutely aware of resource limitations; following his return in 1977 he supported nuclear weapons and delivery systems programs on a *limited* scale. He emphasized the importance of being able to strike back to avoid being bullied, but made clear that China lacked the capacity to compete with the US and Soviet Union.¹³⁶ But arguably most significant was Deng's assessment of

¹³³ Interview with well-connected senior Party historian, September 2017. See below, p. [238].

¹³⁴ An interesting event occurred in September 1980, the very time the new guideline was approved. William Perry, US undersecretary of defense and the Carter Administration's leading authority on military technology, led a delegation to China on a mission to see how the US might assist PLA modernization. Chinese officials pressed the Americans for new US technology, arguing, as one delegation member recalled, "our stuff is [so crummy] you don't have to worry about these things threatening Taiwan." While an amusing ploy, Perry discovered a gap even wider than he expected. See Mann, *About Face*, pp. 112-13.

¹³⁵ *Selected Works of Deng (1975-1982)*, p. 269.

¹³⁶ Lei Liu, "'Dog-beating stick,'" pp. 22, 25.

the opportunities available on the regional and world scene upon his return to work.

Deng soon articulated an incisive analysis of the international situation, one reflecting an aspect of Mao's "theory of the three worlds"—world war was inevitable, but can be postponed. At the December 1977 CMC plenary conference, Deng argued that it seemed the world would remain peaceful longer than previously anticipated, due to the Soviet Union not having completed its global deployment, and the US being on the defensive after its failure in Southeast Asia. Thus the objective was trying to postpone world war, while using the time to continue opposing hegemonism and making preparations for fighting any modern war thrust on China.¹³⁷ What was crucial was the shrewd understanding that, for all the Soviet military superiority, it was not likely to attack the PRC. In part, this view could be derived from Mao's post-1973 theories: the inevitable war of the superpowers, when it came, would most likely start with a Soviet threat to Europe, with Japan the primary Asian target, leaving China less exposed.¹³⁸ But arguably the reality was better captured in another Deng remark to Fallaci in August 1980: "Our military equipment is very backward, but we have our traditions. ... [The Soviets are aware that] we have enough people, enough places, to cope with [their] invasion."¹³⁹ As the active defense guideline was being formulated, Deng

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 12-13. Deng subsequently repeated the theme of international conditions allowing postponement of world war, and thus time for China's military rebuilding, notably in March 1981, before he effectively dismissed the likelihood of such a conflict in 1985. See *ibid.*, pp. 14-15; and Fravel, *Active Defense*, pp. 140, 167.

¹³⁸ See "Chairman Mao's Theory of the Three Worlds," pp. 32-35; and Pollack, "The logic of Chinese military strategy," pp. 23, 25. In his 23 1980 interview with Fallaci (*Washington Post*, September 1, 1980), Deng noted the interpretation of the PRC leadership that the Soviet focus on Europe did not necessarily mean a direct attack, that military action might be directed at crucial resources such as Middle Eastern oil.

¹³⁹ Fallaci's *Washington Post* interview with Deng.

understood the discarded “luring the enemy in” concept still retained a powerful deterrent function.

Compared to sorting out strategic doctrine and implementing modernization policies generally, although the allocation of scarce resources among modernizing projects surely produced tension,¹⁴⁰ matters went exceptionally less smoothly in other areas where conflict had been inbuilt as a direct result of the Cultural Revolution. This was already clear in 1975, when Mao assigned Deng the linked tasks of preparing for war and consolidating the army. Simply put, the chaos and internal PLA conflicts created by the military’s deep insertion into civilian affairs in 1967-71, degraded the army’s fighting capacity and organizational discipline. In 1975, Mao decreed, and quoting the Chairman, Deng demanded that serious efforts were required to combat “bloating, laxity, conceit, extravagance and inertia.”¹⁴¹ Dealing with these problems again became a priority task for Deng when he returned to work in 1977.

“Bloating,” meaning excessive personnel, was an issue closely linked to turning the PLA into a modern military force, but more fundamentally it involved rectifying the degrading of the army’s traditional role. Military personnel had increased greatly during the Cultural Revolution, by 1975 reaching 6.1 million, including 1.5 million officers, about 600,000 more than what was deemed necessary. At the start of that year, following Deng’s initiative, a GSD meeting decided to cut personnel to 4.5 million over a three-year period, with organizational streamlining and restaffing designated the central task. While progress was made with 800,000 troops reportedly cut by the end of 1976, the

¹⁴⁰ When William Perry visited China in September 1980 (see above, note 135), he discovered a heavy skewing of resources toward Zhang Aiping’s nuclear weapons and delivery systems projects, to the detriment of design work on airplanes and tanks, as well as on computers and lasers. Mann, *About Face*, p. 112.

¹⁴¹ See Teiwes and Sun, *End of the Maoist Era*, pp. 256-57.

effort had encountered resistance. A key example was the air force where, at an extended summer 1975 meeting, proposals for structural change were attacked as rightist deviations.¹⁴² Upon resuming military leadership in 1977, Deng named organizational streamlining as one of his earliest objectives, specifying leading organs and non-combatant staff. In May 1978, he demanded action in the GSD where the problem was considered particularly serious. Yet all did not go smoothly, with PLA numbers surpassing 6 million by 1980. In addition to the major strain on the national budget caused by Deng's Vietnam war, the invasion undoubtedly contributed to the "re-bloating" of the army. In the context of growing leadership concern over a potential financial crisis, in March 1980 Deng returned to the issue, citing the need to cut military spending, and in July the CMC set a downsizing target of 1.5 million by the end of 1981, a target that was only half met. It would take until the end of 1983 before the target was accomplished.¹⁴³

While part of the problem was Deng's Vietnam project, the larger issue was bureaucratic and personal resistance to losing resources and advantages, whether in high-level bodies like the GSD, or down through the ranks. Deng summarized aspects of the problem well in March 1980, noting that more was required than what had been accomplished in 1975. A key issue was that units at various levels had expanded, and were reluctant to cut back. Deng complained there were too many commanders and political commissars, approving a proposal that at the regimental level, two deputy commanders and an additional deputy commissar were enough. Pointing to the three central PLA departments, Deng further complained that whenever a new task was faced, new staff and offices were added,

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 257, 263; and Fravel, *Active Defense*, pp. 157, 167. It is of interest that Deng sent Chen Xilian, Su Zhenhua and Yang Chengwu to bring the air force to heel, figures regarded as close to Hua in foreign analysis, and/or later subject to attack under Deng's auspices.

¹⁴³ Lei Liu, "'Dog-beating stick,'" p. 4; *Deng nianpu*, vol. 1, p. 310; Fravel, *Active Defense*, pp. 167-69; *Selected Works of Deng (1975-1982)*, pp. 269-70; and Teiwes and Sun, "China's Economic Reorientation After the Third Plenum," pp. 178-79. The figure at the end of 1983 was 4,238,000.

but no one ever talked about a reduction of personnel. This was linked to the ageing of senior staff and the lack of a retirement system which needed to be introduced, something that prevented the promotion of younger officers. In any case, those who should retire were urged to do so.¹⁴⁴

The slow response/resistance to Deng's urgings, related precisely to Deng's agenda of requiring people to give up benefits and comforts derived, less from the stressful Cultural Revolution itself, than from the post-Lin Biao period, when the "laxity, conceit, extravagance and inertia" Mao had attacked in addition to "bloating," flourished. Deng understood the problem, and made his intention to deal with it known to the PLA leadership as soon as he returned. In August 1977, he addressed problems mirroring Mao's 1975 list, threatened military discipline for those, "whoever they are," who did not pass investigation, and underlined his determination by noting that many said they wanted him to manage the PLA, but in doing so, "I will offend people." One major concern was the army's fractured prestige among the people due to its overbearing behavior toward the population, including seizing local, formerly civilian, resources during the Cultural Revolution chaos—Mao's "conceit," which had to be addressed. But the key issue for Deng as he resumed control was "laxity," as often expressed in extreme indiscipline. In August and again in December 1977, Deng attacked the refusal to follow orders, especially reassignments from Beijing, provincial capitals and big cities where conditions were desirable, something apparently particularly affecting old comrades. Such people, Deng asserted, must be expelled from the PLA or reduced in rank, in any case disciplined.¹⁴⁵ Obeying only convenient orders would not be tolerated.

¹⁴⁴ *Selected Works of Deng (1975-1982)*, pp. 270-75.

¹⁴⁵ *Deng Xiaoping junshi wenji* [Collection of Deng Xiaoping's Military Writings], vol. 3, pp. 65, 84-85, cited in Torigian, "Prestige, Manipulation, and Coercion," pp. 407-408. Torigian develops the theme in his section, "Deng 'Offends' the Military," pp. 406-14.

Arguably, the most difficult problem to overcome was another form of “laxity”—factionalism, always a latent issue, but one that exploded early in the Cultural Revolution. To deal with this issue, in 1975 Deng sought to implement Mao’s specific instructions on the reassignment and interchange of personnel to break up “mountain strongholds” formed after 1966, the type of directive that encountered disobedience. Factionalism was again a key target from 1977, a phenomenon undermining the PLA from top to bottom of the organization. One aspect was a direct consequence of the insertion of the military into the larger polity, notionally as a stabilizing force in 1967, but as a result of “support the left” activities creating factions both within the army and civilian society. Familiar problems of bureaucratic factionalism appeared in more virulent form given the decline of discipline, with factions developing layer by layer through the promotion of cronies, providing opportunities to climb the ladder and attack others. The Cultural Revolution ethos of finding and exposing apostates and traitors, whether within a specific unit, or directed against major elite figures where denunciations were expected, offered opportunities to criticize personal enemies, or forced people into actions creating animosity and vulnerability to retribution in the new era.¹⁴⁶

Given the extent, complexity and often vicious nature of factionalism during the “Cultural Revolution decade,” the task of dealing with it was never going to be easy. Part of the problem was that there was no certain divide between victims and perpetrators. As noted in an August 1978 GSD document, some who had been persecuted turned around and persecuted others, a matter not only leaving questions of individual culpability and sanctions, but also the issue of how to

¹⁴⁶ Teiwes and Sun, *End of the Maoist Era*, pp. 257-58, 263; “Zhonggong zongcanmoubu weiyuanhui guanyu ‘sancha sanzheng’ yundong de qingkuang de baogao” (August 30, 1978); and “Zongcan jiguan ‘sancha sanzheng’ yundong’ zongjie” [Summary of the “Three Investigations and Three Rectifications” Campaign in General Staff Organs] (January 15, 1979), internal Party document.

achieve the goal of re-establishing unity.¹⁴⁷ As in the civilian sector, the guiding principle was “truth from facts,” but this too was not easy to achieve. One factor was inevitable delays in settling cases, a situation that in a tragic case led a Red Army veteran to commit suicide at the petition office of a major PLA unit.¹⁴⁸ An extreme incident, but one indicating the difficulty of the process and the dissatisfaction caused.

More broadly, the difficulties of handling factionalism can be seen in the GSD’s “three investigations and three rectifications” campaign launched in April 1978 under Deputy Chief-of-Staff Yang Yong. There were basic differences within the General Staff, particularly over how far to go in “ferreting out” factionalist culprits, the projected second stage of the campaign. Some cadres in the department were eager to pursue the cases of leading figures, others argued it was best not to get entangled in settling old accounts. Opposition was reportedly so strong to “ferreting out” that Yang Yong became discouraged, leading Deng to tell him to stand firm. In May, Deng met with the top figures of the GSD, emphasizing the purpose of the movement was to sort out issues of principle left over from the Cultural Revolution, which required exposing all crimes that had been committed. Deng’s urgings notwithstanding, the campaign still met doubts and resistance. A key factor was that behavioral issues were linked to ideological ones, i.e., the radical positions of the previous ten years that were the ultimate target in both the civilian and military spheres. General Staff officers who had been affected by those radical lines, while perhaps bowing to the new Party line, were not necessarily totally committed, reportedly having different understandings, and particularly fearing

¹⁴⁷ “Zhonggong zongcanmoubu weiyuanhui guanyu ‘sancha sanzhen’ yundong de qingkuang de baogao” (August 30, 1978). Cf. Torigian, “Prestige, Manipulation, and Coercion,” p. 426.

¹⁴⁸ Hao Zaijin, “Shi Jinqian Jiangjun he quanjun luoshi zhengce gongzuo [General Shi Jinqian and the Military-Wide Execution of Policy],” *Dadi* [The World], no. 22 (2002), cited in Torigian, “Prestige, Manipulation, and Coercion,” p. 426.

damage to Mao's flag. Some apparently were uncertain of the political situation, fearing retaliation if they became involved in criticism. Others felt unfairly treated, as in the case of departments with close work relations to former Acting Chief-of-Staff Yang Chengwu, who became the major target of the campaign (see below). Moreover, there were considerable doubts about the direction and efficacy of the movement, many believing problems were not really solved.¹⁴⁹

In this last regard, from his perspective Deng agreed. In early August, he again complained that leadership of the "three-three" movement was too weak, that not enough cases had been cleared up. This led to a meeting of Party secretaries of GSD departments where some people opposed the general objective of the campaign, with the debate so sharp that Yang Yong, having said nothing, ended the discussion. Deng then pushed Yang in familiar terms—"when clearing up right and wrong, it's no good not to be brave, it is even necessary to offend some people." As Yang and Deputy Chief-of-Staff Chi Haotian pressed ahead on Deng's orders, by the end of the year officers were writing anonymous letters of complaint, attacking Yang and Chi for unfairly targeting individuals by bringing up their histories. So much animosity had accumulated that eventually, at the end of 1982, Chi was relieved of his deputy chief-of-staff post. At that time, Yang visited Chi in hospital, consoling him that when "everyone accused you, their spears were pointed at someone else." That target, GSD insiders believed, was Deng's

¹⁴⁹ Shu Yun, *Yang Yong Shangjiang* [General Yang Yong] (Beijing: Jiefangjun wenyi chubanshe, 2005), pp. 372-73, cited in Torigian, "Prestige, Manipulation, and Coercion," pp. 410-11; "Zhonggong zongcanmoubu weiyuanhui guanyu 'sancha sanzheng' yundong de qingkuang de baogao" (August 30, 1978); "Zhonggong zongcanmoubu weiyuanhui guanyu chuanda guanche zongcan changwei guodahui de chubu qingkuangde huibao" [Report of the CCP General Staff Committee on Communicating and Implementing the Preliminary Situation of the Enlarged Meeting of the General Staff Standing Committee] (September 15, 1978), internal Party document; and "Zongcan jiguan 'sancha sanzheng' yundong' zongjie" (January 15, 1979).

policies.¹⁵⁰ We observe that this could not have been in any real sense an attack on Deng's authoritative position; no one was brave enough for that. We further suggest that Deng's efforts at best subdued rather than truly rectified factionalism in the PLA.¹⁵¹

As noted, cleaning up the ideological mess left by the Cultural Revolution was a critical objective in both civilian and military sectors. There was one significant difference, however. In the civilian sphere, as elaborated in Chapter 7, the effort was focused on the theories and practice of the "gang of four," even if in general rhetoric the evil lines of both Lin Biao and the "gang" were attacked. In contrast, in the PLA the attack was explicitly aimed at the line and crimes of the "gang of four" *and* Lin Biao. During the "three-three" campaign in the GSD, complaints were made that crimes committed by Lin Biao's followers had been insufficiently dealt with, and it was necessary to expose both factions together. In implementing demands to link exposure of the two factions, the scope of the movement expanded, producing increased emphasis on Lin Biao, and with it a sense of unfairness by those vulnerable because of events in the earlier chaotic period. Beyond that, an essentially fraudulent narrative was created of collusion between Lin Biao's group and the "gang," with the latter essentially inheriting the counterrevolutionary project of the former, when in truth relations between leading figures of both factions was largely conflictual, and often bitter.¹⁵² What explains the different emphases in the two spheres?

¹⁵⁰ "Zhonggong zongcanmoubu weiyuanhui guanyu 'sancha sanzheng' yundong de qingkuang de baogao" (August 30, 1978); and Shu Yun, *Yang Yong Shangjiang*, pp. 376-78, cited in Torigian, "Prestige, Manipulation, and Coercion," pp. 411-12.

¹⁵¹ Cf. Keith Forster's discussion of the subsequent 1983-84 attack on Cultural Revolution factionalism, "Repudiation of the Cultural Revolution in China: The Case of Zhejiang," *Pacific Affairs*, Spring 1986.

¹⁵² "Zhonggong zongcanmoubu weiyuanhui guanyu 'sancha sanzheng' yundong de qingkuang de baogao" (August 30, 1978); and "Zongcan jiguan 'sancha sanzheng' yundong' zongjie" (January 15,

While adding the Lin Biao faction to the basic objective of eliminating destructive Cultural Revolution legacies in the PLA suited Deng's interests, it did not originate with Deng himself. In December 1977, Zhang Zhen, head of PLA logistics, wrote Deng, arguing that at the same time as exposing the "gang of four," it would be better to solve problems left behind by Lin's clique should be resolved, a proposal quickly endorsed by Deng notwithstanding his awareness that many would oppose it as making the scale of attacks too broad.¹⁵³ There were, of course, objective reasons for adopting this proposal. Given the goal of overseeing de-radicalization in the military, much of the destruction occurred on Lin Biao's watch while specific responsibility remained unclear, leaving many cases from the early chaos requiring clarification. Related to that, a pertinent political question remained: were there active military officers who had been associated with Lin unreliable in backing the new Party line, and potentially opposed to Deng himself? In this there is a similarity to Mao's actions in the aftermath of Lin's flight and death in 1971, when a Chairman deeply concerned about loyalty and ideological commitment, authorized extensive investigations, criticism sessions, and the rotation of personnel, some of which were carried out by Deng in 1975.¹⁵⁴ In fact, as we shall see, Deng's actions did not go as far as Mao's, but the concern with reliability was palpable. A case in point occurred in November 1977 when Deng listened to the report of Guangzhou Military Region Commander Xu Shiyou, who had been transferred to the region in Mao's end of 1973 rotation. Deng cautioned Xu to be clearer about dangers in his area, noting the local influence of Huang

1979). On relations between the Lin Biao and "gang of four" groups, see Teiwes and Sun, *Tragedy*, pp. 50-55, 139ff and *passim*.

¹⁵³ Zhang Zhen, *Zhang Zhen huiyilu* [Memoir of Zhang Zhen] (Beijing: Jiefangjun chubanshe, 2003), vol. 2, pp. 132-33; and Yu Guangyuan, *Wo yi Deng Xiaoping* [Recalling Deng Xiaoping] (Hong Kong: Shidai guoji chuban youxian gongsi, 2005), p. 205, cited in Torigian, "Prestige, Manipulation, and Coercion," p. 413.

¹⁵⁴ See Teiwes and Sun, *End of the Maoist Era*, pp. 164-71, 257-58.

Yongsheng, Lin's close subordinate and previously region commander, one of the "four generals" immediately removed by Mao in 1971.¹⁵⁵ We examine possible larger consequences in our following section on personnel change.

Quite apart from exposing genuinely "unreliable" elements, raking over the conflicts of 1966-76 decade, especially those during the early Cultural Revolution period, an inevitable consequence of Deng's pressure on the "three-three" movement, opened old wounds. As did the raising of demands for verdict reversals at the 1978 central work conference by important military figures. Immediately after the Third Plenum and extending into January 1979, a CMC symposium involving the GSD, navy, air force and several military regions was held which deteriorated into airing old grudges and vicious debates. The most notable, which we shortly examine in larger context, concerned the navy's two leaders, Commander Xiao Jinguang and Political Commissar Su Zhenhua, with Xiao organizing attacks on Su as being worse than the "gang of four" in criticizing Deng in 1976. Zhang Aiping sought to lower the temperature, arguing "the past is over, ... how about everyone engage in self-criticism." Xu Xiangqian was in charge of the meeting but lost control and called in Deng, who simply said "meeting over." Deng later observed the symposium had not been very successful, that the senior figures present dared to speak out, the higher in rank the more so, but it did not mean they were correct. Some comments, he said, reflected the spirit of the work conference and Third Plenum, but others had too much subjectivism. In the opinion of Zhang Aiping's son, without the Vietnam war, the participants would have kept on arguing.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁵ Source—11/18/77 in file from you

¹⁵⁶ Zhang Sheng, *Cong zhanzheng zhong zoulai*, p. 415; and Qiao Ya, "Luetan Xiao Jinguang Su Zhenhua zhijian de shifei quzhi" [Talking Briefly on the Merits and Demerits of Xiao Jinguang and Su Zhenhua], statement in hospital, July 2007, made available to the authors.

How were the careers top PLA leaders affected by developments during the “Cultural Revolution decade” and the post-Mao efforts to come to terms with what had happened? Leaving the Su Zhenhua saga aside for the moment, the case of Yang Chengwu is instructive. In effect, Yang had served as Acting Chief-of-Staff twice. He was first appointed in 1966 to succeed Luo Ruiqing in an acting capacity, and thus bound to carry out the orders of Lin Biao as well as Mao. Yang lasted until March 1968, when he was summarily purged by the Chairman for reasons other military leaders could not fathom. Whatever Mao’s reasons, Yang’s army leadership in late 1967-early 1968 was conservative in the sense of attempting maintain order.¹⁵⁷ Six years later, he was recalled to duty, again reflecting the personal hand of Mao; Zhou Enlai confided to Yang that his rehabilitation was particularly difficult, and only achieved following the Chairman’s anger over its delay. In any case, in November 1974 he was designated First Deputy Chief-of-Staff, and ran the GSD under Deng’s authority. During Deng’s absence in 1976 and early 1977, Yang effectively again served as Acting Chief-of-Staff, and in this period contributed importantly to the purge of the “gang of four.” Although formally continuing initially as First Deputy Chief-of-Staff, with Deng’s return he was soon downgraded in September 1977 to the post of commander of the Fuzhou Military Region.¹⁵⁸

Although no longer working in the GSD, when the “three-three” movement unfolded in 1978, as the main responsible person during the two periods noted above, Yang Chengwu became the most important target of attack. Although always retaining the title “comrade” in internal documents, as well as his position in Fuzhou, Yang received severe criticism on a range of issues. These can most

¹⁵⁷ See Teiwes and Sun, *Tragedy*, pp. 90-102; and Teiwes, *Provincial Leadership in China*, pp. 22-24.

¹⁵⁸ See Teiwes and Sun, *End of the Maoist Era*, pp. 193ff, 205, 525-26, 531, 546n30, 550, 579; and *Zhongguo Gongchandang ii ziliao*, addendum vol. 2, pp. 163, 271, 273, 334. In formal terms, Yang retained positions in the GSD as a Deputy Chief of Staff (downgraded from First Deputy Chief-of-Staff) until January 1980, and as second Party secretary until March 1978.

usefully be categorized in three groups: 1) Yang's action as Acting Chief-of-Staff from 1966 to March 1968 in carrying out Lin Biao's line and evil acts; 2) his alleged collusion with and support of Jiang Qing at various points; and 3) his behavior during the anti-rightist reversal/criticize Deng campaign in 1976.¹⁵⁹

The first period saw Yang's greatest alleged mistakes during his two watches. The masses reportedly exposed Yang for following Lin Biao, shamelessly singing Lin's praises as the representative of the PLA's correct line to bolster his own career. More importantly, he was accused of "participating" in the persecution of old comrades, including Marshal He Long, who died as a result of his persecution, Marshal Xu Xiangqian, Luo Ruiqing and Zhang Aiping, among a number of others. In the case of Luo Ruiqing, Yang's wrong actions pre-dated the Cultural Revolution, going back to mid-1965 which involved him in tensions between Lin Biao and Luo, and which culminated in unclear circumstances before the movement was launched. In that secret process, Yang made one of the first major attacks on his immediate superior Luo. In any case, others were not blameless, including Ye Jianying who was put in charge of the group investigating Luo, and Deng, who relayed Mao's decision to purge Luo.¹⁶⁰ As for persecuting He Long, we do not have adequate information to judge Yang's "participation" or culpability. But we can say the overall situation concerning He's case is more complicated than generally presented, and in terms of Yang Chengwu personally, in the factional chaos of the period it appears the initial attack came from He's "camp," when veterans of He's Second Red Army put up a "bombard Yang

¹⁵⁹ The case against Yang outlined below was made most strongly in "Zongcan lingdao zai di shici, di shiyici luxian douzheng zhong de jige zhongyao wenti" [Several Major Problems of Leaders of the General Staff during the 10th and 11th Line Struggles] (November 2, 1978), internal Party document. Yang's case was also addressed in the three GSD documents cited above, note 149.

¹⁶⁰ We do not have a definitive view on Luo's purge in 1965-66, but our past research suggested considerable uncertainty whether the initiative for Luo's removal came from Lin, as in the official version, or from Mao. See Teiwes and Sun, *Tragedy*, pp. 24-32.

Chengwu” poster at the GSD offices.¹⁶¹ Overall, the whole period manifested a fluidity of factions not corresponding to easy assumptions then, or during attempts to investigate those conflicts in the post-Mao period.¹⁶²

The second category, alleged collusion with Jiang Qing and the “gang of four,” is completely unconvincing. Ignoring Jiang’s involvement in Yang’s March 1968 purge,¹⁶³ the charges during the “three-three” movement focused on Yang’s return from 1974. In that period Jiang did make approaches to him including, although not mentioned in the GSD documents, her apparent proposal of Yang when Mao called for nominations to fill the Chief-of-Staff position. A telling exchange occurred when she went to see Yang and took his hand, a gesture he later claimed created “infinite warmth” on his part. For his part, from January to April 1975, Yang provided Jiang with three sets of military studies that she had demanded, something that could perhaps have been refused to a Politburo member on jurisdictional grounds, but would have been foolhardy toward the Chairman’s wife, a matter well understood by Deng in the same period.¹⁶⁴ Political calculations guiding Yang’s actions can also be seen in his “infinite warmth” comment that would be rolled out as evidence of political collusion. The timing was crucial—September 28, 1976, at a GSD Standing Committee meeting. The context clearly was the need to keep secret the plans underfoot, with Yang’s significant role, to purge the “gang of four.”

The third category, Yang’s behavior during the *pi Deng* campaign, was arguably more culpable, and certainly left him more vulnerable in the post-Mao period. Here a link was drawn to Jiang Qing in the accusation that he adopted her

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 34. On the He Long case generally, see pp. 32-37.

¹⁶² See *ibid.*, pp. 38-42, 92-96.

¹⁶³ See *ibid.*, pp. 98-102.

¹⁶⁴ On Jiang’s nomination of Yang, see Teiwes and Sun, *End of the Maoist Era*, pp. 204-205. On Deng’s careful treatment of Jiang in 1975, see *ibid.*, pp. 14, 186, 202-203, 245, 293-94, 302-303, 310.

“high tone” in attacking Deng. The GSD documents criticized the department’s conduct of the anti-Deng campaign as excessive, and declared that the mistakes of the GSD leadership were mostly those of Yang. Various specifics were cited, starting with events in February 1976 as *pi Deng* gathered steam. Yang convened meetings and issued documents attacking Deng, including condemning his mid-1975 MAC conference speech as laying down a “revisionist program.” A grievous error, from the viewpoint of 1978, was that Yang, in February two years earlier, had proposed a review of CMC and GSD records to locate Deng’s “wrong” remarks, and then authorized the printing and distribution of the material. A new set of Yang’s reported mistakes came with the Tiananmen incident, including holding large-scale condemnation conferences, and (by implication) for GSD investigations of high-level leaders, specifically Ye Jianying, who allegedly had shown support for the demonstrators on the Square. Throughout this period, Yang found himself in the quandary of other high officials with executive authority—how to follow the Party line, but avoid excesses contrary to their own preferences which could also expose them to criticism in the inevitable post-Mao reckoning. We cannot say exactly how Yang handled this dilemma, but we can say the 1978 GSD verdict was itself excessive. Even that verdict only claimed Yang had “relatively” adopted Jiang’s “high tone,” and left open the question of whether specific excesses were due to others rather than him.¹⁶⁵

While Yang Chengwu’s case demonstrates the vulnerabilities of officials trying to navigate the shifting currents of the 1966-76 decade, what ultimately explains his demotion? Yang can be considered one of the most prominent military

¹⁶⁵ E.g., concerning the investigations seemingly aimed at leaders like Ye, only Deputy Chief-of-Staff Hu Wei was specifically named, although in a section attacking Yang; “Zongcan lingdao zai di shici, di shiyici luxian douzheng zhong de jige zhongyao wenti” (November 2, 1978). Hu, who arrived at the GSD at the same time as Yang in 1974, was ousted from the GSD in February 1977 as a suspected core follower of the “gang of four.”

“victims” in the process of settling Cultural Revolution questions.¹⁶⁶ Deng surely was central to his demotion, with Yang being sent to Fuzhou as Deng assumed control of the PLA. We do not know the details of the decision, but with Deng certain that he would take over the GSD by May 1977 at the latest, he would have been involved in discussions with Hua and Ye concerning the makeup of the General Staff. Moreover, in August 1978 when he came to the department to complain that the “three-three” movement was lagging, Deng made a point of emphasizing Yang’s case.¹⁶⁷ Deng may have been resentful of Yang’s performance during the *pi Deng* campaign, or his attitude may have more broadly reflected a lack of confidence in Yang based on their interaction in 1975.¹⁶⁸ In any case, although a demotion, it should be noted that the Fuzhou position, then vacant because of the death of the previous commander, was an important one that Yang held until 1983. Whatever the reasons, according to Party tradition, Yang’s removal from the GSD required attacking his mistakes, real, exaggerated or concocted.

Perhaps the most striking aspect of the Yang Chengwu case is that, although not unique, it was still a rare example of PLA personnel demotion at the very highest levels of the military establishment in the early post-Mao period. To pursue this and other key developments, we now turn to an overview of army personnel changes during the immediate post-Mao period through to the establishment of Deng’s “paramount leader” status in 1980.

Analysing Personnel Changes, 1977-80. The problems discussed above posed important staffing questions for the new PLA leadership. Arguably the easiest to handle was purging those considered complicit in the activities of the

¹⁶⁶ Chen Xilian can be regarded an equally if not more significant “victim,” but the denouement of his case came later. We address Chen’s demise in Chapter 8.

¹⁶⁷ “Zhonggong zongcanmoubu weiyuanhui guanyu chuanda guanche zongcan changwei guodahui de chubu qingkuangde huibao” (September 15, 1978).

¹⁶⁸ This, of course, is speculation, but it is interesting that a very senior PLA historian summarized Yang’s essential problem as a personality trait, a propensity for “loose talk.” Interview, May 2005.

“gang of four,” who were largely dealt with quickly, even before the return of Deng,¹⁶⁹ but in a process subject to overzealous excess, as we shall see in the case Nanjing Military Region Commander Ding Sheng. More difficult was how to approach the wider range of officers and cadres influenced by Cultural Revolution ideology, whether during the initial exposure of the “gang of four” in 1976-78, or regarding what was deemed resistance to the Third Plenum line in 1979-80, something Deng regarded as particularly serious among those who had been promoted after 1966.¹⁷⁰ How should such cases, as well as those of leaders and cadres guilty of factional and other excesses during the chaotic periods of the Cultural Revolution be handled—what mix of education, sanctions and organizational adjustments was adopted?¹⁷¹ Also, how were cases of those who had been “persecuted” during 1966-70 handled with regard to their return to work? To what extent was the leadership able to coax aging officers into retirement? And what political factors shaped the personnel assignments in the period following the arrest of the “gang” to the clear emergence of Deng as dominant leader in early 1980?

Much is elusive concerning these matters, yet some broad patterns are apparent. We generally know little of the specifics of decisions on individual appointments or removals, and even when we do know important aspects, we must be wary of overinterpreting the political implications. As case in point is Zhang

¹⁶⁹ Before the “3-3” campaign was launched in the GSD in spring 1978, it was considered that those engaged in conspiracy had been basically ascertained, most notably Deputy Chief-of-Staff Hu Wei who was removed in February 1977. “Zhonggong zongcanmoubu weiyuanhui guanyu ‘sancha sanzheng’ yundong de qingkuang de baogao” (August 30, 1978); and “Zongcan jiguan ‘sancha sanzheng’ yundong’ zongjie” (January 15, 1979). See also below, p. [63].

¹⁷⁰ See Torigian, “Prestige, Manipulation, and Coercion,” p. 430.

¹⁷¹ Documents on the “3-3” campaign in the GSD (see above, note 170) laid down broad traditional guidelines: although Deng demanded that serious mistakes would be pursued and “organizational measures” applied, cases were to be handled cautiously with a heavy emphasis on education and criticism-self-criticism. Most vulnerable were those with serious errors who rejected persuasion and refused to change. No clear indication of the breakdown of actual treatment was provided, however.

Aiping, a figure crucial to military modernization. Zhang did not have a close relationship to Deng before the Cultural Revolution, but Deng had regard for Zhang's work on nuclear weapons issues. As we have seen, in 1975 Ye and especially Deng persuaded a somewhat reluctant "liberated" Zhang to return to work, taking charge of defense science and technology, an area where he also had working relations with Hua. Once Deng came under criticism in late 1975, however, Zhang too was vulnerable as one of Deng's alleged four "Buddhist guardians,"¹⁷² a reputation that would stand him in good stead in the post-Mao period. In November 1975, Zhang was summoned to a small "help" group of Politburo members, chaired by Li Xiannian who presented a harsh face, with Chen Xilian being remarkably supportive under the circumstances, and Hua providing a temporary solution for Zhang's predicament. After the arrest of the "gang," Hua quickly revived Zhang's leadership of the military science and technology sector. Subsequently, although we have no knowledge of any discussions with Hua or Ye on the matter, Deng sought to persuade Zhang to serve as CMC secretary-general, but Zhang refused, preferring to keep his science and technology portfolio. After retirement, in discussing his career with his son who raised the "Buddhist guardian" perception, Zhang dismissed the claim out of hand, saying "I was nobody's man."¹⁷³

What Zhang Aiping's case indicates is that some key military figures had the strong backing of Hua, Ye and Deng in the establishment of the new PLA leadership, that demonstrated military capabilities and past performance were critical determinants in assignments, and the selected officials had an important say in the roles they assumed. Moreover, a major factor we will emphasize further—the post-Mao army leadership was in a fundamental sense shaped by the

¹⁷² The others being Wan Li, Hu Yaobang and Zhou Rongxin; see Teiwes and Sun, *End of the Maoist Era*, p. 416n82.

¹⁷³ See Teiwes and Sun, *End of the Maoist Era*, pp. 416-19; Lei Liu, "'Dog-beating stick,'" p. 5; and above, p. [36].

Chairman's "liberation of cadres" following Lin Biao's demise, a process that began earlier and more tellingly in the military sector.¹⁷⁴ Zhang's case also suggests that viewing appointments as an aspect of Hua-Deng struggle can be misleading. Of course, this is not to claim equal enthusiasm among the three top leaders in all cases,¹⁷⁵ nor does it reflect the changing authority pattern during 1976-80 that sharply shifted toward Deng. We identify three periods: 1) October 1976 to some point in spring 1977, when Hua and Ye were authoritative, and Deng had a consultative role at best; 2) the period from Deng's formal return to military leadership in summer 1977, through to the Third Plenum and well into 1979, when both Ye and Deng were involved in determining appointments, with Hua's role apparently largely ratifying the proposals of his experienced PLA colleagues¹⁷⁶; and 3) from the latter part of 1979 into 1980 when a major reshuffle of military region commanders was initiated by Deng at the time of his larger manoeuvres to undermine Hua.

During the initial period after the arrest of the "gang" two distinct but related developments unfolded: an emphasis on continuity and stability in the PLA;

¹⁷⁴ On this specific point, see Teiwes and Sun, *End of the Maoist Era*, pp. 47-48, 109, 193-94.

¹⁷⁵ A case in point, although not as clear-cut as often believed, was the appointment of Luo Ruiqing as CMC secretary-general, after Zhang Aiping turned down the post. While sometimes presented in PRC literature as a "fierce" supporter of Deng in running the military before his death in August 1978, we have limited knowledge of Luo's appointment, although there are indications Deng was concerned whether Luo would be up to the job given his poor health (interview with senior Party historian, September 2009).

But there are reasonable grounds to surmise that this appointment would have been awkward for Ye given his Mao-assigned role in overseeing Luo's purge in 1965 (see above, p. [52]). Indeed, tension between the families remained palpable, with Luo's daughter later questioning one of Ye's sons on why their father had treated hers so badly; interview with son of Politburo member in the period, September 2009. In any case, another Luo offspring claims that Wang Dongxing was the most strongly opposed of the top leadership to Luo assuming high PLA duties. Interview conducted by Joseph Torigian, February 2020.

¹⁷⁶ A suggestive case was the appointment of Zhang Zhen as head of the central Rear Services Department in February 1978, a move arguably best explained as promoting within the department an experienced and credentialed officer to replace a considerably older figure. A report on the change stated that Zhang was appointed "with the agreement" of Hua.

and coping with the remaining radical elements in the army. While, as we shall elaborate, official statements concerning the military as a whole present a somewhat different picture, detailed personnel data for the highest military bodies underline continuity and stability not only for the immediate period, but for the following years as well. Examining the three central PLA departments, the 11 large military regions of the period, and ten service arms and major central military units, remarkably little personnel change occurred by summer 1977.¹⁷⁷ Of the 210 officers serving in top positions in these organizations in October 1976, only 11 had been moved, with six of these as punishment,¹⁷⁸ only eight new appointments were made, and 12 of the 24 organizations recorded no change at all at these highest levels. Clearly Hua and Ye believed—correctly—that the highest army leadership was behind the new course, a view shared by Deng when he returned, even though personnel movement increased then. What is striking is the stark contrast to what occurred in the civilian sphere where, as we have seen, Hua undertook extensive efforts to change personnel in “disaster area” provinces in the first half of 1977. Yet those efforts overlapped with the military sector.¹⁷⁹

As discussed in Chapter 5, the vulnerability of PLA leaders serving in the regions and provinces was high when they were assigned the top political authority

¹⁷⁷ The positions examined are the directors and their deputies of departments and committees, commanders and deputy commanders, political commissars (not deputy political commissars) of armed organizations. The service arms, in addition to the navy and air force, are the artillery, 2nd artillery, armoured, engineering, and railway forces/corps (*bing*). Apart from the three central departments, other key military bodies covered are the National Defense Science and Technology Commission, the Academy of Military Science, and the National Defense Office. The holders of the relevant positions are listed in the authoritative *Zhongguo Gongchandang zuzhishi ziliao*, addendum vol. 2, pp. 271-407.

¹⁷⁸ We have excluded the small number of provincial Party leaders serving concurrently as military region political commissars in our analysis of personnel changes over the entire period to 1981. If we had not done so, the February 1977 purge of Yunnan’s Jia Qiyun and his replacement by An Pingsheng would add to the number of removals as punishment and new appointments in this early period.

¹⁷⁹ See above, [ch. 5, pp. 32ff].

in their areas. Although this situation confronted officers at the lower provincial military district level,¹⁸⁰ only one figure at the military region level, Gansu Party First Secretary and Lanzhou Military Region Political Commissar/Party First Secretary Xian Henghan, was so exposed. To recapitulate the essential facts, Xian was a senior PLA figure, with a post-1949 career in the Northwest and Lanzhou Military Region, who during the Cultural Revolution in 1967, became the political and military leader in Gansu. During the 1966-76 decade, there were various shortcomings under his leadership, notably inability to curb radical disruption and transport paralysis, but in the new period the key issue was his failure to be tough enough in cracking down on remaining “gang” forces in the province. Under Hua’s auspices, by April ousting Xian began with the transfer into Gansu of significant PLA figure and noted Cultural Revolution victim Xiao Hua, and his removal was completed in early June at a Politburo meeting chaired by Hua. Yet there was an effort at a soft landing in the traditional *luoshi* style, an acknowledgement of Xian’s revolutionary contributions, an expression of hope that he would change, and an undertaking that the CMC would arrange new work for him elsewhere. Unlike some others in similar situations, Xian does not appear to have secured significant new work, but in any case, the soft landing approach continued when Deng returned.¹⁸¹

Xian Henghan’s case contrasts significantly with the only two other cases of the removal of the top leader of their respective organizations for clearly disciplinary reasons, not only in this initial stage, but apart from one likely additional case,¹⁸² over the entire 1976-80 period—Nanjing Military Region Commander Ding Sheng, and Air Force Commander Ma Ning in February-March

¹⁸⁰ E.g., Anhui Military District First Political Commissar and provincial First Party Secretary Song Peizhang. See above, [ch. 5, p. 35].

¹⁸¹ See above, [ch. 5, pp. 36-38, 37n94].

¹⁸² Chengdu Military Region Commander Liu Xingyuan, removed in September 1979; see below, p. [68].

1977. Xian's ouster was due to his failure to adequately control radical forces in his area, and especially to clamp down on them after October 1976, a situation summed up by Wang Dongxing at the decisive June 1977 Politburo meeting as an old cadre degenerating in eight months of grave error, after 48 years of revolutionary achievement. But there was little convincing evidence to link Xian to the "gang of four" in any political sense.

The case against Ding Sheng in Nanjing was strikingly different. As Hua put it at the March 1977 central work conference, the "gang" regarded Ding as their man, he participated in their plot for an armed rebellion in Shanghai, and thus engaged in a conspiracy to seize power.¹⁸³ This was a huge distortion that ignored Ding's awkward circumstances. As the regional military commander, he had to interact with Party leaders in Shanghai as required by Party procedures, but in fact at arm's length. After his November 1973 appointment, Ding did not visit the city before August 1976, and apparently never engaged with the "gang" principals themselves, even though Zhang Chunqiao was the military region's political commissar. The military preparations undertaken in summer 1976, far from involvement in a plan for a radical seizure of power, were in anticipation of possible disruptions when Mao died, and in any case Ding appeared relaxed immediately after the "gang's" arrest.¹⁸⁴ In a real sense, there was less complicity in Nanjing than Lanzhou, where insufficient official action contributed to radical activities getting out of control. In its regional personnel assignments, the Center tacitly agreed. There was limited change in the Nanjing Military Region during the entire period to 1982, apart from the promotion of a local deputy commander to replace Ding.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸³Chi Zehou, "Hua Guofeng dui enren Ding Sheng tongxia henshou" [Hua Guofeng Hurts His Benefactor Ding Sheng], at <http://hk.aboluowang.com/2014/0912/443170.html>, September 12, 2014.

¹⁸⁴ See Teiwes and Sun, *End of the Maoist Era*, pp. 528-31.

¹⁸⁵ Of course, Zhang Chunqiao was immediately removed from his political commissar position. Otherwise, all of the remaining political commissars, and five of the six deputy commanders serving

Yet there was no soft landing. Ding was detained, listed as an offender in the 1980 trial of the “gang of four,” and in 1982 formally drummed out of the army and expelled from the Party.¹⁸⁶

What explains Ding Sheng’s harsh treatment? The most likely underlying explanation is the wider atmosphere of distrust within leadership circles, uncertainty over who was somehow close to the “gang,” or Lin Biao before them. The combination of physical location near Shanghai, together with military preparations in summer 1976, despite the fact that they were carried out in many other areas as well in the context of possible disruption following Mao’s impending death, left Ding especially vulnerable. This led Hua in late September to identify him as someone who could be “neutralized” along with the “gang’s” leading municipal subordinates.¹⁸⁷ The distrust within the military more broadly, although not resulting in significant leadership purges at least in the top positions, cannot be discounted, as in the case of 2nd Artillery Commander Xiang Shouzhi, a veteran of Deng’s Second Field Army. According to Xiang’s account, where he claimed strong opposition to the “gang,” he was sent to a less sensitive posting in September 1977, simply because of the suspicion cast by the mere fact that he had once met Wang Hongwen.¹⁸⁸ Ironically, he simply exchanged positions with Li Shuqing, to that point a deputy commander of the Nanjing Military Region, but

in October 1976, continued in the region until 1982, with the sixth deputy commander promoted in September 1977 to become commander of the 2nd artillery force. In the second half of 1977 and 1978, five officers (one political commissar and four deputy commanders) were added to the region leadership.

¹⁸⁶ Xiao Ming, “Hua Guofeng de gongyuguo” [Hua Guofeng’s Merits and Demerits], *Jiyi* [Memory], November 2008, at <http://www.aisixiang.com/data/66980.html>.

¹⁸⁷ See Teiwes and Sun, *End of the Maoist Era*, p. 583. Some sources, e.g., Chi Zehou, “Hua Guofeng dui enren Ding Sheng tongxia henshou,” point to difficulties in Hua’s relationship with Ding during the Cultural Revolution in Hunan and the Guangzhou Military Region as a factor. We cannot discount this, but believe they at most would have contributed to the distrust surrounding 1976 developments in East China.

¹⁸⁸ Xiang Shouzhi, *Xiang Shouzhi huiyilu* [Memoir of Xiang Shouzhi] (Beijing: Jiefangjun chubanshe, 2006), pp. 351–52, cited in Torigian, “Prestige, Manipulation, and Coercion,” p. 409.

now promoted to commander of the 2nd artillery. As for Ma Ning, although the information is far sketchier, the same suspicion arguably applied, as seen in resistance by the air force to Deng's structural reform orders in 1975 as rightist deviations. While Ma's personal role in this development is unclear, it is not difficult to imagine suspicions that he was aligned with the "gang."¹⁸⁹

There is another aspect to be considered in Ma Ning's case, however. Ma undoubtedly suffered from being considered too junior for the position he had attained. Installed as air force commander in mid-1973, arguably as part of Mao's effort to achieve some sort of balance through younger officers presumptively more in tune with the Cultural Revolution. In any case, Ma had an extraordinary rise. With a post-1949 career entirely in the air force, Ma had only gradually risen from division level to army level in 1959-70, and then served as deputy commander of Lanzhou Military Region air force units in 1970-73, before being catapulted to the command of the entire air force. Moreover, he only attained the rank of general in 1964, when many of similar military position in 1973-75, had received this status in 1955. A clear contrast can be drawn to Zhang Tingfa, who also had an air force career after 1949, was designated a general in 1955, became the force's chief-of staff in 1958 and then deputy commander, before being ousted during the Cultural Revolution. Zhang returned as deputy commander in 1973 at the same time as Ma's arrival. But seemingly as a result of air force resistance to Deng's plans in 1975, Zhang was promoted to political commissar and designated the service's Party first secretary, in effect entrusted by Deng as the organization's principal leader. This situation contrasting a figure historically near the top of the air force hierarchy with

¹⁸⁹ See Teiwes and Sun, *End of the Maoist Era*, p. 263; and above, p. 44. It should be noted, however, that Ma received much better treatment than Ding, retiring with deputy regiment status in 1984.

a vastly junior figure, whatever the actual differences between them, undoubtedly facilitated the quick handling of Ma's case in early 1977.¹⁹⁰

As noted above, in assessing post-Mao personnel changes into 1980, different indications are provided by limited official statements covering significant segments of the army, in contrast to quite extensive data on the highest reaches of the institution where continuity and stability basically prevailed. Going back to 1975, statements on the need to "adjust leadership" (*tiaozheng lingdao banzi*), emphasized that this was required at all levels, "from top to bottom."¹⁹¹ While, as we shall discuss, this did impact significantly on high level appointments in 1975, after Mao it only became an important feature in the very top positions of peak PLA organizations in the second half of 1977 and early 1980, and then in a context where stability was still an essential consideration. Where wider information on punitive dismissals in those peak institutions is available, those affected had apparently served below those positions that can be tracked. Thus in the GSD, those reportedly removed for serious mistakes in line struggle, with the exception of Hu Wei, were all below deputy chief-of-staff status.¹⁹² From an even broader perspective, according to one report, in 1978 over 53 percent of army group and army-level leadership had been adjusted, while nearly 48 percent of division-level commanders and commissars affiliated with military regions were changed, although it is unclear to what extent this reflected rotation, disciplinary sanctions,

¹⁹⁰ Teiwes and Sun, *End of the Maoist Era*, pp. 262-63; *Zhongguo Gongchandang zuzhishi ziliao*, addendum vol. 2, pp. 233, 236-36; and biographical data on Ma and Zhang.

¹⁹¹ E.g., Deng in July 1975, cited in Teiwes and Sun, *Ends of the Maoist Era*, p. 257; Ye to the annual NPC session, June 28, 1979; and a September 1979 GPD meeting, cited in Torigian, "Prestige, Manipulation, and Coercion," p. 430.

¹⁹² "Zhonggong zongcanmoubu weiyuanhui guanyu 'sancha sanzhen' yundong de qingkuang de baogao" (August 30, 1978). Apart from Hu, the 12 other officials identified headed departments or held other subordinate posts.

or other factors.¹⁹³ In comparison to these one-year figures, of the high-level leaders at the central PLA departments, military regions and service arms, 63 percent of those in place in October 1976 were still serving in the same positions (or were promoted within their units) in January 1980 or later. The same can be said of 87 percent of those in office at the end of December 1977, that is, following Deng's return as Chief-of-Staff, and moderately extensive but not disruptive, personnel adjustments since the summer.¹⁹⁴

Examining the comprehensive but still restricted data on these high-level figures allows a modification of, and in some respects overturns, what is generally believed concerning personnel policy after Deng's return. In basic terms, the concern with continuity and stability that marked the very early period where Hua and Ye dominated, continued with Deng the increasingly decisive actor. As noted, we have limited information on the actual decisions involving specific individuals—Hua's clear leading role in the ousting of Xian Henghan is rare, but we are confident that with Deng's return Hua took a backseat on PLA personnel matters. Ye and Deng, given their deep military experience and familiarity with leading officers, would naturally take the lead in filling out and adjusting army positions after the initial handing of what was considered urgent cases. Ye could be expected to have been considering such issues from early in the new period, and in November 1977

¹⁹³ Jiang Siyi, *Zhongguo Gongchandang jundui zhengzhi gongzuo qishinianshi: zai "wenhua dageming" zhong shou sunhai, zai gaige kaifang zhong chuangzao xin jumian* [70 Year History of the Communist Party's Military Political Work: Suffering Damage During the "Cultural Revolution," Creating a New Situation in Reform and Opening Up] (Beijing: Jiefangjun chubanshe, 1991), vol. 6, pp. 32–34, cited in Torigian, "Prestige, Manipulation, and Coercion," p. 31.

¹⁹⁴ See above, note 178, for the basis of this and other claims concerning these high-level officials. In terms of identifying holders of these positions, near certainty was obtained from *Zhongguo Gongchandang zuzhishi ziliao*, addendum vol. 2. Beyond that, however, while career data on those identified is much better than that for provincial Party secretaries (only one PLA figure lacked such information compared to 10 percent of provincial leaders), the available data on military officials drawn from the variety of biographical sources listed in the Bibliography is quite uneven, although in most cases fairly extensive.

he addressed the importance of personnel change in the three central PLA departments and the military regions.¹⁹⁵ There are various assessments of Ye-Deng working relations on personnel matters, with some PRC sources claiming friction, but in our judgment those emphasizing cooperation are most likely closer to the truth.¹⁹⁶

Within the larger period following Deng return into early 1980, as noted we have identified two particular stages. First, from Deng's resumption of the Chief-of-Staff position in July 1977 to the end of the year, when more personnel adjustments took place than at any other time in 1977-80.¹⁹⁷ At the end of December, Deng summed up what had been done and plans for going forward: "Now that we have carried out the necessary reassignment ... of leading personnel among the [large] military regions and the various services and arms, there should be no further [substantial] changes in leadership for a certain period."¹⁹⁸ And indeed, over 1978 and 1979, the rate of change decreased markedly.¹⁹⁹ The second period of our focus begins with mid-1979 discussions for a new rotation of officers, with the military regions the most significant aspect, which resulted in the assignment of new commanders in eight regions in January 1980.²⁰⁰ In June 1979 Deng assigned the task of overseeing the process to Marshal Nie Rongzhen, and

¹⁹⁵ According to a close relative of Ye Jianying; interview, October 2009.

¹⁹⁶ See above, pp. [29-30].

¹⁹⁷ In this six-month period, 34 officials left their units/posts, while 46 new appointments were made.

¹⁹⁸ *Selected Works of Deng (1975-1982)*, p. 92.

¹⁹⁹ Leaving aside four new appointments in December 1979 which can be considered part of the changes planned for early 1980, in these two years 21 officials exited their posts, and 16 new appointments were made.

²⁰⁰ In the Beijing, Jinan, Wuhan, Guangzhou, Kunming, Chengdu, Lanzhou and Xinjiang Military Regions. In addition, Ye Fei succeeded Xiao Jinguang as navy commander, although Ye had been the actual number one figure in the service since he replaced Su Zhenhua as political commissar following Su's death in February 1979. Undoubtedly, the most important change came in March 1980, when Yang Dezhi replaced Deng as Chief-of-Staff.

Ye was also involved, although we believe in a less telling manner than in 1977.²⁰¹ In the larger context, the telling point concerned the process of deciding on these changes. While Hua was probably informed of the initial arrangements, it appears he was kept in the dark once he departed for Europe in October. There were other sub rosa discussions while Hua was abroad that were much more directly aimed at him, as Deng sought to make it clear that he was the paramount leader. This development is examined in Chapter 8, but we will discuss the military considerations of these changes below.

With regard to the continuity and stability theme, we will return to this issue for the latter 1977 months as well as the appointments in early 1980, but first it is necessary to discuss the basis of the stability immediately following Mao's death and the arrest of the "gang of four." The core was the 63 percent of those in place in October 1976 who continued in the same unit until January 1980 or more deeply into the 1980s. The architect, paradoxically, was none other than Mao who had created the disruption in the first place. Of those in the October 1976 group, 12 percent had served continuously from May 1966, the clearest date for the start of the Cultural Revolution, including Navy Commander Xiao Jinguang who held his position to January 1980. As Mao sought to restrain chaos, restore minimally effective government, and finally deal with the initial fallout of the Lin Biao affair in 1967-72, another 31 percent were added to the various PLA bodies, including Kunming Military Region Commander Wang Bicheng who held the post from mid-1971 to the start of 1979, when he became commander of the Wuhan Military Region. There was a significant increase from 1973 through to 1975, with Mao's forced rotation of eight military region commanders in December 1973 the critical

²⁰¹ See Nie Li, *Shangao shuichang: huiyi fuqin Nie Rongzhen* [High Mountains and Long Water: Remembering My Father Nie Rongzhen] (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 2006), p. 368, cited in Torigian, "Prestige, Manipulation, and Coercion," p. 431; and *Ye Jianying nianpu*, vol. 2, pp. 1173, 1180.

feature,²⁰² with the result that 49 percent of the 1976 cohort were added in these years.²⁰³

This process also involved a substantial number of officials who were sent elsewhere or sanctioned in 1973-75 (123, or the equivalent of 62 percent of those remaining or newly appointed as of 1975). A striking feature was the reappearance of major Cultural Revolution victims, arguably most notably Su Zhenhua in 1972 and Yang Chengwu in 1974, as leading figures in the navy and GSD respectively. All in all, a substantial shakeup occurred in 1973-75, one which also affected lower level bodies such as provincial military districts.²⁰⁴ The architect was Mao, but implementing the plan fell to Ye and arguably especially Deng. It is not excessive to say that Mao provided the restored officials from which Deng and Ye could select the leaders of the reorganized army. Of course, this involved some scope to favor individuals particularly trusted or valued for specific skills, but in any case, Deng and Ye were acutely aware of the need to reflect Mao's wishes in staffing military institutions. Moreover, following the Chairman's death, whether for Hua and Ye initially, or Deng subsequently, a bedrock for continuity had been created. Yet this did not prevent internal bitterness as we have seen within the GSD, nor between long-standing top leaders such as Navy Commander Xiao Jinguang and Political Commissar Su Zhenhua, which we examine in the following section.

As indicated, we believe a continuation of continuity and stability was the centerpiece of Deng's approach to military personnel, but contrary views exist in both foreign and PRC writings. In the context of the Hua-Deng struggle narrative, Deng's presumed appointments are seen as politically driven, particularly through

²⁰² On this rotation, see Teiwes and Sun, *End of the Maoist Era*, pp. 139-46.

²⁰³ The figures we provide do not account for 8 percent of the cohort since no pre-October 1976 position in the unit was confirmed for these officials.

²⁰⁴ See Teiwes and Sun, *End of the Maoist Era*, pp. 258-260. In the case of provincial military districts, in mid-1975, 60 percent of districts were adjusted, largely by a fom of rotation.

favoritism to veterans of his Second Field Army (2FA). A foreign analyst argues that since his return in mid-1977, Deng's appointments weakened competing "mountaintops," i.e., other field armies, with all positions of commanders and commissars at the army level and above rearranged by April 1978.²⁰⁵ Looking the higher-level appointments in our sample, however, this is misleading at best, and plain wrong in crucial respects. It is true that the distribution of these high-level positions over the 1977-80 period by field army history, to the extent it is possible to determine,²⁰⁶ does favor the 2FA (with 44 positions), but by a relatively limited margin over the Third (3FA) and Fourth (4FA) Field Armies, with 40 and 41 respectively, a situation reminiscent of Mao's revolutionary period approach of balancing the mountaintops.²⁰⁷ What is striking is that this advantage for the 2FA is overwhelmingly based on those in place in October 1976, making up 30 percent of those for whom field army designations are available at that moment.²⁰⁸ This, in turn, reflected Mao's end of 1973 instruction to promote more people from that army, clearly an attempt to counter advantages gained by 4FA officers during Lin Biao's leadership of the military.²⁰⁹ In this context, Deng (or Deng and Ye) actually *reduced* the relative position of the 2FA, notably so compared to the 4FA, despite the extension of PLA rectification to focus on Lin Biao's army.

²⁰⁵ Huang, *Factionalism*, pp. 355-56.

²⁰⁶ Assigning field army careers is often difficult given the fluidity of pre-1949 military careers (see above, pp. [52-53]), and in any case our biographical sources only make explicit designations for 49 percent of the the individuals concerned. For number one officials, 84 percent are designated.

²⁰⁷ Trailing far behind were Peng Dehuai's First Field Army (1FA), arguably suffering from Peng's 1959 dismissal, with 23, and the smaller North China Field Army with a mere five. On Mao and mountaintops in the revolutionary period, see Frederick C. Teiwes, "Mao Zedong in Power (1979-1976)," in William A. Joseph, ed., *Politics in China: An Introduction* (3rd edition, New York: Oxford University Press, 2019, pp. 79-81.

²⁰⁸ In comparison, at this point the 3FA had 21 percent, and the 4FA had 22 percent, which meant the 2FA had a 70 percent of the total of these three leading armies.

²⁰⁹ See Teiwes and Sun, *End of the Maoist Era*, p. 204.

This pattern is even more dramatic if we examine the number one office holders in the key PLA organizations, and particularly appointments in the July-December 1977 period when Deng was making his mark. In comparison to the situation at the time of the arrest of the “gang of four,” when 2FA veterans held 45 percent of the top posts where field army participation could be identified, more than the combined 3FA and 4FA contingent, in appointments after October 1976 through to 1980, the 2FA and 4FA each provided five such leaders, while the 3FA supplied a remarkable seven. Moreover, focusing on the second half of 1977, a close balance existed in both overall and top leader appointments, as was the case in early 1980 as well.²¹⁰ Clearly, at this level, Deng was not using his prestige and increasing dominance to excessively promote his 2FA, and certainly not to attack other mountaintops. We see another link between Mao and Deng. In comparable periods of consolidating power from positions of enormous prestige, a broad appeal to different army constituencies made absolute sense. For Deng, this was less in strengthening his position in any personal competition, than in building the institution.

What factors, then, guided the changes in the second half of 1977? First, let us focus on the 34 officials moved on in this period. There was no major purge, although the need to follow through with investigations into questions over the past decade had an impact. Five lesser members of the cohort were reportedly removed with sanctions for “serious Cultural Revolution mistakes,” although two of those cases were later reversed. More intriguing were nine cases of removal/demotion indicating some degree political difficulty. A limited case was the previously noted demotion of 2nd Artillery Commander Xiang Shouzhi to a still

²¹⁰ For number one office holders appointed in July-December 1977, two were from the 4FA, and one each for the 2FA and 3 FA; the overall numbers were six for both the 2FA and 3FA, and five for the 4FA. In early 1980, the count for number one office holders was three each for the 2FA and 3FA, and two for the 4FA, and overall five for the 3 FA, and four for both the 2FA and 4FA.

significant position as Nanjing Military Region deputy commander, apparently due to suspicion over his having met Wang Hongwen,²¹¹ but a setback that did not prevent him from future promotion as the region's commander from 1982 to 1990. Other cases indicated a soft landing, e.g., Artillery Commander Zhang Dezhi, who was sent to the Central Party School for study, and subsequently only given honorary posts. In yet another notable case, in September 1977 Ji Dengkui resigned his position as Beijing Military Region first political commissar. This, according to Ji Dengkui's son,²¹² was his own initiative based on his reading of the political situation, and definitely not related to any conflict with Deng, a complex story we address in Chapter 8. Arguably, the closest case to a purge in this group was Chengdu Military Region Commander Liu Xingyuan, removed in September 1977 and given a position in a military academy. Apparently, Liu did not receive focused attention until the 1978 central work conference when he was placed under investigation for alleged crimes, including persecution of Ye Jianying. Liu's fundamental problem undoubtedly was too close a connection to his 4FA boss, Lin Biao, presumably manifested during his period as Guangdong political and military leader in 1969-72.²¹³ Meanwhile, nine departing officials moved on to equivalent positions or promotions, while four had either died or suffered from health problems, and information is lacking on six others.

What factors were involved in the 46 new postings to these elite units? Various factors can be identified starting with the need to complete the rebuilding of the army as decreed by Mao in the early 1970s and implemented by Deng and

²¹¹ See above, p. [61].

²¹² Interview, September 2011.

²¹³ In 1984, the review of Liu's case concluded that he had made serious mistakes in the Cultural Revolution, although it allowed for historical conditions. When Liu died in 1990, main Party leaders attended the memorial ceremony, and his official assessment was positive. "Kaiguo Zhongjiang Liu Xingyuan, da junqu zhengzhi jin 20 nian queyi fuzhi daiyu tuixiu" [Founding Lieutenant General Liu Xingyuan, Who Served Full-time in Military Regions for Almost 20 Years, but Retired as an Assistant], at <http://www.jsyj81.top/forum.php?mod=viewthread&tid=354>.

Ye, before grinding to a halt during the anti-rightist reversal movement in 1976. Notwithstanding Deng's assertion upon return that he would offend people,²¹⁴ or his 1980 criticism of personnel expansion, much of this suited institutional interests with appointments to deal with new problems. Filling vacant positions was also a factor, as in the designation of Wei Guoqing as GPD head after a decade of major disruption in the department, followed by the purge of Zhang Chunqiao, and the appointment of Yang Chengwu as Fuzhou Military Region commander given the vacancy created by the death of the previous commander. Other considerations included the rotation of capable and trusted officers, utilizing appropriate expertise, and making amends for Cultural Revolution "persecution."²¹⁵ These can be illuminated in the four appointments of new number one leaders (in addition to Wei Guoqing and Yang Chengwu) in September 1977.

Direct rotation can be seen in the case of the 2nd artillery force, where Commander Xiang Shouzhi (not fully trusted at that point due to having met Wang Hongwen), switched positions with Nanjing Military Region Deputy Commander Li Shuiqing; both would continue in their new units into the 1980s with Xiang promoted to commander in Nanjing. Another command officer, 4FA veteran Wu Kehua, was sent to the Chengdu Military Region from the railroad *bing* in September 1977 to replace Liu Xingyuan. Wu's departure from the railroad force also highlighted the Cultural Revolution factor, as he was replaced at the railroad force by Chen Zaidao, the famous main victim of the July 20 [1967] Wuhan incident where Chen's forces suppressed radical elements. Chen had been "liberated" by Mao, and he served as a deputy commander in the Fuzhou Military Region until

²¹⁴ See above, pp. [44-45].

²¹⁵ Of the 329 office holders over the 1977-80 period, 61 (19 percent) were identified as having "suffered persecution" (*shou pohai*). The persecution reported involved a considerable range treatment, from dispersal to the countryside to years of solitary confinement, and the coverage is clearly incomplete, and sometimes biased by political factors.

1975. In that year, Chen's status rose as he was named a CMC adviser, but he was not given a command position. His September 1977 posting can be considered a righting of this anomaly.²¹⁶

The final September 1977 appointment, 4FA veteran Hong Xuezhi as director of the National Defense Office, combined making amends for suffering with expertise considerations. Hong's political "persecution" started well before the Cultural Revolution. Having risen rapidly to become an alternate Central Committee member and director of the central Rear Services Department in 1956, Hong became involved in Peng Dehuai's views at the 1959 Lushan conference, and was soon transferred from the army to lower-level provincial work. The Cultural Revolution saw Hong detained and subsequently sent to labor reform, a status revoked in 1972, reportedly following Mao and Zhou's personal enquiry. Hong only returned to a mid-level civilian provincial position, yet clearly he retained high regard for his abilities in PLA circles. The appointment to the National Defense Office reflected that recognition, something even more dramatically seen in his January 1980 return to the Rear Services Department as director, 21 years after initially assuming the office.²¹⁷ While Hong's case was particularly striking, in each of these top appointments, even taking into account that Yang Chengwu's posting contained a rebuke and demotion, substantial military credentials were obvious considerations.

Military considerations were also at the core of the early 1980 personnel adjustments. The political factors that intruded in the 1977 changes were largely absent, the removal Beijing Military Region Commander Chen Xilian being virtually unique, and as with Ji Dengkui's earlier case, this outcome had greater relevance

²¹⁶ On Chen Zaidao, see Teiwes and Sun, *Tragedy*, pp. 80ff; and idem, *End of the Maoist Era*, p. 261.

²¹⁷ On Hong Xuezhi at Lushan, see Teiwes, *Politics and Purges*, p. 332n. Other information drawn from PRC biographical sources.

to larger issues that will be dealt with in Chapter 8. Overall, the 1980 adjustments were significantly fewer than those in 1977,²¹⁸ but understandable attention was created by one of the largest PRC rotations of top military region leaders, with eight regions installing new number one officials.²¹⁹ There were no similar changes in the service arms,²²⁰ and while the restoration of Hong Xuezhi to the Rear Services Department was significant, the reassignment of the highly regarded Zhang Zhen as a deputy chief-of-staff was hardly a demotion. The most important change came in March with Deng turning over the Chief-of-Staff post, the most important position in the entire military structure, to North China FA veteran Yang Dezhi. Of course, everybody knew Deng would continue as the boss, but a clearly recognized deputy was now in place.

What do the personnel adjustments of the eight military regions indicate? A reorganization was rational from several perspectives, one of which was simply dealing with possible staleness of long-term leaders. Also, the issue of age, while not rigorously enforced at this stage, had been raised more broadly. Of the eight commanders who had been in place since Mao's rotation in December 1973, five were still in the same position six years later, with only Shenyang Military Region Commander Li Desheng of the leaders still in place, unaffected by the 1980 shakeup.²²¹ Leaving Chen Xilian aside, the other three remaining figures from the

²¹⁸ In early 1980, 21 officials left the relevant units, replaced by 16 new appointments. In the second half of 1977, the figures were 33 and 46.

²¹⁹ The military regions were Beijing, Jinan, Wuhan, Guangzhou, Kunming, Chengdu, Lanzhou, and Xinjiang.

²²⁰ Technically, two developments might be cited in the navy and National Defense Office, but neither truly apply. In the navy, Political Commissar Ye Fei replaced Xiao Jinguang as commander, but Ye had been the number one leader since he succeeded Su Zhenhua in February 1979 after Su's passing. After Hong Xuezhi left the National Defense Office, no replacement was named, although continuity was maintained with five deputy directors, who had been in place in October 1976, serving until July 1982.

²²¹ Li was a Politburo member, 2FA veteran, and, while we would not make too much of it, the youngest member of the surviving 1973 class of large region commanders. Another member of the 1973 class, Yang Dezhi, did not stay in initial posting in Wuhan, being transferred to the

1973 rotation all drifted into forms of retirement,²²² with age arguably a factor in each, and certainly in the case of Guangzhou's Xu Shiyou, who was only a year younger than Deng.

In contrast, in the remaining four military regions in the 1980 readjustment, the top post was either vacant, or had been staffed on short-term basis.²²³ To deal with these two situations, two approaches were used. One approach was to rely on trusted established military leaders when key posts had to be filled. Thus Wu Kehua, who had already filled three commander positions since October 1976—the railroad force, the Chengdu and Xinjiang Military Regions, now took over Guangzhou; meanwhile Deputy Chief-of-Staff Zhang Caiqian was posted to Wuhan. Also, in this this category was the transfer of the Beijing Military Region's commander position from Chen Xilian to First Political Commissar Qin Jiwei. Qin had served with Chen in the region since 1975, undoubtedly in a subordinate position, but arguably becoming the real number one leader as Chen's larger position deteriorated. These were all measures to handle specific cases, not an approach to deal with the larger personnel issues now facing the PLA.

Such an undertaking can be seen in the second approach that addressed military rejuvenation in five of the new appointments. In strict age terms, this was not particularly dramatic, and far from what was happening at lower levels,²²⁴ yet clearly a serious effort was being taken to blood into top posts less established

Kunming Military Region in January 1979 in order to take a leading command position in the Sino-Vietnam war, and of course was soon elevated to Chief-of-Staff.

²²² Xu Shiyou in Guangzhou, Zeng Siyu in Jinan, and Han Xianchu in Lanzhou.

²²³ The post of commander in Chengdu was vacant after Wu Kehua was transferred to Xinjiang in February 1979, while Wu's stay there only lasted a year before his posting to Guangzhou. Also, at the start of 1979 to facilitate Yang Dezhi's leading role in the Sino-Vietnam war, he and Wang Bicheng exchanged posts, with Wang going to Wuhan.

²²⁴ According to official statistics, the average age at the army level declined from 56 to 54.1 in 1980; *Dangdai Zhongguo jundui de zhengzhi gongzuo (shang)* [Political Work in the Modern Chinese Military (Part One)] (Beijing: Dangdai Zhongguo chubanshe, 1994), p. 481, cited in Torigian, "Prestige, Manipulation, and Coercion," p. 430.

officers. Even regarding age, four of the five of the new less prominent commanders clustered in the 1915 to 1918 date of birth range,²²⁵ considerably less common than for earlier figures at that level. But more important was career experience, marked by less imposing previous positions than those of their predecessors, with their biographical accounts tending to be sketchy, sometimes with significant gaps. The picture is broadly one of step by step climbing the ladder before the Cultural Revolution, followed by apparently minimally interrupted careers once the movement unfolded.²²⁶ We generally cannot know the specific circumstances of individual promotions, but we can be confident that no one subject to suspicion of radical tendencies would have been considered, and some aspect of military competence would have been a factor—something that can be demonstrated in at least one case.²²⁷ In other words, while these appointments were part of the personnel arrangements at the time of Deng’s consolidation of power, they were neither necessary for Deng, nor can they be explained in terms of factional loyalty. In any case, once these “younger” officers were put in place, they exercised command authority into the mid-1980s or beyond.²²⁸

Our examination of personnel adjustments in the designated top military bodies thoroughly demonstrates Hua’s weakness, less over specific appointments

²²⁵ They were: Rao Shoukun (b. 1915) in Jilin; Zhang Yanxiu (b. 1915) in Kunming; Xiao Quanfu (b. 1916) in Xinjiang; and You Taizhong (b. 1918) in Chengdu. In contrast, Du Yide in Lanzhou was born in the more familiar 1912. Cf. below, note 227. Of the 14 military region commanders over the entire period from October 1976 to the eve of 1980, only Chen Xilian (b. 1915) and Li Desheng (b. 1916), were born in 1915 or later.

²²⁶ Of the five less prominent appointees, apparently only Lanzhou’s older Du Yide had his career interrupted, and in the data at our disposal he was the only one reported to have been “persecuted.”

²²⁷ According to his biographical record, Xiao Quanfu had distinguished himself during armed conflict on the Soviet border in the Northeast in the late 1960s, and now was urgently appointed to the Xinjiang Military Region as tension increased on the region’s frontier.

²²⁸ Rao Shoukun, Xiao Quanfu and Zhang Yanxiu served to June 1985 in Jinan, Xinjiang and Kunming respectively, while You Taizhong served in Chengdu until October 1982, when he was transferred to Guangzhou and became commander until 1987. In contrast, Du Yide’s command career ended in December 1982.

where no convincing evidence of conflict exists, than in the political culture of seniority, something most deeply entrenched in the PLA. We have seen how this sentiment was reflected very early in the new period in resistance to propaganda claiming hardly believable historical bonds between Hua and the army's commanders.²²⁹ This attitude was fostered by the contrast between Hua, merely a county-level militia organizer in the pre-1949 period, and our group of 300 plus officers who had participated in some of the most sacred events of the revolution from the Long March to critical battles during the anti-Japanese and liberation wars. Perhaps most telling was simply Hua's age. In the biographical data, where age information was provided, the overwhelming number of officials, including those holding no more than deputy positions, were older than Hua. Ironically, one of the first officers purged on Hua's watch, the air force's Ma Ning, were lack of seniority surely played a role in his removal, was a rare case of a top commander younger than the notional commander-in-chief.²³⁰

This systemic and cultural disadvantage fatally undermined Hua in any potential conflict, and it would have inhibited him from initiating any such conflict in the PLA. While we believe Hua did not seek contention within the army, nor, in terms probably more reflective of Deng's sensibilities, to untowardly stick his nose in the military, cases of alleged conflict raised in PRC and foreign accounts need to be addressed. We now turn to two such matters, tension in spring 1978 arising out of a major naval accident, and Hua's plan for an inspection of the fleet that Deng seemingly opposed; and Hua's asserted efforts in early 1980 as his position was under threat, to seek support within the military.

Narratives of Hua-Deng Conflict: Su Zhenhua and the Spring 1978 Naval Incident, and Hua's Early 1980 Activities Involving the Military. The most substantial

²²⁹ See above, p. [27].

²³⁰ See above, pp. [61-62]. Ma was born in 1922, a year after Hua.

story claiming a Hua-initiated challenge to Deng in the military begins with the naval accident on March 9, 1978, the largest since the formation of the PRC Navy in 1949, an explosion that sank China's most advanced missile destroyer with a large loss of life. Substantial, that is, in that *some* elements of the official narrative attacking Hua clearly happened, notably subsequent plans for Hua to visit the navy in Dalian following his May trip to North Korea. Su Zhenhua, pictured as playing a leading role in Hua's effort, eventually suffered badly before his untimely death in February 1979, and the events following the explosion were subsequently added to the list of charges aired against Hua. Although the official version has never been revoked, alternative versions have been allowed to appear that, while agreeing on specific facts, adopt a very different tone, thus providing vindication for Hua and Su.²³¹ We cannot provide a completely adequate version of events given gaps and contradictions in the sources, but we believe we can demonstrate that the official narrative is essentially false. Finally, after reviewing the evidence we have, we will offer an interpretation of the political factors shaping this still opaque development. We begin by summarizing the charges against Hua and Su.

In Deng-era Party history, the dubious story unfolds simply. Following the explosion and sinking of the missile-equipped destroyer, Deng assertedly severely criticized Su Zhenhua for incompetence in handling the case, and instructed thorough reorganization of the Navy to clear up its problems. Su was very unhappy, and on April 12 went to Hua, with whom he assertedly had a very close relationship, to complain in a five-hour talk. Hua did not criticize Su for his dereliction of duty, but instead allegedly took his side, saying that when he returned from a visit to

²³¹ As seen in the dramatically clashing accounts in the biographies of two key actors. Yang Zhaolin, Chou Yunzhou and Qiao Ya, eds, *Cong gaoshan dao dahai—Gongheguo Shangjiang Su Zhenhua* [From High Mountains to the Great Sea—PRC General Su Zhenhua] (Beijing: Jiefangjun chubanshe, 2001), understandably offered a detailed defense of Su, while *Luo Ruiqing zhuan* [Biography of Luo Ruiqing] (Beijing: Dangdai Zhongguo chubanshe, 1996), brutally attacked Su's and Hua's motives. Cf. below p. [77] on Su and Luo's historical relations.

North Korea in May, he would inspect the navy in Dalian to show his support. They then agreed the inspection would involve a large “military parade,” and Su began preparations ignoring organizational rules requiring reporting to the GSD and CMC. However, Commander Xiao Jinguang and Navy Chief-of-Staff Yang Guoyu did report to CMC secretary-general Luo Ruiqing, who in turn informed Deng, and only then was the military parade in Dalian scrapped. Throughout Hua did not consult Deng or hold a concerted discussion in the CMC Standing Committee—thus making a unilateral decision on a major military manoeuvre. Deng saw this as a political challenge, subsequently telling Hua this was a contest of wills.²³² Other accounts were even sharper, accusing Hua of using the accident as an opportunity to thrust his hands even deeper into the navy in his attempt to seize military power, with Su in Hua’s camp during the power struggle.²³³

Before examining the gross distortions in this narrative, it is necessary to explore pre-existing relations among key actors in both the spring events and subsequent consequences. While the larger Hua-Deng relationship is the centrepiece of Chapter 8, here it is sufficient to note the two early 1978 developments previously discussed: Deng’s conversation with Ye Jianying where he suggested Hua had too much power; and the Ye-led approach to Hua, apparently endorsed by Deng, that Hua devote more time to military affairs.²³⁴ In short, the inherent issue since Deng’s return of the relative authority of Hua and Deng was at play, but with an acceptance that Hua had a legitimate role in the PLA. But what of Su Zhenhua and the two crucial leaders? Before the naval incident, Su

²³² See Tan Zongji, “The Third Plenum Is a Major Turning Point,” pp. 44-47. For a foreign analysis picking up the official narrative, see Huang, *Factionalism*, pp. 356-57.

²³³ E.g., “Yang Guoyu: kaiguo jiangjun” [Yang Guoyu: Founding General], at <http://www.jialing.gov.cn/a/ztl/lianzhengjianshe/2016/0613/7662.html>, June 13, 2016; and “Yici yaozhe de Zhonggong haijun yuebing, Luo Ruiqing zhuan xianqi de quandou luoshengmen” [Luo Ruiqing’s Biography Set Off a Fight over the Death of a CCP Naval Parade], at http://culture.dwnews.com/history/news/2019-04-26/60131195_all.html, April 26, 2019.

²³⁴ See above, pp. 31-34.

had positive relations with both, albeit based on very different contexts in CCP history. Although having some experience in the 4FA, Su was essentially a 2FA man, favourably impressing Deng in the liberation war. After 1949, both before the Cultural Revolution and following Deng's first return to work in 1973, interaction was positive, with Su playing a significant role assisting Deng in his 1975 military consolidation efforts. Following the fall of the "gang of four," Su soon visited Deng and strongly supported his new return. As for Deng, returning to work he praised Su, characterizing him as more "reliable" than Chen Xilian, and subsequently took him on an important mission later in 1977.²³⁵

Su Zhenhua's relationship with Hua obviously lacked the depth of connection with Deng, or indeed any previous work relations. In fact, significant interaction only came with Su's role in the purge of the "gang of four," involving both participation in plotting the arrest, and subsequently securing control. On the recommendation of Ye Jianying, Hua gave Su responsibility for cleaning out radical resistance in Shanghai and securing central control, a task completed with marked efficiency.²³⁶ There is little doubt that at the personal level the Hua-Su relationship was very good,²³⁷ and that at a political level Su offered important support in the context of the immediate post-Mao period, as would be expected of a Politburo member. At the March 1977 central work conference Su spoke strongly for Hua, although claims that he asserted Hua must be supported in the same manner as

²³⁵ "Kaiguo Shangjiang Su henhua qushihou canzao 'bianshi' neimu" [Inside Story of the Tragic "Whipping the Corpse" of Founding Admiral Su Zhenhua after His Death], at <https://www.wenxuecity.com/news/2015/02/10/4020731.html>, February 10, 2015; and Teiwes and Sun, *End of the Maoist Era*, p. 263. The mission in November 1977, which included Luo Ruiqing as well as Su, was to the Guanzhou Military Region where Deng warned of the lingering influence of Lin Biao's followers; see above, p. [50].

²³⁶ See "Su Zhenhua zai fensui 'sirenbang' de qianqian hou hou (xia)" ["Su Zhenhua Before and After Crushing the 'Gang of Four', part 2"], 1994-2007 China Academic Journal Publishin House, at <http://www.cnki.net>; and Teiwes and Sun, *End of the Maoist Era*, pp. 550, 579, 585-86.

²³⁷ A senior Party historian with close ties to Hua described it as such; interview, January 2011.

Mao are questionable.²³⁸ In terms of the PLA, it may well be that Hua sought Su's advice as Su himself reportedly claimed, and that Su benefitted in the navy from Hua's praise for his role in smashing the "gang."²³⁹ But even if Su had the closest personal relationship with Hua of any senior officer, these developments in the context of the times do not equate with being aligned with Hua in a struggle *against* Deng.

Another relationship to note is that between Su and Luo Ruiqing, particularly for what it reveals about the upending of relations caused by the Cultural Revolution. Before 1966, Su and Luo were quite close, with Su a student at *Kangda* (Yan'an's "Resistance University") when Luo was vice dean, and they also served together in the army. But Luo always had higher status, and it remained so after 1949, especially when he became PLA Chief-of-Staff in 1959, and a secretary in the central Secretariat in 1962, before they were both purged at the start of the Cultural Revolution. But their status was in effect reversed once Mao brought each of them back work in the early 1970s. Su was now at the higher level with a significant executive position as the navy's top leader, important positions in the CMC, and selection as an alternate Politburo member in 1973. Luo had lesser posts, with his most noted appointment a CMC advisory role in mid-1975. After the arrest of the "gang," however, there was another change, one that confused status and authority relations. Su, promoted to full Politburo membership in 1977, was higher politically, but Luo as CMC secretary-general (Su served as deputy secretary-general) was higher militarily. We have no evidence of whether or how this factor may have affected developments in April 1977, but the fact that Luo's widow

²³⁸ This claim was later spread widely among the elite, but the text of Su's speech we have been given contains no such phrase. The thrust of Su's argument was that Hua should be supported *because* he was defending Mao's flag.

²³⁹ See *ibid.* The negative version is that Hua sought Su's help to *control* the army.

became a prominent voice attacking the episode as a power grab is arguably suggestive.²⁴⁰

Paradoxically, for Su the most critical relationships turned out to be within his own organization, much less with regard to the alleged military parade, than concerning the attacks on him at the turn of 1978-79. As Hua put it when receiving Su's widow two decades later, the official story was full of falsehoods, and Su's actual vulnerability was due to "contradictions in the navy."²⁴¹ The key relationship was with Commander Xiao Jinguang, a very senior officer a year older than Deng, an alternate Central Committee member in 1945, and a full member at every subsequent Congress until 1982. Moreover, he was commander of the navy from its founding in 1950 until 1980. Yet this never translated into great political authority, with Xiao never achieving Politburo rank, and it appears that rank aside, Xiao was rarely the dominant figure in the organization. In the 1960s he was pushed aside by Li Zuopeng, one of "Lin Biao's generals," probably even before the start of the Cultural Revolution. Meanwhile, Su only arrived at the navy as a deputy political commissar in 1953, becoming senior commissar in 1957, but his status in the larger military increased following the 1959 Lushan conference when he became a member of the CMC Committee (joining Xiao) and a CMC deputy secretary-general (under Luo Ruiqing). Although both Xiao and Su were regarded as having been "persecuted" by Lin Biao, Xiao suffered little more than criticism, formally holding the position of commander throughout the decade, while Su was placed in solitary

²⁴⁰ This is largely based on the account of Luo's son; interview conducted by Joseph Torigian, February 2020. Cf. "Luo Ruiqing zhizhi Hua Guofeng jianyue haijun shijian shida mituan" [Top Ten Mysteries of Luo Ruiqing Stopping Hua Guofeng from Reviewing the Naval Incident], at <https://www.aboluowang.com/2015/1101/637854.html>, November 1, 2015; and Teiwes and Sun, *End of the Maoist Era*, pp. 40-42, 47, 103, 146, 148, 252, 261, 295.

²⁴¹ "Hua Guofeng tan tasuo zhidao de Su Zhenhua," p. 27.

confinement. Yet Su was one of the earliest PLA figures brought back by Mao, given significant military power broadly, and clearly placed in charge of the navy.²⁴²

The seeds of Xiao's animosity toward Su followed the latter's return to the navy in 1972. The essential problem was the context and events of the time, with Mao demanding a serious investigation of senior personnel to see who might have been compromised by relations with Lin Biao, and with the Politburo radicals harshly pushing individual cases. As a 4FA veteran, and particularly due to his apparent support of the Lin Biao group's attack on the civilian radicals, especially Zhang Chunqiao, at the 1970 Lushan plenum, Xiao was vulnerable. With Su in charge of a group set up to handle Xiao's case, a Navy meeting on the Lin Biao issue was convened in July 1972, with Zhang Chunqiao leading the attack on Xiao's alleged mistakes, claiming he had "boarded [Lin's] pirate ship," and succeeding in dragging out the meeting for another three months. While Mao ignored pressure to dismiss Xiao, the "pirate ship" episode was a bitter event for the navy's commander. In August 1978, Xiao wrote to Ye Jianying on the issue, and in his somewhat suspect memoir claimed that in 1978 Su delayed the reversal of the 1973 criticism which, of course, could be true. Whether Su had been complicit in Zhang Chunqiao's activities, or simply unable to stop them, is unclear, but at least some in the navy regarded the "pirate ship" matter as the basis for Xiao seeking revenge at the end of 1978.²⁴³

The official story starts to unravel virtually from the moment of the explosion that sank the missile destroyer. An important context is at that point Su Zhenhua

²⁴² *Zhongguo Gongchandang zuzhishi ziliao*, vol 5, p. 58, and addendum vol. 2, pp. 102, 229. On Su's return and Mao's investment of power in him, see the citation of Teiwes and Sun, *End of the Maoist Era*, above, note 241.

²⁴³ Teiwes and Sun, *End of the Maoist Era*, pp. 40-42, 42n44; *Ye Jianying nianpu*, vol. 2, p. 1150; and Qiao Ya, "Luetan Xiao Jinguang Su Zhenhua zhijian de shifei quzhi" [Brief Talk on the Merits and Demerits of Xiao Jinguang and Su Zhenhua], transcript of talk, July 25, 2007. On the attacks on Zhang Chunqiao at Lushan, see Teiwes and Sun, *Tragedy*, pp. 141ff.

was both the navy's political commissar and actual number one, and the political leader of Shanghai, with the Shanghai post his primary duty. Su was in Beijing for the NPC session on the day of the explosion, but once informed, he immediately went to the navy's command center and started to take control of the response. According to a Su-friendly source, Xiao Jinguang did not know what to do, but agreed to Su's plans. These involved serious investigations, similar to those pushed and praised by Deng in the GSD and air force in the same period, but focused on the incident, hardly the disinterest of the subsequent Party narrative. One aspect of these serious investigations that would turn against Su later in the year, was that those found at fault were criticized, dismissed, and even arrested, thus creating resentment among those affected. The navy leadership, including Xiao as well as Su, was required to submit an examination to the Party Center on the incident, but there was no evidence of a critical central response. And crucially, there is no written record of any criticism by Deng directed at Su. A very careful senior Party historian could find no such criticism in internal documentary sources, and observed that references are all second hand and appeared after Su's death. For his part, decades later Hua denied that Su expressed any resentment of such criticism on April 12.²⁴⁴

To unpack what actually happened on April 12 and the following days, it is necessary to start with the purpose of the Hua-Su meeting in the first place. As required by Party procedures, Su came to request from Hua a formal reallocation of his primary responsibility from Shanghai to the navy, so that he could follow through on rectifying the service. Undoubtedly, there would have been

²⁴⁴ Wen Bei, "Su Zhenhua yu haijun shijian" [Su Zhenhua and the Naval Incident], at <http://wenbei.blogchina.com/2186343.html>, May 17, 2014; Qiao Ya, "Luetan Xiao Jinguang Su Zhenhua zhijian de shifei quzhi"; *Deng nianpu*, vol. 1, pp. 276-96; "Hua Guofeng tan tasuo zhidao Su Zhenhua," p. 27; and interview with Party historian, November 2019. In addition, in Deng's detailed *nianpu*, there is no reference at all to the explosion during the entire period from March 9 to April 12, the date Su allegedly complained to Hua about Deng's criticism.

considerable discussion of navy work, including the March 9 sinking, during the reported five-hour meeting, but we have no details on that aspect. But far outweighing the critique of Su's alleged incompetence in dealing with the explosion, the official narrative focused on Hua and Su conniving in an illegitimate plan to for a large military parade upon Hua's return from North Korea in May. The context, we should recall, is the earlier approach by CMC Standing Committee members, seemingly involving Deng, asking Hua for deeper attention to military matters, something which had already happened with a visit to the PLA military academy on March 15, with Deng in attendance, and Hua providing an inscription. Clearly Hua did discuss a visit to the navy in Dalian after his Korean visit, but it is unclear with what degree of detail, or even who first broached the subject.²⁴⁵

In any case, the navy leadership, including Xiao Jinguang, took this not simply as an instruction from the CMC Chairman, but a wonderful opportunity that was enthusiastically grabbed. As Xiao observed, while Zhou Enlai had visited the navy in 1957, Mao never came, and it would be a great thing for the new Party Chairman to visit. Although Hua would later claim he was only talking about going simply to have a look, following Su's report of his meeting with Hua to his subordinates the same day, the navy began planning for a formal review involving considerable service assets. With or without Hua's knowledge, preparations quickly unfolded. ²⁴⁶ While necessarily speculative, we believe it much more likely that Hua's purpose in considering a visit was to enhance navy morale in the difficult period following the explosion, than to try to advance his political clout in the PLA.

Another aspect of the official case against Hua and Su was that they avoided official procedures, in effect trying to present the "military parade" as *fait accompli*

²⁴⁵ "Hua Guofeng tan tasuo zhidao Su Zhenhua," p. 27.

²⁴⁶ "Yici yaozhe de Zhonggong haijun yuebing"; Wen Bei, "Su Zhenhua yu haijun shijian"; and "Luo Ruiqing zhizhi Hua Guofeng jianyue haijun shijian shida mituan."

without consultation. Without going deeply into this complicated matter, it is clear Su immediately had Xiao Jinguang informed, and there was never any intent to avoid going through the necessary procedures of informing the GSD and CMC. Su instructed navy Chief-of-Staff Yang Guoyu, someone with close working relations with Deng in the revolutionary period, to directly inform him, but Yang begged off on the grounds that their current organizational status was too distant, and instead Yang went to report to Luo Ruiqing on April 17. Luo did not express direct opposition, but raised some questions, notably about timing and the resources required, and whether international factors had been considered, particularly the possibility of creating foreign anxiety about the PRC's intentions, and indicated he would consult Deng. Deng would later claim that he agreed with Luo, and asked him to pass on their views to Hua. In one questionable version, Hua refused to accept Luo's phone call. In a more likely account, Deng asked Luo and to make his argument in a hierarchically appropriate manner by requesting Hua's instructions (*qingshi*), and in the phone conversation that ensued Luo made a detailed analysis that resulted in Hua changing his plans, later claiming he had been too busy to go through with it.²⁴⁷ What truly happened is unknown, but as argued in one PRC source, neither the official view that Deng "cancelled the parade," nor Hua's claim that he was simply "too busy," is convincing.²⁴⁸

Looking at how this situation played out in spring 1978, it is plausible that Deng was upset with what he perceived as Hua sticking his nose in the military, notwithstanding the CMC Standing Committee's request that he be more involved. It may simply have been that Hua failed to mention any interest in a naval visit to Deng. And the practical considerations Luo raised certainly may have been

²⁴⁷ "Yici yaozhe de Zhonggong haijun yuebing"; Wen Bei, "Su Zhenhua yu haijun shijian"; and "Yang Guoyu: kaiguo jiangjun" [Yang Guoyu: Founding General], *Dangshi renwu* [Personalities in Party History], at <http://www.jialing.gov.cn/a/ztlz/lianzhengjianshe/2016/0613/7662.html>, June 13, 2016.

²⁴⁸ "Luo Ruiqing zhizhi Hua Guofeng jianyue haijun shijian shida mituan."

convincing to Deng. In any case, it is implausible that Hua was attempting to engage in any sort of struggle with Deng for military power: he was aware of his own limitations in that area, in effect he had to be coaxed into greater involvement, and at the very least he should have been aware of Deng's steely character. Whatever arguments were put to him by Luo, or perhaps by Deng himself, may have been persuasive, especially when linked to a sense that this was causing a problem with his most powerful colleague. It is arguable that the navy's own desire for a grand occasion created an awkward situation for both Hua and Deng. For Hua, any perceived challenge to Deng would not sit well with high ranking PLA officials, despite their admiration of Hua's crushing of the "gang of four," and respect for Mao's choice; while undermining Hua at that stage, given the importance of stability and unity, would have been very premature for Deng.

Gossip within the elite aside, the events of the spring do not appear to have produced much attention during the six months before the central work conference. At the work conference, Su Zhenhua faced a limited amount of criticism, none in large meetings, but only in the military small group on unclear matters.²⁴⁹ But the situation dramatically changed with the CMC seminar held following the work conference from December 20 and into January. This was the seminar of often bitter arguments among PLA leaders over past events, exchanges Deng soon criticized as getting out of hand.²⁵⁰ It was at this meeting that Xiao Jinguang launched a fierce attack on Su. While Xiao criticized Su's role in the proposed Dalian visit as abnormal,²⁵¹ other issues were more important. One was

²⁴⁹ Interview with senior Party historian who examined available conference records, November 2019.

²⁵⁰ On January 2, Deng said the seminar had not been very successful, with a fair amount of "mouthing off" and subjectivism. See Torigian, "Prestige, Manipulation, and Coercion," p. 412. For a less pointed version of Deng's talk, one also emphasizing the need for unity, see *Deng nianpu*, vol. 1, pp. 463-64.

²⁵¹ Interview with senior Party historian, March 2020.

criticism of the navy's alleged resistance to the criterion of truth debate, which was linked to claims that Su was an unreconstructed supporter of the two whatevers. On December 30, when conveying the results of the work conference and Third Plenum to the Shanghai Municipal Committee, Su conceded that Shanghai had been complacent, and had not done enough in the debate. This, however, must be seen in the context of the work conference when, as we examine in Chapter 7, the criterion/two whatevers issue only became a major issue in the latter part of the meeting, not something high on the agenda of participants earlier, nor a subject of particular contention within the navy. Su's apparent position was that it was a matter for Party theorists, and best left to them. It is worth noting that Wan Li, soon to be ensconced in the pantheon of reformers, was also slow to get on the criterion bandwagon.²⁵²

Arguably, the most damaging, albeit unfair, charge against Su, concerned his behavior during the *pi Deng* campaign in 1976. Su's statements attacking Deng at that time were highlighted, and when informed Deng expressed dissatisfaction. But even if Su had gone too far, this ignores the amount of pressure faced by navy leaders in 1976, and particularly the fact that, in this context, Xiao Jinguang had also "jumped high" in attacking Deng. In Xiao's December 1978 narrative, ignoring Su's role in the demise of the "gang of four," he was linked to them and declared even worse than the "gang," and Su was also accused of opposing Deng's return to work. In this atmosphere, moreover, it is likely that resentment within the navy over Su's spring rectification measures, now presented as attacking factional enemies, motivated disgruntled officials to join in the escalating attacks against

²⁵² Qiao Ya, "Luetan Xiao Jinguang Su Zhenhua zhijian de shifei quzhi"; and Wu Dianqing, "Haijun kaizhan zhenli biao zhun wenti da taolun shimo [The Beginning and End of the Navy's Opening of the Great Truth Criterion Debate]," *Dangshi bolan*, no. 10 (2009), cited in Torigian, "Prestige, Manipulation, and Coercion," p. 405. Cf. below, [ch. 7, pp. xx-xx].

him. Intense pressure on Su resulted, pressure that at least contributed to, if not caused, his fatal heart attack in February 1979.²⁵³

We can only speculate about what gave Xiao the sense that the opportunity had come to initiate a frontal attack on Su, Deng's attitude toward the unfolding drama, and whether there was any linkage between the two. It is plausible that when the criterion issue was raised at the work conference, a line of attack was opened. While Deng may have expressed some dissatisfaction over the spring events in the context of the work conference and seminar, we have no evidence to this effect. Deng's general attitude toward the seminar was that everybody should calm down and pay attention to unity, but he did indicate his unhappiness with Su's actions during the anti-Deng campaign, and conceivably expressed further anti-Su sentiments behind the scenes. In any case, there were subtle indications of favoritism toward Xiao. When told that Xiao "jumped high" in *pi Deng* criticism, Deng demanded written proof, and with both Xiao and Su in hospital by the new year, Deng visited Xiao, but not Su.²⁵⁴ It may well have been the case that Deng perceived Su had drifted too close to Hua, and resented this from a 2FA man, but there little to substantiate claims that the naval episode produced hatred toward his old subordinate. Following Su's death, Deng gave the official eulogy, declaring that Su had been "an outstanding and loyal revolutionary fighter, an outstanding leader of the Party and army, and a good student of Chairman Mao."²⁵⁵

Over the following several years, a negative picture of Su Zhenhua developed as Deng's pre-eminence and the undermining of Hua unfolded. Addressing a navy meeting in July 1979, without mentioning Su by name, while discussing the criterion/two whatevers debate, Deng claimed he had criticized the

²⁵³ Qiao Ya, "Luetan Xiao Jinguang Su Zhenhua zhijian de shifei quzhi"; and above, p. [79].

²⁵⁴ Qiao Ya, "Luetan Xiao Jinguang Su Zhenhua zhijian de shifei quzhi."

²⁵⁵ *RMRB*, February 16, 1979.

service's inadequate political performance the previous year. Deng reportedly further spoke of the Dalian trip issue as a bad, politically wrong idea, but examination of navy records of the meeting, as well as the *Deng nianpu* account, revealed no such remarks.²⁵⁶ Over a year later at the nine Politburo meetings attacking Hua, on November 19, 1980, Hu Yaobang lumped Su together with Wang Dongxing, Chen Xilian, Ji Dengkui and Wu De as a key member of Hua's faction in the leadership.²⁵⁷ And at the Sixth Plenum in June 1981, Su was sanctioned for improper actions together with Hua concerning the proposed visit to Dalian, a questionable conclusion, but one that became the definitive statement on his case.²⁵⁸

With Su Zhenhua having faded from the political agenda, after Deng's death, as the anniversary of Su's 100th anniversary approached in 2012, Su's family sought a formal reversal of the negative conclusion in his case, but this was rejected by the authorities, who cited the alleged avoidance of proper procedures. With the family disappointed, and Su's widow entering deep depression, Su's son commented on how strange it was that after all this time, the conclusion of Deng's era could not be touched.²⁵⁹

We conclude with a final observation on this case, and on the broader handling of military personnel. As we have seen, great attention was given to continuity and presumed unity in PLA assignments. The navy was an example of this with a high degree continuous service at top levels, but clearly as elsewhere it only created fragile unity at best, a unity that could not hold in difficult circumstances. Indeed, when Su died, Deng brought in Ye Fei, who had relevant

²⁵⁶ *Deng nianpu*, vol. 1, pp. 540-42; and Wen Bei, "Su Zhenhua yu haijun shijian."

²⁵⁷ *Hu Yaobang sixiang nianpu*, vol. 1, p. 553.

²⁵⁸ Internal Party document, June 22, 1981.

²⁵⁹ "Su Zhenhua Shangjiang bainian yuan nanxue" [Admiral Su Zhenhua's 100 Years of Injustice], *Yazhou zhoukan*, December 23, 2012.

experience as the pre-Cultural Revolution top leader of both Fujian province and the Fuzhou Military Region facing Taiwan, to replace him as political commissar *and*, like Su, the true number one of the organization. In giving Ye the post, Deng observed that appointing an outsider to the navy organization like him was a sensible move, arguing that as an outsider he would be better suited to controlling the factions within the service.²⁶⁰

The second narrative of Hua-Deng conflict is, ironically, more clearly articulated in Western scholarship than in PRC sources, and captured most succinctly in Richard Baum's influential book, *Burying Mao*, in the heading of a discussion of the politics of 1980—"Hua's Last Stand."²⁶¹ In this analysis, extending the dominant scholarly view of a Hua-Deng struggle throughout the entire initial post-Mao period, Deng had clearly achieved a decisive victory by the time of the Fifth Plenum in February-March 1980. Finding his position precarious, Hua assertedly sought to fight back by using his organizational status as CMC Chairman, to court senior disaffected generals who were unhappy with "Deng's reform policies." To this end, Hua addressed military audiences using messages allegedly defensive of the Cultural Revolution, most notably in his April speech at the GPD's political work conference, where he supported the leftist slogan "foster proletarian ideology, eliminate bourgeois ideology," launching in the process an attack on Deng's economic reforms. Although assertedly winning some PLA support, Hua's efforts galvanized opposition that fatally undermined his position.²⁶²

²⁶⁰ Wu Dianqing, "Deng Xiaoping yu haijun Silingyuan Ye Fei [Deng Xiaoping and Navy Commander Ye Fei]," *Fujian dangshi yuekan* [Fujian Monthly Journal of Party History], no. 7 (2004), p. 20, cited in Torigian, "Prestige, Manipulation, and Coercion," p. 429.

²⁶¹ Baum, *Burying Mao*, p. 92.

²⁶² *Ibid.*, pp. 92-93. See also MacFarquhar, "Succession to Mao," p. 325"; and Torigian, "Prestige, Manipulation, and Coercion," pp. 432ff.

This analysis contains a few grains of truth, but overall grossly distorts the reality of elite politics at the time, and within the military specifically. The accurate aspect of the period is that Hua's position was untenable, as we discuss in Chapter 8, already months before the Fifth Plenum. The misleading corollary is that Hua reacted to his desperate situation by seeking support from discontented generals; a better characterization of his political performance going forward was quasi-passivity. This was perhaps nowhere better put than by Hua himself in reflections years later: "Some said I was a fool [for not resisting Deng]. Some said I was too honest. I do not regret it."²⁶³ A second aspect of reality in the narrative concerned PLA opposition to "Deng's reform policies," although the policies concerned were hardly unique to Deng. Such opposition existed, and was of concern to Deng and the leadership more broadly, but its political strength and impact on elite politics is vastly overstated.

Hua's alleged efforts to cultivate the military involved little more than the types visits encouraged by Ye and the CMC Standing Committee in early 1978, and the performance of his role as CMC Chairman at major PLA meetings. The first engagement with the army occurred on January 1 when, accompanied by Wei Guoqing and Gu Mu, Hua visited and gave a speech to a Beijing Garrison regiment. In this low-key encounter, he extended New Year greetings, hailed the regiment's revolutionary history, and praised the contributions to the people and construction of the PLA founded by the older generation of revolutionaries. Hua also solicited opinions from the officers present. In the ensuing discussions he was sensitive to army concerns, and defensive of it on issues that had generated criticism regarding its performance during the Cultural Revolution. Most notably, he provided

²⁶³ Li Haiwen, "Hua Guofeng tan shizhuan xiezuo [Hua Guofeng Discusses the Writing of History]," *YHCQ*, no. 4 (2015), p. 10, cited in Joseph Torigian, "The Shadow of Deng Xiaoping on Chinese Elite Politics," *War on the Rocks*, January 30, 2017.

measured support the PLA's performance during the "three supports [of the left] and two militaries" activities initiated in 1967,²⁶⁴ acknowledging mistakes, but emphasizing the historical conditions of the time, that the effort had been instructed by the Party Center, and it was necessary to stabilize the then chaotic situation. The basic message was that while individual mistakes should be corrected, the army as a whole should not carry burdens from this past. This was nothing more than the standard view in the post-Mao period.²⁶⁵

Far from any hint of an attack on Deng from the left, the exchanges with military officials were classic Hua—never straying beyond agreed policy, addressing in pragmatic detail a variety issues, and consistently striking a moderate position. One example should suffice. Addressing an issue reflecting the need for adjustments in a still firmly socialist system, Hua responded to concerns over the idea of letting some people get rich first. Here he explained the rationale for the concept, and linked it to socialist principles. In a large county where physical and labor resources were unevenly distributed, it was inevitable that some areas and individual units would be more productive than others. In this situation, the egalitarianism of eating from the same big pot was harmful and had to be avoided, and it was essential to enforce the socialist principle of distribution according to work, i.e., the very principle that was increasingly emphasized during the period of his clear leadership in 1977-78.²⁶⁶

²⁶⁴ On the "three supports and two militaries," see MacFarquhar and Schoenhals, *Mao's Last Revolution*, pp. 177ff. Cf. above, p. [46].

²⁶⁵ "Hua Guofeng Tongzhi zai yijiubaling nian yuandan kanwang Beijing weishuqu budui shide zhongyao jiang hua" (genju jilu zhengli)" [Hua Guofeng's Important Speech When Visiting the Beijing Garrison Troops on New Year's Day 1980 (organized according to notes)], internal Party document.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.* On distribution according to labor under Hua, see above, [ch. 3, pp. 21ff].

Hua's April address the political work conference was more significant,²⁶⁷ but equally unconvincing as an attack from the left, while at the same time the matter underlines the vagaries in Deng's position. In fact, Hua was essentially irrelevant to the question of the "foster proletarian ideology, eliminate bourgeois ideology" slogan. Debate over the slogan emerged in 1979, and was reignited by the April 1980 political work conference. It had two aspects. First, political/theoretical conflict between those wishing to push forward the liberal currents of the Third Plenum, predominately intellectuals, with Hu Yaobang the most supportive leadership figure, and those concerned with emerging bourgeois liberalization, with Hu Qiaomu the most notable protagonist in the civilian sphere, and Wei Guoqing in the military. The second aspect had broader elite and societal ramifications, with wide concern over foreign cultural influences such as clothing and particularly music.²⁶⁸ It is important to note that neither Hu Qiaomu nor Wei Guoqing were pushing Cultural Revolution ideology; quite the contrary, at most they sought a (modified) pre-1966 orthodox Maoism. Particularly as reflected in Hu Qiaomu's statements, they were worried about the destabilizing consequences of too much relaxation—precisely the concern of Deng over the danger to Mao's reputation at the 1978 work conference, and in his declaration of the Four Cardinal Principles in March 1979. Moreover, there is no evidence of Deng taking a stand on the slogan in 1979, and the underlying factor in Wei's confidence to proceed was that the author of the slogan was Deng himself during the harsh Anti-Rightist Campaign in 1957.²⁶⁹

²⁶⁷ Baum's account is based on this meeting, which he depicts as an "anti-rightist banner" to counteract the Fifth Plenum line; *Burying Mao*, p. 93. Torigian's more tempered discussion begins with Hua's New Year encounter with the Beijing military; "Prestige, Manipulation, and Coercion," p. 432.

²⁶⁸ For discussions of these aspects, see *Deng Liqun zishu*, p. 1; and Xiao Donglian, *Lishi de zhuanzhe*.

²⁶⁹ On Deng's reaction at the work conference, see above, [ch. 5, pp. 139ff]. On the Four Cardinal Principles, see below, [ch. 7, pp. xx-xx].

Without the slogan, Hua's April speech would have hardly been noticed. By now performing little more than a ceremonial role, Hua essentially read from the GPD script, noting that in the new period political work remained the "lifeblood of army work," and emphasizing the need to strengthen it, which was after all the function of Wei's department. There were some touches reminiscent of his January talk, such as "the socialist principle" of distribution according to work, which may or may not have been Hua's personal input. The most interesting aspect of this sparsely publicized and condensed speech, however, concerns the circumstances of the slogan. According to Deng Liqun, who played an important role on the liberal side of the debate and had direct access to Deng at critical points in the unfolding drama, the slogan was written into Hua's speech by Wei Guoqing, and approved by Deng. But what Hua went on to say was that while *steadily* expanding proletarian ideology and *gradually* reducing the influence of bourgeois ideology, it was also necessary to reduce *feudal* ideology. We do not know if Hua insisted on the phrase in his own speech, but the dire consequences of centuries of feudalism had been a significant part of the liberal argument since the Third Plenum. It would continue in intellectual and broader elite circles following the GPD conference, essentially with little if any reference to Hua, even within Deng's personal circle, with the ironic exception of Deng mobilizing the issue against Hua in his August 18 speech on the reform of the system of Party and state leadership.²⁷⁰

We will not discuss in detail the substantive and political aspects of emerging discussions of the feudalism issue, which we leave to Chapters 7 and 8, here only outlining the forces involved and focusing on Deng's in effect about face on the proletarian/bourgeois slogan and the larger feudal question. Although

²⁷⁰ Summary of Hua's speech, *BR*, no. 20 (1980), pp. 7-8; and *Deng Liqun zishu*, p. 1. On the marginal involvement of Hua, Deng Liqun's detailed account only mentions him four times, essentially in his formal roles, with only one critical comment that the spirit of the speech was inconsistent (p. 2).

Hua's involvement apparently was rarely if at all raised,²⁷¹ the slogan itself resulted in considerable debate and criticism. In a May propaganda department theoretical work conference, participants argued that the slogan was leftist and should be abolished. Propaganda head Wang Renzhong affirmed the slogan, but was open minded and let everyone speak. After the meeting, the department's theoretical section produced a briefing paper laying out problems with the slogan, and included a lament on the failure to clear up feudalism's detrimental impact. The document was sent to the Party Center, but not issued. Meanwhile, from May 21 to June 2, the Guangzhou Military Region's political work conference reflected differing opinions within the army. Provincial and military region leader Xi Zhongxun felt the slogan was not scientific enough, but others disagreed, and the military region's Standing Committee was divided. This would lead to Wei Guoqing when Xi requested clarification from the GPD on June 25, and ultimately to Deng.²⁷²

Wei went to see Deng for instructions, and replied a few days later. He reported that Deng now said the slogan was incomplete, it was not necessary for *People's Daily* and *Guangming Daily* to print it, while the *Army Daily*, as a PLA organ, would continue to use the slogan, but at the same time had to explain it properly, including attention to feudalism (note: Hua's speech two months earlier had added feudalism to the slogan). Deng subsequently, in his major August speech, acknowledged that he read the documents of the April GPD conference and didn't find anything wrong at the time, but in June he was clearly concerned with its insufficiency. Where did Deng's new understanding come from? Obviously not from Hua. And although Hu Yaobang and Deng Liqun clearly supported the critical view in opposition to Hu Qiaomu, the key influence came during a meeting

²⁷¹ In *Deng Liqun zishu*, p. 2, he notes that Hua's status as "paramount leader," undoubtedly his position as Party Chairman, did enhance attention to the slogan, but does not report any criticism of Hua personally in the revived debate.

²⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 2.

on May 24 between Deng and Li, a very senior Party figure then 83, and one who, in elite circles, was rumoured to be highly disliked by Deng. On this occasion, in any case, Deng found much that was compelling in Li's arguments about the danger of the patriarchal system born of feudalism that had reached its destructive apex in the Cultural Revolution. Again, according to Deng Liqun, Li urged Deng to take the lead against feudalism, arguing "there must be a leader and an authority," and you are most appropriate. This clearly suited Deng's ego, his actual status in the Party, and his plans for dealing with Hua, but he was reluctant to come forward strongly on the issue.²⁷³

On May 31, Deng called in Hu Qiaomu and Deng Liqun, his closest collaborators on theoretical matters, and discussed his meeting with Li Weihan. Noting that he (Deng) had not asked questions about the slogan during the political work conference, he tasked Deng Liqun with instructing Hua Nan, the official responsible for PLA media, to correctly interpret but not excessively publicize the slogan. Deng clearly was proceeding cautiously, reflecting what he told Li a week earlier—that while "I agree with you, I can only take it slowly, can't be impatient, even though I am an impatient person." That Deng had not been overly forceful on May 31 and over the following months can be seen in Hu Qiaomu's ongoing efforts to tamp down the issue, as in writing to the ever-enthusiastic Hu Yaobang of the need for careful preparation to avoid an explosion. In our analysis, Deng's hesitancy had little to do with concerns about his leadership, which had truly reached the "paramount leader" status and was under no threat from Hua, but reflected the type of concern with stability motivating Hu Qiaomu. But in August, Deng did follow Li Weihan's urging, and stepped forward to attack feudalism in his noted speech on reforming the political system. As Deng Liqun

²⁷³ *Ibid.*, pp. 2-3; and *Selected Works of Deng (1975-1982)*, p. 321.

later put it, the essence of Deng's August 18 speech was directed at Hua, to prepare for his resignation, which was actually already on offer, and find a theoretical basis for it. The ultimate paradox was that the anti-feudal rhetoric was used to attack a leader who had operated collectively and had minimal claims patriarchal authority, and complete the transition to Deng who had such authority in spades.²⁷⁴

The fanciful narrative of Hua attacking Deng from the left was intertwined with a more substantive, but misleading, story of Deng struggling with opposition within the military. A useful assessment comes from the distinguished Party historian Xiao Donglian: "In the military, Deng's prestige was not absolute."²⁷⁵ This is indisputable, particularly when set against the authority of Mao which remained the ultimate difficulty for Deng in exercising his enormous power. Yet it is necessary to distinguish opposition to Deng's authoritative position in the PLA from opposition to policies believed, rightly or wrongly, to be central features of *his* reform program. It is further necessary to be as precise as possible concerning where, within the military structure, opposition existed, and was politically significant. Joseph Torigian has provided an array of positions that can be plausibly considered reflecting such opposition. These include, Zhang Aiping's criticism of allowing some people getting rich first, and his complaint that when opening the window for economic reform, it is necessary to screen out adverse tendencies such as worshipping the West; an April 1979 Nanjing Military Region theory training course where sentiments were expressed that the Third Plenum line was not correct, questioned whether class struggle was really over, and criticized official propaganda as leading people to criticize Mao; new Navy leader Ye Fei's conclusion after two month's investigations in spring 1979 that officers, including some in

²⁷⁴ *Deng Liqun zishu*, pp. 3-6, 277-78. For the full speech, see *Selected Works of Deng (1975-1982)*, pp. 302-25.

²⁷⁵ Xiao, *Lishi de zhuanzhe*, p. 199.

leading positions, felt the plenum had been “too rightist,” and the two whatevers were needed to stabilize the situation; and strong opposition from peasant soldiers over the removal of bad class labels in the countryside.²⁷⁶

It was inevitable, given the developments at the 1978 work conference and Third Plenum, when combined with years of pre-1966 socialist practice, that there would be differing views on the results of those meetings in the military as well as the elite broadly. But it is important to emphasize that at the senior levels of the PLA and the Party generally, the fundamental concern was that the differences and tensions did not get out of hand—the principle of stability and unity, however difficult to sustain, remained sacrosanct. This was clearly seen in the shifting positions of Deng himself: after calling for “emancipating the mind” at the work conference, the resulting challenges to orthodoxy led him to assert the Four Cardinal Principles at the end of March 1979, a doctrine inherently limiting, indeed contrary to, the position that practice is the sole criterion of truth. Yet four months later, with negative views about the Third Plenum strong in the navy, he demanded a new effort to study the criterion debate in order to defend the plenum’s line.²⁷⁷ And as we have seen, he had little interest in the “foster proletarian ideology, eliminate bourgeois ideology” issue before Li Weihan’s approach, and dealt with it tepidly then, until finally stressing it as part of a surely coming attack on Hua in any case. Crucially, throughout all these gyrations, there were no signs of an attack on Deng’s leadership authority, apart from the lower-level incidents discussed below, from Hua or any other senior figure, whatever individual leaders may have thought about his specific positions and actions.

²⁷⁶ Torigian, “Prestige, Manipulation, and Coercion,” pp. 425, 427, 429, 443. Cf. Torigian’s discussion of “Leftism in the Military and the Denouement of Hua Guofeng’s Leadership,” pp. 423ff.

²⁷⁷ *Deng nianpu*, vol. 1, pp. 540-42. Cf. above, p. [84].

In the strict military system, discipline was sure to result in fundamentally carrying out the orders of the authoritative figure at the top—Deng, certainly by 1979, and as we have argued, effectively from his return in 1977, albeit in more complicated circumstances. Yet there was significant opposition to “Deng’s” policies, and even to his person, from young officers and ordinary soldiers who had entered the army during the Cultural Revolution, absorbed its ideology, and worried about what they perceived as deMaoization.²⁷⁸ Two incidents, arguably of limited intrinsic significance, but causing Deng concern, stand out. While reflecting attitudes at even lower levels, the first concerned the PLA Political Academy, a body including officers of various ranks from various places. In spring 1979, a student at the academy claimed that one-third of the people there opposed the Third Plenum. This claim was included in a confidential report that came to Deng’s attention, he regarded it very important and had copies sent to the Politburo Standing Committee and CMC, and came back to the matter several times privately. In addition, a comrade at a united front conference reportedly said one-third of people opposing the plenum line could be found everywhere. Yet it appears the matter was exaggerated. Academy head Xiao Ke, while perhaps simply defending his unit, organized a meeting in September, and concluded only a very limited number of officials and students doubted the new line. In September, Deng also indicated reservations about such sweeping claims, saying those opposing had largely been sent out to support the left during the Cultural Revolution. Clearly, however, it was a matter of concern for him.²⁷⁹

²⁷⁸ Cf. Deng’s concern about younger officers who joined the PLA or were promoted during the Cultural Revolution. *Selected Works of Deng (1975-1982)*, pp. 357-58; and *Deng nianpu*, vol. 2, p. 727.

²⁷⁹ Xiao Donglian, *Lishi de zhuanzhe*, p. 199; *Deng nianpu*, vol. 1, p. 534; and Xiao Ke, *Xiao Ke huiyilu* [Memoir of Xiao Ke] (Beijing: Jiefangjun chubanshe, 1997), p. 537.

The second incident was clearly directed at Deng personally and the leadership generally, as well as the official line. In November 1980, Gao Huaiming, a temporary worker at a county people's armed forces department in Hebei, stole a gun and went to an artillery regiment in the 66th Army near Tianjin. Gao declared himself a special emissary of the new Central Committee, and it was time to establish a new PRC. In this agitation, Gao complained that some people wanted to overthrow Hua, and officers should declare support for him, an argument that reportedly gained considerable support at the regimental and battalion levels. Deng was understandably angry with this "blatantly counterrevolutionary incident," and in January 1981 he said the incident reflected a trend not only in the Beijing Military Region, but also something in the entire military that was underappreciated.²⁸⁰ Of course, notwithstanding Deng's assertion, it is impossible to gauge just how widespread this phenomenon was; our only conclusion is that it came nowhere near to a serious threat to Deng or the regime. And while undoubtedly there was support for Hua as a reflection of the much greater loyalty to Mao, Hua had nothing to do with fostering it. Deng fully acknowledged this fact when commenting on the new Historical Resolution in June 1981: "[Now some people with ulterior motives, wave] the banner of Hua Guofeng, [a matter meriting] serious attention. [But as] I have said to many comrades—Comrade Hua Guofeng himself is not responsible for any of this."²⁸¹

The paradox is that while this very low-level support for Hua was useless, backing from a much higher level in the PLA was also useless once Deng made up his mind that Hua had to go. Various high-level figures, including marshals, were unenthusiastic about Deng's removal of Hua, with Xu Xiangqian considering it

²⁸⁰ Xiao Donglian, *Lishi de zhuanzhe*, pp. 393-94; Jiang Siyi, *Zhongguo Gongchandang jundui zhengzhi gongzuo qishinianshi*, pp. 462-63; and *Deng nianpu*, vol. 2, pp. 707-708, 717-18.

²⁸¹ *Selected Works of Deng (1975-1982)*, p. 296.

excessive. Compared to other sections of the regime, at the late 1980 nine Politburo meetings and the Sixth Plenum, military attacks on Hua were comparatively restrained. Not only was there respect for Mao's designation of Hua as leader, there was also admiration for Hua's purge of the "gang of four," something Deng fully shared at the time. Yet none of this created any determined resistance to Deng who was, after all, as Ye Jianying had put it in 1977, "the leader of us old marshals."²⁸²

The contrast between Deng and his notional Party superiors, both before and after the change in paramount leader, was nowhere clearer than in the military. In March 1978, addressing the army delegation to the NPC, Marshal Xu Xiangqian lauded Hua, "the commander of our army," for saving the Party and country with his decisive action against the "gang," but complained that while Hua had spoken ten times on the need to address the "backdoor" problem, "no one listened."²⁸³ Once Hua had been removed, Hu Yaobang, now formally China's number one leader, indicated his frustration in dealing with the army: "It is sufficient for [Deng] to say one sentence, but we [including Zhao Ziyang] have to say five sentences [to get a reaction]."²⁸⁴

Normalizing US-China Relations

A great deal is known about the politics of normalizing US-China relations, although overwhelmingly concerning the American process. An extensive literature exists on US policy, power/influence, bureaucratic and personal conflict,²⁸⁵ while

²⁸² See above, [ch. 2, p. 47], [p. 25].

²⁸³ The "backdoor" problem referred to officials using their position to secure university places for unqualified children.

²⁸⁴ Hu's interview with Hong Kong journalist Lu Keng, May 10 1985; trans. in *Issues & Studies*, July 1987, pp. 18-19.

²⁸⁵ For example, academic and journalistic studies: notably Ross, *Negotiating Cooperation*; Patrick Tyler, *A Great Wall: Six Presidents and China, An Investigative History* (New York: Public Affairs,

the documents compiled in the *Foreign Relations of the United States* provide not only nuanced understanding of US developments, but also some important insights into the often unclear PRC position, as well as the Party's related generally opaque elite politics. The Chinese literature presents nothing remotely comparable to understanding the internal politics of normalization; no evidence of significant contention over the PRC's broad, essentially unchanging approach is presented. Our interpretation is: on the narrow point no such conflict existed at the top, but in the broader sense subsequent official history, as in other areas, simply wrote Hua out of any positive role, making the whole story basically a matter of Deng taking the critical initiatives that resulted in the outcome.²⁸⁶

Before examining, in detail, the unfolding of the negotiations leading to the normalization agreement in December 1978, we advance some overarching observations. To elaborate on the broader problem of evidence concerning PRC foreign policy making with specific reference to normalization, leading US diplomatic personnel in this period were severely handicapped in understanding what was truly happening on the Chinese side. In recalling the intense developments leading up to normalization, Ambassador Leonard Woodcock and Deputy Head of Mission Stapleton Roy, who also participated in the decisive December 1978 talks with Deng, paint a picture of an exceptionally opaque PRC leadership, where the status of the negotiations was often unclear, no differences

1999); Mann, *About Face*, and Rosemary Foot, "Prizes Won, Opportunities Lost: The U.S. Normalization of Relations with China, 1972-1979," in Kirby, Ross, and Gong, *Normalization*. Also, of course, the memoirs and reflections of key actors: Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith: Memoirs of a President* (New York: Bantam Books, 1982); Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*; Cyrus Vance, *Hard Choices: Critical Years in America's Foreign Policy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983); and Harold Brown, *Thinking about National Security: Defense and Foreign Policy in a Dangerous World* (Boulder CO: Westview, 1983). In addition, significant interviews with US officials involved in the events have been exceptionally helpful.

²⁸⁶ E.g., Li Jie, "China's Domestic Politics and the Normalization of Sino-U.S. Relations," discussed above, pp. [20-21].

among the top leaders could be discerned, and, at least until the final December meetings, no firm conclusion was reached on the relative status of Hua and Deng.²⁸⁷ Only then did Woodcock and Roy conclude Deng's clear predominance, a view that spread in the relevant policy community, as forcefully (but prematurely) stated internally in a March 1979 memo by NSC staffer Mike Oksenberg. A major policy figure, justly characterized as "Brzezinski's teacher," Oksenberg declared there was no longer any doubt that Hua was a figurehead.²⁸⁸ Moreover, as events unfolded in 1979-80, given the growing intensity of relations with China, US officials gained insights on the evolving Hua-Deng equation. In paradoxical contrast, North Korea, a PRC treaty ally, had much less knowledge of Hua's impending demise than its American enemy.²⁸⁹

Going back to the 1977-78 path to normalization, despite the deep uncertainty regarding the PRC leadership equation of American representatives in Beijing, and the hedging of bets by policy makers in Washington, Carter Administration sentiment tilted toward Deng. In two somewhat contradictory respects, both reflecting considerable misunderstanding of CCP reality, Deng was seen as the figure most congenial to American interests. One aspect was to regard him as the predominant figure in a new era moving away from class struggle toward modernization, a view reflected in the broader US elite and public as dramatically seen in *TIME* magazine's selection of Deng as the 1978 Man of the

²⁸⁷ Woodcock Papers, file no. 23 (April 20, 1982), and no. 27 (May 19, 1982); interviews with Stapleton Roy, June 1999 and June 2008; and personal communications with David Denny, commercial official in US Liaison Office/Embassy, on Woodcock's discussions with his staff, January 2010 and June 2018.

²⁸⁸ *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, p. 816; cf. below, p. [170]. Brzezinski several times referred to Oksenberg as his teacher in meetings with the Chinese officials, including Deng in May 1978; *ibid.*, p. 433. Personal knowledge of the two men based on their time at Columbia University makes this totally believable, as does a close reading of the memo flow between them at the NSC reproduced in the *FRUS* collection.

²⁸⁹ See below, pp. [170-72].

Year, the "Visionary of a New China."²⁹⁰ In this vein, in early April 1978, Brzezinski wrote Carter that "the Deng administered regime appears to be joining the rest of the world,"²⁹¹ and during preparations for Brzezinski's trip in May, an NSC memo largely authored by "concluded "Deng appears to have the strength to chart a course for ... economic development."²⁹² And on the very eve of the conclusive December negotiations, State's Bureau of Intelligence and Research concluded that an impatient Deng had seemingly succeeded in building a growing consensus for normalization among "more cautious colleagues."²⁹³ Internal Administration documents did not clearly identify Hua with an oppositional position, but the underlying assumption was that *Deng's* program was most in line with American interests.

While the tentative assumption was that Deng was probably prevailing with *his* modernization effort (thus seriously misreading the reality that modernization was a consensus position within the leadership, with Hua having a more hands on role than Deng), there was also another erroneous view in the Administration that Deng faced significant opposition, and was in danger of having his presumed program compromised. The most striking statement of this came in a memo from Oksenberg, an accomplished scholar of PRC politics, on November 15, 1978, in the midst of the critical central work conference that did in fact have lasting impact on CCP elite politics, although in a process wrongly perceived then, and indeed in the ongoing conventional scholarly interpretation. Of course, there was no way Oksenberg could have known internal developments at the work conference, but

²⁹⁰ *TIME*, January 1, 1979. Deng's selection was argued on the basis of internal changes in the PRC which were credited to Deng. Personal communication from Ross Munro, the *TIME* journalist who wrote the November 1978 proposal nominating Deng, January 2017.

²⁹¹ Memo, April 7, 1978. This document did not appear in *FRUS*, but is available at the Carter Library. The specific quotation appears in Enrico Fardella, "The Sino-American Normalization: A Reassessment," *Diplomatic History*, September 2009, p. 557.

²⁹² *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, p. 382.

²⁹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 616-17.

he did know enough of contextual developments to make educated guesses. In this assessment, “leadership struggle [had reached] a fairly acute phase,” with Deng pressing a “high risk policy” that left him vulnerable to opposition from various sources. While predicting that Deng was likely to prevail, and not placing Hua in an opposition camp, Oksenberg offered policy advice that “it is important to us that Deng should win.”²⁹⁴ All the evidence, however, suggests no significant differences at the top on normalization, and Deng was not under threat on that or any other issue at the work conference. More broadly, without questioning Deng’s likely most influential role in securing US diplomatic relations, we have very little credible information on discussions within the leadership. But what we can demonstrate is that, at least until the agreement was reached in December, Hua was involved in a significant fashion.

There are larger issues concerning the PRC process that culminated in the December 1978 agreement—how skilful was the policy and its implementation, to what extent did it achieve China’s stated goals, and how does Deng’s reputation as a decisive and incisive foreign policy strategist stack up? Deng’s strategic insight and diplomatic skills have inevitably been emphasized in official Chinese accounts, and have received ample endorsement in foreign scholarship.²⁹⁵ While not underestimating Deng’s negotiating skills which were generally impressive in his encounters with American officials, it was the case that the key aspects of the

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 594-95. Concerning Hua, the memo pictured him as leaning to Deng’s position for his own purposes. To be clear, Oksenberg’s assessments of internal CCP politics during his service in the US government were—understandably—a mixed bag, yet a reading of his memos overall reveal a penetrating understanding of PRC objectives and negotiating strategy, as well of how to be an effective policy advocate in the US system. For earlier internal Administration documents expressing pessimism about a weak or divided PRC leadership, see *ibid.*, pp. 331, 511, 516.

²⁹⁵ E.g., Fardella, “Sino-American Normalization,” *passim*, which reassesses normalization as the product of the brilliance of Deng and Brzezinski; and Chen Jian, “From Mao to Deng: China’s Changing Relations with the United States,” Cold War International History Project Working Paper 92, November 2019, pp. 1-2, which describes the agreement as “a gigantic achievement for Deng” which allowed the accomplishment of (again *his*) grand reform and opening-up project.

Chinese position were on the table both before Deng's return to work, and during his initial discussions with Secretary of State Cyrus Vance in August 1977. These were exactly what was accomplished at the end of 1978, the acceptance of Mao's "three conditions": 1) the recognition of the PRC as the sole legitimate of government of China including Taiwan; 2) the termination of the US-Republic of China defense treaty; and 3) the removal of US forces from Taiwan—with appropriate adjustments given the political sensitivities of both sides. The delay in concluding the agreement essentially lay with the US side. Robert Ross has captured the general foreign policy predicament of a China with limited strategic weight: "[The leverage] of the PRC was not primarily a function of its policy makers' creativity and diplomatic ingenuity. It was dependent on the diplomatic opportunities created by changing international circumstances."²⁹⁶

Ross, of course, was referring to US and Western alarm generally over Soviet actions in Africa and the Middle East in particular. In the specific case of Sino-US normalization, the PRC—and thus Deng—were further dependent on factors they could not control, including a new US administration sorting out its policy agenda and differences among key officials, an immediately heavy in-tray of issues deemed more urgent, and the need to manoeuvre a delicate policy initiative through Congress, all with an eye to the larger domestic political situation. In the end, China did get the *minimum* of the three conditions, but the outcome in fact produced the opposite of the larger goal proclaimed in the Shanghai communique following Nixon's 1972 visit, and again in the normalization agreement—the claim that there was only one China. In fact, the agreement solidified *two* Chinas, at least for the short and intermediate terms, and in fact to this day. This was understood by both sides. It was clear during the very earliest internal discussions on the US side, and

²⁹⁶ Ross, *Negotiating Cooperation*, p. 119.

stated bluntly by Defense Minister Harold Brown, a proponent of normalization, in April 1978: "The PRC is not going to get Taiwan back."²⁹⁷ The Chinese, despite some testing of the limits, understood this as well. Mao had given his successors the three conditions and the slogan to "liberate Taiwan," but the Chairman knew the PRC did not have the means for an armed takeover; thus his comment to Kissinger that it would be fine to wait 100 years for the island.²⁹⁸ What would secure Taiwan was continuing US arms sales after normalization, the most delicate issue of the negotiations where Hua arguably made the most intriguing proposal.²⁹⁹ Throughout the whole process, as Woodcock observed, there was no PRC indication *at any time* that such sales were absolutely unacceptable,³⁰⁰ and in the end Deng was reduced to seeking face saving measures, with minimal result.

The Initial Phase: the Vance and Brzezinski Visits, August 1977 and May 1978. The PRC's continuing position on the three conditions was clear well before Vance set out for Beijing in August 1977.³⁰¹ Meanwhile, although US policy was not fully formed, it was open to some substantial degree of acceptance of the conditions. Despite the differing views of Vance, who was intent on prioritizing US-Soviet relations and sceptical of giving too much attention to a strategically weak China, and Brzezinski (and others), who saw advantages in fashioning a strategic understanding with Beijing, a consensus emerged that normalization was an important goal that could enhance America's strategic position.³⁰² The consensus

²⁹⁷ *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, p. 345. For earlier indications during preparations in April-July 1977 for the Vance trip, see *ibid.*, pp. 77-78, 80-81, 94-95, 102, 124-26.

²⁹⁸ See above, p. [17].

²⁹⁹ See below, pp. [11'6-17].

³⁰⁰ Woodcock Papers, file no. 8 (December 18, 1981).

³⁰¹ In early January 1977, during the transition period to the Carter Administration, PRC Liaison Office head Huang Zhen met with Kissinger and Vance. Huang affirmed the three conditions, emphasized the Shanghai communique and the one China principle, and was critical of Carter for remarks that he felt placed the PRC and Taiwan on equal footing. *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, pp. 5-6.

³⁰² See *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, pp. 124-30. Brzezinski, however, was slow to focus on normalization, seemingly believing a strategic dialog could be established without full diplomatic relations. See

included finding an acceptable version of the three conditions—as Vance argued, they could not simply be accepted, but could provide a framework for agreement,³⁰³ as long as security for Taiwan was provided, with arms sales the crucial issue. A key feature of the discussion concerned how to introduce these points to the Chinese leadership, notably on whether to raise arms sales directly or indirectly. Although it did not eventuate in Beijing, Carter favored a direct approach. Moreover, at Carter’s direction Vance carried a draft communique on establishing diplomatic relations, which the Secretary of State also did not present, a document reportedly very similar to the October 1978 US draft communique that rapidly led to agreement.³⁰⁴

The Chinese, in any case, would have had awareness of the existence of differences within the new Administration³⁰⁵ to go with scepticism, based on their experience with the Nixon and Ford Administrations, over the ability of US politicians to deliver on their promises. Yet any chance to further normalization, even if progress would fundamentally be dependent on American calculations, would be grasped in Beijing. The story of the first year and a half of the normalization process can be structured around the two visits of high American officials, Vance in summer 1977, and Brzezinski in May 1978. While the consensus view of the Vance visit as a setback, and Brzezinski’s trip as securing a critical opening, has much to recommend it, some modifications are necessary, and potential insights into the PRC leadership from this period should be examined.

ibid., p. 133; and Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, pp. 197-98. In private discussions with Woodcock following the Carter Administration, Oksenberg claimed it took six months of “education” before Brzezinski was willing to say he was for normalization, and in that period Vance was probably more committed. Woodcock Papers, file no. 4 (November 2, 1981).

³⁰³ Vance, *Hard Choices*, p. 77.

³⁰⁴ See *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, pp. 130, 522. The similarity to the October 1978 draft was stated by Oksenberg; Woodcock Papers, file no. 6 (December 12, 1981).

³⁰⁵ See *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, p. 216.

Claims of PRC foreign policy rigidity in the immediate post-Mao period are valid concerning the Soviet Union; Moscow's conciliatory efforts were flatly rejected.³⁰⁶ In contrast, notwithstanding transition period complications in both countries, a situation much more severe in China, Beijing quickly indicated its desire to resume the pursuit of diplomatic relations with the US. The first sign came only a month after the arrest of the "gang of four," with a US Congressional delegation received cordially by Standing Committee member Li Xiannian. In this period, Hua's reported private statements suggested the desire for heightened cooperation with the US against the Soviets. January 1977 saw the publication of an analysis praising Zhou Enlai's foreign policy contribution that contained unprecedented praise for US-China rapprochement. Particularly interesting was the inclusion of the claim that the PRC had "consistently held" the Taiwan problem could be solved by negotiations rather than armed force.³⁰⁷ While this arguably overstepped the mark in that previous and future PRC positions generally retained the force option, airing it was a conciliatory gesture. In January and February, diplomatic statements by PRC Liaison Office head Huang Zhen in Washington insisted on the three principles, but did not raise the option of force, and the encounters were cordial and looking toward the future. Huang was not in a position to negotiate, but his task was lay out the Chinese position that new negotiations should start with what they claimed was on offer from previous administrations. Whatever the expectations in Beijing of what was likely come out of new negotiations, four

³⁰⁶ On China's rebuff of Soviet conciliation efforts following Mao's death, including an early Noember, 1976, formal reaffirmation of its opposition to hegemony, see Wang Zhongchun, "The Soviet Factor in Sino-American Normalization, 1969-1979," in Kirby, Ross, and Gong, *Normalization*, pp. 165-66. According to a senior Party historian with close personal ties to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, while no top leaders were involved, in the early post-Mao period some middle-level officials in various ministries wanted a more balanced foreign policy and advocated improving relations with the Soviet Union. Interview, July 1999. A few years later higher-level leaders began to raise the issue; see below, pp. [174-75].

³⁰⁷ See Ross, *Negotiating Cooperation*, pp. 102-103.

months before Deng's official return, Huang told Carter that while China was patient, they were willing to move on normalization as soon as the US was ready.³⁰⁸

Notwithstanding the judgment that the Carter Administration entered office relatively disinterested in normalization,³⁰⁹ Vance's mission was a serious undertaking seeking to explore three topics: discussions on international issues with the inevitable emphasis on the Soviet Union, normalization, and bilateral issues such as trade, technology transfers, and credit arrangements. As noted above, this was a consensus position, with the President most impatient, Brzezinski on board although not yet totally engaged, and Vance the key figure as the person who would directly deal with the Chinese leadership. Vance's overall foreign policy beliefs, together with his cautious lawyerly method, can be justly regarded as a contributing to the limited results of the visit. This method was foreshadowed in his exchanges with Carter on the arms sale issue. As indicated, Carter called for raising the issue directly. Vance immediately agreed with his boss, but Carter, while stressing "leaving no doubt" in the minds of the PRC leaders, assumed his Secretary of State would broach the matter in a "rounded fashion."³¹⁰ In any case, the best way to characterize Vance's objective in Beijing was to advance normalization—virtually his first official statement in China was that "the time had come," and that Carter was "[strongly] committed to normalization."³¹¹ But this was linked to

³⁰⁸ *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, pp. 2-14; and Carter, *Keeping Faith*, p. 189. We cannot be totally confident that force was not mentioned in February since we have located no memorandum of conversation, but the obsessive diarist Carter's relatively detailed memoir account is unlikely to miss such a statement. In any case, in early July, Li Xiannian restated the basic position that China had the right to decide whether or not to use force; Ross, *Negotiating Cooperation*, p.107.

³⁰⁹ See Ross, *Negotiating Cooperation*, p. 92.

³¹⁰ *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, pp. 124, 127, 130-32; Foot, "Prizes Won, Opportunities Lost," p. 105; and above, p. [100], and note 302.

³¹¹ *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, p. 142. This came in Vance's meeting with Foreign Minister Huang Hua, the first of four. The Secretary's crucial negotiating session was with Deng. Vance also met with Hua, but no record to the exchange has been found; see below, pp. [106-107].

presenting a maximum *initial* position, in the expectation of further negotiations to come. In essence, this replicated the PRC's maximum starting position. Both sides would operate within the framework of the three conditions, and try to find mutually acceptable formulas for the practicalities those principles entailed.

When Vance's party reached Beijing, it found a society still dominated by Mao's image and slogans, with Cultural Revolution messages only partially, albeit definitely, being culled.³¹² In the largest sense, foreign affairs, like all other policy spheres, was faced with the necessity of paying homage to the late Chairman, while at the same time modifying his policies. The situation was considerably easier in foreign relations than in virtually all other areas, both because the new leadership largely believed in Mao's strategy and policies, and due to public's generally calm acceptance of even dramatic reversals, such as the rapprochement with the United States. A potential difference, however, concerned issues of national sovereignty, and in this respect, Taiwan had been drummed into the populace for decades, creating sensitive considerations for policy makers.³¹³

Moreover, Vance began his talks only four days after the conclusion of the 11th Party Congress, certainly a high point of Hua's leadership. It is understandable that, in Vance's discussions with Chinese leader, they referred to Hua's political report to the Congress, specifically its assertion that China would continue Mao's revolutionary foreign policy line. There was also personal praise of Hua, as in Foreign Minister Huang Hua's reference as the country's "wise leader." Of particular interest were Deng's comments. Specifically, he noted that given his age he might

Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, p. 201, suggests at the very start of Vance's engagements in Beijing, Carter was having second thoughts, largely for domestic political reasons. There is no available evidence, however, that any such second thoughts were transmitted to Vance.

³¹² As seen in Oksenberg's recollections of the experience in his conversations with Woodcock, "the memory of Mao hung heavy over the country"; Woodcock Papers, file no. 5 (December 8, 1981).

³¹³ See Zhang Baijia, "Biandong de guonei yinsu dui Zhongguo waijiao de yingxiang," p. 3. Cf. above, p. [10].

not have many days left, but “Chairman Hua is 57 and he may live to see the liberation of Taiwan and reunification.”³¹⁴ None of this, of course, tells us what Deng may have really thought about Hua at that juncture, nor about how they interacted in discussions on normalization and other international issues. We can only offer a mix of factual and speculative observations. Clearly, at the very least Deng was given the US portfolio, and Hua undoubtedly was deeply influenced by his views. Hua, although having an active diplomatic schedule in 1977-79, had only three meetings with senior American officials in the run in to normalization—Vance, Brzezinski in May 1978, and Energy Secretary Schlesinger in early November 1978.³¹⁵ Yet the evidence, as discussed below, is of Hua’s major significance during the Brzezinski visit, and we find it difficult to believe that there would not have been close consultation between Deng and Hua until agreement was reached, although the situation clearly changed by some point in 1979.

The “failure” of the Vance mission rested solely in the normalization question. But before examining this issue, we assess briefly the other perennial subject of US-China exchanges since Nixon’s visit, assessments of the international situation and the appropriate response to the Soviet “Polar Bear.” Despite all the discussions concerning cooperation against the Soviet Union, the PRC and the US had fundamentally different policies. China essentially pushed Mao’s “one line” policy that sought a broad international united front of regimes of all colorations opposing Soviet hegemony, particularly including major countries such as the US, Japan and the Western European nations.³¹⁶ In contrast, despite differences with

³¹⁴ See *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, pp. 176, 182, 203.

³¹⁵ Over 1977-79 Hua had more than 550 meetings with foreigners. Following normalization, in 1979 he met only two high ranking American leaders—Treasury Secretary Michael Blumenthal in February, and Vice President Mondale in August, followed by a January 1980 meeting with Defense Secretary Brown. In the eyes of Administration officials, these encounters suggested diminished power; see below, p. [171].

³¹⁶ See above, pp. [11ff].

its predecessors,³¹⁷ the Carter Administration adopted the Nixon-Kissinger “triangular diplomacy” which sought better relations with both Moscow and Beijing than they had with each other, with normalization and SALT II pursued in the same period. One of the consequences was that US negotiators had to endure repeated lectures on not only the Soviet threat, but also US weakness in dealing with it. Vance received a good dose of such criticism, with Deng, if less abrasive than Huang Hua, characterizing aspects of US policy as “appeasement,” together with advice on what America should do, without offering any indication what China might contribute to the struggle with the Polar Bear.³¹⁸ The question is how much, if at all, this approach contributed to securing normalization. With US officials seeking to demonstrate their anti-hegemony *bona fides*, Deng *et al.* repeatedly raising the hegemony issue could, in some circumstances, create a context amenable to progress, but in our judgment, this had little effect on achieving the ultimate goal of diplomatic relations.³¹⁹

In contrast to Mao’s focus on anti-Soviet strategy in meetings with American leaders, Deng greeted Vance by raising the “important” Taiwan issue, although noting international issues were “at least equally important questions.” The initial phase of the discussion then involved a familiar review of world problems region by region, and some chiding of US inadequacies.³²⁰ But, as soon as negotiation turned to normalization, critical differences emerged. Deng, of course, had been well briefed by Huang Hua that the new US Administration was not willing to

³¹⁷ In policy terms, consciously stepping back from some of earlier perceived concessions to the PRC. Moreover, Carter demanded avoiding Nixon-Kissinger “ass kissing” among other practices. See *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, pp. 126, 128; Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, p. 20; and Tyler, *A Great Wall*, p. 237.

³¹⁸ See *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, pp. 196-98.

³¹⁹ The jousting on anti-Soviet themes of Deng with Brzezinski in May 1978 created an atmospheric plus, but the breakthrough was fundamentally due to the NSC Adviser’s repeated emphasis that Carter “had made up his mind” on normalization. See below, pp. [112ff].

³²⁰ See *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, pp. 192-200.

accept the "Japanese formula" of non-official representation on Taiwan that Ford had elusively indicated he *might* accept,³²¹ and insisted this was a step backward, with the Japanese formula the maximum concession the PRC could make. Deng rejected Vance's arguments that US circumstances were different from Japan's, and both strategic stability in East Asia and US public opinion required Chinese accommodation of some form of US official presence, repeating his assertion to Kissinger in 1974 that "you owe us a debt" for unfulfilled promises.³²² While Deng was tough in presentation, he was far less harsh than he had been with Kissinger during the Ford Administration, and in general terms China treated Vance with the same respect Brzezinski received in the breakthrough meeting nine months later.³²³ The problem for both sides was how to flesh out the three conditions regarding ending US representation on Taiwan. As Deng indicated, China was willing to re-join the issue after the US rethought it carefully, citing Mao's statement that "we can wait." Deng added the prescient comment, "the question now is for the US to make up its mind."³²⁴

While the representation issue was the immediate obstacle to further progress, it was not an intractable matter and would be quietly dropped by the Administration in early 1978. The critical issue, as discussed in the preparations for Vance's trip, was arms sales to Taiwan, considered the key to the security of the island. Although receiving attention at middle-levels of the Nixon and Ford

³²¹ In December 1975, Ford told Deng that in his second term he would move toward full normalization "along the model perhaps of the Japanese arrangement." Foot, "Prizes Won, Opportunities Lost," p. 103; and *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, p. 202n7. Cf. Vance, *Hard Choices*, p. 82.

³²² See *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, pp. 202-206; and Tyler, *A Great Wall*, p. 196.

³²³ William Gleysteen, the highly respected State Department specialist on both the Vance and Brzezinski missions, described the Chinese treating Vance quite well, adopting a posture not very different from that accorded Brzezinski; *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, pp. 485, 486-87. On Deng's rough treatment of Kissinger, including insults and signs of contempt, see Tyler, *A Great Wall*, pp. 194-200, 206-10, 215-19.

³²⁴ *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, pp. 201, 203.

Administrations, it had never been systematically addressed at the policy level. Crucially, as Vance stated, it had never been raised with the Chinese. Although this was something Carter wanted on the table at the Beijing meetings, as Rosemary Foot has observed, Vance's "rounded fashion," amounted to excluding mention of arms sales from a list of military matters that would lapse, in the hope PRC leaders would conclude arms sales would continue, without being provoked into a negative response. Vance addressed this hint to Huang Hua and not to Deng. Although Deng would have been thoroughly briefed, we cannot be sure the issue came to Deng's attention. In any case, neither Huang nor Deng made direct reference to arms sales. Whether they were negligent in missing the point, or simply unwilling to address the vexing issue at that stage, also cannot be known. We believe the latter more likely, but in any case, it was an indication of both sides dancing around this essential issue, while avoiding a decisive engagement until the very end of the negotiations.³²⁵

Vance's final meeting on his visit was with Hua. There is nothing to indicate that this encounter had an impact on the negotiations which had deadlocked the previous day, but it does raise the issue of Hua's foreign policy performance. This question cannot be definitively answered. In evaluating the hour and a quarter meeting, one major problem is the absence of a comprehensive record; all that could be located was a brief cable from Vance referring to the meeting as "the highlight of the day." The cable reported that Hua spoke on domestic affairs, castigated the Soviets, and, drawing on Vance's meetings with Huang Hua and Deng, urged moving forward, considering each other's views, and continuing discussions.³²⁶ Another problem is the varying opinions of those in the room,

³²⁵ See *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, pp. 124, 173; and Foot, "Prizes Won, Opportunities Lost," pp. 104-106.

³²⁶ *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, pp. 213-14. No memorandum of conversation was found by US archivists.

including two negative assessments. Assistant Secretary of State Richard Holbrooke was scathing, dismissing Hua as someone in over his head, and simply not up to the job of national leader.³²⁷ Ambassador Woodcock was also not impressed, four years later recalling Hua giving a monologue as if by rote, and hardly engaging with Vance.³²⁸ A contrary opinion, however, was offered by William Gleysteen, who recalled being impressed with Hua's presence on the occasion.³²⁹

We obviously can only make a speculative assessment of the Hua-Vance meeting. In terms of Hua's "competence," it does not seem this was his best hour. The focus on domestic affairs, apparently dominated by two of his greatest accomplishments—the arrest of the "gang of four" and the just concluded Party Congress, was self-indulgent, and added nothing to the negotiations at hand. Yet it can also be said that Hua, in stating the desire to continue the discussion, expressed precisely the leadership's view of the PRC objective for, and the accomplishments of, the Vance visit. The aim was to engage seriously with a new US Administration, present a tough starting point for ongoing negotiations, and clearly indicate the desire to continue the process. Deng had presented the desire in a comparatively demanding fashion, Hua apparently more softly, but the underlying message was the same.

This was also not far removed from the immediate American assessment of what had happened, if perhaps more optimistic about the likelihood of ultimate success than the Chinese side. Members of the US delegation perceived a positive encounter, and sent upbeat cables back to Washington, even after Deng's rebuff of Vance's proposal. Back in Washington, both Brzezinski and Carter concluded

³²⁷ Oksenberg, who was not present, relayed Holbrooke's opinion given at the time; interview, June 1999. Holbrooke confirmed it in a brief email, November 2008.

³²⁸ Woodcock Papers, file no. 6 (December 1981).

³²⁹ Interview, June 1999. Cf. above, p. [7].

China had not been negative, with Brzezinski finding encouraging that the PRC avoided reference to arms sales.³³⁰ Yet within a fortnight of Vance's departure from Beijing, a significant setback resulted from an own goal emerging from Brzezinski's NSC. A leak to the press by Samuel Huntington, the highly regarded political scientist, academic colleague of Brzezinski, and now a hard-line member of the NSC staff, reflected Brzezinski's optimism in claiming the Chinese had shown flexibility and there had been "progress" toward normalization. On September 6, Deng responded strongly in a meeting with leading US newspaper publishers, reiterating what he had told Vance—the US proposals were not a step forward, but instead a "retreat."³³¹

Whatever anger Deng may have felt that his "retreat" had been turned into "progress," the larger issues were first diplomatic, to make the US understand that the three conditions required the Japanese formula—something that was not all that difficult to realize, but even more a matter of domestic politics. At this point in time in particular, there could be no concessions away from what was understood as the requirements of Mao's three conditions. Deng shortly thereafter explained his, and the regime's, predicament to former Liaison Office head George H.W. Bush: "[I] felt compelled to say there was no flexibility ... on Taiwan," and indicated he considered the matter closed.³³² In any case, the drift of the normalization process into a low period more fundamentally reflected Stapleton Roy's later judgment that Vance came with "the wrong package at the wrong time."³³³ Yet this was more a case of the wrong time than the wrong package. The matter of US representation on Taiwan, as would soon become apparent, was not

³³⁰ Oksenberg in discussions with Woodcock, Woodcock Papers, file no. 6 (December 1981); and Foot, "Prizes Won, Opportunities Lost," p. 106.

³³¹ See Ross, *Negotiating Cooperation*, p. 110; and Gong Li, "The Difficult Path to Diplomatic Relations: China's U.S. Policy, 1972-1978," in Kirby, Ross, and Gong, *Normalization*, p. 135.

³³² *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, pp. 252-23.

³³³ Interview, June 2008.

an issue that would prevent normalization. The issue that would complicate the process, and definitely should not have been pressed at this early stage, was arms sales, and despite Carter's interest, Vance's artful avoidance of the subject was a long term plus. The time was simply not right for advancing too far into a process that had not yet been thoroughly worked through internally in Washington, and was a dangerous domestic political issue. And Sino-US relations were quickly overwhelmed by more urgent policy questions—the inevitable SALT II negotiations, and the struggle to secure ratification of the Panama Canal Treaties.

As China policy in the Administration fell into what Oksenberg would call a backburner stage,³³⁴ the PRC side indicated at various levels the wish to revive the discussions. At the end of September, Huang Hua at the UN, while noting Deng had not requested an immediate reply, still probed, only to be told by Vance that the US had had not yet completed its reflections on the PRC position.³³⁵ Deng's remark to Bush, that he considered his public rebuke of the American characterization of the Vance mission closed, clearly reflected the desire to resume talks. In subsequent meetings with Congressional leaders and other influentials, Deng indicated his eagerness for agreement, and lobbied by pointing to advantages for the US.³³⁶ But the most intriguing indication was a little-known oral message from Hua to Carter, not long after Vance concluded his visit. Hua called for progress on normalization, emphasizing that the question essentially was not a diplomatic issue, but should be approached from a political and strategic perspective. Several channels were apparently used, but no substantial reply came from the White House. The Chinese leadership found the non-response annoying,

³³⁴ *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, p. 522. Oksenberg dated this period from September 1977 to March 1978, a period marked by the Panama Canal agenda, the perception of the PRC reaction to Vance's presentation, and bureaucratic divisions within the US government.

³³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 252-53. . Cf. Gong Li, "The Difficult Path to Diplomatic Relations," pp.135-36.

³³⁶ See Li Jie, "China's Domestic Politics and Normalization," pp. 84-85; and Vogel, *Deng Xiaoping*, pp. 315-16.

and subsequently impatiently reminded the US of the message. Most interesting, on the very eve of the final negotiation with Deng, the position presented to Woodcock referred to Hua's message as the spirit China had been following *exactly* throughout.³³⁷ Of course, we can say little with confidence about the political dynamics of this effort, beyond that Hua would have been significantly involved in an approach going out in his name at a time of great political strength. In any case, the entire leadership was dependent on when the Administration shifted its attention to US-China relations.

As has been well documented, external events and developments within the Administration stimulated that shift by early 1978. Among the key policy makers, Brzezinski, closely assisted by Oksenberg, had increased his focus on the PRC, developed contacts with the Washington Liaison Office, planting the idea of a Brzezinski visit to Beijing and gaining a positive response, and pushed several policy initiatives to enhance relations.³³⁸ Thus a force within the White House now pushed a more proactive view than Vance's more cautious approach, with Brzezinski at the same time seeking Carter's approval for his trip. Carter had been mulling over a new engagement in Beijing, but had not settled on who to send. By then, increasing concern with Soviet activities, particularly in the Horn of Africa, came into the mix, with Carter providing a stern warning that US strategic forces would counter Russian nuclear blackmail in an address at Wake Forest University. On March 16, the same day as the ratification of the first Panama Canal Treaty and

³³⁷ The message was conveyed to Vance by Huang Hua at the UN late September, and apparently to Woodcock in Beijing in November. Hua further referred to it in his meeting with Brzezinski the following May, and as negotiations intensified in October, Huang reminded Vance of it, again at the UN. The final point was made by Vice Minister Han Nienlong to Woodcock on December 4, 1978. *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, pp. 252, 454, 466, 487, 554-55, 614.

³³⁸ These included technology transfer and the sale of military equipment to China by Western Europe and Japan; *ibid.*, pp. 252-23.

the day before Wake Forest speech, Carter authorized Brzezinski's trip despite Vance's reservations and State Department resistance.³³⁹

With the Brzezinski mission decided, planning quickly began, involving all the key officials in a largely cooperative process.³⁴⁰ The stumbling block of US representation on Taiwan was removed, as had already been indicated to the Chinese by Woodcock.³⁴¹ As before the Vance visit, there remained considerable uncertainty about what the US was facing with in the PRC. Some of the internal discussions raised questions of the PRC's credibility: Huntington, and some of his Cambridge, Massachusetts, associates, questioned Beijing's "inscrutability [as] simply a mask for their ignorance"; while an NSC paper under Oksenberg's direction that set guidelines for Brzezinski, asked him to assess if "they are rational."³⁴² The more immediately relevant questions dealt with policy and process. There was, as the previous August, uncertainty about what would be too much for the Chinese leadership, thus how direct to be on sensitive issues. There was also the perennial issue of how much PRC hectoring to bear, the perceived need to persuade Beijing of American toughness, and at the same time adhering to triangular diplomacy,³⁴³ without, of course, putting it in those terms. There was

³³⁹ See Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, pp. 181-89, 202-205; Carter, *Keeping Faith*, pp. 193-94; Tyler, *A Great Wall*, pp. 248-49; and *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, p. 309.

³⁴⁰ Despite resentments over Brzezinski elbowing Vance aside as the Administration's primary interlocuteur with the PRC leadership, US government veterans looking back on the normalization process picture unhappiness, but a team on substantive issues laying the basis for Brzezinski's visit, a situation; as Stapleton Roy put it, "a collegial approach on the policy, which then became heavily affected by personality differences." "The National Security Council Project, Oral History Roundtables: China Policy and the National Security Council," The Brookings Institution, November 4, 1999, pp. 12ff.

³⁴¹ In February, although Woodcock did not have formal negotiating authority, he indicated the US was no longer seeking an official presence in Taiwan. See Ross, *Negotiating Cooperation*, pp. 112-13; and idem, "U.S. Relations with China," in Vogel *et al.*, *Golden Age*, p. 90.

³⁴² See *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, pp. 369, 386.

³⁴³ While Brzezinski's anti-Soviet sentiments were well understood and genuine, he too followed the triangular approach, commenting in February that he worried the Administration was not managing the triangle well, and by the end of the year relations with both Beijing and Moscow could be worse than when we took office, *ibid.*, p. 289.

also the unknown of exactly who Brzezinski would see, with only Huang Hua promised in advance, although it was not too difficult to anticipate since the Chinese were told he would speak for Carter. With the experience of August 1977 in mind, there was studied advocacy of a low key approach without a communique. This was to be a significant effort, but it was not to be oversold to the PRC or US domestic audiences in advance, and there was a recognition the proposals might not be realistic for accomplishing normalization.³⁴⁴ Despite PRC eagerness to revive the discussion, the limited evidence suggests muted expectations in Beijing for the forthcoming visit.³⁴⁵

Regarding the three conditions, internally the US essentially conceded the letter of the PRC position by the time Brzezinski set out for Beijing. There would be no *official* US representation on Taiwan, US military forces were in a stage of an accelerated withdrawal from the island, and the US-Republic of China Defense Treaty would soon end.³⁴⁶ The remaining key issues were matters of political face—presenting an emphasis on a peaceful outcome of Chinese unification for the US, and hiding to the extent possible continuing arms sales for the PRC. The first was easier to solve along the well-established pattern of the Shanghai communique: separate unilateral statements by each side, while avoiding attacks on the other side's position. Indeed, a beginning was there during the Vance mission. National sovereignty prevented China from accepting a ban on force if all else failed, but Deng declared preparedness for peaceful reunification, and indicated an approach that would adopt policies taking into account actual conditions on Taiwan.³⁴⁷ Leaving such fantasy aside, looking at a prospective time when both sides would

³⁴⁴ On the above themes, see *ibid.*, pp. 294-95, 323, 324, 330, 332, 358, 362, 384.

³⁴⁵ See, e.g., Gong Li, "The Difficult Path to Diplomatic Relations," p. 136.

³⁴⁶ The PRC wanted a termination of the treaty upon normalization, but the US insisted on an abrogation of the treaty at the end of its term in December 1979. China would concede the point at the end of the process in December 1978.

³⁴⁷ See *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, pp. 203-204, 330-31.

get their minimum objectives, it would not be too difficult to achieve non-aggressive disagreement. And as Brzezinski left for China, the US had opted for such a polite, don't embarrass us approach, rather than press for a binding PRC commitment to a peaceful solution.³⁴⁸

On the most difficult issue, arms sales, it was clear that the PRC had to accept continuing US provision to Taiwan or there would be no deal—this was the time of Brown's exclamation that "the PRC is not going to get Taiwan back."³⁴⁹ Yet while policy makers had grappled with the issue in contrast to the previous administrations, Oksenberg complained that there still had been no coherent consideration of the problem, and sensibly there was little expectation of the Chinese endorsing the US position. Also, as with the Vance mission, there was uncertainty as to how it should be broached to the Chinese. Formally, the negotiations to come would be left to Woodcock, who had been probing the issue in Beijing since February, but Brzezinski was able to secure the first concrete reaction from China's highest leaders.³⁵⁰

While the pieces of the US position had been determined, exactly how Brzezinski would handle his encounters with Chinese leaders was unclear. Ten days before his departure, the principals (Vance, Brown, as well as the NSC Adviser), requested guidance from Carter concerning how much priority normalization should receive on the mission. They noted that Woodcock favored a prompt effort to complete normalization, noting that they did too, but fudged this with concern that "balance" be maintained. The principals basically adopted an NSC staff proposal of a series of steps toward diplomatic relations. Brzezinski would not

³⁴⁸ See *ibid.*, p. 329.

³⁴⁹ See above, p. [99].

³⁵⁰ See *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, pp. 292-92, 295, 318, 332, 358, 362; and Ross, *Negotiating Cooperation*, p. 114. Woodcock's probing consisted of public statements within the Liaison Office and, discussions with foreign diplomats who had good contacts at the MFA.

negotiate as such, but he would indicate that the US was ready to begin negotiations toward a settlement through Woodcock in June.³⁵¹ Carter approved, but at least equally important were his instructions to Brzezinski to emphasize that the US was serious and ready. Given Deng's chiding of Vance that the question was for "the US to make up its mind," as well as Hua's basically ignored message that the matter should be approached from a "political and strategic perspective,"³⁵² Brzezinski was to stress that a Presidential decision had been made.

In some ways an ironic carrier of the normalization message,³⁵³ Brzezinski introduced himself in Beijing in a way similar to Vance, but proceeded with much more persistence. Vance had begun his initial visit with Huang Hua by asserting the time had come for normalization, and Carter was committed to achieving it. Now, nine months later, Brzezinski quickly reaffirmed Carter's commitment to full normalization, and declared "the US has made up its mind." He repeated the claim, sometimes personalizing it as "President Carter has made up his mind," three or four times in meetings with Huang Hua (again), Deng and Hua. Brzezinski rebutted Deng's comment about waiting for Carter to make up his mind, declaring "I have told you before [he] has made up his mind." As for Hua, he simply responded with "We will observe the actual action." And as per Hua's mislaid message, Brzezinski stated that Carter was prepared to undertake the *political* responsibility for resolving outstanding issues.³⁵⁴ This visit, moreover, leaving aside Hua's inconclusive exchange with Vance, was the only time in the run in to normalization where both top leaders met their American guests. We return to the normalization

³⁵¹ *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, pp. 357, 358, 366.

³⁵² See above, pp. [106, 109].

³⁵³ During an April 11 discussion with the other principals, Brzezinski mused about exploring other ways than normalization to achieve the strategic dialog so dear to his heart, and he also had to be reminded what the three conditions were. *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, pp. 345, 346. Cf. above, note 302.

³⁵⁴ See *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, pp. 393, 409, 433, 434, 435, 440, 460; and above, p. [102].

question shortly, as well as commenting on the Hua-Deng performances. First, however, we address the inevitable discussion of the international situation and the Polar Bear.

We do not dispute the assessment of those on the scene that the atmosphere of the Brzezinski visit was much better than the Vance mission, and that an aspect of this was the NSC Adviser's anti-Soviet instincts, which would earn him the admiring title of "Polar Bear tamer" in local circles. And certainly, the tone of the encounters, while still containing criticism of US weakness, inadequacy and naiveté, particularly from Huang Hua and Deng, was softer than in the past. This was perhaps most evident in Hua's early statement that "our criticism [of you] is good intentioned," and the Chinese dropped references to US appeasement of the Soviet Union apart from one admonishment by Huang Hua. While, in our view, the basic reason for the improved reception was the repeated emphasis on the American commitment to pursue normalization, credit must be given to Brzezinski for refuting the Chinese when they raised US inadequacies in dealing with the Polar Bear, especially by pointing out how little China had to offer in practical terms in that regard.³⁵⁵

In terms of the *tour d'horizon*, the most notable elements concerned Korea and Vietnam. Regarding Korea, the notable factor was less the substance of the claim that North Korea would not attack the south, than the sourcing of this to Hua's recently concluded visit and discussions with Kim Il Sung, as cited by Huang Hua. Hua himself, moreover, stated that he was carrying this message personally to Brzezinski at the request of the North Koreans.³⁵⁶ Substantively, the Americans were surprised by the strength of PRC concern with Vietnam. At the start of the

³⁵⁵ See *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, pp. 414, 427, 443, 450, 462-64, 470-71, 485-87; and Ross, *Negotiating Cooperation*, p. 131.

³⁵⁶ *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, pp. 422, 456.

Carter Administration, and during the Vance visit, the Chinese expressed no opposition the normalization of US-Vietnamese relations, nor concern with a threat from the south. Now, however, there was a very strong preoccupation with Vietnam, with particular attention to its historical objective of forming an Indochinese Federation, seeking regional hegemony, and thus together with the Soviet Union threatening the PRC from the north and south. With a border war underway between Vietnam and Cambodia, the PRC position at that point in time was that both sides should withdraw, but support was strongly with the Pol Pot regime. In addition, Huang Hua and Hua took issue with US criticism of the Khmer Rouge human rights atrocities as overstated, and, in effect, coordinating action with the Soviets. Clearly, it was a sign of things to come that the US did not fully take on board.³⁵⁷

As argued, the centerpiece of the visit was normalization. With Brzezinski affirming US acceptance of the three conditions and Woodcock ready to enter negotiations in June,³⁵⁸ only two difficult outstanding issues remained: how to handle expectations of a peaceful resolution of reunification; and ongoing arms sales to Taiwan. The former was skilfully moved forward, although without firm commitments. Deng rather flatly stated both sides could state their hopes, but no conditions could be placed on the other side—the PRC statement would be the business of the Chinese people. Then, as with Vance, but less encumbered by liberation rhetoric, he suggested reasonableness, that reunification would take due account of Taiwan realities. Furthermore, Deng implied understanding of US domestic political problems, listening to Brzezinski's explanations of the need for

³⁵⁷ See *ibid.*, pp. 24, 153, 419-20, 429, 431, 455, 465, 470, 486. There was no reference to Vietnam in Deng's formal meeting with Brzezinski, but it may have come up in the private dinner with Deng that evening, although not mentioned in Brzezinski's memoir. In any case, this was clearly a major issue for Deng at the time.

³⁵⁸ See *ibid.*, p. 434.

flexibility in a "transitional period." The American visitors were encouraged, believing that the PRC had gone out of its way to draw parameters on what they could accept, i.e., toleration of a fairly objective US statement and stating their own views in minimal terms, perhaps even foregoing mention of forceful liberation, and settling for declaring reunification an entirely internal matter. On the scene, US officials felt the Chinese were trying to avoid talk of force, and in the December PRC statement they got what they hoped for.³⁵⁹

That left the issue that could not be solved, but which could at least be faced in a semi-open fashion for the first time. While the US considered continuing arms sales to Taiwan essential for a deal, Brzezinski's delegation set out unsure whether the minimum American position might be too much for the PRC, and the NSC Adviser's approach was arguably at least as "rounded" as Vance's. As with the peaceful reunification issue, Brzezinski eluded to domestic concerns to both Deng and Hua, pointing out the need for a full range of commercial relations in Taiwan to provide "the necessary flexibility [during the historical transitional period] which *eventually* [would result in] one China." The clearest hint, however, came in raising with Deng the implications for normalization of US military withdrawal from Taiwan: "It should continue in such a manner as not to create destabilizing conditions likely to be exploited by our mutual adversary."³⁶⁰ Whether or not the Chinese leaders picked up on the hint, they would have been aware of the high stakes surrounding Taiwan's security and the arms sales issue, given the views of Congressional delegations, together with Woodcock's probing since early in the

³⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 437-39, 471, 487-88; and "Statement of the Chinese Government," *PR*, no. 51 (1978), pp. 8-9.

³⁶⁰ See *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, pp. 435, 439, 460-61; and Foot, "Prizes Won, Opportunities Lost," p. 106.

year.³⁶¹ In any case, it was top PRC leaders who *initiated* explicit discussion of ongoing arms sales to Taiwan.

As to precisely who initiated this discussion on the Chinese side, there were differences within the US delegation. Oksenberg hypothesized a coordinated effort between Deng and Hua, Gleysteen doubted it, only seeing evidence for Hua, and Brzezinski reported to Carter that Deng had indicated acceptance of a full range of commercial relations with Taiwan, while Hua tacitly showed understanding that this included arms sales.³⁶² Leaving aside what may have transpired in, we believe, the inevitable discussions of Deng and Hua between the two meetings, on a reading of both transcripts the evidence points strongly to Hua. What Deng did acknowledge concerning US commercial relations was no concession given that the US now accepted the Japanese formula. Following Brzezinski's key hint that military developments should avoid destabilization, Deng only responded with a standard mix of the importance of the Japanese formula, the inadequacies of what Vance had offered, and some musings about the Polar Bear.³⁶³ Of course, Deng could have picked up the hint, but decided not to respond, perhaps wishing to consult Hua first.

Relatively early in the discussion between Hua and Brzezinski, following some review of the global scene, the Chinese leader declared he did not intend to dwell on it any longer, and switched the conversation to bilateral relations. Hua noted how the US always wanted China to commit itself to peaceful means on the Taiwan issue, and proceeded to indicate how this looked from the PRC side in terms other than simply asserting it was a matter of national sovereignty. He stated that

³⁶¹ For example, in an audience with Deng at the start of the year, Ted Kennedy made clear "the unanimity among the public and its representatives that Taiwan had to be protected"; Jerome A. Cohen, "Ted Kennedy's Role in Restoring Diplomatic Relations with China," *Legislation and Public Policy*, Vol. 14, no. 2 (2011). On Woodcock's probing, see above, note 350.

³⁶² See *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, pp. 466, 471, 488.

³⁶³ *Ibid.*, pp. 436-37.

“if we undertake the commitment that China will not liberate Taiwan by arms [and] the US is arming Taiwan ... it is still the creation of one China, one Taiwan.” The effect, Hua continued, was to give Chiang Ching-kuo less incentive for a [peaceful] settlement.³⁶⁴ Brzezinski did not respond on the spot, but the American delegation considered Hua’s remarks as offering a choice between continuing arms sales without a PRC statement on peaceful reunification, and receiving such a statement if arms sales ceased. More generally, it was believed that the Chinese leadership understood and hopefully accepted the US intention to continue arms sales. This was a matter of supposition, but for the first time there was a substantial basis provided by the PRC side.³⁶⁵

The Americans departed Beijing with a remarkably different impression of Hua than what was left from the Vance mission. All those who interacted with him were positively affected, with Oksenberg, a professional scholar of Chinese elite politics, observing that nothing from his past reading and own writings had prepared him for Hua’s performance that suggested both “an inner serenity of mind,” yet at the same time “inner toughness.” Closely followed by Brzezinski,³⁶⁶ Oksenberg also assessed the Deng-Hua relationship in his memo immediately after their respective meetings with Brzezinski—and himself. While citing differences in style, he did not sense a tension-ridden relationship, instead seeing and adequate and even strong leadership team—“Deng the asskicker, and Hua the reconciler.” Oksenberg concluded with the sense that “the Hua-Deng relationship [is] more collaborative and complementary than competitive ... We should not assume Deng is in charge. We are dealing with a duumvirate.”³⁶⁷ Of course, we cannot know the

³⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 453-54.

³⁶⁵ See *ibid.*, pp. 466-67, 471, 473, 488, 493.

³⁶⁶ On this and other issues, Brzezinski’s memos closely followed his assistant’s; see *ibid.*, pp. 467-68, 472. Also, Brzezinski’s memoir account essentially cribbed what Oksenberg had written in May 1978; *Power and Principle*, pp. 215-16.

³⁶⁷ *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, pp. 467-68.

precise relationship as of spring 1978, but this is a reasonable assessment of the overall political situation at that time. As for foreign policy, the view of Deng playing the leading role, and certainly with the US, remains most likely, but Hua was no mere passenger, and indeed a figure capable of critical interventions.

The China-Japan Treaty. The conclusion of the Japanese Treaty of Peace and Friendship in August 1978 was linked to the unfolding US-China normalization process, and it also provides an insight into the limitations of Deng's foreign policy leadership. If there was one consistent agreement in the review of the international situation that often saw Chinese criticism and American efforts to defend themselves, it was the desirability of concluding the treaty within the context of a US security guarantee. As the PRC mantra put it: Japan-US relations came first, Sino-Japanese relations were only secondary.³⁶⁸ Moreover, on his way back to Washington, Brzezinski stopped in Tokyo to affirm the US desire for completing the treaty, and he also carried Hua's wish for its conclusion to the Fukuda government which "has not made up its mind."³⁶⁹ How did Deng and the Chinese leadership generally perform in this regard?

Although Mao in 1974-75 assigned Deng to take over the key foreign policy role from the ailing Zhou Enlai, notably in his meetings with Kissinger and Ford, Deng appeared less engaged with Japan as negotiations on the Treaty of Peace

In broad but not exact terms, the views expressed by Oksenberg in this and other memos were confirmed in a generous two-day interview in June 1999. At the start of the Carter Administration, he envisaged three possible leadership equations: 1) Deng preeminent; 2) Hua as leader but Deng as regent; 3) Deng having position but no influence. He soon favored 2), which loosely corresponds with his May 1978 memo, into 1978. Although not consistent with every nuance of subsequent memos, he, as well as Brzezinski, still believed Hua had staying power after normalization until some point in 1979, probably the time of the Mondale visit in August, when he gave up on Hua. Cf. below, pp. [xxx-xxx].

³⁶⁸ See, e.g., Hua's comments to Brzezinski; *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, p. 453.

³⁶⁹ See *ibid.*, pp. 454-55, 457-58.

and Friendship began.³⁷⁰ Upon his return to work in 1977, however, Deng joined Li in receiving Japanese delegations, and emphasized both the economic aspect of making up for lost time regarding “Mao and Zhou’s Four Modernizations” caused by the “gang of four,” and that the Sino-Japanese treaty should be based on the 1972 communique that included an anti-hegemonism clause.³⁷¹ Beyond that, the view that Deng had primary responsibility for China-Japan relations is persuasive, as seen in his meeting with the Japanese delegation at the successful conclusion of negotiations in August, and his October visit to Japan to exchange the articles of ratification. It gains further credence from the dominance of the hegemony clause in the negotiations, which arguably reflected his preoccupations more than any other PRC leader.³⁷²

As one well-connected observer put it, the basic PRC political objectives on relations with Japan had been set at the time of Sino-Japanese normalization of diplomatic relations in 1972.³⁷³ As with the Shanghai communique, the Chinese leadership thereafter sought to hold its negotiating partners to undertakings made or asserted to have been made then. One potentially difficult question was the clashing territorial claims over the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands, an issue shelved by the agreement of both sides, with Zhou Enlai playing the key role for the PRC. The result was that negotiations did not involve the issue, although events could not

³⁷⁰ Evidence of Deng’s direct role at that time has not been found. Although Vogel, *Deng*, p. 299, claims, without a source citation, that in this period he received significant numbers of Japanese visitors, in the most notable reported cases, Zhou and Li Xiannian served as hosts, with Li having overseen China-Japan economic affairs since 1972. See *Li Xiannian zhuan*, vol. 2, pp. 927-31; and *PR*, no. 2, (1974), nos. 4, 20, 25 (1975). Discussions began briefly at the foreign minister level in January 1974, followed later in the year by meetings of Japanese embassy and MFA officials.

³⁷¹ *Deng nianpu*, vol. 1, pp. 198-99, 279-80, 288; and *PR*, nos. 8, 12, 13 (1978).

³⁷² See Zhang Baijia, “Biandong de guonei yinsu dui Zhongguo wajiao de yingxiang,” p. 6; and below, pp. [xxxx, xxx, xxx]. It was not only Deng, however, who pushed the anti-hegemony clause, with Hua and Li Xiannian also emphasizing it as the crucial obstacle to the treaty. See *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, p. 454; and *Li Xiannian zhuan*, vol. 2, pp. 928, 930.

³⁷³ Zhang Baijia, “Biandong de guonei yinsu dui Zhongguo wajiao de yingxiang,” p. 6.

entirely eliminate it from the picture.³⁷⁴ The stumbling block, in fact the only truly divisive question following the start of treaty negotiations in 1974 to their completion in 1978, was the anti-hegemony clause. In terms of the objective interests of both sides, the key factor was economic—the PRC need for capital and technological imports, and for Japan the need for raw materials and the lure of the China market. As rational as this was, it was a low priority while Mao lived, but became a major objective in the new period. As we saw in Chapter 3, Japan was soon identified as major source of capital and technology, something manifest in Hu Linjia’s March-April 1978 delegation to the country, a consensus policy led by Hua with strong support from Deng.³⁷⁵ But as compelling as this objective was, Mao’s successors—Deng and the whole top leadership—both believed in, and were constrained by, the late Chairman’s vendetta against the revisionists turned hegemonists.

Initial foreign minister discussions in January 1974 were unpromising.³⁷⁶ Once formal negotiations began in November 1974, the two sides exchanged draft

³⁷⁴ See Zhu Liang, “Hu Yaobang yu xinshiqi duiwai zhengce de tiaozheng” [Hu Yaobang and the Adjustment of Foreign Policy in the New Period], *Nanfang zhoumo*, February 2, 2011; Zhang Tuosheng, “China’s Relations with Japan,” in Vogel *et al.*, *Golden Age*, pp. 201-202; Robert S. Ross, “U.S. Relations with China,” in Vogel *et al.*, *Golden Age*, p. 91; and Zhang Baijia, “Chinese Politics and Asia-Pacific Policy,” in Vogel *et al.*, *Golden Age*, pp. 44-45.

The most notable event occurred in April 1978 when an armed Chinese fishing boat challenged Japanese claimed territorial waters, a matter Deng subsequently dismissed as an accidental incident, together with a promise the issue would remain shelved for another 20-30 years, and the PRC would not act before then. While some Chinese sources treat this action as a major “solution” affecting the treaty, in fact Deng only reaffirmed existing policy on an issue that never featured in the run in to settlement.

³⁷⁵ See above, [ch. 3, pp. 43ff].

³⁷⁶ Oddly, the hegemony clause did not appear to be a subject at the meetings of Foreign Minister Ohira Masayoshi, later prime minister from December 1978 to June 1980, and his PRC counterpart Ji Pengfei. Ji was more concerned with claimed Japanese failure to live up to their undertakings for only non-governmental activities on Taiwan. Ohira was clearly more interested in trade and aviation arrangements, and only suggested “very non-official working level” consultations on the treaty. Japanese cable from Beijing to Tokyo, January 4, 1974, in the Wilson Center documentary collection, “Japanese Documents on China/Sino-Japanese Relations, 1974-1986,” available from 2020.

treaties in March and April 1975, and an amended Japanese draft was presented in November 1975, without progress. The hegemony clause was at the center of the impasse, but the larger situation on both sides needs to be understood. In certain respects, the situation mirrored developments in the US-PRC relationship in the mid-1970s, with domestic politics creating difficulties for both sides. As with US normalization, the Chinese situation was complicated by Mao's over-arching anti-Soviet focus, and especially by the political instability culminating with the anti-Deng campaign in 1976. On the Japanese side, there was uncertainty within the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), with five prime ministers reflecting not only different party factions, but shifting attitudes toward China in the 1972-78 period. Several larger aspects of Japanese politics should be noted. A critical factor was the heavy dependence on America, particularly in defense, leading to, as PRC leaders approvingly put it, a policy of the US first. But this meant following the American lead on many issues, and, after the Nixon shock of the 1972 rapprochement with China without prior warning to Tokyo, a desire to avoid falling behind when US positions were unclear. Equally important, the post-World War II sense of the country's vulnerability, the "small power mentality" of the Japanese population, together with deep popular support of the post-war Peace Constitution, limited any defense posture against the Soviet Union.³⁷⁷

As with the PRC-US negotiations, China and Japan had fundamentally different international strategies, even more so in the Japanese case.³⁷⁸ In stark contrast to the ferociously focused anti-Soviet "one line" policy, Japan's guiding principle was "omnidirectional diplomacy." As the Japanese negotiators repeatedly emphasized in the face of their Chinese counterparts' hectoring that this indicated

³⁷⁷ On Japanese domestic constraints, see the excellent overview by Kamiya Mataka, "Japanese Politics and Asia-Pacific Policy," in Vogel *et al.*, *Golden Age*, especially pp. 53, 59-61, 64-65, 66-67.

³⁷⁸ On the contradiction with American "triangular diplomacy," see above, p. [104].

weakness and fear of the Soviet Union, the omnidirectional approach was not equidistant from different powers, something patently obvious from the “US first” policy encouraged by Beijing, and Japan’s conflicts with the Soviet Union.³⁷⁹ The essence of the policy was to seek positive relations with as many countries as possible, in practical terms making heavy use of economic capabilities while eschewing the use of force. Essentially, with security guaranteed by the US alliance, strategic considerations were a low priority for the Japanese side in the negotiations with China. Soeya Yoshihde has captured Tokyo’s fundamental objectives: “What stood out in Japan’s approach was its unwillingness to be involved in strategic rivalries among the United States, China, and the Soviet Union. This overall inclination was reinforced by Japan’s desire to forge a special relationship with China on its own merits.”³⁸⁰

Anti-hegemony clauses appeared in four documents linking the PRC with the US and Japan—the Shanghai Communique in February 1972; the September 1972 Joint Statement on the establishment of China-Japan diplomatic relations; the Sino-Japanese Treaty of Peace and Friendship signed on August 12, 1978; and the Joint Communique on the establishment of China-US diplomatic relations, formally in effect on January 1, 1979. Leaving aside qualifications in the China-Japan case, the clauses were essentially identical: “neither [party] should seek hegemony in the Asia-Pacific region or in any other region and ... each is opposed to efforts by any other country or groups of countries to establish such hegemony.”³⁸¹ The Japanese qualifications had some variations but also were

³⁷⁹ Notably, the Soviet continued occupation of four Japanese islands in the Kuril chain at the northern extremity of the country, seized at the end of World War II.

³⁸⁰ Yoshihde, “Japan’s Relations with China,” in Vogel *et al.*, *Golden Age*, p. 226.

³⁸¹ The phrase “or in any other region” was added in the 1978 documents. For English-language versions, see *PR*, no. 9 (1972), pp. 4-5, no. 40 (1972), pp. 12-13, no. 33 (1978), pp. 7-8, no. 51 (1978), p. 8.

basically the same: the agreement would not affect relations with third countries.³⁸² The differences between 1972 and 1978 were less the texts, than the process. Due to the Nixon shock, Japan moved quickly to normalize relations, dealing with Taiwan in a way the US could not, thus the "Japanese formula." In contrast to drawn-out, sometimes excruciating negotiations over the Treaty, in 1972 they were brief, with legal complications concerning Japan's separation from Taiwan settled primarily through PRC concessions. Moreover, any reluctance to accept the anti-hegemony clause was compensated by Chinese concessions more broadly, none more so than the PRC renouncing its demand for war indemnities.³⁸³

The path to the Treaty was much more drawn out, with the PRC in political chaos in 1976, while different Japanese governments, notwithstanding efforts to come up with draft documents, were constrained by the need to create adequate factional support within the LDP, and not under sustained external pressure to proceed. In the post-Mao period pressure came from China, as we have noted, and Brzezinski's stopover in Tokyo reaffirmed the US interest in a successful conclusion. Despite PRC leaders complaining that the government of Prime Minister Fukuda Takeo "had not made up its mind," there are reports of Japanese consideration in March 1978 of somewhat altered wording for the Treaty.³⁸⁴ Whatever the precise details, the final negotiations began in Beijing on July 21. Although Deng had said to Japanese visitors that the Treaty could be settled in one second,³⁸⁵ this meant, of course, accepting Chinese demands on the hegemony clause. In the event, an intense three-week bargaining ensued. The lengthy initial working-level phase

³⁸² The 1972 document stated that "The normalization of relations between China and Japan is not directed against third countries," while the 1978 document declared the "Treaty shall not affect the position of either [party] regarding its relations with third countries. In the Treaty, the "third countries" statement was placed in a separate article from the hegemony clause.

³⁸³ See Yoshihde, "Japan's Relations with China," p. 215.

³⁸⁴ See *ibid.*, p. 220; and Vogel, *Deng*, p. 296.

³⁸⁵ On September 10, 1977; *Deng nianpu*, vol. 1, p. 199.

consisted of 14 negotiating sessions led by Vice Minister Han Nienlong and Ambassador Sato, sessions that produced a stalemate. The stalemate was broken at the "political level," with Foreign Minister Sonoda Sunao flying in for August 9 ministerial meetings with Huang Hua, which ended with the PRC basically accepting the Japanese position.

Fortunately, Japanese diplomatic cables collected and translated by the Wilson Center, provide a detailed account of the encounters. The sticking point was PRC rejection of the inclusion in several Japanese drafts of a statement affirming that the Treaty did not require Japan to align with policies directed at any third country, clearly the Soviet Union. This, of course, was the core concept of Japan's omnidirectional diplomacy, not to mention part of the 1972 Joint Statement signed by China. Although the PRC negotiators were not totally inflexible,³⁸⁶ the fundamental Chinese position was there could be no retreat from the anti-hegemony principle of the Joint Statement. Reading the cables presents an unpalatable picture of Chinese tactics: repeatedly asserting the binding nature of the spirit of the Joint Statement, while treating Japanese usage of a principle from that statement as a sign of fear of Moscow; decrying intimidation by the Soviet hegemonists, yet more than occasionally behaving in a quasi-bullying manner toward those on the other side of the table; descending into tedious arguments such as the inadequacy of the Japanese use of "opposed to" as inferior to the Chinese "opposes," due to not being tough enough; complaining about leaks in the Japanese media, while defending the right of knowledgeable Chinese officials to openly comment on the state of negotiations; and simply not taking on

³⁸⁶ At the ninth meeting on August 2, the Chinese negotiators presented wording moving toward the Japanese position, but it was rejected as inadequate.

board that the Japanese side was not going to cave in, even when informed of the backing of the home government in Tokyo.³⁸⁷

The situation changed dramatically when Foreign Minister Sonoda suddenly decided to visit Beijing for talks on August 9.³⁸⁸ A long-time proponent of relations with the PRC who had, in the past, been subjected to LDP discipline for advocating a departure from the US position, Sonoda feared non-conclusion of the treaty negotiations would, in turn, result in a lengthy stagnation of Japan-China relations. In arguably the most compelling of any leadership statement in either the PRC-US or PRC-Japan negotiations, on the morning of August 9, Sonoda focused on political reality—"discussing things as they are." Brushing aside the traditional leadership review of the international situation as simply going on and on, but not advancing negotiations, and declaring arguing over what each side meant about hegemony did not settle anything, Sonoda asserted the meetings so far showed a lack of trust. The need was to speak frankly, with no holds barred, inviting comments that could offend him, while stating he might say things that would anger the Chinese side. Sonoda soon raised one of irritants faced by Japanese diplomats, PRC claims of weakness before the Soviets. Citing the Chinese mantra of Russian intimidation, Sonoda noted that not only Japan but he himself had been personally subjected to such pressure, but had never given in. Moscow did not want this treaty, but here I am continuing my efforts to bring it to a successful conclusion.

The Japanese foreign minister did much more than vent his dissatisfaction. Despite his dismissal of exchanges on the meaning of hegemony during the earlier

³⁸⁷ These aspects are apparent throughout the cables. Some particularly telling exchanges can be found in the cables of July 24, 28, August 1, 6, 7.

³⁸⁸ The following is based on cables of August 10 and 12 on Sonoda-Huang Hua ministerial meetings. In addition, lower-level working meetings were held on August 10 and 11 to tidy up Treaty details.

working sessions, he offered a clear statement of Japan's concept, and with it some lessons in the dynamics of international relations. In the immediate context, it meant simply that neither Japan nor China would attack each other. As for other situations, nothing was fixed, and Japan would absolutely not support a Soviet threat to China, nor would she cooperate with PRC hostile actions toward Moscow. The greater threat than any specific notional hegemon was conflict between major powers, and Japan feared the spill over of such a conflict by its large neighbors. Moreover, Sonoda discussed shifting international developments, pointedly referring to the PRC's former alliance with the Soviet Union, noting they were fraternal countries at one time. More to the present international context, the minister analysed Southeast Asia, especially the views of the ASEAN countries. Yes, these countries recognised, as did Japan, Soviet hegemonistic tendencies, but in an analysis similar to what Lee Kuan Yew would make to Deng in a few months' time,³⁸⁹ they were also uneasy about such possible future tendencies by China, given border disputes, and dissident and guerrilla movements with some Chinese support. While these countries would welcome a Sino-Japanese Treaty, they had extraordinary interest in how it was concluded, especially the hegemony clause. There would have to be respect for the other side's views, not simply trying to force a settlement on a set PRC position.

As impressive as Sonoda's arguments above were, it is unlikely that they alone, as distinct from the determined manner in which they were given, would necessarily have moved the Chinese side. Much more decisive would have been the minister's presentation of the Japanese political environment. As with the ASEAN countries, he declared the Japanese public, although substantially more friendly to China than the Soviet Union, had substantial reservations concerning

³⁸⁹ See above, p. [15].

the PRC. Following their country's Peace Constitution, the Japanese people "absolutely oppose relying on force to make threats," but they "cannot accept branding one country as a hegemon." Simply put, the public was unwilling to take sides between Beijing and Moscow. Sonoda told Huang Hua that the Treaty would have to be sold to his countrymen, this would require Chinese efforts to gain their trust, and if China cooperated in completing it satisfactorily, he would personally put his reputation on the line in selling it. He drew attention to Chinese high-handed tactics, asking how would the Chinese people feel if we criticized Hua or Deng, while you have criticized various Japanese prime ministers, and even encouraged dissident Japanese elements. If that wasn't persuasive enough, Sonoda emphasized this was your chance, grab it now or it may be a considerable period before it arises again. If China and Japan were to say waiting was fine, we will both become laughingstocks in the eyes of the world.

After the nearly three-hour morning session, largely dominated by Sonoda, four hours later a second one-hour ministerial meeting convened. In the intervening period, to adopt favored PRC terminology, "China made up its mind." Whether this was Deng's sole mind, or in consultation with Hua, which we think more likely, is unknown. In any case, after some initial remarks about hegemony, including that Southeast Asian countries were concerned with a possible revival of Japanese militarism, Huang Hua came to the point and accepted in principle the Japanese draft of August 7. All that was left was for the working group negotiators to work out the details and minor remaining questions. At some soon point that day, after the meeting concluded, Deng met with the participants from both sides. Deng lamented that the conclusion of the Treaty had been delayed, and it was necessary to get back to work to make up for the lost time. Of course, there was no mention of the main factor causing the delay, at least in the post-Mao period—the PRC insistence on a hegemony clause that ignored a key aspect of the sacred

1972 Joint Statement. In his remarks, Deng claimed opposition to hegemony was the core content of the Treaty, but he reflected some of Sonoda's remarks. He noted the Treaty was not aimed at a third country, and acknowledged there was some Southeast Asian concern of a modernized China practicing hegemony, while insisting it would never happen. He further referred to the Diaoyu Islands issue that the current leaders had been unable to settle, putting his faith in a wiser next generation to resolve it. The Treaty was signed on the 12th, with Hua, Deng, and PRC Japanese specialist Liao Chengzhi representing China.³⁹⁰

The final episode of the Sino-Japanese Treaty was the exchange of instruments of ratification, an event much more important as the vehicle for Deng's eight-day trip to Japan in late October. This visit was a major success, both in public relations terms in Japan, and via media coverage in China, and through extensive contacts with Japanese business and industrial leaders, as well as economic organizations, that intensified significant existing interest in the PRC.³⁹¹ A corollary in the economic respect, was both Deng's exposure to advanced managerial methods, and further stimulation of his passion for rapid modernization. Indeed, the visit was a crucial factor in Deng pushing the leadership into an even more excessive "great leap outward," something that would soon be criticized, although the criticism was never directed at Deng.³⁹² But overall, notwithstanding the suspension, although not cancellation, of contracts concluded in the period of over-enthusiasm, Deng's visit contributed to the important ongoing development of the Japan-PRC economic relationship.

³⁹⁰ See *Deng nianpu*, vol. 1, p. 355; and *PR*, no. 33 (1978), pp. 6-7.

³⁹¹ See Vogel, *Deng*, pp. 297ff; and Robert Hoppens, "Deng Xiaoping Visits Tokyo, October 1978 and February 1979," Wilson Center History and Public Policy Program blog, May 18, 2020. Vogel's characterization of the trip as "triumphal" and "electrifying" may be hyperbolic, but there is little doubt of its positive results in these respects.

³⁹² See above, [ch. 3, pp. xxx-xx].

Yet Deng also carried the anti-Soviet message, both in meetings with Japanese leaders, and in a major press conference on October 25. During the discussions with Prime Minister Fukuda, the prime minister emphasized peace via economic power, looked forward to cooperating in the PRC's Four Modernizations, and reaffirmed Japan's policy of no hostile relations with any country. Deng made appropriate polite noises, but then launched into familiar arguments about the futility of arms control and détente, that peace required smashing the strategy of the country that would cause war, that the Soviets were extending their aggressive behavior, and appeasement had to be avoided.³⁹³ Deng's press conference advanced the same general view, presenting it more explicitly in terms of opposing hegemony, which he now, in a public forum, again declared the nucleus of the Sino-Japanese Treaty.³⁹⁴ As successful as the visit was in other regards, Deng's continued pressing of his fervently held view of the Polar Bear could only solicit a polite non-committal response from Fukuda to match his own polite acknowledgement of Japanese policy, and there is no evidence of a shift in public opinion away from aversion to being dragged into Sino-Soviet conflict. In a manner similar to, but more extreme than the achievement of US-China normalization, securing the Sino-Japanese Treaty had little to do with Deng's, and the brader PRC leadership's, insistence on the anti-hegemony principle. In fact, it required an unacknowledged retreat from the organizing concept of Chinese international strategy.

Achieving Normalization, June-December 1978. Brzezinski's East Asia trip clearly had positive results in advancing both the PRC's American and Japanese negotiations. In the far more important US case, while both parties were

³⁹³ Two discussions between Deng and Fukuda on October 23 and 25 are included in the Wilson Center documents.

³⁹⁴ See *PR*, no. 44 (1978), pp. 14-17.

encouraged, neither was completely confident as preparations began for the revived negotiations that started in July in Beijing. In Washington, Vance and Brzezinski began to draft instructions for Woodcock, and seek Carter's approval. While cautiously optimistic, success could only be expected *if* China "understands us" on arms sales, with hope substantially based on Hua having raised the issue.³⁹⁵ As ever, influenced by fear of a negative PRC reaction to directly introducing the issue, the decision was to approach the negotiations by dealing with a series of lesser issues in talks every ten days or so, before arriving at the delicate arms sales matter. Although other options were raised, tabling a draft communique would be delayed.³⁹⁶ Meanwhile, despite Deng's claim during the glow of his January visit to Washington that he knew normalization would happen when he heard Brzezinski's insistence that Carter "had made up his mind,"³⁹⁷ a more realistic assessment from Chinese sources is that he, and undoubtedly the top leadership generally, was appreciative but sceptical of Brzezinski's efforts.³⁹⁸ In any case, both sides sent out positive signals, particularly by accelerating official exchanges, none more significant than Administration science adviser Frank Press' visit in July, an event that underlined the benefits of normalized relations for modernization.³⁹⁹

³⁹⁵ Vance memo to Carter, June 13, 1978, in *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, pp. 490-94. Apart from arms sales, the other yet to be resolved issues were public statements about Taiwan, i.e., peaceful reunification, and details of the projected "private" US relations with Taiwan.

³⁹⁶ See *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, pp. 494, 495-96, 496-97, 503-504, 508, 510; and Carter, *Keeping Faith*, p. 197.

³⁹⁷ See *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, p. 740.

³⁹⁸ Gong Li, "The Difficult Path to Diplomatic Relations," p. 137.

³⁹⁹ Press visited from July 7 to 10, further stimulating the already high PRC interest in science and technology exchanges. He had a significant encounter with Deng, and was hosted by Fang Yi, the Politburo member responsible for science and technology. See *PR*, no. 29 (1978), pp. 3-4. Although we disagree, it is worth noting that Oksenberg regarded the Press visit as even more important than Brzezinski's; interview, June 1999.

Paradoxically, by June 1978, if not earlier, in terms of the minimum requirements of both sides,⁴⁰⁰ normalization was all but inevitable, barring some drastic domestic political turnaround in the United States. Yet despite each side eager to proceed, frustrations emerged. As Carter, who was deeply engaged in the process, put it, “[we were] getting favorable responses from [Beijing], but in a slow and fitful way.”⁴⁰¹ The essence of the problem was the contrasting negotiation strategies of the US and PRC. As indicated, for the Americans, the approach was to ascertain China’s seriousness through a number of discrete issues, proceeding from easier questions to the more delicate, above all arms sales. The procedure would be meetings in sequence on each issue, with tentative agreement reached, before proceeding to the next one. In contrast, the Chinese wanted a comprehensive statement from the outset, undoubtedly to see if the US was truly going to accept Mao’s three conditions in an acceptable form. The compromise reached was a dead end: in the resulting short meetings, the US presented its specific proposals, with some ambiguity, without seeking agreement, while the Chinese listened, but only said “you know our position.”⁴⁰² Outside the negotiations, the Chinese expressed impatience, notably Huang Hua to Vance at the UN in early October, complaining that the US was reluctant to make a clear statement on the three conditions.⁴⁰³ There were other annoyances for each side, but they hardly mattered.⁴⁰⁴

⁴⁰⁰ The US had essentially accepted the three conditions by this point, all that remained was to work out the details in a manner sensitive to the Administration’s political needs. On the PRC side, the critical issue was arms sales, but as difficult a pill this was to swallow, the evidence indicates it was never an insurmountable bar to agreement. Cf. above, p. [99].

⁴⁰¹ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, p. 197.

⁴⁰² *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, pp. 495, 509-11; Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, pp. 224-25; Woodcock Papers, file no. 16 (February 17, 1982); and interview with Stapleton Roy, July 2008.

⁴⁰³ *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, pp. 553-54.

⁴⁰⁴ For example, concerning increasing PRC conflict with Vietnam. Vance and especially Holbrooke were deeply committed to Vietnam normalization, and Carter himself was positive in principle. With discussions with the Vietnamese making progress, Brzezinski worried this would complicate US-PRC normalization, and persuaded Carter to defer the US-Vietnam talks in mid-October. Despite the fears of a negative effect on the China negotiations, the evidence indicates that it would not

With negotiations stalled after four meetings, the US side moved to change the dynamic. While criticism of the cautious American approach can be made, there were enough indications both before and after the Brzezinski visit to indicate clearly what the fundamental US position was in both positive and negative senses from the Chinese perspective,⁴⁰⁵ but the PRC chose not to probe these, instead waiting for a “comprehensive” statement. Referring to this period, in a comment reminiscent of Huntington’s Cambridge, Mass., boffins querying the understanding of the Chinese side, Oksenberg noted that he had wondered whether PRC behavior reflected a negotiating strategy, or simply showed they were less clever than believed, but had come to believe it was more likely the latter.⁴⁰⁶

The initial decisive US effort to push the negotiations forward came in a meeting between Carter and new Liaison Office head Chai Zemin on September 19. In this encounter, Carter clearly made a number of essential points. At the outset, he reaffirmed personal commitment, stating that if the negotiations in Beijing were successful, normalization would follow without delay. Carter further indicated that the Administration’s purpose was not a transient [anti-Soviet] tactical measure, but one looking forward to advancing the long-term interests of

have prevented Sino-US full diplomatic relations as long as the three conditions were met in a satisfactory manner. In his meeting with Vance at the UN in early October, Huang Hua curtly indicated US-Vietnamese normalization was the US’s business, before warning of Hanoi’s aggressive behavior in Indochina and its links to Soviet expansionism. There was no suggestion this threatened a US-China deal. See Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, pp. 228-29; and *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, pp. 508-509, 548-49, 552-53, 570.

On the US side, Woodcock was frustrated with Deng’s undisciplined “loose lips” that violated the American concern for strict secrecy. In his post-administration discussions with Oksenberg, he claimed to to have scolded the Chinese powerhouse several times, even “reading the riot act” over comments on the normalization negotiations during Deng’s October visit to Japan. Woodcock Papers, file no. 15 (February 10, 1982).

⁴⁰⁵ E.g., through Woodcock’s efforts since February (see above, notes 341, 350), and Brzezinski’s strong hints concerning arms sales and the three conditions to PRC Liaison Office head Han Xu on June 19 (see *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, p. 499).

⁴⁰⁶ See his November 2 memo to Brzezinski, *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, p. 583. On the Huntington group, see above, p. [110].

both peoples. And he unambiguously expressed willingness to accept the three conditions. Crucially, Carter came to the point on the critical issue of arms sales in a manner that indicated it was an essential condition for reaching agreement. Although additional rationales were offered,⁴⁰⁷ the essential point was made—domestic US political reality would not allow anything less. Carter cited the impact of the long relationship with Taiwan on national attitudes, and the need for Congressional support of any deal. While not explicitly stated, the message was clear: no American president could complete normalization without ensuring Taiwan's security. Yet at the same time, Carter acknowledged the political sensitivities faced by PRC leaders, and minimized the projected arrangement as the "restrained sale of some very carefully selected defensive arms." On the other key remaining issue, the American intention to state expectation of a peaceful resolution of the Taiwan issue, sensitivity was also reflected in the proposal that the US would not seek Chinese explicit agreement, but it would expect the US statement would not be contradicted by the PRC.⁴⁰⁸

Arguably reflecting Oksenberg's suspicion that the Chinese were not so clever, two weeks later at the UN, in his meeting with Vance, Huang Hua complained about American foot dragging over the three conditions. Reading from a prepared text, Huang went on to say that America's vagueness about its own ideas led the PRC to believe the US intent was to reproduce in a new form the proposal already rejected by the Chinese side, that is, Vance's offering during his Beijing visit the previous year. In words reminiscent of Deng's September 1977 rebuttal of US claims of progress during that visit, Huang insisted there could be no "flexibility" in the PRC position on Taiwan. Huang also referred to Hua's oral

⁴⁰⁷ Carter argued that without the stability the arms would provide, Taiwan might turn to other sources [i.e., implausibly, the Soviet Union], or that Taiwan might seek atomic weapons.

⁴⁰⁸ See the record of the conversation in *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, pp. 531-35. The significance of the encounter is recognized in the literature; e.g., Tyler, *A Great Wall*, pp. 256-57.

message to Carter following Vance's trip that had never been adequately dealt with by the White House. Vance sought to direct Huang's attention to the Carter's meeting with Chai, noting the President's pledge to honor China's three conditions, but all he could elicit was an acknowledgment that the Carter-Chai conversation had been noted.⁴⁰⁹

But if Carter's message to Chai had not been adequately absorbed in Beijing, the penny dropped on November 2, when the US finally put a draft communique on the table. This draft, prepared in mid-October, and reportedly very similar to the draft Vance had carried to Beijing but never tabled,⁴¹⁰ was the basis for the final agreement reached on December 15. The October document was actually a proposal of points to be included in not only the joint communique itself, but also the accompanying separate PRC and US statements, points that would be fundamentally accepted by the Chinese. The critical issue was stated clearly: "The people of the US will maintain cultural, commercial, and other [read arms sales] unofficial relations with the people of Taiwan." The only points not used in the December document, ironically came from the PRC playbook. Presumably seeking to meld American objectives with stated Chinese positions, the draft proposed *for the PRC statement*, included the Chinese people were patient, China hoped for a peaceful outcome and would take into account the actual situation on Taiwan, and was open to discussions with the Taiwan authorities on peaceful reunification, but these were not adopted. The main addition in the final communique, however, came from the PRC at the last minute in December. In the last sessions Deng *requested*, in contrast to the unsuccessful brow beating of the Japanese during the treaty negotiations, the inclusion of a hegemony clause, which was granted, using

⁴⁰⁹ *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, pp. 554-56. On Hua's oral message, see above, p. [109].

⁴¹⁰ See above, p. [100].

the formulation in the Shanghai communique agreed to by the US seven years earlier.⁴¹¹

As noted earlier, the tabling of the US draft on November 2 caused great interest in Beijing. Deng-centric PRC accounts focus on his excited statement in the Politburo urging “seizing the opportunity,” a view encompassing speeding up the economy. Deng, reflecting his responsibility as the leader overseeing US-China relations, and also taking on board the Carter-Chai exchange, ordered the MFA to work on a policy response, accelerate normalization, and emphasized being sure not to slam the door during discussions with the Americans.⁴¹² More than a month ensued, however, before the PRC resumed discussions, a delay that caused some concern on the US side,⁴¹³ but easily explainable by Deng’s absence overseas from 5 to 14 November, and the central work conference that lasted to December 13. In any case, once back in Beijing, in addition to calling together the personnel dealing with the negotiations on November 27 and reemphasizing that “the most important thing is not to miss the chance,” Deng began to use various opportunities to send messages to the US of China’s eagerness to proceed. One of the most important was an exchange with prominent American journalist Robert Novak on the same day, where Deng declared normalization advantageous for both sides, “the sooner the better.”⁴¹⁴ Although not from Deng personally, the most suggestive message came in a mid-November meeting with a US delegation

⁴¹¹ Compare the October draft in *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, pp. 567-68, with the final documents in *PR*, no. 51 (1978), pp. 8-9, 12. Various points in the October draft were rephrased in the December agreement, but the meaning was the same. The critical point about “cultural, commercial, and *other*” relations was positioned as a US unilateral statement in October, but in December it appeared in both the joint communique and US statement. Cf. above, pp. [119ff]; and below, p. [136].

⁴¹² See *Deng nianpu*, vol. 1, p. 417; Gong Li, “The Difficult Path to Diplomatic Relations,” pp. 139-40; Li Jie, “China’s Domestic Politics and Normalization,” p. 86; Wang Zhongchun, “The Soviet Factor in Sino-American Normalization,” pp. 169-70; and above, pp. [23-24].

⁴¹³ Ross, *Negotiating Cooperation*, p. 136; and interview with Stapleton Roy, June 2008.

⁴¹⁴ See Gong Li, “The Difficult Path to Diplomatic Relations,” p. 140; Wang Zhongchun, “The Soviet Factor in Sino-American Normalization,” p. 170; and *Deng nianpu*, vol. 1, pp. 437-39.

led by Senator Edmund Muskie. When asked directly about post-normalization arms sales, [an unnamed] Chinese official, reflecting Deng's then public and private comments avoiding rejecting future US-Taiwan ties, replied that if the three conditions were met, the US "will be able the handle the problem."⁴¹⁵

Before examining the end game in the first half of December, a review of the limited amount we know concerning internal CCP policy making at the critical juncture following November 2 is called for. Some of the observations concerning Deng's foreign policy role noted from the start of this chapter through to the Third Plenum deserve reemphasis.⁴¹⁶ While there is little doubt concerning his clout in foreign affairs generally, and his position as the point man in US-China relations in particular, Deng did not possess Mao's unchallengeable authority, and relied on persuasion to ensure acceptance by his colleagues. But the opaque nature of decisions on normalization does not allow nuanced understanding of the persuasion required. Thus, while it is clear Deng sought to bolster support for "seizing the opportunity" at the November 2 Politburo session, we know nothing of what Hua, who chaired the meeting and had played a key role in the discussions with Brzezinski in May, said, or indeed what doubts may have been expressed by others. For normalization policy as a whole, in contrast to concerns of US policy makers at the time and some subsequent foreign analysis,⁴¹⁷ the testimony of well-qualified PRC scholars finds little significant division, although national sovereignty considerations created a sensitive issue.⁴¹⁸ Moreover, the October US draft with its

⁴¹⁵ *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, p. 617.

⁴¹⁶ See above, pp. 3-4, 103.

⁴¹⁷ In the US government, Oksenberg saw normalization as a difficult issue linked to Deng's struggle with vaguely defined enemies. See *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, pp. 512-13, 593-95; and above, p. [97]. Regarding later scholarship, while also not clearly indicating policy issues, tended to be link the outcome to Deng's alleged struggle with Hua. See, e.g., Ross, *Negotiating Cooperation*, pp. 98-99, 127-28, 138-39; and Fardella, "Sino-American Normalization," pp. 546, 563.

⁴¹⁸ Interview with senior Party historian with deep ties to the MFA, February 2009; and interview with senior international relations scholar specializing in US-China relations, February 2009.

demand for *other* relations, i.e., ongoing arms sales, made the question unavoidable. Yet, perhaps reflecting Deng's persuasive efforts, the absence major contention continued for the period up to the agreement in mid-December.

While whatever Hua may have said at the Politburo on November 2 remains unknown, some insights into his thinking can be seen from his meeting with Energy Secretary Schlesinger two days later.⁴¹⁹ Hua did not raise the US draft communique, a position consistent with the PRC response generally which was delayed for several weeks, and only swung into diplomatic action when Vice Foreign Minister Han Nianlong met with Woodcock on December 4 (see below).⁴²⁰ Hua did, however, express the basic Chinese position of seeking a quick establishment of full diplomatic relations, noting that despite progress in US-China relations, restrictions in various areas could only be overcome after normalization. A main feature of the conversation, as indicated earlier, concerned economic relations, with Schlesinger more broadly indicating his trip left a deep impression of a determination for modernization. In their discussion, Hua underlined economic ambition by citing the accomplishments of the subsequently criticized Ten Year Plan, emphasized the PRC's backwardness in science and technology and the country's desire to catch up, discussed the Chinese energy sector in some detail, and stressed efforts to learn from advanced countries—noting that quite a number of people had been sent abroad to study such countries, a development that, although not stated, had come under his leadership. On foreign policy broadly, Hua articulated the anti-Soviet line, calling attention to Moscow's abusive

Moreover, in the US government, a mid-November CIA analysis concluded that there was "no evidence of serious opposition" to opening to the US; *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, pp. 599-600.

⁴¹⁹ The exchanges between Hua and Schlesinger below are from the memcom of their November 4 meeting, available at National Archives, RG39, Central Foreign Policy file, P820112-0377.

⁴²⁰ The delay, which concerned the US Liaison Office, is best explained as a combination of Deng being in Southeast Asia from 5 to 14 November, the need to carefully consider the US proposal, and the epic Central Work Conference starting on November 10.

statements directed at him during his visits to Yugoslavia and Romania in August 1978.⁴²¹

But arguably the most revealing aspect of the conversation came as a result of Hua dwelling on events leading to the arrest of the “gang of four” in October 1976, something cited quite wrongly as a possible attempt to to disassociate himself from suspected anti-Deng figures still on the Politburo, and then under attack.⁴²² In fact, the interesting point is that the subject probably came up because Hua and Schesinger had met in September 1976, the critical and intense period between Mao’s death and the arrest of the “gang.” On foreign policy, Hua argued that what China was doing now was “following the concept I explained to you in 1976.” On economic policy, Schesinger recalled that Hua had then emphasized strengthening the economy by 2000 on the basis of self-reliance, a self-reliance linked to developing science and technology, a process that would come to involve acquiring technology from abroad. As the meeting concluded, Hua returned to the theme that after normalization all kinds of obstacles would be removed and relations would develop even faster, and he hoped that Schesinger would work to further facilitate achieving the result. This discussion not only suggests a full convergence with Deng on the importance of US normalization, it further indicates Hua’s attachment to relevant modernization policies well before Deng’s return, not to mention coming at a time when he was grappling with regime defining events.

One further aspect of the internal handling of the enormously significant issue of reaching a normalization agreement is clear, that is, just how restricted decision-making authority was. Again contrary to Western scholarship assuming normalization would have been a major topic at the work conference and Third

⁴²¹ In addition to the memcom, see Schesinger’s report to Carter in *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, pp. 603-605; and above, p. [23].

⁴²² See Oksenberg’s November 15, 1978, memo to Brzezinski, *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, pp. 593-54.

Plenum,⁴²³ it was not an agenda item at either meeting. At best, there were a minimal number of small gatherings on the margins of the conference where the issue was discussed. A revealing case occurred on December 1, when the Standing Committee called together nine people, apparently consisting of provincial first secretaries and large military region commanders. The latter included at least two Politburo members, Li Desheng and Xu Shiyou, but as members non-resident in Beijing, it is plausible they did not attend the November 2 Politburo session. Of course, available PRC sources do not mention Hua, but a significant portion of Deng's comments reportedly summarizing the recent deliberations of the top body are available. The purpose of the meeting was clearly to inform those assembled of the thinking of the Standing Committee, and US normalization was part of Deng's initial point, thus indicating that this policy, which was not submitted to the Central Committee or broader senior elite, was firmly in the grasp of the five-man highest body.⁴²⁴

What we know of this meeting sheds additional light on the policy concerns of the top leaders, providing insights at some variance with PRC sources focusing on normalization. Gong Li reports that Deng discussed the establishment of diplomatic relations with the US, and greater detail elsewhere indicates he reported the plan to complete the process on January 1, and issue a joint communique then. Deng also called for taking account of the "big picture," which we assume meant accepting the concessions on Taiwan that were coming. We do not have any indication of whether the arms sales issue was spelled out, and certainly no indication of any resistance to the Standing Committee's plans. In fact, the main

⁴²³ E.g., Ross, *Negotiating Cooperation*, p. 139.

⁴²⁴ Zhu Jiamu, *Wo zhidaode shiyijie sanzhongquanhui* [What I Know about the Third Plenum of the 11th Central Committee] (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1998), pp. 57-58; Gong Li, "The Difficult Path to Diplomatic Relations," p. 141; and Zhang Baijia, "Biandong de guonei yinsu dui Zhongguo wajiao de yingxiang," p. 7.

point, which covered issues much more vital at the work conference, and the key aspect of Deng's initial point, was to avoid damage to the Party's stability and unity. The relevance to normalization was that foreigners worried about the PRC's stability, and at this delicate time don't give an impression of a power struggle. The message was: stifle any reservations you have about Taiwan, and don't make the Americans nervous.⁴²⁵

Against this background of Standing Committee backing and the absence of significant opposition in the top elite, Deng could enter the decisive December phase of negotiations confident of his authority. In the actual negotiations with Woodcock, he was accompanied by Vice Foreign Ministers Han Nianlong and Zhang Wenjin. Again, PRC accounts provide no role for Hua, but we find it incomprehensible that Deng would not have consulted with Hua between his several meetings with Woodcock, except, perhaps, before the rushed final encounter. All the evidence suggests they were on the same page, and after all, Hua was Party Chairman. The endgame began on December 4, with a meeting between Woodcock and Han Nianlong. This occasion indicated the PRC was on the verge of accepting the US position. Han agreed to the US proposed January 1 date for diplomatic relations, presented a PRC draft communique, indicated Deng would see the American representative soon, and crucially, for the first time, provided acceptance of what Carter told Chai in September was one of the only two remaining obstacles—that China not directly challenge an American separate statement on a peaceful resolution of the Taiwan issue. The other obstacle, arms

⁴²⁵ *Ibid.* Deng emphasized avoiding a major personnel shuffle that would suggest instability, and warned that historical questions should only be raised in a rough manner, avoiding details. He added a separate point that the 1957 Anti-Rightist campaign, where he played a leading role, was correct, although some excesses had occurred, and declared that for now discussion of the Cultural Revolution must be avoided.

sales, received an emphatic objection, but as we will continue to argue, this was essentially for the record, a face-saving exercise.⁴²⁶

The literature provides useful, although in some respects misleading, accounts of Deng's four meetings with Woodcock from December 13 to 15.⁴²⁷ We analyze these events in some detail, both for additional nuance, and to support our interpretation. The Chinese draft provided by Han Nianlong on December 4 and carried to the meeting by Deng on the 13th, strongly reflected the October US draft, with the first paragraphs affirming the PRC was the only legitimate government of China in almost identical terms. It did, however, contain some language about future American relations with Taiwan that Carter found unacceptable.⁴²⁸ At this first meeting with Deng, Woodcock presented the final US draft, drawn up after the PRC draft had been tabled, and presented in "a revised, short and business like" form.⁴²⁹ Deng fundamentally accepted the US draft, substantively only proposing an anti-hegemony clause, which "we hope you will consider," although his could be done in separate statements. He also offered a Chinese concession on a matter left hanging earlier, that is allowing, given American political and legal complications, the US-Taiwan defense treaty to lapse at the end of 1979, rather than upon normalization. Otherwise, Deng suggested some wording and other presentational changes, but with no effect on meaning. And he accepted the

⁴²⁶ *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, pp. 609-15; and Woodcock Papers, file no. 18 (March 3, 1982). Cf. Ross, *Negotiating Cooperation*, p. 136.

⁴²⁷ E.g., Tyler, *A Great Wall*, pp. 262-71; Ross, *Negotiating Cooperation*, pp. 136-38; and Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, pp. 230-32.

⁴²⁸ Woodcock Papers, file no. 18 (March 3, 1982); and Carter, *Keeping Faith*, p. 198. Cf. above, p. [131]. In addition to the October US draft, Vance, *Hard Choices*, p. 118, claimed, with justification, that the results of the December 13th meeting were "almost the letter" of the objectives of the May 10 memo on the aims of Brzezinski's trip prepared for Carter by himself, Brown and Brzezinski. Cf. *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, pp. 358-59.

⁴²⁹ See *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, p. 620. This characterization was in a proposal by Brzezinski to Carter on December 5, and clearly implemented. The actual drafting was most likely done by the "China team" of Vance, Brzezinski, Holbrooke and Oksenberg, and clearly carefully vetted by Carter; see "Evolution of Normalization," *Washington Post*, December 17, 1978.

invitation to visit Washington in January, an event hardly his on the spot decision as sometime claimed.⁴³⁰

The crucial issue that would bedevil the final meeting two days later, inevitably was arms sales to Taiwan. Paradoxically, on the 13th the issue was both settled but not settled, perfectly understood but not understood. For Deng, the aim was to accept what had to be done, but keep it as hidden as possible from PRC domestic audiences—less the high elite which largely understood the bargain, than broader parts of the Party-state structure and the general public brought up on liberating Taiwan. For Woodcock, the goal was to get both normalization and a security guarantee for Taiwan without embarrassing Deng. The issue of delaying the end of the US-Taiwan defense treaty for a year complicated the matter, but it provided a filmsy disguise that Deng grasped. Although wishing to hide the treaty's extended length too, Deng drew a distinction between accepting that, and continuing arms sales *during the remainder of the treaty*, again "hoping" there would be no sales during that period, something that "would cause a lot of trouble," and offering to accept the additional year of the treaty if there were no sales in that year. His language was specific: no sales for one year, or in 1979. Curtailing sales beyond that year was never raised; Woodcock correctly perceived that Deng had fully accepted the American position.⁴³¹

⁴³⁰ See Woodcock's December 13 cable including the record of his exchange with Deng, *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, pp. 630-37. Cf. Gong Li, "The Difficult Path to Diplomatic Relations," pp. 142-43.

Concerning the invitation, Brzezinski extended an invitation to Deng or Hua through Ambassador Chai on December 11 (early morning December 10 in Beijing). At the December 13 meeting with Woodcock, Deng noted that "we have decided that I will go"; see *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, pp. 624, 634. Whatever this might say about the relative standing of Deng and Hua at the time, Deng, on multiple occasions going back to the Ford Administration, had expressed his desire for such a trip, and it was a rational choice given Deng's role not only in negotiating sessions and exchanges with other American influentials, but also his proven public relations skills as seen recently in Japan.

⁴³¹ *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, pp. 632-33, 634-36.

Brzezinski also thought the deal was done, and Carter was surprised that Deng had accepted the US draft so quickly without even taking it away for study. Oksenberg explained it to Carter: "Mr President, the Chinese have been waiting twenty-five years for the question [of establishing diplomatic relations]!"⁴³² But not everyone in Washington was so sure. In his acceptance of the US position, Deng had neither said the PRC *understands* what you are up to (which the Chinese leadership did), nor that it *agrees to* it (which they would never do in a formal sense). Despite Brzezinski's efforts to exclude the State Department from an essential role, State could not be kept completely at bay, and Warren Christopher, deputizing for Vance who was in the Mid East, and Holbrooke soon got access to Woodcock's cable and a follow up from Beijing. Holbrooke in particular fixed on what Deng had not said, worrying that the resulting ambiguity would undermine the Administration's effort to sell the package to Congress.⁴³³ In addition, although the deal had truly been done, as Woodcock noted in his follow up cable on the 13th, there were two matters to be dealt with, the hegemony clause, which was added, with the not against third parties addition as in the Shanghai communique and Sino-Japanese treaty, and accepting Deng's proposal of no arms sales during the extension of the Taiwan treaty for another year. Woodcock also interpreted Deng's likely reason for fixing on no sales in 1979, seeing it the period when he would be most vulnerable to charges of selling out Chinese principles on Taiwan.⁴³⁴

There were two meetings with Deng on the 14th, an apparently brief one in the afternoon to convey Carter's wish to expedite announcement of the agreement, and an evening one to deal with the outstanding issues. The evening meeting went

⁴³² Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, pp. 230-31; and Carter, *Keeping Faith*, p. 198.

⁴³³ See Tyler, *A Great Wall*, pp. 264-66.

⁴³⁴ *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, pp. 638-41. Concerning Deng's "vulnerability," there was subsequent discontent with the consequences of normalization, but Deng's authority was never challenged as a result; see below, pp. [xxx-xx].

extremely well, with the Chinese leader not challenging the Ambassador's presentation, agreeing to the revised joint communique with only minor wording changes, and providing the text of the PRC's brief unilateral statement. Woodcock described him as elated with the outcome of the session. Deng did, however, return to the arms sales issue, but in a manner related to saving face rather than the substantive question of whether such sales could continue after 1979. The essential understanding had been that in his press conference announcing the agreement, Carter would steer clear of matters sensitive to the Chinese to the extent he could, but he would have to answer (inevitable) questions on arms sales. Having misunderstood an earlier Woodcock statement, Deng now asked that Carter drop any reference to no new sales in 1979, as it left open the implication that they might resume thereafter. Woodcock responded that, in fact, there never had been an intention that Carter would raise the matter in his remarks. Deng, accepted Woodcock's explanation, and as the meeting concluded, declared that it seemed full agreement had been reached.⁴³⁵

But the ambiguity of the arms sales situation could not be dispensed with so easily. When meeting with Ambassador Chai on the 14th Washington time, and noting the agreement included continuing arms sales, Brzezinski discovered the Ambassador was astonished, thinking his country's position, as in Han Nianlong's December 4 statement, was to reject such sales, and he had not received any new instructions to the contrary. We note here that this was hardly competent policy management, leaving the PRC representative in the US, who had considerable contact with Brzezinski, in the dark, thus magnifying the potential for misunderstanding. Having shrugged off the concerns of Holbrooke and others at State, Brzezinski now had his own doubts and cabled Woodcock for his assessment.

⁴³⁵ *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, pp. 642-45; and Gong Li, "The Difficult Path to Diplomatic Relations," pp. 143-44.

Woodcock quickly replied with a cable defending his view that the deal had been done. He recounted clearly laying out the US position to Han Nianlong on December 4, that had drawn a for the record "emphatic objection," and to Deng on the 14th, that raised no response, apart from trying to find ways to obfuscate the reality of the matter. Woodward, reflecting the US approach throughout the larger negotiations since 1977 to avoid provoking the Chinese into rejecting an agreement, observed that the the more embarrassing the sales, the sharper PRC protests would likely be, but concluded Beijing was prepared to deal with the issue within the context of normalized relations. But this was not enough. Carter and Brzezinski felt that, in order to protect themselves from a political disaster with Congress, they had to confirm that Deng understood US arms sales policy, and would not pull the rug out from under them.⁴³⁶

Woodcock was instructed to meet Deng again to make sure that he understood. Meeting at 4 pm Beijing time, a mere 18 hours before the scheduled announcement of the normalization agreement, an explosive encounter unfolded. Woodcock entered the meeting "having to be optimistic," but his deputy Stapleton Roy was highly pessimistic. Woodcock's somewhat anodyne cable reporting on the meeting nevertheless captured its essentials: after an intense lengthy period of arguing back and forth, Deng had no answer on what to do, and in the end simply accepted Woodcock's advice to proceed as had been previously agreed.⁴³⁷ The oral testimony of Woodcock and Roy gave a greater sense of the encounter, of yelling by a furious Deng angry that he was suddenly required to once more discuss a done deal, and the two Americans fearful that normalizarion was on the verge of collapse. Deng repeated Han Nianlong's statement that accepting ongoing arms

⁴³⁶ See *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, pp. 646-47; Tyler, *A Great Wall*, pp. 267-68; and Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, pp. 231-32.

⁴³⁷ *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, pp. 648-49.

sales was absolutely unacceptable, but the substantive issue was not the basis of his fury. Again, everything was a matter of face, as most clearly indicated, after giving Woodcock a look of "you stupid SOB," by his enraged comment that "you know what we are going to do, and we know what you are going to do."⁴³⁸ Many familiar positions were exchanged, Deng arguing that arms sales would be a disincentive for Taiwan to conclude a peaceful settlement, and Woodcock emphasizing the essential point that US political reality meant no administration could deny arms to Taiwan. But as captured in Deng's exasperated remark about each side knew what the other would do, the deal required the PRC to look the other way.

Woodcock's cable reported two strikingly different parts of the meeting. Following Deng's rage, his mood changed, and he began to search for ways to manage the problem. Deng, again for face, repeatedly urged that Carter avoid direct answers on arms sales; if he did not, China would be forced to respond. Throughout, Woodcock made the argument, that could be traced back to Brzezinski's sessions with Deng and Hua in May, that a transitional period was required, and much change could happen during this interval. The extent to which Deng accepted this argument, or indeed the degree to which Woodcock believed this rather naïve proposition, is unknown. But it had to suffice. In the end, Deng asked Woodcock, "what shall we do," and the Ambassador, declaring the US would take Chinese sensitivities into account, recommended proceeding as previously agreed. Deng simply said "okay," undoubtedly relieved that normalization was going ahead, but angered over the humiliating circumstances of the meeting. The Americans were not quite sure what had happened, with Roy reportedly believing the PRC would never except the US position, while Woodcock captured the reality that the negotiations had come full circle on the arms sales issue, with both sides

⁴³⁸ Woodcock's recollection, Woodcock Papers, file no. 18 (March 3, 1982). The most colorful other account of the fireworks is Tyler, *A Great Wall*, pp. 268-70.

agreeing to disagree. Moreover, he judged that, politically, Deng and Carter each wanted to do it, and were capable of dealing with their domestic problems.⁴³⁹

Seventeen hours after the Deng-Woodcock meeting concluded, normalization went ahead with all the agreed upon documents published. Arms sales was there, but only as *other* non-governmental relations between the US and Taiwan. In these documents, PRC sensibilities were protected as well as they could be. The same applied to Carter's Oval Office television statement at 9 p.m. on the 15th, and on this occasion there was no press conference that would require a response to media questions on arms sales, but these inevitably emerged in subsequent Administration press briefings in the following days. Yet at the very hour Carter spoke, the PRC not only published the documents, but Hua as CCP Chairman held a press conference where he addressed the question. The issue could no longer be hidden, and Hua declared the PRC's opposition: "We made it clear that we absolutely would not agree to [arms sales to Taiwan] ... [which] would not conform to the principles of normalization. ... So our two sides had differences on this point. Nevertheless, we reached an agreement on the joint communique."⁴⁴⁰ Arguably, this provided useful evidence for whenever future conflict emerged, as the PRC could say it had never agreed to arms sales, but it could never prevent sales as long as the US considered them in its interests.

After 16 months of off and on negotiations, changing moods, and last-minute fears of collapse, the achievement of normalization had been difficult in process, but easy in substance. For the PRC, the fundamental requirement was Mao's three conditions, something suggested as possible by the Nixon and Ford

⁴³⁹ *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, p. 649; Woodcock Papers, file no. 18 (March 3, 1982); and Tyler, *A Great Wall*, p. 269.

⁴⁴⁰ See Hua's press conference and a version of Carter's statement in *PR*, no. 51 (1978). For Carter's full Oval Office address, see <https://china.usc.edu/jimmy-carter-%E2%80%9Cestablishing-diplomatic-relations-china%E2%80%9D-dec-15-1978>. Regarding subsequent press coverage, see "Evolution of Normalization," *Washington Post*, December 17, 1978.

Administrations, and considered a framework for negotiations by Vance. There would be difficulties in translating that framework into specifics, but nothing insurmountable. And to pick up on Woodcock at the end of the process, from the start of his Administration, Carter identified normalization as a major objective,⁴⁴¹ it was basically the complexities created by other foreign policy goals and domestic politics that slowed the process—matters beyond the PRC's ability to influence. As we have repeatedly emphasized, for the US the essential requirement was Taiwan's security, which meant arms sales. A bitter pill to swallow, and one often obfuscated by both sides, it was never presented as an obstacle to full diplomatic relations by the Chinese. The earliest, more or less clear, indication in this vein came from Hua in his discussion with Brzezinski in May 1978, and it was telegraphed, presumably under Deng's authority, in November as the end game approached. Notably, arms sales was never raised by Mao, and his throw away comment that it would be better for the US to keep the island for a hundred years was pure realism since the PRC lacked the capability for a military solution.⁴⁴² As an exasperated Deng said on December 15, "we know what you are going to do," and the last-minute drama resulted in Hua publicly swallowing the pill half a day later.

In analyzing the path to normalization, the discussion has been overwhelmingly Deng-centric in both PRC and foreign scholarly literature. The PRC accounts, regardless of the extent to which they may be true, clearly are a case of

⁴⁴¹ Early in the Carter Administration, Brzezinski prepared a briefing book on ten major goals, including normalization, to be accomplished in its four years; *Power and Principle*, pp. 53-56. Despite widespread criticism of Carter's foreign policy as weak and inadequate, the great majority of these goals were achieved fully or partially. See Frederick C. T[ei]wies, "Carter's Foreign Policy: The Perception of Failure," *Australian Outlook*, April 1987, pp. 53-55.

⁴⁴² In early 1978, a US analysis of the military balance in the Taiwan Straits concluded that, although the PRC was not able to seize the island, Taiwan would be dependant on US modern weapons for the foreseeable future, a major US policy interest. *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, p. 292-93. Moreover, the greater factor was the potential use of US forces to maintain the peaceful regional environment that was a keystone of American interests.

the victor writing history. For foreign scholarship, the lamentable tendency of giving too much credence to the official version as long as it was not demonstrably false, was a factor, but not the only one. It also drew heavily on the interview testimony of US officials deeply involved in the process. Three decades after the agreement, Holbrooke argued that "the most important factor [for success] was probably the emergence of Deng Xiaoping as China's paramount leader."⁴⁴³ This reflected the interaction of US negotiators and other influential Americans with the tough leader, including the inaccurate view that he decided difficult issues "on the spot," thus confirming his ultimate authority.⁴⁴⁴ To be clear, here we speak only of the period up to conclusion of normalization, and we do not denigrate Deng's generally impressive performance in this period, nor do we dissent from the view that in all likelihood he was the most forceful advocate of the US deal within the highest bodies. We simply argue that we do not know what went on in those bodies, there is no evidence of significant high-level opposition to what was done, and Hua clearly played a significant if indeterminant role. In other words, there is no convincing case that Deng was the essential factor for realizing normalization, although it is a moot point what would have eventuated in his absence.

While the US side was hardly faultless in its negotiating performance, its inadequate understanding of the PRC's positions and objectives is at least partially

⁴⁴³ Richard Holbrooke, "The Day the Door to China Opened Wide," *Washington Post*, December 15, 2008.

We note that Holbrooke's only direct experience with Hua was Vance's underwhelming meeting with the new chairman in August 1977, and Brzezinski excluded him from the meeting with the much more impressive Hua in May 1978. Cf. above, pp. [106-107]. Brzezinski's shabby treatment of Holbrooke, which reflected State-NSC tension, is discussed in the Woodcock Papers, file no. 14 (February 9, 1982).

⁴⁴⁴ In particular, his acceptance, without consultation, of the invitation to visit the US, and his "understanding" of arms sales during the December end game. In fact, the invitation was extended 24 hours before it was accepted; cf. above, note 426. While the final explicit statement of understanding that the US would continue arms sales to Taiwan on December 15 was "on the spot," the basic PRC policy had been determined earlier.

forgivable given the opaque nature of Chinese politics, as well as its own political need to be sure of what the PRC would accept when that was not made explicitly clear during the end game. A harsher view can be taken of the Chinese side, whether it's shortcomings are framed as the top leadership's collective doing, or Deng's, given his responsibility as the overseer of the process. The theme of inadequate clarity in presenting the PRC position, and particularly the failure to grasp the US position, whether expressed as Huntington's comment on "inscrutability [as] simply a mask for their ignorance," or Oksenberg's musing that they were less clever than he had believed, is telling.⁴⁴⁵ In addition, the failure to keep Ambassador Chai in Washington adequately informed, while arguably a deeper general flaw in the PRC diplomatic system, was a serious failure given the timing and critical importance of the issue. Moreover, we also question the utility of the repeated emphasis on the Soviet threat, and especially criticism of US policy in dealing with the Polar Bear.

To further consider the Soviet factor in normalization (while leaving aside the negative impact of the hegemony clause in the Sino-Japanese negotiations), requires confronting several paradoxes. It goes without saying that, going back to the Nixon initiative, countering Moscow was a central aspect of US-China rapprochement. For both countries the Soviet Union was a threat, and there always were elements of standing on the other's shoulders to, at the least, distract and disorient the Russians, and to some extent it worked. Moreover, trading anti-Soviet views, notably between Deng and "Polar Bear tamer" Brzezinski, enhanced negotiations at the atmospheric level, even if Oksenberg warned Brzezinski against thinking he had gained any useable "credit" with the Chinese—"they will use

⁴⁴⁵ See above, pp. [110, 129].

you.”⁴⁴⁶ But the larger issue, as previously noted, was the disconnect between Mao’s “one line policy,” so strongly pushed by Deng, and the Nixon-Kissinger triangular diplomacy, essentially continued by Carter. This was underlined during the end game by the intermural clash between Vance and Brzezinski over the timing of the projected Brezhnev and Deng visits, leaving PRC leaders unable, and not even trying, to affect the outcome, other than by accepting what they were offered.⁴⁴⁷ The essential point is that, in achieving normalization, for all the the rhetoric from Mao’s time, undoubtedly believed by the late Chairman, that the international situation was more important than Taiwan, a view essentially repeated by Deng shortly before the end game,⁴⁴⁸ it was not part of the actual negotiations from summer to mid-December.⁴⁴⁹

A counter argument has been made: the the reason the PRC swallowed the Taiwan poison pill was an increased Soviet threat from spring 1978, notably a buildup on China’s borders, and the Soviet-backed coup in Afghanistan.⁴⁵⁰ This is unpersuasive. Throughout the larger discussions, as well as the formal negotiations starting in the summer, the PRC posture was reactive—here are our three conditions, what are you offering to meet them? When the US position was inadequate during the Vance visit, and more importantly the Chinese were embarrassed by the American leak, Deng felt “forced” to react negatively in public. When the US indicated a serious intent to address the Chinese position with “Carter has made up his mind,” formal negotiations began, even if PRC negotiators simply listened while waiting for a comprehensive statement on the conditions. And when

⁴⁴⁶ *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, p. 466. In addition, Carter told his adviser that he had been “seduced” by the Chinese; *Keeping Faith*, p. 196.

⁴⁴⁷ See Tyler, *A Great Wall*, pp. 261-62; and Ross, *Negotiating Cooperation*, pp. 136-37.

⁴⁴⁸ See above, pp. [133-34], where Deng indicates Taiwan was less important than other considerations, of which the strategic situation was clearly one.

⁴⁴⁹ According to Stapleton Roy, who was present at the negotiations throughout this period, international issues were never raised; interview, June 2008.

⁴⁵⁰ See Ross, *Negotiating Cooperation*, pp. 121, 125, 141.

that statement came on November 2 with the tabling of the US draft communique, the PRC moved rapidly toward agreement. None of this denies in any way that concern with the Soviet threat and the international situation was a central motivating factor in the overall process of US-PRC diplomacy. It simply states that fluctuations in the perceived Soviet threat were not reflected in changing Chinese positions in the normalization negotiations. What did change the PRC posture was the US meeting the three conditions in an adequate matter. Once that was on the table, even in the context of arms sales guaranteeing “two Chinas” for an indefinite period, Beijing grasped the deal.

Clearly, Taiwan was an obstacle to be overcome in the pursuit of normalization, while an anti-Soviet international posture was an essential motivating factor. Another undoubted motivating factor was the benefits of an enhanced relationship with the world’s most advanced economy for China’s modernization. It is impossible to determine the relative weight of these factors in the minds of individual leaders, but surely both were present. In addition, there was a coincidence of developments in the period at the end of 1978 and the start of 1979: normalization, the 1978 work conference and Third Plenum, and the decision to attack Vietnam, leading to speculation of linkage.⁴⁵¹

Concerning the work conference and plenum, since normalization was basically not a part of either meeting, linkage should be discounted, but there are other arguments that center, inaccurately, on Deng’s presumed economic and political achievements at the meetings. As we saw in Chapter 3, the widely accepted conventional wisdom that Deng launched “reform and opening” at the Third Plenum is simply untrue; while there had been moves in each respect *before* the meeting, Hua had been much more involved, and the words suggesting a new

⁴⁵¹ Stapleton Roy noted these overlapping developments, which he placed in the context of “Deng consolidating his position”; interview, June, 1999.

programmatic orientation did not appear in the plenum communique.⁴⁵² More accurate, but also misleading, is to point to the adoption of the “shift of focus” to modernization introduced at the work conference, which dovetailed with one of the two major objectives of normalization. It was a programmatic statement, strongly backed by both Hua and Deng, and indeed one reflecting an orientation initiated, to the extent political conditions allowed, by Hua even before Deng returned.⁴⁵³ As we shall examine in detail in Chapter 8, politically the meetings did result in a shift in influence and authority toward Deng, but in a much more subtle and complicated way than a simple victory in a power struggle.

A greater linkage exists with the attack on Vietnam—as a consequence of normalization, as opposed to a reason for it. Had the three conditions been adequately accepted before the Sino-Vietnamese conflict became unstoppable, and recall that the November 1978 draft communique was very similar to the one Vance carried to Beijing but did not table, it is difficult to imagine it not being grasped earlier. But the coincidence of full diplomatic relations and Deng’s trip to Washington, with the rapidly deteriorating Sino-Vietnamese conflict, created positive conditions for the attack in Deng’s mind, and to some extent in reality, even while posing awkward choices for the Carter Administration, as we examine in the following sections.

Deng at the White House, and Further Sino-American Interaction under Carter. For US-PRC relations during the remainder of the Carter Administration in 1979-80, we generally will not undertake the type of detailed analysis we have offered above on normalization. Some detail, however, is appropriate for Deng’s

⁴⁵² See above, [ch. 3, pp. 2-4, 58]. On the asserted linkage of normalization and reform and opening, see above, note 295. Also note Carter’s 2007 view that looking back, it is important to see the relationship of normalization to reform and opening; “Jimmy Carter’s address to the Chinese People’s Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries,” at <http://en.chinaelections.org/NewsInfo.aspx?NewsID=13771>, December 11, 2007.

⁴⁵³ See above, [ch. 3, pp. 15-18].

visit to Washington and tour of the US, both as a sought after outcome of normalization for both sides, and as a significant aspect of our following major section analyzing the Sino-Vietnamese War. Less detailed attention will be given to the (limited) fall out of the Taiwan Relations Act (TRA), economic and other bilateral developments, and the gradual shift from international consultation to security cooperation. We will also address signs of Hua's declining influence on US-Chinese relations, even as he greatly impressed top European leaders, a development clearly linked to his rapid loss of power overall from the latter months of 1979. Finally, we will take an initial look at high-level leadership discomfort with where Deng's position on the US relationship was taking the country, a development that paradoxically involved no threat to Deng's growing power, nor to the basic thrust of PRC foreign policy.

While it is appropriate to focus on Deng Xiaoping individually concerning his trip to the US, it is important to note that shortly before his departure, the Politburo, with Hua specifically noted, discussed Deng's meeting plans and prepared speeches for the visit, thus providing collective authority for the positions he would present.⁴⁵⁴ In any case, Deng's talks in Washington with Carter and other American leaders on January 28-31, plus his subsequent visits to Atlanta, Houston and Seattle in early February, were clearly a triumph on many levels. Deng presented the modernizing face of China to US leaders and the American public, moved the economic agenda forward, pushed the US-PRC relationship from consultations on the international/Soviet situation toward cautious cooperation, and made necessary, if insufficient, adjustments on the Taiwan issue to enhance Congressional acceptance. Yet in the immediate context, it is clear that Deng's key objective was to obtain US understanding of his impending decision to invade

⁴⁵⁴ See *Deng nianpu*, vol. 1, pp. 472, 473.

Vietnam, which was provided, reluctantly by Carter, and rather more positively by Brzezinski in particular. Robert Gates, then working in the White House, and later CIA director and Secretary of Defense, captured it well in one of his memoirs: “[Carter’s decision] had to have been the best signal Deng could have hoped for. No mention of disruption of normalization. No mention of a change in the direction of economic and military cooperation. No principled objection to the invasion of another state.”⁴⁵⁵

By early January, the bargaining position of the two sides had changed significantly since normalization. On December 15, Deng essentially had been powerless to do anything except accept explicit toleration of arms sales to Taiwan; not doing so would have been irrational in terms of the national—especially economic—interests of the PRC, and, laying considerations of face aside, was quite politically bearable for the Beijing leadership. Yet when Deng laid out China’s plans for teaching Vietnam a lesson on January 29, while the situation was by no means equivalent, it was the US that was forced to face the costs of its investment in the PRC. In the unlikely event that China carried out its “lesson” against clear US opposition, the whole normalization effort could have been subject to ridicule; indeed, tacit American acceptance produced questions of “How could Deng do this to us so soon?” and “What is the value of the US/Chinese relationship?”⁴⁵⁶ In these circumstances, the arguably rational response was to proceed as Carter did—give a green light while constructing a face-saving narrative.

With Deng’s arrival in Washington less than a fortnight away, the Administration prepared with several flawed assumptions. Having become aware of the intensifying China-Vietnam conflict at the time of the Brzezinski visit, there

⁴⁵⁵ Cited in Mann, *About Face*, p. 99.

⁴⁵⁶ See *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, p. 805. These questions came up as Administration officials sought to cobble together a position distancing the US from China once the PRC attacked in February.

was considerable concern over the potential for major military action, but on balance it was felt the PRC would limit itself to aiding the Cambodian resistance of Pol Pot and applying pressure on the Sino-Vietnamese border, particularly given the danger of a Soviet attack from the north.⁴⁵⁷ In addition, while not overestimating US leverage, there was at least the hope that Carter's persuasion could influence Deng away from rash action. Fundamentally, the position was that a major conflict was very much against US interests, which remained within the framework of triangular diplomacy. Brzezinski addressed these issues in a memo to Carter on January 25, declaring that the US should seek improved relations with both the PRC and the Soviet Union, and the next day wrote that triangular relations should be "handled with the utmost care." Deng's expected effort to draw America into a strong anti-Vietnamese posture, perhaps even creating a situation where an attack to the south would be perceived as having US acquiescence, was to be resisted: deterring a Sino-Vietnamese military conflict was a major objective. But at the same time, the objective of a more binding relationship with the PRC meant "they must be confident that we have a realistic and adequate strategy for countering Soviet [expansionist] efforts."⁴⁵⁸ Not an easy conundrum to manage.

Brzezinski, subsequently joined by Vance and Brown, and Vance separately, made a series of suggestions to Carter concerning arguments he could use in urging Deng to exercise caution and restraint. These included: touting diplomatic efforts at the UN and bilaterally to oppose Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia, claiming success in building international sentiment and actions against Hanoi; reporting American efforts to warn the Soviets against establishing military bases in Vietnam; affirming the US would not recognize Vietnam while its forces remained in Cambodia; arguing military action would jeopardize gains in isolating

⁴⁵⁷ See *ibid.*, pp. 713-14.

⁴⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 719, 720-22, 737.

Vietnam; and emphasizing the US could not support an escalation of fighting in the region.⁴⁵⁹

None of this would faze Deng. The basic story is well known. Upon arriving in Washington, he requested a private meeting with Carter, and after formal meetings on the the morning and afternoon of the 29th, Deng and the President adjourned to the Oval Office to focus on Vietnam.⁴⁶⁰ Following Carter's brief recitation of his talking points, Deng dominated the 40-minute conversation in presenting "our view and possible measures we may adopt." Deng argued from world, regional and Sino-Vietnamese border perspectives, with the Soviet Union central to each. Vietnam was (falsely) declared totally controlled by Moscow, Hanoi's Indochinese objectives were linked to the Soviet "Asian collective security system," and compared to Moscow's 50,000 Cuban proxies in Africa, and the Soviets were pictured as using the Vietnamese to harass China from the south. In an analysis reminiscent of the domino theory, Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia was a likely precursor to an attack on Thailand, and the ASEAN countries "hoped that China would be able to do something," with "some friends even criticiz[ing] China for being too soft." The same need was faced by China directly, with continuous border incidents by the arrogant Vietnamese, who preened themselves as being the world's third strongest military power. If they were not punished, violence would increase on the border—"not putting a halt on them won't do."⁴⁶¹

Deng did not lay out in detail what the lesson would entail, but an invasion of some extent was clear. Both to reassure and adequately inform the US, Deng

⁴⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 722, 726, 731.

⁴⁶⁰ Accompanying the two leaders were Mondale, Vance, Brzezinski, Vice Premier Fang Yi, Huang Hua and Zhang Wenjin.

⁴⁶¹ *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, pp. 766-70.

In his memoir, Vance painted a different picture of ASEAN countries, as well as Japan and Australia, as concerned about a skewed US policy preoccupation with China, and fearful of renewed Sino-Vietnamese hostility; *Hard Choices*, p. 123.

emphasized the limited nature of the enterprise—a short period of time in Vietnam before withdrawal, although he misleadingly claimed the withdrawal would be quick and handled like a border incident. He further assured Carter that the leadership had carefully considered possible Soviet reactions, and had concluded they would not be large. Moreover, Deng was careful to indicate an understanding of the limits of what the Americans could do, simply indicating “We need your moral support.” The President had little to say in reply, although he did offer a range of arguments as to why a “possible punitive strike” would be a serious mistake in a one-on-one meeting with Deng the next day. But the game had already been given away on the 29th, when Carter responded to Deng’s presentation only by noting it would be difficult for the US to encourage violence, but we can provide you with intelligence, and understand you cannot allow Vietnam to pursue aggression with impunity. In general, the President observed “I have no answer for you. ... What is your response to my comments [on destabilization resulting from an invasion]? It’s of greater concern to you than to us.”⁴⁶² In a sense, the exchange eerily replayed the events of December 15 in reverse: the figure forced to concede an unwelcome outcome could only ask for guidance.

Carter, however, was arguably more opposed to the projected PRC venture than any other top Administration figure except Vance. Between the end of activities on the 29th and the one-on-one meeting with Deng the following day, the President prepared a letter listing nine arguments on why a “punitive strike” was a very bad idea, which he read out Deng, who listened without interruption. One of these was more appropriate for US domestic needs, i.e., that China’s peaceful image would be damaged, a greater concern to an administration that

⁴⁶² *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, pp. 768-70. Cf. Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, pp. 409-10.

had promoted normalization as enhancing regional stability, than for the Beijing leadership.⁴⁶³ Another argument, that international diplomatic and economic measures would have a significant impact on the Vietnamese presence in Cambodia, was unconvincing. Yet several other points could be taken as reasonable advice from the Chinese perspective of punishing Vietnam, while avoiding possible Soviet overreaction: the proposed limited incursion would not be successful in stopping Vietnamese action in Cambodia; for the time being at least, the Khmer guerrillas were causing greater than expected difficulties for the invaders; Chinese border threats could create problems for Vietnam without intrusion into the country; and restraint could reduce the likelihood of a greater Soviet presence in Vietnam.⁴⁶⁴ In these respects, Carter was offering a strategic critique of PRC plans that was far different from Brzezinski's subsequent memoir assessment. Brzezinski found Deng's discussion of PRC military plans and possible Soviet moves "the single most impressive demonstration of raw power politics" that he encountered in his four years in the White House.⁴⁶⁵ We shall return to the issue of Deng's strategic insight in our following detailed section on the Sino-Vietnamese War.

Carter would repeat his views on the eve of the attack in mid-February in response to a message from Deng that "Hua and I" expect US understanding of what was about to unfold.⁴⁶⁶ But the crucial point was that the President's opinion of January 30 was never more than that. As Brzezinski put it, Carter's letter did not lock the US into anything, and the NSC Adviser saw Deng off as he departed

⁴⁶³ Cf. Carter, *Keeping Faith*, p. 206.

⁴⁶⁴ *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, pp. 770-71. It could also be said that, since Carter suspected the decision to invade had already been made, his arguments had a similar for-the-record character that marked the Chinese position on arms sales during the December end game. See *Keeping Faith*, pp. 208-209.

⁴⁶⁵ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, p. 25.

⁴⁶⁶ *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, p. 792.

Washington, a gesture designed to underline Presidential support.⁴⁶⁷ When the invasion eventuated, the PRC was criticized, and key decisions concerned how to deter a Soviet reaction. Yet to a considerable extent, the issue was presentational. In yet another sense, this was December 15 in reverse, marked by face-saving efforts to obscure what had actually happened during Deng's visit. The picture presented was of little American knowledge what the Chinese were going to do, plus a superficially evenhanded, but in fact pro-China, policy of demanding both invaders withdraw, given that PRC forces were only destined for a short stay, while the Vietnamese would be in Cambodia for the long haul. An immediate conflict within the US leadership was whether Treasury Secretary Blumenthal should proceed with a scheduled visit under the circumstances, with Vance strongly opposed, but the decision was to go ahead. A familiar rationale prevailed, with Carter citing the "responsibility to protect Chinese confidence in us."⁴⁶⁸ The reality was perhaps best characterized by Deng to a Congressional delegation in April 1979, as tacit cooperation "that did not destroy the peace-loving image of the US."⁴⁶⁹ This reality was well understood by relevant actors in Washington and Beijing, and in Moscow as well.⁴⁷⁰

Clearly, the key objective of securing US "understanding" could not have gone better for Deng. To reemphasize, the link between normalization and the Vietnamese "lesson" was problematic as a reason to pursue full diplomatic

⁴⁶⁷ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, pp. 410-11.

⁴⁶⁸ See *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, pp. 796-99, 803-805, 808-10, 811, 813; and Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, pp. 411-14. Cf. below, p. [159].

⁴⁶⁹ "Cong zuixin jiemi dang'an kan Meiguo dui yijiuqijiu nian 'dui yue ziwei fanji zhan' de lichang" [Viewing the US Position on the 1979 "Self-defense War against Vietnam" from the Latest Decrypted Files], PRC document made available to the authors.

⁴⁷⁰ Woodcock recalled that "everyone in Beijing expressed understanding of the US position"; Woodcock Papers, file no. 22 (April 7, 1982). As for Moscow, Soviet Ambassador to Washington Dobrynin told Vance that many in the Soviet capital believed the US pro-China posture encouraged the PRC to attack; *Hard Choices*, pp. 121-22.

relations, but once achieved, it opened the door to seeking the US tacit support that, after the event, Deng viewed as having been critical in preventing a Soviet reaction.⁴⁷¹ As discussed in the following section, the timing of the decision to launch the invasion is unclear, but the most plausible surmise is that while planning for the “lesson” was well advanced before Deng set out to the US, a final decision had not been made, what was to happen in Washington would be a major consideration, and following discussions with Carter and other US leaders, at least in Deng’s mind, the decision to go ahead had been reached. While we believe the essential factor in the American understanding was the Administration’s investment in normalization, Deng’s skill in dealing with the situation was impressive. Deng being Deng, could not avoid a familiar, if temperately phrased, jibe at US inadequacy in dealing with the Soviet danger during the first formal meeting with American leaders, nor from harping on the threat of the Polar Bear on his post-Washington tour in a manner uncomfortable for triangular diplomacy.⁴⁷² But on the whole, he was sensitive to Carter’s needs, and offered the (empty) promise to carefully consider the President’s views when back with his colleagues in Beijing.⁴⁷³

Two other assertions by Deng during discussions with Carter and top American officials are worthy of note. One, the assertion that the PRC’s anti-Soviet policy was “held unanimously by the Chinese leaders”; as demonstrated by the final quotation at the head of this chapter, this was essentially fraudulent when extended to the projected lesson for Vietnam. The second, which followed

⁴⁷¹ See Lei Liu, “‘Dog-beating stick,’” p. 14.

⁴⁷² For the comment at the first formal session, see *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, pp. 744-45. A more vexing matter was Deng’s media comment supporting a letter by retired American generals critical of SALT which earned Carter’s displeasure, and Deng’s agreement to clarify his position, albeit in his own terms; *ibid.*, p. 763, 782. A striking example of the public impact of the Polar Bear message was a *Washington Post* cartoon of Deng dragging Carter toward his anti-Soviet statements; *Newsweek*, February 12, 1979, p. 11.

⁴⁷³ On Deng’s promise in his one-to-one meeting with Carter, see *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, p. 772.

immediately in Deng's discussion, rejected the claim that China was carrying out deMaoization: "actually this is what [Mao] wanted us to say and do."⁴⁷⁴ Arguably, this was a necessary position in internal Chinese politics given the need to contain the unsettling aspects of the 1978 work conference, but raising it during a private session with American leaders provided a remarkable insight into Deng's broader thinking.

While the lesson about to be inflicted on Vietnam was, in substantive terms, the centerpiece of Deng's visit, the whole design, long anticipated by both countries, was to celebrate and advance normalization, something inevitably requiring addressing the Taiwan question. As expected, Deng maintained the official position of China's sovereign right to decide the method of reunification, but he basically acceded to Carter's request that he emphasize patience, notwithstanding that Taiwan's authorities were unlikely to negotiate. Deng responded that the PRC would try to do its very best to use peaceful means.⁴⁷⁵ In fact, Deng went to extraordinary lengths to paint a peaceful outcome for Congress, both in the immediate period before his arrival, and in Washington. In meeting with a delegation led by Senator Nunn in Beijing on January 9, Deng declared there would be no change in society or the way of life on Taiwan, a position developing his comments during the pre-normalization period.⁴⁷⁶ But he went considerably further. In response to Nunn's question whether it would be possible for Taiwan to maintain security forces after reunification, Deng stated there would be no difficulty with that, and "the Taiwan authorities will possess the same power they

⁴⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 747-48. A few days before his departure for the US Deng had also affirmed Mao's Thought as China's guiding ideology, particularly in foreign policy, to Hedley Donovan, editor-in-chief of the Time publishing company; *Deng nianpu*, vol. 1, p. 474.

⁴⁷⁵ Together with curbing implied criticism of SALT, this was a request for a public posture that would avoid embarrassing the Administration, and would potentially further Congressional acceptance of normalization. See *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, p. 782.

⁴⁷⁶ Specifically that the PRC would take Taiwan's reality into account after reunification. See *ibid.*, p. 439; and *Deng nianpu*, vol. 1, pp. 396, 430.

possess now, the only thing they have to do drop the ROC flag." The same message was repeated during a visit to Capitol Hill for meetings with 85 Senators and 40 House members, with Deng declaring that the PRC had dropped referring to "liberation," and as long as Taiwan accepted it was part of China, it could retain its current political and economic system as well as a separate military force indefinitely.⁴⁷⁷ But this was much more than a rhetorical position to accommodate the Carter Administration; it can be legitimately be regarded as a precursor to the "one country, two systems" idea that was a serious, if naïve, proposal to achieve peaceful reunification with Taiwan.⁴⁷⁸

Deng's interaction with legislators and other US influentials basically went very well, even if the end product—the TRA—was another unpleasant pill for the PRC to swallow. Ironically, the Administration's concern that the projected lesson for China's southern neighbors would damage Congressional attitudes concerning the normalization/Taiwan issue, given sentiments created by the American failure in Vietnam, this largely was not a factor at either the legislative or popular levels. As Carter's press secretary Jody Powell put it once the invasion stated, "the basic US public reaction is that Vietnam deserves to to be beaten a little bit over the head."⁴⁷⁹ While this likely encouraged Deng, he probably left Washington with no

⁴⁷⁷ See *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, p. 707; and Jia Qingguo, "Chinese Relations with the United States," in Vogel *et al.*, *Golden Age*, pp. 120-21. The Third Plenum dropped the "liberate Taiwan" slogan and replaced it with "returning Taiwan to the embrace of the motherland to achieve reunification."

⁴⁷⁸ Li Jie, "China's Domestic Politics and Normalization," pp. 87, 301n63, refers to Deng's statements at this time as the embryonic form of "one country, two systems," while "Deng Xiaoping tichu 'Yiguo liangzhi'" [Deng Xiaoping Proposed "One Country Two Systems"], at http://www.china.com.cn/zhuanti2005/txt/2003-11/22/content_5440658.htm, provides a detailed, if Deng-centric, PRC account of the development of the concept from 1978 to the mid-1980s. Deng is officially credited with the concept, although the reality is less clear-cut. Deng himself later referred to it as an idea "we" came up with; *Deng nianpu*, vol. 2, p. 1122.

⁴⁷⁹ *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, p. 810. Moreover, in his post-Administration observations, Woodcock recalled Deng finding greater sympathy for the attack than he received from Carter from Congress, and would have left the Hill feeling the US government was not of one mind. Woodcock Papers, file no. 21 (April 6, 1982).

sense of the toughening of the Taiwan legislation to come. As the bill worked its way through Congress there were various scares, such as proposals to include a provision for a liaison office in Taiwan, the very proposal Vance had advanced and Deng publicly rejected in 1977.⁴⁸⁰ This was avoided, but when the TRA was signed on April 10, it not only contained a requirement to provide the arms that would sustain the “sufficient self-defense capabilities” that Beijing had wanted to hide, but also other security guarantees for Taiwan, and additional provisions very close to undermining the three conditions.

On the security issue, the TRA imbedded “strategic ambiguity”: the US was not required to intervene militarily if the PRC attacked Taiwan, but authority was granted to resist any force or coercion directed at Taiwan as a threat to regional peace and security. As Mao and subsequent Chinese leaders understood, it was US military might rather than Taiwanese forces bolstered by American weapons that was the ultimate deterrent to “liberation.” With the defense aspects of the three conditions now effectively shattered in US law, the “principled” Chinese position of non-official representation, the “Japanese formula” being the absolute maximum concession, was shattered as well. Of course, there would always be subterfuge in this regard, but it was now written into US law with the requirement to establish an “American Institute in Taiwan,” one that would be staffed by State Department officials formally on leave, with the powers of a *de facto* embassy. Additionally, the Act provided that under US law Taiwan would be treated the same as “foreign countries, nations, states, governments, or similar entities.”⁴⁸¹ Congress was less solicitous of PRC sensibilities than the Administration had been during the end game, or during its efforts to shepherd the Act to conclusion.

⁴⁸⁰ See *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, p. 794.

⁴⁸¹ See the text of the TRA at <https://www.ait.org.tw/our-relationship/policy-history/key-u-s-foreign-policy-documents-region/taiwan-relations-act/>.

As annoying as this outcome must have been for the Chinese leadership, what is striking is the mildness of the Chinese reaction. Before passage of the bill, but with its provisions well known, Huang Hua read a prepared statement to Woodcock declaring great harm would be done to the US-China relationship, and it was incumbent on Carter to insure that nothing in the legislation contravened the normalization agreement of the two governments, a position Woodcock's diplomatic peers in Beijing considered essentially for the record.⁴⁸² After signing the Act, Carter, with some justification, told Ambassador Chai that "Nothing [in the TRA] contravenes the understandings we made to your government"⁴⁸³; after all, the essential deal was that normalization would proceed in its economic and proto-strategic dimensions, but the PRC would not get Taiwan, at least for the foreseeable future. In the PRC, harsh media criticism unfolded for several weeks before fading, but words were only followed up by the most limited action.⁴⁸⁴

Of course, the highest leaders could not ignore the matter, but they were very restrained. Shortly after the TRA became law, in meeting with a Senate delegation, Deng made it clear that the Act "placed a strain on [our] new relationship, and the US was overleading the circuits." But in conversations with Americans, Deng largely ignored Taiwan, being much more interested in pursuing trade and economic matters than the TRA.⁴⁸⁵ In June, the NPC session required a formal statement, and Hua indicated concern in his government work report and hoped the US would not do anything to hamper the return of Taiwan to the motherland, while giving much greater attention to the threat posed by the Soviet hegemonists. Deng referred to Hua's report when meeting with Vice President

⁴⁸² *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, pp. 855, 836-37.

⁴⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 869.

⁴⁸⁴ See Holdridge, *Crossing the Divide*, p. 193. The most notable case of actual action was the cancellation of a port calls by US naval vessels which had been Deng's proposal in the first place. See *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, pp. 844, 873.

⁴⁸⁵ *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, pp. 854, 871n4.

Mondale in August, noting that “We showed great restraint in wording and formulating it that way.” Beyond that, Deng asked for greater US prudence in its relations with Taiwan, noting that stepping over boundaries is hard for the Chinese people to understand: “To be very candid, we have been tolerant on some of your actions, but [if this continues] it will arouse public opinion...” The underlying message, as before, was your requirements are causing us [manageable but significant] domestic problems, and we hope you consider this in any future actions you take.⁴⁸⁶ All of this underlined the essential point, never fully understood by the American side during the normalization negotiations, but subsequently stated privately by Vice Foreign Minister Zhang Wenjin, that strategic considerations were more important for Deng than Taiwan.⁴⁸⁷ We would add that economic benefits were also more important.

While the invasion of Vietnam was the highest agenda item for Deng in Washington, and advancing the normalization process as smoothly as possible was a high priority, the economic benefits of normalization were without question a very significant PRC objective. It was arguably nowhere better reflected than in Deng’s comment when leaving Washington that Third World countries that had aligned with the US were successful in modernizing, while those that had not struggled.⁴⁸⁸ This was in a context where both sides sought to expand and deepen the relationship, with economic issues at the forefront.⁴⁸⁹ The key issues were

⁴⁸⁶ See *ibid.*, pp. 941-42; and *BR*, no. 25 (1979), pp. 12-13.

The most notable subsequent reference by a high official came from Defense Minister Geng Biao during Harold Brown’s January 1980 visit; during that visit, however, neither Deng nor Hua raised the matter. See *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, pp. 1047, 1083.

⁴⁸⁷ Zhang stated that the PRC accepted arms sales for “strategic reasons”; Holdridge, *Crossing the Divide*, p. 185. Cf. above, pp. [144-45].

⁴⁸⁸ See above, p. [22].

⁴⁸⁹ Deng made the PRC’s deepening and expanding objective totally clear in Washington, while US leaders planning for the visit sought to press him on advancing major economic questions, in part to make sure “his” bureaucracy was fully engaged in the effort. See *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, pp. 696-703, 724-25, 729, 731, 732, 736.

interlinked: the unresolved claims and assets issue⁴⁹⁰ which the US regarded as necessary to open the way to full economic relations, a comprehensive trade agreement, and Most Favored Nation (MFN) status required for the PRC to achieve maximum trade benefits. While intrinsically significant on their own, economic questions were inevitably linked to the drift toward a US-PRC security relationship, and the requirements of American triangular diplomacy.

In Washington, Deng skillfully addressed economic issues, notably at his third formal meeting with Carter on January 30, and in a meeting with the US Cabinet on the 31st. In his remarks, he exuded confidence that key matters could be handled without difficulty, accepting some American proposals on the spot. He was well briefed on the issues, clearly understood the obstacles to be overcome, advanced suggestions that would be part of at least one settlement, and pressed for quick action by the US side. In the January 30 meeting with Carter and top Administration officials, Deng immediately responded when the President raised claims/assets, linked it to an overall trade agreement, and proposed a joint US-PRC commission to address trade questions, by accepting the joint commission, and declaring it "will not be difficult to solve the assets question." He went on to say China could sign a long-term trade such as that concluded with Japan, of at least equal magnitude. On claims/assets Deng offered various ideas, one of which became part of the settlement reached in early March. Meeting with the Cabinet on the 31st, Deng pressed Treasury Secretary Blumenthal on the need to solve the claims/assets problem to make trade agreements possible, using the familiar plea

⁴⁹⁰ An issue originating during the Korean War when the US froze American assets of all residents of China, and the the PRC responded by placing all American assets in China under government control. Claims were made by American individuals and companies concerning properties that had been seized. See Richard T. Devane, "The United States and China: Claims and Assets," *Asian Survey*, December 1978.

to consider the matter from a political perspective.⁴⁹¹ Indeed, the Chinese leadership also acted from political considerations, pushing through an agreement as fast as possible in little more than a month.⁴⁹²

When concluding the claims/assets agreement at the start of March, Secretary Blumenthal declared the way had been opened for full economic relations. He also reported to Carter that reaching trade agreements with China did not appear too difficult, with the exception of textiles.⁴⁹³ While that appeared accurate, the path to the agreement signed on July 7 was not without tension, particularly over the textiles issue. A significant consideration was the PRC's lack of familiarity with international trade practices and complications created by US domestic issues, plus the legacy of CCP self-reliance ideology. This caused considerable tension in negotiating the initializing of the agreement on May 14 by Secretary of Commerce Juanita Kreps and Minister of Foreign Trade Li Qiang.⁴⁹⁴ Deng's hand was necessary to break the stalemate. As Kreps put it, his statement to journalists [and surely more direct intervention—the authors] greatly influenced the PRC negotiators, and agreement was reached within three days. Moreover, the State Department report on her mission was very impressed with Deng, noting his clear sense of China's needs and problems, his excellent questions about US commercial policies, his acknowledgment that China would have to adapt to international practices, and his attention to the PRC's ability to pay as a factor in its trade. In addition, Deng

⁴⁹¹ See *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, pp. 774-76, 784; and Edward Cowan, "China Will Pay 41 Cents on Dollar For American Assets Seized in '49," *NYT*, March 2, 1979.

⁴⁹² Stapleton Roy reported on last minute PRC acceptance of changes to meet a US domestic "perception problem," commenting that this was a "considerable personal and political effort" by the Minister of Finance and the leadership. *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, p. 814.

⁴⁹³ Cowan, "China Will Pay 41 Cents on Dollar"; and *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, pp. 839-40.

⁴⁹⁴ Kreps had actually left Beijing before the agreement was initialed, leaving Li to initial it, have it sent to Kreps in Guangzhou for her initialing, but not bothering to travel for the ceremony. Leonard Silk, "U.S.-China Trade Pact Is Initialed," *NYT*, May 15, 1979.

told Kreps that PRC policy was not made by him alone, it was a broad internal consensus.⁴⁹⁵

But economic matters were not divorced from the larger foreign and security policy mix. As noted, the earliest complication concerned Secretary Blumenthal's planned visit to Beijing to reach a settlement on claims/assets, and set the stage for a comprehensive trade agreement. For the US, there were several issues: the stated American disapproval of the attack on Vietnam, the concern of Vance and others to avoid the appearance of support for the Chinese action, and the prevailing wish not to lose momentum in the new US-PRC relationship. The decision was to send Blumenthal as scheduled at a time when Chinese troops were still in Vietnam, but with the Secretary making critical remarks.⁴⁹⁶ The relatively easy economic negotiations were handled by Minister of Finance Zhang Jingfu on the Chinese side, Blumenthal did not meet with Deng, but he did see Hua. That conversation did not deal in any detail with the claims/assets issue, Hua limiting himself to saying the Chinese position had been set by Zhou Enlai during the Mao era, and by Deng in Washington. More attention was given to Vietnam, with Hua discussing the state of play. He reported that China did not plan to go to Hanoi, the conflict would not last long, and, acknowledging US concern about Chinese withdrawal, indicated it would happen as soon as possible. Hua captured the essence of the situation: "we think the US attitude on this question falls into the category of a friendly country expressing concern."⁴⁹⁷

⁴⁹⁵ *Ibid.*; and *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, pp. 878-79.

On the issue of textiles, in early June US Special Trade Representative Robert Strauss concluded that Deng, who sidestepped the issue in their meeting, lacked the clout to make concessions on this difficult internal issue; *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, p. 890. Textile quotas were not included in the July agreement. On the larger question of the extent of Deng's power in this period, see below, pp. [174-76].

⁴⁹⁶ See *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, pp. 809-810, 811; and Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, pp. 413-14.

⁴⁹⁷ Hua-Blumenthal conversation, February 28, 1979; Carter Library, National Security Affairs, Staff Material, East Asia, Oksenberg Subject File, Box 25, Blumenthal 2/79 Trip to China: 3/79.

The much more significant matter, shaped by American triangular diplomacy, was granting MFN status to the PRC. Such status would provide a significant reduction of high tariffs for US trading partners, and in the PRC case involved both US political and legal issues, and the Carter Administration's stated position of an evenhanded approach to both China and the Soviet Union. In December 1978, Carter determined that movement with Beijing must be balanced by similar efforts with Moscow. The legal complication was the 1974 Jackson-Vanik Amendment, aimed at the Soviet Union, banning MFN from countries preventing freedom of emigration, with the political obstacle that any trade agreement required Congressional approval. As Deng's visit approached, the US recognized that MFN was a "major emerging issue" for China, and Deng made the PRC interest clear by arguing that Jackson-Vanik "has nothing to do with China, cheekily adding that if the US wished to import Chinese, he could provide ten million. This underlined the one drastic change from Mao's US policy that, whatever he may have privately thought, Deng had articulated to Kissinger in 1975: "China doesn't need MFN, as long as the Soviets don't get it." For the late Chairman, the economic relationship was a minor consideration, but very quickly following his passing it became a key objective for the top leadership.⁴⁹⁸

The foreign policy requirement for the US was to manage the MFN issue in a manner that would not adversely affect either country, particularly to avoid undercutting the ongoing SALT negotiations with the Soviet Union. This produced a new division within the Administration. At the end of March, Vance and Blumenthal argued for pressing ahead with both China and the Soviet Union, using the evenhanded approach. This became embroiled in a debate between the "evenhanded" concept and a "balanced" version advanced by Brzezinski and Brown

⁴⁹⁸ See Mann, *About Face*, pp. 106-108; and *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, pp. 698-99, 702, 774.

reflecting the significant differences of the two communist nations. On the MFN issue, Brzezinski feared that Soviet international actions could lead to Senate rejection of the status for Moscow, and thus possibly derail any similar effort for China, and thus momentum in the relationship with Beijing. This led to his lobbying Carter for seemingly undefined “flexibility” on MFN for the PRC.⁴⁹⁹

Far more telling than conceptual arguments were unfolding actual events. Carter held back on the July trade agreement, with its promise for MFN, until after the SALT treaty was signed on June 18. Meanwhile, Moscow proved inflexible on the Jackson-Vanik Amendment, although Vance and Blumenthal again pressed for starting consultations on MFN with both the Soviets and PRC in July, with Brzezinski reporting Carter’s approval with the caveat that nothing be done that would jeopardize Senate ratification of SALT.⁵⁰⁰ In Beijing, moreover, the importance of MFN became particularly apparent. Woodcock reported in cables in late March and April that, despite the tension caused by the TRA, Chinese officials, notably Deng, focused on trade issues, emphasizing the importance of MFN for their economic objectives, while repeatedly “hammer[ing] home” the significance of the issue.⁵⁰¹ With both the trade deal and SALT signed, the path to decouple MFN efforts with the Soviet Union and the PRC was open, and became a major feature of Vice President Mondale’s visit to Beijing in August, where he promised to press for Congressional approval by the end of 1979. Deng was delighted, declaring he was especially appreciative of no linkage to the Soviets on MFN in the “list of good news” Mondale brought.⁵⁰² Carter formally proposed MFN for the PRC in October,

⁴⁹⁹ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, pp. 415-17.

⁵⁰⁰ See Fox Butterfield, “Peking Signs Treaty on Trade with U.S., Looks to Tariff Cut,” *NYT*, July 8, 1989; Don Oberdorfer, “Trade Benefits for China Are Approved by Carter,” *Washington Post*, October 24, 1979; and *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, p. 905.

⁵⁰¹ *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, pp. 854, 860-61.

⁵⁰² *Ibid.*, pp. 927-28, 931, 932-33. The Mondale visit, considered in Washington one of the most successful trips by any US leader, also provided “good news” on potential official credit arrangements, reimbursable assistance for various PRC projects (available now that China has been

Congressional approval was secured, and the agreement came into effect in February 1980.⁵⁰³

Apart from the good news on the economic front, according to key NSC staffers, Mondale's visit marked "mov[ing] significantly into the beginning of a genuine security relationship with China."⁵⁰⁴ We will return to the Mondale visit, but given the concern of both governments with the perceived Soviet threat, some sort of security link was always on the cards following normalization. Various factors tempered, but did not prevent, a US drift into deeper arrangements. A practical question was what could the US expect from China in concrete balance of power terms. As the defense relationship accelerated in December 1979 and Harold Brown prepared for a ground-breaking visit to Beijing, Brown in effect mirrored Vance's sceptical views in 1977: "the Chinese are ... a weak power [whose] strategic interests are largely convergent with our own."⁵⁰⁵ Brown had earlier concluded that any leverage from the Beijing connection in curbing Soviet actions "is most likely to be ... Moscow's *anticipation* that it can influence the future course of Sino-American relations."⁵⁰⁶ The triangular approach, moreover, produced dilemmas—how to convince China of US seriousness without creating unrealistic expectations, framing measures to constrain but not provoke Moscow, avoiding being sucked into Sino-Soviet conflict, and finding ways to influence Chinese plans inimical to American interests. At an even more fundamental level, the question

declared a friendly country), guarantees and insurance for US businesses investing in China, licensing high technology sales not licensed to the Soviet Union, and a proposed civil aviation agreement; *ibid.*, pp. 928ff.

⁵⁰³ See Oberdorfer, "Trade Benefits for China Approved by Carter"; and Zhou Shijian, "China-U.S. economic relations: accords and discords," *China Today*, February 27, 2012.

⁵⁰⁴ In a September 4 memo to Brzezinski from NSC deputy assistant David Aaron and Oksenberg; *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, p. 974.

⁵⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 1019. Cf. above, p. [100].

⁵⁰⁶ See the Department of Defense's analysis, attached to Brown's March 23 memo to Brzezinski; *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, pp. 848-49 (italics in the original).

was asked within the Administration of how stable the PRC regime was. Buoyed by the results of the Mondale visit that greatly exceeded expectations, the NSC staffers observed that “we are moving swiftly into uncharted waters with a regime whose credibility and constancy has yet to be fully proven.”⁵⁰⁷

If triangular diplomacy complicated the US pursuit of a deeper relationship with the PRC, Mao’s “one line” concept, so fervently adopted by Deng and accepted by the top leadership generally, albeit with new reservations in 1979,⁵⁰⁸ consistently guided the Chinese approach. It is important, however, to understand the limits of this notional effort to build an international anti-Soviet united front. In Washington, Deng eschewed seeking an implausible formal alliance, only telling Carter that “[we] each should act on the basis of our standpoint and coordinate our activities and adapt necessary measures.”⁵⁰⁹ While implying steps beyond discussions of the international situation, it also indicated China’s insistence on foreign policy independence. What the “one line” policy essentially meant was urging a broad array of countries to adopt anti-Soviet policies, each country doing what it could, but without committing a weak PRC to any specific action. Deng tried to explain to Carter that the Chinese approach involved “down to earth work” such as normalization, although the US was still strongly adhering to triangular diplomacy, the Sino-Japanese Treaty, where Japan clearly rejected an anti-Soviet stance, and the flamboyant prospect of “Wherever the Soviet Union sticks its fingers, there we must chop them off.”⁵¹⁰ The PRC did engage in some cooperative actions with the US, starting in spring 1979 with initial steps toward sharing that would involve American equipment managed by Chinese technicians in China.⁵¹¹

⁵⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 974-75.

⁵⁰⁸ See below, pp. [179-75].

⁵⁰⁹ *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, p. 747.

⁵¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 764.

⁵¹¹ See Ross, *Negotiating Cooperation*, p. 150.

But its only major use of resources in the struggle against hegemony was the lesson given Vietnam. The larger reasons for this action will be examined in our following major section, but it was China's individual enterprise essentially devoid of any international united front. Hua captured the essence of the matter in his meeting with Mondale—"China was prepared to take the risk alone."⁵¹²

While Deng raised military issues in discussions with influential Americans,⁵¹³ the security relationship unfolded cautiously at American initiative, with the US receiving a mixture of PRC chiding for its inadequacy, and enthusiasm for good news. In this process, advances were examples of Robert Ross' emphasis on changing international circumstances,⁵¹⁴ something not convincing as a central factor in normalization, but very much in play in 1979. One of the earliest systematic Administration considerations of a prospective security arrangement came in a March Department of Defense study emphasizing the need for a strategy to deal effectively with the issue. With the Vietnamese lesson in mind, concern was expressed over the danger of Sino-Soviet conflict spilling over, complicating US management of the strategic triangle, and exposing US allies in East Asia. Moreover, strengthening Chinese defense capacity could leave regional allies vulnerable to a heightened Chinese military threat; in either scenario, the argument that normalization promoted regional stability would be called into question. As for Moscow, continuation of the current level of Washington-Beijing cooperation was considered unlikely to elicit a strong Soviet response, but the judgment was that relations in the strategic sphere should only expand in response to Soviet

⁵¹² *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, p. 972.

⁵¹³ Particularly an April 1979 meeting with a Senate delegation where he discussed the purchase of advanced military aircraft, again proposed US navy port calls, and expressed interest in the proposal for a US equipped intelligence facility in China, as long as it was under PRC control and operation. See Tyler, *A Great Wall*, p. 284; Jonathan D. Pollack, "The Opening to America," in Roderick MacFarquhar and John K. Fairbank, eds., *CHOC*, vol. 15 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 452; and above, notes 484, 506.

⁵¹⁴ See above, pp. [98-99].

actions. At the same time, “we can expect the Chinese to make maximum demands ... while being reluctant to give much in return,” and PRC requests and domestic commercial pressures for increased sales of dual-use technology could be expected. The overall tone of the study was a clear if provisional “no” to encouraging rapid Chinese military modernization, and an emphasis on avoiding a drift into a security relationship, even as that drift was under way.⁵¹⁵

These internal ruminations, which also included the spring 1979 “evenhanded” v. “balanced” debate where Brown joined forces with Brzezinski, were pushed forward by Soviet actions, especially in Africa with the involvement of Cuban proxies. An important policy shift occurred in early May during Carter’s meeting with Ambassador Chai where the President insisted the TRA would not effect US policy toward the PRC. Carter indicated concern with Soviet naval facilities in Vietnam, and expressed interest in US ships making port calls in China, an idea initiated by Deng, although such visits were now declared “not yet convenient” due to TRA. Later that month Brzezinski and Chai discussed PRC requests for military aircraft, and in early July after the conclusion of both the SALT and PRC trade agreements, Brzezinski made new recommendations to Carter, proposing to begin consideration of “cautiously” entering into a limited security arrangement with the Chinese. Caution was clearly embedded in the proposal, with Brzezinski stating it “would be foolhardy to rush into a full scale relationship [that] would prejudice the chances for a lasting détente with the Soviet Union.” The key to going forward, as in other Administration discussions, was further Soviet actions, with Brzezinski suggesting a hint to Moscow of what might come through transferring “some ambiguously sensitive technology” to China, with Carter broadly affirming the need

⁵¹⁵ See *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, pp. 843-53.

to indicate to the Soviets that the US may have no choice but to counter their moves. The proposal was limited, but it fed into plans for the Mondale visit.⁵¹⁶

The Mondale trip was an effort to further deepen relations that had reached a new stage. As Woodcock observed in late June cable, the US should aim to consolidate and advance gains “occurring during a year of unprecedented mutual exposure to each other.” Clearly, especially given Soviet activities, the security aspect would be part of this, and Woodcock advised there would be merit in expanding contacts between defense establishments.⁵¹⁷ Of the good news on Mondale’s list, of particular security relevance was US flexibility regarding technology transfers, where the PRC would be allowed transfers denied the Soviet Union, and military-civilian differentiation was increasingly blurred. Deng pursued the question of technology being denied China on the grounds of potential military use, seeking additional flexibility. Mondale replied by noting the restrictions of international agreements and US law, but indicated the US was working with allies to improve China’s access to relevant technology, as well as promising the experts accompanying him would address export licensing laws in order to discuss what could be resolved. He also indicated sympathy for PRC efforts to secure military equipment from Europe, and emphasized that “we strongly believe in the importance of a strong China.”⁵¹⁸

For all the intent to further security relations, and despite Mondale’s comment that the sale of weapons to the PRC was a very important question, Carter’s policy of no US weapons sales to China remained. Arguably, the most important step potentially away from that direction, was implementing

⁵¹⁶ See *ibid.*, pp. 871, 873, 895-96, 974; and Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, pp. 419-21.

⁵¹⁷ *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, pp. 892-93. Mondale’s visit can be seen as the culmination of a bureaucratic ploy developed by Brzezinski and Oksenberg to schedule trips by various Cabinet members in order to create a constructive relationship of key policy makers and major bureaucracies with China; see Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, p. 417.

⁵¹⁸ See *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, pp. 930-31, 937-39.

Woodcock's suggestion of expanded contacts of defense establishments, something more significantly advocated in Washington by Brzezinski in the form of a visit to China by Defense Secretary Brown. This was contentious within the Administration, with Vance initially opposed, but it gained Mondale's support, and approval by Carter. When Mondale proposed a Brown visit in Beijing, it was eagerly grasped by Deng.⁵¹⁹ In any case, the underlying trend toward a military relationship with the PRC drew opposition from prominent supporters of normalization, none more telling than Doak Barnett, Oksenberg's mentor and Brzezinski's colleague at Columbia University.⁵²⁰ Moreover, Brown's trip would be complicated by possible Chinese actions, notably if the PRC carried out a second lesson that they warned Hanoi of in March. The NSC staffers accompanying Mondale speculated that Brown's visit might have to be delayed in that case, while Woodcock questioned the chances of influencing Beijing given the irreconcilable PRC and Vietnamese interests. In the Ambassador's insightful view, US policy was contradictory, thus "our best available course may be simply to mark time."⁵²¹

The second lesson did not happen, but Brown's trip in "January faced the contrary pulls of advancing security cooperation and avoiding too deep a military relationship. In a mid-September memo making his pitch for Carter's approval of the visit, the Defense Secretary proposed an approach largely eschewing the familiar *tour d'horizon* of shared security concerns, instead calling for a focus on the global military balance, specifically the Soviet defense buildup, the strengths

⁵¹⁹ See *ibid.*, pp. 939, 975, 984, 986-88, 989, 991; and Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, pp. 419, 421-23.

⁵²⁰ See Mann, *About Face*, pp. 109-10.

⁵²¹ *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, pp. 976, 992-94. The contradiction Woodcock saw was that official policy advocated a political solution in Cambodia that was unrealistic, and efforts to deter China would be seen as unfriendly, while at the same time expanding relations with Beijing would leave the US vulnerable to accusations of collusion if the PRC attacked again. While Woodcock found Chinese strategy flawed and high-risk, he commented that "Beijing at least seems to have a coherent strategy," i.e., to prevent the consolidation of a hostile regime in Cambodia.

and vulnerabilities of the US military posture, and the appropriate size and characteristics of Chinese military capabilities. He argued PRC receptivity to his visit required a prompt follow up to avoid any sign of timidity, but he did not advocate concrete defense arrangements.⁵²² In a further mid-December memo to the President several weeks before his departure, Brown emphasized the importance of China to the global balance of power. While this had to be managed with great care, he advocated exploiting the ambiguity of US-PRC security cooperation in a more open-ended fashion. This went beyond exchanges of visits by military personnel to more sensitive forms of cooperation. In the extreme case this could be arms sales—something Brown did not advocate, but he argued against “ruling them out unequivocally.” Short of that, “very limited cooperative activities such as further flexibility in the transfer of dual-use technology would indicate to Moscow that the US “*could* do much more if they engage in aggressive or expansionist actions.”⁵²³ The mantra of great caution remained, but the Secretary of Defense was inching toward more direct support of PRC military capabilities.

Everything seemed to change on December 24 when the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in an effort to secure a preferred version of the Marxist regime that had come to power by a coup in April 1978, with Carter famously saying the invasion changed his opinion of the Russians more than anything they had done over the previous two and a half years. Carter’s reassessment included a familiar Chinese theme, that Soviet activities in Afghanistan posed the danger of a future drive south that could reach the Indian Ocean, and thus threaten the world’s oil supplies.⁵²⁴ Brzezinski’s immediate proposal was to support the Afghan resistance

⁵²² *Ibid.*, pp. 984-85.

⁵²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 1018-20 (italics in the original).

⁵²⁴ On Carter’s and the broader US response, see George Uriah, “‘One Major Step Short of War’: Jimmy Carter, the Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan, and the Last Chapter of the Cold War,” Masters thesis, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, 2006, at https://trace.tennessee.edu/utk_gradthes/1825,

with money and arms, alter US policy toward Pakistan to encourage support of the insurgents, and seek to involve China as well.⁵²⁵

A few days later, Brown wrote to Carter about his forthcoming trip. On Afghanistan, he would indicate US intent to force Moscow to pay a high political price internationally, consult on cooperative efforts in that respect, and raise the possibility of joint US-PRC-Saudi action through Pakistan to effect the Afghan situation. Yet in terms of Sino-US relations, everything had not drastically changed, and Brown's agenda was infused with caution, with key objectives outlined in his memo two weeks earlier, before the Soviet invasion, retained. The Secretary argued the need to discourage any Chinese illusions they would receive US arms sales at the current stage. With respect to future US-PRC defense cooperation, he intended to convey that there was ample scope for exchanging views, contacts and some dual-use technology, leaving more sensitive forms of cooperation for circumstances in which mutual security interests were "more directly and ominously challenged." This incremental approach, he argued, was most likely to exert a salutary effect on the Soviets, and to and provide domestic and allied support for Sino-US defense cooperation if it became necessary in the future. Nevertheless, Brown carried instructions for a last-minute major policy change—Carter authorized the sale of "non-lethal" military equipment to the PRC.⁵²⁶

In Beijing, Brown basically followed the script in at least two meetings with CMC Secretary-general and Defense Minister Geng Biao, and individual meetings Zhang Aiping, Deng and Hua. The cautious approach on the bilateral security

especially pp. 16-52. For the PRC view on Afghanistan following the coup, see Huang Hua's May 1978 discussion with Brzezinski, *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, p. 418.

⁵²⁵ Uriah, "'One Major Step'," pp. 38-39. Two decades later, Brzezinski described his advice as, in substance, "We now have the opportunity of giving the USSR its Vietnam War" (*ibid.*, p. 40). The US approach to Pakistan, repeatedly criticized by the Chinese, had limited support for the Pakistanis due to a policy of balancing with India, and opposition to Pakistan's nuclear program.

⁵²⁶ *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, pp. 1025-29; and Mann, *About Face*, p. 111.

relationship was implemented, with Brown insisting that no broad change in technology or equipment transfers was possible, the only way was to tell us what you want, which would be considered on a case by case basis. But the situation had changed due to the Afghan events, and the traditional *tour d'horizon* that the Secretary had sought to minimize was very much on the agenda, with Brown telling Geng that "It sounds as though our staffs wrote the [briefing] papers together." Several things stand out from the several meetings. For all the Chinese rhetoric on cooperating against the Soviet hegemonists, the PRC commitment regarding Afghanistan was minimal both in terms of existing activities and new agreed arrangements. When asked what support China was giving the insurgents and what its future plans were, Geng replied that aid was planned via Pakistan to the Afghan rebels, but it would be a limited amount of small arms and supplies. The main commitment was to allow US overflights of weapons to Pakistan, while at the same time questioning the adequacy of what the US was planning. Deng, as in the past, called on "all of us" to unite against the Soviets, emphasizing that the Afghanistan effort must be more than symbolic and produce a quagmire for Moscow. Yet when Brown asked about PRC plans to provide weapons to the insurgents, Deng avoided answering, instead shifting to Chinese aid to Pakistan and the errors of US policy toward the Pakistanis. Hua, for his part, simply approved "[your] effective measures ... to punish the Soviet Union," blandly stating China would make its own contribution.⁵²⁷

Another aspect of the visit, tangential in terms of its basic agenda, underlined how far apart the two countries were in the underlying basis of their relationship—the seizure US diplomats in Iran. Brown pressed the PRC leaders for support in a UN Security Council vote on sanctions against Iran, but got nowhere

⁵²⁷ See *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, pp. 1040, 1042, 1045, 1052-53, 1057, 1059-62, 1072, 1075; and Platt, *China Boys*, p. 254.

with Deng or Hua in his appeals for solidarity from a friendly country, despite stating how much this meant to Carter personally. The PRC position was understandable in terms of its own foreign policy perspective, as incisively expressed by Hua in his comment that the hostage crisis was not an American-Soviet question as the Iranians strongly opposed the Soviet Union. The Chinese attitude particularly rankled with Brown, who was dealing with requests for American contributions to PRC defense needs. This was noted in the Secretary's report to Carter, but his overall assessment was that the defense relationship was off to a positive but cautious start, with China also wanting to proceed with caution, apart from an excessive desire for technology transfers. Summing up, Brown stated that throughout his visit, he emphasized the US-PRC relationship was a two-way street, even though the Chinese had barely stepped off the curb.⁵²⁸ Building on Brown's visit, the relationship developed further in 1980, notably during a March visit to Washington headed by Vice Foreign Minister Zhang Wenjin, a trusted Deng foreign policy aide, that produced results going substantially beyond what had been achieved in January, and Geng Biao's May visit.⁵²⁹ Yet the relationship remained cautious and tentative; as Deng put it to a visiting delegation of US strategic experts in July regarding cooperation on dealing with opponents, "uniting is necessary, but on concrete questions it is difficult to say."⁵³⁰

⁵²⁸ See *ibid.*, pp. 1062-64, 1077-79, 1082-84.

⁵²⁹ Zhang's visit involved US agreements on sales of a higher range of "non-offensive military goods," detailed discussion seeking consensus on Afghanistan, and agreement on a semi-permanent dialog of senior officials and foreign policy experts; AFP, Washington, March 19 and 21, 1980. On the Geng Biao visit, see Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, pp. 424-25; and *BR*, no 24 (1980), pp. 8-9.

⁵³⁰ "Zhonggong Zhongyang bangongting yinfa guanyu Deng Xiaoping Fu Zongli huijian Meiguo zhanlue yanjiu jigou he fang Hua tuan tanhua jilu de tongzhi" [CCP General Office Issues Notice on Record of Vice Premier Deng Xiaoping's Meeting with Visiting Delegation of American Strategic Institutions] (July 26, 1980), internal Party document, p. 17.

What can be said about about policy and elite politics concerning relations with the US following normalization? Here we simplify the story by focusing on Deng and Hua. Continuity can be seen in the overall picture, with Deng as before taking the lead in dealing with the Americans, and more importantly being the most influential figure in shaping the policy approach. As for Hua, the situation remained difficult for US officials to assess given their limited interaction with him. Moreover, some of those officials tended to expand the sense of his limited foreign role into a belief that he had become a figurehead generally, a conclusion that, as we previously noted, was advanced by Oksenberg. The key NSC staffer reached this conclusion after reading the record of the end of February Hua-Blumenthal meeting, asserting that in this conversation Hua simply echoed Deng's statements, in contrast to the creativity he displayed in his significant May 1978 exchange with Brzezinski.⁵³¹ But repeating what clearly were consensus positions does not make one a figurehead; more importantly, as demonstrated in earlier chapters, in several major unfolding areas Hua played leading roles, notably SEZs in April, and rural affairs throughout the year.⁵³² In any case, the reasons for, and process of, Hua's demise in late 1979-early 1980, which we analyze in Chapter 8, had nothing to do with foreign policy differences, and were simply beyond the understanding of American policy-makers.

In 1979, US decision-makers could not quite make up their minds on how to deal with Hua, in part due to having to respect his official status as the number one Chinese leader, with particular relevance for how a trip by him to Washington and one by Carter to Beijing would be managed, while suspecting Hua indeed had

⁵³¹ For Oksenberg's memo, see *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, pp. 816-17. For the memorandum of the Hua-Blumenthal meeting, see above, note 497. Cf. above, pp. [96, 116-17].

⁵³² See above, [ch. 3, pp. 44ff], [ch. 4, xxx, xxx].

become a figurehead.⁵³³ These suspicions grew in the latter part of 1979, and were confirmed in astonishing circumstances during Hua's meeting with Brown in January 1980. During that conversation, where as always Hua was competent and on message, the accompanying PRC officials, in a totally unprecedented manner, showed great disrespect, exchanging notes, with Zhang Wenjin in disinterested fashion staring at the ceiling, and very few looking at Hua.⁵³⁴ Many parts of the Chinese elite did not understand the broader political circumstances, but these foreign affairs officials did. This was in a period when European leaders like Thatcher and Schmidt were impressed with Hua, and Japanese Prime Minister Ohira meeting Hua in Beijing in December, expressed anticipation of his scheduled visit to Tokyo the following May. Yet when Hua and Carter finally met at Ohira's funeral in July 1980, the meeting was short and perfunctory, as the Americans understood he had lost any real power.⁵³⁵

While Deng remained the key PRC player in Sino-US relations, and was regarded as such by American policy-makers, US understanding of his position, and the Chinese political scene going forward, was again flawed. Ironically, for a group of officials so focused on Deng as the Chinese leader who would facilitate the US achieving its objectives, as in 1978 American leaders and government analysts underestimated his strength. Three factors informed this misperception.

⁵³³ On the respective Hua and Carter visits, see, e.g., *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, pp. 742, 910, 922, 963-64, 1008. An example of the uncertainty of Hua's real status came in the preparations for Mondale's visit, both in that it was as an opportunity to assess his actual authority, and in plans to shape the meeting between the two leaders as more than a courtesy call in order to avoid embarrassing Hua; *ibid.*, p. 914.

⁵³⁴ Oksenberg, who had attended meetings with various important PRC leaders going back to Zhou Enlai, was stunned; interview June 1999. Woodcock also noted the extraordinary behavior; Woodcock Papers, file no. 31 (May 26, 1982).

⁵³⁵ On the regard of the European leaders, see above, p. [8]. On Ohira and Hua's visit, see the record of the Hua-Ohira December 6, 1979, exchange in Beijing, in the Wilson Center documentary collection, "Japanese Documents on China/Sino-Japanese Relations." For the brief Carter-Hua meeting, see *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, pp. 1118-24.

First was the belief that his authority was limited, that there were things where he simply lacked the authority to get things done. The key example was the failure to include textile quotas in the July trade deal. In early June, US Special Trade Representative Robert Strauss reported on his meeting with Deng where the PRC leader sidestepped the textile issue. Strauss concluded the Chinese were never in a position to reach a compromise agreement, and Deng's ability to override others on the matter was reduced by his concern that that he could be portrayed as acquiescing to tough US conditions.⁵³⁶ This view of restricted clout was linked to a second factor, that Deng's perceived pro-US policies more broadly left him exposed to internal opposition. In the textile case, Strauss hypothesized Deng had been hurt by his support of the claims/assets settlement. Moreover, in a manner reminiscent of Oksenberg's November 1978 statement that it was "important to us that Deng should win," Strauss observed that to keep up the momentum in the relationship, "[we must] not further undercut Deng."⁵³⁷ By summer 1979, Oksenberg wrote on Deng's exposure due to his pursuit of the Sino-US opening, while a CIA analysis, with a more sweeping focus, declared that Deng was under more severe criticism than at any time since his return to work, and the period of his personal dominance was ending.⁵³⁸

The third factor in misreading Deng also concluded the Deng era was ending, but from a very different perspective which granted him the preeminent leadership position. This was clearly influenced by Deng's advanced (as then considered) age of 75 in 1979, and thus the sense of a man in a hurry, something

⁵³⁶ *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, p. 890. In our view, Deng's performance here can more likely be seen as due his sharing a consensus position, as he claimed on economic policy generally in his meeting with Kreps (see above, p. [158]), or short of that, to a decision not to spend political capital on a difficult internal issue.

⁵³⁷ *Ibid.*; and above, p. [97].

⁵³⁸ See *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, pp. 904, 916.

reflected in his statements that he only had a few years left.⁵³⁹ A thoughtful assessment came in a cable from Woodcock in August titled “The Post Deng Era.” The Ambassador looked forward to what he hoped would be an orderly transfer of power based on an existing collegial leadership based on Deng’s “new pragmatism.” Contrasting the situation to the post-Mao leadership struggle that almost tore China apart, he believed Deng had started preparing for his departure from active political life by placing his supporters in key positions. While believing there was basic agreement on important policies, Woodcock saw no apparent successor who could provide Deng’s drive and purpose, and thought there would be conflict over removing leftist survivors on the Politburo, but overall no catastrophic succession struggle and a sensible if more ponderous and cautious leadership emerging.⁵⁴⁰ For all the wisdom contained in Woodcock’s cable, notions of an emerging end of the Deng period, coming at a time when he was preparing and implementing plans for an essentially unopposed claim for paramount leader status, was the greatest US misunderstanding of the nature of CCP elite politics.

Notwithstanding this fundamental misunderstanding, the paradox was that by 1979 there were reservations in official circles, including the high-level elite, over Deng’s foreign policy orientation—the sharp tilt to the US, and the rigid rejection of the “hegemonist” enemy, the Soviet Union. We shall return to this paradox in the concluding section of this chapter. Nevertheless, the normalization deal was a consensus at the top that the Standing Committee was able to enforce on the high elite generally. Moreover, while the TRA was a source of unhappiness that

⁵³⁹ See *ibid.*, p. 203. Note also his reference to Hua as a younger leader who could realize the Party’s goals long term.

⁵⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 917-21. Of note, although Woodcock provided no names of Deng’s supporters, he also made no mention of Hua, still officially the PRC’s top leader.

In this context, in 1979-80 the US reportedly sought to broaden its contacts among the Politburo; see Michel Oksenberg, “Reflections on the Making of American China Policy,” in U. Alexis Johnson, George R. Packard, and Alfred D. Wilhelm, *China Policy for the Next Decade* (Boston MA: Oelgeschlager, Gunn & Hain, 1984), p. 80.

stimulated reservations, it apparently only reached serious levels during the Reagan Administration, with many wondering what was the point of accepting arms sales, especially as the rationale that it was a temporary concession no longer had the same force.⁵⁴¹ While Deng, probably truthfully, indicated at the time of the Mondale visit that he had faced, but overcame, resistance to developing security relations with the US,⁵⁴² there is no evidence of a clash in the Standing Committee on this question. On this and other issues, despite the rumblings we will address later, developments underlined Deng's control of foreign policy in the post-normalization period. Speaking of Hua individually, throughout 1979 he took no known steps out of synch with the anti-hegemony approach. As in all other areas, policy was not the issue in Hua's fate. Deng's authority in foreign affairs reflected his responsibilities under Mao, but more fundamentally his status as a key revolutionary in the making of Mao's China. Nowhere was this clearer than in the "lesson" afflicted on Vietnam.

The Sino-Vietnamese War

The war launched in February 1979 was absolutely "Deng's war."⁵⁴³ Emphasizing the extensive opposition to the war both within the PLA and the high-level elite generally, a senior Party historian having impeccable ties to the foreign policy establishment, mused, albeit with undoubted exaggeration, that probably no one truly supported the venture. The same source further pointed to Deng as the unique source of the war, by relaying a credible report that Deng, at an unclear point in time, called in Geng Biao, then CMC secretary-general, and declared he

⁵⁴¹ Interviews with senior Party historian with deep ties to the MFA, February 2009 and March 2017; and interview with senior international relations specialist, February 2009.

⁵⁴² See *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, p. 975.

⁵⁴³ As expressed in the title of Xiaoming Zhang's noted book, *Deng Xiaoping's Long War: The Military Conflict between China and Vietnam, 1979-1991* (Chapel Hill NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2015), and other publications.

wanted to fight a war, leaving a shocked Geng to ask “fight who?”⁵⁴⁴ Deng himself, at a large meeting on the day the lesson began, spoke of the significant reservations within the elite, arguing that careful consideration by the leadership had determined the risks could be managed.⁵⁴⁵ While Deng prevailing over widespread opposition is clear, questions concerning when and why Deng reached his view, and the process of securing agreement, remain to be addressed. But first it is necessary to examine the unfolding of the Sino-Vietnamese conflict from a broader perspective.⁵⁴⁶

The immediate context of teaching Hanoi a lesson was the escalating Vietnamese military conflict with the Khmer Rouge regime in Cambodia, culminating in the Vietnamese invasion on December 25, 1978. This, however, followed a long period of tension between the PRC and Vietnam that began under Mao, and was reflected in post-Mao leadership attitudes that were more widely held than simply being a function of Deng’s dominance in this area. Moreover, in contrast to Deng’s penchant for ascribing post-Mao Chinese foreign policy to

⁵⁴⁴ Interview, September 2017. The account of the Deng-Geng meeting came from the son of a high propaganda official, and was based on the original version of Geng Biao’s memoirs, the specific account being deleted in the published version. Although Geng’s appointment as CMC secretary-general was only formally made in January 1979, following the death of Luo Ruiqing in August 1978, Geng was carrying out the duties of the post no later than November 4. On the general issue of Deng overriding opposition, see above p. 1; and below, pp. [233ff].

⁵⁴⁵ E.g., see above, pp. 1, 153.

⁵⁴⁶ An substantial literature exists on the deterioration of Sino-Vietnamese relations. Among the most notable works are: Nayan Chanda, *Brother Enemy: The War after the War* (New York: Collier Books, 1988); Odd Arne Westad and Sophie Quinn-Judge, eds, *The Third Indochina War: Conflict between China, Vietnam and Cambodia, 1972-79* (London: Routledge, 2006); Robert S. Ross, *The Indochina Tangle: China’s Vietnam Policy 1975-1979* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988); Stephen J. Morris, *Why Vietnam Invaded Cambodia: Political Culture and the Causes of War* (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 1999); Brantly Womack, *China and Vietnam: The Politics of Asymmetry* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Philip Short, *Pol Pot: History of a Nightmare* (London: John Murray, 2004); and Andrew Mertha, *Brothers in Arms: Chinese Aid to the Khmer Rouge, 1975-1979* (London: Cornell University Press, 2014).

carrying out the late Chairman's decisions,⁵⁴⁷ there is no evidence to indicate that Mao's displeasure with Hanoi ever reached the stage of contemplating a major armed attack on China's southern communist neighbor.⁵⁴⁸ In short, vexation with and hostility toward Vietnam was a significant attitude in the higher reaches of the Chinese elite in the mid and late 1970s, although the critical step to war was essentially the project of one man. A major problem for the analysis which follows is that, unlike the decision for war, there is little evidence indicating possible leadership differences on specific measures adopted during the increasing tension with Hanoi, and thus no clarity whether at the Standing Committee or Politburo levels there was genuine consensus, or a process largely driven by Deng.⁵⁴⁹

What broader factors fed into the conflict?⁵⁵⁰ As of April 1975, when North Vietnam decisively defeated the southern authorities and unified the country, and the Khmer Rouge virtually simultaneously seized power in Cambodia, a series of issues had already bedevilled Sino-Vietnamese relations, but these matters did not inevitably lead to the dramatic increase in tension by mid-1978, not to mention the war of 1979. The least persuasive argument highlights historic conflict and wars between the two countries, sometimes characterized as "2,000 years of unfriendly relations," as if this doomed them to future armed conflict. In fact, for 400 years until the intrusion of Western force, Vietnam essentially played by the rules of the

⁵⁴⁷ See above, pp. [1, xxx].

⁵⁴⁸ Arguably, a statement attributed to Mao c. 1975 summed up his attitude, at least at that time: "We should not criticize Vietnam before we can see the post-victory development [i.e., after the April 1975 victory in South Vietnam that unified the country]." Cited from a Taiwan source that cannot be verified; Ross, *Indochina Tangle*, p. 39.

⁵⁴⁹ As noted above, p. 4, information on the Sino-Vietnamese conflict has been very sensitive internally. A leading Party historian who wrote a book on PRC diplomacy that covered the period, reported that although there must have been many Deng comments on the issues, he saw none, was sceptical of the claims of other historians of having seen significant materials, and when his book was republished, all references to Sino-Vietnamese relations were deleted. Interview, September 2009.

⁵⁵⁰ For a concise overview of often cited factors, see Bruce Burton, "Contending explanations of the Sino-Vietnamese War," *International Journal*, December 1979.

Chinese tributary system, acknowledging a conceptual superiority of the imperial court in Beijing, adopting various features of Sinic culture and Chinese patterns of governance, but essentially retaining independence within its own realm.⁵⁵¹ In the late 1960s and 1970s, however, historic conflicts surfaced when relations deteriorated for other reasons, as in Vietnamese newspapers and theatrical productions stressing the threat from the north,, matters affecting public opinion that had been sharply raised by Zhou Enlai and Deng in a meeting with Ho Chi Minh.⁵⁵²

Arguably, the most significant resonance with the past was the Chinese belief that, as the primary regional power, it was entitled to a substantial degree of influence over developments on its southern borders—in the then current situation that no unified Indochinese arrangement inimical to PRC interests was acceptable. Zhou Enlai reportedly addressed the matter directly in a 1971 diplomatic exchange: “we do not want to see any one country of Indochina dominate the others.” This clashed with a fundamental Vietnamese sensibility, as put by Ho Chi Minh in 1966—“nothing is more precious than independence,” and beyond that a sense of a natural role as the leader of the three Indochinese nations. In the 1930s, the Comintern stipulated an Indochinese Communist Party to pursue the goal of establishing an Indochinese Federation, with the Vietnamese comrades taking the dominant role. By 1975, although Beijing would soon harp on presumed Vietnamese intentions to revive the Federation, Hanoi diminished the concept to establishing “special relations” with Laos and Cambodia. This was accomplished smoothly with Laos in the first half of 1977, but a quickly escalating military conflict

⁵⁵¹ See *ibid.*, pp. 701-703; Womack, *China and Vietnam*, pp. 129-33; Morris, *Why Vietnam Invaded Cambodia*, p. 119; and Chanda, *Brother Enemy*, pp. 110ff.

⁵⁵² See discussion between Deng and Le Duan, September 29, 1975, in *77 Conversations*, pp. 192-93.

with the Khmer Rouge regime in Cambodia was an essential cause of the 1979 war.⁵⁵³

Two important aspects of the post-1975 deterioration of Sino-Vietnamese relations were border conflicts and the treatment of ethnic Chinese in Vietnam. Indeed, these were the main issues cited by the PRC to justify the major rupture in relations in mid-1978, but while both issues had emerged before 1975, they were relatively low key, and largely kept out of public attention. Border questions had three aspects: the land borders between Vietnam and Guangxi and Yunnan provinces, demarcation issues in the Tonkin Gulf, and conflicting claims concerning Paracel and Spratly Islands in the South China Sea. In narrow national interest terms, the maritime questions were clearly more important involving unsettled territorial claims (usurped by the PRC in 1974 in the case of the Paracels by seizing the islands from the South Vietnamese authorities), the security of shipping lines, and the economic prospects of offshore oil, but it was the land border that became the scene of violent conflict even before the 1979 war. Before 1974 there were issues, but they had been contained. In practical terms, the joint border demarcation undertaken by China and France after 1895 was not thorough, and subsequently, during the recent 40 years of military struggle, many of the 1890s border markers had been moved. In the 1950s it was agreed that neither side would unilaterally alter the status quo, although it could be reconsidered in the future, and through 1973 differences and problems were suppressed. This changed in 1974, with a limited number of violations or "incidents" reported by both sides; one later PRC account claimed that 100 such incidents, including violence, occurred in 1974,

⁵⁵³ See Morris, *Why Vietnam Invaded Cambodia*, pp. 26-36, 45, 65-66; Chanda, *Brother Enemy*, pp. 117-23, 127; Womack, *China and Vietnam*, p. 178; and Burton, "Contending explanations," p. 712n35.

a number that would expand to 900 in 1976.⁵⁵⁴ In short, with the unification of Vietnam in spring 1975, conflicting positions on the land border existed and “incidents” had occurred. Arne Westad may be correct that, by the end of 1974, Beijing and Hanoi were locked into disputes on the border, but in and of themselves these were not a significant cause of the increasing violence and war that would follow.⁵⁵⁵

As of Vietnam’s reunification in 1975, Hanoi’s treatment of ethnic Chinese residents was considerably less of a bilateral problem than border issues. This should be seen in the context of historic and current suspicion of, and actions against, Overseas Chinese in Southeast Asian countries generally. With the establishment of the North Vietnamese state were handled carefully with PRC agreement. In 1955, the two regimes agreed that Overseas Chinese could retain Chinese citizenship, while being placed under the protection of the ruling Vietnamese Workers Party, and in 1961 the PRC approved a Vietnamese proposal to naturalize all ethnic Chinese. Moreover, most of the Overseas Chinese in the north were employed in industrial, mining and other preferred jobs, thus holding a privileged minority position in the country. Yet as larger tensions emerged in the Sino-Vietnamese relationship, by the early 1970s, Hanoi’s fear of a Chinese fifth column intensified, something clearly influenced by aggressive local Chinese residents during the Cultural Revolution. This led to subtle covert discrimination, such as whispering campaigns and early retirement plans designed to force ethnic Chinese out of office. These developments were not openly contested by the PRC, but notably, in the same period, the Khmer Rouge, starting to emerge as a PRC

⁵⁵⁴ A March 22, 1979, *Xinhua* report of Li Xiannian’s figures purportedly given to Vietnamese Premier Pham Van Dong in June 1977; see Chanda, *Brother Enemies*, pp. 93, 423n33. Other figures are somewhat higher, but still modest; see, e.g., Womack, *China and Vietnam*, p. 181.

⁵⁵⁵ See Burton, “Contending explanations,” pp. 706-708; Womack, *China and Vietnam*, pp. 181-82; Morris, *Why Vietnam Invaded Cambodia*, pp. 172-73; and Odd Arne Westad, “History, Memory, and the Languages of Alliance-Making,” in idem *et al.*, *77 Conversations*, p. 14.

ally, were undertaking harsher actions against Overseas Chinese in Cambodia, again without apparent criticism from Beijing.⁵⁵⁶

While border issues and the treatment of ethnic Chinese unfolded late in the piece and were still low key in 1975, a series of questions concerning Vietnam's revolutionary struggle had roiled the Beijing and Hanoi leaderships over the preceding decade. The paradox is that the common cause of the struggle against the US in Indochina kept the two sides closely engaged despite important specific issues generating bitterness and distrust. China's commitment to Vietnam's revolution was both genuine and impossible to disown. As Mao instructed Zhou Enlai in 1971, "We are not in a hurry on Taiwan was important, but there is a war in Vietnam [that is more important]";⁵⁵⁷ moreover, during the crucial period on Sino-US rapprochement in 1971-73 the PRC increased military aid to Hanoi. But the specific issues where China objected to Vietnamese decisions were major, particularly the 1968 Tet offensive which rejected Mao's protracted war approach for more frontal Soviet-style tactics, and the entry into peace negotiations with the US also in 1968, while expectations of the 1973 Paris accords that achieved the withdrawal of US ground forces were quite different. In addition, the spillover of disruptive Cultural Revolution activities into Hanoi, PRC measures creating difficulties for the transit of Soviet arms, and suspicions concerning motives for the American rapprochement and Nixon visit, while not creating a crisis in the relationship, resulted in deep concern in Hanoi; in 1973, the legendary General Giap

⁵⁵⁶ See Chanda, *Brother Enemy*, pp. 236-38; Morris, *Why Vietnam Invaded Cambodia*, pp. 170-71; Sophie Quinn-Judge, Appendix 2: "Cronology of the Hoa refugee crisis in Vietnam," in Westad and Quinn-Judge, *The Third Indochina War*, p. 234; Wang Chenyi, *The Chinese Communist Party's Relationship with the Khmer Rouge in the 1970s: An Ideological Victory and Strategic Failure*, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Working Paper no. 38, December 2018, pp. 27-31; and below, pp. [217-18].

⁵⁵⁷ Cited in Chen Jian, "China, Vietnam and Sino-American rapprochement," in Westad and Quinn-Judge, *The Third Indochina War*, pp. 52-53.

declared that "we cannot trust the Chinese."⁵⁵⁸ In Beijing, Vietnam's actions were seen as ingratitude for PRC aid and sacrifices that had been crucial to the successes in the war against France and subsequently, and a grating departure from the collaborative discussions which had largely prevailed to 1965.⁵⁵⁹ At the center of China's anger stood the Soviet Union.

While all of the above factors had some relevance to the coming deterioration of Sino-Vietnamese relations, they were all fundamentally derivative. Only two factors can be considered essential for intensified conflicts including armed clashes, and, with Deng's insistence, the 1979 war: first, as an overriding framework for Beijing's interpretation of Vietnam's positions and actions, the Sino-Soviet schism; and second, the evolving deadly conflict between Vietnam and the Khmer Rouge.

In various forms, from the late 1950s to the 1970s, Mao made bitter conflict with the Soviet "revisionists," later turned "hegemonists," the lodestone of PRC foreign policy. Vietnam, although briefly tilting toward Beijing in 1963-64 in response to Khrushchev's détente policy, tried to stay aloof from the conflict, a position reflecting both its version of proletarian internationalism, and a pragmatic approach of trying to balance the two large communist powers, both of whose support was required for its own revolutionary project. There was little tolerance in Beijing for such manoeuvring. Even in 1966, two years before the major conflicts over the Tet offensive and opening peace negotiations with the US, China expressed strong discontent with Hanoi, demanding a clear choice in favor of the

⁵⁵⁸ See Womack, *China and Vietnam*, pp. 174ff; Morris, *Why Vietnam Invaded Cambodia*, pp. 161-62; Ross, *Indochina Tangle*, pp. 22-26; Chanda, *Brother Enemies*, pp. 131-33; Odd Arne Westad, "Introduction: From war to peace to war in Indochina" in Westad and Quinn-Judge, *The Third Indochina War*, pp. 5-6; and xxx, "The Sino-Vietnamese split and the Indochina War, 1968-1975," in *ibid.*, pp. 13-14.

⁵⁵⁹ See Womack, *China and Vietnam*, pp. 174-77; and Fallaci, "Deng: A Third World War Is Inevitable."

PRC, with Deng angrily asking Le Duan “Why are you afraid of displeasing the Soviets, and what about China.”⁵⁶⁰ In the event, a tilt toward Moscow emerged in the late 1960s. Stephen Morris has offered an incisive analysis of various Vietnamese positions in line with Moscow, the most significant being the endorsement of the Soviet crushing of the Prague spring, an event causing great consternation in Beijing. Yet Hanoi avoided taking sides on some of the most sensitive conflicts, and declined to attend Soviet conferences propagating Moscow’s international line.⁵⁶¹ Whatever the tilt, it did not overly endear the Vietnamese to Moscow. Various policy differences and the failure to provide advance warning of major initiatives affecting Soviet interests did not sit well in the Kremlin, leading to a judgment that Vietnam was following a “narrowly nationalistic path.”⁵⁶² Hanoi was saying something quite clear: while we strongly prefer Sino-Soviet reconciliation, we are an independent country that does not bow to anyone.

If the Sino-Soviet schism created the context where unfolding events could badly worsen China-Vietnam relations, the emerging bitter conflict between Hanoi and the Khmer Rouge, including violent clashes before 1975, was the development that ultimately led to the 1979 war. The irony, to adopt Shawcross’ characterization of US Vietnam War policy in Cambodia as a “sideshow,”⁵⁶³ is that the Khmer Rouge was very marginal for both Beijing and Hanoi before the early 1970s, specifically the 1970 Lon Nol coup against Prince Sihanouk’s government that had tolerated Vietnam’s use of eastern Cambodia to resupply its forces in South Vietnam. Although Khmer leaders made occasional visits to the two Asian communist

⁵⁶⁰ See Westad, “Introduction,” p. 5. On the same occasion, Zhou Enlai, backed by Deng, said mentioning Soviet and PRC aid together “is an insult to us”; Nguyen Vu Tung, “Interpreting Beijing and Hanoi: A View of Sino-Vietnamese Relations, 1965-1970,” in Westad *et al.*, *77 Conversations*, p. 57.

⁵⁶¹ Morris, *Why Vietnam Invaded Cambodia*, pp. 143ff.

⁵⁶² See *ibid.*, pp. 198-99, 203-207.

⁵⁶³ In his withering critique of US policy, William Shawcross, *Kissinger, Nixon, and the Destruction of Cambodia* (London: Deutsch, 1979).

capitals, with Pol Pot visiting both in 1965, and apparently securing Mao's approval, overall the two countries had limited contact with, and poor understanding of, the Khmer Rouge. The reason was that until 1970, Pol Pot's organization was a minor factor in Cambodian politics, and even when the insurgency against Lon Nol developed, it was weak militarily. While there were differences in China's and Vietnam's approaches to Cambodia until 1975, at various points both sought to bolster Sihanouk, and provided support to the Khmer Rouge, as in the supply of Chinese weapons through off and on Vietnamese channels. In yet another irony, the Vietnamese military was crucial in undermining Lon Nol's armies, but in refocussing on final push to sieze South Vietnam, the remaining battle in the bulk of Cambodia was left to Pol Pot's forces, which surprisingly attained victory at the same time as the fall of Saigon.⁵⁶⁴

By this time, the PRC had developed closer ties with and support of the Khmer Rouge. While it has been argued that Beijing's backing of the Pol Pot's group was due to its ultra-left orientation during the "Cultural Revolution decade,"⁵⁶⁵ we give much more credence to Cambodia being important as an Indochina nation not under Hanoi's thumb, together with Pol Pot's anti-Soviet orientation. But in terms of what was to unfold, the importance of this quasi-alliance lay in what Beijing (and Hanoi) undoubtedly did not adequately understand—the deep Khmer Rouge antipathy to Vietnam. This was not initially

⁵⁶⁴ See Morris, *Why Vietnam Invaded Cambodia*, pp. 47-51, 56, 60-61, 63-64, 169-70; Christopher E. Goscha, "Vietnam, the Third Indochina War, and the Meltdown of Asian internationalism," in Westad and Quinn-Judge, *The Third Indochina War*, pp. 162ff; Wang Chenyi, *Chinese Communist Party's Relationship with the Khmer Rouge*, pp. 9, 27-28; Stein Tonnesson, "Tracking Multi-Directional Dominoes," in Westad *et al.*, *77 Conversations*, p. 39; and Chanda, *Brother Enemies*, p. 130.

⁵⁶⁵ The case has been made by Wang Chenyi, *Chinese Communist Party's Relationship with the Khmer Rouge*, pp. 3, 24 and *passim*. While we accept that Khmer Rouge radicalism had an appeal for Mao at points in this period, it hardly reflected his basic foreign policy approach which set limited ideological requirements for any country or movement that would sign up to the anti-Soviet cause. Cf. below, p. [xxx].

advertised in party to party relations. Even before 1970, the Pol Pot leadership considered Vietnam an unreliable ally, while critically a September 1971 party congress resolved that Hanoi was the long-term "acute enemy" of Cambodia, and a decision followed to expel all Vietnamese troops and cadres as conditions allowed. In this period the Khmer Rouge also carried out a secret purge of Hanoi-trained Khmer Viet Minh communists, and soon engaged in armed conflict with Vietnamese units. In one of its irrational approaches, Pol Pot's forces moved in this direction at a time of relative disadvantage to Lon Nol's troops, not to mention obvious inferiority to the Vietnamese army. When the Khmer Rouge seized power in Phnom Penh in April 1975, it soon attacked disputed islands occupied by South Vietnamese forces, and repeatedly crossed Vietnam's land border, drawing a swift and vigorous rebuff.⁵⁶⁶

Meanwhile, while the PRC had not directly supported the Khmer Rouge against Vietnam up to 1973, it now extended relations with Pol Pot's emerging regime, from spring 1974 shifting its position from seeking a political settlement in Cambodia to support for Pol Pot's struggle.⁵⁶⁷ This was considerably less than a total embrace, but it drew Beijing deeper into involvement with an unmanageable and horrific entity. Despite subsequent paranoid Vietnamese fears of the Khmer Rouge acting as China's agent, or the PRC's repeated claim that Hanoi was following Soviet hegemonistic plans, Nayan Chanda has captured the reality of the situation in 1975 through to the 1979 war: "Whatever may be the appearance, it is very hard to find real puppets in Indochina."⁵⁶⁸

⁵⁶⁶ See Morris, *Why Vietnam Invaded Cambodia*, pp. 54-57, 59-65; Ross, *Indochina Tangle*, pp. 41-42; Short, *Pol Pot*, pp. 296-98; and Chanda, *Brother Enemy*, pp. 12-14.

⁵⁶⁷ See Goscha, "Vietnam, the Third Indochina War, and the Meltdown of Asian internationalism," p. 172; and Lien-Hang T. Nguyen, "The Sino-Vietnamese split and the Indochina War," in *ibid.*, p. 25.

⁵⁶⁸ Chanda, *Brother Enemies*, p. 7. Cf. below, note 577.

Growing Tensions after the Unification of Vietnam, Spring 1975 to mid-1978. At the outset following the dual victories of the clashing Indochinese communist parties in spring 1975, there were potential dangers for an escalating Sino-Vietnamese conflict, but war was not inevitable. For Hanoi, the priority was the consolidation of power in South Vietnam and national reconstruction; the Khmer Rouge regime was better if not fully understood, and the problem was treated as something that could be dealt with at some undefined later time. Toward China, there was recognition that the pre-1965 days of close cooperation, or even a complementary conception of the regional and world scenes, were long gone, despite a belief that underlying revolutionary obligations still existed, as seen in new requests for aid. For Beijing, the regional situation was acceptable; although Laos would soon be incorporated into a "special relationship" with Vietnam, Cambodia was beyond Hanoi's grasp. And if PRC leaders had correctly read ample evidence from Vietnam, there was no danger that the potential regional hegemonists would carry out directives from the global hegemonists in the Soviet Union. Indeed, the final act of reunification, Vietnam's spring 1975 offensive, was opposed by China, but there is no evidence of close consultation or support from Moscow.⁵⁶⁹ Unfortunately, Mao and his successors either failed to adequately understand this, or as time went on willfully decided to ignore it.⁵⁷⁰ In any event, any "revolutionary" ties to Hanoi were essentially null and void. Yet at the same

⁵⁶⁹ See Chanda, *Brother Enemy*, pp. 133, 176-77. Cf. strains in Soviet-Vietnamese communication in the early 1970s, albeit improving by 1975. Morris, *Why Vietnam Invaded Cambodia*, pp. 203-207; and above, p. [183].

⁵⁷⁰ Chinese claims of Soviet dominance of Hanoi, to whatever extent they were believed in the leadership, were extreme by the time of the 1979 war. In laying out to Carter what what would happen to Vietnam in January 1979, Deng claimed "Vietnam has become totally Soviet controlled," while five months later Huang Hua described it as a "semi-colony and a Russian military base." *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, pp. 767, 897.

time, China's leaders had no interest in a war between the two Indochina states, much less between Vietnam and themselves.⁵⁷¹

Before examining the dangerous but not yet fatal deterioration of the relationship that led to the war of early 1979, an overview of key CCP policy makers is necessary in any attempt to illuminate Chinese decisions before the last months of 1978. However, as indicated, before the end game of late 1978-early 1979, internal leadership discussions, whether within key bodies like the Standing Committee, Politburo or CMC, or in informal exchanges, were and remain exceptionally opaque, even by the standard of the foreign policy sphere. This, however, did not prevent speculation by foreign scholars, generally favorable to Deng. For example, Ezra Vogel suggested that if Deng had not been purged in late 1975-76, he might have been able to avoid a complete break with Vietnam, but by the time he returned to work in 1977 relations had badly worsened.⁵⁷² Other analysts suggested that Deng was restricted by the need to adhere to Mao's line in the the early period of his restoration.⁵⁷³ More interesting are similar views advanced in the period itself by China's protagonists in Hanoi. Operating on the assumption of a pragmatic and moderate Deng, in early 1977 the Vietnamese ambassador in Beijing told his ambassadorial colleagues of expectations that relations would improve with his expected return to office.⁵⁷⁴ Most intriguing was the testimony of Le Duan, ironically in a 1979 internal document issued after the war, which indicated he too had similar hopes in 1977—that Deng would win the

⁵⁷¹ Womack's analysis of Sino-Vietnamese expectations upon the reunification of Vietnam is incisive: although both were suspicious of what the other might do, neither suspected a serious security problem; no one knew exactly what to expect, but zero-sum hostility was not anticipated. *China and Vietnam*, pp. 187-89.

⁵⁷² Vogel, *Deng*, p. 274.

⁵⁷³ E.g., see Wang Chenyi's claim that Deng (and others) "could not afford to 'throw off' the Cambodian burden" given Mao's favoritism for the Pol Pot regime; *Chinese Communist Party's Relationship with the Khmer Rouge*, p. dinner c. 9 pm: salas, veggie lasagn35.

⁵⁷⁴ See Chanda, *Brother Enemy*, pp. 87-88.

power struggle and relations would benefit. Le Duan referred to Deng as someone who “treats Vietnam with great understanding” but had been under pressure from others, in contrast to Hua who “does not understand us.” In a total misunderstanding of the situation, he speculated that Deng’s desire to show he was not a revisionist led him to “let *them* [our italics] go ahead in attacking Vietnam.”⁵⁷⁵

Given the opaqueness of the process, we cannot determine any differences in the views of individual leaders prior to discussions on whether to invade. In any case, clearly the most significant figures were Deng, Hua and Li Xiannian who, as we have noted, had been in charge of economic relations with Vietnam during and since the struggle against the US. We will address three different periods since Vietnam’s unification. First, prior to being pushed aside in late 1975, Deng was the key leader involved in dealing with both Hanoi and the Khmer Rouge, faithfully carrying out Mao’s policies. Li Xiannian was the second highest-ranking official involved, while Hua, in this period of his foreign policy education, also had a significant role, perhaps surprisingly more with Cambodia than Vietnam.⁵⁷⁶ The second phase followed Deng’s essential removal, with Hua taking over in early 1976 as the regime’s interlocutor with foreign leaders, and apparently the most important decision maker except for Mao, with Li Xiannian again of major importance. This period lasted until Deng’s formal return to work in July 1977, and

⁵⁷⁵ See the Introduction by Stein Tonnesson and the document, in “Le Duan and the Break with China,” *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, Issue 12/13, pp. 275, 282, at https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/publication/CWIHPBulletin12-13_p2.pdf. This contrast between Hua and Deng reportedly had been expressed to the Soviet ambassador in Hanoi in October 1977, i.e., before Le had met Hua; Morris, *Why Vietnam Invaded Cambodia*, pp. 181-82.

⁵⁷⁶ While Hua apparently was not directly involved in the key visits of Pol Pot in June or Le Duan in September, he did have a significant role in the August visit of a Cambodian delegation headed by Deputy Prime Minister Khieu Samphan, participating in talks where the Chinese side was led by Deng; *PR*, no. 34 (1975), p. 6. Hua’s only recorded interaction with the Vietnamese was an invited attendance at an April affair organized by the Vietnamese embassy.

most likely several months earlier.⁵⁷⁷ In the tumultuous year of 1976, there is little evidence of Hua's interaction with the Indochinese countries while Mao lived, apart from an August meeting with a Cambodian deputy prime minister, but he held significant meetings with both nations following the arrest of the "gang of four," including a secret visit from Pol Pot in October.⁵⁷⁸

Finally, the third period following Deng's return and well into 1978, clearly saw a major impact by him, even if the specifics remain elusive before the latter part of 1978. Initially, Hua was the main leader in talks with Pol Pot and Le Duan in September and November 1977 respectively, and as tensions rose in mid-1978, he held meetings with significant Cambodian leaders.⁵⁷⁹ In broad terms, what is striking is the basic continuity of PRC policy to the region throughout these three periods, at least until Sino-Vietnamese tensions escalated from early 1978: ongoing dissatisfaction with, warnings to, and measures against Vietnam, but with a degree of restraint and concern over driving Hanoi deeper into the Soviet camp; and a strong tilt toward Cambodia involving various forms of assistance, but mixed with concern over Khmer Rouge excesses, and generally ineffective efforts to curb them.

The headline events in the Sino-Vietnamese-Cambodian triangle following reunification in 1975 were the visits of Pol Pot and Le Duan in the latter parts of June and September respectively. Both leaders were granted audiences with Mao, while Deng was the leading Chinese figure in the business sessions of the the two visits. As noted, a Cambodian delegation led by Khieu Samphan conducted

⁵⁷⁷ Deng was working out of State Council offices from April (see above, [ch. 2, p. 53]), and we regard it highly likely that he had an important input into Li Xiannian's significant June meeting with Vietnamese Prime Minister Pham Van Dong. See below, pp. [199-200].

⁵⁷⁸ On Pol Pot's visit, see Wang Chenyi, *The Chinese Communist Party's Relationship with the Khmer Rouge*, p. 34. Hua met with unnamed Vietnamese leaders in November; *77 Conversations*, p. 193. Cf. below, p. [198].

⁵⁷⁹ In 1978, Hua met with Cambodia's deputy prime minister in charge of foreign affairs on June 14, and with the deputy prime minister in charge of national defense and concurrently head of the army's general staff on July 31. On the 1977 meetings with Pol Pot and Le Duan, see below, pp. [202-207].

important discussions in August, with Deng and Hua the top-ranking CCP leaders involved. Unsurprisingly, there were significant differences in PRC dealings with the two countries, even though considerable efforts were made in public to treat the three Indochinese nations as comradely participants in the victory of US imperialism.

Pol Pot's June visit was unusual for its secrecy which denied him the media attention that far less significant actors gained from highly prized meetings with Mao, a feature surely due to the Cambodian's penchant for operating in the shadows. It is unclear who accompanied him to see the Chairman which apparently did not include Deng, but in any case Deng led the Chinese side in four working meetings during Pol Pot's five-day visit. Very restricted information exists on what transpired during the Mao-Pol Pot exchange, with virtually nothing on what the Khmer Rouge leader might have said. It does appear, however, that Mao stated he was very happy with Deng's work, and directed his guest to Deng if any questions arose.⁵⁸⁰ The Chairman's brief known remarks were rather philosophical, and could be cited as evidence of the ideological basis of the Sino-Khmer Rouge relationship, or as comments misleading the Cambodians concerning how tight any such ties were. Mao repeated his discourse on class struggle as something that went through various phases but would always exist, including the emphasis highlighted in the recently concluded dictatorship of the proletariat campaign on inequalities under socialism. Most striking was his modest advice against completely copying China's experience, with one version suggesting the superiority of Khmer

⁵⁸⁰ According to a senior Party historian, this was conveyed by Pol Pot to Chinese officials he dealt with during his visit; interview, October 2007. For a bare bones reference to the four Pol Pot-Deng meetings, see *Deng nianpu*, vol. 1, p. 59. Deng also accompanied Zhou Enlai in a meeting with Pol, but Li Xiannian and Hua apparently had no contact. Li was involved with several economic matters (*Li Xiannian nianpu*, vol. 5, pp. 410-11), while Hua attended a national railways security conference in his role as Minister of Public Security (our compilation of Hua's activities). Cf. Mao's decision to place Deng in charge of the first front by mid-1975; Teiwes and Sun, *End of the Maoist Era*, pp. 245, 292ff, 306.

approaches to the transition to socialism: "You have achieved in one stroke what we failed with all our masses."⁵⁸¹ Mao seemingly had some fascination with what the Khmer Rouge was doing, asking Le Duan three months later whether Vietnam could have matched Cambodia's evacuation of its cities, following Le's negative response with "We couldn't do it either."⁵⁸²

Whatever the Chairman's musing about the Cambodian revolution and Khmer Rouge methods may have meant, this was not the direction of CCP policy. In August 1974, Mao declared that eight years of Cultural Revolution was enough, and now stability and unity as well as economic revival would become the order of the day.⁵⁸³ In foreign policy, building an anti-Soviet united front of all political colors, not pushing revolutionary endeavors, was the overriding orientation. Indicative of Mao's seeming reservations concerning the Khmer Rouge, views undoubtedly shared even more strongly by Zhou Enlai and Deng, was Zhou's advice to Khieu Samphan, perhaps during the visit of his August delegation, and certainly to Khieu on the occasion of his and Sihanouk's departure to return to Phnom Penh in September. According to Sihanouk, the Premier advised against attempting a revolutionary transformation all at once, advocating a step by step approach. In September, the prince recalled, Mao too spoke for moderation, imploring Khieu to make sure Sihanouk was treated well after his return to Cambodia.⁵⁸⁴

⁵⁸¹ See *77 Conversations*, pp. 191-92; Short, *Pol Pot*, pp. 298-300; and Chanda, *Brother Enemy*, pp. 16-17, citations based heavily on Chinese archival and internal Party. In addition, these works overall make extensive use of Vietnamese documents, archives and publications from other countries, and interviews. They must be used with caution, and we make judgements on the reliability of specific quotations and claims, but we generally regard them as reliable. See "Le Duan and the Break with China," p. 273; and Short, p. 463.

⁵⁸² Short, *Pol Pot*, p. 300.

⁵⁸³ See Teiwes and Sun, *End of the Maoist Era*, pp. 186, 196-200.

⁵⁸⁴ See Ross, *Indochina Tangle*, p. 73; Chanda, *Brother Enemy*, pp. 42-43; and Short, *Pol Pot*, pp. 300-301. Zhou met with Khieu in Deng's company in August, but we have no explicit source that he conveyed this message then. See *Deng nianpu*, vol. 1, p. 82.

The actual PRC agenda was best revealed in the working meetings led by Deng in June and August. During Pol Pot's visit, picking up on Cambodian requests for military supplies made just after the April revolutionary success, Deng promised free military equipment, with China not interfering in how it was used. Concrete support was further committed during the August visit of Khieu Samphan, with China agreeing to US \$1 billion in economic aid, the single largest aid pledge in PRC history at the time. Movement continued in the military realm with Khieu, notionally the Cambodian military's Commander-in-Chief, and the delegation including army Chief-of-Staff Son Sen; on the Chinese side Deng himself was PLA Chief-of-Staff, and the preeminent figure on the CMC after Mao himself. In the following months, GSD deputy head Wang Shangrong conducted investigations of Cambodia's military needs, and led the negotiations resulting in a February 1976 agreement. The apparent aim of these efforts was to promote a transition from a guerrilla force to a more conventional army to defend the country, not to stimulate a confrontation with Vietnam.⁵⁸⁵ At the same time, the presentation of the August Sino-Cambodian meetings was deceptive regarding the actual Chinese view of the regional situation, notably the mantra of revolutionary victories by the three Indochinese countries, and warmly welcoming Vietnam's reunification. There were, however, some not overly subtle stings in the tail: Deng's banquet speech cited the revolutionary struggle against "imperialism, colonialism and *hegemonism* [our emphasis]," with the other [Soviet] superpower seizing the opportunity to interfere in the affairs of the region. Khieu, for his part, after claiming Cambodia's firm unity with the fraternal Vietnamese and Lao peoples, emphasized the strategic principle of non-interference in relations with its neighbors.⁵⁸⁶

⁵⁸⁵ See Short, *Pol Pot*, pp. 301-302, 499; Chanda, *Brother Enemy*, pp. 17-18; and Mertha, *Brothers in Arms*, p. 5.

⁵⁸⁶ See *PR*, no. 34 (1975), pp. 6ff, especially 8, 10, 11-12.

While the misleading mantra of the the three fraternal Indochinese parties continued in public presentation during the visit of Vietnamese leader Le Duan in September, the tone and substance of the interactions were far different. The underlying tension was apparent at the welcoming banquet, with Deng restating the anti-hegemony line, while Le Duan ignored it, instead praising the assistance of “other fraternal socialist countries,” which of course included the Soviet Union.⁵⁸⁷ In his meeting with Mao on September 24, Le Duan, who regarded seeking aid as an important goal of the trip, had an early indication he would not get too far, with the Chairman asserting “you are not the poorest under heaven, we are the poorest.” In this encounter, Mao famously asserted the then understood political situation in Beijing, pointing to Deng as the “only [leader] young and strong” enough to take charge.⁵⁸⁸

During working meetings on September 23 and 24, Deng raised the issue of Vietnamese media accounts of the “threat from the north,” asserting this tendency was getting worse. Deng further complained that Vietnam was stirring up border problems, and allowing Soviet aid to influence its foreign policy, while lecturing his guest on Mao’s “Three Worlds” theory.⁵⁸⁹ The working sessions discussed the international situation, economic aid, where Li Xiannian played a key role, and border problems. On the latter, Deng indicated maritime issues would have to be settled through discussion, and negotiations were scheduled to begin in October. On the 25th, with Deng and Le Duan present, agreements were signed

A second deceptive aspect of the presentation was to treat the delegation as representing the Royal Government of the National Union of Cambodia headed by Sihanouk, which had been formed as a resistance force after the Lon Nol coup, but had been supplanted as the leading force by the Khmer Rouge. This treatment, however, reflected a continuing Chinese interest in Sihanouk as a possible moderating factor in Cambodia.

⁵⁸⁷ See *PR*, no. 39 (1975), pp. 3-7, 10-13, especially 11, 13; and Chanda, *Brother Enemy*, pp. 26-27.

⁵⁸⁸ *77 Conversations*, p. 192; and Short, *Pol Pot*, p. 303.

⁵⁸⁹ *77 Conversations*, pp. 192-93; and Short, *Pol Pot*, p. 303. *77 Conversations* erroneously dates Deng’s remarks as occurring on September 29, after Le Duan had left Beijing.

for an aid package covering a small interest-free loan, and a protocol on the supply of general goods to Vietnam in 1976. Yet Le Duan, who had hoped the trip would improve Sino-Vietnamese relations while allowing Hanoi to maintain an independent stance between Beijing and Moscow, claimed no serious discussion of important political questions had taken place. In the event, the angry Vietnamese leader refused to issue a joint communique, and left Beijing without hosting the traditional return banquet.⁵⁹⁰ This undiplomatic departure is an indication that the unravelling of the relationship had more than a little to do with Le Duan's limitations as a leader,⁵⁹¹ although in the case of the September 1975 summit, Le's Chinese counterparts had created a difficult situation for him.

As we have argued, in tandem with the framing factor of Sino-Soviet conflict, Vietnamese-Cambodian relations were crucial to the downward spiral, eventually leading to the 1979 war. In 1975, these relations also exhibited a degree of calculated faux revolutionary comradeship. This occurred in the context of Cambodia seizing disputed islands administered by the South Vietnam regime in the Gulf of Thailand immediately following the twin victories of April. This was followed by a sharp military rebuff which convinced Pol Pot some conciliatory measures were required, and he travelled to Hanoi in June full of praise of Vietnam's contribution to the revolution's success in Cambodia, and proposed the two countries conclude a Friendship Treaty. That did not happen, but in August Le

⁵⁹⁰ See *Deng nianpu*, vol. 1, p. 102; *Li Xiannian zhuan*, vol. 2, p. 917; *PR*, no. 40 (1975), p. 9; Morris, *Why Vietnam Invaded Cambodia*, pp. 173-74; Chanda, *Brother Enemy*, pp. 26-28; and Short, *Pol Pot*, pp. 302-303. Hua apparently played no part in Le Duan's visit.

⁵⁹¹ By the early 1990s, private Vietnamese sources were blaming Le Duan for the country's pro-Soviet tilt; see Carlyle A. Thayer, "Sino-Vietnamese Relations: The Interplay of Ideology and National Interest," p. 527. We would not necessarily go that far, given the difficulties created by PRC policy, but there are cases, which we will note, where under his leadership Vietnam overestimated its position. Le Duan also cultivated a tough reputation, as in his not totally convincing claims of standing up to Mao in personal exchanges; see "Le Duan and the Break with China," pp. 277-78, 281, 286.

Duan paid a return visit to Phnom Penh. Vietnam now took the step of returning one disputed island, releasing captured Cambodian soldiers, and Le signed a joint communique agreeing to settle differences peacefully. More important, the remaining Vietnamese troops in Cambodia left the country by the end of September, while armed clashes essentially stopped. At the end of 1975, the Khmer Rouge had bought time, while Le Duan and his colleagues, shifting their focus to consolidating the new territories in South Vietnam, concluded relations were “slowly improving,” and the alliance remained intact. Clearly, Hanoi still had not understood the depth and potential recklessness of the Pol Pot regime’s anti-Vietnamese hostility.⁵⁹²

Over the next year and into the early months of 1977, that is, the period when Deng had been pushed aside, placed under house arrest, and before his effective return to office, the underlying tensions in Vietnamese-Khmer Rouge relations increasingly came to the surface. The borders between the two countries were a key issue, but the Cambodians indefinitely suspended negotiations in May 1976. It is important to note that from a Cambodian nationalist perspective, not to mention the Khmer Rouge view, this border was very different from the Sino-Vietnamese one which Beijing and Hanoi basically accepted, subject to minor adjustments. In the Indochinese case, during the imperial and French colonial periods, Cambodia had lost large swathes of territory to Vietnam, leaving a sense of national resentment, as well as ethnic populations on the wrong side of the border. The latter problem had been manifest in 1975, with over 150,000 Vietnamese in Cambodia forced back to Vietnam, thus adding another burden to the reunified state, while thousands of Cambodians, who had fled the Khmer

⁵⁹² See Short, *Pol Pot*, pp. 296-98; and Sophie Quinn-Judge, Appendix 1: “The Third Indochina War: chronology of events from 1972 to 1979,” in Westad and Quinn-Judge, *The Third Indochina War*, p. 231.

Rouge advance, were returned to the tender mercies of Pol Pot's forces. Now in 1976, the recent calm in border areas faded, with largely Cambodian initiated clashes between the two militaries, clashes that intensified significantly in the early months of 1977.⁵⁹³

The basic problem was the Khmer Rouge's deep-seated suspicion and hatred of Vietnam, something already seen in the 1971 resolution that Hanoi was the long-term "acute enemy," followed by a decision calling for expelling all Vietnamese troops and cadres as conditions allowed, and of course the removal of 150,000 Vietnamese from Cambodia following the seizure of power in April 1975. Pol Pot returned to the basic theme in 1976, in December adopting Marxist terminology to characterize the relationship as a "constant, antagonistic contradiction," while calling for long-term preparations for war.⁵⁹⁴ The most chilling manifestation was the regime's internal purges that began during the pre-victory struggle largely in less bloody fashion, but began to take on wider and more brutal features in 1976. While other factors were involved, ridding Cambodia of Vietnamese influence was central. During this year executions reached higher levels of the Khmer Rouge organization, military commanders, and regional zone leaders, and by autumn Pol Pot was conducting a merciless purge of all potential Vietnamese sympathizers that could be found. These included Cambodian communists who had fought with the Viet Minh, Cambodian cadres trained in Hanoi, those with personal connections to ethnic Vietnamese, and those judged to have fought inadequately in clashes with Hanoi's forces. In March 1977, the month before Deng's *de facto* return to work, Pol Pot's purge morphed into an effort to exterminate all Vietnamese remaining in Cambodia, and was linked to a decision

⁵⁹³ See Short, *Pol Pot*, pp. 298, 372; Quinn-Judge, Appendix 1, pp. 231-32; and Chanda, *Brother Enemy*, pp. 49ff, especially the maps at 50 and 55, 115-17.

⁵⁹⁴ See Short, *Pol Pot*, p. 363; and above, p. [184].

to go on the offensive and attack Vietnam. On April 30, Cambodian units crossed into Vietnam in force, leaving hundreds of local inhabitants dead, and their villages in flames.⁵⁹⁵

In one sense, there was little change in the overall PRC approach to the Indochina combatants from the time Deng was pushed aside in late 1975, to his return in spring 1977. With Vietnamese reunification, the Khmer Rouge was no longer a sideshow in China's regional policy, or as Andrew Mertha has put it more precisely, Beijing had moved on to a more extensive involvement than simply "graft[ing] its strategic interests onto the political evolution of [Pol Pot's organization],"⁵⁹⁶ and this continued. The undertakings of 1975 progressed in 1976, with economic aid and Chinese experts arriving in Cambodia, the military agreement signed in February, defense training and projects started, and significant hardware committed. In addition, Chinese rhetorical support continued, with Mao and then Hua, hailing the formation of the Democratic Kampuchea government under Pol Pot in April for resolutely defending Cambodia's independence. Yet there were underlying tensions. The new government was a break from the previous arrangement highlighting Sihanouk, who was now forced to resign, which the PRC had favored, even though it was only a formality. As Mertha has demonstrated, the influence of Chinese advisers varied by sector, with defense the greatest area of Cambodian resistance. With regard to of the location

⁵⁹⁵ Short, *Pol Pot*, pp. 238, 253, 260, 339, 358-59, 361-63, 368, 452-53. See also Chanda, *Brother Enemy*, p. 86; Mertha, *Brothers in Arms*, pp. 95-96; Morris, *Why Vietnam Invaded Cambodia*, p. 114; and Edward C. O'Dowd, *Chinese Military Strategy in the Third Indochina War: the Last Maoist War* (London: Routledge, 2007), pp. 35-36; and Quinn-Judge, Appendix 1, p. 232.

⁵⁹⁶ See Mertha, *Brothers in Arms*, pp. 3-4. We would differ, however, from Mertha's view that after 1975, China's ability to modify an increasing embrace of a "Faustian bargain" with the Khmer Rouge decreased significantly, in effect leaving the PRC the subordinate party in the relationship. As we indicate, and Mertha acknowledges, Beijing had agency for a different course; moreover, in the ultimate case, it denied the Khmer Rouge what it most desperately needed. See below, pp. [xxx, xxx, xxx].

of a key airfield constructed with PRC management and technical assistance, Beijing preferred a location less vulnerable to Vietnamese power, and less provocative to Hanoi, but the Khmer Rouge leadership insisted on a position close to Vietnam's border, and China complied. Moreover, Chinese leaders who visited Cambodia had reservations, as in the end of 1976 and start of 1977 trip of Fang Yi who oversaw foreign aid, with Fang, although publicly praising the relationship and concluding a new aid agreement, privately observing that Cambodia had gone to extremes in pursuing self-reliance.⁵⁹⁷

There were other aspects affecting the relationship that were more serious. The overarching problem was the horrific nature of the Khmer Rouge regime which in key respects began to accelerate in the latter part of 1976. We will return to the question of how much Chinese leaders understood of what was transpiring in Cambodia, and what, if anything, they did about it. Here we only claim that they already knew enough to consider, or should have considered, that their commitment was a risky undertaking, and did little to curb the worst Khmer Rouge excesses.⁵⁹⁸ But importantly, there were also concerns on the other side of the relationship. At the start of 1976 a Cambodian foreign ministry official spoke of the need to "watch out for China," claiming that the PRC "wants to make us its satellite," a concern reflected in Pol Pot's emphasis on joint projects contributing to Cambodian self-sufficiency and interests, not Beijing's.⁵⁹⁹

Such suspicions were linked to the unfolding of the intense CCP leadership struggles of the last months of Mao's era, and the strong appeal of China's radicals for the Khmer Rouge. Zhang Chunqiao's secret visit to Phnom Penh in April 1976 seemingly produced a common view of enemies within the respective parties, on

⁵⁹⁷ See Mertha, *Brothers in Arms*, pp. 5-6, 9-10, 79ff; Chanda, *Brother Enemy*, pp. 18, 79; Ross, *Indochina Tangle*, p. 109; and Quinn-Judge, Appendix 1, p. 232.

⁵⁹⁸ See below, pp. [208-209].

⁵⁹⁹ See Mertha, *Brothers in Arms*, pp. 77, 84-85.

this occasion highlighting Deng who had just been removed from his last posts as a consequence of the first Tiananmen incident.⁶⁰⁰ Already concerned by Mao's death, Hua's arrest of the "gang of four" in October understandably came as a shock and cause for fear to Pol Pot and associates. The Cambodian foreign minister was quickly dispatched to Beijing, and Pol Pot himself followed soon followed, after expressing support of Hua's action against the "gang." In return, Hua greeted him with a speech praising the Cambodian victory of April 1975. Their talks, which included Li Xiannian, covered military cooperation and political ties, but no details are available. In any case, they were seemingly sufficient to restore Pol Pot's confidence in the essential Khmer ally. What Hua and Li understood from their encounter with the Khmer Rouge leader is unclear, particularly if it had dealt with the increasing violence in Cambodia, but clearly at this juncture there was little appetite to reconsider Mao's commitment.⁶⁰¹ In any case, what is clear is that neither accelerating purges nor attacks on Vietnam were seen as in China's interests. This was clearly indicated internally by Huang Hua following the brutal attack of April 30, 1977: "[the conflict between Hanoi and Phnom Penh is] trouble for them and trouble for us ... If our handling is not right, we will find ourselves in a dilemma."⁶⁰²

⁶⁰⁰ See Short, *Pol Pot*, pp. 357-58. On the Tiananmen incident and the broader elite political struggle in Mao's last months, see Teiwes and Sun, *End of the Maoist Era*, ch. 7.

⁶⁰¹ See Short, *Pol Pot*, pp. 362-63; *Li Xiannian nianpu*, vol. 5, p. 452; and Chanda, *Brother Enemy*, pp. 77-78.

⁶⁰² Short, *Pol Pot*, p. 375. Short does not provide a source or precise date, but implies it occurred in July. This is consistent with Huang's internal July speech where he took a reasonably balanced view of the conflict, albeit overlaid with anti-Soviet rhetoric, yet pledged all possible assistance to Cambodia. See Huang Hua, "Problems with Indochina, Albania, and Yugoslavia (excerpts) (July 30, 1977), in King C. Chen, ed., *China and the Three Worlds: A Foreign Policy Reader* (New York: Routledge, 1979), pp. 268-74; and Morris, *Why Vietnam Invaded Cambodia*, p. 183.

Meanwhile, PRC policy toward Hanoi continued along the same track of strained relations after Deng was moved aside at the end of 1975.⁶⁰³ Here it is important to note the contributing factor of Le Duan and the Vietnamese leadership. Following Le's undiplomatic departure from Beijing in September 1975, in the next month he travelled to Moscow and secured a pledge of long-term aid, something understandable given the drying up of Chinese aid, but still provocative, interpreted by at least some in Beijing as "surrender to hegemonism."⁶⁰⁴ More broadly, as observed by various analysts,⁶⁰⁵ after completing the defeat of the US, Hanoi had a burst of overconfidence about what could be achieved, as in seeking both Chinese and Soviet aid. Another example, one that at least in theory could have eased Sino-Vietnamese tension by reducing Hanoi's need for Moscow's economic support, was the botched normalization of relations with the US, and thus enhanced potential access to the international capitalist system, since unrealistic demands cruelled the possibility.⁶⁰⁶ Other instances of ineptitude were the refusal to take up Beijing's offers of negotiations on the two nation's land border,⁶⁰⁷ and new internal measures directed against ethnic Chinese residents,

⁶⁰³ Under pressure in fall 1975, Deng began to resign his posts one by one. The last responsibility to be held, with Mao's approval, was for foreign affairs until the April 1976 Tiananmen incident, but *de facto* responsibility had passed to Hua early in the year, and was formally granted in May. See Teiwes and Sun, *End of the Maoist Era*, pp. 405, 412, 414n75, 429-30, 433, 436, 440, 491-92, 516, 517n131.

⁶⁰⁴ On Le Duan's Moscow trip, see Chanda, *Brother Enemy*, p. 28; and Short, *Pol Pot*, p. 303.

⁶⁰⁵ E.g., see Chanda, *Brother Enemy*, pp. 24, 134; and Womack, *China and Vietnam*, p. 188.

⁶⁰⁶ Vietnam initially sought reparations from the Ford Administration, and subsequently aid from the Carter Administration, which came into office with a genuine interest in normal relations with Hanoi, and at a time of PRC approval of the prospect. By 1976, Vietnam's interest in access to the international capitalist market was manifest with an IMF delegation coming to Hanoi in December, and in a flexible and pragmatic investment code. See Chanda, *Brother Enemy*, pp. 136-60, 183; Ross, *Indochina Tangle*, pp. 15, 89-90, 120-21; Short, *Pol Pot*, p. 373; and *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, p. 24.

⁶⁰⁷ See Ross, *Indochina Tangle*, pp. 37-38. The offer came as Hanoi was approaching victory in South Vietnam, and rejected on the basis of the work that would have to be done in the south. Assertedly, Vietnam rejected a series of further Chinese offers to negotiate, only agreeing in late 1977 to start discussions, but rejecting any PRC deviations from its own approach. Ross, p. 243. In addition, in

which drew the first formal PRC complaints in February 1976.⁶⁰⁸ Finally, Hanoi's proposal for an Indochinese summit in early 1977 was a non-starter, given Pol Pot's fear of domination under a revived Indochinese Federation, and Beijing's clear preference for an area of substantially independent countries, not an entity under Vietnam's control.⁶⁰⁹

However one might judge Vietnam's actions, in 1975, and earlier, the PRC repeatedly lectured Hanoi concerning its relations with the Soviet Union, and the sharp decline in aid plus support of the Khmer Rouge in 1976 could only hinder any possible reconciliation. Hua, as the replacement for Deng in dealing with foreign visitors, could only repeat the perspective of Mao's Three Worlds theory that Deng had raised to Le Duan, although he would have no face to face contact with Vietnamese leaders while Mao was alive. It should be noted, of course, that in this very last period of Mao's life there were many more pressing domestic matters than Indochina or foreign policy generally to be dealt with. Mao's death, however, created hope in Hanoi for positive changes in the relationship, as seen in feelers for possible aid that were ignored and then formally rejected in early 1977, and the CCP did not send representatives to the Vietnamese Workers Party's Fourth Congress in December 1976. Yet there was an elusive indication of concern with how far Sino-Vietnamese relations had deteriorated in Hua's November statement to unnamed Vietnamese leaders that, while China had chauvinist cadres,

1976 Vietnamese militia and police allegedly attacked Chinese work crews repairing railway tracks on the Sino-Vietnamese border; Alexander Woodside, "Nationalism and Poverty in the Breakdown of Sino-Vietnamese Relations," *Pacific Affairs*, Autumn 1979, p. 382.

⁶⁰⁸ Vietnamese actions begun in 1976 included enforcing Vietnamese citizenship on ethnic Chinese despite the arrangements of the 1950s, banning them from certain occupations, resettling in more remote areas, and the effective closing down of Chinese social organizations. See Morris, *Why Vietnam Invaded Cambodia*, pp. 175-79; Woodside, "Nationalism and Poverty," p. 382; and Chanda, *Brother Enemy*, p. 17.

⁶⁰⁹ See Chanda, *Brother Enemy*, pp. 84-86, 132-35; and above, p. [179].

"this is not the policy of Chairman Mao and of the CCP Central Committee."⁶¹⁰ In any case, the perceived Soviet-Vietnam tie remained the core of Beijing's Indochina policy.

In the context of late 1976, as well as before and after, this reflected an inability or unwillingness to adequately appreciate Hanoi's efforts to steer a course between Beijing and Moscow in its own often grating way. At the December Vietnamese Party Congress that the CCP boycotted, those regarded as pro-China were removed from the leadership. But it was not a meeting to give much solace to the Soviet delegation. Various Soviet positions were ignored, the Eurocommunist Italian and French parties, then betes noires of Moscow, received considerable attention, and chief Soviet propagandist and Politburo member Mikhail Suslov departed the gathering early. It was also the period when Vietnam rejected pressure to join COMECON, the economic organization of the Soviet bloc. The obligations of revolutionary victory had ongoing significant costs for Moscow to its annoyance. As a Soviet official had already commented in fall 1975: "we don't see how we can say no. These bastards are beginning to act as though they had done it all themselves and now we owe them the moon."⁶¹¹

We do not dissent from the views of some analysts that Hua, like Deng subsequently, was inhibited from altering Mao's line, but we do not believe this was linked in any way to a leadership power struggle as sometimes asserted.⁶¹² As

⁶¹⁰ 77 *Conversations*, p. 193. This simple statement is all that is available from this November 22 encounter. These visitors probably included Vice Prime Minister Do Muoi in a reportedly cordial meeting. Another positive signal was the CCP's message to Vietnam's Fourth Congress in December (see Ross, *Indochina Tangle*, pp. 100-101), but it is important to remember that even Hanoi and the Khmer Rouge could exchange fraternal greetings in the early post-April 1975 period. On the other Sino-Vietnamese developments at the end of 1976-start of 1977 noted here, see Chanda, *Brother Enemy*, pp. 87-89.

⁶¹¹ Chanda, *Brother Enemy*, p. 177. For the events of late 1976, see Chanda, pp. 182-86; Morris, *Why Vietnam Invaded Cambodia*, pp. 180, 194; and Ross, *Indochina Tangle*, p. 257.

⁶¹² E.g., see Ross, *Indochina Tangle*, pp. 103, 113-14, 257; Chanda, *Brother Enemy*, pp. 89-90, 276; and above, note 581.

we have argued throughout this book, changing Mao's policy settings was a delicate matter, and other areas had a higher priority in this regard. This dovetailed with the fact that the late Chairman's views on the international situation had widespread acceptance by post-Mao leaders, arguably none more so than the soon to return Deng. As he returned to work in April 1977, some of the fundamental assumptions of that approach were theoretically open to recalibration. One was whether Vietnam's fierce independence could be leveraged to keep it detached from Moscow's grasp. Another was the matter posed by Huang Hua concerning whether the potential dilemma created by the escalating Vietnam-Khmer Rouge conflict could be managed. The horror of the invasion of April 30 should have emphasized the dangers of support for Pol Pot. Moreover, the fact that the deeply angered Vietnamese showed restraint—after bombing raids at the border in May, Hanoi proposed talks to end the bloody incidents which Pol Pot essentially rejected—suggested engaging Hanoi on the problem. Indeed, as the border tensions continued to intensify, apparently in July the PRC declared its desire for the two sides to stop fighting, and offered its good offices to facilitate negotiations. In stating this, however, Beijing went on to oppose any attempt by "revisionist social imperialism" to invade Cambodian territory. A cautious effort to dampen down conflict on the Cambodian-Vietnamese border was thus hobbled by the dictates of the Sino-Soviet divide, and nothing came of the good offices proposal.⁶¹³

This situation was unfolding by the time Deng informally returned to work in April, and was basically clear when the first major PRC-Vietnam leadership meeting since 1975 took place on June 7-10 with the visit of Prime Minister Pham Van Dong. Hua had a "cordial and friendly conversation" with Pham on the 8th, but

⁶¹³ See Short, *Pol Pot*, pp. 372-75; Morris, *Why Vietnam Invaded Cambodia*, p. 183; and above, note 610.

Li Xiannian was the visitor's main interlocutor. There is no record of Deng meeting Pham; however, we find it implausible that, given his extensive involvement in prior Sino-Vietnamese negotiations, Deng was not involved in formulating the PRC's position. Unfortunately, as with other events well into 1978, there is no evidence on what might have been said among the key Chinese leaders. But according to the brief accounts of the Li-Pham exchanges, Li essentially presented a list of grievances expanding on what Deng had raised in 1975. Of course, the central concern in Beijing was the Hanoi-Moscow relationship, and in the immediate context this was even more vexing in that Pham had just completed a visit to the Soviet Union, where long-term military and economic aid was announced. The grievances Li cited included disrupting the land border, clashes at the border involving the Sino-Vietnamese railway that apparently had escalated in May,⁶¹⁴ creating disputes over South China Sea islands and the maritime border, the treatment of Overseas Chinese, and the use of historical issues for anti-China propaganda. Li further stated China was in no position to provide new aid, and he would not discuss the matter. What is striking, is that none of the brief accounts of these discussions refer to the Khmer Rouge-Vietnam conflict, which would become the *casus belli* of the 1979 war.⁶¹⁵

The next (and final) ostensibly "cordial" PRC-Vietnamese leadership meeting occurred in Beijing in November, two months after a grand welcome for Pol Pot in

⁶¹⁴ See Pao-min Chang, *The Sino-Vietnamese Territorial Dispute* (New York: Praeger, 1986), pp. 35, citing an early 1979 PRC report that Hanoi sent 500 troops to the Sino-Vietnamese border to attack Chinese workers on the railway, wounding fifty, thus seriously escalating an incident in 1976 (cf. above, note 615), a report that may well have been distorted. In any case, in May 1977, at a MFA meeting, Huang Hua voiced concern that if the China-Vietnam railroad question was not solved, ongoing disruption could eventuate; *Li Xiannian nianpu*, vol. 5, p. 483.

⁶¹⁵ See *Li Xiannian nianpu*, vol. 5, pp. 487-88; *Li Xiannian zhuan*, vol. 2, pp. 917-18; Short, *Pol Pot*, pp. 373-74; Chanda, *Brother Enemy*, p. 93; and *PR*, no. 25 (1977), p. 3. A short time before Pham's visit, Hua and Ye Jianying received a military delegation headed by General Giap, a visit following a mission by Giap to Moscow. See *PR*, no. 24 (1977), pp. 6-7; and Chanda, p. 92.

the Chinese capital. We will return to that earlier occasion shortly, but first we address Le Duan's visit. To set the stage, Sino-Vietnamese relations in the period between the trips of Pham and Le, and indeed beyond into the early months of 1978, have been well characterized by Philip Short as involving "moments of vacillation, as both sides tried to escape the consequences of the choices they had made."⁶¹⁶ Neither side wanted an escalation of tensions between them, much less the eventual war, and both hoped for a dampening down of conflict between Hanoi and the Khmer Rouge. Yet various developments could not but help intensify PRC-Vietnam differences. In little more than a month after the Li-Pham discussions, Vietnam concluded a treaty of friendship and cooperation with Laos, thus formalizing Hanoi's dominance there, something clearly at variance with Beijing's desire for a least quasi-independent states in Indochina.⁶¹⁷ More important were improvements in the Vietnam-Soviet relationship, although this can realistically be described as reluctant on Hanoi's part. Discussions with Moscow had become more candid. In the absence of new Chinese aid and the failure of efforts to achieve significant economic results in dealings with capitalist powers, Vietnam was forced to increasingly rely on Soviet aid. In mid-1977, this involved preparatory steps toward joining COMECON, something rejected by Hanoi earlier, and clearly not something desired if it could be avoided.⁶¹⁸ At the same time, a new upturn in Soviet Vietnamese military relations unfolded.⁶¹⁹ Another looming problem was

⁶¹⁶ Short, *Pol Pot*, p. 374.

⁶¹⁷ The Li-Pham talks apparently did not address developments in Laos. On the Vietnam-Laos relationship, see Woodside, "Nationalism and Poverty," pp. 385-87.

⁶¹⁸ See Morris, *Why Vietnam Invaded Cambodia*, pp. 206-207, 209-11; and Womack, *China and Vietnam*, p. 193. Concerning Hanoi's reluctance, in March 1977 a Vietnamese diplomat observed, "The Soviets insist that all Socialist countries should join COMECON ... [but] we certainly do not want to ... the Chinese won't be happy"; Chanda, *Brother Enemy*, p. 183.

⁶¹⁹ Notably, a late July visit of a Soviet military delegation to South Vietnam, an area hitherto largely quarantined from both the Soviet Union and the PRC; Chanda, *Brother Enemy*, pp. 189-90. Even before Pham Van Dong's spring mission to Moscow, General Giap had visited the Soviet capital at

created by the decision of the Fourth Vietnamese Congress in December 1976 to launch socialist transformation in South Vietnam, which inevitably created conflict with the large Overseas Chinese population of Saigon (now Ho Chi Minh City).⁶²⁰

Clearly, Soviet-Vietnamese relations were on the upswing as Le Duan prepared to visit Beijing. However, given the significance of Chinese fears of a possible coordinated Soviet-Vietnamese threat from the north and south, a few observations concerning Moscow's perspective are in order. First, ambivalence remained in the relationship, with some Hanoi figures grumbling that Soviet backing for liberation struggles was simply aimed to make life difficult for the PRC, while Moscow officials faced a situation where Vietnam's requirements could complicate more important foreign policy goals. Clearly there were potential benefits of closer Soviet-Vietnamese relations for Moscow: e.g., disadvantaging China, and the possibility of naval bases, but there were also financial and other costs of support, as well as possible international political complications, notably in Soviet-US relations. At the practical level, it is instructive that the Soviet Union provided far greater resources to Cuba than Vietnam, both subsidizing its economy and supporting Cuban proxy forces in Africa. It is also instructive that Hanoi hardly credited Soviet proposals for the larger region, notably the Asian Collective Security System advanced by Moscow in 1969, an idea dismissed by one former associate of Ho Chi Minh as totally unrealistic.⁶²¹ As Le Duan prepared for his Beijing trip, Moscow-Hanoi relations were becoming closer, but the extent was as yet undetermined, and would depend largely on developments in Indochina.

least three times in 1977. See Marian Leighton, "Vietnam and the Sino-Soviet Rivalry," *Asian Affairs: An American Review*, September-October 1978, p. 6.

⁶²⁰ See Womack, *China and Vietnam*, p. 197; and below, p. [214-15]. On earlier Vietnamese measures concerning the Overseas Chinese that drew the first formal PRC complaint in early 1976, see above, p. [197] and note 616.

⁶²¹ See Chanda, *Brother Enemy*, pp. 176-79; Morris, *Why Vietnam Invaded Cambodia*, p. 197; and above, pp. [198-99].

In a conversation with the Soviet ambassador in October, Le Duan was upbeat, declaring Hanoi faced “no insoluble problems of any kind,” expressing confidence that the Overseas Chinese did not pose a serious threat, especially as economic authority in the south was firmly in “the people’s” hands. The single complex problem was the border conflict with Cambodia, and the PRC attitude to this conflict was naturally source of concern.⁶²² Whatever confidence Le may have brought with him on the November 20-23 visit was not fulfilled. There are many uncertainties concerning the three plus days Le spent in Beijing, but the one certainty is that the talks were difficult, and as in 1975 there was no farewell banquet or joint communique. The leaders’ banquet speeches repeated the essential divide articulated by Deng and Le in 1975: Hua affirmed upholding Mao’s three worlds theory and opposing social-imperialist aggression; Le emphasized the need for socialist countries to unite in the struggle against US imperialism, but he went even further by praising the Soviet Union by name. Yet the public atmospherics of the visit remained firmly in the fraternal comrades mode, with a large airport reception matching Pol Pot’s two months earlier. Le was also farewelled at Beijing airport by Hua and other top leaders, and accompanied by Geng Biao to Guangzhou where he received appropriate honors.⁶²³ In terms of the negotiating discussions on the 21st and 22nd, however, even limited statements, such as Pol’s two months earlier, are essentially lacking.

At the negotiating sessions, as was appropriate for a meeting of the highest Party leaders, and as had occurred with Pol Pot, Hua was undoubtedly the main

⁶²² See Morris, *Why Vietnam Invaded Cambodia*, p. 187.

⁶²³ Le Duan’s visit, including the complete banquet speeches of Hua and Le, is covered in *RMRB*, November 21-24, 1977. Short, *Pol Pot*, p. 377, offers an unsourced and completely erroneous account of Le’s banquet speech as vituperative, accusing his hosts of abandoning communist principles.

spokesman of the Chinese side. Li Xiannian was a key figure,⁶²⁴ as was Geng Biao in his role as head of the Party's International Relations Department. The striking absence was Deng, who despite Le Duan's emphasis in his 1979 recollections of Deng's positive role,⁶²⁵ he simply did not participate in any aspect of Le's visit apart from attending the welcoming banquet. Both the extensive media coverage of the visit, and *Deng nianpu*, report no involvement on his part in the negotiations, and his activities, to the extent known, were not of any huge consequence.⁶²⁶ Needless to say, given Deng's long history with Vietnam and with Le personally, his full involvement in Pol Pot's September visit, and his major foreign policy influence generally even in this early period following his return to work, his absence requires an explanation. This absence might understandably lead to speculation of Hua-Deng differences, but we have no indications to support such a conclusion.⁶²⁷ As discussed below, the limited information available concerning Beijing's policy on Indochina during the period of Pol's visit, suggests basic leadership agreement on support for the Khmer Rouge regime, together with trying to push it in the direction of negotiations with Vietnam.⁶²⁸ While speculative, we believe the best interpretation is essentially the umbrage Deng would have taken Le's praise of

⁶²⁴ Li attended both negotiating sessions with Le Duan on the 21st and 22nd, and on the 23rd he held discussions with Deputy Prime Minister and head of state planning Le Thanh Nghi; *Li Xiannian nianpu*, vol. 5, p. 539.

⁶²⁵ See "Le Duan and the Break with China," pp. 275, 282; and above, pp. [189-90]. Le remembered Deng agreeing to start border negotiations. It is likely he confused Deng's position on this matter in 1975, with the discussions in 1977.

⁶²⁶ On the 22nd and 23rd, Deng dealt with research and educational issues. On November 23rd, when the sessions with Le Duan were finished, he joined Hua and the Standing Committee, except for Ye Jianying, to hear the SPC's report on economic planning issues. *Deng nianpu*, vol. 1, p. 241.

⁶²⁷ Deng's non-involvement in the November 1977 negotiations has been ignored in the leading literature. However, Chandra, *Brother Enemy*, pp. 202-203, finds the "cautious approach" of the meetings with Le Duan a retreat from the encouragement given Pol Pot in September, and speculates that it was linked to the Party's unresolved political struggle, with the pragmatists around Deng pushing a moderate line on the Khmer Rouge. The problem with this is not only that the Chinese leadership had attempted to move Pol away from radical policies, but also, more narrowly, that Deng had a prominent role in Pol's visit in contrast to his absence from the meetings with Le.

⁶²⁸ See below, pp. [204-206].

Moscow in his presence at the welcoming banquet, but this does not appear to have pushed him toward a harder policy as the PRC continued to seek restraint in the Vietnam-Khmer Rouge conflict.

As to what concretely transpired in the negotiating sessions, in the absence of even minimal transcripts, we can only surmise the likely exchanges based on the context of the meetings, and a few claims from each side. A Vietnamese account by a top leader in Le Duan's delegation, presented to the Soviet ambassador in Hanoi a week later, is surely genuine, but clearly somewhat misleading. Xuan Thuy, a Central Committee Secretary, seemingly attempting to put a positive spin on the events in Beijing, claimed that the discussions largely exchanged opinions on various international questions, with Hanoi seeking solidarity of the USSR, PRC and Vietnam, in order that these relations "are not changed for the worse." In this account, Vietnam emphasized that different views on international questions must not affect friendly relations between the two countries. What is least convincing in Xuan's account was his claim that critical questions were not discussed in order to avoid "complicating negotiations": long-term Chinese aid (credible⁶²⁹), problems involving the Overseas Chinese in Ho Chi Minh City (unlikely), the Sino-Vietnamese border (also unlikely), and Hanoi's problems with Cambodia (difficult to countenance given Le Duan's October assessment).⁶³⁰ Surely the question of different views concerning the Soviet Union, whether discussed in terms of overall theory or practical matters, had the potential to generate sharp conflict. In any case, the allegedly not discussed Cambodia-Vietnam conflict was festering, and this issue will be examined in greater depth.

⁶²⁹ As noted, (see above, note 624), Li Xiannian did hold a separate meeting with Vietnam's planning chief Le Thanh Nghi, but given Li's refusal to discuss long-term aid in June, it is likely these discussions dealt with existing, more short-term economic matters. Xuan Thuy's report indicated that the PRC expressed willingness to complete projects that had already started.

⁶³⁰ See Morris, *Why Vietnam Invaded Cambodia*, pp. 184-85, 281. The conversation was summarized in a Soviet document.

A PRC version came in a November 1979 commentary on a Vietnam white paper. In essence, the revealing part was a mere snippet in a long refutation of slanders by the two-faced Hanoi leadership, with notable references to Le Duan. In one sense, it supported Xuan Thuy's claim that the intent of Le's delegation was to prevent Soviet, Chinese and Vietnamese relations from getting out of hand, an effort unlikely to succeed given China's anti-hegemony stance, and Le's undiplomatic praise of Moscow. The snippet presented Le as trying to appeal to the Chinese negotiators by drawing on former periods of close cooperation: "I assure Chairman Hua Guofeng that we in Vietnam always regard China as our good friend, we are your younger brother, and we will always stand with you." Le went on, apparently trying to demonstrate sincerity, by noting that in the past "Soviet revisionism opposed China, ... and we opposed them for doing that."⁶³¹ In fact, Soviet *revisionism* was never off the table in Hanoi or Beijing, but raising it at this difficult moment could only increase Chinese belief in Vietnam's untrustworthiness.⁶³²

Given the crucial importance of the Hanoi-Khmer Rouge conflict, it is necessary to review developments after the vicious Cambodian attack of April 30 and the firm but measured Vietnamese response, as well as the PRC's offer of good offices. The situation on the border settled down until September, although Khmer

⁶³¹ "Yuenan kang Fa, kang Mei douzheng shiqi de Zhong-Yue guanxi" [Sino-Vietnamese Relations in Vietnam's Anti-France and Anti-American Wars], November 21, 1979.

We are not including an oft-cited alleged January 1979 speech by Geng Biao, which claimed the Le Duan visit showed that efforts to reach agreement on the Vietnam-Cambodia conflict had failed; "Keng Piao's Report on the Situation of the Indochinese Peninsula" (January 16, 1979), in *Issues & Studies*, January 1981, p. 85. Appearing in Taiwan's Institution of International Relations journal that periodically published fake documents, the veracity of the report is very dubious. Our doubts are due to various problems with the text, notably the failure to mention any "lesson" for Vietnam, more than a month after it had been discussed at a CMC meeting, and was then at an advanced stage of preparation. Moreover, there is no mention of any such report in either Geng's memoir or his official biography.

⁶³² On the continuing relevance of Moscow's *revisionism* in Beijing, see above, p. [12]; and below, p. [244].

Rouge purges continued within Cambodia. But on September 24, less than a week before Pol Pot arrived in Beijing, two Eastern Zone divisions of the Cambodian army crossed into South Vietnam, penetrating about four miles, and leaving behind nearly a thousand often mutilated dead bodies. Hanoi again reacted with restraint, with the Politburo ordering a total blackout on the attack, and putting retaliation on hold. With the Khmer Rouge having just announced publicly the existence of the Communist Party of Kampuchea (CPK), the Vietnamese leadership even sent its congratulations, albeit with the twist of pledging to defend the *special relationship* [our emphasis] of the two parties. On September 30, with Le Duan in the chair, the Politburo decided to take up the Chinese offer of good offices and seek a meeting with the Cambodians in Beijing. At the same time, General Giap was instructed to make plans for a reprisal if mediation failed.⁶³³

By this time, of course, Pol Pot was receiving a grand welcome in Beijing. Hua, Deng and the complete Standing Committee met him at the airport on September 28, and Hua and Pol exchanged laudatory speeches at the welcoming banquet that evening. Pol also received massive media coverage and a prominent role at China's national day celebrations. As with Le Duan two months later, Hua was China's main interlocuter, while Deng, Li Xiannian and Geng Biao participated in the discussion sessions on the 29th and 30th. Pol Pot's return banquet was held on October 2 with the full Standing Committee again in attendance, and the delegation departed for North Korea, always the Khmer Rouge's strongest supporter, for an even more lavish visit on the 4th.⁶³⁴ Pol's no holds barred reception in the PRC, at one level reflected the Chinese leadership's investment in

⁶³³ See Short, *Pol Pot*, pp. 368-69, 375; and Chanda, *Brother Enemy*, pp. 233-35.

⁶³⁴ See *PR*, no. 41 (1977), pp. 6, 9-13, 20-30; *Deng nianpu*, vol. 1, pp. 208-209; and *Li Xiannian nianpu*, vol. 5, p. 524. Pol Pot's reception in North Korea, where had at least six meetings with Kim Il Sung, is detailed in a September 13, 2012, blog report by freelance journalist Nate Thayer, "Pol Pot Tells China in 1977 that Killings Underway, to Continue." Thayer is well known for his significant contacts with Khmer Rouge leaders, including presence at Pol's deathbed. Cf. Short, *Pol Pot*, pp. 376-77.

Cambodia since 1975, but as events proceeded, less obvious doubts about China's ally clearly remained.

At the discussion session on the 29th, the available part of Pol Pot's presentation emphasized the combatative mindset seen in the September 24 attack. The segment began with a claim of Soviet, Vietnamese and Cuban cooperation "to fight us in the border areas." This involved agents penetrating Cambodian forces, including at the central, provincial and division levels. The US and Thailand also assertedly joined in to poison the Khmer Rouge leaders, but solving the problem had been basically completed in June. Pol went on with a dismissive discourse on the Vietnamese army as no longer willing to bear hardship, or wanting to fight anymore. While declaring no fear in fighting them, Pol painted a picture of a constant, ongoing threat of Vietnam not only wanting to annex Cambodia and Laos, but also to occupy all of Southeast Asia. He claimed many negotiations with Hanoi, but all to no avail. For all of the overt dismissal of the Vietnamese army, Pol indicated a direct military solution could endanger the Cambodian forces, and instead proposed a "strategic orientation" of developing revolution in Southeast Asia. He claimed to have reached agreements with the communist insurgencies in Burma, Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand to this end. Pol admitted this was a complicated strategy when one went into the details, indicated the importance of PRC support, and stated "we feel safe having the Chinese as friends." This account ends with a brief response by Hua: "Your strategy regarding the neighboring countries is correct."⁶³⁵

While Hua's brief response on the 29th could, on the face of it, be seen as supporting the Khmer Rouge fantasy, this was hardly the PRC position. Despite historic links to the Southeast Asian insurgencies, these had never been practically

⁶³⁵ *77 Conversations*, pp. 193-94. A condensed version of Pol's statement, which lacks Hua's purportedly brief reply, is found in Short, *Pol Pot*, p. 376.

significant for the PRC, and were clearly being backed away from in the post-Mao era by both Hua and Deng.⁶³⁶ Indeed, when the discussions resumed the next day, Hua ignored Pol's remarks about the communist insurgencies, instead urging Cambodia to strengthen relations with Southeast Asian governments which could offer actual support to contain Vietnam. Most significant, Hua focussed on the real issue in the Cambodia-Vietnam conflict, and suggested a peaceful outcome: "We do not wish the friction ... to grow. We want the two sides to find a solution through negotiations..., and by making mutual concessions. That said, we agree [it] will not be easy ... it is necessary to be very vigilant [with Vietnam]."⁶³⁷ This surely was a consensus position. Several weeks after Pol Pot left Beijing, in replying to a journalist's question, Deng provided the same message, telling a Western reporter that China wanted "good negotiations" between the two nations, without "judging what is just or erroneous."⁶³⁸

The period spanning the Pol Pot and Le Duan visits to Beijing and the following several months, encompassed further Khmer Rouge provocations, tentative PRC efforts to moderate Cambodian behavior, and Hanoi pondering what would be a viable approach to its western neighbor. With Hua having urged Pol to

⁶³⁶ Ross, *Indochina Tangle*, pp. 139, 169, 198, notes increased PRC media attention in 1977 to Southeast Asian communist parties as a flawed foreign policy approach, perhaps due to Hua's concern with his political vulnerability, or to bureaucratic inertia before Deng took full control. A better explanation is that this was another indication of the need to hew publicly to Maoist positions, in this case the out of date picture of the CCP as leader of national liberation movements. Even while Mao lived, in his early days as foreign policy spokesman in June 1976, Hua assured Australian Prime Minister Fraser that PRC governmental assistance was not going to the insurgents, to Fraser's considerable relief; interview with Fraser, April 2008. The real aspect of Chinese support was declarative theatre, with China sending messages to communists in Southeast Asia, in addition to broadcasts to Overseas Chinese in the area. The issue was raised by Lee Kuan Yew in discussions with a startled Deng in November 1978. For all his influence in PRC foreign policy, and awareness of the broadcasts' counterproductiveness in building sentiment against Vietnam, Deng only moved to curb them two years later; see above, p. [14-15].

⁶³⁷ Short, *Pol Pot*, p. 376. This second day comment, not found in other sources, is apparently from a captured Khmer Rouge document held in the Vietnamese archives.

⁶³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 377.

negotiate, which was quickly followed by Vietnam's request to send a negotiator to Beijing for discussions with the Cambodians, they had little option except to agree, but two lengthy sessions on October 3 only produced sharp mutual attacks. Later that month Giap was authorized to launch limited raids into Khmer territory which occurred in November before Le's visit, but not a large-scale retaliation. The apparent messages were to warn Phnom Penh to back off, while demonstrating restraint to Beijing. What is not clear is what concrete spoken messages on this critical Indochinese border issue were exchanged between the PRC and Vietnam. We believe the Chinese account that it was not included in the Li Xiannian-Pham Van Dong discussions in June is plausible, but can hardly credit that it was not discussed during Le's November visit. For the remainder of 1977, border conflict continued, with more extensive, but still short-term Vietnamese incursions in December. As Edward O'Dowd has observed, "Vietnam finally increased the stakes, [launching a large-scale] offensive campaign for limited objectives, [but] Cambodia remained defiant." At the diplomatic level, Phnom Penh broke off relations with Hanoi on the last day of the year, at the same time making the conflict public to Vietnam's international embarrassment.⁶³⁹

As these events unfolded, China had not given up on its effort to moderate the conflict, as well as the Khmer Rouge approach more broadly. In mid-January, a delegation headed by Deng Yingchao, Zhou Enlai's widow, was dispatched to Phnom Penh to convey Beijing's concerns, not only over Cambodia's security against far superior Vietnamese forces, but also with its provocative posture that might draw the Soviet Union openly into the conflict. Mme Deng's delegation also addressed the regime's sectarian internal policies, advising Pol Pot to broaden its political base, which in China's eyes would be facilitated by returning Sihanouk to

⁶³⁹ See *ibid.*, pp. 377-79; Chanda, *Brother Enemy*, pp. 199, 207-209; O'Dowd, *Chinese Military Strategy*, pp. 36-37; and above, pp. [200, 204].

political life. Pol, however, was not moved, and rejected proposals for attempting to settle the conflict with Vietnam through negotiations, and refused Mme Deng's request to meet Sihanouk. Meanwhile, with the delegation still in country, the official media made clear that Cambodia demanded to be treated as an equal by its "good friends," and would make its own independent decisions. While the objectives of the mission were not achieved, a promise of more aid was given. More significantly, as Khmer-Vietnamese tensions further intensified, Chinese support of Cambodia increased, including a sharp increase in military assistance in 1978, that only now provided sophisticated weapons. But even then, the PRC initially attempted to maintain a degree of public restraint on the Indochinese conflict.⁶⁴⁰

At this point, some broader reflections on PRC-Khmer-Rouge interaction are in order. Two things can be said in a general sense for the 1975-78 period. First, Chinese leaders were well aware of Pol Pot's excesses, although it is unclear in what detail, and particularly how much weight was attached to them. Second, they made significant efforts to moderate Khmer Rouge policies, generally but not completely failing to achieve results, while avoiding bolder steps that possibly could have had more impact. Clearly, the most spectacular excesses were fully understood, and growing awareness of the bloodletting of internal purges could not have been avoided as they intensified in 1977-78. One view, however, points to the impact of toned down of reports coming from Chinese advisers in Cambodia and PRC foreign policy bureaucracies through to 1978.⁶⁴¹ This is probably correct in the narrow

⁶⁴⁰ See Short, *Pol Pot*, pp 378-79; Chanda, *Brother Enemy*, pp. 210-11; Quinn-Judge, Appendix 1, p. 232; and Ross, *Indochina Tangle*, pp. 247-48. In another indication of Beijing's desire for a negotiated Cambodian-Vietnamese settlement, on January 10, 1978, the *People's Daily* published communiques from both sides stating their respective cases; Morris, *Why Vietnam Invaded Cambodia*, p. 185. Also, in January, the PRC signed the annual agreement on the supply of goods and payments to Vietnam; Chanda, p. 209.

⁶⁴¹ See Wang Chenyi, *Chinese Communist Party's Relationship with the Khmer Rouge*, pp. 21-25, 36-37. Wang notes both the MFA and the Party's International Relations Department withholding criticism of developments in Cambodia.

sense that understanding was restricted, although not in terms of preventing consideration of different choices on the basis of what did reach the leadership, and in any case PRC leaders downplayed Khmer Rouge atrocities while making the case against Vietnam.⁶⁴²

Another view is both more and less favorable to CCP leaders. According to journalist Nate Thayer, who had significant ties to Khmer Rouge leaders notably including Pol Pot, the PRC made extensive ongoing complaints, including regarding the slaughter of ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia and attacking Hanoi's territory, causing Pol to place China among "everybody [who] yells at us, except the North Koreans." Yet, according to Thayer, the Khmer Rouge was implacable in rejecting all Chinese pressures.⁶⁴³ We believe this overstates both the degree of Chinese insistence, and the total implacability of the Khmer Rouge. This was indicated by none other than Deng in his August 1980 combative, but relatively candid, interview with Fallaci: "We were aware of [Pol Pot's serious mistakes] at the time and, looking back, we think that perhaps we did wrong in not pointing out these mistakes to [him]."⁶⁴⁴ Arguably, the best perspective is simply that China was deeply involved in sustaining the Cambodian regime, but proved incapable of finding a way to prevent its ally from self-destruction and invasion by Vietnam.⁶⁴⁵

As 1978 began, both Beijing and Hanoi sought a negotiated outcome to the Cambodian-Vietnamese conflict, but the considerations in each capital were very

⁶⁴² In a particularly aggressive instance, in May 1978 Huang Hua criticized Brzezinski for raising Khmer Rouge human rights violations, saying US actions on this front constituted coordination with the Soviet Union; *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, p. 420.

⁶⁴³ Interview, March 2017. Thayer claimed there were many written PRC documents to the Cambodian regime criticizing its activities, but we have not seen them. Cf. above, note 638.

⁶⁴⁴ Fallaci's interview published in the *Washington Post*, September 1, 1980. Deng argued that Pol Pot's excesses were not as great as claimed in the West, although admitting he killed a relatively large number. Deng did not directly reject Fallaci's claim that the Khmer Rouge was guilty of genocide, simply rejecting the figure of deaths as unreliable and "nonsense."

⁶⁴⁵ In a sharper version of this perspective, Mertha strongly criticized Beijing as being suckered by the Khmer Rouge, thus becoming subordinate in the relationship; *Brothers in Arms*, pp. 2-4.

different. China wanted its difficult ally to be viable, and Vietnam somewhat distant from Moscow. For Hanoi, the issue was a more immediate and direct threat⁶⁴⁶—Khmer Rouge actions that killed large numbers of ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia, a virtual genocide as reflected in an official radio broadcast in March 1978 calling for the “extermination of the Vietnamese race,” and murders of their own citizens within Vietnam.⁶⁴⁷ With negotiations going nowhere, the alternative was demonstrating superior force, but this too was ineffective. Vietnam’s limited incursions clearly showed its military superiority, but when its forces withdrew, Cambodian forces returned to the border for new provocations. Thus, while as Morris argues, Hanoi’s approach to early 1978 can be considered largely defensive and somewhat proportional, this suggested something more was required. The changing perspective was expressed in the statement of a senior Vietnamese foreign policy official in March 1978 concerning the how the conflict would end: “Either the Cambodian regime will change its policy or the regime will be changed by the Khmer people.”⁶⁴⁸ By this time, moreover, any remaining hope that the PRC might facilitate negotiations was fading away, and even worse, the fear that Beijing was using using Cambodia as a proxy to attack Vietnam was deepening.⁶⁴⁹

⁶⁴⁶ Here we set aside the question of Vietnam’s longer-term goal of a strong “special relationship” among the three Indochinese states, even given Hanoi’s counterproductive raising of the issue. This was by no means a realistic short-term goal due to China’s position, save for the Khmer Rouge’s self-destruction.

⁶⁴⁷ See Chanda, *Brother Enemy*, p. 251; Odd Arne Westad, “Introduction: From war to peace to war in Indochina,” in Westad and Quinn-Judge, *The Third Indochina War*, p. 4; and Ngo Vinh Long, “The socialization of South Vietnam,” in *ibid.*, p. 136.

⁶⁴⁸ See Chanda, *Brother Enemy*, p. 225; O’Dowd, *Chinese Military Strategy*, pp. 36-37; and Morris, *Why Vietnam Invaded Cambodia*, p. 111.

⁶⁴⁹ According to a high Vietnamese official, the failed November 1977 mission convinced Le Duan that China “will use Pol Pot against us.” In February 1978, Hanoi radio claimed an unnamed power had used Cambodia to attack Vietnam. See Chanda, *Brother Enemy*, pp. 212, 215-16. In June, a Vietnamese Politburo meeting identified China as Hanoi’s main enemy that was using the Khmer Rouge as a proxy; O’Dowd, *Chinese Military Strategy*, p. 37.

Alternatives to the elusive negotiated settlement had been canvassed earlier, and January-February 1978 Vietnamese Politburo meetings which determined that Hanoi could not coexist with the Khmer Rouge, considered both organizing an uprising in Cambodia, and a direct military invasion. The uprising project was aided by Pol Pot's extremism; Khmer officials threatened by Pol's escalating purges defected in increasing numbers in 1977-78. A noted example was Hun Sen, then a young Khmer Rouge military commander who fled to Vietnam in summer 1977, who was installed as a leading figure in the regime established by Hanoi in January 1979, and in 1985 became the dominant leader of Cambodia to this day. He was followed in 1978 by Heng Samrin, a more senior figure, then the deputy head of the Eastern Zone military, who became the head of the new Phnom Penh government in 1979, until supplanted by Hun. Such figures were assessed, indoctrinated and trained by the Vietnamese, who concluded that they could be shaped into a liberation army in support of an uprising, and a future pro-Hanoi regime in Cambodia. The first Khmer rebel brigade was created in April 1978, as a guerrilla army was being formed in South Vietnam. The failure of any uprising to overturn even the shakey Pol Pot regime, however, pointed to an invasion by regular Vietnam forces. In June, Vietnamese political cadres were informed of preparations for such an invasion. What, if anything, had been conveyed to the Chinese leadership of the limits of Vietnam's tolerance is unknown, but in the first half of 1978 plans for regime change were rapidly taking shape.⁶⁵⁰

Three factors were coming to bear that decisively led to the Cambodian-Vietnamese war, and were also conducive to—but not determinant of—the Sino-Vietnamese war of 1979. First, the PRC had simply given up on trying foster a negotiated Khmer Rouge-Hanoi settlement. In February, Vietnam proposed to

⁶⁵⁰ See Chanda, *Brother Enemy*, pp. 197-98, 214-15, 217-19, 253, 255; Short, pp. 378-80, 386, 451, 452; and Morris, *Why Vietnam Invaded Cambodia*, pp. 107-108.

Cambodia a major agreement to stabilize their border: a mutual withdrawal, a non-aggression pact, and an internationally supervised border. This was not serious, as Hanoi calculated the Khmer Rouge would never accept it, but it was useful for international opinion. Whether a serious effort was undertaken to engage the PRC on the proposal is unknown, but given Deng Yingchao's recently concluded abortive mission, the Chinese leadership undoubtedly agreed with Hanoi that Pol Pot would never accept such a deal, thus leading to the decision to double down on support of Cambodia.⁶⁵¹ A second factor in this polarizing situation, was Vietnam going further in seeking Soviet backing, with Giap, by June, presenting Moscow a draft of the Soviet-Vietnamese treaty that would be formalized in November. As one Vietnamese official later observed, "We took a leaf out of India's book," reflecting on the 1971 treaty with Moscow that facilitated the dismemberment of Pakistan. This accelerating involvement with the Soviet Union surely energized the Chinese leadership's unprecedented concern with Hanoi as regional hegemonists working with Soviet global hegemonists during Brzezinski's May visit. Surprisingly, of the very top leaders in their recorded remarks, this view was expressed by Hua rather than Deng.⁶⁵² In this regard, Vietnam's fear of a Chinese reaction to its plans for Cambodia furthered the greater Soviet traction in Indochina that was anathema in Beijing.

⁶⁵¹ See Chanda, *Brother Enemy*, p. 216, on Vietnam's proposal. It is possible that Hanoi did make an official approach to the PRC on the proposal two weeks later, with a border negotiator sent to Beijing. However, nothing is known about the content of those discussions, which may well have concerned the Sino-Vietnam border. See Quinn-Judge, Appendix 1, p. 233. Concerning the Cambodian-Vietnam border, in April and May Phnom Penh also proposed a non-starter, a seven-month trial ceasefire, conditional on Vietnam giving up its territorial designs on Cambodia; O'Dowd, *Chinese Military Strategy*, p. 37. During the Brzezinski visit in May, Huang Hua stated the PRC position as both sides should withdraw and negotiate, but tellingly added there could be no short-term solution because of Vietnam's desire to establish an Indochinese federation, and Soviet support; *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, pp. 419-20.

⁶⁵² See Chanda, *Brother Enemy*, pp. 256-59; *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, pp. 447, 455; and above, pp. [113-14]. Curiously, given the soon to be emphasized characterization of Vietnam as "the Cuba of East," Deng applied the label Afghanistan.

The third factor was in some respects the most significant—the self-destruction of the Khmer Rouge regime in this period. Ironically, this was probably the period of Pol Pot’s greatest receptivity to Chinese advice. There was a recognition of the strains on the system and the need for some moderate changes: an attempt to cultivate international and regional support, notably including the non-communist regimes in Southeast Asia; a notional re-established united front policy internally, with intellectuals, petty bourgeoisie, small capitalists and landowners to be “pull[ed] to our side”; and efforts to relax living conditions and show greater tolerance to ordinary people.⁶⁵³ But these measures hardly addressed the underlying dynamic of the regime. From the start of January, an ever intensifying purge to “prurify” the Party, army and cadres unfolded, the biggest and bloodiest campaign since the Khmer Rouge gained power. The height of insanity, in strategic as well as political terms, came in May with launching the purge in the Eastern Zone facing Vietnam, where local forces were essential to national resistance. The bloodletting was massive, units fled into the jungle, battled with other regime forces, or deserted to Vietnam, leaving regime defenses decimated. Pol Pot saw these failures as proof of treachery, as captured in the famous slur about “Vietnamese minds in Khmer bodies.” More broadly, by August, Cambodian armed forces were reportedly spending 60 percent of their time fighting internal enemies. This was not a situation where the regime could survive, nor could China do much to save it if Vietnam struck. For Hanoi, the combination of anger over continuing attacks and anti-Vietnamese racism, and the opportunity created by a gravely weakened enemy, could only strengthen the impulse for regime change.⁶⁵⁴

⁶⁵³ See Short, *Pol Pot*, pp. 380-83. See also Ross, *Indochina Tangle*, pp.167-68.

⁶⁵⁴ See Short, *Pol Pot*, pp. 383-87; Chanda, *Brother Enemy*, pp. 213-14, 247-55; and Mertha, *Brothers in Arms*, pp. 77, 90, 95-96, 117.

Two other sources of tension between China and Vietnam featured in the period up to mid-1978: the two countries land border, and Hanoi's treatment of its Overseas Chinese population, locally known as the Hoa people. As for the border *per se*, we totally ascribe to Brantly Womack's assessment that it was "more a venue for confrontation than a matter of serious dispute."⁶⁵⁵ Clearly the shaping factors were Vietnam's relationship to the Soviet Union, and its intensifying conflict with the Khmer Rouge. As previously noted, border incidents had emerged in low numbers from 1974, reaching, according to different accounts, 752 or 1,625 in 1977. Figures for 1978, perhaps only covering the first half of the year, report an increase to 2,175 (Hanoi's version), or 1,108 (Beijing's version). Much is unclear about these incidents, including who instigated them, and whether or not they were completely local in origin. Surely, the larger influence of Sino-Vietnamese conflict had a role, but whether or when there was some degree of higher-level impetus is uncertain. It appears likely, as reported in a CIA assessment, that incidents before summer 1978, began with small fistfights, before escalating into a military confrontation from the summer. Prior to mid-1978, significant injuries seem to have occurred only in the May 1977 Sino-Vietnamese railroad incident, and a late February 1978 border clash.⁶⁵⁶ Of particular interest, the PRC overview, as told from the perspective of 1979, was quite low key about the border conflict. Hua conveyed a relaxed attitude about developments, at least to some imprecise time in 1978. Hua told US and British leaders that China originally stationed no troops on the border, and later soldiers were under strict orders not to shoot. Moreover, Hua variously reported the small number of 300 plus or about 400

⁶⁵⁵ Womack, *China and Vietnam*, p. 199.

⁶⁵⁶ *Ibid.*; *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, pp. 828-29; and above pp. [180, 200] and notes 562, 622.

Chinese “casualties” on the border during the period leading to the 1979 “lesson.”⁶⁵⁷

The border area, however, was increasingly becoming the venue of a genuinely severe conflict in 1978 due to its very real link to the Overseas Chinese issue. As we have discussed, there were some subtle measures undertaken by Hanoi against its ethnic Chinese population in the early 1970s before reunification, and in 1975-76 further, although limited, policies undermined what the PRC regarded as existing commitments from the 1950s. By 1976-77, Vietnamese concern with a possible Chinese fifth column had intensified, leading to further steps to tighten control of the Hoa. These had different aspects in the north and south of Vietnam. In North Vietnam, about 20 percent of Chinese residents nationwide lived, while the south not only had the dominant share of the Hoa population, but also a strong business community in Ho Chi Minh City (the former Saigon). In the north, pressure grew on ethnic Chinese to register as Vietnamese citizens from 1977, while the border areas were cleared. Overseas Chinese, particularly if they refused to give up their Chinese citizenship, were moved to more remote areas, and thus placed in a reduced socio-economic circumstances from what they previously enjoyed. As state to state relations further worsed in 1978, various factors, notably war rumors, led many to flee or be expelled to China.⁶⁵⁸

The situation in the south, which probably created even greater fifth column fears, grew out of Hanoi’s general overambitious approach. Rather than the slow transformation CCP leaders had advocated, Vietnam’s Fourth Congress in

⁶⁵⁷ Hua-Blumenthal conversation, February 28, 1979; and “Record of Discussion between the Prime Minister [Thatcher] and Premier Hua Guofeng at No. 10 Downing Street on 29 October 1979,” UK archival document. Deng placed the number at more than 300 when speaking on the eve of the invasion of Vietnam.

⁶⁵⁸ See Chanda, *Brother Enemy*, pp. 238-40, 242-44; Morris, *Why Vietnam Invaded Cambodia*, p. 189; Burton, “Contending explanations,” p. 709; Quinn-Judge, Appendix 2, p. 235; and above, pp. 180-81, 197n616. Cf. “Vietnam’s ostracism of Chinese nationals is orchestrated, systematic and deliberate,” *New China News*, September 6, 1978, p. 12.

December 1976 laid down a socialist transformation program to bring the south into line with the north, a doctrinaire effort that, as Alexander Woodside noted, created huge gaps between ambition and performance. It was a failure, alienating the critical Overseas Chinese business community, disrupting the economy, and intensifying ethnic hostility. This culminated in March 1978 with the banning of private trade and other measures against private business, including forcing capitalists out of the city to New Economic Zones, a process that resulted in what has been called the "second battle of Saigon." These events did not simply disrupt the ambitious objectives of socialist transformation, they undermined even the more modest post-liberation goal of economic construction and political stabilization in the south. But the dislocations, both before and after the "second battle," also contained a strategic threat due to the geographical closeness of Ho Chi Minh City to the Cambodian forces launching attacks across the border, thus further complicating the task of bringing stability to South Vietnam. It accordingly added to the argument for finally dealing with Pol Pot's regime. Indeed, the mid-February Politburo meeting that decided to set up an anti-Khmer Rouge resistance in Cambodia, also examined the security implications of Overseas Chinese economic power in the south.⁶⁵⁹

Events moved quickly from March. While additional anti-capitalist measures were carried out in the south, a campaign in May against corruption and black markets heavily affected ethnic Chinese in the north. In the same month, Hoa residents of northern cities started to depart for China, and large numbers from the north generally left in April-May. The PRC claimed that 160,000 fled in the period from April until it sealed the border on July 12, which greatly reduced the number that would be let in, and resulted in violence where Vietnamese guards

⁶⁵⁹ See Woodside, "Nationalism and Poverty," pp. 392-96, 403ff; Chanda, *Brother Enemy*, pp. 231-35; and Quinn-Judge, Appendix 2, p. 235.

tried to push people past their Chinese counterparts. Meanwhile, while the PRC had limited itself to firm but restrained private warnings on the treatment of ethnic Chinese until March, at the end of April the head of the State Council Overseas Chinese Office publicly referred to forced citizenship changes, and noted the sudden appearance of large numbers of Hoa in China. At a State Council meeting in early May dealing with resettling fleeing Hoa, Ji Dengkui placed developments in a larger geopolitical context, emphasizing the influence of Soviet “revisionism” on Vietnam. On May 12 China cut off 21 aid projects, a measure soon presented as a direct response to the expulsion of ethnic Chinese residents, quickly followed by further cancellations, and ended all aid in early July. The key development came on May 24, when China openly denounced Vietnam for persecuting and expelling the Hoa. A line had been crossed, and the matter soon became one of theatre and mutual accusations. In a farcical development, Beijing sent ships to both Haiphong in the north and Ho Chi Minh City in the south to repatriate persecuted Hoa, only to return empty in late July, i.e., after the land border had been effectively sealed against their fellow Overseas Chinese. Negotiations held in August-September simply allowed each side to vent their grievances.⁶⁶⁰

Both countries had complicity in the Hoa crisis that emerged unexpectedly in spring 1978—what Chanda has called “push and pull” factors, but fleeing to China arguably was more the result of community-generated panic due to war rumors than any particular state action.⁶⁶¹ Fundamentally, however, Hanoi was the

⁶⁶⁰ Quinn-Judge, Appendix 2, pp. 235-37; Morris, *Why Vietnam Invaded Cambodia*, pp. 193-94; Chanda, *Brother Enemy*, pp. 242-43; Ross, *Indochina Tangle*, pp. 176-80; Womack, *China and Vietnam*, p. 199; and Guangdong sheng qiaowu bangongshi [Guangdong Province Overseas Chinese Affairs Office], *Qiaowu gongzuo shouce (er)* [Handbook of Overseas Chinese Affairs (2)], 1979, pp. 62-63.na

⁶⁶¹ See Chanda, *Brother Enemy*, pp. 240-47. The main PRC “pull” factor was the issue of Chinese visas to Hoa by the embassy in Hanoi from early 1978, as well as appeals to Overseas Chinese to join a “broad patriotic united front [against] hegemonism.” An important factor in the war rumors was

culpable party for policies that were highly detrimental to its own, as well as Hoa interests, as in the destabilizing socialist transition in the south, and measures that alienated ethnic Chinese for no truly necessary reason, as in their relocation in the north. Yet in and of themselves, these developments probably would have drawn little more than behind the scenes criticism from the PRC, but Hoa flowing across the border created both a drain on resources to deal with them, and probably more important, public exposure to the plight of Chinese compatriots. Indeed, Li Xiannian remarked that "if we don't speak out, we will feel weak."⁶⁶² While the treatment of ethnic Chinese surely generated anger in Beijing, PRC action more broadly was essentially derivative of the larger Sino-Vietnamese relationship. The closing of the border after little more than three months, for example, indicated how limited concrete state support of persecuted compatriots was.⁶⁶³ Even more, the essential hollowness of Beijing's approach to the Overseas Chinese issue in its immediate area can be seen by a comparison with Cambodia.

In truth, throughout PRC relations with the Khmer Rouge, little attention was given to the views and needs of even CCP organizations in Cambodia. Wang Chenyi has provided a detailed summary of connections on the ground between Pol Pot's group and the Huayun, a broader group with the Cambodian overseas branch of the CCP at its core. While the Khmer Rouge requested a direct relationship with the Huayun in 1966, it was never trusted since key figures had been trained in and arrived from Vietnam in the 1950s. The broader ethnic Chinese population had also come from South Vietnam. Following the 1970 Lon Nol coup, the the Chinese

mysterious notes left under the doors of Hoa residents, for which China and Vietnam blamed each other.

⁶⁶² In forwarding a MFA request for instructions to the Standing Committee on June 7; *Li Xiannian nianpu*, vol. 5, pp. 610-11.

⁶⁶³ In preparation for Brzezinski's May trip as numbers of Hoa crossing the border surged, a US NSC memo called for encouraging the PRC to continue to take refugees, and urging expansion if necessary, although the message does not appear to have been delivered. *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, p. 350.

embassy ordered the withdrawal of the Huayun to the countryside, but they were rejected there by the Khmer Rouge as a "state within the state." In 1972 the Huayun dismantled all its organizations, and sent representatives to Beijing to consult on the future. To their dismay, they were told that the Khmer Rouge and CCP agreed that Huayun members should transfer to the Khmer Rouge, and those who did not fulfil this instruction would not be allowed to enter China. With Pol Pot in power, the CCP was no more sympathetic to ethnic Chinese complaints, where deadly forced labor a key issue. In 1978, grievances over the question and lack of PRC support were rejected, with those who suffered told, *inter alia*, to consider the big picture, be patient, and accept the labor education of the Cambodian authorities.⁶⁶⁴ The Vietnamese were not amused by being criticized for their treatment of the Hoa, while Cambodia's far worse behavior toward its Overseas Chinese was met with silence. Notably, Hanoi claimed that Vietnam aided fleeing ethnic Chinese from Cambodia who Beijing ignored. According to a subsequent CIA analysis, about 200,000 ethnic Chinese died under Pol Pot's rule, a number roughly equal to subsequent expanded PRC estimates of "persecuted" Hoa who fled to China. Evidence of any Chinese remonstrance to the Khmer regime in this regard is missing.⁶⁶⁵

By spring-summer 1978, the Chinese leadership faced a new, more threatening situation as Sino-Vietnamese relations further deteriorated. Two factors stood out. Most obvious, but less significant, was the unexpected Overseas Chinese issue, which resulted in the open denunciation of Hanoi, the total cut-off of aid, and dropping all pretense of fraternal relations. Deng subsequently told Lee

⁶⁶⁴ Wang, *Chinese Communist Party's Relationship with the Khmer Rouge*, pp. 25-34.

⁶⁶⁵ See *ibid.*, pp. 25, 31-33; Ross, *Indochina Tangle*, pp. 186-87; Chanda, *Brother Enemy*, p. 245; and Woodside, "Nationalism and Poverty," p. 383. In February 1979, Hua offered a figure of about 210,000 Chinese nationals expelled from Vietnam; Hua-Blumenthal conversation, above, note 497.

Kuan Yew that the aid cut-off was a serious, carefully considered decision,⁶⁶⁶ but the resulting enhanced tension on the border was by no means a matter that would lead to war. The second, less publicly prominent, but truly important matter, was the Vietnam-Khmer Rouge conflict, where Hanoi was priming itself for an invasion. It is unclear how much PRC leaders understood of Vietnam's intentions, but undoubtedly they knew some sort of intervention was likely. However, reports that the Politburo met in May and July to consider military action are unpersuasive⁶⁶⁷; discussions on "teaching Vietnam a lesson" came later in the year. Also unpersuasive are claims, attributed to Chinese officials speaking in 1979, that differences over Cambodia policy existed within the Chinese leadership until late 1978, when "Deng's line" prevailed.⁶⁶⁸ This confuses the most likely policy dynamic. While necessarily somewhat speculative given the lack of information on leadership discussions before late 1978, we reiterate that we have found no solid evidence of significant differences between Hua and Deng, nor indeed among the high elite generally, on the Indochina conflict up to mid-1978. The dilemma remained, dependent in large part on Hanoi's actions. Major differences would only emerge as China moved toward war, with Deng getting his way over much opposition.

The Path to War, mid-1978 to February 1979. The pressures setting the stage for war as of summer 1978 are clear—intensifying conflict on the border tied to the fleeing of Vietnam's Hoa population, increasing Hanoi-Moscow links, and Vietnam's preparations for intervention in Cambodia. Also clear are crucial subsequent developments, notably the Soviet-Vietnamese pact of November 3,

⁶⁶⁶ Lee Kuan Yew, *From Third World To First*, p. 661.

⁶⁶⁷ See Chanda, *Brother Enemy*, pp. 259–60, 358, 443n51; and Short, *Pol Pot*, p. 380. Short and Chanda refer to the alleged July meeting as raising the idea of a "lesson," but provide no source. Chanda's sources for the May meeting are a Japanese press report, and what "Chinese sources" told him years later.

⁶⁶⁸ Chanda, *Brother Enemy*, pp. 203, 434n22.

and the Vietnamese invasion of December 25. But much is uncertain along the way to February 1979 concerning which unfolding developments were critical, and how they were handled. There is also the process to consider: on the one hand, all the evidence indicates this was Deng's decision; on the other hand, unlike the period of his paramount leadership, under Hua there were procedures that were basically followed. In the case at hand, according to a senior Party historian with good ties to Hua, Deng had to work hard to convince relevant leaders of his view.⁶⁶⁹ This leaves three levels of decision, Deng deciding in his own mind that a "lesson" would be required, the process of "persuading" the relevant highest elite, i.e., the Standing Committee and key senior military figures, and expanding discussions and preparations in the light of further developments, before the decisive step was finally taken.

While anger was growing in Beijing, it should be emphasized that the "lesson" of February 1979 was by no means what was being contemplated in mid-1978. In early June, Deng told visiting Thai journalists that Vietnam had taken 11 steps against China, while China was only taking its first step in response. Significantly, he noted that the PRC was waiting for Hanoi to make further moves.⁶⁷⁰ With Sino-Vietnamese tensions further intensified, and Cambodia's situation rapidly deteriorating (see below), in mid-July a *People's Daily* commentary focused on the Indochina conflict. The commentary predictably claimed that the problem was due to Hanoi's intent to swallow up the Khmer Rouge regime, but ludicrously argued that it had failed so far due to the Cambodian people again and again rising up to smash the Vietnamese aggressors. It further argued that Hanoi's

⁶⁶⁹ Interview, May 2008. There is tension between this claim and the account of Wang Shangrun at the head of this chapter; we resolve it on the basis that Deng did put in persuasive effort, but when opposition remained, he essentially overrode it. See below, pp. [xxx-xx].

⁶⁷⁰ See King C. Chen, *China's War with Vietnam, 1979: Issues, Decisions, and Implications* (Stanford CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1987), p. 85.

frustration in subduing Cambodia led it to turn its anger on China, including driving out large numbers of Overseas Chinese, thus linking the two issues. But the commentary did not go further than declaring unspecified opposition to regional hegemonism, and firm, but unspecified, support for the Khmer regime.⁶⁷¹ At the end of the month, on the occasion of the Army Day anniversary, Defense Minister Marshal Xu Xiangqian published a long *Red Flag* article that focused on the larger global context. Xu attacked Soviet anti-China activities going back to the 1950s, observing that the Soviet *revisionists* hate us, warned that Moscow's military preparations had the "objective of invading China," and was using Vietnam's anti-China posture to surround the PRC. Xu vaguely implied possible military action, declaring "we are never afraid of war," but in fact this was only a call for preparations if the enemy launched a surprise attack.⁶⁷² And it should be remembered that, when the time came, Xu opposed the "lesson" that meant invading Vietnam.⁶⁷³

While Chinese leaders had not yet worked out a response to Vietnam's actions, paradoxically PRC policy for Cambodia was essentially determined in summer 1978. The approach was consistent with previous policy, albeit with enhanced clarity and intensity. The critical factor had become apparent in the first half of the year—the unfolding disintegration of the Khmer Rouge regime. In August, with Vietnamese forces building on the Cambodian border, Pol Pot told the CPK Standing Committee that "We can hold on for a certain amount of time, but [without change], it will become impossible. ... If things go on as they are, we will face the risk of collapse."⁶⁷⁴ Pol again began to take Chinese advice, shifting

⁶⁷¹ *RMRB*, July 12, 1978.

⁶⁷² Xu Xiangqian, "Tigao jingti zhunbei dazhang" [Be Vigilant and Prepare for War], *HQ*, no. 8 (1978). Cf Ross, *Indochina Tangle*, p. 175.

⁶⁷³ See above, p. 1; and below, p. [xxx].

⁶⁷⁴ Short, *Pol Pot*, p. 388.

from the aggressive “attack first” forward posture of the first half of the year, to a defensive strategy avoiding decisive confrontations, in addition to notionally accepting some internal and foreign policy changes.⁶⁷⁵ PRC policy significantly increased military and related support,⁶⁷⁶ but at the same time drew the line at any military engagement in Cambodia, a completely rational position given both the logistical difficulties of involvement, and especially the chaotic conditions in the country. This was conveyed to Khmer Rouge leaders in a series of visits to Beijing: Son Sen, the deputy prime minister in charge of national defense, in late July-early August; CPK Deputy Secretary Nuon Chea, the number two figure in the regime, in early September; and Pol Pot himself during the last ten days of that month. The message was urging preparations for a Vietnamese invasion, a promise of all the military help China could provide, but making clear the conduct of war was Cambodia’s own responsibility.⁶⁷⁷ It may well be that Deng was the most forceful of the messengers, but Hua, who had been deeply involved with Cambodia since 1975, was also engaged.⁶⁷⁸

⁶⁷⁵ See *ibid.*, pp. 388-89. In September, Pol agreed to Deng’s emphasis on the importance of providing a role for Sihanouk, the need for united front tactics, and preparing for protracted guerrilla war, but nothing meaningful occurred in any of these respects. The regime continued increasingly shrill propaganda, and launched a new round of purges in November; *ibid.*, pp. 390,

⁶⁷⁶ Even as Son Sen received a lecture on the need for self-reliance (see below), China undertook an unprecedented airlift of arms and ammunition, as well as dispatching hundreds of advisers, reportedly reaching 5,000 by the end of 1978. These advisers, however, were not involved in front line conflict. See Chanda, *Brother Enemy*, pp. 261-62; and Mertha, *Brothers in Arms*, p. 82. O’Doud, *Chinese Military Strategy*, p. 38, reports a higher number of advisers in the 10 to 20,000 range.

⁶⁷⁷ See Short, *Pol Pot*, p 389; and Chanda, *Brother Enemy*, pp. 261-62.

⁶⁷⁸ The few brief direct citations given concerning the message only concern Deng. They are based on interviews, Short’s with the Cambodian ambassador to Beijing who attended some of Pol’s meetings with Deng is particularly persuasive. However, here, as well as in other valuable books on the period, the false assumption of a Hua-Deng conflict, here that Deng had already eclipsed Hua as paramount leader, potentially give a misleading, and certainly incomplete, account of events; see Short, *Pol Pot*, p 389n. In fact, the open coverage of the Cambodian visits is sparse, and non-existent for Pol’s secret encounter. Hua did meet both Son Sen and Nuon Chea, and surely Pol. Deng did see Son, but apparently not Nuon. See *PR*, no. 31, p. 3, no. 32, p. 3, and no. 37, pp. 5-6, (1978); and *Deng nianpu*, vol. 1, pp. 348, 367-70.

During this period of intensifying animosity toward Hanoi, a PRC military response emerged that, while always having potential for an as yet unconceived "lesson" aimed at Hanoi's Cambodian venture, was essentially directed at developments on the Sino-Vietnamese border. We have noted how "incidents" had grown on the border since 1974, but that with a few exceptions such as the May 1977 conflict over the joint Sino-Vietnamese railway, they had been basically limited to verbal exchanges or fistfights carried out by local residents or police and militia.⁶⁷⁹ While it is difficult to confidently assign blame for these clashes, and the PRC acknowledged that "on the surface" both sides had responsibility,⁶⁸⁰ on balance, quite apart from the toxic Overseas Chinese question, Vietnam appears more at fault in terms of not addressing the issue and thus letting provocations fester.⁶⁸¹ Moreover, Hanoi had been moving forces toward the border from 1977, and especially in mid-1978. Also, according to Chinese sources, in July the Vietnamese military ordered an "offensive strategy" of "attack and counterattack within and beyond the border." While probably designed as a deterrent against potential Chinese actions, these measures appear particularly ill-advised in that, before summer 1978, there had been no PLA mobilization directed at Vietnam.⁶⁸²

⁶⁷⁹ See above, pp. [180, 200n622, 214]; and a 1979 CIA analysis, *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, pp. 828-29.

⁶⁸⁰ *Xinhuashe*, November 27, 1979. In this version, the difference was that Vietnamese violations were premeditated and planned actions, especially in 1978.

⁶⁸¹ According to the PRC account which appears broadly credible, Vietnam had not engaged with Chinese proposals for border negotiations before "reluctantly" agreeing during the June 1977 Li Xiannian-Pham Van Dong meeting, but the negotiations which began the following October did not produce results; *Xinhuashe*, Hanoi, May 12, 1979. We reiterate that while maritime border issues were difficult given the resource and territorial issues involved, there were no significant intrinsic issues with the land border; see above, pp. [179-80]. It may be the case that neither side sought to separate the land and maritime issues during the negotiations.

⁶⁸² O'Doud, *Chinese Military Strategy*, pp. 50-51; and Zhang, *Deng Xiaoping's Long War*, p. 42. In addition to moving troops into the border area, Vietnam unilaterally built a new border defense line, disrupting the status quo in almost every section of a previously relatively open and loosely demarcated border; *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, p. 829.

The tense but still contained conflict on the border changed in August with particularly violent clashes on the 12th and 25th. The August 25 event was repeatedly cited as proof of Hanoi's evil intent in PRC pronouncements. In early September, the Overseas Chinese Office of the State Council characterized Vietnamese actions on that day as using force to expel refugees [although China had closed the border], "killing them on the spot, .. at the same time invading our territory, ... a planned and premeditated murder."⁶⁸³ What appears to have happened is that Vietnam security personnel had driven 2,000 Hoa across the border, causing a few deaths of ethnic Chinese, and attacking PRC personnel with stones. This in turn led Chinese and Vietnamese soldiers to fight a small but ugly battle, where Chinese forces crossed the border in a local assault that seemingly went beyond the official policy of restraint, resulting the first death of a Vietnamese combatant.⁶⁸⁴ These events clearly required a reconsideration of existing policy for both forces on the border and the regional military authorities, and also by political and military leaders in Beijing. That came with a meeting convened by the General Staff and held in Beijing for several weeks in September.

We have no information on any role played by Deng in the General Staff meeting, but as Chief-of-Staff it is incomprehensible that he would not have authorized it, and most likely laid down guidelines for the gathering. The meeting was chaired by Deputy Chief-of-Staff Zhang Caiqian, and involved both General Staff departments and representatives of the Guangzhou and Kunming Military Regions. The Guangzhou delegation was headed by the region's Chief-of-Staff, Zhou Deli, who was sent with instructions to better understand the strategic intentions of the CMC, the operational tasks of the military region, and Vietnam's

⁶⁸³ Statement of State Council OCA Office, Sept 4, 1978.

⁶⁸⁴ See Burton, "Contending Explanations," p. 708; Ross, *Indochina Tangle*, pp. 202-203; and Nguyen Minh Quang, "The Bitter Legacy of the 1979 China-Vietnam War," *The Diplomat*, February 23, 2017.

political and military trends. Zhang Caiqian laid down the the meeting's task as advising Party leaders on how to counter Hanoi's mistreatment of ethnic Chinese and the increasing provocations on the border. Clearly the post-1975 instructions for the two military regions to simply stabilize the border while acting with restraint would be changed, and there was a consensus on the need to respond to the Vietnamese actions. There were, however, disagreements on the appropriate size of the response, with some participants arguing for low-scale conflict in order to limit the drain on resources and impact on the economy. The majority view, however, after a day of reviewing intelligence on a possible Vietnamese attack on Cambodia, was that the problem was more than a border question, and any military action must have a significant impact on Hanoi. The General Staff recommendation was an operation against a Vietnamese regiment in a border county, but the proposal was carefully designed to avoid escalation. Ultimately, the meeting did not produce a decision, but it indicate both a linking of the border and Cambodia issues, and provide a sense of central concern that local commanders might become too aggressive in responding to border incidents. Indeed, even in November, the CMC ordered border units to continue acting with restraint, only striking the enemy after it hadbeen struck.⁶⁸⁵

The bulk of the 300 to 400 PRC casualties cited by Deng and Hua occurred in the six-month period from mid-August to the start of the February war, which in reality was an indication of continuing restraint on the battlefield, and that the border as such was not a big deal. Deng was explicit in Washington as he explained the need for a lesson to Carter for broader strategic reasons, saying only that while the Vietnamese were creating problems at the border day in and day out, these

⁶⁸⁵ Zhang, *Deng Xiaoping's Long War*, pp. 41-43; and Zhou Deli, *Yige gaoji canmouzhang de zishu* [Self-Account of a High Ranking Chief-of-Staff] (Nanjing: Nanjing chubanshe, 1992), pp. 242-43.

were small scale conflicts.⁶⁸⁶ Moreover, although the public justification for the war was as a “self-defense counterattack” against Vietnamese invasions of Chinese territory, of course there was never any worry of a serious military strike from the south. Deng subsequently dismissed the idea, declaring that if Hanoi were ever to attack, “our three southern provinces [Yunnan, Guangxi and Guangdong] could readily handle it.”⁶⁸⁷

In any case, from the perspective of October 1978, while there was a desire to punish Vietnam, something brutally expressed by Deng in his late September discussions with Pol Pot, there was no clarity concerning China’s role in effecting any punishment.⁶⁸⁸ Whether the idea of a “lesson” was then circulating in CCP leadership circles is unknown, but the earliest known reference to the concept, in a very different form than what happened in 1979, came from Deng during his late October trip to Japan. In discussing Vietnam with Prime Minister Fukada, Deng declared that it was fine for Hanoi to associate with the Soviet Union, because in doing so they would “grasp as soon as possible the lesson that we once learned” of Moscow creating more difficulties for them.⁶⁸⁹ If there was any seriousness in Deng’s remarks, they did not require any action from the PRC.

The situation quickly changed with the signing of the Soviet-Vietnamese Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation on November 3. While this development did not essentially change the existing situation of Vietnam priming itself for an

⁶⁸⁶ *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, p. 768.

⁶⁸⁷ Deng’s assertion to Ohira in their December 6, 1979, talk; Wilson Center documentary collection, “Japanese Documents on China/Sino-Japanese Relations.”

⁶⁸⁸ Deng reportedly lauded into a ferocious condemnation of Vietnam, attacking Le Duan as an ingrate “who had to be punished for his treachery; Short, *Pol Pot*, p. 389. Chanda, *Brother Enemy*, p. 260, reports that earlier, apparently at an alleged July 1978 Politburo meeting, Chinese leaders decided to punish an “insolent” Vietnam. This, however, is based on an inadequate Sorce (see above, note 674), and our overall reading is that this is much too early for any firm decision.

⁶⁸⁹ Deng-Fukada discussion, October 23, 1978, in “Japanese Documents on China/Sino-Japanese Relations, 1974-1986.”

invasion of Cambodia, Moscow-Hanoi cooperation intensifying in ways that China could not ignore, and the ongoing "small scale conflicts" on the border, only after the treaty did a sense of increased urgency lead to a new focus on how to deal with Vietnam.⁶⁹⁰ As Deng put it on the eve of the war in mid-February, after about two months of repeated consideration of what to do, and the dangers of initiating an attack, the Party Center finally made its decision.⁶⁹¹ The trend was clear, but a final decision would await Deng's return from Washington. And along the way, there were signs of uncertainty and an openness to modifying plans. The scope of the "lesson" was not determined until late in the process.

Given Beijing's deep concern with the Soviet-Vietnamese relationship, and its worries over encirclement by enemies in the north and south, a brief assessment of the treaty and the overall relationship of the Soviet Union and Vietnam is in order. The treaty called for coordinating economic plans, consolidating the world socialist system, and, in the event of an attack or threat, for the two parties to immediately consult and take appropriate measure to eliminate the threat. This wording was almost identical to that in the 1971 Soviet-Indian treaty, the conclusion of which was quickly followed by India's "liberation" of East Pakistan; as previously noted, Vietnamese officials spoke of "taking a leaf out of India's book." The clear benefit from Hanoi's perspective was securing some kind of deterrent against possible Chinese actions. That, of course, was not effective in preventing the 1979 "lesson," and perhaps it also even increased the likelihood of a PRC reaction given Beijing's fixation on the global strategic aspects of the Moscow-Hanoi alliance.⁶⁹² From Moscow's perspective, the pact had the advantages of solidifying the relationship with a prestigious member of the world socialist system,

⁶⁹⁰ See Chen, *ç* pp. 83, 85ff.

⁶⁹¹ Deng's February 16, 1979, speech in *CRDB*.

⁶⁹² See Morris, *Why Vietnam Invaded Cambodia*, pp. 213-15; Chanda, *Brother Enreemy*, pp. 257-58; Short, *Pol Pot*, p. 391; above, p. [xxx]; and below, p. [xxx].

advancing the possibility of securing military, especially naval bases,⁶⁹³ and, of course, creating a new problem for its bitter enemy in Beijing. At the time of the conclusion of the treaty in Moscow, Brezhnev noted that while some disfavored the friendship between the Soviet Union and Vietnam, “whether one likes it or not, one would have to take into account this reality.”⁶⁹⁴

At an even deeper level, it should be noted that the blossoming treaty did not remove ambivalence and distance from the Moscow-Hanoi relationship. Sergey Radchenko, a scholar informed by various Soviet-era archives, has flatly declared “the assumption that the Soviet Union blessed or even encouraged Vietnam’s invasion of Cambodia had no factual basis.” Radchenko went on to say that on the balance of evidence, Vietnamese leaders did not share their plans to invade with Moscow.⁶⁹⁵ Various evidence supports these claims. While the Vietnamese had sought a clear formulation of military assistance, the treaty only obligated the parties to consultation, the Soviets refusing anything more. According to a high Soviet official, Moscow’s leaders had no intention to go to war with China over Vietnam. On Hanoi’s side, obfuscation was a major feature of dealing with the Soviet Union. In the run in to his trip to Moscow to conclude the treaty, in September Le Duan spoke to the Soviet ambassador in vague terms of the goal to solve the Cambodian problem by the start of 1979, only pointing to efforts to promote the Khmer resistance. A less solid source claims that during the treaty signing meetings, Cambodia was hardly discussed, with the Vietnamese

⁶⁹³ While the Soviet Union gained increased military access in Vietnam in 1978 both before and after the treaty, it was only after the Chinese invasion that the Cam Ranh Bay naval base was leased to Moscow, by 1985 becoming the largest Soviet offshore naval facility, and facilitating a dramatic growth in its military presence in the Pacific. See Chanda, *Brother Enemy*, pp. 396-98; and Womack, *China and Vietnam*, p. 193. None of this, of course, was consistent with China’s interests in Indochina and the Southeast Asian region.

⁶⁹⁴ See Chanda, *Brother Enemy*, pp. 321-22.

⁶⁹⁵ Sergey Radchenko, *Unwanted Visionaries: The Soviet Failure in Asia at the End of the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 127.

leaders again citing the Khmer resistance forces, with powerful attacks from them expected in the coming dry season. More telling, three highly involved Russian officials at the time, strongly deny that Hanoi had informed Moscow of its plans to invade in advance.⁶⁹⁶ Beijing leaders nevertheless had a reason to be concerned, but Radchenko's conclusion is persuasive—the Soviet hand in the overthrow of the Khmer Rouge was “an imagined threat, seeming to the Chinese, at the time, much bigger than it really was.”⁶⁹⁷

In any case, Indochina became a central issue for the CCP leadership in the days immediately following the signing of the Soviet-Vietnamese treaty, and subject of several critical meetings to the end of the year. The most significant immediate development, although clearly arranged earlier, was Deng's visit to Southeast Asian non-communist states, Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore from November 5 to 14. On the same day that Deng left Beijing, a delegation headed by Wang Dongxing, and including Yu Qiuli and Hu Yaobang, arrived in Phnom Penh, in what undoubtedly was an emergency mission to deal with the perceived threat in the treaty. Notably, a new focus on the Vietnam and Cambodian question came at a time of intense elite involvement on the whole range of Party affairs, the central work conference from November 10 to December 15, and the Third Plenum on December 18 to 22. Despite claims or assumptions that dealing with Vietnam was a key issue and/or decided at these meetings,⁶⁹⁸ and although the plenum's communique emphasized opposing hegemony, at most the Indochina conflict only came up on the fringes of these gatherings, as had discussion of US-China relations.⁶⁹⁹ But critical meetings happened: on November 23, a meeting of navy,

⁶⁹⁶ See Morris, *Why Vietnam Invaded Cambodia*, pp. 215-16; and Short, *Pol Pot*, p. 391.

⁶⁹⁷ Radchenko, *Unwanted Visionaries*, p. 127.

⁶⁹⁸ E.g., see Chanda, *Brother Enemy*, p. 327; Short, *Pol Pot*, p. 393; and Chen, *China's War with Vietnam*, p. 93.

⁶⁹⁹ See above, pp. [134-35]. The plenum communique did, however, call for preparing to repulse aggression “from any direction”; *PR*, no. 52 (1978), p. 8.

air force and Guangzhou and Kunming Military Region personnel was convened to discuss combat plans for Vietnam; on December 7, the CMC held an emergency meeting on the Center's decision to act against Hanoi; and on December 31, another CMC meeting considered the situation following Vietnam's December 25 invasion.

Deng's visit to Southeast Asia was, in part, a response to a trip by Pham Van Dong to the region in September, and undertaking that had improved Hanoi's image, albeit far from eliminating long-standing doubts in local leadership circles. A major part of Pham's approach was to disassociate Vietnam from the communist insurgencies in the region, as in Kuala Lumpur by laying a wreath on a memorial to Malay soldiers killed fighting the insurgency. Deng, of course, had strategic arguments based on Soviet and Vietnamese hegemonic threats, and in any case local elites were wary of both Beijing and Hanoi. Deng, however, was unwilling to publicly distance the PRC from insurgent forces, although he privately indicated China would curb support, particularly to the sensitive Thai Communist Party, although declaring this was not a matter that could be resolved overnight. As previously noted, Deng was somewhat shocked by the issue of Chinese support of communist insurgencies, and he refused any wreath laying gestures. We have argued that for Deng, and all CCP leaders, this was a difficult matter given Mao's image in China as leader of the world struggle. But in Deng's case, something more seems involved—a self perception as a communist revolutionary. To Lee Kuan Yew, he denounced Pham for “selling his soul” by honoring people who had killed communists.⁷⁰⁰

Of particular interest during Deng's regional tour was his broader discussions with Lee Kuan Yew in Singapore. Although known for his dismissive

⁷⁰⁰ See Lee Kuan Yew, *From Third World To First*, pp. 664-66; Chanda, *Brother Enemy*, pp. 318-20, 324-25; Short, *Pol Pot*, pp. 390, 391; Vogel, *Deng*, pp. 280-91; and above, pp. [14-15].

attitude toward foreign leaders he regarded below his standard, Lee had a high regard for Deng, due to both his history as a great Chinese revolutionary, and from what he experienced in dealing with him. As in Thailand and Malaysia, Deng gave an intense analysis of the Soviet global threat and the linked impact of Vietnam's regional ambitions. Importantly, he addressed the "urgent problem" of a possible massive invasion of Cambodia by Vietnam. Deng, apparently both in response to Lee and on his own initiative, repeatedly dealt with the issue of what China should do if such an attack eventuated. No clear answer emerged, as Deng said on one occasion that China would punish Vietnam and make them pay a heavy price, but on another simply saying "it depends," and no commitment of a counterattack on Hanoi was given. When asked how Vietnam would be punished, the answer came back simply that "we have ways and means." The critical factor in Deng's mind, repeated numerous times, was how far Vietnam went in any attack, although this was not defined. Logically, too far would be the fall of Phnom Penh and the establishment of a pro-Vietnam government, precisely what happened in early January. But what might be an acceptable Vietnamese incursion and how it might be managed was not indicated, although Lee came away with the impression that the PRC would do something if Hanoi crossed the Mekong River. One Chinese source concluded that at this stage Deng did not have a firm determination to launch a war against Vietnam, and if Vietnam had found some way to save China's face, war could have been avoided.⁷⁰¹

There are also reports, although we regard them highly unlikely for the Vietnamese leadership, apparently convinced by the end of 1978 that regime change was both necessary and increasingly inviting given the collapse of the Khmer Rouge regime, that Hanoi considered an approach that might have met

⁷⁰¹ Lee Kuan Yew, *From Third World To First*, pp. 660-62, 666-68; Chanda, *Brother Enemy*, p. 325; and above, note 25.

Deng's still unformed idea. According to interviews with members of the Khmer forces supporting Vietnam's invasion, the initial plan was only to take over half of Cambodia at the Mekong, but the rapid advance of Vietnamese troops ended any such consideration.⁷⁰² In any case, the question of this alternative to a full invasion raises important issues of responsibility and political dynamics in the Indochina tragedy. Morris, who ultimately regards Beijing as the only basically rational leadership of the three communist adversaries, argues that Hanoi had an option that might have avoided the February lesson. This was to limit itself to an intensification of counterattacks inside Cambodia's eastern zone destroying Khmer Rouge offensive capabilities, relying on an indigenous Cambodia resistance, and temporarily seizing several eastern provinces. Whether Vietnamese leaders would have considered this a viable option given that versions of it had been tried, but the Khmer Rouge always came back to engage in more violence, is one thing, but another critical aspect was for Hanoi to pursue "sincere negotiations" using China as an intermediary.⁷⁰³

Leaving aside questions of sincerity and rationality, what gives particular pause is the notion of Beijing serving as a reliable and effective intermediary. To be sure, China wanted a peaceful settlement, had offered its good offices, and had tried to steer the Khmer Rouge away from its destructive path. But ultimately the PRC fundamentally sided with and gave concrete support to Phnom Penh, and intensified its backing in 1978 despite the signs of Cambodia's increasingly hopeless situation. Beyond this is the question of whether either Beijing and Hanoi ever confronted the underlying problem in a clear and candid way with each. The available information is too inadequate for us to know, but there is nothing to suggest that they did. Did either side state what their respective red lines were in

⁷⁰² Chanda, *Brother Enemy*, pp. 345-46.

⁷⁰³ Morris, *Why Vietnam Invaded Cambodia*, pp. 229ff.

face to face leadership meetings or otherwise? Did Deng or other Chinese leaders indicate stopping at the Mekong would be acceptable? Did Le Duan lay down what the Khmer Rouge had to do to satisfy Hanoi, and what was expected of the PRC to make sure this happened? It seems not, a major political and diplomatic inadequacy on both sides that possibly could have avoided a "lesson."

Meanwhile, Wang Dongxing's hastily organized delegation arrived in Phnom Penh on November 5. In the context of the Soviet-Vietnamese Treaty, the immediate need was to convey some indication of support, and to make an assessment of conditions in Cambodia. But arguably more important was the task of reinforcing the message given to top Khmer Rouge leaders including Pol Pot during their visits to Beijing in July to September—don't count on direct military assistance. Pol may not have fully absorbed the message earlier. In one (unreliable) account he asked Wang for volunteers,⁷⁰⁴ and in any case, a statement in Pol's welcoming speech that Cambodia could "count on the aid of the fraternal Chinese army in case of need" was removed at the last minute, presumably due to PRC objections. In his speech, and more directly in private, Wang reiterated Beijing's position: the need was to prepare for the coming struggle with a strategy of protracted guerrilla war, rather than a quick military fix with foreign help. Wang affirmed Chinese support in general terms, but as earlier the key point was that in the crunch, Cambodia was on its own in facing Vietnam.⁷⁰⁵ Back in Beijing, there was no appetite for volunteers despite claims, using the same dubious source, that the "leftist" and "hawkish" Wang argued for Pol's request, only to be batted away by a newly dominant Deng.⁷⁰⁶ The basic line since July, surely supported by both

⁷⁰⁴ Chanda, *Brother Enemy*, p. 326, citing Geng Biao's alleged January 16, 1979 report. See our reservations about this document, above, note 637.

⁷⁰⁵ See Chanda, *Brother Enemy*, pp. 326-27; and Short, *Pol Pot*, pp. 391-92.

⁷⁰⁶ See Chanda, *Brother Enemy*, pp. 327-28, largely based on the frequently cited Geng Biao report. The larger issue was the propensity to frame developments in terms of a Hua-Deng struggle that, in the argument of this book, did not exist.

Deng and Hua, could hardly have been challenged by any member of the November delegation who experienced first hand the insane radicalism and disorganization of the Cambodian situation.

In any case, apart from what Deng's trip to Washington meant for the final go ahead, the months of November and December were critical for the nature and scope of any lesson that would involve considerably more than the proposal for a limited incursion into Vietnam raised, but not accepted, at the September GSD conference. Deng's invasion-eve statement that consideration had been going on for about two months before the decision was made, probably suggests that November and December was the period of intensive debate and decision.⁷⁰⁷ Two significant meetings occurred on November 23 and December 7, with a final meeting on December 31 after the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia. The November 23 meeting, convened by the CMC, involved navy and air force leaders and relevant personnel from the Guangzhou and Kunming Military Region to study and discuss a combat plan, reportedly drawn up by Deng, that was much larger than the previous one. The area involved was greater, as was the expected number of enemy forces and period of combat. As reported by Guangzhou Chief-of-Staff Zhou Deli who was present, some participants worried that if the goal was to restrain Vietnam from attacking Cambodia, it might not be sufficient as Hanoi itself would not be seriously threatened.⁷⁰⁸

The December 7 "emergency meeting" convened by the CMC is generally treated as the point of decision to attack Vietnam and teach Hanoi a lesson. What was conveyed to military leaders at this short four-hour gathering was that the

⁷⁰⁷ Alternatively, if December 7 is taken as the decision date (see below), the period of consideration could have started in mid-October, something consistent with a vague reference in Xu Xiangqian's biography; *Xu Xiangqian zhuan* [Biography of Xu Xiangqian] (Beijing: Dangdai Zhongguo chubanshe, 1991), p. 549. We believe, however, that intense consideration would not have begun until after the Soviet-Vietnamese treaty.

⁷⁰⁸ Zhou Deli, *Yige gaoji canmouzhang de zishu*, p. 245.

Party Center had decided on “action against Vietnam,” and for the first time a clear indication of teaching Vietnam a lesson appeared. Two things stand out from this statement. First, while the CMC rather than the Politburo or other civilian bodies took the lead in discussions, it was at the Standing Committee that the decision was made—that is, venue where Deng convinced his most senior colleagues, and the system’s most authoritative body to take much more extensive and potentially risky actions than previously agreed. Second, as stated in one source, this was not yet a decision to attack, but only one to make systematic preparations for launching such a war. The participants at the meeting discussed possible Soviet responses and detailed information on Soviet forces near the Chinese border in the north. This discussion was clearly structured around three possible Moscow reactions (see below), with the Party Center already declaring the risk was “not too large.” The result of this brief meeting was to create a major momentum toward war, even though a final decision had not been made. While there had been some military buildup in previous months, it was only now that a major mobilization occurred. The meeting ended with verbal orders, quickly followed by Deng’s signed order. On the next day, the CMC ordered nine army units from the Guangzhou, Kunming, Wuhan and Chengdu Military Regions to prepare for operations against Vietnam. On the 9th, Guangzhou Commander Xu Shiyou returned to Guangzhou, now named overall commander of military operations against Vietnam, and on the 13th Xu ordered all Guangzhou Military Region units designated to participate in the potential war to set off immediately to the Guangxi border, subsequently planning the mobilization of troops.⁷⁰⁹

⁷⁰⁹ *Ibid.*; Min Li, *Zhong-Yue zhanzheng shinian* [Ten Years of War between China and Vietnam] (Chengdu: Sichuan daxue chubanshe, 1993), pp. 15-19; and Nie Chuanghui, *Shinian Zhong-Yue zhanzheng (shang)* [Ten Years of War between China and Vietnam, vol. 1] (Hong Kong: Tianxingjian chubanshe, 2010) pp. xxx-xx. We have found no evidence that Deng or Hua attended the December 7 meeting, but it clearly was regarded as transmitting orders from the top that were quickly followed.

On December 31, six days after Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia, Hua presided over another CMC "emergency meeting" to further study how to conduct combat and make decisions for what seemed an even more inevitable war, with Deng making immediately accepted proposals for a major expansion of war plans. The meeting formally determined the exchange of military region commanders between the Wuhan and Kunming Military Regions, with Wuhan's Yang Dezhi, a highly regarded soldier who was named deputy to Xu Shiyou for the whole campaign, exchanging with Wang Bicheng. Yang took charge of the western front of the border in Yunnan. At this meeting, due to the full Vietnamese invasion and Deng's initiative, the CMC decided to increase the number of troops and expand the scale of the operation, with two armies assigned to serve as a battle reserve force. This meeting's strong approval of Deng's proposals underlined his dominance, while also demonstrating Hua's full support for the venture despite his earlier reservations.⁷¹⁰ Hua's significant involvement in the undertaking would be demonstrated by his activities in the subsequent period up to the launch of the attack and during the conflict itself.

While the above meetings provide important clues, they hardly explain the key factors in to the march to war, a process concerning which, as put by one of the most rigorous and insightful Party historians, few materials are available, and few people could know the whole story.⁷¹¹ In attempting to arrive at an accurate picture of what happened, we rely heavily on oral sources, not only senior Party historians, but also family members as well as secretaries and other assistants of involved high-ranking officials, including Hua, Ye Jianying and Chen Yun. These

⁷¹⁰ The report on the CMC meeting at http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/articlelist_2658399837_1_1.html only mentions Hua, but the memoir of General Zhang Zhen describes Deng and Hua at a Politburo meeting on the same date; two two sources most likely conflated the same event. See Zhang, *Deng Xiaoping's Long War*, p. 56.

⁷¹¹ Interview, September 2009.

accounts contain significant differences concerning particular actors and specific events, thus leaving to us the task of evaluating clashing claims where documentation is insufficient. A particular problem is that interviews generally are not time specific, thus, for example, it is unclear at which stage of the process various actors were consulted. However, with careful consideration of the reliability and biases of different oral sources, together what is known from written sources and the logic of the situation, we believe we can construct a credible interpretation.

We have considerable confidence that the decision to invade Vietnam and teach Hanoi a lesson, or perhaps more precisely to prepare for such an attack pending favorable circumstances, particularly concerning the US, was taken by the highest CCP authority, the Party Center, i.e., the Politburo Standing Committee. As noted above, this was clearly stated, according to available written accounts, at the December 7 meeting where the decision was conveyed to military leaders, and also in the speeches of Deng and Hua on February 16, the day before the invasion.⁷¹² There is also little doubt that discussions within the higher ranks of the military, notably the living marshals and the CMC Standing Committee, preceded the December 7 meeting, as suggested by Su Yu's rejection of Deng's request to take overall command of the operation.⁷¹³ Broader segments of the military were probably involved in early discussions; when Deng called in Geng Biao and revealed his intention to invade Vietnam, Geng's assignment was to lobby the PLA for support, a difficult job given widespread disagreement.⁷¹⁴ It is quite clear that substantial reservations within the military, particularly at its higher reaches, would have been well known to the Standing Committee as it considered its position.

⁷¹² Deng predominantly simply used *zhongyang*, in fewer references Hua used both that and *dangzhongyang*, Deng also twice referred to the Center's Politburo. At the end of the war, Deng also linked the Party Center and the CMC on several occasions; speech on March 16, 1979, document provided the authors by a PRC military source.

⁷¹³ See above, p. [41].

⁷¹⁴ Interview, September 2017. Cf. above, pp. [176-77].

Meanwhile, it appears the MFA and Huang Hua, described as weak in this context by a senior Party historian with close ties to the foreign policy establishment,⁷¹⁵ had little if any input. To again emphasize, the war was not an agenda item at either the work conference or Third Plenum, nor is there clear evidence of significant discussion on the fringes of these meetings.

Within the Standing Committee, this was solely Deng's project. Interviews strongly indicate Hua, Ye, and Li Xiannian held considerable reservations, while Wang Dongxing essentially took no part, something understandable as he was coming under heavy attack at the central work conference. This leaves Chen Yun, whose *de facto* promotion to the Standing Committee occurred at the work conference, with interviewees differing on his actions and opinions. We can consider two of levels of debate in the top body: Deng's overall arguments as to why such an invasion was in China's interest; and the issue of the risk of a possible Soviet reaction to an attack on its new treaty ally, something identified as the major source of worry among the military and elite generally by Deng in his invasion eve speech. We can be confident that Deng made many of the same arguments to his Standing Committee colleagues as he articulated on February 16. Ye Jianying's influential nephew, Ye Xuanji, recalled Deng making an economic argument, that economic construction required a stable external environment, and threats from the Soviet Union in the north and Vietnam in the south threatened development.⁷¹⁶ A Party historian close to Hua reports Deng emphasizing the long period since China had engaged in military action, insisting the PLA needed a test.⁷¹⁷ Moreover, given subsequent statements from both Deng and Hua,⁷¹⁸ we can be sure Deng

⁷¹⁵ Interview, May 2007.

⁷¹⁶ Interview, October 2009.

⁷¹⁷ Interviews, May 2008 and January 2011.

⁷¹⁸ E.g., Deng in his February 16 speech, in *CRDB*; and Hua in his October 29, 1979, meeting with Margaret Thatcher, UK archival document.

pushed the view that the PRC faced a choice in dealing with the offending Vietnamese: doing nothing or taking action. Credibility, or in Deng's repeated assertion that "China means what it says," surely was strongly presented to his top colleagues.

None of Deng's arguments, in and of themselves, convinced those colleagues. Leaving aside for now the inherent inadequacy of Deng's economic opinion, it was precisely the potential damage of Deng's proposed war to the economy and its distraction from the Four Modernizations, that especially worried the other Standing Committee members. According to the Party historian close to Hua, he had been concerned about the cost of the war from the outset of discussions, an emphasis shared by Li Xiannian. Most interesting, this historian reports that Hua consulted Chen Yun, the leader whose basic economic perspective was most hostile to Deng's plan, and came away from the exchange more clear about his own reservations. We will return to Chen shortly. Ye Jianying was particularly concerned with the military consequences of Deng's proposal, sharing the reservations of other marshals. How strongly Ye voiced his opinions was a matter of dispute among interviewees, some picturing him as more ambiguous than Marshals Xu Xiangqian and Nie Rongzhen, others reporting very strong opposition, to the point of hitting the table with his fist while making his argument. But in the end, the result was collective discussion in the Standing Committee which reached unity by conceding to Deng's position. When asked late in life by a family member why he supported the war, Hua replied, because Deng wanted to do it; another close family member provided greater depth by reporting greatest concern was maintaining Party unity.⁷¹⁹ Reaching that point, however, required careful consideration of potential Soviet reaction.

⁷¹⁹ Interviews, October 2009 and April 2019.

The leadership's claim that it proceeded after careful consideration, and did not act rashly can be seen in the evaluation of possible Soviet responses, and thus the viability of Deng's war. As noted, three possibilities, with the Standing Committee's assessment, were presented to the December 7 "emergency meeting." One possibility was a "small stir," essentially the existing situation of troop movements and reinforcements in the northern border areas, or perhaps grabbing a small bit of PRC border territory. The second, a "medium fight," perhaps involving an army of up to four or five divisions, would be unable to have much effect over the massive border. It would require PRC preparations, but could be easily dealt with. The main threat would be a "big fight," a large scale attack, but this was judged highly unlikely for a variety of reasons: the Soviet forces in the border regions were inadequate for a major attack, Moscow's priority remained in East Europe, a half year would be required for the material and mental preparation for a big military endeavor, and the inhospitality of the north for military action in winter months.⁷²⁰ Based on this, a strategy was clear. While the specifics would not have been worked out at this stage, the answer was a limited, brief invasion that would place no pressure on the Soviet Union for a major response, as arguably an attempt to seize Hanoi might have. Thus as claimed, the PRC adopted a strategy in a process that was not rash, and in substance not particularly risky in national security terms.

At the level of elite politics, the intriguing factor is that the underlying analysis has been presented as the work of Chen Yun. This narrative could cause scepticism given Chen's well-known adversity to risk, particularly when we consider the economic costs, and one interviewee dismissed the story as impossible.⁷²¹ The

⁷²⁰ These scenarios are drawn from *Deng Liqun guoshi jiangtan*, vol. 3, pp. 354-55, reflecting the Chen Yun angle discussed below; Deng's February 16 speech; and Hua's October 1979 meeting with Thatcher.

⁷²¹ The son of a Politburo member at the time; interview, May 2008.

evidence, however, from both interviews and published work, indicates that Chen was indeed involved in advancing the three scenarios analysis. The story as presented is that Deng, caught in a predicament over the issue and finding himself isolated in the Standing Committee, turned to Chen who was respected for his sober perspective, to conduct a study of the likely Soviet threat in order to provide needed support. Chen set out to gather the opinion of significant military figures, reportedly holding discussions with the leaders of six military regions over a week's time, and coming back with Deng's desired conclusion that a short war, stated as less than half a year, would not give Moscow time to act, in addition to Soviet misgivings over whether a big conflict would be in its interest.⁷²²

All of this is plausible, but does not adequately address the elite politics of the episode. For all the potential advantage for Deng in seeking Chen's support, Chen was hardly a figure with the expertise or contacts to pursue military issues. As outlined by one senior Party historian, Chen had steered clear of such questions since 1949 following Mao's criticism during the last phase of the civil war, deliberately not touching foreign affairs matters apart from foreign trade.⁷²³ But the weakness of the narrative as given is the portrayal of Deng as in a bind and needing Chen's support to prevail. There is also the possible implication, given that Hua and Deng had taken different positions, that Chen had decided to back Deng, despite his larger economic views, as a move against Hua, something we do not believe likely in this particular circumstance.⁷²⁴ Given the specific task by Deng, Chen produced a convincing assessment, surely in its essentials Deng would have concluded already—a short, brief invasion of Vietnam was not going to lead the

⁷²² *Deng Liqun guoshi jiangtan*, vol. 3, pp. 354-55; *CY nianpu*, p. 236; and interview with former secretary of Chen Yun, November 2006. Notably, Chen's official biography does not mention the matter.

⁷²³ Interview, September 2017.

⁷²⁴ On Chen's possible moves to align himself with Deng against Hua in this period extending into early 1979, see below, [ch. 3, pp. 94-95, ch. 8, pp. xx-xx].

Soviet Union into a major military conflict with China. While it certainly did not hurt to have another old cadre of enormous prestige articulating the view, in our view it was hardly necessary to secure Standing Committee agreement. This was not a case of Deng having supplanted Hua as overall leader at the work conference and Third Plenum as sometime believed,⁷²⁵ but simply that in the area of PLA leadership he was authoritative, particularly in comparison to Hua and Chen's limited military experience. This also applied to Ye, the "tenth marshal," who had declared Deng "the leader of us old marshals" even before he had returned to work. As his nephew stated, when Deng insisted, Ye no longer opposed the venture.⁷²⁶

As for the military establishment, it is clear that at the highest levels there were major worries and reservations, including some strong opposition. From our interviews, of the four living marshals all except Liu Bocheng⁷²⁷ expressed significant reservations; thus of the five CMC vice chairmen only Deng pushed the project, with Liu, in a state of dementia since 1973,⁷²⁸ apparently silent. Below the vice chairman, of the nine members of the MAC Standing Committee at the time, oral sources identified five as opposed or deeply concerned: GPD head Wei Guoqing, Su Yu, Beijing Military Region Political Commissar Qin Jiwei, Vice Premier Wang Zhen, and Li Xiannian. The only officers of this stature, both subsequently

⁷²⁵ See Ross, *Negotiating Cooperation*, pp. 138-39, who, using the case of US-China normalization, argues that Deng's *new* authority allowed him to face down the opposition of his colleagues. For a detailed analysis of the Deng-Hua power relationship at the time of these two meetings, see below, [ch. 8, pp. xx-xx].

⁷²⁶ Interview with Ye Xuanji, October 2009; and above, pp. [24-25]. Li Xiannian, although a significant commander during the revolutionary wars and a member of the CMC Standing Committee since the 11th Congress, had civilian career since 1949.

⁷²⁷ Liu had been the commander of the Second Field Army, known colloquially as the Liu-Deng army. More significantly well before late 1978, despite his political and military posts, he was significantly impaired physically and mentally, and unlikely to have contributed to the debate. As stated, the other living marshals, Ye, Defense Minister Xu Xiangqian, and Nie Rongzhen, indicated their concerns.

⁷²⁸ See "Liu Bocheng wannian weihe shiyi?" [Why Did Liu Bocheng Lose His Memory in His Later Years?] at <https://history.ifeng.com/c/83Gwer0vJWL>.

promoted to the Standing Committee, who were regarded as supporters, were Yang Yong, the first-ranking deputy chief of staff serving directly under Deng, and Yang Dezhi, who would soon be sent to the Kunming Military Region to assume command of the western section of the border war.⁷²⁹ In any case, the CMC leaders showed little appetite for Deng's war and had to be dragged into it, but they essentially complied. While the full story cannot be known, the only figure on the available evidence who might be considered to have continued his opposition was Su Yu, who not only refused Deng's request to lead the attack, but also went to Deng's home to argue against the war, only to be treated with disdain.⁷³⁰

The situation regarding the larger military leadership is more murky, but it is reasonable to conclude there was no broad support for Deng's project before the decision to teach Vietnam some sort of lesson. Our oral sources, in any case, do claim some backing for action. In one version, the northern military opposed, but southern commanders supported. This has a certain logic, in that commanders in the north would face unknown problems in potentially facing a superior Soviet army, while southern commanders had to deal with Vietnamese border clashes, and had already considered punitive action, albeit nothing on the scale of the coming war. Another claim is that military region commanders who had served in the Second Field Army, the Liu-Deng army, all supported the invasion. In any case, in the absence of further information, neither of these assertions is convincing. Of those reported opposing the invasion, Wei Guoqing, while now GPD head, had

⁷²⁹ For the CMC membership in this period, see Ma Qibin, *Zhizheng sishinian*, pp. 589-90.

It is of note that neither Xu Shiyou, who was assigned command of the southern front, nor Li Desheng who commanded the northern front, both Politburo members, were on the CMC Standing Committee. They were not appointed when Mao revived the committee in 1975, nor when a new version was appointed at the 11th Congress. Although the dubious January 1979 document ("Keng Piao's Report," p. 86) portrays Xu as a hawk, he was not identified as supporting the invasion during the debate stage by any of our interviewees. Xu and Li were most likely appointed because they respectively were the commanders of the Guangzhou and Shenyang Military Regions.

⁷³⁰ Interview with well-connected senior Party historian, September 2017.

considerable past experience in south China border region, as well as significant early post-1949 experience as an adviser to Vietnam's military forces in the war against France. Reportedly, Wei believed that an invasion was a bad idea that would have a negative impact in Southeast Asia.⁷³¹ As for 2FA leaders supporting the war, that undoubtedly was the case after the decision, but at the end of 1978 only two military regions (Shenyang and Beijing) were led by 2FA veterans, neither were identified for their support during the debate stage, while the Beijing Military Region was negative.⁷³² In any case, as revealed in Geng Biao's difficult effort to secure support, success reportedly came not from the arguments in favor of an invasion, but from making clear this was what Deng wanted.⁷³³ As with higher ranking figures, the ultimate compliance was not because of the persuasiveness of the case, but due to who insisted on it.

Whatever the scepticism in the ranks, by the time of the Vietnamese Christmas invasion of Cambodia, the momentum for war was intense, even if the final decision had not been taken. While planning was advanced, three matters had to be dealt with: Deng's visit to Washington to determine the potential US reaction, adjustments in military planning given various inadequacies, and dealing with the

⁷³¹ Interview with senior Party historian, January 2011. After his service in Vietnam, from the mid-1950s Wei served in various roles in Guangxi, becoming provincial leader in 1961-66. By the early 1970s he became the leading political commissar in the Guangzhou Military Region, and in 1975-77 he served as the top leader in Guangdong, before his appointment as GPD head.

⁷³² The two Beijing Military Region leaders, Commander Chen Xilian and Political Commissar Qin Jiwei were both 2FA veterans. Qin, as noted, expressed reservations about the proposal, while Chen, under attack at the work conference, may not have addressed the issue. The only military region commander cited as supporting the invasion, Yang Dezhi, had served in positions in units that became part of the 2FA system, but throughout the liberation war held major command posts in Nie Rongzhen's North China Field Army. On appointments according to Field Army history, cf. above, pp. [65ff]. For a detailed history of the Field Army systems, see William W. Whitson with Chen-hsia Huang, *The Chinese Communist High Command: A History of Communist Military Politics, 1927-71* (New York: Praeger, 1973).

⁷³³ Interview with senior Party historian, September 2017. Cf. above, pp. [176-77, 234].

political actors in Southeast Asia, particularly the remaining Khmer Rouge forces, and Thailand.

Although there is no definitive proof that the decision to proceed with the invasion was made after Deng's meeting with Carter and other US officials at the end of January, the existing evidence and logic of the situation indicates this was the case.⁷³⁴ It is likely that Deng made up his mind on the way back to Beijing, with the final preparations made during the week after he returned to Beijing on February 8. While we leave to the final section of our analysis of the Sino-Vietnamese War a discussion of Deng's contradictory attitude toward, and misunderstandings of, the US, the visit was clearly the last hurdle before ordering the poorly planned invasion of Vietnam. As we have seen in our earlier discussion, this was the preeminent feature of Deng's visit to Washington, which was handled with a considerable degree of skill. Apart from conveying the sense of a strong determined leader, Deng demonstrated awareness of the limits of what the US would do to accommodate the PRC, telling Carter that "we understand it will be difficult for you to [approve]," but moral support is needed. Hua subsequently gave essentially the same message of understanding and gratefulness for muted support to Treasury Secretary Blumenthal, who during the war carried Carter's reservations to Beijing.⁷³⁵ For Deng there were surely two key objectives as he set out on his trip, reportedly not completely confident of what he would find in Washington⁷³⁶: that some sort of American understanding would help deter any possible Soviet reaction, and that

⁷³⁴ This view was confirmed by two senior Party historians with a keen interest in the question; interviews, May 2007, and September 2009. In addition, an intellectual activist with personal links to Li Shenzhi, a Party intellectual who accompanied Deng on the trip, reported that Li strongly supported it; interview, January 2000. Also, a Taiwan Ministry of National Defense document claims a CMC meeting during February 9-12 made the decision; see Chen, *China's War with Vietnam*, pp. 92-93. We have not been able to confirm this meeting, however.

⁷³⁵ *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, pp. 768-69; and above, pp. [149-53, 160].

⁷³⁶ See Zhang, *Deng Xiaoping's Long War*, p. 60. Zhang cites Gong Li, a leading international relations scholar at Beijing University.

the broader aspects of the new relationship not be derailed. As we have seen, while the US obfuscated its attitude in public, on these essential points it gave Deng what he wanted in spades.

Military circumstances and planning faced serious problems that contributed to the exceptionally poor performance in February-March 1979. Deng's analysis that PLA deficiencies were substantially due to the chaotic aspects of the Cultural Revolution cannot be doubted, but it leaves the question of why push an army into such a large-scale undertaking when the inadequacies were obvious. Moreover, in the view of the son of a deceased marshal, the war was such a "mess" because of the lack of a central coordinating figure guiding the whole venture—the type of position Su Yu apparently rejected.⁷³⁷ Deng himself, although PLA Chief-of-Staff, was too busy with other matters to perform that function. Also, apart from the lingering doubt about the project in the military, as previously discussed senior military figures held a seminar from December 20 to January 3, marked by interpersonal rancour over who did what to whom during the Cultural Revolution.⁷³⁸ At a more nuts and bolts level, from mid-December the GPD faced great difficulties in filling positions required for the coming conflict. Enormous numbers were required and not adequately met as the launch of the war approached, leading to a relaxation of appointment procedures at the start of February, and a great amount of personnel turbulence on the very eve of the war. As previously noted, the December 31 CMC meeting decided to increase the number of troops and expand the scale of the operation. The meeting was followed by massive additional movements of troops and armor to the border, and deferment of the date of the attack, with war preparations extended on January 23

⁷³⁷ As relayed in an interview with a senior Party historian, September 2017.

⁷³⁸ See above, p. [50].

on Deng's instructions. Given various difficulties with the force being assembled, plans for combat in Vietnam also expanded from a shorter period to three weeks.⁷³⁹

While the above measures were being taken in preparation for direct combat with Hanoi, the Chinese leadership sought to devise methods to aid the Khmer Rouge within the strictures of no direct military intervention. A key player would be Thailand, a susceptible, if still wary, Southeast Asian country, to Deng's message during his early November tour of the region.⁷⁴⁰ Thailand was the regional nation potentially most exposed to Vietnamese power, and also geographically in a position to supply aid to Pol Pot's forces as the PRC wanted. At the same time, the Khmer Rouge was hardly trusted by the Thai leadership, having themselves been subjected to their border attacks. On January 15, Geng Biao was dispatched to Bangkok and met with Prime Minister Kriangsak. Geng reported back to Hua that Kriangsak was very nervous nervous and kept asking whether the Cambodians could really hold out. The Prime Minister initially sought to keep contact with the Khmer Rouge as indirect as possible, but was much more accommodating on the main Beijing concern, the shipment of Chinese aid to the Cambodian forces. Other favorable steps were allowing the Khmer Rouge to buy arms and other supplies from Sino-Thai merchants in Bangkok, and on January 21, announcing Thailand would continue recognizing the DK as the legitimate government of Cambodia.⁷⁴¹

⁷³⁹ O'Doud, *Chinese Military Strategy*, pp. 52, 53, 112-14; Zhang, *Deng Xiaoping's Long War*, pp. 56, 58; Chanda, *Brother Enemy*, p. 349; Zhou Deli, *Yige gaoji canmouzhang de zishu*, and above, p. [233].

⁷⁴⁰ See Short, *Pol Pot*, p. 391; Chanda, *Brother Enemy*, pp. 325-26; and Vogel, *Deng*, pp. 282-85.

⁷⁴¹ See Short, *Pol Pot*, p. 405-406; and Chanda, *Brother Enemy*, pp. 348-49.

Goscha, "Vietnam, the Third Indochina War, and the Meltdown of Asian internationalism," pp. 178-79, presented an unconvincing alternative version claiming that Deng himself had gone secretly to Bangkok. *Deng nianpu*, pp. 468-70, reports him busy in Beijing in this period, including a meeting with a Thai vice premier on January 13.

Apart from the the Thais, Beijing leaders focused on the Khmer Rouge, with both Deng and Hua deeply engaged. The key developments were discussions with Ieng Sary, the Cambodian leader frequently and now resident in the Chinese capital. The substance of the message mirrored what the CCP had urged on the Pol Pot regime throughout 1978, only gaining marginal acknowledgement and exceptionally little implementation, but now presented with a heightened degree of upbraiding in the current situation. The key points were: prepare for a lengthy guerrilla war, establish a broad united front with Sihanouk occupying a key role, developing better relations with Thailand while cutting ties with revolutionary movements there and elsewhere in Southeast Asia, focus on the people's living conditions, and end movements against exaggerated counterrevolutionaries. What is particularly notable in these discussions apparently taking place over January 12-15, is that Deng and Hua were on the same page, both in substance, but also in providing a mix of serious lecturing of the Khmer Rouge for its past mistakes, and pragmatic guidance on what had to be done. One encounter reportedly involved Deng and Hua together on January 15. As in other respects, putting aside his initial reservations, Hua was offering wholehearted support on an important aspect of Deng's project.⁷⁴²

Following these developments in January-February, a large meeting of senior Party, government and military officials was convened on the eve of the war.⁷⁴³ The February 16 meeting was introduced by Hua, who also made a brief,

⁷⁴² See Goscha, "Vietnam, the Third Indochina War, and the Meltdown of Asian internationalism," pp. 175-80; and Short, *Pol Pot*, pp. 402-404. These sources, which are essentially consistent except for the claim that Deng made a secret visit to Bangkok in this period (see above, note 148), list the following meetings with Ieng Sary: Deng on January 12, 13; Hua on January 15 and another occasion; Deng and Hua jointly on January 15; and Huang Hua on January 15. There may be some inaccuracies and conflating of these dates in the two sources.

⁷⁴³ The following discussion draws on the text of Deng's February 16 speech, in *CRDB*. The assembled cadres were at and above the Party, government and military vice department/ministry level, and the deputy army level.

closing speech, but this was Deng's gathering. The purpose was to listen to his report on the "self-defense counterattack against Vietnam, and Deng offered a wide-ranging lengthy justification of what would be launched the following day. This was an impressive speech, one with a particular impact given the proclivity of the audience to support their military leader, notwithstanding earlier doubts. Deng fully acknowledged that there had been many doubts especially about the Soviet Union, but assured his listeners that the Party Center had carefully considered all the risks, and had come to a sound decision. He further assured that the war would "not be too large, too too deep, or too long." The wide-ranging factors Deng discussed had mostly been raised in various contexts. Among the most telling were: Vietnam's long-standing and over the past year intensified violation and disruption of PRC borders, something linked to its attack on Cambodia in pursuit of the Indochinese Federation and serving the global hegemonists in Moscow; the argument that the Four Modernizations was imperiled by the existing situation, and the impending lesson would create the necessary peaceful environment on the borders to facilitate economic development; an analysis of the international situation indicating favorable conditions and China's importance; issues of PLA preparedness for the undertaking; and the need to act to uphold China's credibility.

Some of Deng's arguments merit particular comment. In making the case that the lesson would produce stability on the border, which it did not, Deng made a bogus reference to the 1962 China-India border war in very different circumstances, claiming the result of a peaceful border ever since. More important, while arguing the existing threat to the Four Modernizations, the lesson would not damage the economy, even though uneasiness among cadres and some drain on resources and money was acknowledged. No substantial damage to the Four Modernizations would result, in large part due to the broader international situation. While having critical things to say about the weak attitude of the western

powers, notably the US, Deng completely bought into the global ant-Soviet struggle, and argued that the West wanted a strong China, was already providing finance and technology to the PRC, and it was necessary for China's actions to reinforce that foreign perception by dealing with the Cuba of the East. Deng also acknowledged concerns about how the PLA would perform, but the lack of major conflict since the Korean war, he stated, actually bolstered the need for a test of arms. Deng admitted uncertainty about the outcome, suggesting alternatives of a good performance that would weaken Vietnam, improve the situation in Cambodia, and even potentially cause changes in Laos. But a less satisfactory outcome was possible, and risks were necessary. There will be casualties, but we are not be afraid of them, the important thing was to really fight. All of this was framed by the importance of proving that "what China says counts," providing proof to the international powers that the PRC was reliable force in the overarching struggle against the Soviet Union.

Significant internal political issues are also present in Deng's remarks. First, in tension with Western analyses seeing Deng's aim in launching the invasion as part of his effort to undercut Maoism in the PLA,⁷⁴⁴ Deng's international argument was firmly placed in the context of Mao's theory of the Three Worlds and his "one-line" concept. Everything, not only in his invasion-eve speech, but also in his entire foreign policy performance since his return to work in 1977, indicates this not simply a ritual reference, but something he totally believed at the time. We have argued that this perspective was broadly accepted by the top leadership during the early post-Mao period, but on the evidence Deng seems most strongly wedded to it in this period, and definitely as matters proceeded into the 1980s, and even

⁷⁴⁴ See O'Doud, *Chinese Military Strategy*, pp. 95-96; and Eisenman, "China's Vietnam War Revisited," pp. 19-28. Eisenman also frames the Sino-Vietnam War as part of a Deng-Hua power struggle, with Hua portrayed as an advocated of Mao's people's war and an aloof opponent of the Vietnam effort.

shortly after the Vietnam conflict in 1979. This involved significant figures including at very high levels, as we shall examine in the final section of this chapter. In any case, as we have argued, Chinese bitterness about the Soviet Union predated its identification of the world's most dangerous hegemon to an earlier period, when Deng was one of the most active figures involved, Moscow's sin was revisionism, and this earlier sin was not forgotten. While we cannot explain the difference, references by Deng and Hua on February 16 were to Soviet social imperialism and hegemony. A month later, at the March 16 meeting marking the end of the invasion, Deng and Hua both consistently referred to Soviet revisionism (*Suxiu*). As international communism further fractured, the CCP elite attacked the Soviet Union for both deviations decreed by Mao. As Hua put it, while hegemony had to be combated, Moscow's revisionist heart was not dead. More broadly and particularly telling, at the March meeting both Deng and Hua, but especially Deng, emphasized the need to "safeguard Mao's banner."⁷⁴⁵

A final observation concerns the political status of Hua. We leave the full complexities of this situation to Chapter 8, and in no way rule out the possibility that Deng was contemplating the removal of Hua at the very time he engineered the invasion of Vietnam. Yet it should be noted that at the time of the February meeting, despite it clearly being Deng's show, Hua's status was rigorously affirmed. Not only was the order of leaders as Hua number one, Deng number three affirmed, but Deng referred to him as "Chairman Hua," notwithstanding Hua's somewhat self-critical statement at the year-end work conference that he should be referred to in less elevated tones. Moreover, Hua was self-confident enough to interject during Deng's presentation. But most telling was Deng's comments about his own future. These came in the context of remarks concerning Western

⁷⁴⁵ Speeches by Hua and Deng, March 16, 1979, documents provided the authors by a PRC military source. Cf. above, pp. [11-12, 220-21].

hesitations about the PRC: they see elderly leaders, and worry whether promising policies will continue if the elderly die. Deng continued that he couldn't live forever, but reassuringly noted that "our Chairman Hua" had not even reached 60. The basic point, a constant of the early post-Mao period, was the importance of stability and unity, not only for nervous foreigners, but also the Party elite who had lived through the Cultural Revolution. Deng had made similar statements about Hua shortly after his return to work which could be seen as strategic in that context,⁷⁴⁶ but repeated it at a time of his greatly enhanced position. The basic proposition was very positive for Hua, but could hardly account for any change in Deng's objectives.

Evaluating Motives and Consequences. While the top CCP elite was generally angered by many of Vietnam's actions discussed in our preceding analysis, probably to the point that many felt some punishment was justified, given the fact that the war was uniquely Deng's project, understanding the motives for the conflict must center on him. Given Deng's personality trait of not confiding his true intentions to colleagues, even those notionally close to him, plus his tendency not to leave a detailed paper trail, his motives are difficult to assess with complete confidence. Both Party historians and foreign scholars have provided sometimes overlapping interpretations of the reasons behind Deng's decision to invade Vietnam, efforts we find inadequate in significant respects. Below we offer our own assessment, with particular focus on the inadequacies of Deng's own rationale and actions.

Before turning to more nuanced analysis, it is necessary to deal with presumed linkages of the war decision to three developments in December 1978: US-China normalization, Deng's alleged launching of reform and opening at the

⁷⁴⁶ See above, p. [103].

Third Plenum, and the inaccurate narrative that the plenum marked a key step in Deng's victory in a power struggle against Hua.⁷⁴⁷ Here we simply emphasize our arguments in the preceding chapters, and what we will elaborate in Chapter 8. Views that Deng accepted arms sales to Taiwan in the normalization deal in order to gain potential US support for the Vietnam venture, or alternatively that he acted against Hanoi to justify the concession, are unsustainable; arms sales, while inconvenient, were never an obstacle to normalization.⁷⁴⁸ Early manifestations of reform and opening had begun under Hua well before the Third Plenum, which did not mention the slogan, but did pursue a policy of shifting the focus of work to economic development which was an agreed project of both leaders. Finally, whatever power shifts occurred at the work conference and plenum, there was nothing like a struggle, and Hua was fully on board for the war regardless of his initial reservations.

In seeking to understand Deng's motives, we find dubious concepts, shrewd perceptions mixed with misunderstandings of foreign positions, likely (or possible) calculations concerning his political future, and deep angry emotions. We saw the questionable guiding concepts in his February 16 speech, Mao's theory of the three worlds and the "one line" principle, shaping ideas he consistently claimed guided his overall policy approach, and, less convincingly, applied to the "lesson" for Hanoi.⁷⁴⁹ Deng would frequently characterize the invasion as done less for the PRC's own interests than for the broader international objective of opposing the

⁷⁴⁷ See Xiaoming Zhang, "Deng Xiaoping and China's Decision to go to War with Vietnam," *Journal of Cold War Studies*, vol. 12, no. 3 (2010), p. 4.

⁷⁴⁸ See, e.g., Ross, *Negotiating Cooperation*, 139-41; and Holdridge, *Crossing the Divide*, p. 179. Cf. above, pp. [99, 137-42].

⁷⁴⁹ See his September 1979 comment on the general foreign policy approach (above, p. 1), and his assertion to Carter in the context of teaching Vietnam a lesson (above, pp. [153-54]).

Soviet hegemon.⁷⁵⁰ But more to the point, it was an undertaking that would insert China, “an insignificant, poor country,”⁷⁵¹ into the world-wide struggle against Moscow in an area where Beijing had the opportunity, and could gain international credit and support as a consequence. Deng held a conflicted attitude toward the advanced capitalist powers, which on the one hand wanted a strong China and had the capacity to provide it, but on the other lacked the will to do much about it; in this sense, the lesson was as much for those powers to show proper resolve against the Soviets.⁷⁵² In fact, the lesson did not produce much admiration for Beijing, although it did not curb the wish for a “strong China”—in short, it was both ineffective and unnecessary.⁷⁵³ At another level, while a devotee of Mao’s foreign policy theories in the general sense, Deng now violated the Chairman’s practice: under Mao the PRC never engaged in major combat except in cases of a direct national security threat (Korea), or disputes over territory (India in 1962).⁷⁵⁴

The US stood at the center of both Mao’s concepts and Deng’s policies. To the central objective of enlisting Washington into an anti-Soviet alignment, Deng added the economic objective, convinced that some sort of arrangement with the US was essential for economic development. Again, as with the advanced capitalist

⁷⁵⁰ E.g., Deng’s claim to a US Senate delegation in April 1979 that the “lesson” was not for Vietnam or Indochina, but was decided by contemplating Asia and the Pacific; cited in Zhang, *Deng Xiaoping’s Long War*, p. 140.

⁷⁵¹ Deng’s observation as he prepared for his trip to the US; see Daniet Tretiak, “China’s Vietnam War and its Consequences,” *CQ*, no. 80 (1979), p. 742.

⁷⁵² On the eve of the war, Deng complained to his audience that the US and Japan considered a weak China useless, but they themselves did not take risks; Deng’s February 16, 1979 speech, in *CRDB*. At the end of the war, the State Department Bureau of Intelligence and Research concluded that “Beijing feels its military action ... educated the West”; *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, p. 838.

⁷⁵³ For our argument, see below, p. [254].

⁷⁵⁴ The other noted use of military force under Mao, the 1969 border clashes with the Soviet Union, were in important respects like Deng’s political war, growing out of similar concerns about Soviet hegemony and the legacy of Moscow’s purported revisionism. But while subject to a significant danger of escalation, the scale of armed conflict was relatively limited, and neither side was engaged in seizing significant territory claimed by the other. See Yang Kuisong, “The Sino-Soviet Border Clash of 1969: From Zhenbao Island to Sino-American Rapprochement,” *Cold War History*, vol. 1, no. 1 (2000), pp. 25ff.

powers generally, invading Vietnam did not further this objective, even if it ultimately did not do more than complicate actions for the American leadership, as in obfuscating the limited, somewhat grudging support for the lesson. While one high-level US figure, who dealt with Deng personally, declared he didn't understand the US system at all,⁷⁵⁵ Deng combined a shrewd understanding of what could be secured from the Americans, e.g., "moral support" for the war, with an apparent failure to understand the limits of how much he could influence a US with its continuing triangular diplomacy. Nowhere was this more relevant than in contemplating "teaching Vietnam a lesson." Various well-credentialed Party historians and other insiders believe that Deng saw the invasion as proving to the US China's value in the anti-Soviet struggle.⁷⁵⁶ Most striking, however, were the reflections, more than a decade later, by General Liu Yazhou who claimed most people did not understand that Deng fought the war for two beneficiaries—the CCP and the US; of course, "for the US" meant gaining support for China, particularly economic and technological.⁷⁵⁷ While this may overstate Deng's expectations, they suggest at least the hope that the war would enhance US support for the PRC. Instead, US officials asked, "how could Deng do this to us so soon?"⁷⁵⁸

If Deng conceived of the war as something that would gain foreign support for PRC economic development, something already underway quite separate from

⁷⁵⁵ Interview with Chas Freeman, July 2009. Freeman, a leading China specialist at the State Department, served as deputy chief-of-mission in Beijing, and was present when Deng declared he had achieved the real Chinese revolution after the Third Plenum.

⁷⁵⁶ Interviews, December 2008 and February 2011. In addition, the source cited above, note 734, reports Li Shenzhi saying, "Deng decided to give the US a present in order to to create an environment for reform." Cf. Radchenko, *Unwanted Visionaries*, pp. 128-29, 157.

⁷⁵⁷ "Zhongguo da Yuenan yeshi wei Meiguoren dade" [China's Fight against Vietnam Was also Fought for the Americans], at http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_1421ba9330102vmb9.html. This blog was provided by Li Xiannian's son-in-law.

⁷⁵⁸ See above, p. [148].

the Indochinese conflict, an even more dubious argument was that the invasion was necessary to create a peaceful environment for the Four Modernizations. Apart from the inherent absurdity that starting a war would create a lasting peaceful situation, there was no imminent threat from the north, with Moscow prepared for negotiations to reduce Mao's Sino-Soviet rift,⁷⁵⁹ and even the Vietnamese, notwithstanding their role in creating unnecessary conflict on the border, were also ready for negotiation.⁷⁶⁰ Moreover, given the strongly expressed concern in Beijing about encirclement and increasing Moscow influence in Vietnam, an attack was likely to enhance Soviet presence, as indeed happened with the lease of the Cam Ranh Bay naval base shortly after the war in 1979.⁷⁶¹ And it was also inevitable that the war would cause damage to the economy, as Deng's colleagues feared and he apparently simply underestimated. Instead of securing a peaceful environment, an intense border war continued into the mid-1980s, as we shall briefly discuss subsequently. While the Four Modernizations in China *as a whole* did advance regardless, the provinces facing Vietnam suffered severe economic losses.⁷⁶² In this sense, Guangxi and Yunnan were sacrificed, not to secure economic development elsewhere in China, but for Deng's international and domestic political objectives.

The narrative that Deng, for all of his assertions that the PLA needed a test, used the war to promote military modernization is highly dubious. It only becomes understandable if he was unsure of its fighting capacity, and simply sought to

⁷⁵⁹ Although the process had its ups and downs, given both the desire to improve relations after Mao, and the opportunity provided by negotiations on the expiring Sino-Soviet treaty, Moscow was ready to explore the sources of tension, including the border. Negotiations resumed in September 1979, following a Soviet proposal in April. See Vitaly Kozyrev, "Soviet Policy Toward the United States and China, 1969-1979," in Kirby, Ross, and Gong, *Normalization*, pp. 280-83.

⁷⁶⁰ At the war's end, Deng noted that Vietnam had proposed border negotiations, but waved the idea aside, commenting "maybe in 10 or 15 years"; Deng's March 16, 1979, speech, document provided the authors by a PRC military source.

⁷⁶¹ See Womack, *China and Vietnam*, pp. 190, 193.

⁷⁶² See below, p. [255].

determine what aspects of military forces required improvement, something plausible, but hardly convincing, given his awareness of the Cultural Revolution's massive disruption of the army. Or, in order to establish total dominance over the PLA that would also allow him to overcome resistance to modernization, he was willing to countenance combat failure.⁷⁶³ Yet whatever plausibility exists for these scenarios, they raise serious issues concerning both Deng's motives and his reading of the situation. Whether Deng sought additional acknowledgment of dominance, his authority in military affairs had long been apparent with Ye Jianying's acknowledgment of him as the "leader of us old marshals" even before returning to work, Ye's fading into the background subsequently, and Hua's clear unwillingness to challenge him in this sphere. Moreover, while Deng in the general sense was an advocate of modernization in 1975, and again after his return to work, as Fravel has argued, the war itself had nothing to do with the modernization steps underway, and thus was irrelevant for what Deng would term the "real war" that might come from the north.⁷⁶⁴ In the narrow sense, for modernization Deng had stressed reducing the size of the bloated PLA, and two demobilizations followed, but a hasty expansion was now required. In the larger sense, the war was neither modern, nor Deng's asserted target of Mao's people's war which emphasized drawing the enemy in; instead it was the costly human wave tactics of the Korean War.⁷⁶⁵ Similar to "creating a peaceful environment," China's soldiers on the

⁷⁶³ See Eisenman, "China's Vietnam War Revisited," pp. 739ff; and Dryer, "Deng: The Soldier." p. 544. Party historians and other elite figures spoke in a similar vein concerning Deng's wish to establish absolute authority in the PLA, and his motivation to modernize the military; interviews, December 2008, September 2011.

⁷⁶⁴ See Zhang, *Deng Xiaoping's Long War*, p. 176; and above, pp. [41-42].

⁷⁶⁵ A relevant additional case concerned the early stage of the Viet Minh struggle with France where the method was also used with the aid of Chinese advisers. Wei Guoqing, the senior adviser, finally advised smaller-scale attacks and attrition as more likely to achieve victory; see O'Doud, *Chinese Military Strategy*, p. 148. Speculatively, this could have been a factor in Wei's reported objection to the invasion.

ground, like Guangxi and Yunnan, had to make huge sacrifices for Deng's larger project.

All of the above considerations involved a degree of emotion, but in this respect two features of Deng's performance stand out: insistence that the PRC's credibility required nothing less than the invasion; and animosity, reaching levels of hatred, against the Soviet Union and especially Vietnam. Credibility has been a driver of bad decisions in many countries, with purportedly rational arguments obscuring the fact of being trapped in a deteriorating situation.⁷⁶⁶ The Chinese situation in 1978-79 was different—for all its warnings, the PRC had not yet made major physical commitments that had to be justified, and less costly alternatives that could have been taken to uphold the country's honor existed.⁷⁶⁷ Although various key leaders mirrored Deng's concern that China should not appear weak,⁷⁶⁸ no one seemed to feel this was sufficient for war. Deng, however, ultimately decided he and his country could not be weak appeasers, as he had repeatedly accused the US, and he equated that with carrying out the "lesson."

Credibility was closely linked to Deng's animosity toward Moscow and Hanoi. Ambassador Woodcock recalled Deng "always talking about Soviet expansionism,"⁷⁶⁹ a preoccupation due to much more than an analysis of the international situation. As we have indicated, Deng's deep involvement with the Soviet Union went back decades, and he was a key player in Mao's struggle with Soviet revisionism, an attitude we have no doubt was he deeply held intellectually and emotionally. In the post-Mao context, Deng consistently sought to maintain

⁷⁶⁶ See deDaulle's dismissal of Kissinger's credibility argument for the US-Vietnam War; Henry Kissinger, *White House Years* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson and Michael Joseph, 1979). p. 110.

⁷⁶⁷ Notably, ongoing pressure at the Vietnamese border and support for the Khmer Rouge's guerrilla war, which is precisely what Deng did for nearly a decade after the "lesson." Ironically, these suggestions were suggested to Deng by Carter, although clearly in a more limited sense. See above, p. [151]; and below, pp. [256-57].

⁷⁶⁸ E.g., Hua, Li Xiannian and Xu Xiangqian. See above, pp. [217, 221, 235n725].

⁷⁶⁹ See above, p. [16].

Sino-Soviet hostility. In addition to additional lessons from the war capitalist countries, especially the US, there was also one for the Soviet Union—we are leaving a heavy burden for you to support the damaged Vietnamese.⁷⁷⁰ As we shall briefly discuss below, this would carry on beyond what was necessary given changing international circumstances, with Deng still holding to Mao's "one line" view into the mid-1980s, even as PRC policies adjusted to those changes. Moreover, it is very likely that a key motive for Deng had a domestic political aspect linked to the Soviet factor: in launching the invasion he attempted to solidify the PRC's political alignment with the US, and prevent a shift modifying attitudes toward Moscow.⁷⁷¹ Paradoxically, such changes in attitude were cautiously emerging shortly after the war, a complicated matter we address in the final section of this chapter. Deng's objective was rational, particularly given his correct belief that economic development was furthered by alignment with Washington, and not Moscow, yet it was surely intensified by personal involvement in Sino-Soviet bitterness.

Deng's animosity toward Hanoi exceeded that for Moscow. China had indeed given massive support to Vietnamese revolutionary struggles against both France and the US, at considerable cost to the PRC's own resources. Expressing his sense of Vietnam's ungrateful betrayal, Deng later commented that "even when we hungry, we gave [them] food, clothes and ammunition ... they tricked us."⁷⁷² The fundamental aim of the invasion, far exceeding any international or domestic rationales, was to *punish* Vietnam, to create pain. At the start of the war, specific goals, apart from seizing designated provincial capitals before withdrawing, were not clear, but following the bloody encounter Deng articulated a clearer objective.

⁷⁷⁰ As indicated to Japanese Prime Minister Ohira; see below, p. [256].

⁷⁷¹ This assessment, which we find very persuasive, was expressed by the son of a Politburo member at the time, and by a senior Party historian; interviews, December 2008 and September 2011.

⁷⁷² See Radchenko, *Unwanted Visionaries*, p. 154.

Rather than possibly trying to force Vietnamese units out of Cambodia, the goal became to leave Hanoi bogged down in a costly quagmire until the pain was so great it would force total capitulation, and the PRC would add to the pain by supporting the guerrilla resistance, and engaging in repeated major clashes on the Sino-Vietnamese border.⁷⁷³ Anecdotally, those who engaged with Deng noted his intense antipathy for the Vietnamese, e.g., Singapore officials seeing the glint in his eyes when those “ungrateful people” were raised by Lee Kuan Yew.⁷⁷⁴ In policy terms, as movement in Sino-Soviet relations emerged from 1982, of the three obstacles Deng set for improvement, he returned time and again to the demand that Vietnam had to withdraw from Cambodia before meaningful political relations could be restored with Moscow, while downplaying the other two conditions.⁷⁷⁵ Soviet revisionists may have betrayed the struggle against imperialism in the 1950s and ‘60s, but the Vietnamese had taken China’s treasure and blood, increasingly aligned with the revisionists in Moscow, and showed no respect.

A final potential motive for the invasion is the possibility of Deng using the “lesson” to advance the aim of seizing number one status in the Party as a whole, something basically achieved by early 1980. Again, this does not mean this was a product of a power struggle at the Third Plenum. It does not even necessarily mean that Deng was consciously considering the invasion in terms of a possible change in the Party hierarchy. Indeed, his movement toward the decision to attack Vietnam, was undoubtedly fundamentally a consequence of the other considerations discussed above. But what it does mean is that circumstances arising from the events and personnel changes at the work conference and plenum,

⁷⁷³ See below, pp. [256-57]. Various foreign analysts assumed a major goal of the “lesson” was to force substantial Vietnamese army units out of Cambodia, but whether this was a key objective, or just a hope at the outset of the war, is unknown.

⁷⁷⁴ See Chanda, *Brother Enemy*, p. 325.

⁷⁷⁵ See Radchenko, *Unwanted Visionaries*, p. 130. The other two obstacles were the demands to cut troops at the border and pull forces out of Mongolia, and leave Afghanistan.

to be discussed detail in Chapter 8, created new possibilities of leadership change, matters Deng was certainly aware of. Without being able to know what Deng was thinking, well-positioned figures in Beijing have pondered the question whether he may indeed have seen the war in terms of overall Party leadership.⁷⁷⁶

For the most striking version, we again turn to General Liu Yazhou, a view we regard as unlikely in terms of Deng's precise motivation, but revealing in other respects. Liu argued that for to achieve *his* blueprint for reform and opening (which hardly existed in any systematic sense), he needed to seize absolute authority to defeat leftists in the Party. As Liu put it, "the quickest way to establish authority is to fight," and he went on to declare Deng our Mao. For his part, at the end of the war, Deng, perhaps to suggest the link, proclaimed that "to deny Chairman Mao is to deny the new China."⁷⁷⁷ Liu's views cannot reveal Deng's intentions at the time, but they point to continuing deep loyalty to Mao in the PLA, the ease with which military leaders could link Mao and Deng, and the logic that the top leader, as Mao said of Deng, should combine *wen* and *wu*, ability in both civilian and military affairs.⁷⁷⁸ In 1979, only Deng was perceived to combine those qualities.

In considering the consequences of the lesson, the first issue is the war itself. While declared a success by the leadership, largely for its strategic accomplishments, a geopolitical outlook endorsed by leading past and then present American officials,⁷⁷⁹ foreign evaluations of the military operation were

⁷⁷⁶ Perhaps the strongest indication in private discussions we are aware of came from a very high-ranking Party historian who told Joseph Torigian that, based on his knowledge, he believes becoming *the* leader was a key factor in Deng's decision; Torigian interview, October 2019. Cf. David M. Lampton, *Following the Leader: Ruling China, from Deng Xiaoping to Xi Jinping* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), p. 185.

⁷⁷⁷ "Zhongguo da Yuenan yeshi wei Meiguoren dade"; and Deng's March 16 speech, document provided the authors by a PRC military source.

⁷⁷⁸ See Teiwes and Sun, *End of the Maoist Era*, p. 67.

⁷⁷⁹ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, p. 25; and Henry Kissinger, *On China* (New York: Penguin Books, 2011), p. 340.

critical, and marked by surprise at how poorly the PLA had performed.⁷⁸⁰ Moreover, internal PRC assessments accepted that the invading army had received major setbacks in the early part of the war, and highlighted an array of shortcomings.⁷⁸¹ We do not intend to discuss the various factors in the debacle which are well covered in the literature. Here we only mention some of the most serious: inexperienced, poorly trained troops, poor communication among units on the battlefield, unwillingness/inability to use air support, rigid combat plans prioritizing control over flexibility, outdated equipment and inadequate military production, major logistics failures, and little understanding of effective use of artillery. The most striking outcome was that human wave tactics, likely the only approach available for seizing detailed targets during a strictly limited short war, were so appallingly executed, with small Vietnamese units routinely handling much larger PLA forces. In Korea, a similar-size PLA army moved further in 24 hours against a larger opponent, than the 1979 version against fewer Vietnamese in two weeks.⁷⁸² The result was huge casualties, perhaps upwards of 30,000 dead and wounded, or even much more.⁷⁸³ Deng had envisaged casualties on February 16, but tone was somewhat different on March 16. In February, he simply mentioned that casualties would happen, but we are not afraid, and the army must fight on. In March, although still downplaying casualties, Deng spoke of the high number, especially

⁷⁸⁰ The most devastating academic analysis is O'Doud, *Chinese Military Strategy*, chs. 4-5, 7; O'Dowd, however, notes the effectiveness of political work on the battlefield.

⁷⁸¹ As indicated by Wang Shangrong's report on the invasion, March 16, 1979, document provided the authors by a PRC military source.

Wang put a positive spin on the results of the "lesson," notably the failure of the Soviet Union to take major action as predicted, but he acknowledged heavy casualties and slow progress in the early days of the war, and reviewed various serious defects in military performance.

⁷⁸² See O'Doud, *Chinese Military Strategy*, pp. 63, 65, 73.

⁷⁸³ For a discussion of Chinese and Vietnamese claims, as well as foreign assessments, see, Zhang, *Deng Xiaoping's Long War*, pp. 118-19. See also O'Doud, *Chinese Military Strategy*, pp. 45-46. Vietnamese casualties were probably of similar dimensions. The much higher possibility is suggested by a reported internal discussion where Ye Jianying and Li Xiannian spoke of 48 million deaths on each side.

in the first five days, but no matter how large, the had army fought heroically, restoring the reputation of the PLA.⁷⁸⁴

This was a dubious claim, as was Deng's assertion that the war had raised China's prestige internationally.⁷⁸⁵ We have touched on this when reviewing Deng's motivations above; here we discuss three telling cases. The key point is that although various international actors had to some degree assisted PRC objectives in Indochina, this was basically due to a combination of opposition to Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia, and various broader interests in developing relations with China—the "lesson" as such added nothing to these considerations, if anything making them more difficult. The classic case, as we have seen, was the US effort to hide its reluctant and limited support of the invasion, as well as its concern about a "second lesson," all the while seeking to develop the overall relationship with Beijing.⁷⁸⁶ Given its basic omnidirectional foreign policy, Japan was essentially unmoved. When Deng met with new Prime Minister Ohira in Tokyo on his way back from the US, Ohira cautioned against actions that would upset stability in the region. At the year's end in Beijing, Deng argued that Japan was even more threatened by the Soviet Union than China, only to be told by Ohira that Japan was still providing aid to Vietnam under existing agreements.⁷⁸⁷ Southeast Asian countries had much more to fear from Hanoi, especially Thailand given Vietnamese forces pursuing Khmer Rouge guerrillas to and across its border, but in this region support for the PRC's objectives was tempered. As Lee Kuan Yew told Deng in November 1980, neither Malaysia nor Indonesia was troubled by Hanoi's occupation of Cambodia, also noting that a strong Vietnam could oppose

⁷⁸⁴ See the sources on Deng's February and March speeches, cited above, notes 698 and 752.

⁷⁸⁵ For a conflicting assessment, see Zhang, *Deng Xiaoping's Long War*, pp. 121-22.

⁷⁸⁶ See above, pp. [148ff, 166-68].

⁷⁸⁷ Memos of Deng-Ohira talks on February 7 and December 6, 1979, in Wilson Center documentary collection.

southward expansion by China.⁷⁸⁸ By then, Deng seems to have grasped the essential point. In his August 1980 interview by Fallaci, he admitted that “look[ing] back, we must say that [the “lesson”] wasn’t very effective, as many countries did not favor our action.”⁷⁸⁹

As indicated, the “lesson” also hardly delivered the promised peaceful environment for the Four Modernizations on the southern border, with Guangxi and especially Yunnan enduring severe economic setbacks, setbacks which extended well into the 1980s as Deng’s objectives required continued intense conflict on the border. As Xiaoming Zhang has noted, these border provinces committed enormous human and material resources to support PLA operations, to the great detriment of their economic and social development. Throughout the ongoing border conflict, central and local governments invested huge sums in military action, but funding for reconstruction was tardy and unsatisfactory.⁷⁹⁰

While key areas of the rest of China began to develop due to what came to be called reform and opening,⁷⁹¹ these policies were unrelated to the 1979 war or the continuing border conflict. Moreover, in strictly economic terms for the country as a whole, the consequences of the “lesson” were detrimental to development in the short run. As we saw in Chapter 3, by 1980 the leadership focused on a developing deficit crisis, leading to increasingly severe retrenchment measures hobbling growth. There were various factors involved, most prominently Hua’s overly ambitious Western great leap, fervently supported by Deng. In 1979, however, two developments worsened the fiscal situation—Hua’s investments in

⁷⁸⁸ Lee Kuan Yew, *From Third World To First*, p. 673.

⁷⁸⁹ Fallaci’s interview with Deng published in the *Washington Post*, September 1, 1980.

⁷⁹⁰ Zhang, *Deng Xiaoping’s Long War*, pp. 170, 191.

⁷⁹¹ The official characterization of economic policy at the Third Plenum was “socialist modernization,” only replaced as the regime’s unifying concept by “reform and opening” in the mid-1980s. For a detailed analysis of the policy process furthering development, see Lawrence C. Reardon, *A Third Way: The Origins of China’s Current Economic Development Strategy* (Cambridge MA: Harvard East Asian Monographs, 2020).

the countryside and pricing reforms that increased peasant incomes, and Deng's war. The cost of the war was well beyond what was anticipated, blowing out from a projected Y2.2 billion to Y4.7 billion, consuming virtually half of state reserves.⁷⁹² The Vietnam project, moreover, went against a key concept of the Four Modernizations. As affirmed at the Third Plenum, defense modernization "must be subordinate to economic construction," meaning PLA demands for resources had to give way to civilian needs, a position affirmed by Deng before and after the war.⁷⁹³ The blowout caused by the war, however, in 1979 resulted in a spike of 32.7 percent military spending over 1978; as the deficit crisis grew in 1980, Li Xiannian opposed the CMC's budget request, and the military leadership adjusted to the reduced funding. The invasion violated the spending requirements of the Four Modernizations, but the fiscal crisis, created in part by the war, reoriented priorities toward the basic concept, with a significant levelling off of PLA expenditures from 1980-81.⁷⁹⁴

While the "lesson" had not achieved various of his international or domestic goals, Deng told the PLA elite at the end of the war that the struggle was not over.⁷⁹⁵ Threats of a "second lesson" soon emerged,⁷⁹⁶ and while they were never formally invoked, an ongoing lesson continued with conventional military operations at the border continuing to 1987. As previously indicated, while the

⁷⁹² See above, [ch. 3, pp. 94-95].

⁷⁹³ On the Third Plenum, see "Zhongguo linian junfei yilan" [Summary of China's Military Expenditures over the Years], at <http://news.163.com/special/junfei/>. At the plenum, defense modernization was placed last after agriculture, industry, and science and technology. For Deng's support of these spending priorities from 1977 to 1982, see *Deng nianpu*, vol. 1, pp. 217, 272, 468, 681-82, 685-86, vol. 2, pp. 738, 759-60, 772-73, 850.

⁷⁹⁴ "Zhongguo linian junfei yilan"; Finance Minister Zhang Jingfu's report to the NPC, June 21, 1979, *BR*, no. 29 (1979), p. 23; and Zhang, *Deng Xiaoping's Long War*, pp. 176-77. The military proportion of national fiscal revenue was 19.4 percent in 1979, 16.7 percent in 1980, and in the 10-14 percent range from 1981 to 1985.

⁷⁹⁵ Deng's March 16 speech, document provided the authors by a PRC military source.

⁷⁹⁶ Geng Biao made the threat to Vietnam in July 1979; see O'Doud, *Chinese Military Strategy*, p. 89.

overall objective of punishing Hanoi remained, the possible initial goal of forcing some of its troops out of Cambodia had changed to keeping them there in a strategy of bleeding Vietnam dry. As Deng put it to Ohira in December 1979, Hanoi's dispatch of more troops to control Cambodia was advantageous to China as Vietnam would suffer more, as would the Soviet Union from its ongoing commitment of support to Hanoi, until neither could bear it.⁷⁹⁷

At the border, there were two aspects of Beijing's strategy: the nine years of sporadic ground clashes, including particularly significant battles in 1981 and 1984, and artillery barrages, what O'Doud refers to as "artillery diplomacy." Both were generally linked to developments in Cambodia. In spring 1981, as China and Thailand worked on plans to unite the Khmer resistance, the PRC initiated combat across the border in two locations, resulting in ferocity not seen since the 1979 war. In 1984, the PRC launched a bigger attack across the Yunnan border, but after fierce fighting only penetrated about five kilometers into Vietnam; as in 1979, the attack did not draw any Vietnamese units from Cambodia. Artillery diplomacy also did not shake Hanoi from its Indochina policy, its use was basically symbolic. A case in point occurred in summer 1980, as Vietnamese forces pursued Khmer guerrillas into Thailand. Beijing's response was a week's shelling of a provincial capital, with no military utility or impact.⁷⁹⁸ After the "lesson" Deng had been inflexible⁷⁹⁹—Vietnam had to leave Cambodia or continue to suffer. Ultimately, Deng's single mindedness, which left Vietnam's economy in dire straits, together with Sino-Soviet rapprochement and Moscow's wish to be free of its Indochina burden, led to

⁷⁹⁷ Deng-Ohira talk, December 6, 1979. See also Chanda, *Brother Enemy*, p. 379.

⁷⁹⁸ O'Doud, *Chinese Military Strategy*, ch. 7, especially pp. 92-95, 98-101.

⁷⁹⁹ Key examples are: Deng's unwillingness to seriously negotiate the Sino-Vietnamese border after the "lesson" for at least for 10 or 15 years (in his March 16 speech); his 1984 refusal end support for Pol Pot even when Pol's utility as leader of a viable resistance waned, and ASEAN brought pressure on China to desert the international pariah (see Chanda, *Brother Enemy*, p. 394); and, despite earlier worry about being encircled, in 1985 he stated there was no objection to a Soviet base at Cam Ramh Bay, *if* Vietnam left Cambodia (see Chanda, p. 400).

Vietnam's final exit in 1989.⁸⁰⁰ Yet it had not been a victory without high costs in 1979, nor for many years after in Yunnan and Guangxi.

A final consequence of the "lesson" was its near disappearance from the official record and public consciousness in the PRC. The immediate official reaction to the war was low key. Although editorials on the conflict appeared almost daily, no national leaders gave speeches, no demonstrations supporting the war were held, and no serious effort was made to use it to mobilize the population for domestic programs, occasional general references to the Four Modernizations notwithstanding.⁸⁰¹ In the border provinces a depressed situation was apparent, with incredible numbers of invalid soldiers visible, and popular apathy toward efforts to celebrate the "victory."⁸⁰² As time went on, references receded, with official Party histories, encyclopedias and other published works, as well as public statements, increasingly downplaying or ignoring the war. Few memoirs dealt with the "lesson" in any detail, with mention of support for the Khmer Rouge particularly sensitive.⁸⁰³ While the apparent intent to hide the war had considerable success, as seen by graduate students from top Chinese universities having no knowledge of the conflict, it could hardly be wiped from the memories of those involved. Every February, online debates and memories appear on both sides of the border. On

⁸⁰⁰ For accounts of the end game of Vietnam's presence in Cambodia, see Womack, *China and Vietnam*, pp. 204-209; and Radchenko, *Unwanted Visionaries*, ch. 4.

⁸⁰¹ See Tretiak, "China's Vietnam War and its Consequences," p. 751. Of course, as Tretiak pointed out, this most likely was in part intended to avoid provoking Moscow. Beijing did, however, dispatch Politburo members Wang Zhen and Fang Yi to the border in late March to express condolences.

⁸⁰² Chanda, *Brother Enemy*, pp. 361-62. Chanda visited the area in June and July 1979. Particular striking was disaster in an exhibition organized in Kunming, and even more so at a song and dance show in Nanning. In the latter case, the audience applauded lustily a series of traditional minority items, but when the final performance portrayed the PLA punishing Vietnamese bandits, the reaction was embarrassed silence.

⁸⁰³ See O'Doud, *Chinese Military Strategy*, pp. 160-62. The four official Party histories published since 2000 only provide very terse accounts of the circumstances and war, with one not mentioning any fighting with Vietnam. We are indebted to Chun Han Wong for providing the relevant pages of these histories.

the PRC side, the verdict is by no means universal, with some citing the Overseas Chinese crisis and the struggle against hegemony as justification. But voices of resentment have been strong, including complaints of being sacrificed for politics and for Pol Pot's regime.⁸⁰⁴ Deng's war has never been officially rejected, but its relegation to a place distant from significant accomplishments speaks volumes.

The most telling aspect of the "lesson" was what did not happen after the military debacle. At the time, many foreign observers, such as Daniel Tretiak in Beijing, felt the failures of the invasion must have weakened Deng. Beyond that, there were other developments in period that contributed to this opinion—perceived resistance to policies regarded as his, and perhaps the Taiwan Relations Act.⁸⁰⁵ These outside views, of course, reflected deep misunderstanding of contemporary CCP politics. Later, in the post-Deng period, academic articles raised questions, some concluding the war had been unnecessary, but even then there was no criticism of Deng's decision-making process.⁸⁰⁶ During the period of the invasion and its aftermath, surely there was private dissent, as suggested by Tretiak's report that some quarters felt Deng had acted rashly, but open criticism either internally or from the public was extremely rare.⁸⁰⁷ In known Party discussions there is no evidence of *any* criticism of Deng. The elite appears to have accepted his claim that the "lesson" was a necessary step in China's increased standing in the world; an example was liberal Party intellectual Li Shenzhi, who

⁸⁰⁴ Nguyen, "The Bitter Legacy"; and Howard W. French, "Was the War Pointless? China Shows How to Bury It," *NYT*, March 1, 2005. French's report was based on talks with PLA veterans and others in China.

⁸⁰⁵ See Tretiak, "China's Vietnam War and its Consequences," p. 752; *FRUS, 1977-1980: China*, pp. 904, 916; and above, pp. [172-73].

⁸⁰⁶ This is based on an interview with an international relations specialist, September 2009, and our own survey of the literature.

⁸⁰⁷ Tretiak, "China's Vietnam War and its Consequences," p. 750. The only report of apparently limited public criticism of the war, and even more rare Deng personally, that we are aware of cites Democracy Wall; Vogel, *Deng*, pp. 532, 820, citing Michael Lampton who observed them.

considered Deng a great statesman who was creating a new world order.⁸⁰⁸ To the extent this was actually believed internally, it would have been because it was Deng's line. Fundamentally, the war demonstrated that Deng's pre-invasion military prestige was so great, that even very great battlefield losses, and other setbacks, could not dent his authority.

The Gradual Move Away from Mao's Strategic Doctrine, 1979-82

The striking paradox, as we shall detail, is that within months of the normalization of US-China relations and teaching Vietnam a "lesson," the basic direction of Mao's strategic doctrine, which was also Deng's strategic doctrine, was coming under quiet criticism which reached high into ruling circles. Yet this undercurrent did not affect Deng's power one bit, as seen in his clear if still unannounced assumption of the "paramount leader" role by the start of January 1980. Of course, Deng's approach added economic objectives that did not particularly influence Mao's foreign policy. Moreover, initially, even in this sphere where he had an admired track record and deep experience, he was not the sole director of foreign policy, with Hua taking the lead in repairing schisms in the international communist movement. Most notable was the bold invitation of Yugoslavia's Tito, an arch revisionist in the classic Maoist narrative, that was arranged before and implemented during the very early days of Deng's return to work.⁸⁰⁹ But on key

⁸⁰⁸ For the source on Li Shenzhi's view, see above, note 734. This was essentially the official assessment at the Sixth Plenum in mid-1981; "Zhonggong zhongyang guanyu shiyijie liuzhong quanwei de juemi chuanda wenjian" [CC Confidential Document on the 11th Congress Sixth Plenum], 65, July 4, 1981, Internal Report 1981.07.04, Box 1, Zhongguo gongchandang, Hoover Institution Archives, cited in Torigian, "Prestige, Manipulation, and Coercion," p. 419.

⁸⁰⁹ Officials taking the lead in agitating for a change in foreign policy recognized the significance of Tito's visit as one of the earliest breakthroughs. Wu Xingtang, "Yuan Zhongguwei Li Yimang: wengehou duiwai zhengce baluan fanzheng de xianxing zhe" [Former CAC Member Li Yimang: Forerunner of Overturning Chaos in Foreign Policy after the Cultural Revolution], *Zhongguo xinwen zhoubao* [China Weekly News], March 21, 2015.

questions, clearly US normalization, and seemingly the Japanese peace treaty, Hua delegated authority to manage the process to Deng. The crucial decisionmakers, in any case, shared with Deng the essential aspect of Mao's approach—the "one horizontal line" of rallying international support against the Soviet Union, with achieving US normalization central to that end. Vietnam was different, however. Both Hua and Deng played front line roles and were broadly consistent on policy until late 1978, but the eventual outcome was not a consensus decision, instead being simply giving Deng what he wanted.

Without detailed information on internal leadership exchanges, plus different views of some degree being inevitable in serious policy discussions, we cannot be absolutely sure of a consensus on rebuffing Moscow and pursuing US normalization with concessions, but we are confident that this was the case with those who mattered. If we look at PRC policy from late 1976 through 1977-78, this was consistent throughout, although normalization was more actively pursued with the return of Deng, something quite understandable given the much more pressing domestic issues facing Hua in the immediate post-Mao period. As throughout the history of the PRC, foreign policy decisions were held very tightly at the top, and in 1977-78 this was the Standing Committee, although the full Politburo was drawn in to some uncertain extent.⁸¹⁰ When it came time to persuade broader sections of the high elite of what had been determined, it was a matter of informing those involved of the thinking of the Standing Committee, the Party Center.⁸¹¹ Despite some outside speculation,⁸¹² we have found no credible evidence of divisions within the Party Center on the fundamental setting provided by Mao's strategic

⁸¹⁰ Notably the November 2, 1978, meeting where Deng urged his colleagues to seize the chance presented by the US tabling of a draft normalization communique. See *Deng nianpu*, vol. 1, p. 417; and above, pp. [131-33].

⁸¹¹ See above, pp. [134-35].

⁸¹² See Ross, *Negotiating Cooperation*, pp. 98-99, 107, on the possible influence of power conflicts and individual political interests on policy positions.

doctrine, or what was required to achieve normalization. Ironically, while US leaders correctly saw Deng as the forceful figure pushing the project ahead, it was Hua who took the initiative to indicate that arms sales would not obstruct agreement.⁸¹³ We cannot know what would have happened in Deng's absence, but rather than having enforced his personal view on the other top leaders, or having come up with the essential necessary compromise, in a sense his critical contribution was to provide an authoritative voice that would calm doubts about the arms sale concession that surely existed within the broader elite.

There were both strategic and domestic political reasons for accepting Mao's strategy. Leaving aside questions of China's responsibility for the Sino-Soviet schism in the first place, by the post-Mao period Moscow had assembled a large military force on the PRC's northern borders, and was the only realistic military threat the country faced. In domestic political terms, as in all fields, the need was demonstrate, even if falsely, fealty to Mao, but in foreign policy there was a substantial degree of genuine acceptance. Of course, there could have been a more receptive attitude to initial Soviet feelers as apparently desired by mid-level MFA officials, but it hardly would have been consistent with nearly two decades of anti-Moscow rhetoric. In terms of US normalization, Mao's legacy was more promising, with his three conditions accepted rather easily by Washington, and arms sales never identified by the Chairman as a deal breaker, even if long-entrenched propaganda on "liberating Taiwan" created issues of face.⁸¹⁴ Despite Deng's effort to present the "lesson" for Vietnam as something the Chairman wanted,⁸¹⁵ there was no statement from Mao suggesting an invasion of a still notionally socialist neighbor. Mao had, however, left the conundrum of critically watching a suspect

⁸¹³ See above, pp. [115-17].

⁸¹⁴ See above, pp. [99, 132ff].

⁸¹⁵ See above, pp. [153-54].

Vietnam, and an alignment with Cambodia. Although the post-Mao leadership apparently operated within those parameters into early 1978 with a policy of measured support to Phnom Penh, cutting back on fraternal aid to Hanoi, and trying to encourage both Indochinese states to settle their differences peacefully,⁸¹⁶ the effort floundered due to Hanoi's mishandling of the Overseas Chinese issue, and the nature of the Khmer Rouge. But the "lesson" was something else entirely.

As indicated, by spring 1979 there were reservations in official circles over the foreign policy orientation strongly advocated by Deng—the sharp tilt to the US, and the rigid rejection of the "hegemonist" enemy, the Soviet Union. The timing, caution and limitations of the subdued critique underlines Deng's foreign policy dominance. While the "lesson" was intimately linked to the "one line" approach, there is no evidence that Deng's February-March war was raised in known discussions on policy inadequacies.⁸¹⁷ An event in the same general period, the passing and signing of the TRA in Washington in March-April, was a source of discontent, indicating that the notional quasi-ally could openly disregard Chinese interests. Moreover, the coming expiry of the 1950 Sino-Soviet treaty offered the opportunity for adjustments in the relationship with the Soviet Union, something Deng did authorize in minimal terms.⁸¹⁸ Arguably, the very fact that, as predicted, Moscow made very few threatening moves during the war, also encouraged advocates of more open attitudes toward Moscow that were surely lying latent for many years. Fundamentally, the source of doubt and discontent was a policy perceived as too pro-American, and unnecessarily hostile to the Soviet Union.

⁸¹⁶ Before major differences over the "lesson," despite foreign claims of divisions in Beijing over Vietnam policy (see above, note 627), there similarly is little evidence of major conflict within the Party Center.

⁸¹⁷ Similarly, while shortcomings of the invasion were examined within the military, we have found no evidence that the rationale of the war, and thus Deng, was questioned.

⁸¹⁸ Cf. above, note 759.

Different voices were initially heard in May at a foreign policy forum of experts and diplomats, with one ambassador stating China shouldn't go too far in confronting the Soviet Union; the meeting as a whole agreed the Soviets were the main threat, but efforts should be made to develop contacts with Moscow.⁸¹⁹ The May forum apparently had not been attended by senior leaders, but that changed at a foreign affairs meeting during the annual NPC session in July, an occasion indicating how high reservations had reached within the system. With many in the MFA reportedly feeling a more normal relationship with the Soviet Union was desirable, Hu Yaobang, who would come to be regarded as the first top leader to advocate an independent foreign policy, answered questions in a manner indicating significant doubts about the current line. Hu questioned existing views of the Soviet Union, whether from the broad theoretical perspective of characterizing it as a social imperialist nation, which he said required reconsideration, or by implying the immediate threat war threat from the Soviets was overblown, while also cautioning against provoking Moscow.⁸²⁰ The next day Deng spoke, seemingly aiming his remarks at Hu, stating the war crisis was becoming closer and closer, the Soviet Union was the source of this war, the US was at least an indirect ally, and the "one line" policy must be supported as the guiding strategic principle. Unsurprisingly, the meeting rejected Hu's opinions, supporting the anti-hegemony policy against "one tyrant."⁸²¹ With Hu slapped down, the pro-US anti-hegemony stance remained the PRC policy guideline for the rest of the Carter Administration.⁸²²

⁸¹⁹ Interview with senior Party historian specializing in the period, September 2009.

⁸²⁰ Zhu Liang, "Hu Yaobang yu xinshiqi duiwai zhengce de tiaozheng"; and *Hu Yaobang sixiang nianpu*, vol. 1, p. 396.

⁸²¹ Hu Pengchi, "Wo xinzhong de Deng Xiaoping" [Deng Xiaoping in My Heart], *Boxun*, at https://bnn.co/news/gb/z_special/2015/01/201501191053.shtml, January 19, 2015.

⁸²² As laid out in detail in the MFA plan for 1980: "Zhonggong zhongyang zhuanfa waijiaobu yijiubaling nian guoji xingshi zhanwang he waijiao gongzuo yaodian de tongzhi" [The CCP Central Committee Forwards the Notice of the MFA on the Outlook for the International Situation in 1980

The events at the July 1979 NPC session point to another feature of elite politics in this period emphasized throughout this book—policy issues had nothing to do with Hua’s fate. As stated earlier, throughout 1979 he took no known steps out of synch with the anti-hegemony approach. At the NPC session, Hua addressed the same diplomatic discussion group on the same day as Deng’s attack on Hu Yaobang’s views. From the sketchy account we have, his theme was the Party’s “shift of focus” to economic modernization, but there was no clear indication of any significant foreign policy comments from the CCP Chairman.⁸²³ However, at this very point in time, the evidence suggests Hua-Deng policy coordination: Hua’s NPC work report, by Deng’s own testimony, was a deliberate effort to downplay criticism of US actions.⁸²⁴ From the policy views/political status perspective, there is another telling aspect involving Hu Yaobang. Although retaining his contrary foreign policy opinions, a few months later, as we shall see in Chapter 8, Hu played a significant role in the dubious process of removing Hua from power. This was despite working well with him on cadre and *pingfan* issues, and during the crucial 1978 work conference privately hailing the young Chairman as providing an inspirational vision that would create a new historical trend.⁸²⁵ By early 1980, Hu had essentially replaced Hua in responsibility for management of Party affairs. Cooperation with Deng on foreign policy could not protect Hua, while Hu’s existing and soon more systematically expressed reservations concerning the Mao/Deng strategy did not stop his continuing rise.

and the Main Points of Diplomatic Work] (February 6, 1980), internal Party document. Key points included: the international situation was more turbulent and the factors for war were increasing, the Soviet Union was advancing in the Asia-Pacific and elsewhere, and might encourage Vietnam to attack Thailand, the US will increasingly coordinate with China, and the possibility of joint opposition by America, Japan and Europe was developing, although still inadequate, and the guideline for the new year was to continue following the Three Worlds strategy.

⁸²³ *RMRB*, July 20, 1979.

⁸²⁴ See above, p. [157].

⁸²⁵ See above, [ch. 5, p. 111]; and below, [ch. 8, p. xxx].

While developments in 1979 underlined Deng's control of foreign policy, at the same time they indicated more nuanced features of elite politics after the Third Plenum. In contrast to the late Mao period, contrary views to the leader's were possible within the system, with high leaders of Hu Yaobang's status able to cautiously express different opinions in official forums. The understanding for those seeking change was that Deng's decisions had to be obeyed, but there were possibilities to influence him. In reflecting on the move away from the Mao-Deng strategic concept from 1979 to the 12th Congress in 1982 and beyond, Zhu Liang, a leader of the Party's International Liaison Department, reflected that "we tried to influence Deng, but a sudden turn was not easy."⁸²⁶ The change was accomplished, with Deng accepting "an independent foreign policy" that was formally adopted at the 12th Congress, albeit with some emotional reluctance on his part, including an unwillingness to completely discard the "one line" doctrine until 1985. But fundamentally, in a political and strategic sense, this new guideline was Deng's decision—he proved ultimately responsive to the lobbying of experts and high-level colleagues, but more fundamentally to changes in the international situation.

The process of change was complicated not only for Deng, but also for the specialists attempting to influence him. A revealing account has been offered by He Fang, a pre-Cultural Revolution MFA official who had his verdict reversed in 1979, and was then assigned to CASS. In November of that year, he was a member of a CASS delegation to the US headed by Li Shengzhi. The delegation met with American scholars and officials including Brzezinski, with the Soviet Union the focus of discussion. As Fang recalled, "[when we came back] we felt the 'one line' diplomatic strategy was not quite right," and prepared a report that neither Hu Yaobang or Deng apparently saw. The view of this group, like others who sought

⁸²⁶ Zhu Liang, "Hu Yaobang yu xinshiqi duiwai zhengce de tiaozheng."

more balance, was the need for a certain distance from the US, and an adjustment of policy toward Moscow. They too set out to try and influence Deng, and found it difficult. After his return to work, Deng consistently insisted on the inevitability of war, although as time passed he increasingly pushed the dreaded day further into the future, before essentially discarding the idea in 1985. Fang's group continued to work on policy proposals in 1980, tried to draw in a member of the GSD with limited success, with Fang himself rewriting the document. The theme of distance from the US and an adjustment in Soviet policy was central, but it also included, quite contrary to Deng's insistence on the increasing likelihood of war, an assessment that the international situation was easing. Provocatively, the proposal argued against the "rigid" approach of the "one line" doctrine, instead proposing a US-style triangular policy—"make both sides compete for us." This proposal apparently did receive some attention at the Party Center, but little is known beyond that.⁸²⁷

This was only one of several efforts by foreign policy specialists in this period to influence Deng and other leaders. In the Party's International Relations Department, Deputy Director Li Yimang organized the study of six policy issues which concluded that, despite the changes resulting from the Third Plenum, old international views still prevailed, the international situation had fundamentally changed, war had not only been avoided, but also would not be able to be fought for a long time. This draft paper was discussed in the Politburo with Li Yimang and, more importantly, Deng present. Deng turned directly to Li, declaring "imperialism still exists, how can war be avoided?" But those seeking change were encouraged that the issue had finally attracted the attention and thinking of the leadership. A

⁸²⁷ "He Fang: qinli Zhongguo waijiao zhengce de lishi zhuanzhe (xia)" [He Fang: Personal Experience of the Historical Turning Point in China's Current Foreign Policy, 2], *Koushushi* [Oral History] November 23, 2009, pp. 71-72, at <http://www.cnki.net>.

final issue of note, Mao's Three Worlds theory that had been promoted by Deng through Hu Qiaomu's 1977 article, and was the overall guiding task of foreign affairs work in 1980, became the subject of another discussion document organized by Li Yimang. The argument was that it wasn't really a "theory," had completely isolated China in the international communist movement, and from most developing countries, but this was rejected by Deng. However, the recommendation that the theory not be used again was later accepted by the leadership—central comrades would no longer mention the Three Worlds. Undoubtedly in deference to Mao and Deng, the decision was not conveyed downward. In any case, it was regarded as ideological preparation for the end of the "one line" doctrine.⁸²⁸

As significant as the input of the experts was, the key to change was the impact on leading figures, and at the center of the process was Hu Yaobang, correctly regarded as the first leader to seek an independent policy. Whatever unknown private discussions he may have had with other leaders in 1979-80 following Deng's rebuke at the NPC session, in contrast to his limited remarks at the 1979 NPC, at a March 1981 Secretariat meeting on foreign affairs, Hu dealt with the importance of independent diplomacy at length. Framing his discussion as overcoming "leftist ignorance," he laid down three guidelines for independence: 1) never be attached to any particular country's diplomatic policy; 2) never be leveraged by any accident on the world scene; and 3) never be instigated into action by tentative sentiments at home and abroad, especially those reflecting a leader's individual mood. Turning to key relationships, Hu first discussed the Soviet Union, offering another three guidelines: 1) fight against its hegemonism, but

⁸²⁸ *Ibid.*; Wu Xingtang, "Yuan Zhongguwei Li Yimang"; and above, pp. [1, 10-15, 42, note 822]. In 1982, while preparing for the 12th Congress, Hu Qiaomu admitted that his words in the 1977 article were "nonsense"; "He Fang," p. 72.

without interfering in its internal affairs, and especially avoid mention of “uniting with the US for fighting the Soviet Union”; 2) never blur political struggle with mutually-beneficial economic ties; and 3) never mislead the people that we are contending with the whole Soviet nation. Hu had less to say about the US, but in an apparent warning against being taken in by particular figures, he advocated that future relations should be based on understanding the overall American elite, instead of any individuals. Particular attention to Japan was urged because of the significant potential for economic cooperation. Finally, Hu noted great changes in the third world and suggested continuing support, but with the proviso that support should be based on what the PRC could afford, without the pretense of being a saviour.⁸²⁹

Hu Yaobang’s talk was obviously a notable departure from the existing “one line” policy, crystal clear in criticizing “uniting with the US for fighting the Soviet Union.” Hu had also criticized saying the Soviet regime had become “social imperialist,” and saw no likelihood of a Soviet attack on China. The talk attracted interest and support within the leadership, in no small part because Hu circulated written notes on it. Ye Jianying reportedly appreciated Hu’s ideas, and Zhao Ziyang was impressed with Hu’s initiative, telling him “you are so bold in having your notes printed.” Deng reportedly ignored Hu’s opinions, although we have no knowledge of whether he expressed displeasure to his *de facto* subordinate.⁸³⁰

Other elite figures in this period expressed similar views. Four days after Hu’s speech, a Party Center foreign affairs work leadership small group was established, headed by Li Xiannian, who had been responsible for foreign affairs individually, or with Deng, in the late Mao and post-Mao periods. The makeup of this small group is not known, nor are full details on its deliberations available. What has been

⁸²⁹ *Hu Yaobang sixiang nianpu*, vol. 1, pp. 610-12.

⁸³⁰ See *ibid.*, p. 614.

conveyed, however, is that Li's group came up with opinions on many issues that were consistent with Hu's position. Li himself reportedly emphasized not sticking to the "one line" doctrine, and advocated meeting with Soviet leaders.⁸³¹ Even earlier, some elite members, apparently largely quietly, chafed at the one-sided treatment of Moscow and Washington. Marshal Xu Xiangqian claimed to have raised the issue in the Politburo, asking why China couldn't be like Yugoslavia and take an independent stance.⁸³² For all of this, in 1981 there was little movement in the basic rationale in Chinese foreign policy, but at the 12th Congress "an independent foreign policy" was formally adopted as the new guiding concept. The foreign policy section of Hu Yaobang's Political Report to the Congress naturally required different language and topics, and contained Deng's claim that "the danger of world war is growing ever greater," but the basic spirit was very similar to what Hu had advocated in early 1981.⁸³³ What had happened?

Clearly events had intervened. The arrival of the Reagan Administration was the most significant. Deng had tried to build a quasi-US-PRC alliance in 1979-80, and for all the frustrations of that effort, it was perceived to be moving forward, and China virtually endorsed Carter for re-election.⁸³⁴ Reagan's known positions on Taiwan were a major concern, and George H.W. Bush's pre-election effort to persuade Deng that all would be right fell flat.⁸³⁵ In power, the new administration's attitude was contradictory, with Reagan's first Secretary of State, Nixon-Kissinger veteran Alexander Haig, seeking to reduce tension over Taiwan and repair the

⁸³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 396; and Zhu Liang, "Hu Yaobang yu xinshiqi duiwai zhengce de tiaozheng."

⁸³² *Xu Xiangqian nianpu 1950-1990 (xia)* [Chronology of Xu Xiangqian, 1950-1990] (Beijing: Jiefangjun chubanshe, 2016), vol. 2, p. 487. Xu vaguely claimed this took place "during the time of Hua Guofeng" which, depending on his view, could have been before the Third Plenum, up to Hua's shunting aside at the start of 1980, or even up to his resignation and replacement in 1980-81.

⁸³³ See Hu's report in *BR*, no. 37 (1982), pp. 29-33.

⁸³⁴ During his March 1980 visit to the US, Vice Foreign Minister Zhang Wenjin publicly and controversially expressed support for Carter's re-election; AFP, Washington, March 20, 1980.

⁸³⁵ See Holdridge, *Crossing the Divide*, pp. 197-98.

strategic understanding, but the President remaining attached to his pro-Taiwan sensitivities. It is not our intent to review the eight months of tense negotiations that ended in, on the surface, significant US concessions on Taiwan arms sales in the August 1982 third US-China communique, concessions quickly followed by Reagan's internal memo renegeing on them, Haig already having resigned.⁸³⁶ Instead, we focus on the bitter emotions in Beijing surrounding the process.

The irony is that throughout the process of moving toward normalization, the Chinese leaders presented to their American negotiating partners a position that while Taiwan was important, strategic issues were more important. While Mao could be flamboyant and declare it didn't matter if the US occupied Taiwan for a hundred years, Zhang Wenjin could report that strategic considerations were more essential for Deng, and Hua and Deng worked together to soften criticism of the US after the TRA,⁸³⁷ Taiwan remained a sensitive issue in Chinese politics. By late 1981, Deng, who had already urged the Politburo to prepare for a worsening of Sino-American relations, bristled over several issues. He complained that the US had not given China a single item of advanced technology (exaggerated, but in fact by 1983 China only received marginally better technology than the Soviet Union), asking whether China was being treated as a hostile country. But Taiwan was an even greater transgression. Deng expressed exasperation over the US dragging its feet on the Taiwan issue to Vice President Bush in May 1982, attacking those in America who regarded China as insignificant. In a striking turnaround from his rationale for concluding normalization, Deng denounced such people for thinking that "as long as the US is tough with the Soviet Union you can do what you feel

⁸³⁶ The ample literature on these developments includes Mann, *About Face*, chs. 6-7; Ross, *Negotiating Cooperation*, ch. 6; Holdridge, *Crossing the Divide*, chs. 12-14; and Tyler, *A Great Wall*, pp. 289-339.

⁸³⁷ See above, pp. [16-17, 156].

about China and China will swallow it.”⁸³⁸ Suddenly, being strong in the international struggle with Moscow, as incessantly advocated by Deng in 1977-80, was no longer sufficient.

This raises questions about Deng’s naïveté, as well as that of other top leaders, in accepting Woodcock’s last-minute advice that a historical transition would smooth the way to a Taiwan settlement on terms acceptable to PRC interests, something seriously taken up with the development of the “one country, two systems” concept.⁸³⁹ But by autumn 1981 at the latest, Deng’s Politburo remarks indicated he was convinced the US would continue to guarantee Taiwan’s security, and certainly not provide any pressure on Taipei for a settlement with Beijing. Dissatisfaction and anger with the US was also significant in leading circles. This was expressed in June 1983 by Xu Xiangqian, still a Politburo member, in stark terms that went well beyond his earlier complaints. Xu spoke of the Americans as “really hating us,” not able to change, wanting to destroy communism, and to that day imposing hegemony over “our Taiwan.”⁸⁴⁰ Yet for all his own anger, Deng still prioritized relations with the US over any rapprochement with Moscow. With the strategic aspect greatly reduced, this surely was primarily for economic reasons. As a leading Party historian with deep personal knowledge of the foreign policy area has put it, “Deng was very clear that US-China relations was the big picture, if you want modernization the Soviet Union had nothing to offer.”⁸⁴¹ Given elite discontent with the US, and various advocacies for improved Soviet relations, the continuation of tilt toward Washington was simply new evidence of Deng’s foreign policy dominance. Paradoxically, with the “one line” approach largely set aside and Taiwan in fact “swallowed,” US-China relations entered a more stable and

⁸³⁸ See Radchenko, *Unwanted Visionaries*, pp. 27-31.

⁸³⁹ See above, pp. [140-41, 154-55].

⁸⁴⁰ *Xu Xiangqian nianpu*, vol. 2, p. 487.

⁸⁴¹ Interview, September 2017. Cf. Zhang, *Deng Xiaoping’s Long War*, p. 208; and above, p. [158].

productive period that would last until the Tiananmen crisis of 1989, as Deng would have wished.

We do not mean to overestimate resistance to Deng's "one line" approach to Moscow. Indeed, within the elite the sense of the Soviet Union as the most significant threat to China's security was substantial, and not without reason, even if the Mao-Deng version of the severity of the threat was always overdone, at least since the late 1960s. Deng implicitly recognized this, even at the time of his maximum insistence on the anti-Soviet hegemony line.⁸⁴² As the push to alter Soviet policy tentatively emerged after the invasion of Vietnam, Deng authorized an adjustment in relations with Moscow, albeit in a very limited and practical sense.⁸⁴³ The push, in any case, had various sources. One was a simple recognition, as argued by various experts and Hu Yaobang, that an unbalanced policy, especially as American foot dragging on Taiwan became increasingly apparent, made no sense for the PRC's larger interests. A specific practical consideration was that given the similarities of the Soviet and Chinese economies, and the utility of trade between them, economic interaction could be developed, something not contradicted by Deng, but downplayed by him. These also reflected deeper historical memories of earlier Sino-Soviet cooperation, particularly those held by top senior leaders, notably Chen Yun and Li Xiannian, doyens of the planned economy, with Chen praising Soviet support in the 1950s.⁸⁴⁴ A final consideration concerned the origins of the Sino-Soviet schism. Arguably this issue was a major factor in the failure of the 1981 Historical Resolution to deal with foreign affairs,

⁸⁴² As in the calculation that the Soviets would not react significantly to the Vietnamese "lesson," and his 1980 comment that invading China was beyond Soviet capabilities given Moscow's larger situation. See above, pp. [42-43].

⁸⁴³ The immediate framework was negotiations on the non-renewal of the 1950 Sino-Soviet treaty. The most significant practical aspect was economic, but this only took off significantly with rising PRC-US tensions from 1981, and especially 1982. In the 1981-85 period, Sino-Soviet trade increased nine fold. See Radchenko, *Unwanted Visionaries*, p. 44.

⁸⁴⁴ See *ibid.*, pp. 42-44.

since Mao, at least as much and probably more than Khrushchev, was guilty for the collapse of the relationship. Deng seemingly accepted the point in 1982, implying that both sides should take responsibility for the fracturing of the alliance.⁸⁴⁵

Yet, as with his reluctance to abandon the “one line” doctrine, in practical terms Deng slowed movement toward better relations in the political sphere. In summer 1979 the Politburo laid down two obstacles to improved relations, which in 1980 became the “three obstacles” of removing or reducing forces on China’s northern borders, Vietnam’s withdrawal from Cambodia, and (additionally) the Soviet Union’s own withdrawal from Afghanistan. These were, of course, substantial requirements for vaguely defined better relations from a country treating Moscow as the main threat of international disruption and war. The development placing the possibility of rapprochement on the agenda was Leonid Brezhnev’s March 1982 Tashkent speech that did not present a great departure from Moscow’s previous position, but adopted a new tone suggesting promise. As with the third US-China communique, we will not go into the details of the interactions of the two countries and the political background in each, leaving that to Radchenko’s well-researched work. What is clear is that this approach from Moscow did, for the first time, create sufficient reason to consider a serious if restrained response. Significantly, for all of Hu Yaobang’s influence on the reorientation of foreign policy, it appears that this latest Party Chairman was not central to the decision to take up the Soviet initiative. Rather, reflecting Hu’s observation at the time of taking up the post in June 1981, that “our Party [is lucky that some old revolutionaries [especially Deng] are still alive, and [serve as] the mainstay of the Party’s leading core,”⁸⁴⁶ it was those key leaders—Deng, Chen Yun and Li Xiannian—who decided in summer 1982 to send

⁸⁴⁵ Deng to the Turkish president in December 1982; in Pan Jingguo, *Gongheguo wajiao fengyun zhong de Deng Xiaoping* [Deng Xiaoping in the Midst of the Republic’s Foreign Policy Storms] (Harbin: Heilongjiang renmin chubanshe, 2004), p. 318.

⁸⁴⁶ See below, [ch. 8, p.xxx].

a secret emissary to Moscow. The emissary reaffirmed the “three obstacles,” and the first round of formal discussions began in October.⁸⁴⁷

The three “old revolutionaries” had various considerations in agreeing to explore the meaning of Brezhnev’s speech. Chen and Li undoubtedly were interested in the economic possibilities of closer ties, something arguably reflected in Chen’s continuing advocacy of state planning in 1983. But this was not Deng’s concern, and his authority over the other two elders was graphically revealed by a 1984 incident involving Chen Yun. As part of the slow warming of relations, Soviet First Deputy Premier Ivan Arkhipov, who had coordinated the massive economic and technical aid to China in the 1950s, and developed particularly close relations with Chen, visited China. The visit was proposed by Moscow, and discussed in Li Xiannian’s leading group on foreign affairs. Li supported the visit, arguing that economically it could advance the Four Modernizations, and politically create a “kind of pressure” on the US. Arkhipov’s visit produced three agreements on economic cooperation, scientific and technological exchange, and the establishment of a Sino-Soviet committee on economic, trade, scientific, and technological cooperation. The telling encounter was with Chen Yun, who, to his obvious discomfit, had clearly been instructed to read out a statement affirming Chinese demands concerning the “three obstacles.” Deng’s political position had been forced on the Party’s second most prestigious leader.⁸⁴⁸

This leaves two related questions: why did Deng move away from his previous strongly held belief in the “one line” policy, and why did he drag out the process of rapprochement with Moscow? Obviously, assessing Deng’s motives here as elsewhere is speculative, but several considerations stand out. One was his concern with the views of the broader elite. As elite concerns with the anti-Soviet

⁸⁴⁷ See Radchenko, *Unwanted Visionaries*, pp. 33-35; and *Li Xiannian nianpu*, vol. 6, p. 166..

⁸⁴⁸ See Radchenko, *Unwanted Visionaries*, pp. 41-48.

hegemony line began to surface after the Vietnam “lesson,” Deng sought to impose his still fervently believed view on a leadership that accepted his dominant position. Later, as he observed, although Soviet threats in the 1970s had led to closer relations with Washington, “in recent years some US actions have caused our concern,”⁸⁴⁹ Deng accommodated his colleagues with the move toward an “independent foreign policy,” which clearly made sense in the circumstances. The shift also had an external target in Washington. Although failing to get from the US either the stronger anti-Soviet policy he sought from Carter, or the gratitude he felt owed for imposing the “lesson” on Moscow’s ally, Deng was aware of Washington’s sensitivity concerning policy changes toward the Soviet Union, but unwilling to overplay that concern.⁸⁵⁰ In this process, his thinking had shifted from the strategic considerations the US had failed to adequately address, to the fundamental economic benefits he correctly believed America—and not the Soviet Union—could provide.⁸⁵¹ Related to this, in the early 1980s Deng developed a more realistic view of Soviet power and intentions. A better understanding of mutual deterrence helped push the “inevitable” war further into the future, and Soviet “expansion” in Afghanistan led to a quagmire that seriously undermined any threat to the PRC.⁸⁵² Finally, in the post-Tashkent period, progress would inevitably be slow due the “three obstacles” and policy conflict in Moscow, something, we

⁸⁴⁹ See Pan Jingguo, *Gongheguo waijiao fengyun zhong de Deng Xiaoping*, p. 318.

⁸⁵⁰ See Radchenko, *Unwanted Visionaries*, pp. 40-41. Cf. Li Xiannian’s above comment on using movement with Moscow to create pressure on the US.

⁸⁵¹ While we believe Deng’s interest in the economic benefits of relations with the US was a feature throughout, based on his exchanges with US officials, before normalization he avoided economic issues while heavily emphasizing the strategic threat from the Soviet Union. In 1979-80, bilateral economic issues joined strategic matters in his interaction with Washington. Thereafter, while strategic questions were never ignored, the political problems with the Reagan Administration made the economic relationship the most significant.

⁸⁵² On deterrence, see Lei Liu, “‘Dog-beating stick,’” p.14; and Fravel, *Active Defense*, p. 175. On Deng’s reassessment of the Soviet danger, see his September 1982 comment to Kim Il Sung that the Soviets were “having a hard time”; *Deng nianpu*, vol. 2, p. 851.

presume, fit well with Deng's undoubted continuing resentment of past Soviet treatment of China. CCP-CPSU party to party relations only occurred following Deng's 1988 judgement that Moscow had sufficiently adhered to China's conditions.⁸⁵³ In sum, Deng had adjusted to the changing world scene, and although others who took prominent roles in the adjustments had clashed with his anti-hegemony narrative, he was unquestionably in charge.

While not the sole decider of PRC foreign policy, from the time of his return to work in 1977, Deng was the most impactful actor, and by 1979, if not earlier, unquestionably the dominant figure in this area. While we have made various comments questioning some of his actions, particularly concerning the unnecessary invasion of Vietnam, one cannot help being impressed with aspects of his performance. The power of his advocacy, whatever the actual persuasiveness of his views, is apparent when reading his presentations and addresses, whether to American negotiators in the normalization process, or to the PRC political and military elite on the eve of the Vietnam "lesson." Part of Deng's dominance was due to force of personality, repeatedly referred to by his US interlocuteurs, yet more due to his historical status. This applied not only to the Chinese elite, reflecting his unmatched foreign affairs experience and, more importantly, his status as the most respected surviving leader of the 1949 revolution, but also to foreign leaders and officials.⁸⁵⁴ This could result in massive misunderstanding, as in Le Duan's belief that as a senior "moderate" leader, Deng would work for an Indochinese outcome suitable to Hanoi's interests, and lesser misunderstandings

⁸⁵³ In addition to his earlier detailed discussion of post-Tashkent negotiations and differing Soviet views then, Radchenko, *Unwanted Visionaries*, ch. 5, analyses the post-1985 process leading to the normalization of party to party relations, and Gorbachev's ill-fated May 1989 visit to Beijing.

⁸⁵⁴ An instructive account comes from Platt, *China Boys*, pp. 259-61, who recounts meeting Deng and Hua in January 1980. Platt not only found Deng "[keeping his] guests guessing with a mixture of light humor and blunt, heavy substance," he also noted how he had read about Deng for more than a decade, and was not disappointed. In contrast, reflecting current attitudes in Washington, Hua was dismissed as a "low-common-denominator functionary."

that led US officials to sometimes feel it necessary to craft policy in a way that would support his presumed political interests.⁸⁵⁵ For Deng, this clearly provided a significant advantage in dealing with the outside world.

Ultimately, the most important factor in Deng's enormous stature on the international stage was simply that, as the PRC's most prominent and powerful leader, Deng was seen as the key to China, a nation which, for various reasons, major countries sought good, and perceived as very important, relations. The size and history of the country, its economic potential, and, in the context of the 1970s and 1980s, Mao's gift of fracturing the core of the communist world, placed Beijing in a key position for the last phase of the Cold War. While in various regards Deng misunderstood the realities of the international situation, with his authority and intelligence, he was able to guide the PRC through a challenging transitional period.

⁸⁵⁵ On Le Duan's misunderstanding, see above, pp. [184-85]. On US sensitivity to the need to support Deng's presumed position in 1978-79, see above, pp. [96-97, 172-73]. During the Reagan Administration, Holdridge, *Crossing the Divide*, p. 214, reports official concern that the ongoing arms sales issue would be a major setback for Deng and his modernization program.

Contact

China Studies Centre
Faculty of Arts and Social Science

Level 7 Jane Foss Russell Building (G02)
156 City Road The University of Sydney
Darlington NSW 2006

+61 2 91140837
Chinastudies.centre@sydney.edu.au

<https://www.sydney.edu.au/china-studies-centre/>

CRICOS 00026A